

Preserving the Cultural Bond towards Strengthening Sino-Malaysian Friendship

Melestarikan Hubungan Kebudayaan, ke Arah Memperkukuh Persahabatan Malaysia-China

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ABSTRACT

This paper is an attempt to trace the history of traditional friendship between China and Malaysia which had been established since the Han Dynasty. The ties between both countries were further strengthened in the 15th century with the establishment of diplomatic relation between the Ming Dynasty and the Malacca Sultanate. The paper also discusses the diplomatic ties between China and Malaysia which was officially reconciled in 1974 during the second Malaysia Prime Minister, Tun Abdul Razak bin Hussein's visit to China. This bilateral relationship has continued to develop and gained significance with China's 'One Belt One Road' initiative in 2013, which was inspired by China's president, Xi Jinping. The paper describes the relationship between the two great empires (China and the Malay world), which carries a special significance in the context of the interaction of civilizations. This interaction does not only revolve around the issues of trade, investment and tourism alone but its significance is also visible in various socio-cultural issues especially the development of the Malay language in China.

Keywords: Sino-Malaysian relations; Malay language; Overseas Chinese (Huaqiao); Peranakan Chinese (Baba-Nyonya); Malayan Communist Party (MCP)

ABSTRAK

Makalah ini menelusuri sejarah panjang persahabatan tradisional antara China dengan Malaysia yang sudah dijalinan sejak Dinasti Han. Jalinan kedua-dua negara ini terus dimekarkan pada abad ke-15 dengan hubungan Dinasti Ming dengan Kesultanan Melayu Melaka. Seterusnya makalah ini juga membincangkan hubungan diplomatik antara China-Malaysia yang dijalinan semula secara rasmi pada tahun 1974 semasa kunjungan Perdana Menteri Malaysia, Tun Abdul Razak bin Hussein ke China. Hubungan dua hala ini telah pesat berkembang sehingga kepada inisiatif 'One Belt One Road' China yang diilhamkan oleh Presiden China, Xi Jinping pada 2013. Makalah ini menjelaskan bahawa hubungan antara dua buah kerajaan besar, yang satu di Asia Timur dan yang satu di alam Melayu itu, mempunyai signifikansi yang khusus dalam konteks interaksi tamadun yang bukan hanya berlingkar pada hubungan perdagangan, pelaburan dan pelancongan semata-mata, malah menjangkau kepelbagaian isu-isu sosiobudaya khususnya perkembangan bahasa Melayu di China.

Kata kunci: Hubungan China-Malaysia; bahasa Melayu; Orang Cina Seberang (Huaqiao); Peranakan Cina (Baba-Nyonya); Parti Komunis Malaya (PKM)

INTRODUCTION

The relationship between China and the Malay world was often strengthened during the Ming Dynasty with the Malacca Sultanate. In fact, the Malay Peninsula and the Island of Borneo have built ties with China since the first century even when the country and nation's entity was still non-existence. According to archaeological findings found in the Niah Cave (Sarawak), the mural paintings, coffins made of copper had similarities with the copper coffins found in Guangxi, Guizhou and Sichuan. It was proven that these coffins were archaeological remains of the Three Kingdom (AD 220-280) war

era in China. In addition, archaeological remains such as the bronze drum unearthed after a flood in the Temerloh River (Pahang), coins, knives, iron and fishing hooks carved with Chinese characters was found on the coast of Sarawak also proved that there were initial relation in trades between the Malays and Chinese (Zhou & Tang 2011: 41). Majority of the earthenware found in the area was linked to the remains of Han Dynasty (206 BC -220 AD). In addition, the trade relationship between the Malay Peninsular and China can be seen from the remains of artifacts such as found in the Bujang Valley (Chieh-cha), Kalumpang Island (Sabah), Matang in Perak, Johor Lama (Lo-Yueh),

Singapore, Tioman Island (Tiyumah), Kuala Berang in Terengganu (Fo-lo-an), Pattani, Chaiya and Ligor in Thailand (Zuliskandar & Nik Hassan 2010: 47). The ports in these states formed trade relationship with China from the artifacts found since the Song Dynasty while the trades in Kedah have begun since the Tang Dynasty (618 – 906 BC). Historian, K. G. Tregonning (1965: 2) stated that the Malay Peninsular was the port (relay station) for China-India trades. Indeed, the history of interaction between Malay and Chinese civilization has run long. The Sino-Malaysia cultural exchange was developed out of the trade between China and India, due to the Malay Peninsula's strategic location on the route of Chinese and Indian sails, the Malay Peninsula had developed transit trade through which its cultural exchange with China had dawned (Zhou & Tang 2011: 12).

