Higher education under market forces how the "transnational shadow education" industry emerged and persisted to help Taiwanese students to study in the U.S

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HIGHER EDUCATION UNDER MARKET FORCES
HOW THE “TRANSNATIONAL SHADOW EDUCATION” INDUSTRY EMERGED
AND PERSISTED TO HELP TAIWANESE STUDENTS TO STUDY IN THE U.S.

by

Kenneth Han Chen

A Dissertation
Submitted to the University at Albany, State University of New York
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the Requirements for the Degree of
Doctor of Philosophy

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Department of Sociology
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ABSTRACT

My dissertation examines the marketization of higher education, drawing on empirical case studies from Taiwanese students using “education agents” to apply to U.S. colleges and universities. I argue that without these intermediary agents, applicants and parents may be left flying blindly amid uncertainties, emotional distress, and interpersonal tension in families during children’s admission. The existing sociological literature and higher education research mainly concentrates on studying national policies and formal higher education institutions (universities and research institutes), but the private market research is relatively insufficient. Also, the research on international students' transnational movement mostly started from the viewpoint of the students' receiving countries and did not further discuss the status of the country of origin of the international students. My research explores these two aspects and makes new contributions to existing research.

Relying on 54 interviews, participant observation, content analysis, and archival studies, my dissertation project focuses on examining education agents' experience in Taiwan. I discuss how this industry was formed in response to the neoliberal wave of American higher education in the 1980s and the development of Taiwan’s higher education, thereby promoting Taiwan’s higher education marketization. Under today's highly developed global higher education system, I pointed out that the transnational shadow industry maintains the business model and assists students in transnational learning and mobility. Further, I pointed out that the core of the "transnational shadow education industry" for studying abroad is to bridge the differences in transnational culture and commercialize these cultural differences. Through these discussions, I re-examine the existing sociology theories on education and the market and analyze how the market helps us reinterpret core assumptions in higher education admission, such as merit and personal value.
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Introduction

We observed a fundamental change in our modern life: how market has affected the structure, activities and actors within higher education. Market has changed the ways universities and colleges operates by molding their structure into revenue-seeking machines. Market has also altered the actions people take to secure their seats in colleges and universities, especially the more prestigious ones. In a competitive global and knowledge economy, one need higher education credential to climb up the social ladder. Not to mention, for many young pupils and families residing in Asia, admissions to higher education institutions in the U.S. was exclusively valued—as compare to the domestic post-secondary credentials. As a result, a massive global market has emerged around recruiting and admission international students to the U.S. In this dissertation, I outlined a private “transnational shadow education” market in Taiwan that reflect these dynamic changes.

With a few notable exceptions (Abelmann, Park, and Kim 2009; Altbach and Knight 2007; Brooks and Waters 2011; Habu 2000), previous studies on internationalization of higher education tends to focus on market reforms and exchange occurred within the formal college and university organizations in the United States (Altbach and Knight 2010; Knight 2004, 2012). As a result, the scholarly largely overlooks transnational student exchange and market dynamics outside of the U.S. control. This research gap prevents us from seeing other ways overseas student motilities have been managed and institutionalized, as the cases described in this dissertation will show. Besides universities in the U.S. drawing foreign students to its national soil, a workforce in Taiwan has sought to create a brokerage market by assisting international students’ application and admission processes. Through such a brokerage agents’ market, Taiwanese students can tilt the
admission process to their advantage; as agents can help create admission pipeline for international student programs, modify transnational educational connections and rebrand student’s personal and cultural meritocracy.

This dissertation intends to examine such emerging private service market brokering Taiwanese international students to the U.S. and elsewhere. This dissertation documents the process, the dynamics, and the economic-moral context through which a Taiwanese transnational “shadow education” (Bray 2013; Buchmann, Condon, and Roscigno 2010; Byun, Chung, and Baker 2018a; Byun and Park 2012a) supports the mobility of students within the transnational education system. It explores how such a market mediates student’s admission and application process by turning it into a service market; and how agents work legitimizes their knowledge and position and transnational cultural and social brokerages. Over time, this dissertation argued that we see an emergent institutionalized market servicing international student mobility, something that is unprecedented (Altbach and Knight 2010; Collins 2012). In so doing, this study offered to theorize how such private market imported market logic into shaping the structure and opportunities in education: a process where many scholars called neoliberalization of higher education (Anwaruddin 2013; Mitchell 2003).

The puzzle: The neoliberalization of international student admission

The development of what I called a “transnational shadow education” industry was most associated with the overall neoliberalization in higher education worldwide. Governments and university administrations, facing stronger pressure to turn its organizations into a “economic engine”, have turned to the market to support and recruit international students (Berman 2012; Mosneaga and Winther 2013; Ng 2013). Under such system of mutual matching between schools
and students, a large industry surrounding the international students’ admission and application process began to emerge (Coffey and Perry 2014; Collins 2012; Hulme et al. 2014; The Observatory on Borderless Higher Education 2014).

Unimaginable until the late 20th century, the process of international student admission to college is now part of a multibillion-dollar market (Becker and Kolster 2012; Huang, Raimo, and Humfrey 2016; Hulme et al. 2014). Hundreds of colleges and universities in the United State offer programs and credentials with attractive packages and streamline admission-to-graduation services (Huang et al. 2016; Nikula and Kivistö 2019). At the same time, middle-class families thousands of miles away, betting on resources and effort, hope that their children will one day receive the favor of these programs (Finch and Kim 2012; J. Kim 2010; Kim 2018; Lee and Koo 2006; Xiang and Shen 2009a). In previous research, this industry goes by many names, such as “education agent”, “education brokers”, “education consultants”, and “international student migration industries.”, each focusing on certain aspect of the tripartite relationship between the state, the student and universities (Collins 2014; Coffery 2014; Hagerdorn and Zhang 2014). In this dissertation, I rename them “transnational shadow education” as they represent a large assembly of transnational professions that pursue profit-oriented practices and activities linked to an international student’s admission and mobility process.

Importantly, neoliberalism in the North America has not created new institutions but mobilized an existing industry in Asia to grow new functions and professionals. Specifically, countries such as Taiwan and South Korea have always had "shadow education", but it was not until powerful neoliberal forces transformed American higher education institutions that shadow education in Taiwan turned into a commercial tool to support international students’ mobility. They are operating in the “shadow”, relative to the more "legitimate" activities and programs that
universities so often promoted in their admission brochures (Bray 2013; Buchmann et al. 2010; Byun and Park 2012a). Additionally, these agencies and institutions are important for connecting the market logic and educational institutions' logic (Hulme et al. 2013; Levy et al. 2019; Nikula and Kivistö 2019; Xiang and Shen 2009a). A connection that is now prevalent at the formal education end and, importantly, “in the shadow” with local informal educational markets and professions.

In the contemporary development of a globalizing higher education field, the emergence of “transnational shadow education” industry in East Asia was often presented as the model case in which the political, economic and social context motivates expanding mobility of students seeking oversea education (Becker and Kolster 2012; Habu 2000; Hulme et al. 2013; Mok and Lee 2003; Nikula and Kivistö 2019). On the one hand, such shadow education sector may be characterized as a logical response to the “massification” of higher education around the world—a trend movement from elite to the mainstream, driven by the dramatic expansion of neoliberal market economies and the rising of middle-class families in support of children’s studying abroad (Mok, Yu, and Ku 2013; Xiang and Shen 2009a). On the other hand, while students, parents and institutions enjoy wider enrollment horizons, they might also feel ill-equipped to participate in the competitive global education market, leading them to turn to knowledgeable agents and tutors to serve as brokers for competitive opportunities.

My research attempts to demonstrate that dissecting how such an "informal" economic phenomenon can informed us of the broader developments and exchanges taking place in the global higher education field. This industry is undoubtedly the product of basic supply and demand business logic: people and universities need them, so they exist. My analysis also revealed why and how local students turned to the market to help them manage the complicated and, often,
challenging application process. To do that, we need to zoom in on the micro process and operations to understand how the agents work (Anteby, Chan, and DiBenigno 2016; Knight 2012). We also need a broader knowledge of the field, such as how it developed, the different types of agents it consists of, how they work independently and about each other, and how they understood their identities as workers (The Observatory on Borderless Higher Education 2014). In the following sections, I will first explicate the definition of shadow education and extend such definition to the professions and occupations operating in facilitating transnational international student mobility.

**What is a “shadow education”? Why should it matter?**

Sociologist interested in educational phenomenon are no stranger to the existence of “shadow education” (Bray 2013; Buchmann et al. 2010; Byun, Chung, and Baker 2018b; Byun and Park 2012b; Lee and Shouse 2011; Stevenson and Baker 1992). Bray (2017) finds out that after 1980, the phenomenon of "attending private tutoring" or going to so-called “cram school” has become more popular among families with secondary and primary school children, especially in East Asia. He called this phenomenon a movement toward an emerging “shadow education” industry. Parents pay for after-school tutoring (hereon as "shadow education") to enhance the learning of the academic-related subjects in schools such as language, mathematics, physics and chemistry, thereby enhancing their children’s performance in schools. Bray also pointed out that this phenomenon is particularly prevalent in East Asian countries where the “ability for taking test" determine high school and university entrance and many other life changes—such as China, India, Japan, South Korea, and Taiwan (Byun et al. 2018b; Byun and Park 2012b; Liu 2012). Bray argues that deep-rooted credentials tied to status consciousness and collectivism, particularly those
influenced by Confucian traditions, explain why such phenomena were so widespread in Asia but largely absent in Western Europe, North American and other English-speaking countries (Bray 2017).

Simultaneously, sociologists have also noticed this phenomenon and the challenges such private sector poses to other common social issues: such as inequalities. Stevenson and Baker (1992) study that these shadow education institutions can effectively affect what kind of educational pathways students will be allocated to in formal schooling. More importantly, Stevenson and Baker argue that shadow education encourages competition amongst students' families over financial resources, rather than students' actual merit and intellectual capacity(Byun 2014; Byun and Park 2012b; Dang 2013; Lan 2018; Shih 2019; Shih and Yi 2014). Together, the literatures illustrated, importantly, that bringing market into education paved the path for the elites who can reproduce their privilege positions through the usage of these private tutoring and services.

Notwithstanding these contributions, existing scholarship on “shadow education” has some fundamental limitations. For the most part, the literature discusses only educational market and institutions appeared in the domestic realms(Bray 2017; Bray, Institut international de planification de l’éducation, and Unesco 2009; Bray and Kwo 2013; Byun 2014; Byun and Park 2012b). Yet, scholars rarely pay attention to a dependent regime in sending international students to foreign universities. For example, many studies have begun to observe that Asian American family’s native to Asian countries have begun to bring the Asian private tutoring system to the United States(Buchmann et al. 2010; Byun et al. 2018b). In ethnic communities, many of those exam-preparation institutions and crams schools are ran by East Asian immigrant entrepreneurs(Shrake 2010; Zhou 2008). For East Asian parents, these institutions not only provide exam preparation to improve students’ school performance, but they also provide counseling for
college admissions, and served as a cultural institution that helps immigrant children integrate into the mainstream United States societies (Byun 2014; Byun et al. 2018b; Byun and Park 2012b; Lee and Shouse 2011).

As Taiwanese students began to move internationally to pursue higher education admission opportunities, a “transnational shadow education” emerged. Since late 1980s, a broad assembly of actors have occupied the intermediate role of cross-national education settings—including school representative, recruitment officers, ethnic leadership, pastors, and travel agents (Ministry of Education 2019). Those who participated in the “transnational shadow education” industry often served as intermediaries in the process global education mobility, mainly to generate revenue by providing service to:

"…marketing the institution's country to prospective students, providing information about course options and entrance requirements, and helping students navigate complicated visa and application processes" (Coffery and Perry 2014:3).

Those who served in this industry fulfilled multiple purposes in the transnational educational market. For international students, employing education agents help buffers their peripheral position in the global student market. Education agents help students manage the tasks and risk with their migratory journey and connect them to ethnic-centered network and resources (Collins 2012; Xiang and Shen 2009). Knowledgeable agents help closing the gap by providing crucial information, advices, and training for students to securely be admitted to education institutions abroad and safely transition into living abroad. At the same time from a university managerial perspective, education agents are critical cultural liaisons who assist the university student-recruitment in fitting the local legal and social norms.

My focus is on such “transnational shadow education” industry for studying abroad in Taiwan in this research. I call it “transnational” in part because it intermediates two education systems with
different geographic locations and cultures. Also, I call the industry "shadow education" because they share a very similar informal economy and status with other similar “shadow education” institutions like cram schools or private tutoring. At the same time, these “shadow education” operates at the transnational level.

The search for answers: literature and analytical frameworks

Despite recognizing its growing popularity, scholars have struggled to define what this “transnational shadow education” is and its implications on higher education more generally. In this study, I argue that this industry deserves our attention not just because it is empirically interesting but also because it challenges our analysis of existing propositions about education and economics. The emergence of industry has also corresponded with some of the more fundamental issues of educational organizations, immigration, and economic sociology. In searching of an answer for understanding this “transnational shadow education” industry, I was directed to more interrelated sociological discourses concerning migration intermediary, brokers and professions, and moral market and meritocracy. This following section addressed how such research paradigms and issues informed my analytical strategy and frameworks.

The first discourse focused on examining migration intermediaries, which prevailed in migration scholarship and transnationalism literature. Today, there is a growing consensus that international students are also "immigrants", those who also experienced preparation, integration, competition, and adaptation in the American soil (Blilcen and Faist 2015; Bodycott 2009; Chung et al. 2018; Kim 2018; T. Kim 2010; Madge, Raghuram, and Noxolo 2009, 2015). Gradually, scholars studying international students are not limited to those who care about educational issues, and immigration research can also bring in valuable insights.
Scholars of immigration research bring to the research front their observations on transnational movement, culture, and subjects participating in transnational ethnic groups (T. Kim 2010; Pries 2008; Schiller, Basch, and Blanc-Szanton 1998; Zembylas 2012). Although there is not much written about the education broker or related intermediate migration industry, their research still pointed out how the existence of these institutions challenged the existing ethnic and class order of the host society (Hulme et al. 2013; Kim 2018; Lindquist, Xiang, and Yeoh 2012; Xiang and Shen 2009a). Some of the earliest accounts of migration studies have highlighted the roles played by previous immigrants as “brokers” in facilitating new migrants’ ability to move to and assimilate into a new society (Kern and Müller-Böker 2015a; Lindquist et al. 2012). In contrast, recent studies are more likely to take a “transnationalism” approach, highlighting how agents and organizations appropriated cultural knowledge and used it to construct and reproduce the process of migrants’ social and cultural transition into a global/transnational subject (Kim 2010, 2018). Yet, while the discussions have been fruitful, these studies have failed to further investigate the actual nature of this relationship and the motivations of participants in the entrepreneurial market of migration-facilitating businesses, especially for students’ migrations (Kim 2018). I therefore propose to intervene this line of discussion by drawing attention to the entrepreneurial and market dynamics of these agents I studied.

A second discourse relating to the organization's study concerns the formation and maintenance of brokers (Burt 2005; Kellogg 2014; Levy et al. 2019; Stovel and Shaw 2012). Ron Burt’s influential work on the “structure hole” argues how brokers play a pivotal role in connecting resources and network between organizations and institutions (Burt 2005). Brokers gain various benefits from their roles; specifically, side parties will rely on them, which give them status; and they also often dominate the communication and access of information between groups and
organizations, which warrants them power and advantage (Levy et al. 2019; Stovel and Shaw 2012). In this study, I borrowed insights from this line of study by examining the institutional and organizational design of this "brokerage profession." To my knowledge, no existing research studies intermediary market relating to studying abroad through professional lens (Kern and Müller-Böker 2015b; Levy et al. 2019; Sasovova et al. 2010). My research intends to enrich this line of discussion.

The third approach relates to economic sociology because the phenomenon of “shadow education” in Taiwan should be considered a multifaceted market (Anteby 2010a; Arambewela, Hall, and Zuhair 2006; Chan 2009; Robins and Webster 2002; Zelizer 1978). Therefore, the shadow education market surrounding of international students should be considered along its unique moral, cultural and economic context (Anteby 2010a; Chan 2009; Fourcade and Healy 2007; Quinn 2008a, 2008b). Economic sociology is a very new and prosperous discipline in sociology in recent decades. Among them, my research pays special attention to the discussion of "cultural" and "moral" markets in economic sociology (Anteby 2010a; Chan 2009; Fourcade and Healy 2007; Rossman 2014; Zelizer 1978, 2013).

The discussion of "moral market" by economic sociology is conducive to my discussion of the moral and cultural consequences of the commercialization of education intermediary professions (Breslauer 2016; Gammeltoft-Hansen and Sorensen 2013). The answers offered by various theories are, particularly, dominated by American social science and paradigm, which prescribes the ideal of meritocracy (Alon and Tienda 2007; Littler 2017). The meritocratic ideology suggests that college admission should be based on students’ worthiness, that is, their academic ability and hard work. International students can apply for admission and that these commercial institutions can prosper because international students meet the market value attached to a specific
merit in the US higher education enterprise. Also, how to clarify the conflict "market value" in such a unique market, especially for issues such as how it involved in “cheating” or “threatened the education integrity and mission.” (Baird and Clare 2017; Collins 2012). That is why my dissertation argues that we should seriously investigate the relationship between market and moral to further our intellectual scope on such topic (Bolton and Laaser 2013; Dale 2010; Lacher 2019; Palomera and Vetta 2016; Polanyi 2001; Quinn 2008a; Zelizer 2013).

Uniting all three theoretical schools, this study focuses on transnational shadow education institutions because it informs our broader sociological understanding about college admission process (Karabel 2005; Posselt 2016; Stevens 2009). On this basis, I postulate part of investigating the role of "transitional shadow education" institutions lies in uncovering: What kind of institutions and institutions are intermediated by them in what way?

In summary, each of the three literature has its focus and merits. The migration literature points to the industry's transnational nature but failed to develop more systematic explanation of its emergence. The organization and work literature focus on the broker’s role and inter-organizational structure; but they do not fully address how the market's logics competes with the logic of higher education institutions in the profession. Finally, the economic sociology brought great insights into seeing market as more than an economic phenomenon; but have not yet pushed for more in-depth investigations of the moral and cultural nature behind such new emerging “transnational shadow education” market. Based on these existing theoretical gaps, my research attempts to ask questions and answer them about the industry.

Research Questions

To fill in existing theoretical gaps, this dissertation focusses on three main questions uniting
all three approaches:

1. Under the neoliberal wave, how can higher education enrollment, especially international student enrollment, become a market that money can solve? Why is the private market steering the structure and activities of international students' enrollment today, not the state or other forces?

2. As a group of professional institutions operating between formal and informal education systems, what are the characteristics and unique function of transnational shadow education? How do they operate transnationally and locally?

In Search of a Site and Research Cases

Why Taiwan?

To dig into the micro processes by which a new economic practice is introduced to the higher education field, and the dynamics through which macro forces shape these micro dynamics, I confined my fieldwork and research analysis to one national-context, Taiwan.

Taiwan presents itself as an ideal place for this study for three major reasons. First, the country represents the “lowest end” of how a particular local market could have plays a role in the shaping the construction of a modern American higher education capitalist market enterprise. Compare to the industry in other countries, Taiwan’s industry dynamic was less ideal: the relatively small number of international students compared to other countries¹, the relatively weak global political and cultural influence², and the relatively conservative international education policies and

¹ According to the Open Door Report (IIE 2019), Taiwan currently accounts for about 2.1% of the total international students in the United States. It is the seventh-ranked country, after Canada’s 2.4% and Vietnam’s 2.2%. There are about 22,000 students overall.
² Due to the long-term political and sovereignty disputes between Taiwan and China, although Taiwan has an influence in the international economy, it has been politically on the brink of diplomacy and development. In terms
development that lags other countries\(^3\). Yet, if we find that the “shadow market” in Taiwan, a country and education system that is relatively “marginalized”, can form intermediary markets with foreign markets abroad, then we shall be confident that these connections and impacts are as influential in other countries’ context, if not more so.

Secondly, the “shadow education” in Taiwan for studying abroad is more informative of our discussion of the structural-agency issues in higher education neoliberalism. Compared to the same markets in China and South Korea, Taiwan’s market does not have too many giant supra-national for-profit private institutions, such as New Oriental(新東方) or iae Global. When I started working in 2017, less than ten companies in Taiwan had multinational departments, and only one had foreign branches, UKEAS. Here, the Taiwan study abroad “shadow education” market represents a more authentic manifestation of neoliberalism. Their development relies more on the wisdom of micro-level balancing of education and business management. The cultural, institutional, and economic resources mobilized by the Taiwan “transnational shadow education” agent also further represent how the profession in this small market can masterfully leverage the global education environment to their will.

Finally, Taiwan is suitable for this research because it has a very vigorous local "shadow education” industry. Part of this industry is native to Taiwan's special historical and cultural context, while part is influenced by foreign economies and other similar organizational systems. From this perspective, we can extend the empirical breadth of "shadow education” studies in Asia and deepen the discussion of the nature of this industry.

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\(^3\) For a comparison of international education policies between Taiwan and other countries, please refer to Chan (2013), Mok (2000), Chou and Ching (2012).
Fieldwork and Archival Data

In the literature review chapter that follows (Chapter 2), I addressed how I define the term “agent” more broadly within a broad host of occupations and professions. Such workforce can include educational consultants, freelance editors, language tutors, and others. These occupations and professions are compatible given that they shared similar organizational feature as “a wide assembly of actors whose existence depends on money paid either to facilitate or to constrain migration mobility” (Arambewela, Hall, and Zuhair 2006; Gammeltoft-Hansen and Sorensen 2013). They have varying roles in intervening in educational meritocracy ideal construction, writing admission essays, and combating uncertainties in the global higher education landscapes.

To obtain a more in-depth understanding of the industry and the definition of such a complex service sector, I conducted face-to-face interviews with participants working in the student-serving industry. I conducted 60 interviews, focusing on their perceptions of the job, daily routine, and consideration of the moral issues within the market transactions. The data presented in this study provides details of the narratives from 25 education consultants, 14 language instructors, and five freelance editors. I recruit my participants mainly through snowball sampling. The participants came from a wide range of educational and work backgrounds, working in firms with different organizational forms and missions.

I investigated the practices and conceptualization of the jobs of these agents via another route. The interviews were supplemented with ethnographic participant observations at five critical events. One event was at a one-on-one admission essays-writing consulting session between a student and an agent. The other event was at an admission essay-writing panel hosted by a primary international education agency and a language institution with approximately 100 people. Agents
hosted two separate study-abroad experience sharing sessions within their firms. I also observed a collective of agents operating as they hosted their annual exhibitions at the Taipei International Convention Center in November 2018. Participating, communicating, and reciprocal exchange of information on studying abroad and essay-writing were these sites' main themes.

After completing the first phase of data collection through fieldwork, I turned to archival data to triangulate my findings with more objective administrative data and publications. In the two months after fieldwork, I visited and accumulated several archives and libraries located within the metropolitan Taipei, such as the National Central Library. This library is currently the largest national archive for all existing published books, periodicals, and international education research in Taiwan. My visit to the archive is critical given that it provided more comprehensive socio-historic background for my cases. I also obtained various first-hand documents, such as brochures, books, or pamphlets, which brokers used to advertise their business. In examining the text and all the publications, another major archive was the Information Center on Study Abroad, established in 1990 in Taipei and currently based in the Taipei Public Library.

To further extend elaborate phenomenon in the post-internet era, I have also used observations from an online forum, STUDYABROAD, to inform how particular boundaries are drawn in the student community regarding this kind of market. I studied a dedicated oversea study Taiwanese student forum called the PTT STUDYABROAD, where participants expressed well-articulated opinions and experience about studying abroad. The site's digital ethnography starting in the summer of 2014 is composed of students and non-students and continued with 47 interviews of site users between 2015 and 2018. These posts are hand-coded with a focus on students’ understanding of the community in general and the market and nonmarket forms of admission assistance. I outlined the result of my observation in the independent case study chapter in chapter
Interview, online and offline ethnographic approach is useful for understanding how people in a controversial market make meanings through different transactions and form relationships with clients. I do not claim that all actors participating in the transnational education market produce the same outcomes and boundaries. However, the mechanism identified in this study is likely to have comparable results in other contexts.

Chapter Outline

This dissertation study why this seemingly independent, local shadow education in Taiwan was closely connected to the transnational international student mobility process. In doing this, I asked a series of how questions: How did such Taiwanese market emerge? How did people work in such a market? How do people view and are related to such a market? To decipher how question about specific processes and dynamics, I begin with a portrait of the economic, transnational institutional, and cultural conditions under which the commercial-educational “shadow education” industry was introduced to the world stage. Then, I presented the emergent market's characteristic, analyze how different industry-level economic models show us the depth and scope of the market and those people and institutions composed it. Following that, my empirical chapters focus on agents and students’ interactions and perceptions as the main unit of analysis. My conclusion finished up by putting the micro process back into the macro structural system and understanding its implications and complications.

Chapter 2 lays the theoretical foundations and motivating research questions from different literature and sub-disciplines of sociology—immigration, organization and work, and economic. In this chapter, I discuss how the study of this “transnational shadow education” can be informed
by other critical insights developed from other sub-disciplines of sociology. Each research paradigm points to some specific features of the market’s distinctiveness and their generalizability of other cases of intermediators and professions. This section's goal was not meant to provide a comprehensive review of all the development in the field, but merely the parts and bits that alludes essential development of the core arguments and conceptual frameworks. At the end of each summary subsections, I discuss how these literature lines are relevant for this study.

Chapter 3 concerns the specific method and data used for this dissertation. I started with the primary data source, which is how I structured my qualitative data gathering process, including in-depth interviews with 60 agents and several in-person observation events. I also explain why I consider selecting them as my primary data source. Then, I present the supplementary secondary archival data that I collect to better inform and triangulate my fieldwork. I mention the source of some second-hand government reports, whitepapers, or publications, how to find them, and why I think it is necessary to include them in my main studies.

Chapter 4 through 8 present rich details of the macro and micro dynamics through which the market is emerging. Chapter 4 begins with macro political-historical conditions that give rise to “transnational shadow education” companies, with specific focus on how the nation state’s influence have withered in international student admission. Chapter 5 and 6 center on the organization level of the operation of the transnational shadow education market. Chapter 7 and 8 are each independent case study focusing on the market's cultural and moral dynamics.

Chapter 4 begins with a brief historical background of the neoliberalization of higher education in the U.S. and Taiwan. I particularly discuss how major global-local dynamics created such a strong demand for such market, including 1) the changing institutional environment on international student recruitment; 2)Taiwan local-level shift in social and cultural resources
supporting international student migration; and 3) the Internet and distance learning. This chapter ends with presenting an outlook of different major “professions” in this emergent Taiwanese shadow education industry.

Chapter 5 and 6 ask what makes people buy service from such market, what kinds of product they buy, and why. But the two chapters focused on slightly different aspect of the job. In Chapter 5, my research focuses on how agents turn such global higher education environment into technical works and relational and emotional labor. Chapter 6 focuses on how individual agents and agencies brokerage different structural resources at transnational and local levels. I also outlined the two dominant types of business models—commission-based and fee-based—and how they turn educational migration into commodities: Overall, I discussed how such different organizational design have different organizational and economic implications for the industry, firms, and the individual clients (students) they served.

Chapter 7 and 8 are each case studies showing the dynamics of the transnational shadow education market. Chapter 7 illustrate the effect of “culture” in shaping the market. Education agents represent a new and emerging form of labor, labeled in this article as “authenticity crafting,” which aims to help international students who want to brand themselves during a transnational application process. This growing workforce sits at the intersection of critical development in college admissions expansion and is part of a growing economy to produce someone else’s self. When undergoing such process, the agents help students create a distance between a student subject’s “actual self” and the required cultural and social capital he/she intends to showcase to the application committees. The chapter uncovers a unique labor process by which agents take pride in facilitating students' admission by managing multi-level symbolic meanings of “authenticity.” At the end, the chapter also suggested that such emergent market engages more
moralized aspect relating to the good and bad about the admission services.

In Chapter 8, I looked at how moral and market intersects in the shadow education in Taiwan by taking a step back, seeing how at the “field” level how specific to-be customer’s international students define these agents differently. I studied how a Taiwanese online-forum about over studies draw distinctions between different transnational shadow education. The distinction was divided by justifying how each profession contribute to the meritocracy. The meritocratic ideal prescribes that college admission should be based on students’ worthiness. I find that forum participants view college admissions services as moral when compensating for collective disadvantage yet reject their morality in other contexts. Paying to beat a “meritocratic” system becomes legitimate when one recognizes one’s systematic disadvantage in that system. Yet recognizing group disadvantage along one dimension does not imply an awareness of individual (dis)advantage along other dimensions, nor does it undermine a broader faith that the system is meritocratic. At the end, I examine how this definition and buyer’s preferences were shaped by their shared value, moralities, and perceptions, and how shifts in a neoliberal American higher education enterprise strengthen those preferences.

Finally, following the eight chapters of data analysis and background discussions, I present the chapter to conclude the dissertation. Seeking to bring in all empirical, background theoretical chapters together, the final chapter synthesize the broader theoretical implications of the findings and discuss contribution to the field and the real “field”. At the end, I would also suggest future projection and address how my field is likely to face changes of significant disruptions as the presence of COVID-19 pandemic took the world by surprise since the spring of 2020. To which context I conclude with the study’s limitations and suggest future research directions.
Chapter 2: Literature Review: Understanding Transnational Shadow Education

Transnational shadow education institutions represent only part of the larger universe of the global higher education sphere. Transnational shadow education institutions in Taiwan pushes international students to study in developed countries such as the United States. Those institutions can perform various tasks to assist students with the application and admission, such as tutoring for standardized exams, consulting for admission strategies and documents, planning, and preparing to transition living abroad. However, some international students rely more on these agents than others, as we saw a more significant expansion of this service industry in East Asia.

I argue that while existing scholarship has touched upon the empirical *de facto* existence of such an industry, few studies have examined the *de jure* organizational and institutional mechanism of its operations. As the demand for overseas education has risen and the need for recruitment intensified, the industry evolved into a niche brokerage profession, thereby sending the international student to another education system. Before discussing the overarching professional field, I would first review some alternative explanations in this chapter relating to different sub-fields in sociology. Elements of truth are found in each of these explanations, but none fits the Taiwanese case perfectly.

This dissertation bridges several sub-fields in sociology. Studies on global migration, organizations, institutions, work, occupations, and economy critically informed my research about the “transnational shadow education.” First, I will review the relevant literature and how it informs my current study approach. This review chapter will also summarize the three crucial features of transnational shadow education: transnationalism, informal institutions, and moralized market.
Second, I will discuss how previous literature develops different categories to understand the workforce's wide range of individuals and institutions. Finally, I conclude with the taxonomy of the five focal occupations and professions in this work.

**Migration Literature and the Role of Transnational Intermediaries**

We shall first turn our analytical attention to the social/spatial horizon of the institutions: transnationalism. Transnationalism refers to the increasing tendency among migrants to maintain ties with their country of origin. Until recently, discussion and research on education are largely confined to what Adick(2005) called the “national paradigm.” Researchers emphasized education system developed and spread worldwide in association with modern nation-states' formation (Meyer 1977; Meyer, Ramirez, and Soysal 1992; Meyer and Rowan 2012). To a certain extent, this historical process is so ubiquitous and self-evident that many studies tend to believe that educational institutions are "naturally" emerged around the nation-state. As a result, in contrast to the national paradigm—or “methodological nationalism” (Chung, Bloemraad, and Tejada-Pena 2013; Schiller, Basch, and Blanc-Szanton 1992; Schiller et al. 1998)— “transnational” educational phenomena and developments have only entered the social scientific discourse recently.

In recent decades, researchers have started to incorporate the idea of “transnationalism” into studying higher education phenomenon, especially regarding the relocation of international students (Holloway, O’Hara, and Pimlott-Wilson 2012; Waters and Leung 2013; Zembylas 2012). Transnationalism literature draws attention to the fact that transmigrant communities—international students and their families—establish financial, cultural, religious ties and education ties between the place of origin and destinations. Example of such links are widely documented in the literature, including: “parachute kids,” where children are sent to another country attending
schools outside of their country of origin (Tse and Waters 2013; Zhou 1998); or “astronaut households,” where a household is split across different countries, as one partner pursue a career in the country of origin, while the other relocate oversea to assist their children’s educational pursuit (Finch and Kim 2012; Pe-Pua et al. 1996; Waters 2002). This broad literature tradition's highlights agents’ positions as "bridge person and institutions" facilitating migration flow and capital exchange within the global higher education (Bliicen and Faist 2015; Collins 2008; Kim 2018; Lindquist et al. 2012).

Previous Studies on Transnational Intermediaries

Prior scholars suggest that transnational shadow education emerges because of the interactions between different forces within the student mobility processes. Based on this assumption, international shadow education operates similarly to other entities in the “migration industry,” whose main tasks were to clear cultural and social obstacles related to border-crossing (Baas 2007; Gammeltoft-Hansen and Sorensen 2013). The kernel of truth in this assumption was that the agents working in transnational shadow education serve as global intermediaries and that the industry was made possible because of the migration and admission constraints regulated by the U.S and other countries.

However, if the destination societies’ dynamics entirely dominates this industry, we likely expect such an industry to have originated in the U.S., not in Taiwan. What happened was the opposite. Although large for-profit corporate institutions such as Kaplan, Inc. that provided education services have existed as early as 1938, their emphasis on the international education sector did not appear until the 1990s.⁴ From this perspective, we can say that the transnational

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⁴ Kaplan, Inc. is an American for-profit corporation that provides educational services to colleges and universities.
shadow education industry is mainly native to Taiwan.

Existing scholarship on migration also postulates that transnational shadow education stems from ethnic communities (Byun 2014; Byun et al. 2018a; Shrake 2010). Early immigration scholars see ethnic-based community resources and infrastructure as a burden to migrants' assimilation to new destinations (Gordon 1964; Liang and Miao 2013). Nevertheless, most scholars today would agree that migrant communities and settlements—such as ethnic enclaves and home-based social and economic ties—can provide resources, interpersonal support, and identity recognition that aids immigrants in their new societies (Chung et al. 2013; Light et al. 1994; Massey 1999, 2008). Similarly, for transnational shadow education, whose primary role is to assist international students' admission, they can serve as critical ethnic resources and support (Collins 2008, 2012; Hulme et al. 2013). Overall, immigration research allows us to explain why these shadow education institutions' primary owners or establishments always involve specific entrepreneurial individuals from a particular ethnic background.

However, this explanation remains insufficient. If the above view is correct, the most active groups in this industry should be individuals or institutions with the most institutional resources and knowledge. For example, many Taiwanese students who have studied abroad have now served in higher education institutions in their home countries as professors or researchers. In theory, they should be the people who are most likely to engage in this business or be the “experts” who are most capable of turning the business into a profession. Nonetheless, the people who turn these into a business sector are not university professors but another Taiwanese entrepreneurs group:

and corporations and businesses, including higher education programs, professional training and certifications, test preparation and student support services. It was founded in 1938 by Stanley Kaplan. In 1984, Kaplan was sold then to The Washington Post Company; and then in 2018 sold to Purdue university and rebranded the institution as Purdue University Global. In the U.S., Kaplan was mainly known for providing educational service relating to SAT and college entrance preparations. Overseas, the team and branch franchises extended to approximately 225 different locations across the globe providing service and training.
“shadow education” employers and employees who have transformed education into teachable and sellable products. In turn, they pushed these education services and products to the transnational level, turning what Kim (2018) called the “migration-facilitating capital” into business firms.

Exploring beyond Transnationalism

To understand transnational shadow education in Taiwan, we must consider the “transnationalism” perspective discussed by migration scholars. However, relying on such a view alone is not enough to examine the entire industry's development and complexity. Two closely related problems exist: why choose to market and why not other intermediators?

First, why international choose market? Existing migration studies have informed us of the importance of understanding global, transnational connections. Nevertheless, they do not tell us why this connection must pass through the market. Higher education internationalization is not a new concept. Its roots and principles can be traced back thousands of years ago to cultural centers like ancient China, Greece, Rome, Persia, and India, where people move to gain knowledge and learning(Hudzik 2015). People searching for new ideas, opportunities, and inspirations led to the earliest form of higher learning migrants and migration institutions. Compared to knowledge and ideas, people and money began to cross borders later in global educational systems. If we need to understand this field, we must ascertain why they have evolved into markets and why agents who provide services became the dominant order.

Second, why not other intermediators? Prior migration research reminds us to pay closer attention to intermediaries but does not reveal how such an intermediary turn work into goods and services(Kellogg 2014; Kern and Müller-Böker 2015b; Levy et al. 2019; Stovel and Shaw 2012).
We should realize that an important reason any industry becomes one is that it provides products or services that other individuals and institutions cannot offer. Transnational shadow education has neither the coercive force of immigration border authorities nor American higher education institutions' legitimacy representation. Still, it has the flexibility and resilience lacking in those two entities to serve individual students and their families. Other intermediaries may work, but they tend to have a short existence. From here, we can enter into another explanation for this market and these professions.

**Organization and Work Literature and the Role of Brokerage Professions**

*Previous Studies on Brokers*

Prior research can also explain the transnational shadow education market by examining the structural function between different organizational fields. A second possible explanation of why transnational shadow education exist would emphasize the industry's role in brokering other inter-organizational economic, political, and social relationships (Burt 2005; Kellogg 2014; Stovel and Shaw 2012)). This argument holds some truth as well. The most significant advantage we gain from investigating organizational sociology and occupation studies was our understanding of transnational shadow education status by looking at their work. In the transnational shadow education market, studies on brokerage have helped theorize the emergence of such intermediate actors, particularly focus on how such professions help mitigate high uncertainty in the global student admission process (Coffey and Perry 2014; Collins 2008; Kern and Müller-Böker 2015a; Madge et al. 2009). While conceptually broad, the notion of brokerage is vital for understanding significant aspects of the agent’s work and the commodification behind such professional groups’ pursuit:
Brokerage comes about when two parties are interested in making a deal, but either do not know about each other or do not know enough about what the other offers to know what a fair price might be. The broker brings the parties together and mediates across this knowledge gap (Stovel and Shaw 2012: 147).

By adapting the “brokerage profession” to explain the transnational shadow education, theories in organization and work can inform how such a nuisance institution to help bridge universities and students. The brokers' position allows them to occupy multiple geo-locational positions, selling their service serving different clients' demographics and catering to differentiating concerns—ranging from adults, adolescent students, middle-class family, and universities (Xiang and Shen 2009a).

This understanding about work and organization was neatly reflected in brokerage and brokerage investigation, especially when traditional research often ignores such a context and favors other more “legitimate” or organized forces (Burt 2005; Stovel and Shaw 2012). Research on international students in American higher education was no exception. Past studies focused mostly on more “formal” organizational structures and policies while overlooking other “informal” activities and individuals that maintained the system's operation. As American higher education expands, the demands for communicating, coordinating, and dispatching resources also increase. Ron Burt’s (2005) highly influential work reveals that “structural holes” will begin to arise between these gradually complicated organizations. People will increasingly need individuals or institutions to mediate these unconnected units. In real terms, if we must understand what transnational shadow education is, we must apprehend how it relates to other organizations, especially how it brokered with something as massive as the American higher education enterprise. As a result, we need to understand the intermediary, informal groups of agents who work to send students abroad.
However, this view also has its problems. Particularly, when focusing on organizational brokers in the transnational sphere, what is the “space” we see these brokers connecting? Ludger Pires (2007) distinguishes between three ideal types of social spaces for transnational organizations: everyday life (at the micro-level), organizations (at the meso-level), and institutions (at the macro-level). In this study, the influence of education agents on international students covers all levels (micro, meso, and macro)(Pries 2008). Still, we focus on their influence on institutions, that is, the market's influence on the education system. The empirical development we have seen suggests that such a work is “outsourced” to broker-like individuals and organizations outside of universities, particularly the transnational shadow education.

The above broker position is highly related to how such agents service organizations across professional boundaries, which falls under the meso-level organization function they played. Scholars propose two main explanations for why any field becomes professional brokerage work: when the design of the structure is suitable for the work of an intermediary (Burt 2005; Stovel et al. 2011) and when certain social relationships or interactions can lead to strategic gains (Kellogg 2014; Kern and Muller 2015; Levy et al. 2019). Moreover, some researchers have suggested that the emergence of certain intermediaries does not aim to complete the work better but instead seeks to enhance relational quality and strengthen the trust (Kellogg 2014; Sasovova et al. 2010).

Indeed, later chapters in this dissertation reveal that the transnational shadow education role and work process are scripted and controlled under careful consideration of aligning interests, preventing conflicts, and invoking strong emotional bonding with parties in the transnational education process. As expressed by the three model studies of occupations and professions by Anteby, Chan, and DiBenigno (2016) 's, traditional literature allows us to find the “doing” and “relating” aspect of transnational shadow education—the way members perform occupational
tasks and claims the scope of expertise and how occupational members build intra-, inter-, and extra-occupational relationships. Nevertheless, the organization and work literature have largely failed to provide us with an explanation about the critical problem of “becoming”—the particular ways in which “occupational members are socialized into the cultural values, norms, and worldviews of their occupational community” (Anteby et al. 2016).

Beyond Brokerage, Work, and the Market

The insight we gained from the literature of organizations and occupation and professions brought us both opportunities and limitations. Interestingly, the two are interrelated. The organization and profession perspective have the advantage of motivating us to carefully identify the nuance mechanism and describe detailed work scenes to which many of us can relate emotionally and socially. Nevertheless, their critical limitation is just as cliché as it is true: so what? We long knew that agents in the transnational shadow education sector are social beings. They experienced many of the difficulties they faced in meeting demands about their professional status and productive role. They struggle to balance pressure within the professional sector's institutional boundary while resolving the problems and contingencies demanded by their service users. Finally, they are people that make this field both complicated and meaningful as they consist of men and women, supervisors and subordinates, professionals and non-professionals. Why should we study this work instead of others?

I argue that this industry's most extraordinary aspect is that it challenges the boundary (or boundaries) between formal and informal educational institutions. For this issue, the following queries must be answered. Why is it that “only” this industry can change the American higher education enterprise from their perspective, and why at this moment? Faced with various choices,
why do international students and schools finally choose to work with them? Fortunately, this workforce is quite extraordinary in addressing those concerns from observing higher education enterprise and the market. Transnational shadow education operates in a vastly different socio-geographical space than any other occupation and profession. Its practitioners live transnational lives and struggle to satisfy multiple individuals, institutional, and market demands. Also, their work constantly juggles between boundaries, including the divide between legal and illegal or formal and informal. Finally, they forge connections despite this often-liminal status and identity. These efforts are not easy. The difficulties experienced by those education agents make their stories unique and precious, and they offer social scientists’ insights into the remarkable dynamics of maintaining a business in education.

**Economic Sociology and the Moral Market of Transnational Shadow Education**

The final explanation is that understanding transnational shadow education must start with the question of “value.” We generally assume that value is an economic exchange issue. Thus, the easiest value to explore is the bargaining relationship in the market. This approach is useful for studying transnational shadow education because students are “bargained” in such a market. However, our concern should be the “economic value” of the market and the cultural and moral-infused value construction within any market. This literature focuses on the moral and cultural value impacting students’ values and practices in the transnational shadow education market. As discussed, we should pay attention to transnational shadow education because it challenges our understanding of how the higher education market negotiates and shows its value.

*Previous study on value and market*
Almost all the existing literature on the operation of transnational shadow education focuses on this existing market's effect and overlooks its cause. In other words, numerous studies present perspectives and comprehensive reports describing the de facto market. We know that these markets exist and are influential (Collins 2014). We understand their unique supply and demand environment (Baas 2016; Coffey and Perry 2014; Kim 2018). Finally, we can even analyze how these markets are used as tools for immigrants or organizations (Kim 2018; Levy et al. 2019). Notwithstanding these contributions, I argue that the studies failed to capture the full picture of the industry’s economic and social nature.

The study of economic sociology revealed that if we want to fully understand the operation of transnational shadow education, then we must cast our views wider outside the market. From the perspective of economic sociology, we must simultaneously examine the cultural and moral issues endogenous to the market (Chan 2009; Fourcade and Healy 2007; Zelizer 1978, 1989, 2013). On top of understanding the market supply and demands, we need to provide a balanced assessment of its significance and value of these actions. Instead of asking whether the market provides freedom of choices or if the market drives cultural distinctions and differences, we must utilize an economic sociological lens that provides us with an approach to understand the specific cultural and moral conditions under which specific market and market actors interact, contradict, and collaborate (Fourcade and Healy 2007).

This notion offers the strongest explanation thus far. Moral and ethical debates played a major role in the rise of the market discourse in global higher education markets (Fourcade and Healy 2007; Quinn 2008a). Collins (2008) emphasized that earlier literature asserted that the movement of international students should be placed within a neoliberal frame that views them as “trade” (White 1998) or “flows” (Chen and Barnett 2000) that involve revenue-generating and national-
building potentials. Yet, such a discussion in the literature has promoted “a rather uncritical enthusiasm for international education and its potential effects” (Collins 2008:400). In turn, over several decades, the need to use the international student market as a supplement or even replacement for state-funding further drives up the tension between education as a public and private good. In a context like the U.S., the business logic of “selling high” has replaced the higher education institutions' aspiration for maintaining quality and affordable teaching and learning for average American families. In other words, understanding the rising market logics of higher education requires us to simultaneously untangle the moral and cultural discourses shaping its operations.

Sociologists have long noted that higher education lived up to its notorious reputation as the playground for the rich and the privileged (Armstrong and Hamilton 2013; Armstrong and Massé 2014; Bourdieu 1973, 1986, 1989; Jack 2019). Boudieu (1986) indicated that through long-term cumulated capitals, middle-class and elite families could reproduce and legitimize their dominant position through a certain institutional arrangement of higher education. This observation was echoed by Xiang and Shen (2009) in their discussion of how elite Chinese families use American diplomas to legitimize their children's continued control of political power and economic resources in China. For sociologists, a diploma of higher education exists in the form of economic, social, and cultural capital; at the same time, a feature that constitutes a significant impact on individuals' future lives (Apple 1979, 1999; Bowles 2014; Bowles and Gintis 1976).

