

REVISITING CHAM ETHNIC IDENTITY IN VIETNAM AND CAMBODIA: THE CONCEPT OF “ETHNIC PASSPORT”

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**Revisiting Cham Ethnic Identity in Vietnam and Cambodia: The
Concept of “Ethnic Passport”**

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To my dearest Nora whose love sustained me during the darkest hours of my life

To my parents: Thank you for your support

To my supervisors: Thank you for your guidance

To the indomitable Urang Cham

Never surrender

CONTENTS PAGE

CHAPTER 1

- 1.1) Introduction: Reflections on the passport**
- 1.2) The “non-physical” and “immaterial passport”**
- 1.3) My set of “Internal documents”**
- 1.4) On fieldwork and interviewees**
- 1.5) My language abilities**
- 1.6) Fieldwork “technique” and some issues**
- 1.7) Main Issue of thesis and the “Layers” of the ethnic passport**
- 1.8) Limitations of thesis**
- 1.9) Summary of thesis chapters**

CHAPTER 2

- 2.1) Meeting Mr “Iskandar”**
- 2.2) The History of the Cham and Some Contemporary Issues**
- 2.3) The Cham Had “Primordial Ties” with the Malays**
- 2.4) The Cham and the Instrumentalists**
- 2.5) Barth’s “Interaction” Theory**

CHAPTER 3

- 3.1) The “Historical” Layer of the Cham ethnic passport**
- 3.2) Cham and Khmer historical consciousness**

3.3) Cham and Malaysian Malay historical consciousness

3.4) Fuelling Malaysian Malay interest: Academic works and Newspapers

3.4. a) Academic works

3.4. b) Malaysian Malay Newspapers and the Cham

CHAPTER 4

4.1) The “Religious” Layer of the Cham ethnic passport

4.2) Cham Muslims: Marriage

4.3) Cham Muslims: Education

4.4) Lunch and discovery

CHAPTER 5

5.1) The “oppressed minority” layer of the Cham ethnic passport

5.2) Meeting with three Rade men

5.3) Cham Manuscripts and insights into the Cham mental world

5.4) Insight into the mental world of the Cham of the past through Cham manuscripts:

5.4.a) Ariya Po Phaok The

5.4.b) Ariya Po Ceng

5.4.c) Ariya Tuen Phaow

5.4.d) Ariya thei mai mang deh

5.4.e) Ariya Hatai Paran

5.5) Meeting with Mr Hung

CONCLUSION OF THESIS

SUMMARY

Revisiting Cham Ethnic Identity in Vietnam and Cambodia: The Concept of “Ethnic Passport”

The Cham people are one of the most fascinating ethnic communities in Southeast Asia. The thesis aims to understand Cham ethnic identity and the qualities that the Cham possess that allowed them to successfully participate in societies in Southeast Asia.

It will be argued that the Cham possess the “ethnic passport,” i.e., a set of “internal documents” that have given the Cham the qualities necessary to enter other societies. Through such a framework, one is able to garner a more nuanced view of the Cham especially in regard to their ability to negotiate the “non-physical” boundaries of nation states in Southeast Asia.

The “ethnic passport” is composed of several “layers”: the “historical” layer, the “religious layer”, and the “oppressed minority” layer. The “historical layer” is an essential aspect of the “ethnic passport” because it establishes the Cham’s entry into the consciousness of Malaysian society. The “religious layer”, or the perception of other Malay-Muslims of their “Muslimness”, allowed the Cham the ability to participate in the social networks, establish personal relationships and engage in certain processes within pre-dominantly Malay Muslim countries, such as Malaysia. The “oppressed minority” layer of the ethnic passport shows that the Cham, more than just being politically and economically oppressed, have been historically conditioned to think like an oppressed minority.

These “layers” all together form the basis of the ethnic passport framework. Analyzing the Cham through such a framework will give a more nuanced and interesting perspective to the issue of Cham identity in Southeast Asia.

CHAPTER 1

1.1) Introduction: Reflections on the passport

I have a passport. It is a small, well-used red booklet. It has seen better days as after much traveling; it is now in a rather pitiful condition. I have always wondered how such a small booklet can reveal so much of a person. It contains details about my identity such as my name, gender, nationality and date of birth, and a photo of my face. However, the aspect that I found most fascinating about this little red booklet is that it is also supposed to be a ‘talisman’ that somehow guarantees my safety. This is encapsulated in the foreword of the document, “The President of the Republic of Singapore requests all authorities to allow the Singapore citizen named in this passport to pass without delay or hindrance and, if necessary, to give all assistance and protection”.



Photo 1: Author with his passport

Simply put, if I get into trouble while abroad, my country would be obligated to offer some form of assistance ...but only if I carried my passport. The significance of this red booklet is only felt when I am about to cross the borders of my country or, in fact, any country in the world. Immigration checkpoint officials routinely demand my passport (which I surrender meekly), verify my identity, and affirm whether I have all the necessary documents like visas or proper entry forms. Having verified my papers (and depending on his or her mood!), the official engages in conversation as if to further probe my identity, my motive for travel, and so forth. Then, searching through the pages of my passport, he finds a space to dismissively imprint the very important entry (or exit) stamp. Only after I have been approved by the official, am I allowed to go on my way.

According to Torpey, the passport is a “*documentary expression of modern states’ efforts to monopolize the “legitimate means of movement” the passport concentrates in itself the enormous increase in modern states’ control over individual existence that has evolved since the nineteenth century*”.¹ Torpey’s analysis was based largely in the framework of European historical experience. The passport therefore is a creation of the State to control and regulate the movement of people through its borders. It is also a product of a long historical process. However, in Southeast Asia, the concept of boundaries, nation states and the categorizing ethnic minorities were only introduced during the colonial period. The attempt by Southeast Asian nation states to control and regulate the movement of its people was only largely a recent innovation.

¹ Jane Caplan and John Torpey (ed) (2001). Documenting Individual identity: The development of state practices in the modern world, Princeton University Press. “*The Great War and the Birth of the Modern Passport System*” by Torpey, pp. 256-257

This was highlighted in Charles Keyes's Presidential Address to the Association of Asian Studies, "The Peoples of Asia: Science and politics in the classification of ethnic groups in Thailand, China and Vietnam,"² which traces the historical development of racial theories in Europe, or the "Scientific classification of human differences". More importantly, Keyes illustrates the application of such "scientific classification" by modern states of Southeast Asia in present times as a "technology of power", or a means for Southeast Asia nation states to assert their hegemony over their ethnically diverse populations. The passport is therefore a reflection of Southeast Asian nation states' efforts to assert their hegemony over their populations as movements of communities and individuals could be tracked and monitored more effectively.

But for a certain ethnic community in Southeast Asia, I propose that there is a different kind of passport: One that is not 'issued' by the State, but is no less tangible. However before this is introduced in the thesis, I must reveal how this idea was conceptualized in the first place.

1.2) The "non-physical" and "immaterial passport"

Foreign authorities approved my entry or exit through their boundaries on the basis of my passport. But I sometimes asked myself, "would I have the necessary requirements to pass through non-physical boundaries, such as the cultural, social and

² *The Journal of Asian Studies*, Vol. 61, No. 4. (Nov 2002), pp. 1163-1203. "Presidential Address: The Peoples of Asia-Science and Politics in the classification of Ethnic Groups in Thailand, China, and Vietnam," by Charles Keyes

religious boundaries, that demarcate entities and spaces?” How does one gain access to, negotiate, and penetrate such non-physical boundaries? Questions of this sort led me to entertain the possibility of the idea of a “non-physical” or “immaterial” passport. This “passport” could be manifested through a “set of internal documents” which I vaguely understood then as being composed of attributes that defined my self such as my culture, language, religion and sense of history—crucial components that formed the basis of a person’s uniqueness, identity and place in society at large.

I began to understand the nature of the “non-physical” passport and the “set of internal documents” when I traveled throughout Vietnam and Cambodia. One needs to be “approved” by the community before being accepted by it. When I was in Hanoi (the dominant metropolis in northern Vietnam and the nation’s capital) some local Vietnamese assumed that I was an ethnic Vietnamese as I could speak the language. More importantly, I discovered that my “ethnic Vietnamese identity” was further affirmed when I was with my Vietnamese friends, who were men and women around the same age. Despite being from a different ethnicity (I am Malay), my interactions with other Vietnamese in Hanoi were somehow more barrier-free when they observed that I had been accepted into the company of Vietnamese friends. I found that I was generally treated with less suspicion. It would seem that being “approved of” by my Vietnamese friends allowed me to better access and engage with northern Vietnamese society at large. I realized that my ability to speak Vietnamese could be seen as a feature of my ‘ethnic passport’ as it allowed greater access to the cultures of my Vietnamese friends and informants.

This feature of my ethnic passport nevertheless failed me somewhat when I moved to southern Vietnam and Cambodia. Let me attempt here to describe the mental processes of the southern Vietnamese (from the regions of Phanrang in Southern Vietnam and Ho Chi Minh City) and Khmer people as they tried to “rationalize” me. It began somewhat with the observation that I spoke Vietnamese but the problem was I did not look like one; I looked more like a Khmer to the Vietnamese. However the Khmers I came into contact with thought otherwise as I didn’t speak Khmer or have a Khmer name. I could speak Vietnamese so they thought I must be Vietnamese but still the problem was that I did not really look like one. Besides, I smoked clove³ cigarettes, which only Indonesian and Malaysian Malay tourists apparently do. In addition, I did not dress well enough to be a foreign tourist. Furthermore, I couldn’t be a Malaysian because no Malaysian travels with a Singapore passport. Usually at this point, both Vietnamese and Khmer individuals that tried to “figure me out” would have decided that I was neither Vietnamese nor Khmer. To add further to their confusion, I was neither Singaporean (despite my passport, as they associate Singaporeans with being mainly Chinese) nor Malaysian, so who on earth was I? Usually by this time they would have given up trying to identify either my ethnicity or nationality.

1.3) My set of “Internal documents”

I found that the confusion with my ethnicity stemmed from the fact that I did not have the proper set of “internal documents” as I attempted to engage Vietnamese and

³ It must be noted that I have already quit smoking when the thesis was written

Khmer individuals in their societies. Firstly, this is because my “religious layer,” formed largely by my consciousness that I am Muslim, restricted me from engaging in certain Vietnamese and Khmer religious and cultural practices, mainly ceremonies that included the consumption of alcohol and pork.

Secondly, my “historical layer” or my different historical conditioning, made me less attuned and sensitive to how the Khmer and Vietnamese conceptualized their past. I do not “feel” and empathize like the local Khmer and Vietnamese for certain historical experiences such as the Vietnam War (the effects of the US bombing, the use of chemical agents and the 1975 Communist victory) and Pol Pot’s regime (manifested, among other horrific experiences, in the horrors of the *Tuol Sleng* prison in the outskirts of Phnom Penh). This lack of a sense of a shared historical experience and emotional response to specific events, however intense, were to me only abstract notions.

Lastly, my “oppressed minority layer” or my conditioning as a minority in Singapore affected my engagement with Khmer and Vietnamese society. This was because I saw certain similarities in how the Khmer and Vietnamese treated and “handled” their minorities. This was especially so when I recognized the subtleties of certain policies that were meant to “help” the ethnic minorities but at the cost of assimilating them into the culture and society of the majority ethnic group.

Although my ethnicity was ambiguous to my Vietnamese and Khmer friends, it was strangely useful when I engaged Cham individuals, especially in areas inhabited by

the Muslim Cham. The religious similarities, historical affinities⁴ and the shared sentiment of seeing ourselves as “oppressed minorities” formed the set of “internal documents” of my ethnic passport that I used to gain access to the Muslim Cham world. With this ethnic passport I was able to penetrate and negotiate through the “non-physical” boundaries of the Cham communities in Vietnam and Cambodia.

Then it occurred to me that since I had an ethnic passport that allowed me to enter the Muslim Cham world, what about the Cham themselves? I found that the Cham, especially the Muslim Cham (while the majority are Muslims, some Cham are Hindu), had been using their own ethnic passport for some time now in countries such as Malaysia and Indonesia (where they travel to mostly for work, study and business) where there are large Malay-speaking and predominantly Muslim populations. The question therefore is this: If the Cham have an ethnic passport, what are their sets of internal documents like? How did they develop? How were they used and under what conditions?

1.4) On fieldwork and interviewees

A substantial part of the thesis relies on the use of data gathered from fieldwork research conducted in 2004 and 2005 in Vietnam and Cambodia. In Vietnam I explored Northern, Central and Southern regions of the country. I was in Hanoi for one and a half months in 2006 and spent my time mostly interacting with local Vietnamese and certain

⁴ This is because of my knowledge of Cham history, in which there are several tropes however I am most attracted to the version that showcased the Cham as displaced and conquered people that had an Empire but exist today as fragmented ethnic minority groups. I was able to engage Cham society and individuals in a much more complex way. This is because I found much familiarity and empathy with the culture, language, religion and even the sense of history of the Cham of Vietnam and Cambodia.

Cham individuals that I had met there. The discussions usually touched on their opinions on various issues especially on the status of ethnic minorities in Vietnam. I regarded this as an important phase of my research because it enhanced my understanding of the nature of the relationships between ethnic Vietnamese and those that are considered “nguoi dan toc thieu so” or ethnic minorities. I found that many of the young ethnic Vietnamese in Hanoi, most if not the majority, had never been to the Southern or central areas of Vietnam. However they believed that most ethnic minority groups in Vietnam had prospered under the rule of the Vietnamese Communist party and that the ethnic minority groups were actually content and peaceful people.



Photo 2: Author and a Cham family he met in the Central Highlands. Picture taken in 2006

This perception was readily reinforced with Vietnamese television programmes that romanticized the culture and social practices of many ethnic minority peoples. Apart from achieving such awareness, I also stumbled on a group of Cham Muslims living in Hanoi and the experience reinforced certain ideas I had at that time of the itinerant

behavior of the Cham people and changed somewhat my naïve assumption that the young Cham viewed working and living in Hanoi as an anathema.

After spending some time in Hanoi, I explored Southern Vietnam especially areas such as Ho Chi Minh City, Danang, Pleiku, Ban Me Thuot and Chau Doc from 2nd January to 26th January 2007. My objective there was to primarily interact with the Cham Muslim community and to observe the nature of relationship between the Cham, Vietnamese and other ethnic minority peoples from the Central Highlands. While there, I met many Muslim and Hindu Cham individuals and a whole Cham family that worked as craftsmen, traders and artisans in various small towns located along the Central Highlands. This was fascinating to me as I had always thought the Cham to be rooted in their various localities and communities. Meeting Cham people in such places changed my opinion of them as reclusive ethnic group.

One exciting part of the research in Vietnam was when I interacted with several people from the Jarai and Rade ethnic groups. They are among the “Malay” speaking peoples that are still living in the Central Highlands of Vietnam. It was a fascinating exchange and even though the encounter was brief, as I was just transiting through Ban Me Thuot and Pleiku, major cities located in the Central Highlands of Vietnam. I found that Jarai and Rade languages to be very similar to Malay. We compared the names of animals such as monkey or “Kra” in the Rade language. This is similar to the Malay term for monkey which is “Kera”. Another similar word is crocodile, in Rade its “Biya” and in Malay, “buaya”. This experience, (and the significance of it will be discussed later in the

thesis) triggered many questions within me. Among such questions are, “Do the Cham and the other ethnic communities from the same linguistic family, felt any sense of affinity with each other as they had almost similar languages?” and most importantly, “what were the significance of such affinities in the pre-colonial and modern history of southern Vietnam?”.



Photo 3: Taken in 2006: Author exploring the Central Highlands of Vietnam. Note that he is wrapped in plastic to keep warm

I did my next phase of research in Cambodia and explored the Muslim Cham communities in areas such as Phnom Penh, Kompong Cham, Siem Reap from 26th January to 12 February 2007. I was heavily dependent on the connections I had already established during my trips to Cambodia in 2003 and 2004. Foremost among these were the connections I had made with the Cambodian Muslim student association of Cambodia. I solicited their help to solicit interviews with certain *Imams* (religious heads)

of local mosques in Cambodia. I observed as much as I could of the daily activities of the Muslim Cham of Cambodia and especially the nature of interactions they had with the Khmer in Cambodia. I have to admit that though I am not a trained anthropologist and though my observations may perhaps be construed as “unprofessional” and somewhat “amateurish”, I nevertheless believe that in order to understand the Cham in countries such as Malaysia, Cambodia and Vietnam, I must seek and observe them by myself.

This approach paid off in the border areas between Cambodia and Vietnam when I met a Cham on a boat ride from Vietnam and Cambodia (the significance and details of encounter will be elaborated further later in the thesis). He was in charge of the passengers crossing the river route from Chau Doc and Phnom Penh. He highlighted the interesting connections established by the Muslim Cham from Vietnam and Cambodia with other countries and communities throughout Southeast Asia.

1.5) My language abilities

Most of the interviews were conducted in the Vietnamese, Cham and Malay languages without the use of translators and they were done in an informal setting such as a road side coffee stall, the mosque and even at their homes and workplace whenever I am invited. I have learnt Vietnamese with Madam Nguyen Bich Thuan the coordinator of the Vietnamese language programme in the National University of Singapore since 2001 in Singapore. I have also studied the Vietnamese language in reputable schools in Hanoi such as *E.S.P: Trung Tam Ngoai Ngu Khoa Hoc* in 2003 and 2006. My Vietnamese

language speaking abilities were reinforced further as I explored Southern and Central Vietnam in 2004 and 2005.

I learnt the Cham language by myself as I found the language to be somewhat similar to Malay. My exposure to various Cham communities in Cambodia and Vietnam enhanced my understanding of the language and my constant study of romanised Cham manuscripts provided me a vocabulary of the Cham language which I was able to use during conversations with various Cham individuals I had met. I have no doubt that I will have certain mastery over Cham language and writing in the years to come.

My Malay and English language abilities are quite developed as a consequence of being educated in the Singapore educational system. I have learnt and used Malay and English languages all my life and consider my Malay and English language to be second and first languages. With such abilities I managed to interview various people from different socio-economic backgrounds of both rural and urban areas of Vietnam and Cambodia and some individuals in Malaysia.

My discussions with a wide range of informants offered unique and valuable insights into issues that laid the basis for my concept of the ethnic passport. Nonetheless, it is also necessary to add that there was a sense of suspicion, anger and fear at times when I asked some old Cham individuals about their experiences during the Vietnam War and Pol Pot's regime. I had fewer obstacles talking to younger Cham interviewees and I managed to get highly useful (and sometimes animated) responses.

It must be noted, however, that I have changed the names of the interviewees to protect their identity. This was because of the sensitive nature of the information divulged and also because many of them preferred their identities to be unknown for fear of getting into trouble with the authorities. They have heard of people who have been questioned by the police after being interviewed by researchers and preferred not to be such a situation. Nevertheless, I have tried my utmost to transcribe, as accurately as possible, what they had told me. Though it may be argued that not revealing the identities of the people interviewed may affect the veracity or even the “truthfulness” of the information used, I believe that the task of protecting the identity, safety and privacy of my informants is essential in the light of the sensitive nature of the information that I was able to acquire. I will not, for any reason, put my informant’s lives in danger.

1.6) Fieldwork “technique” and some issues

I was most intrigued with James Clifford’s work “Travel and Translation in the late twentieth century” as it describes in a way, how I conducted and perceived fieldwork. According to Clifford “...*An urban neighbourhood, for example, may be laid out physically according to a street plan. But it is not a space until it is practiced by people’s active occupation, their movements through and around it*”.⁵ Putting my fieldwork into such a context, it consisted of observing the movement of the Cham people and my journey through Cham habitats and communities. I focused more on investigating the

⁵ James Clifford (1997), *Routes: Travel and translation in the late twentieth century*, Harvard University Press. p. 55

nature of Cham individual's interactions in a particular society rather than trying to comprehend the Cham communities in a particular region or locality. This I believe will require more in depth fieldwork (coupled with more resources and time)

The thesis does not attempt to problematise the definition of “Malayness” and the many contending views to its construction which in itself a highly problematic and fascinating issue that will be discussed in my future works. I am more interested in the repercussions of the perceptions Malaysian Malays of the “Malayness” of the Cham. I also am not making a statement against the treatment of ethnic minorities in Cambodia and Vietnam although this is another topic which I am highly interested in.

Lastly, I am not in any way trying to portray any religious groups in a negative way. I recognize and embrace the cultural, religious and ideological diversity among the various ethnic communities in mainland Southeast Asia and am just allowing my informants to speak for themselves. Most importantly because of the limitations on the word limit of the thesis (30,000 words but I have exceed it a little), I focused instead on going “straight to the point” i.e. the application of my ethnic passport framework to understand the Cham better. Though I recognized the importance of these issues, to focus on them will be far beyond the scope of my thesis.

This thesis reflects the attempt to understand the Cham from the perspective of a Malay Singaporean who belonged to an ethnic minority community in his country and

who somewhat understands Malay, Cham and Vietnamese languages. It is hoped that my research will complement the available data on the Cham.

