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The Chams and the Malay World

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Abstract

There has been a lot of interest on the Malay world in the recent years but there is still a lack of conceptual clarity as to what the term really means. This has fueled an interesting debate as to how it should be conceptualized and approached. In Japan, although different approaches have been attempted, the Southeast Asian maritime world perspective seems to be prevalent. This paper will try to examine the link between the Malay world and Indochina from the viewpoint of commercial activities. The first section will discuss the role of the Chams in the early modern Malay World. I would like to assess the profile of the Chams in this period. The second section of the paper will, in contrast, examine the activities of the Malays in Champa and Cambodia. In the final section, I would like to highlight some information on the Chams in contemporary Malaysia based on my preliminary survey, which seems to suggest a recurring theme in the history of the Malay world.

Introduction

Over the past few decades, scholarly concern with the Malay world has been growing. For Malay scholars in Malaysia, the Malay world is undoubtedly one of the most important subjects of study. While using the term “*dunia Melayu*”, they try to clarify the historical influence of Malay culture in Southeast Asia¹ Particularly, with regard to their imagined vision of the Malay world, Islam is given a definitive place as demonstrated in the book entitled *Islamic Civilization in the Malay world* (Mohd. Taib Osman 1997).

Although western scholars rather like to use such terms as “*alam Melayu*” and “Malayness”, they also share an interest in the Malay world². Nevertheless, their focus has been more to explain the political systems or political cultures of the pre-colonial period³. However, some recent studies have begun to focus attention on the developments in the Malay world and the shift in ethnic identity in the early modern period. Such a tendency, in particular, is clearly reflected in some of the articles contained in the book *Contesting Malayness: Malay Identity Across Boundaries* (Barnard 2004).⁴

Interest in the Malay world has also been growing in Japan, although scholars there approach the subject from different angles, that is mostly from the viewpoint of the Southeast Asian maritime world. The renowned Japanese anthropologist, Tachimoto Narifumi has discussed the culture of this maritime world in a case study of Bugis immigrant society in the Malay Peninsula. The “*Nusantara* culture” that he describes is characterized by migration of the diaspora type, commercial-orientation, and networking (Tachimoto 1998). Historians rather tend to focus attention on port-polity⁵ in the early modern period. Consi-

¹ As for a discussion of “*dunia Melayu*”, see, for example, Mohd. Yusof Hasan 1991.

² As for “*alam Melayu*”, see Milner 1982 and for further details of “Malayness”, see Barnard 2004.

³ See, for example, Reid & Castles 1975 and Milner, A.C. 1982.

⁴ See, for example, Reid & Castles 1975 and Milner, A.C. 1982.

⁵ The “port-polity” is a concept on pre-colonial states of Southeast Asia. Its main features are as follows: (1) Port and capital city merged into a single urban complex at the river mouth. (2) Agrarian and trade activities should be viewed as complementary features of inter-regional cohesion and regional integration rather than as internally and

dering the coastal port-inland and local-international relations, Hirose Masashi points out the roles played by rulers and immigrants as mediators either connecting or separating two different societies (Hirose 1996, Hirose 1999; Hirose 2004). Nishio Kanji discusses the historical developments of the political culture of the maritime people, in particular their idea of contract, in the early modern Malay world (Nishio 1995, Nishio 2001a, Nishio 2001b, Nishio 2003, Nishio 2004). Hayase Shinzo, on the other hand, discusses the differences within maritime Southeast Asia by examining specific cases in its eastern region (Hayase 2003).

As stated above, contemporary scholars have been concerned with the Malay world even though they have been looking at it from many different aspects. The growing interest in maritime activities, in particular, presents us with a chance to consider the interactions and similarities between mainland and insular Southeast Asia. New concepts like “maritime Southeast Asia” and “port-polity” have encouraged us to pursue those subjects of study. However, it seems that the potential of the studies in those directions have not really been fully realized yet. For example, as far as Malay studies is concerned, only few scholars have tried to understand the links between the Malay world and that of Indochina although some Malay scholars in Malaysia have often argued that the concept of the Malay world naturally includes some parts of Indochina. Hitherto, to some extent, the cultural and the political exchanges between Indochina and the Malay world have already been discussed, in several studies⁶. Notwithstanding this development, very little is actually known about the other, and perhaps more significant aspects of their interactions.

This paper will approach the link between the Malay world and Indochina from the viewpoint of commercial activities. The first section will discuss a few points on the Chams in the early modern Malay World. The second section will consider the Malay activities in Champa and Cambodia. In the final section, based on my preliminary survey, I would like to present some information on the Chams in contemporary Malaysia.