Chinese historical source described the relationship of the Chinese kingdom with the Malay world in detail from the beginning. It was pioneered clearly during Han Dynasty which was recorded by *Han Shi Di Li Zhi*, followed by series of relationship with later dynasties. *Han Shu Di Li Zhi* described the voyage of Emperor Wu Di (140 BC- 87 BC) to Huang Zhi (Kanchipuram) in southeast India with the country in Southeast Asia and South Asia. In addition, *Hou Han Shu* also described that in the year 131 AD, the kingdom of Diao Ye believed to be either in Java or Sumatera has sent tribute to the Chinese emperor and whereby the emperor later awarded a prize to the king in return (Liang Liji 1996: 13).

However, the relationship between China and Malay world was briefly interrupted when stability in the Han Dynasty was compromised. Hence the relationship with the Malay world is often severed without continuity. Similarly, at that time, there is no state in the Malay world which has a great and impactful government that the relationship is not so familiar. However, China's relations with the Malay world jumped to a higher level after the rise of the Tang Dynasty (618-907 AD) and in the Malay Srivijaya Empire in the 7th century. The relationship between the two kingdoms of which one was in Southeast Asia while the other from the Malay world, carried a great significant specifically in the context of modern interaction. It was not confined to trades only but transcends to the cultural ties, thoughts and belief system. During Tang dynasty, the Buddhist monks' activity in Srivijaya became the best means to expand religious teachings outside its territory. At

the same time, the old Malay language which was strongly influenced by Sanskrit became the tool to understanding Sanskrit for the Buddhist monks. One of the monk's well-kept record was documented by Fa-Hsien who have made the sacred journey to India by land across Central Asia. Paul Wheatley (1961) in his research about the adventures of Fa-Hsien was more likely to follow the opinion of Grimes (1941) which stated that Fa-Hsien has been through passage in the Straits of Malacca before arriving in Borneo or Java as compared to the opinion expressed earlier by Wilson (1838-1839), Sykes (1840-1841) and James Legge (1886) which states that the adventures of Fa-Hsien been through before reaching the Sunda Strait to Borneo (Takakusu 1896). Meanwhile the monk, Yi Jing (I-Ching) who lived for six months in the capital of Srivijaya in 671 AD and later went to Chieh-cha (Kedah) with the mission to enhance his religious study, while helping to expand the spread of Buddhism in the country has clearly shown the close tie between the two countries and civilization. At the beginning of 673 AD, when the northeast monsoon wind blows, I-Ching begins to cruise through the Bay of Bengal to India. In his voyage, he had stated that after ten days of sailing from Kedah, he arrived in the Kingdom of the Naked People (Nicobar Islands) (Takakusu 1896: 197) and a half months later arrived at Tan-mo-li-ti (Tamralipti). In addition to the question of religion, aspects of customs, etiquette and different culture in Malay has attracted the attention of Yi Jing that the Srivijaya Empire was highly regarded by Tang Dynasty as the centre of civilization in the Malay world. The Chinese kingdom also hopes that the peacefulness will allow diplomatic missions and trades between Southeast Asia who commutes to China will gain benefit in the concept of "de" (德) in the form of harmonious, natural relationship. "De" is key concept in Chinese philosophy, usually translated as "inherent character; inner power; integrity" in Taoism, "moral character; morality" in Confucianism and other contexts and "quality, virtue" or "merit, virtuous deeds" in Chinese Buddhism.

China not only established relationship with Srivijaya but also with other provinces in the archipelago such as Siam (Thailand), Burma (Myanmar), Annam (Vietnam), Malacca and Java. China's efforts to create a good regional relations was also continued by sending Chinese naval fleet expedition to Nanyang (southern sea) and other regions. While the Tang Dynasty was ruling China,

his ruler had opened seven trade routes with the outside world which was commonly known as the Silk Road. The Silk Road not only was the trade route for silk but also for various other commodities such as slaves, satin, and many other fine fabrics, musks, other perfumes, spices and medicines, jewels, glassware and rhubarb. One of them is the sea route from Guangzhou to India, Persia and Arab through the Malay world such as the Malay Peninsula, Srivijaya, Java (Ho-ling) and others. This route is a catalytic activity of cultural exchange and technology as well as the main channel for the dissemination of knowledge, ideology, philosophy and culture which connects traders, merchants, priests, missionaries, soldiers, nomads and urban dwellers in China, India, Persia, Asia and Mediterranean for nearly 3,000 years. Trade along the Silk Road is the most important factor driving the development of the great civilizations in China with the outside world. At times, it set up the basis for the development of the modern world (Manchester & Cuno 2007: 8).