1.7) Main Issue of thesis and the “Layers” of the ethnic passport

The Cham people had established extensive and intense webs of relationships that encompassed activities in the economic, religious, cultural, and political spheres throughout maritime Southeast Asia. This thesis seeks to answer the question: What qualities do the Cham possess that allows them to successfully participate in the cultural and social dynamics in societies other than their own? Throughout the course of this thesis, I attempt to locate Cham ethnicity in the context of several theories of ethnicity. This will be followed by an attempt to address this issue through various means namely understanding the phenomenon of “Cham ethnic mobility” throughout the perspective of “layers” i.e., the “historical” layer, the “religious layer”, and the “oppressed minority” that culminate in what I term as the ethnic passport. I argue that by analyzing the Cham through the perspective of these layers, one is able to garner a more nuanced view of the Cham especially in regard to their ability to negotiate cultural and national boundaries of nation states in Southeast Asia.

Why “layers”? And why did I decide to use such a framework?. This was because I believe that Cham ethnicity, identity and how they interacted with other communities in Southeast Asia could be better understood with such a framework. Furthermore, since the Cham live in other societies in Southeast Asia such as Vietnam, Cambodia, Malaysia and

even Thailand, Cham ethnicity has to be fluid so as to constantly adapt to its environment and society they are in and as a consequence, the Cham developed these layers in order to enter and adapt in these societies. It must be said that despite this, the Cham have always preserved the core that ultimately defined their identity. It is the memory ingrained in every Cham that they are descendents of a powerful people who had a kingdom once in history and that the “Urang Yun” or Vietnamese destroyed it.

However it could be that the concept of the ethnic passport is not new and I may be a bit too bold in suggesting that I will come up with other approaches to the study of ethnicity. This thesis is not a contribution to theory making. Realistically, the most I can do is to show how some theories are inadequate, while other theories are useful and can be “tweaked” further with the Cham data. This is because the fields of anthropology and ethnicity studies have developed much further than what I have summarized. Nevertheless, I will try my utmost to produce original arguments based on highly exciting data that I have gathered during my fieldwork.⁶

1.8) Limitations of thesis

It must be admitted that this thesis lacks quantitative data such as detailed statistics on the population of Cambodians and Vietnamese compared to the Cham,

⁶ It must also be mentioned that I have written about the “layers” framework in an article for Sojourn Journal titled “Understanding Cham Identity on Mainland Southeast Asia: Contending Views” published in 2006. I have incorporated the journal article into the thesis. The major difference between the journal article and the thesis is that these “layers” which I term as “set of internal documents” culminate in what I call the “ethnic passport” which was used by the Cham to access and participate in other societies in Southeast Asia. The publication of the “layers” idea in a refereed journal somewhat validate my framework and encouraged me to pursue the idea.

indications of poverty levels, statistics that reflect the educational level of the Cham to further demonstrate that they are an oppressed minority. My justification for this, though it may be flawed, comes from my personal distrust of the reliability and accuracy of such statistics provided by the state and other organizations. Nevertheless, such information will be provided, albeit sparingly in the thesis.

Another limitation was the underrepresentation of the Cham settlers in Malaysia in this thesis as I focused more on the Cham that lived on mainland Southeast Asia. Nevertheless, the incorporation of surveys of Cham communities in Malaysia coupled with interviews that would have included more Cham people working in Malaysia, will be of great use for my future research. In researching for this thesis, however, I lacked the resources and time to provide such information.

Lastly, the framework employed by the thesis might be limited if one argues that the Cham, like the Chinese and Indians and other new migrants in Malaysia are accepted because Malaysia is a tolerant country. This negates the need for any ethnic passport. The Cham, regardless of their religion and history, would be welcomed in Malaysia.

On the other hand, if one applies the ethnic passport framework to countries like Singapore and China, it will mean that the Chinese in Singapore (the majority ethnic group) and the Chinese in China would share much more cultural and historical affinities since most of the Chinese in Singapore are descendent of immigrants from China. Each would be able to enter and access the other's society easily. But then again, the Chinese

in Singapore do not view the Chinese migrants positively in Singapore and vice versa. Therefore my framework in such a context is contestable and would negate the idea of the ethnic passport. However despite this, the ethnic passport framework will be greatly useful in terms of furthering the understanding of the unique Cham communities in Southeast Asia and their uniqueness warrant a special approach to understand them.

1.9) Summary of thesis chapters

To reiterate the main elements of chapter 1, I have proposed that there is a different kind of passport: One that is not ‘issued’ by the state. With this ethnic passport I was able to penetrate and negotiate through the “non-physical” boundaries of the Cham communities in Vietnam and Cambodia. The Cham have such a passport. The Muslim Cham had been using their own ethnic passport for some time now in countries such as Malaysia and Indonesia. The “layers” framework will be used as I believe that Cham ethnicity, identity and how they interacted with other communities in Southeast Asia could be better understood with such a framework. A substantial component of the thesis relies on the use of data gathered from fieldwork research conducted in 2004 and 2005 in Vietnam and Cambodia and most of the interviews were conducted in the Vietnamese, Cham and Malay languages.

Chapter 2 will see me describe a chance encounter with a Cham man on a boat trip from Chau Doc (Vietnam) to Phnom Penh. His name was Iskandar and a native from Kompong Cham. The experience represents a prevailing occurrence during my fieldwork throughout Southern Vietnam and Cambodia, especially in areas inhabited by the Cham,

where one met many of them who knew how to speak Malay, had worked, and even lived in countries where there were large Malay speaking populations. I will then explore some aspects of the history of the Cham and will mention some contemporary issues related to it. This will be followed by an attempt to engage certain important theories on ethnicity with the Cham data that I have acquired. I will engage the ideas of Clifford Geertz's in the context of the primordialist school of thought, the Instrumentalist school and the ideas of Frederick Barth. Though these theories are useful in understanding ethnicity, on their own they do not explain the Cham people's unique situation adequately. In order to understand the qualities that the Cham possess that allowed them to successfully participate in societies that are predominantly Malay Muslim. Here I will further explain the framework in this thesis termed "ethnic passport" and how it could further the understanding of the Cham through the sets of "internal documents", which are the "layers" of history, religion and perceptions of the Cham as an oppressed minority. Though the main focus of this thesis will be on the Muslim Cham, I recognize the diversity of the Cham people and that there are Hindus among them. I will also describe in this chapter an interview in Kompong Cham in Cambodia a fifty-seven year old Muslim Cham by the name of "Yusuf" in 2003.

Chapter 3 will involve an analysis of the first layer under study, the "historical layer". I argue that history, or more exactly, the production of historical knowledge by academics and interpretation by the media of the history of the Cham established the conditions necessary for the Cham to enter the consciousness of a society and public imagination. Furthermore, the process of appropriating the culture and history of the

Cham people to further certain ethnocentric agendas such as furthering the concept of the “Malay world” to mainland Southeast Asia, created by academics and politicians was also crucial in determining how the Cham were perceived. This has not only enhanced the positive way the Cham and their history have been viewed by the Malaysian Malays but gave the Cham the ability to pass through many type of boundaries that exist within nation states.

Chapter 4 will analyze the “religious layer” an important component of the ethnic passport that entrenched Cham presence in Muslim society with greater certainty. To be accepted by a predominantly Muslim society was important but how the Cham remained accepted depended on how the Cham engaged the “religious layer” or the perceptions of other Muslims of their “Muslimness”. This allowed the Cham greater access within pre-dominantly Malay Muslim countries such as Malaysia and Indonesia

Lastly, in Chapter 5 I will analyze the “oppressed minority” layer. I argue that this layer provided the primary source of motivation or driving force for the Cham to enter other societies. There are several aspects to this. Firstly, the Cham in Vietnam developed a propensity to exit their countries because they are reacting against being perceived and categorized as minorities. This enhanced their sense of being alienated in their own country. Secondly, the economic oppression faced by the Cham in Cambodia, especially the Muslim Cham, also precipitated the movement to “exit” the country. Thus the emotive dynamics that resulted from such experiences, led to the Cham to be especially attracted to other cultures and traditions which they see as more powerful. This would

explain why the Muslim Cham wanted to enter other societies in Southeast Asia, it is because, in such countries that they feel more empowered. But the “oppressed minority” layer must be understood more than just in terms of how the Cham react against political and economic oppression. The way the Cham, both Hindu and Muslim, had been historically conditioned to think and react like an oppressed minority must also be understood as an important feature in understanding with more complexity, the dynamics of the “oppressed minority” layer.

CHAPTER 2

2.1) Meeting Mr “Iskandar”

I had a chance encounter with a Cham man on a boat trip from Chau Doc (Vietnam) to Phnom Penh. His name was Iskandar and a native from Kompong Cham, Cambodia. On the journey, the passengers (most of them were from Western countries) had to surrender their passports to him as he was in charge of showing them to the Cambodian customs. Taking particular interest in the name written in my passport, he looked at me curiously. This gave me an opportunity to observe him. At first glance, I could not tell whether he was Khmer or Cham but he was definitely not ethnic Kinh (or ethnic Vietnamese). Vietnamese refer to themselves as “nguoi Kinh” or a “Kinh” person. Suddenly, he said “Assalamualaikum” the standard Muslim greeting that means “Peace be unto you”. Automatically, I replied in the affirmative “Waalaikumsalam”. He smiled and to my great surprise, began conversing with me in Malay and Cham.



Photo 4: Picture taken by the author in 2006 of Mr “Iskandar” during the boat ride to Cambodia

The conversation turned out to be rather friendly and he spoke excellent Malay. I learnt that he had worked for the boat company for a few years and was paid very well. He learnt Malay in Vietnam, from classes run by the Malaysian government in Ho Chi Minh city and managed to work for some years in Malaysia. What was most impressive was that he could speak Vietnamese, Khmer and Malay and such knowledge made him a “valued employee” as he could communicate and more importantly negotiate with the customs officials on both sides of the border. He said that the Vietnamese guides in the company would rather not deal with the Cambodian officials, as “troubles would arise” therefore Cham workers were sought after because they were “tolerated more” by the Cambodian officials at the river checks. Iskandar then roped in his friends from the village to work with him. He would return to work in Malaysia or Indonesia if the opportunity arose but to do that he must establish good relations with a certain mosque in Cambodia where the Imam disseminates information on the working opportunities for Cham Muslims.

Asked whether he liked working in Malaysia or Indonesia, he replied that he liked both because “Urang Cham” (Cham people) like him felt very comfortable living among people who spoke a similar language and practiced a culture that bears close similarities to that of the Cham. He said enthusiastically that more importantly, only in “Nagar Urang Jva”⁷ (country of the Malays) that he felt “free” as nobody would see him as an

⁷ This was how Cham people I have met pronounce the word “Java”. It’s pronounced as a singular.

“outsider” because he felt that he was accepted by the people of such countries. His ethnicity was not questioned or discriminated against. Before disembarking, I thanked him for the conversation and wished him well, he replied that if I so desired, he could arrange for me to meet several Cham women in Pattani “*Kumei binai lo*” (women, very pretty). Several of his relatives lived in Pattani after marrying the local women there. This experience represents a prevailing occurrence during my fieldwork throughout Southern Vietnam and Cambodia, especially in areas inhabited by the Cham, where one met many of them who knew how to speak Malay, had worked, and even lived in countries where there were large Malay speaking populations.

2.2) The History of the Cham and Some Contemporary Issues

The Cham are a Malayo-Polynesian ethnic group in Vietnam. They have a culture and language that bear great affinities with peoples from Malaysia, Indonesia and the Philippines⁸. They were the earliest inhabitants of the area of Southern Vietnam. Champa, the kingdom of the Cham, existed from 700–1471 A.D⁹ was composed of the five territories Indrapura, Vijaya, Kauthara, Panduranga, and Amaravati.

⁸ Thurgood, G. and NetLibrary Inc. (1999). From ancient Cham to modern dialects : two thousand years of language contact and change. Honolulu, University of Hawai'i Press. pp. 14-27

⁹ National University of Singapore. Asia Research Institute. (2004). Symposium on New Scholarship on Champa : 5-6 August 2004,... National University of Singapore : symposium papers.



Photo 5: Picture taken in 2004 by author in National Museum of Vietnam, Ho Chi Ming city, showing the territories of Champa.



Photo 6: Picture taken in 2004 of the Po Klong Garai temple in Phanrang. An example of Cham building skills

The long existence of the Kingdom of Champa have left deep social and economic imprints and contribute to the Cham's historical consciousness of the "Champa motherland" or, in Cham terms, "Inu Nagar". The Cham once dominated what is today Southern Vietnam and other ethnic minorities looked highly upon them. This can be seen in the role ethnic minorities play in Cham celebrations such as Kate (Cham New Year). Jarai tribesmen would participate in the Kate ceremonies by cleaning the top of Cham temples and the presentation of Cham royal regalia which was, according to the Jarai and Chru, entrusted to them by Cham rulers for safe keeping.¹⁰ Furthermore the Cham could understand the language of the Jarai, Raglai, and Chru peoples, the major tribes in the Central Highlands, as these languages are from the same linguistic family and this ability allowed for much social and economic engagement with the Cham.¹¹ A fact noted by the Cham writers of the Cham manuscripts I possess. I am studying these Cham manuscripts and my conclusions are still tentative. At a future date, they will be presented in greater detail.

Some of these manuscripts have been preserved in microform and several have been published as books in Malaysia, e.g., "Nang Nai Mang Makah" or "The Princess that came from Kelantan", "Akayet Inra Patra"¹² and "Akayet Dowa Mano".¹³ I am

¹⁰ Interviews with Dr Thanh Phan, lecturer in Anthropology, University of Ho Chi Minh. 2005

¹¹ Hickey, G. C. (1993). Shattered world : adaptation and survival among Vietnam's highland peoples during the Vietnam War. Philadelphia, : University of Pennsylvania Press. pp. 47-51

¹² Po, D., G. Moussay, et al. (1997). Akayet Inra Patra = Hikayat Inra Patra. Kuala Lumpur, Perpustakaan Negara Malaysia dengan kerjasama l'Ecole fran*caise d'Extrême-Orient.

¹³ Po, D., G. Moussay, et al. (1998). Akayet Dowa Mano = Hikayat Dowa Mano. Kuala Lumpur, Perpustakaan Negara Malaysia dengan kerjasama Ecole fran*caise d'Extrême-Orient.

studying several Cham manuscripts which have been digitized, such as “Ariya Tuen Phaow”, (a document that tells the story of a Cham hero named Tuen Phaow who tried to liberate Champa from Vietnamese control) “Ariya Gleng Anak” (A documentation of the Cham reflections on the effects of Vietnamese occupation of their lands) and “Hatai Paran” (a manuscript that tells the story of the difficulties that the Cham faced under the Vietnamese). These Cham manuscripts are problematic in terms of authorship and dating. According to Mr Abdul Karim, a Muslim Cham researcher who worked on the Cham manuscripts, the authors do not dare to put their names to the documents for fear of being arrested by the Vietnamese. Many of Cham manuscripts could be found in Cham villages in Cambodia and Vietnam but most are in very poor condition. This made translation of such manuscripts very difficult.



Photo 7: (Picture taken by Dr Thanh Phan, of a Cham manuscript half eaten by vermin)

The ethnic communities that share close linguistic and cultural affinities with the Cham such as the Jarai, Rade, Chru, and Raglai formed part of the Cham conception of the “Nagar”, the Cham term for a polity or Kingdom, and had established social and economic linkages with the Cham.¹⁴ Besides groups of the same ethnicity that lived in the nearby Central Highlands of Vietnam, the Cham also engaged other Malayo-Polynesian groups further afield in Southeast Asia throughout history. This was recorded in Malaysian and Indonesian historical sources. Mention of the Cham could be found in Shellabear’s version of “Sejarah Melayu”¹⁵ as well as certain *Hikayats* such as “Hikayat Hang Tuah”, “Hikayat Raja Jeumpa” and “Syair Siti Zubaidah Perang China”. The “Sejarah Melayu” described the divine origins of Pau Gelang (one of the Kings of Champa), Champa’s relationship with “Majapahit”, the destruction of Champa, and the escape of two Cham princes to Aceh and Melaka. Champa was also mentioned in the “Negarakertagama”¹⁶ as one of the polities that was acknowledged by Majapahit. In the “Hikayat Hang Tuah” there is a story about the attack by swordfish on Inderapura. This story was thought to be a euphemism for an attack by the Vietnamese on the Cham capital Inderapura.

The “Hikayat Raja Jeumpa” told of a story of Raja Jeumpa who went to the kingdom called Indra to look for a bride and along the way met an old lady named Po Ni who gave him advice. The story also told of wars between the Raja of Indra and Raja

¹⁴ Hickey, G. C. (1982). Sons of the mountains : ethnohistory of the Vietnamese central highlands to 1954. New Haven, : Yale University Press. pp. 115-120

¹⁵ Shellabear, W. G. (1979). Sejarah Melayu. Kuala Lumpur, : Fajar Bakti.

¹⁶ Prapanca (1995). Desawarnana (Nagarakrtagama). Leiden, : KITLV Press.

Cina. This story seemed to be referring to Champa. In the story of “Syair Siti Zubaidah Perang China” there were several references to a Kingdom named “Kembayat Negara” who had altercations with Raja Cina and this “Kembayat Negara” was understood as Champa by some historians. In the “Babad Tanah Jawa”¹⁷ there was also mention of a marriage of a princess of Champa to Prabu Brawijaya king of Majapahit and the conversion of the kingdom of Champa to Islam. In the “Hikayat Banjar”, Champa was mentioned as one of the kingdoms acknowledging the rule of Majapahit. Thus Champa existed in the historical consciousness of the Malay world and was frequently mentioned in Malay language sources.

The Vietnamese kingdom, then known as Dai Viet, invaded the Champa in 1471 A.D after defeating China’s Ming military forces.¹⁸ The gradual annexation of Cham territories such as Vijaya, Indrapura, Amaravati, and Kauthara followed. The Vietnamese not only reduced Champa’s territory but cut off its access to the sea with the capture of ports in the conquered territory¹⁹. This cost Champa its economic viability and Champa was eventually reduced by the 1800s to only one autonomous territory called Panduranga. This ancient territory is now known as Phanrang in today’s Vietnam.

2.3) The Cham Had “Primordial Ties” with the Malays

¹⁷ Ramlan, M. (1975). Babad Tanah Jawa. Kuala Lumpur, Dewan Bahasa dan Pustaka.

¹⁸ Wade, G. (2003). The Ming Shi account of Champa. Singapore, Asia Research Institute National University of Singapore. p.10

¹⁹ Interviews with Dr Thanh Phan in 2005, lecturer of Anthropology, University of Ho Chi Minh.

At this point, it would be worthwhile to look into how the Cham were able to successfully participate in the cultural and social dynamics of Malay societies not their own because they had primordial ties with the Malays of such countries, e.g., Malaysia. The Cham seem to be more successful where the dominant community accepted the Cham as one of their own (as part of the Malay family). This line of argument would follow upon Clifford Geertz work, in his article titled *Primordial ties*, wherein he maintained that being born into a particular religious community and using a particular language are powerful forces that sometimes transcend the spiritual.²⁰ The Muslim Cham ethnic group possessed some of the attributes mentioned by Geertz, such as having a particular language, social practices and a dominant religion; and therefore they have a well-defined sense of their culture, history, and traditions. Though the main focus of this thesis is on the Muslim Cham, I recognize the diversity of the Cham people and that there are Hindus among them.

The Cham people's (both the Hindu and Muslim Cham in both Cambodia and Vietnam) consciousness of their ethnicity was made more potent in the light of the Cham's historical memory that they were once a great and powerful people that had a kingdom in what is now Southern Vietnam. The Vietnamese had invaded and destroyed the kingdom of Champa and relegated its people to a minority position. A history of Champa can be found in the work of Georges Maspero.²¹ The book offers an interesting version of Champa's history. Based largely on Chinese historical sources, Maspero

²⁰ Hutchinson, J. and A. D. Smith (1996). *Ethnicity*. New York, : Oxford University Press.

²¹ G. Maspero & W.E.J. Tips (2002), MASPÉRO, G. & TIPS, W.E.J. (2002), *The Champa Kingdom: the history of an extinct Vietnamese culture*, Bangkok, Thailand, White Lotus Press.

reconstructs a version of Champa's history that ends with the Vietnamese invasion of Champa in 1471 A.D. However new research findings (based on Cham sources) have argued that Maspero's version of the end of Champa was inadequate because the Kingdom of Panduranga, the last kingdom of the Cham, existed till the 1830s before it was destroyed by Vietnam's Emperor Minh Mang. In a personal conversation with Dr Po Dharma, a renowned historian on Champa's history, he said that there were different kingdoms of Champa and he likened it to Malaysia where there were different kings for each territory.²²

In addition to a common language, cultural practices and a dominant religion, I argue that the "primordial ties" of the Cham were conditioned by their historical memory of themselves as once a sovereign people of a kingdom. The Cham today are of the opinion that they are a conquered people and when the historical memories of the Cham engage with the Cham's perception of their present situation, tension is produced. This leads to a certain dynamism in the way the Cham articulated their existence through the manifestation of certain imaginaries such as having "primordial ties" with each other and more significantly, with peoples that are *like* the Cham, e.g., the Malays of Malaysia. The Cham people in Cambodia and Vietnam faced similar problems such as the difficulties of integration with Vietnamese society, high levels of poverty, limited political representation, and the young losing touch with Cham culture and traditions.