Moreover, these capitals' accumulation mostly depends on past strategies and practical actions, but people with a superior culture and economic capital more readily obtain a subjective or objective structural advantage position (Bourdieu 1973; Kim 2018). To apply the game metaphor, every game brings the players with strong capital closer to winning. In this process, Bourdieu
pointed out that education also has the function of “symbolic capital,” to make the cultural field “non-economic” and possessing the logic of moral pursuit (Bourdieu 1984; Wong and Apple 2019). As most of the actors will find ways to hide their true economic motives, their actions do not make it seem like they are pursuing individuals or groups' interests (Wong and Apple 2019). If we proceed from Bourdieu's critical point of view, the traditional perspectives on the higher education market are preventing us from constructing “a general science of the economy of practices” (Bourdieu 1986:242)

Therefore, existing sociologists, including economic and social scholars, may not be too surprised because the entire higher education market will further “immorally” exacerbate existing inequalities in class, race, ethnicity, gender, and other social variables. What might surprise them is the notion that when that market became global and when international students and the economy intersect, what counts as “valuable” in higher education can change dramatically (Zelizer 1978, 1989). In the sociology of education, a group of scholars is concerned about how international education can change national education missions and social stratification (Attewell 2001; Xiang and Shen 2009a). The existence of the emerging market of transnational shadow education has again challenged higher education as a social resource allocation and value-oriented institution.

Beyond Market, Values, and Inequalities

These existing economic and sociological interpretations of the higher education economy can extend to many interesting topics and might be limited. First, existing studies on the value of higher education tend to use a “Bourdieuann” language to analyze its structural consequences, that is, by calling specific attention to class resources and class reproduction (Holloway et al. 2012).
However, this analysis narrows the orientation of “capital” and the various strategies for obtaining these capitals. Holloway et al. (2012), for example, criticizing the Bourdieusian approach as a limitation that overemphasized the reproduction that occurs along with people’s class identities and resources, but at the same time ignores how these reproductions intersect with other identities.

Many scholars have extended the concepts of economics and political science, deepened the capital discussed by Bourdieu, and proposed various new “capital”—such as Coleman’s discussion on the “social capital” of education and Bourdieu’s profound influence on education research. Recently, mobility capital (Kim 2018; T. Kim 2010) or "migration facilitating capital” (Kim 2018) were also explored. If these various capital studies symbolize different fields, including gender, ethnic group, and race or age studies, which have all put forward their views on the various dimensions of inequality, then our current judgments on the higher education market may be too narrow (Bourdieu 1986; Waters 2009). The influence of class is not unimportant, but other things may have similar, if not greater, influence.

Another major limitation involves how the economic, sociological analysis on higher education has been missing in critical studies about the morality process and category formations when values are negotiated in higher education admission (Quinn 2008a; Schilke and Rossman 2018). From this perspective, the higher education market affects more than just individuals who make rational decisions. A market is also a system of affiliations and values (Anteby 2010a; Meyer 1977; Quinn 2008b). People experience its impact as individuals with their unique tastes, moral views, and social identities. In a nutshell, transnational shadow education has an intersectional influence on students and schools (Holloway et al., 2016). Here, I am not just saying that such a market analysis must “add” gender, ethnicity, or other analyses. Nevertheless, we must realize that apart from being an individual subordinate to the global higher education market order,
international students also have other identities, loyalties, and affiliations. These identities and values form part of the market and sometimes also challenge the operation of the market.

In sum, economic sociology encourages us to pay attention to cultural and moral issues that affect the transnational shadow education market (Zelizer 2011). In this respect, I argue that the discussion of moral markets and economic sociology can contribute to new ways of thinking about the existing boundaries for market behavior than what occurs in higher education. *When the market is no longer just a market, how should we understand its boundaries and the actors and actions?*

My research does not intend to shake up the entire economic and sociological discussion of the market, but instead extends the key insight to the higher education market discussion. My attempt to bring in the economic sociology lens was one of the core contribution of this dissertation to the sociological inquiry on this particular transnational higher education market.

**Synthesizing the Literature: How does the literature inform this study**

When we synthesize the three literature streams' views and limitations, we observe the uniqueness and generalizability of this transnational shadow education industry better. I summarize the three defining features that informed my analysis in this dissertation about the feature and characteristics of transnational shadow education. From the previous review, a transnational shadow education could be defined by its three critical features:

1) A *transnational* intermediary of the higher education field;

2) An occupation field consisting of people and institutions *in-between formal and informal* structures of the global higher education field;

3) A market that is entangled with the *cultural and moral values* in society.

First, *transnational shadow education embodies transnationalism.* Although American
higher education has its trajectory and logic, its development entails the gradual removal of national boundaries and an emphasis on international connections in the contemporary era of gradual marketization. However, the actual daily work involving transnational affairs and connections is rarely borne by the school itself. More commonly, they “outsource” that transnational work to the market. Using this perspective, we can revisit many existing educational economics analyses such as educational costs, educational benefits, educational investment, and educational programs (Cohn 1975; Machlup 1962; Schultz 1960; Patrinos and Psacharopoulos 2011; Pfeffer 2015). Without these intermediary markets, we may see a more stringing global higher education system and market. Furthermore, without these markets, we may not see so many international students who are simultaneously living within the American higher education enterprise and are involved with the social and cultural development of their home country. Of course, we cannot avoid discussing how these intermediary markets have exacerbated some of higher education problems.

Second, transnational shadow education operates in-between formal and informal institutions. In international student admission systems, a wide variety of participants fell under “informal” groups, from family members to ethnic networks and, in a murky zone between formal and informal groups, the business of transnational shadow education workforces. The informal groups are fascinating and enjoyed the influence of the “formal” groups on students’ decisions and pathway studying overseas. I argue that the occupations and professions in the transnational shadow education sector operate as a broker between “formal” and “informal” groups in the field of global higher education. Studying their work, perceptions, and identities gives us a great overview of how such a formal-informal divide has changed due to the neoliberalization of higher education in the U.S.
Finally, transnational shadow education is the market's activities themselves and the moral and cultural context enabling them. As other brokers in labor migrations, the transnational shadow education workforce helps nurture “desirable” characteristics and preparation training service to help students outperform others who compete to enter selective colleges and universities (Collins 2012c; Kim 2018; Xiang and Shen 2009). Although students and these market actors may negotiate different intervention levels and cost for the actual writing process, the moral line drawn between the legitimate and illegitimate market and transactions has been arbitrary. Precisely because of that situation, the recent emergence of bribery and the use of admission aid scandals provoke a great societal backlash in news media and academia alike. This dissertation illustrates multiple “moral” issues concerning the operation of the market of education agents. I also argue that revamping the moral market context is a critical missing piece to theorizing the contemporary global context of higher education commercialization. The conventional knowledge of the debate on commercial agents and brokers tends to focus on the ethical concern. However, I posit that the underlying meritocratic ideology and professional dynamics around actors participating in the higher education market should be the central concerns of this debate.

Overview of Occupations and Professions in Transnational Shadow Education

What is Shadow Education?

Systematic and comparative global studies on “shadow education” only started emerging over the past three decades (Bray et al. 2009; Buchmann et al. 2010; Byun and Park 2012b; Lee and Shouse 2011; Stevenson and Baker 1992). The international academic community usually cites the research of Mark Bray (1999:20) when studying this phenomenon. In his work, “shadow education” is defined by three distinctive features:
1) *Supplementation:* tutoring that addressed subjects already covered in school and excluding, for example, language classes for minority children whose families were anxious for new generations to retain competence in languages not taught in mainstream schools.

2) *Privateness:* tutoring provided in exchange for a fee as opposed to unpaid tutoring provided by families or community members or extra tutoring provided by teachers as part of their professional commitments and responsibilities;

3) *Academic subjects,* particularly languages, mathematics, and other examinable subjects and excluding musical, artistic, or sporting skills, are learned primarily for pleasure and/or for a more rounded form of personal development.

In recent years, research on “shadow education” has been conducted in roughly three main directions. First, taking the book by Mark Bray and Chad Lykins (2012) as an example, the so-called “shadow education” is observed to exist in many different organizational forms. For example, non-academic artistic ability, language courses, or study abroad tutoring classes are common in Taiwan’s education system (Byun and Park 2012b; Chen et al. 2009; Liu 2011a, 2011b; Shih and Yi 2014). Such an institution may involve a school-based exam and a shadow education teaching and service derived from professional certification and certification. At the same time, Bray also noted that tutoring activities in many countries no longer indicate a small-scale individual teaching activity but already constitute a large-scale enterprise organization and that some have even become multinational companies or stock listings. Some of these educational activities have even achieved considerable legitimacy in many countries and come out of the “shadow.”

Second, researchers have also begun to pay more attention to cross-country comparisons, especially about the differences in students’ learning performances between countries with private tutoring and shadow education. In cross-border surveys and research such as the Program for International Study Assessment (PISA), in which dozens of countries participate in the world and students’ participation in “shadow education,” was also investigated (Bray and Kwo 2013; Byun et
al. 2018b; Lee and Shouse 2011). Others, such as the 2003 General Social Survey study across South Korea, China, and Taiwan, tracked students’ tutoring. The Taiwan Education Panel Study in Taiwan conducts a long-term survey on tutoring data and performs a long-term comparison of tutoring motivation and reasons. Finally, the latest book published by Bray (2012) also compares different tutoring forms and cultures in many countries. In addition to the teaching and service activities that transpire in the shadow education institution itself, many studies have also begun to explore the impact of tuition on student experience and other aspects. The most common investigation focuses on academic performance (Byun 2014; Comparative Education Research Centre, University of Hong Kong and Braya 2013; Dumais 2002; Lee and Shouse 2011; Stevenson and Baker 1992). Other concerns involve the social problems caused by tutoring and family communication (Bray et al. 2009).

Finally, most relevant to this research is that researchers have begun to pay attention to those European and American shadow education institutions that are generally considered to have not “deeply embedded in the culture” (Bray 2009: 24). For East Asian parents, these institutions not only provide exam preparation to improve students’ school performance, but they also provide counseling for college admissions and serve as a cultural institution that helps immigrant children integrate into the mainstream American societies (Byun and Park 2012, 2017; Byun, Chung and Backer 2018; Byun and Park 2012). Buchamann, Condron, and Roscigno (2010) also observed that higher education admission in the U.S. pays more attention to student SAT scores, test preparation services, and private tutoring emerged as “American style shadow education.” Today, American students from privileged families, including many Asian Americans, can find one-on-one private test preparation services. Moreover, parents can also choose to consume “shadow education” services from other larger corporate, educational companies like Kaplan or Princeton.
Review, especially as these larger companies can provide more comprehensive service and support for their children’s pathway to college. Shadow education has been rapidly expanding in the U.S., and with it, many multinational education business institutions that centered on the U.S. have gradually expanded to the world.

*Developing Categories and Definitions for the Agents*

Defining transnational shadow education is difficult. An important reason is that past research presented little agreement on what kind of people and institutions constitute such a field and its defining characteristics. For instance, Coffey and Perry (2014) reported for the Council of Minister of Education, Canada (CMEC) that such a transnational shadow education sector (the author called it “education agents”) stands for

"an individual or organization is offering education advising services to students and their parents in exchange for a fee (paid by students and their families) and a commission (paid by an [educational] institution they represent)."

Similarly, cross-national comparative studies of the industry conducted by the Observatory on Borderless Higher Education (The Observatory on Borderless Higher Education 2014) defined that industry as: "an individual or organization that helps a prospective student enroll in an educational institution or helps an education institution recruit a student."

The above statements suggest that scholars have more agreement on what constitutes the core tasks of the workforce but disagree on the levels of legitimacy and affiliations they have had with the universities and other formal institutions. The different definitions created by previous studies are summarized in Table 2.

Of course, the ambiguity of the term “education agents” owes itself to the ambiguity of the
commonly used term “agent.”. The term “agent” has a wide range of meanings. Perhaps the central characteristic associated with agents is their mastery of abridging the knowledge, information, resource, and status valuable in one setting and disadvantageous in another. On the one hand, “agents” could mean actors who help individual students’ cross literal borders, such as helping them acquire proper legal documents, academic admission, and school and residential placements. On the other hand, “agents” could also mean actors or organizations responsible for transforming and transfiguring resources, information, and knowledge across cultural boundaries (Kellogg 2014; Kern and Müller-Böker 2015). In this research, I abandoned the use of an agent as the industry’s name but still used the term "agent" to refer to various occupations and professions in it.

The diversity of definitions and the taxonomy of the transnational shadow education workforce in the market is not surprising. They revealed the lack of clear consensus on what constitutes the core aspect of the industry. People also use different names for agents operating in a different work setting or provide varying services. For instance, Raimo, Huang, and Humfrey (2014) highlight the relationship between the schools and agents, whereas Baas (2016) and Collins (2012) focus more on the collaboration between the students and the agents (Coffey and Perry 2014; Collins 2008; Raimo, Huang, and Humfrey 2014). This diversity of scholarly definitions hinders research in two main ways.

First, that divergence constrains scholars from producing a coherent, comprehensive theoretical framework about how and why this market came to exist and persist. As The Agent Question paper aptly pointed out, one of the central challenges of this study area is the widespread use of the word agent “to describe diverse actors and activities” (The Observatory on Borderless Higher Education 2014):1). To date, there is also little work that compares different professional services and sectors; most studies concentrate on one specific industry and assert that the result
applies to education agents across the industry in general.

Second, our current state of knowledge about education agents failed to show the agent industry’s boundary. For instance, does the definition of third-party service providers include academic editors and translators? Language instructors and tutors? Education consultants? Why or why not? More specifically, to what extent should the definition fit one case but not the other? How do we define the boundary of the industry? Based on what criteria?

In other words, to progress toward a better understanding, our scholarship first needs to tackle this central problem: who are and who are not education agents? Table 3 lists a wide range of categories and taxonomies that have been listed in recent studies as examples of the education agent industry. The list reveals a lack of clear consensus on what constitutes the core aspect of the industry.

**Four Typical Professions in the Education Agent Industry**

To further address the ambiguity problem about the agents’ definition, I develop an explicit and systematic taxonomy differentiating each education agent not based on the specific market they were in but on their organizational features.

In Table 4, I compared differences between the five major roles of occupations and professions in the Taiwanese transnational shadow education. I also included an important School Representative role. The role and implications are detailed in Chapter 5 and how it facilitates the “pipeline model” of education agents. In doing so, I develop a taxonomy of the five primary education agent occupations and professionals, each representing a subsector of a different level inhabitant in the broader industry of the education agent industry. Based on the empirical data generated from interviews with students and agents, I focus on five important characteristics of
education: core tasks, professionalization, legitimacy in the industry, brokerage role, and business model. For each characteristic, I discussed the resulting market organization structure constraints and opportunities and the distinctive organizational features that may be responses to those constraints and opportunities.

**Education Consultants**

Education consultants are individuals who work as personal advisors for students and parents during the admission process. Education consultants provide advice on admissions regarding the process, knowledge, and resources to help students make the best decision. Moreover, education consultants work in “education admission agencies” (The Observatory and Borderless Reports 2014) and generally have a central command over the order of work, the priority of individual student cases, and the manner of allocating resources. Consultants typically enjoy a high level of autonomy as workers in the industry.

Education consultants have two main tasks: (1) counseling and (2) personalized documents. Although how the work is done and the level of responsibility vary widely, education consultants control the most personalized aspect of providing a student with education brokerage service. On the one hand, the consultants are responsible for meeting with students, responding to their needs and demands, and providing emotional and professional support as needed. Many consultants claimed that they think their work resembles professional counseling, which involves extensive interaction and trust-building. On the other hand, the consultants also served a gate-keeping role for the document’s student submitted to the admission committee. They provide a wide range of services, from line-editing to ghost-writing students’ essays, CVs, and statements. Their job
involves coordinating varying help within and outside the organization to complete the documents and supervising how the documents were customarily made to the students' satisfaction (and parents).

Language Instructor/Tutors

Language instructors are individuals who work as teachers for private language institutions. They offer preparatory courses and training on standardizing exams for students. International applicants from non-English-speaking countries must take one or several standardized exams, such as the Testing of English as Foreign Language (TOEFL) and the Graduate Record Examinations (GRE). Each exam has a unique structure, format, and challenge; however, most demand various written and oral skills. This variety allows teachers to employ an extensive range of expertise and open different courses to cater to different student populations. Standardized exams also tend to be expensive and generally range from 170 to 230 USD per exam. Therefore, students are forced to plan strategically for a limited number of attempts. As a result, the language institution business has become quite competitive in Taiwan. Instructors compete not only in terms of who has the most students but also on whether their students achieve the best results in a timely fashion. In socializing into the profession, instructors learn to teach students to think, study, and develop personal strategies to deal with standardized exams.

Language instructors occupy an extraordinary role in the admission process in Taiwan. Almost all students seek language institutions at the early stage of their journey toward the overseas study. The students often saw the standardized exams as an anchor point as to whether they qualify for studying abroad. As a result, in terms of timeline, taking multiple standardized exams often took precedence over the actual admission process, which, in turn, was regarded by
most students to be the more committed effort toward studying abroad. Noting their particular role in the new decision-making process of students’ study-abroad goals, language tutors often knowingly utilize their classroom and teaching sessions to educate them about managing anxiety and personal planning. Language instructors also noted their role at the forefront for all students willing to study abroad—whether the student qualifies or not. As all international students must pass some standardized exams to qualify for their application, almost everyone consults language institutions or language tutors for their services. In turn, the language business acts as a frontline for almost all prospective Taiwanese international students. Students are also likely to take the exam and attend the language service several times before reaching the desired score. These contexts allow instructors to become involved in students’ applications in a variety of ways. Some language instructors only partake in students’ language exam preparations; others also extend their services to assist students in the application process (with or without charges). Still, others worked with students up until they traveled abroad. In general, the language instructors see their role as a consultant for language/related cultural issues. They are rarely willing to give in and commit to the miscellaneous student service to the education consultants and administrative staff level. However, they often are willing to help students broker difficulties in the application process to the best of their abilities.

Language instructors also had another unintended role in the admission process for Taiwanese students—network formation. As most students partake in language preparatory courses, the virtual and physical space of language institutions and tutoring classrooms often formed a natural habitat for the Taiwanese international student network. In turn, students first encounter like-minded individuals from various backgrounds and who are willing to study abroad in those classrooms, both literally and virtually. These meetings could take several forms, ranging from
informal chats during the courses, study group meetings for the standardized exams, or support student networks during the admission process. Nevertheless, these meetings could also be formalized as “experience-sharing” panel sections. In those sections hosted by individual instructors or the language institutions, Taiwanese students who already studied abroad are invited to talk to prospective students who are still taking the courses. Students shared various information from basic tips to prepare for the exams, stress management, dealing with family matters, visa applications, and the wisdom of adapting to life abroad in those panels. Most instructors (and students that I previously interviewed) told me that these panel sections and informal gatherings served as incredible motivators for their overseas study goals. Students find emotional support, crucial information, and coaching for their admission through interaction with their peers. From a more practical standpoint, most instructors also saw these panel sections and informal networks as powerful advertisements and recruitment tools for their education service.

Administrative Staff

Administrative staff constitutes a host of middle or lower-ranked staff members working in an education agency firm as aids for the consultants. The administrative staff goes by many names, such as administrative staff, documents consultants, consultants’ assistants, or secretaries. Regarding the division of labor and occupational identity, the relationship between consultants and administrative staff best resonates with the relationship between lawyers and paralegals. The administrative staff is deemed to have lower status than consultants. They also served a more peripheral role in the admission process. The content of their work involves more trivial and detail-oriented administrative tasks at the command of the consultants. Being an administrative staff member is also considered an entry-level job in the industry. Even with strong educational
background and credentials, most consultants worked as administrative staff as a training process to gain more familiarity with the admission process. Occasionally, experienced administrative staff could be promoted as consultants permanently, but they often maintained a semi-professional role in the industry. The education consultants’ work most closely resembles a semi-profession or occupation. They generally have limited control over the ordering, the content, and the person they work with. They also have limited means to define the legitimacy of the knowledge and skills they acquired at work, even though some of their work often intersects with the consultants.

The administrative staff has three main tasks: (1) filing students’ profiles to the admission websites; (2) personal assistance for the students’ different demands; and (3) visa application and travel arrangements. Relative to the consultants who have a more conspicuous presence, the staff are those lurking in the background of the application process and working with or without the students' awareness. A central part of their work consisted of abiding by a scripted routine of how they aid the admission process. They participated in various levels of producing standardized documents and abbreviated forms to simplify the admission process. Their main work entails supplying and translating the schools' guidelines on their websites regarding the application process and demands. In various large corporate education agencies, the staff is also involved in transferring the admission information to a standardized format so that the consultants and other staff could work in conjunction with one another. The staff reported that they rarely need to utilize their judgment in working with the students’ profiles and admission documents. Nevertheless, many of the staff rejected the claim that their works are easily replaceable, and they claim that knowledgeable staff could help students with important technical tasks.

Editors/Ghost-Writers
The editor/writer is the most hidden occupation in the industry. If the consultants are the face of the industry, the editor/writer are the organs responsible for completing various tasks maintaining the body's function. Most editors/writers are hired to help or are freelance individuals. Some agencies or language institutions hire dedicated editors for their written work, although this situation is rare. Most agencies and consultants depend on either an individual freelance writer or a translator firm to recruit editors/writers to complete their admission documents. The editor/writer’s work involves a wide range of line-editing, paraphrasing, translating, and sometimes ghost-writing the essays and personal statements. Therefore, these individuals unsurprising work and are paid under the table—because most universities forbid students from employing writers/editors of any kind to help with their documents.

Very little to no information is known about these people on any formal websites of either education agencies or language institutions. The level of involvement of the editor/writer is strictly confidential information. Lower-ranked consultants or administration staff were primarily excluded from insider knowledge and information about who these writers are and how they are recruited. Moreover, the customer often has little to no knowledge whatsoever of the involvement of the editor/writer. My knowledge of this group of people came from a combination of scattered information I gathered from the interview with the consultants and staff and a handful of knowledgeable editors/writers I interviewed during my fieldwork.

School Representative

The so-called school representatives should be more accurately depicted as the personnel assigned by private education institutions to contact the school. Their work is affiliated to many multinational for-profit educational institutions, such as Kaplan and INTO. Being a school
A representative is also the industry’s least known occupation and profession to outsiders. Representatives can be said to be “agents of the agent” or “the shadow of the shadow education”. Simultaneously, given that their work is generally directed to consultants and consulting firms, the wider international student population are rarely aware of the school representative's existence. Despite their peripheral role, school representatives fulfill several critical functions in the industry and maintain the market.

In Taiwan’s market, small selective “school representatives” work to match the sales and educational needs. The professionals in this sector refer to themselves as “school representatives” because they are marketing representatives of foreign institution-based private-owned colleges. They help matched local agents who need to send Taiwanese students with the foreign colleges’ criteria. Many commission-based pathways and programs promoted by the agents in transnational shadow education are made possible through school representatives’ aid. School representatives play a pivotal role in transnational shadow education, especially in the commission-based environment market, because they offer two distinct services that bring market providers and agents together.

First, school representatives organize training packages and business meetings for agents and agencies. These training and business meetings serve two functions. They are critical platforms for agents to meet one another and form potential partnerships. They are also critical training tools for agents early in their career, either for socializing into the profession or learning the crucial cultural and social skills relating to the occupation. The main objective from the company’s end, such as Kaplan, was for the school representatives to convince agents about the benefit of the schools they have partnerships with and sign commission contracts with them. A by-product of this objective was that school representatives have an invested incentive to improve the communication, decision
making, and information acquisition channels for the agents. As they work with agents daily, their concern about converting “commissions” and “contracts” into sales becomes helping agents understand the specific strengths and weaknesses of the school and assist them in developing usable frameworks to help a student choose a suitable one. The school representative has become an inevitable yet indispensable part of the education agent industry. No education agents are immune from the influence of school representatives.

School representatives are also significant because they are essentially the industry brokers (agents) of the education brokers (agents). They play a pivotal role in shaping, connecting, and communicating close collaborations between different transnational shadow education sectors and agents. A good school representative can maintain an admission pipeline with a clear division of labor, thereby allowing a large company to sign contracts with schools and complete the administrative procedures for overseas study applications while allowing small companies to provide students with customized services. As Taiwan’s market is relatively small compared to those of other countries such as China, even Taiwan’s largest transnational shadow education institutions must use some methods to maximize their student base. One way is to use school representatives to coordinate and create upstream and downstream relationships between small companies and large companies. Large companies provide guarantees and reputations to sign contracts with overseas educational institutions, and small companies receive customers.

Finally, school representatives, or the economic markets they represent, have an important function for certain small- and medium-sized colleges and lower-ranked public schools. For some American universities, relying on the already tight organizational manpower or resources to recruit international students would be difficult. Therefore, an important solution is to directly “outsource” the recruitment process to a private organization, such as Kaplan. The finance courses, bridging
courses, and even establish independent colleges and dormitories in some schools. Therefore, the school representative plays the role of selling these independently operated colleges and programs to their local, transnational shadow education partners. The “pathway” or “conditional admission” approach that has emerged in the international student market in recent years is closely related to this group of professional workers' emergence. I will address some of these specific programs and dynamics in more detail in Chapter 4 about “pipeline-based” transnational shadow education.

**Chapter Conclusion**

Like all other fields heavily impacted by globalization, higher education has undergone dramatic changes in the late 20th and early 21st century. Neoliberalism has fundamentally changed the ways people relate, how organizations are governed, and how different market activities in higher education are “intermediated” (Xiang and Shen 2009). However, although scholars would probably agree on the notion that such transnational shadow education exists, they would probably have a harder time reaching an agreement on why it exists. This section aims not to provide a comprehensive review of all the developments in the field but merely to present the parts and bits that alludes to the essential development in the understanding of education agents.

Taiwanese transnational shadow education industry developed because of the rising demand for a workforce to manage international students' admission, recruitment, and applications. These trends, combined with the rising pressure for college administrations to seek financial independence via diminishing state funding, have pushed colleges and universities to turn the global admission of international students into a market, a situation which, in turn, created a revenue-oriented approach toward the operations of higher education (Wang 2010) as well as a more market-like relationship with students (Hudzik 2015; Madge, Raghuram, and Noxolo 2015;
Waters 2006; Xiang and Shen 2009). Consequently, the pathways and processes that traditionally allocated students into universities through a universal admission system become rapidly marketized and hyper-mediated (Armstrong and Hamilton 2013; Karabel 2006; Stevens 2009). A “transnational shadow education” sector embedded in the international student admission and recruitment activities and structures grew out of this context.
Chapter 3: Methods and Methodologies

All fieldwork and qualitative studies prescribe some form of storytelling. As researchers we inevitably interpret, synthesize, re-construct, and re-assemble social facts to make sense of the social world that matters to us. My sociological autopsy of the Taiwanese transnational shadow education agents involves the same level of reconstruction of realities. It would be a true blessing to claim that my fieldwork was comprehended, and impartial, so that my study reflected the true nature and experience of the education agent worker that I studied. However, as fieldwork progresses, I become keenly aware of my limitations as an observer and researcher, who has limits and biases. Some of these limits and biases are structural and institutional. But some also stem from deeply held personal and intellectual beliefs.

Therefore, my writing of this dissertation and my method choice were not neutral or impartial. But they reflect the very essence of deeply reflected social facts, which reflects both human’s subjective and objective view of the world. In this chapter, I would like to describe the field experience itself and the data-collection process. This chapter explains my research design that includes sampling strategies, data collection processes for in-depth interviews and field observation, and analytical strategies. To understand the working of education agent industry, I directly observed the practice and interviewed education agents in such market. Drawing on in-depth interviews with informants working to help Taiwanese student with admission essays and documents—conducted during the June of the 2017 to December of the 2018—the data concluded with 60 interviews with different agents. The data were then inductively coded to identify emergent themes using qualitative data analysis software. As the argument developed, field notes and interview transcriptions were revisited to identify the kinds of arguments users made about these distinctions.
My data collection was divided into three stages: the summer of 2017, the summer and fall of 2018. Most of the data presented in this thesis were collected in the summer and fall of 2018. During this period, I focus mainly on collecting three sets of data for three analysis levels: (1) The organizational level included education agents’ market strategies, firm managements, and inter-market collaborations and competitions. To collect such data, I interviewed owners and employee of the firms, including mangers, agents, administrative, and others. (2) The interactional level included education agents open house sessions, exhibitions, and tutoring sessions with their potential buyers. (3) The individual level included agents’ personal history, perceptions, motives and understanding of participating in the market. On top of the interviews, as I left my fieldwork in Spring 2019 and started teaching back at my home institutions, I turned most of my attention to collecting archival and online ethnographic data that I can access without physically staying in Taiwan. At the end, the observation and interviews were supplemented with close reading and coding of over 3000 pages of archival data and multiple years of on-going online ethnographic observations and interactions with netizens and former applicants. The data including publication pamphlets, books, magazines, newspapers, online posts, and private messages showing all aspects of the field I intended to study.

Entering the Field

How did I begin? I started my recruitment process since early June, 2018. My main methods of recruitment consisted of a combination of snow-ballng and cold-calling, but mainly the former. The first thing I did was contact a mutual friend of my roommate, who now worked as an independent editor/agent, and ask for her cooperation. More participants are either referred by a shared acquaintance of some friends of mine or someone introduced by other agents as the
fieldwork persisted. On top of recruiting interviewee through personal network, I have posted recruitment message online on social media (Facebook), study abroad forums (*PTT Studyabroad*) and English learning tutoring networks (*PTT tutors, PTT iBT*, etc). I also used government and NGO archival data to generate a list of “accredited” agencies, which I then used to directly contact each agency. I wrote out emails, text messages and phoned several agents and agencies independently. Although only a handful responded, those who do generally are very informative and willing to help.

The sample recruitment's initial design was an attempt to maximize the range of population I can reach (Weiss 1994). Rather than choose respondents randomly, and risk unwanted duplication of empirical findings in my sample, I select agents purposively to include all the important dissimilar forms of occupations and professional features I can found in the larger population. Because I do not have much insider knowledge of the agents' population before the fieldwork, I postulate the more likely way is to expand my initial search to include as many typical and atypical cases. In retrospect, my design did leverage the benefit of the displaying significant variations of experience, occupational type, levels, and expertise of the education agents. But it is still somewhat of a stretch to suggest that my case represented Taiwanese education agent’s industry entirely.

Fortunately, the combinations of snow-balling and cold-calling methods did grant me access to some agents willing to speak to me at the beginning stage of the project. Since my personal friend and network are skewed heavily by Taiwanese student and parents who have had, or intended to study abroad, many seemed enthusiastic when hearing about the project being launched. Unexpected acquaintances such as classmates from middle-school I haven’t spoken for years and introduced me to someone who can teach me something about this industry and the institutional field. Although I still have to earned the trust and entry of the field later, many of my initial
fieldwork visit are fortunately vetted by either my friends, relatives or classmates, ds who previously were a customer of these agents, which in turn granted some level of trust by these agents.

*Interview process*

Interviews were conducted in Mandarin or English. I used Mandarin in most cases, but some agents felt comfortable speaking in English as their native language. Given my interviewees' frequent overseas travels, I frequently used online communication tools and social media to make contacts with my interviewees before my visits. In two of the interviews, I conducted my interview through Skype and Line, where I chatted with two agents unavailable for face-to-face interviews in Taiwan. Most of the interviews took place in the agent’s chosen location, such as offices, coffee-shop, classrooms, and homes, depending on interviewees' availability. Per agreement of the interviewees, interviews were audio-taped and transcribed.

The master interview guide (see Appendix) consisted of four main parts: (1) *Background*, including personal life history, international education, career paths, and foreign life experience; (2) *Work content*, including work routines and their perceived expertise of the work; (3) *Legitimacy*, including perceived identity status and interactions with others; (4) *Organizational Differences*, including agents knowledge of the other education agent sectors and their operations. Before each interview, I went back to my master interview guide and selected the questions in the actual interviews. Therefore, each interviews flows slightly different as I prepared different probes, different orders, or likely different length of the interviews. At the end of the interview, I asked interviews to fill in one-page general information paper to record interviewees' demographic
background (e.g., age, nationality, occupation and education). Each interview was conducted for 1 to 4 hours and more than half of the interviews lasted for 1.5 hours.

Following Weiss (1995) guidance in *Learning from Strangers*, I took several precautions to not ask “questions out of idle curiosity (Weiss 1995).” Before each interview, I looked up my interviewee’s personal background information, experience, and written pieces online. The preparation helped me gain initial clues of the agents' background and individual characteristics, sometimes appearing very differently across different social media platforms and entries. On top of personalized social media platforms (such as Facebook, Instagram), I also found information through several employment-oriented service websites—such as LinkedIn or 104 Corporation (a job bank website based in Taiwan). I used a note system to document that information building a personal portfolio before meeting each interviewee. These preparations helped me create customized probing questions and familiarize myself with the interviewee before meeting them, which helped ease the stressful emotion of expecting to talk to a total stranger. In increase incentive and participation rates, I also offered compensation for my participants.⁵

Except for one instance where the agent declined my recording request, I audio-taped all my interviews and transcribed them afterwards. On top of that, after each interviews, I immediately recorded an oral memo for each interview, usually right after the interviews or once I can find a

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⁵ In terms of compensation, I followed my IRB form and formal guideline of the university by providing $5 worth of gift-card, or small gift for each interview I conducted. With very few exceptions, I paid extra for around $10 worth of gifts, especially when I’m visiting a corporate owner. Because for most interviews I have to pay a visit to the agents’ office or classroom, I made a decision to follow the social norm in Taiwan by presenting my gift when we first met. Most gift I picked were either cookies or other bakeries, to ensure that it doesn't seem to intrusive yet still seem candidate. The decision was made after I was several interviews in my field, when I discovered that the gift served as a good token of my appreciations and helped transition the topic quickly to informed consent form. I property that maybe because most individuals I interviewed were businesspeople, the presence of a contract-like paper prior to the interview really change the dynamic of the conversation. Yet, a gift in sight help ease the social tension and ensure that I, as a student of the subject, were there to learn. Further, I also found that the gift worked most effectively when conducting interview with administrative workers and clerks in the agencies.
place to talk quietly. The oral memo served to capture initial thoughts, inspirations, and detail clues that I missed out in the interview recording. Those oral memos lasted between 10-30 minutes and were transcribed along with the interviews.

During the intensive fieldwork period, I constantly referred to these oral memos when I’m free, reflecting on interviewing agents' strategies. For instance, in one instance, I discovered that despite my best effort not to, I constantly tried to fight for control of the interview. I constantly interrupt my interviewee when they started talking after a short period of silence. In another instance, I realize that I often discuss my personal background and thoughts too much because of a sense of insecurity, especially when I’m responding to their inquiries and concerns. By reflecting on my interviews after several attempts, I found a better balance between being honest and being effective in interviews. By learning about my habit of talking through these memos, painful as the process were, I improved on my skills and flow of the interviews while feeling more in command of the interview process than I started when I’m at the end of my fieldwork. The oral memo and the interviews note help highlighted several nuanced dynamics and pedagogies that I learned while talking to the strangers in the field.

**Trust**

Gaining access to someone and talking to them about their work is one thing, but approval and trust to talk about the details are another. Something I have learned gradually in my fieldwork was that gaining trust was the result of continual testing and retesting, and its process highly diplomatic. I have had interviewee who was extremely cooperative, personable, and seem candid, which revealed very selective information of his/her work processes. I also have had participants who seemed to be holding back and protective of the information, yet I had managed to learn quite
a lot from the conversation. In retrospect, I learned two things about speaking to and gaining trust of occupations and professions talking about their work.

First, the timing of the interviews and projects made a difference for acquisition of quality data. My project started in June, which to many agents is just at the start of another busy season new groups of students started to apply for oversea schools. In one of my interviews, an agent claim that if I started a few months later, many of them would simply be too busy to agree with the interviews. Another agent added in another interview that my timing is well because they are good at speaking about the cases and results they worked on over the past year. The high and low emotion they experienced with the students and parents seemed to be at a stage where it is not too intensive, but yet still vivid to be shared and expressed comfortably. I found out that discovering these emotion clues and identifying their occurrence cycle significantly helped ease my way into conversations about the work processes.

Second, expectations and appearances matter. People’s expectations of me are shaped spontaneously by my performance and their assumed role as a researcher/student. I have no formal channel to verify how my researcher/student identity blockade my entry of fields. Yet, I have several opportunities to observe how my student identity shapes my relationship with the people I interviewed. In my field specifically, I think being a student helped opened up the people that I interviewed and certainly allowed them to be less protective.

Being a “student”, on the other hand, as a sociologist Ph.D. student, I carry certain reputations and role with me. I least expected that some of my interviewees told me that they believe in my goodwill and interests is somewhat shaped by their previous experience with college-level sociology courses. I have not expected my study discipline would influence my interviewee’s expectation of me and my interviews. There are a few instances where the official interview has to
stop or pause, because the interviewees are interested in finding out what a “sociologist student” would think about the subject matter. In reflection, this status tension and dynamics probably most materialized when building rapport with different professions and occupations in the field—owners, agents, and administers, respectively.

Being a student meant that they viewed me as both someone interested in studying the subject matter and someone they can comfortably educate something. Some of the participant take pleasure in doing this. I particularly found that those of the interviewee with administrative and staff work are those most willing to lecture about their work. How and why this has come to this I do not known. I later concluded that it is perhaps because of the low visibility and low recognition of their work in the field more generally. As the field primarily defined by consulting, language instruction work, bureaucratic and daily administrative maintenance work was often overlooked. Most staffs seemed genuinely happy that I am interested in speaking to them about their experience and knowledge about the field. Most of my longest interviews are with the staffs, one lasted more than 5 consecutive hours. At the end, I have to make a judgement call whether to include some of these interviews in my analysis. Most of them didn’t make it to the end, but they served quite important role shaping my general knowledge of the field, the history, and nuance pedagogies in the field.

**Sampling Strategy**

As I gain better understanding of the market field and develop my network, my agents' recruitment was based on several executive decisions. Those decisions are partly shaped by my theoretical concerns to identify most deviants from anticipated outcomes and practices of agents. The decisions concern with how I have come to understand education agents as more than a
collection of population who works to conduct student mobility. Rather, they are both unique and similar with other groups of individuals who experienced transnational education, living lives, and doing work that they found meaningful and sustainable. In the process, I tried to maintain balance between the number of participants to ensure credibility of the data, yet also tried my best to reach out to diverse groups of actors working in the industry.

Decisions on the demographic of agents

First, my participant came from varying age in terms of age, ranging from 25 to 65. Due to the nature of the “cumulative causation” (Massey et al. 1999) indicates, migration network and infrastructure takes several generations to mature. Taiwan’s transnational shadow education industry only become prevalent at the late 80s. It serves to reason to deduct that the earliest group of agents, consultants, and tutors started in the early 1990s. I’m interested in the identity discourses, legitimacy claims, and people of these people, since they construct the basic educational industry institutional structure in the 1990s and 2000s.

Second, I initially decide to recruit agents/tutors with previous study-abroad or occupational experience abroad concerning education. Although prestigious degree is not a necessarily condition, it has been recognize by many researchers that agents graduating from a well-known school embodies great commercial appeal, where their credential serve as both a proof of literary and pedagogical knowledge of studying abroad (Madge et al. 2010; Waters and Leung 2006). Eventually, my participants are quite highly educated holding either a bachelor’s degree, an MA, or a Ph.D. degree from abroad. This was not too surprising considering most agencies and language institutions set criteria for candidates who want to join their firms, one of them being foreign educated. The destination the agents choose to seem to concentrate in English speaking countries
such as U.S., U.K., Canada and Australia. Again, this fact is not too surprising considering these destinations have been the most popular locations for Taiwanese students studying abroad for decades.

What was perhaps a bit unexpected was how diverse the educational background the agents are coming from. First, albeit highly educated, almost none of my participant came from the same disciplinary training. Agents who previously studied abroad graduate from various undergraduate and graduate programs domestically or abroad, ranging from science, humanities, and business (not a lot of Social Scientist, though). I suspect that this diversity has something to do with the industry being identified by many as an “entry-level” job for foreign returnees. One disciplinary training that seem to have a relatively conspicuous presence among people’s background was Business major (and graduate programs like MBA). I don’t yet have a conclusive explanation for the relative presences of Business major graduate in the industry. However, I postulate that business schools' disciplinary training might be unique in encouraging its students to think strategically about their personal experience and the market.

Finally, in terms of gender, my initial design was to see how agents has become dominated by female agents and workers. My participants consisted of 55 individuals, of whom 22 are male and 33 are female, a ratio that is far more balanced than I previously anticipated. Although my method is not a probability sample, the ratio seems to be consistent with what I observed on public record. Further, in my conversation with owners and HRs in the industry, gender plays a peripheral role in selecting who gets access to the job. However, I do suspect gender still plays an underlying factor among who gets sorted to do what at the work, as I see more females working in the industry were assigned to do tasks that are more relating to tedious document-sorting customer service. Although we cannot claim that the market sector reflects a female-dominated profession, culturally specific
gender role and identity is still relevant in shaping the work process and relational aspect in the industry. Although, I did not attempt to expand further with the discussion in this dissertation.

Decisions regarding locations

The majority (90%) of the agencies and institutions my participants worked in were in the Northern part of Taiwan, specifically in the Taipei Metropolitan area. Agencies and language institutions located in other cities in Taiwan are generally more scattered and less concentrated than Taipei's peer institutions. With only a handful of exceptions, most study-abroad relating business anchored in two locations. One location was in Central District in Taipei near the Taipei Main (Train) Station. The district was a known location for cram schools and after-school tutoring institutions by the locals. The location was also a traditional center for education service provider and industry (See Figure 1 for Taipei City Map). Due to its communal convenience, most language institutions and tutoring services build their office around the area to attract students from the Taipei area and central and Southern Taiwan.

Even though some language institutions no longer based in this area, a branch office would often still be established to host the student in need. Many education agencies also locate in this area, although not as concentrated as the language institutions. However, most known education agencies, including some newly established offices, have begun to migrate to the Eastern District in Taipei, probably 3 miles away from the city center. Starting around 2010, the newly emerging district in Eastern part of Taipei becomes a new popular center for education service industry. On top of being where the education agencies were, the district also became the new location for English tutoring service and language institutions.
**Boundaries regarding economic and non-economic practices**

In alignment with my research questions, I made an executive decision to focus exclusively for-profit individuals and organizations whose daily tasks involve creative writing work helping with international student admission documents. This means that I exclude most outcomes and insights from non-profit actors and agencies conducting similar education advising or document services, such as government-funded websites like Study in USA (studyusa.com) or school counselors. This criterion also excludes co-ethnic members who tentatively helped with student documents and consulted about oversea study decisions. In real practice, the boundary between economic and non-economic practice is less transparent and direct as it may seem (Kim 2018; Sorensen 2007; Gammeltoft-Hansen and Sorensen 2013). For-profit agents may do work, share information, and help students for free because they want to see Taiwanese students’ success. Non-profit oriented students, counselor, faculty, or online netizen participants, on the other hand, may request compensation such as care fare, or do the work in exchange of mutual reciprocity. In this project, I focus on agents’ experience and perspective about doing student aiding and service work for money. Although I believe non-profit actors and institutions may intersect with the occupational sector I intend to study, I argue that non-profit actors and institutions’ associations with the market, the student groups, and the admission system might be different. My analysis is targeted to study the economic practices, experience, and implications of education agents in Taiwan.

**During the field: Participant Observations in Key Events**

Fieldworks, especially interviews, are the social processes of learning from strangers of their world that is previously unfamiliar to us (Luker 2008; Weiss 1995). The key point is that we, as
social scientist, are involved in the academic enterprise of “pattern recognition” (Luker 2008:172). One person is part of a larger pattern, but they might not know until social scientist has done at least a handful of interviews to study people who shared certain pattern of shared identities, social status and positions, or similar ideas. Yet, importantly, social scientists, especially qualitative sociologists, are well aware that they are not immune to the same logic: they are co-creators of the pattern they studied. Qualitative social scientist created and re-imagine the social structure around people alongside people thinking and talking about them. But, they faced a critical dilemma, something that would always come up when facing serious academic criticism from other researcher who favors other forms of research tools or study approach: Why should we believe you? Or most related, why should we believe your belief in the research subject’s honesty and transparency during the fieldwork?

It is true that in this dissertation that my analysis presumes that the conversations were real and genuine. Yet, I also recognize that these talks could be simultaneously “sales talks” that consultants selectively presented to the authors. In Taiwan, as in other countries, hiring professional help to work on oversea study applications and documents for graduate school admission is a stigmatic behavior. While I do not have reasons to doubt that all statements made by the consultants are deceptive, we are aware that the statements might be cherry-picked from the consultants to presents an idealized picture of their moral behaviors. In more formal terms, we faced what Jerolmack and Khan(2014) called the “attitudinal fallacy” or “attitude-behavior consistency”(ABC) problem(Jerolmack and Khan 2014; Khan and Jerolmack 2013), something they provide a detailed reason to caution researcher not to fully relying on that:

Not only is it the case that people commonly act in ways that are inconsistent with their expressed attitudes, they also routinely provide inaccurate accounts of their past activities…However, many sociologists simply ignore the ABC problem and make
little effort to validate the assumption that the attitudes they measure are associated with the behaviors they are interested in (see Pager and Quillian 2005). In so doing, they commit what we call the attitudinal fallacy—the error of inferring situated behavior from verbal accounts.

