“Traveling Yellow Peril: U.S. American English Teachers in Japan and the Threat of Filipino Competition”

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Over the past decade Filipino migrants have increasingly filled positions in Japan's native-English teacher industry, a field that has historically employed a majority white workforce. These changing employment patterns have overlapped with the expansion of outsourcing and dispatch hiring practices and other neoliberal reforms that ultimately threaten to undermine working conditions across the language industry and beyond. Drawing on 20 months of fieldwork with U.S. American English teachers in Nagoya, this paper argues that my mostly white interviewees' responses to these changes translate "yellow peril" discourses into a new socio-historical context. As scholars in Asian American Studies have chronicled, previous iterations of this discourse have positioned Asian workers as threats to the livelihood and working standards of a white workforce within the U.S. This instance in Japan highlights how neoliberal globalization enables a partial translation of white supremacist 'yellow peril' discourses even within an Asia-based labor market. In an era of increased transnational mobility, discursive and material histories of oppression get re-worked as "white migrants" make sense of what it means to compete abroad against migrants from the Global South. A Transnational American studies lens can help us understand how U.S. imaginaries "travel" and transform in response to the racial politics of neoliberal regimes. Inasmuch as U.S. American migrants buy into neoliberalism's ideological promise of a post-racial order (in which everyone competes on equal terms based on their value to the market), it becomes impossible for them to imagine a racially just world outside of a "white victim" narrative.