

Panel proposal EuroSEAS Paris | 28 June–1 July 2022
EHESS-Campus Condorcet, Paris-Aubervilliers, France

Title :

Gender and sexual pluralism in Southeast Asia

Convenor:

PD Dr. Viola Thimm

Associate Professor of Anthropology (*Privatdozentin*)

Institute of Anthropology, University of Heidelberg

viola.thimm@uni-heidelberg.de

Brief description and explanation of the chosen format

This panel will exploratively consider new approaches to gender and sexuality research in Southeast Asia. Although there are already some, albeit few, established scholars researching sexual diversity in Southeast Asia such as Tom Boellstorff, Sharyn Graham Davies, Peter Jackson, or Michael Peletz, queer studies in general is a relatively young field in the research landscape. Accordingly, research on sexual diversity is just beginning to emerge on a broader scale. In order to explore these new developments in the research landscape, the panel format will invite different scholars, especially young ones, who themselves come from different regional contexts and work on different regional contexts in Southeast Asia.

Brief description of panel

Across Southeast Asia, gender and sexual diversity is more restricted today than it was a hundred years ago. The *sida-sida*, for example, were a particular class of ritual-specialists among the Malays who were considered to combine female and male properties, and through this combination they were invested with spiritual power. The *bissu*, a particular class of ritual-specialists among the Bugis of South Sulawesi, occupied a special social position because they combined female and male qualities. The Ngaju Dayak, a group living on the island of Borneo, knew the ritual transgender specialists as *basir*, while in Burma they were famous as the *nat kadaw*. Gender and sexual pluralism has been severely transformed by colonial and postcolonial state policies in the context of economic and religious developments. However, transgender identities and practices still exist in contemporary times, albeit marginalized. The *mak andam* in Malaysia are ritual practitioners whose role is to plan weddings and prepare brides. Many male transvestites in the Philippines, in Thailand or in Indonesia work in the beauty sector. In Singapore, homosexuality is still punishable by law; at the same time, the city-state has become one of Asia's gay capitals.

This panel invites presentations that deal with past and present gender and sexual pluralism in Southeast Asia and its complex negotiation processes between political, religious and economic spheres. On an empirical level it can be analyzed, among other things, how gender and sexuality are related to one another; what role transgender people play in contemporary Southeast Asia and how they perceive their identities. On a theoretical level, papers can address, for instance, interlinkages between categorization processes of what counts as “transgender”, “third gender”, “female”, “male”, “homosexual” or “heterosexual” in the context of nation state building, class formation, religion and ethnicity; transformations in understandings of “femininity” and “masculinity” or the role of morality and spirituality as part of these processes.

Proposal for a **single session** (3-4 presenters)