In short, people’s talk can be, at best, cheap, and at worst a deception. According to Jerolmack and Khan(2014), this premises suggests the need for providing more justifications of using moral-accounts to develop a more rigorous rationale that people other than the researchers themselves can also learn from the participants and research subjects. The solution, argued Jerolmack and Khan (2014); Khan and Jerolmack 2014) was to be more mindful of including ethnographic means to capture the “interaction order” (Rawls 1987) explaining social action and how it relates to the larger contextual and institutional context.

There are equally wonderful discussions in these methodological debates, criticizing the ethnography method's limitations and other limitations that may be brought about by "adding" the ethnography method (Lamont and Swidler 2014). Calling on such recognized reflection on the methods and methodology thinking, I include ethnographic participant observations to supplement and triangulate my main findings with my interview data. One event at a one-on-one admission essays-writing consulting session between a student and an agent. The other event was at an admission essay-writing panel, hosted by a major international education agency and a language institution with around 100 people. And the final event at a study-abroad experience sharing session hosted by multiple agents with a local university. These observations enriched my analysis in two main directions.

For the workforce who observes transnational shadow education, recognizing that what they said can be "sales talk" might not be such a bad thing. In Hochschild’s classical work *The Managed Heart*, she postulates that a socially warranted script or a moral stance toward one’s action suggest
how culture can powerfully direct one’s action (Hochschild 1983). Since most of the places where I conduct interviews are in the industry's office, it is entirely conceivable that they will engage in a "script" that is more in line with their professional status to answer my questions. Therefore, when I observe their actions and interactions on other occasions, I can see different "performance" and "interaction accounts". For example, most people I interviewed will emphasize their commitment and caring for students, but on another occasion that direct most of their attention to convincing students of their "professional" stance and status. In other words, we have once again proved that the transnational shadow education market may not only be a market, but more. When they explain their work to me, what they care about is responding to the moral/legitimacy/cultural forces that define their work, and when they work with students, what they care about is the economic utilities of the market itself. After the end of the field, I found that sales talk is an idealized world view of their work and market they hoped to present and the most sociologically interesting part of this field.

Secondly, I think participant observation provides some important viewpoint on the analysis of the "material basis" behind the study abroad industry. More specifically, how does such a "shadow" industry exist in Taiwan's urban space, and how does it develop its connection with the American higher education enterprise? For example, my participant observation helped me discover that their location in the Taiwan metropolitan area reflects how they use the economic and cultural links urban major cities to strengthen the multinational occupational and professional identity that they so eagerly need to maintain their status. However, their offices are often hidden in a humble corner amid a forest of commercial buildings in Taiwan. They are ambitious, but they must keep a low profile, too. The work they are engaged in almost inevitably needs to occur in a corner of an office Taipei that is invisible to American higher education enterprise.
I was an observer in the shadow education offices, and my role was primarily peripheral according to classification of membership roles in the fieldwork (Johl and Renganathan 2010). I maintained some distance with the people I studied by presenting my identity as a Ph.D. student interested in their business. I dressed up to blend into the environment, as if I am just a normal joe going in to hear about their sales. But, at the later stage when I arrive to some of these scenes where I intended to observe, I am sometimes treated as if I were a would-be transnational shadow education agents. I got questions, directed by the agents to other students who need help, or asked to introduce business partners that can help their business. I mostly refused to help convince prospects students to buy their products or serve as liaisons between agents, simply because I feel this would jeopardize my role in observing the selling altogether. However, I did think such realization further re-sensitize my analysis by reminding myself that these are activities happening in the business context. There is no way I can escape that part of the discomfort I feel walking between the realm of academia and the realm of market. I believed these feelings help me sympathize on how those agents themselves need to juggle the social and emotional burden of defining their occupational and professional status in the two worlds: business and education. Often, those areas are in conflict, and the agents faced those consequences both financially and as individuals as a result of that.

The Bigger Picture: Archival Studies, Secondary Data and Online-Textual Data

I was less convinced initially that my research was one about the higher education market's historical dynamics; become gradually aware how an extensive historical analysis may be pivotal helping me understand this industry. As a result, I searched for historical documents and secondary data to supplement my research findings. Also, to better understand how students, view the industry,
I collect the text of comments and posts from the Internet and analyze them.

Archival Studies and Secondary Data

In this dissertation study, the purpose of collecting second-hand literature and historical documents is to provide background knowledge and provide a point of reference for the knowledge gained from other fieldwork methods. Many discussions on qualitative research have explored the shortcomings of relying solely on personal memories for interviews. The literature and second-hand materials I collected after completing the fieldwork helped me draw a more objective industrial development description. On the one hand, people in the industry do not necessarily understand the industry's historical changes. Even the most senior and experienced consultants tend to believe during certain period Taiwan just suddenly give birth to a new profession that helps international students. Taiwanese transitional shadow education was developed through different stages.

On the other hand, I would like to point out that reviewing historical documents and secondary data is also a kind of "fieldwork" for my field. Because, if we think about it carefully, the actual "interaction" of many steps and procedures for international students to go abroad takes place in writing, not verbally. Such writing can range from a single-document brochure printed by the school or a catalog sent to international students, or book series of edited collections of study-abroad magazines. Before the Internet appeared, these documents and publications were the first line of battle in this transnational shadow education market. In this research, I did not systematically collect these materials. But showed up repeatedly, the same way ethnographer would encounter real-life events that matter to their field and analysis. In short, I used historical and second hand documents to supplement some industry-level evolutions that my fieldwork could
not explain; at the same time, reading these documents also helped me understand how former students and agents were involved in this market. In addition to other scattered readings, I hope to point out the two most critical findings for my research, which I never thought of in my initial research setting.

The first one is a series of international student magazines I read during 2018-2019, about a month after I finished the fieldwork. One of the sets, *Foreign Diaspora* （留學學人）is a government-funded magazine published directly by the Ministry of Education in Taiwan. It records many policy initiatives, events, student networks, and discussions about students and their lives in the United States. This magazine was published in 1956 and ceased publication in 2005. It helped me understand the overall evolution of studying abroad in Taiwan before the 1980s. The earliest on-paper record of Taiwanese transnational shadow education I could find also came from this magazine, which was published in an advertisement published in 1960. Another set, *International Student Newsletter* (留學生學訊) was self-funded published jointly by the Taiwanese Student Association in the United States. This magazine was first published in 1992 and ceased publication in 2002. The most important of this entry is that it provides a snapshot of the emerging transnational shadow education in Taiwan in the late 1980s and 1990s. For example, in it I found one of the earliest article I could about agents making remarks about their professional codes and ethics in an issue in 1994. All these evidence helped me better understand the industry's overall changes and why they are what they are today.

Additionally, I think another important reading shaping this research was, quite unexpectedly, not from the published handbooks for international students, but the commercial advertisements appeared in these handbooks. Through these advertisements, I realized that the commercial behavior of transnational shadow education does not necessarily only happen right when the
formal education institutions are conducting recruitment activities. For international students, the "recruitment" started when they start selectively consuming different services preparing them for abroad. Sometimes, the lively images of agents working that came to my mind when reading these advertisements were even clearer than talking directly with them. It is a pity that because these materials are too scattered and concentrated in a few specific companies, I have not been able to organize a complete more systematically. However, I still want to emphasize that reading these documents has enriched my original monotonous imagination of this industry. And I think this is what this dissertation most fundamentally hopes to achieve.

**Online Forum and Online Ethnography**

I conducted “digital ethnography” to finally triangulate my finding with the ones I have had with my interviews. Academic readers of my dissertation have a good reason to doubt my reports' credibility if my studies were lack of a comparison groups. To generalize my findings regarding “market”, I added a small part of interviews with foreign students and a participant observation in the online forum to understand the stories from the consumers. Drawing on the site's digital ethnography starting in the summer of 2014 and continuing with 11 interviews of site users and international students who used transnational shadow education service between 2015 and 2018, the data were informative of my fieldwork materials.

The STUDYABROAD community is an excellent site for studying students’ overall. STUDYABROAD is an online bulletin board, one of thousands of forum sections under its parent site PTT, a nonprofit social network site in Taiwan. The forum uses a discussion thread structure, where users can post a topic or question, and other users participate by posting their responses or starting another conversation. A group of international student alumni founded STUDYABROAD
in 2005 and, as of May 16, 2019, contained over 6,815 threads with over 14,000 entries and comments about international student issues. Today, STUDYABROAD is one of the main sites prospective Taiwanese international students consult during the admissions and migration process. Discussions of pathways to studying in the U.S. dominate the Taiwanese international student community. For Taiwanese students and families, attending a prestigious school in the U.S. is both a testament of individual ability and academic merit, as well as a guarantee of a successful career. The STUDYABROAD forum is both a primary information hub and a means of socialization into an international social mobility project.

Yet, I am acutely aware that the STUDYABROAD community is a selective group despite providing open and public information. First, STUDYABROAD participants are more likely to be elite students from top universities in Taiwan (Chang, 2009; Lu et al., 2010). Discussion of U.S. graduate schools dominates the forum, although conversations about other destinations and postsecondary education levels can also be found. Second, the STUDYABROAD forum is organized as an “expertise sharing community” or “Internet discussion group”, in which members’ posts and comments are valued differently depending on their perceived expertise and status within the community. Community experts include both student and non-student members; education agents can also be found, although their participation is a community taboo.

My method of collecting these online articles and interactions is based on the online ethnography method used by scholars. Ethnographic research on online practices and communications has become increasingly common in recent years with the internet’s growing influence on people’s lives. Digital ethnography approaches online behavior and text-based interactions as social behavior similar to that which might occur in any field site, which can be studied using similar methods (Golder and Macy 2014a). Following the conventional approach to
studying online communities, the first author became a “lurker” to know the site without disturbing community interactions (Gatson 2011; Gatson and Zweerink 2004). I began my participation in the summer of 2014, when he began to study Taiwanese international students' social lives. The “researcher-lurker” identity of my virtual account was recognized by most veteran users of the forum, although not all users were directly informed that he was performing scholarly research on the site. Participation, communication, and reciprocal exchange of information about studying abroad continued, even when he was not studying the site, mirroring a conventional offline ethnographer’s dual life as both local and distant observer (Hallett and Barber 2014).

I did not collect more systematic textual analysis and compare other similar websites widely. The reasons are as follows: First, I think that doing comprehensive textual analysis deviates from the purpose of my research. Because my purpose is to find the existence and legitimacy of these industries in these discussions and sharing, not to discuss how international students use these online forums. Secondly, I think I didn't compare different forums because the STUDYABROAD of PPT is the longest study abroad forum in Taiwan. After years of accumulation, the remaining discussions are relatively in-depth and help us understand the entire industry's transformation. Although there are also many emerging study abroad forums, such as DCARD and other places. With the rise of social media, students gradually use other platforms. I chose this forum precisely because it accurately represents how the industry is viewed from 1980 to around 2010. And this analysis of transnational shadow education is an indispensable piece of knowledge puzzle.

My goal, therefore, is not to find the most representative group of students to represent the group of students I want to study. Most importantly, if I do this, I will find people who already have the buy-in service industry. In contrast, I hope to find the student group's debate on "should
“you choose this industry?” Informed by the literature on expertise networks (Matzat, 2009), the study began focusing on the “favorite posts” section to help identify high-status participants and important conversations in the community. These posts were hand-coded with a focus on students’ understanding of the community in general and market and nonmarket forms of admissions assistance. Using five keywords generated from the process, “代辦 (agents)”, “值得 (worth)”, “有效 (merit)”, “補習班 (cram school/language institution)”, and “編修 (editing/editor)”, the first author then selected and coded 324 posts on these topics by high-status participants in the forum. Also, he used an ethnographic approach to conduct “thick description” of participant experience on the forum more generally (Gatson and Zweerink, 2004).

Through extensive observation and studying of the text in the online forum, I found the other side of transnational shadow education in this online forum. Compared with the "functional" position they presented in the workplace and global education, they face huge identity legitimacy problems in some other fields. This goes on to further my argument that markets are more than markets. For me who is doing research, I need to pay attention to how this market continued to be impactful despite different discourse conflicts and contestations. Based on these views, I developed Chapter 8. Although it may seem different from the whole article initially, it aims to explain how the online community of international students supports and opposes the existence of this market at the same time. And from these differences, how can we see such kind of a moralized market?

Chapter Conclusion

Before entering the field and analyzing my data, I experience some anxiety, concerns, and fear about the field's data collection. My primary concern was the worry about whether my qualitative approach can replicate the social world as observed by an insider. As I immersed myself in the
fieldwork process, I was also worried about whether and how to write about and position their cases with the larger global higher education process's larger environment. Yet, as it gradually becomes clear, my concerns and anxiety replicate how agents do their work while worrying about how they are perceived and represented in the educational world more broadly. Most agents I encountered feared about the stigma and were concerned about whether my interviews would further feed into such bad names they had in public media in Taiwan. Many others seemed to believe that I would help clear their names to the public. I found both positions very difficult to deal with at the beginning. Thus, my initial discomfort and concern transformed into comfort pursuing deeper understanding of their personal and professional life. After the fieldwork I started to believe that the same way it should impact our participants.

A frequent question raised about qualitative work is how to gain validity and ensure non-biased analysis. My strategy is to provide an enriched depiction of the institutional background and historical review which my participants are embedded in. My analysis of agent’s work and discourse gains validity because it considers the subtle impact of structural forces and holistic understanding of the research participant’s actions. My ultimate goal is to distance myself as much as possible from the moral judgement so often placed upon the workforce but explain why and how the people that work in such profession understand the meaning of their work.

My depiction of the agent’s cases may imply that their workforce is paradox and complex. There are several seemingly positive qualities of these professions of their work, such as their commitment and professionalism, dedication to students, and concerns about how international higher education contributes to Taiwan's overall development. Yet, there are morally questionable aspects of these firms and companies, such as ghostwriting, gaming the admission and immigration systems, etc. However, I took the position that viewing deeply into such complex, paradoxical
social institutions' mechanism enhances our ability to ask why and how it is. It is my core belief that all true sociological quest and any other intellectual inquiry might discover the good in bad as do the bad in good. Also, one might see organizational strength suffering from some key weaknesses, as do individual weaknesses becoming powerful structural strengths. As sociologist, it is not my responsibility to judge the company and firms' good and bad, strength and weakness. But rather, it is my job to provide a balanced assessment of their social beliefs and socio-economic structure around them.

Remembering these is an irking reminder of my limitations as researchers, and ultimately, as humans. Yet, I still choose to pull my punches to provide the analysis, even though I had no institutional interests to safeguard, no individuals I need to praise, and no agenda that I sought to promote.
Chapter 4: The Emergence of Transnational Shadow Education in Taiwan

To examine the role of transitional shadow education in international student migration, we must first delineate the historical conditions as they emerge. Transnational shadow education rises because of a neoliberal process by which the nation-state has withdrawn from international student admission and has turned the control over the market. This gradual process can be further traced to two historical conditions. On the one hand, in-home countries—such as Taiwan—students no longer seek help from the state to provide resources or assistance. On the other hand, in receiving countries—such as the United States—international student recruitment programs are rapidly expanding, and projects have become pervasive. Transnational shadow education joins the needs from both ends by gradually replacing the state power and impact with the market forces. Over time, a global workforce emerges to fill in the need between students and schools.

Taiwan is neither the only country with transnational shadow education nor does it only have an industry linking its domestic student sojourner groups with the destination societies. Nevertheless, studying the historical development of Taiwan’s transnational shadow education can help us uncover the special conditions enabling the emergence of this private industry. First, due to the pervasive cultural and economic influences of the United States, the ways Taiwanese students envision and develop pathways to study abroad have been significantly impacted by the education and immigration policies of the United States. Second, Taiwan has a native-born “shadow education” industry that supplements educational demands from formal education—such as private tutoring or entrance examination preparations. As higher education has become globalized and commercialized over the past half-century, this industry has gradually transformed itself into a transnational occupation field. Both factors have contributed to the development of the
unique transnational shadow education industry of Taiwan.

The emergence of Transnational Shadow Education: Withdraw of the “State.”

Compared with the movement of knowledge and ideas, large-scale cross-border flows of capital and population are relatively recent activities in the world system of education. The United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) estimated that approximately four million students were migrating to studying overseas in other countries’ higher education institutions, with the United States, the United Kingdom, and Australia (in that order) as the three currently leading destination countries (UNESCO Institute for Statistics 2014). Massive education mobility can be a consequence of the natural reaction to the global system's polarization, including the Western Anglophone countries' continued cultural and language dominance. Parents and children in the peripheral countries achieve “class reproduction” by moving to or sending their children to the core country to receive “better” education (Water and Leung 2013; Xiang and Shen 2009; Wong 2016). After World War II (WWII), the direction of the education movement has mainly become from east to west and from south to north, with parents and children pursuing credentials in destination countries in exchange for improved job provisions and cultural and language advantages provided by training and living in those countries (Chung et al. 2018; T. Kim 2010; Tse and Waters 2013; Waters 2009). Although some exceptions have been noted, these migration patterns in recent years, such as north to south and south to south migrations (Jon, Lee, and Byun 2014; Lan and Wu 2016; Sidhu, Ho, and Yeoh 2011) or the emergence of new educational hubs (Chan 2013; Mok 2003; Raimo et al. 2014; Sidhu et al. 2011), much of the global flow of educational capital and population, are still heavily skewed to the influence of the Western worlds from the Global North.
Historically, the status of the “state” in international student mobility around the world has undergone many changes, which can be further divided into three stages. In the first stage, when the movement of many “international students” in the pre-modern era was characterized by individual-level migration, the role of the “state” was akin to mere political and cultural attractions. For example, the so-called “Confucius Cultural Circle” before the 17th century was centered around major cultural and political hubs in imperial China, attracting foreign students from neighboring countries to study their culture, education, and administrative systems (Altbach and Knight 2007, 2010; Hudzik 2015).

After the emergence of modern nation-states, the degree of state involvement in higher education has increased rapidly in the second stage (Altbach and Knight 2007, 2010; Mok 2000, 2005). After WWII, all countries began to revolve around their nation-states to establish educational systems and allocate educational resources that corresponded to their development needs (Apple 1979; Ballantine 1983; Bourdieu 1986; Bowles 2014; Thomas and Postlethwaite 2014). Until the third transition period in the 1980s, international students' movement was mostly actively controlled and mobilized by the state (Altbach 2006; Bean and Spender 2004; Butcher 2004; Collins 2012; Jon et al. 2014). However, since the 1980s, a series of neoliberal shifts have caused the modern nation-states to fade out of higher education management (Anwaruddin 2013; Mitchell 2003; Park 2011). Instead, an emerging global market, something we are quite familiar with today, began taking over the governance of higher education institutions (HEIs) and their relationship with international students (Arambewela et al. 2006; Bauder 2015).

Since the 1980s, aiding the overseas studies of students has moved from state welfare to individual choices and responsibilities. At the same time, a global education market for study abroad has emerged. Owing to the rise of the knowledge age and the need for creative knowledge
workers, the global competition for the most educated and “talented” population began (Killgore 2009; Ng 2013). Behind this charge, the political and economic discourse was the emergence of a new type of global meritocracy around “human capital development” (Becker 2009; Brown, Lauder, and Ashton 2010; Coleman, Ganong, and Fine 2000). In most international students' host countries, governments change visa, social, and even education policies to attract and retain talents abroad (Becker and Kolster 2012; Huang et al. 2016; Raimo et al. 2014). Traditionally, students put forth their hard work and talent in exchange for their worthiness of admission. Today, schools use multiple admission packages to attract students to invest in capital. Below, we divide the stories into the United States and Taiwan to describe the rise of transnational shadow education.

The United States Context

The Pre-1980 Period

For the past century, international students' rapid enrollment growth in the United States coincided nicely with the dramatic higher education economic and institutional restructuring (Berman 2012; Breslauer 2016; Ehrenberg 2012). Launched shortly after WWII, the American higher education enterprise, especially the public universities, begun rapidly transforming itself into a “mass higher education” system—which by definition was not only for the elites but also for the wider public (Altbach and Knight 2010; Armstrong and Massé 2014). Even though Americans began to go to college long before the 1940s, the college became a middle-class entitlement and affordable means during this crucial period.6 These changes created the

6 According Goldin and Klatz (2009), two pieces of legislation bills contributed to the college system as we know it today. One is the Serviceman’s Readjustment Act, passed by the Congress in May 1945 and commonly known as the GI Bill of Rights, which involves massive national-level education planning to enable enlisted service personnel to attain education. The other is the Economic Bill of Rights passed in 1944, which ensures that young American men and women receive “good education” to guarantee economic security.
necessary institutional conditions for higher education institutions to actively market themselves as incubators of social mobility, especially for the urban middle classes. At the same time, due to the superior economic and political hegemony of the United States since WWII, middle-class families in many countries in Asia started regarding obtaining a higher education degree in the United States as a symbol of status and prestige (Bilecen and Faist 2015; Wong 2006, 2016; Xiang and Lindquist 2014; Xiang and Shen 2009b). With the United States government’s welcoming and supportive attitude toward the harboring of this attraction of the higher education sector, the United States' institutional environment before the 1980s was propitious for a rising higher education enterprise.

As one of the largest and most potent host countries in the world today, the United States, especially its national education system, has excellent power that impacts the mobility of international students. This influence can be divided into two parts. According to the Institute of International Education (IIE) (1956:1), the government's most important influence on international students is determining their legal credentials and status. Also, the official process of “legalization” consists of two further steps:

1. The Office of Education, United States Department of Health, Education and Welfare, certifies that the institution issuing the credentials is authorized to confer degrees, diplomas, or certificates and that the credential presented is genuine.
2. Students’ transcript, diploma, or certificate is authenticated by the Secretary of State in which the institution is located.

To put this process into perspective, the United States government is responsible for and legally entitled to selecting and authenticating who can enter the border through education. As the administrator of national borders and security, the state can confirm whether a school is eligible to select students through the means of certification and ensure whether students have reported
reasonable and accurate personal information through the means of authentication. Against this background, many researchers point out that the “international students” selected by the United States national education system can be similarly described as transnational migrants, the same way labor and professions are chosen by their employer (Kim 2018; Chung et al. 2019). The relationship between the state and the national higher education system can also directly affect international students' opportunities and obstacles.

Before World War One (WWI), the United States government was less active recruiting international students (Nikula and Kivistö 2019; Raimo et al. 2014). However, American universities began attracting international students and scholars aggressively (Ehrenberg 2012). After WWII, the half-century was the “golden age” of American universities as global talent hubs, sustained in part by exchange programs supported by the United States government (e.g., Fulbright Scholarship) and generous financial packages upon admission. Before the 1980s, the United States government was the main moderator for its colleges and universities' knowledge and talent. WWII was a critical turning point for a burgeoning international student flow into the United States (Ehrenberg 2012; Wong 2016). Before the war, national higher education systems were somewhat insular. However, the interwar and postwar periods brought the government's attention to advance its higher education sector with foreign talents. A milestone representation of the effect of this massive state-led initiative was the Manhattan Project, where the combined work of American and European-migrant scientists and students had brought a significant advancement for the scientific front and promoted the growth of the American higher education sector (Cudmore 2005; Reed 2014). During this period, the United States government—federal and state-level—expanded its international student admission process involvement.

The beginning of the Cold War promoted a new international exchange era within and outside
American college campuses. Additional international students landed and studied in the United States because of state-sponsored academic packages and pathways, such as the Fulbright Program. Overall, higher education migration during this time helped promote the political and diplomatic cooperation between the United States and many developing countries and strengthened the cultural and economic dominance of the United States in the world (Deardorff, de Wit, and Heyl 2012; Meyer 2010; Meyer et al. 1992; de Wit and Merkx 2012).

Taiwan in the 1950s and 1960s was a notable example of how such dominance prevailed (Wong 2006, 2016). The United States government intervention had pervasive cultural, political, and economic impacts on Taiwan. These influences can roughly be traced back to China’s civil war in 1949. To prevent the spread of communism, the United States began to aid and support the Kuomintang (KMT) regime that retreated to Taiwan after 1949. Until Taiwan’s industrialization and economic take-off in the 1970s, its industrial technology, in almost all aspects, depended on the United States. Technicians, bureaucrats, and social elites viewed the opportunity to study higher education in the United States as a symbol of merit and social status.

To contain the development of communism, the United States used “U.S. aid” to develop higher education on the island of Taiwan. Washington's influence on Taiwan University's field was even more significant than that of the authoritarian KMT regime government (Wong 2016). Around this time, Taiwan also ushered in the fastest growth period for international students to study in the United States. This growth continued until the early 1990s, as shown in Table 3. Taiwanese overseas studies in the United States also mainly focused on research institutes or technical training.

By the 1980s, the paradigm shifted again. Three decades after the Cold War era, the United States began to further reduce its international student admission interference. Although the United
States resumed some of the methods of controlling international students after the 9/11 incident, the state never restored its full power before the 1980s (Bauder 2015; Deardorff et al. 2012). With the government's withdrawal, non-governmental organizations began to play a significant role in the admission process planning and selection, including non-profit organizations, such as the IIE and the National Association of Foreign Student Affair, and for-profit organizations, such as transnational shadow education (Collins 2008; Institute of International Education 2017; de Wit and Merkx 2012).

The Post-1980 Period

After the 1980s, the United States experienced a significant transformation in higher education: neoliberalism. Neoliberalism was initially used by economic philosophy research to refer to a series of “new” guiding principles to deregulate government restrictions on market forces (Barnett 2005; Flew 2014; Rowlands and Rawolle 2013). Higher education's neo-liberalization is defined here as a deregulation pattern and dismantlement of state institutions (Madge et al. 2015; Mok and Ngok 2008; de Wit and Merkx 2012). In their article about international education and international study, Madge, Raghuram, and Noxolo (2015) argued that the uprising population of international students over the past decades had been the result of “transnationalization of education.” The number of international students' unprecedented growth represents a significant departure from the 1980 international-aid model, where the state is responsible for recruiting and hosting international students (Collins 2012). By the mid-1990s, as part of the new public management reforms, a worldwide withdrawal of the state role in education subsidies occurred, and interference indicated a step toward market-driven higher education opportunity structures (Bauder 2015; Breslauer 2016; Cudmore 2005; Killgore 2009)
In higher education, neoliberalism has pushed out the state's role in aiding and assisting international students migrating to the United States. In the United States, these reforms indicate the emergence of private education providers and a wide range of revenue-generating actors in higher education (Knight 2004; 2013). One of the effects of this change is the revenue sources. Universities are becoming accountable to the state and their graduates to generate and train additional “valuable” skills and research to make enterprises competitive (Berman 2012). According to Harland (2010), this accountability pressures universities to concentrate on revenue sources to generate the most economical returns for their organization bodies. Partly in the face of diminishing state support, changing public management demand, and identifying international students' recruitment as the new lucrative market, the entrepreneurial and commercialized dimension of higher education has increasingly become a topical field of institutional strategies and national agendas. Researchers also highlight the growing popularity of these for-profit institutions as a general trend of the declining importance of public governance and private providers' rising importance in higher education (Chae and Hong 2009; Collins 2012; Mok 2012).

The above situation provides an excellent profit-seeking space for the “shadow education” market in Taiwan. In response to the transformation toward markets, numerous new players have entered the United States' higher education market. At the same time, practices to recruit international students have become more stratified than before. For prestigious and more resourceful universities, recruiting international students may only require them to send their international admission officer to the world every year to select suitable students. However, for universities and colleges with fewer resources and are mid-and low-ranking, recruiting international students is often a burden they cannot bear and an economical source too precious to lose. Under such circumstances, universities in the United States began to rely on private
institutions native to various student-sending nations and regions to recruit students and assist them in the admission processes. Through these institutions, American universities hope to promote themselves internationally and bring internationalization directly back to the United States.

In sum, due to the rapid accumulation of higher education momentum in the United States during WWI, the United States became the world’s largest international student host country in the past century. The nation-state evolved into different roles in this maturing system in the United States: from the initial Laissez-faire to the later centralized management, to the final decentralization and marketization. From the observation of national status changes, especially the diminishing degree of intermediary between authentication and selection students, we can observe that American HEIs have become the core of higher education enterprises. Chapter 5 will further explore why HEIs will start adapting the help of transnational shadow education and what makes the “shadow education” sector inevitable and crucial. However, at this stage, we should first turn to another side of the story: international students’ sending countries.

The Taiwan Context

Transnational shadow education is now a multi-billion-dollar market and an occupational field that significantly impacts the Taiwanese international student market. Before the 1980s, no transnational shadow education “field” existed in Taiwan in a sociological sense(DiMaggio 1991; Marginson 2008). Because no sets of individuals, organizations, and institutions saw themselves as part of a shared social space. Educational providers and resources were distributed strictly along national and cultural lines and ran by government official channels. However, during the second half of the late 20th century, an occupational field originated from Taiwan began eyeing such growing business opportunities opening to the market. As a result, they began taking up a more
Before WWII: Colonized Taiwan and Modernization

Before Taiwan entered the modern era, neither formal education systems nor cross-border exchanges existed. No so-called transnational shadow education was also observed, at least not in its modern form. During the Qing Dynasty, intellectuals originally from Taiwan often crossed the Taiwan Strait to China to study or take national examinations (Yang 2001; Yang and Welch 2010). Education in the Qing Dynasty was also instituted by a private “academy,” which operated as an organization between officials and semi-officials for the then Qing imperial government. This organization was the earliest on-record documentation of the origin of private “shadow education” in Taiwan. Such an informal “shadow education” well supported the local education needs. Therefore, Taiwanese people's education was accomplished through informal institutions and the series of modernization reforms in China before WWI. Although no so-called transnational shadow education existed at this time, the existence of these “academies” began to connect the educational opportunities afar to Taiwanese people.

Taiwan’s higher education was also impacted by the Japanese imperial government from 1895 to 1945 when Taiwan was a colony. Modern Taiwanese higher education infrastructures were established under the ruling of the Japanese imperial government. Under Japanese rule, a formal education system was established in 1919. Many modern colleges also sprung up, mainly offering Japanese, medical training, and normal education to promote imperial colonial education (Chou 2015, 2016; Dai and Chan 2006a; Yang 2001). However, higher education pathways were
reasonably limited for native Taiwanese and were instituted to meet the demand of imparting ethnonational Taiwanese to promote the goal of “national characteristic education.”

Transnational shadow education also barely existed during this time, although some local “shadow education” industries started emerging. During the Japanese rule, given that Japan implemented a strict ethnic segregation education policy, the secondary education received by Taiwanese people was mostly completed by “industrial instructional schools,” (補習學校) which were semi-formal and informal educational institutions (Hsu 2013). In contrast to institutionalized instructional schools with formal curricula, Japanese and Taiwanese schoolteachers often offered private after-class lectures. These lectures formed the embryonic form of some of the earliest “shadow education” found in Taiwan. However, the strict ethnic segregation policy also limited the opportunities for Taiwanese to study in higher education. The only exception was that Taiwanese could go to Japan to study (Chou 2015). However, all movements and applications must go through the then imperial government.

Before the end of WWII, Taiwanese people did not have systematic channels for studying in European countries and the United States (Chan 2013; Dai and Chan 2006a). Young pupils who wish to study abroad have to rely on informal reading the guidebooks and autobiographies written by few fortunate elites to study abroad before. Elite individual scholars and sojourners play a pivotal role in “brokering” information and provide general social support for students. However, these elite experts have never become a collective professional group than their counterparts several decades later. Notably, although the publication of autobiographies about studying abroad during this period was not small, it mostly relied on the interest and kindness of a small number of individuals.

For example, the earliest guidebook-like publication regarding international studies we could
find in Taiwan during this period was called *Guidebook for Going Study Abroad to the U.S.* (赴美留學指導) published in 1945 (Figure 1). In the opening introduction, the author emphasized a clear statement of “a lack of practical and cultural guidance” for Chinese (then Taiwanese) students to study abroad. Author Liu Zhihong was already a university professor teaching in China at the time of writing. He went abroad to study in 1938. After referencing many works, he completed and published the book in 1945. The most noteworthy aspect of this statement is the source of the information he quoted. One of them was *Guide for Foreign Students in the United States* (1937, 5th edition). This source was a landmark publication by the then New York Institute of International Education—now more commonly known as *Institute of International Education (IIE)*—which has been publishing annual reports and guidebooks for international students in the United States even to this date. Liu also referenced the *Students’ Handbook of the University of Cincinnati, 1938–39*, and multiple North American Chinese Student Association Newsletter issues.

The publication of Liu’s book highlights two pivotal points as we examined the historical forces and development leading to transnational shadow education. Before any systematic “occupational field” emerged, international student support and recruitment initiatives were performed mainly at individual and ethnic-community levels. A small number of individuals might have been motivated to write books or share personal stories to help subsequent international students, but they neither managed nor attempted to turn it into a lucrative full-fledged business. Second, civic, non-governmental organizations in the United States, such as the IIE, served as critical unofficial channels of bridging the knowledge and pedagogical difficulties between international students and schools. However, official and unofficial American institutions might not have systematically

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7 Liu, Zhihong (1945), *Guidebook for Going Study Abroad to the U.S.* The Commercial Press.
pushed these influences overseas during these periods.

*Post-WWII to the 1970s: State Delegates and United States-sponsored Programs*

Until the gradual lifting of various restrictions on studying abroad in the late 1970s, students' numbers and qualifications for studying abroad had been strictly controlled by the authoritarian state of the KMT government in Taiwan (Wu 1995; Wu and Tseng 2013). Before the 1980s, international Taiwanese students going abroad were intermediated, supervised, and sponsored directly by the then authoritarian state government of KMT. Taiwanese students had to pass a special qualification examination and be approved by the state to go abroad. Although some government channels were meant to support students, student applicants and sojourners were also closely monitored by these so-called “supporting” channels and networks controlled by the authoritarian regime. After the end of the civil war between the KMT government and the Chinese Communist Party in 1949, the defeated KMT government retreated to Taiwan and began implementing a series of “patriotization” education policies (Chou 2016). Against this backdrop, Taiwanese students did not have the opportunity to study abroad freely, unless it was with ally countries, such as the United States. The government regarded the restriction and permission to study abroad as an essential means of controlling ideas and loyalty to the party-state.

Strict control measures did not mean that the government did not pay attention to international students' export. By contrast, as early as 1953, the KMT government announced its first policy initiative for government regulations on Taiwanese people studying abroad. Implementing the new *Studying Abroad Regulations* (1953)\(^8\) plays a crucial role in sending government-funded qualified

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\(^8\) In addition to explaining the purpose and significance of international students to the state, the *Studying Abroad Regulations* also regulated the specific quota and qualification regarding studying abroad. For instance, all applicants were mandated to pass the *National Studying-Abroad Qualification Exam* (NSQE) to study abroad, which
students to pursue foreign education in the United States. In this policy guide, “international students” have two critical roles: help “modernize and industrialize the ‘free China’” compared with the unfree communist China, and prevent “the impact of Maoist ideology from spreading in the world” (Ministry of Education 1953:2). During this period, the authoritarian state government’s will and agenda influenced overseas students' movement.

Specific “shadow market” sectors emerged during this time in Taiwan, but they were mostly either associated with or funded by state initiatives to strengthen overseas studies' control and governance. State-sponsored education delegates and intermediaries became the most prominent players during this period. Accompanied by high-level government regulation and invested interests connecting overseas students, the government affected international Taiwanese students the most during this period, not the market. Private shadow education and similar kinds of private intermediary service workers were scarce, dwarfed by state-centered educational service and financial aid provided directly by the authoritarian regime.

The state’s control of Taiwanese students at that time was not only limited to policies but also included the individual information students could obtain. From an official international student magazine, *Foreign Diaspora*, published by the government at that time, we can observe how the government managed and influenced discourses and narratives related to studying abroad. This magazine was first published in 1969 by the Ministry of Education in Taiwan and was made available to oversee Taiwanese students for free. Before it ceased publication in 2004, the magazine was officially an essential channel for Taiwanese students to obtain domestic information and exchange contacts. However, one closer look reveals that the magazine's content significantly restricted the political affiliation. All qualified applicants received state-funding for studying abroad, but the revenue of discipline was given priority to scientific and technical expertise. Applicants were only allowed to apply for studying abroad at the post-graduate level.
was deliberated, serving the story's narrative desired by the time's political and diplomatic agendas.

A summary of the foreword in one of the issues reads:

“This publication mainly wants to serve as a bridge—connecting Chinese students and diasporas abroad and the people in our domestic realm. Although we cannot guarantee that our conditions can be fully conveyed through this publication, we should try our best to report what has happened on our domestic border. We not only report how people aspire and contribute to their well-being and their country but also show some of the obstacles we encountered...because college students and those who can study abroad—our diasporas—are often considered to have superior intelligence and abilities, which come with great responsibilities.”

In the era without the Internet, the magazine editors and the publication constituted an actual “transnational broker” in a symbolic and cultural sense. At the same time, the magazine played a role in connecting culture. Many of its issues discussed different cultural themes, such as the differences between women’s clothing, family concepts, and personal hygiene habits compared with those in the United States. Probably less implicitly, this kind of magazine also functioned as a kind of self-censor. For example, by repeatedly reminding the Grant-China narrative, the KMT government hopes to emphasize that it opposes Taiwanese independent thinking, which grew popular among some international student sojourners in the 1960s and the 1970s.

Notably, the first “transnational shadow education” institution in Taiwan was also documented on paper for the first time in the third issue of Foreign Diaspora. In the form of a cross-page advertisement, MERICA.Co, Taiwan’s first standardized English examination tutoring institution,
appeared. Although the coverage was short, the appearance of such a private, for-profit shadow education company in a policy-oriented magazine is of great significance. MERICA.Co later expanded to one of the largest and most long-lasting transnational shadow education institutions in Taiwan’s history. For most Taiwanese students going abroad before the 1970s, MERICA.Co was often the only private institution they could consult, indicating that before the private market of transnational shadow education fully developed, it was a force wielded according to the state’s will.

The 1970s–1989: Opening Up

A real meaningful “global field” of transnational shadow education started emerging after the 1980s (Marginson 2008). After 1986, Taiwan experienced a series of earth-shaking political, economic, and educational system changes. Anxious to break free from the control of the past decades' authoritarian system, the civil society began mobilizing various social movements and changes to loosen the existing power structure from the bottom up. As the country shifted from labor-intensive to capital and technical-intensive economy, including political liberalization, the government gradually relaxed and deregulated social-oriented control, including the education system. One of the notable changes concerned the increasing number of Taiwanese students studying abroad.

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Data from the Ministry of Education show that from 1951 to the 1960s, the number of international Taiwanese students increased nearly seven times (from 216 to 1,560). From 1961 onward, subsequent generations of students began pursuing higher education at major developed countries, such as the United States, United Kingdom, Japan, and Canada. Broadly sketched, from the 1960s onward, international Taiwanese students enjoyed a steady growth in all significant recipient countries and the overall population until 2009. Before the 1990s, the United States had the most significant share of international Taiwanese students who chose their own educational destination, contributing more than 80% of the overall number of students studying abroad. As a result of steadily opening-up the education market and increasing the need for international education, the education industry during the time was rapidly growing.
The increasing number of outgoing international students was partly due to the series of deregulations on study-abroad policies. Specifically, for the international education between 1962 and 1964, the Ministry of Education lifted the mandatory *National Studying-Abroad Qualification Exam* (NSQE) for self-funded students. In 1976, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs canceled the national quota system administered by the Studying Abroad Regulations, opening applications for the state- and self-funded students to pursue the foreign degree of their own choice. Finally, in 1988, the Taiwanese government entirely lifted the cap on applicants’ age, rendering all high school graduates to study abroad in post-secondary education. After the series of deregulations and decentralization, a burgeoning army of students of different ages, academic abilities, and academic inclinations began swarming to study abroad.

Behind this massive group of students gradually formed the Taiwanese urban middle class in the 1970s and 1980s. During this era, parents had economic and cultural capital and were willing

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10 See Appendix Table 1 for detail Taiwanese international student through 1950-2018.
to invest resources to support their children in pursuing higher and more prestigious educational opportunities abroad. Over time, parents vexing to send their children to the best and appropriate education abroad started developing an important commodity market and profession: providing information, professional consultation, and children's application plans.

**Emerging Occupational Field in the Post-1980s**

The 1980s was a crucial period for the institutionalization of transnational shadow education. Other than the macro-dynamics noted above, alternative social and cultural developments leading to the market's emergence were observed. Based on the fieldwork, I point out three main factors: international students who returned in the 1980s, knowledge gap created by transnational interconnectivity, and information deliberation through the Internet. These contexts correspond to a specific context about the emergence of a developed Taiwanese transnational shadow education today.

*Migrants who Returned with Local and Foreign Ties and Knowledge*

Transnational shadow education in Taiwan grew almost 20 times between the 1980s and the 2010s. One of the major contributing factors is the large-scale return of overseas students during this period. Whether in the eyes of sending nation or receiving nation, groups that can cross the transnational field are valuable human assets (Kim 2016; Massey, Goldring, and Durand 1994; Ong 1999; Zhou 2008). Even when these people no longer move and settle down, their past transnational experience's social ties and knowledge present significant potential for creating new transnational linkages (Blilcen and Faist 2015; Brooks and Waters 2011; Levy et al. 2019; Madge et al. 2015; Waters and Leung 2013).
International students who return to their home country bring cultural and social impacts from the destination country they studied. Accompanying such impacts is the ability to turn such fluency on linguistic and cultural skills into capitals. Cheng and Yang (1998) used the concept of “global articulation of higher education” to represent earlier highly trained migrants' cumulative effect on the later migrants between the most and least developed countries (Cheng and Yang 1998). Significantly, migrant returnees who were trained in advanced countries facilitate their ability to “master English, technology, shared body of scientific knowledge, common methods, and shared style of thinking,” all of which transform into the ability to help later potential migrant students “fit” the admission to the developed countries. Migrant returnees play a significant role in bringing back “social remittances” and foreign influences from abroad. In Murphy-Lejeune’s work (Murphy-Lejeune 2003), such capital is conceptualized as a “mobility capital,” which the author argued that:

The main difference between student travelers and their [non-mobile] peers rests in the acquisition of what we should refer to as “mobility capital.” Mobility capital is a sub-component of human capital, enabling individuals to enhance their skills because of the richness of the international experience gained by living abroad.

The entire transnational shadow education industry relied on returnees’ ability to transform such capital to their ethnic peers. Almost all our research objects are returnees or previous-student-then-migrant returnees. Over the years of studying abroad, they established cultural and social ties with receiving countries that can be activated to assist future students in obtaining jobs, visas, and study opportunities. However, when asked about their experience entering the job sector, the terms
“accidental” and “stumbled upon” were often mentioned by our informants to distinguish esteemed and straightforward career paths from the choices they used to make. We quote one senior agent who was interviewed for this study:

J: At the time, FlyingAway [pseudonym] was regarded as a Type A travel agency\(^{11}\) in Taipei. The company, which is no longer operating, was the agent for many foreign companies. It did not send out its tourist group, but FlyingAway mainly served as an agent for purchasing air tickets and other travel arrangements. FlyingAway slowly developed into several subsidiaries underneath, and one of them was the “study tour” sector, which I helped operate at the time. [The company I worked for] was probably the first institution to do study tours in Taiwan approximately 30 years ago.

Kenneth: Why do they do “study tours” then?

J: At that time, several major airlines, such as Swissair and Air Canada, went through the hands of FlyingAway to sell tickets. Swiss Air Lines mainly had a language agency called Eurocenter. Our company dealt with their aviation business and subsidiary language learning programs. In addition to English, other languages, such as French, German, Spanish, Italian, and Japanese, were offered. At that time, FlyingAway was one of the first agencies that did the “study tour” business in Taipei, but it only focused on language and learning; it did not offer other formal programs. What I call formal programs are degree programs that offer graduation credentials. FlyingAway could not offer degree programs, at least not without help.

From J’s interview, a broad trend can be observed in addition to her personal experience. When the state began to fade out the many matters of studying abroad, the tourism service industry took over. With the gradual decline of authoritarian government control over the people, people began to have the freedom to move and go abroad. In the beginning, going abroad was only limited to the most privileged few. Nevertheless, after the economy took off in the 1980s, it became an activity that many middle-class families could afford. After such development, many tourism operators gradually discovered that families who go abroad often have children eager to study

\(^{11}\) those that accept the commission to sell domestic and international air, land, and air transportation tickets or purchase domestic and foreign tickets and checked baggage on behalf of passengers.
abroad. They began to develop “package tours” for parents with children willing to studying abroad. In the beginning, these packages only included few sporadic trips to universities and high schools; eventually, stable routes and “study tours” were offered with contracted universities, local high schools, or language institutions.

The tourism market provides the timely human power and resources to connect the overseas study market with children who are desperate to go abroad and parents willing to pay to send them overseas. At first, the market might only aim at recruiting Taiwanese returnee students who can speak well in English, but it later resulted in unintended consequences: large amounts of surplus labor and skills rose to meet a sudden surging demand for studying abroad at that time. Furthermore, given that language barriers often reinforce the borders between cultures and education systems, these once low-service workers who were less regarded in the tourism business are now relied upon to act as brokers for educational opportunities (Stovel and Shaw 2012; Stovel 2010). Moreover, the tourism industry's transformation has turned the career of global brokerage into a professional field or institutional space, where specific sets of transnational skills and language capabilities are critical.

Another significant economic sector that set off many agents’ career in the transnational shadow education was the private English-tutoring industry in Taiwan. With the economy that took off after the 1970s, the demand for English talents in various industries gradually increased. Some of the most business-minded international students returning to Taiwan also began to turn their private tutoring into corporate operations. Except for the then established MERICA.Co, many for-profit tutoring businesses emerged at the time. Their purpose was not to teach English for ordinary people but to prepare for the English examinations needed for studying abroad. One of our informants, F, was a famous English tutor who started practicing as early as the late 1980s. He
It was crazy; it grew like a snowball. After two years, everything was out of control. I had little clue. I did not plan for that kind of success. Money was coming in like it was paper. I opened one class after another, branches after branches. I felt that it was all because I grasped something crucial and fundamental…Solution is critical. I found a solution. Graduate Record Examinations (GRE) and standardized tests all have their logic. We provide Solutions to understand such logic.

