

Meso-Level Mechanisms of Business Environment Optimization in Ethnic Regions on Community Construction: A Case Study of Linxia's Ethnic Specialty Food Industry

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ABSTRACT

The optimization of the business environment in ethnic regions generates potential spillover effects on community construction through organizational coordination and rule reshaping, yet the intermediate transmission mechanisms remain under-theorized. This paper examines the ethnic specialty food industry in Linxia Hui Autonomous Prefecture, Gansu Province, constructing a meso-level analytical framework of "institutional supply—organizational coordination—relationship reconstruction—community outcomes." Findings indicate that industrial park anchoring, chain-leader enterprise mobilization, standardization, and brand integration have transformed the industry from dispersed operations to organized collaboration, engendering processual conditions for community construction through rule sharing, interest articulation, and intensified interaction. The study argues that the spillover from business environment optimization to community construction hinges not on policy rhetoric, but on the translation of institutional supply into stable collaborative relationships and sustained interaction scenarios through industrial organization. This research offers an analytical lens for understanding the community construction potential of business environment governance in ethnic regions.

Keywords: *Business environment, Ethnic regions, Community construction, Meso mechanisms.*

1. INTRODUCTION

The Regulation on Optimizing the Business Environment defines the business environment as institutional and systemic factors conditioning market economic activities. Its core lies in creating stable, fair, transparent, and predictable conditions through market-oriented, rule-of-law reforms—a systematic governance project involving rule supply, expectation stabilization, and trust generation. This affects not merely resource allocation efficiency but may reshape cooperation boundaries and interaction conditions, thereby acting upon community construction.

In ethnic regions, such effects frequently transcend economic efficiency, extending into social relations. Multi-ethnic settlement, cultural pluralism, and dual local and trans-local embeddedness render economic interaction a

critical vehicle for social reproduction and inter-ethnic exchange. The Linxia Hui Autonomous Prefecture case—where standardized, chain-based development of ethnic cuisine through the "Hezhou Flavor¹ Linxia Cuisine" brand leverages integrated policy instruments—demonstrates how business environment optimization acts upon community construction via industrial organizational restructuring. This offers a representative field for examining meso-level mechanisms linking institutional governance to social integration.²

1. Xi Jinping. Speech at the Central Conference on Ethnic Affairs[N]. Xinhua News Agency, 2021-08-28. (in Chinese with English abstract)

2. Department of Commerce of Gansu Province. 2024 China Ethnic Cuisine Industry Development Conference and Hezhou Flavors Linxia Food Consumption Season Kicks Off[EB/OL]. 2024. (in Chinese with English abstract)

Empirical evidence reveals an organizational transformation in Linxia's ethnic specialty food industry: from dispersed, trust-based operations toward institutionalized collaboration anchored by industrial parks, chain-leader enterprises, and standard-based governance. This shift progressively incorporates transactional relationships—originally sustained through acquaintance networks and informal coordination—into traceable, verifiable collaborative frameworks, rendering business environment optimization a critical variable in social reorganization and community construction.³ Local policies strategically target prepared dishes, livestock processing, and dairy products through platform investment and chain-leadership systems, while national standardization efforts for prepared dishes concurrently shape a macro-institutional environment that stabilizes trust through governance. This paper thus interrogates how, under multi-ethnic co-residence, business environment optimization transcends conventional cost-reduction functions to generate identifiable community construction effects through industrial coordination. What intermediary mechanisms enable this translation? Under what boundary conditions? When might coordination shift toward differentiation? These questions constitute our analytical core.

Rather than juxtaposing business environment, industrial organization, and community construction, this paper theorizes their interconnection within the industrial practices of ethnic regions. It interrogates how institutional supply reshapes coordination boundaries, how coordination restructures social relations, and under what conditions such restructuring spills over into community construction. The contribution lies in providing case-based analytical reference rather than normative prescription.

2. THEORETICAL FOUNDATION AND ANALYTICAL FRAMEWORK

Institutional economics elucidates how the business environment reshapes the boundaries of industrial coordination.⁴ Its core proposition holds that transaction costs and uncertainty jointly determine collaborative patterns among market

entities, while institutional supply reduces uncertainty and stabilizes cooperative expectations, thereby conditioning organizational forms. The business environment, in this sense, constitutes not merely a matter of administrative streamlining, but a critical institutional infrastructure that shapes the scope and predictability of collaboration.

