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Publication Date

2026-10-02

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UNIVERSITY OF CALIFORNIA

Los Angeles

Foreign Pitch

Border Practices and Migrant Soccer Leagues in Taiwan

A dissertation submitted in partial satisfaction of the
requirements for the degree Doctor of Philosophy in Geography

by

Edward Painter

2026

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2026

ABSTRACT OF THE DISSERTATION

Foreign Pitch

Border Practices and Migrant Soccer Leagues in Taiwan

by

Edward Painter

Doctor of Philosophy in Geography

University of California, Los Angeles, 2026

Professor C. Cindy Fan, Chair

Balancing between local capital's requirement for labor, a shrinking local workforce, and exclusionary notions of national belonging, Taiwan's migration regime bears similarity to a growing number of analogous migration regimes globally. Often described as 'guest-worker' programs, these policies exclude migrants from incorporating socially and culturally, by distinguishing between migrants based on skill. This dissertation explores the reproduction and mediation of guest-worker programs within everyday life through an analysis of migrant soccer leagues in Taiwan. The project focuses on guest-workers from Southeast Asia, but also highlights the experiences of student-workers and highly skilled migrants from Europe, the Americas, Southeast Asia, and East Asia in migrant soccer communities. The empirical evidence collected through semi-structured interviews and ethnographic observation and participation within migrant soccer communities, demonstrates overlapping processes through which Taiwan's guest-

worker program is perpetuated and challenged as migrants confront and overcome barriers to attending soccer games during their limited free time. This dissertation engages with the critical border studies literature to parse the various motivations that animate the exclusion guest-workers experience in Taiwan and analyzes the social capital guest-worker communities rely on to negotiate access to field space and organize soccer games. Finally, the dissertation explores the sense of place that is produced by migrant soccer communities as an analysis of the effects that the guest-worker program has on globalization and multicultural encounters.

The dissertation of Edward Painter is approved.

John Agnew

Jamie Goodwin-White

Min Zhou

C. Cindy Fan, Committee Chair

University of California, Los Angeles

2026

DEDICATION

For my Grandmother, Mary-Clare Penney

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ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

This dissertation could not have been completed without the support of various communities and ‘places’ where I lived and worked while completing this dissertation. The first place was UCLA, where I learned from faculty mentors as I developed my research project and subsequently turned it into this manuscript. To Min, thank you for your help connecting with scholars in Taiwan through the Asia-Pacific Center and the work that you do to foster the community of Taiwan studies scholars at UCLA. To Jamie, thank you for your insight and kindness in conversation over my work and migration studies more broadly. To John, I will always cherish the conversations that we had in your office on the topics of Soccer, China, and other current events. I deeply appreciate the feedback you provided to me over the years on my work and the support you have provided me in various application processes. To Cindy, over the past 6 years I have learned so much from your kind guidance and insightful wisdom – they have helped me to formulate my research interests and advocate for their relevance. You have made me a more confident researcher, academic and person. I am incredibly grateful.

Chapter 2 of this Dissertation is based upon a solo-authored journal article with the same title which was published in the journal *Geopolitics* in 2026.

I also would like to thank Kasi McMurray, Jenée Misraje, and the rest of the departmental staff for their patient support while I worked and studied at UCLA. While working at UCLA I also had the chance to learn from professors as a teaching assistant. In particular Justin Zackey and Tom Gillespie, who both trusted me to develop my own pedagogical skills while assisting the instruction of coursework. While at UCLA I also

benefited from various internal grants, thank you to the Geography Department and the Asia-Pacific center for this support. Finally, I would like to express my gratitude and deep affection for my fellow graduate students who have become my friends, in particular those in the geography department and the Taiwan studies working group.

For much of my dissertation fieldwork, I relied on a Fulbright-Hays Doctoral Dissertation Research Award (DDRA) for support while living and conducting research in Taiwan. Along with the Fulbright-Hays program I would like to thank Ross Fenimore at UCLA for his invaluable help throughout the process. While in Taiwan, Fulbright Taiwan provided me with logistical support and included me in their own programming, which I greatly appreciated. I would also like to thank National Taiwan University's Global Asia Research Center for hosting me while in Taiwan. While I was in Taiwan conducting research, I benefited from various groups and individuals who were involved with advocacy work for guest-workers in Taiwan. This project would not have been possible without the help of Karen, David, and Father Arie. I also spent time with many different soccer playing communities, I am grateful for the warm welcome I received across these groups. I would like to extend special gratitude to Jheng Da, Aris, Doug, Oliver, and Bong. Finally, I would like to extend a warm thanks for all of my new and old friends in Taipei who make the city feel like home after all these years.

Perhaps most importantly, throughout my life, my parents have provided me with love and support to succeed and believe in myself. While writing this dissertation, the conversations we had about my work, and the time you took to read drafts of my articles were invaluable and exceptionally appreciated. To Katie: I am sure that this life would

be less pleasant and interesting without you, thank you for your company and encouragement.

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Painter, Edward. 2025. "Reorganizing space: A critical bordering perspective on hukou reform." *Transactions in Planning and Urban Research*, 4(2): 193-206

Painter, Edward, and Marie Price. 2019. "Creating Social Capital on Soccer Fields: Immigrant Opportunities and Gendered Barriers in Adult Soccer Leagues." *Journal of Ethnic and Migration Studies* 47 (7): 1631–48.

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American Association of Geographers Annual Meeting, New Orleans, LA: April 2018: *Social Capital and Soccer: Adult Soccer Leagues as Arenas for Immigrant Incorporation*

INTRODUCTION

Putting Taiwan's Guest Worker Program in a Global Context

Researching the soccer leagues that guest-workers from Southeast Asia organize while living and working in Taiwan, this dissertation contributes to the migration studies literature which analyzes different policy contexts of migrant incorporation. Along with this interdisciplinary focus, the dissertation explores 'place' and globalization, by contributing a case study to theoretical discussions over the relationship between the everyday settings of social life and the global and regional forces which structure it. Before introducing these theoretical arguments and the empirical findings to support them, this introductory chapter sets the stage by introducing Taiwan's guest-worker program as well as a brief literature review of the academic discussion among studies set within similar policy contexts within East Asia with a particular focus on scholarship which centers migrants' agency within restrictive migration policy. However, before diving into Taiwan's guest-worker program, it is worthwhile to introduce the notion of a guest-worker program.

The term 'guest-worker program' is common nomenclature for border policies which regulate the arrival of migrants to jurisdictions to bolster workforces while restricting migrants from remaining permanently and inhibiting their incorporation into local society. Since the advent of modern borders, analogous migration policies have proliferated in societies across the world as governments seek to balance the requirement for labor with concern from organized labor and society over labor migration (Haas et al., 2018; Hahamovitch, 2003). These types of programs are often referred to as 'guest-worker' programs, referencing the German 'gasterbeiter' program,

which – while predating the Second World War (Rass, 2023) – also continued afterwards during the post-war period (Hahamovitch, 2003). In contemporary times, the H1B visa program in the United States of America, the Kafala System across the Gulf region, and the Technical Intern Training Program in Japan are prominent examples of this category of border policy (Boucher and Gest, 2018).

There is a consensus among migration and legal scholars that temporary labor migration (TLM), including guest-worker programs, is a growing border practice (Boucher and Gest, 2018; Cook-martín, 2024; Dauvergne, 2016; International Labour Organisation ILO, 2022). This consensus is complicated because most scholars also acknowledge that TLM has existed since the birth of modern migration policy in the 19th century (Boucher and Gest, 2018; Dauvergne, 2016). Scholars make various arguments to explain how TLM migration has changed, drawing a distinction between migration before and after the 1990s. Although it is difficult to quantify and compare migration policies over time, scholars have demonstrated that a large proportion of contemporary documented international migration is through temporary migration programs (Boucher and Gest, 2018; International Labour Organisation ILO, 2022). Scholars have also argued that before the 1990s TLM was carried out in concert with widespread nation-building immigration to exclude certain undesirable groups of migrants from these projects on the basis of race and ethnicity (Dauvergne, 2016). These arguments continue by asserting that contemporary migration is rarely interested in nation-building migration and allow mobility only on the basis of economic logics, thus migration is defined by a marketplace where labor migration is based upon market mechanisms which determine desirable migrants while avoiding commitments to unskilled labor

based upon economic logics of supply and demand (Boucher and Gest, 2018; Cook-martín, 2024; Dauvergne, 2016). There are various explanations for this shift including the growth of neoliberalism (Boucher and Gest, 2018) and the decline of the settler-state (Dauvergne, 2016). Whatever the explanation, the outcomes of this new marketplace paradigm of migration are defined by their emphasis on skill and temporariness in adopting border policy.

The deployment of 'skill' as a technology for migration policy is a common practice to justify treating people differentially (Iskandar, 2021). 'Skill' allows governments to deploy policy which appears neutral and merit-based to carry out distinctions based upon class, race, and ethnicity since skill is both an individual attribute as well as a sociopolitical construct (Cook-martín, 2024; Iskandar, 2021). It also can create a class-based migration system as wealthy migrants are able to accumulate the cultural capital to qualify as 'skilled' while others may not (Boucher and Gest, 2018). The temporariness of migration policy makes migration palatable for localist concerns over migrant incorporation by implying the lack of incorporation (Cook-martín, 2024; Hahamovitch, 2017; Surak, 2015). It also affects relationships between migrant workers, locals, employers, and others involved in migration infrastructure (Cook-martín, 2024). Analyzing the role that 'skill' and 'temporariness' have on migrants' experiences of mobility are pressing research concerns, undertaken by this dissertation.

Taiwan's migration regime is characterized by this emphasis on temporariness and skill, as the migration regime distinguishes between categories of migrants based upon skill and their occupation. Within the legal framework of Taiwan's migration regime, low-skilled migrants are known as 'category two' or low-skilled migrants and

distinguished by their acceptable occupations and wage while in Taiwan (Ministry of Labor, 2025b). The 'category two' migrants are unable to qualify for permanent residence and are closely managed by their employers. 'Category one' migrants are defined by their employment contract of over NTD 47, 971 and proof of financial resources, these tests of 'skill' are used to qualify these migrants for permanent residence in Taiwan (Bureau of Consular Affairs, 2026). From its onset in the 1990s, this two-tiered migration regime was created through bilateral agreements with the governments of Southeast Asia, and was explicitly concerned with extracting labor value while limiting the social and cultural incorporation of 'category two' labor migrants (Tseng and Wang, 2013). Thus, the policies associated with 'category two' migrants are characteristic of guest-worker programs. Studying the day-to-day experiences of these migrants, along with other academic and news media discussions of the Taiwanese migration regime, this dissertation refers to 'category two' of Taiwan's migration regime as a guest-worker program and its participants guest-workers.

Albeit slightly inaccurate, relying on the 'guest-worker' nomenclature invites a comparison between Taiwan's migration regime and other similar programs worldwide. In particular, establishing terminology of the guest-worker program places the migration policy within an emerging paradigm of human mobility defined by transience and adjudicated based upon perceptions of skill.

Taiwan's Guest-Worker Program

Since 1992, Taiwan's migration regime has distinguished between migrants on the basis of skill (Tierney, 2007). Migrants who are categorized as guest-workers have come from Southeast Asia to work in fishing vessels, elderly care, and manufacturing, in

workplaces that have been described as dirty, dangerous, and difficult (Chien, 2023). These migrants provide a policy solution to manage local capital's requirement for cheap labor alongside local resistance to immigration (Tseng and Wang, 2013). Meanwhile, migrants who are considered highly skilled by the migration regime arrive from across the world, but in substantially lower numbers. In 2023, of the total 918,019 foreigners working or studying in Taiwan, 753,430 arrived in Taiwan as low-skilled migrants from Vietnam, Indonesia, the Philippines, and Thailand (Ministry of Education, 2023; Ministry of Labor, 2024b). Across academic literature, there is compelling evidence of the exploitation that takes place within the guest-worker migrants' workplaces in Taiwan at the hands of employers and the private migration intermediaries who manage the program (Chung, 2020; Dinkelaker, 2024, 2026; Hoang, 2016, 2017). Thus, migrants' experiences of Taiwan are heavily affected by their position within Taiwan's migration regime.

Taiwan's guest-worker regime has fluctuated constantly as the legal frameworks which determine the program's policies are adjusted in response to political, cultural, and economic trends (Chien, 2023). Attending to these fluctuations, this brief review of the program establishes the framework and mechanisms which reproduce Taiwan's guest-worker program and demonstrates the regime's use of 'skill' to achieve its policy goals. Along with this emphasis on 'skill,' is close attention to the delegation of the program's management to employers and intermediaries. In addition to demonstrating the program's neoliberal characteristics, this delegation also establishes the variety of migrant experiences within the guest-worker regime as migrants confront an array of

private enterprises who manage and reproduce the borderwork which reproduces the program.

The guest-worker program was established in 1992 to codify a preexisting undocumented flow of migrants from Southeast Asia to Taiwan for work. The government determines quotas which specify the number of migrants enrolled in the program, the salaries of guest-workers, the duration of stay within Taiwan, and the type of work that workers are allowed to do while in Taiwan (Chien, 2023; Tierney, 2007). Guest-workers commit to three-year terms of labor in Taiwan during which period they are assigned a work place and managed through a collaboration between their employers and the migration intermediary which facilitated their arrival in Taiwan (Surak, 2018; Tierney, 2007). Since the program's establishment, Taiwan has made agreements with Southeast Asian governments to allow migrant workers to Taiwan for work; workers from Vietnam, Thailand, the Philippines, Indonesia, and Malaysia have been able to come to Taiwan as guest-workers (Chien, 2023). From the beginning, the program was designed to import migrants' labor contributions but limit their social and cultural impact. Before the program's establishment, a group of scholars and policymakers produced a report which identified a growing labor shortage among low-skilled workers, as well as potential negative effects that importing labor could have on local society (Tseng and Wang, 2013). Based upon this study, Taiwan's guest-worker program left 'low-skilled' guest-workers ineligible to earn permanent residence unlike 'highly skilled' migrants.

Along with being ineligible to earn permanent residence status in Taiwan, the experiences of guest-workers in Taiwan are shaped by two major differences from

highly skilled migrants in Taiwan. First, guest-worker migrants' ability to change employers is heavily constrained (Chien, 2023; Dinkelaker and Ruckus, 2024). This lack of mobility is exacerbated by the fact that many guest-workers in Taiwan live in housing provided by their employers (Tierney, 2007). The end result of this policy is widespread accounts of surveillance and control carried out by employers who seek to shape migrants into ideal workers (Chien, 2023; Dinkelaker, 2024; Hoang, 2017). This surveillance and control is particularly prevalent among migrants who work in home healthcare and live in close quarters with their employers (Lan, 2003). In 2007, following a labor protest in response to poor working conditions, the government moved to create a special petition process to the government that migrants can use in order to change employers (Chien, 2023; Dinkelaker and Ruckus, 2024). According to activists and advocates, these measures have failed to prevent migrants' exploitation in the workplace because of the power dynamic between guest-workers and employers (Dinkelaker and Ruckus, 2024).

Second, unlike other migrants who come to Taiwan for work or study, guest-workers rely on intermediaries to pay for, organize, and facilitate their arrival in Taiwan. Migration intermediaries are for-profit businesses which pay for training and transport for migrants to come to Taiwan (Surak, 2018). In the past and to the present day, intermediaries have charged migrants monthly fees ostensibly in order to pay back the upfront cost that these firms incur (Chien, 2023; Surak, 2018). These intermediary firms are responsible for placing workers at workplaces in Taiwan (Tierney, 2007). While relying on these firms to manage and facilitate this labor flow for local capital, the government has set guidelines in order to standardize the practices associated with

these firms (Surak, 2018; Tierney, 2007). Despite these guidelines, the practices of these intermediaries have been described by scholars as exploitative and inconsistent in terms of their training regimes and varied in terms the amount of money that these firms charge migrants (Chien, 2023; Dinkelaker and Ruckus, 2024; Tierney, 2007). In 2016, a law was passed which reformed the guest-worker program allowing migrants to stay in Taiwan between three-year terms, and no longer requiring them to return to their home countries for a minimum period of a day (Chien, 2023). This change was consequential for intermediary firms as well as guest-workers because it meant that intermediaries could no longer extract an additional payment from workers every three years to facilitate workers' travel to reenter Taiwan (Chien, 2023; Dinkelaker and Ruckus, 2024). Finally, in recent years, factories have responded to pressure from global supply chains to abolish indebted labor practices; however, for the time being, these concerns are more prevalent in large high-tech factories rather than medium and small factories (Chien, 2023).

Following the program's brief pause during the COVID-19 pandemic, the government initiated a noteworthy reform of the guest-worker program. Building upon the preexisting skill-based logic of the program, the law change created a new category of migrant within Taiwan's migration regime labeled as intermediate-skilled (Lan, 2022a). Guest-workers are now able to change their categorization from low-skilled to intermediate-skilled, creating an avenue towards permanent residence in Taiwan. The rule change also allows guest-workers to live more independently from their employers and enjoy more protections and rights in the workplace (Ministry of Labor, 2025a). While the language of 'skill' used to differentiate between migrants suggests objective

categorization processes, the difference between low-skilled and intermediate-skilled workers is procedural and extremely dynamic. Currently migrants working in manufacturing can qualify as intermediate-skilled if they have worked for the same employer for 6 years, if they have proof of qualifications or their employer signs an affidavit asserting they have undertaken 80 hours training, and if they make more than 33,000 NTD per month. If they make more than 35,000 NTD per month, the training requirements are waived (Ministry of Labor, 2022). Employers play a key role in adjudicating skill as the change requires employers to pay migrants a higher monthly wage. Since it depends on the extent to which employers desire to retain laborers over the long term, the program further establishes Taiwan's migration regime as being driven by market forces. This addition of intermediate-skilled guest-workers with a path to permanent residency reflects the growing demand for guest-workers in Taiwan in the aftermath of the COVID-19 pandemic and as a result of a shrinking and aging population. Since its enactment subsequent rule changes have allowed further leniency to the migration regime, intermediate-skilled migrants are no longer limited to 20 percent of the foreign workforce (Ministry of Labor, 2025a), and the qualifications required for intermediate status have reduced gradually (Ministry of Labor, 2022).

Table 1 End of 2025 Migrants in Taiwan by Visa Category Source: Taiwan Ministry of Education, Taiwan Ministry of Labor

Guest-worker Migrants	Intermediate- skilled Migrants	Southbound Policy Students	Other Students	Highly Skilled Migrants
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820,083	45,562	82,622	48,917	48,506
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Along with migrants who arrive in Taiwan for work, as of 2017, student migrants are also able to work (Chien, 2023). In particular since the establishment of the ‘New Southbound Policy,’ an antecedent of 1990s policy which sought to establish economic and cultural connections with Southeast Asia, the government has recruited students from Southeast Asia to study and work in Taiwan. Among these students, there have been reports of similar exploitation and forced labor as migrants experience within the guest-worker program (Dinkelaker and Ruckus, 2024).

Table 1 provides a breakdown of migrants in Taiwan by visa category in 2025. Migrants participating in the guest-worker program as ‘low-skilled’ migrants dwarf all other categories. In particular, while the number of students from Southeast Asia is greater than ‘other students’ and ‘highly skilled migrants’ in Taiwan, the intermediate-skilled labor program is still quite small compared to other visa categories. The number of migrants enrolled in the intermediate-skilled labor program is also modest in comparison with the number of migrants who have left their workplaces to take part in undocumented work in Taiwan. In Taiwan, there is growing concern over this category of migrants, often referred to as ‘runaway’ workers, who leave their assigned employers and take up undocumented and unregulated work (Surak, 2018). Migrants who leave their workplaces do so because of pressures from intermediary payments and poor workplace conditions (Hoang, 2017; Parhusip, 2023). ‘Runaway’ workers in Taiwan represent a policy failure not only because they represent a growing failure to regulate migration to Taiwan, but also because the growth of ‘runaway’ workers is an expression of poor management of migrants’ experiences by employers and intermediaries. In

2025, there were a total of 94,542 migrants classified as 'runaway' by the government, meanwhile only 45,562 migrants had been registered as intermediate-skilled. Qualifying as intermediate-skilled is the government solution for migrants to escape the poor conditions experienced by guest-workers in Taiwan. To date, leaving employers to find undocumented work is a more common solution; however, the intermediate program has made up ground.

Despite reforms, the fundamental relationships between guest-workers, employers, and intermediaries which constitute Taiwan's guest-worker regime remains largely unchanged. The most recent reforms which establish a pathway to permanent residence and offer an alternative to the exploitation of the guest-worker program, returns to the notion of skill, in order for migrants to demonstrate themselves worthy of inclusion in Taiwanese society. This process, which is heavily influenced by employers, takes place through an individualized application process, and requires migrants to petition the Taiwanese government and their employers for permanent status in Taiwan. The reform to the guest-worker program maintains the program's neoliberal characteristics. Work protection and permanent status is marketized and earned by individual migrants and the management of and discernment of skill is delegated to employers, while in its reform the program continues to bolster Taiwan's economic viability as the home to manufacturing.

