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Research Note

INDOCHINA AND THE MALAY WORLD: A GLIMPSE ON MALAY-VIETNAMESE RELATIONS TO THE MID-NINETEENTH CENTURY

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Studying Southeast Asia as a regional unit, scholars such as O.W. Wolters in *History, Culture, and Religion in Southeast Asian Perspectives* have stressed the linkage and cultural dialogue among the peoples of the Southeast Asian coastal areas: sharing a "common ocean", they have certainly been in communication with each other from very early times. However, the recent publication of many valuable research works notwithstanding, the interaction between mainland and insular Southeast Asia needs further inquiry. This paper is a modest attempt to highlight some landmarks in past relations between Vietnam and the Malay world.

The Prehistoric Framework of Interrelations in Southeast Asia

Southeast Asian populations are composed of many diverse ethnic groups, for whom prehistorians are still framing hypotheses to argue about their remotest origins and identity. Linguists have been able, however, to delineate major and overarching language families. From the linguistic standpoint, two large groupings can be distinguished:

> –the Austroasiatic family, subdivided into Austronesian (or Malayo-Polynesian), and Môn-Khmer. The languages of the Indonesian archipelago and the Malay peninsula can be conveniently defined as belonging to the "Austronesian" family. Among the Malayo-Polynesian speaking populations, the Dayaks of Borneo, the Bataks of Sumatra, the Alfurs of the Celebes and the Moluccas are called Proto-Malays, as opposed to the Malays of the coasts or Deutero-Malays, over whom Indian culture had left a profound imprint. In the Indochinese peninsula, the people of Champa and certain mountain tribes of South Vietnam (i.e., Rhade and Jarai) belong to the same Austronesian lingustic family. But others, like the Sedang and Bahnar, or the Kha of Laos, speak Môn-Khmer languages. Those minorities are considered Proto-Indochinese, in contrast

to the Cambodians, whose language is also Môn-Khmer, but significantly Indianized. In early times, the Môn-Khmer family of languages stretched from Burma to northern Vietnam and southern China.

–the three related linguistic families of Tibeto-Burman, Tai and Vietnamese, all equally influenced by Chinese and spoken now in most of Southeast Asian mainland. About the origin of the Vietnamese language, there has been and still is much controversy, but it appears to combine characteristics derived from Môn-Khmer, Tai and Malayo-Polynesian. The most probable hypothesis is that the Vietnamese spoke a basically Môn-Khmer language that had been subjected, over a long period, to a strong Tai and to a lesser extent Malayo-Polynesian influence. In any case, proto-Vietnamese was already a well-developed language by the time that the Vietnamese people came into close contact with the Chinese civilization, and the process of borrowing Chinese literary, philosophical, administrative and military terms began.

How these diverse populations settled in Southeast Asia is still not fully understood. Until about the late sixties, Southeast Asian prehistory was explained in terms of the first wave migrations of "Nesiots" (roughly, Malayan physical types). Subsequent waves of "Pareoeans" (southern Mongoloids) settled into an area previously inhabited by backward Australo-Melanesians. The first of these migrant groups brought agriculture, while the latter introduced metallurgy. The operative concepts in Southeast Asian prehistory were thus based on a simplistic two fold migration model, and the diffusion of a unidirectional nature from the more advanced centers of India and China into backward countries between them.

Recent scholarship has challenged these assumptions concerning the migrations of people into the region. Nowadays, the plains and lowland areas of the Far East during the period between 10000 and 1000 BC is considered an area of largely independent regional development. Traces of a pre-Neolithic industry, characterized by chipped stone chopper tools, have been found in north Vietnam (in Hoà-bình province, hence the term of Hoabinhian culture), in Laos, in north and northeast Thailand, in the Malay peninsula (Gua Kerbau, Perak), in Sumatra, Java, Borneo, and the Celebes. Because these Mesolithic cultures, Hoabinhian and Hoabinhian-like, seem to have been a Southeast Asian phenomenon and not only a local one, it is hypothesized that their owners constituted an Australoid-Melanesian type that branched, through a process of differentiation, into the primitive Indonesian and Veloid (or Austro-Asiatic) groups. They evolved independently into the Neolithic cultures characterizing the whole region from about the fifth millennium BC onward. Between 4000 and 1500 BC, bronze metallurgy was developing in a number of areas

throughout the region as a whole, probably, according to Donn Bayard, neither as a series of completely separate inventions nor as the result of a direct diffusion from a single source.

In Vietnam, the Bronze Age climaxed in the classic Dông-son civilization, the roots of which may well extend back to 1000 BC. Its external connections are reflected in the range of territories in which bronze drums have been found in Yunnan and Sichuan in southern China, in the Malay peninsula, in southern Sumatra, in Java, Bali, Sumbawa, Salayar. Bronze objects excavated in Dông-son and other Southeast Asian sites, Samrong Sen, Mlu Prei in Cambodia, Non Nok Tha, Ban Chiang and Non Chai in Thailand, Kompong Sungai Lang in Western Malaya, Gilimanuk in Bali, etc., offer such a similarity in their technique and decoration that it is impossible not to believe in cultural connections between these sites. But the present evidence indicates that these different cultures were equally advanced, and it seems unreasonable now to regard Vietnam as the only source from which the Dông-son drums were originally exported. The Carbon-14 drum date from Malaya of c. 500 BC suggests nevertheless that the drums from Ngoc-lu and Hoàng-hà in Vietnam are even older. Thus, it is highly probable that the Dông-son culture was engaged, during the last millennium BC, in considerable interchange with other Southeast Asian cultures.

The Southeast Asian mainland, therefore, is now seen as an advanced area, in which the groundwork for civilization was very likely present well before the onset of Indian influence. Prehistorians have consequently admitted that when Southeast Asia felt the impact of Indian culture, it already possessed a culture of its own. George Coedes, in *The Indianized States of Southeast Asia*, summarizes the characteristic traits of this civilization as follows: "with regard to material culture, the cultivation of wet rice, domestication of cattle and buffalo, use of metals, knowledge of navigation; with regard to the social system, the importance of the role conferred on women and of relationship in the maternal line, and an organization resulting from the requirements of irrigated agriculture; with regard to religion, belief in animism, the worship of ancestors and of the god of the soil, the building of shrines in high places, burial of the dead in jars and dolmens; with regard to mythology, a cosmological dualism of mountain versus sea, winged beings versus water beings, men of the mountain versus men of the seacoast."

