

Emotion, Network, and Institution: The Triple Logic of the "Cultural Identity-Investment Willingness" Conversion Mechanism for the New Generation of Teochew Diaspora

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Abstract: The new generation of Teochew diaspora is emerging as a critical force linking their homeland with global resources. How their "cultural identity" is effectively converted into "investment willingness" is a core issue for the sustainable development of Qiaoxiang (hometowns of overseas Chinese). Traditional research has either been confined to the singular perspective of "emotional drive" or fallen into the trap of "rational choice" economic reductionism, neglecting the complexity and dynamism of the conversion process. This article, based on the "embeddedness" theory from economic sociology, constructs a "Emotion-Network-Institution" triple-logic analytical framework to parse this conversion mechanism. The study posits that: Emotional Logic serves as the foundational impetus for the conversion, centered on "nostalgic memory" and "identity," providing the original psychological momentum and value orientation. Network Logic acts as the conversion accelerator, utilizing social capital such as "Teochew chambers of commerce" and "fellow townsmen associations" as vectors. Through information screening and credit endorsement, it accelerates the filtration of abstract emotional intentions into concrete business opportunities. Institutional Logic functions as the security guarantee, with the business environment, represented by "policy transparency" and "property rights protection," providing the final safety threshold and legitimacy guarantee for investment decisions, determining the conversion's sustainability and scale. These three logics are nested and sequential, collectively forming a complete closed loop for the conversion of the new generation's cultural identity into economic behavior. This study aims to transcend the "culture/economy" dichotomy, offering a new theoretical perspective for Qiaoxiang to implement precise policies and optimize work related to overseas Chinese affairs.

Keywords: New Generation of Overseas Chinese, Teochew Diaspora, Cultural Identity, Investment Willingness, Conversion Mechanism, Triple Logic.

1. Introduction: The Problem and Theoretical Divergence

In the context of deepening globalization and transnationalism, overseas Chinese, as a unique bridge connecting China and the world, are undergoing a profound generational evolution in their roles and contributions to their ancestral (host) country's modernization. The development history of prominent Chinese Qiaoxiang, represented by Teochew (Chaozhou), is closely intertwined with the interactive history of its overseas compatriots. However, compared to the older generation of overseas Chinese who adhered to the "falling leaves return to their roots" mentality, started with the "three knives" (kitchen knife, scissors, razor), and whose main contribution was "feedback-style" donations (e.g., funding schools, building bridges, and paving roads)-the new generation of Teochew diaspora (typically referring to those born after the 1980s, who received a complete education overseas or grew up in the digital age) exhibits markedly different group characteristics. They possess stronger cross-cultural adaptability, higher professional literacy, and a more distinct individual consciousness. Their identity also presents a hybridity interwoven with "localization" and "globalization" [1].

This generational difference has directly led to the diminishing effectiveness of the traditional "emotional

mobilization" model in overseas Chinese affairs. The emotional connection of the new generation to their homeland has shifted from their parents' "memories of material scarcity" to a "cultural-symbolic nostalgia." Their economic behavior has also transitioned from "emotion-driven public welfare feedback" to "market-logic-dominated value investment." Against this backdrop, a core issue urgently needing resolution emerges: How can Qiaoxiang like Teochew transform their unique and profound cultural heritage into effective capital to attract this new generation of overseas Chinese? More specifically, how does the "cultural identity" (an emotional attachment within the socio-psychological realm) of the new generation of Teochew diaspora cross boundaries and ultimately convert into "investment willingness" (a behavioral decision within the economic-rational realm)?

Clarifying this "culture-to-economy" conversion mechanism is not only a practical necessity for Qiaoxiang like Teochew to upgrade from "overseas capital" to "overseas wisdom" and activate new momentum for high-quality development, but it is also a theoretical frontier for deepening overseas Chinese studies and expanding the fields of migration sociology and cultural economics.

A review of existing research reveals that academic explanations for overseas Chinese investment motives generally fall into two paths, neither of which fully answers

the aforementioned question.

