

## Malaysia-Vietnam Relations from the 15<sup>th</sup> to 19<sup>th</sup> Century

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### Abstract

This paper attempts to analyse the historical development of the Malaysia-Vietnam relationship from the 15th to the 19th century with reference to the works of researchers in Malaysia. This particular period was chosen for review as the Southeast Asian at this time was the theatre of radical unrest following the growth of capitalist trade which sparked an influx of Europeans to this part of the world. By providing the background and a general overview of the research done on the history of Malaysia-Vietnam relations, it is hoped that this study can serve as a platform for other researchers to further explore this relationship.

**Keywords:** Malaysia-Vietnam Relations, Resources of History, Champa, Malay World

### Abstrak

*Artikel ini cuba menganalisis perkembangan sejarah awal hubungan Malaysia dengan Vietnam dalam abad ke-15 sehingga abad ke-19 yang dihasilkan oleh penyelidik-penyelidik di Malaysia. Tempoh ini dikaji kerana Asia Tenggara telah menjadi teater pergolakan radikal lantaran perkembangan perdagangan kapitalisme yang mencetuskan kemasukan berduyun-duyun orang Eropah ke rantau ini. Dengan menyediakan satu latar belakang dan gambaran umum kepada para penyelidik tentang sejarah hubungan Malaysia-Vietnam ini, diharap kajian ini dapat menyediakan satu platform kepada para penyelidik lain agar dapat menerokai dengan lebih jauh konteks hubungan Malaysia-Vietnam.*

**Kata Kunci:** Hubungan Malaysia-Vietnam, Sumber Sejarah, Champa, Dunia Melayu

### Introduction

The relationship between Indochina (read: Vietnam) and the Malay world (read: Malaya) has long been existed but rarely been indicated in historical sources according to Nguyen (1995). This is because there is no text which gives a clear picture of their cultural link. He has also concluded that their established political connection cannot be regarded as being strong or stable due to the fact that many authors of the old Vietnamese chronicles were not familiar with the Malay world. They relied on Chinese sources to name the places in the Malay Peninsula and the Malay Archipelago. This confirms that they had a vague general knowledge of these geographical territories as mentioned in the Chinese sources. (Nguyen, 1995).

As for the Malaysians, the interest in the study of Indochina (read: Vietnam) has only began to peak in the 1980s. The reason is that Indochina had long been guarded from the view of the Malaysian community because of the language barrier as well as the attitude of the colonialists. Almost all researches on Indochina's cultural history in the past were limited to the French language and those were never translated. In addition, the British and Dutch colonisation of this region often isolated the Indochina Peninsula from the southern archipelago. The separation was further entrenched after the Second World War (1942-1945), when the Indochina Peninsula took a different political path by embracing the Communist ideology.

Nevertheless, Malaysia has shown a keen interest in studying Vietnam especially after the Paris Peace Accords in 1973. The treaty was a symbol for ending the war and re-establishing peace in Vietnam and hence, opening a new page on geopolitics in Southeast Asia. The Americans were forced to accede to the vitality of the Vietnamese soldiers and withdrew from Indochina. Therefore, the year 1973 is an important milestone in the history of international relations in Southeast Asia and in Vietnam particularly as it manifested the guiding principle of combining national power with the

strength of the times, the power of the nation with international power and the diplomacy of the country with the people's diplomacy.

Consequently, in 1973, the University of Malaya History Department, led by Dr Heather Sutherland introduced the topic of Vietnam History as one of the chapters for discussion among her students under the course of Nationalism in Indochina. Subsequent development of this interest among Malaysians can be found in Danny Wong Tze-Ken's writings in Vietnam History in Malaysia (Danny, 2006).

With reference to Indochina's early history, it is noted that initially, the only Malay language book on Indochina available in Malaysia was *Alam Melayu- Sejarah dan Kebudayaan Campa*, a translation of *Monde malais: histoire et culture du Campa* by Abdul Rahman Al-Ahmadi with the support of Excole Francaise d'Extreme Orient (EFEO). It was published in 1988 by Malaysia's Ministry of Culture, Arts and Tourism in collaboration with EFEO. The publication of this edition reflects the growing interest of Malaysia in Indochina studies. Hence, as in the case of Ismail, Lafont & Po (1995) and Danny (2006), several number of their articles, books and even seminars are devoted to discussing the relations between the Malay World and Indochina.