Local diversities of culture were naturally inevitable in such a vast area. Donn Bayard even views prehistoric Southeast Asia as "a continually shifting mosaic of small cultural groups, resembling in its complexity the

distribution of the modern hill tribes." It is significant, however, that the Chinese would seem to have had some idea of the cultural unity of the region when they applied to its various peoples and languages the name, "Kunlun". This word has been interpreted in different ways. Gabriel Ferrand has indicated that it must have been employed to transcribe many different indigenous terms that had become confused in Chinese usage (one of the Vietnamese names for Poulo Condor, for instance, is Côn-lôn, which is the Vietnamese articulation for the word Kunlun). Sylvain Lévi has interpreted the term as the equivalent of the Sanskrit expression dvipantara, "the people of the islands". Nicolas J. Krom has indicated the possibility of equating Kunlun and Malaya. It may be of significance that the Chinese pilgrim, Yijing (Iching), writing in the late seventh century after his travel to India, says that "Kunlun" was applied to the people from the South who first came to the Chinese commandery of Jiaozhi (ancient north Vietnam) and Canton, presumably as traders. Thus, it was probably used originally for the maritime peoples of Indochina, and later extended to the Indonesian population, i.e. all Malay-typed peoples.

At any rate, evidence is accumulating that the Indian influence moving into Southeast Asia was not responding to a vacuum. Data from sites in central and northeast Thailand for example suggest the presence of centralized towns based on intensive wet rice agriculture; precise dating is uncertain, but 500 BC may be a fair estimate. More importantly, archaeologists are beginning to think that extensive trade networks may have been established before this period, developing as early as 3000 BC, possibly as a result of the demand for tin and copper. These preexisting patterns of exchange facilitated Southeast Asia's response to international trade between the Eastern and Western worlds when it expanded. During the last millennium BC, the zone encompassing the northern Malay peninsula and the southern Vietnamese coast was the first to openly solicit and favor East-West interchange. The initial agents of foreign contact were Malayo-Polynesian sailors who made voyages to as far West as the African coast and to China in the East. Passage through the Malay peninsula by international traders steadily increased. Ships from Indian ports touched land on its upper western coast; their trade goods were then portaged across the Isthmus of Kra to the Gulf of Siam, reloaded on ships and transported along the coast to ports on the western edge of the Mekong delta, most notably to one identified by archaeologists as Oc-èo in the Funan realm, a state based on the lower Vietnamese coast. Maritime navigation had been also practiced along the coast of the Malay peninsula, and the site of Kuala Selinsing has been long known as an active

manufacturing center as well as glass and stone beads trading. Early interactions between the archipelago coastal centers and the Chinese and Indian commercial markets were, however, funneled mainly through Funan's ports.

The implication of this is that trade networks predated significant foreign economic penetration in Southeast Asia. They did not develop as a response to Indian contacts, but had themselves a long history. Conversely, trade development and extension may well have been the initial incentive for Indianization rather than a result of it. This refutes the earlier views that Indianization was an imposition, be it by Brahmans or Indian merchants, on the backward natives of Southeast Asia. Most authorities, while accepting that trade was of primary importance in the Indianization process, now believe that foreign traders served more as a stimulus for indigenous leaders to Indianize themselves. Interaction with foreign merchants was therefore the result of indigenous initiative and response to opportunities that already existed. Indeed, the preconditions for the rise of civilization, wet rice, iron technology, increasing population density, and political centralization were present in at least some of the alluvial areas of the mainland by the mid first millennium BC. These, with the spur of foreign trade, were likely the key factors that caused the rise of the Indianized kingdoms.

In any manner whatever, the main point is the almost simultaneous appearance of evidences of Indianization in various parts of Southeast Asia, with the exception of the Red River delta region of north Vietnam, which came under Chinese political authority in the second century BC. The Vietnamese thereafter, alone among Southeast Asian peoples, had to take the Chinese into account in their regional relations, and not for the reason that the Chinese market brought opportunities for commercial prosperity as it did to the major emporia in the archipelago. It follows that Vietnam's fate was to diverge from that of the other Southeast Asian states. For the latter, Indianization was going to map out a common destiny for more than one thousand years. In this connection, an Indonesian legend, interestingly, relates the mythical figure of Aji Saka to both Java and Champa, a former kingdom occupying the coastal region of today's central Vietnam. Aji Saka was the hero believed to have introduced Indian culture into the archipelago, more precisely the calendar (the çaka era) and script. The legend says that he stopped first in Champa, where he married the princess Prabawati. Then, after having "civilized" Java, he had her brought there together with their son, the young prince Prabakusuma, who was to reign after him.

Funan, Champa and the Malay World

The earliest known Southeast Asian political entity is Funan, which controlled coastal centers on the lower Vietnam coast. Archaeological vestiges at Oc-èo, the site of one such port, show that the coast was occupied by Malay fishing and hunting groups. Already building their own ships, these seamen were aware of the importance of their strategic position opposite the upper Malay peninsula, and understood that the location of their coast in relation to the new international route across the Isthmus of Kra would enable them to provide passage for Indian and Chinese goods. Soon Oc-èo was booming. When in 240 Kang Tai and Zhu Ying, the first Chinese envoys on record, traveled to Southeast Asia to explore the nature of the sea passage at the behest of the Wu emperor on the Yangzi, they went to Funan. According to their reports, the founding of the Funan state took place in the first century AD, after a foreigner bearing the Indian name Kaundinya had married a local naga princess, daughter of the ruler of the water realm, and achieved political integration by subordinating local chiefs to his authority as well as to that of his chosen successors. Historians have proposed different interpretations of this Funan origin myth. Suffice it to say that the Funan region soon grew into an economic center having contacts with three early Southeast Asian cultural zones. One of them extended from lower Burma to Funan and was inhabited by developing Môn-Khmer and Pyu cultural groups. A second zone extended north up the Vietnamese coast and comprised what was to become the domain of Champa's civilization. A third zone extended from Funan into the Java Sea cultural realm with its Malay population. Ideas from Funan were introduced into these three zones via the trade routes that connected the mainland and the Indonesian archipelago.

By the third century, Funan's authority stretched beyond the lower Mekong delta to the upper Malay peninsula. First, Funan's hold over the Mekong delta was consolidated with the annexation of the territory northward up to the mouth of the Tonle Sap, and then the subjugation of Champa's domain to the south on the north edge of the delta. Second, a major naval expedition gave Funan control over many of the trade centers on the Malay coast, thereby consolidating its dominance over the flow of commerce through Southeast Asia. Those fell into Funan's orbit included major Malay entrepôts described by Chinese sources as the states of

Dunsun (probably on the Tenasserim coast of the Malay peninsula), Panpan (in the northeastern part of the Malay peninsula), Langjiasu (the Langkasuka of the Malay and Javanese chronicles, astride the neck of the Malay peninsula), Dandan (possibly a state either on the northeast coast of Malaya, south of Pattani, or still farther south in the region of Trengganu), Chitu (literally "the Red Earth Land" its identification is one of the most difficult problems in the historical geography of Southeast Asia: G. Coedès places it in the region of Phatthalung in southern Thailand, while several scholars put it in the southern part of the Malay peninsula). In the southern end of the peninsula, the port of Juli (Chuli), where Indian ships awaited the change of monsoons, also owed allegiance to Funan.

