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China's Experience in Poverty Reduction through Smart Culture and Tourism and The Mirror Study of Southeast Asia ——Based on the case of Guang'an "Tourism Food Map"

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Abstract
How to effectively link the achievements of poverty alleviation with rural revitalization is an issue that cannot be avoided in current poverty governance. This article takes the perspective of digital governance and uses the "Tourism and Food Map" in Guang'an, Sichuan as a case study to examine the Chinese experience of smart cultural tourism poverty reduction and its reference value for Southeast Asia. The data is sourced from local policy texts and platform operations, with a case study conducted in terms of methodology, and compared with the tourism consumption cooperation carried out by Vietnam's Qinghe Province through Grab. The case shows that Guang'an integrates agricultural, commercial, cultural, and tourism resources through an electronic map, with government leadership, platform support, and market participation. Each party plays its own role, driving local economic growth; There is room for adopting similar models in Qinghe Province, but adjustments must be made according to local conditions. Comparing the practices of China and Southeast Asia can provide a practical reference for developing countries to find digital poverty reduction paths.

Keywords
Southeast Asian Mirror; Smart cultural tourism; Digital governance; Poverty reduction

1 Introduction

At the end of 2020, China achieved historic results in eliminating absolute poverty in rural areas under current standards, establishing long-term solutions to continuously increase farmers' income, and leveraging digital governance to bring the cultural and tourism industry to rural areas. The concept of "smart tourism" was first proposed by Zhenjiang City, Jiangsu Province in China in 2010. Later, based on this, "smart cultural tourism" was derived by combining cultural inheritance. Smart cultural tourism is driven externally by information technologies such as big data, the Internet of Things, cloud computing, artificial intelligence, and 5G, and internally by the cultural resources of the destination. Simply put, it means providing full process and all-round intelligent services and management, reflected in new formats such as customized tours, self-service tours, and shared

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tours[1]. Most existing research remains at the level of technical tools and single case experience, with insufficient discussion on specific platform operation mechanisms, institutional conditions for multi-party collaboration, and cross-border comparisons. Domestic research on smart cultural tourism mainly focuses on digital technology and implementation pathways. Scholars such as Zhao Ming and Feng Jiqiang focus on the construction of digital platforms, while scholars such as Yuan Huaiyu and Ren Guozheng tend to study implementation strategies. Foreign research has paid early attention to information and communication technology. Nadkarni and PATA both pointed out that information asymmetry and digital inequality are the primary obstacles to promoting smart tourism[2][3]. This study attempts to fill this gap.

Regarding whether and how China's experience can be transferred to Southeast Asia, existing research lacks a systematic comparison under a unified framework, and there is still insufficient verification of platform mechanisms and collaborative systems in different stages. In 2020, ten departments including the Ministry of Culture and Tourism of China issued the Opinions on Deepening "Internet plus Tourism" to Promote the High Quality Development of Tourism, which requires to promote the transformation and upgrading of tourism to digital, networked and intelligent, and foster new formats and models[4]. China and ASEAN are closely linked in economy, trade and tourism, and Southeast Asia is an area with important cooperation potential of the "the Belt and Road"[5][6]. So what is the reference value of China's smart cultural tourism poverty reduction experience for Southeast Asia, and how should it be implemented?

In response to the insufficient cross-border comparison in existing research and the lack of in-depth discussion on platform mechanisms and collaborative systems in foreign countries that focus on the digital divide, this study selects Guang'an in Sichuan and Qinghe in Vietnam, and uses case analysis and comparative methods to analyze the similarities and differences. Incorporate the two regions into a unified framework, compare similar conditions and substantive differences, and determine which ones can be used for reference in stages.

2 Development status and potential for reference

2.1 Current situation and problems

The policy system of China's smart cultural tourism is relatively complete, and multiple policies have been introduced to promote a modern tourism system with "smart cultural tourism" as the core. By 2025, national 4A level and above tourist attractions, as well as provincial-level and above tourist resorts, will basically achieve intelligent transformation and upgrading. While the government is promoting the integration of culture and tourism, Internet enterprises are also accelerating their layout, and platforms such as "hospitable Shandong travel to Qilu", "travel to the Forbidden City", "digital Qinling", and "smart travel to Tianfu" are widely praised. About 90% of the 100 global cases of poverty reduction through tourism come from China[7], with a particularly prominent example being the "Tourism Food Map" in Guang'an, Sichuan, which integrates red resources and cuisine and has been selected as the "World's Best Poverty Reduction Case"[8]. After the implementation of smart cultural and tourism policies at the local level, Guang'an's "Tourism Food Map" has indeed achieved quantifiable poverty reduction results and has become a typical case that can be promoted internationally.