Migration in East Asia

Recall that Taiwan's guest-worker program can be considered a part of a broader global trend in migration policy. The program can also be considered part of a collection of similar programs within East Asia, sharing similarities with South Korea (Chung,

2021), Hong Kong (Hwang and Hwang, 2023), Japan (Chung, 2021; Xiang, 2012), Thailand (Palmgren, 2024), and Singapore (Goh et al., 2017). These migration regimes deploy similar policies which prevent migrant incorporation by strictly limiting the period of stay of migrant workers who are perceived as unskilled. The motivations for these programs are also often described as similar, concerned at once over shrinking population sizes, as well as incorporating migrants into relatively ethnically homogeneous populations (Chung, 2020). Like in Taiwan, migrants participating in these guest-worker programs are subject to difficult work conditions and exploitation from their employers and the intermediaries which facilitate the migration. The distinction between unskilled and skilled workers is not just a function of temporariness; it also justifies regimes which treat guest-workers less well than other workers. Within this context, scholars have demonstrated that rather than being powerless within these spaces, guest-workers have produced spaces within migration regimes which produce meaningful cultural and social impacts on receiving societies despite the policies intended effects (Chen and Szeto, 2015; Dinkelaker, 2024).

While there are meaningful distinctions in terms of wages, minimum qualifications, and rights enjoyed while overseas for work (Chung, 2020; Goh et al., 2017; Surak, 2018), there is considerable overlap between East Asian guest-worker programs. In general, these programs rely upon intermediaries to source, transport, and manage guest-workers throughout their participation in the program. Like Taiwan, Hong Kong, Thailand, Singapore, and Japan all rely on the private intermediaries to facilitate their guest-worker programs (Goh et al., 2017; Hwang and Hwang, 2023; Palmgren, 2024; Rosenberg, 2025). It is only South Korea that – citing exploitation and corruption

– has adopted a government-managed placement system (Chung, 2021; Surak, 2018). Most East Asian guest-worker programs also rely on the notions of skill to distinguish between guest-workers and other migrants who are eligible for permanent stay (Lan, 2022a; Zhan and Zhou, 2020). Demonstrating its flexibility as a social political construct, ‘skill’ has also been deployed as a justification for migrants’ temporary status in Japan, where migrants are treated as guest-workers but are officially in Japan for job-training (Rosenberg, 2025). Comparing the programs, Taiwan has been described as more desirable than Singapore by migrants (Goh et al., 2017), while South Korea’s program is even more desirable because of higher wages (Surak, 2018), not to mention local voting rights (Chung, 2021). Of course, South Korea requires more qualifications than Taiwan (Chung, 2020), and guest-workers often use Singapore as a stepping stone to reach Taiwan (Goh et al., 2017). Thus, while this dissertation takes Taiwan as a singular case study, it is not surprising that participants in this study had worked elsewhere in East Asia and compared their life in Taiwan to these other similar programs.

As a case study within this broader policy context, this dissertation is focused specifically on the role that soccer plays for guest-workers within Taiwan’s migration regime. Within the extant migration studies literature, there is considerable evidence of the effect that playing soccer has as an associational activity, forming social connections among migrants and with locals in migrants’ new homes (Hernández-León and Zúñiga, 2003; Painter and Price, 2021; Trouille, 2021). Of course, there is also plenty of evidence for the effect that numerous associational activities have on migrant incorporation through their organization of social networks (Airriess et al., 2008;

Mitchell, 2007; Zhou, 2009). At the same time, social networks have also been demonstrated by scholars to have negative impacts on certain community members, and as means of control and surveillance (Hoang, 2016; Joassart-Marcelli, 2014; Portes and Sensenbrenner, 1993). The fourth chapter of this dissertation further develops the ambiguous impact of social networks, and their effect on soccer-playing guest-workers in Taiwan. More broadly, the dissertation contributes to the migration studies literature by exploring the production of social networks which are somewhat adversarial to the migration regime itself.

Attending to restrictive migration regimes in East Asia, this dissertation focuses on soccer-playing communities as an example of the successful strategies that guest-workers have deployed to make space for themselves outside of their workplaces in Taiwan. Focusing on empirical cases within similar policy contexts in East Asia, scholars have identified the spatial exclusion which migrants experience as an expression of regime efforts to exclude migrants from mainstream society (Chen and Szeto, 2015; Goh and Lee, 2022; Yeoh and Huang, 1998; Yeoh and Lam, 2022). More specifically these scholars at once recognize the role that exclusion from public spaces has in reproducing the migration regimes as well as the strategies migrants use to overcome this exclusion (Chen and Szeto, 2015; Yeoh and Huang, 1998). In Taiwan, scholars have noted that guest-workers in Taiwan have limited access to free time and available public space (Chung, 2020; Dinkelaker, 2024; Hoang, 2016; Ruckus, 2023). More recently, Dinkelaker (2024) uses the music scene in Taiwan to demonstrate the strategies that migrants use to leave their workplaces during their free time, but also the expressions of human dignity associated with these strategies. Building from this work,

this dissertation attends to both the pressures which prevent guest-workers from leaving their workplaces and the politics which prevent migrants from accessing field space in Taiwan.

Research Questions and Outline

Interested in understanding the embodied experiences of mobility within guest-worker programs, the dissertation takes Taiwan's guest-worker program as a case study. This empirical focus seeks to understand the mechanisms and practices which produce the policy of a guest-worker program into the lives of migrants who participate in it. By analyzing this process of mediation, the dissertation develops an understanding of the constitution of a guest-worker program both from the structure of migration policy and the agency of individual migrants. This theme of structure and agency exists throughout the dissertation, but different chapters rely on distinct theoretical approaches to conceptualizing this relationship. Thus, the specific empirical focus for this theoretical task is not just Taiwan's guest-worker program, but the soccer leagues which guest-workers attempt and mostly succeed in organizing while they are working within the structure of Taiwan's guest-worker program.

With this in mind, the dissertation explores three research questions:

1. How are guest-worker programs negotiated during the everyday lives of participating migrants?
2. What are the relationships between migrant social structures, the guest-worker regime, and public space?
3. How do the identities that are produced within a guest-worker program relate to other proximate territorial identities?

Chapter Two, provides a brief methodology, which includes my epistemological approach, details of data collection, and a brief reflection on my own positionality as a researcher. Chapter Three explores the barriers to play that guest-workers experience in Taiwan. Building upon the theme of structure and agency the chapter develops a conjunctural approach to the critical border perspective by arguing that there are moments of 'plasticity' within the migration regime. Building upon this 'plasticity', Chapter Four examines the social networks which guest-workers rely upon to organize field space in Taiwan. Analyzing these social networks, chapter four develops a place-based approach to social capital borrowing from theories of social structuration. Focusing on the third research question, Chapter Five explores the sense of place associated with fields where migrants play soccer. This chapter explores new social configurations which are produced by the guest-worker program as well as through migrants' own agency.

Chapter 1 Methodology

Contributing to the migration studies literature on the policy contexts of migrant incorporation, this dissertation provides a case study which takes soccer leagues as an aspect of everyday life to analyze the dynamics of Taiwan's broader border regime. This case study invites comparison to other policy contexts and explores the relationships between migrants' limited free time and the political projects of governance and belonging which organize the migration regime. With this interest in mind, the dissertation begins from Burawoy's extended case method and follows its commitment to relational social science and attention to the effect of processes that take place partially or completely outside of a given field site (Burawoy, 1998). Studying a relatively specific social phenomenon – migrant soccer leagues – the study is interested in understanding a social process of migrant incorporation which is affected by the migration policy of Taiwan and begins in sending countries. With this empirical focus across scales, the dissertation demonstrates a growing interest within migration studies to move beyond single-site epistemological approaches (Xiang, 2013). This means that, while most of the field work undertaken for this study took place on or near soccer fields, in line with the extended case study there was an explicit interest in understanding the relationship between these fields and broader social processes.

Seeking an understanding of the relationships between policy and everyday life, this dissertation's methodology focuses on the conflict and friction which exists as guest-workers leave their workplaces to enter public space. This friction is the embodied outcome of Taiwan's migration regime but also, as Chapter Three demonstrates, of other political forces which reproduce the exclusion that guest-workers experience in

Taiwanese society. This approach bears some similarity to relational ethnography as described by Desmond, where – rather than focusing on a place or a group of people – academic study uses a “relationship of mutual dependence or struggle” as a unit of analysis, thereby avoiding practices which “enshroud the objects of group-and place-based ethnographies in an essence of conceptual impartiality” (Desmond, 2014). Put another way, studying relationships rather than pre-assumed units of analysis is better suited to understanding something which is dynamic rather than static. For instance, if I had used an empirical focus on simply “guest-worker soccer leagues,” I may have learned about the health benefits that guest-workers find in playing soccer while in Taiwan. But with an empirical focus on “barriers which guest-workers face and the strategies deployed to get around them,” I still heard about the health benefits of soccer as well as the relationships that they had with foreign soccer players of other nationalities. Not that the health benefits of playing soccer is not important, but this knowledge is well-established and expected. Meanwhile, the connections to other migrant soccer-playing communities expanded the scope of who I interviewed for the study, and my findings.

Semi-Structured Interviews

With this epistemological approach in mind, I collected 44 semi-structured interviews over the cumulative period of a year, with members of soccer-playing communities in which guest-workers participate. Interviews were conducted by myself in either Mandarin Chinese or English or with the help of a translator in Vietnamese and Bahasa Indonesian. Interviews were predominantly conducted with participants who are in Taiwan as guest-workers. Participants were identified through my attendance and

occasional participation in tournaments organized for and by guest-workers, a process which relied on a working relationship with a local non-profit, as well as my own personal background playing soccer in Taiwan as a child. At time of research, Taiwan's guest-worker program included migrants from Thailand, Indonesia, Vietnam, and the Philippines. As illustrated in Table 1, most interviews were conducted with players from Vietnam and Indonesia. Indonesia and Vietnam send the highest number of guest-workers to Taiwan (Ministry of Labor, 2024b) and generally have a higher cultural interest in soccer.

Table 2 Participants by Origin

Origin	Total Participants
Vietnam	15
Indonesia	11
Taiwan	7
Thailand	2
Other	9

Table 3 Participants by Occupation

Occupation	Total Participants
Factory Worker	17
Highly-Skilled Migrant	8
Student	7
Fisher	4
NGO staff	2
Other	6

Among these players, all had played soccer before arriving in Taiwan although their skill and previous experience playing soccer varied considerably. Several interviews were also conducted with highly skilled migrants and student migrants who

were part of the same communities as guest-workers. Table 2 shows a breakdown of participants by their occupations in Taiwan. The discrepancy in enforcement across the guest-worker program makes it difficult to make generalizations about migrant experiences; similarly the range of migrant experiences associated with the category of student is equally broad. The plurality of student migrants who participated in interviews were undergraduate and graduate students, also from Indonesia or Vietnam. Meanwhile, highly skilled migrants who participated in interviews were predominantly from Europe, North America, and East Asia. Among the soccer players interviewed, all interviews except one were conducted with men.

As alluded to above, interviews were also conducted with participants who were involved in soccer games but were not guest-workers themselves. These interviews included players who regularly played alongside and against guest-workers. These players were often student-workers but also included 'highly skilled' migrants. Extending beyond those involved in actively playing soccer, interviews placed particular attention on the processes and relationships through which games emerged, so interviews were also conducted with participants who were mainly involved with the processes of organizing field space which included local Taiwanese participants. These interview participants were involved with administering field space or renting field space on behalf of guest-worker communities. These community members were at times involved with the non-profit with which I collaborated, but were also teachers at universities, team members, or simply concerned individuals hoping to support guest-workers.

Appendix A of this chapter includes the full script used to structure my interviews with guest-workers and other soccer players in Taiwan. The interview script is divided

into three main sections which attended to my three main research questions introduced in the first chapter of this dissertation:

1. How are guest-worker programs negotiated during the everyday lives of participating migrants?
2. What are the relationships between migrant social structures, the guest-worker regime, and public space?
3. How do the identities that are produced within a guest-worker program relate to other proximate territorial identities?

Addressing my first research question, I began by asking players how they first navigated Taiwanese society to find a soccer playing community. In addition to being an open-ended starting point, it also introduced the idea that finding a soccer community might be an undertaking that took effort and social bravery. The subsequent questions attended to the details of attending soccer games while in Taiwan. After beginning with more open-ended prompts, these questions ensured that participants addressed the pressures which inhibited their freedom while in Taiwan. It was here that participants most often brought up trouble accessing field space and professional pressures.

The follow-on questions in the second section focused on the temporal aspect of playing soccer in Taiwan and encouraged participants to share how they had navigated the barriers to play. The first question was broad in scope: "Since you began to play soccer in Taiwan, has it become easier or more difficult to find and attend games?" Participants most often answered that it had become easier to play soccer since arriving

in Taiwan, prompting a discussion of why and how playing soccer had become easier. The next question “do relationships formed through play make it easier to attend more games?” prompted participants to think about how social relationships helped them access soccer games.

Finally, the third group of questions attended to the identities which were produced through membership in soccer playing communities. There are seven questions included in this section, an expression of the complexity of identity and its multifaceted relationship with place. Designed for semi-structured interviews, all of my scripted interview questions were open-ended and flexible in practice, but the questions in this section were often the most flexible and iterative. In particular, questions four and five often needed follow up and explanation. In fact, trying to differentiate between a sense of place associated with Taiwan and their everyday lives, these questions only worked some of the time. When this distinction was not clear, the participant often provided an expression of their senses of belonging within Taiwan or on the soccer fields where they played, but not both. Of course, while not exactly what was intended by the research design, these responses were still fruitful during data analysis.

Once interviews were completed, they were transcribed and coded for thematic analysis. Using an iterative process of inductive coding, I allowed themes within my interview transcriptions to become apparent gradually through the process of rereading interview transcriptions. Cross referenced with categorizations of participants by visa type, ethnicity, and role within the soccer playing community, these thematic codes facilitated the utilization of the corpus of interview data to answer my research questions

and thereby explore the relationships between the guest-worker program and migrants' everyday experiences in Taiwan.

Participatory Research and Positionality

Alongside interviews, ethnographic data was collected through my own participation and observation in the communities from which interview participants came from. Prolonged experiences with these communities not only assisted the practicalities of conducting interviews, but also reiterated the impacts of field space politics on local playing communities that were expressed during interviews. In particular, the senses of place associated with these soccer fields were clear through participation within these games not only through play itself but also through sharing meals and informal conversations. The sense of place associated with these spaces was also expressed through shared experiences: positive on-field moments as well as local pushback over field space usage.

Although I had pre-existing connections to soccer playing communities in Taiwan, I began my research project by reaching out to a Taiwanese non-profit which had been supporting guest-worker soccer leagues, which they often called 'World Cups.' At the same time as meeting the staff responsible for these tournaments, I also reached out to my soccer playing community contacts and managed to find a spot on one of the teams which was competing in the next soccer tournament organized by the non-profit. These 'World Cup' tournaments always included a mix of teams and – while that day I ended up on a team of mostly South American and African non-guest-workers – I was able to meet players from various teams with whom I later followed up, joined games, and built connections. Thus, similar to a snowballing sampling for interviews, I

snowballed across various soccer playing communities in which guest-workers participated within. In addition to being in touch with these soccer playing communities, I continued to meet with and assist the non-profit with which I originally connected. This included helping with grant-writing, assisting at tournaments, and maintaining close contact with the program director.

Throughout the research process, and in particular while I was participating within these communities, I was aware of the effects that my own positionality had on data collection, and later data analysis. In keeping with my commitment to reflexive social science, I have provided some details about my own background and how I came to study guest-worker soccer leagues in Taiwan. Arriving in 2002 as a child, over eight years of living in Taipei, I played among and against a wide range of communities, including high school teams, indigenous teams, club teams, and co-ethnic teams. Once I even represented Taipei in a one-off friendly match against the British Deaflympics team as a warm-up for the 2009 Deaflympics held in Taipei. When we first arrived in Taiwan, there were not many chances for my two brothers and me to play soccer; in general, soccer is not popular in Taiwan. Subsequently my family was involved in the foundation of a soccer club called International Soccer Club Taipei, which still exists today.

While in Taiwan conducting this research, I benefitted from my own personal connections and previous experiences living in Taiwan. Along with learning to speak Mandarin Chinese while growing up in Taiwan, I also became comfortable culturally within Taiwanese society so that I feel as comfortable in Taipei as in the United States. Of course, a large part of this comfort is due to the close personal connections that I

have to people still living in Taipei and in Taiwan more broadly. These connections make it easy for me to live in Taiwan and helped me make connections necessary for my research. Perhaps the clearest example of this was the connections to soccer players in Taiwan who invited me to join their team for the ‘World Cup’ mentioned above. As a United States passport holder, and presenting as white, I remain an outsider in Taiwan, but my language ability, cultural knowledge, and social connection mean that my status as an outsider in Taiwanese society, which I might have shared with guest-workers, is ambiguous. At the same time, my status as an academic with a privileged visa-status in Taiwan also meant that my experience in Taiwan was different from most of the research participants in this study. Still, playing soccer did provide some temporary insider status within these soccer playing communities which included guest-workers and other migrants. I have included these details in order to satisfy a theoretical commitment to the “correlations between the researchers’ social position and the research product” (Lichterman, 2017), as well as a normative commitment to discard claims of objectivity (Burawoy, 1998; Eliasoph and Lichterman, 1999; Lichterman, 2017).

Chapter 2 Right to the Field: Critical Bordering Perspectives on Field Space Politics and Migrant Soccer Leagues

I first met Ismail at a soccer game where we were both playing on opposite teams. Ismail is from Indonesia but spoke English because of a free English camp that he used to attend as a child. He arrived in Taiwan as a guest worker ultimately because the requirements to work in Taiwan were low compared to South Korea and Japan. His parents had also worked in Taiwan. In Indonesia, he had once made a living through playing soccer and working at a bubble tea stand, now Soccer was the most exciting and happiest aspect of his life in Taiwan. His work was boring and monotonous but not dangerous, he had a girlfriend who he only saw occasionally, mostly because he used his free time on the weekends to play soccer. Because he is a great soccer player, he was often invited to tournaments and games by other Indonesian teams in cities across Taiwan and had joined multicultural teams made up of players from places spread across the globe. Once, he reached out to ask me about professional soccer in Taiwan. I told him that he could at least practice with a team I had a relationship with, but when I told him the salary of professional players playing in Taiwan, he lost interest in playing. We still went to watch a game together and meet a coach of a professional team in Taiwan.

After the game Ismail and I traveled to the center of Taichung close to the train station where there are many restaurants and stores which cater to southeast Asian migrants. We ate dinner at an Indonesian restaurant that Ismail liked. He told me that he didn't eat Taiwanese food because he didn't like it, the closest he got was the chicken that he was served at work. He often got takeaway Indonesian food on his

electronic scooter after playing soccer in the evenings on weekend nights in particular. In an early interview Ismail told me that he liked living in Taiwan because his income meant that he had freedom to pursue hobbies and to enjoy his time away from work. Ismail had paid around NTD 115,000 (~USD3900) to an intermediary in order to work in Taiwan, and sent around half of his monthly salary back to his mother, but still had a little bit of money for himself every month. At dinner, Ismail told me that he would participate in the upcoming Taichung city league for a multicultural team and that he would also bring a few of his Indonesian friends. His inclusion in the team, no doubt impacted by his soccer skills as well as his English language ability meant that he was often offered car rides to and from games and organized games between the team and Indonesian teams. Thus, Ismail was an important conduit between guest-worker soccer communities and other migrant soccer communities who usually played separately and on different fields. When he first began to play with the team, he expressed that playing with the team was a little difficult for him, not because of language barriers but because of cultural differences. And yet by the end of the year he had become an established member of the team, not just important on the field during the game but also involved in finding players and organizing games.