By the fourth century however, the Chinese, having lost access to the Central Asian caravan routes, were forced to encourage the further development of the sea passage. The initiatives they took to expand the volume of trade along the sea route were met with an immediate response from a number of coastal centers south and east of the Malay peninsula that had already been trading directly with India, but indirectly with China. Direct voyages began to be made from the Sunda Strait region to China across the South China Sea, bypassing Funan. A commercial entrepôt known in Chinese records as Geying (Ko-ying, perhaps Kawang in northwestern Java), which had evolved as a terminus on the Strait of Malacca for trade between India and the spice islands of the Eastern archipelago, had been trading with China via Funan for a long time. But its economic position was challenged in the fifth century by the western Java commercial center of Heluodan (Holotan), whose ships sailed on a regular basis to China. Eventually, both were to be replaced by a new southeast Sumatra commercial center, Gantuoli (probably Palembang), and its successor, the Srivijaya state, as the dominant maritime power in the western Java Sea area.

The growth of commercial centers on the Sumatra coast near the Sunda Strait, which were making an increasing contribution to international trade by providing shipping facilities between Indonesia and China, was the cause of the demise of Funan and other northern peninsula centers. Malay ships and crews transported Sumatran products and Java Sea spices to China and brought back Chinese goods. Soon, coastal rulers began to use these same seamen to police the Straits, for piracy was a plague to shipping in this area. Once the *orang laut*, the sea gypsies who subsisted on this practice, were brought under control, maritime contacts between Sumatran ports and India expanded. Ships from India began sailing south through the Strait of Malacca, instead of landing on the

upper Malay peninsula and sending their goods by land across the Isthmus of Kra. Henceforth, Funan's ports became peripheral to the mainstream of international commerce. In order to continue to take a part in it, Funan's traders had to travel to other entrepôts, just as previously Southeast Asian seafarers had to come to Funan to carry on their exchanges. This had incalculable consequences for Funan: the shifting of the international trade route to the Strait of Malacca and the subsequent omission of stops at its ports denied its rulers important revenues. The result was the diminution of the state's prosperity.

By the mid fifth century, the Chinese had recognized that Funan's ports no longer played a dominant role in Southeast Asian commerce. Their attention was now fully shifted to Java Sea entrepôts: in 449, embassies from the Chinese emperor were sent to three Indonesian coastal centers to confer titles on the rulers of those "states". More significantly, in 491 the Chinese court bestowed the title of "Commander in chief of the military affairs of the seashore" upon the ruler of the Cham kingdom known as Linyi, based north of the Mekong delta on the Vietnamese coast, despite the fact that Linyi had been continually harassing the Chinese Rinan and Jiaozhi provinces in northern Central Vietnam and the Red River delta to the North. The 491 investiture indicates therefore that the Chinese held Linyi's ruler responsible for curtailing acts of piracy on the Champa seacoast. As a matter of fact, ships from Java, to avoid the reefs of the Paracels because of their navigational hazards, had to keep close to the Champa coast when sailing to China. Here, it would seem, they were threatened in the fifth century by piracy. According to K.R. Hall, this piracy was either the result of Funan's attempts to regain its control over the maritime channels by compelling ships to use its ports as intermediaries, or because Funan's decline as a major commercial center had forced its Malay maritime colony to resort to piratical practices.

Apparently, with Funan's commercial demise, Linyi's ports assumed a strong commercial position on the southern Vietnam coast as a consequence of their geographical proximity to the now restructured international maritime route that went through the western part of the Java Sea before turning northward toward China. Champa ports became intermediary stops for merchant ships navigating the South China Sea, which put into them prior to their entry into Chinese harbors. The sixth century Chinese standard history *Liang shu* mentions that Poli (probably Bali, if not Borneo, which was designated by the name "Poni" from the ninth century by the Chinese, or even Brunei in Borneo), a kingdom on an island about two months' journey from Canton, was reached after passing

Linyi, Funan, Chitu and Dandan.

Funan's collapse as a major international entrepôt resulted in the secession of its vassals, which broke away to establish their own identities as economic centers. Not only Champa, but numerous river valley centers on the Malay peninsula coast began sending tribute missions to the Chinese court in order to solicit favorable trade relationship with the Chinese. Without the prosperity of the previous age, Funan sovereigns withdrew inland, concentrating their rule on the ricelands of the upper Mekong delta, in an effort to maximize revenue collections from their agrarian economic base. But by the mid sixth century, Funan was severely weakened by internal strife. Recognizing its crisis, its neighbors applied increasing pressure. The people of the Khmer domain known to the Chinese as Zhenla began to move against Funan from modern Thailand and Cambodia to the North. The Funan territory was ultimately conquered by Zhenla, whose people called themselves Kambuja: they were the ancestors of today Cambodians. The former Funan Mekong delta domain declined, whereas the centers of Cham and Khmer authority became the focal point for civilization on the mainland, the Chams controlling the southern Vietnam coast and the Khmers building a great agrarian civilization at Angkor.

After Funan's dismemberment, the Chinese sought to establish commercial relationship with other trade centers capable of maintaining the flow of East-West trade. As a consequence, various Southeast Asian emporia attempted to become the dominant entrepôt of the region. One such state to emerge was Srivijaya, which succeeded in gaining control of the Malacca and Bangka straits. From the Malay heartland on and behind the central and southern coast of eastern Sumatra, a Srivijayan network of Malay-speaking centers developed throughout the Riau-Lingga archipelago to the southern part of the Malay peninsula. Chinese trade with the Malay peninsula and beyond came to be focused on these Srivijayan ports. And Srivijaya's heyday was to last until 1025, when the South Indian Cola dynasty successfully attacked the ports of the Malacca region, and shattered Srivijaya's authority over the Strait.

While Srivijaya was imposing its economic hegemony over the southern maritime route, Champa consolidated its role as a secondary entrepôt on the main international route between the Malay world and Canton. By 758, the Chinese reported that Champa had developed two commercial centers at Kauthara (today Nhatrang) and Panduranga (today Phanrang), and began to give the state the name Huanwang. Chinese ships would call at these ports before launching forth toward the archipelago. Champa was

offered in this way the opportunity to take advantage of the economic benefits deriving from participation in the maritime route between China and the Srivijayan empire.

