

# The Inter-construction of Knowledge Payment and Knowledge Anxiety in China

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**Abstract.** There have been a lot of results which illustrate that knowledge anxiety is an important reason of knowledge payment, however, its specific mechanism still needs to be deepened, and whether knowledge payment has effects on anxiety mentality in return also needs further research. Specifically, this paper deepens the expert system theory, one of Giddens' disembedding mechanisms, and reveals a stepped expert system theory (SEST) which contains inherent contradiction. With the help of SEST, this paper tries to demonstrate that knowledge anxiety is not only a precondition but also a consequence of knowledge payment, as people will reproduce knowledge anxiety in the process of paying for knowledge. In this regard, this paper argues that consumers consider knowledge payment mostly as a strategy for self-improvement, which is more often than not a seemingly practicable but physically helpless action under the pressure of reality.

**Keywords:** Knowledge Anxiety; Knowledge Payment; Stepped Expert System.

## 1. Introduction

Knowledge payment has been a traditional form of payment since ancient times, such as private schools and academies in ancient China and universities in modern times. However, with the development of mobile internet and new media technology,

knowledge payment could be dealt online, which meets what Giddens called the "emptying of time and space", "cutting through the connections between social activity and its embedding in the particularities of contexts of presence". [1] People can get the knowledge they need and answers to practical questions in the form of payment.

According to iiMedia Research, in 2022, the market size of China's knowledge payment will reach 112.65 billion yuan, and the market size is expected to reach 280.88 billion yuan in 2025 [2]. With the boom of knowledge payment, a large number of scholars have argued the reasons and impacts of the prevalence of knowledge payment, among which the more typical ones include, Guoming Yu pointed out that under the background of anxious and out-of-control times, knowledge payment became popular because of its existence as an anchor [3]; Xiaowei Ding and other scholars pointed out macro reasons such as the state's promotion of the sharing economy, the transformation and upgrading of residents' consumption structure based on human capital investment, and micro reasons such as residents' knowledge anxiety[4]; in terms of the impact level, Chunhui Luan believes that online knowledge payment only focuses on incremental content thus making abstract summary knowledge downgraded to a kind of information [5]; on the other hand, Jing Bao and other scholars argue that some knowledge payment applicants can make people profit from sharing and enhance community cohesion through quality content. [6] With the concerted efforts of scholars, both the causes and effects of the knowledge payment phenomenon have been analyzed in depth.

However, what is the mechanism that transfers knowledge anxiety, a mentality, into a behavior of payment? Furthermore, whether the effect of knowledge payment on knowledge anxiety is exacerbated or alleviated? Considering that Giddens distinguish two types of disembedding mechanisms intrinsically involved in the development of modern institutions, *symbolic tokens* and *expert systems*, [7] and knowledge payment is a combination of them, this paper attempts to argue the mutually constructive relationship between knowledge payment and knowledge anxiety under the perspective of disembedding theory.

Disembedding means the "lifting out" of social relations from local contexts of interaction and their restructuring across indefinite spans of time-space. The image evoked by disembedding is better

able to capture the shifting alignments of time and space which are of elementary importance for social change in general and for the nature of modernity in particular. [8]

## 2. The Definition of Knowledge Payment

Currently, there is no clear definition of the concept of "knowledge payment" in academic circles, and it is often confused with the concept of "content payment". Content payment can be regarded as the prototype of knowledge payment, which includes media subscription, online education, music and video copyright payment, membership, and various media platforms that sell content for profit. [9] Xiaowei Ding points out that knowledge payment is actually an Internet economic model that satisfies the needs of self-development by purchasing information content and services. [10] Jinghong Xu argues that the essence of "knowledge" in knowledge payment is to make more people willing to share their knowledge accumulation and cognitive surplus through transaction means, and to achieve the optimal allocation of information through market rules and convenient Internet dissemination. [11]

