

# Changing Perception of the Malay World and Indochina as Seen from Vietnamese Sources<sup>1</sup>

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Historical contact between the Malay World (insular) and mainland Southeast Asia is recorded to have take place since the eighth century A.D. Relations between them is said to have been dominated by relations between the Kingdom of Champa and the various states in the Malay World, particularly those situated at northeast of the Malay Peninsula. The above has been the focus of many scholarly studies.<sup>2</sup> This paper however, aims to offer another dimension of that relationship from the perspective of the Vietnamese.

In examining Vietnamese contact with the Malay World as well as their view on the Malay World, it is necessary to refer to various Vietnamese historical sources. Chief among these is *Dai Viet Su Ky Toan Thu* (literary known as Complete History of the Dai Viet), compiled by Ngo Si Lien during the Le Dynasty (1428-1788), and supplemented by additional volumes for period after Ngo Si Lien's demise. Then there is the *Kham Dinh Viet Su Thong Giam Cuong Muc* (Annotated Mirror and Commentary of the History of Vietnam), compiled in the nineteenth century, and the *Dai Nam Thuc Luc* (Veritable Records of Dai Nam), also compiled by the nineteenth century court historians of the Nguyen

Dynasty (1802-1945). However, unlike treatments accorded to Vietnam's immediate neighbours such as Champa and Cambodia, reference to the Malay World is scarce, and scattered throughout the various Vietnamese sources that cover the period between eight century AD and the nineteenth century.

Given this lengthy period, this paper will be exploratory in nature. Nevertheless, it is hoped that several questions would be explored. This includes the way the various Vietnamese courts viewed the Malay World, the place of the Malay World in Vietnamese historiography, and the nature of the relationship. Finally, this paper will focus on Vietnam's shifting perception of the Malay World based on the former's seafaring missions during the third and fourth decades of the 19<sup>th</sup> century. This will highlight the observations made by two of such missions on the Straits Settlements. These two observations are based on the work of Li Van Phuc<sup>3</sup> and Phan Chu Huy<sup>4</sup> who had visited the Straits Settlements during their journeys to India and Java in 1830 and 1833 respectively.

### THE LANGUAGE OF HISTORY

It is most interesting to note that throughout Vietnamese historiography, the term most frequently used to describe the people or state in the Malay World regardless of the places of origin is Do-ba, Tra-Oa or Cha-va. These terms are Vietnamese phonetic variants of the term *Java*. It is unclear as to why the Vietnamese and other people in the Indochina Peninsula referred to the Malay World as *Java*. In fact, until the 18<sup>th</sup> century, only two other names, clearly referring to specific countries in the Malay World could be found in the Vietnamese sources when referring to period before the 19<sup>th</sup> century. The first is Sam-Fo-Chi that is the ancient Chinese term for Srivijaya<sup>5</sup>, and the second is La-kha referring to Melaka. However, these terms only appear twice each in the three major Vietnamese sources mentioned above. Other than these, only the phonetic variant term of *Java* is used. In fact, the Vietnamese, the Chams<sup>6</sup> and the Cambodians still use this term when referring to the Malay world.

The failure on the part of the Vietnamese to distinguish in specific, the various people from the Malay World suggest that the Vietnamese had little contact with the insular world. Another possible explanation points to the fact that the Vietnamese are more concerned with events and happenings on the mainland than that of the island states. This however, does not mean that the

Vietnamese were entirely ignorant of the existence of the maritime world. Nevertheless, the use of the term Do-ba in Vietnamese sources when referring to people from the Malay World deprives us of detailed information that could be useful in answering specific questions pertaining to Vietnam's long-standing relations with the Malay World. For this, we have to depend on some non-Vietnamese sources. This is demonstrated in the case of the destruction and massacre of the English factory on Condore Islands in 1705. The Vietnamese sources reported that the Do-ba (Java) people in the employment of the English East India Company had conspired with the Vietnamese and mutinied. It was only through the East India Company sources that we know the so called Do-ba people were actually Makasarese.<sup>7</sup>

Another term that found its way into Vietnamese vocabulary referring to the Malay World is Ha-Chau, which means 'the Region Below'. The usage of this term however, only became popular after the Fifteenth Century, and was widely used by Vietnamese court officials during the Nguyen Dynasty when referring to the Malay World.

### TWELVE CENTURIES OF CONTACT

Prior to the establishment of French Colonial rule, Vietnam's interaction with the Malay World can be divided into two periods. The first, dates from the Eighth century A.D. to the late Eighteenth Century, and the second, from the late Eighteenth Century to 1883.

The first period, which covers a total of ten centuries is characterized by the visits of traders from the Malay World to the different ports in Vietnam such as Van-don, Pho-hien, Hoi-an and Qui-nhon. During this period, the initiative in maintaining such ties was in the hands of the people from the Malay World.

The earliest record found in the Vietnamese historical texts referring to the Malay World is a report of an attack by the armies of Con Lon and Java on Hien-chau in the Tonkin area in 767 A.D. Vietnam at that time was under the Chinese which ruled Vietnam from 111 B.C. to 939 A.D. The attack was checked and the two invading armies were destroyed.<sup>8</sup> That was the only instance where hostility was reported in the Vietnamese sources between Vietnam and the Malay World. Since then, relations have been friendly and have centred on trading activities.

Even when under Chinese domination, a period known as Giao-chi, Vietnam was already attracting foreign traders, especially those from the Malay World. The port of Lien-lau on the edge of the Red River Delta, near present day Hanoi was a major stopover for traders from the Malay World who were on their way to Canton (Guangzhou).<sup>9</sup> Benefiting from this early Asian trade, Vietnamese ports thrived thus attracting increasing number of foreign merchants to the place.

