Call for Eggs: An Exploratory Study on Cross-Border Egg Donation from Taiwan to the US

Karen Chang
University at Albany, State University of New York, kchang2@albany.edu
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Student: Karen Chang

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M.A. Final Project Committee Members:

[Signature]

Dr. Rajani Bhatia (Chair)

[Signature]

Dr. Elise Andaya (Second Committee Member)
M.A. Final Project

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Karen Chang

Committee:

Dr. Rajani Bhatia (Chair)

Dr. Elise Andaya

Department of Women’s, Gender, and Sexuality Studies

University at Albany, SUNY

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Abstract

This paper sheds light on how Taiwanese egg donors and recruitment agencies engage with the transnational fertility industry. Taiwan, as a popular sending country of Asian ethnic egg donors to the US, has fostered a vibrant digital community consisting of egg donation agencies, agents, and previous and intended donors. Recruitment agencies employ social media to recruit donors by constructing carefree, easy, and highly rewarded narratives of cross-border donation trips. Donors utilize anonymous group chats and public forums to exchange information and manage the physical and mental risks within the donation process. Through a narrative analysis, I identified common patterns of these donation trips, and recognized the bioavailability (Cohen 2007) of Taiwanese donors and their efforts to reverse the disadvantage. By looking into the narratives constructed by recruitment agencies and donors, we can understand how the global egg market seeks to recruit Taiwanese donors through social media campaigns and how these donors engage with the global fertility industry.
CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

With the progress of assisted reproductive technologies (ARTs), the fertility industry has become an extremely lucrative business around the world. The difference in cost, regulations and gamete gene pool are the reasons ART users start to perform cross-border reproductive travel. Common patterns include intended parents traveling to circumvent regulatory bans such as on surrogacy (Deomampo 2015), sex selection (Whittaker 2012) or ART access for same sex couples (Leibetseder & Griffin 2018). In some cases, ART users travel to less developed countries where they can access cheaper treatments and desirable eggs (Speier 2010; Perler & Schurr 2021).

A less visible travel pattern is the movement of gamete providers, especially egg providers, flying to a different destination to donate their eggs. In these cases, global market conditions that prompt cross-border travel include destinations like India or the US where the demand and compensation for eggs is high and there are no limits on the number of times one can donate (Whittaker and Speier 2010; Pande 2020).

Taiwan is a country that is famous for its robust healthcare system and high technology medicine. ART treatments are popular and common in Taiwan, which has become a popular receiving country for ART users from nearby Asian countries. However, the country strictly regulates gamete donations. Egg providers are allowed to donate only once in their lifetime and the compensation cannot exceed $99,000 NTD (roughly USD 3,200). As a result, Taiwan has also become a sending country for Taiwanese egg providers.

For Taiwanese women, egg donation is not an unfamiliar topic. In Taipei, the capital of Taiwan, there is a famous “cram school street” for high schoolers and college students who are preparing
to take the TOEFL or GRE, law bar and other government exams. A few fertility clinics squeezed themselves into the cram school street, recruiting potential egg providers who are experiencing uncertainty in their lives.

With a growing demand for Asian ethnic eggs (Deomampo 2019, 2021; Tsai, et al. 2022), egg agencies started to branch out to Asian countries to recruit Asian women to travel to popular destination countries to donate their eggs. Advertisements to recruit egg donors started to show up in Taiwan, especially on social media and different public online forums. A fertility tourism pattern of Taiwanese women traveling to foreign countries to provide their eggs has since begun.

My research project “Call for Eggs: An Exploratory Study on Cross-Border Egg Donation from Taiwan to the U.S.” aims to understand how the Taiwanese engage online with the transnational fertility industry, especially concerning egg donation. The goal of this research is to collect and document how Taiwanese egg providers participate in the global egg supply chain and how this global egg market seeks to recruit Taiwanese donors through social media campaigns and advertising. Existing literature on transnational egg donation is scarce and primarily focused on Europe. In addition, scholarship on transnational fertility tourism involving Asia centers on the travel of gamete recipients. My research can shed light on the practice of fertility tourism involving egg donors from Asia, and how Taiwanese agents and donors participate in the process online.

In this project, I use egg donors and egg providers interchangeably. I recognize the term “egg donor” is embedded in the altruism framework of gamete donation, and egg provider is believed to be a more neutral term. I believe both egg donors and egg providers are suitable terms for the Taiwan-US egg donation context. Besides, “egg donor” is how most actors in the industry refer to themselves or their clients.
CHAPTER 2: LITERATURE REVIEW

Commodifying Donor Eggs

Social scientists have been interested in ART and how it stimulates our society’s understanding of race, kinship, and reproduction (Almeling 2009, 2015; Cromer 2019; Homanen 2018; Newman 2019). The traditional assumption of altruism towards family as a female responsibility influences the practice of ARTs. For example, third party assisted reproduction services such as surrogacy or oocyte provision is viewed, regulated, and practiced as an altruistic act (a “donation” even when commodified) to help others achieve motherhood or enjoy parenthood (Ragone, 1994). A donation framework of gamete provision was thus established in the US. With the popularization of ART services and the growing demand for donor eggs, the fertility industry has spawned recruitment agencies and egg and sperm banks in addition to clinics to cater to gamete recipients and donors. The highly commercialized price/compensation of eggs creates an egg market, where recruitment agents are trying to find “sellable” eggs that come from donors with “desirable” qualities (Almeling, 2009, 2011).

However, Cattapan (2016) critiqued the language of donation arguing that it restricts donors’ agency, stripping their rights to “bargain and struggle” (Federici 1975, as cited in Cattapan, 2016, p. 243) and making them feel less comfortable requesting medical attention and information. Egg donors are also made aware that they need to present themselves as altruistic women to boost their chances of getting selected (Almeling 2007). Gezinski et al. (2016) revealed that 98% of potential egg donors rank “helping others to have children” as one of the significant reasons for their donation, while only 54% of potential egg donors reported that they are aware of the potential
psychological risks; and 69.51% of them believe that potential risks were somewhat minor to very minor.

**Globalizing Egg Market**

With the commercialization of fertility treatment and the heightened regulations (Bergmann 2011) in developed countries, fertility tourism became a common solution for people who cannot afford or do not have access to treatment in the country they live in. As more and more ART users travel to different countries for eggs and IVF treatment, the demand for eggs skyrocketed in the popular destination areas. Egg providers in these areas are not portrayed as altruistic women who are giving life but as socially and economically constrained victims who are selling their eggs to survive (Nahman 2008; Gupta 2006). Some of these egg providers also see themselves as sellers of their bodily commodities. In Nahman’s qualitative study (2008) of Romanian egg provision to Israeli recipients, one interviewee, Nadia, asserted her right to engage in the market as a seller, insisting that she was “giving life. So, it’s not a problem to get paid to give life” (Nahman 2008: 68).

Some destination countries of IVF treatments such as Thailand and the Czech Republic have become the nexus of fertility tourism (Whittaker and Speier 2010). Not only will gamete recipients arrive for cheaper treatments and select gametes (Speier 2016), but egg providers from other countries will also travel here to donate in exchange for higher compensation and a chance to see the world (Tober and Kroløkke 2021; Pande 2020). Transnational egg agencies use the tourism narrative and photos of vacations to attract providers (Kroløkke 2015: 23). These narratives of a “free vacation” were also used as a disguise for “the discomforts of travel, medication injections, and the uncertainties of medical procedures in a foreign place” (Tober & Kroløkke 2021: 9). Pande (2020) describes egg providers in South Africa, who view egg provision as “a way to escape the
normative expectations of their (primarily rural, conservative) families” and fulfill their “aspirations for cosmopolitanism” (Pande 2020: 4).