It is not difficult to find that to explain the definition of knowledge payment, the key is to study the relationship between knowledge, content and information. The question of "what is knowledge" is called the "Theaetetus problem" in Western philosophy. The classic definition of knowledge put forward by Plato in "Theaetetus" is that "knowledge is a true belief that has been confirmed." Most of the academic discussions so far have emphasized that knowledge should have truth, universality and verifiability under certain historical conditions. [12]

But as Giddens points out in *The Consequences of Modernity*, social practices are constantly examined and reformed in the light of incoming information about those very practices, thus constitutively altering their character. Therefore, no knowledge under conditions of modernity is knowledge in the "old" sense, where "to know" is to be certain, [13] since knowledges' characters would be altered in practices. That is to say, Plato's traditional definition of knowledge has been challenged to a certain extent, and content and information have become social cognition to re-examine and transform social practice under the conditions of modernity. Thus, they can also become knowledge of modernity.

Given all this, this paper argues that content payment for self-improvement rather than entertainment is also knowledge payment, and knowledge and content are a kind of information. That is to say, not only knowledge of various disciplines, such as psychology, economics, investment and financial management, PPT production, basic Python, etc. are counted as knowledge payment; the purchase of suggestions of opinion leaders and KOL is also counted as knowledge payment, such as "Secretary Mao Says Workplace Skills" is a county-level retired cadre with 30 years of grass-roots leadership work experience. He currently summarizes practical experience and knowledge in the workplace through Baidu's paid column to help young people in the workplace solve their doubts.

Therefore, knowledge payment is an Internet economic model for purchasing information and acquiring knowledge for the purpose of self-improvement. Compared with the traditional way of acquiring knowledge, it has three characteristics: First, for consumers, this consumption is "space-time emptying", as an online payment for knowledge and a social connection between buyers and content producers which breaks away from the fixed time and space constraints; secondly, the purpose of payment is to obtain information and knowledge to answer questions and improve oneself, rather than for entertainment purposes; furthermore, the concept of knowledge is different from the traditional definition, besides "confirmed true belief" also include the subjective personal opinions of content creators.

### 3. How does Knowledge Anxiety Lead to Knowledge Payment?

According to the research data of *2022-2023 China Knowledge Payment Industry Research and Consumer Behavior Analysis Report*, 62.2% of Chinese knowledge consumers believe they have knowledge anxiety. [14]

However, in theory, how does knowledge anxiety arise? More importantly, how does knowledge anxiety lead to knowledge payment?

#### 3.1 Origins of Knowledge Anxiety

##### 3.1.1 Anxious Times

In the traditional world, closed societies and defined boundaries provided order and a sense of meaning. People live what Giddens calls a "day-to-day routine," guided by practical consciousness, and this routine is conducive to the maintenance of ontological security. [15] In modern society, people's daily life is also mostly routine, but compared with traditional society, modern society has more mobility and uncertainty due to globalization and other factors, which is what Qing Liu, a professor of philosophy at East China Normal University, points out as "no local life is local anymore"-- People's lives are increasingly affected by some uncontrollable factors; in traditional society, people are only affected by the things around them, and it is easy to put life in a submissive way. Today, everyone's life encounters hundreds of variables, many of which come from very distant places. [16]

Moreover, while dealing with external uncertainties and risks, people also endure internal torture. The disintegration of local life destroys routines thus brings about the loss of ontological security; Michael J. Sandel reveals that modern society trumpets meritocracy that as long as individuals work hard, they will eventually succeed [17], which makes people believe in the prospect of success. Unfortunately, as Tocqueville pointed out, "while people are excited by the possibilities of success, they also suffer the torture of uncertainty." [18]

Therefore, with the modernization process of the times, people are enjoying the infinite possibilities brought by democracy, equality and globalization; but at the same time, due to intensified risks, limited resources and fierce competition, they also suffer anxious mentality. Freedom preaches the possibility of success, and people strive hard to demand that this age of freedom fulfill its promises. In this social context, people in modern society suffer from external and internal torment. Though under a lot of inner pressure, they still have to keep working hard, because working harder and harder is the way out of the current predicament.

The anxiety caused by this era is the macro background of knowledge anxiety. This is because, in many cases, knowledge has been alienated as a means and strategy to change the current situation and improve social status, which will be detailed illustrated in 3.1.2.