AN OVERVIEW OF THE MALAY AND CHINESE RELATION

The close tie between China and the Malay world was continued by Song Dynasty (960– 1279 M) and Yuan Dynasty (1206–1368 M). During the two dynasties, the relationship with Srivijaya and Java was focused on trade although aspects of culture follows on. The close relationship between Malay-Chinese, continues while focused was given on trade relations. Merchandise from Southeast Asia, China, India and West Asia are traded together. Trades through the use of sea route has allowed traders from China to identify the various exotic and valuable commodities. Referring to a source from Han Dynasty, a chapter 28 from a book titled *Ch'ien Han Su* (Annals of the Early Han Dynasty) of Pan Ku tells a story of Chinese traders who boarded the ship of “barbarian” who were not of Chinese descent, to buy pearls, jewels and other rare commodities (Wheatley 1955). It was estimated about 36 times or an average of three times in a year, messengers from Srivijaya was sent to China in Southeast Asia. As a sign of respect and appreciating good relation with the Chinese kingdom, king of Srivijaya financed the building of temple in Guangzhou city in 1079.

However, the height of the relationship between the two civilizations, happened during the Ming

Dynasty in the 15th century that Liang Liji (1996: 12) stated, “this history should be recorded in gold because of its achievement that is unparalleled in the history of both nations.” This is so because both civilization have reached a diplomatic relationship that is organized both in the politics or trade relationship as well as culture. Malacca under the rule of King Parameswara (Sultan Iskandar Syah) became the first destination for Emperor Ming Yongle (1403 – 1424) to come to Malay world in 1403. The history of diplomatic ties between China and Malacca written in *Ming Shi Lu*. This huge electronic work of Ming Shi Lu can be accessed via Geoff Wade, *Southeast Asia in the Ming Shi-lu: An Open Access Resource*. Singapore: Asia Research Institute and Singapore E-Press <<http://epress.nus.edu.sg/msl/>>.

Rapidity and closeness between the two civilizations is reflected in the fact of some important and interesting facts. These include the sending of Admiral Zheng He or Sampo Kong (which in Malay history known as Admiral Cheng Ho) with a massive fleet for a goodwill visit to Southeast Asia, South Asia and West Asia, with the greatest ship can load goods weighing 2,500 tons and a total of 1,000 people. The total number of ships were 100 to 200 ships with the officials, crews and army reaching to 27,000 to 28,000 people on board. Zheng He was the epitome of excellence at world sailing expedition during the 15th century. He is a Muslim and a very well-known sailor, diplomat, a wise war hero, and a daring explorer. Zheng He created history by making seven sailing expedition from China to Southeast Asia, South Asia, Central Asia and East Africa from 1405 to 1433 (Tan Ta Sen 2009: 155).

Another important factor was the visits made by the Malacca king to China. In 1411, Parameswara (1344 – c. 1414), the ruler of Malacca along with 540 followers was escorted by Cheng Ho to meet the third emperor of Ming Dynasty, Yung Lo. The delegation from Malacca was granted yellow umbrella, a seal and a set of clothing as a sign of recognition from the Chinese kingdom towards the Malay sultanate of Malacca. Later, envoys from Malacca was sent to China in 1412 and 1413 as a sign to strengthen the friendship. During the reign of Sultan Mansor Shah (1459 – 1477 M), he also forge a diplomatic tie with the Chinese kingdom. An envoy with gifts were sent to China. The Chinese Emperor bestowed Princess Hang Li Po upon Sultan Mansor Shah as a decision and acknowledgment of Sultan Mansor Shah as the ruler of Malacca

Sultanate. Hence, the Sultan sent the Bendahara Tun Perpatih Putih to escort the award, Princess Hang Li Po to Malacca in 1458 along with 500 of her followers. Princess Hang Li Po was later married to Sultan Mansor Shah in 1459. This envoy and award showed that Malacca and China have entered another phase of long-term relationship between Malacca-China. This forged the relationship between the royal families of two kingdoms. This historical marriage was commemorated with the building of Hang Li Po's well. The well never went dry and was the only source of water during the dry season. The Dutch built a wall surrounding the well in 1677 to preserve it as a wishing well. Some said that by tossing coins, they will return to Malacca in the future (Kong Yuanzhi 2000: 68).