1. The Chams in the Malay World

The Malay equivalent for Cham is “*Cam*” and for Champa is “*Campa*.” I checked these terms in the Malay court histories (*hikayat*). These terms are not present in most of the Malay court histories. For example, the *Hikayat Raja Pasai* underlines his relations with foreign states or people from places such as Jawa, Siam, China, India and the Middle East (HRP: 12-17, 21, 23-24, 26-29, 36, 37, 40, 43, 46, 47, 50, 59), but this work does not mention either the Chams or Champa.

In contrast, the *Sejarah Melayu* contains some stories on the Chams and Champa. The *Sejarah Melayu* suggests that the Cham sea captains from Champa (*nakhoda Campa*) had high standing in Melaka as important traders (SM: 124; Brown 1970: 45, 217). Moreover, the *Sejarah Melayu* describes the origin of the Cham community in Melaka. According to this work, after the defeat of Champa by the King of Kuci (Vietnamese), two Cham princes escaped from Champa with their followers. These two princes were known as *Indera Berma Syah* and *Syah Palembang*. While *Syah Palembang* went to Aceh, *Indera Berma Syah* reached Melaka. *Indera Berma Syah* was well treated by Sultan Mansur Syah who asked him to convert to Islam. *Indera Berma Syah* consented and he was appointed a minister (*Menteri*). The *Sejarah Melayu* says that all the Champa Melaka (the Chams in Melaka)

externally oriented divergent forces. (3) Rulers take active part in prosperity of port-polities (Kathirithamby-Wells & Villiers 1990: 1-13).

⁶ See, for example, Ismail Hussein, Lafont & Po Dharma 1995.

were his descendants (SM: 193-95; Brown 1970: 101-03). In short, this story states that the Cham community in Melaka dates back to the reign of Sultan Mansur Syah (r. 1459-77).

Considering the history of the Cham-Malay relations, Danny Wong Tze Ken states that the fall of Vijaya in 1471 marked the beginning of the change in the relations between the Chams and the Malay world. He goes on to suggest that the period from 1471 to 1693 was characterized by the exodus of Chams from Champa following the occupation of their homeland (Wong 2006: 6)⁷. Therefore, there is considerable validity in the story on the origin of the Cham community in Melaka. As mentioned above, the *Hikayat Raja Pasai* does not mention either the Chams or Champa. However, the main reason for this is likely that the migration of the Chams to the Melaka Strait area occurred from 1471 onward.

It should be noted that the Cham exodus was an event that occurred almost during the same period as the “Age of Commerce (1450-1680)”, which is claimed by A. Reid (Reid 1988 & 1993). It is quite likely that the Cham diaspora played a very important role in establishing trade links between the Melaka Strait area and Indochina. In fact, as I have already mentioned earlier that the Cham sea captains were well treated in Melaka. The *Sejarah Melayu* mentions a Cham sea captain called Saidi Ahmad who stayed in Pahang. After reaching Pahang, Hang Nadim of Melaka made great friends with Saidi Ahmad. Saidi Ahmad gave all the details of Pahang to Hang Nadim. Then, Saidi Ahmad helped Hang Nadim to carry out his secret mission there. At last, Saidi Ahmad sailed off for Melaka to send Hang Nadim (SM: 238-41; Brown 1970: 139-41).

An interesting point is that the Cham sea captain was much more informed about the vassal state of Melaka than any Malay subject of Melaka was at that point of time. This story suggests that the Cham sea captain took an active part in trade between the Malay states and Indochina. This view is supported by the Portuguese record that states that the trade network between the Malay Peninsula and Cambodia developed in the latter half of the 15th century (Pires 1966: 223). Therefore, it is not unreasonable to think that the Cham diaspora had a close connection with the development of Melaka in “the Age of Commerce.”

Finally, I would like to add that we could find many traces of the Cham-Malay relations in the northern Malay state, Kelantan. Names of places such as *Pengkalan Chepa* (Cham jetty) and *Kampung Chepa* (Cham village) can be found there. The term “Champa” was also associated with various products such as costume, textile, hair decoration, weapon, and paddy⁸. It was believed that a mosque in *Kampung Laut* was built by the Cham sailors who frequented Kelantan. Furthermore, according to the *Hikayat Kelantan*, the royal family of the present-day Kelantan sultanate originated from a state known as *Kebayat Negara* or *Kembayat Negara*, which is believed to be Champa (Wong 2006: 13).