##### 3.1.2 Stepped Expert System and Knowledge Cult

###### (1) The penetration of knowledge productivity.

With the development of knowledge economy, knowledge has gradually become a leading production factor. For example, breakthroughs in physics can promote the development of aerospace, and mathematics has benefited China's fifth generation business. But in fact, knowledge not only brings benefits at the macro level of the country and society, but also plays a role in daily life. The productivity of knowledge gradually penetrates from the macro to the micro. For example, learning how to negotiate, persuade, and express can help people perform better on campus and in the workplace, so let's talk, a Chinese debate program once became the most popular variety show. Twenty days after the launch of the first paid subscription product in iGet, a famous knowledge payment APP, the revenue exceeded one million, making it a phenomenal subscription product. Coincidentally, the productivity of enhancing workplace emotional intelligence, learning investment and financial management, understanding parenting methods, mastering academic paper reporting and PPT production and other related knowledge has gradually been recognized by the public.

###### (2) Knowledge cult

After people realize the productivity of knowledge, they begin to use knowledge as a strategy and means to get rid of the current predicament, expecting to obtain the stepping stone of class transition through knowledge. Recently a report points out that consumers prefer knowledge-based payment products to solve practical problems, and users are willing to pay for professional content, providing opportunities for the development of knowledge-based payment platforms in vertical fields. [19]

This reveals that Chinese people hold the opinion that knowledge and education certifications could improve one's social status, changing one's destiny. In fact, this view has existed since ancient times, when people believed that "everything is inferior, only studying is high" and "the book has its own golden house". Entering the era of knowledge economy, this phenomenon is further intensified after people realize the productivity of knowledge in daily life. No wonder that modern society has witnessed so many parents in China spent their savings in their children's education, including piano classes and extracurricular tutoring. The Chinese belief that knowledge could bring about a class leap, can be supported by an article, *"All I can do for my child" – development of the Chinese Parental Sacrifice for Child's Education Scale* [20], which shows that parents have willing sacrifice, including restructuring of daily routine, sacrifice of lifestyle and aspiration, as well as the shielding of worries from their children, let alone with the spent of money and efforts.

The connection between knowledge and social status helps illustrate the phenomenon that in knowledge payment Apps, in terms of users' paid content preferences, "knowledge and experience which could improve working efficiency or income" enjoys the most recognized, accounting for 63.3%, followed by "professional advices on career/academic development", accounting for 39.2%. [21] These statistics show that Chinese believe in knowledge's function to the point of knowledge cult that it helps solve difficulties and problems in real life, improving income and eventually their social status and living standard.

### **(3) Stepped expert system**

One of misembedding mechanics is expert system. But as described above, knowledge also plays an important role in daily life. Therefore, according to the importance and availability of professional knowledge in daily life, the expert system discussed by Giddens is actually stepped. The development of calculus and linear algebra is important for productivity at the macro level, but has little effect on the daily life of ordinary people. Learning history and philosophy teaches people to self-examination and self-reflection, but the effect is not as immediate as investment and financial management. According to the theory of behavioral economics, the importance of discounting the future utility to today will be relatively reduced. In addition, some knowledge, although important and immediately beneficial, is difficult for ordinary people to obtain due to related factors such as confidentiality.

It should also be noted that, because of the inherent contradiction between importance and availability, steps are fluid rather than fixed. Specifically, importance is related to scarcity on the ground that valuable information or productive knowledge is often scarce. As Guoming Yu pointed out in his paper, "scarcity is the first quality of knowledge-based payment products. Only scarcity is what the market pursues." [22]

Therefore, there is a trade-off between importance (scarcity) and availability. Important knowledge and information will be mined by the market and capital, thus increasing availability and decreasing scarcity. However, the primary purpose of people acquiring knowledge is to improve their competitiveness. When the knowledge acquired is no longer scarce, the competitiveness will naturally decline. Rising availability tends to reduce the scarcity and importance of knowledge, thereby reducing the return on it. The most intuitive example is the devaluation of education. Undergraduates used to be outstanding, but with the increase of undergraduate rate, the returns on its diplomas have declined, resulting in the devaluation of academic qualifications. People are forced to obtain postgraduate diplomas to be more competitive while seeking for a job. Unfortunately, the more people go to graduate school, the further the scarcity and importance decreases.