Southeast Asia is known as the "ethnic museum" and "religious museum"[9]. The region has extremely rich cultural and tourism resources, with dozens of UNESCO World Heritage sites, and is also one of the most active

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areas in the development of the global digital economy. With the successive introduction of various policies, the development of smart cultural tourism is steadily advancing, and applications such as "Visit Vietnam", "Half price Tour Thailand", and "MaiA" are accelerating the growth of the cultural tourism economy. Recently, the further cooperation between Qinghe Province in Vietnam and Grab has actively responded to the key goals of digital transformation advocated by the ASEAN Tourism Development Plan 2026-2030.

However, compared to the above practical progress, relevant research is still insufficient: domestic research mostly focuses on policy implementation and single case summary, while foreign research tends to explore the digital divide. At present, there is a lack of in-depth discussion on the operating mechanism of the platform and the conditions for the "government platform village collective" collaborative system, as well as a lack of systematic comparison within a unified analytical framework. The feasibility of drawing on the experience of Guang'an has become an urgent issue to be addressed. Guang'an's "Tourism and Food Map" relies on village collective asset certification and strong administrative support, while Qinghe Province is more inclined towards market-oriented operation. Whether these experiences are replicable and in which areas localization adjustments are needed, there is still a lack of phased verification.

2.2 potential for reference

Guang'an and Qinghe are both in a situation of abundant resources but insufficient transformation, which is necessary for learning from experience. The possibility of reference lies in the fact that there are commonalities in the issues between the two places. Both Guang'an and Qinghe have common problems such as uneven distribution of resources, single dissemination methods, and insufficient conversion, so Guang'an's entry path has a basis for transferring to Qinghe. Below, we will explain the practical basis for this feasibility from the perspectives of time and cooperation.

Both Guang'an and Qinghe provinces have a situation of resource enrichment but ineffective transformation. The first step to solving the problem is to seize the window of digital transformation. After 2010, the China National Tourism Administration began pilot work on smart tourism. In 2014, the China National Tourism Administration called 2014 the "Year of Smart Tourism". The establishment time of China's smart cultural and tourism platform is relatively early, and its coverage is also quite extensive. From the initial government promotion to the joint promotion of various aspects, from a single scenic spot to the widespread application in various fields. Compared with other regions in Southeast Asia, the development of smart tourism in Southeast Asia mostly shows significant results in 2025 or 2026. Thailand's TAT-AI project was launched in 2025, and all apps for accessing Vietnam are about to be put into use. Malaysia's AI tourism assistant, which cooperates with Alipay+, will also be launched in 2026. From the perspective of China, not only did it start earlier, but it has also completed the entire process from policy formulation, platform creation to grassroots implementation. This has led to grassroots practical activities such as the Guang'an Tourism Food Map, which can be summarized as experience for poverty reduction. This means that the digitalization work currently being carried out in Qinghe Province can be directly connected to mature channels, thus avoiding detours.

On July 14, 2026, the Culture, Sports and Tourism Bureau of Qinghe Province, Vietnam signed a cooperation agreement with Grab on the digital transformation of the tourism industry. On July 15th, the two companies held a "Famous Restaurant" award ceremony together in Qinghe Province, commending 40 outstanding restaurants.

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This event is of great significance because in the early stage of digital transformation in Qinghe Province, like Guang'an District, the focus is on tourism and food maps, which are characterized by a wide distribution of scenic spots, limited information transmission channels, and poor conversion effects. Due to the similar development model between Qinghe Province and China in the past, it has obtained a low-cost development path. Therefore, Qinghe Province is likely to imitate the approach of Guang'an's "food map" to promote local economic development. It's not about whether it can be achieved, but about how to implement it according to local conditions.

3 Analysis of Guang'an Case

3.1 Case Introduction

Guang'an District is located in the northeast of Guang'an City, Sichuan Province, with a total area of 1028 square kilometers. There are 7 A-level tourist attractions and 1 national key village for rural tourism in the region, with excellent red tourism cultural resources. It is one of the first 10 tourism strong counties and Tianfu tourism famous counties in Sichuan Province. However, due to the limitations of the traditional economic development model, Guang'an has long had three major problems: the distribution of scenic spots is too scattered, which makes it difficult to form effective linkage between various scenic spots, resulting in low overall economic benefits. In addition, Guang'an's agricultural, commercial, cultural, tourism and other resources have not been fully integrated, coupled with limited dissemination channels and outdated management methods.