Yet institutional economics alone remains insufficient to account for how industrial coordination in ethnic regions translates into community construction. Embeddedness theory suggests that economic action is invariably enmeshed in pre-existing social relations. In ethnic regions, industrial collaborative networks typically interweave with kinship, locality, and religious ties. Business environment optimization, by shifting certain cooperation from particularized trust toward institutionalized generalized trust, may fundamentally alter the stability and sustainability of cross-group, cross-locality collaboration.⁵

Community construction theory further indicates that social relation restructuring does not automatically yield communal outcomes. Communities do not exist naturally; they emerge gradually through the accumulation of shared rules, sustained interaction, and common experience. Accordingly, this paper does not merely juxtapose the three theoretical perspectives, but constructs a progressive explanatory chain of "institutional supply—organizational coordination—relation reconstruction—community outcomes" to elucidate how business environment optimization influences community construction through industrial synergy.⁶

This framework comprises four stages. Institutional supply—rules, standards, services, and infrastructure—reduces uncertainty and demarcates collaboration boundaries. Organizational coordination captures restructuring toward chain-based division of labor, platform synergy, and brand integration. Relation reconstruction denotes the shift from particularized to generalized institutional trust, yielding stabilized interest articulation and intensified interaction. Community

3. State Council of the People's Republic of China. Regulations on Optimizing the Business Environment[Z]. 2019. (in Chinese with English abstract)

4. Coase R. H. The Nature of the Firm[J]. *Economica*, 1937, 4(16): 386-405.

5. Zhang Juntao, Tang Rui. The Economic Effects and Realization Paths of Business Environment Optimization: An Empirical Analysis Based on Chinese Prefecture-Level Cities [J]. *China Industrial Economics*, 2020(10):136-154. (in Chinese with English abstract)

6. Li Junjie, Zhang Wei. Fostering the Consciousness of the Chinese National Community and Integrated Industrial Development in Ethnic Regions [J]. *Journal of South-Central Minzu University (Humanities and Social Sciences)*, 2022, 42(09):1-8+189. (in Chinese with English abstract)

outcomes are conceived as processual results: rule sharing, interaction densification, and institutional dependence. The argument centers on progressive social spillover through industrial organization as mediating layer.

Existing scholarship on ethnic industries focuses on growth effects, branding, and policy modalities, neglecting intermediate mechanisms linking business environment optimization to community construction. This study recuperates this meso-level process at the nexus of institution, organization, and interaction.

Three testable propositions follow. First, institutional supply reshapes coordination boundaries, conditioning transition from dispersed to organized collaboration. Second, spillover to community construction hinges on sustained rule sharing, interest articulation, and interaction—not merely scale expansion. Third, where supply lacks inclusive coverage or resources concentrate at core nodes, effects stagnate at efficiency gains. The inquiry targets not whether optimization "works," but its mechanisms and failure conditions.

3. RESEARCH DESIGN

This paper employs in-depth single-case analysis with meso-level mechanism explanation, selecting Linxia Hui Autonomous Prefecture to examine how business environment optimization acts upon community construction through industrial coordination. The case exhibits an extended industrial chain, diverse actors, dense regulatory frameworks, and strong outward market orientation—conditions that concentrate the entire process of institutional supply penetrating industrial organization⁷ and reshaping collaborative modes. Empirical analysis centers on the critical phase since 2023, examining the nexus among institutional supply, organizational coordination, and cross-actor interaction throughout park anchoring, chain-leader introduction, standard system construction, and brand expansion.

Data comprise three categories: national and ministerial institutional texts; policy documents, work reports, and media coverage from Gansu Province and Linxia Prefecture; and comparative materials from Qinghai Lamian and Xinjiang Nang industries to identify boundary conditions.

7. Yu Shuhong. Hezhou Flavors Leverage the "Tip-of-the-Tongue Economy"—An Observation of Linxia Prefecture's Efforts to Build a 10-Billion-Level Food Industry[N]. Gansu Economic Daily, 2024-08-06. (in Chinese with English abstract)

Operationally, business environment optimization is disaggregated into five institutional supply categories: regulatory transparency, park and infrastructure provision, quality standards and inspection, platform-type organization cultivation, and public branding. Community construction is operationalized along four dimensions: fair governance, interest articulation intensity, interaction density, and institutional dependence. Analysis triangulates textual analysis, process tracing, and cross-source verification.