**From Stratified Reproduction to Reproductive Tourism**

On the surface level, it may be considered a positive for racialized gametes to become more valuable and for donors of color to receive more compensation. It shows the industry has started to show interest and recognize value in non-white gametes (Quiroga 2007). The rareness and expensive price of Asian or multi-ethnic gametes, however, obscures below surface problems in the ART industry. Minorities like Asians and indigenous people, for example, cannot access ARTs with the gametes that meet their needs (Newman 2019; Deomampo 2019), reflecting how reproduction is stratified among different ethnic groups in the US. Stratified reproduction per Shellee Colen “describe[s] the power relations by which some categories of people are empowered to nurture and reproduce, while others are disempowered” (Ginsberg and Rapp 1995, 3). The lack of ART options for Asians in the US demonstrates how their reproductive rights are constrained. The pattern of Taiwanese donors traveling to other countries to donate eggs is also a reflection of inequality and the relatively disempowered status of Taiwanese young women without financial capital who participate in globalized ART markets.

As demand for donors of certain ethnicities and the price for their eggs grow, the fertility industry seeks bioavailable (Cohen 2007) bodies to make up for the shortage and boost their sales. Cohen (2007) stated that “to be bioavailable in my terms is to be available for the selective disaggregation of one’s cells or tissues and their reincorporation into another body (or machine)” (Cohen 2007, 83). The bioavailability of Taiwanese donors refers to their willingness to donate their eggs in exchange for money and a chance to visit the US. A shortage of Asian ethnic eggs within the US
combines with the popularity of becoming cross-border egg donors within Taiwan to construct the bioavailability of Taiwanese young women.

Speier (2016) has demonstrated that intended parents from the Global North will purchase eggs from eastern European countries. Moll (2019) also shows how the fertility industry started to seek white/Caucasian-looking donors from South Africa because donors from South Africa are willing to donate for a smaller amount of compensation. A transnational egg supply chain has since formed. Tober and Kroløkke (2021) use the concept of reproductive colonialism to describe this pattern of clinics and egg banks that caters to the global North exploiting the bioavailability of the global South and East.

Using tourism as an attraction to recruit ART users has since become common, especially in countries that are either exoticized or romanticized like Thailand for Global North ART users and the US for Global South donors. Almeling (2017) has pointed out that donors in the US will bring their friends or family with them to the destination of their egg retrieval surgery, trying to turn the medical event into a family vacation. The industry uses languages like holidays and vacations to attract ART users to travel to different countries for IVF treatments (Speier 2016). Kroløkke (2015) pointed out that agencies rely on the idea of tourism to recruit egg providers. In the recruitment campaign, agencies never show photos of the technical side of the donation trip, but "photos engage a more typical holiday setting aligned with conventional touristic expectations" (Kroløkke 2015: 23). Tober and Kroløkke (2021) also presented how egg agencies manipulate the idea of traveling for cross border egg providers: “the discomforts of travel, medication injections, and the uncertainties of medical procedures in a foreign place is turned into a fun tourist experience more likely to be experienced by a privileged or mobile elite” (Tober & Kroløkke 2021: 9).
Furthermore, Pande’s study on egg provision in South Africa revealed that recruitment agencies act as travel agencies to “organize the entire package—the itinerary, flights, accommodations, and the sightseeing. The egg providers travel in groups of 4 – 12, and are accompanied by a ‘den leader,’ often a former egg provider. The den leader may administer injections and accompany the egg provider to her ultrasounds, but her main task is to ensure the safety of the women as well as to ensure that the group behaves responsibly before the egg retrieval.” (2020: 6). Scholars of cross-border egg donation travel have identified various strategies and patterns of the migration, which also recur in the Taiwan to U.S. case.

**Seeking Asian Ethnics**

The discussion on race and ARTs is one of the hottest topics in social studies research regarding ARTs. Race is still the most important element when recruiting and selecting gamete providers (Cromer 2019; Almeling 2011). On one hand, some ART users want to reproduce whiteness by purchasing eggs from European heritage (Speier 2016). On the other hand, the fertility industry often used multi-ethnic eggs as a selling point because of their rareness (Newman 2019; Cromer 2019). In the US egg market, “the ova of white and Asian women are the most requested, but many advertisements also overtly state that they welcome applications from women from all ethnicities; non-white and non-Asian women may be included in a broker’s pool of potential egg providers even if they never get matched with intended parents” (Martin 2018: 156).

The demand for Asian heritage eggs is increasing. Asians are the “fastest-growing minority group in the United States and have high rates of assisted reproductive technology usage” (Deomampo 2019). Besides, China has become one of the major sending countries of gamete recipients (Weis 2021). Eggs with Asian heritage have thus become one of the “scarce and valuable” commodities
in the global ART market (Deomampo 2019). As a result, egg banks started to view “eggs of color” as valuable assets. In order to attracting more clients, egg banks will actively try to recruit more donors that can provide valuable eggs.

Although scholars have noticed the surge of Asian actors in the global fertility market and the high demand for Asian ethnic eggs, research on reproductive tourism involving Asian actors has mostly focused on ART recipients (Shirai 2019; Yang 2020) or regulations (Whittaker 2011). In Taiwan, the academic discourse on assisted reproductive technology centers on the regulations of the technology (Heng 2007) and ethical practice of ART procedures (Wu 2012).

Heng’s study (2007) on egg donation establishes Taiwan as having the most active ART industry within East Asia given that Japan, Korea, and China have stricter regulations on donor compensation. However, in comparison to the US and other ART destination countries, ART services in Taiwan are more regulated. According to the Assisted Reproduction Act of 2018, women can donate their eggs only once in their lifetime in Taiwan, and receive compensation not exceeding $99,000 NTD. As a result, some Taiwanese egg donors who want to donate a second time will seek opportunities to donate outside of Taiwan.
CHAPTER 3: METHODOLOGY

Research Questions

This research project maps out the online sites of cross-border egg donation from Taiwan to the US and identifies the common narratives employed by marketers and matters of concern as relayed by providers. Cross-border egg donation from Taiwan is a topic I began to follow in 2018, when recruitment agencies launched social media accounts in order to outreach to prospective providers via the Internet.

My research questions are the following:

1. What are the major narratives employed in online sites of the fertility industry in Taiwan to attract egg providers to travel abroad? What other devices do agencies adopt to construct the image of a cross-border egg donation trip?

2. How do Taiwanese egg providers engage with the tourist narratives themselves? What matters of concern do they raise?

Data Collection

When I started the research project to understand the roles of Taiwan and Taiwanese donors in the global egg supply chain, I intended to do interviews with providers and agents. However, I encountered a major setback in gaining access to these groups. The recruitment agencies may have viewed my research as a threat to their business and, I learned, there is no efficient way to connect and communicate with donors in a short time frame.
I decided to approach my research from a different angle by collecting the materials published by these actors (agents and prospective or past providers) online to portray the industry and the people within it. To answer my two research questions, I combed through websites, social media accounts, and anonymous public forums that make up the online cross-border egg donation community in Taiwan.

