

Examining the fabrics of match-fixing: The underground sport betting system

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Abstract

This study aims to examine the very fabrics of underground sport betting system that is associated with match-fixing. Mafia, syndicates, and bookmakers are the three levels of actors in the hierarchy. Having grassroots bookmakers as our particular focus, we examine their roles and networks, what regulates the system, and how the system functions. Thanks to our academic links with the mafia, we had access to bookmakers to carry out observations and 25 interviews. We rely on the social capital model in which structural, relational and cognitive dimensions are identified. Findings reveal that actors are empowered by their social capital to streamline their underground business. Far from the stereotype of a competitive market under the control and coercion of very powerful mafia, our observations of bookmakers, mainly women, show that they cooperate, trust each other, and have great autonomy in their activities. Because of their strong shared culture and networks, betting activities are considered acceptable in their own small community.

Keywords

match-fixing, underground sport betting, social capital, Taiwan, mafia, culture, regulation

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When it comes to match-fixing cases, those in Taiwan, always linked to underground betting, are ironically famous¹ (Lee, 2017). To fight against these problems, the government set up a legal framework and in 2008 a legal sport betting provider commenced the business. Three features are identified in its history. First, a change of dealership in 2012 (two years earlier than it ought to be) due to its unpopularity and a series of financial difficulties. Second, a corruption scandal (fraud) at the management level in 2011 that destroyed its credibility. Third, recurring scandals in which legal betting centers were also involved in underground bets. The authorities concerned were consequently censored by the government watchdog (Chen, 2013; Long, 2012; Yeh, 2012). Compared to that, the underground betting system benefits from being the alternative for clients. It is composed of three levels, the mafia, the syndicates and the bookmakers². It has a clear division of work, with the former two as the organized crime groups manipulating the system and the third as their grassroots collaborators. Making empirical observations on the mafia is rarely accessible for social scientists and consequently few systematic studies have been conducted. This is the feature of our study. Thanks to the first author's academic links with the mafia, it was possible for us to understand the social practices of bookmakers related to illegal betting. This access to the field has made it possible to go beyond the idea that the market is solely driven by profits, corruption, and fraud, and to identify social roots of such practices.

Indeed, sport and betting are by nature highly associated as uncertainty of results is one reason why they can be attractive (Forrest and Simmons, 2003; Huggins, 2018; Vodde, 2013). Besides, the links between match-fixing and betting are also well identified (Brooks et al., 2013; IRIS, 2012)³. A further examination of the scholarship on match-fixing and betting reveals that: a) more is known from the perspectives of economists, rather than sociologists (Forrest, 2018; Rebeggiani and Rebeggiani, 2013); b) legal betting is more discussed than illegal betting (Aquilina, 2019; Asser Institute, 2014); c) illegal betting operated by organized crime groups is an emerging concern (Anderson, 2019; Hill, 2016; Spapens, 2017).

However, limited systematic studies have been conducted to investigate the real operations of underground betting. We know that match-fixing is linked to underground betting (Haberfeld and Abbott, 2013; Opie and Steele, 2018; Villeneuve and Pasquier, 2019), and that on-the-field match-fixing has to do with off-the-field arrangements (Tzeng et al., 2020). Less is known about the illegal betting providers and how they run their business. More precisely, the roles and functions of grassroots bookmakers are rarely discussed in the scholarship. Such disproportionate development is somehow problematic, and a better understanding of the organizational field will not be possible without investigating its operation. The necessity to explore this missing puzzle is self-evident. As money matters to activate the leverage between match-fixing and betting (Anderson, 2019), it is time to study more about the other side of the story, namely, the cash flow by which criminal groups can eventually corrupt athletes. Besides, economists' approaches based on rational choice theory fail to explain thoroughly the interaction and mechanism in the complex social setting (Rebeggiani and Rebeggiani, 2013). Examining the system with a sociological gaze is important as classic economic analysis neglects the social relations in which markets are embedded (Granovetter, 1985). This is especially true in the case of match-fixing, which relies on trustworthy networks of actors.

This study asks: a) how the business networks of the mafia, syndicates, and bookmakers are configured; b) what regulates the system; c) how the system functions. For the first concern, as the mafia's manipulation of coaches and athletes is explored (see Tzeng et al., 2020), it is high time to check the other part of the story. For the second and the third, it has to do with resources mobilized or exchanged, if not only in the form of financial or material resources. Because match-fixing relies on the grassroots bookmakers and their networks, as we will demonstrate, the social capital constructs are highly relevant to these questions and will be the theoretical foundation of this paper.

By investigating the grassroots operation of the system, this study has its empirical and theoretical values. Empirically, it reflects on the assumption that legal and regulated provision of sport betting can reduce social problems associated with illegal or unregulated delivery of the same services. In addition, applying social capital constructs to examine an illegal market activates theoretical dialogues, notably on the role and effects of social capital that can be used to serve alternative functions.

