

# TRANSNATIONAL MIGRATION AND ETHNIC ENTREPRENEURSHIP AMONG THE CHAM DIASPORA IN MALAYSIA<sup>1</sup>

## MIGRASI TRANSNASIONAL DAN KEWIRAUSAHAAN DIASPORA CHAM DI MALAYSIA

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### ABSTRAK

*Artikel ini berkaitan dengan diaspora Cham di Malaysia, yang mempertahankan hubungan transnasional dengan tanah asal mereka “Kampong Cham” di Kamboja. Dengan proses perpindahan dan pemukiman kembali, komunitas ini menghadapi tantangan nyata dan harus mengembangkan cara hidup baru di lingkungan baru. Dari bentuk tradisional pertanian dan perikanan, yang merupakan sumber utama dukungan ekonomi mereka di Kamboja, orang-orang ini mengubah kegiatan tradisional utama mereka untuk mengembangkan kegiatan ekonomi berorientasi komersial di pemukiman baru mereka. Makalah ini bertujuan untuk menjawab dua pertanyaan, pertama, bagaimana migran menggunakan hubungan klien patron untuk bertahan dan mengejar kehidupan mereka di Malaysia. Kedua, bagaimana Cham diaspora di Malaysia yang mengambil peran pengusaha etnis atau pelindung membantu migran lainnya untuk menegosiasikan ruang transnasional dan karena itu memfasilitasi transnasionalisme. Jaringan etnik ini memegang peranan penting dalam bisnis etnik dan strategi bertahan hidup ekonomi mereka, baik bagi pendatang migran migran sebelumnya maupun pendatang baru. Makalah ini berkontribusi pada isu kontemporer Cham diaspora di Malaysia, salah satu etnis minoritas di Kamboja dan strategi mereka untuk menghadapi globalisasi dengan membangun jaringan transnasional.*

**Kata kunci:** *Diaspora, Cham, migrasi transnasional, kewirausahaan, jaringan etnik, Malaysia.*

### ABSTRACT

This article is concerned with the Cham diaspora in Malaysia, who maintain transnational ties to their home land of “Kampong Cham” in Cambodia. With the process of movement and resettlement, this community confronted real challenges and had to develop new ways of life in a new milieu. From traditional forms of farming and fishing, which had been their main sources of economic support in Cambodia, these people transformed their main traditional activities to develop commercially-oriented economic activities in their new settlement. This paper aimed to answer two questions, *first*, how migrants use patron client relationships to survive and pursue their life in Malaysia. *Second*, how Cham diaspora in Malaysia who take the role of ethnic entrepreneur or patron help other migrants to negotiate transnational space and therefore facilitate transnationalism. This ethnic network plays an important role in their ethnic businesses and economic survival strategy, both for the previous migrant and new comer migrants. This paper contributes to a contemporary issue of Cham diaspora in Malaysia, one of ethnic minority in Cambodia and their strategy to face globalization by establishing transnational networking.

**Keywords:** Diaspora, Cham, transnational migration, entrepreneurship, ethnic network, Malaysia

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## INTRODUCTION

The era of globalization is characterized by dynamic interactions linking more countries and more people than ever before, resulting in a proliferation of studies on the various driving forces in the process of globalization, such as the state, capital, interesting groups, etc. Diasporas, characterized by a strong cultural identity, the maintenance of links with the country of origin and transnational identity, have begun to play a role of increasing relevance in the global society, where non-state actors emerge in the first instance with an increasing economic weight and in some cases also political weight.

This article is concerned with the Cham diaspora in Malaysia who migrate in the period of 1975 until present who still maintain transnational ties to their home land in Cambodia. With the process of movement and resettlement, the Cham community confronted real challenges and had to develop new ways of life in a new milieu. From traditional forms of farming and fishing, which had been their main sources of economic support in Cambodia, these people transformed their main traditional activities to develop commercially-oriented economic activities in their new settlement. The Cham's entrepreneurship cannot be separated from economic networking among the Cham diaspora in Malaysia and Cambodia. In this paper I argue that even though the Cham diaspora live in different countries, but they still have strong ethnic relationship and kinship.