Inscriptions dating to the eighth century record two sea raids that threatened Champa's very existence. A Sanskrit epigraph of the Po Nagar temple at Nhatrang informs us that in 774, "men born in other countries, living on food more horrible than cadavers, frightful, completely black and gaunt, dreadful and evil as death, came in ships", stole the linga and burned the temple. A second raid in 787 by "the armies of Java, having come in vessels", burned another temple at Panduranga. Historians have traditionally identified these dark skinned and demoniac seafarers with groups of sailors similar to the Malay sea nomads who were the strength behind the state of Srivijaya's hegemony, seamen who could be used to control shipping, but who in times of political turmoil might turn to piracy as the source of their livelihood.

Both of the mentioned raids were directed at the two ports considered by the Chinese as commercially important. The Malay raids reflect, in K.R. Hall's opinion, two possible interpretations. First, the rise to prominence of Kauthara and Panduranga located in the southern areas of the Champa coast might well have posed a threat to Srivijaya's hegemony over the international maritime route. In this instance, the raids could be explained as having been initiated by Srivijaya to prevent the development of rival economic centers. Alternatively, they could have been undertaken by groups of seafarers who had formerly supported Srivijaya's control over the southern seas, but who had become pirates in the eighth century. The ports of Champa, recognized in that period as prosperous centers of commerce, no doubt presented attractive sources of plunder.

Panduranga remained, nevertheless, a major port on the Cham coast. In the middle of the tenth century, the monarch of Champa Indravarman III utilized a member of its merchant community, a Muslim named Abû Hasan (called Pu He San by the Chinese), to further commercial relationship with Canton. By then, the Chinese had changed the name of the country once more - this time to Zhancheng, "the Zhan city" (Champapura). In this period, Champa's maritime strength was supplied by peoples similar to those who in the eighth century had pillaged the Cham coast, that is, the Malay seafarers. This intensified Cham-Malay interrelationship, which can be seen particularly in the Javanese influence upon Champa's culture. This influence is most visible in Cham temple architecture, notably at My-son (in today Quang-nam), the leading temple complex of Champa's monarchs and the heart of Champa's holy land. A

Cham inscription reports that during the first years of the tenth century, a relative of the queen Tribhuvanadevi, Po Klung Pilih Rajadvara, went on a pilgrimage to Java (Yavadvipapura), in order "to acquire the magical science". A Javanese inscription from this period also makes specific reference to the activities of both Cham and Khmer merchants in Java. The preferential relations that existed between Champa and Java were not to be severed in the following centuries: the legend of Putri Cempa tells of a Cham princess who became the wife of a Majapahit sovereign. And in the middle of the fourteenth century, Prapanca, the author of the *Nagarakertagama*, included Champa as being under the protection of the Majapahit ruler; the only Southeast Asian country excluded from the Majapahit sovereign's mandala was Vietnam, called "Yawana", a Sanskrit word for "Greek" or "foreigner".

Undoubtedly, this Javanese contact in turn attracted Malay traders and seafarers to Champa's ports, particularly Panduranga. The sovereigns of Champa directed the piratical energies of these seafarers against the domain of Vietnam, which exerted increasing pressure on its southern neighbor after having won its independence from Chinese authority. Two major sea-borne expeditions were organized, a first time in 979, a second in 1042, not counting the numerous attacks that the Chams multiplied along their northern frontier. It is quite possible that a number of the naval raids against Vietnam attributed to the Chams during this period were actually initiated by the semi autonomous Malay sea nomads who used Cham ports as their bases of operation.

The hostilities of the tenth and eleventh centuries between Champa and Vietnam were not only attempts at territorial expansion but they might have had commercial implications as well. In fact, not only was the emerging Vietnamese state a political threat, but from an economic perspective, its ports were Champa's chief commercial rivals. The harbors of the Vietnam coastal region served indeed as major centers for South China trade. The port of Vân-dôn on the northeast corner of the Red River delta was emerging as an outstanding port, and an interior route connecting South China, Vietnam and the Khmer capital Angkor was also becoming important. The development of an alternative northern route overland from Vietnam would have notably diverted trade from Cham ports and jeopardized their prosperity. It was therefore in the interest of the Malay merchants' community in Champa to cooperate with Champa's rulers in their expeditions against the Vietnamese.

The foreign merchants and seafarers were useful to the Cham rulers in two ways: on the one hand, they provided them with their aid to expand

economic opportunities, and on the other, with their navies for coastal defenses and expeditions of conquest. This relationship demanded strong leadership to keep these potentially disruptive forces in check. On the positive side, it helped to expand Champa's trade with China, bringing economic prosperity. But the decidedly negative aspect was the threat that these foreigners posed to the integrity of the state when, exceeding their autonomy, they broke free from the central authority. Unfortunately, as secondary centers of international commerce, Champa's ports had a limited trade volume and thus the tax collected by Champa's monarchs could not suffice to maintain the loyalty of their maritime allies, whereupon these seamen turned into pirates. Champa's rulers were in fact often unable to control the actions of their maritime population. Cham coastal piracy, which was well known among the international maritime community, further weakened the appeal of Champa's ports to international traders and increased the potentiality of Champa's political instability.

As K.R. Hall has pointed out, Champa's monarchs, unable to tap the surplus production from their land base, and at the same time incapable of securing sufficient return from port taxes to maintain the loyalty of the seamen in their service, were obliged to seek substitute sources of income in order to maintain the alliance networks crucial to their power. Consequently, they found it necessary to direct their supporters to venture outside the Cham realm in plundering expeditions against Champa's neighbors, the Vietnamese to the North, and the Khmers to the West. This "plunder dynamic" explains why Champa's history is dominated by one military expedition after another. Those expeditions were undertaken to acquire both material wealth and manpower, in the form of slaves. This wealth was subsequently distributed among the participants of the expeditions, the warriors and seamen who in return acknowledged the Cham rulers' authority. Successful plundering expeditions were thereby a mean of reinforcing the image of Champa's sovereign as the source of his allies' prosperity.

Unlike Srivijaya's rulers, who derived their power and brilliance from the redistribution of wealth accumulated from the state's role as a leading promoter of East-West trade, and the Khmer rulers, who drew their income from the wet rice core surrounding Angkor, Champa's rulers were forced to maintain the loyalty of their subordinates, including Malay seamen, by keeping these supporters active on various expeditions against their neighbors. This reveals the inherent institutional weakness in the Cham state, which ultimately sealed its fate. Vietnamese retaliatory

expeditions finally drained the Cham realm of its manpower during the fifteenth century.