2. The Malays in Indochina

2.1 Champa

As the 13th century Venetian, Marco Polo states in his travels, Champa was famous for its forest products like agalloch (or eaglewood) (Polo 1971 vol.2: 144). On his way from Pasai to China, the 14th century traveler, Ibn Battuta stopped at a state called *Tawalisi*, which was considered to be Champa (Ibn Battuta 2001: 410, 427-29). According to his tra-

⁷ Danny Wong Tze Ken divides the historical links between the Chams and the Malays into four phases as follows: (1) Early Links Before 1471, (2) Between Fall of Vijaya in 1471 and Defeat of 1692, (3) From 1693 to 1835 when Champa was a Tributary State of Vietnam, (4) From 1835 to Present Day (Wong 2006: 2).

⁸ There were costume named *tanjak Chepa* and textile named *sutra Chepa* and *kain Chepa*. Moreover, there were *keris Chepa* (Cham dagger), *padi Chepa* (Cham paddy) and *sanggul Chepa* (Cham hair decoration) in Kelantan.

vels, the ruler of Champa exerted great power like Chinese emperors and had many junks. He states that people of Champa were not Muslim (Ibn Battuta 2001: 410).

However, Ibn Battuta describes a few interesting points about a charming Cham princess. This Cham princess was familiar with both the Arabic and the Turkish language. She spoke to Ibn Battuta in the Arabic and the Turkish language and she could write in the Arabic language. When Ibn Battuta announced that he came from India, the Cham princess said that India was famous for pepper (Ibn Battuta 2001: 413). It is noteworthy that although she was not a Muslim, the Cham princess mastered the languages of West Asia and had a knowledge of Indian products. Her story reveals that the rulers of port-polities in Southeast Asia paid much attention in establishing trans-regional trade networks (See footnote 4).

French missionary records mentioned that during thirty years prior to the fall of Champa to the Nguyen in 1692, there were many Malay scribes in the court of Champa. Several French missionaries wrote letters saying that the Malay missionaries were also there and their main task was to propagate the Islamic faith to the Chams. It is likely that these Malays were involved in the Cham struggle against the Vietnamese encroachments into Cham territories, resulting in several anti-Vietnamese movements (Wong 2006: 12).

French records show that *bahasa Melayu* (the Malay language) functioned as a lingua franca even in mainland Southeast Asia. Another important point is that French records suggest that the Malays played an important role in the Islamization of the Chams in Champa⁹. These facts also suggest the close links between the Malays and the Chams of Champa.

2.2 Cambodia

The flow of the Chams from Champa into Cambodia occurred after the fall of Vijaya in 1471. As mentioned in the previous section, trade links between the Malay world and Cambodia grew from the latter half of the 15th century. A French traveler, G. Tachard states that the Malay migration to Cambodia increased during this period. Moreover, his record shows that the Malay set-up close cooperation with the Chams (Choisy & Tachard 1991: 430-34).

Spanish records also contain interesting information on the Malay activities in Cambodia. According to A. Morga, in the late 16th century, the Malays grew to be a powerful military force in Cambodia. The Malay force went to Champa and carried out military operations there. A Malay leader who had a title of Laksamana (admiral) extended his power with the support of the ruler's mother and court dignitaries. Then, he banished foreign people such as the Spanish, Portuguese, and Japanese from the state. This Malay *Laksamana* came to exercise great power and he coped with every matter of the state (Morga 1966: 138-39, 144, 176, 247-49). A. Reid points out that the Malay *Laksamana* was a nobleman (*orang kaya*) from Johor (Reid 1993: 188).

On the other hand, the Dutch documented that the Malays were engaged in trade activities. In the early 17th century, Intse [Encik] Lanagh Patanee [Patani] from Patani worked as a guide and interpreter in Cambodia. He led the Dutch to Laos (Kersten 2003: 6). Moreover, F. Valentijn states that by the early 18th century, the Malay language was used in the Cambodian court (Valentijn 1724: 44). These facts show the following two points. First, the contact between Cambodia and the Malay world became much closer in the 17th century.

⁹ The Cham classic entitled *Nai Mai Mang Makah* (The Princess from Kelantan) tells of the story of a princess from Kelantan who was trying to convert the Cham ruler to Islam. Although the event was not dated, Po Dharma and Gerard Moussay assume that the event took place between the fall of Champa to the Vietnamese in 1692 and 1771 when the Tayson rebellion occurred (Po Dharma, Moussay & Abdul Karim 2000: 29-30).