Focusing on the negotiation of Taiwan's guest-worker program in the setting of everyday life, this chapter outlines the exclusion that guest-workers experience while working and living in Taiwan and identifies instances where guest-workers overcome this borderwork. Ismail's experiences demonstrate the impacts that social life outside of work (in this case soccer) and the structure of the guest-worker program have on guest-workers in Taiwan. Most guest-workers who play soccer in Taiwan do not experience

the same degree of inclusion that Ismail has experienced within multicultural soccer communities, but the belonging and happiness that Ismail also expressed as result of playing soccer in co-ethnic communities is widespread among players that participated in interviews. Ismail's experiences playing soccer in Taiwan demonstrates how soccer can facilitate a marginal process of migrant incorporation, in some cases bridging cultural and class divisions. Yet, playing soccer has not led Ismail to incorporate into Taiwanese society more broadly, or even led him to take part in the limited Taiwanese soccer community. Instead soccer has become an important source of community for Ismail among other migrants. Capturing this incomplete and patchwork process of migrant incorporation, this chapter attends to both the exclusion and inclusion which takes place on the soccer field, through attention to conflict over accessing field space itself. Demonstrating the diverse processes through which the exclusion of guest-workers is produced within the settings of everyday life, illustrates the production of the guest-worker program. Furthermore, the processes of social exclusion indicate that a portion of the exclusion that guest-workers experience in Taiwan is not directly associated with the guest-worker program itself.

Compared to other interview participants, Ismail's experiences in Taiwan also illustrate the broad range of outcomes that are associated with participation in Taiwan's guest-worker program. In an early interview, Ismail said that it was easier for him to play soccer in Taiwan than it had been in Indonesia, most guest worker participants did not express similar experiences but the ones that did cited lower familial commitments while working alone in Taiwan, rather than the financial freedom expressed by Ismail. Furthermore, Ismail had freedom to use his weekends as he chose, in particular

because the factory that he worked at often did not offer or require overtime work on the weekend. Although his employers did have some control over his time away from work. For instance, after the soccer game and dinner Ismail had to return home for an early bedtime because he had to wake up at 6am for a medical clearance examination on a Sunday. Like many guest-workers, Ismail still did accumulate debt to work in Taiwan because of the intermediary fee he was charged despite growing pressure on Taiwanese manufacturers to remove these fees from supply chains. Yet, his work in Taiwan was monotonous but could not be considered dirty, dangerous, or difficult as other guest-workers in Taiwan have experienced.

Taiwan's guest worker program is difficult to analyze because participation outcomes are so wide ranging. This discrepancy is not only an outcome of the unique background of each migrant but also a result of the delegation of the migration regime's enforcement and management to intermediaries and employers (Tseng and Wang, 2013). The regulations which the government places upon employers and intermediaries, the public perception of migrants, as well as the norms towards the treatment of migrant labor also fluctuate. Ismail's own background as an English speaker and skilled soccer player have affected his inclusion into soccer communities, and in turn his participation in these communities have defined his experiences in Taiwan. His experiences in Taiwan have also been defined by his particular workplace and intermediary firm. Relying on the critical border literature, this chapter develops an approach to Taiwan's guest worker program which accounts for migrants' individual and collective agency as well as a variegated migration regime which not only treats guest-workers differently from other migrants but also includes variation within the guest-

worker program itself. Focusing on the processes that combine to construct Taiwan's bordering-scape the chapter keeps track of these various exclusionary forces while at the same time analyzing their interaction with the agency of migrants to organize communities and access space.

Conjunctural Bordering

The critical border perspective offers a theoretical approach to explain the diversity of actors and logics which intermingle to perpetuate socio-spatial exclusion in Taiwan. Reconceiving borders as processes rather than static 'lines in the sand,' the critical border perspective introduces the term 'bordering' or 'borderwork' to theorize the socio-spatial exclusion which is produced throughout and outside of territories (Kolossoff and Scott, 2013; Parker and Vaughan-Williams, 2012; Rumford, 2008). Alongside the increased spatial scope and technical repertoire of borderwork beyond walls and checkpoints (Burridge et al., 2017; Paasi and Prokkola, 2008), scholars have also noted that, rather than a monolithic border, borderwork impacts individuals differentially, and often on the basis of skill (Iskandar, 2021; Painter, 2025). Finally, the scholarship has emphasized that borderwork is produced by a diversity of local actors involved in the localized embodiment of social exclusion (Ehrkamp and Nagel, 2017; Yuval-Davis et al., 2019). Collectively borderwork produces 'bordering-scapes' defined as 'spatial zone(s) in which specific bordering processes are taking place' (Yuval-Davis et al., 2019). Taiwan's bordering-scape is made up of borderwork which begins in migrants' home jurisdictions, continues long after migrants cross Taiwanese customs at the airport, and treats guest-workers differently than other migrants because they are perceived as 'low-skilled.' Furthermore, due to its privatization to employers and

intermediaries, much of the borderwork involved in Taiwan's bordering-scape is not directly enforced by the state.

Theorizing borderwork to be comprised of both notions of spatial belonging and spatial ordering, along with a diversity of actors involved in producing borderwork, scholars have argued that the motivations behind borderwork are also numerous (van Houtum and van Naerssen, 2002; Yuval-Davis et al., 2019). Yuval-Davis introduces the terms 'political projects of governance' and 'political projects of belonging' to describe the coalitions and logics which intermingle to produce borderwork and bordering-scapes (Yuval-Davis et al., 2019). In some cases, these two types of political projects might be mutually reinforcing (van Houtum and van Naerssen, 2002), in particular because of the sense of place that governance can impress upon individuals and groups (Agnew, 1987). However, the two can also be in conflict; in particular Yuval-Davis outlines avenues through which political projects of belonging might produce 'everyday bordering' a term which captures the interpersonal exclusion or segmented inclusion which takes place in everyday life that is not associated with statecraft (Yuval-Davis et al., 2019). In the case of migrant soccer leagues in Taiwan, there is no official government policy which forbids migrants from using public soccer fields; however, local politics of belonging have intervened so that migrants struggle to gain access to field space.

Based on fieldwork, neither borderwork associated with spatial belonging or spatial governance is static. Rather as processes that are being embodied by local actors, they are constantly being renegotiated by those involved in contesting them and enforcing them. Therefore, in places like soccer fields where migrants are confronting

and overcoming barriers, the separation of guest-workers from the rest of society is contingent. Attending to this contestation, I draw from the emergent methodology of conjunctural urban analysis to theorize ‘the structural and the contingent’ (Peck, 2023) within Taiwan’s bordering-scape. The approach stresses the potential of local actions within larger-scale processes (Leitner and Sheppard, 2020). Attending to this emerging epistemological approach, Ward and Davidson advance an analytic framework for this conjunctural approach, introducing the term ‘plasticity’ in reference to the instability of relations which make up urban conjunctures (Davidson and Ward, 2024).

Within academic geography, conjunctural analysis has gained prominence in the last decade (Yeung, 2023), as urban geographers have developed theoretical approaches to the contextualization of global trends such as neoliberalism into specific contexts (Leitner and Sheppard, 2020; Peck, 2023). Spatially conjunctural analysis engages in a dialectical analysis between the particular and the general producing a framework which traces the processes through which large- and small-scale forces combine to produce local conditions (Leitner and Sheppard, 2020). In this case, the local end of this dialectic is the realm of everyday life, where the guest-worker program is articulated through borderwork as migrants organize access to public space during time away from work. At the spatially broad end of the dialectic are the political projects of governance and belonging which perpetuate this program throughout Taiwan.

Of course, in the past, human geographers have also theorized structure and agency across spatial scales and amid globalization (Agnew, 1987; Massey, 1991), emphasizing agency while still taking seriously the effect of structural forces (Agnew, 1987). With some similarity, conjunctural approaches in geography have been

described as a middle ground between orthodox Marxist structuralism and ‘flat’ ontologies (Yeung, 2023). By design spatial conjunctural analysis is difficult to pin down, but it includes the spatialization of historical conjunctural analysis whereby local movements (or conjunctures) forestall the conclusions of broader crises (Leitner and Sheppard, 2020). In practice this entails an approach which outlines how the macro and micro, the local and general, and the structural and contingent, shape one another bilaterally (Leitner and Sheppard, 2020; Peck, 2023), bearing some similarity to theories of structuration (Sheppard et al., 2020). Finally, the conjunctural approach problematizes the city as a bounded unit of analysis advocating an investigation which stretches out horizontally, vertically, and temporally from its starting point, when considering dialectically its relationship with structural forces (Leitner and Sheppard, 2020).

Both relational and processual, the critical border literature has some commonality to conjunctural approaches in urban studies. The shift of focus from borders to borderwork is comparable to the shift from bounded urban cities to unbounded sites of urban analysis defined by their connections across time and space. Both entail a spatial unpacking of their main subject of analysis, from unifying nomenclature (the border, the city) to the embodied and local encounters and transactions which constitute them. This spatial unpacking of the border has been fruitful in analyzing the variegated functions and uncovering the dispersed geographies of socio-spatial exclusion. Furthermore, critical border scholars have addressed the impact of border externalization, and have argued that the dialectical production of bordering-scapes is contextualized by place while also affecting the reproduction of

place (Cobarrubias and Novak, 2025; Novak, 2025). A conjunctural approach to borderwork builds upon this literature by providing a framework to consider the contingency of bordering-scapes as they are reproduced by local actors. Already within the critical border literature, the duality between ordering space on behalf of governance and belonging attends to the multiple logics which animate borderwork. A conjunctural approach to borderwork adds a scalar component to these analyses, by developing the dialectic between spatially broad migration regimes and the particular borderwork which produce them locally. It is not only numerous logics which reproduce bordering-scapes, but also local agencies which mediate political projects into embodied practices that take place in everyday life. There is a power geometry (Massey, 1991) to these contestations but nonetheless bordering-scapes are affected by the local as well as the regional, national, and the global.

The conjunctural approach “begins with...obligations to understand politically active ‘situations,’ critical junctures, unfolding crises or problem spaces” (Peck, 2023). Accommodating anti-immigrant and economic pressures to keep migrants from joining into mainstream society, I argue that guest-worker programs are a suitable case for conjunctural analysis because they perpetuate an exploitative status quo. There are two contradictions within this status quo which challenge its perpetuation. The first has been identified by migration scholars across numerous contexts whereby capital’s requirement for labor applies pressure to government to retain migrant labor (Haas et al., 2018). In Taiwan, from the onset of the guest-worker program, this pressure has been quite lucid (Surak, 2018; Tierney, 2007), not least in recent years as the government has sought to maintain labor during and after the COVID-19 pandemic

(Lan, 2022b). The second contradiction is specific to Taiwan's societal and governmental commitment to human rights. The exploitation that is rampant within the guest-worker program exists as a contradiction to these normative commitments. Occasionally this contradiction has produced crises in which deaths and human rights abuses break through into mainstream news media and result in top-down reforms (Chien, 2023). As an empirical focus, the conflicts that arise as migrants organize and participate in soccer games demonstrate the micro-level reproduction of the guest-worker program and the potential for contestation and change locally. This conjunctural conflict is produced by projects of governance and belonging which combine to produce a bordering-scape. Concomitantly these conjunctures are produced by the guest-workers as they engage with borderwork through individual and collective strategies.

Attending to the fluctuations within these contestations, I rely on Davidson and Ward's concept of plasticity which was developed as a meso-level concept to operationalize conjunctural analysis. According to Davidson and Ward, 'conjunctures as plasticity captures their fixity-fluidity dynamics, how they consist of structures that under certain conditions (are) both massageable and malleable, as well as also possibly fixed and solid' (Davidson and Ward, 2024). Within the bordering literature there is a lot of evidence for the idea that borders are fluid for some and impassable for others (Burridge et al., 2017; Parker and Vaughan-Williams, 2012; Yuval-Davis et al., 2018). The empirical evidence that is introduced in the next sections demonstrates this fluidity as a result of shifting relations (Davidson and Ward, 2024) and illustrates the negotiations of borderwork within everyday life. But the success of these negotiations is not inevitable, and their successes are still situated within the structure of Taiwan's

bordering-scape. With some similarity to Naughton's geographic approach to social capital (Naughton, 2014), my approach to conjunctural analysis develops an understanding for how, and in what circumstances, the relationships which are transformed or reproduced through occupying space for soccer games challenges borderwork taking place in Taiwan.

Political Projects of Governance and Guest-Worker Leisure Time

When it came to participating in soccer games, many guest-workers expressed that the main barriers to play were pressures from their employers. Conceptualizing these pressures as borderwork, this section demonstrates the socio-spatial exclusion which is animated by the political project of governance which endeavors to furnish local capital with cheap labor through a guest-worker program. Due to Taiwan's neoliberal approach to managing this guest-worker program, the reproduction of its spatial order is produced by employers themselves, alongside for-profit intermediaries (Tseng and Wang, 2013). The pressures that guest-workers experience while attending soccer games are more or less direct, but always impede migrants from leaving their workplace housing and taking part in recreation during their free time. In more direct cases, employers attempt to disallow migrants from leaving their workplace dormitories in order to participate in soccer games, a straightforward example of the borderwork which employers produce in Taiwan.

Less direct but more pervasive, I argue that financial pressure to work more overtime and spend less time on hobbies outside of work also constitutes borderwork because of the financial pressures that the guest-worker program itself places on migrants. To an extent this pressure is built into the structure of a guest-worker program

which is based on the premise that migrants come to Taiwan for a higher salary in order to send remittances home. However, the monthly fee that migrants must pay back to intermediaries adds additional pressure for migrants to work overtime to maximize their remittances home. Finally, student migrants and highly-skilled migrants who guest-workers at times play alongside, are not confronted with the same pressures as guest-workers.

Living in housing provided by employers, the surveillance and pressure that employers put on guest-workers is the most direct form of borderwork experienced as migrants leave their workplaces to attend games. Among guest-worker migrants, those who worked and lived on fishing vessels were most likely to receive pressure from employers, forbidding them or inhibiting them from playing soccer. In interviews, fishers working on short-haul boats expressed that some captains did not allow their employees to play sports, and that it was very common for fishers who were working on long-haul boats to be disallowed from participating in soccer games. Short-haul fishers were also prevented from playing soccer at times by the boat captains who employed them. One such fisher explained that their previous captain had disallowed him from going to play soccer while the boat was ashore, but their current captain allowed them to play at a nearby university. The participant explained that the new captain was probably comfortable with them playing soccer because he knew exactly where the field was, and that it was nearby to the port. With the previous captain, the player still left the boat with athletic shoes to play soccer and the captain didn't stop him; the fisher assumed that that captain thought that he was just going to run by himself. The situation with the second captain took place in a port where migrants were able to access field

space with their employers' blessing, demonstrates the flexibility of borderwork as something that is negotiated and heavily contextual. Because the soccer field at the university was visible from the port, employers were able to maintain surveillance over migrants living their boats to play soccer. Compared to factory workers, migrants working on short-haul fishing boats also had less predictable free time. Fishers' time off from work depended on the weather and when their captain wanted to go to sea, so they were unable to plan ahead. Furthermore, because time at shore often corresponded with poor weather when it was unsafe or not profitable to fish, participants pointed out this meant that much of their free time was during weather conditions which were poor for playing soccer.

Factory workers also reported direct pressure from their employers. A participant who worked in a factory explained that their boss would be upset whenever they left to play soccer. The participant explained that,

“Because, to be honest, my boss is quite strict. Every time I come back from playing football (soccer), she doesn't like it because she often says, “you work hard all week, so why do you still go to play football?... Although my boss nods her head outwardly, she still doesn't like me going anywhere. Because we usually play football in the afternoon, but after finishing work in the afternoon, my boss insists I return to the dormitory, so it's very difficult for me to participate in those afternoon games.”

Nevertheless, most factory workers did not report these issues leaving their workplaces to play soccer. More than directly forbidden, time away from work was negotiated with employers. One player who had become certified as a referee explained

to me that he had good relations with his employer and was able to schedule his time off ahead of time so that he was available to work as a referee.

Even among those who did not experience direct pressure from their employers to limit their play, participants reported that work commitments were the main limitation on their free time. Mostly factory workers reported that they were unable to play on weekday evenings because work ended too late or that they were too tired after. But playing on the weekend was also a challenge because of the requirement and opportunity to take overtime shifts on Saturday and Sunday. Representative of these responses, a player explained that, “in Taiwan, working is tough, and I usually have to do overtime. I only have time to play on my days off or when there's no overtime, sometimes I can play in the middle of the week. Usually, it's on weekends, after 5 PM until around 10 PM. During that time, I arrange to play soccer.” Participants explained that while they had more free time on the weekends, there were some months when they were able to play every Sunday and other months when they were only able to find time once a month.

The reason for this discrepancy was unpredictable work schedules. Because soccer is a social sport, even if a couple of workers are free in the evening on the weekend, it does not always mean that a game is able to be convened. One participant explained that, “some people want to play on Saturday as well, but not everyone can get a day off on Saturday. For football, the more people who join the better. For example, if my friend and I want to play but other friends cannot join, it doesn't work out.” The same lack of predictability in overtime schedules also means that guest-workers are less reliable members of the diverse soccer-playing communities which

include other categories of migrants. In one such international soccer community, a team organizer once explained that, leading up to Lunar New Year, Vietnamese players were no longer reliable to show up to games, because they always had overtime work.

The financial pressure to work was the primary reason that guest-workers had little free time to play soccer. In interviews, migrants often repeated some version of the statement, 'we are here mainly for work.' Along similar lines, non-profit staffers explained the pushback they received from government officials and factory owners when organizing soccer tournaments for guest-workers. Non-profits were told that guest-workers came to Taiwan in order to work rather than to play soccer. When explaining that their lack of free time for soccer is because they are in Taiwan to work, guest-workers are expressing the logic of the guest-worker program itself which emphasizes guest-workers' role as laborers. Along similar lines, in interviews some guest-workers expressed that playing soccer made them better employees as it prepared them mentally and physically for the work week. Thus, participating in soccer was justified by the logic of the migration regime itself, which prioritizes labor. While these expressions might be a result of the governmentality of the migration regime, they are also the result of financial pressure produced by the regime itself through intermediary fees, which pressures migrants to work more and pick up as much overtime as possible. One participant explains that, "when I first came here, no one thought much about soccer right away because you come here mainly to work, especially after spending more than 100 million VND (almost 4,000 USD) to come," and demonstrates the effect that intermediary fees have on migrants' free time. In Taiwan, factory workers make less than 1,000 USD a month; in order to pay off their fees so that

they can maximize their earnings while away from their families, migrants prioritize picking up overtime shifts.

At times guest-worker migrants play on teams with a few students of the same nationality or, less commonly, play on diverse multicultural teams with white-collar migrants and local Taiwanese. In comparison to guest-workers, migrants who arrived in Taiwan outside of the guest-worker program had less direct and indirect pressure from work and more free time for soccer. However, student participants did indicate in interviews that they were not able to play as much as they would have liked. Almost all students who participated in interviews worked while they were in Taiwan, taking advantage of a policy which allows foreign students to work 20 hours a week while in Taiwan (Chien, 2023). The financial pressure that student workers faced was varied. For some students, work is a distraction from studying which is hard to resist. One participant explained that, “if we focus on studying, we can’t earn money or enjoy the perks of being in Taiwan.” For others, working was necessary in order to earn a living while they studied in Taiwan. Meanwhile, highly skilled migrants who played soccer in Taiwan played as much soccer as they wanted. One participant explained that they were available every evening after 5pm during the week and all day on the weekends to play with few restrictions. As mentioned previously, in Taiwan qualifying for a highly skilled visa means that you earn a monthly wage of at least 47,000 NTD (around 1,600 USD). Migrants in this category not only had more free time compared to guest-workers, their salary and the absence of intermediary fees also allowed them more financial leeway.

Labor is at the heart of the political project which has instituted Taiwan's guest-worker program, so it is perhaps not surprising that work life is one of the primary sources of borderwork which prevents guest-workers from playing as much soccer as they would like while living in Taiwan. The pressures that employers and intermediaries exert on guest-workers sets them apart from student and white-collar migrants in meaningful ways, even if all three groups at times occupy the same fields. The direct social control that employers have over guest-workers because of their dual status as employer and landlord is the most straightforward example of the borderwork which distinguishes guest-workers from other groups of foreigners in Taiwan. The role of financial pressures is more ambiguous. After all, financial pressures affect most individuals, let alone migrants. First, the remittance logic of the guest-worker program encourages migrants to maximize their earnings while they are in Taiwan, in order to send money back to their families in the jurisdictions where they are allowed to develop long-term futures. Second, the money owed back to the intermediaries that facilitate labor migration to Taiwan, constrains guest-workers' ability to remit earnings home and further motivates guest-workers to work over-time during the weekend. Thus, it is through employers and intermediaries that the spatial order of the guest-worker program is reproduced.

Political Projects of Belonging in Public Spaces

Guest-worker migrants also struggle to access soccer fields. As one participant explains, "as a foreigner, it's really hard to rent a field. That's the truth in my heart. It's really difficult. Because there's some sort of barrier or something." But unlike the borderwork created by employers and intermediaries, the exclusion from field space is

not associated with any government policy. Rather notions of who belongs in public space produce borderwork which excludes guest-workers from soccer fields in Taiwan. In this case, guest-workers in Taiwan are prevented from renting field space due to preconceptions about how they use field space, often centered around the issue of trash disposal. Just like guest-workers struggle but ultimately succeed in overcoming pressures from their workplaces, they also are able to access field space in Taiwan for games. However, the process through which they are able to access soccer fields relegates them to undesirable fields of poor quality. Thus, the distinction between the guest-workers and other soccer players in Taiwan is reproduced on the soccer fields due to political projects of belonging.