I employ a qualitative research methodology for this project, focusing on narrative analysis. The narrative analysis sheds light on how agencies shape the discourse around cross-border egg donation and control the information circulating online. By monitoring independent, anonymous public forums and collecting articles that are posted by previous and prospective donors, I was able to understand how donors engage with the narratives shaped by the donation agencies and come up with their own strategies to navigate the donation journey.

I named this set of data the independent posts. These data from independent public forums are not associated with any agencies. The forum is operated by social media corporations to host discussion forums on different topics. I scrutinize the two biggest public forums in Taiwan: ptt and dcard to search for experience-sharing posts from previous donors. The two online forums operate like Reddit, where they have different sub-forums and everyone can post anonymously. I found around 10 posts to incorporate into my research for a better understanding of how donors view their own autonomy in the process and how they engaged with the narrative(s) agencies put out.

In addition, I monitored an anonymous group chat for over 6 months, which has around 150 intended donors, donors in process, and previous donors exchanging information and concern together. The group chat was created by an agent in IBabyAngel. While it is public information
that the administrator of the chat is associated with an agency, the administrator is not very active in the chat, which allows the discussion in the anonymous group to be diverse and vibrant.

To identify the agencies’ websites and social media accounts I would be analyzing, I did a thorough Google search and found around 10 agencies that specialized in cross-border egg donation from Taiwan. I narrowed the 10 agencies down to 7 through the following inclusion criteria:

- Agencies based in Taiwan and dedicated to recruiting Taiwanese donors for travel to the US. For example, I excluded agencies that targeted Chinese, Hong Kongese, and Taiwanese donors for travel to non-US destinations.
- Agencies who are active within the past year (2022). I excluded agencies with websites and social media accounts that only contain older posts and information without updates.
- Agencies that have enough information and materials published online to support the clear narrative that I am looking for. I excluded agencies that published similar posts or that did not offer a lot of content on their website.

The seven agencies that I selected include:

- **BBCS**: a popular agency that was frequently mentioned in an anonymous group chat. Their main channel to communicate with the public and publish recruitment materials is through their social media account on Instagram. They also have a brand-new website that contains a few blog posts. BBCS promises their intended donors a compensation rate between 8,000 USD to 30,000 USD. The difference in price depends on whether the donor was matched with an intended parent or egg bank. Most of BBCS’s posts documented donors traveling to the US, but they also have service in Japan, China, etc.
• **Baby Bank:** a popular agency that had around 500 followers on Instagram, which is their only platform to recruit donors. They have a strong social media presence and get mentioned a lot in different public forums and group chats, yet the comments around this agency differentiated a lot, as some posts suggest the agents in this agency are not honest. Baby Bank also has the option to donate to egg banks or wait for matching with an intended parent, which constitutes the compensation difference.

• **IBabyAngel:** this agency is a pretty popular option among intended donors. They operate a Facebook fan page. Their Facebook account has around 600 followers. IBabyAngel offers multiple services, including cross-border IVF and surrogacy, and advertises them on its Facebook page. Their Instagram account is exclusively for egg donation recruitment. Their Instagram account has more than 100 posts and followers. Their destination is exclusively within the US and mostly in California. One of the IBabyAngel agents is the administrator of an anonymous group chat about cross-border egg donation, which gives them strong exposure to intended donors.

• **New Care:** this agency started recruiting cross-border egg donors in 2018. They promise donors a higher price than other agencies because they do not collaborate with egg banks, which means donors would only be able to donate when an intended parent selects their profile. New Care operates a blog that hosts FAQs, fact sheets about egg donation, and reviews/experience-sharing from their previous donors. Their Facebook page and Instagram account contain similar materials about their donors getting matched and going through donation cycles. They have almost 700 followers on Instagram and around 500 on Facebook.
• **RSMC**: RSMC is a Reproductive Sciences Medical Center in San Diego, CA. Their official website stated they offer third-party gamete IVF, surrogacy, egg freezing, and egg donation. I believe their official Mandarin website hopes to attract clients from Mandarin-speaking countries. They have their own egg bank and intended parents, so their demand for Asian egg donors is high. Their Facebook and Instagram accounts share some stories and successful examples of their reproductive services, yet their websites contain the least recruitment materials. RSMC stated on their Instagram and Facebook accounts that they are “the only legal institution of cross-border egg donation.” They rely on the legitimacy of a medical center to recruit donors, and publish a lot of information on their blog. RSMC’s social media accounts do not post often and do not have a lot of followers. In sum, **RSMC is not an agency but a medical center that has staff who will scout Taiwanese donors to donate**. I include RSMC in my data set to demonstrate the diverse channel of cross-border egg donation from Taiwan. In addition, a lot of other agencies I listed above will connect their donors to RSMC to donate.

• **卵愛 (Egg Love)**: this agency operates a website as its main channel to share information with intended donors, which includes a fact sheet, educational materials, and reviews from their previous donors. They also have a Facebook account and an Instagram account, in which the Facebook page contains more information and recruitment materials. This agency does not have that much visibility in the independent posts and group chat that was hosted by IbabyAngel compared to other agencies listed above, yet their website is the second or third search result when googled with keywords like “美國捐卵 America Egg donation” and “美國捐卵 仲介 American Egg Donation, Agency.”

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1 The first search result is usually RSMC
- **Miracle Life Consulting:** this agency uses its Facebook page as its main website to recruit donors and publish recruitment materials. Their website hosts multiple articles on the donation process and reviews from previous donors. Miracle Lift Consulting is the only agency that has a TikTok account. They use a TikTok filter to film short videos with their donors during their donation trips, and also as a platform to publish the videos. Their Facebook page has more than 1000 followers and their TikTok videos have around 1800 views in total.

<table>
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<tr>
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<th>Online Sites</th>
<th>Operation Launch</th>
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<th>Destination</th>
<th>Other services</th>
<th>Match or Egg Bank</th>
<th>Popularity</th>
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<tbody>
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<td>BBCS</td>
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<td>03/2019</td>
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<td>Both</td>
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<td>Instagram</td>
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<td>High</td>
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<td>$20,000 USD/ $40,000 USD/</td>
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<td>IVF</td>
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<td>Match Only</td>
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<td>IVF</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Blog</td>
<td>07/2018</td>
<td></td>
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</tbody>
</table>

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2 Operation history for Social Media Accounts are determined by the date of first post. For the website, it was determined by the date it cited on the website.

3 Popularity is assessed by the frequency they are mentioned in independent donor posts and group chat.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Agency</th>
<th>Contact Method</th>
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<th>Match Requirements</th>
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<td></td>
<td>Facebook</td>
<td>09/2018</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Blog</td>
<td>05/2020</td>
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<td>卵愛(Egg Love)</td>
<td>Website</td>
<td>2020</td>
<td>7,000USD to 20,000USD</td>
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<td>No</td>
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</table>

**Data Analysis**

After collecting the data from the 7 agencies, I coded them according to common themes I identified. The coding categories were adjusted throughout the data collection process to best reflect the data. A coding sheet is provided in the Appendix.