The forging of this tie gave an impact and encouragement when Malacca was no longer disturbed by foreign powers like the Siam and Majapahit. This situation has provided an opportunity for Malacca to grow rapidly into a world-class flourishing trading center. Melaka's monopoly on the China's commodity has attracted more and more traders to conduct trade in Melaka. Hence, Malacca became the focus of Muslim and non-Muslim traders developing Malacca not only in terms of economy but also socially. This condition allows Malacca to develop rapidly until it became a successful main

trading centre (Tan Ta Sen 2009: 156).

LANGUAGE VERSATILITY, ETHNIC DIVERSITY

The friendship between Malacca and China has brought changes in the structure of society in Malaya when there are traders from the other country who migrated to Malacca and got married with the locals. The result of this mixed marriages have created a new group of society called the Peranakan Chinese or better known as Baba Nyonya. "Peranakan" came from the Malay language root word "anak" (child) which means "descendants of Chinese and of another race" or "generations of Chinese born in Malaya". The name "Baba" is a reference for men while "Nyonya" is used to refer to the women. The existence of the "Peranakan" race linguistically have helped to increase the Malay language vocabulary which came from Hokkien. The process of communication between the two communities have demonstrated the phenomenon of vocabulary adaptation. In such case, the relationship between the Malay and Chinese society have caused the adaptation of Chinese language in Malay language. Some of the vocabulary adapted from Chinese language can be seen below:

Field	Example
Food	<i>Mi (noodles), beng (ice), ebi (dried prawn), cang (rice dumpling wrapped in bamboo leaves), tauhu (tofu), teh (tea), mihun (vermicelli), lai (Chinese pear), pau (dumpling), kicap (soy sauce)</i>
Clothing / Glossary	<i>Kekwa (chrysanthemum), koyak (tear), gincu (lipstick), bak (ink), sempoa, tocang (braid), teko (teapot)</i>
House/ Tools	<i>Loceng (bell), beca (trishaw), pongkes (dustpan), cat (paint), pisau (knife), dacing (scale), sampan (boat), jong (Chinese sailing boat)</i>
Human Affairs	<i>Abah (Father), encik (Mr), tokong (temple), taoha (tiny piece of cloth as a sign of mourning), kongsi (share), amah (maid)</i>

Source: Goh Sang Seong 2011

An in-depth research on the borrowing of Chinese language in Malay Language was conducted by Kong (1993). According to Kamus Dewan (Dictionary of the Malay language, 1970), Kong (1993) concluded that there are 261 Chinese loan words in Malay language. A research by Mashudi and Yeong (1989) stated that there are 341 Chinese loan word in the Malay language. From the number of words, only 90 words are still used while another 251 words were outdated and no longer use. The

Baba Nyonya society are fluent in Malay language. Although fluent in the Malay language, in the aspects of ideology and spiritually, they still follow their ancestral practices and beliefs. They practise a different lifestyle as a result from the convergence of two different cultures. Until now, they still exist in Malacca and maintain the lifestyle and tradition of their ancestors. The legacy of friendly relations between the Sultanate of Malacca with China also remains to this day. This can be seen in the names

of places and the architectural influence which is related to China. The mosques had terraced roofs or pyramid shaped. Chinese pattern carvings are significant and can be seen on roof edges as well as the top of a mosque which can also be seen in Chinese temples. Mosques that have pyramid-shaped roof is also in the habit resembling a pagoda tower (Ezrin Arbi 1971). The sino-eclectic mosque with three roofs were Kampung Hulu, the Tengkeria Mosques and Kampung Keling Mosque. They are located in the town of Malacca. Therefore, the mosques have always been the focus of traders in view of its position in the strategic areas of the city. The mosques are fenced with bricks and stones with an archaic entrance similar to a temple. According to history, the mosques were built by Chinese traders. Hence the Chinese elements and carvings in the architectures. Among the best example was the Kampung Keling mosques which has a pagoda shaped tower and an arched entrance. The mosque is decorated with intricate Chinese carvings in the prayer section and outside the mosque (Ezrin Arbi 1971).

In addition, in the course of close relationship between Malacca and China over a century, since 1403 to 1521, it is apparent that there were mutual visits between the two sides, both of which involved kings or rulers with regard to the relation of political trade and culture. *Ming Shi Zhong Lu's* record in the fourth edition, listed 57 diplomatic relation between Malacca and Ming Dynasty during that period. The relationship was based on loyalty and mutual respect between both kingdoms. Even though China is a big empire and powerful then, their visits to Malacca was only to show goodwill and for trade. China never planned to conquer or to colonize Malacca.