4. CASE DESCRIPTION: THE ORGANIZATIONAL PRACTICES OF LINXIA'S INDUSTRY

The evolution of Linxia's ethnic specialty food industry has transcended conventional scale expansion, exhibiting a pronounced organizational restructuring. Industrial park anchoring, chain-leader mobilization, platform coordination, brand integration, and standards embedding operate not as isolated measures, but as interlocking components of a new operational framework. Production, processing, distribution, and sales relationships—previously dispersed across catering businesses, family workshops, and localized networks—are progressively absorbed into a rule-based, platform-supported collaborative system. The 2024 China Ethnic Cuisine Industry Development Conference hosted in Linxia signals the government's sustained commitment to this trajectory.⁸

From the perspective of industrial scale and structural change, publicly available data and authoritative media reports indicate continuous growth across multiple metrics: food processing enterprises, above-scale enterprises, industrial park construction, supply chain cultivation, and public brand outlet expansion. These developments signal not merely quantitative gains, but a qualitative transition from fragmented, experience-based operations toward chain-based division of labor, platform-driven coordination, and standards-based governance.⁹

A salient feature of this organizational transformation is the tight coupling between local governance instruments and national institutional norms. Through the industrial chain leadership

8. Linxia Prefecture Fully Promotes the Transformation and Upgrading of the Food Processing Industry[N]. Ethnic Daily, 2024-08-09. (in Chinese with English abstract)

9. Wang Hu. Linxia: Stirring the Surging Momentum of High-Quality Development[N]. Gansu Daily, 2024-07-06. (in Chinese with English abstract)

system, Linxia Prefecture has integrated investment attraction, factor allocation, infrastructure provision, and enterprise services into a unified coordination framework, with leading officials personally overseeing chain extension, supplementation, and strengthening. This signals a shift from generic policy support toward comprehensive governance mechanisms built around industrial chain operations.

A pivotal node in this transformation is the joint venture supply chain company established by the chain-leading enterprise and the local state-owned capital platform. Beyond enterprise attraction, this "prepared dishes processing + central kitchen + platform scheduling" model progressively converts dispersed, experience-dependent offline transactions into platform-based collaborative networks integrating order consolidation, process control, and quality traceability. Local governance instruments thus penetrate beyond policy documentation into the internal architecture of industrial organization, directly reshaping collaborative modalities and connectivity structures among actors.

The introduction of chain-leading enterprises represents not merely the result of investment attraction, but a key juncture at which the optimization of the business environment is translated from institutional texts into concrete organizational capacities. Its significance lies in the fact that this enterprise did not intervene after cooperative relations had matured, but entered at the initial stage when cooperation remained unstable, preemptively reducing uncertainty through a comprehensive set of institutional arrangements, thereby generating the initial trust for cooperation.

Public reports indicate that negotiations with Shandong Huifa Food Co., Ltd. were framed not merely as capital attraction, but as mutual empowerment. The agreement mandated priority hiring of local labor—including surplus rural workers and poverty-alleviated populations—coupled with skills training to facilitate integration into modern industrial systems. Simultaneously, the enterprise was required to anchor into local agricultural supply chains, scaling and standardizing specialty product procurement. The objective was thus not single-project landing, but embedding the chain-leader into local employment structures and supply systems as a force driving industrial restructuring.

Correspondingly, local governments furnished customized institutional supports to reduce entry costs and stabilize cooperative expectations: tailor-made standardized factories, initial rent reductions, registration and approval agency services, coordinated credit facilities, and upgraded cold-chain logistics, water, and electricity infrastructure. These measures transcend administrative efficiency gains, transforming inherently uncertain cross-locality relationships into negotiable, predictable, and executable contractual arrangements. Mutual consensus enabled rapid advancement of joint venture registration, factory renovation, and equipment debugging, achieving operational production within six months. Coordinated approval, factor guarantees, and customized services thus constitute collective institutional conditions for cross-locality enterprise entry and initial trust formation with local actors.

Meanwhile, national-level efforts to standardize and regulate prepared dishes provided critical compliance foundations for Linxia's industrial upgrading. The 2024 clarification of definitions, scope, and regulatory requirements by national authorities marked China's entry into a new stage of standardized development. Linxia's prioritization of prepared dishes coincided precisely with this institutional window. By building public capacities in inspection, cold-chain logistics, and quality traceability, local governments converted national compliance requirements into industrial access capabilities and reputational assets, lowering regulatory alignment costs for national market integration.