The Relations Between Vietnam and the Malay World

From what has been related above, we may safely infer that since the remotest time, there had always been contacts between Vietnam and the Malay world, albeit at times they could have taken an indirect form through Champa's intermediary. Expansion of international maritime trade explains, in particular, the early development, as we have seen, of a maritime route linking the Malay peninsula, the Java Sea, the Sulu archipelago and the Vietnam coast. This network still remains active until very recently, with the frequent voyages made by merchant ships from Trengganu to different places in the Gulf of Siam, pushing as far as Saigon and other South Vietnamese ports in the years following immediately the Second World War.

These relations were not only restricted to momentary commercial exchanges. A colony of Malay merchants had seemingly come to settle permanently in the area of Biên-hoà, near Saigon, since the end of the seventeenth century; it appears that the seashores of the province of Hà-tiên to the West had also sheltered a Malay population at about the same time. On the other hand, the problem of the refugees from the sea, although very far from reaching the extent of the recent exodus of the boat people, had already existed in the past: Charles Chapman, the envoy of the East India Company to Vietnam in the latter half of the eighteenth century, noted in 1778 the presence at Trengganu of forty-odd natives of "Cochinchina", whose vessels had been driven off their own coast and wrecked near this port. They were made slaves of the Rajah of Trengganu, but preferred to continue to live in bondage, instead of being repatriated to a country then torn by civil war.

Mentions about contacts between the two folks are however rather scant in historical texts, and seldom very informative. Yet, precisely because of the silence of the documents, we do not know whether it had once been possible for cultural relations to be established durably. The Vietnamese annals recorded that a prince of the Trân court, Trân Nhât Duât, who died in 1330, had a remarkable reputation for his interest in foreign languages and customs. He was the only member of the court who could serve as an interpreter when Malay envoys arrived from Sách-mã-tích, signifying Temasek, the old appellation of Singapore, which was flourishing in the

beginning of the fourteenth century. But Trân Nhât Duât's case is too exceptional for us to deduce that a veritable encounter had ever really taken place between the two cultures. Likewise, we should not systematically conclude in favor of the reality of unintermitting political relations, just because ancient Vietnamese chronicles report that some Malay states had periodically sent tribute to the Vietnamese court. This in fact was a fiction motivated by the Vietnamese monarchy's pretension to cultural superiority over neighboring Southeast Asian societies, meaning that other countries (with the exception of China) were ranked below Confucian Vietnam. Accordingly, diplomatic intercourse with these countries could only be carried out at the Vietnamese court if their envoys followed the ritualized vassal-like behavior. The court chroniclers were therefore required to present even foreign merchants coming into contact with the Vietnamese ruler as envoys bringing tribute.

Nonetheless, like Champa's monarchs, the Vietnamese rulers had recourse to the service of the Malays in some peculiar circumstances. The Nguyên chronicles relate that, in the very beginning of the eighteenth century, in order to dislodge the East India Company's merchants who had come to settle at Poulo Condor with a garrison of more than two hundred men, Truong Phúc Phan, the governor of Trân-biên province, had fifteen Malays recruited with the secret mission of infiltrating the intruders' ranks. One night, these mercenaries started a fire and took advantage of the commotion that ensued to kill nearly all the staff of the British settlement. The English thereafter gave up whatever intention they had of establishing an entrepôt in the Nguyên territory. Still, one cannot help calling into question the ease with which the Vietnamese governor's scheme had been carried out. It could be that the Nguyên chronicles had wittingly distorted the facts; they differ anyway from English sources, according to which the massacre of the East India Company's men was perpetrated by the Makassar they themselves hired to serve as soldiers, but who had mutinied because they were detained beyond the time of their contract.

Generally speaking, historical documents in connection with Malay-Vietnamese relations are misleading in many respects. First of all, Vietnamese ancient authors were, as a rule, inadequately acquainted with the Malay world. Borrowing their geographical terminology from the Chinese, they gave the countries of the Malay peninsula and the Indonesian archipelago impeccable Sino-Vietnamese variants of their contemporary Chinese names. But they often did not seem to have a very precise idea of the geographical realities that these names represented. The

result was that they were easily inclined to include all the regions and populations of the southern seas in the same generic term Chà-và, one of the names given by the Chinese to Java (Chawa, Shepo, Dupu) but pronounced the Vietnamese way. Consequently, it is not infrequent to find in ancient chronicles such passages as for instance: "in 1789, envoys from the kingdom of Tà-ni (for Pattani), a particular name of the Chà-và country, came to offer local products and solicit assistance against Siam."

Ancient historiographers also showed a certain propensity for avoiding the difficulty of localizing the geographical names that looked too exotic to them. But when they ventured to determine the position of places and countries, their attempts at identification were sometimes surprising. Take for example the ancient Chinese names of Poli, Gantuoli, Chitu, quoted earlier. Basing on phonic concordances, Trinh Hoài Dúc (1765-1825) proposed in his *Geographical repertory of the Gia-dinh country* to locate Poli in the area of Bà-ria in eastern Cochinchina. Nguyên Siêu, an author of the second half of the nineteenth century, proffered other arguments by situating Poli in Siam, and Gantuoli and Chitu in present-day Biên-hoà province. These conclusions were adopted by the Historical Institute of the Nguyên dynasty when composing the *Geography of Dai-Nam*, stating that the zone of red earth of Biên-hoà province corresponded to ancient Chitu.

Complications arise from the fact that Vietnamese articulation of the Chinese terms further modifies the sound of the original names, sometimes distorting them to the point of making them hardly recognizable. Moreover, to add to the difficulties, certain particular linguistic conversions could be preferred to transcriptions used by the Chinese, such as Ha-châu instead of "Xinzhoufu" for Singapore, or Lat-gia instead of "Manlajia" for Malacca. At times, the Chinese terms could be translated directly into non Sinic-Vietnamese terms; none of their etymology is then preserved. The Chinese term for Penang Island was written "Binlangyu", associating the approximation of the sound of the name Penang with its meaning as Palm Island. In borrowing this term, Vietnamese officials first converted it into Sino-Vietnamese, Tân-lang-du. This expression still managed to retain much of the sound of the original name, while conveying the adjunct meaning of its Chinese equivalent. A further change occurred however, as uneducated Vietnamese junk captains were unfamiliar with classical Chinese characters: for them, Penang became Hòn Cau or Cù-lao Cau, which meant "Palm Island" in Vietnamese. This new term would not suggest Penang to anyone but a Vietnamese, since it only preserved the meaning of the Chinese transcript

of the name, while sacrificing the transliteration of its sound. Concomitantly, it should also be noted that the word "Cù-lao" for island in Cù-lao Cau was a Vietnamization of the Malay term "pulau"; it was to be employed more commonly in nineteenth century documents than the Sino-Vietnamese word "dao" for island. This was not the only instance of linguistic borrowing, which meant that a certain amount of permeability to Malay cultural influence could have been possible after all.