The relation between the Malay and the Chinese before the occupation of the West, took place in harmoniously and naturally without force. Of course, nothing was termed as a proto-maritime colonialist as it was once touted by Geoff Wade (2004: 10) to the Zheng He delegation to Nanyang. It was entirely different from the arrival of Western powers to Malacca such as the Portuguese, Dutch and the British who tried to expand their power and influence to Southeast Asia with war and colonization. There lies the uniqueness of Malacca and China's relationship. It is because the relationship was never to conquer and colonize as what the Western powers were doing in the 16th century. This relationship shows how both sides are interdependent on mutual interest in the political and

economic aspects. Mutual respect and recognition of the dignity and sovereignty of each as well as to appreciate the culture and heritage of both sides. Moreover, there was mutual desire and interest to appreciate the unique treasures of the local culture and civilization. It can be seen in the records by Ma Huan (c. 1380-1460) and Fei Xin (c. 1385-1436) about the situation in Malacca. Generally, Liang Liji (1996) summarized three important things which is a result of the relation and interaction of the two great civilization which can be simplified as such:

1. The establishment of friendship which was mutual in all things such as respect, understanding and appreciation to the extent that no conflicts can affect the friendly relation of both nation.
2. The existence of similar attitude in promoting peace and justice by revoking violence and hostility. This is different from the arrival of the Western fleet with the intent and mission to colonize.
3. The existence of economic cooperation in the form of bilateral trade through three systems of that era; the trade between the ruler (in the form of tributes and reply in awards and various valuables), trade between the kingdoms based on the contract of sale of certain goods only to China with prices that favours Malacca and common trade among the general public.

Another benefit that is no less important in the context of civilization is the influence and the expansion of the use of the Malay language as the lingua franca of the Malacca Sultanate era. If during the Srivijaya era had already existed the Chinese Buddhist monk who learnt ancient Malay, hence, during the Malacca Sultanate, the Malay language was not only learnt by the religious ministers but also a language learnt and used to manage trades and livelihood by the Chinese especially among traders. More important than that was the "royal attention" on the Ming Dynasty when the committee set up interpreters (Da Tong Shi) to meet the interests and needs of external relations. Tong Shi or interpreters who served in 18 sub-committees (Xiao Tong Shi) amounted to 60 people and two were dedicated to the Malay language; one for Malacca and the other for Sumatera. To train interpreters, in 1405, Emperor Ming Yongle established a language academy known as "Si Yi Guan" (Center of Foreign Languages) in the capital of Yingtian Fu (now Nanjing). There were eight departments in the

foreign language academy. Malay language was put under *Hui Hui Guan* (Islamic Department which covers Persia, Arab, Malacca, Java and others). The foreign language academy lasted over 400 years and extended into the Qing Dynasty from the Ming although its name was changed in 1748 to *Hui Tong Si Yi Guan*. The role of the academy only stopped after the Opium War in 1840, after the Qing Dynasty faced political instability.

The importance of the Malay language as the language of communication across civilizations created an effort to compile a bilingual dictionary which was important for Chinese traders and others in the interaction in the Malay world. Initial efforts in compiling a bilingual dictionary was traced back as early as 14th century during the era of Emperor Ming Hongwu (1368 – 1399), the first emperor of the Ming Dynasty (Liang Liji 1996: 92).

However, in the dictionary as a list of Chinese words - the word of foreign states (*Hua Yi Yi Yu*) is not clear if the Malay language is also embodied in it. However, it was found in the 15th century that a Chinese-Malay bilingual dictionary was made as was researched by western scholars such as E. D. Edwards and C. O. Blagden in the 1930s. The title of the dictionary in Chinese was *Ma La Jia Guo Yi Yu* (A Chinese Vocabulary of Malacca Words and Phrases, 滿刺加館譯語). The words collected in it are believed to include the vocabulary of the early days of the onset of the Ming Dynasty's relationship with the Malacca Sultanate from 1403 until the fall of Malacca in the hands of the Portuguese in 1511. The dictionary consists of 482 entries of Chinese words which are considered important and categorized into 17 fields namely astronomy, geography, season and time, plants, birds and animals, houses and castles, behaviours, body, gold and jewels, society and history, color, counting and common words. Each entry is given a Malay translation written in Chinese (Liang Liji 1996: 92).

The dictionary was compiled with the needs of the Ming Dynasty to establish a relationship with Malacca. Until the end of the 16th century it was still a reference dictionary, including in the preparation of Chinese history books. Thus, the close and familiar relationship between the two civilizations have also left a large and important impact on the language as well, as evidenced by the widespread role of the Malay language.