I want to point out that a lot of agencies will suggest their donors who complete donations with them write reviews/experience-sharing posts for the agency to post on their website. For these posts, I use both sets of codes to examine the information within. However, I mostly considered
them a part of the recruitment campaign published by the agencies, since these posts were written with the intention to be posted on agencies’ websites to attract intended donors.\textsuperscript{4}

\textsuperscript{4} In my understanding of the Taiwanese custom, reviewers usually get some kind of perks in exchange for writing promo articles.
CHAPTER 4: AGENCY AND THEIR FAIRY TALE

The Cross-Border Egg Donation Trip

Since the plot of a narrative is made up from a sequence of events, I sought to lay out the step by step process of a cross-border egg donation trip. All the agencies have published their own materials on “how to become a cross-border egg donor” on their websites, but the information is often vague and incomplete. To construct my understanding of the process, I pieced together information from all agencies’ online sites, and from the independent donor posts. The effort to glean these steps was both challenging, puzzling, and time consuming since agencies appear to gatekeep a lot of information from intended donors. As an outsider who did not establish contact with agents as a candidate, I constructed this narrative on how the cross-border egg donation journey is presented via agencies’ materials and donor’s experience. As a researcher, I sought to construct a beginning, middle, and end to a narrative about the cross-border egg donation journey.

Step One: Application and Selection

The first step for intended donors is to establish contact with agencies. Most agencies suggest intended donors DM the agency account and an agent will tell them more about the details of the donation and assess if they will be a good candidate for egg donation. This assessment usually includes an examination of the intended donor’s age, appearance, height, and education level. Agencies post their desired qualities on their website, and when intended donors contact them, the agents will ask the donors to either fill out a form/answer questions and submit their photos (current photos and some agencies also request photos from donor’s childhood) to see if they are qualified to become a candidate.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Agency</th>
<th>Eligibility Criteria on Their Website</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>BBCS</td>
<td>• Did not specify qualifications, only encourage donors to DM them.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Baby Bank</td>
<td>• Age: 18-30</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Height: 158cm and above</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Education: high school and above</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• BMI: Normal</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>IBabyAngel</td>
<td>• Age: 19-30</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Height: preferably 163 and above, but 158-163 is acceptable</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Education: Current college student or graduated</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• BMI: 18-24</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Okay with taking shots, and surgery</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• No infectious disease and need to pass the genomic test</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Good mental and physical health condition</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• No smoking, drug abuse, or other bad habits</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>New Care</td>
<td>• Age: 18-30</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Height: 160 and above</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Education: College and above</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• BMI: Normal</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• No smoking, drinking habits, or drug abuse</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• No genomic defect, no infectious disease</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Willing to do blood tests and ultrasound</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Can stay in the US for two weeks</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>RSMC</td>
<td>• Age: 19-27(29)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Height: preferably 165cm and above, and at least 160cm</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Education: College and above</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• BMI: Normal</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• No smoking or drug habit</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• No family history of genomic defect</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>卵愛</td>
<td>• Age: 19-31</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(Egg Love)</td>
<td>• Height: 160cm and above</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

5 [https://www.instagram.com/p/CapAQe_vlHH/](https://www.instagram.com/p/CapAQe_vlHH/)

6 I believe it meant between 18.5-24, which is generally considered a healthy weight in Taiwan


8 [https://www.facebook.com/newcaretw/posts/767362786937769](https://www.facebook.com/newcaretw/posts/767362786937769)


10 [https://useggdonation.com/instructions-for-egg-donation/](https://useggdonation.com/instructions-for-egg-donation/)
Table 2. Eligibility Criteria of Agencies

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Agency</th>
<th>Criteria</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Miracle Life Consulting</td>
<td>• Height: 160 cm and above</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Appearance: 甜美（sweet and pretty)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

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**Step 2: Wait for Matches**

After the agencies select donors based on their eligibility criteria, agents will start pairing intended donors with intended parents, who are connected with a particular egg bank. A lot of intended donors commented on independent posts and anonymous group chats that they did not hear back from the agents after submitting their initial forms and photos, which I assumed meant they did not reach the sellable standard (Almeling, 2011) of agencies and egg banks. Some agencies suggest intended donors keep submitting recent photos during the wait time to boost their chances of a match.

**Step 3: Medical Examination and Genomic Testing in Taiwan**

When an intended donor gets matched with an egg bank or an intended parent, the agent will start arranging a series of medical examinations and genomic tests for selected donors. The medical examination includes blood tests for AMH level, STDs, drug use history, and a transvaginal ultrasound to check on the ovaries.

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11 [https://www.facebook.com/eggdonortaiwan/](https://www.facebook.com/eggdonortaiwan/)
The agency will identify a reproductive health clinic relatively close to the selected donors to do all these exams in Taiwan. On the other hand, genomic testing is a saliva testing kit that needs to be mailed back to the US for examination. If all testing results indicate the donor is suitable to donate, the agent will start coordinating the donation cycle with the donor, the clinic in the US, and the egg bank or intended parent. During this phase, some agencies highlight that there will be a contract signed between the donor and receiving parent or egg bank, but some agencies do not specify this.

*Step 4. Preparation for the trip*

In this stage, the donor will start taking birth control pills to regulate their menstruation cycle, so their body will be ready for ovulation induction when they arrive. Donors will also start booking plane tickets and applying for a travel visa. Although all agencies use “free vacation and free plane ticket” in their recruitment materials to attract donors, donors are often required to pay for the ticket out of pocket first, and the agency will pay them back for the ticket, visa, and sometimes the fee for covid test after the surgery. Out of the 7 agencies I monitored, Baby Bank and Egg Love\(^\text{12}\) specified on their websites that the donors are required to pay for their own tickets and medical exam fees by themselves, and the agency will reimburse them after the egg retrieval surgery. Some posts on the public forum also indicated that donors paid for the tickets themselves and got reimbursed later. Only Miracle Life Consulting and RSMC particularly stated they would book and pay upfront for the ticket for donors.

\(^{12}\) [https://useggdonation.com/egg-donation-experience-in-us-vivian/](https://useggdonation.com/egg-donation-experience-in-us-vivian/)
Lastly, the agency trains donors on how to interact with the TSA. Going through TSA is always a popular topic in the donor group chat because donors are scared to be questioned about the purpose of their trip and to get denied entry into the US by the customs agent.

*Step 5. Shots, Ultrasound, and Surgery in the US*

After donors arrive in the US, they live in a place the agency arranges for them. The accommodation may be a hotel, an Airbnb, or dormitory for donors. Donors will then report to the clinic for ovulation induction, which they administer to themselves for the next 10 or so days. They are expected to administer the shot on themselves every day and video record the process. The agent will inspect their video to make sure the donors are fulfilling their duties as egg donors. Donors will need to visit the clinic a few times during this process to check on the development of their eggs. When the ovarian follicles are fully developed, the doctor will issue the HCG shot for donors to administer during a short window prior to the egg retrieval surgery.

The surgery is conducted under general anesthesia, and after the surgery, the donor will receive the compensation and reimbursement they were promised. The money may be a check directly given to them at the clinic, or a direct transfer.

*Step 6. Back to Taiwan*

Donors usually fly back to Taiwan a few days after the surgery. They are reminded to take care of their body and the newly gained funds they have, but generally, they stop having contact with agencies after they are back in Taiwan. The whole trip to the US takes about 14 days.
Some donors will do two donations during a trip, which means they will stay in the US for 80 days and undergo one donation cycle, rest for one menstruation cycle, and undergo another donation cycle before going back to Taiwan.

*Holes in the Story*

While constructing the narrative of the donation trips, I found some questions that I do not have answers to. These are the gaps in between the steps that were not exposed to donors. First, the logistics of medicine injection was not clear. All the materials only mention there are two kinds of medicine to inject but do not explain what the side effects are. Nor is any information provided on the frequency and duration of the injections. Second, there is no explanation on what would happen if donors failed their medical and genome tests. Third, although some agencies specify that the donor will buy their own tickets and the agencies will reimburse them, the limit of reimbursement and the process of reimbursement are not explained. Finally, there are no statements on potential medical risks, nor the protection and compensation that will be provided if a donor experiences a negative reaction/side effects. Agencies do not explain what kind of medical insurance, treatment, or resources will be provided in the event that donors experience illness or discomfort during the donation process.

