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**Working Paper**

## Building transnational labor markets: The case of Taiwan

Working Papers on East Asian Studies, No. 116/2017

**Provided in Cooperation with:**

University of Duisburg-Essen, Institute of East Asian Studies IN-EAST

*Suggested Citation:* Wang, Chih-Chieh (2017) : Building transnational labor markets: The case of Taiwan, Working Papers on East Asian Studies, No. 116/2017, University of Duisburg-Essen, Institute of East Asian Studies (IN-EAST), Duisburg

This Version is available at:

<https://hdl.handle.net/10419/168563>

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INSTITUTE OF  
EAST ASIAN STUDIES

**CHIH-CHIEH WANG**

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**Building Transnational Labor Markets –  
the Case of Taiwan**

**NO. 116**

**WORKING PAPERS**

**WORKING PAPERS  
ON EAST ASIAN STUDIES**

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**AUGUST 2017**

UNIVERSITÄT  
**DUISBURG  
ESSEN**

*Offen im Denken*

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ISSN: 1865-8571 (Printed version) / 1865-858X (Internet version)

Download: [https://www.uni-due.de/in-east/news/green\\_series.php](https://www.uni-due.de/in-east/news/green_series.php)

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**CHIH-CHIEH WANG**

# **Building Transnational Labor Markets – the Case of Taiwan**

**WORKING PAPERS ON EAST ASIAN STUDIES, NO. 116, DUISBURG 2017**

## **Abstract**

Taiwan has embedded itself in the global markets and established strong economic relations with many countries, especially the neighbors in East Asia. However, working in a foreign country, as part of international economic exchange is still constrained by the regulations and/or socio-cultural barriers in respective countries. Nonetheless, it is argued that transnational labor markets, which are primarily constructed by private actors, are emerging in East Asia. Taking up Taiwan as a case, this study investigates how private actors – temporary help agencies – go ahead of the states and forge institutions that facilitate labor mobility across national borders in the absence of supra-national institutions, such as EU or ASEAN Economic Community, where freedom of movement has taken place or is expected to launch.

Based on interviews with staffing agencies, union activists and government officials, it is found that staffing agencies serve as a transnational HR management function, as they develop international networks and provide their clients and workers with services such as visa application and employment arrangements that accommodate to business, employment and social welfare regulations in both sending and receiving countries. Moreover, staffing agencies translate and diffuse socio-cultural meanings between countries by engaging in socio-cultural training for workers as well as their clients to ensure the success of cross-border labor placements. This research contributes to the understanding of transnational labor mobility by studying the process of building transnational institutions and how these institutions make sense to the involved actors.

## **Keywords**

Transnational labor markets, institution building, staffing agency, employment regulation, industrial relations, Taiwan, East Asia

This research is part of the project *Cross-Border Temporary Staffing: Market-Making and Transnational Regulation in Inter-Regional Comparison* (PI: Karen A. Shire) funded by the German Research Foundation (DFG).

## 1 INTRODUCTION

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Taiwan has embedded itself in the global markets and has strong economic exchanges with many countries, especially the neighbors in East Asia. Typically, economic exchanges between nations are carried out through the flow of capital and/or workforce. While the former often takes the form of foreign direct investment (FDI) and multinational enterprises and do not necessarily involve labor mobility across borders, the latter is exemplified by labor migration or guest worker system, which is at best “international” in the sense that it is organized through specific bilateral agreements usually validated by nation states. As part of international economic exchange, working across national borders is still constrained and governed by various regulations in respective countries. Moreover, there are socio-cultural barriers, such as languages and business conventions in the region.

Despite regulatory and socio-cultural constraints, it is argued that transnational labor markets, which are primarily constructed by private actors, are emerging in East Asia. Taking up Taiwan as a case, this study investigates how private actors, primarily staffing agencies, go ahead of the states and forge institutions that facilitate labor mobility across national borders in the absence of supra-national governance institutions, such as EU or ASEAN Economic Community, where freedom of movement has taken place or is expected to launch.