As the penetration of knowledge productivity mentioned above, the important and available part of the expertise that was once monopolized by experts will gradually become common sense. For example, on December 20, 2021, the psychological term Gaslighting rushed to Weibo's hot search,

with more than 220 million topic readings and more than 30,000 discussions. In this context, both importance and availability are fluid. And, experts will continue to explore expertise, just as brands will innovate as more and more middle-class people can afford luxury goods; Or, like developed countries constantly transferring old technologies to developing countries, they continue to study high-precision and cutting-edge technologies themselves. To put it simply, the knowledge reserves of the entire society and the threshold of public common sense continue to rise, and the stepped expert system will unceasingly flow and update due to the continuous availability of knowledge.

In this context, the low-level expert system has become people's grasp and reliance on this complex world because of its availability and importance; it is like an entry-level luxury bag, because of its availability (compared to other relatively luxury goods) and importance, it has become the first choice for middle-class identification. Acquiring knowledge has become an important tool for dealing with the real world and solving practical problems, so the anxiety about goals (improving social status, increasing income, etc.) has shifted to the thirst for tools, the knowledge.

### 3.2 Why do People Choose Knowledge Payments?

#### 3.2.1 Knowledge Payment and Stepped Expert System

As mentioned earlier, a stepped expert system can measure its productivity in terms of the importance and availability of knowledge in daily life. And knowledge payment can meet people's needs in these two dimensions.

##### **(1) Trafficking anxiety: capital exaggerates importance.**

Opening various official accounts, people can see all kinds of advertisements that promote knowledge-based paid products and sell anxiety. The advertisements will try their best to tell you some truths that sound wonderful, such as, "You can never save money to buy a house in Beijing and Shanghai, Guangzhou and Shenzhen. You must earn money!"; "Learn financial management with me, and your annual income will exceed 500,000!"; "Those who know Python will not be too bad at work. Catch up with your peers, take advantage of it now!"; Flicking through the knowledge-based payment app is full of headlines like: "Follow me for three months to get shell baby muscles", "Learn these ten tricks, the boss will see your face".....They will tell you that millions of people have followed the course, as if you were abandoned by the times if you didn't pay. For example, when Meituan acquired Mobike, there was an explosive article that went all over the circle of friends in WeChat, called "*Mobike Founder Cashed Out 1.5 billion: Your Peers Are Abandoning You.*" [23] This article has attracted many readers to feel ashamed, and they have forwarded it to encourage themselves. The article takes "abandoned by peers in silence" as the starting point, and uses Hu's 1.5 billion to imply the binary opposition between rich and poor, which is undoubtedly deliberately arousing anxiety: "some people have earned an annual salary of one million, while some people are still robbing two yuan of red envelopes", "everything changes so fast that if you don't react and follow up quickly, you risk being knocked to the ground by your peers". Capital keeps telling you: if you slack a little, you will be left behind. Even if you stay where you are, your slow growth is a step backward.

##### **(2) Emptying Time-Space: Disembedding Enhances availability.**

Benchmarking the market and mining user needs have always been the characteristics of capital. But disembedding gives knowledge products the possibility of trading in a wider space and time, enabling cognitive surplus to be redistributed under infinite space and time conditions. As pointed out in 2.0, one of the important features of paid-for-knowledge products is disembedding. The Internet enables social connections between knowledge producers and consumers to span fixed temporal and spatial connections, thereby enhancing its availability. People can interact socially with just their mobile phones, and they only need to enter keywords in the search bar to browse their favorite online courses. A more intuitive example is paid Q&A. For example, Xing Qing, a first-year graduate student at Shanghai Jiao Tong University, started a class on Zhihu Live to share her successful experience. The first class, with 100 minutes of voice within 15 Q&A, priced at 19.9 yuan, attracted nearly 3,000

people to pay to participate. [24] In traditional Chinese culture, the "expert guides the way" has greatly improved the availability: people can buy advice from strangers without limitation of time and space.