The language about F’s success being unexpected and “out of control” was a testification that the knowledge and information were largely unclaimed before the domination of these returnees serving as agents. As theories of brokers suggested, the specialization of brokerage work is linked, first and foremost, to the identification of a specific area gap between abstract forces that require individuals to fill such void with specific localized knowledge (Kellog 2012; Stovel and Shaw 2012).

Establishment of Professional Turf

Educational migration has always been more than a process for people with knowledge or talent to pursue education. It is also the process of transferring all international students' social and economic needs across geographical and cultural borders. Transnational shadow education agents fall into the category of brokers who bring students, buyers, and schools together into knowing one another. However, being bound up in this seemingly institutional work is contingent daily work of information maintenance, bookkeeping, and clerical work. These trivial daily tasks are not as insignificant as they are imagined today. From our informant’s sharing, in the early days when the study abroad industry has not yet emerged, serving these fragmentary personal needs could be considered the core of this industry. When asked regarding their work and identity as agents, they
feel nostalgic about the earlier times when agents were perceived positively.

I started in this industry in 1986. Yes, that was a time that if you want to study overseas, you need to depend on agents because alternative channels for information about overseas studies were unavailable. Nothing. No Internet or previous veteran students to rely on, only us [agent and agency]. Students respected us and saw agents as superior. I remembered students and parents having to line up for our services. You know, like we were on the second floor of a building, and the single stair was filled with Kraft paper bags with names lining up. It was crazy.

Since the 1980s, an increasing number of people have been able to live in this industry. Furthermore, we can witness a steady “professionalization” process of the transnational shadow education sector, which could be exhibited in two main historical developments during this time. First, professional associations around specific tasks, skills, identities, and moral codes emerged in Taiwan. In 1993, TOSA started as collaborative associations among groups of agencies and later became recognized by the Taiwan Ministry of Education and Ministry of Interior. As its impact grew nationwide in Taiwan, it changed its name to International Education Consultant Association in 2005. In an interview with one of its founders, who is now also an agent at a significant transnational shadow education consulting company, the agent talked about how TOSA started as a call for an order for this once unclaimed market.

There was a little story behind it [TOSA]. I recalled one day, we opened a newspaper, and an article from the social news section talked about someone being a fraud by an agent for over 10 million dollars. The agency then vanished, leaving the parents stranded and helpless. Something like that, you know, at the time, we did this work but did not fight for recognition. No. We only thought it is what we are. All these studies abroad cases used to be through cram schools and language institutions, such as MERICA.Co. At one point, certain language institutions could not even do agency work because we were only recognized by the Ministry of Education and Ministry of Interior a few years later. My husband became the first president of TOSA at the time.
This association's appearance was significant for our understanding of the emergence of transnational shadow education in Taiwan for two reasons. First, in assembling a nationwide professional association, it became involved in what sociology of work called the process “professionalization,” where groups of workers and professionals become united and seek institutionalized governance to establish professional identity. Gradually, the agents replaced the state’s and the school’s role in authenticating and gatekeeping students’ enrollment and application. These agents also provided students with support and resources so that they could smoothly adapt to foreign schools.

Second, this rising occupation and the professional group began to establish its professional jurisdictions. As previously mentioned, as a country’s influence faded, especially Taiwan’s support for expatriate students, more diverse players arrived. In this process, agents must distinguish their professional identity from other “others” who are not engaged in the industry, including the state or other non-profit intermediaries' role. The most direct evidence is that in addition to starting to engage in such an intermediary work, these practitioners also began to enter the mainstream educational discourse and publication.

![Figure 4: National Central Library publication for “overseas studies.”](image-url)
For any Taiwanese student who wants to study overseas today, you can find books or magazines written by these agents if you want to find a book to study abroad. From the National Central Library Catalog of Taiwan, if we search for the keyword “study abroad,” we can find that related publications have almost tripled between the 1980s and the 2000s. Several publications led by transnational shadow education constituted most of the growth—for example, Harvard Co. or MERICA.Co has jointly produced over 50 publications over the past three decades, far exceeding any other institutions and even the Ministry of Education in terms of a significant outlet for Taiwanese students. Both companies are branch businesses by two of the largest corporate transnational shadow education sectors; one mainly focused on tutoring and the other on education consulting. These book publications are commercial advertisements and carefully calibrated means to highlight agents' expertise in others' place in the field. I also quote one excerpt from the advertisement, which is illustrated in Figure 4:

“I hope that the level of our company will change from the traditionally isolated assistance to the ‘one-stop-service’ for your overseas study journey! That is, I hope our service has been upgraded from a sporadic and fragmented approach to a ‘consultant-based,’ ‘personalized,’ and ‘holistic’ service model.”

The advertisement represents how these practitioners persuade their readers of their knowledge and work's legitimacy and uniqueness. This factor is another reason we must use the term “field” to understand the rise of the entire transnational shadow education and its environment. The establishment of this workforce is the rise of a literal building and an institution on government record and a gradual process for a group of would-be professionals

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12 The National Central Library Catalog in Taiwan includes all past and present book publications published in Taiwan since 1933.
who continuously face challenges and strategically find different ways to strengthen their legitimacy.

*Rising Importance of Technology (the Internet) in Global Admission*

A third vastly significant change that brought the marketplace into the forefront of international student outflow was technology change. Specifically, technology related to information transmission and the Internet.

Before Google existed, individual applicants had to look over study information literally by cold calling each institution and program. In the 1990s and the early 2000s, university websites also rarely existed; even if they did, they would not have as much information as they do today. Driven by a motivation to help students and to outperform other competitors, various agents often must try different means to stay on top of the changing environment. A former secretary from a significant education consulting firm shared how they attempted to build a database for overseas studies.

“At the time, our boss, our former boss, spent a considerable amount of time on the establishment of a database. His goal was to create an all-encompassing database. No agents could memorize every bit of information needed for application, so we built this system. In the earlier stages of the company, all logistics fell on our shoulders [as secretary]. We spent a significant amount of human labor finding out about the information, inputting the work, and maintaining it. Consultants were happy because they only needed to focus on students’ demands and not worry about the logistics. It may feel silly now, but before, it was quite needed.

The information about overseas studies is monopolized commodity. Something that only a professional agent can interpret, understood, and use. However, today agents felt that they are less able to monopolize people’s access to such information. Some industry players believe that the emergence of information and technology has transformed how the agents are thinking about and
branding their professionalism. Given how information is gathered and stored these days, no one can really “monopolize” the knowledge about transnational educational opportunities.

“Every year, information can be different; new updates, new progress, or new rules. We will compare and see if the application this year has become difficult or easy, and all this stuff will go into our database. These tools help us optimize, prepare to answer the questions of students, and stay on top of the constantly changing market and university admission criteria.”

Today, knowing that agents can no longer monopolize information flow, they repackage themselves as experts in information interpretation and sorting. From this perspective, we can reexamine why transnational shadow education has become an occupational field and why agents who work in it generally think that they are highly professional, even though people from outside the industry may disagree.

For these agents, the Internet's emergence has changed how people relate, work, and find information. In general, the decentralization brought about by the Internet is likely to disintegrate the market that initially revolved around asymmetric information gradually. The Internet brought two significant changes that dramatically boosted the emergence of transnational shadow education. First, middle- and working-class children have grown to depend on the Internet and social network to deal with time-sensitive information about the fluctuating job market, diverse educational opportunities and pedagogies, and culturally specific and adequate norms (Golder and Macy 2014b; Matzat 2009; Waters 2009). For international students, online communities and online sites provide a virtual buffering space between institutional demands (schools) and their individualized trajectories. For the agents, a tech-savvied, native netizen generation of students has grown accustomed to sharing and exchanging information, goods, works, and ideas online, which give them the power to create customized services for sale (Kim, Yun, and Yoon 2009; Ngai
Second, the Internet’s emergence has dramatically changed the time-space construct that previously defined the global higher education mobility process. Our informants brought about issues relating to how their established social and familial networks tend to “aged out” and become irrelevant when helping them decide on how and why they want to study abroad. That is, for a person or a network, grasping all the information and opportunities for studying abroad has become a too costly activity. Therefore, such activity will eventually and gradually turn to marketization; people will pay paid professionals to select and sort relevant information. This process is like hiring contemporary people to manage their stocks or personal websites, for example (Anteby and Occhiuto 2020; Hochschild 2012; Zhang, Ackerman, and Adamic 2007). In this sense, the emergence of transnational shadow education is also the rise of expertise that manages overseas study information.

Trickling-down Effect on the Taiwanese Shadow Education Industry

These three changes in higher education and international education in Taiwan—migrant student returnees, emerged professional turf, and aftermath of the Internet's arrival—have contributed to the emergence of the transnational shadow education industry in Taiwan. If viewed independently, each change has not fundamentally favored the market’s dominance of students' migration process. Nevertheless, combined, these processes converge into a unifying force: the higher education market's neo-liberalization. The transnational shadow education market grew out of the combined forces of the neoliberal economy of higher education.

Furthermore, this market was not an imported institutional order altogether. Shadow education has always existed in Taiwan’s education system. However, these different forces have
caused it to embrace international students’ huge commercial opportunity studying abroad. Migrant student returnees provide the necessary human power with a transnational experience that the industry lacks. Subsequently, these industries have gradually constructed their own professional identity and professional turf through constant trials and attempts to grasp these specific business opportunities. Finally, in response to different environmental changes, especially the emergence of the Internet and other communication technologies, agents in these markets must frequently change their strategies and adapt to new professional identities. Today, in the days after the 1980s, the “shadow education” centered on the service of studying abroad has developed a complex commodity service market and an institutionalized organization.

These related domestic players in the occupational field prove that transnational shadow education is special and typical. On the one hand, its existence proves that the market, in a broad sense, may have always existed in the education system. It is always ready to accept and supplement students and parents who cannot be satisfied with formal education. On the other hand, the study abroad market that we care about is a brand-new market type. The people working in it must constantly cross-cultural and academic boundaries, including individuals and institutions who serve different transnational positions. In this sense, exploring the emergence and characteristics of transnational shadow education can reflect some unique contexts of higher education globalization in our era. The following chapters investigate, in further detail, the interactional aspect and daily operations between people and institutions in the market.

**Chapter Conclusion**

Neoliberalism has brought the reforms of globalization and market management into higher education. Specifically, it has brought a brand-new market for the admission of international
students into higher education. Most scholars believed that the flow of capital, people, and information across borders is a process of network dependence (Massey 1988; Massey and Sanchez 2010; Liquids et al. 2010). In a transnational context, those with ties to critical individuals and organizations in host societies who can conduct the act of brokerage—communicate and connect an isolated part of life—can access information, resources, and support better than those who cannot (Stovel and Shaw 2012). However, our research highlights that the neoliberal shift has brought these intermediator individuals and organizations together to form an occupational field, that is, “transnational shadow education.”

From the perspectives of receiving (United States) and sending nations (Taiwan), this chapter finds that the rise and fall of the state's role have necessarily affected the importance of the international student market's neoliberal market. An “occupational field” that connects both aspects of international education—organizations and the environment of organizational responses—is created (Dimaggio and Powell 1983; Schelling 1978). By looking at the state's transformation into international students' market support in Taiwan as an “occupational field” in emergence, the perspective aptly captures how organizations and individuals constitute the recognized area of institution life. The transformation in Taiwan suggests why such a market has directly strengthened the industry's influence on international students on the divergent, competing for institutional logic of commodification, corresponding with different education agents' submarkets. We outline each of these nuances in Chapter 5.

In education, individuals and institutions that play as brokers for overseas education always exist, but such a role does not always have the profit-oriented “transnational shadow education” market. Those who conduct businesses that send and support international students also do not tend to come together as a collective group equal to an occupational field in a sociological sense.
Indeed, the outlines of the occupations and the market divides, as we know them today (education consultants, language instructors, editors/writers, administrative, school representatives), began to form in the late 1980s and became established in the 1990s and the 2000s in multiple Asian countries. Existing research on organizational studies provides a fertile analytical ground for establishing and maintaining the legitimacy of cross-national brokerage behaviors and brokerage works (Burt 2005; Kern and Müller-Böker 2015b; Sasovova et al. 2010; Stovel and Shaw 2012).

In this chapter, we are concerned with these crucial processes of internationalization and student mobilities, their link to different modes of the commodification of higher education, and the creation of new spaces of opportunities and subject identities it implicates. The following chapters' central focus is to highlight these forces, ideals, and actors and determine how they help shape the unique market of Taiwan's education agent industry.
Chapter 5: Economies of Brokering: A theory of transnational shadow education

In the previous chapters, I highlighted several historical contingencies of the state, ethnic network, Internet, and others critical to examining the critical questions of occupational field emergence of the education agent market. I have also established that multiple existing scholarships have devoted different efforts to study and tease out dynamics within this unique market. However, what makes Taiwanese education agents' market distinctive from other professionalizing types in an emerging institutional field and other types of brokerage behaviors?

This chapter is dedicated to answering this question by focusing on this workforce's "brokerage" aspect (Gammeltoft-Hansen and Sorensen 2013; Kern and Müller-Böker 2015b; Kim 2018; Levy et al. 2019; Xiang and Lindquist 2014). In this chapter, my goal is to turn to the guiding principle of the field, namely the technical and human dimension of how such a workforce simultaneously pleased its role as a merchant selling a service and broker of global higher education (Collins 2012; Levy et al. 2019; Nikula and Kivistö 2019). When one becomes an agent, what work do they do to make their service commercially valuable? What are professional works and labor process best facilities turning transnational admission into business? Further, precisely what is a best practice, or to go further, what kind of planning and strategies for best practice can be worthy of being turned into a profitable market and service?

To address these questions, I relied on my fieldwork interviewing with the agents to inform my empirical findings. My result shows how agents work and understand the meaning of their professions. Domestic education consulting firms are a familiar subject of debates at national and institutional levels for our transnational shadow education agents (International Education Consultants Association 2019; Sklarow 2011; Smith and Sun 2016; Sun and Smith 2017). However,
my study mainly addresses the education industry's potential outreach in international admission and recruitment (Coffey and Perry 2014; Hulme et al. 2013; The Observatory on Borderless Higher Education 2014). My findings suggest that technical and emotional labor are central to the work of agents. My findings also show that education agents' unique features are associated with their unique position as brokers in the transnational education sector.

**Critical dimensions of transnational shadow education**

To an extent, professional education agents working in sending a student abroad is both ordinary and extraordinary. Education agents experienced many of the difficulties they faced in meeting demands about their professional status and productive role. Education agents struggle to balance pressure within the professional sector's institutional boundary while absolving problems and contingencies demanded by their service consumer (Anteby et al. 2016; Freidson 2001). The challenge to meet the need of several stakeholders in a professional field is expected. Men and women, supervisors, and subordinates all negotiate the division of labor. Professions and customers negotiate price and authority (Freidson 2001; Hochschild 1983; Janowitz 1972). In this sense, this chapter is about the relatively ordinary life of a group of professionals and their diverging professionalization process.

At the same time, education agents work in vastly different environments than other professions. Education agents live transnational lives, struggling to satisfy multiple individuals, institutional and market demands. For them, the job's joys are found in fulfilling aspiring children's dream to study abroad. To that end, educational agents serve multiple identities in the transnational educational market. They also help the universities buffer the significant risk of over-investment in international recruitment while also assisting the university recruitment in fitting the local legal
and cultural restraints. They work directly with students and parents and serve the cultural bridge's purpose by preparing students with crucial pre-migration skills and cultural awareness (Thieme 2017). The difficulties experienced by those education agents make their stories both unique and precious. It provides a vantage point to study "brokers" and their market in education. Such perspective has not been fully captured by existing educational, migration, and organizational literature.

Transnational shadow education institutions exhibit not only diversity but also certain shared principles. Some of them are quite fundamental: they are used by many professions and consultancy (Thieme 2017). For example, every transnational shadow education institution needs to provide specialist resources, do diagnostic work, develop action proposals, and provide expert opinion to cater to help students of different backgrounds apply to different schools. In my research, operating transnational shadow education institutions should have at least one of the following dimensions:

**Technical Dimension: Making things happen**

Occupation is often understood at least partially regarding the work activities members are undertaking, or as Abbott calls it, a "task area" (2001: 322). Like all other ordinary occupations and professions, transnational shadow education evolves around several core "technical dimensions. (Abbott 2001)" Scholars underscore how agents are working to perform many distinct tasks and practices associated with their particular occupations in the industry, and how these performances have implications for groups statuses, sense of identity, meaning, and dignity relating to their work (Collins 2012; Baas 2016; Xiang and Shen 2009; Coffery and Perry 2014). However, there seems to be no agreement on what constitutes the core work contents in various
occupations and professions that the transnational shadow education industry represents.

In my interview, I spent most of my time talking with my interviewees about their work content and how they understood these jobs' meaning. Although I rarely used words such as "techniques" or "skills" in my initial probing in the interviews, most of our conversations turned into an exciting discussion about the "professional skills" and "nuanced techniques" that my participants think were crucial in carrying out their daily work.

**Provide, interpreted, and integrate information**

More complete and more relevant information is often the main or only thing that a student needs to make the right decision. It can be the information of the application process, potential competitors, different channels, particular programs, governmental policies, and insider knowledge of the examiner's personal preferences, or others. However, agents often play the role to "provide" this information and interpret and integrate information and resources for different channels of applications for the students.

They (can) have too much information, too much. In this era of information explosion, everyone can search the websites they want online and find many application materials and channels. Moreover, our students are often facing helplessly with these mountains of information. Sometimes he does not have the language ability to understand this information, or he may not know how to sort the relevant from the irrelevant, do not know how to order, or do not know how to read. My job, then, is to give such information directly… For example, I will help him screen the information about the dormitory. I will say these two are good options. You can choose one of them, probably like this, and help him make a decision.

The agents may have the information about applications on file, in their minds, or know where and how to find it. In many instances, information gathering and analysis may be the only or the main objective of assignment students (and parents) give to an agent. Records are a prolific source
of information, and some records will require special editing, editing, classifications, and fact-checks. In many of the agent industries I interviewed, as long as they are slightly larger companies or companies that have been in operation for more than five years, there will almost always be specialized departments or systems to handle information on studying abroad. Experienced agents learned through years of application about how to judge the completeness, clarity, validity, and relevance of the data they can access. Additionally, experienced agents need to recognize between publicly available information and information that is restricted and developed specifically for the particular clients.

In providing an analysis of information for study abroad decisions, a delicate question is such information's timeliness. When discussing kenneth516 their work, my interviewees repeatedly mentioned the importance of having real-time, updated information every year for their clients. One of my interviewees is Linda, a consultant who has been in this industry in Taiwan for 22 years. She pointed out the transformation of the role information played in college admission from the past to the present.

Agent L: In the past, there was no Internet. It was necessary to find an overseas study provider because the information was inconvenient, and there was no way to go online and search for information quickly. However, today, anyone can check information online.

Kenneth: So, how do agents like you define your expertise and professionalism?

Agent L: We are professional because we have continuously obtained new information. Good agents should continuously improve themselves, follow each school's trends, and get the latest news from various schools. If students test you, but your information is not current enough, they will think you are not professional enough. After years of training, our consultants can also answer the questions you want from their own experience at any time. Give you the timeliest response.

The information here does not necessarily limit to information about application channels.
Some professionals specialize in standardized exam taking and English instructions among my research participants, who teach students how to prepare for the TOEFL and GRE test exams. For these agents, it is also imperative to obtain real-time and continuously updated information. For example, one of the teachers, Rosa, shared with me to obtain practical information to help students judge which test environment is essential to improve their standardized exams. She mentioned that they would collect the experience of students who conducted exams in various rooms and locations for the previous months and then recommend subsequent students to choose the classroom with better quality microphones and less distraction to obtain higher scores in listening and speaking sections. As she later put it, "These small, trivial information details determine success." Although the agent is talking about how students succeed in the exam on the surface, it also describes how she should be qualified as professionals to help students in their admission journeys.

Diagnosis and provide expert opinion

Diagnostic skills and instruments are among the Taiwanese agent's principal assets. Various usage falls under this heading. The agents may be approached to provide expert opinion in cases where the students must choose among several programs and prefers to seek impartial and independent third-party advice. In a former case, an agent mentioned:

Agent D: In fact, OK, our relationship is, as it is currently, I think it is a role between parents, a student, and the schools they applied. Of course, the student is our main concern, and the parent is usually those who pay for our service. We have to strike a balance between different parties when their opinions do not match, and we need to give someone a suggestion, a neutral, impartial role that can be reference reasonably by everyone.

Kenneth: So this professionalism is a neutral position?

Agent D: I think so. Our job is to play a very neutral role between the students, the
school, and the parents.

Also, agents could be invited to weight in as an expert with experience and specialized knowledge. It should be stressed that any consultancy involving destination universities and colleges assessment and decision will engage agents' expertise, particularly as transnational college decision risk being affected by a shortage of information. As such, diagnostic skills and instruments that the agents provide can be called upon to concern the entire application process or its parts—a specific department, university organizational structure, the application process, and skillsets. In my case, the agent usually calls this process "placement analysis," which judges the student's acceptance rate among a group of school choices or pathways. Therefore, a student can use agents for a wide range of planning tasks concerning the organizations' strengths and weaknesses, positive and negative trends, the potential for improvements, underutilized resources, technical and human programs, and else.

...whether some schools they[students] have a relatively higher chance of getting admitted, while some others may be his "dream school" that he could aspire to. Yes, we need to come up with a list [for the students]. Sometimes, it is not that more is necessarily good, but we have to apply to the most suitable school for the student, according to his grades, personal characteristics, and preferences. So, you need a list of Dream schools and a list of "safety list" so that you can plan for the unknown. Of course, for a consultant, the most significant achievement is to apply him to a higher-than-expected school, which is, of course, every consultant's goal. However, experienced agents also acknowledge always to be cautious about taking precautions. I think these tasks differ from the so-called professional from not-so-successful agents.

Because education agents work so often intersects with transfiguring and transforming resources, information, and knowledge across cultural boundaries, they are also called upon to serve as knowledge brokers who contribute their expertise and understanding to fulfill knowledge gaps (Bilecen and Faist 2015; Burt 2005; Kellogg 2014; Kern and Müller-Böker 2015). As another
agent working in a consultant company aptly depicted in one of our interviews:

"We filled the void created by the formal education systems, whether in Taiwan or the U.S. or U.K., for that unmatched and unsupported language, emotional, and academic demands. We also do education, but we do it better and do it with a fee."

It should be stressed that any work and coaching involving helping students select particular schools or destinations have some diagnostic work components. Agents can help students do a wide range of work to find new opportunities and resources, such as analyzing organizations' strengths and weaknesses, positive and negative trends, the potential for improvements, underutilized resources, and else.

Planning and Predictions

In real practice, the continuity between Taiwanese agents' diagnosis and action planning and proposal works are interrelated. The foundations of a successful action planning of admission are laid in excellent dialogistic works, i.e., by defining and analyzing problems and purpose as well as the factors and forces that stimulate or hamper the change necessary for the clients to take to achieve their individual or organizational goals (Kubr 1996). In my observation, most agents comply with a specific professional script, which is almost a natural step-by-step arrangement to orchestrate their work. Such professional script is shown in Figure X, as cited from the leading website from one of the firms I interviewed.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>No.</th>
<th>Step</th>
<th>Description</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>01</td>
<td>First Time Free Consulting</td>
<td>Suggest application strategies and timetables for individual needs</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>02</td>
<td>Sign Contract</td>
<td>Sign the formal contract, and the consultant delivers relevant preparation package</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>03</td>
<td>Guidance and translation of application documents</td>
<td>Prepare application documents, resumes, reading plans and recommendation letters based on student backgrounds, and provide essay writing guidance.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>04</td>
<td>Fill in the application form</td>
<td>The agents fills in the application form and assists in sending the application documents to each school</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>05</td>
<td>Application status tracking</td>
<td>Guidance and advice on school correspondence</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>06</td>
<td>Assistance with admission procedures</td>
<td>Analyze the pros and cons of each school, write rejection letters, and write extension application letters.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>07</td>
<td>Planning and assistance before departure</td>
<td>Visa processing, visa applications instructions, booking air tickets, free pre-school language courses, accommodations and others</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>08</td>
<td>Pre-departure Briefing</td>
<td>Local school enrollment procedures, luggage preparation and travel advice. Introduction of local resources and networks.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>09</td>
<td>After-enrollment correspondance</td>
<td>Follow up contact and assist with schoolwork and life matters. Advice on further studies and employment, transfer services, etc.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Figure 6**: Standard Procedure for Education Agents in Taiwan

Every agent may use or organize their work differently from this script, but alternative arrangements often stand on the existing work style to make changes or propose new solutions.
Some agents, like Thomas, who works in a significant education consultancy company located in Taipei, can effortlessly point out the "technical" aspects required for this job:

Kenneth: How would you define "professional" in your work?

Agent T: [We] use our professional knowledge to analyze with the clients, and tell them the advantages, disadvantages, and admission conditions of those schools and programs. We would also have done our analysis and discussed our opinion with the students. We then let them decide by themselves. Our role is to provide students information and provide more ideas and professional knowledge to help them better make a decision and plan things accordingly.

T's comments pointed out that one of the cores of the "technology" of their work is to help students make informed decisions. These decisions must be based on specific evidence, data, and facts. Sometimes this includes collecting information beforehand, and sometimes it means that the industry must use their own Make individual judgments based on experience and familiarity with foreign education systems. The key is that their job is to advise the service objects (students) and participate in their decision-making and planning to study abroad. This is very similar to the use of commodity or process consultants by commercial enterprises. In Kubr's (1996) study about corporate consulting firms, the relevant technology is defined as: "The nature of the management or business problem faced by the clients and how this problem can be analyzed and resolves." (Kubr 1996: 18).

*Risk evasion and management of uncertainties*

In addition to advising, T also mentioned that another crucial technical dimension of the work is that agents should help students avoid the risk of application failure.
Agent T: We always try to make this clear.

Kenneth: Make what clear?

Agent T: That we tried our best to prevent you from falling. There should be no instances where students cannot find any programs to be admitted that they can accept. It is simply unacceptable. If a student applied today and failed all of his or her applications, it is the agent's fault. This could mean either of the following three things: the agent's professional knowledge is insufficient, not broad enough, or the placement's judgment is not practical enough. They should have known better to develop some backup plan with the students in terms of their applications.

Managing failure is a big part of agents' tasks because it threatens their legitimacy as experts and trustworthy professions. A critical professional step to take is that agents must carefully advise the appropriate course of actions students take to balance university ranking and realistic conditions of the student themselves. This means that sometimes their professional judgment might clash with student's judgment of themselves. Also, students and parents might have unrealistic expectations for both the schools and the agent's ability. In those instances, agents took precautionous steps lowering or sometimes re-directing students' and parents' expectations. In doing so, the professional education agent's intervention on students' decisions. Another agent, Tina, highlights how the mediation of expectations often breaks up students (and parents) with their unrealistic expectations that they can attend the best-ranking schools without concerted efforts to manage their application process.

Agent TI: They always do; they always come to us wanting the best-ranking schools. Many people romanticize overseas studies, and some agents reinforce that. They tend to think they are just going to another school somewhere further."

Kenneth: What do you do then?

Agent TI: We manage, and control their expectations, to some extent. I asked them, why did you choose this program and this school? There are many college students and fresh graduates who just cannot answer. Do they consider continuing studying the
same discipline, or do you want to switch focus? What career do they looking to enter? By putting realistic context in front of their unreasonable expectations, many would know it is best to work with us[agents] who can help them find more realistic placements.

In other words, another key technical point for the agent's job is to increase the predictability of success rate and put in efforts to buffer the risk of failure for admission. This links the agent's job further to other professional advising work, especially those that invest in dealing with uncertain situations (Beckert 1996; Daipha 2012; Sun and Smith 2017). This includes technically improving forecasting, diagnosis, and predictability of specific scenarios, such as weather forecasts or professional financial consulting (Chong 2018; Kubr 1996; McKenna 2006). Further, it could be linked to other service workers who were dedicated to limit the contingencies of the clients and disturbance in the institutional environment, such as (Hochschild 1983, 2004).

**Articulations and planning in admission documents writing**

In my interviews, one of the most frequently mentioned key agent "technical dimensions" concerns their ability to help students craft admission documents—including personalized admission essays and more generic filing of the application forms. In the process of studying abroad, how to package the performance, experience, and ability of students into application packages that foreign examiners can understand is a crucial task. Sometimes, the success of this kind of work can even replace the objective transcript performance itself: because through more free writing and expression, students may be able to persuade the examiner of their other potential and personal characteristics and then qualify for admission. Chapter 7 will discuss the cultural and labor technical input in these jobs in more detail, which I called "authenticity crafting." In this chapter, I would briefly mention why the consultant considers the document itself to be an essential
technical work.

In fact, in interviews, consultants often talk interchangeably between their efforts that help student planning, strategizing, management of uncertainties, and document writing, although they acknowledge that these are different "techniques" and "skills." When T talked about the documents for studying abroad, he specifically mentioned the importance of pre-planning and planning:

Agent T: Yes…we agents compete with one another for our expertise by trying to see who can best help their students prepare and plan their application materials. It is sometimes difficult for them to write such things or such a level based only on the student's own experience and abilities.

Kenneth: Please tell me more about how you help students with their writing?

Agent T: In short, writing is not necessarily a problem about language ability; it is about the ability to articulate. The student's English may be OK, but they do not know how to articulate, so they need help sharpening their application content expressions. They need to know, for example, whether their direction of writing is right or wrong or whether such expression would make sense to a foreigner. In other words, what does the school want to see?

T continues to talk about how to "technically" and how to guide students to write documents:

When we talk to them, we tell them about their structure, the structure itself, the whole structure, and the idea of your article, yes, so we will give them some brainstorming and some ideas. He may have a lot of experimental experience or some intern experience, but he does not know how to present it on this reading project, yes, and then he may not know how to start writing this thing, so we will follow him Discuss, we will tell him how they did it, and let the document write out the characteristics of the students.

T believes that the reason why students are willing to pay to use their service is large because it involves some tacit knowledge and techniques that can only be known after going through these processes. Therefore, maintaining customers' trust and confidence in them and the legitimacy of
their paid service lies in how the agents could consciously emphasize these tacit technical dimensions in the work process with the clients. Despite this, sometimes they have to engage in more intensive interventions in the student's work or interact with students personally.

Another important place where agents intervene in their expertise is how they simplify and standardize the admission process. Many education consultants invest time and energy to help make the complicated and cumbersome admission process somehow manageable. They provide a wide range of services, from line-editing to ghost-writing students' essays, CV and statements. Their job involves summarizing potential school placement, gathering relevant admission requirements, and respond to students' requests during their admission process. In practical terms, experienced agents help the student create the most individualized documents that fit their aspirations and potential and match the foreign admission committees' unique taste and preferences. I will give a more detailed description of the skillsets and process of turning admission essays into "authentic" student self-branding in later chapters.

Taking standardize exams

Finally, I want to highlight a particular function worth noting in my interviews: the "language instructors," who also did technical work helping students with their exams. Like the local Taiwanese students who go to "cram schools" to learn techniques dealing with in-school exams, Taiwanese international students would go to agents for standardizing English qualifications exams—such as TOEFL and GRE. Language instructors do so by wielding their expertise to plan, diagnose, and analyze the exams and break them down into hundreds and thousands of steps. During my interviews with this instructor, I was always amazed by the technical details and the tireless efforts they take to transform the teaching of language exam-teaching into such unique
Many people think that they can teach, but in fact, they cannot. Many people think that because one gets a Ph.D. degree, one should teach well, but he cannot teach. Teaching is a very delicate...craft. This is not a type of skill that everyone has, and the lack of this skill will waste much time for the students coming to their class. You can imagine how many professors at those top-tier universities like National Taiwan University and National Tsing Hua University have a high degree and then teach very badly and waste their students' time. So, I spent much time studying the teaching craft and skills and then improving them. It usually takes three hours for my students to sit there listening to my lectures. It is hard to stay focus. So, I think this is... yes, this is an intricate craft.

Developing the skills to teach about standardized language exams is more than preparing to boost students' linguistic ability. It also involves the development of skills to transfigure and transform students' habits and culture into literacy. In other words, through learning and teaching, they are transforming not only their English abilities but also themselves as transnational subjects.

For instance, as one instructor explained, the student should adequately describe their hometown and culture to the standardized testing examiners. The students' fluency to utilize language is demonstrated, to a certain extent, by their ability to perform as skilled, intrigued foreigners looking back on their own culture. Language instructors mainly train students to be skillful exam takers and intellectuals who are well-assimilated to meet schools' expectations. David, a senior language instructor, defined his work as "weight training" for students seeking to study abroad.

"Studying in my class is like weight training. You first push yourself beyond the boundary. In actual tests, several students would feel too stressed to perform well. Others would encounter questions for the first time and become nervous. My class helps students train to be adaptive. Then, they learn to manage exams quite easily. I teach them not just knowledge and content. Every mundane teacher can do that! I teach my students how to think like experts, get behind the examiner's logic, and then use these skills to their advantage.'
Language instructors assume the role of cultural brokers in actual teaching sessions. They are consultants in language/culture-related issues. Language instructors are responsible for utilizing their classrooms to help students accumulate language skills necessary for taking standardized exams. Three types of skills are acquired in such teaching sessions. The first is semantic logic, in which students learn to speak, write, and listen in English and comprehend the unique logic behind the test questions. Nathan, a young instructor teaching TOEFL, shared the following.

'Let me give you an example. A student is presented with two sentences; sentence A was written in the past tense, whereas sentence B was written in the present tense. Logic then dictates that the two are opposite in meaning. In other words, you are comparing and contrasting. If you were to fill in the answer, you can identify the answer by looking at the different options. (Kenneth: So, you teach them to learn the logic?). Yes. Eventually, they do not even have to know EXACTLY what the sentence means.'

Students must take the course designed by the language instructors to accumulate knowledge and skills in semantic logic. However, learning is not limited to classrooms. Language instructors design homework and "study notes" that students can practice and memorize. These "study notes" include guidebooks for vocabularies, phrases, or idioms assembled by instructors to systematically memorize students. Several instructors consider these "study notes" as representative of instructors' expertise and professional prestige. The popularity and widespread use of such guidebooks are a testament to language instructors' influence in the industry and their unique form of expertise that distinguishes them from ordinary English teachers. Furthermore, language instructors consider these guidebooks as supplementary material to the official guide published by the Educational Testing Service, a formal guideline published by the official testing agency to help students' study for the exams.
Of course, I am aware of the official guide by the ETS. It does not say much. Moreover, its information is often redundant and out of context. (Kenneth: How so?) For example, it does not say that the ETS often recycle articles from past years. Thus, my study guide should include that information. I need to let students know specifically what the sources of these recycled articles are come from. Also, a limited number of vocabularies and phrases are included in the exams. Therefore, by using my "study note," students can memorize numerous vocabulary words and relevant phrases. My methods must work. Otherwise, students might not want to pay that much money for my teaching.'

In addition to honing their language skills, students also learn to deal with various types of contingency occurrences that can prevent them from obtaining satisfactory standardized exams grades. In other words, the actual learning of language is also about managing risk and problems. Eloquent instructors frequently take the standardized exams to test their teaching approach. These exam trials are generally funded by institutions but are sometimes not. Personal experiences, especially multiple ones, are used as powerful tools to persuade students to adopt the instructors' approach in learning and preparing for exams. The high scores of successful instructors in these exams are a testament to their abilities. Also, mindful instructors utilize their personalized experience to help students prepare physically and psychologically.

'These are the little things that matter. For instance, at what point will you be able to rest with such a tight exam schedule? How should you adjust your microphone for the best outcome for recording? How would you structure your notes if you only have 10 seconds to listen to the questions and descriptions? The official exams assume many skills, cultural knowledge, and adequacy that students learn to adapt. That is our primary job.'

This is another proof that the entire TSE industry is so in line with Taiwan's own "shadow education" industry. Although instructors do not formally recognize instructors, they nevertheless see themselves and their services as an integral part of helping students manage the international admission process. The key to this is their ability to turn such tasks into "skills" and "techniques,"
which can then be turned into merchandise for sale. Further, students depend on the guidance of committed language instructors not only on a technical level but also personally.

**Human dimension: Making people Connected**

The technical details present above highlights how agents deal with their work and strengthen their professional expertise. However, as Hochschild (1983) suggested over three decades ago, individuals who worked in professional fields draw not only from physical or mental labor but also their personalities, caretaking, and emotional work (Hochschild 1983). This kind of service engages with more interactive and emotional labor that can create a comfortable environment and experience for the clients (Hochschild 1983; Leidner 1993; Martin, Knopoff, and Beckman 1998). In my field, I found agents I draw in various cultural and relational tools to make students' admission process more predictable and ease the tension of uncertainties, although the specific process varies.

**Creating Trust**

The agents' positions in the transitional admission field prescribes that Taiwanese agents have access to information, resource, and power that their clients do not. When employing agents, students' danger is that they have little knowledge and channels to find out if the agents are (dis)honest, whether due to interest in exploiting the relationship or accumulating power and personal profit (Stovel and Shaw 2012). Therefore, trust becomes a central issue that gives students a particular incentive to work with agents.

Trust is a central feature that consultants rely on to define their personal and professional
prestige. It was a central theme in my conversations with the consultants about their work. Most agents described how they have to earn their clients' trust instead of being warrant legitimacy of their work immediately. As stated, in Taiwan, agents are a highly suspected and scandalous profession, as students and parents feared that the agents might trick them. This lack of trust necessitates agents to spend a considerable amount of time and energy persuading and assuring students and parents of their worthiness and loyalty. For most consultants, enforcing trust was a rational decision for which transitions between different tasks and works can be most effective and efficient. An education consultant named Emma shared the following.

"In this job, I feel that you cannot afford to be a professional because you can speak about the jargon and make the application process sounds incredibly complicated. Quite the opposite! Students need to feel that you are working with them. They need to understand what you understand. They need to see what you foresee.

Education consultants also must speak and interact with students in ways students find acceptable and comfortable. In doing so, education consultants must invest considerable efforts in creating a shared sense of membership and an atmosphere of trust. As an interactive service provider, multiple consultants made references to professional counselors' work, which involved considerable interaction and trust-building.

*Emotional and Relational Works*

Multiple agents also highlight the emotional aspects of their work. In their eyes, doing good consultancy work (and as language instructors) requires more than technical expertise and specific "soft" human skills. Not only do they need to persuade students that their services are useful, but they also have to persuade students (and parents) that the work they propose is really about their
well-being. When done well, these emotional work types can create a strong bond between students and agents that transcend beyond client-merchant relationships. For example, many agents like T mentioned personal stories about how they sometimes communicate students' own will to their parents.

'You know, sometimes, a child is not willing to tell his or her parents the truth or does not dare to do so. Specifically, boys rarely share what is on their minds. So, when we later learn what is really on their minds, we learn that their school choice is often based on their parents' pressure. A student might have a genuine heart and passion for psychology, but her parents want her to study business abroad. We communicate ... many parents ask us to find out what their children want through our consulting session. I feel they need a third person with an educators' role because students are more honest with us.'

In T's eyes and others, agents occupy a pivotal "third-party" role in serving international students' families, particularly parents with little knowledge of the foreign schools and admission systems. As agents build rapport with their student clients, they become essential mediators between children and parents. In some cases, some Taiwanese parents described by the agents would ask agents to convince their children to attend certain degrees or school programs. Some other times, agents might be asked to convince parents of the "worthiness" of individual program students desire to go, but rejected by the parents. T recounts:

"they [students and parents] sometimes want me to be a liaison between them, to communicate interest and preferences of school choices that they were too shy or too scared to talk to each other in fear of jeopardizing their relationships."

The function of this kind of communication goes beyond just passing information to the other party or diagnosis or planning specific activities. Alternatively, agents' work often requires the agents themselves' emotional and relational skills to cater to the student's more personal needs.
From this perspective, agents need to serve the process itself and the emotional and psychological states of the people (students and parents) who are going through these processes.

*Creating new networks and relationships*

One of the most often overlooked aspects of agents' work is facilitating and creating new social networks and relationships. This includes that they can enhance the bonding and mutual assistance between students, and they can also connect other interpersonal resources for students, such as the International Student Associations or overseas diasporic immigrant's groups living in the U.S. These links not only help students accumulate the necessary cultural and social capital, but also serve as another means of legitimizing agent professionalism.

In my observations, the most successful industry players—agents, instructors, and others—are not always best at emphasizing their professional skills and work abilities. Instead, those who can get the best package of their professional skills and abilities into more spontaneous interpersonal interactions and social exchange tend to win their clients' hearts. For example, many agents I spoke to are known for initiating "study abroad networks" that bring together applicants with common interests, ambitions, and ages to prepare to study abroad.

Agent M: There are other social groups and the network of senior elder students in the same cohort, with their support behind them.

Kenneth: I saw at least two or three hundred of these discussion groups and networks?

Agent M: There are more, but I got tired of listing all of them out on our website at some point. It is great to have such networks come to such a scale to reap the community's benefit. When the community rises, people can quickly find others who share similar interests, backgrounds, and experiences. We can be a crucial platform where they meet others, connecting them with other people and resources, and so on.
Like M, many agents will use their ability to reach many students to improve their work effectiveness. Senior agents usually have an army of "model students" who is always willing to come to share their success stories and advice when needed. These model students provide personal accounts, techniques, and information on how to apply to studying abroad. However, most importantly, they can endorse particular personal experience and strategies working with agents. In my interview with a language instructor, she mentioned that past students would often take up the role of so-called "teaching assistants" to teach subsequent students to learn English reading and listening, and speaking skills.

Agent J: We sometimes recruit them [past students] as teaching assistants. They would help us on more private, one-on-one sessions with the students to learn more effectively. Let us say I teach them something about application material or an essay in a TOEFL test; if you still do not understand after the lecture, who should you go to? The teaching assistant is designed to be there to aid you through the process. Plus, students can learn from others who have experienced learning the same topics or techniques.

Kenneth: Are they paid or compensated?

Agent J: We compensate them for their travel expense and some subsidies. But, most of them, do not want to get paid, or that is not what they are here primarily. They want to give back to the community. At least, that is what they have told me. I appreciate their offering.

These social networks also have a more latent role: they help agents obfuscate the work itself is commercial color. The best example, I think, is reflected in what students call each other in these communities. Among several events I participated in, junior and senior students called each other not by their actual names but by "underclassman" and "upperclassman" or brothers and sisters of the same class. In this kind of shared community, this title effectively hides the differences in identities between students but focuses on only the difference in their experience or ability. Many agents also require students to call them "upperclassman" instead of teachers. When pressed to
explain why do would encourage students to use such name-calling for each other's, one agent explanation help highlight why personalizing such interaction is so important:

Agent T: It is not necessarily just a question of trust. Even outside our institutions, they are a junior and senior peer network collective of each other. Even when they go abroad, other people will help them, such as the Taiwanese Students Associations. They must learn how to interact with others, admit that they need help, and then seek resources and contacts beneficial to them.

This symbolic name-calling and assignment of social relationships help neutralize the commercial nature of agent-student exchanges. It is the market that brought them together. However, in people's minds, it is the social bonding that brought them closer. This kind of social relationship is likely to last long after the application. More importantly, students can "re-socialize" their ways and roles into the international student networks. Many people may be employers, engineers, teachers, or young pupils before studying abroad, and they must adapt to their new "underclassman" and "upperclassman" status after being a collective group of student migrants. It can be said that students experience the transformation of personal capital and ability and the transformation of social identity and group affiliates. These conversion processes may all become part of the intermediary work of agents.

Identity work, gender, and ethnicity

Furthermore, I want to emphasize Taiwanese agents' role in the "re-socialization" of international students into different social identities. Mostly because, contrasting existing studies that often highlights how commercial agents reproduce class privilege and identities in transnational college admission, I want to point out that there are other lines of work agents do to reshape students' identities. Agents work often help students challenge or reinforcing certain
boundaries and categories along with gender and ethnic identity, examining intertwined legal and economic positions in both international and domestic sphere, as well as managing regulations and bureaucratic process which are bounded to conventional category-oriented identity politics within the nation-state (Kern and Müller-Böker 2015).

Although gender is not a significant component of the agents' interaction with the students, it is undoubtedly an inherent factor that impacted the structure of their interactions. As I studied my field, it becomes astonishingly apparent that Taiwanese transnational shadow education is a highly gendered occupation and professions-with a too high female representation in such a professional field. F, a male employer, and consultant shared with me in an after-interview chat about why he thinks the profession is predominately female.

Yes, there is an exciting feature in our industry. This industry is what people called the "female industry," so you will find that about 70% to 80% of consultants and agents are females. What do girls dislike? They do not like to stay tuned to the current affairs, they do not like to read the Business Weekly magazine, and they do not like to observe trends and changes in the industry. However, those are crucial qualities in consulting work in our professions. Very interesting. You know. However, why do females still are suitable for this industry? Because this industry needs to be more careful, and that girls can do better, they can help people trust them better.

In this passage, the most noteworthy thing is that agents' personal quality and professionalism was associated with particular assigned gender role. The assumption behind F's comparison between different gender was that both genders are qualified as professionals but based on different qualifications and criteria. A preliminary study shows that a female holds roughly two-thirds of the top position in Taiwan's case, listed as either leading "consultant" or general manager of the agency (Ministry of Education 2015). Combining these empirical findings, although there is no further systematic evidence to show how gender affects agents' work, it is
safe to speculate: either women are exceptionally good at the job, or there were precise mechanisms that drive women into this professional niche, or possibly both.

Gender also affected the human dimension of agents' work in bringing their personal touch to the job.

Agent T: For my work, students' interaction is sometimes like their friends, or like their brother. It gives them some psychological aspects and enlightens them, not necessarily the actual application process.

Kenneth: For example, what kind of things?