²² Though it I have not read Dr Po Dharma's PhD thesis titled "Le Panduranga (Campa), 1802-1835: ses rapports avec le Vietnam" as it was written primarily in French. His work published in 1987, focuses on the study of Cham manuscripts to contend Maspero's long standing notion that Champa ceased to exist in 1471A.D. Another author is Dr Danny Wong Tze Ken, from the University of Malaya and his article studies Cham activities after the 1471 period. His work can be found online http://kyotoreview.cseas.kyoto-u.ac.jp/issue/issue4/article_353.html

2.4) The Cham and the Instrumentalists

The Cham successfully participated in the cultural and social dynamics of societies other than their own because they were able to use their ethnicity for specific agendas. This perspective would be congruent with the framework of the instrumentalist school of thought with regards to theories of ethnicity. For the proponents of Instrumentalist argumentation, ethnicity is a “*social, political, and cultural resource for different interest and status groups*”.²³ The work of Abner Cohen takes this notion further when he maintains, “... *ethnicity is essentially a political phenomenon, as traditional customs are used only as idioms and as mechanisms for political alignment*”²⁴

Cohen alludes to the possibility that ethnicity could be constructed and even manipulated to adhere to the specific agendas of groups. The Cham, in such a context, would therefore have an agenda and indeed, there may be some examples to corroborate this view. There are essentially two groups of Cham people, the Muslim Cham and the Hindu Cham. The Muslim Cham have greater economic and social stature because of the economic links they have with other Muslim countries such as Malaysia, Indonesia, and some countries in the Middle East. According to Bjorn Blengsli in an article entitled “Trends in the Islamic community”, pointed to the existence of Arab charities such as the Om Al Qura Charity Organization and the Islamic Heritage Society that have set up schools and mosques around Cambodia. The article added that overseas funds opened

²³ Hutchinson, J. and A. D. Smith (1996). Ethnicity. New York,: Oxford University Press. p.8

²⁴ Ibid. pp. 198-201

opportunities to study abroad or perform the pilgrimage to Mecca.²⁵ However what was more significant was that the Muslim Cham rode on linguistic, cultural, and historical affinities with peoples of the “Malay world”. The Cham capitalized on the perception of Malaysian government that the Cham were “cousins” of the Malays. The interview with “Yusuf” will highlight the some features of this. Through such perceptions the Muslim Cham garnered a greater degree of economic opportunities in such countries than they could have if they were Hindu Cham. Therefore the Cham, following the logic of the Instrumentalists, used their ethnicity to further their interests, socio-economic survival being one of them. At this point, I would like to add that I consider religion as a part of Cham ethnicity and this notion will be expanded upon later in this thesis.

I had the chance to interview in Kompong Cham in Cambodia a fifty-seven year old Muslim Cham by the name of “Yusuf” in 2003. The interviews that I have used in this thesis are transcriptions of oral recordings (whenever permitted) that I have made in the course of the conversation with them. Owing to the nature of his work, he had to travel between Phnom Penh and Kelantan frequently. I asked him whether he had any difficulties dealing with the Malays and Khmer. He replied in Malay, “Saya banyak berdagang dengan orang Melayu dan orang Kambuja. Orang Kambuja sama seperti orang Melayu bila tawar-menawar. Mereka tidak suka paksa memaksa. Kalau kita tetapkan harga mereka tidak akan mencari masalah. Tetapi orang Yun suka berunding kadang kala saya terpaksa menurun harga dengan banyak tetapi itulah cara mereka”. (Translation: I have traded many times with the Vietnamese and Cambodians. The Cambodians are like

²⁵ Blengsli, Bjorn. Religious globalization and the potential for terrorism among Cambodian muslim: trends in the Islamic community. PPP12/12. Phnom Penh Post, 2003

the Cham when bargaining prices. They do not like to be insistent. If we set the price they will not make trouble but the Vietnamese like to bargain hard and sometimes I have to bring down my price a lot but that is their way).

Yusuf learned Malay while studying the *Al Koran* in his village. Malay was the language that was used by the Imam in teaching the Koran. I asked him whether he would like his children or even his grandchildren, for that matter, to learn Malay. He said “Belajar bahasa Melayu sangat bagus untuk masa depan mereka. Anak dan cucu-cucu saya boleh mendapat kerja yang bagus dengan gaji besar di Malaysia. Malaysia tempat kaya. Dua anak cucu perempuan saya sudah berumah tangga dengan orang Malaysia. Saya kerap mengunjungi mereka”. (Translation: Studying the Malay language is very good for their future. My children and grandchildren will be able to get high paying jobs in Malaysia. Malaysia is a rich place. Two of my grand daughters have married Malaysian men and are staying there. I visit them often). I asked him if his granddaughters encountered any problems living in Malaysia, he said, “No problems, the Malaysians accept us as Malays. We are Muslims ... same religion and race”. This dovetailed with the reality that the Malaysians actually supported such a notion that the Cham are “Malay”.



Photo 8: Picture taken in 2006 with Mr “Yusuf”, at his house in Kompong Cham. I have distorted the picture in order to protect his identity further.

2.5) The Cham through Barth’s “Interaction” Theory

What qualities do the Cham possess that allowed them to successfully enter, participate and gain access to societies other than their own? Cham are able to successfully participate in other societies. In the approach used by Fredrik Barth, he maintains that a change of emphasis is needed in looking at ethnicity. He posits that “... *Ethnic groups are categories of ascription and identification by the actors themselves and thus have the characteristic of organizing interaction between people*”.²⁶ This is

²⁶ Hutchinson, J. and A. D. Smith (1996). Ethnicity. New York, : Oxford University Press. pp.10-19

different from the Primordialists and Instrumentalists, as this approach does not totally essentialize Cham motivations. Barth's approach is useful as a means of understanding the issue of Cham ethnicity because following its logic, Cham ethnicity is fluid and is somewhat a product of interactions with other groups. This is a believable notion that takes into consideration the thousands of years the Cham have been interacting with other ethnic groups. The Cham language has seen many borrowings from Mon Khmer and Austroasiatic language systems.²⁷ If their language can be influenced by other groups, the culture of the Cham would also be similarly affected.

Barth's argument may be useful in terms of understanding ethnic groups in terms of ethnic or cultural boundaries but this explanation is somewhat inadequate when trying to understand present-day Cham relations with the Vietnamese. Barth's assumption that ethnic groups are culture bearing units having interactions with other groups may be useful but it fails to take into account a situation when a particular ethnic group as a powerful majority tries to shape the culture of a minority. In this kind of hegemonic situation, which is the case of the Cham in Vietnam, ethnicity is not a product of equitable and free interaction.

Though the abovementioned theories are useful in understanding ethnicity, on their own they do not explain the Cham people's unique situation adequately. In order to understand the qualities that the Cham possess that allowed them to successfully

²⁷ National University of Singapore. Asia Research Institute. (2004). Symposium on New Scholarship on Champa : 5-6 August 2004,... National University of Singapore : symposium papers. "The outward influence of Chamic into Mon-Khmer speaking areas" by Dr Gerard Diffloth. pp.1-15

participate in societies that are predominantly Malay Muslim, I employ a framework in this thesis termed “ethnic passport” to understand the Cham through their sets of “internal documents”, the “layers” of history, religion and perceptions of the Cham as an oppressed minority. In the following chapter I will explore the first “set of internal documents”, i.e., the “historical layer”.

CHAPTER 3

3.1) The “Historical” Layer of the Cham ethnic passport

Though I focused my fieldwork mostly on Vietnam and Cambodia, I made several trips to Malaysia especially Kuala Lumpur in 2006 to consult several Cham academics and persons on my current research on Cham manuscripts. I met and interviewed a student at Museum Negara in Kuala Lumpur and he wished to be anonymous. Nevertheless he has kindly permitted me to use his words for this thesis: “Orang Cham adalah antara tamadun yang tertua di Asia tenggara, mereka menunjukkan bahawa orang melayu mempunyai sifat-sifat yang membolehkan mereka membina tamadun yang sangat unik dan istimewa dari segi pembinaan candi dan unsur-unsur budaya mereka. Tetapi kejayaan mereka tidak kekal kerana mereka selalu berperang dengan orang Vietnam. Akhirnya, mereka hilang Negara dan tamadun Champa hilang sama sekali ... inilah pelajaran kepada orang Melayu ... yang kita mesti menjadi bangsa yang kuat supaya kami tidak akan hilang daripada dunia ...” (Translation: The Cham are one of the oldest civilizations in the region; they have shown that Malays have the characteristics that enabled them to establish a great civilization. However their civilization did not last as they are always fighting the Vietnamese. In the end, they have even lost their country. This is the lesson that the Malays learn from the Cham, that the Malay people must be strong ... in order that we will not disappear from this world).

This was an interesting perspective as it encapsulated the views that the Malays had of the Cham. The Cham provided proof for the historical justification of “Malay greatness”. With such favorable sentiments, the Cham were able to use the “historical layer” or the historical consciousness that the Malays of Malaysia had of them, to gain, among many other things, an affirmation of the importance and uniqueness of the Cham people.

This leads to the first layer under study, the “historical layer”, because, in my view, history, or more exactly, the production of historical knowledge by academics and interpretation by the media of the history of the Cham, established the conditions necessary for the Cham to enter the consciousness of a society and public imagination. Furthermore, the process of appropriating the culture and history of the Cham people to further certain ethnocentric agendas such as furthering the concept of the “Malay world” to mainland Southeast Asia, created by academics and politicians, was also crucial in determining how the Cham were perceived. This has not only enhanced the positive way the Cham and their history have been viewed by the Malaysian Malays but gave the Cham the ability to pass through many type of boundaries that exist within nation states.

3.2) Cham and Khmer historical consciousness

It must be said that the Cham at present were conscious of their historical role and presence in Southeast Asia and were aware that other nations perceived them to be descendents of a “great kingdom” and knew how to capitalize on such positive perceptions. The Cham were able to use the “historical layer” or the historical awareness of the Khmer people of the Cham as being the “descendents of Champa. The Khmers

(Cambodians) perceived the Cham as a people who have lost their country to the Vietnamese. This was an opinion shared by many Khmer Cambodians whom I have met during my fieldwork. In a conversation with a waiter (an ethnic Khmer) in a restaurant in 2006, I asked him whether he knew about the Cham people in Cambodia. He said that *“they (the Cham) are a people who have been here (Cambodia) for a long time. They came to Cambodia because the Yun (Vietnamese) took away their land and they once had their own country in Vietnam”*. Fascinated by his answer I asked other ethnic Khmer Cambodians the same question and got somewhat similar perspectives. It seemed to me that the Khmer historical consciousness of the Cham was based on the awareness that the Cham were a historically displaced group. Most Khmer people perceived the Cham as a “non-indigenous” people living in Cambodia for centuries but despite this some Khmer still think see the Cham as refugees.

Interestingly enough, the Cham, too, had interesting perspectives about their historical origins in Cambodia. In the many conversations I had with young Cham in Cambodia, most of them (at least those who had some historical consciousness) believed that their ancestors came to Cambodian lands seeking refuge and Khmer protection from the Vietnamese. The Cham were able to use the “historical layer” or the historical awareness of the Khmer people of the Cham and this facilitated Cham acceptance into Khmer society because to some degree, the Khmers felt sorry for the Cham. Most of the Khmer people I interviewed genuinely felt pity for the Cham because the Cham are a “rootless” people. Such sentiments were made more potent with the view, held by both Khmer and Cham people, that they had a similar historical enemy i.e., the Vietnamese.

Khmers believed that the Vietnamese have tried for centuries to exert greater control over Khmer politics, economy, and territory. I have personally witnessed the tension created when I spoke in the Vietnamese language while changing money at a financial establishment. The staff thought I was a Vietnamese and made the exchange a very unpleasant experience. Thus continuing to accept the Cham within Khmer society could be seen as a means by the Khmers to spite the Vietnamese.

3.3) Cham and Malaysian Malay historical consciousness

However a more revealing example that illustrated the Cham engaging the “historical layer” could be seen in how they engage the historical consciousness of Malaysian Malays, which was dominated by a perspective called the “Malay world”. Proponents of this perspective viewed the Cham as a Malay people, based on linguistic and cultural affinities that lived in Indochina. Malaysian academic interest in the Cham and Champa was a recent development. It began with the arrival of Muslim Cham refugees from Cambodia in 1975.

The exodus of Muslim Cham refugees into Malaysia was precipitated by the extermination of the Cham people during Pol Pot’s reign. Cambodia was ruled by the Communist Party led by Pol Pot in 1975. That regime imposed a reign of terror that killed millions of people.²⁸ A recent book by Ysa Osman titled “The Cham Rebellion” published in 2006 described the horrors of the genocidal policies of the Khmer rouge

²⁸ For an account, see HINTON, A.L. and NetLibrary Inc. *Why did they kill?: Cambodia in the shadow of genocide*, Berkeley, Cal.: University of California Press, 2005, pp. 206–207.

against the Cham in detail.²⁹ The book compiled accounts from various Cham survivors from the period. The main thread of the accounts was that many Cham were arrested by Khmer Rouge cadres and imprisoned in various detention centers that were established around Cambodia. They were mercilessly tortured and denied the right to pray and were even forced to eat pork. Villages that chose to be defiant and resisted Khmer Rouge ideology were attacked by Khmer Rouge forces and many villagers were killed. Though the Cham resisted, they were not equipped with modern weaponry (according to the accounts in the book, the Cham fought Khmer Rouge soldiers only with traditional weapons such as swords) and thousands of Cham died fighting, overwhelmed by artillery and tactics used by the Khmer Rouge soldiers. Many Cham who surrendered or captured were tortured and killed.³⁰

I understood better the lasting impact of such brutal actions during a visit to a Cham village called “Lime Village” in 2003 located somewhere around Takeo province. In a conversation with the “Imom” (or Imam) of the village, he told me that the Cham established the village only in the 1980’s. Before that the Cham lived elsewhere. On hindsight the Cham that I have met in the village could have been the survivors of massacres described by Ysa Osman in the book. This realization gave my recollections of being in that Cham village greater poignancy. This village will be mentioned further in the Chapter on “oppressed minority” layer.

²⁹ Osman, Y. and Documentation Center of Cambodia. (2006). The Cham rebellion : survivors' stories from the villages. Phnom Penh, Documentation Center of Cambodia.

³⁰ Ibid pp. 19-159

The Khmer Rouge targeted the Cham for several reasons. Firstly the Cham have a history of involvement in the activities of the Cambodian court and government³¹, the perception of their martial potential and most importantly the fact that they were Muslims. The massive scale of the extermination campaigns and the sheer brutality of the tactics used by the Khmer Rouge caused many Cham to flee to Malaysia where their Muslim identity enhanced the probability of being accorded refugee status. This meant greater opportunities to get free housing, medical care, employment, and education from the Malaysian government.

This was attested in a paper presented by Dato' Nik Mohamed Nik Mohd Solleh, titled "The arrival and presence of the Cham people in Malaysia" presented at a Champa Conference in 2004, held in Universiti Kebangsaan Malaysia. He was one of the officials responsible for the Cham refugees that arrived in Malaysia. Among the roles he assumed was ascertaining the "Muslimness" of the Cham who had just arrived in Malaysia. He asked them to recite a particular verse from the Koran. They were only regarded as Muslims when they could utter this particular verse.

According to the abstract of his paper that I translated from Malay: (From Jun 1975 to 1988 about 10,722 refugees of Malay Cham ancestry have entered Malaysia and were placed in refugee camps in Kemumin, Pengkalan Chepa, Kota Bahru, Kelantan. The

³¹ *Journal of Southeast Asian Studies*, 37 (1), pp 1–22 February 2006. Printed in the United Kingdom. 2006 .The National University of Singapore. "Cambodia's Muslim King: Khmer and Dutch Sources on the Conversion of Reameathipadei I, 1642–1658." pp 1-22 by Carool Kersten

camp was later renamed Taman Putra, Kemumin ... The refugee camp in Kemumin was administered by PERKIM. The refugees were placed in the camps for 2 years and during that time they were given classes on Islamic education, the Malay language and culture and the Malaysian way of life. Their health was also tended to. In early 1977, nearly 4/5ths of the refugees were allowed out of the camps to work in plantations and to engage in businesses. They were given visitor passes which was a temporary document enabling them to look for work and live temporarily in Malaysia. Many of the refugees, after they have left the refugee camp, lived and worked in Kelantan especially in Kota Bahru. Many of them also looked for work and opportunities in other states in Malaysia such as Selangor, Negeri Sembilan, Perak, Melaka and Johor. Their children are allowed to study in schools; colleges and many of them are studying in higher institutions of learning. The Malay Cham refugees have integrated well with Malaysia and most Malaysians regard them as Malays. After 25 years of living in Malaysia, many of them have become citizens of Malaysia. Today, there are about 25,000 Malay Cham in Malaysia including those who are born here.)

I was there for the conference and while he was presenting the paper and I noticed several students seated just behind me in the conference room. I struck a conversation in Malay with them and guessed correctly that they were Cham. They were quite indistinguishable from the other Malay students that I have seen on campus. They wore the “baju kurung” or traditional Malay dress. Most of them said that their parents were Cham Muslims from Vietnam and Cambodia but they came to Malaysia in 1975 to escape the conflict that happened there. Their schooling was paid for by the Malaysian

government and their parents worked as farm hands in villages in Terengganu and Kelantan. It was another poignant moment and mixed with little sense of “déjà vu” that the children of the Cham refugees were talking to me, while a paper on Cham refugees was being presented.

What really struck me about the paper was the revelation of the Malaysian government’s view that the Cham as not just Cham but “Malay Cham”, a powerful synthesis of two terms which indicated that the Cham people were officially recognized as Malay even at that point of time. More importantly it gave further credence that the perception of Malay Muslim identity of the Cham of Cambodia, somewhat guaranteed their entry into Malaysia and assisted their integration into Malaysian Malay society. The paper also revealed the Cham seemed to be a source of fascination to the people in power in Malaysia as they were found to have a language, culture, and religion that were almost indistinguishable from the culture and religion of the general Malaysian Malay population.³²

This heralded an unprecedented period (from the early eighties to the late nineties) that saw many Malaysian academics probing deeper into the history, culture, and language of the Cham. But it must be said that academic perspectives on the Cham were greatly influenced by the “Malay world” perspective. This perspective draws from the notion that Malay speaking peoples can be found as far as Hawaii and Madagascar, forming a “linguistic space” that was understood as a geographical reality. Simply, if one

³² I am aware of article 160 (2) in the Constitution of Malaysia that defines a Malay in Malaysia but I feel that the Malaysian Malay saw Cham “Malayness” through the perspective of cultural and religious affinities rather than a politically defined one.

could speak a variant of the Austronesian language then one must be part of the “Malay world”. This was articulated most succinctly by Dr S. Husin Ali in his definition of “Malay”, “the term refers not only to those who are settled in the Peninsula, but also includes those in the larger area of the Malay Archipelago, embracing the Malay Peninsula and thousands of islands which today form the Republics of Indonesia and the Philippines. Although they are divided into many subgroups, and perhaps as many dialects, linguistic and cultural experts always considered them as belonging to the same stock, known as the Malays or Malayo-Indonesians. Indeed the Malay world covers a wide area, and its people constitute one of the major racial groups of the world”.³³

Thus the Cham were seen largely as part of the Malay world because they could speak a variant of the Malay language and especially if they are Muslims. Furthermore, the Cham had no historical and political baggage that impeded the cultivation of very close ties with the Malaysians unlike the ongoing suspicion between the two Malay world representatives of Indonesia and Malaysia. This further facilitated the engagement and appeal of the Cham to the Malaysian Malays.

The Cham (especially the Muslim Cham) were able to cultivate a more intense and comprehensive relationship with the Malays because of the similarities they shared in terms of culture and religion. More importantly, the Malaysian Malays were beginning to be fascinated by the Cham historical experience. This fascination was an important stage for the development of the "historical layer" of the Cham ethnic passport as it reflected

³³ Husin, A. (1981). The Malays : their problems and future. Kuala Lumpur, : Heinemann Asia. p.1

the early processes of Cham entry into Malay academic and public consciousness. This fascination laid the ground for the Cham entry into Malaysian society and will be further explained in the following segments.

3.4) Fuelling Malaysian Malay interest: Academic works and Newspapers

3.4.a) Academic works

Malaysian academics were fascinated by the Cham historical experience and began to initiate research on their culture and history after the events of 1975, the year Muslim Cham refugees from Cambodia entered Malaysia. Such interest culminated in the “Seminar Sehari Mengenai Sejarah dan Kebudayaan Melayu Campa” (A one-day seminar on the history and culture of Malay Champa).³⁴ The seminar highlighted the closeness of the Cham to the Malays and viewed that Champa and the Cham belonged to the Malay world. The articles of the seminar showed a great interest particularly in the origins and history of Champa. Much attention was also paid to the historical, linguistic, cultural and religious connections that Champa had with the Malay world. One of the most interesting statements in the seminar contended that Champa was the oldest Malay Kingdom in the world.³⁵ In short, many Malay historians from Malaysia who participated in this seminar viewed Champa as part of the Malay world. However I will focus on the

³⁴ Malaysia. Kementerian Kebudayaan Kesenian dan Pelancongan. (1988). Seminar Sehari Mengenai Sejarah dan Kebudayaan Melayu Campa, 13 Sep. 1988, Kuala Lumpur. It must be noted that most of the articles were particularly focused on this interpretation.

³⁵ Ibid.

works of a particular Malay historian as he was among the earliest Malay historians who researched on Champa and his works had been influential in spawning greater academic interest in the field.

The Malay historian, Abdul Rahman Al Mahdi, was among the first to establish historical links to Champa by using certain primary Malay historical texts, such the “Sejarah Melayu” (the Malay Annals) and “Siti Zubaidah perang Cina”³⁶ (Siti Zubaidah Chinese war). He was one of the most prominent local Malaysian historians on Champa and his works were among the earliest to explore notions of Cham-Malay relations in the historical context.