The question of geographical terminology is but one among the numerous problems researchers on the history of the relations between Vietnam and the Malay world are confronted with. This history certainly remains to be written. But light will be thrown on all its diverse aspects only after every historical source will have been collated, and every documentation available in different places consulted. From the Vietnamese side alone, not all the documents on the subject have been exploited. Travel relations that have been preserved remain to this day mostly unpublished. The journal entitled *Notes on things seen in the oceanic journey*, in which the mandarin Phan Huy Chú recorded his impressions during his mission to Batavia in 1833-34, has been translated only very recently.

For the time being, what is going to be attempted here is no more than a simple chronology of Malay-Vietnamese relations until the mid nineteenth century.

From the beginning to the tenth century.

Under Chinese domination, from 111 BC to 939, the northern part of the Vietnam, Giao-chi (Jiaozhi), formed with Guangdong and Guangxi the province of Giao-châu (Jiaozhou). After the establishment of commercial and political relations between China and the southern seas (Nanhai), the province of Jiaozhou became the terminus of sea trade. The main port of this trade was Liên-lâu in the Giao-chi commandery, probably on the edge of the Red River delta, near modern Hanoi. This does not mean that Malay ships that performed passages from the ports of Southeast Asia to South China did not go to Canton. But the merchants might have found it inconvenient and unnecessary to travel beyond Giao-chi, where they could already trade easily. The foreign traders who came to Linlu were people from Champa and Funan, Malays, Javanese, Indians, Ceylonese, also Arabs.

After the fifth century, due to political vicissitudes and to attacks of the coastal region by Champa, the commercial importance of Liên-lâu was at

times surpassed by that of Canton. Giao-chi continued however to tap a great part of the maritime trade with the countries beyond the Gulf of Siam and the Strait of Malacca. Then, Canton was sacked in 758 by Persian and Arab merchants dissatisfied with excessive exactions by Chinese officials. Its foreign merchant community, especially the traders who participated in the southern maritime route, began to shift their commercial operations to the Vietnam coast. The area of today's Hanoi benefited most from this relocation of the foreign merchants' base of operations. It was to remain the center of the Nanhai trade till the end of the eighth century, and its prosperity caused the coasts of North Vietnam to be raided in 767 by the people from "Shepo and Kunlun", who most probably came north from the Malay peninsula or the Indonesian islands to establish their commercial supremacy. Liên-lâu's economic success also affected the trade of Canton to a point that, in 792, the Chinese governor of the Lingnan region had to appeal to the Chinese emperor to close the North Vietnamese market.

During the first centuries of the Christian era, thanks to its strong commercial position, the commandery of Giao-chi played thus a key intermediary role between China and India. All the southern kingdoms that, since the Han period, came to pay tribute to the Chinese emperor had to pass through here: already in 132, ships believed to be sent for the first time by the ruler of the Javanese country of Yediao carried to Giao-chi ambassadors to the Shun emperor. Buddhist pilgrims also used to stop by this area, where they could find monks able to read Chinese, Sanskrit, and probably Javanese, who could serve as interpreters and help in the translation of sacred texts. As early as the third century, the urban community of Liên-lâu had furthermore become a great center of Buddhism, with more than twenty temples and over five hundred monks in residence. By the seventh century voyage of the Chinese pilgrim Yijing, Liên-lâu was viewed as an important stopping point prior to one's entry into China, not only because it was a commercial entrepôt, but also because it had grown into a major religious center for Buddhist pilgrims.

But Malay seamen responsible for opening the entire sea route from India to China could be as well a serious obstacle to the development of ancient North Vietnam's trade. Fifth-century Javanese shipping, as mentioned above, was threatened by piracy within range of the Cham coast of lower Vietnam. Besides the 767 raid, Chinese records also report that the coast of North Vietnam was pillaged by Kunlun pirates during the Tang dynasty (618-906). These "Kunlun" seafarers profited equally from trade and from plunder: if the attack of coastal populations or a convoy of

ships was deemed risky, they presented themselves as peaceful traders; if they felt that they were strong enough, then they acted as pirates. But because of these acts of piracy, all the maritime populations of the region, from the Gulf of Tonkin to Java, from the Malay peninsula and Sumatra to the Moluccas, were practically in a perpetual state of reprisals one against another. We have also seen that Champa's rulers used to launch these marauding seafarers against the Vietnamese domain in expeditions that benefited the Cham state and improved, at the same time, the economic status of their commercial community.

From the eleventh to the fifteenth century.

While recovering its independence in the middle of the tenth century, Vietnam lost the primordial rank it formerly held in the Nanhai trade. There exists little evidence of Vietnamese involvement in maritime commerce. With the rise of new ports on the southeastern coast of China, Fuzhou and Chuanzhou supplementing the older place of Canton, the Chinese had seen little commercial advantage in regaining their hold over their former colony. The Vietnamese kingdom nevertheless slowly fit into new patterns of trade that were taking shape in the eleventh century, as the concentration of the international route through the Srivijayan ports along the Straits were disrupted by the Cola attack of 1025, and the ports of east Java began to draw traders from India, China and the mainland of Southeast Asia, as well as from the eastern islands.

The Vietnamese annals reported that in 1066, luminescent precious stones were bought at a high price from Javanese merchants. But it was only in 1149 that mention was formally made of the arrival of trading ships from three countries, Java, "Lô Hac" (Lavo or Lopburi) and Siam. These traders asked for a place to live to sell their wares. Subsequently, they were allowed to establish a settlement called Vân-dôn on an island off the coast of today Quang-yên province, east of Hanoi. This location had been chosen above all with the purpose of preventing foreigners from penetrating inland. Vân-dôn, however, was not long in becoming a flourishing port in contact with the Chinese provinces of Fujian and Guangdong, where trading ships gathered from the area bordering the Gulf of Siam and from parts of the island world, most particularly Java. The arrival of merchants from Tam-phât-tê (Palembang) was recorded precisely in 1184. The name Vân-dôn, literally meaning "cloud settlement", may have originally referred to the fact that foreign trading ships gathered there like clouds.

