

University of Wisconsin - Madison
Spring 2025

History 500: Reading Seminar - Empire & Gender in Southeast Asia
3 credits

M: 3:30-5:25 / Humanities 5255

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Office Hours: Mondays 11 am - 1 pm

Course Description

The study of gender and sexuality in Southeast Asia has depended on several major classic assumptions that have defined the field and the region. In almost all these cases, the colonial encounters have shaped the meanings, structures, and practices of gender and sexuality not just of the colonized (or semi-colonized) Southeast Asian societies, but also those of the imperial powers. In this seminar, we focus on these intersections to understand why historical and cultural concepts such as the “high status of women,” “gender pluralism,” and the “man of prowess” have achieved longevity in analyses of the region. In this reading seminar, we return to those classics not only for their explanatory value, but also to see how other scholars have contested, rejected, or expanded upon such assumptions in the history of Southeast Asia. The goal is twofold: to examine how classic concepts remain fertile ground for open questions in the field, and also to introduce students of the region to the various ways historians analyze gender and sexuality in Southeast Asia.

Aims and Outcomes

The seminar aims to provide an opportunity for participants (both undergraduate and graduate students) to learn several things. First: To be able to **identify** and **contextualize** the broad themes of the history of sex and gender in Southeast Asia from the early-modern period to the twentieth century. Second: To explore its recurrent debates to **analyze** and **understand** the kinds of scholarly interventions that continue to shape the field. Third: To offer a way for students to learn how to read secondary historical material not only like a historian, but like a Southeast Asia scholar, to be able to **develop and sustain comparison and critique** between ideas and arguments.

Designations, Attributes, Requisites

Req. HIST 201/Junior Standing
Advanced Level
L&S Credit
50% Grad

Format and Credit Hours

Our seminar meets in person, once a week, for 115-minute sessions.

The credit standard for this 3-credit course is met by an expectation of a total of 135 hours of student engagement with the course's learning activities (at least 45 hours per credit, or 9 hours per week). This includes regularly scheduled meeting times, reading, writing, group work, individual consultations with the instructor, and other student work as described in the syllabus.

Participation

The goal of an advanced seminar like ours is to have a conversation with everybody in the room, not just between the instructor and individual participants. You are expected to come to the seminar with your own questions about the assigned texts, and to contribute to the discussion. Listening carefully and attentively to your colleagues, and approaching and responding to the discussion with a spirit of critical generosity is crucial not only to the seminar, but to further education itself.

One or two students will lead the first hour of the discussion for each of our weekly texts—not by making an argument about what the text is about, or necessarily to provide an analysis of the text, but to guide the seminar to arrive at such a collective analysis.

Since we meet only once a week, missing a seminar session will have an adverse impact on the final grade.

Grading

A	AB	B	BC	C	D	F
92.5 – 100	87.5 – 92.49	82.5 – 87.49	77.5 – 82.49	70 – 77.49	60 – 69.99	below 60

Undergraduate Assessment

Discussion leadership (20%)

Because discussion is crucial to the seminar, each student is expected to lead it once during the semester on a text of their choosing. To prepare for your week's discussion, read the text ahead of time so you could introduce the reading and provide context. You must meet with the instructor before your week to discuss how you'll approach the discussion.

Participation (20%)

Active participation and engagement is crucial to the structure of a seminar; participation means an active contribution to the discussion, showing evidence of preparation for the class by doing the reading and thinking about it, and thinking out loud about it.

Author background (5%)

A brief intellectual biography of the scholars whose texts we're discussing. There's a worksheet for this, but you have to present it in class, and try to connect the author's intellectual biography with the arguments in the text we've read.

Reading notes 10x (15%)

To assist with getting ready for discussion, students are expected to fill out a reading notes worksheet for ten texts to be discussed in class and submitted on paper at the end of each seminar meeting.

Article style assessment (15%) — Due by end of Week 9

Choose any two articles from weeks 7, 9, 11, or 14—they need not be from the same week—and in a 1,500-word essay, compare the structure and effectiveness of the writing. This is not an assessment of content or argument, but rather the style and structure of writing itself. Compare introductions and conclusions; the structure of the piece itself; the clarity of its prose; the texture of the language and its appeal to the reader.

Historiographic essay (25%) — Due May 5th

The final requirement of the course is an essay of 2,500-3,000 words, analyzing one of the three intellectual themes we're covering in the seminar, laying out the stakes, origins, consequences, sources, shortcomings, and tensions within the use of these themes in Southeast Asian scholarship.