The relationship and interaction between the two civilizations was later ended for a long period due to the change in the system in China and

from the effects of colonization on Malacca and the Malay kingdom by the Western powers. Only in the 18th century onwards, the relationship was reconnected however with a pattern that is much different, because the arrival of the Chinese was not sent by the Chinese government on diplomatic relations but rather an attempt by Western colonialists to meet the needs of its economy, with most of the migrants made workers in the tin mines and a number of others trying their luck in business. According to Blythe (1947: 66), 1850 was the date of commencement of a large-scale immigration from mainland China to Peninsular Malaysia. Mc Gee (1964: 70) has noted that the Chinese arrived by the largest numbers between 1880 and 1914. On the contrary, Tregonning (1962) stated that the number of Chinese migration increased from 50,000 in 1880 to 200,000 in 1990 and peaked to a record level of more than 360,000 in 1927. More than 6 million Chinese have signed into colonies and territories under British protection in Peninsular Malaysia (Tregonning, 1962). History finally gives reference to the pattern of demographic and social system in the Federation of Malaya and then Malaysia when Chinese residents were granted citizenship at the time of the Federation of Malaya gained independence in 1957. Now (2014), Chinese makes up 22.6 percent of Malaysian citizen and they contribute to the various cultures through their way of life in the areas of art, festivals, food, clothes, belief system and so on.

PRESERVING THE RELATIONSHIP OF MALAYSIA – CHINA.

The longstanding relations between Malaysia and China was disconnected as a result of the Cold War and Western colonialism that do not want to have any relation with countries that practiced communism. However, a new hope in the relation between Malaysia and Republic of China emerges in the 1970s when the need to build a diplomatic relationship for mutual benefit arise. Malaysia's foreign policy after the conclusion of the Indonesian confrontation that emphasizes efforts to maintain national security and interests through improved relations and cooperation with regional countries regardless of their view of life and professed political system, contributed to the success of Malaysia establishing a diplomatic relation with the People's Republic of China.

The relationship was accomplished due to the effort and confidence of the Prime Minister of Malaysia, Tun Abdul Razak bin Hussein who dared to take risks when other countries do not want a relationship with China. The relationship actually began with a letter written by Abdul Razak to China's Prime Minister, Zhou En-Lai in 1971. The letter was sent through the Chairman of the Table Tennis Association of Malaysia, who was also secretary-general of the Alliance Party (now Barisan Nasional), Tan Sri Michael Chen Wing Sum, when the country joined the table tennis tournament in Beijing in September, 1971. After reading the letter, Zhou En-Lai requested that the Minister of Foreign Affairs, Ji Pengfei to meet with Chen. The brief meeting paved the way for a serious decision to establish diplomatic ties between the two countries. Three years later, Tun Abdul Razak made a historic visit to China which not only formed a bond of friendship between Malaysia and China, but also opened up new chapters in the two way relationship between both countries (*Sin Chew Jit Poh* 1974). Tun Abdul Razak stated that,

In our foreign policy, we have shown our commitment to the cause of peace by consistently pursuing a policy of non-alignment and regional co-operation and of extending our hand of friendship to all countries who wish to be friends with us irrespective of their political ideology or social system on the basis of mutual respect, non-interference and co-existence. (Jain 1984: 215).

Malaysia was the first Southeast Asian country to form diplomatic relations with the People's Republic of China in 1974. It was an important relationship for Malaysia as it helped to curb communist activities and to maintain the stability and peace in the Southeast Asian region. China's commitment to communist movements in Malaysia made it easier for the latter to tackle communist problems in the country. Following Malaysia's initiative to form good ties with China, other ASEAN countries also developed similar relations with the republic. Philippines and Thailand were the first to do so in July 1975, followed by Singapore in 1990, and finally Brunei in 1991. Indonesia who suspended their diplomatic relationship with China in October 1967 also renewed their relations in July 1990. Thanks to Malaysia's insistence, China was successfully accepted into the United Nations Organization in 1971. Tun Abdul Razak's wise and bold decision resolved the Cold War which drove a wedge between China and The Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) countries. It

also became the basis upon which Southeast Asian countries could boost their relations with the most powerful force in the region.