This interest was triggered by the incidence of tens of thousands of Vietnamese refugees flooding Malaysia as well as other ASEAN countries after the withdrawal of the US troops from Vietnam in the mid-1970s. It is noted that in May 1975 a total of 47 refugees from Vietnam arrived in Malaysia shortly after the fall of Saigon (Ho Chi Minh City) in the Vietnam War (1955-1975). The decision to receive the Vietnamese refugees led the Terengganu government to declare Pulau Bidong, an uninhabited area off the coast of Terengganu, about 40 kilometers from the mainland, as the centre for Vietnamese refugee settlement between 1978 and 1990. At that time, many Vietnamese refugees landed on Terengganu's shore and its islands in the East Coast waters. It was estimated that 252,390 Vietnamese refugees landed in Malaysia and 4,535 babies were born here. The highest number of landing was at port Klang in 1978 from the ship Hai Hong which ferried 2,400 people.

This so-called second wave of refugees has brought about the awareness of Vietnam among Malaysians according to Ismail (1995). Actually, there was an earlier flight of Cham refugees and Malay Muslims from Indochina to Malaysia a long time ago; it can be traced back to the early 15<sup>th</sup> century. These refugee incidents have aroused the awareness of Indochina and her people not only among Malaysians but also a group of French scientists and scholars. In 1987, not long after the large arrivals of Vietnamese refugees, a group of French scientists established the Ecole Francaise d'Extreme Orient (France's Far East Research Centre) office in Kuala Lumpur (KL) for their own needs and that of the Malaysian scholars. Coincidentally, a group of French scholars have long lost their site for activities in Indochina. As a result, the EFEO-KL under the leadership of Dr Pho Dharma, who is of Cam descent and a member of the Champa historians, saw the need for both parties to work together to delve deeper into the research field especially on the Malay elements in Indochina. (Ismail, et al., 1995). Since then the enhanced number of French scholars through EFEO-KL, under the leadership of Dr. Po Dharma, have been passionately organising activities and researches as well as collaborations with the local institutions in this area of studies.

However, the emphasis of these scholars is more on the relationship of the Malay World with the Indochina World, leaving a void specifically, where Malaysia-Vietnam relations are concerned. Nevertheless, there is a growing consciousness and a new sensitivity of the Malaysian society towards its connection with Vietnam. Therefore, through this paper, the writer tries to fill in the gap by drawing the attention of readers to the history of Malaysia's contact with Vietnam from the early 15<sup>th</sup> century right up to the 19<sup>th</sup> century. This is because hitherto, the studies on the relations between Vietnam and Malaysia had focused more on the traffic and trade networks in the South China Sea and in the Gulf of Siam before the 15th century. On the other hand, the study of their relationship after the 15th century had received the least attention. It is hoped that this review of existing historical writings can provide the essential background for the discussion of this relationship and serve as a platform for other interested parties to explore in-depth this subject particularly in the period from the 15<sup>th</sup> to the 19<sup>th</sup> century. For this purpose, the qualitative approach is employed particularly with reference to the Malay and Chinese primary sources.

## **Relationship from the 15th to the 17th Century**

Since the 15th century, the states of the Indochina Peninsula had fallen within the economic sphere of Malacca, and due to their geographical position, they remained within this orbit even after Malacca was captured by the Portuguese and later by the Dutch and Aceh. This shows that the economic ties of the states of the Indochina Peninsula and the Malay world from the 15<sup>th</sup> to the 18<sup>th</sup> century was mostly centred around Malacca and a few other trade cities which were bound to Malacca, such as, Johor, Patani, Terengganu and Kedah (Lafond, 1995). Champa's historical record shows that the Malay ships had arrived at the Vijaya and Panduranga ports even before the 15<sup>th</sup> century. (Lafond, 1995).