One of Abdul Rahman Al-Ahmadi’s articles, “Campa dalam kesusteraan Melayu”³⁷ (or Campa in Malay literature) attempted to explore the connections between the Malay world and Indochina. At this point, I would like to focus more particularly on his interpretation of a particular chapter that referred to the Cham in the “Sejarah Melayu”³⁸ A highly regarded primary Malay source of pre-colonial Malay history, the “Sejarah Melayu” contained interesting descriptions of Champa. It described the divine origins of Pau Gelang (one of the Kings of Champa), Champa’s relationship with Majapahit, the destruction of Champa, and the escape of two Cham princes to Aceh and

³⁶ Abdul Rahman, A.-A. (1994). Syair Siti Zubaidah Perang China : perspektif sejarah. Kuala Lumpur, : Perspustakaan Negara Malaysia.

³⁷ Abdul Rahman Al Ahmadi, “ Hubungan Semenanjung Malaysia dengan Campa berdasarkan Empat Buah sastra Melayu Klasik.” *Jurnal filologi Melayu, Jilid 9*,(2001), pp. 1-8.

³⁸ Shellabear, W. G. (1960). Sejarah Melayu, or, The Malay annals : jilid yang pertama dan kedua. Singapura, : Malaya Publishing House. pp.131-134

Melaka. However how Al-Ahmadi interpreted the text was of great interest because it highlighted the way Malay primary historical documents were generally used by Malaysian Malay historians in their research on Champa.

In his analysis of chapter 12 of the “*Sejarah Melayu*”³⁹, where the Cham were mentioned, Al-Ahmadi argued that Pau Gelang was none other than Jaya Parameswaravarman I who ruled Champa in the middle of the 11th century. Pau Gelang furthermore was replaced by Thang Visymumurti or Harivarman IV that ruled Champa in 1074. This ruler was the product of the union between the father of the Coconut clan and the mother of the Areca nut clan. He went on to state that Pau Gama or Pau Gelang’s son was actually Raja Campa Jaya Simhavarman III (1288-1307) who married the Javanese Princess named Tapasi. It is also very interesting that Abdul Rahman Al-Ahmadi attested that Pau Gama, was also Jaya Simhavarman III, the king who was responsible for the cession of two Northern provinces of Champa in order to marry a Vietnamese princess.⁴⁰ Abdul Rahman Al-Ahmadi also maintained that after Vijaya (the northern most territory of Champa) was conquered, two Cham princes fled to Peninsular Malaya and Northern Sumatra (Acheh). The significance of this was that he was one of the earliest Malay historians who used Malay primary historical sources to prove the existence of connections between the Cham and Malay in history. But the way these “historical

³⁹ This Chapter of the *Sejarah Melayu* or Malay Annals is one of the more cohesive and exciting versions available in Malay primary sources on the Cham. It has long been assumed by certain Malay historians that Pau Gelang is actually Po Klong Garai, a famous Cham king whose temple was named after him. This temple, the Po Klong Garai temple, can still be found in Central Vietnam today. Abdul Rahman’s Al Ahmadi’s claim that the king mentioned in the *Sejarah Melayu* was actually a different king is one of the rare attempts by a Malay historian to question a famous and long established primary historical text.

⁴⁰ In a recent conversation with Dr Po Dharma and Mr Abdul Karim, both are renowned Cham researchers, there are actually four territories named “O, Ly, Ma and Che”. The territories that were given to the Vietnamese were the “O” and “Ly” territories.

connections” were made was arbitrary but nevertheless illustrated how early historical research was done by Malaysian Malay historians.

Disregarding the arbitrary treatment of these primary historical sources by Malay historians, such research was nevertheless significant for the realization that Malay primary historical sources could be an important repository of knowledge about Champa. Sources such as the “Negarakertagama”, that mentioned Champa as one of the polities that was acknowledged by Majapahit empire, the “Hikayat Hang Tuah”, where there is a story about the attack by swordfish on Inderapura, thought to be a euphemism for an attack by the Vietnamese on the Cham capital by the name, were looked at more seriously by Malaysian Malay historians.

Probably encouraged with the abundance of Malay primary historical material that contained references to the Cham, Al-Ahmadi sought and found other historical material of interest to the research on Champa’s history. He described a text titled The “Hikayat Raja Jeumpa” which told of a story of Raja Jeumpa who went to the kingdom called Indra to look for a bride and along the way met an old lady named Po Ni who gave him advice. The similarity of the term “Jeumpa” to “Champa” seemed to be of great interest to Al-Ahmadi. The story also told of wars that were waged between the Raja of Indra and Raja Cina and the mention of Po Ni (“Po” was a term used only for Cham royalty) and the wars Raja Indra had with Raja Cina (Champa too fought many wars with Annam) seemed to have made the text of special interest to Malay historians especially Al Ahmadi.

Al-Ahmadi also highlighted the other primary Malay sources that mentioned Champa. In the story of “Syair Siti Zubaidah Perang China” there were several references to a Kingdom named Kembayat Negara who had altercations with Raja Cina. Kembayat Negara is Champa. In the “Babad Tanah Jawa” there is mention of a marriage of a princess of Champa to Prabu Brawijaya king of Majapahit and the conversion of Champa to Islam. In the “Hikayat Bandjar”, Champa was mentioned as one of the kingdoms that acknowledged the rule of Majapahit.

Though these sources are not as detailed as the version in the “Sejarah Melayu”, the attempt by Abdul Rahman Al- Ahmadi to verify and reconcile the story in the “Sejarah Melayu” with historical research on other Malay historical texts that mentioned the Cham highlighted a growing tendency among Malay historians to use primary Malay sources to establish Champa’s links with the “Malay world.” Therefore, more of Abdul Rahman Al-Ahmadi’s works will be featured in the coming segments. This was because apart from being one of the earliest Malay historians interested in Champa, his works were among the earliest that attempted to recreate the historical links that Champa had with “Dunia Melayu” or the “Malay world” through the use of various types of Malay primary sources, an unprecedented method in research into Champa history.

More than just uncovering primary Malay historical sources, Al-Ahmadi’s research also incorporated primary Malay historical sources that have been ignored or considered insignificant even in the study of Malay history. This could be seen in his

analysis of an old Malay Syair (poem), called the poem of “Syair Siti Zubaidah Perang China”.⁴¹ The text was always regarded as an anomaly in the study of Malay history as it contained unfamiliar references such as “Kilan” (a term which meant Princess in the book). He analyzed the text by probing the term “Kembayat Negara”, the kingdom that was featured in the text. He maintained that the term “Kembayat Negara” was usually associated with Kemboja (Cambodia) and also appeared in ancient texts like the *Negarakertagama* but he believed that Kembayat Negara was also another ancient reference to Champa.⁴²

Al-Ahmadi proved this further in the book by adding that in the “Hikayat Sri Kelantan” there is a story of two Princes of Kembayat Negara that left the country on ships after being attacked and conquered by the Chinese. They arrived in Patani and later on went on to Kota Kubang Labu in Kelantan. In addition, Abdul Rahman Al-Ahmadi stated that the term Kembayat Negara was mentioned in *Rengkesan Tarikh Kelantan*. In this text it is Raja Kembayat Negara, with his two sons, who left their country in a ship that brought them to a country called Bekalan Datu near Kelantan.

The name “Tembayat” also appears in “Babad Tanah Jawi”. Based on this text, Abdul Rahman Al-Ahmadi mentions that near Semarang (Central Java) there is a place called Tembayat where a holy man named Sunan Tembayat lived. The name Tembayat, he attests, may also be another version of the term “Kembayat”. Furthermore, in the

⁴¹ Abdul Rahman Al-Ahmadi (1994) “Syair Siti Zubaidah Perang China: Perspektif Sejarah”. Perspustakaan Negara Malaysia, Kuala Lumpur.

⁴² Ibid. pp16-17

Javanese legend that tells of the nine holy men of Java or “Wali- wali sembilan di Jawa” all came from Campa and were also referred to as people from “Kembayat”.

Among the many disregarded and forgotten historical references to the Cham, the most intriguing piece of research based on such sources written by Abdul Rahman Al Mahdi was his article “Bangunan Kuno Masjid Kampung Laut: Hubunganya dengan Campa dan Demak”⁴³ (The ancient Mosque of Kampung Laut: The link with Campa and Demak”). This article explores the religious links between Champa and Demak, postulating that Cham religious leaders often went to Demak and vice versa. It focused on a mosque in Kelantan named Masjid Kampung Laut that was built by shipwrecked Cham who was on their way to Java. Local legends tell the following story: on their way to Java, as their ship took on water, these Cham promised to God (Allah) that if they reached land safely, they would build a mosque there. Suddenly a fish appeared and plugged the breach, which stopped the flows of water from pouring in. The ship landed at a village near the coast in Kampung Laut (literally named Sea-village), and as they promised, the Cham set up three mosques with the wood they had brought from Champa. After the construction of the mosques was completed, they continued their journey to Java and once there, they build two more mosques similar to the ones they had built in Kampung Laut.

The most fascinating aspect of the article was that it incorporated village histories into establishing the links the Champa had with the Malay world. This is important as it

⁴³ Abdul Rahman Al Mahdi, (July 1990) “ Bangunan Kuno Masjid kampung laut: Hubunganya dengan Campa dan Demak”. *Warisan Kelantan IX* pp. 1-12

reflected the recognition of the Malay historian of the usefulness of village histories, an untapped historical resource by Malay historians thus far. It was the zeal to recreate the historical links that the Malays had with Champa, beyond the information available in primary Malay historical texts that led to greater scrutiny of such histories.

Abdul Rahman Al-Ahmadi's works contributed to the development of the study of the history of Champa by showing that traditional texts of the Malay world could also be used as viable sources in highlighting grey areas of the history between the Cham and the Malays. Therefore to some extent he was successful in revealing and rediscovering new and exciting type of primary historical sources for the study and the writing of the history of Champa. More than just uncovering primary Malay historical sources, Al-Ahmadi's research also incorporated primary Malay historical sources that have been ignored or considered insignificant even in the study of Malay history. His works showed that the Malay world was indeed conscious of the polity of Champa that once existed in Southeast Asia, and considered it as part of the Malay world.

Malaysian Malay historians tried to show that there existed a long history of contacts between Champa and the Malay world. Another historian of note would be Dr Po Dharma, a historian of Cham ethnicity, currently living in Malaysia. He suggested that there were linguistic exchanges with Cham sailors and Malay inhabitants of the northern coasts of Malaysia in the 17th century. Cham sailors actually recorded certain sentences which they had learnt from local Malays and localized it to Cham understandings in attempt to provide more prove for historical contacts that had existed with the Malays and

Cham.⁴⁴ However more will be said about him as, even though he played an important role as a historian, beyond producing historical knowledge, he played a much more important role in being an unofficial representative of the Cham in Malaysia and this will be discussed in the following section.

The production of knowledge on the Cham, as we have seen, actually established the foundation that fostered the interest of Malaysian Malays in the history, language, culture of the Cham of Vietnam and Cambodia. In other words, in their efforts to locate the Cham within the history of the Malays, academics studying the Cham inadvertently formed the initial parts of the historical layer, i.e., the fascination of the Malaysian public for the Cham and Champa's history.

3.4.b) Malaysian Malay Newspapers and the Cham

The production of knowledge of the Cham by Malaysian Malay historians, while uncovering the historical links between the Cham and Malays, has enhanced the perception of the Malaysian Malay academic community of Cham ethnicity as being “essentially Malay”. It was, however, the Malaysian Malay newspapers that played a far more potent role in enhancing Malaysian Malay public perception of the Cham. Academic knowledge on the Cham is not as widely accessible to the public as newspapers. While academic knowledge tend to be esoteric and could sometimes be only

⁴⁴ Po, D. (2000). *Empat leksikon bahasa Melayu-bahasa Cam : yang disusun di Campa pada abad ke-17*. Kuala Lumpur, Kementerian Kebudayaan Kesenian dan Pelancongan Malaysia : “Ecole française d'Extrême-Orient.

fully appreciated by the academic community, newspaper articles contained information that could be easily understood by the masses. Therefore in order to understand the processes of how the Malaysian Malay public perceived the Cham as Malay, newspaper articles must be examined because they are widely disseminated.

One of the earliest mentions of Champa in a Malaysian newspaper was in an article titled “Pakar Sejarah Campa di Kementerian”⁴⁵, or “Champa Historians in the Ministry”. It reports the first instances of cooperation between the Malaysian government and French historians in establishing new avenues of research on the culture and history of Champa. According to the article, the move was initiated by Dr Po Dharma, a very influential figure in Malaysia as he was widely regarded as the unofficial representative of the Cham in Malaysia. He was one of the leaders of F.U.L.R.O “Front Unifié de Lutte des Races Opprimées” or United Front for the Liberation of Oppressed Races.

⁴⁵ Article found in 18th April 1988 Edition, Utusan Malaysia

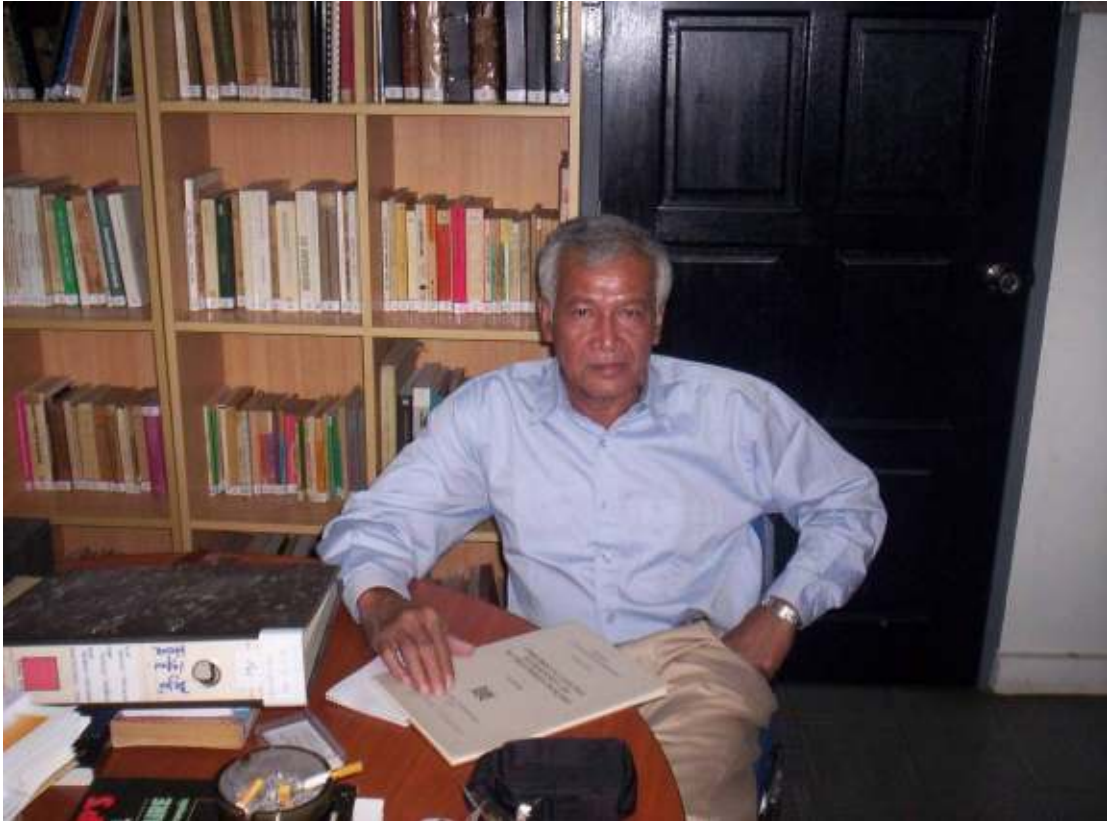


Photo 9: Dr Po Dharma at his office. Picture taken by author in 2004

I first met Dr Po Dharma in 2004 in Kuala Lumpur. I had earlier established some correspondence with him through email and asked him whether I could meet him. I had read about him and wanted to ask him on his perspectives on the history of the Cham and further information on the Cham manuscripts. He agreed and I went to Kuala Lumpur. I met him at his office located at E.F.E.O (Ecole Francaise Extreme Orient) branch of Malaysia.

My first impression of the man was that he has somewhat of a “commanding presence”, a charisma which I was greatly impressed with. Nevertheless, I was asked rather friendly and inquisitive questions, as he was curious about my interest on the

Cham. The most important aspect of the first meeting was that I observed that he had somewhat of a clout in Malaysia in terms of his academic and political connections (he knew several important people in power in Malaysia). However it was in my other meetings with him in Malaysia in the year 2005 and 2006 that further highlighted his importance to the development of Cham studies in Malaysia. I still lucidly remember his descriptions of guerilla activities (among the most memorable was sneaking into enemy encampments to sabotage artillery pieces of the enemy) and life in the Central highlands of Vietnam (especially his great admiration for Les Kosem, the leader of the organization) when F.U.L.R.O was still a combat active organization.

However the most memorable of Po Dharma's stories was when he recalled the time when he was only allowed one hour to visit his ailing father in Phanrang, Vietnam some years back, as he was still greatly distrusted by the Vietnamese authorities. Even at his age he was still filled with much vigour and passion for the Cham cause (having political autonomy and regaining Cham lands). I am of the opinion that he believed that academia was a means by which he could continue the struggle (defined as resisting the Vietnamese) since the military and political means were unavailable. This was a similar mindset of other Cham academics whom I met in Malaysia. For them, producing knowledge on the Cham was a continuation of the struggle by other means.

It would seem that Malaysian newspapers seemed to have become increasingly interested in reporting matters that concern the Cham after 1988. This could be the effect of Dr Po Dharma's increasing presence in the media showcasing Cham culture and

history. However, more importantly, the socio-political climate of the day was also favorable to Dr Po Dharma's cause. This was because before the Asian Financial crisis in 1997, there was somewhat a heightened sense of Malay ethno nationalism during the late eighties and early nineties in Malaysia. Such sentiments were symptomatic of Mahathir's nationalistic stance when he was Prime Minister of Malaysia during that period. This was bolstered by the high economic growth experienced by Malaysia at that time which made the expression of "Malay greatness" very much in favor with the social and political climate of the time.

It was therefore no surprise when the Malaysian media reported on a seminar, called "Seminar Sejarah Melayu Champa"⁴⁶ ("History Seminar on the Malay Cham"), which opened on 12th September 1988. It is pertinent to mention at this point that there seems to be a (implicit?) shared agenda between the academic and journalist in Malaysia, in that both seem to be very willing to portray the Cham as "Malay". It must be said that the tendency to see the Cham as "Malays" by editors was present even in Singapore when I contributed an article to *Berita Harian* (Singapore's only Malay language newspaper). I found out later that this was because the editor found the Cham language (I had translated Cham sentences into Malay for the article) to be very similar to Malay and could not distinguish the differences.

The Cham fit well into the language of "empowerment" uttered by the political leaders Malaysia at that time. However the consciousness of the Malaysian Malay public of the Cham people and history was still at an early stage and what was needed was

⁴⁶ Article found in 11th September 1988 Edition, *Utusan Malaysia*

greater media coverage. This was a gradual process that will be highlighted in the following sections.

In reading Malaysian Malay newspaper articles, we can imagine Malaysian public consciousness of the Cham and Champa progressing through various stages, beginning with the introduction to the Cham people's history.⁴⁷ The focus of the articles then turned to Cham culture, society, and archaeology, such as "Kajian perhubungan orang Melayu Campa perlu dilakukan" or "A need for research into Cham Malay connection".⁴⁸ The article was revelatory of the interest during the period by several institutions, especially the National Museum of Malaysia and Institute of Malay Culture, to initiate research into Champa's history and people. The article expressed optimism that in the future, when Malaysia would be an international centre for research on the Malay world and the Malay people, such as the people of Champa. The importance of the article was the fact it attested to official interest being shown to the study of the Cham. This enhanced the profile of the Cham to the Malaysian Malay public as since important people and institutions such as the National Museum of Malaysia were found to be interested in the Cham, the Malaysian Malay public was intrigued enough to want to find out why this was so. What is so special about the Cham that the government is actually researching about them?

⁴⁷ According to Berita Harian Malaysia <http://www.bharian.com.my> it has around 1.4 million readers and according to Utusan Malaysia <http://www.utusan.com.my> it has around 1.5 million readers.

⁴⁸ Article published in Utusan Malaysia on 13th September 1988

The next article of interest was titled, “Teater Putera Raja Melayu Campa: Inspirasi untuk kenali sejarah” or “A play on the Malay Cham King: Inspiration to study Cham history”.⁴⁹ Organized by the Malay Cultural Institute, the play was based on the story of a Malay king who went to Champa and fell in love with a Cham princess. However he had to return to his kingdom. Interestingly, Cham musicians provided the music. According to the article, the play was important as it showed that the people of Champa have very similar culture and art to the Malays.

The play was one of the earliest manifestations of public interest in Cham culture and history and was, indeed, important for the continuation and even enhancement of public interest in the Cham. However the most important impact of the play and the article was that it captured the imagination and enhanced the fascination of the Malaysian Malay public for the Cham. This was done through several ways, firstly through music. Apparently according to the article, authentic Cham musicians were present and among them was Che Linh, a notable musician of Cham ethnicity based in America. Che Linh provided the Cham traditional music for the play. Second was the use of authentic Cham costumes by the princess, the lead female actor. These contributed to the enhancement of the audience fascination as they would have found great similarity and affinity with Cham costumes and music.