Agent T: Personal life concerns or sometimes family-related issues. They may need people to give them more personal advice on some of their issues during admission, which is not necessarily about the application process itself. But the lack of motivation, family concerns, and others. Yes. Sometimes students would request to speak to a female agent at the beginning of the conversation. Sometimes girls' students think it is easier to talk to female agents, or it is easier to talk to her about life considerations. Boys tend to choose male agents, which is more related to the disciplinary concerns. Because male students mostly seek most STEM fields, male agents may be more desirable sometimes.

Gender difference is less so often mentioned as a defining feature of agents' professional stature. However, the fact that male and female agents might live through different life trajectory matters. In my field, agents are no neutral individuals who "utilize" their experience and past qualifications to help other students negotiate spatial, economic, and political differences in positions and identities. In reality, such lived experience is critically intersectional with different identity category and experience, which some gives them an advantage while others hinder them. Only by looking at those more systematically can we better understand the occupational position along gender and class line.

Another more obvious case is ethnicity and how co-ethnic identity is used to bring about agents' professionalism. One conventional view by migration scholars was that these middleman and
brokerage roles are served by individuals motivated by their ethnic identity and ethnic-centric reciprocal network. This conventional wisdom is true to some extent when applied to analyze transnational shadow education in Taiwan because most agents highlight their identity as Taiwanese. However, rather than saying that the agent and the student have a shared co-ethnic identity, my fieldwork suggests it is describing that students and agents developed a shared "oppositional identity" to face the host country's unkindness towards them.

For instance, many agents highlighted institutional or more converted types of racism to reason why their business would have sprung up and helped the student prepare for it before leaving the country (Bonacich 1972; Bonacich and Modell 1980).

Students are quite afraid that they will face discrimination or experienced racism in the local area. Everyone in Taiwan is Taiwanese, so I do not feel much. However, once you arrive in the United States or Europe, you are not a local. If you do not have the qualities that others want or change your way of speaking accordingly, others may not welcome you in.

On top of more covert types of discrimination and racism, agents also highlight how students face a shared disadvantage in the admission process—as nonnative English speakers in an English-only admissions process. Part of this common co-ethnic identity of students and agents formed was based on oppositional boundary-making attempts to highlight this disadvantage, which members of the community all had to overcome if they were to succeed in their quest to attend a U.S. university. In other words, the opposition to this English-dominated field and hegemony gave agents the ability to legitimately claim that they are working on the student's part.

For example, one agent recognized that the underlying logic behind application documents in numerous destination universities in the United States is based on fundamentally westernized ideological perceptions of how a student should be evaluated based on the natural fluency of their
individuality.

Sometimes, I need to teach the students to be more expressive of what they want and assert their achievements. (Kenneth: Why?) I think Taiwanese students are more reserved in showing off their individuality and uniqueness. Because we do not live in a society that praises personal distinctiveness like the U.S., You have to do that when you are writing your statement of purpose in applying to a school in the U.S.; You need to take on a Western mind.

By being born in Taiwan, rather than the U.S., they were not native speakers of the expected language and with the cultural fluency that can help them "play the game" of the admission system. My participants highlight how such a feeling of inferiority and "otherness" has fueled their business. For many agents and many Taiwanese students, ETS tests and evaluations, such as TOELF or GRE, often emphasize students' disadvantage of lacking English fluency, rather than measuring their true potential and merits. More importantly, these so-called "non-profit" institutions themselves represent a kind of structural oppression where students have no way of escaping from repeatedly taking these costly tests.

K: Do you mean your work is to resist the ETS?

Agent F: Yes, yes, to prove that we are stronger than them. What do you learn from reading the official guide provided by the ETS official publications? Nothing! The Official Guide is a total mess, very superficial. They published it because they have collected so much money they need to spend it to look like they have done something. Why do we have to pay 150-200 USD to take a supposedly test from a "non-profit" organization? I think it is unfair. We need to fight back.

Not all agents or instructors will be so fierce that they are the entire application system's oppositional force. However, most agents will use a similar metaphor to describe themselves: students are about to go to the battlefield, and they are pioneers who help students remove obstacles.

For a Taiwanese student, such expectation from the admission system for natural fluency might be more than a passive disadvantage they inherited, but a strong motivator to turn to professional
helps from someone else from the same ethnic group. Although agents do not necessarily need to use ethnic groups to define their work, the work itself does have a strong ethnic-centric identity dimension.

Further, such types of nuanced personal feels and shared ethnic identity make their services and expertise invaluable. In discussing what makes their market of help for students particularly valuable, some agents, quite surprisingly, did not highlight their merit and professional skills. However, instead, they pinpoint the Western (the U.S. in particular) admission system upholding the meritocratic ideal in recruiting students as a source for their market to appear. By putting themselves in that way, agents associate their role with other types of co-ethnic intermediaries (Kern and Müller-Böker 2015b; Levy et al. 2019; Xiang 2012). The same reason why, for instance, undocumented migrants might have turned to brokers in ethnic enclaves for support instead of seeking more institutionally bounded resources. Agents were there to respond to calls for tasks and works best served by people living in and succeed before as "outsiders" of the West's mainstream transnational admission.

The Utilities of Employing Transnational Shadow Education

Turning uncertain into technical expertise

Cross-border movement often involves reorganizing personal resources, skills, knowledge, and background in a different language and cultural contexts (Stovel and Shaw 2012). Usually, finding appropriate university programs that fit students is done through the admission selection system with shared cultural and academic identification of students' merit. However, in the case of searching for overseas education admission, "fitness" becomes a set of calculative evaluations of ones' strengths and weaknesses as a provision of the future. In turn, these evaluations transform
the highly institutionalized environment into a lucrative market of the education agent assistive service business can intervene. In the context of overseas students in Taiwan, it means that Taiwan's academic performances and social activities may not be easily transferable to merits that the foreign admission committee might appreciate.

For many Taiwanese students, these decisions happened with "experts" with knowledge and understanding of the overseas education institutions—the education agents from their homeland. In addition to this function of directly linking economic markets opportunities, study abroad agents also play an important symbolic and intermediary cultural work (Stovel and Shaw 2012). Intermediaries not only need to explain the objective conditions, rankings, or facilities of individual schools. They must also turn these conditions into a coherent framework in their interaction with customers (Collins 2008).

In Taiwan, educational agents' work was constructed by cultivating specific educational merit and fitness narratives about students' homeland performances as a form of upward mobility. Individualizing each student's experience with their educational pursuit was key in branding their services as lavish services for the agent. However, to individualize each student's experience, they first need to find ways to convince them to narrate educational opportunities the same way agents see education. Many Taiwanese agents highlighted that their crucial positions and service sales were generated by developing ways to communicate the choices and relevant uncertainty associated with students' choices. Specifically, many of these communication takes place in an agent's discussion with students about university rankings.

Controlling human dimensions

Agents in transnational shadow education in Taiwan also served a more personal role in
mediating students' decision-making of overseas studies. In practice, they work with the "valuation" of the education market as an abstract idea. What makes education agents' work particularly hard was that the product (service) they sell are abstract promise and outcomes—educational opportunities and experience. They cannot guarantee the former because of all the contingency within transnational higher education admission, but they also cannot necessarily guarantee the latter because it has not happened yet. Unlike selling a chair or television, selling transnational education can only happen on paper and imagination. Agents' work deals with the "value" of education as a promise of status, a dream, and pathways to better opportunities. As a result, skillful agents learn to deal with these uncertainties as opportunities. They turn these instances of uncertainties into specific activities, experiences, and rhetoric that strengthen their business and relationship with students.

Education consultants occupy a pivotal role mediating between international students' families, particularly parents with relatively less cultural and social capital linked to benefit their children's overseas education opportunities. Education consultants build personal trust with students through multiple consulting sessions by using their personality and characteristics to persuade them to trust them. As consultants build rapport with their student clients, they become essential mediators of children and parents. Education consultants are responsible for helping students and parents find common ground when disagreeing on school choices. In some cases, parents entrust consultants to convince their children about their expectations on specific educational goals. In other instances, Thomas recounts: "they [students] want me to be a liaison to communicate study interest and school choices that they were too shy or too scared to tell their parents directly."

Chapter Conclusion
Professions have long served as a sweeping force of rationalization in society, particularly education (Mayer 1977; Ritzer 1975; Weber 1968; Freidson 2001; Abbott 1988; Collins 1971, 2019). Nevertheless, even more so now, they have come to be stabilizing fixtures of contemporary higher learning environment, especially in light of destabilizing forces of economic, technological, and cultural factors that have challenged education's function (Besbris and Petre 2019; Collins 2012). Much of the professional literature has developed around the assumption that professionals have hard-won expertise, deeply held values, identities, and robust material and status interests related to performing their profession's core tasks.

Some scholars have found some critical overlaps between education agents with other types of migration intermediary and brokerage activities (Collins 2012; Stovel and Shaw 2012). For instance, scholars have long posited third-party intermediators being used by migrants as tools of assimilating to new destination setting. However, little research has addressed brokers in education, and even fewer have discussed their particular nature of their labor and the technical and human dimension of their workforce. This chapter was to fill in such a gap, focusing on how transnational shadow education most associate with the transnational higher education admission phenomenon.

This chapter contributes to existing studies of international student recruitment and education management literature by demonstrating how the transnational shadow education served as brokers of global education to reproduce or resist the complex governance structure in the global education market. Conventional understanding tends to see intermediary commercial agents as an exogenous part of the admission system, both institutionally and morally. As a result, existing research on higher education's commercialization has mainly focused on state-level and organization-level actors and policies (Altbach 2006; Altbach and Knight 2010; de Wit and Merkx 2012; de Wit and Urias 2012). However, my evidence in this chapter describes a market-oriented, "shadow"
education institution that has powerfully impacted the global higher education admission process's structure and operation.

My results suggest that transnational shadow education is essential because they, as a transnational organization, can transform the evaluation criteria of students' meritocracy between their homeland and the destination schools into equivalent market bargaining. Taiwanese students must spend efforts courting the U.S. colleges in some ways so that their "merits" can be equally evaluable by the examiner in the U.S. search committees. The transnational shadow education market's existence can flexibly adjust, integrate, and reshape these meritocracies to make it more transferrable across transnational borders. In this process, transnational shadow education has successfully helped students achieve the purpose of upward mobility. However, this process also furthers higher education inequality, making agents' work both controversial and popular.
Chapter 6: Connecting Transnational or Local Resources: Divergence Between Commission-based and Fee-based Agents

In the previous chapters, I showed how agents are self-sufficient, providing technical, human, and cultural support for students in the market. What I have not mentioned was how different agents are related to each other. Overlooking such a crucial dimension of the transnational shadow education would prevent us from understanding how the institutional context and other forces are conditioning these professional actors. Alternatively, we need to understand transnational shadow education's operation within a more extensive institutional system, where multiple organizations are engaging in "boundary-spanning" activities to better connect to sources of support (Scott 2008, 2010; Scott and Biag 1988).

Agents often find themselves intersecting with different players and stakeholders when helping students with their applications. Therefore, agents are defined not just by who they are and what they do but by the collaborative relations with other groups. Therefore, a critical way to understand the Taiwanese transnational shadow education market was to outline how they are "relating" to other groups and organizations in the field (Anteby et al. 2016; Byun 2014; de Wit and Urias 2012). I adapt the term "relating" here cautiously to focus on how the agents as an occupational group can form other generative dependent and independent relationships with other occupational and non-occupational groups. This chapter borrowed organizational scholars' insights to show how the transnational shadow education market was a resource-dependence field (DiMaggio 1991; Pfeffer and Salancik 1978). Specifically, I adapt an organizational lens of the "resource dependence theory" to explore international student recruitment phenomenon (Pfeffer 1981, 2012; Pfeffer and Salancik 1978). I point out that the formation of so-called transnational shadow education markets is related to their resources. In the organizational setting's
dependence on resource-seeking, transnational shadow education organizations reproduce the order presented by existing organizations and present new opportunities and resources to help individuals and organizations activate power and autonomy.

I outlined such a relationship by showing two different ways how Taiwan's transnational shadow education market can advance students' transnational migration. In so doing, I delineate how agents work a complex web of stakeholders and organizations to achieved shared or complementary goals (Hudzik 2015; The Observatory on Borderless Higher Education 2014; de Wit and Urias 2012). For example, Taiwanese agents would be situated in higher education recruitment, where school administrators put faith in paying them to connect local cultural customs and social demands (Coffey and Perry 2014; Hulme et al. 2013). On the student side, Taiwanese agent's businesses with extensive local resources and pathways can provide service for their local Taiwanese students and families (Collins 2008; Levy et al. 2019). In turn, I argue in this chapter that Taiwan's transnational shadow education market operates in a resource-dependent field. They do works that convert student's applications into a set of strategic, resource-dependent activities. Although both scholarly reports and the media have paid considerable attention to international students' growth in the United States, they have mostly focused on either the impact on colleges and universities as organizations and students themselves. Instead, they have largely ignored how existing bodies of organizations and institutions have made connections to inter-organizational resources and networks. I offered my observation by pointing out how a private, transnational shadow education forms a formal and informal linkage with different organizations in such resource-dependence field.

Transnational gatekeepers: How the Commission-based Agents help Brokerage

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Transnational Network and Resources?

Stovel and Shaw (2012) define brokers' role by focusing on the structure of ties they form with each side of the brokerage interactions. Transnational gatekeepers are those participating actors in transnational shadow education who builds their business around formal and informal relational ties with foreign universities and markets. In this context, the ties refer to the extent to which the agents are: "relationally, socially and informally closer to one party than the other" (Stoevel and Shaw 2012: 142), or what the authors call bias. However, one of the more critical issues for our research is: Why and how do the agents mobilize those ties with foreign schools?

As student demand for cross-border education grows, so does the desire to welcome these globally mobile students. Take the U.S., for example; many schools are initiating international student outreach activity for the first time in their history while others enhance existing efforts. Universities in the U.S. may mobilize their internal organizational members to create programs and pathways that provide such support to host and recruit international students. The emergence of the role "senior international officer(SIO) was an embodiment that college and universities had dedicated key institutional resources and personnel to internationalization and international recruitment (Dessoff 2010; Leventhal n.d.). On other campuses, such support and international students' recruitment is done by employing external helpers and marketing agents. The so-called "commission-based" agents and their corresponding admission pipeline were a perfect representation of these later groups(Coffey and Perry 2014; Raimo et al. 2014).

A private market of agents and consultants could be employed when the universities cannot support international students internally. In the U.S. context, this usually happens to that mid-or-smaller, regional colleges, where their capacity to grow we are stagnated continuously by a tighter budget. However, they have faced continuously intense pressure to recruit international students.
As a result of limited resources, many of these colleges and institutions turned to hire a third-party recruiter to promote their programs and schools. Like other commodities, this promoting process relies on complex market mechanisms, bargaining, and sales services to complete. Within this context, the transnational shadow education firms in Taiwan can function for the schools in the U.S. to help them recruit local students. In Taiwan, so-called "commission-based" agents have emerged as intermediaries in the process of global education mobility to generate revenue by providing service to:

"marketing the institution's country to prospective students, providing information about course options and entrance requirements, and helping students navigate complicated visa and application processes" (Coffery and Perry 2014:3).

In my interviews, some Taiwanese agents call these types of agent's organizations B2B (business to business) organizations, or so-called "pipelines." A Taiwanese agent spoke about what it means to work in such a workforce.

"In B2B work, you work with schools and other agents. You make your company appealing for the schools or search committees so that they want to hire you to help them recruit. You need to be all knowledgeable about what they have to offer. You also must be very predictable because schools do not want trouble, abnormality, or contingency. I felt that is the main thing."

The commission-based model attracts universities and colleges that are not in the top-tier in significant college ranking.\(^{13}\) The way such a "pipeline" works was that number of universities and

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\(^{13}\) University at Albany-SUNY, a state-run, mid-tier, local schools which ranked 298 in the U.S. News “Best Global Universities”, was best known among my participants as common user of agents to help them recruit international students. It encapsulates some of the crucial characteristics of schools who would use these agents: without a long history of international recruitment, relatively lacking of time, money and staff sufficient to compete with other universities’ recruitment programs, and s
colleges in the U.S. can sign a contract with local Taiwanese agents to promote their schools and programs. In exchange, agents often received a percentage of students' tuition or commission after sending a given proportion of students successfully enrolled in the partner schools. In the process, these so-called commission-based agents will help the student complete a series of tasks such as school selection, paperwork, and filing applications by sending students through particular admission channels or conditional admission (Coffey and Perry 2014). Because commission-based admission tends to happen to mid-and-lower tier schools with less competitive admission standards and more substantial incentives to admit fee-paying students, such a model enables fee-paying students with lower academic performance to enter prestigious colleges and universities. By lowering the standards, many schools also made the application process more modular so that the agency they employ can replicate the process and mass-produce application results. As reflected in Taiwan agents, my participants often pointed out how commission-based agents can cater to a more significant number of applicants, and at the same time, complete a highly effective pipeline channeling good numbers of willing, fee-paying students to the universities.

From this perspective, these commission-based agents are called transitional gatekeepers because they can draw their closeness to schools to help students mobilize underutilize resources that existed transnationally. If agents do not activate these resources, students may never be able to access these opportunities, or they will need to spend a lot of resources and energy to organize this information and opportunities. In other words, through the gatekeeping of agents, various information and opportunities can be quickly connected. I gave two examples of how commission-based agents mobilize their ties with the schools and international partners.

*Gatekeepers of alternative admission channels and pathways*
A good portion of transnational shadow education institutions in Taiwan operates based on
their ability to connect resources and admission channels with schools in students' destination
countries, such as the U.S. or U.K. In Taiwan, these institutions' most prominent features are their
unique overseas campus resources, partnerships, and exclusive admission channels. After years of
market-oriented development, agents in the transnational shadow education in Taiwan have
established business partnerships with colleges and universities in the destinations. They have also
turned admission into a "one-stop" service process for students working with them. The advantages
of applying with the aid of these agents are a high success rate and the potential of saving time and
money. By encouraging students to apply to a specific partner school, the agent can obtain a higher
success rate and credibility, and the school can also receive a stable source of enrollment.

The business model of the commission-based agent is an imported concept on Taiwanese soil.
In major receiving countries, using commission-based international agencies have existed for at
least more than three decades. As early as 1986, D.G. Blight, the CEO of the International
Development Program (IDP), noted the need for "specialized services to bring together the
supplier of educational services with the consumer." (Leventhal and Rota 2013):1). In the early
years, the commission-based model merely defines multinational corporations from the
destination countries, such as IDP, which warrants by the core destination states to provide
support and streamline admissions channels. As late as the early 2000s, many commission-based
agents started to mushroom in the student sending societies, including Taiwan. Today, some of
the most successful and largest firms in Taiwan's industry ran by commission-based models.

The way commission-model admission works is that the agency receives a percentage of the
student's tuition after being admitted in exchange for agents' service during admission. After a
benchmark is reached, such as successful completion of the first semester of study or an agreed
number of recruited students was reached, agents received commissions from the schools directly (Coffey and Perry 2014). In exchange for such commission, commission-based agents provide social, cultural, and linguistic support for international students' applications before they arrived at prospective schools. The level of commissions is based on contracts signed independently or negotiated between multiple schools and agencies. The commission fee fluctuates from the local or regional industry standard. However, it may also vary based on the type of agencies schools select to send students. Over the years, maintaining such a commission-based model of agent become a crucial means to secure the enrollment rates of international student, both in terms of ensuring quantity.

Matching students to the so-called "conditional offer" and "bridge program" is an essential organizational task for commission-based agents. For example, many agents have mentioned that many schools have developed more versatile ways of "alternative admission," allowing international students to enroll in their programs due to the neoliberal shift and heavy demands for courting international students. As opposed to "direction admission," which schools only let students enter when they fit the school's official selection criteria, agents will also find alternative pathways to allow some students to enroll in programs that offer so-called tiáojiàn shì rùxué("conditional admission") or "bridge programs"(Deardorff et al. 2012; Hudzik 2015). The following is an excerpt from the description of conditional admission in a magazine published by the agent I interviewed.

You can still enter a prestigious school without satisfying grades!

Generally speaking, if you want to apply for overseas universities or research institutes, you do not have an average GPA of 75% or above, TOEFL80 or IELTS6.5 or above, it is difficult to enter a world-renowned university.
In the modern age where multiple admissions are emphasized, academic performance and language ability are no longer the only criteria that determine your learning potential, so there is "conditional admission". “Conditional admission” means that the student's application documents or conditions do not fully meet the admission requirements, but the school believes that the student has the potential to complete their studies, so "conditionally accept admission applications." Students are usually required to attend a language school first, and then they can enter the formal curriculum after improving their English skills. Many students think that conditional admission means admission to an unknown university or a more relaxed admission standard, but in fact, apart from not looking at English and academic performance, the admission requirements for other application documents are not so relaxed.

Today, many potential applicant's students can pay a certain fee to enroll in higher education institutions in the U.S. through alternative channels even if they do not initially qualify. Many schools emerging transitional programs called "conditional admission" or language school accommodating services was a case and pointed for such channels. With the conditional offer and the accompanying supplementary bridge programs, students who are traditionally unqualified for studying abroad can attend those schools they desired. Therefore, alternative enrollment options such as the conditional offer, language schools, and sponsored pathway colleges served as a springboard for many aspiring Taiwanese students to gain admissions. This is limited to mid-tier or lower schools attracting international students and the super-league schools attracting elite students.

For example, in contrast with traditional direct admission channels, one the one hand, the "bridge program" (or known as "pathways") is one form of conditional admission to higher education institutions(Coffey and Perry 2014; Hudzik 2015). If you do not meet the admission
criteria but have reached a certain level, each school will provide different "bridge language courses" according to students with different levels of conditions. Most of these programs and courses are offered and ran by the university themselves. For example, if you intend to admit SUNY Buffalo and meet the TOEFL iBT 70, IELTS 6.0, and GPA 2.75 requirements, they will provide you with conditional admission options to two semesters of 8 months of language bridging courses. If the students achieve the iBT 45, IELTS 4.5, and GPA 2.75 requirements, they must take one semester of English for academic purposes plus three semesters of language courses for a total of 16 months. In many institutions, courses taken in the "bridge programs" could be directly transferred to one's college or graduate school credits. Many students can directly enter various degree programs within the institutions after completing the programs, although specific requirements might vary.

On the other hand, "language schools" are private-owned company approved language course offering service, providers. International students generally take courses in the language schools to pass university's required scores on standardized language exams, such as TOEFL, GRE, IELS, etc. Today, an increasing number of colleges have formed a partnership with these private providers. ELS Educational Services Inc. or Kaplan.Inc, are some of the largest firms best known among the agents and recruitment officers and has signed an agreement with hundreds of colleges and universities in the U.S. For college admission, students must typically complete the ELS course work, retake and pass an English-proficiency exam, and, at some institutions, sit for a university-specific placement test. Some colleges also develop their criteria, which requires their Intensive-English students to do community-based service-learning projects to give them speaking experience outside the classroom.

Having skills and knowledge helping groups of students to apply for conditional offer and
language schools are a significant part of managing the pipeline of admission. When interviewed with a consulting firm manager, one of the agents highlighted his consideration in training and evaluating proper candidates who can manage the job well.

I hope that the consultants who work with me are very versatile so that no one can take his place after a consultant has left. So, our consultant must have multiple skills and able to manage the three central admissions types: they are "direct admission," "bridge programs," and "language schools."

By linking local Taiwanese students with information and access to those alternative channels, many agents' economic success rests solely on their ability to form close collaborator relationships with the destination schools. Their economic success rests solely on their ability to connect resources in the foreign higher education field. Business in the commission-based model where agents operate was partly guaranteed by making sustainable and widespread organizational partnerships between agents and the schools. In other words, as brokers, agents bridge and gatekeeping between market and educational institutions.

*How gatekeepers' agents rely on other brokers to secure their market?*

Many commission-based agents develop various versatile ways of dealing with securing market predictability and staying connected with the schools and officers. One way for Taiwanese agents to achieve that is to develop their usage of "brokers of brokers," the so-called "school representatives." Another sub-group of service brokers emerged to support and maintain the unique commission-structure and middleman role of these multinational agencies. In Taiwan's market, a group of small selective "school representatives" matches sales and educational needs. The workers in this workforce call themselves "school representatives" because they are marketing
representatives of foreign-institutionally based private-owned colleges. However, they are not administrations from the schools. Instead, they are delegates from private corporate education companies, such as Kaplan, INTO, StudyGroup, or EduCo, send on behalf of schools to coordinate with agents in student's homeland abroad. They help match local agents' need to send Taiwanese students with the foreign colleges' criteria and core policy missions. A participant of mine who formerly worked as a school representative from company K explained:

   Kenneth: So, what is your main objective as a school representative in XX company?

   S: Yes, our primary work is employee training, primarily with the client agencies who signed a contract with us. We promote schools to those agents that also signed a contract with K in the U.S., the U.K., and others. That is my job.

   Through the help of school representatives, agents also gained better insider knowledge of the schools. Although many agents can choose to be more informative of a certain school, they mainly focused on promoting. However, for many commission-based agents, there may be thousands of potential candidates that students can apply. Gradually, it becomes impossible for the agents to keep track of each of the schools individually. Therefore, through school representatives, agents can more effectively grasp a large amount of school information without investing too much human and organizational resources to hoard such information. One school representative replied in an interview:

   Yes, sometimes our work is about creating a useful summary table or PowerPoint. Our main task is to help simplify the application criteria and our agency school curriculum and make it easier for the consultants to sell. So, they will not be troubled by the trivialities when students ask them questions. So, I do a lot of this summary work for information about our partner schools.

   As this school representative also highlighted, one of the more crucial functions of their work
is to enable local agents to facilitate under-utilized organizational resources and pathways in the destination schools. For instance, school representatives can refer specific programs with more lenient admission standards and more standardized application process to agents. Without the agents and the school representatives, students would not have chosen the specific programs and schools instead of the ocean of choices in hundreds and thousands of U.S. universities and colleges. Such programs, pathways, or schools are under-utilized resources because many students would not have been known if not referred by the agents.

Through school representatives' help, agents maintain strong (and broad) affiliations with different schools on their list to present to students. A school representative's main objective was to convince agents of the benefit of the schools they have a partnership with and signed a commission contract with them. However, a by-product of this objective was that school representatives had invested incentive to improve the communication, decision-making, and information acquiring channels for the agents. Because they work with agents primarily, their main concerns are helping agents build affiliations and knowledge about these affiliations. Uniquely, the school representative becomes an indispensable part of the education agent industry in Taiwan. No education agents are immune from its touch of influence. "I know, literally all the education agents' company in Taiwan," explained the same school-rep from XX, "and all of them knows me as well, I am their problem-fixers," saying the school representative proudly.

Extra-organizational resources

In addition to linking students to school-bound resources, the commission-based agent also helps brokerage other resources outside the school. Past studies most often overlooked that as professional groups, agents can connect professional associations' resources to further their
organizational goals (Coffey and Perry 2014; The Observatory and Borderless Reports 2014; Kim 2018). It is important to note that these commission-based agents are transnational actors who connect resources outside their domestic realm. For instance, they can join foreign professional organizations to access resources that are not available at home.

Kenneth: So why would you consider joining these organizations?

L: Let me give you an example. Our colleagues will take some trips abroad to the United States every year to attend meetings hosted by NAFSA or NACAC. We met other agents there and exchange what we know about the market and recruitment practices. Further, these organizations sponsor trips that send our agents to visit schools or participate in professional training. These are things that you cannot get by sitting in an office in Taiwan. By sending people to participate every year, we can get in touch with the most grounded, most cutting-edge, and most updated information about recruitment and study abroad. No one can be updated on the most recent conditions than us.

In my interview, agents see these formal and informal connections with the professional associations as crucial means to gain access to the latest information of the U.S. market. For example, agents often brought about different professional training courses and tutorials that these associations host that they see as crucial resources of information. These associations' training and courses can help agents better understand the latest application information and situations. Also, it helps agents better understand their industry and professional groups around the world.

I have encountered numerous agents who know extensively of the transnational shadow education market at home and the market from neighboring countries throughout my six-months of fieldwork. For example, I have brought up the transnational shadow education industry topic in other countries in Asia and Central and South America to several veteran agents. Much to my surprise, despite not having any formal connections or collaborations, these agents knew the relating industry abroad quite well. As I grew to discover, the reason why these agents were so
well-versed was that they all attended the same training course provided by the International Consultants of Education and Fair (ICEF). Through the sharing of agents, I found the critical research database cited when sharing all the industry information, the *i-agent* database (The Observatory and Borderless Report 2010).

Professional associations have long been seen as a marker of professionalization (Abbott; Millerson 1964; Berman 2006). Though the establishment of professional associations does not necessarily mean such professions have achieved professional stature. However, for professions in Taiwan's transnational shadow education, having an individual, organizational representation, and membership is often an essential means of legitimation for their work and professionalism. This legitimacy, however, was imported externally from abroad. What is more, the connections formed with these professional associations can often bring additional resources, connections, and opportunities. There are two types of professional associations in international education that concern our case of Taiwanese transnational shadow education.

One of them is the professional association's organization based on student destination countries. For example, in the United States, the National Association for College Admission Counseling (NACAC) and National Association for Foreign Students Affairs (NAFSA) are two of the influential local professional and educational associations that have the most significant influence on admission and recruitment practices (Leventhal and Rota, 2013). Until mid-2000, NACAC was one of the strongest opposes of the private market of admission and commission-based recruiting (Leventhal and Rota 2013; NACAC 2014). Commission-based domestic student recruitment is illegal under U.S. law, prompting critics to similarly question the appropriateness of agent use by U.S. institutions abroad (Altbach 2006; Altbach and Knight 2010; Coffey and Perry 2014; Huang et al. 2016; Raimo et al. 2014). However, since the past decade, such US-based
organizations have gradually turned to a more lenient attitude towards the agent market, although some federal level organizations still barred their members from working with local agents who received payments. In addition to more and more schools beginning to use the commission-based agent and such pipeline recruitment approach, another primary reason is that more and more voices within these organizations believe that by including these "foreign" (in our case, Taiwan and the like) agents to the associations will help improve the standards and ethical standards of these institutions. For agents in Taiwan, joining these organizations not only mean that they subject themselves to the regulatory environment of these associations. However, more importantly, agents who become members can utilize these professional organizations' information, networks, and resources.

Another critical group of professional associations and resources come from a host of organizations whose primary role was to conduct appraisal, regulations, and accreditation. My interviewees, especially those applying for agents based in the United States, most often mentioned American International Recruitment Council (AIRC)’s extensive review system and certification.

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14 For example, David Hawkins, NACAC Director of Public Policy, wrote “[NACAC’s] SPGP does not specify whether its ban on commission payments applies to recruiters of foreign students. However, the ban on commission payments is binding for NACAC member institutions.

In 2013, under pressure from leading institutional voices, NACAC voted to revise its stand to permit but not encourage members to work with agents internationally. Members that choose to work with agents are required to disclose terms to students and parents. Others like The State Department in the United States, which runs EducationUSA, a global network of advisors based in American embassies and the like, and also avoid advisers from working with "local" agents who receive payments from institutions for student enrollments.

15 In early 2008, Leventhal was approached by a NAFSA volunteer who asked him to write an article for NAFSA’s Recruitment, Admissions, and Preparation (RAP) Knowledge Community detailing how to responsibly use agents and protect student’s interests. The resulting article, “The Legality and Standards of Commission-based Recruiting” appeared on the NAFSA website in spring 2008. It remains on the website and has become a seminal document tied to the development of AIRC.
Kenneth: What motivates you to send your company to be certificated by the AIRC? Is it right for your business, or else?

L: commercial organizations cannot conduct AIRC’s review mechanism, so they must find the school, an international student office director, or senior officers in the school. We must read all of our pre-review materials during the review process, and then we must pay for their air tickets, board, and lodging. The reviewer will go to our machine shop to review: how we counsel, consultant education, experience, and success rate. About the number of pages, I remember it is 30 pages full, and then I do it every five years with a non-refundable membership fee of $2,000.

Kenneth: So expensive!

L: Yes, but actually, the total sum of money we spent on the process cost us around 1 million NTD dollars ($30,000). That includes attending their mandatory education and training courses and tutorial sessions for applying for such a certificate. Overall, it is difficult. We were delighted after we passed, but we were also very disappointed because most students do not care about an AIRC certificate. However, it is still helpful for our business because it helps promote our services and professionalism. Not all students studying abroad have to go to the top-ranked, private Ivy League schools. Those intermediate and commission-based programs are also worth promoting. Therefore, we are pursuing something more long-term.

As this excerpt reveals, agents' role is not limited to providing information to students or the recruitment of students. Instead, agents play a pivotal role in industrial construction and promotion. In contrast, it seems that the essential value of connecting with these international organizations' accrediting is to obtain symbolic recognition and legitimation. Institutional accrediting has a vital role in organizations' legitimation process, mostly higher education organizations (Deephouse and Suchman 2008; Stovel, Golub, and Milgrom 2011). In international education, because of regional and cultural differences, different education systems rely on a standard accrediting ranking system or independent institutions to confirm standards and missions' consistency (Hou 2011; Huang et al. 2016; Raimo et al. 2014). In turn, the pursuit of certification is not necessarily the most economically beneficial activity for the agents. However, these connections provide agents with essential kinds of "institutional form cultural capital" (Bourdieu 1986; Wong 2016).
Overall, transnational admission commission-based agents in Taiwan are essential because they have access to transnational resources—namely the schools. Gould and Fernandez (1989) highlight variation in brokerage ties' structure on the environmental structure and resource-dependent relationships (Gould 1985; Howard and Gaztambide-Fernandez 2010). Commission-based agents' significance in Taiwan as brokers stem from how they can effectively build informal, extensive, and sustainable connections between individuals and schools segregated transnationally. Through various business arrangements and design, agents set up pathways and branches that enable the schools' recruitment efforts. For instance, many of the U.S. schools do not sign commission contract with Taiwanese agents directly. Instead, a host of private education groups signed a contract with an individual agency in Taiwan, and these education groups negotiate specific conditions of admission with partner universities and colleges. Therefore, for agents in Taiwan, especially those engaged in a commission-based approach, maintaining their cooperation with these intermediate education groups is another important task.

The good and bad of acting as gatekeepers

Commission-based form of admission is often praised in the educational management scholarships and studies as an effective way of bringing together the educational service supplier. Because of this reason, many major international student enrollment countries, such as the United Kingdom, Australia, New Zealand, etc., attach great importance to the commission agent-assisted admissions channel (Collins 2014; The Observatory and Borderless Reports 2014; Coffery and Perry 2014). Many of these destination countries also have substantial national-based institutions to certify and manage these agent's recruitment. As Leventhal and Rosa (2013:2) called it a "disruptive innovation," commission-based agents' appearance substantially influences the global
international student market worldwide. To some extent, such appraisal reinforces the widespread of the commission-based form of agents in Taiwan's transnational shadow education market. As they continue to brand themselves and their service as an institutionally vetted form of admission and recruitment, its operation's leading utility was that it is highly predictable both for the students and for the schools.

Business in the commission-based model was also praised for making the admission process as predictable as possible for the schools. On the one hand, agents can work with schools to recalibrate the existing institutional arrangements of education policy and criteria such as creating "easy majors" or "bridge programs" to ensure enough international students could get in. As commission-based agents enter the picture, a dynamic change was they offer the (often) necessary human powers and organizational capacity to broaden the "business" for the schools. The commission-based business models are highly attractive to the schools with high demands for recruiting international students but limited capacity. On the other hand, agents can also utilize their familiarity and ties with the schools to help students make predictable outcomes for their application. For instance, they can do so by standardizing and routinizing how they help students write the application materials. As some agents call it, they can have a ready-made "stencil" that they feel can best ensure students' outcome, despite their background.

However, notwithstanding it utilizes, such a business model has a significant negative consequence for the agents: it hinders their flexibility as business organizations. A quick tour to any of the agencies using the commission model would have quickly realized how similar they look alike. Many classrooms or offices are covered with flags of various famous foreign schools on the walls. Often it is located in a commercial building at the heart of Taipei, surrounded by a robust commercial atmosphere. At the beginning of my field, these designs were not particularly
outstanding, and I even took them for granted.

It seemed apparent that the agents will want to use these symbols, and these decorations are likely to make students feel that they are trusted experts. However, as my fieldwork progresses, it becomes clear that besides drawing local Taiwanese student's attention to their international linkage, these seemingly neutral designs also showcase how the United States has extended its hegemony through these sponsored business partnerships. As previous researchers have mostly examined the benefit these business collaborations bring to the schools in the United States, they have largely failed to illuminate how such relationships exploit agents. One agent spoke about a hypothetical situation by which admission officers commonly use competitions between agents for their institutional gain.

Agent L: Let us say I am at the University of Michigan. The University of Michigan needs to recruit Taiwanese students. I started off signing my contract with many agents because I am unsure about the Taiwanese student market turnout. By the second year, if the agents were successful, the admission rises. Suddenly I do not need as many agents anymore. I can abandon any of you, or I do not need to give you as much commission to finance the operation. Then, for any of the firms who used to have secured commissions with selective schools, they now have to collect fees to compensate for the loss. Some more students spot that you collect the fee and choose to be served by the selective few commission-agents. This is what makes the market smaller and more monopoly.

Kenneth: Do you think that is unreasonable because?

Agent L: It is unreasonable because we may provide very well service to a student but still get nothing. Zero. Moreover, because the student did not enroll in the schools eventually, they will not pay us for anything.

Further, over-reliance on foreign school partnerships significantly hinders agent's autonomy as professions. For instance, they have little or no ability to negotiate price or the level of revenue they get from schools or any other organizations in the destination state altogether. Other than the
ideological detriments, many agents highlighted that such a relationship pushes agents to embrace a clerk-like mentality for their service. That is, they see themselves as merely a salesperson for the school's programs and pathways. A problem relating to this salesperson mentality was that it hurts school's reputations and pushed away clients from trusting agents in the long run. Another problem was that the condition might force some agents to adopt marketing campaigns that make unscrupulous promises and guarantees.

Moreover, another problem is that the service has become more like fast-food and likely to take short-cuts. You can rush people, but you cannot rush a company. Students would want a guarantee: Can you make a promise? If you cannot, I will find another who can. So, some agents make very vague promises or lower the bars. They treated you well, invited you to coffee, pampered your C.V.s, and resume to build a dream in you, so your weight in for their service. They promise you with "Ivy Leagues," but they are the "poising Ivy's."

The agents pointed out that while schools enjoy significant autonomy and freedom by employing agents, they outsource the agents. However, the condition that warrants the school the power to employ agents was not based on free-market competitions. But instead, the inequality between capital-rich and capital-poor countries. In the process, because schools and the recruitment administrators have relative power of monopoly over the educational good, they can directly intervene with the market operations by deciding how and what conditions to make signing contract with the agents.

Local Representatives: How The Fee-based Agents help Brokerage Local Network and Resources?

Another way how Stovel and Shaw(2012) defines brokers was by describing the level of
internal solitary or cohesion among sets of actors linked by them. The sociologist has long recognized that the ways brokers were connected to vantage points of group identity—such as group norms or shared sense of fate—often determines the stability of their role as intermediary. From this perspective, *transnational representatives* are the agents who build their business on establish, anchor and reinforce local (Taiwanese) networks and resources.

Another business model that proliferated among Taiwanese agents was a "fee-based" profession, whose main occupational task was turning the migration process and preparation into the business. In this model, different professional workers can provide specific paid services in their fields and professions, which these agents integrate. In this way, they do not need to be in a commission-based model, where one company is responsible. The advantage of this is that these agents and agencies can maintain sufficient flexibility to cope with changes in the ever-changing higher education market. Secondly, these agents can also continuously improve their reputation and technology in specific fields and gain more customers' trust.

Fee-based agents witness the paramount of its industry in Taiwan during the late 1980s to early 1990s. Their appearance may be understood as a logical response to the "massification" of international higher education in Taiwan—a trend movement from elite to the mainstream, driven by the dramatic expansion of neoliberal market economies and the rising of middle-class families in support of children's studying abroad (Knight 2012; Xiang and Shen 2009). Acknowledging the bounded administrative tasks and cultural brokerage needs of outgoing student applicants, these agents step into the role otherwise fulfilled by the state to support student placement and settlement (Collins 2016; Knight 2004, 2012). Initially developed as a submarket within the massive franchised English *buxiban* industry, the education agent's industry is now an independent market with varying service providers and niche markets. However, the business's central institutional
operation is similar: they profit from students' payment for a fee in exchange for their service for immigration or academic brokering (Coffey and Perry 2014; Hulme et al. 2013).

Collins (2012) points out that in order for agents to play an essential role in facilitating cross-border movements, they must also be strategically placed in agents' movement's critical locations. Based on such geographies of business operations, transnational shadow education organizations and agents involved in international students' movement from Taiwan to the United States can take several forms. Many are strictly locally based operations firms in Taiwan and with about one-third maintain one or several "branch offices" in the United States. This geographical placement is a crucial feature of identifying, connecting and organizing resources surrounding Taiwanese student mobility.

In my field, I found that another important reason these agents can survive stably is to link other local organizational resources effectively. Their fortune rests in their ability to place student enrollment that fits the student's tastes and demands of the school's search committees. The "fee-based" agents better embody the term "agent," which shows what agents do and how agents represent the students.

Admission to higher education institutions in the U.S. was believed to be a meritocratic process. The meritocratic ideal prescribes that college admission should be based on students' worthiness, academic ability, and hard work. Moreover, for international students and migrants, admission rules further embody the screening mechanism of most "valued" individual migrants who can be qualified to contribute to the destination countries' economy and social growth. Because of this belief in meritocracy, the U.S. admission system often places a very high value on
selecting the most compatible and academically superior students and the students with the most distinctiveness, elite cultural taste, and cosmopolitan outlook (Kim 2018). For instance, in writing admission essays, students are encouraged to talk about self-centered choice and personal accomplishments and demonstrate "individualized" interest in each education program (Baas 2016). One of the Taiwanese agents that I interviewed explained working with a student on admission essays and C.V.s.

Agent TI: They want to see you beyond the paper; they want to see all-roundedness. They want you to live out your personality. I thought about it all the time when trying to help my student conveyed that in their document. It is more than translating stories in Mandarin into stories in English.

Kenneth: Is that an essential part of your work?

Agent TI: Yes. I teach the student how to articulate their strength and uniqueness. Of course, if I am lazy, I can always let students use some templates. However, you know what, there is no supplement for the lively text that came out of your real experience. If you have experienced it, the article you wrote will have a life. These things have to be carefully planned and considered.

Articulations about individuality in writing admission documents and essays are case and point for how one accumulates such achieved status in international student admission. For instance, writing a purpose (SOP) statement was a standard challenging social process for international student applicants during graduate school admission. On the other hand, prospective undergraduate international student applicants face the challenge of branding themselves in writing admission essays, which involved significant cultural work translating and transforming their attributes into applicable merits. All prospective students must become adaptive to how different education systems differently value self-performance in such a process. For instance, Taiwanese students might learn to describe their merits and rhetoric of self-worth in writing the admission essays, such as describing the worthiness of individuality or individual achievement appraisal. For
many Taiwanese students, for example, the conception of self and the rhetoric framing of individuals might be an estranged experience, as it works quite the opposite in Taiwanese cultures.

In the case of the transnational context of the agents in Taiwan, this could mean various things. On the one hand, agents could mean that actors help individual students' cross literal borders, such as helping them acquire proper legal documents, academic admission, and school and residential placements. On the other hand, agents could also mean actors or organizations responsible for transforming and transfiguring resources, information, and knowledge across cultural boundaries. By such definition, education agents are equivalent to knowledge brokers or cultural brokers of this type (Bilecen and Faist 2015; Burt 2005; Kellogg 2014; Kern and Müller-Böker 2015). As another agent working in a consultant company aptly depicted in one of our interviews:

"We filled the void created by the formal education systems, whether in Taiwan or the U.S. or U.K., for that unmatched and unsupported language, emotional, and academic demands. We also do education, but we do it better and do it with a fee."

Because fee-based agents work mainly with students, their priority is to help the student discover ways to overcome obstacles (such as standardize exams) or outperform other applicants during the process. As the Merica website pointed out, they are experts with knowledge about finding the "most suitable ideal school at the most economic and most efficient way." They are distinct from the commission-based model because the prices do not come from a shared industry-standard or contract with the schools but rather a negotiated price based on the customers' warranted.

In summary, agents are representatives of the students because they work for a fee to reconnect local resources and networks to re-define students' positions in a meritocratic admission process (Stovel and Shaw 2012). In contrast with a commission-based model whose main aim was to eliminate human contingency, fee-based agents' market capitalizes on the singularities of its merchandise and consumer's characteristics. The operation of a "singularized" market, such as
vintage wines, antiques, service by doctors and lawyers, and admission essay-writings, presumes a unique form of economic relationship that "calls on both competition and monopoly" (Chamberlin 1933:22).

Enhancing business collaborations in the local educators

Agents represent not only the student's self but also the institutional habitus where they cultivate such self. The evidence I found showed how the economy of fee-based transactional representative agents often emerged in a context where markets are not well developed at the local level. I showed several empirical settings in my field in which such relational complexity can facilitate transactions or matchmaking.

In recent years, the number of international schools in Taiwan and throughout Asia have proliferated. In many of these countries, fueled partly by the dissatisfaction with the domestic English-teaching and Western-style education, the middle and upper-class families often turned to third-party international schools for education (Brummitt and Keeling 2013; Tanu 2018). In Taiwan, international schools are categorized as a form of "alternative education," which means that they have organizations, courses, ideology, and funding systems independent of formal education. As international schools became more popular among the Taiwanese middle and upper class, growing numbers of international schools have become for-profit private schools catering to a specific student and parents' demand. Over the years, international schools and the transnational shadow market have developed closer collaborative and co-dependency relationships. This means that sometimes they do not rely solely on foreign schools and local students' needs to survive. In the interview, several language instructors mentioned to me the links between the companies they employ and other local schools in Taiwan, mainly private "international schools." Others
mentioned how the collaborations and cooperation are between different professionals within the industry are crucial.

