

# Women in the Early Modern City: Suzhou and Paris

CO-SPONSORED BY THE HISTORY DEPARTMENT GENDER & SEXUALITY GROUP AND THE CENTER FOR CHINESE STUDIES

Monday, November 7th

12:00 pm - 3:00 pm

6275 Bunche Hall

Please RSVP here: [forms.gle/reHJ4QQsub65eA72A](https://forms.gle/reHJ4QQsub65eA72A)

## TWO GUEST SPEAKERS

**Peng Xu, Assistant Professor, Department of Theatre and Dance,  
University of Hawaii at Manoa**

"The Courtesan's 'Role Portrait' and the Suzhou Marketplace in the Late Ming"



Abstract: What is a late Ming courtesan's portrait? Given the rarity of visual examples that come down to us from the late Ming, what do we talk about when talking about a courtesan's "portrait?" I argue that it is a role portrait that combines a female icon with a specific erotic story, a static beauty icon that can be animated into an actress with virtuosity in singing and dancing. Mediating between reality and fiction, such a prop portrait can cross the bounds of the physical stage. To the late Ming consumers, it remained suspended, waiting to be reanimated by the copier or the admirer. The meiren tu genre, without being sexually explicit, is erotic, because, for the owners of the copies, eroticism would arise from imagining the painted beauty's reanimation, a theater of the mind.

**Ryan Hilliard, Assistant Professor, Department of History,  
Clemson University**

"Sharing a Home, Sharing a Life: Single Women's Domestic Alliances in Early Modern Paris"

Abstract: In eighteenth-century Paris, unmarried women formed domestic alliances as strategies of survival and alternatives to family. While these associations ranged from long-term cohabitation to affective relations, their defining characteristic was their voluntary nature. Nonetheless, singlewomen's domestic arrangements resembled and replicated kinship during a period when household membership shifted from coresidential characterizations toward consanguineal qualifications. By coopting language, patterns, and privileges associated with kinship, unmarried women offered legitimacy and even legal protection to their chosen relations. In doing so, they negotiated an increasingly rigid and exclusionary family model without being defined by it.