Trading relations between Vietnam and the Malay World however can be described as a one-way traffic. The Vietnamese were not known to be a seafaring people, and lacked the technical know-how of constructing seagoing vessels. Apart from that, there was also a cultural barrier that had prevented the Vietnamese from venturing beyond coastal areas. According to Anthony Reid, there were little evidence of people from mainland Southeast Asia (which includes Vietnamese, Thais, and Khmers) doing business outside their own regions, or taking to the sea on trading expeditions. If they did so, they presumably reclassified themselves as Malays, Chinese or Mons, and associated with the urban enclaves of these groups.<sup>10</sup> The need to assume a foreign identity must have discouraged the Vietnamese from travelling out of their borders, both as traders or even as seamen. Thus, the initiatives of conducting trade fell largely on the traders from the Malay World. Apart from that, the Vietnamese also depended on the Chinese traders who were conducting an active trading network in Southeast Asia since the 15<sup>th</sup> century.

Until the 14<sup>th</sup> Century, Van Don in the Red River Delta was the principal port in Vietnam frequented by foreign traders including those from the Malay World.<sup>11</sup> When Van Don declined in importance, the traders went to the port of (Pho) Hien, further up the Red River that lead to Thang Long (present day Hanoi), the capital of Vietnam. Other Vietnamese ports that had attracted traders from the Malay World during this time were Can-Hai, Hoi-thong and Hoi-trieu, all in present day Nghe An province. When the Vietnamese began to extend their influence to the south, new ports were opened, among them was the port of Hoi An in the province of Quang Nam in central Vietnam. Originally a Champa port, it came under Vietnamese control in the 13<sup>th</sup> Century, and became prominent by the 16<sup>th</sup> Century. There were other ports such as Qui Nhon in Binh Dinh province and later, Sai Gon in the Eighteenth Century.

For the Vietnamese, the Malay World was a source of exotic goods that were much sought after by the Vietnamese. Indeed most of the passages in the

Vietnamese chronicles emphasize the quality and exquisite value of the items brought to Vietnam by traders from the Malay World. The term most frequently used is "Bao-vat" which literary means precious goods. Among the items mentioned were pearls,<sup>12</sup> gems stones,<sup>13</sup> parrots that could talk,<sup>14</sup> and precious woods.<sup>15</sup> The exotic nature of the goods from the Malay World was termed as "U-vat" or exotic goods in the Vietnamese chronicles.

Two cases describe how much these goods were sought after. The first took place during the Tran Dynasty (1225-1400) in 1348. In that year, trading ships from *Java* brought pearls to the port of Van Don for sale. It was reported that many Van Don residents had stolen these pearls. When the authority learned of this, the culprits were punished.<sup>16</sup> The second incident took place almost a hundred years later during the Le Dynasty (1428-1788). In 1438, the Government of the newly established Le Dynasty imposed a ban on private citizens from engaging in trading foreign goods. The ban came about as the Court discovered that three custom inspectors at Van Don and their accomplices had falsified custom declaration documents for trading ships from *Java* in order to siphon-off some of the goods. The syndicate resold the goods valued at 900 taels of silver, and earned at least 100 taels each.<sup>17</sup> After the syndicate was crushed, and its members punished, the government issued the ban. The two cases demonstrate the great value placed by the Vietnamese on goods from the Malay World. It also strongly suggest that many Vietnamese wanted to engage in the trade with the Malay World even if they had to resort to unlawful means.

In most instances, contacts between the Vietnamese and those who were from the Malay World were cordial, but not entirely pleasant as the Vietnamese, particularly the ruling elite was always suspicious of foreigners. Such suspicions were permeated by a strong cultural prejudice, fostered by centuries of reinforcement through the Chinese ethnocentric perception of foreigners as barbarians.

Cultural prejudice aside the Vietnamese were fully conscious of the economic and strategic values attached of such contacts. Vietnamese response however differs from time to time and varies depending on the idiosyncrasies of the various ruling houses. This is evident during the civil wars of the Seventeenth and Eighteenth Centuries between the Nguyen Lords in the south and the Trinh Lords in the north. At the height of the conflict during the period 1627 and 1672, both ruling houses actively engaged in external trade as a means of earning the much needed revenue needed to acquire military arms and materials as

to sustain them in the war against one another. The West was seen as a main source of military know-how and supplies. But as the open conflict came to a stand still, and status-quo was maintained after 1672. The Trinh Lord shunned itself from trade probably because trade was an activity considered less virtuous in Confucianist thinking. The north thus reverted to the traditional land-tilling agricultural activities. This led to a gradual departure of western enterprises from the north, and less trading ships arrived to its ports. But the Nguyen in the south continued its pursuit for external trade in order to ensure its survival against what it perceived as threat from the Trinh in the north. Foreign traders continued to arrive in its principal ports, first at Hoi-an, later at Qui-nhon, Saigon and even Ha-tien. Thus the south's contact with the west as well as the Malay World was considerably longer. That however, did not change the fact that few Vietnamese ventured beyond their shores.

The Vietnamese' contact with states in the Malay World and the west was hampered by its limited knowledge on seafaring technology. Even though Vietnamese historiography suggests the existence of a large naval force in the country, they were actually riverine or coastal defence flotilla forces that cruised from port to port along the extensive Vietnamese coastline. Few were suitable for long journeys in the open sea. In fact, in conducting overseas trade and diplomatic missions, the Vietnamese often had to depend on either Chinese junks or Siamese trading or official ships. Yoneo Ishii's compilation of the reports of the Chinese junks that arrived in Nagasaki, carried many reports that these junks had stopped at the various Vietnamese ports before proceeded to Japan.<sup>18</sup> In 1702, it was reported that the Nguyen Lord, Nguyen Phuc Chu, sent a tribute delegation to China on board a Siamese tribute ship.<sup>19</sup> The Vietnamese' reliance on Chinese traders to conduct their overseas trade persisted even until 1820s as observed by John Crawford, "This branch (British Ports in the Straits of Malacca), and any other of the foreign trade of Cochin China, is carried out by Chinese, who are both the merchants, mariners and navigators. The native Cochin Chinese scarcely venture beyond their own coasts."<sup>20</sup>

Vietnamese external contacts during the first period was broader, involving contacts with a number of countries from the Malay World as well as European countries including the Portuguese,<sup>21</sup> the Dutch,<sup>22</sup> the English<sup>23</sup> and the French.<sup>24</sup> However, such contacts were made within the shores of Vietnam. In fact, whatever impressions the Vietnamese had on the world beyond Vietnam,

came from the little contacts they had with foreign traders or western missionaries who came to Vietnam.

