

CSEAS Gender Seminars 2025



with Dr. Li-li Chen

Lecturer, Universidade Nacional Timor Lorosa'e

March 3 Tue 5 Thu 2026

Seminar on Gender Issues in Academia

Understanding Gender in Timor-Leste



March 3 Tue 2026

16:00-17:30 In-person only



Venue

Seminar Room (213)

2nd Floor, Inamori Building, CSEAS, Kyoto University



Moderator

Chika Obiya (CSEAS)

Special Seminar Frontiers of Gender Studies in Asia

Sexual Politics and Situated Agency in Timor-Leste:

Rethinking Sexuality as Resistance



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16:00-17:30 In-person only



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Moderator

Kisho Tsuchiya (CSEAS)

Speaker Li-li Chen

Lecturer, Universidade Nacional Timor Lorosa'e

Dr. Li-li Chen, lecturer, Universidade Nacional Timor Lorosa'e, is a Feminist International Relations scholar focused on Women, Peace, Security (WPS), border politics, and small-state geopolitics in Southeast Asia. Her research critically engages IR theory and policymaking through empirically grounded work in Timor-Leste and Southeast Asia, examining how global norms (e.g., UNSCR 1325, LGBT rights frameworks, geopolitics) are translated, contested, and experienced across different geopolitical contexts. Research interests include: (1) the intimate geopolitics of China's Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) and U.S. geographic strategies in small postcolonial states; (2) gendered security, migration, and governance in borderlands under China-U.S.-ASEAN pressure; (3) feminist and critical approaches to sexual normativity and governance, with implications for understanding indigenous lifeworlds in postcolonial Asia. Theoretically grounded in critical engagements of IR theory, political geography, and security studies; and methodologically employing qualitative research (life histories, ethnography, interviews) combined with critical discourse and policy analysis. Ph.D. (Political Science), University of Florida, 2018.



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Understanding Gender in Timor-Leste

Gender is a contested word in Timor-Leste, where the men-women dyad is central to it. I trace how the men-women dyad in Timor-Leste has been understood and governed across three historical periods: the late Portuguese colonial era (before 1975), the Indonesian occupation (1975–1999), and the post-independence period (after 1999). In the first period, gender relations were organised through customary systems and marriage exchanges such as *barlake*, where men were associated with public authority and external relations, and women with domestic work, reproduction, and important but often hidden ritual roles, producing complementary but hierarchical relations. Under occupation and armed struggle, militarised nationalism deepened expectations of male heroism and female sacrifice, even as women's participation in the resistance temporarily stretched conventional roles and generated new forms of agency. Since 1999, the Constitution, laws, and donor-driven gender mainstreaming have formally repositioned men and women as equal citizens, while everyday life remains strongly shaped by patriarchal norms of male headship, female care work, and widespread gender-based violence. By following various understandings and shifts of the men-women dyad across time and groups, I argue that it is a layered and contested practice rather than one simply resuming or replacing another in history.



Special Seminar: Frontiers of Gender Studies in Asia

March
5
2026

Sexual Politics and Situated Agency in Timor-Leste: Rethinking Sexuality as Resistance

I examine how sexuality in Timor-Leste operates not only as an object of governance but also as a situated form of agency and resistance. Focusing on women and LGBT people in a small postcolonial, Catholic-majority society, I trace how colonial rule, church moralities, Indonesian occupation, and post-independence nation-building have sought to regulate bodies, desires, and intimate relations. Rather than treating sexuality simply as identity, sexual expression, or as a linear and progressive rights story, I analyze sexual practices, silences, and everyday negotiations as ways through which people navigate violence, economic precarity, kinship obligations, and state authority. Drawing on ethnographic research and interviews, I foreground how micro- and everyday acts, such as choices of partnership, discretion, disclosure, mobility, and care, reconfigure power relations in families, communities, and institutions. In doing so, I argue that sexuality is a resistant form of agency that both emerges from, and subtly transforms, the gendered and colonial orders that shape contemporary Timor-Leste, and suggest how these insights can contribute to broader debates on sexual politics in global South contexts.



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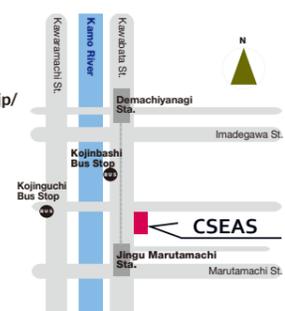


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Take No.4, No.17 or No.205 bus and get off at "Kojinguchi". Then walk for five minutes to the east.
- ▶ From "Jingu-Marutamachi" Station of Keihan Railway.
Walk for five minutes to the north.



■ Contact ✉ obiya@cseas.kyoto-u.ac.jp

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The seminars are organized by Gender Equality Promotion Committee, Center for Southeast Asian Studies (CSEAS), Kyoto University



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