From the market entity perspective, business environment optimization manifests through sustained policy instruments spanning financial support, employment promotion, logistics facilitation, and brand development. Public reports indicate cumulative implementation of approximately 73.41 million yuan in reward and subsidy funds for brand building, standardized production, and technological upgrading; 422 million yuan in entrepreneurial loans alleviating financing constraints for SMEs and individual businesses; and employment generation for approximately 170,000 persons through brand system development and catering network expansion—forming a mutually reinforcing pattern of industrial development and employment-driven income growth.

These measures transcend mere external support for enterprise development. Fundamentally, they

lower barriers to participation in modern industrial collaborative networks. Farm households, cooperatives, small-scale processors, brand stores, supply chain companies, and platform enterprises—no longer reliant solely upon fragmented resources for independent market competition—are progressively integrated into a collaborative system underpinned by financial backing, logistical guarantees, standardized systems, and brand networks. It is precisely here that business environment optimization acquires preconditions for social integration effects: improving not merely enterprise development conditions, but the capacity for actors of diverse ethnicities, scales, and functional positions to be incorporated within shared organizational order.

5. PATHWAYS OF COMMUNITY CONSTRUCTION

Community formation in ethnic regions requires more than conceptual advocacy or shared interests; it demands the institutionalization of shared rules and sustained interaction. The Linxia case demonstrates how business environment optimization, mediated through industrial coordination, generates fair governance, interest articulation, and institutional dependence—laying micro-social foundations for community construction.¹⁰

Fair governance constitutes the logical starting point. By supplanting differential trust structures—kinship ties, acquaintance networks, and local customs—with uniform rules and public supervision, cooperation shifts from identity-based to procedural trust, enabling cross-ethnic collaboration beyond primordial boundaries.

In the food industry, technical rules and institutionalized enforcement provide critical entry points. National regulatory benchmarks for prepared dishes, combined with Linxia's park-based organization, standardization, and traceability systems, have transformed transactions from reputation-based exchanges into institutionalized models grounded in third-party inspection and standardized processes.¹¹ When diverse actors

cooperate under shared rules, institutionally grounded fairness emerges—transcending original group boundaries and establishing a stable basis for cross-ethnic cooperation.

Interest articulation requires integrating diverse actors into mutually dependent value realization processes, not merely incorporating them into the industrial chain. Community stability rests on a foundation of shared interests; only when actors form genuine benefit-sharing and risk-bearing connections can cooperative order transcend transactional attributes and evolve into stable relationships.

The Linxia case illustrates this embedding: chain-leader introduction, forty-two supply chain enterprises, and an organized chain linking farmers, cooperatives, processors, platforms, and brand stores have bound Han and Hui actors within a shared industrial ecology. Returns and risks are no longer isolated but jointly determined by order stability, brand reputation, and standard implementation. Under this governance framework, government coordinates, chain-leaders export capabilities, and SMEs and farmers enter through specialized division of labor—generating binding force beyond one-time transactions.

Yet this mechanism lacks inherent stability. Interest articulation becomes community's material foundation only when value distribution is equitable. If chain-leaders monopolize benefits while micro-actors bear risks without sharing dividends, articulation degenerates into structural dependence. Fair distribution mechanisms and risk mitigation arrangements within chain-based collaboration are thus essential to sustain this foundation.

Linxia has introduced targeted safeguards: strengthening rural cooperatives through subsidies and technical training to foster stable order-based relations with chain-leaders; constructing shared cold-chain logistics to reduce costs for micro-actors; and building public technical service platforms providing free quality inspection and standard consultation. These measures balance interest relations across the chain, enabling diverse actors to fairly share dividends and preventing interest articulation's degeneration into dependence.

Interaction and integration constitute the necessary link between institutional frameworks and socio-psychological community formation. Rules and interests provide structural scaffolding, yet without sustained high-frequency interaction,

10. Huang Chengwei, Qin Zhimin. The Logic and Path of Integrated Promotion of Rural Industrial Revitalization and Fostering the Consciousness of the Chinese National Community in Ethnic Regions [J]. Reform, 2022(05):116-126. (in Chinese with English abstract)

11. International Organization for Standardization. ISO 22000 -Food safety management systems[EB/OL]. <https://www.iso.org/standard/69085.html>, 2024.

cooperative relations remain instrumental and fail to sediment into cross-ethnic understanding. Community emerges not automatically from shared institutions and interests, but through repeated practical confirmation and reproduction.