Graduate Assessment

Graduate students enrolled in our course are required to submit **a substantial research paper (35%)** at the end of the term, of approximately 8,000 - 10,000 words. This research paper (and preparatory work for it) will comprise a significant portion of the grade. Throughout the semester, smaller writing submissions will be required to speed us along in formulating the research project:

Week 3 (**preliminary project thoughts – 5%**): 500 words introducing the topic or question you wish to explore;

Week 5 (**sources – 5%**): 500 words on a locally or digitally accessible archive (or other primary source materials) and how you think this will provide you a source-base for the project, and how you will be using this material;

Week 7 (**research plan – 10%**): 750 words on the relevance of the research project, as well as on the kinds of secondary sources you'll be using.

Week 11 (**chunky outline – 10%**): an outline of the major arguments you'll write about and how they're connected to secondary literature and how they come together to form your thesis.

Active **participation in the seminar (15%)**, **discussion leadership (15%)** during a week of your choosing, and providing an **author background presentation (5%)** will comprise the remainder of the grade.

Statements of Principles and Policies

The Fundamental Principles

We will always treat each other with respect and courtesy. We will offer arguments in good faith. We will approach ideas offered by others with the intellectual generosity and openness that makes for good scholarly and professional and civic conduct. We will provide feedback and criticism—and accept these—without transgressing boundaries of respect. We will approach the interpretation of the past with the humility of the present, with the growing understanding that our judgment of the past reflects the concerns of our present, which will then, inevitably, be revised by those who come after us.

Accommodations for Students with Disabilities

The University of Wisconsin-Madison supports the right of all enrolled students to a full and equal educational opportunity. The Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA), Wisconsin State Statute (36.12), and UW-Madison policy ([UW-855](#)) require the university to provide reasonable accommodations to students with disabilities to access and participate in its academic programs and educational services. We share responsibility in the accommodation process. Students are expected to inform their instructors of their need for instructional accommodations during the beginning of the semester, or as soon as possible after being approved for accommodations. The instructors will work either directly with you or in coordination with the McBurney Center to provide reasonable instructional and course-related accommodations. Disability information, including instructional accommodations as part of a student's educational record, is confidential and protected under FERPA. (See: [McBurney Disability Resource Center](#))

Academic Integrity

“[We] are expected to uphold the core values of academic integrity which include honesty, trust, fairness, respect, and responsibility. These core values, combined with finding one's purpose and passion and applying them in and out of classroom learning, produce students who become extraordinary citizens. This unique path of opportunities, created by each student, is commonly known as the Wisconsin Experience and impacts our campus community and beyond in significant and positive ways. The value of a University of Wisconsin-Madison degree depends on the commitment of our academic

community to promote high levels of personal honesty and respect for the intellectual property of others.”

(From the Office of Student Conduct and Community Standards)

Diversity

Diversity is a source of strength, creativity, and innovation for UW-Madison. We value the contributions of each person and respect the profound ways their identity, culture, background, experience, status, abilities, and opinion enrich the university community. We commit ourselves to the pursuit of excellence in teaching, research, outreach, and diversity as inextricably linked goals. The University of Wisconsin-Madison fulfills its public mission by creating a welcoming and inclusive community for people from every background – people who as students, faculty, and staff serve Wisconsin and the world.

Generative AI Policy

We, as a learning community in our class, need to think critically and deeply about the advantages and risks of using generative AI as an aid to our learning and teaching. We may, of course, consult these models about class material as we might have used Wikipedia in the past, in full knowledge that these generative AI models are not citable authorities. The tendency for these models, likewise, to hallucinate and provide false data is a necessary consideration when using generative AI services. We may not pass off text generated by AI as our own writing, and submitting these texts for class assignments is plagiarism.

Attendance and Participation

Attending class is crucial to the social contract of any course at the university. We all (students and instructor) will attend all sessions prepared, having done the readings, open and willing to contribute to discussion, and ready to participate in in-class writing exercises. That is, of course, the ideal scenario; there will be times that we cannot live up to those expectations. That is fine; shit happens sometimes. In those rare cases, even just showing up ready to listen is sufficient. Let’s not make a habit of it, though.

Exceptions will be made for reasonable accommodations defined elsewhere in this document.

Religious Observances

Students are responsible for notifying instructors within the first two weeks of classes about any need for flexibility due to religious observances. Reasonable accommodation shall be provided by the instructor.

Course Schedule

Week 2:

Loos, Tamara. "Transnational Histories of Sexualities in Asia." *American Historical Review* 114, no. 5 (December 2009): 1309–24.

Scott, Joan W. "Gender: A Useful Category of Historical Analysis." *American Historical Review* 91, no. 5 (December 1986): 1053–75.

Najmabadi, Afsaneh. "Beyond the Americas: Are Gender and Sexuality Useful Categories of Analysis?" *Journal of Women's History* 18, no. 1 (2006): 11–21.