The first is "Cultural Emotionalism." This path, originating from traditional overseas Chinese studies, emphasizes the decisive role of "patriotism," "nostalgia economy," and "geographical/kinship ties." Scholars argue that a common dialect, lineage, customs, and even culinary preferences constitute the fundamental driving force for overseas Chinese to invest in their hometowns [2]. However, this paradigm falls short when explaining the new generation. Their emotional structure is more complex, and their cultural identity is "selective" and "situational." Why does a high degree of emotional identity in some groups manifest only as "symbolic consumption" (e.g., tourism, buying cultural products), while in others it can leap to "substantive investment"? What is the specific position of emotion in the conversion chain?

The second is "Economic Rationalism." This path, mainly based on Western neoclassical economics and rational choice theory, treats overseas Chinese investors as homogeneous "economic agents" (*homo economicus*), whose decisions depend entirely on utilitarian calculations of policy dividends, market opportunities, and factor costs. While this perspective has some explanatory power in analyzing large-scale industrial transfers and profit-seeking capital flows, its "de-contextualized" and "de-culturalized" tendency makes it incapable of explaining the high geographical concentration of overseas Chinese investment (why Teochew and not other regions with similar business environments?). It also fails to explain why, under the same market conditions, the investment preferences of groups with high cultural identity (e.g., inclination towards cultural industries, intangible heritage activation) differ significantly from those with low identity.

The opposition between these two paths essentially severs the socio-cultural attributes of economic behavior. As Granovetter stated, all economic actions are "embedded" in specific social structures and relationship networks [3]. The investment decisions of the new generation of overseas Chinese are neither purely emotional impulses nor rational calculations in a vacuum. They are the complex product of the interplay of multiple factors: cultural identity, social capital, and the institutional environment. Therefore, this study attempts to transcend the "emotion/rationality" dichotomy. From a "process-mechanism" perspective, it constructs a "Emotion-Network-Institution" triple-logic analytical framework. This paper argues that emotional logic is the "initiating impetus," network logic is the "accelerating channel," and institutional logic is the "safety valve." These three elements are sequential and mutually reinforcing, jointly analyzing the dynamic process of cultural identity converting into investment willingness.

2. Emotional Logic: Cultural Identity as the Initiating Impetus

In the conversion mechanism chain, emotional logic holds the primary position. It answers the fundamental directional question: "Why Teochew?" For the new generation of overseas Chinese, countless investment targets with equal or higher returns exist globally. Only the emotional drive based on cultural identity can pull their attention back from the global market and focus it on the specific "homeland" of Teochew. Emotional logic is the "prime mover" for the emergence of investment willingness. It does not directly

determine the occurrence of the investment behavior itself, but it provides the necessary psychological soil and value foundation for the "germination" of investment willingness.

2.1. Symbolic Awakening of Nostalgic Memory: From "Cultural Restoration" to "Value Reassessment"

Although the new generation of overseas Chinese did not experience their parents' material deprivation, they grew up amidst their parents' "nostalgic narratives." The specific aroma of Teochew Gongfu tea, the unique ritual of the Mid-Autumn Pagoda Burning, the lively scenes of the Qinglong Temple Fair, and even the architectural details of ancestral homes (Teochew-style houses) together constitute their collective memory and cultural totems of "Teochew." This nostalgic memory, further reinforced in their cross-cultural upbringing, becomes an important coordinate for defining "who I am."

When the new generation looks back at their homeland from the perspective of an "other," this nostalgic memory is easily triggered, generating an impulse for "cultural restoration." For example, when they witness the ancestral homes carrying family memories falling into disrepair, or discover that traditional skills from their childhood (like Teochew woodcarving or embroidery) are on the verge of being lost, a sense of responsibility derived from cultural identity arises. In an interview, a Teochew-diaspora designer based in North America mentioned his distress upon returning home and seeing many exquisite "Kansai" (porcelain-inlay) decorations in the old city falling off due to weathering. This "distress" did not stem from economic loss, but from the emotional impact of the impending "loss" of a cultural symbol.

This emotional impact is the starting point of the conversion mechanism. It prompts individuals to reassess the value of these cultural elements and fosters a willingness to "intervene." The initial intention of this intervention is often non-utilitarian, aimed at "repairing" the breaking cultural chain. For instance, an overseas Chinese might initially intend to fund the restoration of an ancestral home or sponsor an inheritor of intangible cultural heritage. At this stage, the investment willingness is still in a vague "public welfare" or "emotional" phase, but its focus has been precisely "anchored" from the outside world onto the specific cultural symbols of Teochew.

