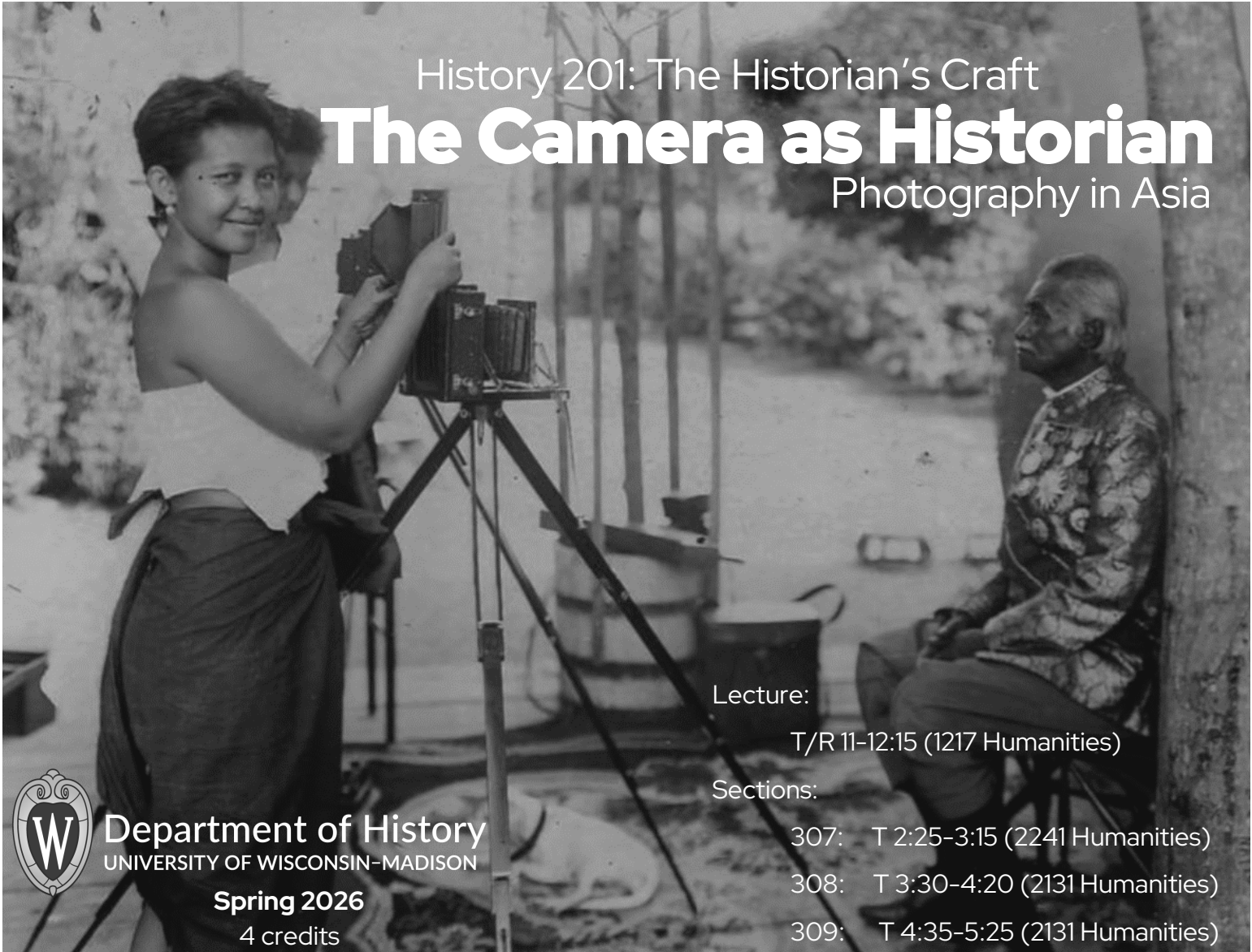




History 201: The Historian's Craft

The Camera as Historian

Photography in Asia



Department of History
UNIVERSITY OF WISCONSIN-MADISON

Spring 2026
4 credits

Lecture:

T/R 11-12:15 (1217 Humanities)

Sections:

307: T 2:25-3:15 (2241 Humanities)

308: T 3:30-4:20 (2131 Humanities)

309: T 4:35-5:25 (2131 Humanities)

course description

We will look at photographs taken in Asia during the 19th and 20th centuries. We will learn how to analyze these photographs, not merely for the "look of the past," but for what we can read in them about ideals of power, desire, and modernity. We begin with the premise that photographs themselves *have* histories. We will ask, through these photographs, what it means to perform modernity for audiences both domestic and foreign, what it means to exercise power and be subject to it; and who is desiring what, and why. We will approach the material thematically across East, South, and Southeast Asia. These photographs provide a useful and unique source of historical understanding that we will critically examined not just for what the image shows—its surface and content—but also for why the photograph was taken in the first place, who made it, where it was taken, and for what ends was it used. That is, how do we read photographs to see them not just as images but as arguments? In this course, we shall develop skills in historical analysis, writing, and research through a critical engagement with colonial-era photographs from Asia.

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instructors

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Wednesdays, 1–2pm

Thursdays, 2–3 pm

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attributes

Comm. Part B
Humanities Breadth
Intermediate Level
L&S Credit

content warning

The photographs we will examine, analyze, attempt to historicize and (if at all possible) comprehend, in this course are from the colonial period in Asia. They are visual artifacts that bear lasting imprints of power-relations whose histories are difficult and contentious, and in many cases create portrayals that possess continuing consequences. A small number of the images we will analyze are graphic in nature. They involve, in some cases, extreme physical violence—torture and execution, and battlefield photographs. In other cases, they may involve male and female nudity, though without explicitly sexual content. Any explicitly graphic content will be noted by the instructors in the readings and before they are projected in class sessions. The task of analyzing these images for their less apparent, though no less pernicious, claims about the histories of Asia and its peoples is the task of historical interpretation, which is the purpose of our course. Part of our engagement with these visual histories is the question of looking at the images, or looking away, or refusing to look. All are legitimate ways of engaging with the visual artifacts of the historical past. Your instructors are always available to discuss and meet about these circumstances as they arise.

outcomes

Upon successful completion of this course, students will be prepared to undertake substantial historical research and writing in a variety of courses, including the History 600 seminar required for the undergraduate major.

Specific goals for this course include learning to:

Ask questions—by developing the habit of asking questions that may generate new directions for historical research;

Find sources—by learning the logic of footnotes, bibliographies, search engines, libraries, and archives, and consult them to identify and locate source materials;

Evaluate sources—by analyzing the perspective, credibility, and utility of source materials;

Develop and present an argument—through the appropriate use of sources to create, modify, and support tentative conclusions and new questions;

Plan further research—by drawing upon preliminary research to develop a plan for further investigation;

Communicate findings effectively—by making formal and informal written and oral presentations tailored to specific audiences.

format, credit-hours, interaction

Our class meets in person, three times a week: two seventy-five-minute lectures on Tuesdays and Thursdays, and one fifty-minute discussion section led by the teaching assistant, Tuesday afternoons.

The standard for this four-credit course is met by an expectation of a total of 180 hours of student engagement with the course learning activities (at least 45 hours per credit), which includes the lecture and discussion sessions outlined above, in addition to weekly readings, writing exercises, drafting and revising the components of a research essay, individual consultations with the instructors, as well as other student work as described in this syllabus.

Students are required to meet with the instructor in office hours at least once during the semester.

required texts

All required texts are available on our course Canvas site as pdfs. No additional textbooks or other materials are required to be purchased.

fundamental principles of our course

We will always treat each other with respect and courtesy. We will offer arguments in good faith and personal honesty. 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 be, inevitably, revised by those who come after us.

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)

generative AI

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. With these in mind, we will not pass off text generated by AI as our own writing, and submitting these texts for class assignments is plagiarism.

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.

disability accommodations

We support the right of all enrolled students to a full and equal educational opportunity. The Americans with Disabilities Act, Wisconsin State Statute, and UW-Madison policy 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.