Part I: The "High Status of Women" Reconsidered

Week 3:

Andaya, Barbara Watson. *The Flaming Womb: Repositioning Women in Early Modern Southeast Asia*. Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press, 2006. Chs 1-2, 7

Week 4:

Locher-Scholten, Elsbeth. *Women and the Colonial State: Essays on Gender and Modernity in the Netherlands Indies, 1900-1942*. Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press, 2000. Chs 1, 5-6

Week 5:

Ikeya, Chie. *Refiguring Women, Colonialism, and Modernity in Burma*. Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press 2012. Chs 1-3

Part II: Rethinking the "Man of Prowess"

Week 6:

Wolters, O. W. *History, Culture, and Region in Southeast Asian Perspectives*. Rev. ed. Ithaca: Cornell University Southeast Asia Program Publications, 1999.

Anderson, Benedict R. O'G. "The Idea of Power in Javanese Culture." In *Language and Power: Exploring Political Cultures in Indonesia*, 17–77. Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1990.

Week 7:

McCoy, Alfred W. "Philippine Commonwealth and Cult of Masculinity." *Philippine Studies* 48, no. 3 (2000): 315–46.

Schulte Nordholt, Henk, and Margreet van Till. "Colonial Criminals in Java, 1870-1910." edited by Vicente L. Rafael, 47-69. Ithaca: Cornell University Southeast Asia Program Publications, 1999.

Fishel, Thamora. "Romances of the Sixth Reign: Gender, Sexuality and Siamese Nationalism." In *Genders and Sexualities in Modern Thailand*, edited by Peter Jackson and Nerida Cook, 154-167. Chiang Mai: Silkworm, 1999.

Ryter, Loren. "Privateers, Politicians, Prowess and Power." In *Southeast Asian Perspectives on Power*, edited by Liana Chua, Joanna Cook, Nicholas Long, and Lee Wilson, 107-18. London: Routledge, 2011.

Week 8:

Walker, J. H. *Power and Prowess: The Origins of Brooke Kingship in Sarawak*. Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press, 2002. Chs. 1-5

Week 9:

Rosaldo, Michelle Z. *Knowledge and Passion: Ilongot Notions of Self and Social Life*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1980. Ch 5.

Rosaldo, Renato. "The Story of Tukbaw: 'They Listen as He Orates.'" In *The Biographical Process: Studies in the History and Psychology of Religion*, edited by Frank E. Reynolds and Donald Capps, 121-51. The Hague: Mouton, 1976.

Rosaldo, Renato. "Grief and a Headhunter's Rage: On the Cultural Force of Emotions." In *Text, Play, and Story: The Construction and Reconstruction of Self and Society*, edited by Stuart Plattner and Edward M. Bruner, 178-95. Washington, D.C.: American Ethnological Society, 1984.

Week 10: Spring Break

Part III: Rethinking "Gender Pluralism"

Week 11:

Peletz, Michael G. "Transgenderism and Gender Pluralism in Southeast Asia since Early Modern Times." *Current Anthropology* 47, no. 2 (April 2006): 309-40.

Peletz, Michael G. "Gender Pluralism: Muslim Southeast Asia since Early Modern Times." *Social Research* 78, no. 2 (2011): 659-86.

Blackwood, Evelyn. "Gender Transgression in Colonial and Postcolonial Indonesia." *Journal of Asian Studies* 64, no. 4 (November 2005): 849-79.

Week 12:

Sinnott, Megan. *Toms and Dees: Transgender Identity and Female Same-Sex Relationships in Thailand*. Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press, 2004. [Selections]

Week 13:

Boellstorff, Tom. *The Gay Archipelago: Sexuality and Nation in Indonesia*. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2005. [Selections]

Week 14:

Loos, Tamara. "Sex in the Inner City: The Fidelity between Sex and Politics in Siam." *The Journal of Asian Studies* 64, no. 4 (2005): 881–909.

Vann, Michael G. "Sex and the Colonial City: Mapping Masculinity, Whiteness, and Desire in French Occupied Hanoi." *Journal of World History* 28, no. 2/3 (2017): 395–435.

Anderson, Benedict R. O'G. "'Bullshit!' S/He Said: The Happy, Modern, Sexy, Indonesian Married Woman as Transsexual." In *Fantasizing the Feminine in Indonesia*, edited by Laurie J. Sears, 270–94. Durham: Duke University Press, 1996.

Brewer, Carolyn. "Baylan, Asog, Transvestism, and Sodomy: Gender, Sexuality, and the Sacred in Early Colonial Philippines." *Intersections: Gender, History, and Culture in the Asian Context*, no. 2 (May 1999). <http://intersections.anu.edu.au/issue2/carolyn2.html>.

Week 15:

[Final seminar]