Underneath match-fixing: The betting

The strong association between sport and betting is well identified (Huggins, 2018; Vodde, 2013). Some accept the fact as it is, while others claim to decouple their association (Forrest and Simmons, 2003). Villeneuve and Pasquier (2019: 1) observed that betting has “a transversal role in society: it is an economic sector, a popular form of entertainment, a source of financial revenue of states and much more. It is when coupled with another important social activity, sport, that gambling takes on its most diverse, complex and involved nature.” As a form of sports corruption, match-fixing is generally believed to have links with betting (Brooks et al., 2013; IRIS, 2012). In the definition of IRIS (2012: 6), match-fixing is “any manipulation or attempted manipulation of a result or aspect of a game with the aim of enrichment on the sports betting market”. This is a typical economic perspective whose underlying explanation of social actions is only directed toward economic rationality.

A further examination of the scholarship on match-fixing and betting also reveals that economists are more active than scholars of other disciplines (Forrest, 2018; Rebeggiani and Rebeggiani, 2013). We do not rebut economists' approaches, but their strength and weakness are just as its proponent have claimed “to single out different factors influencing the behavior of the involved actors and to evaluate their respective contribution to the cheating decision” (Rebeggiani and Rebeggiani, 2013: 165). This demonstrates that a complete picture of match-fixing cannot be well silhouetted only from the economic perspective. We share similar concerns as economists who endeavor to discern mechanisms and enabling factors favoring sports corruption. But we believe that a more comprehensive framework is necessary to complement the rational choice perspective which does not give much attention to social networks and interactions that occur in the real world. With the sociological lens of this study, we aim to extend a more evidence-based knowledge of the system.

Besides, more has been done to examine the mixing part of match-fixing, rather than the betting part (Dietl and Weingärtner, 2014). We know that there is a link between

match-fixing and betting (Haberfeld and Abbott, 2013; Opie and Steele, 2018; Villeneuve and Pasquier, 2019), but the reality of betting has been largely overlooked. Blackshaw (2012: 6) mentioned that “there is often more to play for off than on the field of play”. Van Rompuy (2016: 237) argued that “betting-related match-fixing is a covert and consensual activity, which makes it extremely difficult to detect instances of fraud”. Similar to Hill (2013), Anderson (2019: 74) claimed that “it is the criminal, shadowy web of intermediaries wherein lies the problem”. In Anderson’s elaboration, a conspirator of match-fixing must ensure that three conditions are met: a) the fixing taking place as expected, b) the manipulation of betting markets, and c) the collection of the betting money. The last two conditions are about betting, but they remain empirically and theoretically undetected. Truly, money matters to activate the leverage between match-fixing and betting. But the other side of the story, namely, the cash flow by which criminal groups can corrupt athletes, has been neglected. It is time to study this “black box”.

Though some scholars start paying attention to betting, many issues remain unexplored. The spotlight is on legal betting entities (Aquilina, 2019; Vodde, 2013), though some have studied the illegal betting operated by organized crime groups (e.g. Anderson, 2019; Hill, 2016; Spapens, 2017). Hill (2016: 231–232) made it clear: “anti-match-fixing industry is drowning in nonsense—nonsense that is being propagated by a mixture of commercial agendas (of bookmakers)” who “misdirected the debate by emphasizing the issue of ‘illegal betting’ rather than match-fixing...it helps bookmakers gain a commercial advantage over their rivals if they can declare them ‘illegal’”. These less known betting operators still run their business even though they are labeled illegal by the so-called legal betting entities. Their system deserves more academic attention if the scientific research is supposed to help our better understanding of match-fixing that covers both the fixing and betting parts.

Certainly, there is still much to explore in the “betting” part. Different from the mainstream studying the fixing part, we shift our attention to other side of the story: betting that generates financial sources to feed match-fixing. Here, we can imagine that various actors at different levels are involved. By investigating forces of social mechanism among actors involved in the betting part, this study offers a complementary gaze at the social basis of match-fixing. Examining sports corruption, Kihl (2018: 202) claimed that “corruption is both a state and process”. Moreover, as argued by Rebeggiani and Rebeggiani (2013: 165), the legal perspective is too narrow while the moral one is short of convincing employability. Here, we may envisage that diverse dimensions shall be examined. In short, to study the dynamics of underground betting from a sociological perspective, the theoretical constructs shall fulfill two criteria: cross-level and multi-dimensional.

First, since criminal organizations are involved in match-fixing (Haberfeld and Abbott, 2013; Villeneuve and Pasquier, 2019), we share the same idea of Kihl et al. (2017) that cross-level analysis is needed to examine sports corruptions. In the context of corruption, it entails both the corrupters and the corruptible (IRIS, 2012). These two kinds of actors can be in the form of individuals and groups/organizations, a micro-meso approach is thus appropriate. Second, following other works whose concerns are similar to ours (e.g. Numerato, 2008; Numerato and Baglioni, 2012; Tzeng and Lee, 2021), we believe that a comprehensive framework to study sports corruption should at least

incorporate the structural, relational, and cognitive dimensions of the social capital. That way, we shall be able to better understand the social basis of the underground activities.