In 2024, the Ministry of Commerce guided Guang'an District to launch the "Tourism and Food Map" project through the joint Internet platform under the guidance of the No. 1 central document and the State Council's advice on promoting high-quality development of service consumption. The project was officially launched in July 2024, positioning itself as the first county-level "tourism food map" in China. The concept is "global integration+platform empowerment", and the mechanism is "government led+platform support+market participation". This project is supported by digital technology, aggregating the full scenario resources of "food, housing, transportation, tourism, shopping, and entertainment" in urban and rural areas, activating the agricultural, commercial, cultural, and tourism markets, driving the rapid development of tourism and homestay industries in rural areas, and promoting local employment and income growth for farmers.

The implementation process is carried out from three levels. In terms of resource integration, the Guang'an District Bureau of Commerce has integrated more than 20 core scenic spots, 21 "Yucheng cuisine" and 6 types of specialty agricultural products. Two boutique tourist routes have been launched by connecting 12 scenic spots with 20 "Congyun restaurants". In terms of platform construction, the project was promoted on Kuanzhai Alley in Chengdu and launched on platforms such as Meituan and Dianping. The platform has functional sections such as "Guang'an Impression", "Map Guide", "Find Guang'an", and "Taste Gathering Guang'an", achieving full scene online navigation and consumer reach. In terms of publicity and promotion, with the help of resources from the Ministry of Commerce, the promotional video was broadcasted for a month on the national high-speed railway. In addition, more than 300000 cultural and creative products, including Long'an pomelo juice and cultural shirts printed with map QR codes, have been developed, forming a multi-dimensional promotion pattern of online and offline linkage and consideration of both domestic and foreign markets.

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3.2 Effectiveness analysis

Since the release of the Guang'an Tourism Food Map, a complete chain of achievements has been formed. From dissemination to reach, the project relies on platform integration and various channels of promotion to achieve good publicity effects, attracting many tourists and forming a good traffic entry point. From the perspective of consumption conversion, the number of orders and consumption amounts for local catering and accommodation have increased significantly year-on-year, indicating that the exposed traffic has transformed into real purchases. Rural tourism and overnight tours are rapidly increasing, which meets the expectations of extending tourists' stay time and expanding the consumption chain. From 2023 to 2025, the number of tourists received increased from 5.022 million to 15.627 million, and the revenue of the tourism industry increased from 4.1 billion yuan to 13.74 billion yuan. The year-on-year growth rate of both indicators in 2025 exceeded 140% (Table 1). This indicates that under the intervention of the platform, traffic and consumption did not simply increase linearly, but through the integration of resources and precise drainage, there was a one-time leap between the two, thus confirming the entire process from exposure to conversion.

Deeper changes are reflected in the income of business entities and farmers. The number of agricultural tourism business entities has increased, and the per capita annual income of residents in memorial archway Village has also increased significantly. This indicates that digital platforms do not rely solely on increasing orders for catering and accommodation to develop, but gradually transfer benefits to grassroots rural operators and villagers through resource integration, platform contact, and consumption conversion, thereby promoting their income growth[10]. This link can provide a measurable window for how digital platforms can benefit grassroots issues. This also provides a comparison of the ways in which we will collaborate with Grab in Qinghe Province in the future. The elimination of poverty is the result of the mutual influence and interaction among various parts, rather than an increase in the exposure of a certain part.

The main feature of Guang'an's "Tourist Food Map" is the integration of three main parts. Firstly, it is the integration of resources, relying on government screening and platform packaging to organically integrate scattered scenic spots, authentic cuisine, agricultural products, etc. This overcomes the situation of scattered, weak, poor, and distant rural resources, and with administrative support, enables small producers and operators to be included in the larger market. Secondly, it is traffic diversion, not blind exposure, but purposeful guidance for tourists visiting the red tourism of Deng Xiaoping's hometown. This turns the flow entrance into a transportation pipeline between urban and rural areas, thus illustrating the phenomenon of an increase in both rural and overnight tours. Finally, there is the distribution of benefits, which includes the income of the village collective economy into dividends from the source, making the increase in per capita annual income of farmers both genuine and traceable[11]. Only when these three conditions are interrelated, can the final chain of "exposure-conversion-income increase" have testable properties.

