

How Do Poli and Boni Relate to Borneo? A Survey of Chinese Sources from the 10th to 18th centuries"

By:

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10th April 2013, Wednesday

2:30 p.m.

Room 2.27 IAS Meeting Room, FASS Building, 2nd Floor.

Abstract:

Even before independence from Great Britain in 1984, local and expatriate scholars have worked to create a national history for the modern sultanate of Brunei. The by far the most active writer on Brunei history has been Robert Nicholl. It was largely due to his efforts that the national history incorporated pre-modern Chinese descriptions extending the existence of pre-Islamic Brunei to the sixth century. Nicholl identified Poli 婆利, Jinlipishi 金利毗逝, Shilifoshi 室利佛逝, and Boni 渤泥 (also 勃泥) as precursors of Brunei. He consequently constructed long standing relations between 'ancient' Brunei and the imperial court in China.

The aim of this paper is twofold: It examines the original Chinese sources and discusses textual and subsequent historiographical problems of Nicholl's allegations. Moreover, it argues that the ambivalent nature of pre-modern Chinese sources facilitated the transformation of assumptions about Poli, Jinlipishi, Shilifoshi, and Boni into facts about the pre-modern history of Brunei.

Speaker's Profile:

Johannes L. Kurz received his Dr.phil. in Classical Chinese Studies (major), Modern Chinese Studies (1. minor), and History of Far Eastern Arts (2. minor) from the University of Heidelberg, Germany, in 1993. After working as a librarian and temporary lecturer at the Institute of Chinese Studies as well as the Institute of Art History, he started working as an assistant professor at the Department of Chinese Studies, Institute of Oriental Studies, University of Kiel in 1995. Since 1998 he works in the History Department/Historical Studies Programme, FASS, Universiti Brunei Darussalam. In 2002 he was awarded the degree of Dr.phil.habil. for Chinese Studies (Habilitation; certification as full professor) by the Faculty of Philosophy, University of Kiel .

His main research interests are on the history of the Five Dynasties and Ten States period with a focus on the Southern Tang dynasty (937-976), as well as the intellectual-political-historiographical topics in the early Northern Song dynasty (960-1022). He so far has published two books, namely *China's Southern Tang Dynasty, 937-976* (Routledge, 2011) and *Song Taizongs Kompilationsprojekt (reg. 976-997)* (Lang, 2003). A third one on the structure, collection practices, and organization of the Northern Song imperial library is in preparation.