As both countries' governments sealed a joint statement between Malaysia and the People's Republic of China on 31st May 1974, various joint ventures were explored for the benefit of both parties. After over 50 years today, the ties and joint ventures between the two countries have grown stronger especially in the main sectors such as trade, tourism, culture, education, healthcare, and science and technology. Within this time period, leaders from both countries have exchanged visits in order to discuss arising issues and their solutions for the sake of both countries' economic and social wellbeing. Malaysia and China's understanding of and dependence on each other have slowly destroyed the dividing wall built by Western colonizers during the Cold War. In truth, the diplomatic ties were simply a political formality to a relationship which had been established way before. Since 1946, Malay (Indonesia) language had been taught at the Foreign Language Institute in Nanjing City, before being moved to Beijing in 1949 following the formation of the People's Republic of China (Awang Sariyan 2014: 13).

Malaysia and China also nurtured special relations in the field of education and academia. This was evident in the formation of Malaysia-People's Republic of China Malay Studies Chair. The Malay Studies Chair is an honorary academic position created by both governments to recognise the role that Beijing Foreign Studies University (BFSU) had in establishing and expanding Malay Studies programs in the republic since 1961. The Malaysian government's first Malay Studies Chair in China was Datuk Dr. Awang Sariyan who was elected to the chair in 2008. Among other responsibilities, the chair is responsible for introducing new fields to Malay Studies including language, literature, culture, and so on. The chair is also in charge of improving academic programs for degree and post graduate levels, conducting research and publications, organising seminars, and assisting the establishment and fortification of Malay studies or language programs in China's higher education institutions. Beijing city is the fourth foreign location to hold an academic chair with the Malaysian government after the University of Ohio in the United States of America, Leiden University in the Netherlands, and Victoria University of Wellington in New Zealand. The idea for the conception of the chair in Beijing

was first introduced in 1996 during the International Malay Studies Conference between BFSU and DBP Malaysia, which led to its official establishment in early 2007. On 20th Jun 1997, the Malay Language Teaching Centre was established in BFSU as an agreement between both governments to collaborate in the field of education; specifically the teaching of Malay language in China. (Daily Express 2014). On 1st September 2005, the China School of Malay Studies was formed and officiated by the Prime Minister of Malaysia, Dato' Seri Mohd. Najib Tun Abdul Razak. With the Malay language teaching program being upgraded to Malay studies program, the China School of Malay Studies became the official base for all academic activities and efforts to expand the Malay language, literature and culture in the republic. It also helped to establish Malay Language and Studies Programs in other higher education institutions throughout the country. Among the pioneers of the China School of Malay Studies was Professor Dr. Wu Zongyu (Awang Sariyan 2014: 12).

Malay studies continued to flourish in China with the addition of six universities which offered Malay Language courses. Apart from BFSU, Peking University and Communication University of China which are in Beijing, Malay Language course is also offered in Guangdong University of Foreign Studies during the 2008-2009 academic years, Guangxi University for Nationalities in Nanning, Yunnan Nationalities University in Kunming in 2008, as well as Luoyang Military Academy in Henan in 1988.

The Malay Language Section of the China Radio International (CRI) which broadcasted in Malay and reported various topics pertaining to China and its relations with foreign countries in Malay, also helped to spread the Malay language, literature and culture in the country. This indirectly placed CRI as an agent for promoting Malay language and culture in China. Dewan Bahasa dan Pustaka's (DBP, Malay for the Institute of Language and Literature) publication, *Dewan Budaya* magazine have published writings from China through the section '*Bingkisan CRI*' in order to introduce China's culture and tradition to the Malaysian society (<http://dwnbudaya.dbp.my/wordpress/?cat=24>).

With both states working hand in hand on the matter, Malay studies continued to flourish in China. DBP had launched an internationalization program in the People's Republic of China as the centre for the expansion of Malay language and culture in the East Asian region. The long standing foundation is

reinforced through current and updated programs which are concrete and matches the requirements of the times. Both countries proved they had a strong bond by learning each other's official language. This was attested when Malaysian students taking up Mandarin studies at BFSU performed a *dikir barat* in Mandarin while Chinese students doing Malay studies sang a number of Malay songs and also performed a Malay dance during the delegation's visit led by Raja Muda of Perlis Tuanku Syed Faizuddin Putra Jamalullail in year 2014. There are roughly 200 students from Malaysia studying for their degree in the Mandarin language at BFSU, Beijing (The Star Online 2014).