Social capital constructs in sports corruption studies

Underground betting is usually considered a typical social activity motivated solely by profit maximization without moral values. From an outsider's view, match-fixing is a corruption-based fraud that could fit the ideal market model of the "classical economy". Since there should be no legal constraints, neither social responsibility nor justice, actors should behave as *homo oeconomicus* with limited social constraints on their activities. However, as kind of insiders, we observed that actors are embedded in social networks which are enabling factors for the existence and operation of the system. These networks and their carried benefits can be analyzed from the perspective of social capital, which is considered an important form of capital (Bourdieu, 1986) and its concepts are widely applied. It has several meanings and dimensions that are important to understand markets and organizations of social embeddedness. Business studies already analyzed them in business cases, but it is only recently applied by sports sociologists to study match-fixing (Tzeng and Lee, 2021) and other forms of sports corruption.

The theoretical framework of social capital developed by Nahapiet and Ghoshal (1998) has its merits in this study as it covers both micro and meso analysis levels and three dimensions: structural (network ties, network configuration, appropriate organizations), relational (trust, norms, obligation, identification), and cognitive (shared codes and language, shared narratives) (Nahapiet and Ghoshal, 1998: 251). The cross-level analysis approach helps to explore the links among social capital, markets, and organizations. But little is known about non-transparent and controversial markets such as match-fixing and betting, as well as how the "bright side" of social capital transforms into its "dark side". More precisely, we do not know well how that "bright side" of social capital serves illegal betting, i.e., the intermediary via which its "dark side" is activated. The distinction of structural, relational, and cognitive dimensions of social capital can explain how the system functions, what regulates it, and how the business networks are configured. These three concerns have corresponding dimensions: actors' cognition has to do with the first question; actors' relational issues must be considered when examining the regulation, especially in the underground context; actors' embedded networks and structure are the prerequisite of the aforementioned two aspects.

In the scholarship of sports corruption, the constructs of social capital are already applied in other works—those of Costa (2018), Numerato (2008), and Numerato and Baglioni (2012) are concrete examples. A review of these pioneers' studies reveals that the concept of "social capital" needs further elaboration because a) their understanding of the same term varies—Costa saw it as a single or collective concept while Numerato proposed a more nuanced classification of its dimensions; b) Numerato (and colleague) did not distinguish the lack of social capital and its dark side; c) we already know that the three dimensional social capital constructs help to understand sports corruption such as match-fixing, but there are very few empirical evidences of underground activities in which

these three dimensions are activated. Do some social conditions exist so that three dimensions of social capital can exert a role respectively?

Methodology

Thanks to our academic connections with the mafia, it was possible to engage in the snowballing that was a top-down process—firstly from the mafia to syndicates, then from syndicates to bookmakers, and finally a horizontal outreach (from bookmakers to bookmakers). Professional contacts with the mafia and syndicates at the upper level were already constructed, and it was from these gatekeepers that bookmakers were approached. Through bookmakers it became possible for us to understand how bookmakers do their business with clients⁴. Though not completely intentionally arranged, for two reasons bookmakers are the group in which we recruited the most informants. In terms of the function, bookmakers are the fundamental part of the system but this women's labor, often economically and symbolically devalued, corresponds to the "invisible work" (Hatton, 2017). In sport betting and match-fixing scholarship, little is done to study who they are and their function although there are many more bookmakers than syndicates and the mafia.

For public health concerns, three rounds of fieldwork were implemented as access to informants varied according to the COVID-19 actuality in Taiwan. The first was conducted online from January to March 2020. At that time Taiwan had few COVID-19 cases but the syndicates and bookmakers already started preparing for worse situations. The second was from April to August 2020 when face-to-face interviews and on-site observations⁵ were possible thanks to the decreased impacts of COVID-19. Based on the mutual trust established in the first two rounds, we were able to keep regular contacts with informants in the third round, from September 2020 to August 2021. It was mainly during the third period that we accumulated thick data from our socio-anthropological approaches. Table 1 illustrates detailed information about the 25 informants of this study.

The betting part of match-fixing made possible thanks to actors' social capital

While we examined the underworld's business prosperity, it was at a unique time when high-profile professional sports events were canceled or delayed due to COVID-19. However, underworld actors did not stop their sport betting business. They still had other targets to bet, ranging from football matches at local level to whether the Tokyo Olympic Games would take place as planned. When the situation became a little bit normal (e.g. Europe Cup and Tokyo Olympic Games in summer in 2021), betting money and targets again focused on these high-profile events. They developed their own warning devices to ensure that their underground activities functioned well. It helped to avoid police interrogations and to reset the odds of the betting if necessary. Ironically, though the sport governing bodies have their own whistle blower functions, the underworld has its own countermeasures. Despite the

Table 1. The detailed information about the informants of this study.