Labor markets are “transnational” in the sense that cross-border labor mobility takes place simultaneously between multiple points, rather than bilaterally, in nature (Morgan 2001b: 115). More specifically, transnational labor markets are defined here as transnational institutions which facilitate cross-border exchange of labor force without central authority (Quack 2009) and reduce uncertainties and risk of the exchange (Morgan 2001a). In transnational labor markets, actors – both states and private actors

– interact “between and across nations” (Djelic and Quack 2003a: 305) and are connected in the form of multiple nodes, which cannot be simply reduced to the sum of bilateral interactions between national units (Hannerz 1996; Morgan 2001b). Drawing on economic sociology on labor market formation, I see employers, workers, their respective collective associations as well as states as key actors in constructing labor markets (Fligstein 2001; Streeck 2005). By attempts of imposing cultural and cognitive framing, these actors negotiate rules of exchange and re/define social relations that serve their own interests in the labor market (Fligstein 2001). Moreover, it is argued that international staffing agencies are crucial actors in the formation of transnational labor markets, especially in East Asia, where supranational institutions that coordinate between nations are absent.

Previous research has pointed out that private staffing agencies and their internationalization actively shape labor markets at the national level (Peck, Theodore and Ward 2005). Yet, only little research investigates the internationalization of staffing agencies from a transnational perspective (for example, Coe, Johns and Ward 2011). In her research on international law firms, Quack (2007) argues that service intermediaries are practitioners that critically contribute to the formation of transnational rules as they develop transnational solutions to problems of collaboration between multiple jurisdictions – especially when international coordination by nation states is rather weak (p. 644). International staffing agencies resemble international law firms in the way they find transnational solutions for their clients at the absence of international government coordination. By organizing cross-border labor mobility between different states in East Asia, which are shielded with tight border control, staffing agencies step by step build up transnational labor markets.

Using interviews with staffing agencies, union activists and government officials, this research investigates the transnationalization of labor markets and contributes to the understanding of transnationalization as institution-building processes (Djelic and Quack 2003b). In contrast to international studies and migration studies that center on nation states, the focus and the central argument here is that transnational labor markets are constructed mainly by private actors without a central governing authority. Moreover, the path to the transnationalization of labor markets in East Asia shows how national institutions are partly translated into transnational institu-

tions through the understanding and interpretation of the former by the actors. In the following sections, the role of temporary agency work in national and transnational labor markets in East Asia is discussed respectively. Then, I situate the transnationalization of labor markets in the Taiwan context and point out how unclear regulatory environment for temporary agency work at the national level creates both necessity of and space for staffing agencies to engage in building up transnational labor market institutions. Practices and dynamics of constructing transnational labor markets are analyzed before the final conclusion and discussion.

## 2 NATIONAL/TRANSNATIONAL LABOR MARKETS AND TEMPORARY AGENCY WORK IN EAST ASIA

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Due to entrenched national borders and the absence of supra-national institutions, East Asian states naturally tend to focus on labor and employment issues at the national level. Cross-border labor mobility has not been given much attention, except labor migration, which to a large extent addresses blue-collar workers.

Meanwhile, temporary agency work<sup>1</sup> (hereafter TAW) – a triangular employment relationship between workers, staffing agencies and client/user firms – has been one of the highly debated labor market issues worldwide (Kalleberg 2000). TAW is particularly considered as a precarious form of employment that the governments are expected to attend to in the East Asian region (Hsiao 2013; Osawa, Kim and Kingston 2013; Shin 2013; Zhou 2013). Trade unions are generally against TAW and the public often have negative impression on it, as they are both concerned about the deterioration of working condition related to TAW in the domestic labor market. In contrast, businesses are against restrictions on TAW and consider it as an important way of obtaining labor flexibility as la-

bor market regulations are on the rise. The polarized situation is especially true in countries where TAW has not been well institutionalized and creates high risk for the governments being seen as favoring certain party – labor or business. Therefore, issues and problems of TAW are often not directly addressed or even ignored at the national level, not to mention TAW that involves complex relations across countries (Interview W-JP-01).