Industrial chain collaboration institutionalizes this transformation. The state's principles of co-residence, co-study, co-work, and co-enjoyment are most continuously activated through "co-work." Linxia's ethnic food industry incorporates diverse actors into shared production chains—standard negotiation, collaborative production, logistics coordination, and unified training create cross-ethnic, high-frequency interaction scenarios. The significance lies not in intensity but in transforming cooperation from sporadic contact toward routinization and professionalization.

Structured by brand norms and service standards, these interactions sediment into stable cooperative habits and cross-cultural comprehension—forming occupational bonds transcending kinship and locality. This becomes the necessary intermediary from community of interests to community of social life.

Institutional identification is not abstract endorsement but gradual realization through long-term cooperation: local characteristics and ethnic resources gain market trust only through embedding in unified standards and common order. It is a higher-level outcome accumulated through fair governance, interest articulation, and interaction, acquiring endogenous momentum when actors perceive concrete benefits rather than responding to external coercion.

The Linxia ethnic food industry positions itself as a "Belt and Road" food supply base, targeting national and overseas markets. This necessitates interfacing with stringent domestic and international regulatory systems—food safety management, quality traceability, halal certification, and import-export registration.¹² Local governments have constructed inspection, testing, traceability, and certification capabilities as public goods, furnishing enterprises with low-cost or free institutional services. These function not merely to secure qualifications, but to guide local industry toward embedding in larger-scale market orders and regulatory systems. Institutional identification here does not dissolve local characteristics, but enables their broader market expression through

unified rules. Market actors thus gradually elevate from dependence on specific cooperative rules toward value recognition of national unified market order and modern governance—laying foundation for community of institutional identification.

The Linxia experience traces a progressive path: rule supply—synergy deepening—interaction intensification—identification strengthening. Rule transparency enhances cooperative expectations; deepening cooperation strengthens interest articulation; intensified interaction accumulates social capital; institutional dependence reinforces rule stability. Yet this process is neither natural nor unidirectional. It requires sustainable institutional supply, equitable resource distribution, and open organizational platforms. Imbalance at any link risks arresting community construction at short-term cooperation or generating new exclusion. Whether optimization ultimately spills over into social integration hinges not on policy formulation, but on the sustainable operation of mechanisms that stably generate integration outcomes.

6. DISCUSSION: BOUNDARY CONDITIONS AND COMPARISON

Business environment optimization does not uniformly translate into community construction; its impact is mediated by industrial morphology, resource distribution, and the inclusiveness of institutional supply. While the Linxia case demonstrates how chain-based coordination can foster rule-sharing and intensified interaction, it also reveals risks of core-periphery differentiation. Excessive concentration of standards, brands, and channels in parks or chain-leaders, combined with unequal access to certification, logistics, and financing for smaller actors, may undermine fair governance and convert interest articulation into dependency. Thus, the spillover into community outcomes depends not merely on institutional supply, but on its equitable reach and embeddedness.

Business environment optimization operates through distinct organizational logics. Its community-construction effects are conditional: when institutional supply deeply embeds in industrial organization and sustains equitable interest articulation and repeated interaction, it can transcend efficiency gains and foster social integration. Where such embedding is absent or unequal, outcomes may remain limited to economic upgrading. Hence, analyzing community construction in ethnic regions must be grounded in

12. International Organization for Standardization. ISO 22000 -Food safety management

concrete industrial morphologies—the framework offered here is a bounded explanatory tool, not a general formula.

7. CONCLUSION

This paper demonstrates that in ethnic regions, business environment optimization is not merely an economic governance arrangement serving efficiency improvement and market expansion, but may further spill over into processual results of community construction through industrial organizational reconstruction, rule sharing, and intensified interaction. The Linxia case illustrates that this spillover does not occur naturally through development, but rather results from the sustained effects of institutional optimization via organized collaboration and repeated interaction. Specifically, fair governance conditions promote the shift of cooperative foundations from identity-based trust toward procedural trust; interest articulation incorporates different actors into mutually dependent value realization processes; intensified interaction transforms institutional collaboration into perceivable cross-ethnic interactive experiences; and institutional dependence further enhances the stability of rule implementation and collaborative order.

It should be noted that, constrained by material types, this paper's grasp of subjective experiences and long-term identification changes remains relatively limited. Subsequent research should incorporate more interview, survey, and tracking materials to further enhance the capacity to identify mechanism boundaries, effect intensities, and their dynamic changes.

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