2.2. Transnational Practice of Identity: From "Bloodline" to "Career Linkage"

If nostalgic memory is an emotional look back at the "past," then identity is a value construction oriented towards the "present" and "future." For the new generation growing up in multicultural environments, "Teochew-ren" (Teochew person) is not just a bloodline label, but a social identity that needs to be maintained and strengthened through transnational practice. Under the grand label of "Chinese identity," the "Teochew" identity provides a more discernible cultural distinction.

Investing in the homeland becomes an effective way for the new generation to "practice" their Teochew identity and consolidate their social status within the global Teochew network. By investing in their hometown, they not only create an economic link with the homeland but also complete a dual narrative of "seeking roots" and "empowerment" in a social and cultural sense. A

"third-generation" overseas Chinese who took over his family business in Southeast Asia frankly stated that participating in the renovation project of a cultural block in Teochew was, for him, of secondary importance in terms of business returns. More importantly, it earned him high prestige within the local Teochew community and was seen as an exemplary model of "not forgetting one's roots" in family inheritance.

Under this logic, the investment behavior is endowed with a social significance that transcends economic rationality. It becomes an "identity investment," a "cultural practice" to declare their "Teochew" identity to their transnational social network and draw resources of legitimacy [4]. This practical need further focuses the vague nostalgic sentiment into a more proactive willingness for a career linkage. They begin to consider how to combine this cultural identity with their own professional advantages (e.g., finance, design, technology) to find a "second curve" for their careers in the homeland. At this point, emotional logic has fulfilled its mission-it has locked onto a globalized individual and turned them into a "potential investor" for Teochew.

3. Network Logic: Social Capital as the Accelerating Channel

While emotional logic provides the "why," it cannot overcome the immense gap of "how." Transnational investment inherently faces high information asymmetry, differences in legal systems, and business culture divides. A new-generation overseas Chinese, even with strong investment willingness, can easily be deterred by the practical obstacles of being in an "unfamiliar place." At this juncture, the Teochew social network-bound by ties of geography, kinship, and profession-acts as "social capital," playing the role of the "accelerating channel" and "risk filter" for the conversion mechanism [5].

3.1. Information Screening and Opportunity Provision: From "Ambient Nostalgia" to "Precise Business Opportunity"

Emotion-driven investment willingness is often diffuse, for example, "I want to do something for Teochew culture." A core function of the social network is to concretize this "ambient nostalgia" into "precise business opportunities." The global network of the International Teochew Groups, Teochew chambers of commerce, fellow townsmen associations, and various professional associations (e.g., the Teochew Doctoral Group) constitutes a key hub for the new generation to obtain information about their homeland [6].

Compared to public government investment information, information from within the social network has two key advantages: First, "Screening." Core members of the network (e.g., chamber leaders, fellow townsmen who have already invested) will "filter" and "translate" the complex policies and projects based on their local experience, helping the new generation weed out false information and high-risk traps. Second, "Customization." The network can "customize" and push business opportunities based on the specific professional background and resource endowments of its members. For example, a Teochew-diaspora PhD in artificial intelligence in Silicon Valley learned about the urgent need for "intelligent upgrading" in Teochew's local manufacturing industry through the annual meeting of the Teochew Doctoral Group, thus precisely matching a

technology application scenario.

Through efficient information flow, the social network vastly reduces the "search costs" for the new generation of overseas Chinese. It acts as a bridge, guiding the diffuse emotional energy to the most needed and best-matched structural nodes of Teochew's industrial layout, completing the key conversion from "willingness" to "opportunity."

3.2. Credit Endorsement and Risk Buffering: From "Individual Decision" to "Network Co-bearing"

One of the biggest obstacles to transnational investment is the lack of trust. For the new generation, which places high importance on the spirit of contract and the rule of law, the complexity of the homeland's "acquaintance society" (renqing shehui) can instead become a deterrent. The Teochew social network, especially the collective credit accumulated by the "Teochew merchant" brand, provides a "network endorsement" that transcends the individual.