Players who organized games and tournaments indicated that accessing field space was the most difficult aspect of playing soccer in Taiwan. As one guest-worker who regularly organizes tournaments explains, 'the biggest challenge for Vietnamese people here in Taiwan is finding venues. Realistically, we rely on the sports fields of local universities or high schools. Since we're outsiders, we can't contact the schools directly for permission—we usually need an intermediary to help us secure the space. This will likely remain a challenge in the future as well.' This quote demonstrates two important realities that guest-worker communities face when accessing field space. First, these communities end up playing soccer at schools. Along with games taking place at high schools and universities, games are also often played at primary schools and middle schools. Because soccer is not a popular sport in Taiwan, school soccer fields are usually very low quality, often overgrown and quite small. Participants explained that the fields that their soccer teams were able to access regularly were not

suitable for soccer. Second, even when reserving subpar fields for tournaments, social connections are required to access them. In this case, the same participant explains that their status as foreigners means that, 'we usually need someone else's help, like a representative from a company or association, because it's really hard for us as foreigners to make those connections directly to rent the fields.' Another solution for finding a field to rent is relying on community members who are more established in Taiwan, as one participant organizer explains, because they "understand Taiwanese customs and have built relationships, it's simpler for them to handle." A coach of one team had a long-established relationship with a university which allowed them to use their sports field. While many of the players on this team had just arrived in Taiwan, they were able to take advantage of the coach's status as a permanent resident in Taiwan. Even when going through established channels, the process was not without some friction. For instance, games would be moved to new fields at the last minute because of issues with field access. When attending these games, I often observed someone from the school show up to ask the players if they had permission to use the field. In these cases, an organizer would call their connection on the phone and hand it to the school employee who would leave before reminding everyone to take care to throw out their garbage.

At the center of these field space disputes was the issue of trash disposal, which was used as an explanation for why guest-workers were not welcome to use public space. A participant explained that, 'right now, organizing tournaments is very difficult because, in our culture, there's an issue of littering and improper smoking. Taiwanese people are very mindful of these things, so when it comes to renting fields for large

tournaments with many people, it's hard to get approval.' In another case, a coach of a guest-worker team explained that they once lost access to the field they considered their home base because of trash left on the field. The coach pointed out that it had not been his team that left the trash, but they were still banned from the field. Still, Taiwanese involved in managing fields and renting field space explained that trash disposal was at the center of guest-workers' exclusion from soccer fields. A non-profit involved in helping guest-workers rent field space explained that trash disposal was the biggest challenge, because of relatively complex norms of trash disposal in Taiwan. The non-profit worked with players to separate out the landfill trash from the recycling, and they had to pay for a garbage truck to come and pick up the separated trash to avoid using public trashcans. One Taiwanese participant explained that it was difficult for guest-workers to gain access to fields because of perceptions that guest-workers would leave out trash and get into fights. At another field, I was told that migrant fishers had been allowed to continue to use a university's field only as long as they did not leave trash on the field or smoke or drink. Thus, much of the borderwork which migrants encounter when accessing the field is tied to a notion that guest-workers are unable to uphold the local norms of public space usage.

Navigating these barriers, guest-worker migrant communities have endeavored to self-police their communities in order to establish themselves as responsible participants in public space and ensure that they will be allowed to rent and access field space in the future. In some cases, these actions were established through social pressure from organizers and coaches. At the end of each tournament, players and spectators work together to clean up and package all the debris from the tournament.

Communities also used fines to ensure that public space was used according to local norms. As one participant explains, “it can be challenging, but I handle things like cleanliness and set rules, like fines for littering, which helps maintain the fields.” If communities maintain the field spaces that they gain access to, they are likely to be able to rent the same field space in the future. Migrant communities, and in particular the organizers, have learned that they will be better tolerated as occupants of public space if they follow local norms.

Despite these efforts, there are many fields that migrants are unable to access. One reason for this exclusion is cost. For instance, when asked how a tournament ended up being hosted on an overgrown field at a university, a participant organizer explained that for other fields you needed to pay or get government approval to rent, but for this field there were no requirements besides taking care of trash disposal. Another player on the same team explained that the team used two fields, one that was free to use and the other that cost money. Of course, the field that cost money was much better to play on but they usually used the free field, particularly towards the end of the month when players were waiting for their next paycheck. The highest quality fields were unavailable for guest-workers even if they were willing to pay high rental fees. A Taiwanese participant who helped to organize the field space for a multicultural team explained that the fields that they played on were difficult for him as a local to get access to, let alone a foreigner. While often created with public funds, these pitches were administered by local non-profit associations. The delegation of management of public goods in Taiwan to these associations is quite common and minimizes the direct role that the government has in administering its policy (Wang, 2007). Personal

relationships with the individuals involved in running these associations were essential to gaining access to them. For Taiwanese who were not connected to these groups, the politics for these pitches were murky. The lack of transparency meant that guest-workers in particular struggled to gain access to high-quality field space. When a well-connected Taiwanese participant helped rent field space on behalf of guest-workers, he could never get guest-workers access to the best fields because when the pitch manager discovered that it was being rented for guest-workers they would not accept the reservation. Thus, a combination of financial pressures as well as politics of belonging combine to exclude guest-workers, for the most part, from playing on the most desirable fields that other soccer-playing communities in Taiwan benefit from playing on.

Plastic Bordering-Scapes: The Mediation of Borderwork in Everyday Life

The previous two sections demonstrate the concrete consequences that political projects have on space through borderwork. However, they also reflect that, despite this borderwork, guest-workers are still able to attend games while working in Taiwan. From the critical border perspective, scholars have argued that borders are negotiated by those involved (Kolossov and Scott, 2013; Rumford, 2008; Yuval-Davis et al., 2019), and demonstrated the impacts that communal strategies can have on migrant experiences of bordering-scapes (Pascucci, 2017). Conjunctural analysis provides a framework to theorize this negotiation with sensitivity to the dynamic permeability of bordering-scapes. In particular, Davidson and Ward's concept of plasticity which attends to the morphing and reforming of conjunctures as they are contingently remade, identifies the potential for relations to affect the reproduction of structural forces.

(Davidson and Ward, 2024). This notion of plasticity can be applied to the role that local actors have in redefining bordering-scapes through forming new relationships. This section attends to the social connections which facilitate and organize access to soccer fields, among guest-worker migrants, and between guest-workers, local community, and other migrants playing soccer in Taiwan.

Guest-workers rely on social networks to facilitate economic strategies while they are in Taiwan. Compared to other groups of migrants, the financial costs of participating in soccer games during free time is increased because of intermediary payments, pressure to send money home, and a low salary. Guest-worker migrants have mediated these pressures by turning soccer into an activity that is not only a hobby, but a setting to earn money or to develop professional opportunities. By creating economic value out of their hobby, they reduce the cost of using their free time for recreation rather than working overtime. In some instances, participants explained that playing soccer allowed them to cultivate social connections which lead to employment opportunities. A participant explained that, “when I first arrived, soccer helped me land a part-time job; without it I might have struggled a lot more.” Technically not allowed, taking work outside of their official workplaces was a common strategy that guest-workers employed to increase their earnings. Along similar lines, a participant explained that, “I do bike repair as a side job; many friends I meet through soccer end up becoming future customers.” Finding work outside of their employers’ factories reduced their reliance on employer’s business fluctuations for overtime pay. One participant also explained that if he ever needed to switch factories, connections made through playing soccer would facilitate finding a new place to work. Finding a new factory to work at through

interpersonal connections would avoid an introduction fee paid to an intermediary. Participants also made money directly through their participation in these tournaments, which were entrepreneurial spaces as well as recreational spaces. Referees, organizers, and video-streamers all earned money through their participation in tournaments which often had multiple sponsors from businesses that cater to guest-workers from Southeast Asia. Thus, the soccer tournaments created a place for economic exchange outside the confines of the guest-worker program itself, mitigating the financial pressures that guest-workers face while in Taiwan.

Connections to soccer-playing communities of highly skilled migrants as well as to non-profits who supported guest-workers in Taiwan helped guest-workers to access field space in Taiwan, including fields which by themselves they could not reserve. First, non-profits have accessed government funding to support migrant soccer leagues by organizing tournaments on behalf of guest-worker soccer communities. These tournaments often focus on educating guest-workers on their rights as workers in Taiwan and aim to mitigate the negative effects of Taiwan's migration regime. However, because they receive government funding to organize these tournaments, they must perform identification card checks at the fields. Thus, while the tournaments certainly were one of the most direct and productive forms of support that guest-worker soccer player communities received from Taiwanese civil society, the support also included borderwork because this support was related to the government. Outside of the tournaments themselves, non-profit staffers have played an important role in passing along local knowledge regarding field space reservation and trash disposal. Motivated by a cultural emphasis on human rights, the non-profits express an alternative political

project of belonging which is inclusive of guest-worker migrants. The non-profit that I worked with while conducting fieldwork was itself not interested in soccer but organized the tournaments because it provided access to male guest-worker communities who they struggled to reach to carry out their mission of humanitarian support.

Second, through participating in multicultural soccer communities, guest-workers gain access to field space that otherwise they would be unable to access. In one such multicultural community in which I participated and conducted interviews, guest-workers made up a minority of a team that was made up predominantly of students and white-collar migrants. This team occupies field space through local Taiwanese members of their community. Themselves a minority within these teams, Taiwanese players are able to deploy their own personal connections, language ability, and knowledge of cultural norms to reserve high quality fields. Guest-workers explained that they joined these teams by messaging the group's Facebook page, the same way that many migrants found co-ethnic teams to play on. Once members, guest-worker players have helped to facilitate the organization of games between the multicultural club and the co-ethnic teams that they also play on. Within these teams, guest-workers are supported by their teammates. For instance, Ismail was picked up and driven to and from games by a highly skilled migrant who had their own car in Taiwan. Of course, these sorts of cultural exchanges were not seamless; Ismail also reported that playing on the team could be hard, not because of a language barrier but because there were "too many different cultures."

In general, because soccer remains unpopular in Taiwan, and because Taiwanese players often avoid playing with guest-workers based on a perceived rough

style of play, guest-workers rarely played within Taiwanese soccer communities. Yet, guest-workers do occasionally play with elite Taiwanese teams when the Taiwanese teams require a scrimmage or players to make up the numbers. Similar to playing with multicultural teams, in these events guest-workers gain access to the highest quality of field space available in Taiwan. While sharing the same field, the games also reaffirm the differences between the two groups. For instance, when a guest-worker team was invited to scrimmage with the U18 National team, the organizer explained that playing against workers would prepare the young players for more physical opponents since guest-workers played with more physicality than Taiwanese. The guest-worker team arrived at the field with a national flag and other banners, demonstrating their own identity. In another instance, guest-workers were once again invited to scrimmage with elite Taiwanese youth teams. According to an interview with a Taiwanese participant involved in inviting the guest-worker teams, originally the tournament organizers had hoped for ‘foreigners’ meaning highly-skilled migrants but had settled for ‘foreign laborers’ meaning guest-workers, once it became apparent that guest-workers were the only teams available to play. Once more, referencing the politics of belonging which exclude guest-workers from public space, the Taiwanese interview participant did indicate that – because there were no issues with fighting or trash disposal – he thought that the guest-workers might be invited back to play in the future.

Combined, these strategies and relationships reiterate that borders are not static entities but are processes and these processes are not taking place in a vacuum. Rather, as with Appadurai’s formulation of neighborhoods (Appadurai, 1995), the conjuncture is produced amid flows of new people and new ideas which affect its

reproduction and relational constitution. One of the factors which reformulate the conjuncture is the agency of guest-workers, which mediates the borderwork produced by political projects, and redefines the bordering-scape. Along with the collective and individual actions that migrants take, their relationships with other soccer-playing communities also play a role in mitigating the effects of borderwork. While not revolutionizing the bordering-scape, these processes demonstrate the potential for actions taken by migrants locally to make social and cultural lives within the confines of the guest-worker program. But there is a clear power geometry to this process (Massey, 1991). That is to say, the migration regime has a structural impact on guest-workers' mobility. Like other migrants, guest-workers have arrived in Taiwan for work, but the effects of Taiwan's bordering-scape have left guest-workers with a different experience of mobility than other migrants. In this case, while the participation and organization of soccer games in Taiwan demonstrates the agency of guest-workers to contend with borderwork, in comparison to other soccer players in Taiwan, the fields they access and their position within these communities reflect their status as less privileged and less desired migrants.

Particularly when facilitating secondary jobs but also when providing support to other guest-worker soccer players, the social networks associated with the soccer-playing community do directly contend with or violate borderwork associated with the migration regime itself. However, these actions occur at the local scale and – based upon the evidence collected for this study – have not had an effect on the political project of governance which produces Taiwan's guest-worker program. Protests such as the one previously mentioned in 2005 (*Taipei Times*, 2005), which continue

sporadically, are more likely to shift these structural forces and bring change to Taiwan's bordering-scape.

Considering the effect that these communities have on the political projects of belonging which reproduce borderwork, is more complex because this borderwork is not institutionalized by the state. In Taiwan, multiculturalism has been an inward-looking movement concerned with acknowledging existing diversity within the population's four largest ethnic groups as a result of processes which ended martial law (1949-1987) and led to democracy in the 1990s (Chun, 2017). Migration scholars have argued that this 'civic legacy' is one reason that guest-workers have not been recognized as candidates for incorporation within Taiwanese society (Chung, 2020). With some similarity to the in-your-face multiculturalism observed among Filipina workers in Hong Kong (Chen and Szeto, 2015), guest-worker participation in public space demonstrates a de facto multiculturalism which challenges more parochial understandings of belonging in Taiwan. While most guest-workers who participated in interviews felt very little sense of belonging within Taiwan, many did express a sense of belonging and comfort within the teams and communities that they participated. Indeed, this was an explanation for the effort taken to organize these games in the first place. The exclusion that guest-workers experience in Taiwan is on display and even reproduced on the soccer fields, and yet the incorporation into small pockets of life in Taiwan – outside of the confines of the guest-worker program – is also evident in soccer-playing communities throughout Taiwan on Sundays.

Talking with members of the soccer-playing community in Taiwan, it is clear that guest-worker soccer communities have grown considerably since 2010. The growth of

these communities demonstrates a contradiction that exists between guest-worker programs and their institution in democratic societies which emphasize multiculturalism and human rights like Taiwan. This contradiction contributes to the plasticity of Taiwan's guest-worker program as it facilitates migrant agency. The shortcomings of government transparency, in particular its inability to deliver safe and fair workplaces in Taiwan, is clear (Chien, 2023; Chung, 2020; Hoang, 2017). However, discourses of human rights and civil society organizations have had some limited efficacy in advocating for migrants' rights while in Taiwan including some of the reforms mentioned previously in this paper. Because participants in this study were identified through the soccer-playing community, it is hard to say with certainty the efficacy of these reforms, as guest-workers who were unable to play soccer were not included in interviews. At the same time, the growth of these communities does reflect the space afforded by the migration regime to meet on weekends and organize communities during free time even if migrants have to struggle to make time and space for their communities to play. The outcome of this plasticity are communities of migrant soccer players that have carved out space for themselves within Taiwan's bordering-scape. Like other guest-worker communities in Taiwan, these communities are still at the margins of Taiwanese society, meeting mainly on Sundays and maintaining limited interaction with local communities. Nevertheless, their occupation of space during limited time away from work, is an articulation of local capital's requirement for labor, political projects which limit local belonging, as well as migrant's own agency.

Conclusion

The empirical evidence collected in interviews demonstrates the impacts that borderwork produced by political projects have on guest-workers' free time and social lives. The distinction between political projects evokes the distinct bordering processes that comprise a bordering-scape. In Taiwan, this bordering-scape is produced by a migration regime which emphasizes guest-worker's labor contributions and local notions of belonging in public space.

Critical border perspectives have already centered the roles of migrant agency and migrant experiences (Wemyss and Cassidy, 2017; Yuval-Davis et al., 2019). Returning to this dissertation's first research question which considered the negotiation of a guest-worker program in everyday life, taking a conjunctural approach to migrants' positions within bordering-scapes offers a theoretical lens to consider migrants agency within these processes of socio-spatial exclusion. Novak (2025) argues that borderwork and its resistance is both produced by and productive of local contexts. Applying a conjunctural approach to borderwork extends this analysis. Introducing a dialectic relationship between the local and the general facilitates an understanding of the effect that local actions have in mediating border processes that are taking place across larger spatial scales into everyday life. In this case, the organization of soccer games by guest-worker communities has an ambiguous impact on the political projects which reproduce spatial exclusion, but still interrupt borderwork and make space for guest-workers within Taiwan. Thus, the bordering-scape is created dialectically between local agency of migrants and the structure of the migration regime. These ruptures are created by the relationships soccer players cultivate while in Taiwan and demonstrate the plasticity that exists within bordering-scapes. Scholarship suggests that soccer

communities are not the only social networks which migrants rely on to manage life in Taiwan's bordering-scape (Dinkelaker, 2024, 2026). The networks which produce and are produced by soccer games serve as the basis for additional sources of income, collective strategies, and support from other community members, which produce permeability within a bordering-scape.

As a project of governance, guest-worker programs are a paradoxical middle ground which allow migrants to enter territorial space for work but endeavor to exclude guest-workers from becoming full members of society. In theory, these migration regimes produce a permanent labor-market segmentation while at the same time assuaging national and local notions of belonging which eschew the incorporation of migrants. In practice, these migration regimes require continued perpetuation in order to realize these policy goals. Rather than a border between guest-workers and the rest of society, Taiwan's guest-worker program is a process of spatial exclusion which takes place inside and outside of its territorial extent. Thus, the program's reproduction is contingent. From the perspective of policy, Taiwan's guest-worker program has gradually expanded to allow guest-workers to extend their stays in Taiwan as the requirement for labor increases (Lan, 2022b). Meanwhile, as introduced in this paper, from the perspective of everyday life, migrants form coalitions and social relationships which influence the socio-spatial exclusion of guest-workers from the rest of society. The impact of these local coalitions on the guest-worker program as a political project or even broader notions of belonging in Taiwan are unclear. However, these leagues do provide guest-worker migrants access to communities which occupy space and support one another while living under difficult structural conditions. There is a marginal process

of migrant incorporation where guest-workers establish social networks and communal practices within Taiwanese territory. But these processes are limited spatially and separated from mainstream society.

Chapter 3 Social Capital, Place, and the Communities which Organize Migrant Soccer Leagues

On a Sunday morning I had arranged to conduct an interview with an internet streamer who was working at a soccer tournament for soccer players from the central region of Vietnam. The field was difficult to get to and was played at technical and vocational college that was around a 40-minute drive from Taichung high-speed rail station. Once I arrived at the university the field itself was also difficult to find. The rest

of the campus was empty, but finally I found the soccer field – full of soccer players taking a break in the shade that surrounded the overgrown soccer field that the tournament was being played on. The lunchbreak had been extended by the organizers because of 40 degree heat and extremely high humidity, so that after being offered lunch by the organizer from a seemingly endless supply of ‘lunch boxes’, I had time to conduct interviews with the streamer I had arranged to meet as well as several other players and organizers. The game itself was the finals of a tournament that had been taking place over the previous month and I was told that in the evening there would be a closing ceremony which included a performance by a singer from Vietnam. The singer had not traveled to Taiwan for the closing ceremony alone but nonetheless the organizers had managed to secure their attendance because they were from the same province in Vietnam as many of the participants in the tournament.

It was hard to imagine a concert taking place on the basketball courts and grandstand that was being prepared for the evening’s entertainment. But I was often surprised by the scale of the soccer tournaments that I attended on the weekends. The games organized by Taiwanese non-profits also had relatively high production value, opening ceremonies, prize money, referees wearing earpieces and even an occasional makeshift video-assisted referee set-up. However, this was unsurprising because of the government funding that these tournaments received. In fact, many of the ceremonies and banners were a way of justifying their funding to visiting politicians and city officials. In the end it was not made clear to me how exactly the organizers had managed to attract a pop singer to the tournament, but the scale of the tournaments was crowdfunded by the participating teams as well as sponsored by local businesses which

catered to Southeast Asian migrants. The tournaments also relied on the players and community members' commitment to the games in order for them to take place, let alone to be organized at the size that they often reached. For instance, the streamer explained to me that in order to prepare for the task of filming the games and streaming them live via Facebook and YouTube the process was quite strenuous, "in the morning I have to get up at 5 or 5:30. But the night before, and in the days leading up to it, I have to prepare a lot, from designing banners and other things for the soccer tournament—I have to do everything!"