During this first period, the Vietnamese' perception of those who came from the Malay World was rather poor and unclear. Probably due to their inability to distinguish between the different types of people who came from the Malay World, the Vietnamese used the term, 'Cha-va', 'Trao-Oa' or 'Do-ba' when referring to those who were from the Malay Archipelago. This inability to distinguish one from another was also blurred by their heavy borrowing of Chinese geographical terms that were then transferred to the Sino-Vietnamese pronunciation.

The scarcity of reference in Vietnamese historiography to the Malay World during this first period of ten centuries of contact actually highlights the dynamics of relations between the two regions. Given the nature of traditional Vietnamese historiography that was highly selective and steeped in their functions of edifying their rulers, it is not surprising that reference to the Malay World is wanting.

#### COURT AND DIPLOMATIC MISSIONS

Given the nature of the first ten centuries of relations, the bulk of the contacts between peoples from Vietnam and the Malay World took place at the Vietnamese ports where ships from the Malay World brought with them exotic products valued by the Vietnamese. Apart from that, different Vietnamese courts also had some degree of contacts with the Malay World. This is evident from the various entries found in the Vietnamese chronicles. These contacts came in two forms, trading missions and diplomatic missions. In the former case, it is common to see how Vietnamese courts under different dynasties received traders from the Malay World who came bearing gifts and seeking permission to trade in Vietnam. These missions were reported to have taken place in 1068, 1149, 1184, 1349, 1360 and 1434.

The Vietnamese' degree of understanding of the Malay World was dependent to some extent, on the interests of some members of the ruling houses. During the Tran Dynasty (1225-1400) for instance, a certain prince by the name of Tran Nhat Duat was reputed to be interested in foreign languages and customs. He was for some time, the court interpreter on occasions when Malay

envoys arrived from Sach-ma-tich (Temasik/Singapore).<sup>25</sup> Though the prince's case is by no means a yardstick with regard to the level of the Vietnamese courts' understanding of the Malay World, it nevertheless demonstrated the practice of the Vietnamese court to use some of their people as interpreters when dealing with the Malay World.

The degree of the Vietnamese courts' understanding on the Malay World can be gauged from the manner in which their records were written. With the absence of a seagoing tradition until late Eighteenth Century, Vietnamese knowledge of the Malay World, and in fact, the world beyond Vietnam, was rather limited. Apart from China that they turned to as source of cultural tradition and knowledge, the Vietnamese seem rather doubtful when dealing with the Malay World. As the Vietnamese had little capacity and few opportunities to explore the external world on their own, much of their information on the Malay World actually was derived from Chinese travelogues and encyclopaedias.<sup>26</sup> This involved heavy borrowing of geographical terms from the Chinese which were later translated into the Sino-Vietnamese, and pronounced in the Vietnamese style. This made the already exotic terms of places in the Malay World an inexplicable tone, adding to the confusion.

The process of borrowing geographical place names from the Chinese is one thing, but precise knowledge of them is quite another for the Vietnamese. This explains why the term Do-ba, which the Chinese used specifically for the island of Java, was used indifferently by the Vietnamese to describe all the regions and peoples of the Malay World. This inability to pin-point precisely a particular place based on a name in Vietnamese is demonstrated in a statement from the *Dai Nam Thuc Luc*: "In 1789, envoys from the kingdom of Ta-ni (Pattani), another name for Do-ba (Java), came to offer local products and seek assistance against Siam".<sup>27</sup>

In another case, Trinh Hoai Duc, author of the celebrated early nineteenth century *Gia-Dinh Thanh Thong Chi* (Geographical Exposition/Gazetteer of Gia-Dinh) made an attempt to locate the ancient Chinese names for Poli, Gantuoli and Chitu. Duc managed to locate Poli in the area of Baria in the Mekong Delta. Another nineteenth century author Nguyen Thieu placed Poli in Siam, and Gantuoli and Chitu in the present day Bien Hoa Province. When Cao Xuan Duc and his team of writers compiled the monumental *Dai Nam Nhat Thong Chi* (Geographical Gazetteer of Vietnam) in the late nineteenth century, he accepted both Trinh Hoai Duc and Nguyen Thieu's conclusions. Duc's works became the stan-



dard geographical reference for imperial Vietnam during the last few decades of the Nguyen Dynasty. By then, the handling of foreign relations and even external trade were no longer the prerogatives of the Vietnamese Court, but instead, the sole rights of the French who had started their rule over Vietnam in 1883.

One interesting feature in Vietnamese historiography whenever referring to foreign countries is the tendency to associate them with tributary relations. The Vietnamese' notion of tributary relations was in many ways similar to that practiced by Imperial China throughout its many dynasties. Like the Chinese, the Vietnamese took it upon themselves to regard their nation as the centre of universe surrounded by a cluster of kingdoms and peoples.

In 1349, the great Do-ba (Java) kingdom is reported to have sent a tribute of local produce and a talking parrot to the Vietnamese court.<sup>28</sup> Another mention of tribute sent from Do-ba took place in 1434.<sup>29</sup> In 1442, the Le Court listed Do-ba, Siam, Sam-fo-chi (Srivijaya), Champa, Malacca, which it regarded as maritime kingdoms, as having sent tributes to Vietnam.<sup>30</sup> However Vietnam was never acknowledged as a tributary master by any kingdom or state in the Malay world.

This self-invented "tributary relation" of the Vietnamese was an important feature in its historiography as it accorded certain measures of cultural superiority to the Vietnamese over peoples from other parts of the region, with the exception of China, to which it actually sent regular tributes. In reality however, almost all of these countries from the Malay World mentioned, had sent traders to Vietnam. Thus, it is imperative to exercise caution and discretion when consulting Vietnamese historical sources relating to foreign relations especially those that related to the Malay World.