Among my participants, one of the best representations of this close relationship was Christina. Christina is the President of a domestic for-profit education corporation in Taiwan. Her corporation owns several sub-companies: one private-run local high school in Northern Taiwan, an international school in Southern Taiwan, and several education consultancy and boarding schools in Vancouver, Canada. During the interview with her, one can feel how these seemingly different educational institutions share a very similar educational mission and purpose: what scholars would call "raising global citizens" (Tanu 2018; Hayden 2006).

This is because there is a concept of cost when a business is operating. Traditional formal schools are public institutions, and there is no concept of cost because they do not care whether the school makes money or not, right? People do not care about the future and provisions, let alone the long-term effect for the students. Teachers do not care either because they are public servants; no matter how much they do, they can still get a sizable pension. However, when it comes to business operations, it is quite different. Once a business enters education, it becomes a survival-of-the-fitness game. Such a mental and corporate culture would be passed down to the corporations' specific educational institutions. What is our culture? We have three: professionalism, responsibility, and sustainability.

In this sense, international schools and transnational shadow education are unique private organizations where transnational education meets business. For Christina, all the different branches of her business emerged to satisfy a group of students who are "globally mobile and networked, with the experience that is transnational and transcultural, and aspirations that are cosmopolitan and internationally-minded." For both the expatriate's children in international schools or the aspiring Taiwanese international student applicants who seek help from their agents, the most crucial goal is to develop sufficient linguistic and cultural skills to gain certain advantages in the application stage and to enter the world's top universities. This partly explains
why international schools and transnational shadow education are so close.

In addition to their resemblance to business logic, international schools and transnational shadow education institutions seem to have shared deeply-rooted resource dependence. These dependence pathways can be capitalized in the following two ways, as appeared in my fieldwork. One of them is that international schools "outsource" specific application services to their enrolled students to specific transnational shadow education institutions. There are two examples in my field: international schools will directly introduce the curriculum developed by private language institutions on standardized exams such as TOEFL, GRE, and GMAT. The other one was employing agents to help their students with their college admission packages and writing. Although the latter is less common than the former. One of the agents from language institutions shared his experience, which he described as bringing his "teaching expertise" to complement the teaching in the international schools:

N: Oh right, our program also cooperates with Cambridge[A local international school in Taipei].

Kenneth: What do you mean by cooperating?

N: It is like after-school tutoring. Once they are done with formal school courses by the day, for example, at 4:00 PM or 5:00 PM, SAT courses and TOEFL courses that we went teaching at 5:30 PM.

Kenneth: So your role is to like a tutor to them?

N: Yes, to put it more simply, we bring in the language programs that we developed to compensate for Cambridge's systems.

Kenneth: Are you the only one that went to teach?

N: No. About four of us regularly went together. Because there are both TOEFL and SAT courses simultaneously, and there are also different majors such as speaking, writing and reading.

The other example where international schools are hiring agents to help their students with
their college admission packages and writing. Compared to the outsourcing of standardizing language exam tutoring, external outsourcing agents would be less common to assist with students' application process and material. The main reason is that international schools themselves often have academic consolers within their systems, mimicking the formal school systems in the U.S. and elsewhere. However, some international schools still occasionally call for experienced agents' expertise by asking them to hold workshops or specific consulting sessions in schools.

Note that the dependence of international schools and agents is sometimes two-way. Sometimes agents also rely on students from international schools as their primary customer base. In particular, since most international students in Taiwan are in elementary to high school education, the goal is to apply to American universities. In addition to focusing on academic standard test scores (such as SAT, ACT, etc.), extracurricular activities and other personal characteristics and expertise are also essential when it comes to admission in higher education in the U.S. How to package these specific characteristics into admission documents and plans suitable strategy for your application is often the reason why agents are so popular amongst parents and children in the international schools.

Another critical link between international schools and transnational shadow education is through parent's networks. From my interviews, agents see most of the parents of international school students come from high income, high education, and overseas experience backgrounds. These middle and upper-class parents are willing to invest a significant amount of resources and time in improving their children's competitiveness in college admission. As a result, once the school does not provide them with satisfactory resources or cannot answer their fear of the unknown, these parents will turn to more known paid consultants, instructors, or agents.
Kenneth: So you would usually work with parents from international schools?

T: Yes. For example, in international schools, parents have their channels of communication, such as social media. The more active parents will always discuss with each other and say: When do you want to prepare and what to prepare, or else, they would talk about how little time they might have left... etc. Those under-prepared parents would feel scared and frustrated, mostly mothers, so they rush to ask us[agent] what to do. Sometimes, just because they get too much information from the school and other parents, they feel overwhelmed, and our role is to help them clarify and solve those anxieties.

In other words, international schools and agents are both brokerages. The former connects foreign schools with domestic students through specific learning methods, curriculum, and system design. The latter helps students apply for admission to navigate education through a complicated market network, technical guidance, and economic connection. The partnership with international schools confirms the importance of transnational shadow education as a hub of information and resources. More importantly, in the "business" of assisting international students to go abroad, there will be organic links between different markets and organizations. However, it is precisely because these informal links between those otherwise separated individuals and organizations that transnational shadow education can play such a gradually important role in transnational higher education admission.

**Vertical and Horizontal Growth**

Agents can also expand their operations by setting a growth strategy to pursue profit and other industry members: horizontally and vertically. Horizontal growth occurs when supposedly competition agents outsourced cases to one another. Vertical growth happened when an agent outsourced tasks to other fee-oriented professionals in the supply chain to carry out the applications.
In other words, organizations must always rely on the resources, flexibility, and workforce provided by each other. These two types of business exist that Taiwan's fee-based agents rarely have a single agency monopolizing the market. This is because Taiwan's agent market is relatively small. Compared with neighboring countries such as China and South Korea, Taiwan's agents market has the least proportion of listed companies—there are only two in the entire market. This environment limits a single organization's growth space, but it has promoted practical cooperation and dependence between Taiwanese agent's organizations.

The most common growth strategy was to collaborate with different professions who specialized with different tasks in applications. For example, a company that helps students complete the "agent" work on the application can outsource their language editing work to a specialized editor or editing company. One of my interviewees was a freelance editor that often hired by agents to work on student's application materials. He elaborates on how such a relationship works:

> These companies may not have the workforce to handle it. I mean, they may have many people who can handle domestic issues, such as helping you understand your merit and turn your merits into an application. However, there are some things that only native English speakers can do, such as articulating and sentence expression. So they will look for my help, ask me to do translating work or editing work for them.

> It is worth noting that in this relationship, there is rarely an obvious upper-lower or competitive relationship between agents and translators. They are more akin to close business partners. Experienced agents often brought up their ability to manage such business partnerships as a form of professional skill by itself.
CL: I keep telling others: I am not an agent, but a consultant. There is a big difference between the two. Because agent's work is done after the application process, but a consultant's work is never finished. So we called ourselves education consultants.

Kenneth: What is the difference between an agent and a consultant?

CL: It is a bit like the realtor. They are a dedicated consultant who can understand the entire process and sell specific professional services to their customers. Moreover, the more professional people who can help me complete a specific part, the better. My task is to integrate these resources and let the student trust me to delegate these tasks to more professional people.

In other words, many agents I interviewed took pride in their ability to brokering different local professions in Taiwan. Fee-based agents' fortune rests in part on how they can be brokering different professions and resources. In conducting aid to students' application, cross-professional collaborations and coordination are often necessary because they may demand different agents with different expertise to help them with particular processes or tasks. Furthermore, as options for studying abroad increase, personal care for students' application planning and strategies becomes more individualized.

In contrast with the commission-based model, whose main aim was to eliminate human contingency, fee-based agents' market capitalizes on the singularities of its merchandise and consumer's characteristics. The operation of a "singularized" market, such as vintage wines, antiques, service by doctors and lawyers, and admission essay-writings, presumes a unique form of economic relationship that "calls on both competition and monopoly" (Chamberlin 1933:22). In other words, agents fortunate in the are not based on predictability, but on how they differentiate their service from others. Furthermore, perhaps because education agents have a foot in both worlds, their business is secured by how well they can convert these differences into "capital valuation and conversion work" as another migration broker, such as labor-migrant headhunter or
marriage brokers (Kim 2018). One of a Taiwanese agent explained what he thinks to distinguish different levels of "skilled" agents:

"We used to say, those with the least skill sell with their price. Those who are slightly better sell different specifications and modules. What do most skilled agents do? They talk about neither price nor specifications. They talk about dreams, futures, and visions."

In doing this job, you cannot afford to be professional because you are dealing with students; they need to feel working with them. If you let them know you are helping and trust you, this case would be easy. If we do not gain students' trust, if they feel we are antagonistic, or we have a relationship based on money and contract, they will not treat us as meaningful helpers.

Another crucial growth strategy was forming close collaborations between agents to claim a larger share of the market. For example, a more prominent company can recruit more students and outsource them to one or several smaller companies. This kind of case is relatively rare, but it often happens when large "commission-based" companies outsource their business to small agencies. Usually, these companies have contracts with foreign schools and must send a certain number of students to their schools. Sometimes these contracts are exclusive, which means that students must deal with these companies to go to these schools. However, sometimes students are more inclined to work with consultants and companies they trust. At this time, these specific companies must enter into internal contracts with other companies. One party completes the application work, and the other party is responsible for sending the application documents to the exclusive contract school.

Agent W: The "downstream" We call it "downstream" in our industry.

Kenneth: Downstream?

Agent W: Yes. We are the wholesalers, and they are the dealer. We are upstream, and they are downstream.
Kenneth: Oh, I understand.

Agent W: Yes, so students would approach them directly. We do not intervene in students signing specific contracts with their agents. We do not intervene with the ways they conduct their service. They come to us when they need us to send those applications through such contracted channels. So we have dedicated personnel for such communication channels and collaborations. For example, if I say I want to help a student apply to a school via INTO "pathway" channel today, but I did not have a direct contract with INTO, then I will find an agent with INTO and ask them to send the application on my student's behalf.

Kenneth: What are the benefits of this relationship for you?

Agent W: Together, we can make more money. Most of the profits will go to Tina, so what is our benefit, because our benefit is the number of people, because we have a contract with INTO, and there is a contractual relationship. We must have the conditions for the number of people. We must reach a certain number of people every year. Therefore, to meet the requirement of the number of people and our consultants who are pushing them, we also need to rely on the part of our next home. This number is not enough to rely on ourselves. We have to rely on others. This requires teamwork.

As predicted by resource dependency theory (Pfeffer & Salancik, 1978; see also, Weisbrod, Ballou, & Asch, 2008), different organizations that have complementary resources would grow to depend, not compete with each other. My participants were well-aware how such complementary reciprocal resource and information exchange might benefit industry-level growth, which in the long-run benefit their professions. I can find many examples in my fieldwork that most recently established agents and agency offices tend to form business allegiances. These close allegiances partly ensure that these companies will not compete viciously and achieve overall market development by making up for each other's resources. These close allegiances partly ensure that these companies will not compete viciously and achieve overall market development by making up for each other's resources.

Of course, apart from cooperation, there may be more vicious competition among peers, such as price cuts or even more vicious rumors. However, experienced agents believe that their most
important job is to provide students with good bridges and connect with other professionals they believe are excellent and trustworthy. Sometimes, this also includes working with specific vendors. Moreover, in this process, do not let these specific circumstances affect the student's application process.

**The good and bad of acting as a representative**

Fee-based agents are widely popular among students and parents, as they carry out the service demanded by them. However, they are often viewed as a form of corruption. Unlike other individuals or organizations who facilitate global migration, brokers in the transnational shadow education are explicitly paid for their act of brokerage. However, if the group members observe or suspect (correctly or incorrectly) that the broker is not conforming to their value system, they may doubt such brokerage activities and their community's legitimacy. One of the most prevalent claims in the literature is that brokerage produces rewards for the brokers. Moreover, as a result, agents can exploit such relationships to their own will, either to monopolize price or conduct unscrupulous practices (Burt 1992).

One of the more interesting dynamics that I recognized is how the agents define their service's price and value. In the industry, pricing the service is an act of business decision and a crucial signature of the service's value.

Of course, because the student can run around shopping for free, you, as a student, you cannot control them. However, interestingly, if they pay, they will listen to you; So confusing. I make it free for you, and you mess with me, and then I make it costly, you suddenly show respect.

Pricing the service for the right amount is a nuanced decision in the industry, especially for
those who work as the fee-per-service based model. However, many commission-based agents are considering turning to include fee-per-service business lines in the offering because of the specific drawback addressed above. In one of the cases where I interviewed a chain education agency, the manager suggested re-modeling their service sales.

However, what is more interesting to me is how the price is used in the industry as a practical means to gain control over the customer. Many agents (consultants, writers/editors, English tutors, mostly) told me that they set up reasonably high prices to keep their customers committed to their service. The service price ranges from 1,200 to 3000 USD, depending on the student's package and program. The large sum of money signaled a paid contract, financially and socially, that the students (and parents) entrusted their goal of studying abroad to the agents. A large sum of money means that the customer is less likely to seek multiple agents simultaneously, which would lead to heightening contingency and conflict of expertise working with the students. Students' and parents' willingness to pay a large sum of the service fee is also seen as a sign of respect for the agents' professional knowledge. While a few agents are willing to devote some effort to convince the customer to trust their honesty and service, most agents rely on pricing their service correctly to screen for the committed customer they desired. The price is also a screening method for the agents to pick the customers who might work with the agents willingly and entrust the agents with high autonomy.

Topics about price and pricing their service also echo with the agents claim as professions, who desired to be reckoned with other local highly reputable professionals—such as doctors, lawyers, and business consultants.

Yes, the consultant service fee is relatively high. It is the same as if we were asking for a lawyer's service. If you can identify with the profession of the lawyer, you will pay.
Moreover, you probably will not want to bargain with a surgeon for their operation to be free, right? This is also a place we don't like very much; that is, the public will take the price to measure professionalism.

Pricing the service is also a crucial act of boundary-making mechanism in the profession. Pricing the service also directly relates to how the agents define the role that they played. For instance, many consultants expressed a firm opinion about distinguishing the price of hiring a "Guwan" (顧問, consultants) from employing a "Daiban" (代辦, broker). The former term elicited a more active role in students' application process, while the latter invoked a passive, marginal role.

**Explaining divergence between gatekeepers and representatives**

The fieldwork details presented above demonstrate the competition among different commodification processes of education agents and the negotiations between agents and institutional factors over creating a market. Allying with either the institutional (universities and colleges) or individual (student and parents) preferences, the Taiwanese agents' workforces create organizational allegiances and collaborations. Professionalism and professionalization processes were manifested in managing local/transnational demands for international student admission opportunities and risk. This divergence, I argue, manifests two competing ways how brokers' professionalization vies with market forces.

**Source of power**

In commission-based (pipeline) agents' case, agents play a crucial role in *reproducing* higher education institutions' governing of the admission processes. Their accommodations with organizational buyer's demand were based on an institutional logic of market share, isomorphism, and self-exploitative. However, these features made their commodifying both predictable and
profitable, rendering them more visible and praised by administrations and academics.

In contrast, in fee-based agents' case, agents undertake the role in *resisting and buffering* the cost of dealing with higher education institutions for individuals undergoing the admission processes. Agents indigenized their service to help local Taiwanese students gain access to admission across literal and symbolic borders. Their professional scripts were instead created by an institutional logic of market differentiation, competition, and valuations. These features made agents working less public and difficult to be evaluated. However, this set them apart from the institutional constraints experienced by commission-based agents. The unique ways to respond to local demand and cultural obstacles explain why they adopted such a market approach to address admissions problems.

*Professionalization*

The commission-based industry attaches great importance to turning their profession into a company that foreign institutions can employ. The commission-based industry attaches great importance to turning their profession into a company that foreign institutions can employ. In terms of organizational structure, they often turn themselves into large-scale bureaucracy, with the fair division of labor and transparent upper and lower management relationships. Through labor division among these different departments, they can disassemble studying abroad into more detailed technical tasks. Through these adequate labor and management divisions, they can collectively sell their packaged services to foreign university institutions and sign exclusive admission contracts and channels. Their appearance symbolizes a system developed after the higher education entrance market is more institutionalized. These systems allow students who do not have foreign (U.S.) capital to obtain unique admission qualifications or assistance through
cooperation with domestic (Taiwan) industry players. Through this assistance, students who are already relatively inadequate can find their opportunities for admission.

Simultaneously, schools that rank low in foreign countries and actively recruit international students to fill the economic gap are increasingly actively supporting these companies. For this reason, commission-based specialization is closely linked to the needs of foreign higher education. They pay special attention to turning their customers, namely students, into predictable admission products. This process has led them to pay special attention to the development of "pipelines," which are ways to send students to foreign schools more efficiently. This approach indeed invites criticism, but more importantly, it also allows the industry to subject to exploitation and treatment by foreign institutions. In this respect, studying abroad's commission-based agent is a kind of intermediary work between systems, but this kind of intermediary work has not been valued and legitimized by people.

For fee-based service providers, professionalism is more inclined to the needs of individual customers. Because they hope to be different from commission-based companies, they are more committed to developing customized services. Simultaneously, because most of them are relatively small studios or individuals, they cannot compete with large study abroad institutions. Instead, they turned to more sophisticated study abroad casework and service projects. The most representative is the "meritocracy" work that revolves around producing documents for studying abroad. It is worth noting that although agents are rarely regarded as professionals by mainstream opinions, they often require themselves from the perspective of professionals and market standards. These processes have also prompted consuming students and families to trust the services they provide.
Resource-dependence

Finally, one can observe that commission-based and fee-based are also different in the resources that help students connect. The most crucial difference is that the commission-based industry attaches great importance to helping international students to connect resources across the country and overseas, while fee-based focuses on connecting domestic resources. Among them, the resources linked by commission-based agents are mostly the organizational resources of overseas admissions institutions (universities, colleges) or the market resources provided by overseas professional institutions. The fee-based agent provides students with horizontal links to other market factors, such as other "shadow education" players, such as academic counseling, employment counseling, and international schools. It also helps students find the meritocracy that can flip educational opportunities from their education majors.

To this end, I outlined such a relationship by showing the two prominent brokerage role in the transnational shadow education market in Taiwan: transnational gatekeepers and local representatives. In so doing, I outlined how agents work a complex web of stakeholders and organizations to achieved shared or complementary goals. For example, Taiwanese agents would be situated in higher education recruitment, where school administrators put faith in paying them to connect local cultural customs and social demands. On the student side, Taiwanese agent's businesses with extensive local resources and pathways would give its customer an added advantage. In turn, I argue in this chapter that the transnational shadow education market operates in a resource-dependent field. They do works that convert student applications into a set of strategic, resource-dependent activities for higher education organizations. Although both scholars and the media have paid considerable attention to international students' growth in the United States, they have mostly focused on either the impact on colleges and universities as organizations and students
themselves. Instead, the existing scholarly studies have primarily ignored how existing bodies of organizations and institutions have made connections to inter-organizational resources and networks. I offered my observation by pointing out how a private, transnational shadow education connects and is related to different organizations in such resource-dependence field.

Chapter Conclusion

Transnational shadow education is most associated with brokering international study. Both students and institutions may not know or connect between them, thus turning to a knowledgeable third-party to close the gap. In transnational education, agents occupy a unique structural position as brokers. They could connect a buyer and seller who otherwise might not learn of each other's existence (Stovel and Shaw 2012; see also Burt 2005). First and foremost, international education is an asymmetric market where information is poorly distributed, so knowledgeable individuals and groups can monopolize capital or information and restrict access to outsiders. In such a context, brokers who can trade on gaps of information and knowledge in such a transnational educational field tend to prevail (Burt 2000; Small 2009; Stovel and Shaw 2012). The crucial characteristics of agents in Taiwan are that (a) they conduct work to bridge a gap in such social structure and (b) they help goods, information, opportunities, or knowledge flow across that gap.

Second, another central question concerning international education that is often overlooked is the brokerage work by agents bringing together the schools, the students, and the market. While earlier studies and previous chapters of this dissertation emphasize the need to identify a mechanism to overcome inherently conflictual relationships, I challenge this chapter's assumption. For example, Kellogg(2012), in her study of semi-professionals in medical reforms, highlights how individuals and groups occupying brokerage roles can intermediating between new professional territories and facilities cross-occupational collaborations. Barbris(2014) found that
homeowners hire realtors to broker their buying houses in a similar vein. In part, realtors thrive due to the expansive knowledge and investment in submerging in the community, which allows them to develop a formal and informal collaborative relationship that an outsider customer would not have access to otherwise. In the international higher education case, agents are adopted by students and parents because they can help reap the benefit of cross-occupational collaborations and connects independent resources and networks.

In sum, I argue that Taiwanese agents, as well as the more general transnational shadow education industry, may emerge to fill critical gaps in a complex network of relations by "connecting, buffering and mediating" across multiple transnational educational boundaries and organizations (Kellogg 2014; Kern and Müller-Böker 2015c; Kim 2016; Mok and Wat 1998). Instead of competing with other groups, agents can also form more "positive" relations such as coordinate and sharing revenue. Further, as a transnationally mobilized group, rather than setting up boundaries, they can bridge across different stakeholders between different organizational and professional boundaries. Agents can connect students and schools, such as if a realtor brings together buyers and the housing compound. In the process, they often help enabled pathways and connections that would otherwise not exist, which in my case corresponds to the student-recruitment programs and pathways that closely dependent on the help of transnational shadow education.
Chapter 7: How Culture Matters: Culture, Market and Authenticity

Apart from giving their professional knowledge and allocating institutional resources, transnational shadow education agents also have a crucial institutional task: cultural brokerage. They need to do the appropriate cultural work to make a new student population’s past merit evaluable in another country’s educational system. First, they must overcome the issue of differences of culture; and second, they must make students’ “authentic” personal characteristics and merits somehow qualify for application opportunities in the eyes of the examiners abroad. In this chapter, by studying the micro-dynamics of the labor agents put in with students' application material to make them brand themselves in the transnational market, I highlight how transnational shadow education served its primary purpose as a cultural broker between students’ sending and receiving societies.

Education agents represent a new and emerging form of labor, labeled in this chapter as “authenticity crafting,” which aims to help international students who want to brand themselves during a transnational application process. This growing workforce sits at the intersection of critical development in college admissions expansion and is part of a growing economy to produce someone else’s self. This chapter explores the cultural work that goes into producing legitimate application materials and self-representation. This chapter reveals that agents engage in multiple authenticity crafting tasks, which help their clients (the students) develop themselves and prove their “authenticity.” When undergoing such an application process on a transnational scale, the agents help students create a distance between a student subject’s “actual self” and the required cultural and social capital he/she intends to showcase to the application committees. In so doing, this study uncovers a unique labor process by which agents take pride in facilitating students' admission by managing multi-level symbolic meanings of “authenticity.”
More broadly, this chapter stressed how the highly competitive global higher education industry had spawned the need for such an authenticity crafting workforce, which can fulfill people's demand for adulterating their social selves. To be valued in the college admissions market, international students can pay such workers to engage in various tasks, which would help them seem legitimate and suitable in others' eyes. Despite the merits, such a workforce could also engage in more controversial interventions, such as ghostwriting. These particular labor forms mean that studying this industry can provide a new perspective for understanding higher education mechanics and this emerging economy.

**Constructing Selfhood in the Admission Market**

Generally, selfhood is the product of how one performs his/her social conduct under a particular culture and norm. Nevertheless, displaying and branding selfhood is a more complicated and sociologically interesting topic (Anteby and Occhiuto 2020; Hochschild 2012; Wee and Brooks 2010). While concern about the concepts of the self and identity in the making has always been a topic of interest in sociology, more attention has been paid to the methods used to modify oneself in pursuit of social and economic gains (Abelmann et al. 2009; Giddens 2013). A group of sociologists has begun studying market labors, such as dating coaches or college admission agents, who specialize in reinventing others’ worthiness in specific economic bargaining spaces (Hochschild 2012). More importantly, this gradually developed “economy of self” has challenged people’s understanding of the self and the society, which used to be considered relatively stable. Simultaneously, the market also changed the distinct mark of modernity by challenging numerous practices and beliefs so closely related to Western cultures (especially American culture), such as self-fulfillment, personal development, and meritocracy (Alon and Tienda 2007; Anton 2001;
In this study, I argue that the admission market experts (herein referred to as “education agents”) related to higher education admissions operate within this unique context wherein people hire others to pursue a “better” self. In contrast, a service market emerges to aid such a process during college admission.

Broadly sketched, education agents work on college admission fixing and consulting relating to international students. Although they are known by other names, including “education consultants,” “education brokers,” or “independent education consultants,” they are more commonly referred to as “education agents” (Altbach 2013; Coffey and Perry 2014). Cross-border movement often involves reorganizing personal resources, skills, and identities into different linguistic and cultural contexts (Stovel and Shaw 2012). In the context of overseas students’ admission, it means that the academic performances and social experiences from a student's origin society may not be easily transferable to merits that foreign admissions committees might understand. For many students raised outside of the Western individualistic culture, for example, the conception of the self and individuals' rhetoric framing might be an estranged experience, as it works quite the opposite in more collective cultures. Understanding these cultural differences becomes crucial when international students learn to write their admission essays to win the committee members' hearts. This process is also where the agent’s intervention in the admission begins as they help international students achieve branding and establish authenticity as applicants (Collins 2012).

Importantly, this kind of economic incentive of international students willingly outsourcing “themselves” to others can be directly traced to the highly competitive global higher education admission (Hochschild 2012). International students apply to schools in the US or other English-dominated countries because degrees obtained from these institutions are seen as pathways to
upward mobility (Ma 2020; Xiang and Shen 2009a). Not only do students acquire credentials that are highly desirable in the labor market, but their educational opportunities would also allow them to distinguish themselves from their peers with domestic degrees (Waters and Leung 2013; Xiang and Shen 2009a). However, making the transition to overseas study is challenging, both socially and culturally. In simple terms, prospective students must become familiar with the formal and informal rules on how different admissions systems reward presentations of the self.

When international students want to improve their competitiveness in the global education market, they must first transform their application into a symbol of their status and earning ability. In doing so, they need to signal specific narratives through personal stories in their application and write those documents to be suitable representations of themselves (Karabel 2005; Stevens 2009). Although the application documents should presumably only present a student’s “authentic” personality, potential, past merits, and evidence of his/her hard work, the more realistic situation is that these documents represent students’ ability to reproduce their class privileges. Compared to their less privileged peers, children from wealthy families might have access to experiences and cultural narratives that would help them seem more credible and competitive in college admission. Furthermore, privileged children are also in a better social position allowing them to pay for better knowledge about how to usefully transform personal experiences and merits into better application documents (Sun and Smith 2017). For some international students, how to brand themselves was not necessarily work on the application itself but on the quest for a better helper to maximize the outcome. This partly explains why recent studies have documented emergent discourses of international students hiring professional admission helpers, thereby demonstrating the industry's pervasiveness and its controversial nature (The Observatory on Borderless Higher Education 2014).
Making claims to authenticity in college application

Education agents create authenticity in the admission process by turning it into a literal commodity—either a counseling session or tutorial. For instance, after a Taiwanese student purchases a full-service package, the first activity is to participate in a tutorial session, such as the one I observed called Preparation for Studying Abroad Application or the like. Those preparation courses and tutorials are required annually. Every year, eager Taiwanese students and potential applicants flock to these institutions in search of skills and techniques that would give them an advantage in a fiercely competitive college admission process to US schools. In one instruction session about document preparation, the speaker began her speech by confidently saying this to her audience of eagerly waiting for Taiwanese student applicants (and parents):

“No matter what you think of yourself, being the top student or the bottom one, the first thing you do when applying for studying abroad is that you can no longer be what you think you are. You must be a potential stock in the investors' eyes, who will invest in letting you study in their schools. The way you speak, your transcripts, your stories are all your capital, and you have to use these to sell yourself.”

“What happens,” the instructor scanned the students waiting for her to continue, “when you are too fixed on presenting yourself as whom you think you are?” Answer: You may be wasting your chance of communicating your uniqueness to the search committees in the prestigious university, who might have seen thousands of application branding their merits. “What do you then do to communicate what is special about you?” Answer: You must write and re-write your application materials until they can be linked to some preferences that might be interesting to specific admissions committees in the programs you applied for.

These cultural works may seem trivial or idiosyncratic to individual cases. However, it became clearer that it was precisely such a technique of managing oneself or performance that a student’s application became legitimate for the search committee. Therefore, through these particular
cultural works, students were introduced to a host of other works that were scarcely mentioned in typical application websites or international student handbooks: the cultural work being done to help students look legitimate to US colleges. Most experienced education agents advise students to disengage from “themselves” and discover ways to construct a credible, complete, and authentic portrait to attract the search committees’ interests.

In other words, students are encouraged to deal with their application materials in the same way a chef would handle an authentic cuisine. They find ways and highlight traits that would amplify rather than displace their essential nature—a nature that is deemed credible and crucial for the search committees. In this way, it becomes evident that authenticity concerns how cultural identity is determined through a reference of time and space (Grazian 2005; Reilly 2018). A novice student may present his/her unadulterated past academic experience and personal background. However, a more experienced student (and often with the help of education agents) establish their credentials, credibility, and prospects with the strategic ordering of information present on the application materials. Sometimes, this would mean concealing a particular job they have been engaged in at a specific time or increasing the space to promote the deliberate measures they have taken to pay attention to disadvantaged groups or engage in social services.

How do schools gatekeep the authenticity of students’ applications?

To consider just how an education agent institution or any organization might begin intervening in students’ application process, we also had to rethink what an application represented. Ideally, every student’s application represents his/her own merits (i.e., their worthiness and hard work). However, merit is also subjective; that is, someone is continuously judged as to whether they possess the attributes that the decision-makers deem legitimate (Littler 2017). Thus, Posselt
(2016:10) calls the college admission review process a form of “gatekeeping,” accurately pointing out that the admission depends not just on how students present themselves but on how the examiners view them. Selecting the final candidates from many applicants and determining the few who should be given the opportunity depend on the application's quality and the layers of inferences made from seemingly minor details presented therein. Through the application system, educational institutions hope to select genuinely outstanding students. However, this does not mean that they only value those objective conditions (or the so-called merits), but most rather care more about students' other individual traits and personal characteristics, making these objective conditions reliable.

The school’s judging methods and processes, along with the attention given to these details that either make or sink students' applications, pushes agents to encourage students to pay extra effort to crafting a social self that is different from their “actual self.” More importantly, education agents claim to provide added value by altering themselves to an audience looking at the students from another culture's lens.

“A student’s characteristics are based on his/her words. Thus, you need to put effort into fixing and articulating your essay to make the search committee appreciate your distinctiveness or look at your other attributes. If done well, even though you may not be at the top of your class, but our work [as agents] can help people see your potential as an all-rounded individual who is fully prepared to be just as good as the top students.”

In other words, the agents' service helps students gain an advantage by inciting examiners to look at their application with a more focused eye on their individuality rather than the static academic performances. As a reasonably experienced firm claims in their online advertisement: “We do not measure a student's potential by quantitative standards; we collect every reason that a student can impress.” In a face-to-face interview, she added, “Compared to the typical ‘three
dimensions’ (GPA, GRE, and TOEFL) used to evaluate students, we pay more attention to the other three dimensions: motivation, conversation, and personality traits.”

The services that education agents claim to provide have another feature. They must pass the test of the entire admission screening process. That is, these expressions must consider the “self” expressions of other applicants. As another agent explained, “You can rarely impress the search committee by saying things about your academic performance.” Other agents clarified this by pointing out how static academic performances cannot help students promote the application: “You tell your story, not your achievements; you discuss the experiences that influence your motivation, not list the science exhibitions or Model United Nations you participated in; you must be special, but not in a way someone else can easily replicate.”

**Reinventing authenticity in admission**

For education agents, students with different academic backgrounds and academic preparations must transform themselves differently. However, the common thread is that students of all levels must transform their authenticity to a certain degree. Sometimes, this means that students who do not possess the most impressive academic records in Taiwan can gain additional advantages in their application by narrating their own stories “correctly.” As one agent shared,

“I like to work with students who are not elite...that is, students who are not from prestigious universities or colleges in Taiwan. The former would often have more potential to tap. They will not care too much about their credentials and the ‘three merits,’ allowing me to use my way to a greater extent to help them find their uniqueness. American schools value whether you are independent and whether you can articulate your story with a clear motivation. These stories are not necessarily elite-focused.”

In addition to making changes in the words and sentences, the more experienced education agents will also remind students to highlight other identity traits in different application
documents—especially those that are easily overlooked—to express their distinctiveness. The diversity statement in college applications, for example, is commonly referenced by agents as a tool to present the students' distinct attributes and individuality maximally. An agent explained this to her students in a one-on-one consulting session:

“What is a diversity statement? A diversity statement is not just about listing your diverse background, what kind of Asian you are, what language skills you have, and so on. The diversity statement is an opportunity for you to express yourself. It means that you can show that you understand the United States' racial history and express what kind of effort you are willing to make to eliminate inequality. We do not necessarily care as much about these things living in Taiwan, but you must show to the search committee in the United States that at least you have thought about it carefully.”

In fact, in my interviews and participant observations, a diversity statement is a typical example used by education agents to justify their role in brokering the transnational cultural differences. In the cross-border application process, this example demonstrates that ethnic identity, or at least the symbolic aspects, may either facilitate or hinder how individual students can navigate such an application market. In these processes, consciously presenting their different selves in the application documents allow these students to “practice situated performances, incorporating the reflective self, the distinctive self, and the imagined self” (Fang and Fine, 2020). Not everyone needs to purchase services that instruct how to alter one’s identity and self. However, those who hire education agents can often better orchestrate the branding of such an identity, including the writing process, to appear more natural compared to others, thus making those representations of “selfhood” seem more faithful to the students' traits. To a certain extent, the emergence of the education agent market is precisely the product of the hidden cultural and social criteria pervasive in college admission and can be easily leveraged by the elites to improve their chances of being accepted to their chosen schools.
Authenticity Crafting: Managing Authenticity by Claiming a Professional Need to Disappear

Markets in which individuals can pay experts to make them look good are not new, but paying professionals to brand oneself in the ideally meritocratic college admission process has only emerged in recent years. The overarching point is that modernity has unleashed an economical service market around what Fine (2006) called a “culture of authenticity,” by which people are called to be true to themselves and pursue a personal quest for development and its fulfillment (Fine 2006).

To study such distinctive occupational and professional groups and their related work content, Anteby and Occhiuto (2020) proposed the concept of “stand-in labor” to explore how such practices and services engage the reinvention of other people’s selves. They define stand-in labor as comprising works aimed at producing and advertising someone else’s self to make it more worthy—a process that parallels how firms conduct product branding in the capitalist market. To illustrate these jobs’ uniqueness, Anteby and Occhiuto also proposed the concept of recognized estrangement, which describes how practitioners engaged in stand-in labor must put in extra labor to ensure that the “true” self of the service object has integrity or is independently authored. Based on such concepts, Anteby and Occhiuto pointed out that people engaged in such labor will actively and consciously make their intensive intervention disappear while modifying the subject’s selfhood. These actions ensure the agency and sacredness of the “selfhood,” which the employer of the stand-in labor workers hopes to present while simultaneously preventing the paid service's profanity from polluting this sacredness (Grazian 2005; Reilly 2018).

These discussions are critical to understanding higher education admissions because they
point out that the presumptions of meritocratic entry in contemporary higher education presuppose an unadulterated social process of self-construction. In such an idealized process, the evaluation of the self’s worthiness should reflect the distinctiveness that is authentic to the applicants. However, the actual evaluation process creates loopholes wherein students can literally “hoard” opportunities by presenting their applications as their own (McKnight 2015).

The more serious work relates to using their different skills to create legitimate claims to the authenticity of students’ identities for education agents. At the core of these skills, the education agents must become masterfully skilled at what I call “authenticity crafting.” Through this process, they accompany students in the writing process to understand the latter’s “true” voice while simultaneously making their professional intervention undetectable by the examiners. In cooperating with students, the education agents achieve the purpose of working and helping students obtain legitimacy by reinventing students’ cultural capital.

Cultural works on students' self-narratives

The first way education agents manage Taiwanese students’ legitimate identity is by incorporating self-narratives that bring up the students’ worthiness and personal backgrounds into the admission essays. Almost all agents I interviewed stressed that their core mission was to help students articulate their personal stories and backgrounds appropriately in their applications. In one of the consulting sessions, an agent and his student spent several sessions talking about “brand” herself for Western readers. One of the ways to achieve this, as the agents later explained to me in a follow-up interview, was to teach students to speak about personal qualities that highlight their individuality:
“What you want to do is make yourself [student] unique. So you do not devote too much space talking about ‘information’ about you, such as your grades or academic achievements. Instead, you narrate. You tell stories. You tell stories that make the search committee relate to or sympathize with you. However, you need not share everything about yourself. Just those things that make you shine amongst others in the admission pool.”

The expression of distinct attributes and merits is prescribed as a central component of the admission essay-writing process to gain acceptance to US schools. However, the process can be challenging for different groups far removed from the dominant group norms. In the US context, writing admission essays or statements of purpose (SOP) can be quite challenging for non-White, non-English-speaking international students and other minorities struggling to navigate a school culture, not of their own (Fordham and Ogbug, 1986; Willis, 1981; Tatum, 2017; Armstrong and Mamilton, 2013).

In other words, the self's performance issue in writing admission essays involves partly learning how to narrate one’s distinct experiences to maximize his/her capacity to be appreciated by the examiners. Here, personal stories about how one faced racial discrimination or language difficulties can be interpreted as proof of determination and well-roundedness compared to mundanely citing past achievements and awards. Further, unlike concrete merchandise or goods that are immediately subject to economic transactions, the value of the ways by which students describe themselves in their admission essays is negotiated between different competing interests and inferences (Posselt 2016). In such a process, agents play a unique role in creating an essay as an end product and connecting students to the specific local cultural and social knowledge that could make their writing valuable.

Notably, the process of bringing about students’ distinct attributes is often put in parallel to the agents' disappearance in the students’ subjective voice. For the agents, the actual writing process begins not when students start to write the first paragraph in the essay but when they start
thinking about how to narrate themselves to others in an authentic way. In so doing, agents liken their work with that of professional actors: they portray the characters and write admission essays by looking into what the students “authentically” are and what they unconsciously revealed between the lines:

“I feel that sometimes, I need to teach the students to be more expressive of what they want and be assertive of their achievements. (Kenneth: Why?) I think Taiwanese students are more reserved in showing off their individuality and uniqueness because we do not live in a society that praises personal distinctiveness like the US. You must do that when you are writing your statement of purpose in applying to a US school. You need to take on a Western mind.”

In other words, agents pay particular attention as to what student essays “give” and “give off” as if performing to a crowded audience on a stage (Goffman 1978). Despite their extensive help in enabling students to develop and write their essays, agents learn to disappear to preserve the “sacredness” of student objects in the admission process, linked to the original and authentic self. Agents must try their best to let their admission package convey both authenticity and consistency. For instance, many agents do not just teach students how to write admission essays but also help them “frame” a desirable subject across different documents, such as the personal statement, transcript, and CVs. “They need to tell a coherent story of yourself, of you as a person,” was a common theme in my conversations with the agents. Agents play a crucial role in abridging both an “authentic” version of students’ self-performance and turning these narratives into favorable ones.

Creating and maintaining a consistent tone

Second common way agents facilitate the legitimacy of a student’s identity in the admission process is to perform micro-management actions that preserve the authentic tones of the language
in the essays. For instance, some agents shared that they deliberately left some grammatical errors in the students' documents to preserve the process's integrity. One agent, when pressed about how he manages to help students create a document deemed legitimate, responded by saying,

“If you help them overdo it, let us say you line-edit too much and sound completely arcane, you risk creating a tone that does not sound like the student at all. Sometimes the trick is to do it for just the right amount. For instance, I reminded myself to ‘tone down’ my English sometimes when editing my students’ essays. For instance, I left some grammatical errors if they reflect my client's genuine English proficiency level. Suppose the students find it, good for them. If they do not, at least I tried my best to articulate the original paper in their ‘authentic’ voice.”

Interestingly, while agents made the conscious effort to disappear from their students’ final essays—what Anteby and Occuio called recognized estrangement—they used this to justify their professionalism and commitment to student well-being. Therefore, they see themselves as a hard-working workforce similar to the foot soldiers in the frontier, clearing obstacles for the disadvantaged international students. As one of my participants, an experienced education agent, expressed,

“No admission process can engineer conditions so well that all potential pupils have access to quality education opportunities. My job is merely leveling the game [for my students]. My role is to help Taiwanese students overcome their disadvantages as foreigners and help them rebrand themselves in their application materials.”

For them, their intervention in students' writing served some of their commitment toward putting back this meritocracy by nurturing students to stay committed to their individuality. The study abroad review system assumes that students can express their true nature and worthiness in their application documents. However, the schools often fail to consider that international students must spend extra energy transforming their cultural and social capital, which is a more comprehensive, costlier process. Therefore, in the agent's eyes, the kind of authenticity crafting work they do is what matters in highlighting the students' actual merits and potentials. This is
because such stories and complete background can help students present their struggles and hard work, not their inherent class or linguistic advantages.

*Dealing with logistics and routine work*

The third way agents can help students craft their authenticity relates to routine bookkeeping and non-essential documents, such as necessary filing forms. Students opt to hire education agents because they can outsource such trivial and detail-oriented tasks to the agents and their staff. However, agents consider these seemingly mundane tasks as quite significant for two main reasons. First, multiple agents highlighted that these trivial works carry significant implications of “face work” in admission. While students might not gain many advantages by following the deadlines and instructions, they may very well risk their chances if they cannot follow the rules, especially when search committees might interpret these slips as a sign of irresponsibility and carelessness.

One agent cited the example of dating to demonstrate her point:

“I will do my best to help you apply to the ideal school. Making sure all the documents are right in place, and the instructions are duly followed. I will dress you up, put make-up on you. I will also make sure you do not appear sloppy…as if you are on a date with someone else.”

The dating and face-work metaphor is again referenced here as evidence that the agents masterfully manage and stage the students’ self-based on certain conditions. Furthermore, what is noteworthy is that they see this act of building other people’s authentic self as a noble quest. Thus, they do the work without being credited for it. Furthermore, they believe that their assistance gives students extra time and energy in performing such a strained process.

“And each school’s application form looks similar. Indeed, they are similar. If you are unsure whether you have filled in the details carefully, you can also ask us to assist you. At the same time, the application documents required by each school are
different. These requirements may be scattered in various corners of their official website, and they need to be dug out carefully. Our streamlined service can greatly increase your freedom and help you put your mind to better use while you prepare for your exams and complete your application documents!”

In so doing, agents highlighted how the students’ construction of their authentic self in the admission process could be considered a multi-layered process, which involves extensive creative writing and, to some extent, a trivial form of image management. In such a context, many agents emphasized the necessity of their work as a professional quest that removes the human complexity in dealing with more “pure” problems and formats for their clients and prevents them from wasting their time and energy on unnecessary and non-creative works.

**Failures of Authenticity Crafting: Managing Controversies on Ghostwriting**

Yet, it is equally important to point out that the Taiwanese students who can pay the high fees for such service are probably well-off themselves in the first place. As previous research shows, children of privileged backgrounds can often have better institutional knowledge and cultural resources that help them succeed in the application process (Takacs 2020). Therefore, the agents’ work involving authenticity crafting may be another way by which elite students can reproduce their class advantage in this context. However, in international students' application systems, these authenticity crafting market behaviors are mostly packaged as more neutral self-fulfillment and self-development initiatives. Such discourses mask the underlying inequalities regarding why and how such markets can be made available in the first place.

On top of its potential to exacerbate inequalities, the agents' authenticity crafting works can also tread towards the morally controversial territory. In my fieldwork, I observed two types of more troubling works agents perform to help their clients. Each one requires other works that reinvent or obfuscate students' authenticity. First, sometimes agents deal with low grades and
English writing skills, making branding the “authentic” student characteristics very difficult. In such cases, agents have two options: push students to apply to lower-ranked schools with less rigid admissions criteria or ghostwrite the students' essays altogether.

Of course, ghostwriting students’ essays require re-creating students’ authenticity, often based on the agents' own experiences and imaginations. Instead of “crafting” and discovering a student's desirable characteristics and potential, ghostwriters use their knowledge in scaffolding stories and personal statements that seems convincing. One might suspect that such cultural matching means that some agents perform fraudulent behaviors and interventions by helping students fabricate information about themselves. After all, the search committee might not detect whether the students and agents deliberately fabricate stories that are not too different from their actual experiences. However, interestingly, in my interviews, although some agents admit to ghostwriting students’ essays on several occasions, many agents point out that such fabrication of the self does not impact the overall integrity and originality of the resulting documents. As one agent stated, “It might seem we can do whatever we want with his or her self-presentation [when ghostwriting students' essays]. However, we can only do so much. You cannot turn the stone into gold.”

For these situations, the agent must also take specific measures to save the student’s authenticity while staying true that students may sometimes lack the desired abilities. Many agents respond to these kinds of students by choosing to turn down such a request, even though ghostwriting can be very lucrative. Meanwhile, other agents choose to direct these students to schools that do not require customized applications, such as lower-ranking schools or those with the so-called “conditional admission” system. These behaviors may seem to have nothing to do with a student’s authenticity itself, but in fact, it is through these acts that agents can carefully select a specific application pathway that could determine whether a student needs to engage in authenticity
crafting in the first place. When they lead students to schools with lower rankings or more flexible admissions criteria, they also alter students’ selfhood on paper by portraying them more like numbers and quantitative measures rather than showcasing their distinctiveness. Many schools will take the initiative to hire education agents to turn students into better, more manageable, and understandable units. Under such circumstances, the education agent's role shifts from assisting students in creating their admission essays to using their transnational experience to help students find niche opportunities.

