

MINH CAO

Ph.D. Candidate, Organization and Management

(Degree expected in September 2022)

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PH.D. DISSERTATION

“Feeling the Gordian knots”: Workers’ lived experiences of organizational paradox in college admission consulting

My dissertation is an ethnographic study of two college admission consulting firms, Icarus and Sparta. These firms provide consulting services for Asian students applying to colleges in English-speaking countries. The first and second chapters of my dissertation focus on consultants at Icarus: Chapter 1 shows how these consultants navigate the tension between a) customers’ demands for personal connection, care, and intimacy, and b) their own need for personal boundaries and professionalism in daily interactions with customers; Chapter 2 analyzes how consultants translate a Western image of “the ideal college applicant” by simultaneously showcasing “Harvard standards” and explaining why most students, including those who pay for consulting services, will never reach those standards. The third chapter focuses on salespeople at Sparta during the COVID-19 pandemic, showing how they cope with abnormal levels of work-related pressure and disruption by enacting normal life: consuming various snacks during work hours while chatting and joking about music, superstitious beliefs, romantic relationships, and cosmetic products. Overall, my dissertation examines service workers’ lived experiences of organizational paradox as tensions involving dynamic, emotional, and sometimes irrational aspects of human interactions and daily life.

Chair of Dissertation Committee: Gerardo Okhuysen

MANUSCRIPTS IN PREPARATION

Cao, Minh. “Reflexivity at the micro level”: How institutional actors resolve conflicts by focusing on present impacts. *To be submitted to Organization Science in June 2022.*

Cao, Minh. “The realm of the ridiculous”: Straddling intimacy and professionalism in college admission consulting. *(The first chapter of my dissertation) To be submitted to Academy of Management Journal in August 2022.*

RESEARCH IN PROGRESS

Cao, Minh. “Maybe don’t mention Harvard”: Translating Western standards of excellence in college admission consulting *(The second chapter of my dissertation). Data collection completed. Data analysis ongoing.*

Cao, Minh. “First, let’s eat cake”: Resisting abnormal levels of work-related pressure and disruption by enacting normal life (*The third chapter of my dissertation*). *Data collection completed. Data analysis ongoing.*

CONFERENCE PRESENTATION

Cao, Minh (paper accepted for presentation in August 2022). *The realm of the ridiculous: Straddling intimacy and professionalism in college admission consulting*. Academy of Management (AOM) annual meeting. Online.

Cao, Minh (paper accepted for presentation in June 2022). *Reflexivity at the micro level: How institutional actors resolve conflicts by focusing on present impacts*. European Group for Organizational Studies (EGOS). Online.

Cao, Minh (2019, August). *Temporal and relational: The positionality of embeddedness in immigrant rights advocacy work*. Academy of Management (AOM) annual meeting, Boston, MA.

This paper was presented at the symposium titled “*Inequalities and the fight for inclusiveness: Unpacking the varied experiences of migrant workers.*”

Cao, Minh (2021, October). *The empathizers: How workers resolve conflicts by focusing on present impacts*. Harvard Business School’s Rising Scholars Conference. Online.

This paper was presented on the panel titled “*Meaning of Work.*”

WORK EXPERIENCE

Instructor, Paul Merage School of Business, University of California, Irvine, August 2020

- “Introduction to Business and Management” for undergraduate students (My Overall Instructor Rating: 3.82/4.0; Department Average: 3.74/4.0)

In this course, I provided my students with an overview of major business functions and management topics, including the impact of economic policies, international laws, cultures, social responsibility and ethics, human resource management and organizational behavior, accounting and finance, marketing, and supply chain management. While teaching, I focused on addressing the global and fast-changing environment in which modern organizations operated, as well as the challenges posed by concerns about sustainable growth, ethics, and social responsibility.

My responsibilities as an instructor included the following tasks: design contents, structure, and schedules for the course; plan and deliver assignments, quizzes, and exams; prepare materials for lectures and in-class activities; deliver live lectures remotely on Zoom; plan and organize in-class activities; answer students’ questions about course concepts, course schedules, homework, and exams; assist students with special needs; grade homework and exams.

Teaching Assistant, Paul Merage School of Business, University of California, Irvine, September 2016 – present

I have worked as a teaching assistant for the following courses:

- “Responding to Dynamic Times: Thinking Strategically in Business” for MBA students
- “Negotiations” for MBA students
- “Organizational Behavior” for MBA students
- “Organizational Behavior” for undergraduate students
- “International Business” for undergraduate students

My responsibilities as a teaching assistant for the above courses have included the following tasks: grade assignments, quizzes, and exams; proctor exams; prepare and distribute materials for lectures and in-class activities; answer students’ questions about course concepts, course schedules, homework, and exams; assist instructors with technical issues concerning remote teaching via Zoom.

Research Assistant, Anthropology Department, State University of New York at New Paltz, 2011 – 2012

- Project: “Singing Sentiment”

“Singing Sentiment” is an ethnographic film documenting the daily life of an elderly “*quan ho*” folksong artiste – Nguyen Thi Ban – who lives in Diem Village, Bac Ninh Province, Vietnam (“*quan ho*” is a type of Vietnamese folksong). Nguyen Thi Ban’s life story as a devoted folksong artiste exhibits the intimate and dynamic connection between folksong and the daily rhythms of village life.

My responsibilities in this project included the following tasks: research the meanings of “quan ho” lyrics; translate all Vietnamese conversations and “quan ho” lyrics into English; prepare and edit English subtitles for the film.

OTHER EXPERIENCE

Symposium Organizer, Academy of Management annual meeting, August 2019

Symposium title: “*Inequalities and the fight for inclusiveness: Unpacking the varied experiences of migrant workers.*”

I organized this symposium with my colleague Carrie Wang to offer insights into the various work and life experiences of migrant workers, all of whom are challenged by their environments and many of whom are marginalized. This symposium consisted of four studies examining: 1) multi-level factors influencing ascriptive inequality towards migrant workers; 2) individuals who return to mainland China to pursue entrepreneurial opportunities; 3) the impact of social categories and group esteem theory on different immigrant groups; and 4) workers who do advocacy work for immigrant rights. This symposium was selected to be featured in the 2019 All-Academy Theme “Understanding the Inclusive Organization.”

Reviewer, Academy of Management annual meeting, 2017 – present

I have acted as an anonymous reviewer for many qualitative studies submitted to the Academy of Management annual meeting since 2017.

EDUCATION

University of California, Irvine

Doctor of Philosophy in Organization and Management

Expected September 2022

University of Cambridge

Master of Philosophy in Development Studies

June 2015

State University of New York at New Paltz

Bachelor of Science in International Business

December 2013

AWARDS AND HONORS

Ray Watson Fellowship, Paul Merage School of Business, University of California, Irvine, 2019

OMT Doctoral Consortium Accepted Participant, Academy of Management annual meeting, 2019

Scholarship from the Cambridge Commonwealth, European & International Trust, University of Cambridge, 2014 – 2015

REFERENCES

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