### THE NGUYEN MISSIONS

The Vietnamese' view of the West as well as insular Southeast Asia took on a new meaning during the closing years of the eighteenth century and the early part of the nineteenth century. Internal conflict in Vietnam saw the Nguyen Lords' rule in southern Vietnam coming to an end after being invaded by a Le-Trinh army from the North in 1776. Twelve years later, the Le Dynasty and the Trinh Lordship were overthrown by a rebellion known as the Tay Son Rebellion that originated from the south. Since then, remnants of the Nguyen family, led

by one of the princes, Nguyen Phuc Anh (later Emperor Gia Long, r. 1802-1819), challenged the Tay Son to restore the Nguyen family rule. It was under Nguyen Phuc Anh that brought about a change in the way the Vietnamese viewed the Malay World.

Pressed by the need to beef-up his relatively small force against the seasoned Tay Son army, Nguyen Phuc Anh followed the examples of his ancestors by turning to the westerners.<sup>31</sup> However, unlike his predecessors who turned to the Portuguese in Macau, Anh looked to the British and the Dutch in Southeast Asia for arms and ammunitions. He also solicited assistance from the French through French missionaries.<sup>32</sup> This shift of direction, especially toward Insular Southeast Asia, was inevitably a result of the rise of the British and Dutch power in the region that coincided with an almost total decline of Portuguese power in the East. Undoubtedly, Nguyen Phuc Anh was also influenced by the many westerners who were in his service, especially mercenaries who were leading part of his army.

The earliest attempt by Nguyen Phac Anh to obtain arms and ammunition from the Malay World was in 1788 when he sent a mission to the British and the Dutch settlements there to obtain arms, ammunition and powder for guns.<sup>33</sup> Since then, several other missions were sent, including one to Nhu-Phat (Johor) in 1797.<sup>34</sup> In 1802, Nguyen Phuc Anh finally defeated the Tay Son and restored the fortune of his family with the establishment of the Nguyen Dynasty (1802-1945). Since then, there were no more missions sent abroad for the procurement of arms. It was only after Emperor Minh Menh (r. 1819-1840) had succeeded Gia Long that new missions were sent.

One interesting feature that had emerged from Nguyen Phuc Anh's overseas missions was the clearer identification of names of places in the Malay World that had thus far been unheard of in Vietnamese writings. Instead of the term Do-ba (Java) as commonly used in Vietnamese historiography and geographical writings when referring to the Malay World, new names were incorporated, they included terms like Giang-Luu-Ba (Kelapa/Batavia in Java), Tieu Tay Duong (Small Western Ocean), Co-a (Goa in India), Ma-la-kha (Malacca), Tan-gia-ba (Singapore), Tân-Lang-Du (Penang), Nhu-Phat (Johor), and Tam-ba-lang (Samarang). Part of this new development is the result of the need to identify places for navigation.

When Emperor Minh Menh succeeded his father in 1820, he decided to send out missions to the Malay World in order to collect information on the

events taking place outside Vietnam, especially information on the places they visited. Apart from that, Minh Menh was hoping that the navigation skills of his seamen would improve in the course of his journey. According to John Crawfurd, contrary to previous practices, "...the adventures to the Straits of Malacca made within the last few years by the king of Cochin China, on his own account, and the junks employed in which, with the exception of the Chinese pilots, are all navigated by native Cochin Chinese".<sup>35</sup> Even though the missions were generally included trade, at no time did the Vietnamese sources mention that the missions were commercial in nature. Under Minh Menh, a total of nine missions were being sent to the Malay World in the years 1825, 1832, 1832/33, 1836, 1836/37, 1839, 1840, 1844 respectively, while Emperor Thieu Tri had sent one in 1846/47.<sup>36</sup> All the missions visited Batavia, six visited Singapore, two went to Penang (1832 & 1835), two to Samarang (1839 & 1840), and two separate missions visited Luzon in 1832 and 1835 respectively.<sup>37</sup>

While it was not explicitly stated in Vietnamese sources, the decision to send such missions was probably a response towards European enterprises in Asia, particularly, in China. The pressure exerted by the European merchants upon China to open its doors for trade had probably persuaded Emperor Minh Menh to initiate plans to send out missions in order to learn the ways of the Europeans in governing their colonies. Another reason is the encouragement of trade between Vietnam and Southeast Asia, particularly, with Singapore. Following John Crawfurd's mission in 1821, Emperor Minh Menh invited British merchants to trade with Sai-gon, Tourane (Danang), Hoi-an and Hue. There were however, very few British merchants who traded in Vietnam. This had actually prompted Emperor Minh Menh to complain to the Resident of Singapore in 1825 that British merchants were not taking advantage of his invitation to trade in Vietnamese ports.<sup>38</sup> In that same year, Emperor Minh Menh sent the first of his many missions to the Malay World, by having two armed vessels sail to Singapore. The ships also carried a deputation of mandarins to buy woollen manufactures and glassware. While they were there, they also gathered information on the conditions and views of the European settlements in the Straits of Malacca.<sup>39</sup>

Minh Menh's decision to regulate trade inevitably established a form of governmental monopoly on Vietnam's trade with Southeast Asia. This monopoly was reinforced by a series of cases aimed at discouraging the Vietnamese from carrying out private trading with Southeast Asia. This included the withdrawal

of governmental protection to private traders thus leaving them at the mercy of pirates.<sup>40</sup> George Windsor Earl, who had an encounter with a group of "Cochin-Chinese" during one of his sea journeys in 1830s, recounted how, "in their commercial intercourse with Singapore, they have to struggle against many disadvantages. In the first place the selfish government of their country, not permitting a foreign trade, they are consequently, when engaged in this forbidden pursuit, obliged to steal away and risk all their property, and probably their lives also; and being unable to procure arms, become the favourite prey of the cowardly Malay pirates".<sup>41</sup>