On the one hand, the network provides "credit endorsement." When a local project or partner is "recommended" by an authoritative network like a Teochew chamber of commerce, it is implicitly credited. This trust, based on "insider" status, is irreplaceable by any commercial due diligence and constitutes the "social safety mat" that gives the new generation the courage to initiate investment. One interviewee stated that his final decision to invest in a local Teochew prepared-food enterprise was critically influenced by the fact that the company's founder was recommended by an "old acquaintance" of his father's at the Teochew Poit Ip Huay Kuan in Singapore. This "acquaintance society" credit chain made him feel secure.

On the other hand, the network provides "risk buffering." Investment always carries risks, but risks for investments embedded in a social network are "semi-controllable." The network not only provides resources beforehand (e.g., joint investment, supply chain collaboration) but also offers "informal" dispute resolution mechanisms during and after. When an investment encounters difficulties (e.g., policy changes, contract disputes), organizations like chambers of commerce and fellow townsmen associations often step in to coordinate, using their local social influence to "smooth things over." This "network co-bearing" mechanism significantly increases the risk tolerance of the new generation, allowing them to dare to move from "small-scale trial" to "substantive investment."

4. Institutional Logic: The Business Environment as the Security Guarantee

If emotional logic is the "engine" and network logic is the "transmission," then institutional logic is the "braking system" and "navigation system." It determines the final "landing" and "sustainability" of the investment behavior. The new generation's global perspective and professional background make them far more sensitive to the business environment than their parents. Their parents might have relied on "connections" (guanxi) and "favors" (renqing) to navigate ambiguous institutional zones, but the new generation relies more on "rules" and "the rule of law." A transparent, predictable, and fair institutional environment is their "last line of defense" for converting investment willingness into actual action, and it is the "security

guarantee" of the conversion mechanism.

4.1. Policy Transparency and Stability: From "Emotional Reliance" to "Rule Reliance"

When assessing the investment environment, the new generation of overseas Chinese primarily focuses on policy "transparency" and "stability." What they dislike is not strict regulation, but "fickle" policies that change overnight and "person-specific" selective enforcement. Ambiguous policy space implies huge rent-seeking costs and uncontrollable risks [7].

In recent years, the efforts of Teochew and China as a whole in "delegating power, streamlining administration, and optimizing services" and improving the business environment have provided an institutional "reassurance" for the new generation. For example, "one-stop" service windows for overseas Chinese-invested enterprises, simplified cross-border approval processes, and clear industrial support lists (e.g., special subsidies for cultural and creative industries, digital economy) - these clearly verifiable institutional provisions have greatly enhanced investment predictability.

One interviewee, who develops cultural tourism projects in Europe, chose to land a boutique homestay project in Teochew after comparing several cities in China. He admitted that what impressed him was not the "nostalgia card," but the clear definitions in the Teochew Ancient City protection regulations regarding the property rights and renovation standards for the "activation of overseas Chinese houses." This institutional transparency, "laying the cards on the table," made him feel the rigidity of the rules, thus generating a "rule reliance" that transcended "emotional reliance." This reliance is the fundamental guarantee for him to invest significant capital in a long-term operation.

4.2. Property Rights Protection and Contractual Spirit: From "Public Donation" to "Commercial Investment"

Another core of institutional logic lies in the rigid protection of "property rights." This is the fundamental benchmark distinguishing "public donation" from "commercial investment." A donation is a one-way emotional contribution, whereas an investment is a two-way value exchange, premised on the effective protection of the invested capital (including intangible assets like intellectual property and brand) [8].

The investment fields of the new generation are increasingly concentrated in "light-asset" areas such as cultural creativity, digital technology, and modern services. The core value of these fields lies in "IP" (Intellectual Property). For example, the viability of a business model based on the modern redesign of Teochew's intangible cultural heritage (e.g., Teochew embroidery, hand-pulled pottery) depends entirely on whether its design copyrights can be effectively protected. If a hit cultural product is quickly and arbitrarily counterfeited by the market, all efforts driven by emotional and network logic will be in vain.

