

University of Wisconsin – Madison
Fall 2025

History 458/Asian Studies 458:
History of Southeast Asia from 1800

M/W: 4-5:15 PM
Humanities 1221
In-person
3 credits

Juan Fernandez, PhD
fernandezcap@wisc.edu
Humanities 5116
Student hours: W 1-3 PM

Our course will focus on the “modern” in the history of Southeast Asia, a region usually conceived of as riven by ethnic, religious, political, economic, and ecological dissimilarities—yet as we shall see, forms a connected region with long histories of mutual interaction. We shall examine its colonial history in the 19th and 20th centuries, anti-colonial struggles and the emergence of national consciousness, into the end of the Cold War. We will approach the region's history thematically, paying attention to its supposed broad dissimilarities to attempt to understand how these continue to inform and structure the region's current configuration. Throughout the semester, we will examine the so-called “emergence of modernity” in the region by focusing on spaces (broadly construed) through which modern subjects, modern practices, modern ideas, and modern conflicts crystallized over this two-hundred-year period of Southeast Asian history. We will read secondary sources to contextualize a series of primary documents that we will examine hands-on during in-class exercises that will complement our lectures. Our course has a reading load of about 50 pages a week, with a sit-down midterm and final.

Course Designations

Req. Junior standing
Intermediate Level
Social Science Breadth

L&S Credit
50% Graduate Coursework
Honors Optional

Learning Outcomes

By the end of the semester, undergraduates enrolled in our course will:

Develop an understanding of the relationships between local and regional histories and broader, global historical trends that characterize the emergence of modernity;

Interpret and contextualize a variety of primary textual, visual, and material sources produced in and about the region to become familiar with the breadth of sources and to develop historical and analytic skills using those sources;

Analyze critically the histories of Southeast Asia to understand the enduring consequences of colonial-era transformations on the cultures and societies of the peoples of the region.

Additionally, graduate students will:

Demonstrate familiarity with the historiography of the region through in-depth structural analyses of other scholars' uses of primary sources, and by doing so acquire a solid foundation from which to contextualize future interventions into the field.

Format and Credit Hours

Our lecture meets in person, twice a week on Mondays and Wednesdays, for 75-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.

Grading and Coursework

Our course is graded on an uncurved and unweighted points basis, with a total of 1000 points possible throughout the semester, which is functionally equivalent to a 100% scale.

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

Points	Task
250	In-class document exercises (10x)
100	Reading notes (10x)
250	Midterm Exam
250	Final Exam
150	Participation and Attendance*

*Undergraduates are required to meet with the instructor at least once during the term.

Graduate Assessment

Points	Task	Due
250	In-class document exercises (10x)	
100	Participation	
200	Structural analysis essay	19 October
200	Book review	16 November
250	Historiographic essay	15 December

**Structural Analysis Essay (Due 19 October)*

Using any two readings assigned between weeks 2 through 6, and in a 1,500-word essay, analyze and compare their structure. Aim to be as specific as you can. (E.g., and by no means an extensive list of things to think about: How do the authors frame their intervention into the field? With whom are they in conversation, and how does that influence their use of sources? What sources do they use, and how do they use them? Does the evidence they use match the arguments they make? Do they do anything structurally that you found effective, or perhaps less so?)

**Book Review (Due 16 November)*

Write a 1,500-word review of a book that is relevant to your field, and is related—thematically, or geographically—to the questions of our course.

**Historiographic Essay (Due 15 December)*

The final requirement of the course is an essay of 2,500-3,000 words, analyzing the central theme of the class—“Modernity”—laying out the stakes, origins, consequences, sources, shortcomings, and tensions within the use of this concept in Southeast Asian scholarship.

Honors

Students may elect to take our course with the additional Honors designation that will complement the assigned coursework. Students should [add or drop the Honors Option](#) by following the steps outlined on the Honors Program website as soon as possible.

Earning Honors credit in this course will entail the successful completion of either a series of smaller projects structured throughout the semester that will be assigned to enrich and give greater texture to the historical lectures and discussed during one-on-one meetings with the instructor, or an individualized project due at the end of term. Students enrolled in Honors should meet with the instructor before the end of the first week of term to discuss options and plans.

Textbooks and Readings

No textbooks or other materials are required for purchase to participate in this course. All required reading materials are available either through the UW Libraries catalog or will be provided as scans by the instructor, and linked or uploaded in the course Canvas site. Please try to do all the readings before the Monday lectures.

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.

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.

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.

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.