It is in this light that Vietnam's contact with the West and the Malay World had increased. More importantly, it was through the Vietnamese' own initiatives that these new contacts were made. Out of these missions a new genre of writings emerged, namely, records of diplomatic missions to the west. Though not entirely new, as Vietnamese diplomats normally leave behind journals relating their journeys as ambassadors to China in the framework of the traditional tributary relations.<sup>42</sup> Apart from travelling journals, some also left behind poems describing their awe for the things they saw in China. The more famous and notable of these writings includes the works of Le Quy Don, Phan Huy Chu and Phan Tian Gian and Li Van Phuc.<sup>43</sup> The new genre of writing however differs from those produced from trips made to China as they describe journeys to the West, a previously uncharted region with descriptions of new culture and people. Some of the same people who were sent to China were also being sent to the West as emissaries, such as Phan Tian Gian in 1844.<sup>44</sup>

The "West" as understood by the Vietnamese requires some explanation. The West or Tay here does not strictly refer to Europe as is commonly accepted, though there were missions that were being sent to France and Spain, such as that of Phan Tian Gian's. But the definition of West here takes on a broader meaning. On one hand, it simply means direction west of Vietnam, as in the case of Europe and India, the latter as in the case of Li Van Phuc's journey in 1830. In some historical geographical writings for instance, the southwest, as in the case of *Tay Nam Trai Yeu Cbi* actually refers to places such as Cambodia and Laos, which in fact, is on the western part of Vietnam.<sup>45</sup> On the other hand, it also means countries under western rule in the Malay World, as in the case of Malacca which was then under the Dutch rule (1641-1824) and Li Van Phuc's India that was under British rule.

Even though both Gia Long and Minh Menh, as well as Tu Duc had sent a total of 18 missions to Insular Southeast Asia, few had left behind records of their journeys. Thus far, three of them are identified, namely Li Van Phuc's 1830 mission to India via the Straits Settlements (*Tay Hanb Kien Van Ki Luoc*), Phan Huy Chu's 1832/33 mission to Batavia (*Hai Trinh Chi Luoc*), and Li Van Phuc's 1832 (or 1835) mission to Luzon (*Li Van Phuc Di Van*). The first two are discussed in the following section.

### DESCRIPTIONS OF STRAITS SETTLEMENTS

Both Li Van Phuc and Phan Huy Chu saw the Straits Settlements at a time when the settlements were under administration transformation. Penang, the first British Settlement in the Malay Peninsula (taken in 1786),<sup>46</sup> was beginning to lose its importance to an emerging Singapore that was opened only in 1819 by Stamford Raffles.<sup>47</sup>

Between the two authors, only Li Van Phuc had the opportunity of visiting all three settlements of Singapore, Malacca and Penang while on his way to India. Phan Huy Chu only saw Singapore before proceeding to Batavia. Nevertheless, it is interesting to note that Phan Huy Chu was the more meticulous of the two when recording observations. Apart from providing us with a description of the Singapore town and its buildings, he also commented on the history and customs of the area.

Both Li Van Phuc and Phan Huy Chu made almost similar observation on the history of Singapore. According to Li, Singapore was formerly a vassal of Trao-Oa Quoc, or Java. Whereas Phan Huy Chu noted that it was formerly a part of Java. Phan Huy Chu went further in saying that Java was once a great kingdom, and had sent a tribute to the northern Song Dynasty (Emperor Jianlong, 960-963 AD), but had gradually declined and fell into the hands of the westerners. Li Van Phuc however, made a mistake in saying that the British took over Singapore 19 years before 1830, which corresponded with the year 1811.<sup>48</sup> Instead, the correct year should be 1819.

Li Van Phuc observed correctly that Malacca was formerly under the Dutch (Pha-lang-thi Quoc). Though in offering an explanation on how Malacca came under British rule, Li Van Phuc speculated by suggesting that the Dutch had left Malacca after a conflict with the British. He was probably unaware of the 1824

Treaty of London, that had redrawn the balance of power in the Malay Archipelago. Under the treaty, Dutch Malacca was exchanged for British Bencoleen on the island of Sumatra.

As for the island of Penang, Li Van Phuc said that it was formerly under Java before being annexed by the British. By *Java* (Trao-Oa or Do-ba), Li Van Phuc was actually referring to the Kingdom of Kedah that had ceded the island of Penang to Francis Light in 1786.<sup>49</sup> Here, some explanation pertaining to the use of the term *Java* needs to be offered. Despite having trading relations with the Malay World for a long time, the Vietnamese made little effort in identifying the actual origins of the people who came to trade with them.

Both Li Van Phuc and Phan Huy Chu made some very interesting observations on the administration of the Straits Settlements, particularly on Singapore. On the Straits Settlements system, Li Van Phuc seemed to have it figured out when he mentioned that Penang, Malacca and Singapore each had a chief, with Penang having greater power over the other two. According to Li Van Phuc, the chief in Penang was in turn, under the jurisdiction of the chief (President) at Bengal (Ming-Ga). What Li Van Phuc refers to was actually the system of the Presidency of Straits Settlements whereby the Straits Settlements was governed by a governor in Penang. The first governor was Robert Fullerton. In the year of Li Van Phuc's arrival in the Straits Settlements, financial crisis had plagued the administration as the Straits Settlements was suffering from a trade deficit. At the same time, the East India Company was facing a severe financial crisis in India. As a result of that, the Presidency of the Straits Settlements was abolished, and the Straits Settlements were reduced to the status of a Residency dependent on the Presidency of Bengal, based in Calcutta.<sup>50</sup> The arrangement was so much disliked by the European residents of the Straits Settlements that they endeavoured to break away from control from the India. This, they succeeded in 1867, when the Straits Settlements was placed under the direct rule from the Colonial Office, with the Governor in Singapore as the main representative. At the time when Li Van Phuc made his visit, the 'chief' at Singapore was actually an assistant Resident. During that transition period, he was not even accorded the power to convene a judicial court.