| Role & function | Informant code | Gender | Age | Years of experience; full time (FT) or part time (PT) in betting (other non-betting jobs) | Urban/Rural | Other notes (e.g. marital status etc.) |
|-----------------|----------------|--------|-------------------------------|---|-----------------|--|
| Mafia | M1 | M | 40s | 25; FT | Urban | Married |
| | M2 | M | 50s | 35; FT | Urban | Blended family |
| | S1 | M | 60s | 30; FT | U + R | Married (has a mistress), nephew of B1 |
| | S2 | M | 60s | 45; FT | U + R | Married, brother of S3 |
| Syndicate | S3 | M | 50s | 35; FT | U + R | Married with B6, brother of S2 |
| | S4 | M | 50s | 20; FT | Urban | Starting underground economy after being married with someone whose family business is betting |
| Bookmaker | S5 | M | 50s | 35; FT | Rural | Married with B5 |
| | B1 | F | 65 + | 40; PT (hair salon) | U + R | Separate (her husband used to have a mistress) |
| | B2 | F | 70s | 40; PT (grocery shop) | Rural | Married (her husband used to have a mistress) |
| | B3 | F | 65 + | 40; PT (agriculture) | Rural | Widow |
| | B4 | F | 60s | 40; PT (caregiving) | Rural | Divorced, sister of a prison guard |
| | B5 | F | 50s | 40; PT (tailoring) | Rural | Married with S5, her husband used to have a mistress, adopted a son due to her infertility |
| | B6 | F | 40s | 20; FT | U + R | Married with S3, used to be a sex worker |
| | B7 | F | 65 + | 35; FT | U + R | Married with C1 |
| | B8 | F | 50s | 30; PT (golf caddie) | U + R | Married with C2 |
| B9 | F | 60s | 30; PT (financial consultant) | Rural | Married with C3 | |

(Continued)

Table 1. (continued)

| Role & function | Informant code | Gender | Age | Years of experience; full time (FT) or part time (PT) in betting (other non-betting jobs) | Urban/Rural | Other notes (e.g. marital status etc.) |
|--------------------|----------------|--------|------|---|-------------|--|
| | B10 | F | 50s | 20; PT (agriculture) | Rural | Married, mother of 6 daughters and 1 son |
| | B11 | F | 50s | 25; PT (food and beverage) | U + R | Married with P1 |
| | B12 | F | 65 + | 30; PT (sex services) | Urban | N/A, a sex worker |
| Other collaborator | C1 | M | 65 + | 30; PT (temple chairperson) | U + R | Married with B7, used to be president of a parent association supporting school sports |
| | C2 | M | 50s | 30; PT (temple chairperson) | U + R | Married with B8, village head |
| | C3 | M | 60s | 40; PT (transport of agriculture, retired) | Rural | Married with B9 |
| | C4 | M | 40s | 15; PT (manager of an agriculture cooperation) | U + R | Used to be a bookie |
| | C5 | M | 50s | 30; PT (transport of aquaculture) | U + R | S4 is his oldest cousin's son in law |
| Police | P1 | M | 50s | N/A | U + R | Married with B11 |

COVID-19, both their whistle blower mechanism and the continuation of underworld activities were made possible through the mobilization of social capital. This can be analyzed with three dimensions of social capital as proposed by Nahapiet and Ghoshal (1998).

The network configuration of actors involved in the system

The division of work

From our fieldwork, we realized that the mafia, syndicates, and bookmakers have different functions in the system—the mafia governs the system, the syndicates manage it, and the bookmakers operate it. More precisely, the nuances between the syndicates and bookmakers are as follows: a) syndicates work directly for the mafia while bookmakers in general do not have direct contacts with the mafia; b) except betting, syndicates do other illegal business (e.g. sex business and drug transactions). Compared to that, bookmakers have other *normal* jobs while betting is their part time job (though they might earn more from it); c) for the mafia, syndicates are their primary collaborators while bookmakers are the secondary. The mafia's devolution to the syndicates is recognized, not only technically but also strategically. Compared to that, the syndicate-bookmaker relationship is a quasi-subordinate one⁶. When the mafia asks the syndicates to collect grass-roots information, it is a top-down order. But when a bookmaker reports issues to a syndicate, it is more for the reason of mutual aid and reciprocity.

These mafia, syndicates, and bookmakers are all multi-tasked in terms of their betting activities. Illegal sport betting is the major one, but other illegal betting such as the Mark Six⁷ is also important for them. However, different from the mafia and syndicates who are involved in the diversified business such as pachinko (a mechanical game with its origin from Japan), slot machines, and underground mahjong spaces, a majority of bookmakers and their clients focus on illegal sport betting and lottery. For bookmakers, these two are platforms where they hold their hopes to win or to earn a living. More specifically, based on our fieldwork, there exist some bookmakers who only do illegal lottery business without sport betting, but those doing illegal sport betting usually include lottery as their services.

From our on-site observation, there seems to be a clear gender and age division. The bookmakers are mainly older women (12 bookmakers in our sample), while the mafia and syndicates at the higher level who govern and manage the system are mainly male (7 out of 7 in our sample) and younger than the bookmakers (see Table 1). The system is quite stable and not conflictual. Neither our observations nor interviews allow us to identify tensions among actors, and to question the roles of each and the division of labor. To understand the stability of this structured division of labor, Abbott's analysis can be applied since he suggest to extend his model and apply it to 'the whole social world in the form of linked ecologies' (Abbott, 2005: 247). The activities of actors at different level and of different functions are clearly defined, and this corresponds to the relatively stable "linked ecologies" where actors do not encroach on each other's "jurisdictions". Consequently, actors do not feel threatened and they trust each other mostly.