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.

attendance and participation

Attending the lectures as well as the weekly discussion sections are crucial to the social contract of any course at the university. We all (students and instructors) 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.

The participation grade (15% of the final grade) will be determined primarily by active engagement during discussion sections, and more minimally during the lectures. Because of the importance of active participation in discussion sections, absences from those class meetings will serve as gatekeepers. To be eligible to receive A-level participation points, you may only miss two section meetings, and so on through a sharp descending scale. (That is, 3 absences = max participation grade B; 4 = BC; 5 = C.) More than 5 absences imperil your final grade significantly.

Since we will be doing a lot of in-class writing and group exercises to have a better grasp of the historian's craft and to practice historical thinking, missing lecture days means likewise missing the opportunity to do this work, which contribute 20% to the final grade. In-class exercises on paper are not eligible to be made up at a later date.

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

coursework

Over the course of the semester, we shall be writing approximately 30 pages, divided into several categories. (See table below.) Most of the writing will be in the form of short in-class exercises, which individually are for low stakes, but because we're doing a lot of these exercises in thinking and writing like a historian, collectively these exercises comprise a significant part of the grade. There are also three short essays (9-12pp total), and a final project (8-10pp), which includes preparatory writing. In addition to writing, we shall also have a short presentation once during the semester.

In-class writing exercises are due at the end of the class. The three essays will all be due on a Sunday at midnight Central. Late essay submissions will be docked a letter-grade equivalent for each 24-hour period after the deadline. Exceptions will be made for reasonable accommodations defined elsewhere in this document.

Assignments are to be submitted either through the course Canvas site or on paper, depending on the instructors' instructions.

grading

Scale		Assignment Points	
A	92.5 – 100	Essays:	
AB	87.5 – 92.49	1. Image Analysis	75
B	82.5 – 87.49	2. Source Criticism	100
BC	77.5 – 82.4	3. Analytic	150
C	70 – 77.49	Research Plan	50
D	60 – 69.99	Final Project	175
F	below 60	Writing Exercises	200
		Presentation	100
		Participation	150

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

course schedule

Week 1: The Camera as Historian

Reading:

Barthes, 1977 - "The Photographic Message"

Due: Sunday 25 January

Recognizing and Avoiding Plagiarism

<https://plagiarism.iu.edu/index.html>

Week 2: The Evidence of Photography

Readings:

Elkins, 2013 - "Visual Analysis and Torture"

Thomas, 2009 - "The Evidence of Sight"

Due: Sunday 1 February

Essay 1

Week 3: The Evidence of Photography

Reading:

Hevia, 2009 - "The Photography Complex"

Week 4: Counting the Dead

Reading:

Rafael, 2000 - from *White Love and Other Events in Filipino History*

Week 5: The Naked and the Nude

Readings:

Sen, 2006 - "Savage Bodies, Civilized Pleasures"

Levine, 2008 - "States of Undress"

Due: Sunday 22 February

Essay 2

Week 6: Regarding the Pain of Others

Reading:

Chaudhary, 2012 - from *Afterimage of Empire*

Week 7: Landscape and Power

2—8 March

Reading:

Protschky, 2011 - from *Images of the Tropics*

Week 8: Portraiture and Portrayal

9—15 March

Readings:

Wue, 2005 - "Essentially Chinese"

Cary, 2000 - "The Image of the King"

Due: Sunday 15 March

Essay 3

Week 9: Family Frames

Readings:

Protschky, 2012 - "Teacups and Cameras"

Pattynama, 2015 - "Interracial Unions"

Week 10: Modern Subjects

23—29 March

Reading:

Natanaree, 2019 - "The Siamese 'Modern Girl'"

Week 11: Spring Recess 30 March—5 April
—No Class—

Week 12: Visual Warfare 6—12 April
Reading: Wade, 2015 - “The Living Room War”
Due: Sunday 12 April Research Plan

Week 13: Presentations
In-Class Presentations

Week 14: Presentations
In-Class Presentations

Week 15: Semester Wrap-up 27 April—1 May
Final Lecture: 1 May
Due: Monday 4 May Final Project