Phan Huy Chu talks about the location of the administrative centre that he says was on a hill. This was probably Fort Canning Hill, where the governor's house was situated. According to Phan Huy Chu, there were two main administrators in Singapore at that time, namely an army chief and another who admin-

istered justice and prisons. He also mentions the position of the harbour master who was also the custom officer. At the time of his brief stay in Singapore, the main administrator of justice was actually a recorder who had arrived in the year before.<sup>51</sup> What Phan Huy Chu failed to observe was the existence of the restored governorship, acted in that capacity by George Bonham from 1833 to 1835, before becoming a substantive governor in 1836. Phan Huy Chu made two very interesting observations regarding administrative procedures. First, he mentioned a ten-hour working day and that the officers wore white tunics.

Having been attached to the Ministry of War (Binh Bo), Li Van Phuc made some observations about the military chain of command. He thought that the army chief in India had subordinates who acted as chiefs for the troops in the Straits Settlements. Phan Huy Chu merely commented that the army at Singapore was well-equipped and impressive.

The two authors made very interesting observations regarding the currency used in the Straits Settlements. Both noticed the different type of currencies used, describing their makings. However, both were unable to distinguish clearly the actual denominations of the various currencies. Most of the time, both writers tried to fit the value of the money in the context of Vietnamese currency, making the observations very confusing. Li Van Phuc who had the opportunity of seeing the value of money in India, also made some comparison on their value and those used in the Straits Settlements.

Both Li Van Phuc and Phan Huy Chu had very little good things to say about the physical features of the westerners. On their way of life, Phan Huy Chu talks about their practice in keeping a seven-day week, with the seventh day being a rest day. He had also noticed the manner in which the westerners spent their Sundays, which according to him, were normally spent eating and drinking. Phan Huy Chu had probably witnessed the Europeans' fondness in having picnics.

Phan Huy Chu was wrongly informed of the way the western calendar operates. According to the information obtained from Chinese living in Singapore, the year 1833 corresponded with the number of years the Netherlands had been in existence. With that, he was wrongly impressed by the durability of the Dutch as a kingdom. He also wrongly generalised that all the European laws had originated from the Dutch. Likewise, Li Van Phuc was also been wrongly informed of the year 1830, which, like Huy Chu, he attributed to the number of years the English had been in existence.

According to Phan Huy Chu, the buildings were two to three stories high and made of bricks. He also noted the wide usage of glass in buildings. Apart from that Phan Huy Chu touched on the mode of transportation and the prosperity of the port of Singapore.

By referring the locals as Do-ba people, both Li Van Phuc and Phan Huy Chu probably meant Malays. For observation on the locals, Phan Huy Chu did a better job than Li Van Phuc. From his tone, he seemed to be sympathetic with the plights of the Malays. Phan Huy Chu mentioned about how the Malays were conquered by the English and had to live under their laws and pay taxes. While he found the Englishmen ugly and aggressive, he saw the Malays as well mannered and soft-spoken. He also found that, apart from being darker in complexion, they were no different from the Vietnamese. He also briefly described the Malay's costume, which according to him, "The Do-ba (Malay) people wore long and loose fitted gowns made from coloured clothing with prominently red and blue".<sup>52</sup>

Phan Huy Chu also included some recent history of the two places. According to him, Singapore was part of Java before being taken over by the Red Hair (English). The English set up a government with the government house situated on a hill.<sup>53</sup> His description of actual Java is more extensive, probably with the help of some early Chinese writings. According to Chu, Java in the ancient time was a great kingdom, and had sent a tribute to the Song Court of Jianlong period. But it ceased doing so after that, presumably in decline and conquered by the Westerners. After living for a few hundred years under Western rule, the Java (Malay) people lived miserably. They had to pay taxes. Even though they attempted to resist Western rule, they were too weak and had to bow to the rule of the westerners.<sup>54</sup>

From the above passages, it is clear that despite of their improved knowledge on the Malay World, the Vietnamese still preferred using the term Do Ba (Java) when referred to the people from the region, regardless of their actual origins. The passages from *Hai Trinh Chi Luoc* also show the limited contacts that existed between the Vietnamese and the people from the Malay World. As the Nguyen missions were official envoys aimed at first soliciting military supplies, and later for the gathering of information from the Westerners in these places, they restricted their contacts to the Government officials and the Chinese. It is doubtful if the presence of these Vietnamese envoys had actually contributed in anyway to cultural contacts between Vietnam and the Malay World.



### CONCLUDING REMARKS

Historical links between Vietnam and the Malay World spans a very long time. Starting in the 8<sup>th</sup> Century A.D., the relations took the form of trading activities. These trade connections however, was quite devoid of actual understanding on the Vietnamese side on the Malay World as evident from the manner insular Southeast Asia is portrayed in Vietnamese writings. Throughout the period between the 8<sup>th</sup> and late 18<sup>th</sup> centuries, the tendency was to lump the diverse and plural characteristics of the Malay World into the limited and misleading term of 'Java' (Trao-oa, Cha-va or Do-ba), devoid of any attempt to explore further the peculiarities of this region.

The late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries saw Vietnamese overtures via its missions to insular Southeast Asia and ushered in a shift in how the latter figured in Vietnamese understanding. The two texts of *Tay Hanh Kien Van Ki Luoc* and *Hai Trinh Chi Luoc*, provided insights into the new manner the Vietnamese were looking at the Malay World, at least from the way they were looking at the Straits Settlements. From the extracts of their writings on the Straits Settlements, it is clear that both Li Van Phuc and Phan Huy Chu represent a new phase in the Vietnamese' understanding of the Malay World. Greater efforts were made to observe things they saw, culminating in some very detailed information being recorded. Nevertheless, these were still constrained by old ideas entrenched in Vietnamese official writings, especially in the manner chronicles and gazettes were written. Nonetheless, as both authors' actual mission was to India and Batavia respectively, their observations on the Straits Settlements was therefore not given priority and at certain times, they were sketchy.

Vietnamese missions to the Malay World came to an end shortly after the ascension of Emperor Thieu Tri (1841-1847). Little attempts were made by the Nguyen Court to further encourage contacts with countries in the Malay World. The tragic experience of China in handling their transactions with the Europeans and the defeat inflicted upon it by the Europeans in the First Sino-Anglo War (Opium War) of 1839-1842, compelled the Vietnamese rulers to look inward, and adopted a closed door policy vis-à-vis foreign countries. This had also meant the end of any attempt toward the pursuit of meaningful and lasting relations with states in the Malay World.