Why does someone who works a difficult factory job all week choose to wake up at 5:30 on their days off to work a whole day in the heat of a Taiwanese summer? According to the streamer the most important reason was that the tournaments were the time and place that migrants could connect with people while in Taiwan, "I feel that's the most special benefit, connecting through soccer, meeting each other, sitting down, enjoying food and drinks together, its wonderful. It's the most important thing which soccer brings us." The last chapter mentioned the strategies that migrants used to maintain access to field space. So that social networks were an important component of accessing field space. Going one step further and exemplified by this streamer, many guest-worker soccer players explained that social connections were one of the most important benefits of playing soccer while in Taiwan. Thus, the social networks were not only instrumental in producing soccer games themselves, they were valued as the reason for playing games in the first place; social networks are not only the tool used to occupy space but also the justification for doing so. Plainly, the question of how guest-worker communities organized elaborate tournaments is closely linked to why they

chose to do it in the first place. Parsing this duality, this chapter addresses the social networks associated with the soccer playing communities in which guest-workers are participating while in Taiwan. This focus on social networks addresses this dissertation's second research question by exploring how these structures contend with the guest-worker program through accessing public space.

Of course, social networks are often drawn upon and theorized in academic study of migration (Haas et al., 2018). In particular, 'social capital' has been deployed by scholars to understand the effects that social ties have on migrants when they arrive in new places by analyzing the flexibility of social capital to be transformed into other distinct forms of capital (mostly cultural and economic capital) (Hernández-León and Zúñiga, 2003; Painter and Price, 2021; Zhou and Kim, 2006). There is an intuitive logic to these approaches, because migrants are at deficit of social connections when they arrive in new places, as Agnew points out, "people's lives are anchored geographically, and their welfare rests thus, at least in some degree, on staying put rather than moving elsewhere"(Agnew, 2013). When migrants arrive in their new homes they lack the social and cultural connections which make life easier regardless of economic capital. The migration studies literature has therefore focused on the role that forging new connections and reestablishing old connections can have on migrant experiences. Exploring the role that social capital has in the lives of migrants, scholars have generally described the positive outcomes of investment in social relations. Yet, within this broad scholarship, there have also been more critical approaches which warn against deploying the term too broadly so that it becomes a public policy silver bullet that accompanies budget austerity (Radcliffe, 2004). These scholars have pointed out that

the impacts of social capital on individuals are not necessarily positive, rather they depend on individuals' positions within social networks as well as the social networks embeddedness within broader structural forces (Bankston and Zhou, 2002; Naughton, 2014; Portes and Sensenbrenner, 1993).

Building upon the empirical focus on the social networks which produce and are produced by migrant soccer leagues in Taiwan, this chapter deploys a social capital literature to theorize the role that social networks play in guest-worker soccer-playing communities in Taiwan. The chapter also attends to a theoretical debate over the embeddedness of social capital which has sought to better understand the variegated outcomes associated with investment in social networks that have been observed across empirical work, through analyzing social capital within the context of a guest-worker program. Contributing to this theoretical debate I follow several geographer's lead and argue for the contextualization of social capital within relational theories of 'place'. This approach accounts for the structural power dynamics embedded within social networks identified by sociologists as well as the embeddedness of these social structures within larger scale forces.

The chapter has the following agenda. First, a brief theoretical discussion which introduces existing theoretical approaches to studying social capital within migrant communities before outlining a place-based approach to social capital. Next is an empirical section which introduces the closely-knit communities which produce 'bonding' social capital with a particular emphasis on the collective strategies that are employed in order to create benefits for members of the community. The next section attends to the individual strategies and benefits that members of soccer-playing communities ascribe

to their involvement in soccer games. The final section takes the findings from these empirical sections and applies them to a place-based approach to social capital.

Social Capital and Embeddedness

As formulated by Bourdieu social capital is an explanation for the value of social networks which alongside economic and cultural capital make the social world, “something other than a simple game of chance.” (Bourdieu, 1986) For Bourdieu, the main analytic thrust of these arguments was the formulation of an understanding for the production of social power which went beyond considerations of economic capital and identified the cultural and social reproduction of social class (Medvetz and Sallaz, 2022). The value of these alternative forms of capital was rooted in their exchange value into social capital (Bourdieu, 1986), and much of the subsequent scholarship on social capital that has proliferated social science emphasizes its exchange value rather than its role in reproducing social power.

Bourdieu explained the embeddedness of social capital by introducing the concepts of ‘field’ and ‘habitus’, which provide the contexts that define the value of all forms of capital as well as a commentary on structure and agency in the social world. Fields can be defined as “relatively autonomous structured spaces where a variety of agents struggle for power.”(Kauppi, 2018). A field is a structure in which individuals operate, but at the same time a field is a product of individuals own investment of labor; collectively fields comprise society (Bigo, 2011). Habitus is explained by Bourdieu’s student Lois Wacquant as “subjective complexes of dispositions (categories, skills, and desires)” (Wacquant, 2018), However, habitus is not simply a product of a given social field that an actor exists within. Humans exist within many fields, all of which influence

the habitus, so that a person's habitus is at the same time structured by multiple fields with different "facets of the same habitus coming from different fields... enter(ing) into competition in the moment to act and 'take priority'" (Bigo, 2011). Thus, the relationship between field and habitus are analogous to structure and agency, only the agency is multi-faceted, and the structure is multiple and potentially contradictory. Within this theoretical perspective, different forms of capital are accumulated and converted for individual advantage according to the rules of the game as dictated by the variegated social fields.

No doubt due to its intuitive insight into the value of social connections, social capital has been employed in an increasingly diverse array of case studies such that some scholars have argued that its heuristic value is being diluted (Portes, 2009). Crucially as social capital has become popularized it has been deployed as a necessarily positive phenomena through which individuals, communities and even societies might cultivate a brighter and more prosperous future (Putnam, 2000). This is at odds with Bourdieu's treatment which emphasized the structural components of social capital. Bourdieu argued that the value that perpetuates social networks is distributed within groups based upon existing hierarchies, so that those in privileged position often benefit the most from social networks (Bourdieu, 1986). Therefore sociologists, while insisting on the value of social capital as an analytic framework, have reiterated that studying social capital must be rooted in specific positive or negative outcomes produced through investment in social relations (Lin, 2001). Theorizing the variegated outcomes of social capital, sociologists have argued that its embeddedness within social structures explain that negative outcomes can be produced alongside

positive ones. The same solidarity and trust that produce value for community members can mean that individuals' freedom is constrained and experience pressure to behave against their personal interests (Portes and Sensenbrenner, 1993). At the same time, scholars have argued that even weak social connections, oftentimes considered to be particularly valuable for individuals (Granovetter, 1973), can also lead to exploitation because of the lack of care that is inherent to weak ties (Ryan, 2011). Within migration studies scholars across multiple disciplines in the social sciences have developed the embeddedness of social capital to include social networks situatedness within broader structural forces such as gender, ethnicity, and political economy (Hoang, 2016; Joassart-Marcelli, 2014; Sporton, 2013; Zhou and Kim, 2006). This literature demonstrates that the hierarchies through which the benefits of social capital are distributed are heavily influenced by traditional family values, cultural values, as well as legal status.

Melding together approaches which have accounted for the effect of power relations embedded within social structures, as well as perspectives which emphasize the external effects on social structures and the distribution of group resources, I argue for a theoretical approach to social capital which embeds social structures within the geographic concept of place. A place-based approach to social capital not only accounts for external and internal impacts on social networks, it also puts them in contact and in some cases conflict with one another. Thus, the outcomes facilitated via the accumulation of social capital are produced by local power relations as well as power relations which operate regionally, nationally, and globally. There is a didactic intuitiveness to embedding social capital within a geographic context, after all social

connections must take place somewhere. But this place-based approach to social capital is more than just a description of the setting where social relations occur and an evaluation of their associated impacts. The key here is a relational approach to place, which focuses on the processes through which local contexts interact with broader trends and mutually constitute one another (Agnew, 1987; Massey, 1991).

Contextualizing social capital does not mean providing a setting for social relations rather it means contextualizing the processes through which social networks produce benefits for members within a broader process of place reproduction. Geographers have sought to contribute a place-based perspective to social capital (Holt, 2008; Mohan and Mohan, 2002; Naughton, 2014; Radcliffe, 2004; Rankin, 2002) but much of this literature is a critique of Putnam's popular formulation (Holt, 2008; Mohan and Mohan, 2002; Radcliffe, 2004). Meanwhile other geographers have used a relational approach, developing place-based approach to address Bourdieu's original formulation of social capital as a theory to understand the perpetuation and contestation of privilege in the social world rather than as a silver bullet policy solution (Naughton, 2014; Rankin, 2002). In particular Naughton seeks to examine social capital's potential to challenge dominant groups by asking:

How are networks established, maintained and disbanded? How are resources accessed, mobilized, or denied? How does space, place, and material physicality affect these processes? How are power relations played out in these settings? (Naughton, 2014)

Naughton's research questions outline a specific research agenda that begins to contextualize social networks within the process of place reproduction. Building upon

this approach and applying these questions to the case of migrant soccer leagues in Taiwan I rely on Agnew's conceptualization of place to situate social capital within place. Agnew defines place as reproduced through a process of structuration which includes local power structures (locale), global and regional networks (location) as well as subjective territorial identity (sense of place) (Agnew, 1987; Cresswell, 2015). Agnew's conceptualization of place is particularly applicable to the geographic contextualization of Bourdieu's social capital, because it shares a dualistic approach to structure and agency. Recall that Bourdieu considers capital to be accumulated according to the rules of specific fields, a consideration that is similar to the concept of locale. At the same time, Bourdieu conceptualizes an individual to possess a habitus, the 'feel for the game' (Bigo, 2011) developed as a result of experiences across numerous fields, which mediates the structural effect of fields. In terms of structure and agency, Bourdieu's social theory is somewhat similar to Anthony Giddens social theory of structuration, which presents social life as a situated and recursive reproduction of social structures (Giddens, 1984). Agnew's approach to place also draws on Giddens work, developing Giddens effort to contextualize structuration within time and place by arguing that place is a process of structuration itself. Agnew argues that it is through places that human agency produces and reproduces social causes, "it is in places that power to act as human agents is both channeled and realized within limits laid down by locally dominant practices within which are incorporated extralocal influences or power" (Agnew, 1987).

Social capital is one component of how places are reproduced, the chapter attends to the relationship that social networks have to the soccer games which they

produce and through which they are reproduced. Attending to locale, the chapter attends to the local power relations which these social networks reproduce through organizing migrant soccer tournaments. The chapter also addresses their location by situating social networks within broader power relations, most specifically by situating them within Taiwan's migration regime and broader neoliberal political economy. The effects of sense of place on these leagues is saved for the next chapter of this dissertation.

Social networks of Care and Control

For the most part guest-workers in Taiwan play in communities made up of closely-knit social networks with teammates, opponents, coaches, referees, and spectators from their own home country. Within the migration studies literature, tight-knit social networks have been found to contain support for community members which has been referred to as 'bonding' social capital. Bonding social capital produces social support for community members through enforcing group norms through proximal social connections (Burt, 2001; Portes and Sensenbrenner, 1993). To an extent the soccer playing communities which guest workers participate in are an example of this kind of social capital because they provide a social safety net for members outside of the migration regime and reproduce themselves through soccer tournaments organized by the strict enforcement of social norms. This section attends to these closely-knit social networks which produce guest-worker teams and tournaments in Taiwan. It begins with a brief explanation for how new arrivals most often find soccer playing communities before demonstrating how these social networks produce soccer tournaments. Next, the section demonstrates the role that soccer-playing communities have in providing care

for members outside of the soccer field itself. Finally, it demonstrates the role that control and group hierarchies have in reproducing the social networks and the games which they organize.

The last chapter introduced Ismail, a talented Indonesian soccer player who participated in multi-cultural soccer leagues in Taiwan. Despite participating in these mixed social settings, Ismail predominantly played among fellow Indonesians, mostly among guest-workers but these communities included some students as well. Originally Ismail found his primary soccer team through an incidental meeting, once while eating breakfast at an Indonesian store he saw some people wearing sports jerseys. After asking them if they played soccer, he learned about an Indonesian soccer team that played on a university's field around 20 minutes from his workplace. Because Ismail worked at a smaller factory with few other guest-workers he had to rely on this incidental meeting, however most players relied on connections with co-workers at work. Factories in Taiwan generally hire guest-workers so that their work force is all the same gender and nationality. This meant that during interviews when participants explained that they found soccer communities through connections from work, these connections were from the same country and the communities that they joined were made up of teammates from the same country. The internet also played a large role in connecting new arrivals to soccer playing communities in Taiwan. As mentioned in the previous chapter, in some cases the internet connected guest-workers with multi-cultural communities. However, in general, most participants explained that the internet helped them to access communities made up of players of the same national origin as themselves which I refer to as 'co-ethnic' soccer communities or teams. Whether

through large Facebook groups where tournaments were announced and players posted in search of nearby teams, or through tiktok pages where teams advertised themselves to attract new players, the internet mostly connected players to teams and communities who shared the same language and nationality as themselves. So that even while players were not explicitly seeking out communities made up of their own compatriots, they oftentimes ended up playing with co-ethnic communities because of language and logistical ease.

However they access them, once players join these groups they enter into communities that are organizing events similar to the ones that the internet streamer was participating in described earlier in this chapter. These events are organized by communities with strong norms of reciprocity and collective effort. As one participant explains, “everyone chips in for drinks, uniforms and balls. Sometimes we even improve the field, like cutting grass on making goalposts.” When players aren’t able to contribute financially and are unable to afford expenses associated with participating in the community, players who have been in Taiwan longer and have more secure finances help out. One participant recalled, “when we first arrived in Taiwan, we were financially tight, so we couldn’t even afford the 300-400 (NTD) needed for a soccer kit. (My teammate) funded the uniforms for the entire team.” All participants also benefit from the extra work that organizers undertake to organize and manage tournaments. An organizer describes this workload in an interview, “as the head organizer, it’s much more challenging. For example, as a team captain you only manage 25 players. But as a head of the organizing committee, you have to handle 10 teams, each with around 25 players, totaling 250 people, not including the audience.” Everyone pitches in to

produce tournaments, but organizers take on the most responsibility. This discrepancy is further demonstrated in interviews when players rarely mentioned the difficulty of accessing and maintaining field space, while almost every organizer brought up the difficulty of gaining access to field space. Mitigating the load of these extra burdens was reciprocity among organizers which made organizing tournaments easier as one participant explains, “when people attend my tournament, they contribute to it, and when others organize a tournament, I attend and contribute as well. That’s how it works.”

Alongside producing soccer games for guest-workers to participate in, social networks also provide migrants with social networks that provide support in times of crisis. During interviews participants explained that social networks formed through playing soccer provided emotional and financial assistance as well as helped newcomers navigate Taiwan’s legal system and migration regime. One participant explained that, “the football community is supportive... for instance, if someone has an accident or hardship, we come together to help financially and emotionally.” A clear example of the multiple aspects of care provided by soccer playing communities came from a migrant soccer community that I visited with multiple times during fieldwork. In the days leading up to a trip to conduct interviews with this team a player in the community had suffered a total stroke and had been in the hospital for two weeks. Multiple members of the community mentioned the incident and the care that they provided to this team member during interviews. Upon hearing about the medical emergency, the coach took action to notify the Indonesian government and NGO organizations and visited the player multiple times because the player did not trust his

intermediary or the factory where he worked to care for him. Along with this in-person and organizational support the team also pooled up money to contribute support to the player. After sharing that the player had survived the first week after the stroke, a period which the doctor had warned would be crucial for the player's survival, the coach who had organized much of the support emotionally shared that, "we are just human, and we can't have everything. But we need to pray to god. This experience is very emotional for me, I always want to cry when I tell this story because he is like my own child, my student just like the other players." This community's response to this emergency demonstrates two key points about the support that soccer playing communities provide players in Taiwan. First, the support system acts as an alternative to the migration infrastructure of the guest worker program itself, that migrants can turn to in times of crisis (Xiang and Lindquist, 2014). Taiwan's government and migration regime does have policies for injured migrants but because they are related to employers and intermediaries migrants view them with suspicion. Second, while still primarily concerned with organizing soccer games, the social networks that have been formed to play soccer are embedded with a great deal of care.

The medical emergency and the collective response to it also demonstrates the power dynamics that exist within guest-worker soccer communities in Taiwan. In this case after working in Taiwan over a long period of time the older coach plays a parental role over his team not only looking out for them off of the field but also giving team talks and leading the group in prayer before games and practices. The coach explained that one of the successes of his soccer team was the reduced number of fights that occurred within the guest-worker soccer-playing community. Meanwhile a player on the same

team suggested in an interview that playing soccer on the team, “helps us to avoid negative things too. Especially since Taiwan is a permissive society, for example, like with drinking (liquor).” Thus, along with the care and support that existed within these communities, there was also an aspect of control whereby leaders sought to influence member behavior not just on the court, but also off of the field itself.

In the previous chapter, the enforcement of fines was introduced as a strategy through which migrants maintained access to field space, these fines are another example of the role that social networks have in controlling the behavior of community members. But rules over trash collection were not the only expression of organizer’s control over other participants. Tournaments were not being played for pride alone, oftentimes substantial prize money was at stake. For instance, one smaller tournament I attended had a first-place prize of 8,000 NTD for first place and 5,000 NTD for second. With the added stakes of playing for money came extra responsibility for organizers to enforce rules and ensure fair competition. Of course, on the field itself organizers had to enforce rules through hiring referees. Beyond the rules of soccer, organizers explained that they also played a role in adjudicating disputes and fights that occurred between teams which occurred, “since soccer is a contact sport.” Like the tournaments that non-profit occasionally organized, co-ethnic soccer tournaments also required players to show their ID cards before games began so that teams were not sneaking unregistered players onto the field. But there was sensitivity to the invasive nature of these practices, so that when tournaments were made up of guest-workers all from the same home province these checks were not necessary as everyone knew one another.

The social networks which reproduce migrant soccer tournaments in Taiwan create a social setting where guest-workers can access soccer games during their free time. These tournaments reproduce power relations through which organizers, coaches, and team captains combine players into teams, and teams into tournaments. As demonstrated by the previous chapter these social structures can play a role in mitigating the effects of borderwork. At the same time, these social structures also impact migrants away from the soccer field, when the soccer community collaborates to provide a support structure for migrants going through injury or legal trouble, they mediate the impact of the migration regime on individual soccer players. During interviews the sense of camaraderie that is produced by the soccer-playing community is expressed as one of the main reasons that migrants go to great effort to go to games during their limited free time.

Individual Strategies and Individual Benefits

Participants valued playing in migrant soccer leagues for numerous reasons. Among these reasons was an appreciation for the positive feelings associated with membership within a community. But players also expressed that participation in soccer games also created more individualized benefits that soccer had on other aspects of their life. So that soccer was not only an enjoyable activity but also part of a personal strategy of self-improvement and self-empowerment. Oftentimes these benefits were related to their own professional lives. The previous chapter introduced the economic strategies that migrants used to mediate the financial pressures associated with remittance labor in Taiwan. Among these strategies was the utilization of social

connections formed through playing soccer to find new or additional employment in Taiwan. However, guest-workers also expressed the physical and mental health benefits of soccer in terms of benefiting their professional lives. So that playing soccer became a strategy to ensure their continued professional success in Taiwan. A few members of the community, often organizers and coaches, used participation in soccer communities as a means of self-promotion in order to develop a career in soccer or in order to cultivate skills that would translate to an improved position in the labor market. However, these players were not guest-workers themselves so that these distinctive strategies ended up reproducing the differences between guest-workers and other migrants. This section introduces these individualized benefits which migrants create through playing soccer in Taiwan to understand the extent to which membership within soccer-playing social structures can translate into cultural and financial capital. The section also points out that while not directly related to the development of any form of capital, soccer as a coping mechanism was an important and valued strategy that migrants used to make it through busy days and busy weeks.

