DEPARTMENTAL SEMINAR

TITLE

The Changing Trade Order in the Straits of Malacca, 1780-1820

SPEAKER

Dr Atsushi Ota

Day, Date, Time, Venue

Wednesday, 14 March 2007, 3 pm
HY/PS Lounge, AS1-0401

Abstract

The seminar re-examines the maritime trade in the Straits of Malacca from 1780 to 1820, a period which tends to be considered of decline because of rampant piracy and lack of strong ruling power. However, Dutch and English sources suggest the continuing junk and Bugis trades in changing locations throughout the period. Dutch records of ‘piracy’ and ‘smuggling’ also suggest, if carefully examined, that local traders formed organized patterns of raiding and interregional trade breaking the Dutch monopoly.

In the late eighteenth century English traders enthusiastically participated in the interregional trade, often through Chinese intermediate traders, in order to obtain pepper and other produces that were sought after in China. This Anglo-Chinese partnership contributed to the increase in English influence in Sino-Southeast Asian trade and accelerated the demise of the already malfunctioning Dutch trading system. Through an examination of the activity of local, Bugis, Chinese, Dutch, British, and newly-arrived American traders, I shall characterize the trade in the Straits of Malacca in the period 1780-1820 as one of competition and network-formation, leading to the new trade order centered on Singapore in the subsequent period.

About the Speaker

Atsushi OTA is a Postdoctoral Fellow in the History Dept, NUS. He holds a PhD from Leiden University and MA and BA degrees from Waseda University. His research interests include the history of modern maritime Southeast Asia and modern Indonesia as well as Japanese memories of the Pacific War.

For enquiries, please contact the Department of History