This paper aimed to answer two questions, first, how migrants use patron client relationships to survive and pursue their life projects in Malaysia. Second, how Cham diaspora in Malaysia who take the role of ethnic entrepreneur or patron help other migrants to negotiate transnational space and therefore facilitate transnationalism. To answer these questions, this paper utilized the anthropological, economic, and historical approaches in order to understand how traditional pattern of patron-clientism found in Malacca and Kelantan, Malaysia are adapted to fit transnational circumstances.

For data collection and analysis, we employed the qualitative data analysis method,

such as the semi-structured in-depth interviews with Cham traders (both men and women), Cham businessman and their labour in clothing business, and Cham public figures in Malacca and Kelantan. We have also carefully interviewed several scholars in universities, like the University of Malaya as well as the University Kebangsaan Malaysia, concerned with Cham people. Moreover, we also carried out observations of on-going activities of the Cham community in Kota Bharu, Kampong Bunga Mas, Penambang, and Kampong Banggol, PCB in Kelantan and the Cham in Tanjung Minyak and *Taman Sri Champa* in Malacca. Field works in Malacca was conducted in May-June 2012 and Kelantan's field work in June-July 2013.

## THE CHAM DIASPORA IN MALAYSIA: HISTORICAL OVERVIEW

Diasporic communities have been emerging along with the rapid transnational movements witnessed by the migrations in Southeast Asia. Cham people, who originally came from the Kingdom of Champa in Central Vietnam, have migrated to Cambodia and Malaysia in several stages. We need to understand the meaning of diaspora that is often used by scholars. Gabrielle Sheffer defines a diaspora as:

A social-political formation, created as the result of either forced or voluntary migration, whose members regard themselves as of the same ethno-national origin and who permanently reside as minorities in one or several host countries. Members of such entities maintain regular or occasional contacts with what they regard as their homelands and with individuals and groups of the same background residing in other host countries. Thus, globalization has engendered the possibility for diasporans to live a transnational community life, psychologically identifying and socially interacting simultaneously with their countries of origin/heritage and their countries of residence if they are interested and willing to do so. As a result, globalization has broadened the set of actors that potentially have a stake in national development to not only include local residents but also emigrants and their descendants as well – if they can be engaged, enabled and empowered to do so.

The first wave of Cham diaspora to Malay Peninsula had caused by the falling of Vijaya, the

capital of Champa Kingdom by the Vietnamese in 1471. Malay Peninsula, particularly Malacca, Kelantan, and Johor was one of destination in the post-1471 Cham diaspora, while others took refuge to Cambodia, Laos, and further away to the Malay Archipelago in Sumatra and Borneo; and to Hainan island in China (Collins, 2009; Mohd. Zain Musa, 2003; Ysa, 2010).<sup>2</sup> During that time, Malacca and Kelantan became main destination for Cham refugees since they had emotional connection, mainly due to ethno-cultural considerations (Wong Tze Ken, 1994).

Quoting from *The Sejarah Melayu* (Malay Annals), Marrison mentions the presence of Cham in Malacca during the reigns of the Malay sultans. They were known to be political refugees who had arrived in Malacca after 1471 (Marrison, 1951). They were well received by the rulers of Malacca, who appointed some Cham noblemen to official positions in the court. The Cham played a very important role in establishing trade links between the Melaka straits area and Indochina where one of the Champa sea captains from Champa Kingdom (nakhoda Campa) had high position in Melaka as important traders (Nishio, 1997). Trade contacts between Champa and Malay traders occurred since 13<sup>th</sup> century. The *Sejarah Melayu* (Melayu annals) also noted that several Cham's vessels were anchored in Malacca, Banten, Makasar, Petani, Kelantan and Java port (P.Y. Manguin, 1979). It shows that the people movement of the Champa Kingdom in Indochina to the Malay Peninsula seemed to be frequent and even lasting.