A participant summarized the benefits of playing soccer in Taiwan as, “it is great for health, it helps us relieve stress after a day’s work. It’s also a way to stay passionate about what we love,” and encapsulated many of the responses that players gave during interviews. First many participants expressed the health benefits of playing soccer and staying in shape. Sometimes these benefits were expressed as allowing a player to better enjoy a beer after playing soccer but often health benefits were associated with increased performance at work. One player explained the professional benefits of playing as being related to their mindset at work because “when you have the mindset

of a soccer player, you're more likely to pay attention to things like maintaining a healthy diet and sleep patterns." For workers who have more physically demanding jobs like fishers, playing soccer was also explained in interviews as a hobby that kept players in shape for their difficult jobs at sea. Playing soccer, they explained, helped them to avoid cramps while working. Along with physical health, many players expressed that playing soccer had a positive effect on their mental health, whether it was stress relief, joy, or just using their phones less. For many players, a weekly or monthly trip to the soccer field was a way to relieve stress at their workplaces. A participant explains, "after a week of hard work at the factory, football helps me to relieve stress and makes my life more enjoyable and less stressful." This sense of stress relief was often associated with a feeling of joy experienced during and after playing soccer. Ismail explains that, "I love so much about football. And when I touch the ball, I feel happy." For him this sense of joy erases the stressors from everyday life, "when I feel stress and when I have many problems, when I get to the field, I feel so happy. My problems are just gone when I touch the ball." For guest-workers, playing in these leagues were ways to improve their professional performances but also a pressure valve to release the stress and monotony of their day-to-day lives working in factories and fishing boats. Workers at a non-profit explained that during the COVID-19 pandemic they often heard from migrants that playing soccer was what they most looked forward to while they were stuck inside their factory dormitories.

Playing soccer is a valued strategy that guest-workers use in order to mitigate the stress and monotony of their day to day lives working in factories and fishing boats. Based upon the evidence provided in the previous section soccer games are available

to migrants because of the social networks which reproduce them. Bourdieu's approach to social capital emphasized the value of social capital through its exchange value, at times to cultural and other alternative forms of capital, but ultimately to economic capital. While the stress release associated with playing soccer is both a valued outcome expressed by individuals as well as a product of investment and membership in social structures, the connection between stress relief and economic capital is fairly circuitous. To some extent, coping with the stress of work does contribute to an individual's ability to continue to collect monthly payments for remittance and personal savings. However, migrants would continue to collect salary and work even without soccer, but the experience of working would be less positive and life in Taiwan more difficult to endure. Instead of producing economic capital, the social capital developed through participating in soccer leagues produces a positive affective space in contrast to the workplace. Therefore, the extent that social capital challenges existing power relations is minimal.

Playing soccer also produced social capital which was more directly connected to economic capital by providing information about additional and new employment in Taiwan. Recall that the previous chapter introduced the economic strategies that guest-workers used to mitigate the economic cost of participating in soccer leagues. Among these strategies guest-workers used social connections to find new employment. For some these jobs were side employment as illustrated by a participant, "when I first arrived soccer helped me land a part-time job, without it I might have struggled a lot more." For others, social connections helped to facilitate the expansion of a personal business, "I do bike repair as a side job, many friends I meet through soccer end up

becoming future customers.” Social connections could even help migrants find a new place to work as one participant explained, “if someone is unemployed, we try to help them find a job.” These connections are perhaps the most straightforward examples of social capital, as players are turning their social connections into economic capital. Often these connections are formed within the soccer playing community, in particular when it comes to self-employment or undocumented side jobs. So rather than finding economic opportunities through connections outside of their social niche, guest-workers find economic opportunities through the same closely-knit communities which produce the games themselves.

Playing in soccer games, but in particular organizing soccer games, was at times related to players strategies of personal development. Most often these strategies relate to using soccer to develop embodied forms of cultural capital that increase an individual’s ability to perform certain tasks. Below I include several quotes from players who expressed these strategies. While the players who expressed these strategies were still from southeast Asia and involved in co-ethnic soccer communities made up of mostly guest-workers, players with this approach were not guest-workers themselves. Instead these players were in Taiwan as student-workers or had managed to achieve permanent residence in Taiwan through marriage or education.

One player explains that playing soccer had a positive impact on his professional life because, “I’m already used to being a leader. I’ve been a coach and referee. Whenever there’s a tournament, I’m always the one leading them. So, it has really shaped my personality. I’ve learned that I have to manage everything, make sure everyone plays in an organized manner. It’s had a huge impact on me.” Along similar

lines a student-worker explained the positive impact of playing soccer as teaching patience and cooperation with large groups of people. Players also explained that learning both English and Chinese was a benefit of playing soccer, in particular if players had access to multi-cultural soccer communities. In this case some of these students even preferred playing among Taiwanese because of the perceived professional benefits of playing with locals, “I prefer to play with Taiwanese players, many of whom are successful. Playing with them opens up new connections, and they might introduce me to other teams or even recommend me for internships or jobs if I ask.” These experiences mirror those expressed by highly skilled migrants who are involved in organizing multi-cultural soccer communities, who also emphasized in interviews the leadership skills and communication skills that playing and organizing games can instill on individuals.

Finally, in one case guest-workers were also able to use soccer to develop institutional forms of cultural capital – diplomas or certifications often provided by a governance organization (Bourdieu, 1986). In this case the non-profit with which I often collaborated organized for the Chinese Taipei Football Association (CTFA) to provide a training for southeast Asian migrants to become certified referees. According to a non-profit staffer, many participants who participated in the training were unable to receive the referee certification because the CTFA required background checks and police records from home jurisdictions which were difficult for guest-worker migrants to procure. However, one player who was able to get certified was able to work on the side as a referee. Of course, the referees involved in officiating the games played among co-ethnic communities did not have official certifications. In general players who sought to

accumulate cultural capital for a career related to Soccer were limited to organizing games among migrants because professional and high-level soccer in Taiwan excluded foreigners regardless of their immigration status.

Overall during the period of field work these strategies of personal development whether they were related to language, soft skills, or certifications never lead to mobility between categories in the migration regime. Instead most players, guest-workers in particular, saw their future elsewhere. One participant who worked two different side jobs while in Taiwan explained this mindset, “every person has their own job—some study, others work to improve their financial situation, perhaps to build a family in Vietnam. Our main goal is to contribute to society in Vietnam when we return.” While some soccer players saw their participation in co-ethnic leagues in Taiwan as a way to accumulate valuable skills, those players were not directly involved in the guest-worker program so that even within co-ethnic soccer communities the differences between guest-workers and other migrants were reproduced. For guest-workers who participated in co-ethnic soccer leagues, participating in soccer leagues was a strategy to persevere through a difficult life in Taiwan.

Producing Place in a Guest Worker Regime

The soccer games and communities that surround them constitute a locale within Taiwan. Analyzing these locales production within various power structures attends to this dissertation’s second research question and explores the relationship between migrant social structures, the guest-worker regime, and public space. Based upon the empirical evidence introduced in the previous two sections the social networks that organize and comprise co-ethnic soccer games produce local power structures which

affect the production of place. At the same time, the games that these social structures embody are impacted by their position within Taiwan broadly and Taiwan's migration regime and guest-worker program more specifically. Thus, the places in which these games are played are a combination of both the establishment of social structures which organize games as well as their location within larger power structures. The production of local power relations is clearly demonstrated by the hierarchies within soccer playing communities, as well as the space that they occupy (albeit often temporary). At a community and individual level the relationships which soccer has to other places within Taiwan demonstrate the concrete effects that the migration regime has on the places that are reproduced by soccer games. This bilateral analysis demonstrates the development of social capital within a guest-worker program as something which produces meaningful positive outcomes but is nonetheless affected by the strict migration regime.

Occupying physical space is the most straightforward embodiment of the power relations which migrant social structures produced while in Taiwan, and an embodiment of the social capital which exists within these groups. The tournaments which often contained large banners, team flags, and trophy ceremonies occupied space within Taiwan, something that as demonstrated by the previous chapter was not a straightforward task. This occupation of space was mostly temporary. For instance, recall from the previous chapter that in order to maintain field space in Taiwan groups need to ensure that their games do not leave behind a trace. Similarly, some participants expressed in interviews that they are unable to change the long-term appearance of the space in which they played, "some fields don't even have goals, and

we can't bring our own because the field is managed by someone else." The outcome is similar to Chacko's concept of ethnic arenas where migrants occupy space ephemerally, visiting regularly but only temporarily (Chacko, 2003). The main difference here is that while in Chacko's case migrants from throughout a heterolocality (Zelinsky and Lee, 1998) attend ethnic arenas, guest-workers join from their dormitory housing in factories or from fishing vessels. In some cases, migrants were able to produce more permanent changes to material space. As mentioned previously in this chapter as one of the collective works that communities undertake to produce games, players "improve the field, like cutting the grass or making goalposts." Meanwhile fishers near the port of Damshui were able to save up for some goal posts so that they could play during their limited free time.

The force behind these community's successful occupation of space was the same hierarchies which organized collective responses and marshaled group resources in responses to individual and group crises. The organizational structure of tournaments and teams, not only organized, messaged updates, and set forth rules for events, but also directed support towards players who were considered in need of support. While never complained about by any community members during interviews, one component of this was social control by organizers and coaches over the players themselves. Organizers and coaches would influence their players' life outside of the game, for instance by encouraging players to abstain from drinking alcohol or through levying fines on teams who littered on shared field space. But in general players benefited from having these hierarchies because organizers and coaches at the top of these social structures were crucial for gaining access to field space, which allowed for players who

had just arrived in Taiwan to quickly access soccer during their limited free time. This chapter has previously introduced the organizers behind these communities and benefits of participation. But an example of a group of migrants who were unable to access field space also demonstrates the value of these structures. Fishers from Taiwan's Northern Crown Coast explained that at previous ports where they worked, they had been unable to play soccer because the only fields near them were connected to a school. One fisher explained that because they were not sure if they were allowed to play on these school's fields they decided not to play to avoid getting shouted at by locals. In this case, the players would have benefited from someone in their group with more local knowledge about local field space customs, but unlike the guest-worker networks formed by predominantly factory workers they were not able to benefit from connections to more established southeast Asian migrants.

One of the reasons that organizers were better situated to access field space was because they had been in Taiwan for a longer period of time. An organizer explains that, "finding a field is easy since I've been here a long time. I understand Taiwanese customs and have built relationships, so it's simpler for me to handle. For newcomers, it can be challenging." While in some cases these organizers were guest-workers who had been in Taiwan for multiple three-year terms of labor, they were oftentimes skilled migrants who had permanent residence or were factory workers who had permanent residence through marriage. In these cases, the organizational structures of the social networks which produced migrant soccer games reproduced the differences between guest-workers and other migrants as the few members of the community who were not guest-workers were often atop the hierarchies of these social networks. Community

members in these positions expressed strategies of personal development that guest-worker players themselves rarely expressed. These community members were important in producing the social capital that these groups relied on to occupy space in Taiwan. But their position and role on top of these communities demonstrated the embeddedness of these soccer games within Taiwan's migration regime.

Perhaps the clearest impact of the migration regime on the reproduction of migrant soccer leagues, was how guest-workers related their participation in soccer games to their workplaces. The previous section demonstrated not only that migrants used participation in soccer to relieve stress from their difficult jobs, but also articulated these benefits as related to their performance in the workplace itself. Relying on the language of Bourdieu, soccer games are 'fields' in which guest-workers accumulate communal and individual resources, however because migrants also spent much of their time within the 'field' of the workplace that was defined by their employers and the guest-worker program, their 'habitus' often strategized their actions within soccer communities as related to their work places. Or put in less convoluted terms, migrants' participation within soccer leagues is contextualized within their broader participation within Taiwan's guest worker regime itself.

Agnew's framework introduced earlier in the chapter charts a place-based approach to contextualizing soccer playing communities and their social capital within Taiwan's migration regime. First, the locales in which games take place are a product of power relations within the co-ethnic soccer playing communities which organize southeast Asian players to form large scale games and tournaments. The investment in these social groups produce various benefits for individuals, these benefits are an

important component to the perpetuation of the group itself. Perhaps the most important benefit produced by these social networks is access to the games themselves, which provided a place to play soccer but also a place to socialize outside the confines of the workplace. Thus, access to physical space can be considered a positive outcome produced by social capital. Second, the locales where games were played relied on the social and cultural resources of community members who were more established in Taiwan and not part of the guest-worker program. Thus, while these social networks establish space for guest-workers to play soccer in Taiwan, their internal organization reproduces the logic of the guest-worker program itself. The social capital within these communities is structured by its location within Taiwan's migration regime, so that the place where co-ethnic soccer games are played are produced by their position within local and as well as more broad power relations.

Chapter 5 A Guest-Worker Sense of Place: Identity and Soccer in Taiwan

Figure 1 Indonesian Club Banners at a Multicultural Tournament



Figure 2 Banner at Vietnamese Tournament



Figure 1 is a photograph that was taken at a tournament funded and organized by a non-profit organization. The photo is an example of a common sight and practice on gamedays among migrant soccer leagues in Taiwan. The image depicts several banners and flags that an Indonesian team – in this case Tunghai FC – set up on the

side of the field. The banners serve to mark the area in which players of the team rested in between games and demonstrate some characteristics of the team itself. The far-left banner on Figure 1 displays the club's crest with the year the team was established as well as the phrase 'We Are Family,' while the banner on the far right side of the image depicts three masked men with the slogan 'refuse to give up' written in Indonesian. Figure 2 shows a larger banner that was prepared for the closing ceremony of a tournament organized by the Vietnamese community in Taiwan. In this case, the image shows both the flags of Vietnam and the Republic of China (Taiwan), as well as images of the organizers of the tournament. In addition, Figure 2 also names some of the tournament sponsors which helped to pay for the tournament and provide prize money. Figure 3 shows a collection of flags displayed by an Indonesian club at the finals of an Indonesian league in Taiwan. In this case, the flags include a Palestinian and Indonesian flag as well as banners with the team's name 'Dadu FC'.

Figure 3 Flags displayed by Indonesian Team at an Indonesian Tournament



Displaying banners is a placemaking practice players use to mark the field space they occupy when playing soccer. The previous chapter analyzed the power relations which produce the places where migrants play soccer in Taiwan; this chapter introduces and provides a discussion of the territorial identity associated with these places, as explained by the participants themselves. The banners in Figures 1, 2, and 3 offer visual representations of these territorial identities which are described in more detail in this chapter. First, soccer fields where migrants played soccer often reaffirmed the cultural or national identities associated with migrants' home countries. Second, the banners and displays often had limited references to Taiwan, mirroring the limited connection that these communities have with Taiwanese society. Third and finally, the flags also demonstrate the expression of a global soccer playing culture. The club crests, in particular, share the same symbols and design of professional football clubs globally and the banners displayed in Figures 1 and 3 share symbology with 'ultra' or fan banners across soccer fandoms globally. Developing these three points, this chapter focuses on the co-ethnic and multicultural territorial identities which are produced in migrant soccer playing communities. At the same time, the chapter juxtaposes the absence of local Taiwanese identity within these communities' senses of place. Combined these analyses address this dissertation's third research question, interested in the identities that are produced within a guest-worker program and their relationships to other proximate territorial identities.

The empirical evidence is divided into three distinct kinds of communities in which guest-workers participate while in Taiwan. First are games that are played among other players from the same country, co-ethnic soccer games. As introduced previously, while the majority of

players in these games are guest-workers, some student-workers also participate in these communities. The second type of games are made up of multicultural communities where guest-workers from Southeast Asia play alongside migrants from countries all over the world. Finally, the third type of community where guest-workers play, albeit only occasionally, is with Taiwanese soccer teams.

Place and Power Geometry

The previous chapter introduced the notion of place as a theoretical approach for the embeddedness of social capital. Once more relying on Agnew's threefold framework for place comprised of locale, location, and sense of place, this chapter focuses specifically on the places where migrants meet for games. Previous chapters have focused on the barriers to accessing these fields, as well as the mechanisms that migrants rely on to overcome these barriers. Focusing on the sense of place associated with these games, this chapter attends to the subjective identities that are shaped by participation in these communities. Under modernity and globalization, a sense of place can exist at a regional, national, or even global scale; however, as Agnew points out, these territorial identities are mediated through experiences of local life (Agnew, 1987). Geographers have spent considerable time defining and developing sense of place as an analytic framework and a structure of feeling (Cresswell, 2015; Massey, 1994; Tuan, 1977). Particularly among humanistic Geographers, there is overlap between sense of place and the familiar feeling of home (Cresswell, 2015). Further complicating these terms, in this study while interviewing participants, players often expressed a feeling of home associated with playing soccer. Using Agnew's definition, I conceive sense of place as an identity pressed upon individuals within a certain place, so that a sense of

place might be associated with work or school (Agnew, 1987). As demonstrated by this chapter, a sense of place might feel like home, even if it is not where an individual lives. With this insight in mind, and using sense of places as a theoretical lens, the fields where guest-workers play soccer provide insight into how migrants' sense of place in Taiwan is impacted by the sort of mobility which is operationalized by a guest-worker program.

Massey's essay 'A Global Sense of Place' is a foundational work in the development of the relational notion of place that is currently prominent in human geography (Cresswell, 2015; Massey, 1991). Massey argues that rather than produced by internal characteristics, places are defined by their relationships to elsewhere. As Massey defines it, places are, "formed out of the particular set of social relations which interact at a particular location" (Massey, 1991). Similarly, contributing to the theories of relational place, Appadurai argues that places are reproduced constantly by local subjects amid "flows of people, objects, and ideas" (Appadurai, 1995). Together they form a processual understanding of place where place is defined not only by its connections to elsewhere but also by its incorporation of global exigencies into local life. Despite these theoretical approaches' exceedingly open-ended construction of what place might be, both approaches construct notions of place in the details of everyday life. Focusing on the particularity of globalization, place does not become generic as a result of connections but rather it becomes distinctive, defined by its specific arrangement of relationships (Massey, 1991). This section demonstrates empirically that, although the communities produced on the soccer field have connections to migrants' home countries, they are distinct from the communities which migrants leave

as these communities are heavily impacted by migrant's status as guest-workers in Taiwan. Epistemologically, this chapter mainly relies on guest-workers and other community members' own experiences of place, and their articulation of the sense of belonging with which it is associated. For quite some time, humanistic geographers have emphasized the importance of understanding place through personal experience (Tuan, 1977). With this same sensibility, the chapter understands the mediation of broader notions of belonging through the lens of the everyday. Building upon this sensory experience of place, scholars have pointed out that in dense urban neighborhoods the overlapping of proximate social lives can produce entanglements between different groups (Gökarıksel and Secor, 2023). As a practice which involves taking part in and sharing public space, playing soccer does contain this potential for overlapping with non-players and thus an ambiguity of the border between guest-workers and mainstream Taiwanese society.

Appadurai's formulation of place introduces the potential for globalization to produce new configurations which challenge or reproduce existing power structures (Appadurai, 1995). With some overlap, Moore's more recent work argues, "far from being passive receptacles, places actively bring together things, people, and ideas into different configurations" (Moore, 2025). The soccer fields which migrants access and create are places which contain new communities and a new sense of belonging within Taiwan. The subjective territorial identities which are introduced within this chapter are products of these new configurations which have been established within Taiwan, but with only tenuous connections with Taiwanese society. As Massey points out, relationships which constitute place are contingent upon and carried out by structural

forces, termed as power geometry. People on the move are an example of these connections which constitute places, but have varied experiences of mobility; while some might move unencumbered, “there are also groups who are also doing a lot of physical moving but who are not ‘in charge’ of the process” (Massey, 1991). Guest-workers in Taiwan are an example of people on the move, who are heavily constrained and are not in charge of their movements. This chapter develops an understanding for how this power geometry affects the sense of place that these reconfigurations produce.

Figure 4 Video Clip of Goal Reaction Link: <https://youtu.be/Qjb6evNpsdM>



Co-Ethnic Soccer League

The field space which soccer-playing communities occupied in Taiwan created territorial identities which were related to migrants' home countries. Flags and banners are one visual representation of these place-making practices, but during my field work I

observed numerous practices which instilled the soccer fields where guest-workers played with a sense of place that was associated with migrants' home countries. Food was a prevalent example of this. Migrants would organize a lunch for players that was often a bento-box style lunchbox with food from Vietnam or Indonesia. In other cases, food was consumed family style, laid out on a tarp in the shade next to the field itself. Along with food were guest-worker spectators from sending countries who also contributed to the field's atmosphere. The soccer games were places where migrants would come to meet even if they were not personally involved in the games as players. The cheers, offered in encouragement to players or in admonishment to the referees, also instilled a distinct sense of place due to the non-Mandarin Chinese soundscape. Along similar lines, the commentators – narrating the game via portable speakers for the local audience as well as for those watching on stream – added to the local soundscape and created a sense of place distinct from regular Taiwanese space. The brief video clip which is included in Figure 4 captures the moment after a goal has been scored at a Vietnamese tournament hosted at a middle school in rural Changhua County. Along with the cheers and reaction from the fans on the side of the field, you can also hear the announcer over the speaker. Rather than at a moment of high drama after a goal has been scored, Figure 5 shows the same field during a regular play. Here you can see the commentary booth as well as the streaming set up. You can also see and hear how the guest-workers are sharing space with Taiwanese baseball players in the background. While the two groups are sharing space there was no interaction between the two communities.