Vân-dôn was not Vietnam's only center of international trade. There were three other seaports - Cân-hai, Hôi-thông and Hôi-triêu - all located in the central province of Nghê-an. Foreigners were permitted to dwell there just like in Vân-dôn. The activity of these ports was apparently related to the growth of an eleventh century overland trade route that went west from the coast across the mountains to the Mekong river valley, then down to Cambodia. Via this route, Vietnamese gold and silver probably went to Cambodia, to Kelantan on the east coast of the Malay peninsula, to Srivijaya on the east coast of Sumatra, and ultimately to Java. In return, the Vietnamese would have gained spices and other local and international goods of value.

After the thirteenth century, under the Trân dynasty, Vân-dôn's importance increased along with the decline of the Nghê-an seaports, the access of which had been progressively silted up. In 1349, the place was endowed with a much more structured administrative organization, which included expanding its activity. In particular, an Inspector of Maritime Affairs was created, and a garrison was posted to maintain order. Tighter control was, indeed, deemed necessary by the Vietnamese authorities, since in the preceding year Javanese trading ships fraudulently bought pearls from local fishermen, thus depriving the government of a profitable source of revenue.

Succeeding the Trân in the fifteenth century, the Lê dynasty decreed stricter regulations for overseas trade and the comings and goings of foreigners. Foreign merchants were thus allowed to enter only specified places, among them Vân-dôn, a major port. Under the new regulations, they must obtain a commerce license and their cargoes must be submitted to a rigorous inspection. As for the natives, they would have to obtain a permit in order to sell their goods to foreigners. Any official who without good reasons entered any of the Vân-dôn settlements or checking stations of the frontier zone would be punished with penal servitude or banishment. But rules were also edicted in 1485 to define the procedure for the reception at the capital of "the envoys of Champa, Laos, Siam, Java and Latgia (Malacca)." A distinction was made between traders and governmental agents. Thus, steps had been taken to establish regular diplomatic relations. The Vietnamese annals also cite a reception given at court to a Javanese ambassador named "Na-bôi", and the tributary goods presented to the Lê sovereign in 1467 by seafaring vessels from "Tô-môn-dap-lat" (in Chinese Sumendala, for Sumatra).

Strange as it may have seemed, the first mention of Malacca was made apparently only in 1485, whereas this place, strongly integrated into the

older Javanese system, had long emerged as the major trading center of the region. In any case, in the latter half of the fifteenth century, Vietnam sent gold and silver as its main products to Malacca, particularly in exchange for sulfur. Vietnamese gold, judged the best of Southeast Asia, combined with the larger amount coming from Sumatra, helped to make Malacca the main center for gold in Asia, though not in the world. Nevertheless, if we refer to the first major Portuguese work dealing with Asia, the *Suma Oriental* written by Tomé Pires shortly after the Portuguese conquest of Malacca in 1511, few Vietnamese ships went directly to Malacca. Instead, Canton was the main port of call for the Vietnamese, and they went from there to Malacca on Chinese junks.

From the sixteenth to the eighteenth century.

The trading situation of Southeast Asia underwent a drastic change in the sixteenth century. By conquering Malacca in 1511, the Portuguese secured the command of the all-important commercial and strategic focus of the Malay straits. Their penetration was to open the spice islands to international competition in the following years. Eventually the house of Malacca settled at Johor, on the southern tip of the Malay peninsula, and handled the eastern trade, while to the west Acheh, on the northern tip of Sumatra, rose to deal with the Bay of Bengal commerce. In 1567, finding that military measures were insufficient to quell smuggling and piracy on the Chinese coast, the Ming court lifted its ban on private trade with Southeast Asia. Then, late in the century, the Spanish and the Dutch entered the scene and soon had their own centers at Manila and Batavia.

These events did not appear to have immediate implications for Vietnam, as there is little evidence to say how Vietnamese trade was involved in the changes taking place. Presumably Vietnamese commerce continued with Canton and, in the second half of the sixteenth century, began with the new Portuguese center of Macao. The Vietnamese may have had some contact across the South China Sea with Brunei, Johor, and Portuguese Malacca. However, a troubled internal situation, as well as the increasing Confucian influence with its bias against trade, undoubtedly affected such trade activities.

Conditions changed however after the transfer of power into the hands of the two rival families, the Trinh lords and the Nguyên lords. Partitioning the country in the beginning of the seventeenth century, both the Trinh in the North and the Nguyên in the South opened their respective domains to international commerce, in order to secure the

means for their armed conflict. In North Vietnam, first the Dutch, then the English and the French were authorized by the Trinh lords to establish factories at Phô-hiên, on the Red River, about sixty kilometers southeast of Hà-nôi, before they were allowed to settle in the capital itself. As a consequence, relations were developed with the European establishments of Batavia and Bantam in Java. Chinese, Siamese, Japanese, Malays, precisely people from Trengganu, according to English captain Alexander Hamilton who sailed the South China Sea in the first years of the eighteenth century, flocked to Phô-hiên. Nevertheless, the Trinh lords' interest for trade did not last. It faded out as soon as fighting with the Nguyên ceased in 1672, whereupon the need for war materials became less urgent. The Europeans were more and more hampered in their activity. By the beginning of the eighteenth century, they had all given up, leaving the place to private Chinese traders who preserved their preponderance thanks not only to the administrative autonomy they enjoyed, but also to the proximity of China and the commercial network they formed with other Chinese communities across Southeast Asia.

South of the eighteenth parallel, the principality of the Nguyên was more open to international trade, wherein its lords took a personal share, with the purpose of consolidating their finances and strengthening their military power. Some time around 1600, the port of Hôi-an, or Faifo as it was known to the Europeans, developed in response to the new currents of international commerce and to the needs of the southern administration for goods and funds. The movements of the ships that this port received were commanded by the monsoon system: vessels coming from the north (China, Japan) arrived with the winter monsoon beginning in October, and departed with the summer monsoon beginning in April; those coming from India, Malacca, Trengganu or Batavia arrived with the summer monsoon and left with the winter monsoon.

The relative importance of the various merchant groups for the Nguyên may be seen in the duties charged them in the seventeenth century. The lowest rates went to those on immediately adjacent coasts (500 strings of cash to arrive, 50 to depart); the next lowest were charged to the merchants of Fujian, Siam and Manila (2000 and 200), then those of Shanghai and Canton (3000 and 300), then the ships from Macao and Japan (4000 and 400), and finally the other ships said to come from "Occidental seas" (8000 and 800). Thomas Bowyear, the East India Company's envoy to the Huê court in 1696, corroborated those indications by reporting that junks came regularly to Hôi-an not only from Canton and Macao, but also from Nagasaki, Ayudhya, Phnom Penh, Manila and

Batavia.