At the transnational level, it is not surprising that one of the conventional key actors in shaping transnational labor markets seems missing – there is no inter-government communication regarding cross-border TAW in East Asia, as TAW is already considered a controversial subject of the respective national labor markets. Among trade unions and labor organizations, there are generally two camps which hold contrast attitudes toward TAW. One is more conservative and is strongly against TAW, especially in those countries where TAW is not well institutionalized. The conservative camp is concerned that once TAW is officially legalized, labor rights and working conditions would be significantly undermined. The other camp is relatively liberal, as they acknowledge the necessity of flexibility through TAW and demand that TAW should

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1 Often called “dispatch work” in East Asia.

be regulated in order to protect workers. Lacking minimum consensus, trade unions and labor organizations have difficulties in engaging effective conversations across countries, and cross-border TAW is not considered priority on the agenda at the transnational level (Interview W-JP-01 and AW-JP-01). Furthermore, the staffing industry in East Asia is not as well internationally organized as it is in Europe, although one of the largest industry associations, Ciett, is present in the region. Nonetheless, Ciett's attempt to bring cross-border TAW to the attention of the governments in the region has not been successful. In sharp contrast to its achievement in collaborating with trade unions to establish social dialogues and self-regulation in Europe<sup>2</sup>, Ciett did not succeed in making any form of institutions regarding cross-border TAW in East Asia, due to the domestic-oriented situations mentioned above (Interview W-JP-01).

As Djelic and Quack (2003a) argue, institutions at national and transnational levels are interconnected and can be considered as part of an on-

going process of globalization, where institutions at the two levels develop and adjust themselves according to each other. In the case of East Asia, the domestic situations in the respective nations seem to hinder the development of transnational labor markets. However, it is the situation of weak inter-government coordination that makes practices of private actors stand out in the making of transnational institutions (Quack 2007). On the one hand, growth is a strong motivation for staffing agencies to internationalize their business, when they are faced with difficulties in the domestic markets (Coe, Johns and Ward 2007). On the other hand, staffing agencies must follow the internationalization of their clients to a certain degree in order to keep them. As will be discussed, while international staffing agencies are clearly aware of the uncertainties and limitations of the national regulatory environment for TAW in Taiwan, they build on, or borrow, available institutional arrangements to manage cross-border labor mobility and explore possibilities of doing it in the form of TAW at the same time.

### 3 THE TAIWAN CONTEXT – NECESSITY OF AND SPACE FOR INNOVATION

As in some of the other countries in East Asia, TAW has been in practice for a long time but not well institutionalized in Taiwan. Characteristic of triangular employment relationships, TAW is neither prohibited nor clearly regulated by law, and therefore is subject to general labor regulations, such as the Labor Standard Act. Unclear regulatory status could be one of the reasons that TAW is highly controversial in Taiwan. Trade unions and labor activists have been opposing TAW because there have been many cases, where agency workers are badly treated and dismissed illegally. On the other hand, employers consider TAW to be a form of labor flexibil-

ity and are against restriction on it, for example a cap on the percentage of agency workers in a company. The polarized opinions of and the controversial nature of TAW can be exemplified by the process of drafting regulations on TAW. Since 2010, the government has proposed at least two drafts of regulations on TAW<sup>3</sup>, but none of them has gained enough consensus and could be submitted to the parliament for discussion.

At practice level, the Ministry of Labor holds that TAW should be open-ended contracts – the general rule of employment relationships under the Labor Standard Act. While the intention of the

2 See an overview from Eurociett <http://www.eurociett.eu/index.php?id=94> (Last accessed 17.7. 2017).

3 The 2010 amended draft for the Labor Standard Law, and the 2014 draft for the Labor Dispatching Law.



Ministry of Labor is likely to avoid the controversial nature of TAW and to protect workers, the staffing industry considers it as a hindrance to the business and in contradiction to the original purpose of TAW – employment flexibility (Interview A-TW-02, A-TW-03, A-TW-04). Some staffing firms would even prefer a clear regulatory status, even if there are restrictions on TAW (Interview A-TW-01, A-TW-03, A-TW-04). For these staffing agencies, it is the ambiguous legal environment that nurtures mal-practices of TAW, especially among small staffing firms.