The previous chapter has demonstrated the role that playing soccer has in providing stress relief for guest-workers in Taiwan working under difficult conditions. This chapter builds upon this observation by demonstrating that the sense of relief associated with playing soccer is often related to the familiar sense of place that is present in the communities where games take place. Oftentimes this familiarity was expressed as being related to their home country, but the feeling of 'being at home' was also described without reference to home countries, as well as in reference to regional identities. During interviews, guest-worker soccer players explained that membership in soccer-playing communities gave them the feeling of home while in Taiwan, because of the familiarity with fellow migrants as well as familiarity with the cultural practice of soccer. A participant encapsulates this feeling when explaining that, "Of course, I feel that football is the same everywhere here. It all feels very familiar...Since I play mostly with fellow Vietnamese, it feels like playing at home."

When asked if playing soccer made them feel more at home in Taiwan an Indonesian guest-worker replied, "Yes, of course, because I play with Indonesian people." Asked the same question, another Vietnamese player explains that, "Yes, it feels familiar since everyone on the team is Vietnamese." Here both players express the sense of home that is associated with the soccer fields where they play and link this sense of place with fellowship among migrants from the same country. Along similar lines another Indonesian player expressed that playing soccer in Taiwan felt like home because playing soccer was something they did in Indonesia as well. As a cultural practice, playing soccer provided migrants with a sense of familiarity while in Taiwan because playing soccer was something that they were used to doing back home.

Figure 5 Migrants Sharing Space with Others Link: <https://youtu.be/ARnm-zQguIU>



Yet another player from Vietnam expands upon this sentiment by linking the sense of home through playing soccer with a relief from the sense of homesickness and alienation experienced while working in Taiwan despite being connected digitally to their home,

“Generally, whenever I miss home, if I go to practice football and meet fellow countrymen for some interaction, the homesickness diminishes. When I'm alone at home just surfing my phone, images of my hometown keep popping up around me. I miss home a lot, but when I interact with others and receive encouragement, especially since I've only been here for half a year, the period of homesickness becomes more bearable.”

In this case, while having a shared background with other players is the basis for support, it is the encouragement from others and socialization which the player values

the most. This player was not the only participant to juxtapose the comfort facilitated through participating in soccer in contrast with time spent on their phone. Once more responding to the impact that playing sport has on their experience of Taiwan, a participant explained that playing made them, “much more comfortable, without it, I’d just be using my phone and feel unmotivated.” Thus, it was not only the sense of comradery and familiarity with people and practices from home that migrants valued; it was the embodied practice of meeting to play soccer.

As argued in the previous chapter, the shared identity and close social networks serve as an important mechanism for organizing games. Along similar lines, cultural and national identity are central to the discourses which migrants rely on to explain the games. For instance, the Taiwan Indonesia Soccer League is organized by Indonesians, “specifically for Indonesian workers in Taiwan,” explained a student worker. Similarly, Vietnamese tournaments were described by participants as helping to “strengthen the bond between Vietnamese here in Taiwan.” This logic of support and unity based upon national identity was articulated by those organizations and organizers who I spoke with while in Taiwan. A player and organizer explained that:

“Football gives me a passion for the game, and secondly, it fosters unity and social interaction. In Taiwan, every year there are many big and small tournaments, such as regional or hometown matches. Every year, there’s a major tournament where all provinces from Vietnam come together, each with a representative team. It’s called the “Great Unity Cup” and has been organized for five seasons.”

Along with a focus on fostering Vietnamese identity, the 'Great Unity Cup' also reinforces regional identities. These teams were based upon regional affiliation as demonstrated by this participant who explains the process of organizing and founding a team,

“When I first arrived, there weren’t many people from the Mekong Delta in Taiwan. I mostly played with friends living in the same area. Later, as I met more people from our region, I started gathering people—initially just one or two, but now we have around a hundred people from the Delta.”

Once more the establishment of the team is based upon identity and associated with easing homesickness. The same participant explained that playing soccer in Taiwan made them feel more at home, “especially with this league since most of us here are from the Mekong Delta. It eases homesickness.”

Figure 6 Crest of Fishers Association Soccer Team



In Keelung I spent time with fishers who had established an association to provide collective support for one another while in Taiwan. The association I visited rented an apartment nearby the wharf where their boats docked. The apartment served as an important safety net for fishers who were switching employers and needed a place to stay while they waited for a new employer. Staying at the shared apartment meant that they could avoid exorbitant dormitory fees leveled by the intermediaries. Along with the apartment, the association organized a soccer team. Figure 6 shows their football club's badge and the team's shoes stored inside their apartment. Like the Vietnamese team from the Mekong Delta, all the fishers who were members of the association and soccer team were from the same region of Indonesia so that soccer became an expression of this identity and a break from their dangerous and exploitative work conditions.

Along with this sense of regional belonging, playing soccer in Taiwan was related to nationalistic notions of belonging and pride. For instance, while spending time with the fishers in Keelung, players mentioned they had heard that an Indonesian team in Taiwan had played against Taiwan's youth national team. These interview participants expressed pride that this game had taken place. In fact, I had been invited to the game weeks earlier. Figure 7 shows the match. In the background, you can see that the Indonesian club displayed their club banners and Indonesian flag on the side of the field. Images and videos from the game were spread online. Other players expressed this sense of national pride created through playing soccer during interviews. One participant explained that when others watched them play soccer, people would see that, "Vietnamese people may be small in size, but we're dedicated in both work and

sports.” As well as fostering a sense of home through playing in these communities, playing soccer also connected to notions of pride in more broad national communities.

Figure 7 Indonesian Club Scrimmages Youth National Team



Despite a sense of belonging and home that was cultivated through playing soccer, there were some players who explained that playing soccer in Taiwan helped but was not really enough to make them feel at home. As one player explains, “It’s not quite the same as being back home, but it does give me joy and helps me maintain a positive outlook on life here. Still, nothing really compares to being back in my hometown.” A different player likewise explained that the difference was rooted in not being with his family, “There, after playing, I’d go back to my family. Here, I just play and then go home. It feels like a repetitive cycle.”

Familiar people and a familiar practice defined how players described the soccer fields where they played; combined, these two factors furnished the soccer fields with a sense of home away from home. The place-making practices which produced this sense of home at times created conflict with other groups using public space in Taiwan. As established in Chapter Three of this dissertation, guest-workers often struggled to access field space because of conflicts with local Taiwanese over how field space is used. One Vietnamese soccer player explained the relationship between these placemaking practices and the field space politics which excluded guest-workers from some fields,

“For example, when we play in this schoolyard, in the morning, because of the lively atmosphere of the Vietnamese people, it's noisy, bustling when playing football, so they'll come out and warn you or tell you to be quiet.”

In this case, the sense of place which is established through these games creates conflict with a preexisting sense of place. This conflict demonstrates once again the embeddedness of these soccer communities within local notions of belonging as well as the guest-worker program itself.

Global Soccer's Multicultural Sense of Place

In an interview, a guest-worker participant from Vietnam explained that “in Taiwan I have more new friends who are different from friends in Vietnam.” Noteworthy to this study is that these different friends which migrants meet on soccer fields in Taiwan are not necessarily or even usually Taiwanese. As mentioned in previous chapters, guest-workers participated in soccer playing communities which included players from various countries and with different visa statuses. Playing within these

communities, guest-workers gained access to social networks and field space that otherwise they would not have access to while only playing among co-ethnic communities. Along with these benefits, membership within these communities created places of multicultural exchange between guest-workers, student workers, and highly skilled migrants from societies spread across the world. Taiwanese players also participated in these communities however in fewer numbers. Within these communities, players valued and expressed a 'global soccer' shared identity familiar to the slogans made by football governance organizations like FIFA; at the same time, however, national identities within these communities did create misunderstandings and low-level conflict.

The best example of the multicultural soccer communities from my field work in Taiwan came from a team in Taichung that I will call 'FC Arrowhead'. I first connected with the team during a 'Workers Cup' organized by a Taiwanese non-profit for guest-workers but which included teams made up of other migrants as well. While the team I joined for the tournament was made up mostly of African and South American migrants living in Taipei, FC Arrowhead was made up of a mix of both highly skilled visa holders, as well as guest-workers from Vietnam and Indonesia. According to the club's organizers as well as the non-profit group that helped to organize these tournaments, FC Arrowhead was unique in its mixing of guest-worker and highly skilled migrants on the same team. Although it was not especially uncommon for guest-worker teams to play against highly skilled migrants, playing on the same team was unique in northern Taiwan. My own experiences within soccer-playing communities in Taichung, Taoyuan, and Taipei supported this evaluation. Players from Southeast Asia who were

participating on teams with highly skilled migrants were student workers rather than guest-workers.

For years FC Arrowhead had been made up only of players working in Taiwan as highly skilled migrants, with players mostly arriving to Taiwan from East Asia, Europe, and the Americas. However, the club's founder shared that since the growth of Southeast Asian soccer playing communities in Taiwan after 2015, the team had begun to include Vietnamese and Indonesian players who were working as guest-workers in Taiwan. One of these players was Ismail who had joined the club through Facebook, which according to one of the team's organizers was usually how the new players found the club. Teammates were supportive of one another despite different backgrounds, and guest-workers were included in occasional celebrations which were hosted at the houses of highly skilled migrants or Taiwanese players on the team. Thus, the team provided these guest-workers access to social spaces outside of dormitories and workplaces, in these social settings guest-workers were engaging with individuals not involved within the guest-worker program. Players on the team did suggest some challenges associated with playing in the multicultural setting. One player explained that "because players from different countries have different styles of playing soccer, it could be difficult to play together at times, but that once they got to know one another it became easier to play smoothly." Ismail also struggled at times playing within the multicultural community of players on FC Arrowhead. As mentioned in the previous chapter, he explained to me that playing with FC Arrowhead was hard because the other players were not Indonesians, not because of language barriers, but because there were too many different cultures. Despite these challenges, Ismail continued to

play with FC Arrowhead in the months following our first interview. He also brought more Indonesian players onto the team and acted as a conduit between the Indonesian players and the rest of the team.

Because Ismail spoke English, the language barrier was not a big barrier for his inclusion within the multicultural club, which spoke mostly English and some Chinese. For many guest-workers, language barriers were an important reason that they had limited participation in multicultural communities. One guest-worker player explained that while they played with people from other countries, “mostly, my close friends are other Vietnamese. With others, we just know each other’s names, but we don’t have a close relationship, partly because of the language barrier.” Another player was excited about the diversity of players that they had met while playing in Taiwan but explained that the language barriers meant that the relationships were not that close, “I have a lot of friends, from Europe or many places. Now, some of my friends are playing in the first division league here in Taiwan. His name is... I forget, some of my friends... I can speak Chinese, but I can’t speak English much.” Some student workers saw this language barrier as an opportunity to acquire language skills in particular English through playing in multicultural clubs and casual ‘pick-up’ soccer communities.

At the same time, players engaging in these sorts of multicultural communities articulated a global soccer identity which players explained as a basis for the diverse communities which they participated within. Perhaps the most lucid example of this ethos comes from a pick-up community organized by a Korean student which like FC Arrowhead is unique in its composition of guest-workers as well as student workers and highly skilled migrants. In this case, the community was able to communicate through a

mixture of English and Chinese relying on several bilingual community members within the group to help communicate norms.

When the student took over the organization of a Korean pick-up soccer group, they were short on numbers, so he advertised the group and invited foreigners. At the start, most of the non-Korean members were from Vietnam but the club has grown more diverse, to the extent that the organizer has renamed the group 'FC Bibimbap' after "the mixture of many different ingredients in Korean food, (which) represent(s) an international casual futsal club." This commitment to a soccer culture which was inclusive across cultures was articulated in numerous interviews; for instance, an organizer from Europe explained that "as long as they want to play football, there's always a way." A Taiwanese field space organizer expressed a similar cross-cultural logic of soccer, "for example, you are American, and I am Chinese; any sort of conflict based upon culture won't happen on the soccer field, because of the conversations over soccer there won't be any sort of problems." Guest-workers also articulated similar notions of soccer as a global language and global sport. One participant explained that, "soccer is a universal language, even with language barriers. When people understand the game, they automatically connect." In reference to the tournaments organized by the Taiwanese non-profit group, another guest-worker shared that tournament organizers, "sometimes included teams from Vietnam, Malaysia, Thailand, Indonesia. These tournaments are held to promote unity, the round ball represents the globe, symbolizing the connection between different ethnicities." Put more succinctly by another guest-worker player, "soccer is the same everywhere; it's a universal sport that brings people together."

To some extent, these participants are expressing a cliché about soccer and its ability to bring together. Like most clichés, there is a kernel of truth that has been stretched by exaggeration and overuse, particularly by global soccer governance organizations. As a universal game, soccer has a set of rules which facilitate a collective experience. Studying the philosophy of games, Nguyen has argued that games provide participants with ‘disposable ends’ (in the case of soccer scoring more goals than the opposition) but that most players also have external ends (perhaps exercise or mental health benefits). Competition in this case becomes a kind of collaboration as players are “helping each other to have a wonderful experience of struggle that (they) both desire”(Nguyen, 2020). One participant describes the soccer field as a social setting where they can achieve the external end of self-expression which is directly linked to the game's competitive aspect, “soccer is a competitive sport, so when you're on the field, you can show the strength of a man.” In the previous chapter, participant quotations expressed similar sentiment to the following quote, “your schedule is routine like this for like months and you kind of begin to feel like stuck, you know, kind of stuck. But when you go out and play soccer, you feel a little bit free and like a little bit energized.” Within these multicultural communities are positive feelings which are produced through a cooperation with players from divergent cultural backgrounds. Even if they cannot always communicate, they are able to provide one another with this valued embodied experience.

In interviews guest-workers valued their membership within these multicultural communities. The streamer who was introduced in the beginning of the last chapter was excited by his experiences streaming at one of the ‘Workers Cup’ tournaments

organized by the non-profit because it had expanded the reach of his channel to a more global audience:

“I recorded Taiwanese games, such as the Taiwan Cup (sic), which had participants from different countries like Indonesia, Thailand, the US, Japan, and Korea. For example, there was a tournament in Taichung on May 4th. I went there to record, and the audience included people from Vietnam and other countries.”

Another player expressed gratitude for soccer, “I’m really grateful to soccer because it’s allowed me to connect with many people—fellow Vietnamese, friends, and others from different countries. Many of them have helped me a lot in organizing and promoting soccer tournaments here in Taiwan.” Another guest-worker valued soccer as a conduit to access communities that they might not otherwise access as a guest-worker, “it helps build connections and provides an opportunity to meet and learn from others, both from our hometown and other countries. As a migrant worker, I’ve been able to connect with many people.” While multicultural communities were not the most common community which guest-workers played in, many guest-worker interview participants had experiences within diverse soccer communities in Taiwan. Migrants valued these cosmopolitan communities and understood them to be a benefit of participating in soccer due to its global appeal.

Connections to Taiwanese Soccer Playing Communities

While many players did express that playing soccer made them feel comfortable and at home, fewer guest-worker players expressed that this sense of home was associated with local Taiwanese players. While at times guest-workers were

participating in communities which had a multicultural sense of place associated with global soccer-playing cultures, these communities did not include many Taiwanese players. Thus, aside from relatively uncommon exhibition matches between Taiwanese teams and guest-worker teams, the social context in which games took place rarely included Taiwanese players. In interviews, guest-workers and Taiwanese participants had various explanations for the lack of interaction between Taiwanese and Southeast Asian soccer players, including lack of interest in soccer in Taiwan and apprehension among Taiwanese players of playing with guest-workers. On the other hand, student-worker soccer players did report playing with Taiwanese players in interviews.

When asked about whether playing soccer in Taiwan has made them feel better understood by local Taiwanese, a guest-worker player explained that, “because since coming here, I haven’t had much contact with Taiwanese people, especially in football tournaments, so I’m not sure about it.” When another player was similarly prompted, they explained the separation from Taiwanese players by attributing it to the separation that exists between guest-workers and Taiwanese, “I haven’t (felt understood by Taiwanese) because I don’t interact much with them. Also, I usually play in areas away from the population, so I’m not sure what they think of me.” Another player explained the lack of cohesion with Taiwanese soccer players because of a preference for playing with players of the same nationality, “I mostly stick with the Vietnamese community here and don’t interact much with locals on this.” Other explanations for this lack of connection with Taiwanese people, came from the perception among Southeast Asian guest-workers that Taiwanese were not that interested in soccer, “I see that Taiwanese people aren’t very fond of soccer; they don’t care how we play. They are more

passionate about other sports, so it's hard to connect with them." Players attributed this disinterest to Taiwanese society's greater interest in other sports like baseball and basketball. One participant contrasted this disinterest with their time working in Thailand as a migrant worker, "the locals here in Taiwan don't show much interest in our activities, whereas in Thailand, I noticed that they were more involved." Even among the few Taiwanese players who played on a multicultural team like FC Arrowhead, there was limited interaction. Ismail noted that he was really not in connection with Taiwanese players, so that playing soccer in Taiwan rarely put him in touch with Taiwanese players and so didn't make him feel Taiwanese at all.

Even if guest-workers are not playing in games with local Taiwanese, the soccer fields they played on existed in propinquity to Taiwanese communities. In particular, once the midday heat went down, locals would often walk and catch up with friends on the tracks which surrounded some of the fields where guest-workers played soccer. Despite this proximity, there was limited interaction between the soccer players and the Taiwanese people who met to walk around the track surrounding fields in the evening. Any interaction was generally incidental, as described by a guest-worker player, "In the afternoon, around 3 o'clock, people come here for exercise, right? Sometimes when we play, the ball goes out of bounds and into their area. Of course, some support us, but some tell us to be careful or be quiet." Some guest-workers perceived that the local reaction to them playing soccer was mixed, "when we play, we see them watching and taking pictures, and that makes us happy. They still support things like this, but everywhere has all kinds of people, so you can't generalize. There are always some who are discriminatory, but others are kind. It's the same in Vietnam too, not just here.

It's like that everywhere.” Other players assumed that the onlookers did not support their usage of public space, “the majority don't like it, and it affects their leisure time.”

In interviews with Taiwanese involved in the soccer-playing community, participants explained that Taiwanese players preferred not to play with guest-workers because they were scared of their physicality on the soccer field. A Taiwanese organizer explained that the games he organized were “all guest-worker against guest-worker, since Taiwanese players don't dare to play with guest-workers.” The basis for this fear was related to the perception of physicality but also a skill difference between players from Southeast Asia who had grown up in soccer playing societies versus Taiwanese players who were relatively new to the sport. There were also conflicts that existed between the guest-worker community and Taiwanese referees. For instance, referees charged more when refereeing guest-worker games because of the perception that the games would be more difficult to adjudicate. Once, an altercation between a Thai player and a Taiwanese referee led to the referee going to the police.

Despite these barriers, there were cases in which guest-workers were playing against Taiwanese players. In one such case, a university coach who allowed access to the school's field explained that – despite some opportunities to play together – there was not much connection facilitated through play:

“There are foreign migrant workers there. They work nearby. Actually, sometimes when they get off the ship and aren't working, they play football on the field at our school. So, I see them often. At times these teams have exchanges with our university, like the one that we hosted last weekend.

They come to participate every year. These foreign migrant workers... I

think if we organize this competition, it achieves at least one goal: we can play football with players of various nationalities and get to know them a little. But if we're talking about going further, having more in-depth exchanges or mutual exchange with them through this competition, it's not really possible.”

This coach went out of his way to ensure that guest-workers had access to the field space and even organized games between the guest-workers and other players but saw limited possibility for soccer to create a more in-depth level of community.

As developed in the previous chapter, Southeast Asian student workers were more likely to play among Taiwanese players than guest-workers. In interviews, these student-worker players expressed greater inclusion and belonging within Taiwanese society and local soccer-playing communities. Some of this was based upon language ability; indeed, playing soccer was also expressed as a chance to improve these language skills. One player explained that they preferred playing with Taiwanese players, “yes, the more I play, the better I get, and I prefer to play with Taiwanese players, many of whom are successful. Playing with them opens up new connections, and they might introduce me to other teams or even recommend me for internships or jobs if I ask.” Another student-worker player who had joined a university sports team had positive experiences playing with Taiwanese players and found that through playing soccer with the Taiwanese teammates and opponents he learned that “Taiwanese people are very kind.” Thus, student-workers from Southeast Asia experienced a degree of inclusion and belonging among Taiwanese communities as a result of playing soccer which guest-workers did not report.