In conclusion, there are so much knowledge being both important and available, in the knowledge payment products, that it meets the dimensions of low-level stepped expert system. Therefore, people choose knowledge products to deal with knowledge anxiety.

### **3.2.2 Knowledge Payment: Easing the Burden of Solving Problems by Trusting Experts**

Knowledge payment is a good combination of symbolic tokens and expert system. The symbolic tokens that Giddens mainly emphasizes are monetary mechanisms, that is, "payment" in knowledge payment; knowledge is the product of expert systems, and people pay for the knowledge based on their trust in experts.

In the real world of ignorance and complexity, trust is a currency that eliminates uncertainty. Just as Marx pointed out that workers who have "nothing but freedom" obtain the means of life they need through their labor, consumers also trust the answers and methodologies given by experts, or more directly, such as paid questions and answers on Weibo, to directly obtain answers to the complexities of the world. Paying for knowledge reduces the need for people to think about the answers to their own questions and to gather and process further information, saving them brain power and meeting their need for cognitive closure.

Cognitive closure is to describe an individual's motivation and desire to cope with ambiguity, which is "the desire to find a clear answer to a question - no matter what kind of answer - because any clear answer is preferable to confusion and uncertainty." [25]

Therefore, people with knowledge anxiety are prone to choose to pay for knowledge because they can get answers if they believe, relieving people's powerlessness and anxiety about the complex reality.

### **3.2.3 Feasibility of Knowledge Payment**

#### **(1) Economic Conditions: Increase in National Economic Income**

In the first half of 2022, under the impact of the epidemic, the per capita disposable income of Chinese residents was 18,463 yuan, a nominal increase of 4.7% over the same period of the previous year, and an actual increase of 3.0% after deducting price factors; the median per capita disposable income of national residents was 15,560 yuan, an increase of 4.5%, and the median was 84.3% of the mean. [26] In this context, iiMedia Research data center research shows that 34% of paying knowledge users aged 35+ spent 1,000-2,000 yuan and 24% spent 2,000-4,000 yuan in the past year. [27]

#### **(2) Technical conditions: Rise in China's Internet penetration rate**

The 49th "Statistical Report on Internet Development in China" shows that as of December 2021, the number of Chinese netizens reached 1.032 billion, the Internet penetration rate reached 73.0%, and the per capita online time per week reached 28.5 hours. Moreover, the gap between urban and rural Internet access continues to narrow. The number of Internet users in rural China has reached 284 million, and the Internet penetration rate in rural areas is 57.6%. The elderly group has accelerated to integrate into the online society. As of December 2021, the number of elderly netizens aged 60 and above in China reached 119 million, and the Internet penetration rate reached 43.2%. In addition, as of December 2021, the proportion of Chinese netizens using mobile phones to access the Internet reached 99.7%, and mobile phones are still the most important device when browsing the Internet. [28] The portability of mobile phones provides technical support for the availability of paid knowledge, and people can freely choose the time and place to study online.

In conclusion, because of its importance and availability, paid-for-knowledge products have become a low-level expert system that the public needs. When the economic and technical conditions are met, the people rely on the element of trust, the intermediary between consumers and producers, to directly obtain answers thus achieve the decryption of the complex world.

## 4. The Short- and Long-Term Effects of Knowledge Payment on Knowledge Anxiety

### 4.1 The Effect of Temporary Relief

#### 4.1.1 A Sense of Knowing

When Theaetetus was asked by Socrates what knowledge is, he replied that knowing something is inseparable from recognizing it with the senses, so that sensory activity is a constant part of cognitive activity, and therefore he concluded that "knowledge is perception ". Although Plato later rejected this definition and pointed out that knowledge are proven beliefs, he did not completely eliminate the fundamental role of the perception in the process of forming knowledge. By contrast, Theaetetus' definition of knowledge indicates that as the receiving end of knowledge, perception and a sense of knowing are essential parts for people to check whether they have acquired knowledge or not. [29]

Similarly, when people pay for knowledge and know something from those experts, the sense of knowing and acquisition dissipates the feeling of lack of knowledge. This kind of mentality is like the sense of owning luxury bags can bring an illusion of class promotion. "A sense of knowing" is a state of "possession" as opposed to powerlessness in a complex world with chaos, and this "possession" helps alleviate anxiety on the ground that people have knowledge cult. People feel that mastering new knowledge can solve real-world problems, thereby reducing emotional anxiety.