An agent can reinvent students’ identity and authenticity is considered more extreme and controversial, proven to exist in my field. Some agents will “invent” personal narratives and stories based on clients' requests without knowing anything about such clients. For example, an agent I interviewed, working as a freelancer, would receive anonymous admission cases online and then help his clients complete their application documents. When pressed about how he thinks such a process helps ensure that the documents reflect the true nature of his clients, the agent responded:

“Honestly, I think this is better. I will not be as biased as when I know the students too much and become more subjective. I can create an objective personal story and background with consistency based on their background information: transcripts, CV, etc. If the student would pay someone else to write the essay, I think the school he applied to may need a credible document. Moreover, I am just a tool for completing this file.”

Of course, such “objective” stories and documents cannot be verified. However, it is worth noting that their works are also a form of authenticity crafting for these few agents. However, such authenticity crafting focuses more on how the agent uses his imagination and experiences to create different stories, rather than using the students' experiences and abilities as the essential information. Therefore, these tasks are closer to what other previous research calls “contract cheating,” wherein students pay other people to write assignments or accomplish documents that
need to be completed. In this process, the education agents can ensure the integrity and authenticity of the documents based on the fact that they handle entirely the creation process. Just as the faculty can have difficulty spotting inconsistency in ghostwriters' assignments, once the application essays are entirely outsourced to an agent, it would also be difficult for schools to find out what happened.

While it is not news that college admission has notoriously been a playground of the elites, they may be more useful in other kinds of contexts in which demonstrating one's privileged is valued. Therefore, Taiwanese students' participation in transnational college admissions strengthened students’ incentive to find better ways to demonstrate their “authenticity” not for themselves but for the sake of being competitive. In such a process, the education agents' work becomes more tempting, even though it sometimes means crossing moral and ethical territories or reproducing their clients' privileges. As such, the college admission process, like all other economic realms, can be a mere reproduction of one's inherited privileges rather than one real merit.

**The Moral Market of Authenticity Crafting**

Despite its popularity, the transnational shadow education market was a niche market deeply entrenched with moralized debates about the role of admission assisting. Purchasing a service from an agent brings potential stigma to customers because students who outsource admissions essays are considered dishonest by the institutions. Also, heavily curated applications and overly edited essays are a red flag to college admission committees and can hurt an applicants’ chances. This is even more true with international applications.

In stark contrast to the legitimate coaching students with their writing, the act of ghostwriting is viewed as an excessive intervention and, therefore, a cheating practice. Ghostwriting students’
admission essays is defined here as wholly taking over the creative work of writing students’ admission essays, including fabricating experience and merits that student does not have. Consultants viewed ghostwriting as a different intervention level into student self-performance, which is scandalous and an act of students' deprivation for their learning processes. One consultant, M, is particularly vocal about her disdain toward consultants doing ghostwriting because those practices might bring down the entire profession's reputation.

As for the Statement of Purpose (SOP), I knew many [other consultants] help students finished that by ghostwriting. They made up stories. They create statement out of nothing. We cannot wholly avoid those students who want this service. However, a better consultant tried to keep the process as close to students’ real character as possible. That is, we told them, ‘if you just gave me a carrot, I cannot make you a fondue.’ That is the bottom line.

In other words, ghostwriting is seen as an unacceptable act because it violates the moral guideline warranting paying the consultants’ service—their professional role in helping students navigate the “authenticity” of self in the admission process. Although many consultants could not always articulate why ghostwriting was not acceptable or why that constitutes a disdain of the professional code in interviews. However, the rhetoric and the language they used suggested that the consultants’ dismay stems from how they conceive the ghostwriting labor as a lower form of professional conduct.

So, I often tell my students: you must write your essays. I think it is true that the writing mirrors the writer. I want the student to use their ways to articulate themselves. If I do so, it might not be as lively and as convincing. Because it [the essay] only reveal what I feel and believe. Letting students speak for their mind was very important. This might not wholly decide whether they eventually can get admission, but it could be a key to determining whether a school likes them or not.

Consultants concern deeply about ghostwriting as the practice puts their professional status to risk. For them, admission intervention is more than a tool for making money; it is also a platform
demonstrating their status as experts. The act of ghostwriting was considered illegitimate and inconsistent with the professional code because of lower skill and risk-taking level. On the one hand, consultants engaging in ghostwriting do not need to invest in the same personal commitment to learning students’ potential and distinctiveness. On the other hand, ghostwriting is considered a lower status because consultants take less risk of helping the student achieve the outcomes. Ghostwriters can create coherent documents in tone, style, and language ability while putting their clients at risk of being spotted. Because the university admission system is intended to evaluate “authentic” self-portrait essays, human and matching software is likely to be ineffective. Further, the process of ghostwriting was a deviation from consultants’ goal to perceive writing as a collaborative effort. They shared responsibility with the students.

To buffer the moral crisis that comes with ghostwriting, consultants would take other small yet significant actions that preserve the student’s writings' authentic tones. For instance, some consultants admitted to the authors that they occasionally leave some grammatical errors in the documents they wrote on students’ behalf to protect the piece genuinely. In doing so, they feel that their commitment toward educating students about the writing and their integrity of professionalism were both realized. One consultant, when pressed about how they manage to help one of his students to ghostwrite their essays, responded quite astutely:

If you help them overdo it, let us say you line-edit too much and sound completely arcane, you risk creating a tone that does not sound like the student at all. Sometimes the trick is to do it for just the right amount. For instance, I reminded myself to “tone down” my English sometimes when editing my students’ essays. For instance, I left some grammatical errors if they reflect my client's original English ability level. Suppose the students find it, good for them. I tried my best to articulate the original paper in their “authentic” voice if they do not.

Like consultants coaching students, consultants ghostwriting students’ essays also took the act of disappearing from the viewer’s eye. However, unlike how consultants who did so to preserve
the authenticity of the student’s voice, ghostwriting consultants do so not with pride but with a mind to heighten their business opportunities. Therefore, it is understandable that they often do work that makes their errors and grammatical mistakes visible, not to fail the students but so the clients can spot their effectiveness more easily. In this context, students’ *authentic* voice and style are preserved not because it helps make the student more desirable but because remaining such a level of originality helps protect the consultants from threats to their professional turf and identity.

Notably, most consultants pointed out that drawing specific moral boundaries on good and bad practices was not all that clear-cut. The moralized line between what is legitimate and illegitimate can be murky and continually shifting. For example, during our fieldwork, there are pretty divergent opinions regarding how and what constitutes a scandalous process of ghostwriting students’ essays. Some interviewees would consider some of the intensive writing they worked on as “editing,” while others would argue this act already falls into immoral cheating behavior.

Why do such an ambivalent attitude and grey zone exist about ghostwriting? For many Taiwanese consultants, refusing to provide ghostwriting services often means losing business altogether. As consumers of an exquisite cuisine might demand immediate returns of sensations or outcomes, students and parents are just as likely to demand quick and effective returns. Ghostwriting offers a convenient way to satisfy the customer without significant personal or academic input. Also, ghostwriting is more lucrative. For students willing to take the risk of hiring ghostwriting consultants, the ability to deliver an “authentic” written document was a rare skill. High quality ghostwritten documents are worth 8,000-15,000 NTD per document (roughly 270-500 USD). On the contrary, consultants who offered coaching packages typically range from 30,000-60,000 NTD (roughly 1000-2000 USD), although the service time is significantly longer. Thus, the repay much lower. Because many students and parents paid a significant amount of
money to receive help from the agents, they demand the “fixing” conducted to be seen. In those instances, consultants often breached the boundaries between coaching and ghostwriting. As one consultant put it:

There is almost always some controversy on this issue. Students sometimes feel that, since they paid the fee, we [the consultant] should be the ones that actively get things done. Some students have different perceptions of our jobs. So, our ethical wills for keeping the documents at it is be interpreted as laziness and disinterest.

Equipped with those moralized distinctions and market practices, we then discuss how the consultants situated their professions with the larger institutional contexts of the global higher education market. As consultants draw clear moral distinctions between ghostwriting versus cheating and coaching as empowering, what do consultants then use to justify their institutional role and purpose? In other words, how do education consultants give meaning to their work, especially in the background of various admission scandals? We offered two explanations for the questions. One focuses on how consultants obfuscate “cheating” as a benevolent act of helping students level the direct field. The other addresses how consultants situate their workforce in the battle between the broader meritocratic culture and students’ desire to succeed.

The benevolent “cheating” that helps the non-elite students

Firstly, a service market is acceptable when there is a high level of perceivable professionalism that market actors invested in making the transaction happen (Abbott 2001). By claiming themselves as professionals with some form of expertise, Taiw can create legitimacy for their work and services. One possible way is to reframe the admission essay-writing process as a collaborative effort for disadvantaged students. One of the Taiwanese consultants, T, who held
counseling sessions for students before the actual writing process begins, explains why she thinks admission essay-writing was a collective endeavor.

[Taiwanese] Students arrive at the stage of applying for a university abroad with a significant personal background, social, educational, and financial resources. Ideally, they can do the writing themselves. However, only the very few individuals can do so without consulting other people’s help. Those who are fortunate enough to attend more prestigious universities or high schools may have support and guidance nearby. However, the rest of us, the majority, need friends, families, and often professional help when there are constraints on time and costs. I felt that is when we [agents] became relevant in the writing process.

In our observations and interviews, most of the consultants stressed how their approach to intervening in students’ essay-writing differed recruiter “agents” and how their intensive admission assisting should not be seen as cheating conduct. “I am more like an educator” was a typical framing they used to claim legitimacy and gain the trust of their clients. Consultants often highlight the substantial level of interpersonal interaction and emotional work that goes into creating such essays. In so doing, they understood themselves as the liaison students need to when writing a document about culture and self. Consultants manage this “educator” impression in other significant aspects of their work, such as putting capitalized “education,” “caring,” “your dream” in advertisement brochures, or encouraging students to call them “teachers” when they met.

We also found that consultants highlight their “educator” status have a more cultural purpose. By presenting themselves as trustworthy authority figures students can recognize, consultants can mobilize their own cultural experience and symbols to legitimize their paid services without reinvent their justification. In so doing, consultants stressed that their work as a way for leveling the direct field as if teachers would strive for their students’ fair competition. When students, especially those from Asia, are writing the admission essays in English, consultants highlighted that they are not only using another language but also being forced to narrate their
individuality from an estranged cultural context.

A lot goes into helping the student to write their essays. First, you need to invest in time and effort to understand who they are and what they want. And then you need to figure out a way to make them appear appealing before the search committee.

Consultants saw their role as a response to the meritocratic culture imposing on Taiwanese applicants a disadvantage their clients need to overcome. By stressing their commitment to helping a student overcome language and cultural disadvantage, consultants redefine their work of intervention in students' essay writing as a benevolent act of support and mentorship. Also, consultants frame their work of helping students as a benevolent act of cultural brokerage—expands their understanding of the cultural matching of self in admission essays as a cultural construct. This focus on the cultural brokerage role ensures good service manifested in ways more associated with gift-giving instead of economic transactions.

Valuing “cheating” in a meritocracy system

Secondly, Taiwanese IECs situate their professional role within transnational meritocratic ideals, which put unrealistic expectations on self-performance' authenticity. The meritocracy-driven educational ideal prescribes individuals gain access to education best fit their characteristics and worthiness. However, numerous studies have shown that rather than remedying inequality, the ideal often helps legitimize social stratification of the distribution of educational resources (Alon 2007; Stevens 2009; Xiang and Shen 2009). Moreover, the ideal narrowly focused on the imagery of “self” as an original creation of individual students rather than considering the different cultural, social and financial capital they bring to the admission games. As a result, the writing of admission
essays and documents needs to be an organic process, whereas individuals could consult others' help (such as alumni, parents, and elder faculty) but cannot pay someone for assistance. A paradox in such an ideal system was that international students need to show their merits and demonstrate they accumulate this qualification independently in their homeland. Any activities and intervention disrupting the process are immoral, and the actors are conducting it unethical and unworthy.

Typically, self-expression is constructed within coherent social groups with shared cultural and identity affiliations. In the case of expressing oneself in admission essays, it became a set of calculative evaluations of one’s strengths and weaknesses. These evaluations, in turn, transform the interactive process of self-expression into a business. However, in most education settings and cultures, paying someone to work for your academic tasks and documents is considered plagiarism and illegitimate, if not illegal. Many existing moral market studies show the strategies individuals and organizations use to obfuscate exchange in conditions under which it may be perceived as illegitimate (Healy 2006; Rossman 2014) or sometimes to obfuscate (Schilke and Rossman 2018) the market nature of the transaction altogether. To such an extent, Taiwanese IEC's professional activities and identities cannot be entirely divorced from an understanding of how it functions in connection with the contextual issues of economic and cultural resources was redistributed and rewarded.
Figure 7. Macro-micro moralized markets of independent education consultants in Taiwan

Figure 3 illustrates how the macro-level rationales of meritocratic culture influence the micro-level process of education consultants assisting students to turn their writing into admission spots and how different adaptation strategies correspond with different moralized behaviors. Economic success in the essay-coaching business in Taiwan comes from making repeated placement of students by writing competitive admission documents that fit the search committees' desirable characteristics and quality. How authenticity was constructed in the admission essays is enormous because the meritocracy ideals prescribe that college admission should be based on students’ worthiness. Writing admission documents for different schools' levels requires varying English proficiency levels, cultural awareness, and sense of self. Different levels of perceived professional level, moral commitment, and effectiveness of allocating students to foreign universities jointly shaped how education consultants define and understand their work in essay-writing.

Chapter Conclusion

What makes student identity permissible and legitimate in the college admission process?
College applicants can perform various activities to improve their admission odds, ranging from scoring very high in standardized exams to hiring someone to write their admission essays on their behalf. This chapter aims to investigate the cultural works done to help make international student applications seem more legitimate to college admissions committees, mainly when students employ professional helpers to modify their written admission essays. The vast literature on selective college admission has identified how college applicants, particularly those from underprivileged backgrounds, need to learn to manage the college space and opportunity structure of admission (Jack 2019; Nichols 2020; Takacs 2020). This chapter builds on those existing accounts and aims to discuss how existing works have yet to explore how markets can serve as intermediary forces in the international students' college application process by helping them create new cultural capital and selfhood (Bilecen and Faist 2015; Kim 2018). Specifically, my results suggest that agents in the transnational shadow education industry in Taiwan conduct “authenticity crafting” work as they intervene in the international students’ application, which facilitates their acceptance into US colleges.

Such a workforce is not new, but it seems to be expanding in today’s increasingly competitive higher education admission system. A growing strand of literature has discovered how different “economy of self” markets have emerged in support of the social and cultural processes of reinventing someone else’s self for personal gains (Anteby and Occhiuto 2020; Hochschild 2012). However, fewer college admission studies have examined the cultural process involved in catering to students’ admission, especially with hired help and market intervention. One crucial question we can ask is, “What kinds of works being done can make student identity permissible and legitimate in the college admission process?”

In such a way, transnational shadow education professions' labor can be productively thought
of as a kind of authenticity crafting work because they intervene in modifying international students' self-presentation. In other words, agents help students create a self-narrative that can seem most valuable for examiners from other countries. The agents engage in multiple routine and brokerage work that help reinvent the students' self and authenticity. Authenticity here does not refer to objective features that reflect students' essential worthiness and hard work but to the conscious presentation of students’ transnational meritocracy. By doing such work, education agents who conduct authenticity crafting help students find the niche opportunities that best fit their needs and maximize their chance of enrollment in a highly competitive global education admission market. Ghostwriting can also be quite common, particularly when agents are required to manage inconsistency and handle professional failures to salvage the likelihood of their clients' admission.

Defining the admission service market as a platform for authenticity crafting helps us understand how such a market intervenes in international students' transnational admission by engaging in works that help brand students' legitimacy. In some ways, performing such works and tasks (i.e., producing someone else’s self) is very different from building a car or serving food: in this context, workers must labor to change and re-construct the essential nature of the product they are selling, while staying invisible to the consumer of such a product. This chapter suggests how such unique market dynamics can be applied to understand better how international students seek paid help to overcome the difficulties of convincing search committees of their worthiness as applicants. Drawing on the analysis of ghostwriting and other forms of “economy of self” in the literature, this chapter and the empirical evidence contribute toward a better understanding of the admission market and the higher education market catering to international students' recruitment in several ways.
The empirical findings in this chapter also pointed to how such practices raised moralized debates of such workforce— that the transnational admission process can involve cultural brokerage works adulterating oneself to make their admission seem more credible. However, such a process implicates different levels of intermediate labor with students’ admission essays. Some require more benevolent line-editing, and others more extensive ghostwriting. The large literature on higher education internationalization has revealed the diverse ways in which the market-oriented practices and actors profoundly changes the circulation of ideas, capital, and people in the sector. Nevertheless, few scholars have examined the opposite process at work, specifically how moral and cultural-induced values change how higher education markets operate.

Understanding college admission entails unpacking the distinctive cultural works involved, and identifying those who supported the student’s application process can help us understand what characteristics are deemed worthy by college admissions committees. On a practical level, this might help explain, for example, why elite parents may consider hiring helpers to make their children’s stories seem valuable to the search committees. Specifically, in this chapter, I advance our current understanding of college admission by introducing the concept of “authenticity crafting” to understand how education agents can work on students’ selfhood on their behalf. Further, to understand cultural works and cultural capital in more general terms, this chapter extended the existing studies on the significant functions of how the college admission process reproduces social privileges on a transnational level.
Chapter 8: Moralized Market: STUDYABROAD Forum and Different Transnational Shadow Education Services

The meritocratic ideal prescribes that college admission should be based on students’ worthiness. Yet as admission to selective colleges has become increasingly competitive, a market for services to help students succeed in the application process has rapidly expanded. When is participation in this market understood to be morally legitimate? While research on moral markets has examined how participants distinguish legitimate from illegitimate markets, less attention has been paid to why groups define a legitimate market, particularly when its existence conflicts with other group values.

This chapter is an independent case study examining the moral dynamics of transnational shadow education market. In this chapter, drawing on digital ethnography and interviews of participants in an online forum for Taiwanese international students, I find that participants view college admissions services as moral when compensating for collective disadvantage, yet reject their morality in other contexts. Paying to beat a “meritocratic” system becomes legitimate when one recognizes one’s systematic disadvantage in that system. Yet recognizing group disadvantage along one dimension does not imply individual (dis)advantage along other dimensions, nor does it undermine a broader faith that the system is meritocratic.

Meritocracy and the Market of Agents

When it is okay to pay to win in a meritocratic system? College applicants can purchase a range of services to improve their odds of admission to competitive universities: at the low end, buying a test prep book; at the high end, donating a building. Few people would question the former's morality, but as recent news demonstrates (Medina, Benner, and Taylor 2019), actual
purchase of admission is highly scandalous. Where is the line between markets that are legitimate and markets that are not?

We draw on the moral markets literature (Zelizer 1978), which explores the conditions under which market exchange is (il)legitimate, to answer this question. Much of this literature focuses on the creation of “difficult” markets around sacred objects and processes, like body parts (Anteby 2010b; Healy 2006), reproduction (Almeling 2011), and death (Livne 2019). We suggest that meritocracy can similarly be understood as a sacred process in contemporary capitalism, and that purchasing services meant to intervene in its workings can usefully be understood through a similar lens.

This paper draws on digital ethnography of an online forum for current and prospective Taiwanese international students, as well as interviews with a sample of active forum users, to show how one community distinguishes legitimate from illegitimate market transactions in the sacred meritocratic process of admission to competitive universities, primarily (but not exclusively) at the graduate level. Students in this community believe strongly in the meritocratic system, and see the use of “education agents”—consultants who provide information about the admissions process, help students identify colleges and craft applications, and facilitate the paperwork around international moves illegitimate and shameful. Yet they also recognize their collective disadvantage in the process as nonnative speakers of English. Because they understand this disadvantage as unfair—that is, unmeritocratic—they see paying for services that compensate for that disadvantage (tutoring, translating, and editing) as entirely legitimate, even though those services may be pretty extensive. Recognizing the unfairness of a system that expects them to compete with native English speakers does not lead them to challenge the fairness of the system more generally, however, and other, closely related markets in admissions services remain
This case suggests that unpacking what meritocracy elements are seen as legitimate can help us understand what kinds of markets are seen as legitimate. Extra test-taking time for students with disabilities is understood as leveling the playing field. For example; thus the market for private psychological testing to identify such disabilities is understood as legitimate, although diagnoses may be generous and wealthy students are greatly advantaged (Goldstein and Patel 2019). Understanding meritocracy as a sacred process also suggests that a proliferation of markets to game may reflect a broader loss of faith in the system. On the flip side, our evidence also draws attention to the resilience of belief in meritocracy, as identifying one aspect of it as unfair (i.e. its favoring of native speakers of English) does not lead to more general skepticism. Finally, this case also extends the moral markets literature, pointing to processes reflecting sacred values as another type of case where we might expect markets to be similarly complex.

**Market Morality in a Meritocracy**

Participants in the STUDYABROAD forum have well-articulated opinions about what kinds of markets in admissions-related services are legitimate and what kinds are illegitimate. As a whole, they are firm believers that competitive admissions is a meritocratic process that does, and should, reward talent and hard work. They see themselves—Taiwanese applicants to (mostly) U.S. programs—as part of a joint group, and their forum as providing resources to help other group members. However, they also understand themselves as having a shared disadvantage in the admissions process as nonnative speakers of English in an English-only admissions process.

Because they understand this disadvantage as unfair, they see services meant to counteract it—that is, English-language tutoring, translating, and editing—as legitimate, even though such
services can involve extensive intervention in students’ applications. Yet at the same time, they see
the use of “education agents”—consultants who help students navigate the admissions process,
identify schools and craft applications, and facilitate paperwork related to international
admission—as illegitimate and shameful. Hiring an education agent is seen as undermining the
meritocratic process of admission, while paying for English services is a means of leveling the
playing field. Students made this distinction even though admissions success reflected talent and
effort and the varying amounts of cultural, economic, and social capital that they brought to the
process. Recognizing their collective disadvantage along one dimension did not lead to a broader
recognition of individual (dis)advantages along other dimensions or challenging the meritocracy's
fairness more generally.

_Becoming a Taiwanese International Student_

The number of Taiwanese students studying abroad has increased from 216 in 1950 to 41,090 in
2018 (Ministry of Education 2019). For the past two decades, more than 30,000 Taiwanese
students—3% of the total college-age population in 2018—have pursued overseas postsecondary
degrees each year (Dai and Chan 2006b). Historically, U.S. colleges and universities have been
the most popular international destination for Taiwanese students, with 31% traveling to the U.S.
in 2018, compared to 15% studying in Australia and 13% in Japan, the second- and third-most-
popular destinations (Ministry of Education 2019).

As the higher education system has become increasingly global, the number of
international applicants to U.S. institutions has shot up (until recently) at both the undergraduate
and graduate levels (Institute of International Education 2017). For Taiwanese students facing
increased competition for U.S. slots, the demand for admissions assistance—both formal and
informal—has risen. Against this backdrop, Taiwan was one of the first countries to see an “educational consulting industry”—designed to provide assistance with gaining admission to a competitive college—spring up. As in the U.S., this industry is accepted as necessary but seen as only somewhat legitimate, and its participants do considerable work to demonstrate that they are legitimate market actors and sometimes to obfuscate (Rossman 2014) the market nature of the transaction.

Students apply to schools in the U.S. because U.S. degrees are seen as a pathway to upward mobility (T. Kim 2010; Xiang and Shen 2009a). Not only do students acquire a credential that is highly desirable in the labor market, but their educational opportunities allow them to distinguish themselves from their peers with domestic degrees (Waters 2009; Waters and Leung 2013; Xiang and Shen 2009). Yet making the transition to studying abroad is challenging, both socially and culturally. Prospective students must become familiar with the rules of a different higher education system that values an unfamiliar performance of self, master complex standardized tests, and prepare themselves to study in another language. Applicants to U.S. schools are expected to jump through various hurdles in the application process, during which they also learn to adapt to the values and norms of mainstream U.S. society, including meritocracy.

Over the last fifteen years, online sharing of information has become a key source of knowledge about many students’ application process (Matzat 2009; Ngai 2019). Moreover, as college admissions have become increasingly competitive and schools increasingly rely on individual merit to distinguish applicants, international students are forced to find new ways to distinguish themselves and demonstrate their excellence. Against this backdrop, Taiwanese students learn about international admissions through various sources, including personal social networks, professors, and peers. The STUDYABROAD forum is widely consulted by potential...
applicants and involves a great deal of information sharing and exchange between current applicants and students who have successfully navigated the process of becoming international students.

Moralized meritocracy and the agent’s market

Collective Disadvantage in a Meritocratic System

Participants in the STUDYABROAD forum predominantly buy into the idea that competitive college admissions is a meritocratic process: one that rewards a combination of native talent and, especially, hard work and commitment to mastering the arcane demands of college admissions offices. They understand embarking on the process of applying to competitive U.S. graduate schools as almost a heroic quest that one commits to: applicants “want to check and see if they can pass the challenge of getting accepted to top schools” (LebronKing, 2012). This struggle has costs, but also intrinsic rewards: “For those who can endure the painful process, it is a testament to their resilience” (j031020, 2010).

Success at this difficult endeavor requires ability but, above all, persistence. User Gnilnip, who called their two-year process of applying to graduate schools a “war”, emphasized that “Those who seemed like geniuses [because they received a Harvard fellowship in their first year] were just as hardworking [as Gnilnip was], with most of their efforts buried under their success stories.” Gnilnip continued,

To be honest, behind every admission to prestigious schools was a sacrifice not everyone was willing to make. While others are already touring the world, I might be touring the library. While others are driving a famous car, drinking whiskey, getting married, and enjoying their success; I’m riding my bicycle, devouring pain
killers, and writing my paper. This is probably going to be my life long after I graduate, or until I retire. Therefore, I would not say people who have admission to foreign prestigious school have a privilege on some level. Instead, I might say “he or she earned it.” (Gnilni, 2012)

This sense that competitive admission was “earned” as a result of individual struggle was widely shared on the forum.

Yet while they understood the general admission process as basically meritocratic, forum users also saw themselves—and Taiwanese applicants to competitive international universities more generally—as part of a common group with a shared identity. The forum was a place for participants to help one another through that process based on that shared identity. Veterans of the process offered to help those at its beginning to repay the assistance they had received in the past. As user henry77ha wrote in a post, “I was helped by so many people here [on the forum] and want to pay it forward to other people…Please send an IM [internal message]. Free of charge. Please help three more Taiwanese in the future if you did receive my help” (henry77ha, 2015).

The process’s competitive nature could make this common interest initially hard to recognize, but going through it (and participating in the forum) helped applicants recognize its existence. As longtime user L shared, “I’ve been participating in this site for over a decade…Applying to a foreign school is a lot of hard work, emotionally and academically. You come to realize that you are not competing with your peers [Taiwanese], but helping each other to overcome difficulties” (user L, 2018).

Part of this shared identity was based simply on the shared experience of navigating the complex admissions process. Another part, however, was based on a particular challenge shared by nearly all forum participants: applying as nonnative speakers of English. U.S. schools expected English applications, good performance on the TOEFL (Test of English as a Foreign Language),
and high scores on other English-language exams, like the GRE, as well. For forum participants, rising to meet this challenge demonstrated merit in itself. As user j031020 wrote, “the learning process is quite difficult for the non-native speaker. Those who chose to study abroad are willing to face the obstacles of the language barrier. This alone should be worthy” (j031020, 2010).

User Chucheng, returning to the language of war, similarly reflected, “Preparing for TOEFL and GRE was a lonely battle. It is not just about learning the right content and the format of the exam. It is also about learning to be resilient. Both exams take more than four hours to complete. Hundreds and thousands of hours to prepare for. Sometimes you have to be able to make instant judgments in exams, for which “no amount of language instruction would aid you enough” (Chucheng, 2008). Part of the shared identity of forum participants was based on sharing this particular disadvantage, which members of the community all had to overcome if they were to succeed in their quest to attend a U.S. university.

*Disdain for the Use of Agents*

As is perhaps not surprising in a community of users who believed in the meritocracy of admissions and saw themselves as being on a heroic quest, STUDYABROAD users were disdainful both of education agents themselves and the people who used them. “Education agents”—sometimes referred to as “education brokers”, with negative overtones, or as “education consultants”, the agents’ preferred term—offer a variety of services. Much like admissions consultants in the U.S., they might provide information about schools, help identify suitable matches, strategize about preparing for the admissions process, assist with self-presentation in the application itself, and work on the crafting of a personal statement. Education agents often assist with the paperwork particular to international admissions, like visa applications and travel
arrangements. In Taiwan, such consultants commonly graduate of selective U.S. institutions and now help others achieve the same.

Forum participants, however, understood education agents to be acting out of opportunism, and agents’ visible participation in discussion threads was a community taboo. The community was disdainful of their qualifications: “This may sound harsh, but I think nobody’s career goal was to be an education agent before studying abroad” (Ggggggg, 2014). This was, actually, an evaluation agent themselves agreed with: “If you level it clearly, it is not a very prestigious job” (user T, 2018). Agents were denigrated as motivated solely by money, and as making unreasonably high pay: “Agents are incredibly profitable…. [it’s] an occupation with no initial cost and able to charge a tremendously high fee. They do not have to be on call, they can deal with their clients after work on a part-time basis. Each case is worth about $1000 to $3000. You have to do serious work to earn that money otherwise” (deacon, 2014).

Similarly, it was taboo for students to ask for information about education agents on the forum, and users who demonstrated interest in such topics were at risk of alienating themselves from other members. One student found this puzzling: “This is peculiar to me. Why can’t I ask questions about agents? Whenever someone posts something about the agents the immediate reaction from everyone is ‘Please do it yourself’ and ‘As a candidate for international study, you should be ashamed of relying on others’” (student7, 2011).

Other users explained that there was simply no need for students to use agents, especially given the resources the forum provided: “If you work hard enough, you can just post a thread here, and the netizens will give all kinds of opinions. Combine all of our experience, and we know more than your agent” (ndr, 2010). Given access to such knowledge, turning to agents demonstrated an abdication of personal responsibility: “To be honest, if you are preparing to study abroad, shouldn’t
you be more responsible for your application process?” (Nakatsu, 2014). User ahyang commented on the same thread that agents’ only potentially legitimate function was to provide information on specific programs, but students could (and should) find that themselves, if they were willing to do just a little legwork: “If you are certain about what you want, such as programs and research areas, you don’t have to look at every school. You merely skim through some of the information on the website, probably less than five minutes per school. Prepare your file, which is like a half-hour of work. That takes no more than a weekend” (ahyang, 2014).

Even community members who had paid for agents' services felt that doing so had tainted their admission. One student who successfully enrolled in a selective U.S. university after hiring an agent recalled,

Back then, I just wanted to reduce some of the pressure. So I got lazy. I’m not regretful—because I’m here. Nobody can take that away from me. Sometimes, I feel that I failed to manage my path, and I am essentially buying my way into graduate school. They [forum users] were somewhat correct in saying that I could not take care of myself, and it made me feel inferior to others….I think that getting through the application process signifies that you are one of a kind and competent in crafting the opportunity for yourself. I don’t want to tell others about the agent [that I worked with] because I don’t want to be incompetent (User F, 2016).

Thus members of the STUDYABROAD community shared a perception that purchasing the services of education agents was illegitimate, and enforced a ban not only on the (visible) participation of such agents in the forum, but even on discussing the use of such services. This cultural rule was taught to new members, and internalized among community participants so that even those who had used such agents successfully felt ashamed that they had done so, and did not want others to know about their participation in this market.

*Justification for the Use of English-Language Services*
In sharp contrast to the disdain and shame associated with education agents' use in the application process, the STUDYABROAD community saw another market for admissions-related services as completely legitimate: paying for English-language help. Students took classes to help them score better on the TOEFL and paid tutors to improve their English-language skills. They hired English-language editors to help them polish language to sound more intelligent and express themselves better in the all-important “SOP”—Statement of Purpose. These services could be intensive, and involve a great deal of intervention in students’ writing and self-expression. Yet unlike hiring education agents, which was widely denounced as shameful, paying for English-language services was universally accepted in the forum, and hiring an independent editor, in particular, was encouraged and seen as an intelligent move.

Community members could not always articulate why English-language services were acceptable to use when education agents were not. User T, an education agent who frequently visited the forum, reflected on this in an interview: “Many student netizens don’t mind sharing about [i.e. being associated with] professional tutors and translators. The editors and tutors also work for pay [like education agents], so I don’t know. Maybe they are more expensive, so people find them more legitimate? I don’t know.” (User T, 2018). Here, a participant acknowledged that the two markets' differences that made them morally distinct were not self-evident.

When pressed, however, students distinguished between improving one’s ability to play the game and paying someone else to play it for you: “Hiring an editor requires a lot of individualized work and self-learning. You need to be mindful of what you want to do and what you need. We are like players who hire a professional coach to help train to be better competitors. But we are the ones fighting the battle. Hiring a commercial agent is letting the agent do the work for you” (User N, 2016). The value of the quest to be admitted to a selective institution lay in
carrying it out on one’s own. Improving one’s capacity to do so through one’s hard work (even with paid assistance) was understood as legitimate. Circumventing the process, on the other hand, was not.

Yet making the distinction between education agents and English-language services on these grounds seems arbitrary. It is true that paying a tutor to improve one’s English skills still required individual effort to learn. Nor was working with an English-language editor to improve one’s Statement of Purpose typically a passive process. But working with an education agent required effort as well. Education agents understood their job as providing information and advice so a student could find programs that would be an excellent fit and craft themselves into the strongest applicant possible for those programs. This did not inherently involve less work on the part of the applicant.

A more compelling explanation students gave for why English-related services were legitimate, while education agents were not, rested on the fact that such services helped with English, specifically. Community members recognized their collective disadvantage as nonnative speakers of English in a system that expected native fluency. Other elements of the admissions process—even arcane ones, like the American demand for self-expression in applications essays—were understood as legitimate meritocratic criteria worthy of personal mastery. But the expectation of very high levels of English-language performance, while universally acknowledged, was not understood as integral to the meritocratic process in the same way.

This sense that the expectation of fluent English was not a fair meritocratic standard, and thus that paying for services that could compensate for a lack of such fluency was legitimate, was widespread. In an interview, one community member, who firmly believed that people who hire education agents are “lazy”, paradoxically had no qualms about employing an independent editor
himself while applying to international universities: “I think it’s a regular practice. Everyone does it one way or another. We cannot write English and Americans and British applicants do, you know what I mean? So I think hiring an editor gives us an equal chance” (User N, 2016).

Similarly, another user pointed to English fluency not as part of demonstrating merit, but as a prerequisite to being able to do so—a tool for overcoming global disadvantage:

English is not just an international language. It is a form of empowerment. The tool that wins you access to all the information needed….Only when you have gained the advantage of acquiring all the information can you negotiate with Western society about “fairness” and “merit”….English brings you freedom, representing the freedom to fight back [against the West] for what you deserve.(fuffy, 2015)

The legitimacy of the English-language services market lay in a deeper level of sense of collective disadvantage, one that English speakers failed to even recognize. User cottonball succinctly captured this sentiment:

I remember reading an article from the New York Times many years ago about a ‘Crazy English Camp’ in China. I was shocked by the devotion of [mainland] Chinese students and how the West views people who struggle with English. For people worldwide—the West, especially the U.S.—to see you exist, you need to speak perfect English. Language brings you the ultimate power, because language decides whether you exist at all. Resistance might be possible. But you risk marginalizing yourself forever (cottonball, 2008).

The English fluency expected in the admissions process is not understood as a form of meritocracy, but as a reflection of Western power. Pushing back against English's hegemony by paying for English-language services was thus not only legitimate, but even noble.

**Circumventing or Reinforcing the Sacred Meritocracy?**

While forum participants drew a bright line between education agents and English-language services, it was not the case that the former necessarily provided a more intensive form of
intervention into the application process than the latter, nor did their use necessarily require less active effort on the part of students. Instead, what distinguished English-language services was that they addressed a specific, collective disadvantage that forum participants shared: their status as nonnative English speakers in a global higher education system in which English was hegemonic. Community members believed in the meritocracy of the system and valued the struggle to become a successful applicant. Paying for services to circumvent that process was looked down upon. Yet they did not understand English fluency as a skill that similarly needed to be achieved without paid assistance. Instead, paying for help with English was a smart move that could overcome collective disadvantage.

These students recognized the essential unfairness of the meritocratic system along one specific dimension—that by being born in Taiwan, rather than the U.S., they were not native speakers of the expected language. Yet recognizing the system’s unfairness along one dimension did not lead them to challenge it along other dimensions, nor did it cause them to doubt the value of meritocracy in general. Instead, outside this single dimension of language, their accounts of success and failure remained individualistic rather than structural. Native ability and, especially, hard work were key to success in the admissions game.

This belief in the meritocratic system as rewarding individual ability and effort remained despite wide variation within the community—itself already a group of would-be elites—how much economic, cultural, and social capital its members brought to the admissions process. Students’ preexisting knowledge of how international admissions worked, their networks of friends and family who had gone through the process firsthand, and their ability to pay for expensive tutoring and editing services (not to mention the cost of study) all affected their capacity to successfully negotiate the process, independent of any individual ability or their level of effort.
While forum participants were able to identify their collective disadvantage, and their beliefs about market morality reflected that recognition, this did not raise awareness of their own widely varying capacities to “play the game” more generally.

Chapter Conclusion

As elite college admission has become increasingly competitive, the market for services to help applicants navigate the process has dramatically expanded. While paying for some kinds of assistance is viewed as a normal, even routine, part of the process, other services are seen as illegitimate and undermining a nominally meritocratic process. Why do students define some markets in admissions-related services as morally legitimate, while others are morally questionable?

We draw on the moral markets literature to argue that admissions services can be usefully thought of as “difficult” markets because they intervene in a sacred meritocratic process. Our sample of participants in a Taiwanese online admissions forum believed strongly that the admissions process was fundamentally meritocratic and would reward dedication and hard work. They disdained people who paid education agents to facilitate the admissions process, because paying for such help undermined the meritocratic process through laziness and dependency.

While participants believed in meritocracy, they also recognized their collective disadvantage as Mandarin-speakers in a system that rewarded English. Unlike hiring education agents, paying for English-language services—even though that could involve significant intervention into students’ applications—was seen as completely legitimate, and to be expected. This was not understood as undermining the meritocracy, but as compensating for collective disadvantage, thus rendering the playing field more even. By defining one set of services as outside the sacred meritocratic game, they could justify paying for them. This did not erode faith in the
game itself, nor did it draw attention to the fact that some of them, by their social position, started in a better position to play that game than others.

Understanding admissions services as moral markets helps us think through the way people draw boundaries between legitimate and illegitimate markets in the context of competitive college admissions, and under what conditions they begin to challenge sacred meritocratic assumptions. Among Taiwanese applicants, it was recognition of a shared, unfair disadvantage that made certain services—ones that directly compensated for that disadvantage—morally permissible to buy. Paying to counteract disadvantages that are understood to unfairly impinge on meritocratic processes is seen as legitimate. Thus it is not surprising that parents may see paying for a private psychological evaluation that is likely to result in a disability diagnosis that will give students extra test-taking time as legitimate, since extra time can be seen as leveling the playing field. Paying for someone to write a child’s admissions essays, by contrast, is less morally defensible.

This perspective also raises questions about the persistence of faith in meritocracy and the conditions under which it erodes. It was Taiwanese students’ shared recognition of disadvantage, and a sense that that disadvantage was unfair made the market for English-language services morally distinct from the market for education agents. Yet recognizing that disadvantage did not prompt rejection of meritocracy more generally—only accepting ways to counter that specific disadvantage.

Similarly, we see other communities, often organized along identity lines (e.g. race/ethnicity, nationality, gender, first-generation status), recognize collective disadvantage in a putatively meritocratic process and develop strategies to combat it, whether political (advocating for affirmative action) or individual (trading tips on how to succeed as a member of a disadvantaged group). Typically, it is impossible to purchase services that directly compensate for
other types of collective disadvantage, as English-language help does for Taiwanese students. Regardless of whether these strategies involve market action, however, such responses often fail to lead to challenges to the system as a whole, instead manifesting as efforts to make it more “truly” meritocratic by leveling the playing field in one way or another.

Understanding admissions services as moral markets around a sacred process also provides insights into how such markets may be legitimated. Existing research suggest that the markets themselves may be sacralized (Zelizer 1978), professionals may define practices that demonstrate the legitimacy of particular parts of the market (Anteby 2010b), participants may do cultural work to produce new, more acceptable conceptions of the market (Chan 2009; Quinn 2008b), or frames around what markets are permissible may gradually be extended (Dioun 2018). Such efforts are already taking place among education agents. In the United States, for example, a trade association CEO writes, “Independent Educational Consultants (IECs) help level the playing field by supporting working- and middle-class students who go to public school, by allowing families of more modest means to gain similar expert help and advice at an hourly rate that is affordable for most” (Sklarow 2019). The market for education agents will be understood as more morally acceptable if it, too, is a means of leveling the playing field, rather than circumventing the meritocracy.

Finally, considering the space around a particular sacred value—meritocracy—as one where market morality is often contested suggests other sites where similar dynamics are likely to play out, and to highlight why (i.e. their sacred status) such issues are likely to arise in the first place—not because of some intrinsic character of the markets, but because of social processes that imbue them with such characteristics. Much of the moral markets’ literature looks at markets associated with bodies, death, or reproduction. While research has also looked at markets around religious
sites (Yue, Wang, and Yang 2019) and illegal drugs (Dioun 2018), for example, as sites of moral work, thinking of meritocracy as a similarly sacred value suggests other dynamics we might expect to see. For example, obfuscation dynamics (Rossman 2014; Schilke and Rossman 2018) and purification (Fridman and Luscombe 2017) that are visible around other forms of disreputable exchange seem likely to arise around meritocracy as well. The broad moral markets approach can be usefully applied beyond its core topics to a range of societal or locally sacred beliefs challenged by encounters with the market. Given the proliferation of “markets in everything”, this seems like fertile ground to plow.
Conclusion: Higher Education Under Neoliberal Forces:

Transnational Shadow Education in Taiwan

We are neither born good citizens nor noble tribe of the kings; it is a predicament that forces us to learn virtues and crafts, and it is containment that turns us toward the world. Forced to be good—this is the pariah's moral genealogy and another form of slave vengeance.

Wu, Rwei-ren, 2019, “Pariah Manifesto, or The Moral Significance of the Taiwanese Tragedy”

The beginning of sociological inquiry coincides with recognizing the “cultivated man,” a direct corollary of human nature as given by God. Seidman (1986) has suggested that the shift from a harmonious to a discordant relationship between science and religion in the 18th century caused such focus on modernity's influence on human individuals. This position is an epiphany in one of Max Weber’s earliest accounts of education and rationalization in Essays in Sociology, where he highlights:

Expressed in a slogan-like fashion, the “cultivated man,” rather than the “specialist,” has been the end sought by education. It has formed the basis for social esteem in various systems, such as the feudal, theocratic, and patrimonial structure of the domain.

When Max Weber observed that “rational individuals” was a desirable end product of education, he wrote about nineteenth-century Germany—long before there was any form of international schools or language pre-schools and long before the arts of carefully calibrated international-student-admission packages and pathways were standardized and mass-produced. Weber questioned education's function in a state-bureaucratic system and civil-service reforms, considering how individuals use education certificates to legitimize their social and economic advantages and positions. However, his concern focused on something he thought was more fundamental: the institutionalization of “codes of honor,” that is, the shift from prestige and
legitimacy to institutionalized learning and socialization through school education in modern capitalist society (Stevens 2009).

If Weber were to sign on to work as an education agent in Taiwan for the early twentieth-first century like any of my participants, he would be doubtless just as interested in learning about whose rationality it means to facilitates just how are those rational institutions being put into work. He would undoubtedly see that although the intelligent individual students remained the center of the “medium of competition” for their educational capital and merits, the real competition is no longer confined to individuals but rather at the institutional and market level. Institutional competition is now tied to global market competition to recruit as many “competitive” individual students as possible. It is also not merely individual universities that manage their recruitments to do the job; whole industries of “agents” have entered the game. Once a public act of educational management is sold now as service labor in students’ homeland. All in all, a private education recruitment system has been subordinated to commercial logic, and it has been changed by it.

Following the former eight chapters of data analysis and background discussions, I present this chapter to conclude the dissertation. I have used the Taiwanese education agent industry's case to make two significant points in this dissertation. First, and most importantly, the project has demonstrated that zooming in close on how individuals and organizations create the collective action of an “occupational field” can add something to our higher education knowledge. Second, looking at attempts to combine micro-interactive and macro-institutional demands for an intermediary in education can show us that marketization of higher education is the project of constituting a profession and controlling an unsettling global higher education market.

Thus far, the fieldwork details have displayed the micro interactive and macro dynamic in marking the occupational field of education agent market in Taiwan. In this concluding chapter, I
hope to use the Taiwanese case to shed light on the question I postulate at the beginning: What is the role of the market in the making of the “rationality project” of a modern higher education system? How can market brokers emerge in the face of the need for cultural and social barriers? How does such an echelon of institutional actor’s shape admission practices in general? What are the moral and economic implications of such a market? To what extent do local education agents orchestrate the collective resistance to the power of the world system of higher education hegemony by selectively adopt and reject specific imported modern capitalist ideas and practices instead of globalization? All these questions are summarized and synthesized in the section that follows.