Even though Vietnamese records trace the genesis of Vietnam's relations with the Malay World to the Eight Century AD, the actual relationship between the two entities could have been longer as evident from the visits of traders from the Malay World to Vietnamese port such as Lien-lu enroute to China during the first few centuries of the first millennium. The scant and scattered nature of the references of the Malay World found in the various Vietnamese historical sources, especially the chronicles seem to suggest that little interaction had taken place between Vietnam and the Malay World. This however, is not entirely true given the selective nature of Vietnamese historiography and their specific functions as much of the dynamics of the relations were never included. But evidences of this dynamic relationship could be found in non-Vietnamese sources such as Malay and Chinese texts, as well as western sources. The careful utilization of a combination of Vietnamese and non-Vietnamese sources may prove worthwhile in an attempt to reconstruct a comprehensive understanding of the historical linkages between Vietnam and the Malay World.

NOTE

- 1 This is a revised version of a paper presented at the 3rd International Malaysian Studies Conference, 6-8 August 2001, Universiti Kebangsaan Malaysia, Bangi.
- 2 See for instance, P. B. Lafont, "On the Relations between Champa and Southeast Asia" & H. Chambert-Loir, "On the Historical and Literary Relations Between Champa and the Malay World", in *Proceedings of the Seminar on Champa, University of Copenhagen (1987)*, Paris: Centre for the Study of History and Cultures of the Indochinese Peninsula, 1994, pp. 65-75 & 87-99; *Le Campa et Le Monde Malais*, Paris: Centre d'Histoire et Civilisations de la Peninsule Indochinoise, 1991, with specific reference to the article by Eric Crystal, "Champa and the Study of Southeast Asia", pp. 65-76; Nguyen The Anh, "Indochina and the Malay World: A Glimpse on Malay-Vietnamese Relations to the Mid-Nineteenth Century", *Asia Journal*, Vol. 3, No. 1, June 1996, pp. 105-131.
- 3 Li Van Phuc, *Tây Hanh Kien Van Ki Luoc* (1830), AB. 243 & ME. 338 conserved in the Vien Nghien Cuu Han-Nom (Institute of Han-Nom Research) and ME. I/2/328 in the Library of Ecole Francaise d'Extreme-Orient. For the purpose of this paper, the EFEO edition is consulted.
- 4 Phan Huy Chu, *Hai Trinh Chi Luoc* in *Ban Quoc Hai Trinh Hop Tha*, is listed as VNv. 2656 and VHv 2071 at the Vien Nghien Cuu Han-Nom. For this paper, I have used the facsimile edition found in Phan Huy Chu, *Hai Trinh Chi Luoc, Un Emission Vietnamien a Batavia*, Phan Huy Le, Claudine Salmon & Ta Trong Hiep (Trans.), Paris: Cahier d'Archipel, No. 25, 1994, pp. 177-209.
- 5 Paul Wheatley, *The Golden Kbersone, Studies in the Historical Geography of the Malay Peninsula before A. D. 1500*, Kuala Lumpur: University of Malaya Press, 1961.
- 6 In the case of the Cham, the term Jawa refers to Malay speakers and those from the maritime Malay World, see Po Dharma (comp.), *Quatre Lexiques Malais-Cam Anciens, rédigés au Campâ*, Paris: Ecole Française D'Étrême-Orient, 1999, p. 323.
- 7 Dai Nam Thuc Luc Tien Bien, Vol. 7: 23-24; As for English accounts, see "Dr. James Pound to Court of Manager", 2 May 1705, *MS Bradley 24*, Bodleian Library, f. 5.

- <sup>8</sup> *D?i V?ét S? Ký Toan Thu* (Ngoai Ký: hereafter, *DVSKTT*), Vol. 5: 4-5.
- <sup>9</sup> For a study on the early Asian trade, see Kenneth R. Hall, *Maritime Trade and State Development in Early Southeast Asia*, Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 1985.
- <sup>10</sup> Anthony Reid, *Southeast Asia in the Age of Commerce, Vol. II*, New Haven: Yale University Press, p. 482.
- <sup>11</sup> For a study on the port of Van Don, see T. Yamamoto, "Van-Don: A Trade Port in Vietnam", *Memoirs of the Research Department of the Toyo Bunko*, No. 39, 1981.
- <sup>12</sup> *DVSKTT*, Vol. 7: 14.
- <sup>13</sup> *Ibid.*, Vol. 3: 4.
- <sup>14</sup> *Ibid.*, Vol. 7: 14.
- <sup>15</sup> *Ibid.*, Vol. 11: 57.
- <sup>16</sup> *Ibid.*, Vol. 7: 14.
- <sup>17</sup> *DVSKTT*, Vol. 11: 17.
- <sup>18</sup> See Yoneo Ishii, *The Junk Trade from Southeast Asia, Translations from the Tosen Fusetsu-gaki, 1674-1723*, Singapore: Institute of Southeast Asian Studies & Research School of Pacific and Asian Studies, Australian National University, 1998.
- <sup>19</sup> *Dai Nam Thuc Luc Tien Bien* (hereafter *Tien Bien*), Vol. 7: 20; For Chinese intermediaries in Southeast Asian trade, see Jennifer W. Cushman, *Fields from the Sea: Chinese Junk Trade with Siam during the late Eighteenth and Nineteenth Centuries*, Ithaca: Southeast Asia Program, Cornell University, 1993.
- <sup>20</sup> John Crawford, *Journal of an Embassy to the Court of Siam and Cochinchina*, Kuala Lumpur: Oxford University Press Reprint, 1987, p. 514.
- <sup>21</sup> Pierre Yves Manguin, *Les Portugais sur les Cotes du Viet-Nam et du Campa*, Paris: Ecole Francaise d'Extreme-Orient, 1972.
- <sup>22</sup> W. J. M. Buch, *De Oost-Indische Compagnie en Quinam*, Amsterdam: H. J. Paris, 1929.
- <sup>23</sup> Aliaster Lamb, *The Mandarin Road to Old Hue*, London: Chatto & Windus, 1970, pp. 9-56.
- <sup>24</sup> The French were late comers to Vietnam. For an account on early French involvement in Vietnam, see Georges Taboulet, *La Geste Francaise en Indochine*, T. I, Paris: Adrien-Maisonneuve, 1955, pp. 76-162.