Therefore, the local government's enforcement effectiveness in intellectual property protection and judicial adjudication of contract disputes constitutes the "touchstone" of institutional logic. Only when the new generation perceives that their homeland's institutional environment can effectively defend their legitimate rights and interests will

they dare to invest their most innovative core assets in the homeland. The perfection of institutional logic marks the "closing of the loop" of the conversion mechanism-it ensures that emotional investment can receive market returns, which in turn motivates investors to generate deeper cultural identity and stronger network stickiness, forming a sustainable positive cycle.

5. Conclusion: The Nesting of the Triple Logic and Practical Implications

This article aims to unlock the "black box" of the "cultural identity" to "investment willingness" conversion for the new generation of Teochew diaspora. By constructing an "Emotion-Network-Institution" triple-logic analytical framework, this study argues that this conversion is not a linear result determined by a single factor, but a dynamic process of interlocking and sequential steps.

First, **Emotional Logic** is the **Initiating Impetus**. Cultural identity, based on "nostalgic memory" and "identity," is the fundamental characteristic distinguishing the new generation of overseas Chinese from other investors. It provides the value orientation for "why invest" and the original momentum for "investing in the homeland," completing the "anchoring" of investment willingness.

Second, **Network Logic** is the **Accelerating Channel (Accelerator)**. Social capital, represented by Teochew chambers of commerce and fellow townsmen associations, is the "accelerator" and "filter" of the conversion mechanism. Through "information screening" and "credit endorsement," it overcomes the trust and information barriers of transnational investment, accelerating the conversion of diffuse emotional intentions into concrete "business opportunities."

Finally, **Institutional Logic** is the **Security Guarantee**. The business environment, centered on "policy transparency" and "property rights protection," is the "safety valve" of the conversion mechanism. It provides the new generation with "rule reliance," determines whether the investment willingness can ultimately "land," and ensures the sustainability and scale of the conversion.

These three logics form an organic whole: Emotion is the "face" (Mianzi, the external), Institution is the "lining" (Lizi, the internal substance), and Network is the "thread" (Daizi) that connects the face and the lining. Without the emotional face, the institution and network would lose their "overseas Chinese" characteristic. Without the institutional lining, emotion and network cannot "cover" the risks of commercial investment. Without the network thread, emotion and institution cannot be effectively linked.

Based on the above analysis, this study proposes three practical implications for the overseas Chinese affairs work in Qiaoxiang like Teochew:

First, **in emotional connection, shift from "passive appeal" to "active empowerment."** Traditional fellowship and kinship activities are important, but for the new generation, "cultural empowerment" should be emphasized. The government should vigorously promote the "digital engineering" of Teochew culture (e.g., establishing a Teochew intangible cultural heritage database, a "Metaverse" Teochew association, a Teochew dialect APP), providing the new generation with cultural carriers that are easily accessible and interactive. Through the co-creation of

"cultural IP," the professional advantages (e.g., design, IT) of the new generation can be deeply integrated with the homeland's culture, allowing cultural identity to be sublimated in "co-created value".

Second, **in network building, shift from "social platform" to "professional hub."** Promote the transformation and upgrading of traditional Teochew groups and chambers of commerce, upgrading them from "social networking" platforms to "professional hubs" for "industry matchmaking" and "capital services." The government should play the role of a "super-connector," regularly pushing "problem lists" such as industrial needs and technological shortcomings to these network hubs, and guide them to establish market-oriented tools like "Overseas Teochew Youth Venture Capital Funds" to provide professional investment and financing services for the new generation's "small-scale, light-asset, high-tech" investment projects.

Third, **in institutional supply, shift from "policy preferences" to "environmental optimization."** The new generation of overseas Chinese is not sensitive to "supra-national treatment" policy preferences; they value a fair, transparent, and predictable "soft environment" for business. Qiaoxiang governments must deeply recognize that a law-based, internationalized business environment is, in itself, the most attractive "hometown sentiment" for the new generation. It is imperative to continuously deepen reforms in "delegating power, streamlining administration, and optimizing services," especially in strengthening institutional innovation in areas like intellectual property protection, cross-border data flow, and safeguarding the rights and interests of overseas Chinese capital. "Institutional confidence" must be forged into the strongest "gravitational field" to attract the new generation of overseas Chinese.

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