In addition to the education sector, Malaysia and China also nurture good relations in the tourism sector. Despite experiencing a 2.71 percent drop, specifically from 520,466 to 379,265, in the number of China tourists coming in to Malaysia following the disappearance of flight MH370 and the Sabah kidnapping case, China remains the third country with the most number of tourists to Malaysia. Malaysia's decision to provide visa exemption to China nationalities is expected to allow Malaysia to explore the republic's domestic tourism market potential. MCA's president, Liow Tiong Lai (The Sun Daily 2015), stated that the visa exemption will generate even more income from tourism activities coming in from China into Malaysia. In the recently announced modification to the 2016 Budget, Malaysia's Prime Minister Dato' Seri Mohd. Najib Tun Abdul Razak (Sin Chew Jit Poh 2016) announced that as of 1st March until 31st December 2016, tourists from China do not need to obtain visas in order to visit Malaysia. The Prime Minister hoped that a comprehensive strategic relationship with China will be strengthened and thus not only become more productive but also more successful.

In the meantime, the Chinese government is also actively promoting the Muslim Tour Program in China which is organised by China Radio International (CRI), in order to attract Malaysians to visit the country. The Muslim tour package reassures Malaysians on the *halal* status of the food provided by the organisers since China also has a large Muslim community of 22 million citizens. Based on the 2015 China Religion Survey, Islam had the youngest followers whereby 22.4 percent of them were under the age of 30 (The International Business Times 2015).

As the world's economic giant, China has taken the initiative to revive the silk roads and maritime

routes through their 'One Belt One Road' initiative. China plans to build and connect their railways to East Asian countries and is working hard to encourage more neighbouring countries to improve their port structures in order to proceed with their maritime Silk Road mission. From China, the route is expected to span the entire globe to Europe, Africa, the Arab countries, and Southeast Asia. The idea to develop one economic belt and road came from President Xi Jinping in 2013, who viewed it as a symbol of trust, unity and cooperation to create a win-win situation for all parties. Malaysia, along with other ASEAN countries, were of the view that many globalisation challenges had arisen and will continue to affect the socioeconomic and sociocultural growth process in both countries. Its impact will be felt in various aspects of two-way relationships, including in the ASEAN context. However, Malaysia's Deputy Prime Minister Zahid Hamidi is optimistic that Malaysia holds an important role as a gateway to ASEAN that can balance the global trade flow with China (The Malay Mail Online 2016).

Therefore, China views Southeast Asian countries as viable gateways to this maritime route who will share in the benefits and economic prosperity resulting from the efforts they have in plan. The Secretary General of the *China Foundation for Peace and Development (CFPD)*, Xu Zhensui, announced in his speech that China is offering Shenzhen as a future global trade window. According to Xu, history has proven that China was a trade force and not a colonising force, and so more large cities should mirror Shenzhen. Following that, the President of The Asian Strategy & Leadership Institute (ASLI) Malaysia, Mirzan Mahathir, commented that China's approach was a project to 'Prosper the Neighbour'. He stated that, "In order to ensure the success of this aspiration, the plan must be understood by all of China's neighbouring countries so that they too may share the same aspirations." He also added that from the business point of view, participating countries must reap direct benefits through steps such as creating more work opportunities and reducing trade restrictions in order to ensure the viability of global free trade (Utusan Malaysia 2015).

Thailand's former Prime Minister Dr. Bhokin Bhalakula on the other hand, suggested that this plan be included in discussions among ASEAN countries in order to create a sense of trust that could promote solidarity amongst member countries. He stated that

only by doing so can China and ASEAN work on their own Free Trade Agreements framework as the plan involved a huge investment in order to develop transportation infrastructures, financial cooperation, risk management, and maritime collaboration (Utusan Malaysia 2015).

CONCLUSION

Malaysia's history of friendship with China goes a long way back and was first founded over 600 years ago during the time of the Malacca Sultanate. The Sino-Malaysian cultural exchange was developed out of the trade between China and India on the route between these two ancient civilisations. It was during that time that the sultanate forged strong relations with China and eventually turned to China for protection against the kingdom of Siam and Majapahit. Hence, the diplomatic relation formed between the two countries after World War II in 1974 was in fact a continuation of the long standing relationship from hundreds of years before. This friendship was forged upon solidarity, understanding and respect from the highest of ranks down to the everyday folks. Tun Abdul Razak's initiative to re-establish relations with China was then continued by subsequent Prime Ministers as a result of its success and benefits to Malaysia. Various issues and agreements in various sectors were formed in order to boost both countries' economic growth. It is the hope of both countries that the ties that bind Malaysia and China will remain steadfast in the years to come and that many new collaborations will be formed for the economic wellbeing and prosperity of both countries. Perhaps the tragedy of MH370 will become a lesson that could increase the collaboration between Malaysia and China in the aviation, safety, and deep sea rescue sector.

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