As far as cross-border labor mobility is concerned, cross-border TAW is not at all on the agenda of trade unions and labor activists in Taiwan, at least not found in any public statements. For the state, labor migration that primarily focuses on blue-collar workers, care and household workers, still dominates the issue of cross-border labor mobility, even though the Ministry of Labor has been aware of potential cross-border TAW in practice. In a newsletter, rather than an official statement, the Ministry of Labor (Council for Labor Affairs at that time) clarified that cross-border agency work is different from cross-border contracting (or undertaking 承攬) and therefore is not eligible for a favorable condition for applying work permit for foreign workers under the Employment Service Law (§ 51 III)<sup>4</sup>. Nonetheless, the Ministry of Labor only reviews documents, when assessing applications of the work permit. In

practice, when a company (legally qualified applicant, not the worker) in Taiwan applies for work permit for an incoming foreign worker, (supposedly) provided by a contracting partner abroad, only documents showing that the foreign worker provides services on behalf of the contracting partner would suffice for the work permit. As long as the formality meets the requirements, whether the foreign worker is employed by the contract partner or a third party (e.g. foreign staffing agency) is irrelevant. In some cases, one can clearly tell that the foreign worker is not employed by the contracting partner but by a third foreign party (Interview G-TW-01). Cases that involve a third party offering workers are about one third of the applications for the work permit. Pressure from other governmental departments, such as Ministry of Economic Affairs, and private companies, has prevented the Ministry of Labor from going beyond document review. While the Ministry of Labor would be considered to interfere with private business, companies think the government does not have the right to know all the details of their business (Interview G-TW-01).

Judging from the design and practice of the review process of the work permit at the Ministry of Labor, Taiwan has been active as a receiving country of cross-border temporary agency workers for a while, although the regulatory environment for TAW is rather equivocal at both the national and the transnational levels.

## 4 CONSTRUCTING TRANSNATIONAL LABOR MARKETS – A PROCESS DRIVEN BY BUSINESS DEMAND

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In a highly ambiguous regulatory environment, staffing agencies have to be cautious as well

as creative at the same time in order to stay in business and meet various demand from their clients.

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4 <http://mailbox.evta.gov.tw/oldepaper/123.htm> Nov 15, 2011 (Last accessed 17.7.2017). The Ministry of Labor holds that sub/contracting must come with other things, such as equipment, in addition to workers. Agency work is considered as pure labor subcontracting, which is not covered by the Employment Service Law.

Lacking clear regulation of TAW, staffing agencies align themselves with the closest existing regulations about employment services when doing agency work business. Under the Employment Service Law, the definition of employ-

ment service – to facilitate an employment deal between potential employees and employers<sup>5</sup> – is broad and considered to include both TAW service and brokerage. A two-year license of providing employment service requires certain minimum number of certified HR employees and minimum amount of capital. When employment services involve foreign elements – outgoing Taiwanese people or incoming foreigners, including those from mainland China, Hong Kong and Macau –, the standards are significantly higher and an additional deposit as civil liability guarantee is required.

It is by re-deploying the existing regulatory institutions that staffing agencies strive to build new institutions for the transnational TAW business in order to serve their clients. While the clients of cross-border TAW service are usually international businesses, they are diverse in the way of organizing their business. Typically, they are foreign companies having FDI in Taiwan or Taiwanese companies having/expanding business overseas (Interview A-TW-01, A-TW-02, A-TW-03, A-TW-04). Meanwhile, they could be none of them. They may be foreign companies which have business relations with local Taiwanese firms but have no base in Taiwan (Interview A-TW-01), while others may simply take advantage of the Taiwanese workers for their business overseas even without any business relations with local Taiwanese firms (Interview A-TW-02).

### **Capacity for Cross-Border TAW Business**

Compared to Europe where the staffing industry has started to proactively advocate cross-border TAW business (Peck, Theodore and Ward 2005), cross-border TAW business in Taiwan is still very much driven by the demand of the clients. Staffing agencies in Taiwan primarily follow the international strategies of their clients and organize sending out local workers and receiving incoming foreign workers in customized ways.