The publication of this article must have stimulated greater public enquiries on the Cham and would have triggered greater research by journalists in Malaysia. This process will be shown in the following sections below as Malaysian Malay journalists began to

⁴⁹ Article published in Berita Harian on 15th May 1988

publish more emotive reports on the Cham situation. But before this, one can gather from the articles that journalists were responding to the public's growing fascination with the Cham.

It will be shown in this section that public perception of the Cham changed in content as Malaysian newspapers began to publish articles that highlighted the sufferings of the Cham. After this period of fascination with Cham culture and people there seemed to be a transition in the nature of Malaysian Malay public interest on the Cham. There was a deepening curiosity about Cham identity and their current situation, which Malaysian Malay journalists responded to by “digging deeper” to find out more about the Cham. This could be seen in articles such as “Siapakah sebenarnya pelarian Islam Kemboja?” or “Who are the Muslim refugees of Cambodia?”.⁵⁰

This article, published in *Berita Harian Malaysia* seems to be the first article ever published in Malaysia that mentions the plight of the Muslim Cham in Cambodia. It also reported that there is a population of Muslims in Cambodia and must be distinguished from ethnic Cambodians. They are ethnic Cham living in Cambodia. The article concluded by saying that Malays must know more about the Cham. It also mentioned that Champa was a kingdom that had attained a high level of civilization and a powerful army in ancient Southeast Asia. Champa was said to be one of the kingdoms mentioned in Malay historical texts such as the “*Sejarah Melayu*” and “*Hikayat Hang Tuah*”.

⁵⁰ Article published in *Berita Harian*, 2nd October, 1988

The impact of the article was that it referred to the Cham people as being ethnically and historically distinct. It enhanced the special quality of the Cham Muslim of Cambodia as being the dethroned heirs of a powerful kingdom and now living in Cambodia.

The next article, titled “Pertahanan terakhir” or “The last stand,”⁵¹ was published by Dewan Budaya, a local newspaper. It seemed to compare Champa to other Malay kingdoms such as Patani and Melaka, mentioning that these places were conquered and incorporated by more powerful entities because they had weak rulers. The article asked, will Malaysia suffer the same fate in the future? The article seemed to suggest that if Malaysia was not strong enough, it would be consumed by other, more powerful, nation states. From this article, we can somewhat allude to the development of the trend by Malaysian Malay journalists to use the Cham historical experience to transmit the prevailing political sentiments held by the Malaysian government.

The next set of newspaper articles that mentioned the Cham were more emotive in their description of the poverty endured by the Cham in Cambodia. It especially highlighted the fact that the Cham were Muslim. The publication of this article seemed to be advantageous to the Cham as it prompted the Malaysian government to provide more support in reducing poverty and illiteracy among the Muslim Cham in Cambodia. These efforts of the Malaysian government were reflected in the article “Malaysia sedia Bantu Islam Kemboja” or “Malaysia is ready to help the Muslims in Cambodia”.⁵² The article

⁵¹ Article published in Dewan Budaya 11th (month Unknown) 1988

⁵² published in Utusan Malaysia, 26th February 1999

published in Utusan Malaysia in 1999, reported that Malaysia was willing to help the Muslim Cham living in Cambodia and will aid in the development of the education and economy of the Muslim Cham. This was significant as it was among the first articles that implied a significant change in Malaysian government policy in directly providing aid for the Muslim Cham in Cambodia and not just the ones in Malaysia.

The next article reflected public interest in providing sustained effort to aid the Muslim Cham in Cambodia. Titled “Sekolah agama Kemboja perlu bantuan” or “Islamic schools in Cambodia need help”⁵³, the article was published in Utusan Malaysia in February 1999. It mentioned an interview with the “Mufti” (religious head) of the Cham Muslims in Cambodia. The article quoted the “Mufti” who said that there was a dearth of development of Islamic education in Cambodia. This was because of the high level of poverty among Cham Muslims in Cambodia. Most of them earned only ten U.S dollars per month. The Mufti hoped that other Muslim countries can help the Muslim Cham in Cambodia. The article was significant because it incorporated the personal views of a Muslim Cham religious head and this further enhanced the authenticity of such reports to the Malaysian Malay public. By reading such articles the public would have been motivated enough to give greater public support through giving more donations and other types of aid to the Muslim Cham of Cambodia. However the Malaysian Malay public was compelled to give more than just financial aid to the Muslim Cham and this was reflected in the articles mentioned below.

⁵³ published in Utusan Malaysia, 26th February 1999

The article published in 15th February 2000, “10 guru ke Kamboja ajar bahasa Melayu”⁵⁴, or “10 teachers to teach Malay language in Cambodia”, was a good example that illustrated public response in helping the Cham Muslims in Cambodia more than just giving financial aid. It reported that the Malay language and Malay cultural institute had organized the collection of a hundred Islamic books for the Cham Muslims in Cambodia. The article also mentioned a plan to send ten Malay teachers to Cambodia to teach Malay language to Cambodian Cham students. This measure, according to the article, would enhance the performance of the students when they enroll in Islamic schools in Malaysia.

Probably in response to the Malaysian Malay public demand for more details on the extent of poverty faced by the Muslim Cham of Cambodia, an article published in *Berita Minggu* 2nd April 2000 titled, “Menyelami derita masyarakat Muslim Champa. Siapa yang boleh menahan air mata daripada berlinang melihat bayi bertelanjang bulat tanpa dibalut seutas benang pun?” (“Experiencing the suffering of the Muslim Cham. Who will not cry when one sees a baby naked because the family is too poor to afford clothing?”), which reports on the dire conditions that the Cham lived in the area of Kompong Chnang, Cambodia.⁵⁵ This article was among the earliest articles that reported on a first hand basis (the reporter was actually there) on the poverty of the Cham. It described in detail the situation faced by the Muslim Cham. The Cham, have no rice, live in abject poverty and it also reported seeing children going to school without wearing clothes. The article then concluded with information on the number of Cham Muslims

⁵⁴ Article published in *Utusan Malaysia* 15th February 2000

⁵⁵ Article published in *Berita Minggu*, 2nd April 2000

that lived in several areas in Cambodia. It must be noted that the descriptions of extreme poverty deepened Malaysian Malays' pity mostly for the Muslim Cham and not for the Hindu Cham⁵⁶ and further enhanced the gravity of the situation to the Malaysian Malay reader.

The academic production of knowledge from academics and Malay newspaper publications on the Cham enhanced the consciousness of the Malaysian Malay academic community and the public of the Cham. More importantly, the Cham provided proof that the Malays are capable of greatness and they fit well into the Malaysian government's agenda in providing greater historical justification of "Malay greatness". The movement towards placing greater emphasis in highlighting the historical achievements of the Malay people of Malaysia occurred in the late eighties and nineties, a period of intense Malay ethno-nationalism. With such favorable sentiments, the Cham were able to use the "historical layer", or the historical consciousness that the Malays of Malaysia have of them, among others, in affirming the importance and uniqueness of the Cham culture and people. This eased their entry into Malaysia.

Cham ethnicity was useful when it was deployed in countries inhabited by Malay Muslims. The historical affinities formed the initial set of "internal documents" of the Cham ethnic passport. Even with this single layer, Cham Muslims gained much access to the Malay Muslim world of Malaysia and they were able to penetrate through the "non-

⁵⁶ Hindu Cham of Phanrang were sometimes featured in Malaysian newspapers however in a very limited way. Nevertheless the Hindu Cham cultural activities were of some interest to the media and this can be seen in the production of a CD-ROM showing the cultural and religious activities of the Cham of Phanrang. This CD ROM is titled "tamadun dan kebudayaan orang Champa" or civilization and culture of the Cham people, produced in 2003

physical” boundaries of Malaysian Malay society. However, it must be said that the Cham have other layers to their ethnic passport. What will be discussed next is the “religious layer” of the ethnic passport

CHAPTER 4

4.1) The “Religious” Layer of the Cham ethnic passport

The production of knowledge on the Cham by Malaysian academics and the Malaysian media (particularly newspapers) has significantly contributed to the enhancement of the interest of the Malaysian government and the Malaysian public on the Cham and their history. The enhancement of the Malaysian Malay historical consciousness of the Cham allowed them greater ease of entry into Malaysian society. In other words, the Cham engaged the “historical layer” of the Cham ethnic passport: the historical knowledge that has been produced on the Cham, to greatly enhance the perception of the Malaysian Malay society that the Cham are, ethnically Malay and eased their entry and acceptance into the country.

However it was the “religious layer” that entrenched Cham presence in Muslim society with greater certainty. To be accepted by a predominantly Muslim society was important but how the Cham remained accepted depended on how the Cham engaged the “religious layer” or the perceptions of other Muslims of their “Muslimness”. This allowed the Cham greater access within pre-dominantly Malay Muslim countries such as Malaysia and Indonesia. It will be shown in this chapter how this was accomplished.

Cham Muslims in Vietnam and Cambodia could be identified through their Muslim names and engagement in activities such as praying and fasting and celebration

of Islamic religious events. Attire was also an important indicator of a Muslim Cham in both countries. Throughout my fieldwork in Vietnam and Cambodia, I observed that Muslim Cham wore the “sarong” and skullcap as everyday attire and I could identify them easily in these countries. Though they may look like other Malay Muslims in Southeast Asia, a factor that may have endeared them further in the context of Malaysian Malay societies, attire is a superficial indicator of Cham “Muslimness” and does not actually explain how the Cham were able to engage the perceptions of other Malay-Muslims of their “Muslimness”. Instead, it was how the Cham participated and engaged two important social institutions, marriage and education, that reveals the process of how Malay-Muslims in Malaysia perceived their “Muslimness”. This factor was crucial in enhancing the acceptance of Cham into Malaysian Malay society, and will be explained below.

4.2) Cham Muslims: Marriage

It was in Cambodia that I met Madam Zulaiha in 2006, a Cambodian Cham Muslim woman who married a Malaysian Malay. She was at that time, the owner of a Malaysian food stall in Phnom Penh. A nice place which sold Malaysian dishes like “Nasi lemak” (coconut rice) and “rendang” (meat cooked with coconut milk). I asked her in Malay, “Pandangan Cik Zulaiha tentang orang Malaysia berkahwin dengan orang Cham bagaimana?” (What are her views on Malaysian men marrying Cham Muslim women?) She answered rather amicably “banyak perempuan Cham mengawini lelaki Melayu Malaysia. Suami saya, dia dari Kuala Lumpur, pernah berkahwin dengan wanita Malaysia tetapi perkahwinan itu sebentar sahaja. Suami saya bercerai dengan perempuan

itu kerana dia kurang ajar denganya dan juga tidak beragama ... saya tak tahulah... saya tak tanya banyak. Dia pilih saya kerana dia mengatakan yang dia suka pada sifat lembut saya dan saya sangat beragama”. (There are many Cham women who marry Malaysian men. My husband who is from Kuala Lumpur, used to be married to a Malaysian woman however the marriage did not last. He divorced her because she was rude and not very religious ... I don’t know ... I didn’t ask a lot about the matter. He chose me because according to him he liked my gentle nature and I am very religious).

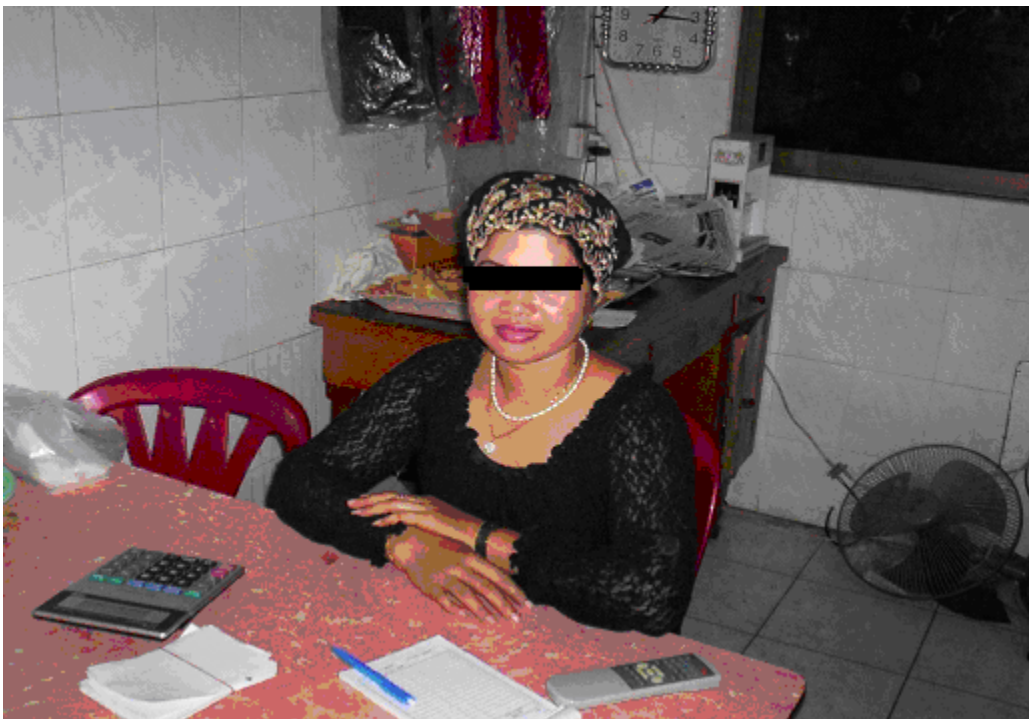


Photo 10: Madam “Zulaiha” at her restaurant in Cambodia. Picture taken by author in 2006

When I asked about her experiences in Malaysia, she said “Selepas saya berkahwin, saya tinggal di Malaysia dan membuat banyak kawan di masjid. Mereka menganggap saya sebagai orang Melayu. Tapi saya selalu mengatakan yang saya orang

Cham dari Kampuchea dan saya bukan orang Melayu Malaysia tetapi dari pandangan mereka orang Cham adalah orang Melayu. Saya setuju sahaja kerana susah saya mahu terangkan perbezaan antara orang Cham dan orang Melayu. Lagipun mereka sangat kagum dengan saya bila saya bercakap dalam bahasa Cham kerana ia sama dengan bahasa melayu. Mungkin sebab itu mereka suka saya dan pada Hari raya saya dijemput ke rumah mereka dan ini membuat saya sangat gembira”. (After my marriage, I lived in Malaysia and made a lot of friends at the mosque. They see me as Malay. But I always say that I am a Cham from Cambodia and not a Malaysian Malay but their view is that the Cham people are Malay people. I have to agree because it is difficult to explain the differences between the Malays and Cham. Furthermore, they are fascinated with me when I speak in Cham language because it is similar to Malay language. Maybe they like me so much that on Hari Raya they invite me to their houses and I am very happy). The conversation revealed fascinating aspects about the nature of Cham interactions in Malaysia. Zulaiha’s marriage to a Malaysian allowed her levels of social interaction and cultural access that would not be easily attained if she did not have the “religious layer”.

Therefore the perception of Malaysian Malay men that Cham Muslim Cambodian women have better religious values compared to Malaysian Malay women, formed part of the “religious layer” of the Cham i.e. the perception of the Malaysian Malay men of the religiousness of Muslim Cham women, a desirable quality of wives of certain Malaysian Malay men in Malaysia. For Zulaiha, the “religious layer” allowed her to effectively engage the cultural and social boundaries in Malaysia because religion and ethnicity are intertwined i.e., Malay identity equates Muslim identity in Malaysia. The

Muslim Cham was able to fit into such a conceptualization because the Cham are regarded as Malay by the Malaysians and coupled with the fact that they are Muslim, enhances the fluidity of interaction of the Cham individual within Malaysia.

I met several Malaysian men during my fieldwork in Cambodia 2006. They were in Cambodia to visit the families of their Cambodian Cham wives who lived there. However they did not allow me to reproduce any of the conversations in any written work of mine. I suspected that most of them married “on the sly” and would prefer to be anonymous. If they had agreed, I would have been able to produce a valuable section focusing on Malaysian Malay husband’s point of view, especially on their perception of Cham Muslim women. This will be done in the future.

The next section will show how the Muslim Cham engaged education, especially Islamic education, to enhance the perception of Malaysian Malay and Indonesian Muslims of the “Muslimness” of the Cham. More importantly, this section will also reveal the advantages of such a perception such as the establishment of relationship networks through enrolment in Madrasahs (or Muslim religious schools) and its importance to Cham Muslims in surviving in Muslim societies.

4.3) Cham Muslims: Education

I was drinking coffee at a roadside stall just beside a mosque in Ho Chi Minh City in 2006 when I heard the loud rumbling of a motorcycle. A large motorcycle emerged

from an alley and it stopped near where I was sitting. A man climbed down the vehicle and sat down at one of the chairs. He appeared to be a regular at the place as the Cham woman served him coffee instantly. They then conversed in Cham. I managed to hear and make out some of it.

The Cham man was saying something about “*sa drei manuk harei ni ... brei ke Imom masjid ni ...*” or “a chicken today ... gave it to the Imam of the mosque...” I then assumed from the words that he had some relationship or dealings with the Imam or religious head of the mosque. The Cham woman left and it would seem that the only people around was the two of us. I could see that he was obviously curious about me, as I do not look like a local Cham or ethnic Vietnamese. Being familiar with such reactions, I looked at him and smiled. Then I offered him a clove “Gudang Garam” cigarette. He smiled in appreciation and muttered to himself “*Thuoc la Indonesia ... Surya nikmat, Gurih, enak ...*” (Indonesian cigarettes ... Surya, enjoyment, heavenly, delicious) I suddenly realized that he was saying something from clove cigarette advertisements on Indonesian television.

Then it dawned on me that apart from the influence of satellite television, he could have actually been in Indonesia and have been exposed to such media content. I asked in Vietnamese “*Anh la nguoi Cham a?*” (Are you a Cham?) I could tell that he was surprised but he did not show it. He lit up his cigarette, inhaled and said “*Dung, toi la nguoi Cham, Anh la nguoi nuoc nao? Sao Anh noi tieng Viet duoc?* ” (Yes. I am a Cham. Which country are you from? How come you can speak Vietnamese?) Thus began the

conversation. His name is Haron and he was around mid-twenties and had just returned from Indonesia where he had graduated from one of Indonesia's Islamic universities. He was supported financially by certain Islamic institutions in Indonesia and Malaysia and had lived in Indonesia for several years.



Photo 11: Mr “Haron” at a restaurant. Picture taken in 2006 in Ho Chi Minh City. I have decided to distort the picture thus in order to further protect his identity as he has divulged sensitive information

He was then unemployed and planned to find work in Malaysia or Indonesia if he could not find work in Vietnam. He said to me, “Saya bahagia sekali jika saya menemui pekerjaan yang sesuai. Saya pulang ke Negara Vietnam kerana ia tempat kelahiran saya, malah ibu bapa saya juga tinggal di sini. Tetapi suasana di sini tidak sesuai ... susah saya mendapat pekerjaan ... saya pasti akan mendapat pekerjaan di Negara orang Islam seperti Malaysia dan Indonesia ... saya ada ramai kawan di sana ... senang juga untuk

mendapatkan makanan halal ... saya rindu makanan seperti mee bakso, opor ayam ... Di sana saya tidak berperasaan aneh ... seperti orang luar ... ganjil ya? Saya merasakan bahawa saya orang luar di dalam Negara saya sendiri! ” (I am happy if I can find some suitable employment. I returned to Vietnam because I was born here, moreover my parents also live here. However, the situation is not very good ... it is hard for me to find jobs ... I am sure I can find jobs in Islamic countries like Malaysia and Indonesia ... I have friends there ... it is easier to find halal food ... I miss mee bakso and fried chicken ... There I do not feel strange ... like here, I feel like an outsider ... strange isn't it? I feel like an outsider in my own country?). This reveals to some extent that he had obviously established some form of relationship networks while he was in Indonesia.

The most interesting part of the conversation was his response to my question “What do you think? Muslims in Vietnam integrate well in Vietnamese society?” He looked at me contemplatively and said, “the Muslim Cham, especially, the young Muslim Cham in Vietnam do not believe that living in this country would be good for their future. Day by day, more Cham people go to countries like Indonesia and Malaysia. There, wages are better, society, culture and life in general is very suitable for the Muslim Cham. Moreover, religion is a way of life”. The conversation with Haron was useful in highlighting several aspects. Firstly was the existence of a sense of alienation felt by Muslim Cham in Vietnam and this was due to the Cham's inability to integrate fully into the society of the Vietnamese majority. More importantly the conversation reveals the perception that Muslim Cham would be better off in countries like Malaysia and Indonesia and that there was a movement of Cham Muslims to such countries. In Haron's

case the “religious layer” is manifested by religious education. It allowed him to gain access to Indonesia and to participate in Indonesian society.

The example mentioned compares two different segments of the Muslim Cham community. Haron, a representative of a Muslim Cham community of Vietnam, was able to engage his “religious layer” in order to attain higher levels of educational and economic actualization. This was enhanced by the social networks of personal relations that he had developed in Indonesia (he retained connections with his alma mater) and Malaysia. These resources gave him greater chances of getting employment in these countries. Madam Zulaiha on the other hand engaged her “religious layer” by playing on the preconceived notions that Malaysian Malay men harboured of the supposed “pious and virtuous qualities” of Muslim Cham Cambodian women. The fascination of Zulaiha’s Malaysian Malay friends of her “Cham-ness” such as her ability to speak Cham language also allowed her to negotiate boundaries (cultural, social, and religious boundaries).

