

Enjoy the feeling of ‘falling in love’: practices of intimacies of Taiwanese sex tourists in Dongguan

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Abstract

The article looks at the closeness between Taiwanese sexual consumers and Chinese sex workers in Dongguan. According to Jamieson (1998), intimacy refers to reveal inter self and close relations between individuals. The relationship between friends, couples, colleagues, and relatives are main targets for theorizing intimacy in modern world. Although commercial sex is frequently represented as the exchange of money and sex, many studies on commercial sex shows that men do seek emotional comfort from sex workers when buying sex (Chen, 2003; Sanders, 2008). Moreover, sex workers, in order to please and keep regular clients, frequently engage in performing embodied emotional labour. Chen’s (2006, 2010) research even found that some clients and sex workers even turn their sexual encounters into long-term relationships such as lovers or get married.

Based on empirical data collected from in-depth interviews with 30 Taiwanese sex tourists and observations on a group of 5 sex tourists the article, the article examines the ways in which Taiwanese clients draw on varied narratives to justify their sex tourism, and deal with the issue of sexual disloyalty to their wives and/or girlfriends. According to these men, monogamous marriage is considered as boring and failed to provide successful sexual and intimate relations between themselves and their wives. On the contrary, their sexual encounters with Chinese sex workers are considered as sexually exciting and having the feeling of ‘falling in love’.

Seeing sex encounters in sex tourism as ‘falling in love’ with sex workers, these men had to perform the labor of love; such as chatting up with sex workers, showing caring and acting as lovers. Therefore, I will argue that sex tourism might be a site to theorize the performativity of intimacies in the global era. Although Sanders (2008) argued that the

relations between regular clients and their sex workers might be 'pure relation', I argue that the relations between Taiwanese clients and their sex workers in many cases not equal or reciprocity at all. Although many men still contacted their sex workers by QQ (a popular social network on the Internet in China) after they returned to Taiwan, they frequently cut off the contact when money or other social and emotional burdens got involved.