In general, these staffing agencies are experienced in doing agency work and clearly aware of the ambiguous regulatory environment in Taiwan. Moreover, they have certain international backgrounds, as they may be established by FDI (Interview A-TW-01, G-TW-01), have managers who previously worked in multinational enterprises (Interview A-TW-02, A-TW-03), or have business overseas (Interview A-TW-01, A-TW-02, A-TW-03, A-TW-04). While their clients exclusively demand white-collar workers, workers' occupation varies, ranging from middle-skilled sales persons to high-end software engineers. Focus industries include the so-called fast-moving consumer goods (FMCG) industry, such as those selling cosmetic and health products, in addition to finance, information technology and high-tech manufacturing. On the supply side, the most important incentive for Taiwanese workers going abroad is the rather stagnating wage levels, which have been lower than some of the neighbors in the region.

In order to cope with respective national border control, including work permission for foreign workers, staffing agencies develop business networks overseas by establishing own branches, deploying intra-network in the context of multinational enterprises, or cooperating with strategic partners overseas. Multinational staffing agencies even hold regular meetings of national or regional managers as an institutionalized channel for discussing transnational issues (Interview A-TW-01). When the business networks are set, information of visa, work permit, employment, social welfare and business regulations as well as cultural conventions in respective countries can be easily gathered through the overseas units. More important, these overseas units are on the frontline of implementation, which requires good knowledge of the actual local environment, in addition to that of regulations.

### **Patterns of Organizing Cross-Border TAW**

Due to the unclear regulatory situation for TAW at the national level, staffing agencies start to

5 Employment Service Law § 2-1.

build up cross-border labor markets by borrowing the existing and well-established institutional arrangement. First of all, these staffing agencies all have the license of employment service involved with “foreign elements”, which requires relatively high standards of capital and personnel. Following the established institutions, the least controversial way of organizing cross-border labor mobility is that staffing agencies act as a broker between workers and the client firms – multinational enterprises which have subsidiaries or are based in Taiwan. The client firms then send the workers to their (other) overseas subsidiaries, as intra-network internal transfer. As found out from the interviews, both foreign firms with subsidiaries in Taiwan and Taiwanese firms with subsidiaries overseas utilize this pattern. In this pattern, after the workers are introduced by the staffing agencies, the client firms assume all the responsibilities of employers, including applying for visa and work permit (Interview A-TW-01, A-TW-02, A-TW-03).

Another way to be on the safe side when a client from abroad requests workforce is *informal brokerage*. It is informal in the sense that staffing agencies conduct recruiting but let the overseas subsidiaries or partners take the lead regarding all the official actions, including processing legal documents with workers and client firms. In practice, this could also be done through sharing data banks within business networks. Staffing agencies in Taiwan are found to use this pattern for both sending and receiving workers. Through informal brokerage, staffing agencies can reduce risks in cases where foreign client firms do not have subsidiaries in Taiwan<sup>6</sup>, as overseas subsidiaries or partners are better informed about the clients (Interview A-TW-01, A-TW-03). In addition, an interviewee mentioned that this pattern also provides a solution for a potential legal restriction on introducing Taiwanese peo-

ple to work in China<sup>7</sup> because it is the subsidiaries that officially sign contracts with the clients and the workers, rather the staffing agencies in Taiwan themselves.

Despite ambiguous regulatory environment for TAW, some of the staffing agencies do explore the possibilities of doing transnational labor placement through the triangular relationships of TAW. One pattern, also being practiced in Europe, is *indirect posted agency work*, where staffing agencies employ workers and send them to client firms, and then the client firms again “post” the workers abroad (Mottweiler et al. 2014). It is often called “Huckepacküberlassung” in German, which literally means “piggyback placement”. In contrast to the intra-network internal transfer, the “piggyback placement” vividly describes how workers are moved overseas by the client firms (or their overseas activities) without employment relationships between the two parties. With this pattern, client firms can utilize the advantages of TAW, such as exemption from certain employer responsibilities (e.g. dismissal compensation) at the transnational level. As the practice that client firms send their agency workers to work externally is not new (e.g. a software engineer placed at a client firm and then sent to serve customers of the client firm), it could also be a case of borrowing existing national institutional arrangements to expand the TAW business to the transnational level. In practice, this pattern provides an opportunity for staffing agencies to do cross-border TAW in the form of domestic agency work.

