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The visible hand behind study-abroad waves : cram schools, organizational framing and the international mobility of Chinese students / Le Lin

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Abstract

This paper adds an organizational dimension to the body of literature on international student mobility. Existing studies examine push/pull factors and student motivations, neglecting that students' motivations and demands are not necessarily spontaneous, but can be shaped by external forces. Drawing on interview, archival and observation data collected on four leading cram schools that prepare students for the TOEFL/GRE, IELTS and SAT in China, I argue that cram schools not only coach students on test preparation and "how to study abroad," but they also adopt organizational framing to instill in students "why to study abroad." Leading cram schools have played an integral role in promoting a certain organizational framing as the dominant approach of a niche market in a given era. During the 1990s, when the TOEFL/GRE niche market was rapidly expanding, the market leader in this niche promoted self-help and nationalism as dominant discourses. Self-help discourse frames overseas study and test preparation not as means, but as the ends of students' lives: going

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beyond one's limit and making one's life complete. Nationalist discourse depicts overseas study as a detour to build a stronger China after learning from the West. After 2000, however, new organizational framing picked up momentum in the new niche markets of IELTS and SAT. Targeting urban middle-class consumers, market leaders in these new niches increasingly framed studying abroad as a springboard for immigration, a channel for becoming global elites and an opportunity for status improvement for the entire family. My article bridges literature on transnational higher education with studies on supplementary education. (HRK / Abstract übernommen)