But the southern principality was to be shaken by a deep crisis: by the mid eighteenth century, its political, social and economic situation had begun to break down. International trade was affected, which caused the decline of Hôi-an. Then the outbreak of the civil war drove the Nguyên away from their capital. Prince Nguyên Anh, the heir of the Nguyên dynasty, was pursued by his adversaries and reduced to arduous peregrinations in the Gulf of Siam. Out of despair, he even resolved to go to Batavia or to Malacca to ask for assistance from the Dutch. We know that the sovereign of Siam had given him aid; but we may reasonably suppose that he had also tried to contact certain Malay sultanates, in order to obtain help to reconquest his states. At any rate, he sent missions to buy arms and ammunitions, most certainly to Batavia and Malacca, but moreover to Penang, Singapore and Johor (called Nhu-phât in Vietnamese documents).

Following these contacts, privileged relations were undoubtedly established with some states in the Malay peninsula. This explains the presence of many Malay merchants in Saigon, once it was reconquered in 1788 by Nguyên Anh. This place became in the last decade of the eighteenth century one of the main ports of international trade in the South China Sea. On the other hand, exchanges of diplomatic missions and presents had followed: the Nguyên chronicles recorded the arrivals in 1789 of envoys of Pattani; in 1790, of the ambassador of the state of "Tam-hoat", named "Giap-tât-dan-diên"; in 1795, of the ambassador "Chê-phú" of the ruler of the "Javanese kingdom"; in 1797, of envoys of the "Javanese kingdom" with a tribute; finally in 1798, of the ambassador "A-bang-cà-trac" of the sultan of Johor. The Chinese document *Hai lu zhu*, based on the testimony of a Chinese merchant who was traveling in the Malay peninsula between 1782 and 1795, corroborated in part the Vietnamese texts by talking about an "annual tribute paid to Vietnam" by the sovereigns of Trengganu. It appeared that on the eve of the installation of the Nguyên dynasty over a unified country, regular political relations with the Malay world were in a fair way to be established. And yet, once the new emperor Gia-Long reinstated at Huê, Vietnamese historical sources no longer breathed a word of the matter.

The first half of the nineteenth century.

Visiting Vietnam in 1822, John Crawfurd, the East India Company's envoy, stated that this kingdom received in the course of commerce

pepper, cloves, nutmegs, sandal wood and tin from the Malayan countries, and that several of its subjects went regularly to trade in the European ports in the Straits of Malacca, particularly Singapore. The Direction of Navigation of the Nguyên monarchy reported in its account of the levies collected during the three years 1819-21 a fair proportion of Ha-châu taxes, that is to say taxes paid by merchant ships from Singapore, Penang and Malacca. Trade with the Malay peninsula was therefore relatively important in the two first decades of the nineteenth century, although an edict in 1809 forbade Malay ships to go north of Dà-nang in central Vietnam. Vietnamese and Chinese merchants residing in Vietnam must also obtain a license before being allowed to go abroad to Malay ports. Nevertheless, Jean-Baptiste Chaigneau, who was appointed in 1821 consul of France at Huê, would soon say that "hardly a few Malays appear in the ports of Cochinchina."

Was the diminution of Malay trade due to the recrudescence of piracy in the waters of the Gulf of Siam and the Straits of Malacca? By 1825, piracy had indeed become firmly established. From Penang to New Guinea, and from Java to the Philippines, fleets of galleys scoured the seas in search of plunder and slaves. The Straits of Malacca in particular swarmed with pirates. The most ferocious were Lanun from Mindanao, and Balanini from the Sulu Sea. In squadrons of ten to twenty praus they cruised along the whole coast of the Malay peninsula from Trengganu to Kedah, and also visited Bangka and Java. After about 1840, the native trade of the Straits Settlements began to suffer from a new enemy, the Chinese. While they usually confined their operations to their own coast or the Gulf of Siam, they were frequently seen as far south as the neighborhood of Singapore. The merchant vessels, not armed and usually sailing alone or in groups of only three or four, were easy preys for these pirates.

Pirates often forayed the coastal areas of southern Vietnam, mostly the region of Hà-tiên, but also sometimes the provinces of Bình-thuân and Khánh-hoà, farther north. The Vietnamese authorities fought in vain against these plunderers designated under the generic appellation of "Chà-và pirates". A garrison was posted in 1833 in the island of Phu-quôc off Hà-tiên coast, and a fortress was erected in 1836 in the island of Poulo Condor, but they were ineffective against an adversary characterized above all by high mobility.

Piracy was, however, not the main cause of the decline of Malay trade. This resulted mostly from a trend already perceptible during the last years of the second decade of the nineteenth century. Conscious of the potential threat represented by the advent of the Europeans in the southern seas, the

court of Huê took protective measures which restricted external commerce to a great extent. Henceforth, a suspicious attitude prevailed toward foreigners. In 1825, two armed junks were sent with a deputation of mandarins to Singapore under the pretense of buying woolen manufactures and glassware. The real objective of these envoys was in fact to report on the conditions and views of the European settlements in the Straits of Malacca. From then on, governmental missions were sent every year to Batavia, to Singapore, to Penang and to Manila, to conduct trade, but their main purpose was to gather information about the political situation and the designs of the Europeans. The royal government naturally maintained its monopoly over the transactions with these commercial centers. Those transactions were carried out on a quite small scale: export consisted of sugar, rice, ivory, rhinoceros horns, copper, silk, sticklac, cinnamon, in return for which were imported tin, saltpeter, fire arms and clothes. This royal monopoly, nonetheless, did not annihilate private trade through the intermediary of Chinese traders, although their junks being without arms could hardly resist the attacks of pirates.

During the second quarter of the nineteenth century, relations with the Malay world were thus limited to a few points, chosen precisely because they were the centers of European domination. They ceased altogether after 1850, when the increasing threat of a French intervention incited the court of Huê to stop sending its vessels abroad, and to impede the contact of its subjects with foreigners. The Chinese were then the only foreign merchants to visit Vietnam's ports, and to serve as their liaison with the outside world. This explains why, after 1860 when the French, following their conquest of Cochinchina, opened the port of Saigon to general commerce, the import trade of the new French colony was largely financed by merchants of Singapore, and several of the ships which plied between the French port and Singapore were owned by Chinese merchants in the Straits. In particular, Singapore handled a considerable share of the rice exports of Saigon, a large proportion of which it reexported to the adjacent countries.

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