Table 1 Statistics of Tourism Industry in Guang'an District from 2023 to 2025

Year	2023	2024	2025
Reception of passengers (10000 people)	502.2	650	1562.7
Drive tourism consumption (RMB 100 million)	41	56	137.4
YoY growth in passenger reception (%)	—	29.4	140.4
Drive year-on-year growth in tourism consumption (%)	—	36.6	145.4

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Note: The data is sourced from the Statistical Bulletin on National Economic and Social Development of Guang'an District from 2023 to 2025

4 The Mirror Path of Southeast Asia

4.1 Analysis of Differences and Similarities between Qinghe and Guang'an

Qinghe Province is located along the central southern coast of Vietnam, with its capital city of Nha Trang being a well-known coastal tourist city with numerous islands and a prominent seafood cuisine culture. On July 14, 2026, the Provincial Bureau of Culture, Sports and Tourism signed a letter of intent to cooperate with Grab. Grab is headquartered in Singapore and operates in eight Southeast Asian countries, including ride hailing, food delivery, fintech, accommodation, and ticketing. It has accumulated a large user base and promotion experience locally, which can provide customer channels and operational support for cooperation.

The differences between the two places are concentrated on both ends of resources and governance. Guang'an focuses on cultural landscape and red education, under the guidance of the Ministry of Commerce and the promotion of the No. 1 central document of the Central Government, relying on domestic platforms such as Meituan and Dianping to form a combination of government guidance and market operation; Qinghe Province is known for its natural scenery and leisure vacations, led by the Cultural, Sports and Tourism Bureau and promoted in cooperation with Grab. It has a lower administrative level and weaker financial capacity than Guang'an. (Table 2)

Table 2 Schematic Table of the Situation in Two Places

Comparative Factors	Guang'an Case	Qinghe Case
Resource type	Red tourism resources	coastal islands, seafood cuisine
Collaboration platforms	Meituan and Dianping	Grab
System background	Guidance of the Ministry of Commerce, No. 1 central document and other policy guidance	Initiated by the Provincial Department of Culture, Sports and Tourism

Despite the above differences, these two regions still have the same problems. Before the launch of the tourism food map, tourism in Guang'an District was mainly focused on sightseeing tourism, which was characterized by a wide distribution of scenic spots, poor cooperation effects, an incomplete consumption chain, and insufficient integration of resources in agriculture, commerce, culture, tourism, and other fields. In addition, its transmission channels are limited and its business model is relatively traditional[12]. Qinghe Province also focuses on sightseeing tourism. Although the province has abundant coastal island resources and active seafood culture, there are still situations where the consumption chain is not extended enough and there is a lack of diversified digital marketing methods. Currently, both of these places have good resource endowments but low conversion efficiency. Due to the existence of the same structure, mutual learning and mutual learning can only occur. Only when a problem has commonalities, that is, it has the same structure, can mutual learning and mutual learning occur.

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4.2 Reference path framework

Qinghe should learn from the experience of Guang'an and address its shortcomings such as scattered resources, single dissemination, and insufficient conversion one by one, rather than blindly copying them. Qinghe can rely on its cooperation with Grab to carry out three aspects of practice. One is resource integration, developing the "Qinghe Must Try Map" within the Grab App, connecting various attractions with delicious food. The attractions and experience projects are recommended by the government and verified on site to ensure the credibility of the list. The second is to launch the platform and promote specialty cuisine, relying on the "Qinghe Must Try Map" to establish a "Must Try Dishes" directory, and concentrate on promoting local representative dishes and food restaurants. The third is to promote Qinghe tourism, through cooperation between Grab and the tourism department of Qinghe Province through media, offline touchpoints in travel itineraries, and online traffic experts, to introduce Qinghe's tourism image, cultural characteristics, and food experiences to domestic and foreign tourists.

The above practices form the practical foundation for Qinghe's reference. In order to present the similarities, differences, and transferability of the practices in the two places more clearly, this article compares Guang'an's practices, Qinghe's referenceable content, and their own conditions from three dimensions: government led and platform empowered collaboration, promoting the integration of agriculture, commerce, culture, and tourism from the perspective of food, and data-driven precision marketing and evaluation, under a unified analytical framework, and makes migration judgments based on these comparisons. (Table 3)

Table 3 Unified Framework Comparison and Migration Judgment of Guang'an and Qinghe Smart Cultural Tourism Platform Models

Comparing dimensions	Guang'an practices	Qinghe conditions, and learning from	transfer judgments
The division of labor between the government and the platform	Government sets direction, Meituan operates	Led by the Tourism Department and undertaken by Grab, with limited financial resources at different levels	Architecture portability, operation transfer to market side
Food Connect Industry	21 street city delicacies connected with all elements	40 high-quality restaurants and island resources	Transitioning from single point dining to tourism, shopping, and entertainment combinations
Data deployment evaluation	Reaching over 8 million potential tourists		Shortcomings in the channel can be addressed, but merchant screening is required

