



Max-Planck-Institut für ethnologische Forschung Max Planck Institute for Social Anthropology

Workshop

Reconfiguring Vietnam: Global Encounters, Translocal Lifeworlds

21-22 April 2022

Organisers: Kirsten W. Endres and Minh T.N. Nguyen
Venue: Max Planck Institute for Social Anthropology, Halle/S., Germany

OUTLINE

Compared to the earlier decades of high socialism, with its political restrictions on transnational mobility and engagement with the world, Vietnam has never been more global. Flows and movements of people, ideas, practices and institutions into and out of the country have created vast transnational networks and global fields of exchange. Now that Vietnam has signed up to various free trade agreements and regional pacts, Vietnamese labour and products are increasingly part of global systems of production and circulation. As global production relocates to the country for its cheaper labour and natural resources, global finance penetrates economic operations and logics at a faster pace than ever before, sanctioned by a constitutionally socialist government eagerly embracing privatisation and global integration. In the other direction, a greater number of Vietnamese leave the country to work the factories, construction sites, homes, care institutions, and commodity trade around the world, joining the global diasporas that had emerged from earlier waves of global migration/refugee movements. Today, many live a mobile life between their second and former home country, with homes and businesses at either end of their transnational lives. Meanwhile, the digitalization of social and economic activities has been generating new possibilities for entrepreneurship, relationships and self-making, at the same time that it creates new problems in private and communal life across locations rural and urban, Vietnamese and elsewhere. Even as anti-globalisation sentiments are on the rise globally, Vietnamese seem to be embracing a more and more global outlook. As the growing middle class looks to global (luxury) consumption, education and pop culture for validation of its distinction, working class people search for opportunities beyond their home place and national borders, often driven by aspirations that are similarly shaped by prevailing notions of the good life.

All these developments produce social and economic formations, dynamics and structures of meanings that are difficult to pin down as characteristics of Vietnam as a country by and for

itself. After all, the global processes shaping these changes ultimately touch upon the lives of people in most global societies. This workshop unpacks these developments as part of a global Vietnam, thus offering a much-needed analysis of how these processes unfold in a country that is deeply implicated in global systems of labor and production. Concomitantly, it provides a comprehensive and much-needed update on Vietnam's socio-economic development in the post-reform era.

In particular, the workshop will address the following themes:

- **Economic Activities:** recasting of economic lives of Vietnamese living in Vietnam and beyond, i.e. the penetration of global finance, ideas of entrepreneurship, digitalization of economic activities and integration of Vietnamese labour into the global labor market through translocal and transnational migration.
- 1) **Gender and Private Life:** reconfiguration of ideas and practices related to gender, sexuality, and, more generally, private life; marriage migration by Vietnamese women to China and other Asian countries, return migration of young men who had worked in Japan.
- 2) **Culture and Identity:** identity constructions that weave together what is imagined as traditional and what is imagined as modern and cosmopolitan through the adoption of global cultural forms and management measures at the workplace.
- 3) **Class and Consumption:** translocal lifeworlds as part of class relations extending across national and regional boundaries via the lens of global consumption; global class-making processes that occur in the circulation of ideas about and practices of middle-classness and take on both global and local means of distinction.

Speakers will be invited by the organisers.

Contact

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