DEPARTMENTAL SEMINAR

TITLE

Becoming a Malay and Looking beyond the Melaka Straits: Sumatran Malay identity politics in a decentralised Indonesia

SPEAKER

Dr Minako Sakai

Day, Date, Time, Venue

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

Abstract

This paper will focus on the increasing interest in reviving Malay identity and cultural symbols in the island of Sumatra after the fall of the centralistic Suharto government in 1998, followed by the introduction of regional autonomy in 2001. The purpose of this paper is to examine why Malayness has suddenly become an attractive and appealing notion in the urban centres of Sumatra. As I show in this paper, numerous incidents epitomising the importance of Malayness took place in Sumatran provincial capitals such as Medan, Padang and Palembang, where the representations of Malayness had been relatively low since the independence of Indonesia. I argue that the recent increasing interest in Malayness in these areas is a response to the fall of the centralistic governance of Indonesia and its cultural and economic policies which had marginalised the social status and political power of Malays in order to promote national unity of Indonesia. After regional autonomy was implemented, politicians from the urban areas of Sumatra are reviving Malayness and asserting Malayness in order to speed up regional social and economic development, which in their view, has been largely neglected by Jakarta. Malaysian and Singaporean counterparts, who are an important part of the Malay world, are perceived positively as potential new partners for their social and economic development.

About the Speaker

Minako Sakai holds a PhD in anthropology from the Research School of Pacific and Asian Studies, Australian National University. She is a Senior Lecturer, School of Humanities and Social Sciences, The University of New South Wales at ADFA campus, Canberra Australia. She is currently a Visiting Scholar, hosted by the Department of History, Faculty of Arts and Social Sciences, National University of Singapore. During her visit at NUS, she is working on a book manuscript titled Reviving the Malay Islamic World: Development across Sumatra and the Malay Peninsula.

For enquiries, please contact the Department of History