Second, the Malay world had already extended its trade network to Laos in the early 17th century. In fact, Malay shippers were the principle rivals of the VOC (the Dutch East India Company) in providing Indian cloth to Cambodia in exchange for benzoin, deer skin, and lacquer (Reid 1993: 189).

We should note that the Cambodian ruler allowed the Malays to enter its inland area. This is quite different from the case of the Malay port-polities, because the Malay rulers prohibited foreign merchants from making direct contacts with the inland people who were engaged in producing and collecting trading items (Hirosue 1996). On this point, Endo stresses the significance of the Malay- Cham links in Cambodia. He states that the Malay were able to approach the inland area with the help of the Chams who kept in close contact with the people there (Endo 2006: 2). Endo also points out that the Malays played a similar role with the Chams. He adds that the *Cambodia Chronicle (Brah Raj Bansavatar)* does not make a clear distinction between the Malays and the Chams (Endo 2006: 2).

In 1644, the ruler of Cambodia, Ramadhipati embraced Islam and adopted the title of Sultan Ibrahim. He established a replica of a Malay court on the Mekong. The reason for this dramatic event is that the ruler needed allies against the Dutch. As a result, Sultan Ibrahim retained the throne of Cambodia longer than any of his Buddhist predecessors since the previous century (Reid 1993: 189, 190). His conversion shows that the Malays were an influential group in 17th century Cambodia. Such a close connection between Cambodia and the Malay world is reflected in the story of Daeng Kamboja (the 3rd Bugis *Yang Dipertuan Muda* [vice-ruler] of Johor-Riau), which is described in the 19th century Malay history, the *Tuhfat al-Nafis* (Hooker 1991: 182-83; Raja Ali Haji ibn Ahmad 1982: 45-46).

3. The Case of Contemporary Kuala Lumpur

Recently, Malaysia seems to be spotlighted as a major tourist destination by the Arab people. Many Arab tourists can be seen in the numerous shopping districts of Kuala Lumpur. The period from July to September, in particular, may be said to be “*musim Arab*” (the season of the Arabs).

With reference to this trend, new restaurants and shops have made their debut and opened. One example is *kedai minyak wangi* (perfume shop) which deals with *kayu gaharu* (agalloch or eaglewood). Last year, there were several *kedai minyak wangi* along Bukit Bintang Street in Kuala Lumpur. However, the number of *kedai minyak wangi* has increased during this span of one year. Now, more than ten shops can be found there.

Most of the above shops seem to be managed by Arabs. However, I found one shop, which is managed by a Cham Muslim family. This Cham family moved from Cambodia to Malaysia about twenty years ago. According to this Cham family, their *kedai minyak wangi* deals with eaglewood from Indonesia, Malaysia, and Cambodia.

We may say that recently the tradition of *nakhoda Campa* is being revived in a new style. The link between the Cham and the Malay world is not only an event in the remote past but also an ongoing event up to the present-day.

Conclusion

So far, this paper has considered trade links between the Malay world and Indochina by focusing attention on the activities of the Chams and the Malays. The discussion of this paper can be summed up as follows.

- (1) The Cham diaspora after 1471 A.D. took an active part in establishing trade links between the Melaka Strait area and Indochina. They had a close connection with the development of Melaka in the “Age of Commerce.”

- (2) In the early modern period, the Malays established close links with Champa. The Malay language functioned as a lingua franca in both courts of Champa and Cambodia. It is probable that the Malays played an important role in the Islamization of the Chams of Champa.
- (3) In Cambodia, the Malay- Cham link dates back to the latter half of the 15th century. In the 17th century, commercial relations between Cambodia and the Malay world became much closer and the Malay trade network extended to Laos with the support of the Chams. The Malays also played a prominent role in military affairs.
- (4) The role of the Chams to connect Indochina with the Malay world continues to be relevant today and can certainly be seen in present-day Malaysia.

Abbreviations

DBP: Dewan Bahasa dan Pustaka

HRP: Jones, R. (ed.) 1987 *Hikayat Raja Pasai*. Petaling Jaya: Penerbit Fajar Bakti.

JMBRAS: Journal of the Malayan/Malaysian Branch of the Royal Asiatic Society

JSEAS: Journal of Southeast Asian Studies

KL: Kuala Lumpur

MBRAS: The Malaysian Branch of the Royal Asiatic Society

OUP: Oxford University Press

SM: Cheah, Boon Kheng (ed.) & Abdul Rahman Haji Ismail (transcribed.) 1998 *Sejarah Melayu, the Malay Annals*. KL: MBRAS.

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