Semester Schedule

Week 1 (3-7 September): Introductory lecture and syllabus overview

Week 2 (8-14 September): Being Modern in Southeast Asia

B. Andaya - "Historicizing 'Modernity' in Southeast Asia"
Cooper – "Modernity" from *Colonialism in Question*

Week 3 (15-21 September): The Border

Scott – "State Space" from *the Art of Not Being Governed*
Thongchai – "The Coming of a New Geography" from *Siam Mapped*

Week 4 (22-28 September): The Census

L. Andaya – "Ethnicity in Pre-Colonial and Colonial Southeast Asia"
Hirschman – "The Making of Race in Colonial Malaya"

Week 5 (29 September – 5 October): The Home

Pattynama – "The Indisch Family"
Stoler – "Carnal Knowledge and Imperial Power"

Week 6 (6-12 October): The Temple and the Church

Owen – "Inner Life and Identity" from *Emergence of Modern SEA*
Ileto – "Religion and Anti-Colonial Movements"

Week 7 (13-19 October): Midterm Exam (in-class)

Week 8 (20-26 October): The Plantation and the Factory

Owen - *Emergence of Modern Southeast Asia* (Ch. 12 & 13)

Week 9 (27 October – 2 November): The Marketplace

Ikeya – "Modern Woman as Consumer" from *Refiguring Women*
Mrazek – "The Indonesian Dandy" from *Engineers of Happy Land*

Week 10 (3-9 November): The School

Pomfret – "Class Reactions" from *Youth and Empire* (Ch. 8)
Kelly – "Schooling and National Integration in Vietnam"

Week 11 (10-16 November): The Police Station

McCoy - from *Policing America's Empire* (Ch. 6 & 7)

Week 12 (17-23 November): The Barracks

Womack – “Ethnicity and Martial Races”

Eckert – “Double-Edged Swords of Conquest in Indochina”

Week 13 (24-30 November): The Battlefield

Kim – *The Japanese Wartime Empire* (Ch. 2)

Week 14 (1-7 December): The Voting Booth

Anderson – “Elections in Southeast Asia” from *The Specter of Comparisons*

Aung-Thwin – “Nationalism and Post-Colonial Identity in Southeast Asia”

Hedman – “Authoritarianism and Democracy”

Week 15 (8-10 December): Final Exam (in-class)

Readings Bibliography

- Andaya, Barbara Watson. "Historicising 'Modernity' in Southeast Asia." *Journal of the Economic and Social History of the Orient* 40, no. 4 (1997): 391–409.
- Cooper, Frederick. *Colonialism in Question: Theory, Knowledge, History*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 2005.
- Hirschman, Charles. "The Making of Race in Colonial Malaya: Political Economy and Racial Ideology." *Sociological Forum* 1, no. 2 (1986): 330–61.
- Ikeya, Chie. *Refiguring Women, Colonialism, and Modernity in Burma*. Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press, 2012.
- Ileto, Reynaldo C. "Religion and Anti-Colonial Movements." In *The Cambridge History of Southeast Asia*, edited by Nicholas Tarling, 3:193–244. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999.
- Kelly, Gail P. "Schooling and National Integration: The Case of Interwar Vietnam." *Comparative Education* 18, no. 2 (1982): 175–95.
- Kim, Diana S. *Rethinking Colonial Legacies Across Southeast Asia through the Lens of the Japanese Wartime Empire*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2025.
- McCoy, Alfred W. *Policing America's Empire: The United States, the Philippines, and the Rise of the Surveillance State*. Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 2009.
- Mrázek, Rudolf. *Engineers of Happy Land: Technology and Nationalism in a Colony*. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2002.
- Owen, Norman G., ed. *Routledge Handbook of Southeast Asian History*. London: Routledge, 2014.
- , ed. *The Emergence of Modern Southeast Asia: A New History*. Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press, 2005.
- Pattynama, Pamela. "The Indisch Family: Daily Life in Early 20th Century Batavia." In *Recalling the Indies: Colonial Culture and Postcolonial Identities*, edited by Joost Côté and Loes Westerbeek, 47–66. Amsterdam: Aksant, 2005.
- Pomfret, David M. *Youth and Empire: Trans-Colonial Childhoods in British and French Asia*. Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2016.
- Scott, James C. *The Art of Not Being Governed: An Anarchist History of Upland Southeast Asia*. New Haven: Yale University Press, 2009.
- Stoler, Ann Laura. *Carnal Knowledge and Imperial Power: Race and the Intimate in Colonial Rule*. 2nd ed. Berkeley: University of California Press, 2010.
- Thongchai Winichakul. *Siam Mapped: A History of the Geo-Body of the Nation*. Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press, 1994.
- Womack, Sarah. "Ethnicity and Martial Races: The Garde Indigene of Cambodia in the 1880s and 1890s." In *Colonial Armies in Southeast Asia*, edited by Karl Hack and Tobias Rettig, 107–25. London: Routledge, 2006.