



*Neuro-Psychiatry as Area Studies:
Han Tong-se and the Cold War Diagnostics
of Sexual "Deviance" in South Korea*

Thursday,
April 13, 2017
4-5:30PM

Mech Lab 209

Faculty Host:
Han Sang Kim

Part of a larger book manuscript project entitled *The Profit of Queerness*, this talk examines how psychiatric discourses on non-normative sexuality and gender variance undergirded authoritarian development in Cold War South Korea. Using the work of one prominent doctor, Han Tong-se (1930-1973) as an example, I highlight how this medical profession contributed to the productive goals of state supremacy and capitalist expansion by marking the ideological boundaries of what I characterize as a socio-cultural system of cisgender hetero-patriarchy. To this end, I focus on the transpacific nature of Han's career, demonstrating how his long-term sojourn in the US as a medical resident, state hospital employee, and senior fellow laid the foundations for his rise as a transnational broker of "modernizing" knowledges. During a decade of service as a neuro-psychiatrist at Seoul National University, Han deployed behavioral and social scientific discourses popular in US hospitals and universities after WWII to expose Korean manifestations of sexual and gender "deviance" in response to the particular upheavals of militarized modernization. Although seeming to uncritically adopt American-centric forms of scientific knowledge in essentialist portrayals of fellow citizens, Han's adoption of national character studies also allowed him to relativize purported differences between culture-areas and thereby buttress the conservative structures of family life. However, the invocation of these authoritative epistemologies led to a marginalization of non-normative sexuality and gender variance, whether by pathologization or obfuscation. Although Han thus implicitly referenced what he considered the monstrosity of queer subcultures, he failed to name a set of alternative life courses that might disrupt or derail "wholesome" paths of anti-communist development.

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