The importance of pre-existing social bonds

This stability of mafia-syndicate-bookmaker jurisdictions, and consequently of the division of labor, is based on actors' social networks⁸, especially networks derived from the family⁹, neighborhood, and business. Social networks from these sources produce trust. Besides, other forms of collaborators exist in the system, and they are mainly from two backgrounds: transport and religion. The importance of transport (mainly for the primary industry such as agriculture and fishery) corresponds to the fact that betting is deeply rooted in the rural society. Transport is also used to deliver betting money, especially when the quantity is large. Religion is an important part of actors' shared culture, and it binds these actors. For those who bet, it offers something similar to the blue-chip stocks, lucky numbers or bets. On the other hand, this information also influences the odds design and the decisions of bookmakers and syndicates (whether they are to keep or to forward bets).

In general, bookmakers run betting business (i.e. they are service providers) but they also like betting themselves. Almost all bookmakers take betting as their second job and their main profession is from a variety of backgrounds. Different from the fulltime mafia and syndicates, bookmakers and other collaborators are involved in betting-related activities as their part time job. Some even have their family members working in the law enforcement agencies. There seems little occupational discrimination against these bookmakers in the Taiwanese society as no one reported that s/he hid his/her involvement in betting business in their family and social life. The bookmakers are themselves buyers and sellers of bets, but a majority of bookmakers reported that their income was mainly from betting, rather than selling bets. This was because bookmakers can freely make transactions with other bookmakers and syndicates, and they may receive insiders' information from their uplines.

The network ties and configurations are based on the appropriable organizations of networks. According to Nahapiet and Ghoshal (1998), it means that networking originally for one reason can serve other purposes. For example, clients for bookmakers can be someone in their family, in the neighborhood, and introduction through the third party. For the syndicate-bookmaker interactions, quite often it is also based on existing networks originally carrying other functions. Indeed, the nature of being underworld necessitates the transformation of existing networks, and the evaluation of compatibility plays a decisive role therein. A syndicate emphasized:

In theory, everyone can be a bookmaker as long as s/he can afford to pay clients. But in reality, this is a business that needs a good risk management all the time. Before entering, you must check if it suits you. Who are your potential clients? What products you can sell? To whom you can forward bets if you don't want to keep them? (S1)

Quite often, business initiatives are supported by social bonds that are appropriable. This strengthens the compatibility of business relationships. A bookmaker whose husband is a police officer shared her story:

At the beginning my husband didn't support my idea [to be a bookmaker]. He even asked me to go away and get fucked¹⁰. But I sensed the business opportunities because I'd many acquaintances who liked betting, and they also supported my idea (B11).

For her, the issue of compatibility was not only about her income but also about her family. Her husband recalled:

Our social circles did not have too much overlapping, so I chose to turn a blind eye. After all, each one has his/her own things. As long as my work wasn't influenced and she's happy in her own circle, then it's OK. (P1)

Not only the entry and training are highly linked with social networks, the business development also has to do with their social ties, especially during the difficult times.

During the pandemics, lots of professional sports events were cancelled. You may imagine that we've suffered a lot, but it's not true. Thanks to our acquaintances, we immediately managed to find other things to bet. For example, matches at the county level or even other non-sports targets. And this summer we've Tokyo Olympic Games and Europe Cup of football, so we came back to these international sports events. We're very flexible. (S4)

Dense and meticulous networks exist among actors, and these network configurations have to do with how the business is organized. The social ties are also strongly articulated in their business decision. Potential clients and other business partners exist within their social networks. But the existence of these networks does not guarantee opportunities that are to be searched or created by actors. The presence of opportunities is one thing, but to what extent one can take advantage of these opportunities is another thing. This explains why the evaluation of compatibility matters. Once entering in the network, the strong social bond keeps actors staying in the system. This has to do with trust and the predictability derived accordingly.

A need for predictability: The central role of obligations, norms, and trust

In bookmakers' business, tainted by match-fixing and linked to the syndicate and mafia, one would expect a low degree of trust and honesty. However, within the system, the relational forms of social capital are central. For example, honesty is an obligation to maintain trust and a violation of such obligation incurs punishment:

A neighbor was my downline. She and her husband had a shop selling pesticides. She cheated me by changing her bets at the last minute. I've got two versions of her bets. I knew the tricky things she's done so immediately I shouted loudly on the street because I wanted to make it well known in the village. After that it's hard for her to keep doing the business and her family had to move away from our village. (B6)

Yang (2015) observed that traditional banishment used by the clan and other rural communities in ancient China to deal with its internal conflicts can help prevent the intervention of a higher legal authority. In the present case, such banishment prevents and preserves the betting networks that are intricate with the local networks, strengthening the predictability by reminding everyone of the cost of *misbehavior*. For two sides of the

transaction, it is an obligation to guarantee the stable supply of services and products, as well as the prompt payment. Again, a violation of this may cause problems.