Therefore the Cham are indeed what the Instrumentalist school advocated. They took advantage of perceived ethnic affiliations to achieve specific agendas namely, socio-economic and ethnic self preservation. Alternatively, it must be noted that the Cham could also be seen as merely “deploying” not “manipulating” their identity, especially in the socio-economic sphere. However, I must say that in my observations of the Muslim Cham of Vietnam and Cambodia, they were very much aware of the benefits of being seen as Malays.

It must also be mentioned further that Muslim identity of the Cham has reaped the following advantages for their community:

1. Preservation of Muslim Cham Identity
2. Sponsorship of the building of mosques by Kuwaiti and Saudi Arabian contributors
3. Connection to the Malay world and the international world of Islam.

Islam “re-energized” Cham identity/ethnicity by inspiring the Cham to establish associations to facilitate the continuity of Cham community and their way of life. This could be seen in the establishment of associations such as the Cambodian Muslim Students Association. These associations provided support to Cambodian Muslim students in need and Madrasahs (Islamic religious boarding schools) in Cambodia.

In my opinion, the Muslim Cham most potent form of affirmation of their Muslim identity was through the establishment of mosques. I spoke to a Muslim Cham when I visited one of the biggest mosques in Cambodia and asked him to explain the grandeur of many mosques in Cambodia. He replied that a mosque was more than just a mosque to the Urang Cham (Cham people). It reflected the strength of the Cham community and was obviously a source of great pride. More significantly, he said that the Cham had lost much in their history and that by building such wonderful mosques, the Cham in Cambodia would be able show others that they are progressive people.



Photo 12: Masjid Saudi: Picture taken in Cambodia, Phnom Penh by author in 2006



Photo 13: Picture taken by author in 2006 of a mosque in Vietnam, Chau Doc, Vietnam. Note the size difference.

It was the meeting with several Cham people that impressed upon me the extent of the Cham engagement of the “religious layer”. The interviews that follow will illustrate how the Muslim Cham entered Muslim society in Malaysia and how “deep” did they went. It will also reflect the nature of their engagement with Malay Muslim society. Furthermore these interviews will showcase a different aspect of the “religious layer”. The Muslim Cham, though they were successful in engaging the perceptions of other Muslims in other Southeast Asian countries and even reaped certain advantages from it, were viewed differently by other Cham that are not Muslim.

4.4) Lunch and discovery

I was having lunch in a Malaysian restaurant called Nisa restaurant in Hanoi in 2005 when I noticed two men looking at me with rather inquisitive expressions. “They do not look like ethnic Vietnamese”, I surmised. They began talking to each other, and as I was just a table away from them, I overheard fragments of their conversation. Their conversation was in the Cham language as I instantly recognized the words “sa urang” (one person), “manuk” (chicken), “Lisei” (rice), “oh urang yun” (not a Vietnamese). I was very surprised to find Cham people in Hanoi. This was because many Cham regard Hanoi unfavorably due to various historical reasons.

Emboldened by my curiosity, I spoke in Cham “Chaprow. Harei ni hu dua urang Cham huak lisei Malaysia?” or “Hello. It seems that today there are two Cham people eating Malaysian rice?”. As I expected, they were stunned, but one of them smiled and said “Lisei Malaysia bingi lo, angan kau Ismail” or “Malaysian rice is very delicious, my name is Ismail”. Thus began series of introductions that eventually developed into a very interesting conversation. Ismail, aged twenty-five years old, and Muhamad, twenty-six years old, were Cham from Chau Doc and An Giang provinces in Southern Vietnam where there were large Muslim Cham communities. They worked in Hanoi as delivery boys for two years and that due to the difficulties of getting “halal” (food and beverage prepared according to Islamic methods of preparation) sustenance in Hanoi, they had their lunch almost exclusively in Nisa Restaurant. I mostly talked about my experiences with Cham communities in Vietnam and Cambodia and they expressed certain

repugnance when I told them of my experience with Hindu Cham communities and that they ate “babuy” (pork). Both of them were of the opinion that they were “better” than the Hindu Cham because pork is an unclean animal and they would not eat pork even if they were dying of starvation. Furthermore, the “Kafir” Cham or “unbeliever” Cham “myum lak” or “drink spirits” and get “mbuk” or “drunk” and they despised drunken behavior. When I asked them whether it was possible to take their pictures, they replied in Vietnamese “Khong duoc...noi nhay cam” or “No...speak sensitive”. I took it to mean that they understood that we were talking about sensitive topics and that it would not be wise for their pictures to be taken if I were writing about them.

Despite this setback, I gained plenty of interesting information from Ismail who revealed that he had spent a year working in Malaysia as a construction worker and had worked in many “Negeri” (Malay States) such as Kelantan, Johore and Negeri Sembilan. Before he worked in Malaysia, he enrolled in Malay language classes in Ho Chi Minh City and learnt Malay. According to him, learning “Bahasa Melayu” or the Malay language was easy because it was so similar to “Dalah Cham” or Cham language. After several months learning the language he went off to work in Malaysia.

Ismail especially liked working in the capital, Kuala Lumpur, because he earned the highest wages there. Despite the high cost of living, he felt that working in Malaysia was pleasant because he felt very much at ease. There were plenty of opportunities to talk to strangers and Malaysian Malays were generally friendly to him. More significantly, he said that “Di Vietnam, orang lihat saya, kulit saya yang gelap, muka saya tidak serupa

dengan orang Yun. Kadang kala saya rasa hina” or “In Vietnam, the people there looked at me, my dark skin, my face very different from the Vietnamese. Sometimes I feel ashamed”.

Ismail’s experience in Malaysia was very different. He explained that the most important factor was the fact that he was Muslim. According to him, “Saya seorang Islam, di Masjid-masjid Malaysia ini sangat berguna, apabila saya kata saya seorang Cham-Melayu Islam, orang di Masjid selalu menolong saya. Di Masjid, saya mendapat pekerjaan pertama saya dari Imam. Dia mempunyai banyak kawan” or “I am a Muslim, this is very useful in Malaysian mosques, when I say that I am a Cham Malay Muslim, people at the mosque would always help me. In the mosque, I got my first job from the Imam. He has a lot of friends”. I was very intrigued. I asked him whether the openness of the people he met in the mosque was due his ethnicity and religion. He laughed and said that the people in some mosques were more “aloof” than others and some had never heard of Cham before, especially those in the more upscale mosques located in major cities in Malaysia. Furthermore, said Ismail, if he was lucky, he would meet an Imam that had been to Muslim Cham areas before in Cambodia and Vietnam. He found such Imams in Kelantan who had many connections with Cham communities. Some of them could even speak Cham. Ismail said that these people were “istimewa” (special) because they understood the Cham people and would readily help them.

Ismail stayed at a mosque in Kelantan for several months working as a caretaker of the mosque’s grounds. For reasons I could only guess, Ismail refused to reveal the name of the mosque and the village. However he indicated that it was located not far

away from Pengkalan Chepa, a town in Kelantan. His most memorable experience was when he was asked to help out in the “Korban” rituals (slaughter of sheep for Hari Raya Haji which is a day that commemorates the pilgrimage of Muslims to Mecca). At first he was quite hesitant as he felt at that time that he was not part of the village. However, he found that the villagers were already accustomed to his presence (as he almost always prays five times a day) at the Mosque, and more importantly, the *Imam* even referred him to his nickname “Mail Hitam” (“Mail” is a short form of Ismail and “Hitam” was the Malay reference to being dark skinned). Being nicknamed was important because it reflected a certain level of acceptance of the villagers of Ismail, an outsider. It could be seen from Ismail’s example that being Muslim was important in gaining acceptance in that village.

It must be noted that it was the Imam who validated Ismail’s Muslim identity and this apparently was the sign of approval that he needed to become part of the village. He said, “Saya orang Islam dan orang Islam tolong orang Islam yang lain” or “I am Muslim and Muslims help each other” and added very significantly “Bila saya pulang ke kampung saya di Vietnam, saya akan menggunakan pengalaman saya dalam masyarakat Islam Malaysia untuk membuat orang Cham lebih maju lagi” or “when I return to my village in Vietnam, I will use my experiences in Muslim Malaysian society to further contribute to Cham people’s progress”.

Thus it can be seen that Ismail used his “religious layer” to engage the perceptions of other Malay-Muslims of his “Muslimness” in order to participate in the social

networks, establish webs of personal relationships, and engage in certain processes within pre-dominantly Malay Muslim countries, such as Malaysia. For Ismail, his Muslim identity became a major component that ensured his participation in Malay society at large. Using a component of his ethnic passport, i.e. his “religious layer”, the mosque became his “check point” that allowed “safe passage” across social and cultural boundaries that exist in Malaysia. The Imam of the mosque somewhat acted in the same way as a check point officer. It was through the Imam that Ismail got the “stamp” of approval, which gave him his “entry” and engagement into the social and cultural fabric of the Malay world.

The meeting with Ismail was important as it highlighted several issues. Firstly, the conversation revealed a sentiment that I felt within Ismail of being “better” morally than the Hindu Cham. Secondly, it revealed the trend that religious identity was more important than ethnic identity in Malaysia and the Cham were able to capitalize on this in an advantageous way. However, the most important thing that I have learnt from the conversation was the inspiration that the young Cham derived from their exposure to Malay Muslim societies in Malaysia.

Apparently some Muslim Cham felt that they were “better” than the Hindu Cham. I have found that this sentiment was very much apparent among many Muslim Cham that I encountered in Vietnam and Cambodia. The other feature of the “religious layer” of the Cham ethnic passport seemed to be composed of sentiments of “superiority” that resulted when Muslim Cham affiliated themselves with other Muslim communities which they

saw as “superior”. I view this as an inevitable process because there were few or no economically successful and “powerful” Muslim communities in Indochina that the Muslim Cham would naturally gravitate to.

The Muslim Cham, by affiliating themselves to a more religiously empowered and politically powerful ethnic community such as the Muslim Malays of Malaysia, enhanced (at least in their eyes) their position in their respective nations. This aspect was alluded to in Philip Taylor’s recent article titled “Economy in Motion: Cham Muslim Traders in the Mekong Delta”. According to Taylor “The Cham people certainly find strong affinities with the cosmopolitan dimensions of Islam, reflecting perhaps their intercultural livelihoods as frontier dwellers and traders”.⁵⁷ Furthermore, “the Cham are prolific traders. They are more active in trade than the “Kinh” in that a greater proportion of Cham people work in trade. Surpassing even the ethnic Chinese, who are renowned locally as an entrepreneurial group, yet whose business activities take place principally within the urban contexts in which they live, the Cham specialise in trading far beyond their localities”.⁵⁸

However the most intriguing part of the article was Taylor’s assertion that due to the “pronounced emphasis of Islam in Cham settlements...it has also led to heightened consciousness among the Cham of the moral exclusivity in relation to their non-muslim

⁵⁷ The Asia Pacific Journal of Anthropology Vol. 7, No. 3, December 2006, pp 237-250, “Economy in motion: Cham muslim traders in the Mekong Delta” p.246

⁵⁸ Ibid.p.239

neighbours”.⁵⁹ I argue that the basis of the Muslim Cham’s moral exclusivity, of which I will interpret as the Cham having a sentiment that they are “better” than their non-muslim members, must be understood as an important aspect of the “religious layer” because it “morally empowers” the Muslim Cham. However this affected the Muslim Cham relationship with non Muslim Cham.

I experienced some notions of Muslim Cham “superiority” during a visit in 2004 to a Cham village in Vietnam where there was a small Muslim community in a middle of a predominantly Hindu Cham village. It was the time of “Ramuwan”, or the Cham version of “Ramadan” or the fasting month. As I observed the Cham preparing food to break their fast, a few Hindu Cham individuals walked past a Muslim Cham individual who had just finished performing his ablutions in preparation for prayers later in the evening. They reeked of “lak” (locally brewed spirits) and were obviously “mbuk” (drunk). It must be said that during that time, “Kate”, or Cham New Year, was also being celebrated by the Hindu Cham at the same time the Muslim Cham were fasting. The reaction of the Muslim Cham was fascinating. I saw his face contorted with extreme disgust and he walked hurriedly into the mosque. He apparently made an issue of this to the other Cham who shook their heads in the direction of the drunken Hindu Cham individuals.

A Hindu Cham friend told me later (after I described to him what I saw) that Muslim Cham found the Hindu Cham drinking and eating habits rather foul, as well as sinful. They also believed that Muslim Cham who do not partake in such activity were

⁵⁹ *ibid*

good people and will be rewarded in the afterlife. He laughed wryly saying that Hindu Cham would not be rewarded in the afterlife then, unlike the Muslim Cham. This experience revealed to me the existence of a sense of “moral and religious superiority” felt by the Muslim Cham over the Hindu Cham.

This brings home the point that even though the Muslim Cham benefited from the deployment of their Muslim identity in other Muslim societies. I observed that this came at a cost. This was the observation of a Hindu Cham whom I had the opportunity to talk to in a Cham village in Phanrang called Plei Pablap located in Southern Vietnam. It must be noted that he declined my request to mention his name in the thesis and would prefer to be anonymous.

It would seem that Mr “Chinh”, (he had refused permission for me to reveal his name and also any other details about him) had less than positive views on the Muslim Cham. Even though he had great respect for the Muslim Cham and had many friends among them, he was concerned about certain developments happening among the young Muslim Cham at present. He mentioned that once as he was having some coffee with a Muslim Cham friend, they talked about the topic of Cham and Vietnamese relations. His Muslim Cham friend would compare many stories from the Quran (Islamic religious text) to the many Cham tales and stories he had remembered especially those that had some element of conflict with the Vietnamese.

“Chinh” was irritated because the Muslim Cham friend would always say that the main reason that the Cham were dominated by the Vietnamese was primarily due to their lack of faith in Islam. “Chinh” was annoyed because he believed that the non-Muslim Cham community had survived till today because they had maintained the traditional ways of Cham life. Islamic faith had nothing to do with it.

“Chinh” broke contact with the Cham Muslim friends as he felt uncomfortable talking to them after that. Furthermore, “Chinh” felt that such Muslim Cham were not really Cham people because they had abandoned, according to “Chinh”, the “true Cham” ways and more significantly became more like the Malays and Cham he had met in Cambodia and Ho Chi Minh City in terms of mannerisms and behavior. But what “Chinh” envied was the fact that Muslim Cham had more opportunities to go to countries such as Malaysia and Indonesia to look for work and admitted that in some ways the Cham Muslims he knew were better off economically. On the other hand, he attributed this to the fact that the Muslim Cham had abandoned all vestiges of traditional Cham ways, language and customs and accepted a version of Cham identity that was most closely aligned to Malay cultural identity.

The production of knowledge on the Cham by Malaysian academics and the Malaysian media enhanced the interest of the Malaysian government and the Malaysian public on the Cham and Champa’s history. The enhancement of the historical consciousness allowed the Cham greater ease of entry into the consciousness of Malaysian society. Malaysian Malays think and perceive the Cham as ethnically Malay

and this eased the Cham being accepted by Malaysian Malay society. This is the historical layer, the first set of internal document of the Cham ethnic passport.

However it is the “religious layer” that entrenched the Cham presence in Malaysian Malay society with greater certainty. Being accepted by a predominantly Muslim society is one thing, but how they remained accepted depended on how the Cham engaged the “religious layer” or the perception of other Muslims of their “Muslimness”. This feature allowed Muslim Cham greater access in pre-dominantly Muslim countries such as Malaysia and Indonesia. For Zulaiha, the perception of her “Muslimness” by Malaysian Malay men enhanced her attractiveness and this eased her entry Malaysian Malay society. For Haron, access to Islamic education allowed him to enter other Muslim societies such as Indonesia and he was able to establish networks that increased his opportunities to find employment. For Ismail, his Muslim identity became a major component in ensuring his participation in Malay Muslim society at large. Using a component of his ethnic passport, i.e., the “religious layer”, the Mosque became his “check point” that allowed “safe passage” across social and cultural boundaries that exist in Malaysia. Ismail’s example reflects certain developments within the Cham community.

By affiliating themselves to a more empowered and powerful ethnic community such as the Muslim Malays of Malaysia, the Cham enhanced (at least in their eyes) their position within the communities from which they originally came, such as Cambodia and Vietnam. Furthermore, it was easy for the three Muslim Cham individuals to gain entry into the Malaysian Muslim world because they had deployed the set of “internal

documents” in their ethnic passport, i.e., the “historical” layer (the historical consciousness of the Malaysian Malays of the Cham) and “religious” layer (perception by other Malay Muslims of their “Muslimness”).

CHAPTER 5

5.1) The “oppressed minority” layer of the Cham ethnic passport

The enhancement of the Malaysian Malay historical consciousness of the Muslim Cham allowed them greater ease of entry into Malaysian society. In other words the Muslim Cham engaged the “historical layer” of the Cham ethnic passport: the historical knowledge that has been produced on the Cham, to greatly enhance the perception of the Malaysian Malay society that the Cham are, ethnically Malay. The “religious layer” entrenched the Cham presence in Muslim society with greater certainty. In other words, being accepted by a predominantly Muslim society is one thing but how they remained accepted, depends on how the Cham engage the “religious layer” or the perception of other Muslims of their “Muslimness”, allowed the Cham greater access within predominantly Malay Muslim countries such as Malaysia and Indonesia.

We now turn to the “oppressed minority” layer that, we shall argue in this section, provided the primary source of motivation or driving force for the Cham to enter other societies. There are several aspects to this. Firstly, the Cham in Vietnam developed a propensity to exit their countries because they are reacting against being perceived and categorized as minorities. This enhanced their sense of being alienated in their own country. Secondly, the economic oppression faced by the Cham in Cambodia, especially the Muslim Cham, also precipitated the movement to “exit” the country. Thus the

emotive dynamics that resulted from such experiences, led to the Cham to be especially attracted to other cultures and traditions which they see as more powerful. This would explain why the Muslim Cham wanted to enter other societies in Southeast Asia, it is because, in such countries that they feel more empowered.

The “oppressed minority” layer must be understood not just in terms of how the Cham react against political and economic oppression. The way the Cham, both Hindu and Muslim, had been historically conditioned to think and react like an oppressed minority must also be understood as an important feature in understanding with more complexity the dynamics of the “oppressed minority” layer. But first, it is important to look at the factors that led to the disempowerment of the Cham and how the Cham feel and react against it.

One source of disempowerment was the assimilation of the Cham into Vietnamese society and especially the effects of being relegated the status of an ethnic minority or “dan toc thieu so”. A book titled “Vietnam: Hình Ảnh Cộng Đồng 54 Dân Tộc” or “Vietnam: Image of the Community of 54 Ethnic groups” highlights this aspect succinctly.⁶⁰ The book reflected the overt attempt of the Vietnamese state to showcase its power, through the categorization of the country’s ethnic minorities into fifty-four essential groups along specific linguistic, cultural, and socio-economic lines. The Cham were portrayed as a powerless ethnic community that needed to be aided by the Vietnamese and this will be further examined in the following segments.

⁶⁰ Thông tin xã Việt Nam. (1996). Viet Nam, hình ảnh cộng đồng 54 dân tộc = Vietnam image of the community of 54 ethnic groups. Hà Nội, Văn hóa dân tộc.

The Vietnamese state asserted its hegemony through such categorizations in the attempt to portray the ethnic minorities as an integral part of the Vietnamese nation. The book's main agenda, which included showcasing Vietnam as a nation progressing and successful under Communism, was to compartmentalize the ethnic minorities of Vietnam along linguistic, socio-economic, and cultural differences. The Ba Na peoples "language belongs to the Mon Khmer group", "live in houses on stilts", "venerate spirits..."⁶¹ etc. The Brau, a Mon Khmer group in Kontum province "led a nomadic life for a long time", "... practice slash and burn agriculture ... and they always obtain low productivity" and "due to backward situation and habits of a nomadic life ... the Brau group are under developed". It would not be possible to reproduce here the characteristics listed for all the fifty-four ethnic groups, but it is obvious that the book's authors adhered to a fixed formula when describing an ethnic group. The description invariably includes the criticism of the "primitiveness" of the economic life and cultural traditions, such as animal sacrifice, of the ethnic group.

If the book had wanted to seem objective about the country's ethnic minorities, it should not have described them in a belittling way. For example, this is what is written about the Cham: "The Vietnamese Party and State pay great concern to restoring and preserving the traditional culture of the Cham. However, the life of the Cham, especially the Cham in Ninh Thuan and Binh Thuan, is facing many difficulties and the backwardness still exists among them".⁶² The statement clearly depicted the Cham as a

⁶¹ Ibid. p.24

⁶² Ibid .p.25

people on the decline and required state intervention to prevent such an occurrence. Only by guiding the Cham and the other minorities on the “socialist path”, could their fortunes be reversed.

The compartmentalization of ethnic minorities along linguistic, socio-economic, and cultural differences was necessary as it effectively highlighted the “backwardness” of ethnic minorities. This gave the State a legitimate excuse to impose its version of morality and progress. In so doing, the Vietnamese regime also canvasses the omnipotence of the Communist ideology in the “emancipation” of the ethnic groups from their primitiveness. Though the intentions to assist ethnic minorities may constitute a real desire on the part of the State, there are contradictions between policy and practice.