*Common Themes in Agency Recruitment Materials*

In this section, I identify common themes in agencies’ recruitment materials. These themes reflect the common narratives agencies try to construct around cross-border egg donation. By scrutinizing the recruitment materials, I recognized the logic and value embedded in the fertility industry and Taiwanese society.
In-N-Out, Disney, and the Beach

The promise of travel and vacation has always been one of the most effective narratives to attract cross-border egg donors (Whittaker and Speier 2010; Pande 2020). All the agencies in Taiwan pick up on people’s desire to travel and use pictures of the beach, Disney, palm trees, and sea lions to construct a classic California vacation. Most agencies collaborate with fertility centers in San Diego, California. Donors were advised that on the days they do not need to report back to the clinic, they can plan sight-seeing trips for themselves. Sometimes an agency will have multiple donors in their dorms at the same time, so donors will travel together; sometimes agents or the owner of the shared house/ Airbnb will take donors out as well. In the independent public group chat, it is also common that donors of different agencies ask around if there are any who will also be in San Diego during their donation cycle so they can find people to travel together.

Figure 1 Example of agents taking donors to Disney and posting the photo on their website to attract new donors.

I want to point out that the narrative of vacation in the recruitment materials is not just about Disney and luxury vacations. The agents and the donors try to imbue their vacation photos and stories with a sense of everyday life, creating an illusion of living an ordinary life in the US. Donors’
review posts often include western-style home-cooked meals they prepare for themselves in the dorm. Agents like to highlight taking donors to Target, Walmart, and the local Asian market. On the agency website, California street views and In-N-Out burgers are some of the most popular elements used to construct a “living abroad” narrative. The fertility tourism of cross-border egg donation is not just about an all-inclusive vacation, but about experiencing the everyday life of an American.

Defining, Creating, and Capturing Beauty

Almeling (2011) noticed that egg banks developed a standard to select a candidate from a pool of intended donors, based on their judgment of a sellable egg. A sellable egg comes from someone with the qualities of being beautiful, altruistic, highly educated, and tall (Almeling 2007, Perler & Schurr 2021). I repeatedly see these qualities being mentioned in the recruitment materials of Taiwanese agencies. When posting recruitment materials, six out of seven agencies accompany their advertisement with a narrow eligibility criterion (see Table 2). The basic conditions include age, height, BMI, and college education.

Although general qualities of a sellable egg may be common, I found an obsessive emphasis on beauty in the cross-border egg donation industry in Taiwan. Two of the agencies directly stated they want donors who are “delicate and pretty” or “sweet and pretty.” This emphasis on delicate and sweet mirrors the exoticizing ideas of beauty in the mail order bride market, where women like china dolls are highly marketed (Chun 1996).

While Egg Love and Miracle Life Consulting stated that they only want people who identified as pretty to apply, all the other agencies repeatedly mentioned how beautiful and altruistic their current donors are. IBabyAngel shows off a “donor who looks like Dilraba [a popular Chinese
actress who perfectly fits the Asian beauty standard]” in their stories; New Care praised their previous donors as having “high education and high facial attractiveness” and “beautiful face and kind heart;” Miracle Life Consulting reminds their donors to keep sending a photoshopped, filtered photo so they have a better chance of getting selected by an intended parent13.

Out of all the agencies, Baby Bank went the extra mile to make sure their candidate presented themselves with great beauty and class. On their Instagram, the agent posts stories on how they “reject the photos intended donors submitted because the photos look too sensual.” Baby Bank had also rented studios to do photo sessions with their donors, because “some intended donors are beautiful but do not know how to take a good photo of themselves.” They also shared their photography tips on Instagram. They suggest that photos highlight facial features and use simple backgrounds. Donors are told not to reveal tattoos and to wear modest clothing. Creating a “good girl” image is emphasized here. Donors are being rewarded when they showcase a doll like Asian beauty without sexuality. The erasure of sexuality within these photos drastically contrasts the hyper sexualized Asian (e-)mail order bride (Liu 2015), where sexuality is key to marketing. In the case of egg donation, donors are stripped away from any sexual associations, and reconstruct to be a wholesome maternal figure with the likeness of an imagined future child.

By implying the quality of the photo will affect the compensation donors can get, agents are able to make intended donors collaborate with them to curate the perfect images. Some other popular qualities include “mixed race (混血),” and “Name Brand University.” Both New Care and BBCS14 posted that they are in search of donors with multiple ethnicities. IBaby likes to show off they have

13 https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=FctmyusqOc0&t=73s
donors from NYU, Columbia University, and Beijing University. BBCS also highlighted their donors from Taiwan University got a compensation of 60,000 USD.15

*The Big Sister Narrative*

When I was collecting data from the agencies’ social media, I found that some smaller agencies are not shy from showing who is operating the accounts. Baby Bank’s agent documented her own donation journey on Instagram as a part of recruitment materials. She also shows off how she and other past donors become friends and are going to donate in Japan together. Miracle Life Consulting’s agent, Yvonne, also posted a video sharing how she became an agent, and pictures of her taking donors out for lunch and to other visitor attractions. These two agencies constructed a vivid image of an agent who is kind and friendly with their donors, in order to lower the uncertainty intended donors could feel about cross-border egg donation. A similar tactic can be found in IBabyAngel. One of their agents administers an anonymous group chat for egg donors. The agent answers questions intended donors have, and even recommends other agencies to the group.

For the agencies who rely more on their website than social media, they do not put the effort into constructing this “big sister” narrative. RSMC highlights the status of a legal medical center in the US, and BBCS uses a wall of pictures of donors currently cycling with them to demonstrate their experience in the field. During my search, I found that Egg Love has an “about us” page on their website. There are three agents on the team with their pictures, names, and stories on the website.

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15 [https://www.facebook.com/people/Bs](https://www.facebook.com/people/Bs)
However, I later found that all three photos of their agents are stock photos. Though a google search I discovered the same images on other websites that have nothing to do with egg donation.

Disciplining the Donors

When I enter the social media accounts of the agencies, the first thing I notice is the large number of photos they have of people holding their bellies while pushing the needle in. I later found that all these agencies required their donors to record themselves every time they inject the ovarian stimulating hormones to demonstrate they are honoring the duty of an egg donor. Other than recording the injections, there are a lot of other duties demanded by the agencies on what is a responsible and well-behaved egg donor. In their social media posts, BBCS highlights the flexibility and credibility of their donors; Baby Bank shames the donors who are not punctual or do not show up to their appointment in their Instagram stories; New Care praises their donors who are being collaborative, responsible, and “discreet and understanding 懂事;” Miracle Life Consulting also emphasizes that donors should be compliant.

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16 https://www.facebook.com/photo/?fbid=147772701576423&set=a.131687923184901
As mentioned before, some agencies require donors to buy plane tickets and pay for medical examination fees themselves first which will get reimbursed after the surgery. Egg Love indicates this payment structure was put in place because previous donors decided not to donate after they arrived in the US. Making intended donors pay for the medical fees and flight rate is a way to force them to collaborate and stop them from backing out of the process. Although some donors claim that buying their own plane tickets will make passing TSA easier, such a payment structure allows agencies to exert tighter control on their donors. Furthermore, to ensure donors will have enough money to pay for the plane ticket and medical exam by themselves, Baby Bank has suggested donors could donate in Taiwan first and use their compensation to pay up front travel costs for a cross-border egg donation cycle in the US.