Everyone is prepared to play the game as usual at the expected time. If suddenly my clients cannot find me [to bet], it's annoying for them so they will go elsewhere. Nobody does that [no show]. If it's short-term, I ask someone to receive bets and payment on behalf of me. If it's long-term, for example a retirement, then we suggest clients and downlines possible alternatives. Anyway, it's a business based on trust and responsibility. (C1)

It is only when two sides know each other very well and trust each other that debits or deferred payments are accepted, otherwise outstanding payment must be received the next day of a game. This is about the bookmaker-client relationship. Indeed, in the bookmaker-bookmaker and bookmaker-syndicate interaction, actors conform to their social norms. For example, a bookmaker (downline) forwards bets to another bookmaker (upline), who again forwards bets to a syndicate. In general, the downline bookmaker is not supposed to contact (or have access to) the syndicate. That means, the vertical cross-level interaction is limited to one level. This explains why a majority of bookmakers reported that they did not know that their betting money was used by the mafia to fix matches eventually¹¹.

Up to this point, we know that obligations and norms contribute to the stability of the system. In fact, trust matters for risk aversion.

If I receive too many bets [of the same odds], then I'll forward them to other bookmakers and syndicates in whom I trust. This for me is a way to manage risks. If the clients win, then we [me and others accepting bets forwarded by me] share the prices. You don't want others disappear the next day, so you only want to collaborate with those in whom you trust (B10)

The mutual trust generates predictability, leading to a market featuring both competition and collaboration. Trust does not fall from the sky but is instead something that needs to be carefully cultivated. A syndicate explained how the system is well protected, thus assuring predictability even in the case of divulging police interrogation. The system is quite efficient in terms of uplines informing downlines the possibility of police investigation.

The underground economy is very sensitive to recognize the trend and to detect the straw in the wind. The police just want to get it over with and go home. So as long as we do it in a discreet way and we don't make trouble with the police, we can be in peace with them. (S2)

The predictability is also increased by concealing information from the police, while protecting the bookmakers who ought to be arrested. The system enables the police to fulfill their mission in exchange of limited interference, while also maintaining trust among actors involved. As M2 explained:

A fixed and regular cost for us is to keep a good relationship with the police. They need to report their good performance so we can satisfy them by arranging some not-so-important bookmakers

to be caught. We pay for bookmakers' fine or legal expenses. But in return, the police must also update me in advance their actions so that my own syndicates and bookmakers will be ready to hide. (M2)

Due to COVID-19, many international sports events were canceled or postponed. New techniques and standards were taught to bookmakers to increase predictability during the uncertain period. The mafia decided to target domestic sports events, but this required bookmakers to learn smartphones for the first time in their life. This transfer took place during the lunar new year in 2020, and many bookmakers reported that they only asked colleagues in whom they trusted for technical assistance.

At our age it's hard to learn new tech. That kind of interface [on smartphones] is just too complicated. My upline [syndicate] taught me already, but when I forgot something, I just asked some bosom buddies. But attention, I didn't ask whoever around me. Because there's always sensitive information [i.e., pricing with each client], I only asked those in whom I trust (B4)

Trust matters to run the business. The exclusion of someone who dares to cross the bottom line reinforces the internal governance and thus makes the whole structure quite stable. Given the sense of community being strengthened, actors' "good will" and efforts to stay in the system were activated, thus reinforcing the solidarity of the system.

Shared codes and narratives of the cognitive social capital feed solidarity

Given the nature of betting, one might imagine that the solidarity of the system is weak because any banker bets for his/her own interests but against others' interests. However, the solidarity can be consolidated thanks to several cognition-related factors, from the individual to the collective level.

First, most bookmakers did not care that there might be potential links between their betting on sport and fixed matches. They considered betting morally acceptable by dramatizing their risky business—each one bets against the other's interests. For example, the syndicates want the house money of bookmakers and clients, and the same for other two kinds of actors. They also used the advantageous comparison as a "technique of neutralization" (Becker, 1963). A bookmaker stated:

Business is business. As a bookmaker I'm running risks when receiving bets from clients, and a syndicate who dares take my bets also runs risks...Others' winning means my loss. Actually, I don't feel guilty to do this kind of business. At least I'm not cheating like those politicians. (B7)

It is necessary to consider both the ends and means. In general, informants agreed that engaging in the underground economy may not be considered a profession with a good reputation. But they tend to ignore the means and highlight the ends as the "bright side"—financial support, economic independence, possibility of a better life,

and even a stronger neighborhood bonding. The first two are self-evident, while the last two crystalize Taiwanese culture that appreciates family value and community awareness¹².

As long as my children can receive good education, have university degrees, find a good job, get married, have children... for me that's enough. If it's the return of my not-so-honorable business, I'm OK. Children's achievement is the best gift for parents, isn't it? (B5)

A village head mentioned:

Mutual aid in the neighborhood is part of our daily life. In the village each household is far from each other and old people live alone in isolated houses. Sometimes when an old person dies, it's the bookmaker who found this because as usual this old person should have already called the bookmaker to bet, but today there's no call. Or, if a client will go on a trip, then s/he will inform me in advance so that I worry less. It's normal in our daily life. (C2)

Up to this point, in the individuals' perceptions, doing the business for bookmakers means a) no intention, no will, and no capacity to manipulate game results, and b) the ability to feed oneself and to help others. At a more collective level, social factors are even more crucial for the solidarity of the system. When evaluating the compatibility and reinforcing the predictability, economic and social issues were both taken into consideration. For economic reasons bookmakers decided to have betting as their second business so that they earn more income. But it is their social bonds, based on shared experiences, that kept them in the system and pushed them forward. A good example is a cooperation established by five women (B1–B5) who had suffered from what their husbands had done. Their leader explained:

We're five women that have, if you want, useless men as our husbands. They're troublemakers in the family. But we as strong women cannot let it be. We had to do something for the family. So, we launched this cooperation. But the more we're involved in, the more fun we've got. We had lots of discussions together, not only for business but also for many other things in our daily life. Finally, it became more for our mutual aid, not just for money. (B1)

These women could not rely on their husbands to cope with their precarious social condition. They had therefore developed solidarity within their small group and, in addition to these strong bonds, their sharing stories and know-how further strengthened these bonds. Thus, it was possible for them to secure autonomy by doing their own economic activities. A woman in the cooperation recalled:

My husband stepped out on me and I was economically in trouble. Luckily my bosom buddies introduced me to this business. They shared with me their know-how, clients, uplines, and downlines. (B2)

Another example of such collective belief is the intertwining of betting activities and bettors' religious practices. Two bookmakers are married with temple chairpersons—the wives are in charge of downstream distribution and application of information produced

by their husbands of the upstream. In bettors' perceptions, going to temples is not only ritual but also has practical reasons. Temples are important sources from which bettors get advices in several ways: they draw lots, cast the moon blocks (two divination blocks in the half-moon shape), listen to what the spirit mediums transfer from the deities, observe the shape of incense ashes, and request the deities to send them messages in their dreams. These are concrete examples of bettors' shared codes and languages. When bettors win¹³, they make good on their promises by offering something to the deities, such as a gold medal, a show, and even the renovation or construction of the temple. In brief, it is based on oracles that bettors try to get wanted answers. These oracles are usually in the form of numbers or animals (this can be linked to the mascots in sports), as well as other events that carry indications.

As a part of their culture, religious practices are deeply intertwined with betting activities, and these two are embedded in their social life. Actors thus found it difficult and not necessary to withdraw from betting and the whole system, even just to pause for a while. Economic consideration was one reason, while strong social bonds were another factor.

I've presbyopia so it's hard for me to handle it at my age. But I won't stop it, otherwise I'll get lost in my life. It's not for money because my children can give me money. Instead, it's for my health. Betting and receiving bets are part of my life since longtime, I can't afford to get rid of my social circle like that. My daughter also reminded me that I might get dementia very soon if I stop. (B3)

As in other cases, for B3, identification with a group can be a key resource for social recognition and plays a central role in a person's life. Embodied in codes, narratives, and languages, actors' shared beliefs are part of their culture that consolidates their social bonds. This explains why the system can be stable and predictable. In short, actors' culture, their betting activities, and their social bonds are mutually embedded.

Discussion and conclusion

Match-fixing is often imagined as an activity mobilized by the violent mafia who corrupt athletes, referees, or sports managers, and who force bookmakers to bet on certain matches. This can be part of the reality, but our research shows that the Taiwanese mafia have little involvement in the day-to-day operation of the grassroots betting market and do not exert violence against bookmakers. In addition, the mafia and syndicates rely on the supportive network of bookmakers. The small hands of betting are on the ordinary people, often precarious women, who organize bets to cope with their social and economic difficulties. Far from the image of a market under the coercion of very powerful mafia, our observation shows that bookmakers have great autonomy in their activities.

This somewhat idyllic vision may seem naive and the result of a methodological bias. Indeed, one could say that our informants might tend to present themselves positively to give a favorable view of their activities and to avoid getting into trouble with the mafia and syndicates. But this is rather unlikely. Truly, we had access to bookmakers through the mafia, but most bookmakers knew little or nothing about what the mafia did after

receiving their betting money. Bookmakers' relations with syndicates are based on mutual aid and reciprocity. Similar to other deviant activities, they are "bound together by ties of mutual obligation" (Becker, 1963: 104). It produces stable networks that can develop other two components of social capital (Nahapiet and Ghoshal, 1998). In addition, during the fieldwork enough time was spent to gain informants' trust. Biases related to the social desirability of being positive were thus not an issue.

Trust matters very much for a criminal activity linked to the mafia. The Taiwanese underground sport betting relies on bookmakers who are in general ordinary women and differ from the mafia and syndicates. Except their links with the organized crime groups for their betting business, they are elsewhere working in other professions. For a system that is a bricolage of two groups, the crime groups (the mafia and syndicates) and ordinary people (bookmakers), only the trustworthy can be invited. This means that trust as an element of the relational social capital does not only exert its function therein because trust is also essential in building the structural social capital. This particularity of collaborative and trusting relationships, dissonant with what we know about other underworlds, seems to stem from an organizational setting where different elements of social capital, together with the stable social networks, favor the predictability and functioning of the system. To put it in another way, there is no need for the Taiwanese mafia to increase mistrust in order to sell protection, which is one of the mafia's main products (Gambetta, 1988). There is no need either to restrict competitions to "ensure a degree of order and predictability", as it is often the case in other markets for illegal commodities (Varese, 2011: 197).