The earliest record of diplomatic contact between present day Malaysia and Vietnam dates back to 1469. The Chinese record shows that 12 delegates from Malacca led by Tun Seri Nara Diraja were on their voyage back from China when they were hit by a storm and were stranded in Annam (Vietnam). All of the ship crew and passengers were caught and some were killed while others especially the younger ones were turned into eunuchs by the Annamese. Henry (1996), in his paper, also condemns the Annamese for their alleged violation of an Asian 'diplomatic protocol' as they killed and enslaved several Southeast Asian envoys who were on tributary missions to China in 1469. The older members of the mission were all killed while the younger members were castrated and sold into slavery by their Annamese captors. The Sultan of Melaka, Sultan Mansor Syah (1459-1477) informed the Emperor of China, Emperor Chenghua (1464-14487), of the incident. Among other issues, he reported,

“In the fifth year of the Cheng-hua reign (1469-1470), when our country's envoy Wei-zhe-ran-na was at sea on his journey home after offering tribute [to the Court], he was blown by the wind to the country of Annam. Wei-zhe-ran-na and his attendants were all killed by that country while the remaining persons were tattooed and made slaves of officials. The younger ones were all made eunuchs.” (MSL, 48:3785-86)

Initially, Malacca did not want to take action because Annam was also a country that sent tribute to China. In 1481, while the envoy from Malacca was in China to present his tribute to the Emperor, he confronted the envoy from Annam who happened to be present at the same time. A quarrel between the two representatives ensued over the incident of Annam kidnapping and killing Malacca's messengers. They were pacified by one of China's defence ministers Chen Yue who advised them to forget about the dispute as the matter had long gone. Before the two emissaries returned to their respective lands, the Emperor of China had sent a letter condemning the deeds of the Emperor of Vietnam and advised him to be on good terms with his neighboring countries and to reflect on his own mistakes. The instructions read;

“Both your country and Malacca follow the Court's calendar. You should maintain good relations with them and act as a screen for the Court. How can you presume on your own strength to go against the patterns of the state and bring Heaven's calamities upon yourself? The Court does not lightly trust what the Malaccan envoy has memorialised, but you should examine yourself and think about your faults, stand in awe of Heaven, respect the law and guard your own country.” (MSL, 48:3785-86)

Meanwhile, the Emperor of China informed Malacca to act firmly and to prepare their army and war horses should Annam be adamant about attacking Malacca. The Emperor of China commented,

“Since ancient times, the Sage kings, in exercising control over the *yi* (barbarian) in the four directions, have not pursued events which occurred in the past. If Annam is again aggressive or oppresses you, you should train soldiers and horses to defend against them.” (MSL, 48:3785-86)

The Vietnamese Emperor referred to above was Le Thanh Tong (1442-1497) of the Le dynasty. During his reign (1460-1497), Vietnam's (read: Dai Viet) territory was extended to the borders of Burma (Myanmar). Le Thanh Tong was said to have attacked the kingdom of Lan Xang (Lao Kingdom) with his army of 90 thousand soldiers but was defeated and forced to retreat. China's chronicles written by Mao Qiling (1623-1716, 毛奇齡), a scholar and philosopher in the early era of the Qing dynasty (1644-1911), in the note known as *Man Si He Zhi* 《蠻司合誌》, contributed valuable narratives on the 3-party relations of Malacca, Dai Viet and Ming dynasty China. This is supported by a record in the source that a 90- thousand strong Vietnamese army had attacked Lan Xang (Lao Kingdom) but was successfully repelled by Malacca's troops. Mao Qiling in the book *Man Si He Zhi* mentions that

“Le Thanh-tong led 90,000 troops to invade Lan Sang but was chased by [the troops of] Malacca, and 10,000 soldiers died...]. (Mao, 1968:10:lb).

From the 16<sup>th</sup> to the 18<sup>th</sup> century, the Southeast Asian oceans became the theatre where radical upheaval was played out by the European traders. With the conquest of Melaka in 1511, the Portuguese ensured its supremacy at an important and strategic trade intersection along the Straits of Malacca. Three years later, the first Portuguese ships arrived at Canton. The Spaniards and the Dutch followed the footsteps of the Portuguese, each reinforcing their position in Manila and Batavia respectively. The influx of Westerners wrought great changes to the trade network that had been established in the Malay world. Notwithstanding the change, it did not leave immediate effect on Vietnam as its relationship with Canton had remained since the mid-16th century. However, the Portuguese trade centre in Macao began to establish some relations with Brunei, Johor and Portuguese Malacca. In contrast, the internal and political turmoil restricted the commercial activities of Vietnam and additionally, due to its practice of Confucianism, it was isolated from the active trading flows with the Malay World.