Another often-mentioned duty of a well-behaved (乖) donor is to “nurture your eggs (養卵)” by eating the right food. BBCS especially educates its donors on how to eat to produce better and more eggs: “Drink protein shakes, take supplements, and eat spinach, tomato, and meat.” They suggest further that a higher yield of eggs will allow donors to negotiate higher rates of compensation the next time they donate. Miracle Life Consulting praises their donors for being compliant, and eating a lot of protein, blueberries, and strawberries. Baby Bank similarly suggests their donors drink protein powder and take the Q10 supplement, which is believed to help with producing better eggs.

Covid-19 and the Cross-Border Egg Donation Industry

The cross-border egg donation industry has been reviving and growing after the COVID lockdown. The agencies’ social media accounts have been showing so many more pictures of donors departing, arriving, and getting their compensation. While the Covid-19 pandemic definitely affected the industry from 2019 to 2022, agencies continued to market to intended donors. For
example, New Care advertised on Facebook, “If the Covid relief is not enough, come see if you can donate.” On the other hand, IBabyAngel used the lack of Covid vaccines in Taiwan in 2021 to attract donors to donate in the US and get vaccinated at the same time. In this late pandemic moment after the reopening of borders and global markets, the industry appears to have rebounded.
CHAPTER 5: DONORS AND THEIR DREAM COMING TRUE

In this chapter, I focus on independent donor posts and anonymous group chats to fully understand the information about cross-border egg donation from the donor perspective. The recruitment materials, independent donor posts, and anonymous group chat are the only channel for intended donors to understand cross-border egg donation before they make contact with an agent. I demonstrated the ambiguity of recruitment materials and the secrecy the agencies hold.

Combing through donor experience enriches the “online scene” of cross-border egg donation. It can also lead us to understand how donors interpreted and internalized cross-border egg donation trips and the industry. In this chapter, I will explore common themes found in these independent posts and anonymous group chats.

Who is talking? Where do they talk?

Independent donor data include posts from previous cross-border donors. They were posted on the two biggest public forums in Taiwan, ptt, and Dcard. On these forums, a knowledge and experience-sharing culture was cultivated. It is not uncommon for people to post extensive stories about their experience doing something interesting. Although there are a few posts that look like fake accounts from the agents trying to recruit potential clients, which I excluded, most of the independent experience-sharing posts appear authentic and contain a list of the pros and cons of their trips. Underneath the posts, there are also a few dozen to a few hundred comments from forum users.

The anonymous group chat is a lot more exclusive than the public forum. The group chat was set up by one of the agents from IBabyAngel for intended donors, current donors, and previous donors.
to exchange information and have a place to vent. The chat administrator is the agent from IBabyAngel, but I observed that she is not actively trying to advertise her agency and does not appear to monitor or intervene in the conversations. The group chat normally has around 150 people members joining or leaving constantly. I observed the chat content for over 6 months, during which I identified trends and patterns of the discourses and document the narratives that appeared.

**Motive**

Drastically different from the American egg donation scene, very few of the independent posts and group chat comments contain altruistic language. Some donors mentioned egg donation is a good deed and can help others, but it is not emphasized. Similarly, “kinship” and “motherhood” was not a concept that gets mentioned. Out of all the independent data I reviewed, only one poster mentioned feeling a sense of motherhood.

In most of the narratives, egg donors do not avoid the topic of money. In fact, “How much compensation did you get?” is one of the most common topics in the group chat. Donors exchange information on the price offered by each agency, and how much money they wanted to get after the trip. In the independent post, donors stated “Right when I saw the money in my bank account, it is all worth it.”

The other major motive among these donors was the urge to visit the US. A few donors mentioned that they were offered to donate in other countries in Asia, but they picked the US. Experiencing the US is one of the most mentioned motivations for cross-border donation. Donors brought up how they always envy their peers who get to study in the states, or how they saw their friends’ social media posts going to Hollywood and Disneyland and felt the urge to visit the US themselves.
The power of “visiting the US” is strong. It can work as a filter to blind the donors about other discomforts and risks they are enduring. One of the independent posts is made by a donor who is already studying in the US. That post contains a significantly higher number of complaints and doubt about the process, and claims they had a reaction 10 days after the surgery, which is the longest duration post egg retrieval side effect mentioned in this data set.

**This Is the Dream Vacation**

I want to jump into the theme of a dream vacation in the donor’s narrative. The reproductive tourism industry has been using languages of vacations, travel, and exotic scenery to attract clients (Speier 2016). These kinds of narratives showed up in multiple posts. Donors are eager to share their pictures from the flight, airports, tourist sites, shopping malls, downtowns, and their accommodations. Their desire to see the US echoes the narratives agencies portrayed in their recruitment materials. Donors emphasized their experiences of living like the locals, going to supermarkets, and making friends with other donors to go shopping together. “I will be in San Diego from (date) to (date), who’s going to be there as well?” is always a popular comment in the group chat.

**The Scariest Part: Going Through American Custom**

One of the most mentioned topics in all independent data is how to go through American Customs without being deported. Most donors got through customs with travel visas while having the intention to participate and be compensated for undergoing a medical procedure. How to go through customs without issues is a major preoccupation of traveling donors.
In the independent posts, donors praised their agents and agencies if they provide a lot of training, tips, and English resources for them to prepare for the questioning from TSA agents. In independent donor posts, they always express how nervous they were when encountering Customs. Donors also defended how the agencies ask them to buy and pay for their own plane tickets as a way to convince TSA that they are coming to America to travel by themselves. In the group chat, a lot of members left the chat at the airport and rejoined after they got through customs.

These donors came up with so many strategies to ensure their safe arrival into the US, and these strategies are circulated in the online communities of cross-border egg donation. The most mentioned techniques include:

1. Buy the supplements (Q10, prenatal vitamin, large amount of protein power) in the US, so if the TSA agent goes through your bags, they won’t find anything “suspicious.” Do not bring any written proof of anything that you normally would not bring for a vacation.
2. Delete all text, images, and information about cross-border egg donation on your phone, and unfollow all social media accounts of the agency. Delete all correspondence you have with the agent and agency. If you talked about it with friends, you should also delete those.
3. Practice how to talk to an agent, sometimes agencies will provide an English speaker with whom you can do a mock interview. Be sure not to panic, cry, or start stuttering.
4. Memorize your “itinerary.” If the TSA agent asks what is your plan in the US, you can show them you are planning to go to all the tourist sites and have a clear understanding of your purpose of travel.
5. Carefully choose your “landing city.” As most of the cross-border egg donations are performed in San Diego, the closest airports are more aware of single females going to the
US for a longer period of time. Some independent donor posts suggest landing in other airports and then taking domestic flights to reach California.

6. Don’t over-dress. A lot of donors believe wearing casual clothes and looking normal can lower the chance of being picked on by customs. “Play ugly (扮醜)” is how they described it.

**Weighing Beauty**

In most independent donor posts and comments, they described the process of connecting with agents and “the wait” before they were informed that they are matched and can start going through the medical tests and planning the trip. I called it “the wait” because there usually was no formal rejection. After you answer the agent’s questions and submit your materials (basic information and photos), you might not hear from them for a few weeks, and sometimes you never hear back. Lots of (intended) donors complain that the wait time made them question if there is something wrong with them. Is it the photo? Am I not attractive? Am I too fat? Am I not tall enough? These are the questions that came up during the wait time.