#### 4.1.2 Disembedding, Leisure Utilitarianism and Self-Touching

As mentioned above, disembedding enhances the availability of stepped knowledge because of the infinitely extended space-time connection, which enables people to maximize the use of their time and space. Specifically, the fragmented time and off-duty time that should be leisure, or a place that is not meant to study, has been given the possibility of learning and making progress. According to *Big Data White Paper of Lychee Micro-class, the Pioneer of "Paid Knowledge" Industry*, 51.2% of users use Lychee Micro-class between 8:00-10:00 pm. In addition, 12.2% of users choose to use Lychee Micro-class on their way to work and 15.4% on their way from work. [30] These data fully prove that in the "fast-paced" life pattern, users seamlessly use their own fragmented and leisure time-space for self-improvement.

Giddens once introduced the concept of regionalization, which refers to the existence of some areas within or between places, which produce relatively fixed differentiation in time or (and) space, guiding people to carry out their own activities in a more familiar atmosphere. [31] However, in the process of paying for knowledge, which is the reproduction of social interaction, the regionalization of certain time-space has been updated and reconstructed. Taking driving after work as an example, in the past, people might turn on the car music without thinking, listen to the news of road conditions, and complain about the traffic congestion. Today, 27.6% of users have reused time-space for learning and self-improvement. In the process of anti-regionalization and confrontation with the routine life that they are familiar with, people feel a different self and self-motivation. People stop routine entertainment and relaxation to study. No matter how efficient they are in the car or at home after work, what they gain is a kind of "self-impression", a feeling that they are working hard, which can offset knowledge anxiety. If this kind of learning spirit persists for a long time, it will bring about the reversal of regionalization and reconstruct a new feature: fragmented time is used for learning. For example, many candidates in high school get used to memorizing English words while queuing for food.

In conclusion, the sense of knowing, especially in fragmented time and leisure place, makes people self-motivated and feel they are a hardworking person. This feeling of effort makes people feel better: at least they are still trying to change.

However, *2022-2023 China Knowledge Payment Industry Research and Consumer Behavior Analysis Report* reveals that while 62.2% of Chinses knowledge consumers believe they have knowledge anxiety, 80.1% of consumers will continue to buy paid-for-knowledge products. Why do

people still fail to alleviate knowledge anxiety even though they continue to buy paid knowledge products?

In another word, is the relief of knowledge anxiety by knowledge payment real or a temporary illusion?

## **4.2 Knowledge Payment Reproduces Knowledge Anxiety in the Long Term**

### **4.2.1 The Returns on Knowledge Payment: Answers Only**

A harsh reality is that, as Sandel exposes to meritocracy, success is often not just about hard work but also luck. To be successful in reality, knowledge is also only one of the sufficient and unnecessary conditions. More importantly, people need to learn to solve problems, not just absorb information and obtain answers only. Zhou Zhiqiang, a professor at the School of Literature at Nankai University, once offered courses related to Marxism on "Chalk.com". His purpose is not to "spread knowledge", but to activate a way of thinking. He hopes that what his course will bring is not the situation of contemporary society and the content of Marxist theory, but the way and approach of Marxism to see the world—which are dialectical, referring to constant transformation of meaning, contradictions, and idealistic impulses. However, few people are willing to pay for this kind of course. What everyone needs is "knowledge" with clear definition, guided direction and simple meaning, rather than the training of learning knowledge and the cultivation of acquisition ability. More than 10,000 netizens decided to give up after the online audition. In the audition class, some people left a message saying that this kind of course has no real stuff, because it is all analysis and interpretation of the problem, without providing a stable view on phenomena or a specific definition of Mann's thought. [32]