## Literary Sources of the Early Relations

### Chinese Source: Ming Shi-Lu

When exploring the initial highlights of Malaysia-Vietnam relations that specifically refer to Malacca and Annam, the suggested historical document to be investigated is *Ming Shi-lu* (明 实錄, Veritable Records of the Ming Dynasty). *Ming Shi-Lu* includes the history of the kings who reigned during the Ming Dynasty (1368–1644) and it is the single largest historical source for that dynasty. In the library of Far Eastern Studies (Perpustakaan Asia Timur), University of Malaya (Kuala Lumpur), there is a complete collection of *Ming Shi-Lu* (Contents: v. 1-133. Ming shi lu -- v. 134-154. Fu lu -- v. 155-183. Jiao kan ji / Huang Zhang Jian zhu) published by China Academy (Library Local Call No. 2720 6238).

Apart from that, there is also Geoff Wade's 2008 translation of the *Ming Shi Lu* documents which was originally done for his doctoral thesis at the Hong Kong University. The documents were translated into English and uploaded on the NUS website while he was a visiting senior Research Fellow attached to the Asia Research Institution (ARI), National University of Singapore (2005-2008). The e-sources of *Ming Shi Lu* can be accessed through the website, Southeast Asia in *Ming Shi-lu: An Open Access Resource*. Singapore: Asia Research Institute and Singapore E-Press – <http://www.epress.nus.edu.sg/msl>.

In the opinion of Geoff Wade, *Ming Shi Lu* “plays an extremely important role in the historical reconstruction of the Ming society and its politics.” (Wade, 2005:1). Another writer, Roderich (2005) believes that *Ming Shi Lu* is one of the key sources for our understanding of China's history from the second half of the fourteenth century through to the early seventeenth century. It is arranged in the form of a gigantic diary and among other things contains thousands of entries on both insular and continental Southeast Asia including Yunnan, home of the non-Chinese ethnic groups, and other regions along China's southern periphery. When looking into Malaysia-Vietnam's initial relations, researchers rely heavily on documents produced by the Chinese dynasties especially those

of the Ming because both Malacca and Annam were tributary states of China during the dynasty. Further, after the fall of the Ming around 1644, *Ming Shi Lu* was used as the main source of reference for the reorganization of the Ming Dynasty history.

### Malay Source: The Malay Annals

As for the Malaysian historical record, there is *The Malay Annals* (Sulalatus Salatin). Chapter 21 of the manuscript, (The Story of the Champa King), describes the origin of the Champa people in Malacca. According to Marrison (1951), Cham's presence in Malacca probably contributed to the racial admixture of the Malays of the Peninsula and some Cham influences might have survived in the Malay cultural tradition. The chapter begins with the story of the king of Cochi, referring to Annam, having invaded Champa during the reign of the Le Dynasty. This led to the flight of the King of Champa's sons, Syah Indera Berma and Syah Pau Ling along with their respective followers. Syah Pau Ling escaped to Aceh and later founded the kingdom of Aceh. According to the history of the Aceh Sultanate, the kingdom was indeed founded by a royal son of Champa, Syah Po Ling, son of King Syah Po Kubah. Meanwhile, Syah Indera Berma fled to Malacca and was appointed a ruler by Sultan Mansor Syah who was very pleased with him. Syah Indera Bernam and his wife, Keni Mernam were asked by the sultan to embrace Islam. *The Malay Annals* states that

“There were two sons of the raja of Champa (Pogopoh), one named Indra Brama, and the other Po-ling, both of whom fled with their wives and dependents. Po-ling went to Achi [Aceh], where he became the founding raja. The other, Shah Indra Brama, arrived at Malacca, where he was gladly received by Sultan Mansor, who had him converted to Islam, and made a mantra; but he was originally a Champa man.” (Leyden, 1821: 211)

For the study of the relationship between the Malaccan Empire with the foreign world, *The Malay Annals* is an indispensable source. Originally titled *Sulalatus Salatin* (*Genealogy of Kings*), it is a literary work that gives a romanticised history of the origin, evolution and demise of the great Malay maritime empire, the Malacca Sultanate. The work which was composed sometime between the 15th and 16th centuries is considered one of the finest literary and historical works in the Malay language. It is believed to have been commissioned by a Regent of Johor in 1612. Written in old Jawi script on traditional paper about the reign of the Malacca Sultanate, it covers a period of over 600 years and it includes how the Kingdom of Malacca was founded, its various relationships with neighbouring kingdoms, the advent and spread of Islam in the region, the history of the royalty in the region as well as the administrative hierarchy of the Malaccan kingdom and its successor states.