During the process of matching and waiting, a lot of donors also reported that their agent suggested they re-submit their photos. This echoes the beauty standard agents are pursuing, trying to create a beautiful but not sexy, modest but not muted image.

**Hidden Concerns and Risk Management**

In independent post and anonymous group chat, donors often talked about their concerns and fear about going to a foreign county and undergoing surgeries. They also discuss their worries about
not being selected and risk of having a negative experience abroad. The topic about medical risk and fear often shows up in the donors’ discourse.

One of the biggest concerns is about their physical status and the effect of the donation. In the group chat, members often express their concerns about their own health. Some donors have polycystic ovary syndrome (PCOS), so they are more concerned about how the ovarian stimulation and retrieval surgery will affect their ovaries and future reproductivity. Donors with PCOS are also worried that this condition will affect the amount and quality of their eggs, which might jeopardize their compensation. Some donors are concerned about how contraception pills are affecting their bodies. They notice the pills made them gain weight or have mood swings, so they want to know which brand of contraception pills other donors used. Everyone wants to pick a brand that is compatible with their bodies and affordable.

For example, when donors were told that their ovarian follicles are not in the ideal shape to be retrieved, or their AMH levels are not good, the anonymous group chat is where they seek comfort and advice. Previous donors are happy to provide advice on what supplement to take and how to adjust their lifestyle to improve their egg count. Other times intended donors have concerns about whether they will be disqualified because they smoke. Members share stories about how their friends managed to quit smoking for a month before going through all the tests.

I observed that prospective and previous donors demonstrated their concerns by re-telling the stories they have heard about the worst things that can go wrong. Donors repeat horror stories that have happened to other people, such as about an agent pocketing the compensation only to give the donor a fraction of what was owed. Some said they heard of bad agencies that force their donors to check out of the accommodation and return to Taiwan immediately post-surgery. These horror
stories represent the uncertainty donors feel about what they are undertaking. Donors either try to ease their own minds by saying they did not pick those bad agents, or reassure themselves that any discomfort they did experience during their trip was not actually that bad. By telling these stories, donors express their own sense of vulnerability. They seek to assure themselves that their agents are good people who will not take advantage of them and that these stories will not be/ were not their case.

**Being Compliant**

In the last chapter, I mentioned agencies required donors to comply with their rules of filming themselves taking hormone shots and to otherwise act responsibly by going to appointments on time. These narratives are common in donors’ posts as well. To my surprise, donors usually do not have many complaints about the agencies’ rules. I view this as a reflection of the power asymmetry between donors and agencies. One donor shared in her independent post that she was booked for two cycles in San Diego. However, after the first cycle, the hospital informed her that she did not produce an ideal number of eggs. Because of that, the hospital canceled her second cycle, and only gave her half of the agreed compensation for her first cycle. Although this donor only received a quarter of the compensation she expected, she rationalized, since the plane ticket is still free, there are no major loss for her. Thus, even after the donation, donors continue to exhibit compliant behaviors by managing any negative experiences in ways that do not hold recruiting agents or clinics accountable.
CHAPTER 6: DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

The cross-border egg donation industry appears to be resilient. In spite of the COVID pandemic, recruitment agencies in Taiwan have continued to dramatically grow their clientele. The industry keeps expanding and more Taiwanese egg providers participate in the trips. However, the risk of harm and potential exploitation embedded within this industry has not been properly addressed. Looking into the narratives created by agencies and donors can shed light on how ART practices impact the value of beauty, experience, and our bodies.

**Hiding In the Gray: Secrecy and Power Asymmetry**

Cross-border egg donation thrived in the unregulated scene of the transnational reproductive industry. The lawlessness created an asymmetry in power, information, and social capital. Donors often do not feel the right to advocate for themselves, being in an English-speaking country and medical facility. Nahman (2018) described egg donors' lack of legal status and financial power leading women to engage “not only for egg provision but for earning money through problematic means that commodify the body.” Although compensation for Taiwanese donors is usually not about “survival,” lack of financial resources contributes to their bioavailability. Whittaker and Speier (2010) stated that “Vietnamese women travel on tourist visas to Thailand to act as sources of ova or wombs for wealthier Thai couples” (p.375). This migration pattern reflects the double disadvantage cross-border donors faced: the lack of money and legal status.

Without actually going through it and establishing contact with agencies as an intended donor, I found it extremely difficult to figure out the process and steps. Donors might start connecting with agents without fully understanding the process of donation. Compared to domestic egg donation, intended donors do not have as much information about cross-border donation. In addition,
different agencies often offer different information. As a donor, it will be very hard to compare and evaluate which agencies might suit their needs better.

When a donor is matched and arrives in the US, they are highly dependent on their agencies. Often times the donor is not fluent in English, lacks insurance, and are not in a place to call for help because of their VISA status. Underneath the carefree tourist/ innocent beauty narrative agencies created, cross-border egg donors are at risk of being stripped of their rights to full information, healthcare, and compensation for their services.

**The Tourism Narratives**

To answer my research question on how tourism became a major narrative in cross-border egg donation. I want to refer back to the case of the donor who only received one-fourth of the compensation she expected but thought she technically did not lose anything because she had a free US trip after all. The free American experience is one of the biggest pulls for cross-border donation trips. Among young Taiwanese women, being able to travel or study in the US is a desirable experience. The power of “visiting the US” is not just the hope to experience the cosmopolitan world (Pande 2019). The United States holds a special place among most Taiwanese, it represents the life of elites. “Go to Taiwan University (the best university in Taiwan) then head to the US 來來來，來臺大，去去去，去美國” is a longstanding saying that implies the American dream is the ultimate Taiwanese dream.

This is also why agencies and donors emphasize the everyday life experience in their travel narratives and donation trip. Going to the US is not about having a relaxing vacation or an exotic tour, but about being able to relate to the American experience. This request is different from the reproductive tourism for intended parents from the US, where the agencies highlight relaxing
holidays, European scenery, and vacation settings (Speier 2016). Grocery stores and accommodations with kitchens to make your own food are not appealing to the American middle class. These experiences are targeted toward young Taiwanese women who have the urge to be closer to an imagined coveted American lifestyle.

The use of tourism narratives successfully covered up the medical and technical side of egg donation. The current pattern of the Global North outsourcing reproductive labor to the Global South is a form of exploitation (Cooper & Waldby 2014). Yet, agencies utilized the tourism narratives to cover up the labor and risk, and donors cooperate by legitimizing the labor, risk, and violation because of the promise of a free trip to their desired countries. The use of tourism narratives hone in on the fun and happy part of the cross-border egg donation trips, while obscuring anything negative.

**Asian Barbie Girls and Their Worth**

The obsession over appearance has been a continuing theme in egg donation (Almeling 2011, Speier 2016; Deomampo 2021). In the Taiwan to US context, I want to highlight the intersection of beauty and race, where the pursuit of appearance is not only about meeting the mainstream beauty standard but also about fitting into the imagination and stereotype of beauty as an Asian woman. Deomampo (2019) has pointed out the shortage of Asian eggs in the egg market in the US, so Asian American donors and their eggs are considered “scarce and valuable.” This shortage of Asian ethnic eggs is possibly the reason Taiwan-US cross-border egg donation started to grow.