Therefore, what people get more from paid knowledge is a sense of ownership and acquisition, rather than an ability of analysis that can really be used in daily life. People are not accustomed to paying for knowledge to develop the habit of thinking, but hope to directly solve the confusion by trusting experts - spending money to buy customized answers. According to Fromm, a German scholar, modern society has cut off the human relations, which permeated in traditional society, causing people fall into a state of loneliness and helplessness. In this great action or undertaking, thereby creating a strong sense of self-subjectivity, "this frees him from making decisions, from taking responsibility for his own final destiny, and from doubting what decisions should be made, and he does not need to question the meaning of life and what it is." [33] In fact, this habit of directly buying customized answers, as mentioned in 3.2.2, helps consumers avoid reflection and questioning, and thus prevent the anxiety of finding answers in the vast sea of information and complex problems. But we need to realize that what is really consistently useful is the ability to analyze a problem, not a customized answer itself, which means knowledge payment products actually are overestimated in its functions.

Given all this, people seem to have learned a lot of fragmented knowledge, but because they have not internalized it, they cannot use them practically. People are still confused and restless, mired in anxiety.

### **4.2.2 Stepped Expert System: The Reproduction of Knowledge Anxiety**

Unfortunately, the returns of knowledge and effort are decreasing. As more and more people pay for knowledge, the relative scarcity of knowledge decreases. The contradiction between importance(scarcity) and availability leads to a change in knowledge payment products, from insightful guidelines to common sense, which means knowing, used to be a bonus, eventually becomes a necessity. When people pursue scarce knowledge to increase their competitiveness, this situation is only temporary. Perhaps only opinion leaders and KOL really gain benefits, in material way, because as experts they are in high-level expert systems and they could take advantage of the difference of decreasing scarcity. Similarly, economics believes that because of the money multiplier effect and the time lag between money inflation, whoever gets the money first on the loan gets the benefit. Therefore, people who are within the monetary system or high-level expert system could really obtain benefits.



In this case, the real role and value of knowledge other than scarcity are ignored; instead, people have to continuously learn new scarce knowledge, from "living and learning" to "living and competing too old". People should stop alienating knowledge and realize that the joy of learning is not based on the scarcity of knowledge and the competitiveness it brings. However, paying for knowledge at least reflects people's expectations to improve the status quo, and to some extent, in the context of class solidification and class disparity, they are at a loss as to how to improve social position. Payment itself has become an expedient measure to deal with the anxiety of the times.

#### 4.2.3 Fetishism in Knowledge Payments: Intensifying Knowledge Cult

As mentioned above, one of the causes of knowledge anxiety is the alienation of knowledge after people realize the penetration of knowledge productivity in daily life. However, knowledge payment will lead to further intensification of knowledge alienation.

First, "the external economic incentives brought by paid knowledge can attract more users and experts in various fields to answer and share knowledge." [34] The paid-for-knowledge industry has made a lot of money, and celebrities in various industries have obtained enviable income, which is a vivid portrayal of the transformation of cultural capital into economic capital. This kind of economic incentive will further exacerbate the alienation of knowledge. People view knowledge from a pragmatic point of view, so what can help them advance is good knowledge, otherwise it is useless knowledge. In order to get a promotion, they must keep up with the times, understand the latest developments, master the newest terms. Once the gaslighting effect is on the hot search and becomes a well-known common sense, it cannot show its uniqueness, and thus loses its value.