Compared to indirect posted agency work, *posted agency work* requires most coordination work done from the staffing agency side and alleviates most responsibility of client firms – work-

<sup>6</sup> It is also found the other way around – a staffing agency receives foreign workers passed on from an overseas subsidiary.

<sup>7</sup> The law literally forbids “letting Taiwanese people to go to China illegally”, which is usually considered applicable to the case of illegally organized tourist travels to China. (Act Governing Relations between the People of the Taiwan Area and the Mainland Area § 15-2). The interviewee is very cautious about this (A-TW-03).

ers are employed by staffing agencies and directly posted to workplaces overseas as client firms request. In this pattern, client firms can be from anywhere in the world and do not need to have a branch or subsidiary in Taiwan. As one of the interviewees illustrated, when a US client firm without any branch in Taiwan needs workers from Taiwan to work in China, the staffing agency recruits and employs workers who are qualified as well as willing to work in China. In the meantime, the staffing agency makes sure that tax and social welfare contributions of the workers are rightly paid in Taiwan, before sending them abroad. This pattern is partly supported by workers, who do not want to lose their social welfare that requires continuous contribution tied to employment status, namely health insurance and retirement pension<sup>8</sup>.

Last pattern found to be used to construct transnational labor markets in East Asia is transnational *labor subcontracting*, where subcontractors send their employees to work for client firms overseas, which was discussed above in the part of work permit application at the Ministry of Labor (Interview G-TW-01). Theoretically, the difference between labor subcontracting and agency work lies in who acts as a work supervisor and a legal employer. In labor subcontracting relationships, subcontractors are the supervisor and the legal employer, while in agency work relationships, client firms are the supervisor and staffing agencies are the legal employer. In business practice, however, there is a fine line between labor subcontracting and agency work, because both are characteristic of triangular relationships. As staffing agencies gradually provide more than workforce-related services, for example business consulting and training, it is a matter of the scope of services provided. As an interviewee mentioned, when they provide a client firm with personnel for data bank management, they could also offer relevant software, if

the client firm wishes so, because they have in-house programmers which are capable of developing software programs (Interview A-TW-03).

### Implementation and Beyond

Actual implementation of transnational labor placement is subtler than just building transnational networks. In fact, staffing agencies have diversified and extended their services beyond visa and work permit issues, in order to facilitate cross-border placement and win clients. While the issue of national border control (visa and work permit) is typically handled via overseas networks, some staffing agencies provide workers with training for languages and cultures of the country of destination, as services to client firms, in order to increase the chances of successful placement. Furthermore, staffing agencies provide business consultation for client firms. Using their knowledge obtained from transnational networks, staffing agencies advise client firms of regulations and conventions of business in the country of destination as well as general human resource planning (Interview A-TW-01, A-TW-02). The soft skills and knowledge for workers and client firms are an important part of consolidating transnational labor markets.

Moreover, the wide range of consulting services eventually leads to a service that facilitates a type of international capital, rather than labor, flow, which I call “soft-landing” FDI (Interview A-TW-01, A-TW-02, A-TW-03, A-TW-04). The soft-landing FDI can be business at an early stage of international expansion, where foreign parent companies need people in the country of destination to work for them, before they officially establish branches or subsidiaries. In this case, staffing agencies assume the role of employers of these “pre-employees”, as a service for the foreign parent companies, which can yet employ any workers without official business registration (Interview A-TW-01, A-TW-02). With this service, foreign companies may reduce business risks by avoiding a large amount of initial investment in foreign markets. For instance,

8 Both the retirement pension by Labor Pension Act and the retirement allowance by Labor Insurance Act.

pilot market research can be conducted before a branch is set up according to local regulations that usually require a minimum of investment. This is especially useful for small and medium-sized companies, which are not as resourceful as their large counterparts when expanding business overseas. On the other hand, the soft-landing FDI can be on a long-term basis. As found out in the interviews, an Indian company regularly carries out project contracts in Taiwan and “hires” many local Taiwanese engineers through staffing agencies without having an official branch in Taiwan (Interview A-TW-02). In this case, the Indian company may reduce the number of engineers it would have to send from India as well as may save recruitment costs it would

have to invest for a branch that is not necessary between project contracts.