Migrant Soccer and Multiculturalism in Taiwan

In 2023 a television show entitled “Port of Lies” premiered on Netflix. The show is intended for a Taiwanese audience but has a storyline that focuses on Southeast Asian guest-workers in Taiwan. Within the story, a lawyer is tracking down a guest-worker who is suspected of murder. While attempting to find the Indonesian worker, the task is complicated because the worker has left their assigned workplace. The lawyer finds a roster of the ‘Taiwan Immigrant Football League’ that includes the player’s name and information. In the show, this is a moment of high drama; the character jumps up and down, loudly proclaiming the name of the league and the player’s name. The non-profit I worked with was horrified, not least because the English translation of a league which they had organized for guest-workers was also ‘Taiwan Immigrant Football League.’ They posted publicly on Facebook and went on local news. They shared that they had not been consulted about the episode, and that they would never share their rosters with law enforcement. While the show demonstrates some acknowledgement of the exploitation of guest-workers, it also demonstrates the surveillance that guest-workers experience in Taiwan. In this case, playing soccer was the hook that the authorities could use to track down an individual who had run afoul of local laws and the migration regime by committing murder and leaving their workplace.

During my fieldwork, I never saw any immigration enforcement take place on the soccer field. Although I did hear about it. But as mentioned, guest-workers did not play with Taiwanese players as a result of logistical separation (far from one another), local disinterest in soccer, and an aversion to playing with guest-workers among Taiwanese

due to their perceptions about Southeast Asian players' physicality. This lack of mixing on the soccer field demonstrates the contingency of soccer as a global sport and a universal language, a cultural identity which has often been oversimplified and overemphasized as a purveyor of peace and understanding (Foer, 2004; Kuper, 2004). It also demonstrates what scholars have described as the inward looking mainstream notion of multiculturalism that exists in Taiwan (Chun, 2017; Chung, 2020). A notion of multiculturalism which is framed as a reaction to the repression of cultural identities during the Kuomintang's single party rule (Chun, 2017). Furthermore, along with limited interaction on the soccer field itself, guest-workers playing soccer also had limited interaction with the locals occupying space adjacent to the field spaces themselves. Despite times of physical proximity, there is still little overlapping between migrants' place and Taiwanese place. To an extent, this lack of overlapping demonstrates the efficacy of the guest-worker program as well as the strength of political projects of belonging in separating guest-workers from the rest of Taiwanese society.

Instead, the communities in which guest-workers participate evoke a strong sense of place through connections to 1) migrants' home countries as well as 2) connections with other types of migrants in Taiwan. First, the feeling of home which guest-workers experience through the soccer field are based upon connections to people and practices related to their homes, but distinct from the connections guest-workers maintain with home through digital connections. The sense of home which guest-workers associate with playing soccer in-person while in Taiwan, is in contrast with the digital connections that guest-workers are able to maintain with their homes in their sending locations. This sense of home experienced on the soccer field is also

juxtaposed with the workplace dormitories where guest-workers live while in Taiwan: their homes in Taiwan. Second, within diverse soccer-playing communities, participants expressed a sense of multiculturalism which they related to a shared identity of global soccer players. For guest-worker players this sense of cosmopolitanism was novel and valued, if not as strong as the sense of home and belonging which was cultivated through playing within co-ethnic communities.

The identification with home and global soccer respectively, were both unassociated with Taiwan. While the sense of home was related to a specific place, the global soccer identity was ubiquitous as to become placeless but was often out of place in Taiwan due to a local lack of interest in soccer. Despite this, the games were being played amongst Taiwanese society and within Taiwanese territorial space. Thus, the identities which these games mediated and impressed upon players are at odds with the idea of territorial space as uniform. This incongruity presents some contradictions that might be considered inherent to a guest-worker program as a policy context. Recall that the guest-worker program was established because the Taiwanese government was concerned about the effects of immigration on social cohesion but required migrants to bolster the local economy (Tseng and Wang, 2013). If a guest-worker program becomes a permanent policy solution to balance these pressures, it does not change the fact that migrants from Southeast Asia live and work in Taiwan; rather it cycles the population of migrant workers as they complete short-term contracts. In fact, the total number of migrants has grown steadily since the program initiation and increasingly over the last ten years as Taiwan grows reliant on foreign labor (Chien, 2023; Ministry of Labor, 2024a). Of course, the transitory nature of guest-workers in

Taiwan contributes to their lack of incorporation into Taiwanese society, but this section has highlighted some of the alternative identities which migrants establish and perpetuate while in Taiwan. These identities and even these notions of multiculturalism are at odds with the exclusionary policy which sought to limit their “social relations” within Taiwan (Tseng and Wang, 2013). Crucially, when new guest-workers arrive in Taiwan, they find these communities which were established by migrants before them, who might have already left Taiwan. The perpetuation of these communities demonstrates that – while these communities and the individual sense of belonging within them might be temporary in nature, as most migrants expect and desire to return to their homes in the long term – they create a territorial identity which outlasts individual terms of labor in Taiwan. These communities might be conceptualized as the temporary ethnic enclaves described as ‘ethnic arenas’ described by Chacko (Chacko, 2003), but they are even more transitory because of the power-geometry which dictates guest-workers’ limited duration in Taiwan. Describing the territorial identities which exist within these communities, and attending to this dissertation’s third research question, I use the term ‘guest-worker sense of place’ to conceptualize the identities associated with these communities. A guest-worker sense of place, while meaningful for individual participants while they remain in Taiwan, is temporary for the migrants who reproduce the places which create it. Meanwhile, the existence of these communities and their weekly gatherings are a permanent part of the host society as long as the guest-worker program continues as a policy. Because guest-worker programs are established to inhibit migrant incorporation, the sense of place which they produce are poorly connected to mainstream society, but not hermetically sealed from it. Furthermore, as

exemplified by the multicultural communities introduced in this chapter, the density and diversity of global networks under contemporary globalization introduces potential for places where guest-workers can establish themselves alongside other categories of migrants. Despite the power geometry of the guest-worker program, the eventfulness of place, that is the potential for places to bring together new and emergent social relations (Moore, 2025), opens up the potential for guest-workers to establish new types of communities and social relationships. So that, while being constrained from incorporating into local society, a guest-worker sense of place is open-ended and itself can incorporate other communities and identities into itself.

Conclusion

Towards the end of my fieldwork, I traveled to a high-quality AstroTurf field to play in a casual scrimmage for the multicultural Arrowhead FC against Ismail's Indonesian team. The field booking had been arranged by a Taiwanese player on Arrowhead FC who I will refer to as Kang Jia. Kang Jia told me that, as often was the case, the field had been difficult to book, and that recently Ismail's Indonesian team had asked him to rent the same field on their behalf. Once the game was over, the multicultural encounter was commemorated with a collection of photos taken of both teams together. The next group – a collection of Taiwanese players – arrived to play 'happy soccer' which referred to a style of play with limited contact. Several of the players were local players who also played for FC Arrowhead but had not attended the previous game. Kang Jia told me that these players had wanted to avoid playing with the Indonesian team due to perceptions of physicality. While driving me to the train station and discussing my research, Kang Jia explained that he liked playing with Indonesians and asserted that, increasingly, the Vietnamese community needed less help accessing field space. He also said that most Taiwanese people were accepting of guest-workers because Taiwan benefits from their labor, and because the migration was temporary. While Kang Jia personally expressed less qualified support of Southeast Asians in Taiwan, the reasons for their broader acceptance – their labor and their temporariness – demonstrated the logic that underpins the program.

Throughout, this dissertation has been guided by three research questions which seek to understand the role that guest-worker programs have on structuring mobility and impacting multicultural encounters:

1. How are guest-worker programs negotiated during the everyday lives of participating migrants?
2. What are the relationships between migrant social structures, the guest-worker regime, and public space?
3. How do the identities that are produced within a guest-worker program relate to other proximate territorial identities?

As described in the anecdote above, the last day of my fieldwork encapsulated many of the themes that appeared throughout my dissertation which are relevant to these research questions: the challenges which prevented guest-workers from accessing field space; the social networks which helped them navigate these challenges; and the multicultural sense of place. Presenting these themes, this dissertation addresses the everyday experiences of life within Taiwan's guest-worker program, within a migration regime which balances requirements for labor with an aversion to migrant incorporation. In Taiwan, guest-workers are able to create meaningful communities which help them adapt to the pressures of the guest-worker program. At the same time, these communities remain relatively separated from mainstream Taiwanese society. Previous studies within Taiwan and other similar policy contexts in East Asia, have demonstrated similar findings (Chen and Szeto, 2015; Dinkelaker, 2026; Yeoh and Lam, 2022). Focusing on migrant soccer leagues offers an empirical case where these strategies at times bridge cultural and visa-category distinctions, while reproducing the differences between types of migrants.

Chapter Three of this dissertation addresses the barriers which guest-workers face while leaving their workplaces to play soccer, conceptualizing these challenges as borderwork produced by political projects of governance and belonging. Building upon the critical border approach, Chapter Three also introduces some of the collective strategies and social relationships which guest-workers use to produce plasticity within the migration regime. Focusing on the negotiated nature of borderwork, I argue that this flexibility underscores the conjunctural quality of border processes. Focusing specifically on social networks, Chapter Four introduces the role that social capital has in producing the places where guest-workers play soccer. It explains that producing places for guest-workers to meet and play is a motivation for players' investment into these social structures. However, these social structures also play a role in reproducing the distinctions within the migration regime as they are often led and organized by migrants who have achieved permanent residence in Taiwan. Finally, in Chapter Five I explore the sense of place which exists within these soccer-playing communities. The subjective territorial identities within these places often reaffirm sending countries' cultural identities but are also shown to be distinct from the remote connections to home which migrants often maintain via digital connections. The fifth and final chapter concludes the dissertation by presenting a guest-worker sense of place which is produced by permanent temporary communities of migrants in Taiwan.

Findings: Place, Power Geometry, and Guest-Worker Programs

Following the humanistic turn in academic geography in the early 1990s, geographers began to debate whether the notion of place was inherently reactionary and exclusionary (Cresswell, 2015). Harvey argued that speaking of place refers to

exclusionary practices where space was bounded from the rest of society, to achieve permanence (Massey, 1991). Speaking of walls, gated communities, and even investment in places' public image, Harvey went on to argue that this permanence was often an outcome of capital's investment into fixity (Cresswell, 2015; Harvey, 1996). Taiwan's guest-worker program and other restrictive migration regimes have motivations which are similarly concerned with trying to maintain a perceived status quo within the ethnic and cultural make-up of a society. Massey, on the other hand, argues that Harvey's argument is based upon a misreading of what constitutes place, defining place as constituted by its relationships with elsewhere, "formed out of the particular set of social relations which interact at a particular location" (Massey, 1994). If this is so, then places are more open-ended, as global flows and new relations are incorporated into local contexts. Global connections are nothing unique to contemporary times (Horden and Purcel, 2000; Moch, 2009); however, since the 1980s there has been an acceleration and intensification of global connections (Massey, 1994). This acceleration played a role in creating these academic debates in geography and produced the economic and political conditions which have grown guest-worker programs globally (Boucher and Gest, 2018). Recall that migration scholars have described temporary labor migration (TLM) as a growing policy practice in the 21st century, replacing the mobilities which defined the 19th and 20th century (Boucher and Gest, 2018; Cook-martín, 2024; Dauvergne, 2016; International Labour Organisation ILO, 2022). This dissertation's main findings emerge from an effort to understand the sort of global connections which form through these new mobility paradigms.

Guest-worker programs are both an example of a TLM, and what Massey refers to as the power geometry of globalization. Referring to the power relations which have produced contemporary globalization, Massey points out that the resulting mobility is far from equal, with some groups of people experiencing mobility while not being in charge of the process (Massey, 1994). When migration takes place in the prism of these power relations, it impacts the relationships which constitute place. Demonstrating this effect, in Taiwan, guest-workers struggled to access field space, played on the worst fields, and depended upon better-positioned migrants for help. Not to mention their negative experiences with their employers and their unrelenting financial pressures. In addition, participants in interviews had limited interaction with local Taiwanese players. Thus, as guest-workers make space for themselves within this power geometry, there is an interplay between arriving migrants and the structural conditions and migration infrastructures which have brought them to Taiwan. Analyzing this interplay, Agnew's threefold approach to place provides a framework to parse the relationship between migrants' agency and the structures which affect their migrant incorporation in Taiwan. Agnew theorizes a processual approach to place where local power relations (locale) combine with external forces (location) and subjective territorial identities (sense of place) to reproduce the setting of everyday life through a process of social structuration (Agnew, 1987). In fact, Chapters Three, Four, and Five of this dissertation loosely follow this approach.

Focusing on the impact of top-down governance, Chapter Three uncovers the effect that participants' location within Taiwan's guest-worker program had on the organization of soccer games. Rather than limited to borderwork associated with the

regime itself, the chapter finds that socio-spatial exclusion experienced by migrants is often extra-legal; that is to say, borderwork is not necessarily associated with the regulations set out by migration policy. Borderwork unassociated with governance is well documented (Tuck et al., 2025), to the extent that Yuval-Davis labeled it “everyday bordering” (Yuval-Davis et al., 2019). As a non-western policy context and as an empirical case, Taiwan’s guest worker program contributes a new perspective to this literature. In this case, while the guest-worker program explicitly sets out to separate migrants from local society, there is still “everyday” bordering which exists beyond the scope of the restrictive regime itself.

Chapter Four directly addresses the local power relations which produce the field space where migrants meet to play soccer. To start, these ‘locales’ demonstrate how social structures contest and negotiate Taiwan’s bordering-scape, relying on enforceable norms as well as the resources of players who were more established in Taiwan to access field space. These contestations also demonstrate that admittance to public space can be a benefit accessed through social capital, similar to educational resources that some migrant groups in the United States benefit from because of membership within social networks (Zhou, 2009). The chapter also finds that, for the players, the motivation for playing soccer was closely related to the formation of social networks and place-making required for the games themselves. This finding emphasizes the close relationship between place and social relations.

Chapter Five directly approaches the sense of place which is associated with these communities. The chapter builds upon a burgeoning literature which argues that border externalization is a form of place production created by borderwork as well as

migrants (Cobarrubias et al., 2025; Novak, 2025). However, this chapter explores place reproduction within the context of a guest-worker program rather than the sense of place which is produced within a border region. The chapter relies on the term “guest-worker sense of place” to describe the persistent transient territorial identity that guest-worker communities produce while in Taiwan as a permanent temporary fix to economic trends which are unlikely to reverse. Chapter Five finds that these communities are well-established in Taiwan, even while they are disconnected from local communities.

Because of shifting policy and economic pressures, it is difficult to predict the long-term outcomes of this contested process. However, through the relatively narrow lens of soccer, it is evident that guest-workers have increasingly been able to establish themselves within Taiwan. The size and frequency of the tournaments described in this dissertation are testament to the places that guest-workers have created for themselves – at times with the help of others – in Taiwan. It would be a mistake to say that the growth of these communities is inherent to soccer or that their growth is inevitable. Rather, as argued in Chapter Three, these successes are partly due to the economic pressure to attract a foreign labor force, and to local and global concerns over human rights issues within the factories where guest-workers are employed. These pressures have produced modest reforms in the guest-worker program and have made a difference in guest-workers’ day-to-day experiences, if not changed their disadvantaged position within Taiwanese society.

Traditionally, migration studies have been dominated by case studies which are taken from policy contexts from the West, particularly the United States’ Southern Border and migration into the E.U. (King, 2012). These destinations remain important to

understanding global mobilities. Recently, scholars have distinguished the contemporary age of migration by its reliance on market mechanisms to determine acceptable migration (Boucher and Gest, 2018; Dauvergne, 2016). Taking policy contexts like Taiwan as a case study provides insights taken from a new and growing type of migrant destination (non-Western TLM), as Taiwan was an early adopter of market-mechanism migration policy (Surak, 2018). As a policy context that has always been restrictive of migrants, the Taiwanese case also provides insight into the effects on migrant incorporation that restrictive migration policy has over the long-term. Guest-workers' success in establishing places in Taiwan to meet for associational activity, as well as the separation of these places from mainstream Taiwanese society, demonstrate outcomes of migration policy which emphasize the temporariness of unskilled migrants. While seeking to preserve the cultural and ethnic composition of a society, this policy has resulted in a fragmentation of territorial space where communities exist with little interaction. Individual Southeast Asian guest-workers in Taiwan remain overwhelmingly temporary in Taiwan, but successive waves of guest-workers have been able to take up space, nonetheless.

Theoretical Contributions

From a theoretical perspective, this dissertation is interested in issues of structure and agency within modern mobility practices. This dissertation contributes to mobility theories by connecting migration studies and critical border studies literature to debates over structure and agency in geography and urban studies. These connections contribute to analytic approaches which make sense of a world that is at once extremely

interconnected and, as always, experienced by individuals through the setting of everyday life.

Chapter Three introduced a conjunctural approach to critical border studies, applying the concept of plasticity from urban studies, which spatializes Gramsci's notion of conjunctural analysis to theorize a dialectical relationship between agency at the local scale and structural forces at the general. Applying plasticity to the language of critical border studies provides a framework for the ongoing conversation over migration regimes and the practices of migrants who navigate bordering-scapes. Developing a conjunctural approach to border studies also contributes to emerging academic literature on conjunctural spatial analysis. Since spatial conjunctural analysis is explicitly invested in understanding 'problem spaces' (Peck, 2023), border practices offer an intuitive empirical case for investigating the role that local agency has in resisting structural forces operating at a more general scale. Like an analysis of neoliberal policies' negotiation within local contexts, a conjunctural approach to border studies explores the negotiation of border policy into the day-to-day life of migrants and locals who are involved in negotiating a bordering-scape. A bordering-scape can thus be conceived as a type of conjuncture.

This dissertation relies on social capital to investigate the collective strategies which migrants use to create plasticity within Taiwan's bordering-scape. In its original formulation, social capital was theorized to have a structural component, so that structure and agency is nothing new to theoretical approaches to social capital. Benefits from membership within social networks depend on an individual's position within social structures. Moreover, investment in social networks is argued to perpetuate social

structure hierarchies (Portes, 2009). As mentioned in Chapter Four, there has been considerable academic discussion over the contextualization of social capital, which endeavors to explain the empirical observation of social networks' varied outcomes. There is a modest place-based approach to social capital developed by geographers (Holt, 2008; Mohan and Mohan, 2002; Naughton, 2014). Developing this approach, this dissertation connects social capital to Agnew's place-based approach to structuration theory. Applying perspectives from political geography to migration studies offers an approach to the contextualization of social capital which emphasizes spatial scale as well as structure and agency. Within the migration studies literature, social capital has offered a valuable theoretical toolkit, to unpack migrant experiences in new places, and articulate the positive and negative outcomes which social networks produce for migrants as they arrive in new places. The place-based approach to social capital introduced in Chapter Four of this dissertation provides a framework for how social capital is contextualized in both local and general power relations.

The dissertation's approach to structure and agency is spatial, parsing between the local strategies that guest-workers rely upon to organize field space, and the policy and economic pressures which reproduce Taiwan's migration regime. This approach offers an explanation for how individuals, and more specifically people on the move, contend with the top-down structures which have produced the globalized world. Chapter Five of the dissertation explores the feelings associated with these processes. A 'sense of place' is almost a geographic cliché, because it is misunderstood as an intrinsically positive attribute, rather than a characteristic which every place engenders. However, as an analytic tool, 'sense of place' provides a lens to consider how these

articulations of structure and agency shape our subjectivities and communities. In some sense, this is similar to Bourdieu's notion of habitus, or the 'feel for the game' which individuals accumulate across various social fields (Bigo, 2011). However, 'sense of place' emphasizes a collective component that inherently groups people together based upon shared experiences of space. Empirically, for guest-worker soccer players in Taiwan, the sense of community and identity concomitant with playing soccer was incentive to overcome the barriers associated with the organization of games during their limited time away from work. From a theoretical perspective, this finding reaffirms that 'sense of place' and the subjectivity of migrants, should be considered alongside the economic forces and power dynamics which produce a bordering-scape.

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Appendix A

Player Interview Outline:

Questions primarily attending to my first research question

1. What is the story of how you began to play soccer in Taiwan?
2. How often do you play soccer a week?
3. Do you play as much soccer as you would like? If not, what constraints prevent you from playing more?
4. Can you tell me about your daily schedule on days that you go to play soccer?

Questions primarily attending to my second research question

1. Since you began to play soccer in Taiwan has it become easier or more difficult to find and attend soccer games?
2. Do relationships formed through play make it easier to attend more games?

Questions primarily attending to my third research question

1. Can you tell me about a friend you have made through playing soccer?
2. What are the benefits of playing soccer?
3. Has playing soccer introduced you to new friends?
4. What sort of new friends have you made through playing soccer in Taiwan?
5. Has playing soccer made you feel more at home in (area that participant lives)?
6. Has playing soccer made you feel more at home in Taiwan?
7. Has playing soccer made you feel more or less understood by locals?