DEPARTMENTAL SEMINAR

TITLE

“The Professional Lives of O. W. Wolters”

SPEAKER

Dr Craig J. Reynolds

Day, Date, Time, Venue

Wednesday, 17 January 2007, 3 pm
HY/PS Lounge, AS1-0401

Abstract

From the late 1960s until he died in December 2000, O. W. Wolters was arguably the most influential historian of early Southeast Asia writing in English. He came to academic work late in life, having served in the Malayan Civil Service from 1938 until he retired in 1957. He was trained as a Chinese specialist. After being interned at Changi Prison by the Japanese army during World War II, he returned to active duty in a number of posts, including Commissioner of Labor in Selangor and District Officer in southern Perak. His last appointment was Head, Psychological Warfare Section, a position that involved supervising the preparation of anti-communist propaganda. This talk will consider possible relationships between his life-experiences as a colonial official and his historical writing on early Southeast Asia.

About the Speaker

Dr Craig J. Reynolds is a historian of Southeast Asia with a special interest in the mainland countries. Recent publications include “Power” in Critical Terms for the Study of Buddhism (Chicago 2005) and Seditious Histories: Contesting Thai and Southeast Asian Pasts (Seattle and Singapore 2006). Work-in-progress includes Practical Knowledge for Everyday Life: A History of Thai Handbooks and Their Modern Application. The material in this seminar forms the basis of his introduction to a volume of selected essays by O. W. Wolters to be published by Cornell University’s Southeast Asia Program.