Although there were roughly 30 versions of *The Malay Annals* manuscript, the translated English edition by Leyden (1821) with an introduction by Sir Thomas Stamford Raffles is the oldest version published in London in 1821. The script was transliterated from the original Jawi manuscript known as Raffles M.S. 18 entitled *Sulalat us-Salatin* (The Genealogy of Sultans). Later, in 2009, the *Malaysian Branch of the Royal Asiatic Society* (MBRAS) published a new Romanised edition of the manuscript in 2009. According to MBRAS's official announcement, this publication of the manuscript was annotated by Cheah Boon Kheng and Abdul Rahman Haji Ismail, both from Universiti Sains Malaysia, in the new Romanised Malay script, based on the new spelling now extant. The work is an improvement on the English scholar and administrator R.O. Winstedt's earlier Romanised edition that was also published by the MBRAS as early as 1938.

### Other Sources

Besides the Malay Annals, there are other Malay manuscripts, such as *Sejarah Johor* (Johor Annals), *Syair Siti Zubaidah* (Songs of Siti Zubaidah) and *Hikayat Kelantan* (Kelantan Annals). I would like to encourage researchers to make full use of these sources which are available online. It should be noted that the internet could be part of one's survey for the pertinent literature to consult (<http://myrepositori.pnm.gov.my/handle/123456789/2722> [The National Library of Malaysia]). As

asserted by Danny Wong Tze-Ken, these are sources of Cham linkages with the Malay World after 1471. 'These include the Cham diaspora and the Malay World and the connection between the Malay ruling houses and the remnants of Cham nobilities.' (Danny, 2008:34). In sum, these Malay manuscripts provide us with valuable information on topics covering bilateral relations, foreign trade and diplomacy, king and kingdom, etc. which are detailed and quite comprehensive.

Whitaker (1985) highlights the fact that the meeting of the two countries at the time was a clash of two different cultures from different religious backgrounds. Despite this, the Muslim Malays have influenced the Champa's way of life which can be seen from the fact that many Malays could be found in the refugee settlement where they later convinced the people of Champa to convert to Islam. It was around 1471 that Champa was attacked and conquered by Annam. With the fall of Champa, many of its people fled to Malacca, Java and Cambodia. It was at this time that many converted to Islam as a result of the influence of the Malays in their area. However, most of the refugees migrated to the Cambodian territory, specifically Siem Reap and Kampong Thom. Some who migrated to Kelantan and Malacca were appointed as officials. It should be noted that both the Champa and Malay communities claim to have similar culture, art, language, religion and history owing to their common Austronesia origin. When discussing the sources and writings of Champa's history by Malaysian scholars, one can refer to the works as mentioned at the beginning of this paper. The collaboration between ECOLE-KL and the local institutions and universities over the last 50 years has spiked many publications. Danny Wong Tze-Ken has listed more than 40 selected works on Champa published or completed in Malaysia (Danny, 2008).

There is also the account of a war fought between Johor and the Dutch in 1594. The people of Champa joined in to defend the Johor-Riau Kingdom. By the 17<sup>th</sup> century, Champa's tributary state Panduranga, as noted, had established a good relationship with Kelantan. Its prince, Po Rome sent emissaries to Kelantan to study and explore Islam. After his demise, emissaries from Kelantan were sent to visit Champa and attend the funeral ceremony of the late prince. They were received personally by Po Saut who was the king at the time. Research on such Cham-Malay relations remains an important component of academic investigation that can contribute to the understanding of the historical relationship between Vietnam and the Malay World. Their connection was not merely a trade but also a cultural and artistic experience as some artefacts found in Chaya, in the southernmost part of Thailand, show similarity to Cam's ancient chisel art (Lafont, 1996).

Other writings depict that trade relations between Vietnam and the Malay World were already established in the early days. Malay traders were recorded going frequently to Faifo (Hoi An) and Dong Nai in Vietnam in the 15<sup>th</sup> and the 16<sup>th</sup> century. The Champa ports in Qui Nhon and Cam Rannh were often deluged with visiting Malay traders from the 15<sup>th</sup> to the 18<sup>th</sup> century. The subsequent period witnessed ships from Vietnam sailing towards Singapore to establish business relations. Trade activities were also reported to have risen even after the French captured Cochinchina. The writings on these trade relations were explored by Nguyen (1995). His research findings describe the pattern of regional economic integration of the Malay World and Vietnam which had been in existence for a long time, as represented by their trading activities. Later, the states of the Indochina Peninsula continued to operate within their own special economic sphere in the 15<sup>th</sup> century while in the archipelago, Malacca emerged as a strategic trading centre.