Overall, staffing agencies build up transnational labor markets by simultaneously coordinating the flow of labor force and capital between multiple parties across national borders, including (local and foreign) client firms, (local and foreign) workers and overseas partners/branches. When the staffing agencies harmonize respective national business, employment and social welfare regulations by providing customized arrangements for their clients, they effectively function as transnational human resource units and form a foundation for businesses to develop from international to transnational level.

## 5 CONCLUSION AND DISCUSSION

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Despite the absence of supra-national institutions and inter-governmental dialogues about cross-border labor mobility, transnational labor markets, which operate without central authority and are essentially constructed by private actors, are emerging in East Asia. Taking up Taiwan as a case, this study shows how private staffing agencies build up transnational labor market institutions by coordinating flows of labor and capital simultaneously between multiple countries, as services to their international clients. Transnational networks, underpinned by overseas subsidiaries and strategic partners, enable staffing agencies to provide transnational solutions that are adapted to respective national regulations, as well as consulting and training that is targeted at potential socio-cultural barriers.

Institutional ambiguity for TAW at the national level encourages staffing agencies in Taiwan to follow the internationalization of their clients and to expand the business to the transnational level by re-deploying and experimenting with the existing institutional arrangements. This demonstrates how national institutions have impact on transnational institutions through

the understanding and interpretation of actors. Staffing agencies organize cross-border labor mobility in various forms that attend to regulatory restrictions. Brokerage, informal brokerage, indirect posted agency work, posted agency work and labor subcontracting are found to be common practices of staffing agencies, serving the needs of both businesses and workers. While brokerage and informal brokerage are the forms available in an under-institutionalized environment for TAW, indirect posted agency work, posted agency work and labor subcontracting are staffing agencies' attempts at challenging and re-defining current ambiguous regulatory environment for cross-border TAW. Moreover, in order to retain their clients, staffing agencies perform transnational HR functions that facilitate international capital flows. In essence, they hire local workers and act as employers for their foreign clients which have not established subsidiaries or do not intend to do so in Taiwan.

While transnational labor markets in East Asia are still in an emerging stage, practical organization of cross-border labor mobility by staffing agencies could serve as a foundation for the re-

gional economic integration. It is worth observing if the agency types of cross-border mobility (indirect and direct posted agency work) would gain more significance in the region in the future. On the one hand, these forms are relatively new, compared to the others found in the region. On the other hand, they require the highest level of coordination by staffing agencies among the other types, which is a strong motivation as well as a business niche for staffing agencies. As staffing agencies have been diversifying their services, they are very likely to proactively promote the agency types of cross-border labor mobility.

From this study, it is found that there is not much action and discussion about cross-border labor mobility from the union side – neither at the national nor at the transnational level. This means that workers have little institutionalized support and may heavily rely on staffing agencies for the entire organization of border-crossing. Future research should include the perspective from individual workers in the making of transnational labor markets, as their understanding, needs and practices of working across national borders could facilitate (like the posted agency work found in this study) and/or hinder the development of transnational labor markets.

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## ANNEX

Interviews in Taiwan were conducted by myself as a member of a research team, while the other interviews were conducted by another team

member. All interviews were confidential and the names of interviewees are withheld by mutual agreement.

Interviewee	Description	Date
W-JP-01	Division executive of a union active in East Asia	January 29, 2014
AW-JP-01	Joint interview with a consultant of an agency with many years of experience working in a multinational staffing agency in Japan and a vice director of executive of a union active in East Asia	February 21, 2014
A-TW-01	Consultant of a multinational staffing agency, Taiwan	March 04, 2014
A-TW-02	General manager of a staffing agency with overseas branches, Taiwan	March 11, 2014
A-TW-03	President of a staffing agency with overseas branches, Taiwan	March 13, 2014
G-TW-01	Officer responsible for work permit affairs, Ministry of Labor, Taiwan	March 15, 2014
A-TW-04	Joint interview with the general manager and vice president of a staffing agency with overseas branches, Taiwan	March 17, 2014

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