Bookmakers do not need protection as the mafia keep the police away. The mafia and syndicates rely on the system without being internally challenged by bookmakers underneath. Examining the three-level hierarchy in their network configuration, we see that bookmakers are empowered by the limited cross-level mobility that gives them autonomy. As bookmakers regulate the market themselves, a restriction of competition that requires additional resources is not necessary. Bookmakers are bound by a system with obligations and norms that ensures trusting relationships and thus stability and predictability of the system. Bookmakers make rules and attempt to enforce these rules. They are similar to other social groups where "the person who is supposed to have broken it [the rule] may be seen as a special kind of person, one who cannot be trusted to live by the rules agreed on by the group" (Becker, 1963: 2).

The model of Nahapiet and Ghoshal helps to understand the system. However, their approach should prompt researchers to question their model, as it may lead to an overemphasis on social capital, an overestimation of its role, and a misidentification. Examining organizations and individuals therein, it allows a focalized analysis of impacts that social ties of an organizational setting have on individuals. It is inspiring for research, but how the cognitive dimension of social capital is defined—as shared codes, language, and narratives—is debatable based on our observation. Codes, languages and narratives are central to actors' culture, it can thus be confusing to include them primarily in social capital rather than in cultural capital. As a resource based on "the virtue of possessing a durable network" (Bourdieu and Wacquant, 1992: 119), social capital depends on culture that strengthens social bonds. Actors share a culture that is converted into social capital. As emphasized by Gambetta (2000), our beliefs

about others are of primary importance for trust and cooperation, and undoubtedly actors' shared belief is embedded in their culture. This explains the stability and predictability of the system. It might therefore be risky that our excessive focus on social capital has hindered our analysis of how actors' culture bond them together.

Finally, this research raises questions about regulation. Orthodox regulators (e.g. the government or sport governing bodies) may enhance their monitoring with sophisticated software and identify matches that are fixed due to betting. It is unlikely for such monitoring to record transactions of the underworld and possibly parallel betting system. Besides, it is even more unlikely for the monitoring system to dissolve strong ties among the mafia, syndicates and bookmakers which derive from both the network structure and the appropriated networks of local community. Furthermore, compared to legal sport lotteries, illegal betting is often much more attractive for clients. This is not only because the odds and game designs in illegal betting are more "user-friendly" and more "seemingly promising" (for clients to win), but also because of the social networks and social capital amongst the involved. The Sorbonne-ICSS¹⁴ Report is more influenced by lobbyists for the interests of sport lottery companies, less for the interests of a sport governing body (Gardiner et al., 2017). Since the Report (with the Qatar funding), sports governing bodies tend to believe that legalizing sport betting through the channel of state lottery leads to a cleaner sport environment as illegal betting should thus ideally diminish or disappear. Our findings offer alternative perspectives. In Taiwan, the existence of a legal sport lottery does not prevent underground betting that is deeply rooted in the culture of some local community.

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Notes

1. For example, five large-scale scandals in its professional baseball league from 1997 to 2010. See Lee (2017) for more details.
2. Unless further specified, the sport betting and lottery discussed in this paper are of the underground, and "the system" refers to this underground system where almost all actors run both lottery and sport betting business.
3. The French Institute for International and Strategic Affairs.
4. To avoid confusion, in this paper those who are purely betting (without engaging in betting business) are termed as clients. This is because although bookmakers, syndicates, and the mafia sell bets to clients, they also bet themselves.

5. Field notes were taken together with observations. These two approaches were especially important to know how their work is organized.
6. A bookmaker is not only subordinated under one syndicate as s/he can forward bets to several syndicates at the same time. Whenever necessary, changes or termination of such quasi-subordination is possible. It is like a business partnership where a bookmaker subordinated or affiliated to one syndicate is allowed to realize technical operations within the jurisdiction of this syndicate. But it is not prohibited for this bookmaker to collaborate with other syndicates.
7. A lottery legal in Hong Kong but illegal in Taiwan.
8. Informants' networking includes several major sources: relatives in the same family or clan, neighbors, and business partners (of any kind). Life experience (e.g., women suffering from their marriage) strengthens their bonding, but religion-related social networks are not that important compared to other societies.
9. According to Greenhalgh (1984: 529), "family networks undergird both the society and the economy of Taiwan" where personal networks are also family-centered. Indeed, the cultural background behind the family and quasi-family networks in Taiwan deserves further explanation. Being filial and loyal to one's family or clan is important in a society deeply influenced by Confucianism. In the *Analects of Confucius*, many dogmas are about filiality. For example, when one's parents have wrongdoing, one can try to persuade them. But if they do not change their mind, one shall still respect them. In the modern context, families in rural Taiwan remain an important source of mutual help, notably in terms of big life events.
10. A slang of Taiwanese male chauvinism, meaning strong disagreement.
11. The exception is the two bookmakers whose husbands are syndicates and thus know more details.
12. Taiwanese culture and society are influenced by the Confucianism that highly value family and community bonds. Principles in social and family life are intertwined (notably those influenced by the dogma of five cardinal relationships). See Lee (2017) and Footnote 9 in this paper for more information.
13. Thanks to the blessing of the deities, in their perceptions.
14. International Centre for Sport Security.

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