## **Relations in the 18th and 19th Centuries**

In 1786, the British through the efforts of Francis Light succeeded in opening Penang. Ever since then, the island had developed, and it became the busiest trading port in the 18<sup>th</sup> century. This facilitated the successful establishment of its relations with the outside world. To illustrate, in the year 1790, a ship from the kingdom of Hue, carrying sugar cane, sailed through Penang before heading to India. Meanwhile, *Dai Nam Thuc Luc* (DNLT, 1964) recognized Penang as Tan Lang du [檳榔嶼] associating the phonetic sound of its name with the word "pinang" which means "an island with many 'pinang' (areca nut) trees". Vietnamese sources also often describe the traded goods brought from the Archipelago to Vietnam as being of high quality and value with terms such as *Bao-vat* and *U-vat*. In addition, envoys from Nguyen Phuc Anh (Gia Long) were also sent to Nhu Phat (Johor), Ma-la-kha

(Malacca), Tan-gia-ba (Singapore) and several other places in the Archipelago to purchase weapons and war arms to fight the Tay Son brothers (Ku, 2002).

It is also documented that as a result of the civil war in Vietnam, the Chinese from Nam Ky (Cochinchina) sailed to Terengganu to carry out trading. According to a research by Tan (2002), the Vietnamese Chinese traders came to Terengganu to exchange their rice (known as lam jiam bi) for Pinang (areca nut) and kambut (gambir). The highlight of the Vietnamese Chinese migration was recorded in the year 1782 when the Tay Son brothers attacked and captured the city of Gia Dinh. Before 1782, Gia Dinh was estimated to have a population of at least 10,000 Chinese but the number dwindled in the period of 1776 - 1782 after the five attacks by the Tay Son brothers on top of the mass killings that took place in 1782.

Another narrative chronicles on how Sultan Ahmad Tajuddin Al-Mukarram Shah's (1853-1979) ship was stranded in the deep waters of Cochinchina. Realising that trade was the greatest catalyst for the advancement of the world, he always reserved his triple-mast ship, commissioned from Europe and named Gratitude, for trading purposes. Although the Sultan gave strict orders that the vessel should only be restricted to trading between India and Singapore for fear of typhoons, his agents in Penang and Singapore, Messrs., Nevins and de Luz, disregarded his instructions and sent it to China where it was more lucrative to trade. In the days of sailing ships, the seamen were exceedingly superstitious and set a great store by the figurehead of the ships. The Gratitude had the figurehead of a bare breasted maiden holding a flaming torch. However, the day before setting sail for home, the crew discovered a breast missing from the figurehead which appeared to have a sad look. As this seemed to be an omen of impending disaster, the English captain named Fowler refused to sail the Gratitude and the ship hands who could get away, deserted. It was with the utmost difficulty that a Spaniard was engaged to skipper the ship. True enough, off the coast of Cochina-China, near a rock which the Portuguese sailors called 'Pedra Branca', the Gratitude, laden with a rich cargo of China goods and 300 Chinese emigrants, was caught in a typhoon. (Augustine, 1992).

A study done by Li (2001) finds that the emigration of traders from the Mekong Delta had caused a deterioration in the trade sector. In 1778, a delegate from the East India Company, Charles Chapman, for example, noted that there were about 40 Cochinchinese who landed in Terengganu after their ship sank. They became slaves to the 'Rajah' whom he referred to as the Sultan of Terengganu. They admitted that they would rather live as slaves than be sent back to their homeland, Vietnam, which was hit by civil war (between the Tay Son brothers and the Early Nguyen ruler). (Alistair, 1970).

The Vietnamese official archives have also revealed that Penang also went by the name of Hon Cau or Cu-lao Cau (DNTL, 1964) which means Palm Island. After replacing Gia Long in 1820, Minh Manh made the decision to send a delegate to the Malay Archipelago to collect information about the outside world. Nine envoys were sent out to the Malay Archipelago known as Ha-chau throughout the years 1825, 1832, 1833, 1836, 1837, 1839, 1840 and 1844. Apart from Batavia (Jakarta), six of the envoys visited Singapore while another two called at Penang. The description of these states is contributed by Ly Van Phuc in the *Tay Hanh Kien Van Ki Luoc* note.