- <sup>25</sup> Nguyen The Anh, "Indochina and the Malay World: A Glimpse on Malay-Vietnamese Relations to the Mid-Nineteenth Century", *Asia Journal*, Vol. 3, No. 1, June 1996, p. 117. Sach-ma-tich (Temasik) was the old name for Singapore in the Sino-Vietnamese terms.
- <sup>26</sup> Two of the most commonly referred texts are *Dongxi Yangkao* (Examinations of the Sea of the East and the West) by Zhang Xie in 1617 and *Haiguo Tuzhi* (Illustrated Monograph of the Maritime Countries) by Wei Yuan in 1844.
- <sup>27</sup> *Dai Nam Thuc Luc Chinh Bien*, as cited in Nguyen The Anh, "Indochina and the Malay World: A Glimpse on Malay-Vietnamese Relations to the Mid-Nineteenth Century", p. 119.
- <sup>28</sup> *DVSKTT*, Vol. 7: 14.
- <sup>29</sup> *Ibid.*, Vol. 11: 16.
- <sup>30</sup> *Ibid.*, Vol. 11: 57.
- <sup>31</sup> For a pioneering study on the Nguyen's missions to Southeast Asia, see Chen Chingho, "Les 'Missions Officielles dans les Ha Chau' de la Premier Periode des Nguyen", *The Journal of Institute of Asian Studies* (Soka University, Tokyo), No. 11, March 1990, translated by Claudine Salmon with Shibata Shintaro and Ta Trong Hiep, in *Bulletin De l'Ecole Francaise D'Extreme-Orient*, No. 81, 1994, pp. 63-82.
- <sup>32</sup> For Nguyen Phuc Anh (Gia Long)'s dealings with the French, see Georges Taboulet, *La Geste Francaise en Indochine*, pp. 163-279.
- <sup>33</sup> *Dai Nam Thuc Luc Chinh Bien, De Nhat Ky*, Vol. 3: 17.
- <sup>34</sup> *Ibid.*, Vol. 9: 15.
- <sup>35</sup> John Crawford, *Journal of an Embassy to the Court of Siam and Cochinchina*, p. 514.
- <sup>36</sup> Phan Huy Chu, *Hai Trinh Chi Luoc, Un Emission Vietnamien a Batavia*, Phan Huy Le, Claudine Salmon & Ta Trong Hiep (Trans.), Paris: Cahier d'Archipel, No. 25, 1994, p. 22.
- <sup>37</sup> *Ibid.* p. 23.
- <sup>38</sup> *Straits Settlements Records* (H. 14), 19 May 1825 as cited in Wong Lin Ken, "The Trade of Singapore, 1819-1867" *Journal of the Malayan Branch of the Royal Asiatic Society* (hereafter *JMBRAS*), Vol. XXXIII, Part 4, December, 1960, p. 155.
- <sup>39</sup> *Ibid.*

- <sup>40</sup> Straits Settlements Records (A. 68), 2 June 1825, as cited in Wong Lin Ken, "The Trade of Singapore", p. 156.
- <sup>41</sup> George Windsor Earl, *The Eastern Seas or Voyages and Adventures in the Indian Archipelago in 1832-33-34*, London: William H. Allen, 1837, reprinted, Singapore: Oxford University Press, 1971, p. 198.
- <sup>42</sup> Li Van Phuc and Phan Huy Chu was sent on mission to China, in 1824 and 1832 respectively.
- <sup>43</sup> See Le Quy Don, *Bac Su Thong Luc* (Record of an Embassy to the North); Phan Thanh Gian, *Su Trinh Thi Tap* (Poems of an Embassy to China) and *Yen Thien Thi Thao* (Collection of Poems of an Embassy to China), Phan Huy Chu, *Hoa Trinh Tuc Ngam* (Further Record of an Embassy to China) and Li Van Phuc's *Su Trinh Quat Yeu Bien* (Important Record of the Embassy) and *Su Trinh Chi Luoc Thao* (Draft of a Record of an Embassy).
- <sup>44</sup> Phan Thanh Gian, *Tay Phu Nhat Ki* (Journal of Journey to the West - France and Spain).
- <sup>45</sup> See *Tay Nam Bien Tai Luc* (Records of the Southwest Borders).
- <sup>46</sup> For a study on the British taking over of the Penang Island, see R. Bonney, "Francis Light and Penang" *Journal of the Malaysian Branch of the Royal Asiatic Society*, Vol. 38, Part 1, pp. 135-158 & R. Bonney, *Kedah 1771-1821: The Search for Security and Independence*, Kuala Lumpur: Oxford University Press, 1971.
- <sup>47</sup> For a study on Raffles, see Emily Hanh, *Raffles of Singapore: A Biography*, Kuala Lumpur: University of Malaya Press, 1968 and Colin Clair, *Sir Stamford Raffles of Singapore*, Watford, Herts: Bruce & Gawthorn, 1963.
- <sup>48</sup> *Tay Hanh Kien Van Ki Luoc*, p. 36.
- <sup>49</sup> See R. Bonney, *Kedah 1771-1821*: pp. 52-78.
- <sup>50</sup> C. M. Turnbull, *A History of Singapore, 1819-1988*, 2nd ed., Singapore: Oxford University Press, 1989, p. 33.
- <sup>51</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 35.
- <sup>52</sup> Phan Huy Chu, *Hai Trinh Chi Luoc*, p. 32b.
- <sup>53</sup> *Ibid.*
- <sup>54</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 32b-33a.

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