

The Malay Division
Asian Languages and Cultures Academic Group
National Institute of Education, Nanyang Technological University

presents

PUBLIC LECTURES

by

PROFESSOR VLADIMIR BRAGINSKY

SCHOOL OF AFRICAN AND ORIENTAL STUDIES
UNIVERSITY OF LONDON

PUBLIC LECTURE I

*TRADITIONAL LITERATURES OF SOUTHEAST ASIA:
A COMPARATIVE PERSPECTIVE*

**19 August 2008
4.30 – 6.00 pm**

**Possibility Room, National Library
100 Victoria Street, Singapore**
(in association with National Library)

PUBLIC LECTURE II

*SUFISTIC TRADITION AND AESTHETICS OF CLASSICAL
MALAY LITERATURE*

**28 August 2008
4.30 – 6.00 pm**

**Lecture Theatre 11 (Blk 5, Level 1, LT11)
National Institute of Education
1 Nanyang Walk, Singapore**

About the Speaker

Vladimir Braginsky (born in Moscow in 1945) graduated from the Moscow State University in 1969 and received his Ph.D. and D.Litt degrees from the Institute of Oriental Studies of the Russian Academy of Sciences, Moscow, in 1972 and 1982 respectively. From 1969 until 1992, he worked in the Institute of Oriental Studies of the Russian Academy of Sciences (Moscow) in the capacity of Research and Senior Research Fellow, and from 1987 until 1992 as the Head of Department of Interdisciplinary Studies of Asian Cultures. He combined this job with the position of Acting Professor of Malay Literature in Moscow State University. In 1992-1993, he worked as a Research Fellow in the Netherlands Institute of Advanced Studies (Wassenaar, Holland). In 1993, he was appointed as Professor of Southeast Asian Languages and Cultures at the School of Oriental and African Studies, University of London, and currently occupies this position.

From July to September 2008, he is a Visiting Professor at the Malay Division, Asian Languages and Cultures Academic Group, National Institute of Education, Nanyang Technological University.

Braginsky is a member of the Royal Asiatic Society (London), the Association for Southeast Asian Studies of the United Kingdom (London), the Malaysian Branch of the Royal Asiatic Society (Kuala Lumpur), the Association Archipel (Paris), the Royal Institute of Linguistics and Anthropology (Leiden, the Netherlands), and the European Association for Southeast Asian Studies. His fields of research include Malay and Indonesian traditional and modern literature and culture, comparative literature, and Sufism and Sufi literature in the Malay-Indonesian world. He has published more than 110 articles and two dozens of books on these subjects in Russian, English and Malay-Indonesian. Among his major books include *The System of Classical Malay Literature*, Leiden: KITLV Press, 1993; *Tasawuf dan Sastra Melayu: Kajian dan Teks-teks*, Jakarta: RUL, 1993; *Erti Keindahan dan Keindahan Erti dalam Kesusasteraan Melayu Klasik*. Kuala Lumpur: Dewan Bahasa dan Pustaka, 1994; *Images of Nusantara in Russian Literature*. Leiden: KITLV-Press, 1999 (co-authored with E.M. Diakonova); *The Comparative Study of Traditional Asian Literatures*. Richmond: Curzon, 2001; *Satukan Hangat dan Dingin... Kehidupan Hamzah Fansuri: Pemikir dan Penyair Sufi Melayu*. Kuala Lumpur: Dewan Bahasa dan Pustaka, 2003; *The Heritage of Traditional Malay Literature; A Historical Survey of Genres, Writings and Literary Views*. Leiden: KITLV Press, 2004; *...And Sails the Boat Downstream; Malay Sufi Poems of the Boat*. Leiden: University of Leiden, 2007.

Public Lecture I: Abstract

TRADITIONAL LITERATURES OF SOUTHEAST ASIA: A COMPARATIVE PERSPECTIVE

As is well-known, traditional Southeast Asia, a cross-road of religions (Buddhism, Hinduism, Confucianism, Taoism, Islam and Christianity) as well as cultural and literary 'halo' surrounding them, forms a kind of 'Asia-in-miniature'. It is a richest field for the comparative study of both: the literary systems based on the world-perception, ethical and aesthetic teachings of those religions and the problems of unity and diversity of a specific literary region, whose level of integration varied during its history. Southeast Asia gives the fresh, though still insufficiently studied, material on literary contacts, syntheses and peculiar national versions of Indian, Chinese, Arabo-Moslem literary traditions inside the region, as well as on the ties of this literary region with 'literary communities' of the outer world.

The first task of this lecture is to trace a historical dynamic and the stages of the integrational/disintegrational processes within the South East Asian literary region. At its earliest stage (on the eve of AD) the region was integrated by a common primeval 'core' of similar mythological cycles and genres of oral folk literatures. In the period of its most intense interaction with Indian and Chinese literatures this 'core', in each case, reacted to external impacts in a similar way, thus preserving the unity that in the Hinduised area achieved its peak between the 7th and the 13/14th centuries. The splitting of the region into separate literary sub-regions ('Burmese-Thai-Cambodian', 'Malay', 'Javanese' and 'Vietnamese') around the 15th century considerably weakened its integrity, but by no means destroyed it. At that stage the literary ties and common typological features of South East Asian literatures became instrumental in maintaining unity.

The other task of the lecture is to delineate the contours of South East Asian systems of literature and analyse the place of belletristic genres within these hierarchical systems. As South East Asian data show, these hierarchies included, first, the works of the corresponding religious Canon and commentaries upon it; second, scholarly and didactic genres; and, third, the genres of fine literature, or *belles-lettres*. Studying the hierarchies in question, it is clear that the systems of writings of South East Asia present a reflection of the given cultures in general and constitute their verbal projections or verbal replicas. This, in turn, determines a great value of literary works as sources for cultural studies.

Public Lecture II: Abstract

SUFISTIC TRADITION AND AESTHETICS OF CLASSICAL MALAY LITERATURE

It is impossible to overestimate an impact that Sufi world-outlook produced on Malay literature of the classical period (the 16th-the 18th century) in general and Malay literature of the 17th century, which is often called 'the age of Sufis', in particular. At that time, Sufism created literature of systematic treatises in Malay, which greatly influenced the intellectual life of the Malay world and enriched its scholarly discourse. Along with it, Sufism influenced, Islamised and created major genres of Malay literature from love-and-adventure romances in prose and verse to edifying 'mirrors for kings' and historical writings. Together with new ideas of God, man, world and their inter-relations, these genres brought into Malay literature fundamental concepts of Islamic poetics and literary aesthetics in their Sufi form.

Thus, after an adaptation to earlier traditions, there emerged the Islamised system of Malay ideas of literature, a kind of pre-modern literary theory, which clarified tasks and methods of the creation of literary works, their hierarchy and impact on the reader or listener. This system is discussed in the first part of the lecture. The second part of the lecture will investigate a reflection of some concepts of Sufi aesthetics in Malay literary practice as exemplified by particular Malay compositions:

- * the aesthetics of symbolic hints and allusions in *Hikayat Syah Mardan*;
- * the aesthetics of the light and lighting effects in *Hikayat Inderaputera* and *Hikayat Isma Yatim*;
- * the aesthetics of symmetry in *Syair Bidasari* and the south-Sumatran version of *Syair Perahu*.

Kindly RSVP by 14th Aug 2008 to Mdm Saripah Basir at saripah.basir@nie.edu.sg or call 67903516 to register your attendance. Thank you.