This Vietnamese perception that the Cham needed to be “saved” produces a reaction against the internalization of such beliefs. This gave rise to an opposing set of beliefs that intensified the Chams’ sense of themselves and led to a synthesis of Cham traditions with those of the Malays. Aspects of this can be seen in the growing use of the Malay language in certain chants in ancient ceremonies of the Cham such as Rija, a ceremony to celebrate spirits of the ancient Kings of Champa. By doing so, the Cham believed that they would also acquire the “semangat” (loosely translated as power or spirit) of the Malays. This phenomena was remarked upon by Ing-Britt Trankell in her analysis of the Cham people’s activities in cults of possession, “The tremendous energy and expenditure spent nowadays on the possession cult may be seen as a way in which people direct their agency towards overcoming the guilt attached to their perceived and

real complicity in historical events, as well as towards the ambition of restoring the dignity, pride and socio-political status of their community, to change it from that of estranged royal subjects to that of a proud, prosperous and sovereign ethnic group”.⁶³

The Cham, then, were trying to compensate for their “feelings of guilt” by an intensification of certain cultural activities. I would argue that this points to another important perspective in understanding the Cham, especially in regard to their reactions against such negative and belittling categorizations by the Vietnamese. The emotive dynamics of rejecting minority classifications and resisting the assimilative tendencies of the state generated greater receptiveness to elements from other cultures, which the Cham perceived to be more powerful. This would explain the Cham ability to participate successfully in the cultural and social dynamics of Malaysian society because the Cham willingly internalized certain facets of Malay culture. Thus the “oppressed minority layer” provided an impetus among the Cham to seek solidarity with foreign communities that are similar to strengthen and empower Cham ethnic identity

As mentioned earlier, the “oppressed minority” layer, the primary source of motivation or driving source for the Cham to enter other societies, exists because the Cham needed to feel more empowered. This led to the development of a propensity among the Cham in Vietnam to exit their countries of origin because they are reacting against the perception and categorization of them as minorities. The sense of being

⁶³ Trankell, Ing Britt. “Songs of our Spirits: Possession and Historical Imagination among the Cham in Cambodia”. *Asian Ethnicity* 4, no.1 (2003) p.44

alienated in Vietnam precipitated the need by the Cham to seek empowerment in other places.

It was a conversation with three Rade men in the Central Highlands that gave me a more nuanced insight into the issue of Cham empowerment. Their opinions became more valuable as one took into account that they are ethnic minorities in Vietnam themselves and greatly empathize with the Cham situation. This empathy was enhanced by the fact that they spoke a similar language to the Cham and have had long historical relationship with them. They understood the dynamics of the relationship between the Cham and Vietnamese better because they have been subjected to the same forces of assimilation as well.

5.2) Meeting with three Rade men

I was in the Central Highlands near the city of Ban Me Thuot, the biggest most developed city in the Central Highlands of Vietnam. However, I observed the heavy and ominous presence of the Vietnamese military there. In a motorcycle ride from Ban Me Thuot to Pleiku, I observed at least four military bases along the way and according to my Vietnamese friend who was with me, the Central Highlands have always been regarded as an unstable area by the Vietnamese military. I also observed the highly intimidating presence of off duty Vietnamese army personnel in many shops and restaurants at night. Indeed the first visit to the Central Highlands was an interesting experience. I related my experience to Dr Po Dharma, a former leader of F.U.L.R.O,

when I visited him in Kuala Lumpur after my fieldwork. The reaction I received was most interesting as I described what I saw. There was a long silence and a brief look of anger and finally, a look that I can only describe as profound acceptance. He did not say anything but what he did not say, spoke a thousand words.

At this point it is important to know the historical background of the relationship between the Cham and the other ethnic minorities of the Central Highlands first before moving further. It must be said that before the demise of the kingdom of Champa which precipitated the southward expansion of the Vietnamese into Cham lands, a process that culminated in the end of Champa as a sovereign polity in the 18th century with the capture and execution of Champa's last King. Champa had within its territories different ethnic groups that maintained tributary relations with rulers of Champa. These interactions are for example mentioned in the Myson Stelae Inscription of Jaya Harivarman I.⁶⁴ Myson was the greatest of all the temple complexes in Champa. It was the center of religious activity for religious and political classes of Champa.

The Myson stelae contained an interesting description of the career of the Cham King Jaya Harivarmadeva and also mentioned the erection of a temple and statues in honour of the god Srisanabhadresvara⁶⁵ and described the victories of the Cham king over his enemies, the Khmers (Cambodians) and Vietnamese. However, what was also interesting about the inscription was the description of the Kiratas: "The King of

⁶⁴ R C Majumdar, *Ancient Indian Colonies in the Far East Vol., Champa*. Greater India Society Publication No.1, The Punjab Sanskrit Book Depot, Lahore, 1927. The inscription was edited by Finot, who compiled it in the book (B.E.F., Vol. IV, and p.963, No.XXI).

⁶⁵ Ibid. 178.

Cambodge learnt that the prince Harideva, his brother-in-law, had perished with all his troops and generals.....by the prowess of Jaya Harivarman. Then.....the kings of Kiratas.....the plain, the forest of south, the village of Slay as far as the forest Vatta...fight. Jaya Harivarman defeated the army of Kiratas. The Kirata kings proclaimed his brother in law Vansaraja, brother of his wife, as king in the city of Madyamagrama...Jaya Narivarman led his army, defeated Vansaraja, captured the Kirata army and defeated them all”.⁶⁶

This description was valuable in highlighting the historical relationship the Cham had with the Kiratas, or “savage people”, that lived in the jungles around Champa. According to Michael Vickery in his paper “Revising Champa’s History” presented in “Symposium on New Scholarship on Champa”⁶⁷, the Kiratas, mentioned in the Myson Stelae, were the “non-Cham peoples in the mountains and forests to the west of Champa coastline”.⁶⁸ Today, the area west of the Champa’s coastline, pinpoint to the area of the Central Highlands where various Austroasiatic, Austronesian and even Mon Khmer people still live today. The Kiratas were powerful enough to challenge the Cham king militarily and even directly challenged his rule. The long history of complex relations between the Cham and the Kiratas were significant enough to be classified, at least in the consciousness of the Cham kings, as a separate people.

⁶⁶ Ibid, pp. 179-180

⁶⁷ Symposium on New Scholarship on Champa, 5-6 August 2004, Organised by the Asia Research Institute: National University of Singapore. *Revising Champa’s History* by Michael Vickery.

⁶⁸ Ibid. 39

The historical relationship of the Central Highland peoples with the Vietnamese was especially turbulent during the Ngo Dinh Diem's rule. Many highland peoples were forced to abandon their highland communities to live in the lowland areas of Vietnam. This led to severe disruptions to the highlander's traditional way of life and this was exacerbated as the Central highlander tribes were often targeted by the North Vietnamese communist forces as a source of manpower and support. As a consequence, American military forces transformed many highlander villages into fenced settlements patrolled by American soldiers. The formation of resistance groups by the highlanders such as *Bajaraka*, (an acronym taken from the names of several ethnic minority tribes such as *Bahnar*, *Jarai*, *Rade* and *Katu* to fight for an independent state for highlanders in the Central Highlands further complicated relations with the American and Vietnamese military and embroiled them deeper into the conflict.

With such awareness of the long established historical relationship with the Cham and the experience of the Central Highlanders in modern history, it was no surprise that I felt more than a little elated when I met three Rade men in a shop one morning. They were drinking beer for breakfast. The usual stares ensued as I, nonchalantly, lit my clove cigarette. The unique smell of the cigarette intrigued them, and they began to talk among themselves. As unobtrusively as I could, I tried my best to understand their conversation and managed to identify words like "urang" (person) and "harei" (day). Extremely pleased to have found one of the "Malay like" peoples of the Central Highlands, the next step was to find the ethnic group they belonged to. I offered them my clove cigarettes and they seemed to be quite pleased. I talked to one of them in Vietnamese "Chao Anh, Anh

la Urang Jarai a?” or “Hello, Are you a Jarai?”. Surprised and shocked that I could speak Vietnamese, he shook his head, smiled and said “No, I am a Rade”. With that, a very interesting conversation ensued. I got to know that they were from the Rade ethnic community, working in a coffee plantation.



Photo 14: The Rade men I talked to in Ban Me Thuot, picture by author taken in 2006

They had moved out of their villages not too long ago and decided to look for employment in Ban Me Thuot. They were extremely fascinated when I said some sentences in Malay, especially the numerals from one to ten as it sounds so similar to the Rade language. I asked them whether they could try looking for work overseas and I got an interesting reply in Rade and Vietnamese ““Tim lam viec kho lam O Vietnam...nuoc ngoai kho hon. Khong biet tieng Anh, tieng Malai, tieng Viet. Duk di glai¹ tot hon...ca-phe nhieu...co tien” or “It is difficult to find work in Vietnam...overseas will be more difficult. Don’t know the English, Malay or Vietnamese language. Sit in forest is

better...much coffee...have money”. Then, I informed them that the Muslim Cham found better opportunities in countries such as Malaysia and Indonesia and that it would be good if they explored similar avenues. I got a most interesting reply from one of them: “Urang Cham co tien, toi di thanh pho Ho Chi Minh gap ban nam truoc...nha lon...” or “The Cham people have money, I went to Ho Chi Minh City to meet a friend last year...big house...” I could see that he was trying to pronounce something with difficulty.

Looking at me for help, the Rade man took a string of “Pho” noodle (Vietnamese rice noodle) and laid it on the table to form a shape of a dome. Then I realized that he was trying to show me the dome shape of a mosque! I exclaimed: “Anh muon noi masjid ah?” or “You want to say mosque?”. He laughed and said, “Dung!, toi khong biet noi...masjid la nha lon Cham Islam...ho nhieu tien” or “Yes! I don’t know how to say it...mosque is the big house of the muslim Cham...they have lots of money”. I asked him whether Rade people would like to be Muslim and become rich like the Cham. He answered, “Khong, Urang Rade song day tot lam. Toi la nguoi co doc. Anak Rade anak glai. Urang Cham Islam co tien nhung” ... or “No, the Rade people live here better, I am a Christian... the children of the Rade are children of the forest. The Muslim Cham have money but”He struggled to find the words, but after a brief discussion with his other Rade friends, he turned to me and said in Rade language: “Ia Mata”, which I immediately understood as it is similar to the Malay term “Air Mata”, meaning tears. He made a motion to illustrate the act of crying. I understood that he was trying to convey a notion that the Cham were in some kind of difficult situation. Then he said in Rade language: “Urang

Cham kra...urang Yun biya” or “The Cham are monkeys...the Vietnamese are crocodiles”, and then made a motion with his hands showing the crocodile eating the monkey up. I put the pieces of the sentences together in a more coherent fashion and somewhat understood that what he was trying to say that there was (at least to him) some tensions between the Muslim Cham of Vietnam and the Vietnamese government.

Despite those tensions, the Muslim Cham were nevertheless capable of attaining greater economic success compared to the other ethnic minorities in Vietnam. When I asked the Rade men about the Hindu Cham, whether they think they are as successful as the Muslim Cham, they laughed loudly for a very long time and said in Vietnamese and Cham, “Cham nay co Thap Cham, van hoa thoi... Kra duk di glai...khong ai biet” or “These Cham have the Cham towers and culture only. Monkeys live in the forest...nobody knows about them”. I take this to mean that the Rade individual thinks that the Hindu Cham, even though they have vestiges of civilization and culture are not very successful and are not looked at in high regard by others.

The interview was important because the Rade men highlighted several key features that described Cham activities and how they are generally perceived in Vietnam.

- The Muslim Cham are more successful than the Hindu Cham
- The Hindu Cham were not seen by the Rade positively
- Some tension between the Cham and Vietnamese. Perhaps the analogy of the monkey being eaten up by the crocodile somehow described an unequal relationship between the two?

In other words the environment in Vietnam was not very positive for the Cham as an ethnic community and the interview did indicate the existence of a sense that the Cham were being alienated in their own country.

The interview that really revealed the extent of the sense of alienation felt by the Cham, especially the Muslim Cham was with a Chinese Malaysian whom I met in Ho Chi Minh City. In his forties and a Muslim convert, he had insisted that his identity and his restaurant not be named. This was because he had been in trouble with certain Vietnamese military officials that patronized his restaurant a few years ago.. They came late at night and were very drunk. They got angry when one of them asked to be served chicken “satay” or spiced chicken meat grilled on sticks. He had run out of such supplies and could not serve them. He was threatened and forced to serve them “satay” nevertheless by asking a restaurant nearby to give him some meat. The memory of it seemed to rile him very much during the interview.

Despite this, he was very friendly and did not hesitate to share valuable insights with me on present day relationships between Muslim Cham and Vietnamese. He had been in Ho Chi Minh City since the early nineties and had many friends among the Cham. He believed that the Muslim Cham had always been looked at with great suspicion by the Vietnamese authorities, and this suspicion had intensified ever since the events of September 11, 2001 (the attack on the World Trade Centre towers by Muslim extremist of the Al Qaeda). I asked him about the nature of suspicion the Muslim Cham faced in Vietnam before this event. He replied in English that “The Vietnamese

government always found the strong unity of the orang Cham Islam (Muslim Cham) very disturbing...you know many Cham go to Sembahyang Jumaat (Friday prayers) in large numbers. The Vietnamese don't like Cham groups to get together in one place. Also, they are also scared of the Cham being influenced by the Imams of Malaysia. I know several Imams that got kicked out of the country for teaching anti-government things to the Cham...all this happened before September 11!" I was quite intrigued and pressed on for more information.

I asked whether Cham, especially the young Muslim Cham preferred to leave the country. He said rather amicably in loud Malaysian accented English "of course they do la!. The anak Cham (young Cham) cannot tahan (stand or endure) the pemerintah komunis! (Communist government). Many of them find work in Malaysia and come and beri duit (give money) to their keluarga (family). He also told me that the animosity between the Cham Muslims and Vietnamese government reached a height in 1975 when the Vietnamese Communist Party took control of Southern Vietnam. Muslim Cham were not allowed to go on Haji or pilgrimage to Mecca, In addition, the wealth of many Muslim Cham were confiscated and Muslim Cham religious heads were questioned and imprisoned by the Vietnamese for suspicion of aiding the Americans during the Vietnam War. According to him, this piece of information was related to him by old Cham men who had experienced the tribulations after the collapse of Saigon in 1975. They often talked to him after prayers at the mosque.

Before I left, I asked him if the situation today was worse or better for the Muslim Cham. His reply was very insightful; he said: “Today the Vietnamese government is very strong. Economy very good but this is only those who can fit in the system. But I don’t think the Muslim Cham can fit in. The orang Cham tua (Old Cham people) masih ingat (still remember) what the Komunis bangsat (communist bastards) did to them. The young Cham feel tertekan (pressured) because their bahasa (language), agama (religion) and even kaum (race) is different from the orang (people) majority. They also cannot find pekerjaan (work). Many of them are unemployed...so they cabut (run) to Malaysia la!”. The interview was especially valuable because it verified the fact that the Muslim Cham perceived that they were living in a hostile environment and would rather live and work some other place rather than Vietnam.

How does the perception of the Rade men of the Cham and the Chinese Muslim convert contribute to the explanation of the “oppressed minority layer?” how does it explain why the Cham wanted to enter other societies in Southeast Asia to feel more empowered?. It must be said that the Cham in Vietnam developed a propensity to exit their countries because they are reacting against being perceived and categorized as minorities, a fact that enhanced their sense of being alienated in their own country. The environment of alienation revealed by the interview with the Rade men also highlighted the unequal economic and social development between the different types of Cham communities that reside in Vietnam. The interview with the Chinese Muslim individual verified the fact that the Muslim Cham really lived in a hostile environment and this led them to develop a propensity to exit Vietnam in order to look for better opportunities

elsewhere. Taking all this into regard, the Cham in Vietnam therefore developed a propensity to exit their countries because they are reacting against being perceived and categorized as minorities, a fact that that enhanced their sense of being alienated in their own country. This is the first key feature of the “oppressed minority” layer.

The second feature of the “oppressed minority” layer is that it is also conditioned by extreme poverty. In other words, the economic oppression faced by the Cham in Cambodia, especially the Muslim Cham, also precipitated the movement to “exit” the country.⁶⁹ According to the World Bank report done in 2005, Cambodia (based on a survey done in 1997), 34.1% of Cambodians lived below \$1 U.S.D a day and 77.7% lived below \$2 U.S.D a day.⁷⁰ I observed first hand such poverty when I spent a night in a Cham village in Cambodia. My experience there will be described in the following segment. After experiencing the realities of poverty of Muslim Cham in Cambodia, I understood with more clarity the issues faced by the Cham community and more importantly, the true extent of the damage the Cham community suffered during the horrendous years of being ruled by the Khmer Rouge and why the Malaysian Malays were so committed to help them.

The village was situated in Takeo province in Cambodia and was called “Kompong Jeul” or “Lime Village”. I found the village quite by accident when my Khmer friend and I looked for mosques throughout Takeo province in order to find Cham villages. The method was simple. As soon as we spotted the star and crescent moon spire

⁶⁹ http://devdata.worldbank.org/wdi2005/Table2_5.htm

⁷⁰ Ibid.

of a mosque in the distance, we just headed for it. Our arrival (we rode on dirt bikes) caused quite a stir as such loud machines were rarely seen in that part of Cambodia. I entered the village and walked to the mosque to find the Imam. He was quite young in his thirties. He could speak Malay as his “Tok Guru” or religious teacher was from Kelantan⁷¹, which obliged him to learn Malay, the primary language used for his religious studies. He invited me to stay in the village. I agreed as it was getting dark.

I immediately noticed that the village was lacking in the most basic necessities, such as running water and electricity. I was appalled to find that the villagers bathed and drank from ponds where rainwater had accumulated. The Imam offered me a sachet of shampoo and told me to bathe in order to get ready for solat maghrib (evening prayers). I complied, not wanting to offend him. After bathing and prayers, I sat down with the Imam and had a very interesting, though sad, conversation with him. He told me that most of the young children suffered from malaria and there were little opportunities for them to be educated. He came to the village to help them as much as he could.

At that point of time, it was already dark and huge swarms of mosquitoes plagued me. However it would seem that the Cham villagers were not really bothered by it. By then many had gathered at the veranda of the mosque where I and the Imam were talking. I guess they are quite used to it. He laughed at my feeble attempts to kill the mosquitoes. The Imam said pointedly that the ponds behind the village were the main breeding grounds but they could not do anything about it as the ponds were the village’s only

⁷¹ One of the Cham texts “Nai Mai Mang Makah” or the princess from Makah or Kelantan tells of the love story of between royal personages from Kelantan and Champa. The story highlighted the long historical connections between Kelantan and Champa.

source of water which meant that they couldn't put oil to prevent the mosquito infestation because oil was expensive.

From my observation, most of the villages were rice farmers. It had been a bad year for them, as a result, there was little rice to be traded or sold. I asked whether there were any other economic opportunities available for them, and the Imam replied that only the young Cham could go to the cities and work. They sent money back home as often as they could. The Imam suddenly became quiet and I stopped asking questions. I looked around the village and I found it hard to believe that such levels of poverty still exist in the 21st century. I thought to myself "they don't even own a motorcycle!". I asked myself the question as I saw a young Cham boy loading a small horse with some bundles and riding it.

I thanked the Imam but before I went to sleep I gave him twenty US dollars. He smiled and thanked me and said that the money will be used to repair the mosque's broken door. I promptly went to sleep on the verandah of the mosque. The mosquito nets were my only protection against attacks by the voracious mosquitoes. Before I slept, my Khmer friend urged me: "They very poor, we leave tomorrow at first light better go fast. You will get malaria". I agreed with him and fitfully slept.

The night I spent at the Cham village made me realize the high levels of poverty experienced by the Muslim Cham, especially in the inner regions of Cambodia. I have no doubt that such Cham would "exit" Cambodia" simply because the economic conditions

were just too dire. More importantly, it opened my eyes to the fact that the Khmer government was not doing anything substantial to alleviate the crushing poverty experienced by the Muslim Cham and Khmers because they are too weak in alleviating the poverty that exist throughout Cambodia. Therefore the second feature of the “oppressed minority” layer is that it is also conditioned by extreme poverty. I have no doubts that the oppressive economic conditions faced by most Muslim Cham in Cambodia, will precipitate the movement to “exit” the country.

At this point it would seem that the basis of the “oppressed minority” layer can only be relevant to the Muslim Cham community in Vietnam and Cambodia because they are more oppressed politically, socially and economically than the Hindu Cham but this is not the case. Many Cham, regardless of whether they are Hindu and Muslim Cham from Cambodia and Vietnam sought empowerment, better economic opportunities and very willing to enter societies that were perceived to be more desirable. However some Cham communities were blessed with more resources, connections and luck. This could be seen in the example of Cambodian Muslim Cham who took refuge in Malaysia. Such Cham gathered resources and capitalized on the connections and networks they have established among Muslim Cham communities that have been established in Malaysia in order to help other Muslim Cham in Cambodia.

However this is not the case for the Hindu Cham but even though they were less successful than the Muslim Cham in tapping these networks and opportunities, the Hindu Cham also want to be similarly empowered. In the following section, it will be shown

through a reading of the Cham manuscripts that the Cham people have been historically conditioned to seek empowerment and such a pattern has been long established. In other words, it does not matter whether the Cham are Hindu or Muslim, both have the “oppressed minority” layer as they have been historically conditioned to think and react like an oppressed minority and this is an important feature to further understand the dynamics of the “oppressed minority” layer i.e. the primary source of motivation or driving force for the Cham to enter other societies.