More importantly, all those who do not possess knowledge are being despised. [35] The calculation formulas and people who know the secrets of Mars in a movie, *The Wandering Earth*, are saving mankind; the TV series "Take Dad to Study Abroad" proves how absurdity can be without the basic knowledge of children's education; "Luo Ji Thinking" tells everyone that the way to survive is not to be brave and take risks, but to obey the order of knowledge; Huawei's "Genius Boys" program has been repeatedly searched, allowing everyone to see how knowledge can be turned into a high salary of 2 million yuan a year; an exceptional famous photo of Lei Jun, Qiangdong Liu and other business giants, who worth hundreds of billions having a dinner together, tells everyone that knowledge can change their fate - Liu is the top student in the college entrance examination in Suqian, and Wang Xing is from Tsinghua University who was recommended for admission. These have further intensified people's worship of knowledge, believing that knowledge can change their own situation, lead the whole family to live a better life, and even save human beings and become heroes as the movie presents.

As Guy Debord's critique of capitalism in *Society of the Spectacle*, the relation of reification has been further escalated from commodity fetishism to spectacle fetishism: "The social control of contemporary capitalism is no longer an external coercive force, but an establishment of cultural hegemony over identity, which here is embodied in the spectacle." [36] In the era of knowledge economy, this spectacle that is different from traditional capitalist society is the mutual relationship between high education and decent income, that is, people convert cultural capital into economic capital, and economic capital can buy cultural capital as an unimpeded currency. In modern China, although the class solidification is not as serious as that in the United States and other countries, the hope of transition is slim due to the pressure of competition, so people take the belief in "knowledge changes fate" as a bet: knowledge can change fate, but not necessarily oneself fate; but once someone slacks, he or she will inevitably be out and fail.

Therefore, paying for knowledge can give people a sense of gain and effort to relieve anxiety, but this resolution is only temporary. When people get answers directly through trust, problem-solving methodologies are not learned; and as availability increases, by contrast, the scarcity and importance decrease. Thus, physical knowledge productivity is less than one might expect. In addition, the prevalence of knowledge payment will further exacerbate its alienation, contributing to the reproduction of knowledge anxiety. In this way, though people are anxious, they have no methods to really get rid of the status quo.

## 5. Conclusion

Knowledge is only a tool for solving problems and what behind the knowledge anxiety is a kind of anxious mentality about reality, including the desire of learning financing and investing knowledge to increase income, studying how to develop high emotional intelligence to get promoted, or how to pass various certificates during undergraduate studies. In other words, knowledge anxiety is the manifestation of reality anxiety. Due to this kind of mentality, people prefer scarce knowledge to enhance their competitiveness.

This paper illustrates that knowledge payment is not a passive object but also have an impact on knowledge anxiety. When people think that they are socially connected with the stepped expert system, the sense of gain and self-impression relieves anxiety on the surface, but buried under people's self-comfort is the contradiction between availability and scarcity. Thus, people's expectations of increasing their competitiveness will eventually fail. People will be caught in the exhaustion of learning, unable to appreciate the fun of learning itself.

However, ordinary Chinese people have no other choices but to study hard, take the college entrance exam, and then get into college. There is at least a way to get a leg up into the gates of the elite, and everyone is following that route. Whether or not it will actually work out, they don't know, but they have to try. The cult and alienation of knowledge is, to some extent, a strategy for people to cope with this harsh reality. People need to realize that for many users, taking the time to improve themselves may be the only way they can do.

Though, paying for knowledge cannot really alleviate anxiety is not within people's action expectations, Giddens proposed the action "flow" diagram, the unintended consequence will reconstitute the unacknowledged condition of people's action. This reminds knowledge producers to improve the quality of paid knowledge content to help users truly reap the benefits, instead of being immersed in the short-term dividends that rely on selling anxiety to harvest leeks.

Regarded the contribution and shortcomings, this paper attempts to analyze the phenomenon of knowledge payment and knowledge anxiety in the perspective of disembedding theory of Giddens, and propose the theoretical relationship between them. This paper also reveals a conception of stepped expert system, which could be considered as the interaction between disembedding theory and the knowledge payment reality. However, this article lacks interviews, and the presentation of knowledge anxiety is not vivid enough.

In the next stage, the author will try to use the payment of knowledge as an example to analyze "techniques of the self" as Michel Foucault pointed out, and illustrates the relationship between power, knowledge, and the self in current China, where Education becomes a stepping stone to class transition. And, how term production and discourse practice construct the identity of knowledge-paying user groups.

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