The two regions have similar architectures but different divisions of labor. Guang'an is directed by the Ministry of Commerce and landed by Meituan, with clear boundaries between the government and the market; Qinghe is led by the Department of Culture, Sports and Tourism to cooperate with Grab. Due to limited administrative hierarchy and financial resources, standard setting and credit endorsement are left on the government side, while merchant screening and daily operations are entrusted to the platform. In terms of resources, Guang'an connects its scenic spots and specialties with 21 authentic city delicacies. Qinghe has 40 high-quality restaurants and resources of islands and seafood, which can be packaged with must try maps, island tours, and homestays to promote single point dining. On the data side, Guang'an's advertising is based on over 8 million tourist portraits

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and performance evaluations, while Qinghe can leverage Grab's user and travel data in eight countries to lock in customers and match products, filling the gap of a single channel. It has been proven that the bottleneck of migration lies not in technology, but in merchant organizations.

Table 4 Comparison Table of Guang'an Experience and Qinghe Reference Path

Regarding the path	Guang'an Experience	Qinghe's reference
resource integration	Integrate core attractions, cuisine, and restaurants	Food connects scenic spots and develops a 'must try map for Qinghe'
Platform launch and promotion of specialty cuisine	Promote popular attractions offline; Recommendation of online platform functional sections	Establish a "must try dish" catalog online and hold a "famous" restaurant award ceremony offline to attract customers
external publicity	Promotional video+cultural and creative peripheral	Government media, offline touchpoints, and online influencers promote

Similarly, by comparing and analyzing the comparison tables of the two routes, we can conduct in-depth interpretation from the following three aspects. In terms of resource integration, Guang'an has solved the trust problem of small and micro entities finding it difficult to enter large traffic pools through administrative endorsement; The government screens and packages scattered scenic spots, cuisine, and agricultural products into a unified entrance. Qinghe Province has developed a "must try Qinghe map" that connects scenic spots through delicious food. However, to truly solve the problem of resource fragmentation, the government must first complete on-site verification on the supply side; Otherwise, the traffic introduced by the platform will still encounter supply bottlenecks. It is obvious that the first step in resource integration is for the government to organize supply, rather than directly injecting traffic.

Guang'an has adopted a combination of online functional sections and offline popular attractions in the opening of the platform and the promotion of specialty cuisine, treating catering as the beginning of tourism. Qinghe Province has created a "must eat list" directory and held an award ceremony for famous restaurants, using offline ceremonies to endorse the online directory. Both places use food to create memory points, which are then amplified through platforms. In different places, Qinghe Province relies more on Grab's high-frequency scenes for tourism conversion. Promotion should be integrated into the entire process of user travel and shopping, rather than creating a separate webpage. Guang'an relies on a combination of online and offline high-speed rail promotional videos and cultural and creative products for external publicity. Qinghe Province can integrate the image of tourism into users' lives through Grab's cross scenario outreach and integration with internet celebrities. The role of promotion is not to make a big sound, but to turn it into people's overnight stays and local consumption, which is an important way to improve conversion rates. These three channels are interrelated and together form the operational mode for improving deficiencies in Qinghe Province. (Table 4)

5 Conclusion

The Guang'an "Tourism Food Map" and the Qinghe "Must Try Map" are very similar in problem orientation, path selection, and cooperation, indicating that the government and platform jointly promote the digital transformation of agriculture, commerce, culture, and tourism in Southeast Asia, which can be learned from. The conclusion of this article is three points: in terms of mechanism, the effectiveness of Guang'an is achieved through

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a chain like transmission of resource integration, equipment construction, consumption promotion, and income increase. As the property rights of village collectives are confirmed, the connection of interests can be found, which is the reason for the effectiveness of experience; From a reference perspective, the difficulties faced by Qinghe and Guang'an are similar. Grab's entry happens to be at a stage similar to China's previous model, with the possibility of low-cost connectivity. However, migration is not simply copying, but requires changing the role of the government, extending the consumption chain, and driving data based on local conditions. From a boundary perspective, technology is only a part, what truly matters is whether the local area can form a self functioning governance structure and regulatory framework, which is the most useful and difficult to imitate in experience output. From a practical perspective, the three suggestions for Qinghe are to place the government's positioning in the formulation of standards and endorsement of credit, hand over the selection and operation rights of merchants to Grab, rely on the must try map, form a complete consumption chain of seafood cuisine, island tourism, and homestays, and use Grab user information to establish a quantifiable and accurate marketing and evaluation system, thus overcoming the shortcomings of single dissemination and low conversion rate. This article only takes Guang'an and Qinghe as examples, and the universal applicability of this conclusion still needs to be tested by more Southeast Asian countries in different stages.

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