

## Dr. Johannes L. Kurz

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### “Contradictory History: Wenlai and Boni in the “Official History of the Ming” (*Mingshi* 明史)”

Wednesday, 28th March 2018 at 2:30 p.m.

IAS Meeting Room 2.27, Level 2, FASS Building

#### Abstract

The *Mingshi* 明史 (“Official History of the Ming”, 1739) has two entries which allegedly describe early Brunei. Wenlai 文萊 is understood as a modern Chinese appellation of the country of Brunei since the early 17th century. Boni 淳泥 and its variant forms (渤泥, 勃泥, 勃尼) found in pre-modern Chinese sources are generally accepted to refer to ancient Brunei from the 10th century onwards.

In this presentation I shall highlight the problematic nature of the contradictive information in the two entries. Taking into account Geoff Wade’s (1987) assertion that Wenlai in the *Mingshi* is not describing Brunei and Don Brown’s (1970) observation that Boni is not necessarily always referring to the same location, the present paper will examine the contents of both *Mingshi* entries. A close reading of the *Mingshi* and related sources reveals that neither Wenlai nor Boni designated a common historical Brunei state, but that Wenlai identified a port, while Boni identified a region.

#### Speaker’s Profile



Johannes L. Kurz, senior assistant professor in the Historical and International Studies Programme (FASS, UBD), is a historian with a specialization in pre-modern Chinese history. Having obtained his Ph.D. in Classical Chinese Studies from the University of Heidelberg in 1993, he worked as an assistant professor at the Institute of Oriental Studies, University of Kiel (Germany), before joining UBD as a lecturer in 1998.

His main research interests include pre-modern Chinese texts on maritime Southeast Asia from the Tang to the Ming dynasties and their modern interpretations; pre-modern Chinese texts in national histories in Southeast Asia; the historiography of the Five Dynasties and Ten States period in China (10th century); pre-modern Chinese sources in the history of Borneo; and the South China Sea in historiographical perspective. He has published a study on the cultural and political integration of southern scholars into the Song dynasty (Song Taizong’s (reg. 976-997) Kompilationsprojekt, Lang 2003) as well as a book dedicated to the history of the Southern Tang (China’s Southern Tang Dynasty, 937-976, Routledge 2011). He is currently working on issues relating to Western interpretations of pre-modern Chinese sources of Southeast Asia and how they affected and possibly distorted contemporary views of pre-modern maritime Southeast Asia.