In the rapid rationalization and commodification of higher education enterprises, education agents play a hidden but significant role as brokerage actors selectively adopt and reject specific imported modern capitalist ideas in the higher education field. Conducting in-depth interviews with 60 agents and stakeholders combined with field observations and archival reviews, I investigated various components of the emergence of the global institutional field of an education agent, mainly focus on how they challenge, define, and redefine historically-ingrained notions of “rational” process behind Taiwanese students seeking admission abroad. My research quests brought me to examine the extent of how local culture and groups wield power to counteract disadvantages in the global field yet reinforcing internal boundaries and rising moral challenges of such practices. Seeking to bring in all empirical, background theoretical chapters together, this chapter will synthesize the broader theoretical implications of the findings and discuss the contribution to the field and the real “field.” In the end, I would also suggest future projection and address how my field is likely to face charges in the face of significant disruptions as the presence of the COVID-19 pandemic took the world by surprise since the winter of 2020. To this context, I
Past Research and Limitations

International Education and Marketization of Contemporary Higher Education

My research aims to find a black box for studying the globalization of higher education. A global system of higher education began to rise in the 1990s. For most countries in the global market, a significant economic and policy issue is how to develop an appropriate education strategy so that educated people can adapt to the evolving global market. For the states, these tasks can be simplified as: (1) how to cultivate the "basic abilities" required by transnationalism (for example, literacy); (2) how to cultivate the macroscopic vision required by transnationalism; (3) how to train students to possess multi-discipline training with global competitiveness, including critical thinking ability and logical expression; (4) How to transform education into more suitable for training industrial talents who can move across borders. With the wave of globalization, the movement of goods, capital, and people began to become the norm. Many international students have begun to move around, and transnational education has also become an important issue.

Most of the past explanations on education globalization focus on the influence of national policies at the study abroad system and the transformation within higher education organizations. These studies can be roughly divided into three directions. First, past explanation has paid considerable attention to uneven distribution of power and resources in global education resources (Albach 2006; Meyers 1979). The world system of higher education described by Meyers (1979) and others, as well as many studies on Boudieuan's transnational capital reproduction derived from global higher education (Xiang and Shen 2009; Xiang 2019; Kim 2019), are intended to discuss
the issue of criticizing the inequality of reproduction in the emerging global higher education system. However, since this research approach attaches great importance to class relations and capital reproduction, its primary focus has been on how the elite wield the higher education system to their will to continue their dominant position in a globalizing world. In contrast, changes in external systems, actors, and organizations are more neglected.

Therefore, the second research path focuses on the globalization changes experienced by higher education organizations. In recent years, multiple disciplines—including public administrations, anthropology, political science, economics, development study, comparative education, and sociology—began to hone in the concept of “commercialization” occurring in higher education, attributing it to the emergence of the global student mobility market. Many studies have framed the globalizing institutions and rising commercialization efforts in universities to the substantial qualitative changes of higher education as actors in the global knowledge economy (Altbach 2006; Knight 2008; de Wit 2008, 2011). de Wit and Merkx (2012) stress that increasingly, higher education has moved from scattered specific international activities to an integrated collection of rationally defined and managed cross-border strategy, including the circulation of scholars and students, cross-border delivery of programs and projects, as well as the competition between and within countries with different educational providers. Higher education's commercialization and privatization dimension have increasingly become a topical field of institutional strategies and national and international agendas. Altogether, this research type has contributed significantly to the rise of the management profession in higher education and related knowledge systems transformation. However, for the critics of this type of research, this type of research has not been divorced from Western society's unique historical and economic factors. Higher education researchers rarely explore the connection between the local (or domestic)
education system and foreign school organizations.

The third kind of researchers, most born out of the curiosity exploring "non-Western" theory and experience of the global higher education formation, seeks to understand transformation of higher education missions in a more holistic stance beyond their particular national context. For example, we can see more and more studies with a comparative perspective with higher education globalization development from East Asia countries, such as China, South Korea, and Taiwan (Abelmann et al. 2009; Chae and Hong 2009; Chan 2013; Chung et al. 2018; Mok 2003, 2005; Mok and Lee 2003). On top of broadening the spatial frame, researchers have also expanded the existing attention to the emerging educational global market in post-communist economies—such as Central Asia, the former Soviet system, and China (Holloway et al. 2012; Mok 2005; Yang, Vidovich, and Currie 2007). Rather than mask the differences between the “developing world” by considering them as a whole, many works have identified that important internationalization and commercialization processes are often particularly apposite selective historical factors and political agenda at a specific time. In this dissertation, I explain in more detail in earlier chapters about Taiwan’s specific historical and economic conditions for integrating into the global higher education system for the same reason.

The last but most often overlooked research perspective is to explore changes in global education brought about by science and technology. The changes brought about by computer technology, information systems, new media, and transportation innovation have entirely changed our current understanding of higher education (Armstrong and Massé 2014; Bowen 2013; Hassan 2017; Page 2004; Robins and Webster 2002; Salganik 2017; Taylor and Dunne 2011; Thapliyal 2018). Technology has not only led to dramatic improvements in the material infrastructure relating to teaching and learning, but it has also forever changed the value of education and
diplomas as institutional capital. It is hardly surprising that the now-familiar “distance teaching and learning” has become a core issue of current higher education development issue and fundamental internationalization toolbox. It is worth noting that with the advent of the digital age, we see more of a global digital education market, a “commercialization of higher education” calling for more business-like university governance and recruitment practices. Today, our researchers are still struggling to find a better way to explain: What new generation of students face a fairer, freely competitive, and "rational" higher education society? Or is it a more fragmented and inferior education market? What kind of institutional organization will continue to be useful, and what kind of value and economic relationship will gradually disappear?

My research attempts to open some new exploration space on these existing research contributions and limitations. There are two essential focuses of my primary research approach: (1) I focus on the brokerage market generated in the institutional logic formed by this global education system. (2) Also, I discuss the technical, market, and ethical issues involved in intermediary professionals themselves, especially their service professions. My research mainly focuses on Taiwan, an island with scarce resources but long-term reliance on the advancement of education immigrants who return to their hometowns. How an intermediary market cultivated has tried to challenge the order of global education and profit from it.

I divided my dissertation into two critical parts to respond to the above questions. Chapter 1 to Chapter 5 focuses on introducing and sorting out the specific historical conditions (and cultural, economic, and educational conditions) to form the Taiwan education agent market. Part II, from Chapter 6 to Chapter 8, from my fieldwork, I explore how the education agent market can help us answer existing and future sociological issues. Some critical research directions, including markets, immigrants, organizations, etc., have been vaguely mentioned but cannot be named. I think my
essential contribution is that I do not just want to discuss how these professional education agents are skilled at producing study-abroad documents and CV. I also want to know how they cultivate enough knowledge and institutional relationships to manage the international education market's various changes.

Research Contributions

Global higher education and Intermediary Market

By all omens, we are on the verge of a substantial change in Taiwan and many other developed countries. Most research on higher education and socioeconomic inequalities in the United States has taken place in the formal educational systems within the scope of one culture and nation-state border. This dissertation shifted the focus to reveal how elite reproduction occurs transnationally when students enter another country to pursue higher education credentials. After a couple of decades of now-familiar developments—the withdraw of state-led higher education initiatives, and the growth of enormous corporate-like education agent industry taking over sending international students abroad, an occupation force emerges first to privatizing English teaching then to servicing specific packaging of overseas admission—has become an increasingly national and now international economy. In doing so, I unpacked a key market mechanism that explains how and why the global market of higher education admission has taken shape, paying particular attention to the institutional dimension and occupational pedagogies behind such a market.

Since World War II, parents and children from developing countries have attempted continuously to migrate to countries in the developed world in search of better education opportunities and labor market prospects. In the past, only some of the most affluent families could
afford the financial cost of sending their children abroad, with very few exceptionally talented students being funded directly by the state to study abroad. Pathways and support for the application process have also been limited, as admissions to foreign schools were generally considered a token of privilege. From the late 1970s to the mid-1980s, many international students began to enter the European and American higher education system. This trend reflects the growing middle-class in most developing countries and their increasing educational needs and reflects a significant change in European and American countries' education systems: the commodification of student admissions. Since then, strategic recruiting and admitting international students have been more commonly depicted as the “war of talent.” This rhetoric references the importance of student recruitment changes, as universities transformed from an emblem of elitism to a token of inclusion and meritocracy. Simultaneously, the phrase also captures the essence of the competitive nature of a system that allocates scarce resources: in this case, the seats and opportunities to study in the prestigious (mainly Anglo-Western, Global North) universities. As competition for college spots grows at the domestic level and the global market front, the pathways, and processes traditionally allocated to universities through the universal admission system become rapidly marketized and hyper-mediated (Armstrong and Hamilton 2013; Karabel 2006; Stevens 2009).

Uneven capital global expansion leads to unequal distribution of resources, wealth, and power globally. Most of the global changes we observed in education—changes toward rationalization, managerialism, and quantification—can be viewed in this fashion through the lens of world-system theory, which highlights not only that such process creates institutional “convergence” in higher education development, but also that they can explain the strategic action people take to react to obstacles and opportunities in the global field(Meyer 1979; Meyer and Rowan 1977;
Meyer, Ramirez, Frank, & Schofer, 2008; Schofer & Meyer, 2005). Earlier studies of this trend-focused mainly on global convergence at the state-level, how education in the world's richest and strongest countries is regarded as the key to modernization, so other countries compete to imitate their systems. However, more recent work has criticized such narrow emphasis that formal organizational demands for “rationalization” addressed how specific markets and local culture respond to such global convergence of education.

For post-1990 Taiwanese students abroad, studying abroad does not have as many political and economic restrictions as before. For example, the government intervened in ideological control in the 1960s. For this generation of students, what is important is how they can obtain enough social and cultural capital through such a process to break the development restrictions imposed on them by the locality. However, such open markets and choices also mean that they are facing a brand-new educational environment. This environment does not bring more freedom because of the Internet’s opening, but more comprehensive competition because of information flow. In this era, a subsequent market, a group of people who used to be students or immigrants, transformed their experience into negotiable knowledge. They are engaged in complex daily services, English teaching, agency, writing, and administrative business, and in this process train students from pupils of one education system to applicants of another education system. Past studies on education and sociological immigration have paid little attention to international students' socialization during the preparation period for studying abroad and the groups that influence these socializations.

Education agent’s industry was a case and point for such market response or the neoliberal shift toward education missions. In chapter 4, I sketch the emergence of education agents in Taiwan. From the late 1980s on, Taiwanese education agents sought first to institutionalize and then to enlarge the niche occupational field unintentionally created by the withdraw of nation-
states in the business of sending an international student abroad. First in private language tutoring schools, and then in independent consultants’ firms, education agents institutionalized the flow of practical knowledge as they organized to increase the use of their service and in recognizing their occupational image. In the 1990s, faced with variable demand from individual students and schools, education agents expanded their service and broadened their appeal, differentiating themselves from one another as they diversified their occupational practices. This strategy worked. Taiwanese education agents saw their peak of influence on students' mobility as they replaced elite personal networks and the government’s role as hubs of information and practical skills regarding admission to foreign schools. In the 2000s and 2010s, as international students' recruitment became even more prevalent in destination nations like the U.S. and U.K., the leading domestic education agents’ firms in Taiwan began to converge. If not most, some have chosen to focus exclusively on “pipeline services” as described in Chapter 5. At the same time, starting the 2010s, an upper echelon of education agents’ firms also emerges seeking revenue from providing more individualized services for the clients. Although market forces and legislative changes occasionally disrupted the firm’s strategic plans and organizations, the education agent’s industry remained strongly tied to the international higher education economy.

However, even when education agents succeed in persuading individual students, parents, and other higher education administrative clients to rely on their professional service, the professional stance of the education agents in Taiwan remained suspected. This was in large part owing to many infamous cases portrayed in the public media, such as the recent 2018 Varsity Blue Scandal in the U.S. Parents who paid a significant amount of money in exchange for some of the “consultants” knowledge for insider tricks and ways to streamline their children's’ pathways to gain access to colleges spots in elite universities. Because these agents and brokers are so often portrayed as
antagonists the fairness of the rules of admission, it is not too surprising that academics do not like them either. For many educational scholars, sociologists mainly, third-party education intermediary’s existence quickly fueled their already cynical views of a higher education system growingly taken over by capitalism ethos. At the beginning of the 2010s, reacting to the broader expansion of such occupation field and a growing concern about the professions' ethics, many works have focused on managing and controlling such national organizational and occupational fields that channel these firms' developments. The proliferation of scholarships on these questions most noticeably flourished in (international) educational management literature and policy studies importantly highlights the clash between market and professional logics within such field.

*Transnationalism and transnational shadow education field*

For the most part, the dissertation's findings thus far call attention to the fundamentally transnational nature of educational migrants and the business around them. This was the theme I delineated in Chapter 5 and Chapter 6 about how they conduct their tasks and work and pull together diverse local and transnational resources.

Mainstream sociological models present students’ decisions and characteristics resulting from applicants' attributed “merits,” which are usually tied to the cumulative reproduction of any given nation-state educational fields and classes. However, as I have noted throughout the chapters, students’ own cultural identities and the definition of merit play an essential role in shaping the actual admission results. Education agents occupy this intermediate role in managing and evoking these *in situ* cultural and social privilege. They are significant precisely because they are “home” but always evoking “out of place” knowledge, norms, and social networks. Agents and their knowledge are influential in making the process of admission to post-secondary institutions less
asymmetrical for international students, at least for the middle-class and upper-middle-class families willing to spend the money to support such provision (Huang and Yeoh 2005; Tse and Waters 2013). They represent a growing component of a multi-billion bound, multifaceted higher education industry whose sole purpose was to brokerage the global power relationship between Western higher education institutions and other culturally peripheral societies.

Secondly, from a more critical standpoint, migration researchers also justify how education agents and the education industry generally serve as an institutional resistance to the hegemonic of English language and Western educational criteria. Most significantly, education agents are part of an ever-shifting and evolving landscape of the “transnational social space” of higher education (Lan 2016; King and Raghuram 2013). The existence of agents and the industry, in other words, prompts scholarship to move beyond the Western-centered “nation-state container model” in viewing higher education. Some research considers the specific social field in which the education agents work by referring to Bourdieu’s theory of practice (Kern and Boker 2015; recent publication in Bourdieu). Although I did not fully engage with Bourdieu's theory in this dissertation, Bourdieu's influence on educational sociology's critical tradition has profoundly impacted this work. From this perspective, I think that education agent is a kind of business behavior that Taiwanese students use their capital to gain an advantage from the original culturally weak position. Knowledgeable agents help close the gap by providing crucial information, advice, and training for students to securely admit to education institutions abroad and safely transition into living abroad. Most significantly, the agents are most likely to emerge when international study creates a geographical and cultural disadvantage for interested students and institutions from abroad.

These cases also have research significance for the researchers on educational stratification and class mobility. What is striking about this case is how agents have been incorporated into
transnational upward mobility systems, probably more so than most would have anticipated. As a cross-border organization, education agents can help students break the restrictions caused by different educational pathways between different countries and change the possibility of students' upward mobility, especially for students from non-Western countries. In particular, when these students from Asian countries, such as Taiwan, China, or South Korea, face highly competitive higher education entrance examinations from their home countries, a relatively customized application process that pays more attention to personal characteristics may become another form of redemption. One of the most common stereotypes in Taiwan is hiring education agents as students from less prestigious schools trying to "whitewashing" their academic credentials to be recognized with more prestigious foreign university graduates.

Simultaneously, many studies have noticed the impact of these industries on the higher education system and the various effects on educational value. Many studies have noticed the impact of these industries on the higher education system and the various effects on educational value. However, with the gradual growth and systematization of such a market, how will they challenge and reorganize the education system's dominance for the legitimacy of upward mobility in the future? In Chapter 6, my research found that at least as globalization unfolds, there will be more and more uncertainties, and as the market grows larger, the organizations and economic systems corresponding to the market will become more sophisticated.

Culture, Capital, and Authenticity

My research also pointed out that the "authenticity" of a student’s identity has cultural significance and economic significance. Saying something or someone is “authentic” can mean different things for different people. Many sociologists have used the term to conceptualize
different empirical, methodological, and sometimes, epistemological conceptions. In the social science world, the use of authenticity emphasizes the socially constructed nature of authenticity as both a social process and a “social-psychological function in terms of social and personal identity” (Williams 2006: 177). Authentic characteristic does not inherent in an object, person, or performance, but rather is a claim used by someone to accept or reject others’ meaningful affiliations to someone else, something, or some performances (Peterson 2005, 1086). Many researchers focus on authenticity's relative objectivity, describing authenticity discourses and narratives by the dominant social groups and norms. Others pay more attention to the social process and implications on the creation and challenge of authenticity discourses, particularly from subcultures or marginal and outside actors (Williams 2006; Chung et al. 2007; Chung, Bloemraad, and Tejada-Pena 2013). Within this structure, international students are both the consumer and the product marketed on the admission processes. “Authenticity” is a powerful conceptual tool that can be used to study how education agents transform students' multiple cultural and social capital into different forms of merit to be evaluated in the transnational admission process.

My fieldwork uncovered the critical functions played by Taiwanese education agents in sending international students abroad. These education agents served as mediators of students' and parents’ feelings, emotions, and relationships with others. Studies show that middle-class parents and children are calculative and anxious about seeking a college education abroad. The combination of poor support from schools and the lack of knowledge of foreign education systems often leads to a high anxiety level amongst parents and students. Education agents fill the knowledge gap by providing personal service and emotional support for families during the contentious admission process.

Western readers rarely think about how much preparation goes into sending a non-English
speaking international student abroad. Not only do international students have to spend years working on academic credentials and standardized exams, but they must also endure tremendous uncertainty and anxiety during the admission process. Furthermore, for many international students, admission to universities abroad means transforming themselves into a cultural identity more appealing in the admission competitions. These preparations do not occur overnight nor in a vacuum. In my interviews, one agent explained how she often spent months or years cultivating students’ personalities, extra-curricular experience, English abilities, and academic credentials before the actual admission process. Another agent gave an example of how he continually moderates competing for educational aspirations between parents and children. Without these agents, applicants and parents are left flying blind amid uncertainties, emotional distress, and interpersonal tension in families during admission. To such an end, I argue that agents are crucial brokers of risks, emotions, and family relationships, particularly for applicant families.

Of course, such “authenticity” of the student was very context-dependent. In the competitive admission market, education agents play many roles in manifesting student identity's authenticity in the transnational educational market. On the one hand, they operate as market makers, working on universities' behalf to recruit students in specific geographical regions. They serve as gatekeepers selecting qualified students for schools’ officials, who most likely lack local knowledge or networks to verify students’ real accounts and credibility. On the other hand, education agents are also cultural brokers. They help students and parents ease their anxiety and distress by making the symbolic distance of another culture and education setting less threatening and relevant. They also help students gain crucial pre-migration skills and develop cultural awareness. Most significantly, the agents are most likely to emerge when international students’ education aspirations are blocked by a lack of proper cultural and social capital (Collins 2016;
Baas 2016). Knowledgeable agents help close the gap by providing “authentic” information, advice, and training for students to be securely admitted to education institutions abroad and safely transition into living abroad.

As a conceptual framework, “authenticity” was rarely used to study service work and its relating labor valuation process. Such lacking studies was due to the fundamentally different context between marketing a product and the selling of service to the customer (Fine 1968; Leidner 1993). First, service work depends on developing scripted and meaningful “interaction and relationship” to complete the transaction (Leidner 1993). This does not mean just in the most mechanical way that the salesperson should be personable and attentive when pitching a sale to a potential customer. However, the service industry's sales have to provide a convincible, authentic experience to make the transaction more meaningful, if not more profitable (Ritzer 1993; Leidner 1993; Fine 2004). In service work, self-affiliation and self-expression are both a means to selling as an end and the very nature of the commodification process itself.

**Professionalization and Work Process**

This dissertation also zones in an insider investigation of how a broker profession operates in higher education. Most brokers' research focuses on either the rational calculations of brokers’ systematical position or productivity, and most higher education studies on qualifications and status. Both, I argue, missed the mark that education agents do individual “unproductive” work and embody stocks of cultural capital and qualification that are generally excluded from the theoretical analysis. Despite some limited administrative pushbacks, the agent is a growingly important part of the empirical global higher education admission enterprise.

The sociology of work literature highlights the importance of studying how education agents
must participate in legitimacy construction while working with clients. Stovel and Shaw (2012) trace the legitimacy issue to organizational brokers to two main dimensions: bias and cohesion. Brokers achieve internal legitimacy when they conform to group norms and sustain a strong sense of shared fate with the other groups. On the other hand, brokers maintain external legitimacy when abridging a loose social network who has had minimal knowledge of each other otherwise.

Education agents face highly idiosyncratic work daily. Unlike normative professions, their work of education agents' legitimacy and professional boundaries are often questioned and contested—both from within and outside of the educational industry. Furthermore, as both a broker and a service worker, agents’ work involves a high level of uncertainty dealing with knowledge, information, and resources that might be valuable in one particular social field but not applicable in another. They need to demonstrate their competence, for instance, by continually showing their knowledge of the subjects are somewhat more authentic, sophisticated.

Finally, a less frequently mentioned but equally important framework proposed by work scholarship is the importance of emotional works in the education industry. The critical approach of emotions at work highlights that while some emotions--such as anger and competitiveness--are disregarded in the workplace, other emotions are selectively incorporated into organizations' operations to enhance the overall efficacy. As Hochschild (1983) suggested over three decades ago, women who worked in the profession draw not only from physical labor activities but also their personalities, caretaking, and emotional work into a symbolic production of expertise, status, and meaning. More recently, Mumby and Putnams’(1993) formulation of bounding of emotional expression at work stresses that the feminist “bounded emotionality” approach highlights voluntarily, interpersonal, and productive emotional expression in a workforce that is closely knitted with organizational goals.
To date, there is still a conspicuous silence of the importance of the usage of emotions and personal characteristics in the occupation literature among the brokerage profession. While scholars generally recognize the importance of more personalized and emotive work in helping an international student with their transnational journey, relatively little work has been done about how to practice, and activities can be organized—particularly among intermediate actors (Madge et al. 2013; Waters 2006). For instance, Hagedorn and Zhang (2010) have noted that agents are crucial for easing individual students’ and parents’ psychological tension associated with foreign international travel and studying abroad (Baas 2016; Collins 2016; Hulme et al. 2013). However, the extent of how education agents make use of their character and group membership, such as their gender, ethnicity, class, and emotions, to sell the “education dream” remain largely unexamined (Headhunter work, Finlay and Coverdill 2009)

*Moralized market*

Transnational shadow education was a scandalous market, often rifted with reports of controversies by media or academics. Such controversies fueled people’s unique prejudices when they view this industry. In March 2019, the exposure of a college admissions scandal shocked American society and the world. The FBI charged over 50 people for a bribery scheme in which parents paid college coaches and admission consultants to help their children gain an advantage in college admissions. In April 2019, the Wall Street Journal reported that parents from China allegedly paid millions of dollars to “college consultants” to gain guaranteed university access. The news prompted an examination of the economics behind the college admission process and raised the question: “Are we witnessing the emergence of a whole new scamming industry in college admissions?” Intuitively, we might believe that the scandal was orchestrated deliberately.
by opportunists intending to cheat the system. However, my fieldwork reveals a slightly different story. In my interviewee’s own eyes, agents are not cheaters. Instead, they are the foot soldiers clearing obstacles for disadvantaged students. As one of my interviewees, is an education agent in Taiwan, said: “No admission process can engineer conditions so well that all potential pupils have access to quality education opportunities. My job is merely leveling the game [for my students]. My role is to help Taiwanese students overcome their disadvantages as foreigners and help them rebrand themselves in the application materials.”

As noted earlier in Chapter 7 and Chapter 8, many of the participants (and online netizens) in my study believed that education agents reflect the unique moral nature of education as an economic phenomenon. However, many also had not seriously reflected on the broad implication of how such moral accountability facilitates or hinders economic inequality in society. For international students who want to increase effectiveness and decrease uncertainty in applying for foreign schools, education agents are their safety net. For one, increasing competition and rising tuition costs at elite and super-elite schools artificially lower the applicants' socioeconomic diversity and upends the bar of applicants’ former credentials. Agencies that want to play along with this “meritocracy” game could adopt a more expansive definition of educational quality to include admission packages that offer high economic returns (including credentials with high job-market turnout) and flexible entrance pathways. Additionally, given that individuality and customized packaging of one’s admission documents are such healthy sources of admission evaluations (and, of course, biases), education agents play an essential role in transforming such alienating “blind evaluator” experience into a culturally relevant context.

My findings suggest that emotional and cultural brokerage, rather than the act of cheating or deception, constitutes the primary venues for these education agents' main routines and
transactions. My findings also show that education agents' unique features are associated with their unique position as brokers in the transnational education sector. Further, such a process and institutional environment also cultivate a market, where your future admission potential and performances can be structured and trained, and therefore materialized and capitalized.

Further, as Fourcade and Healy (2007) pointed out in their seminal paper, there are several competing narratives concerning scholarly consideration of a market society's consequence. In their research, they divided the social consequences of the accompanying market into four categories: *Doux commerce*, *commodified nightmare*, *shackles and blessings*, and *moral market*. My research precisely corresponds to the last one: the moral market situation; morality is inherent in the market and restrains each other.

It is worth noting that discussions on other market perspectives have rarely subsided. For example, the debate about whether the agency is “cheating the systems” seems to have been centered around the commodified nightmare's argument. This side's view often holds that the market's emergence will only worsen the already unbalanced social inequality. On the other hand, a steadily emerging management and professional evaluation organizations in recent years, especially for other accrediting service companies (such as AIRC, etc.). Although they are both called non-profits, they often charge high fees, supporting *Doux commerce* more. Wholeheartedly, they believe the market would crowd out the worst and bring about the best in people, producing a more sustainable future for the international students.

**Future Research Agenda**

Several issues merit further investigation in future research. First, more up-to-date information is needed on the ethnic succession of higher education admission in the U.S. higher education
enterprise and its implication on international student recruitment. The descriptive global pandemic and civil unrest in 2020 expedited and drastically increased university administrations' likelihood to re-adjust the admission rules and priorities. It might end up opening up business opportunities there, but it remains to be seen whether these opportunities will be seized by Taiwanese sojourner students, like her counterparts from Korea, China, Vietnam, India, etc. As seen in the previous half-century, U.S. universities have grown to be more dependent on international students' economic and cultural contributions.

More research is needed for comparative work of the different occupation and professional sectors within different national systems of international student sending countries. The case of China’s transnational shadow education, for example, was fascinating. Compared to Taiwan, they have a more massive scale and a more nuanced and competitive market. However, existing research also pays more attention to comparing their consequences rather than tracing the reasons for these specific institutions' emergence. The advantage of emphasizing cross-country comparison is that we can further deepen the perspectives related to the "marketization" of higher education, its generalizability: such as questions about culture and authenticity. Is this a unique phenomenon of Taiwanese students or Asian students, or not? Or, will these market-oriented technical, institutional, and moralized discourse analysis occur in all markets, or will they only appear in the American higher education enrollment system? These questions all rely on further research to answer. Subsequent studies can also compare the historical factors of transnational shadow education in various countries. These will be the focus of my follow-up research.

Finally, one would certainly need to re-examine the market and dynamics in the Post-COVID19 world in the future. Since I began this research in Fall 2018, much has changed in general and in Taiwan's education agents’ market. One glaring event too essential to ignore is the outbreak of the
world-wide pandemic of 2020. Although the unfortunate situation keeps simmering, it is likely that even when it finally ends, people of all walks of life, gender, ethnicity, nationality, and class will be impacted tremendously. One of the areas that will be significantly affected is the higher education system, especially the higher education systems in North American, which are still one of the world's centers. However, it can be expected that after a global crisis similar to COVID 19, the order of global higher education will be redefined and constructed, including the changes in the movement of the study abroad population and the relationship between the stakeholders involved. How do we recognize these changes? How do we make sense of those critical components, that vulnerable and resilient aspect of global higher education, that might reshape our world? Furthermore, how can our scholarship enterprise help us face the uncertainties from where we are to a post-COVID19 world of the global higher education market? Is the higher education enterprise going to be further tilted by the market logic and world capitalism, as do international student recruitment?

Researchers should anchor themselves through the lens of an understanding of the transnational shadow education to look further about the global admission process. This will also be another critical point for me to enter the field survey again after finishing the current field. First, due to the full-scale outbreak and obstruction of the epidemic and political and economic factors in the post-epidemic era, the number of people studying in the United States (and Europe, Australia) and other traditional study and immigrant countries has dropped significantly. However, these factors that drive international students and families have not entirely disappeared. In my observations over the past few months, there have been many elastic changes in the entire overseas study market. For example, they started to advocate a new discourse of "studying abroad" in the mobile country or encouraged students to travel to Asian countries with less severe epidemics.
How these discourses and actions will affect the entire market and operations remains to be seen.

Another crucial point worth observing is that if this global epidemic implies some "screening" mechanism, what kind of study abroad market will survive? If we regard the study abroad market as a great environment and study abroad companies and agents as a group of the population, what kind of study abroad market will gradually disappear, and which will survive? A pattern that is gradually emerging is that in the past, mechanisms such as language schools, speedy admission, and conditional admission in the United States and other countries have begun to collapse because they cannot cope with the global epidemic and economic recession. However, new discourses on studying abroad and service systems for studying abroad continue to emerge. At present, teaching using Zoom and other media, fully online overseas study credentials, and related agency services have even appeared on the Internet. The trend of these markets will provide us with more theorizing cornerstones for global higher education development.
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Appendix

Samples of Interview Questions and Questionnaires

The interviews were semi-structured and questions were changed when the analytic frame was modified as the research progressed. Some of the most important changes to the content of the questions include: addition questions about online network and social media, the specific culture or service of specific companies, and the comparison of "good" and "bad" players. Quite often the questions for agents were also modified according to the specificities of individual interviewees, such as their seniority in the field, their specialties, and their former work experiences. Considerations were also given to the context of the interviews recruitment process. For example, in some interviews I deliberated asked about the collaborations between agents by the person that refers the other participants. The samples provided below are collection of the questions that were asked most frequently at different stages of the research. Therefore, not all of the interviewees in the research were asked identical questions. These question guided my interviews but were not presented verbatim to the interviewees.

INTERVIEW GUIDE QUESTIONS

I. Background

- Please tell me about how you enter your current occupation.
- Did you know about this profession before joining in this position? Did you know anyone working in the industry? What was your impression of this work prior to joining the sector?
- Did you grow up abroad? Were you an international student yourself in the past? If so, where did you went to study? What was your experience?
- How do you think your previous experience/education influenced or informed your decision to join the education agent business?

II. Work content

Work routines and everyday activity

- Please describe to me a typical workday for you.
  - In a typical workday, how often do you interact with your co-workers, supervisors and other staff in your corporate?
  - In a typical workday, how often do you interact with your student-client?
- Please describe an atypical workday for you that happened recently.
  (probe) what makes you think that the experience was unusual?
  - What was the event/day about?
  - Do you experience these kinds of changes often in your years of working as an agent?

Student recruitment and interaction

- Please describe to me the typical way how your organization and yourself meet your client.
  - How do you usually get into contact with the students? Do they come to you? Or do you or your organization recruit the students?
  - What is the average age of your student client? What is their stage of education?
  - Do you work with parents or guardian often? Do they approach you or do you or your
Please describe to me the interaction you have with your clients.
- Do the student usually trust you at the beginning? What are their attitude? What do you do to make them begin to work with you?
- Do the parents/guardian trust you at the beginning? What are their attitude?

**Workload and role of the agents**
- Please tell me how you and your student-client decide on the division of work.
  - Who makes the decision about the division of work? How do you decide what to do or what not to do to help the students?
  - Who do you think have more power in your relationship? The students or yourself?
  - What do you typically do when the student or parents/guardian pitches new quest or issues? Do the clients ever challenge how the agree-upon ordering of the tasks or your role as agent?
  - What type of client is most likely to challenge you, in your experience?

**Expertise: Translating and transfiguring capital**
- Please tell me how would you describe your expertise and how would you use it at work.
  - What is your expertise as an agent? Do students usually come to you when they are admitting to a particular expertise?
  - Knowledge, experience, or expertise, which one do you think is the most important? What’s the priority? Why?
- What’s your knowledge about other educational industry in other countries? What do you think make Taiwanese agents special?
  - China: Would you think of yourself as a broker potentially working with Chinese students?
  - Have you had relationship working with Chinese students? If so, what’s your experience?
  - How would you think if Taiwanese student choose to work with Chinese agents, instead of a Taiwanese agent?

**Emotional work and emotional labor**
- Please tell me the emotional component of the service you provide.
  - Is emotion a big component in the work? Do you feel the need to address students’ or parents/guardians’ emotional demand when you are at work? How do you deal with those demand when they are there?
  - How do you help students with emotional or personal demand? Do you share your own experience? What language/role do you think you take while speaking to or helping the students?

**III. Professional identity**
- Please tell me what your job title is and how you usually introduce your job to a stranger.
  - Tell me about what it means to be an educational agent in your life and society.
  - Could you tell me how would you define someone working as an educational agent?
- Would you consider language tutors as educational agents, especially when they also work on helping student admit to foreign universities?
- Please tell me how you would distinguish a “good agent (agency)” from a “bad agent (agency)”?
- Have you heard about practices/events by agents that you don’t approve?
- Is money a difficult issue to discuss? How would you usually decide to talk about money when speaking to students/parents/guardians?

**Professional Association and Professional Identity**
- Please tell me whether you or your organization belong to some form of professional group membership for educational agents.
  - Do you join occupational groups in Taiwan, such as the IECA?
  - Do you join occupational groups abroad, such as AIRC or NACAC?
    (probe) Why? Is the membership free? What are the requirement and demands? What do you lose or gain, joining in those organizations?
    (probe) Do you think it is important for an agent to have a professional group membership?
- Please help me understand the cultural position of a brokerage agent.
  - Culturally and socially, what do you think is the role of an agent?
  - Do you belong more to the world or your clients?
  - Do you belong more of the world and knowledge/information you are selling?

**Sample Interview Question for Consultants**

*Consultant background and motivation to enter the industry*
- Please tell me how do you choose to enter the current line? What was your knowledge of this industry before entering this industry?
- Have you ever had other experience or education that made you choose to enter the current job?

*Business and agency services*
- Please share with me what kind of schedule you have on a typical working day recently? How often do you interact with colleagues? How often do you interact with students?
- Is it important to take care of students' emotions/emotions? Is caring for your emotions and emotions a difficult task for you?
- Please share with me an event or event that you feel more fulfilling in your work recently? Please share with me a challenge you have faced in your work recently?

*Professional competence and professional identity*
- How would you describe the "professional ability" of the study abroad consultant?
- What is the general impression of the students or parents you have contacted about the study abroad consultant?
- Do you know other consultants studying abroad and what is your impression?
Student interaction

- How would you describe your relationship with students? How is this relationship established through the process of cooperation?
- In the process of helping students, how do you and the students decide the assignment of work?
- How do you deal with the individual needs of students?

Closing questions and conclusion

- Overall, how would you describe the profession of "study abroad consultant"?
- Overall, how would you describe your company's role in international education?

Sample Interview Questions for language instructors

Instructor background and motivation to enter the industry

- Please share with me what was your motivation for entering the study abroad/teaching industry in the first place? What are the reasons for choosing to teach the exam related to studying abroad?
- Before entering this industry, what kind of understanding did you have about the role of a teacher in the study abroad tutoring industry? What kind of understanding do you have about the supplementary education industry of studying abroad?
- What prompted your decision to establish SK2 as a company? How did you choose a partner to join?

Business and agency services

- What is the biggest difference between SK2’s business model and other traditional study abroad education businesses?
- Why did you choose to define the team as a "consultant"? What kind of role do you hope SK2 teachers play in the eyes of your classmates? How to maintain such a role in the process of interacting with students?
- What are the characteristics of Taiwan’s study abroad tutoring market? For you, what are the good and bad effects of these features?
- Are there any standards to refer to when setting prices? What are the other considerations?

Professional competence and professional identity

- Can you describe your current typical working day and general schedule? How will these arrangements change throughout the year, such as the difference between off-peak and peak seasons?
- How to decide the division of labor among teams? What is the ratio of teaching, lesson preparation, company marketing, and administration?

Teaching pedagogies and professional knowledge

- As a TOEFL teacher, what is the most important professional ability?
- How to determine the "expertise" of individual teachers? Is there a uniform standard for teaching materials? How does the SK2 team provide the resources needed by individual teachers in class?
- What is the importance of "building a correct English concept" for international
students? In your own classroom, how will you influence students?

- How to choose between teaching "exam skills" and "used English in the future"? Is there a need to make a trade-off?
- Have students, parents or others ever challenged your teaching model or content?
- Apart from teaching, will individual students be given any guidance on applying for schools? If so, what form will it usually come from?

**Online information and information-sharing**

- Most of the consultants in SK2 publish and share in PTT. What do you think about sharing information about studying abroad? What impact did this have on the creation of the SK2 team?
- After SK2 starts commercial operations, will there be any changes in the role or perception of sharing information about studying abroad? Will others change their views on sharing information about studying abroad?
- At work, many services are provided free of charge (such as lectures, sharing in school, community management). What do you think of these jobs or services?
- For the community operating international students: whether it is to encourage students to support each other or share information resources, what role do teachers and teams at SK2 play?

**Closing questions and conclusions**

- In the medium and long term, what kind of impact will the emergence of the SK2 team have on the movement of studying abroad or the English education itself? Is there any plan to achieve such influence?
- In your opinion, how important is the TOEFL consultant to the student's study abroad journey, compared to other objects (such as professors, family members, senior sisters) who advise students?

**Questionnaire for Demographic Background of the Agents**

Please complete the questionnaire below. You do not have to answer any questions you do not wish.

1. Name:

2. Age:

3. Gender:

4. Country of citizenship:

5. Marital status: Single/ Married/ Divorced or Separated/ Widowed

6. Children: Yes (No. )/No
7. Education: High school graduate/Bachelors (BA/ BS)_______ / Masters (MA)_______ / Doctor of Philosophy (PhD)_______ / Other _______/ Not applicable

8. Major/minor in University:

9. What’s the name of the institution you graduated? __________________

10. Overseas education experience: Yes/No/Country, City____________

11. General English proficiency: Basic/ Intermediate/ Proficient

12. Parents' income or wealth level compare with the average person in Taiwan
   Higher than average/ average/ lower than average/ I don’t know

13. What is your current job title? ______________

14. What is the name of the company (firm) you worked in now? ______________

15. Would you be willing to participate in future research project relating to educational agents?
   □ Yes, I will  □ No, I will not

16. Do you know anyone working in the industry that might be willing to participate in this project?
   □ Yes, I do  □ No, I don’t think I do.

**Sample Contact Letter for Inquiring Participation**

Hello, I am a PhD candidate currently at the University at Albany-SUNY. I am writing a doctoral dissertation about study abroad agency industry and study abroad tuition industry. Currently receiving scholarship subsidies from the Graduate Student Association, I am currently interviewing working study consultants in Taiwan. This letter is to invite two consultants, Nick and Jessica of Horizon Study Tour Service, to participate in my research interview.

I used to study in Canada and lived in the United States for a long time. I have experienced a long period of preparation for my own study abroad process, and I deeply understand the importance of study abroad preparation courses and study abroad consulting services for successfully helping students study abroad. Therefore, I especially admire and curious about the work of helping international students.

My understanding of the Horizon study abroad service comes from the Internet. I was particularly impressed by the fact that both consultants Nick and Jessica had a background in studying and teaching abroad, and they were highly enthusiastic about helping students study abroad. In addition, Horizon Study Tours is also committed to providing highly one-to-one customized services, and also earnestly participates in every study abroad journey of international students. Whether it is the experience of helping students or the knowledge of
studying abroad, it is very precious knowledge for me.

Recently, a large number of Taiwanese people go to Canada and the United States to study abroad every year, but the research on the related study abroad industry is quite scarce. Therefore, I very much hope that I can have the opportunity to invite two consultants to share with me the experience and knowledge of acting as agent consultants. This will not only help us better understand the overseas education industry, but also help everyone understand more about how to help Taiwanese students gain international competitiveness in the future.

I wonder if you are willing to take the time to participate in the interview? Knowing that you are busy at work, participating in the interview will not increase your burden too much. You only need to provide a convenient place and location, or through online interviews, and I will do my best to accommodate your convenience. The research interview will be about one hour to two hours long, and will be based on the length and method you can spare.

Thank you again in advance for taking the time to read this text. Any reply or suggestion will be of great help to me. Thank you very much again, and hope to hear from you!

The following is my contact information:

Email: kchen7@albany.edu
Line: khchen78516

I wish peace and happiness

Sample Phone Recruitment Scripts

[Phone recruitment]
Hello. My name is Ke-han(Kenneth) Chen. I’m currently a Ph.D candidate at University at Albany, State University of New York. I’m calling to invite Mr./Miss _____ from _____ (institution) to an interview for my research project on education agents and language institution. I wonder if I could have the chance to talk to Mr./Miss _____ about this project?

[Introduction-background and content]
Hello. My research has two main focuses. The first one is about studying the work content and work routine of education agents/language instructors. The second is about the occupational identity of education agents/language instructors. My main goal for this project is to investigate the mediating role of education agents for Taiwanese international students, as well as the specificity of education industry in Taiwan. My research participants include 60 education agents and language instructors. The interview will take roughly around 1-2 hours in an agreed upon location at your convenience. The main body of the interview will contain three topics: 1) The goal and background for your decision to work in the occupation; 2) The daily work routine and work process of your service; 3) Your observation and experience of the industry.

[Introduction-data and confidentiality]
The interview will take around 1-2 hours. If you shall agree, I will audio record our interview. I will store and transcribe this audio record, mainly for my own research and analysis purpose. All
you say in the interview is confidential. Without your permission, I will not publish any of your information. All contents you talked about in the interview will strictly be used only for research purpose, and all information will be anonymous in those interviews. If you are interested, I’m happy to send a copy of my research to you. This research has passed the review by Institutional Review Board (IRB) from University at Albany and comply to all research and institutional ethical codes. Should you have any concerns or questions, please feel free to contact either me or the IRB committee.

Thank you again for considering participating in my research. Wish you a very pleasant day. Thank you!
Table 1: Taiwan’s international students and their destinations, 1950-2018

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>U.S.</th>
<th>Japan</th>
<th>Australia</th>
<th>U.K.</th>
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<td>1,569</td>
<td>2,860</td>
<td>507</td>
<td>40,009</td>
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<tr>
<td>2018</td>
<td>13,000</td>
<td>5,589</td>
<td>6,454</td>
<td>3,686</td>
<td>1,250</td>
<td>1,620</td>
<td>3,170</td>
<td>480</td>
<td>41,090</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
### Table 2: Agent services and activities

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Admission</th>
<th>Overseas Accommodations</th>
<th>School Commissioners</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Health Insurance</td>
<td>Airport Pick-Up</td>
<td>Promote education Programs</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Travel Insurance</td>
<td>Accommodation</td>
<td>Discover New Markets</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Visa Processing/Immigration</td>
<td>Cell phones/cards</td>
<td>Identify Opportunities</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Advice</td>
<td>Currency Exchange</td>
<td>Cut Costs of Establishing Overseas Offices</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Language Training/Testing</td>
<td>Internet</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Application/Admissions Guidance</td>
<td>Career Counseling</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>School Visits</td>
<td>Referral to Institutions</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Local Job Placement</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Program of Study Selection</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Education Exhibitions</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Interviews</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Promotional Materials</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 3: Taxonomy of Education Agents

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Author(date)</th>
<th>Criteria</th>
<th>Taxonomy</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Collins (2012)</td>
<td>Geographical location</td>
<td>Recruiter at homeland</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Agents at destination</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Coffery and Perry (2014)</td>
<td>Source of money Procedure</td>
<td>Commission based vs. fee based</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Immigration agent vs. education agents.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Raimo, Huang, and Humfrey (2014)</td>
<td>Market maturity</td>
<td>Recruiter vs. selectors</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Moral and necessity</td>
<td>Logical requirement vs. crass, corrupt and exploitative</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Observatory on Borderless Higher Education (2014)</td>
<td>Task Scope of business</td>
<td>Corporations Consultants Agents</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hulme et al. (2014)</td>
<td>Price Value by the school</td>
<td>Expensive Cheaper</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>New Established International consultancies</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Baas(2016)</td>
<td>Function for student</td>
<td>Professional education</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Migration agent</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Table 4: Taxonomy and Education Agents in Taiwan

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Core tasks</th>
<th>Consultants</th>
<th>Language instructor</th>
<th>Administrative</th>
<th>Editor/Writer</th>
<th>School Representative</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Document, school selection, social and emotional support</td>
<td>Document, school selection, social and emotional support</td>
<td>Language preparation, social and emotional support</td>
<td>Administrative tasks, brokering of different professions</td>
<td>Editing and writing of document</td>
<td>Coordinating schools and agents</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Level of Professionalization</td>
<td>Medium</td>
<td>High</td>
<td>Low</td>
<td>High</td>
<td>Low</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Brokerage Role with students</td>
<td>Close</td>
<td>Distance</td>
<td>Close</td>
<td>Distance</td>
<td>No contact</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Brokerage Role with school</td>
<td>Strong or weak</td>
<td>Weak</td>
<td>Weak</td>
<td>Weak</td>
<td>Very strong</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Legitimacy in the industry</td>
<td>Center</td>
<td>Center</td>
<td>Peripheral</td>
<td>Peripheral</td>
<td>Broker of the agents</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

¹⁶ Dant and Brown (2008) divide the different marketing strategies of businesses into a dichotomy of the B2B (alternatively as “industrial marketing” or “business-to-business”) or B2C (alternatively as “consumer marketing” or “business-to-customer”). In this paper, Dant and Brown traced the initial idea of the dichotomy to “The Industrial/Consumer Marketing Dichotomy: A Case of Insufficient Justification.” by Fern and Brown (1984) while the field of marketing was still reminiscing about its meaning and empirical implications. The author also showed that pure B2B or B2C research is relatively rare because a retailer must deal with upstream channel members, whether to serve customers or business customers, thereby blurring the definition line. The dichotomous conceptual differences were used widely by practitioners in market and market training, such as those for the education agents that I interviewed.