However, the receiving egg banks and recruitment agencies from Taiwan quickly realized there are a sizeable number of prospectively interested donors in Taiwan, so they can search for donors who are “truly valuable.” Recruitment agencies are blunt in their advertisement about seeking
women who are pretty, delicate, and sweet to match the Asian beauty stereotypes. Some agents openly shamed intended donors whose photos do not look delicate and sweet; some suggest intended donors photoshop their photos to meet that Asian Barbie girl illusion.

These agencies realize they can help mold their intended donors to meet the beauty standard of egg banks and American clients. They rented a studio and hired photographers and stylists for their intended donors, to achieve the perfect balance of beauty and innocence in the images. They want to create a donor who is pretty enough to be a woman you want to have kids with, but sweet and modest enough to be your daughter. The objectifying gaze permeates the discourse of egg banks, fertility clinics, and recruitment agencies.

**Surveillance and Control**

During my research, one thing I am shocked about is why donors did not think it absurd that they are asked to film their hormone injections to report to their agency, not the clinic. Injecting is a medical act, but it was treated like homework that needs to be graded by the agents. Donors are required to do so by their agents to ensure compliance with the regimen. These photos and videos are later posted on the agency's social media accounts as proof to demonstrate how many donors they are managing. Through these actions, donors are denied the subjectivity of a patient. Rather, they become a product of the agencies. Gruben (2013) has pointed out that egg donors are often stimulated to produce more eggs than is safe, and do not receive follow-up care from physicians. Egg donors have not been treated like patients, but as resourced bodies for profit.

Demanding donors to film their injection is a form of control and discipline. Another practice of control in cross-border egg donation seeks to prevent donors from backing out of the donation, by compensating only through the reimbursement method. Instead of paying for donors’ medical
examination fees and traveling expenses, agencies ask donors to pay for it themselves. Only after the egg retrieval surgery, will agencies reimburse the donor. This way when donors have doubts about the process, they need to consider the money they already put in. This reimbursement practice can severely jeopardize the donor’s autonomy, as they lose the freedom to drop out of the project. If the donor has a severe reaction to ovarian stimulation and retrieval or does not feel safe in the accommodation or hospital the concern of not getting reimbursed may persuade them to stick with the process despite their experiencing harm.

Of all the data I combed through, I did not find any discussion on donor regret after starting the cycle. No one thought about discussing with donors if they can terminate the process, how to do it, and what side effects will appear if they did not finish the cycle. The asymmetry in power, information, and capital puts donors in a vulnerable position vis-à-vis the agents.

**Autonomy and Risk Management**

Donors are not given proper treatment and their rights are being exploited, but they can still be motivated, resourceful, and savvy (Nahman 2008). I want to point out that these Taiwanese donors are trying really hard to look after themselves and each other. The reason that there is a vibrant online community about cross-border egg donation for me to research, is because previous donors are generous about sharing their experience and knowledge with others. Donors are always reminding each other to take supplements and eat well to nourish their bodies for themselves in the group chat. In the independent data, donors also candidly disclose their experience with US customs. Sometimes intended donors openly discuss being rejected by agencies, and people always try to comfort them and say it is not their issue, and they can try to apply to other agencies. Despite
being in a disadvantaged position, donors are determined to gain what they want from the trip while taking good care of themselves.

I want to point out that compared to domestic donors in the US, Taiwanese cross-border donors are a lot more upfront about the payment and are not shy to admit money is one of their biggest motives. The ability to self-advocate for U.S. domestic donors is constrained by the expectation and requirement to be altruistic and selfless (Almeling 2007; Gezinski et al. 2016). Although this expectation from the recipients/intended parents still existed in the cross-border donation pattern, the agencies serve as a mediator to ease that expectation on the donors and ensure the recipients only see the altruistic qualities they are looking for. While agents are in control of the profile of donors for intended parents, they take over the burden of presenting the perfect altruistic candidates and leave some room for donors to express their own voices.
**Conclusion**

Cross-border egg donation from Taiwan to the US is an ongoing medical migration pattern that requires more attention from the public policy field, medical field, and academia. The growing population of donors needs more support, education, and protection, and the industry requires regulations and supervision. This research project sheds light on the common difficulties donors encountered and the common techniques agencies used to recruit. The major narrative agencies employed is of tourism, constructing donors’ desire to travel to the US and experience the coveted American lifestyle. In addition, agencies emphasized the importance of beauty, education, and physique to construct this image of cross-border egg donation as an exclusive experience for people who were considered beautiful, educated, and thin. These narratives are effective ways for agencies to attract intended donors. Agencies utilize information control and close supervision to make sure donors comply with cross-border trips. Through their reimbursement policy and injection recording requirement, agencies constructed the narrative and reality of well-behaved, responsible donors.

On the other hand, Taiwanese egg donors eagerly buy into the tourism narratives. The biggest motivation for cross-border egg donation is to visit the US and engage with the American experience. They see themselves as donors and travelers; they do not travel to the US just to donate but to also enjoy some moments of foreign experience. However, donors experience a lot of discomforts, risk, and uncertainty throughout the process. The biggest concern is the lack of medical and legal protection for cross-border donors, which contributed to a strong sense of uncertainty felt by donors throughout the experience, which triggered a risk management response.
This research provided new insights into the bioavailability of Taiwanese young women in globalized fertility markets. By comparing two sets of data stemming from recruiters and egg providers, I demonstrated the different framing of transnational egg donation and its impact. I hope that by revealing the hidden injustices within the industry, this study can inform the development of better regulations and best practices on cross-border ovary stimulation and retrieval surgeries. It would make a tremendous difference towards ensuring informed consent, if regulatory bodies minimally require egg agencies to disclose more complete information about the potential medical and legal risks that cross-border donors undertake.

For further exploration of cross-border egg donation from Taiwan to the US, qualitative interviews would be valuable to gain greater insight and depth into the perspectives and experiences of egg donors and agents. I would also encourage the medical academic field to research the short-term and long-term effects of cross-border egg donation trips on egg providers.
Appendix A: Coding Sheet

For materials that represented the agency perspective, I code them into the following categories:

- **Travel and Vacation**: narrative of the donation trip can be a free vacation; photos of tourist attractions.
- **Donation and Altruism**: narrative of helping infertile families and spreading love; praise on altruism
- **Financial Reward**: description of high financial reward and referral fees.
- **Safety and Risk-Free Assurance**: description of the safety of medicine use and surgery; promise on the low possibility of ovarian hyperstimulation syndrome (OHSS) and no harm to future reproductivity.
- **Agent/ Agency Persona**: narratives of the agent’s personality, charisma, and agency’s reputation.
- **Eligibility Criteria**: description of who can be selected as a cross-border egg donor, including discussion on beauty standards, education level, heights, and so on.
- **Donor Responsibility**: narratives on how to be a “well-behaved” egg donor.

For materials that represented the donor perspective, I code them into the following categories:

- **Motivation**: narratives on why they choose to donate in the US.
- **Interaction with Service Providers and Agents**: description of their interaction with agents and healthcare service providers throughout their donation journey.
- **Travel Logistics and Experiences**: description of traveling details and experience, including buying plane tickets, going through TSA, tourist attraction visits, etc.
- **Medical and Risk Management**: description of how they understand the medical procedure and their physical symptoms; narratives on the health-related decision they made for themselves before and after donation.
- **Personal Positive Experience**: narratives on their positive emotion, thoughts, and experience.
- **Personal negative experience and concern**: narratives on their negative emotion, concerns, and experience.
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