5.3) Cham Manuscripts and insights into the Cham mental world

It is important to study the Cham sources in the “longue durée”.⁷² In other words, one must first understand the historical conditioning of the mental world⁷³ of the Cham. According to Abdul Karim, a Muslim Cham working on preserving and translating Cham manuscripts, Cham manuscripts have always been regarded with suspicion by the Vietnamese authorities as they contained information that reflected the harsh actions of the Vietnamese against the Cham throughout the 18th and 19th centuries.

⁷² Braudel, F. (1980). On history. Chicago, University of Chicago Press. This approach advocated looking at history not in terms of events but from a broader and longer termed historical perspective

⁷³ I was inspired by the approach taken by Reynaldo Ileto in his book *Pasyon and Revolution* in which he uses the information from the Filipino localized version of the Bible to reconstruct history from the perspective of the people. Ileto, R. C. (1979). Pasyon and Revolution: Popular Movements in the Philippines, 1840-1910. Quezon City, Metro Manila: Ateneo de Manila University Press.

This could be seen in manuscripts that allude to Emperor Minh Menh's policies in the 19th century.⁷⁴ Many Cham were arrested and Cham manuscripts were burned and destroyed in order to erase the historical and intellectual consciousness of the Cham. Similar acts of destruction were repeated following the communist victory in 1975. According to Abdul Karim, Vietnamese communist troops even used the Phanrang Cham Cultural Centre's collection of Cham manuscripts as firewood.⁷⁵ Many more ancient manuscripts were subsequently destroyed.

The manuscripts that will be introduced in this section will provide interesting historical perspectives from the Cham on Vietnamese political oppression and the inexorable expansion and control of the Vietnamese in the political, economic, cultural and social sphere. By understanding how the Cham viewed such processes, one could understand the historical basis for the dynamics of the Cham to seek "empowerment" beyond the borders of Cambodia and Vietnam today.

The manuscripts show a consistent political and economic marginalization of the Cham throughout history and also contained instances of the emotive dynamics of the Cham as the Vietnamese strove for domination. I have decided to include them in the main text and not to place them in the annexes. This was because such materials are firsthand accounts by the Cham themselves and more importantly will reveal that the perception of the Cham as oppressed minorities has been a long established process.

⁷⁴ Choi Byung, W. (2004). Southern Vietnam under the reign of Minh M*ang (1820-1841) : central policies and local response. Ithaca, N.Y., Southeast Asia Program Publication. Pp 1-33.

⁷⁵ Information based on interviews with Mr Abdul Karim, researcher on the Cham Manuscripts

However studying the Cham manuscripts was problematic. Firstly, the Cham manuscripts were not reliably dated. According to Abdul Karim, a Muslim Cham researcher on the Cham manuscripts, even the Cham themselves have little knowledge on Cham dating systems and terminologies. This was because such knowledge was not taught properly and had been forgotten. Secondly, the issue of authorship, according to Abdul Karim, Cham writers preferred to remain anonymous due to the Vietnamese repressive policies. Many Cham were afraid that they will get arrested if they were caught writing. Thirdly, most of the manuscripts were written with a heavy use of metaphors and analogies. This to some extent undermined the treatment of the Cham manuscripts as valid and accurate historical documents. It was not easy to find the fact in all the fiction.

The last problem of the Cham manuscripts was the fact that Cham society, in the course of several hundred years, had changed. The Cham manuscripts depicted a different world. One that only existed in the past; therefore the information available in the Cham manuscripts could only reflect the historical experience of the Cham of the past and not that of the Cham in the present time. Nonetheless, despite these issues, the information from the Cham manuscripts are still relevant in my argument as they are valuable records that depict the historical experience of the Cham people themselves and must not be ignored.

Though the Cham manuscripts were only “unreadable” in the context of conventional approaches to history where the written document must be accurate and contain verifiable information. They could still be utilized if a change in approach was adopted in order to include these problematic manuscripts for academic inquiry. Thus, this validated my use of the history from “below” approach to make the information of the Cham manuscripts more valid and comprehensible. In such an approach I am able to recreate the mental world of the Cham to understand the historical events from the perspective of the Cham themselves.

This approach has been best illustrated by Reynaldo Ileto in his path breaking book titled “Pasyon and Revolution”. According to Ileto, “Knowing something of this underlying system enables us to transcend questions of authorship, which is problematic in many Tagalog sources. Once we have gained some idea of the structure of the popular mind, data from conventional sources like official reports and outsider accounts can be fruitfully used”.⁷⁶

This approach, in the context of the Cham manuscripts, could be somewhat useful as understanding of the popular mind of the Cham through the Cham manuscripts, will reveal that the Cham’s “mental world” was somewhat fixated on seeing themselves as “oppressed”. I must admit that this is perhaps an inadequate interpretation of Ileto’s approach, which is more complex than what I have described. It must be said that the whole notion of knowing the structure of the popular mind is highly valid for my

⁷⁶ Ileto, *ibid.*, p.10

purposes of trying to understand the Cham mind especially in the context of understanding how they perceive themselves as oppressed minorities.

What will be proven now is that the “oppressed minority” layer must be understood more than just in terms of how the Cham react to and against political and economic oppression. It will be shown that the Cham both Hindu and Muslim, have been historically conditioned to think and react like an oppressed minority and this is an important feature in understanding the dynamics of the driving force that led to Cham entering other societies today.



Photo 15: Mr Abdul Karim and his collection of Cham Manuscripts placed in files in the cabinet behind him (picture taken in 2004 Kuala Lumpur)



Photo 16: Mr Abdul Karim showing me more Cham manuscripts available in a storeroom beneath his office. Picture taken in 2004

5.4) Insight into the mental world of the Cham of the past through Cham manuscripts

5.4.a) Ariya Po Phaok The⁷⁷

The text belongs to the Société Asiatique de Paris. It was a report dedicated to the last king of Champa called "Po Phaok The" who reigned from 1828 to 1832. The two following passages describe the stages of forceful economic domination of the Vietnamese that led to economic displacement of the Cham:

“Di ndey patao Ming ni Mang ngap pa-mbuak jia padai jang hakak, nyu ngap galang grep nager” (Ming Mang exacted tribute and build stores throughout the whole Negara)

⁷⁷ Ariya Po Phaok The (1835) p.16-17

“Ndey patao Cam mak ni Yuen Pakhik darak, Yuen mabai nyu ngap jhak, nyu mak ni Cam jieng halun” (The Viet took control of the markets and the Cham became like slaves)

This text offers a unique insight to the economic and social conditions of the Cham who lived during that time. It would seem that during the years in 1828 and 1832, there seemed to be a major shift in policy in how the Cham were treated by the Vietnamese rulers. As suggested by the quotes. The Vietnamese seemed to have acquired some degree of control of the economy and the Cham became “halun” or slave. I have referred to Mr Abdul Karim on matter and he explained that the word “halun” was only used in the context of very dire situations. Obviously, more research will have to be done on the manuscript however at this stage the descriptions offered by the manuscript revealed a valuable Cham perspective to the oppressive events during the years of 1828 and 1832.

5.4.b) Ariya Po Ceng⁷⁸

This manuscript forms part of the Société Asiatique de Paris’ collections. It describes the nature of the political relationships between the Vietnamese and the Cham, and the consequences of Vietnamese forceful hegemonic control of the Cham. Unfortunately, the period in which the events took place is not mentioned. However, the manuscript is useful as it alludes to the sense of regret felt by the Cham individual who wrote it:

⁷⁸ Ariya Po Ceng (Date Unknown) p. 1-3

“ra jaw brei wek ka Yuen, ngap patuei saong tian takra” (why was their country given to Yuen and subjected it to their whims and fancies?)

This sentence conveys to the reader an insight into the Cham’s sentiments during that period. I regard the Cham words “brei wek ka Yuen”, which literally meant “given to the Vietnamese”, as a potent statement in facilitating some sort of understanding of the overwhelming sense felt by the Cham as they were dominated by the Vietnamese. It must be said that the tone, the way the manuscript was written, is oppressive, as if the writer was writing while in a dire emotional state.

5.4.c) Ariya Tuen Phaow⁷⁹

This manuscript describes the story of Tuen Phaow who is said to be from Kelantan. (The Cham thought that Kelantan was Mecca), Tuen Phaow went to Panduranga, and fought against the forces of Nguyen Anh and Tay Son in 1796:

“Tuen Phaow nyu lac anak Po Gahlau, gaon Aluah tiap kau, marai pangap palei nagar” (Tuan Phaow is the son of Po Gahlau, by his side Aluah, came to rebuild the Negara)

The words **“marai pangap palei nagar,”** or to rebuild the Negara, hint at the writer’s great desire to emphasize the noble intentions of Tuen Phaow. Possibly, this reflects the writer’s desire to re-establish hegemony over Cham lands, and more importantly, the need to establish a sense of a unified struggle against the Vietnamese by including the Montagnards. This could be seen in the excerpt below:

“dom Cru ni Raglai Cam Kahaow, nyu sap hatam Tuen Phaow, sanak ganreh hagait ya ni” (all of the Cru, Raglai, Cam, Kahaow...attracted to the darkness of Tuen Phaow, his power)

⁷⁹ Ariya Tuen Phaow (Date Unknown) pp.1-26

5.4.d) Ariya thei mai mang deh⁸⁰

This Cham manuscript denounces the Vietnamese as intruders and the writer blames the Vietnamese as the main cause of destabilization of Cham society:

“duissak sa baoh nagar, anak Yuen pa-ndar, Cam yau kerbau” (a country, the Vietnamese used, the Cham like buffaloes, They appealed to the gods for help).

I found this statement a powerful testament on the great sense of anger and injustice felt by the Cham at that particular moment of history. The words “Cam yau kerbau”, or “Cham are like buffaloes”, expresses feelings of humiliation and degradation. It is interesting that the Raglai, an ethnic minority group living in the Central Highlands that shared close linguistic and cultural similarities with the Cham, are also mentioned in the manuscript:

“akak cang langik po mai, cam saong Raglai, kieng pegang ga-mbak” (waiting for the Sky god to come, the Cham and the Raglai, begging for help).

The appeal from both Cham and Raglai people to the gods for help indicates the increased sense of desperation felt by both communities at that point of time.

5.4.e) Ariya Hatai Paran⁸¹

⁸⁰ Ariya Thei Mai Mang Deh (Date and Author Unknown) pp.4-7

⁸¹ Ariya Hatai Paran (Date and Author Unknown) pp.3-8

The Ariya Hatai Paran⁸² or the story of heart of the People seems to question the future of the kingdom and Cham culture. In the following sentence, the writer notes down a prayer invocation to Po Debitreh, one of the Cham gods.

“Likkau gi-mbak hai di po Debitreh, brei bi hu sunt ginreh, trun merai deng pakreng” (I pray to you Po Debitreh to give me great power, to come and show your power)

The writer seems to be asking Po Debitreh for divine intervention in reminding the Cham of their heritage and past glories. This could be seen in the words:

“Habien kieng hu ka paran anak Cam tamuh gok yau krung, nam mak po mang kal” (tell them to remember the glories of the Cham of old)

The manuscript also indicates that the Cham felt increasingly desperate and fearful on their lands. But however fearful and desperate the Cham were in such an oppressive environment, the Cham relied on their memories of their past to empower them. According to Mr Abdul Karim, this was important for the Cham as they have lost their country and the only thing the Cham have is their memory of it and this, according to him was crucial in encouraging acts of resistance against the Vietnamese.

“Anak Cam ngap menuh tuei hadei, mboh ginreh pak halei, jang merat tuei kacah” (the Cham lose direction and will follow anyone). I find such memories important as they remind the Cham of their past glories and without it the Cham will, as the quote puts it, “lose direction,” which in this context I take to mean that they might lose their identity.

⁸² Text from Van Lam village in Phanrang. Dated as composed in the year of the Goat, 3rd day of the Cham calendar. (di thun nasak pabaiy balan klau)

The consequence of such behaviour would only lead to, according to the writer, greater debasement of the Cham as a people and this seen in the words:

“Ngap yau nan oh thau sanang blaoh pathraih, tal hadei mai ligaih, aia thei ni wek ka thei” (actions like this will only bring more self pity)

The writer finally laments on the fact that the Cham will inevitably forget who they are and their history.:

“Oh hu hadar nam muk su kei, caik pieh wek ka drei, bhum pachai tanah riya// nam mak mang Po Ina Nagar Taha, trun parak tanah riya, palaik kalam di bhum nagar” (No memory of the ancestors who left legacies for us, the ancient Po Ina Nagar, whose power is within the Negara).

The Cham manuscripts provide a view of Cham history from “within” since they were written by Cham individuals who lived in the 18th and 19th centuries. These manuscripts provide interesting insights on the deteriorating political and social climate of Cham society that existed at that time.

It must be said that though choice of sentences had been selective and to some extent reflected only a fragment of the information available in the Cham manuscripts, it must be kept in mind that my main agenda of using the Cham manuscripts was to understand the construction of the mental world of the Cham. Though it may be argued that such a representation of the Cham may seem biased, it must be understood that the majority of the references to the Yuen (Vietnamese) people in the Cham manuscripts were of such a nature. I am just allowing the Cham manuscripts to speak for themselves and do not, in any way, advocate a bellicose stand directed against any ethnic group.

The picture that emerges from the manuscripts depicts a sense of constant resistance to Vietnamese hegemony, and more importantly, reveal that the Cham felt oppressed as the Vietnamese at that point of time became more dominant politically and economically. However more research on the Cham manuscripts need to be done to shed more light in this issue.

In sum, it can be seen that the manuscripts provide invaluable insights to Cham perspectives to oppression that existed in the past. The issue that will be addressed in the following section is whether such sentiments still exist among the Cham today, and to what extent do they contribute to the development of the “oppressed minority layer” of the Cham ethnic passport. To what extent have the Cham been historically conditioned to act and think like an oppressed minority? Is there continuity? It would seem that there is and I found this out in a Cham village in southern Vietnam.

5.5) Meeting with Mr Hung

My visits to Cham villages of Plei Pablap in central Vietnam, Phan Rang and to the Phan Rang Cultural centre in 2004, allowed me to talk to many Cham from various age groups. It was in Plei Pablap, during the Kate festival (Cham New Year), where I met Hung during a visit to a Cham house⁸³ that was preparing a banquet. I was told by many Cham to participate in the festivities there. Hung, a Cham in his late twenties, was unemployed and had applied to study in a university in Hanoi to study history and was

⁸³ House visits are customary during the Kate Festivities and in each house I visited it was compulsory that I consume copious amounts of “lak” or fermented fruit/rice wines.

waiting for the results of his application. Hung told me to sit with him at one of the banquet tables, along with several Vietnamese (ethnic Kinh) guests which I later found out to be employers of several Cham there.

In an attempt to start a conversation with Hung, I asked him in Vietnamese whether the “Urang Cham” (Cham people) remember any part of their history. His response was a curt “I don’t know” or “toi khong biet” and turned away from me as quickly as he could. Feeling slightly hurt, I ceased asking him questions and partook in the merriment. It was after the Vietnamese guests had left the table that Hung apologized and said that it was “No good” or “khong tot” to talk about history in front of “Urang Yun” or “Vietnamese people” during the Kate festival. I observed that Hung was obviously in a much more relaxed mood after the Vietnamese guests had left and I decided to ask him some questions about Cham history.



Photo 17: Picture taken on the grounds of a mosque in the village of Plei Pablap in 2004 by author. Mr “Hung” is the first man on the left



Photo 18: The Cham mosque in Plei Pablap village. Picture taken by author in 2004

He responded to the questions well. Among the most interesting part of the conversation were his perspectives on Ming Mang's policies and the relationship that the Cham had with the ethnic communities of the central highlands of Vietnam. According to Hung, the "Urang Cham" suffered greatly during that time and it was when the Cham "lost their country" or "lihik Nagar". Many Cham were killed or "Urang Cham pamatai lo". In regards to ethnic communities of Central Vietnam, he mentioned that the several tribes of the Central Highlands would come down from the Highlands and would return the royal objects of the Kings of Champa that had been entrusted to them for safe keeping. According to Hung, "the forest people are of one heart with the Cham" or "Urang glai sa hatai ngan Urang Cham". More importantly, said Hung, "The enemy of the forest people is also the enemy of the Cham...thousand year history" or "masuk Urang Glai masuk Urang Cham...sakkarai saribuw thun". But he laughed wryly and said: "Today the young Cham learn the history of the Vietnamese, Vietnamese language...heart of the Vietnamese" or "Harei ni, anak Cham magru sakkarai Yun, dalah Yun ...hatai Yun".

Hung told me the great efforts of the Cham community in Vietnam to preserve the stories and oral histories of the Cham. He said that the Malaysians and French were active in this regard by having copies made of Cham manuscripts that were found throughout Cham villages in Phanrang. But he told me that these stories were never meant to be read on paper. They were written down so that they could be recited and remembered by those who told it and those who listened to it. Such histories were meant

to be “felt”, or the listener must feel the full emotive impact of such stories especially those that described the terrible experiences of the Cham during the “wars between the Cham and Vietnamese” or “kalin Cam Yun” consumed the Cham.

The most significant thing that Hung told me was that he had always felt a lot of affinity for the stories and could reconcile the similarities between the situation of the Cham in the past with the Cham situation in the present. He related to me a story that his grandfather told him (I later found it to be similar to the Ariya Hatai Paran or “Heart of the People”), that the Cham must not forget the glory of the Cham of old. This story according to Hung was very moving as he felt that the Cham of old had already prophesied that the Cham would be “Halun”, or slaves or servants to the “Urang Yun”. He kept quiet after that. After a while, he said something that I found to be rather remarkable. Such stories became a source of inspiration for the Hindu Cham (Hung was himself a Hindu Cham), to continue to survive in an increasingly Vietnamized society.

I also asked my Cham friend in Cambodia, a leader of a Cham student organization in Cambodia on this issue, and though he was aware of the existence of these manuscripts he was not very aware if they had any impact on Cham Muslim society in Cambodia. But what he agreed on was that there were certain continuities in the way the Cham perceived themselves as oppressed minorities in Cambodia and how this became a primary source of motivation or driving force for the Cham to enter other societies.

The “oppressed minority” layer, then, was the primary source of motivation or driving force for the Cham to enter other societies. As has been shown, there are different facets to this. Firstly, the Cham in Vietnam developed a propensity to exit their countries because they are reacting against being perceived and categorized as minorities. This enhanced their sense of being alienated in their own country. Secondly, the economic oppression faced by the Cham in Cambodia, especially the Muslim Cham, also precipitated the movement to “exit” the country. The emotive dynamics that resulted from such experiences, led to the Cham to be especially attracted to other cultures and traditions, which they see as more powerful. The main reason why the Muslim Cham wanted to enter other societies in Southeast Asia was because in such countries they will feel more empowered.

The “oppressed minority” layer also reveals how the Cham, both Hindu and Muslim, have been historically conditioned to think and react like an oppressed minority and this is an important feature in understanding better the dynamics of the “oppressed minority” layer. Compared to the other set of “internal documents” in their ethnic passport, such as the “historical” layer (the historical consciousness of the Malaysian Malays of the Cham) and “religious” layer (perception of other Malay Muslims of their “Muslimness”), the “oppressed minority” layer (primary source of motivation or driving force for the Cham to enter other societies) alludes more to the inner dynamics of the Cham mind.

CONCLUSION

The thesis began with the question: What qualities do the Cham possess that allowed them to successfully participate in the cultural and social dynamics in societies other than their own? My answer is that the Cham had an ethnic passport, a set of “internal documents” composed of several “layers”.

The first layer, or the “historical” layer, consists of the Malaysian Malays’ historical consciousness of the Cham, which was the result of the academic production of historical knowledge on the Cham and the publication of Malaysian Malay newspapers on issues concerning the Cham.

The second layer, or the “religious” layer, consists of other Malay Muslims’ perceptions of Cham “Muslimness”, which eased the entry of the Cham into predominantly Malay Muslim societies. But having such a “layer” is not without consequence; it exacerbated the tensions between the different Cham communities.

The third layer, or the “oppressed minority” layer, is the primary source of motivation, or even the driving force, for the Cham to enter other societies. Being politically oppressed in Vietnam and economically destitute in Cambodia, the Cham sought empowerment in other countries. However this sentiment of being oppressed,

according to the Cham manuscripts, has been conditioned by a history of hundreds of years of political, economic and cultural oppression. This has led the development among the Cham today of a psyche of resistance towards such domination, which has driven them to seek empowerment in other societies.

As this thesis has shown, Cham ethnicity is used like a passport to enter other societies in Southeast Asia. Though armed only with a conventional passport, the Cham are allowed passage by the authorities through their national boundaries. This is because the Cham do possess the conventional set of “external” documents such as what one would find in a passport. But in order to pass through non-physical boundaries, such as cultural, social and religious boundaries, that demarcate entities and spaces, the Cham need, in addition, a “non-physical” or “immaterial” passport, i.e., a “set of internal documents”. This is expressed in the “historical layer”, “religious layer” and the “oppressed minority layer” which form the set of “internal documents” of the Cham ethnic passport. With both “external” and “internal” sets of documents, the Chams are able to pass through national boundaries and, more importantly, to engage in the more complex dynamics within such boundaries.

Although in this thesis the ethnic passport framework has only been applied to the Cham context, I hope that, through further research, it can also illuminate the experience of other ethnic communities in Southeast Asia.

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