Towards a Transnational Sexual Field

Male Vietnamese Migrants in Contemporary Japan

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Transnational movements of people across borders have been one of the most prominent forces in shaping sexualities and genders. While migrants’ economic and labour practices have constituted a relatively wide spectrum of both academic and non-academic interests, the sexual and gendered dimensions of migration attract less attention. In particular, sexualities have historically been marginalized, and are still ‘absent as a social factor in mainstream sociological studies of migration’ (Carrillo 2017; Manalansan IV 2006). Moreover, in contrast to female migrants’ sexual and gender identities and behaviours, the sexual and gendered experiences of male movers have not been adequately investigated.

This lecture takes a closer look at the intersection of sexualities, genders and transnational mobilities in an East Asian context. Drawing on data from life-history interviews with male Vietnamese migrants in Japan and returnees in Vietnam, the lecture aims to capture and conceptualize the ways in which migrants’ sexualities and masculinities are shaped and negotiated during various migration processes. It examines migrants’ everyday life experiences, and focuses on the strategies to negotiate intimate relationships and encounters, sexual and gender identities in specific socio-cultural settings. I will also identify multi-level factors that contour migrants’ sexualities and masculinities in transnational migratory contexts, and analyse them from a Bourdieuan field perspective to move towards a theorization of a transnational sexual field. Finally, I will discuss various methodological challenges in the context of the current Covid-19 pandemic.

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