Vietnam's relations with the The Straits Settlements (Penang, Malacca, Singapore), established by the British in 1826, and the Archipelago (Malaya Peninsula) have also been studied by Ku (2014a, 2014b, 2016, 2017). However, due to language constraints, the author has no choice but to consult Vietnamese and Chinese sources though one can also make use of the Straits Settlements Factory Records 1796-1830, the Tabular Statements of the Commerce and Shipping of Prince of Wales Island, Singapore and Malacca and the Straits Settlements Records which chronicle events ranging from economic manipulation to political domination. These archives, besides reporting on British possessions in the Straits of Malacca, also furnish us with information on places which were important to the British maritime trade, like Annam (Vietnam), during the early 18<sup>th</sup> century. The library of University of Malaya (Kuala Lumpur) (<http://www.diglib.um.edu.my/interaktif/>), the Malaysia National Archives (Kuala Lumpur) (<http://www.arkib.gov.my/web/guest/e-arkib>) and the library of Universiti Sains Malaysia (Penang) ([http://pendeta.um.edu.my/client/en\\_AU/default](http://pendeta.um.edu.my/client/en_AU/default)) have quite a good collection of these records. Wong (1961), for example, used mainly these entries in his works. He has shown that they can be useful for the writing of a comprehensive piece on the Singaporean maritime trade history with foreign countries.

Truong Vinh Ky, Petrus Ky, a philosopher and Jean-Baptiste Petrus visited Penang in 1851 to explore Christianity at The College General (truong dao Dulalma). Their experience was detailed in *Gia Dinh Bao* (Gia Dinh News). According to Chiung (2016), Jean-Baptiste Petrus was then well known for having mastered 27 languages including Malay, Tamil, Spanish, Japanese and Thai, to name a few. The College General was built in 1807 by the French Society of Foreign Mission of Paris after receiving the visits of Vietnamese missionaries who wanted to explore theology and Christianity at a deeper level. Hence, the college became a training centre for many Vietnamese Catholic priests and acted as a sanctuary for the Vicar General of Annam and scores of seminarians during the persecutions of 1834-35. Among them was Philip Minh Van Doan who was martyred and later canonised in 1988 (N.A., 2008).

Lastly, as recounted by Wallace (2009) about his adventures in the Malay Archipelago, while he was in Singapore (1854), he met a missionary who came from Cochin China, Tonquin (read: Vietnam). He also added that these missionaries would go to Penang or Singapore to spread their religion using the local language. All of the above literature and accounts confirm the existence of political, cultural and trade relations between Malaysia and Vietnam from the 15<sup>th</sup> to the 19<sup>th</sup> Century.

## Conclusion

In sum, this paper presents a brief overview of the writings and sources from Malaysia (read: Peninsula Malaya or Archipelago) and its early relations with Vietnam (read: Annam). In line with the fact that historians require knowledge of the prequel to the preferred period under inquiry in order to establish continuities and discontinuities, this review of existing historical writings serves as the background to the works of later periods. It is important to recognise that the study of Vietnamese history in Malaysia is still at its infant stage. As Vietnam is now playing an increasingly important role in the ASEAN organisation, it is inevitable that a higher level of understanding of Vietnam needs to be achieved in Malaysia to allow for a more meaningful exchange of scholastic research at the regional level. Thus, a lot of work remains to be done before the subject could garner a wider following in Malaysia. As it is, there is still much room for improvement in the writing of the history of the relationship between the two countries, but it requires researchers to have an aptitude for languages, making this an area where few are willing to venture into. The studies and writings which have hitherto been explored can certainly reveal the important information that there were strong and well established historical, cultural and trading relations between Malaysia and Vietnam from the 15<sup>th</sup> century until the early 19<sup>th</sup> century. This duration of the early relationship has to be perceived as vital because it was the period when the Westerners greedily competed among themselves to secure a stranglehold on trade and power in the region. The intrusion of the Western powers appears to have severed the cultural and trading network which had long been nurtured and cultivated between Malaysia and Vietnam. This is because the different political groups had separated Malaysia from Vietnam with the former dominated by the British and the latter by the French as both Westerners competed aggressively in the Malay Archipelago during this period. Nevertheless, one cannot deny the positive impact of the European period in Southeast Asia as far as historical sources are concerned. They have left us with abundant historical sources which have played a very significant role in contributing to the growing collection of literature on the history of Southeast Asia.

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