The second wave of Cham migration from Indochinese to Malay Peninsula took place in 1975-1990s (Sari, 2012). The flow of Cham's migration from Cambodia then go to Thailand and finally to Malaysia as a result of both rebellion and terrible political situation on Cambodia during Pol Pot regime. Since then, refugees from Cambodia and Vietnam fled their country to neighbouring countries,

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<sup>2</sup> The *Sejarah Melayu* mentions that the presence of Chams in Malacca (Champa Melaka) during the reigns of Sultan Mansyur Syah. They come from descendant of Prince *Indera Berma Syah*, a Cham prince who escaped from Champa after defeated by King of Kuci (Vietnamese) in 1471. They were well received by the rulers of Malacca, who appointed some Cham noblemen to official positions in the court.

such as Thailand, Malaysia, Indonesia, and Western countries. When the Communist regime took control in Cambodia, they were afraid of living under what they considered oppressive government. During the Khmer Rouge regime, they tried to eliminate Cham's culture, tradition and identity because they believed that it should be only one race in Cambodia which is the Khmer (Ysa, 2010). Cham Muslim people were forced to abandon their religious traditions; names related to Islam were eliminated; mosques and madrasah were destroyed and other religious practices abolished. Al Qur'an and other religious readings were wiped out. People were also forced to move out from the Muslim community, or expelled to the jungles and mountains. Culture in the form of activities, clothing, food and accessories was also decimated. As a result, many Cham Muslim people were not familiar with Islam, not good at Arabic and ignorant of Cham culture. Pol Pot eroded Islamic identity of Cham Muslim people (Fauzi, 2011). In a similar vein, Danny Wong mentions that another reason why some people fled Cambodia to Malaysia was because they were enemies of the Communists as they had taken part in the fighting against the regime (Wong Tze Ken, 2013).

Our previous study mentions that Kelantan attracted the largest number of Cham refugees at that time due to several reasons. Firstly, family relations since there were a marriage between princess of Kelantan and Champa regent. A few Cham claimed that they have ancestors from Kelantan since there were mix marriage between Kelantanese and Cham people of Cambodia (Fatimah, Mohd. Zain and Farid, 2009). Secondly, majority of the Kelantanese community was Muslim and they have strong Islamic education connection since long time ago. According to Nik Mohamad, the Cambodian Cham comes to Kelantan in order to pursue their religious study in *pondok-pondok* or *pesantren* in Sungai Pinang, Jalan Merbau, and Atas Banggol which well known as *Surau Kemboja*. Even, several Islamic teachers or *Syeh* from Kelantan went to Cambodia to teach Islam in 19 century (Fatimah, Mohd. Zain and Farid, 2009). The Cham regard Kelantan as Mecca or *Serambi Mekah* because they view Kelantan as center of Islamic education

(*pusat keilmuan*), center of da'wah (*pusat dakwah*) and center of economy. Thirdly, Cham language has affinity with Kelantan language. People carrying such titles as “Nik” and “Wan” in Kelantan and Terengganu, for example, are said to be the descendants of Champa Kingdom. Many Cham also share cultural, religious values similar to the Malays. Finally, Kelantan's east coast was face to face with Gulf of Thailand, so it made easier for the Cham refugees from Cambodia to cross to Malay Peninsula.<sup>3</sup>

The Cham refugees from Cambodia have entered Malaysia from Thailand by overland through Sungai Golok-Rantau Panjang, in the border of Malaysia-Thailand. With the assistance of Thailand government, they left Bangkok by train to Narathiwat in Southern Thailand then cross the border to Kelantan. As reported by actors who take place as informant, their first arrival in Kelantan was the end of a complicated evacuation process and a long struggle for survival at which they were taken away by bus from refugee camps at Thailand-Cambodia border to Bangkok and then by train to be settled in Pangkalan Tujuh and Pangkalan Chepa camps in Kelantan (Manan, 2012). Meanwhile, another group made their own way by sea route with boat or small vessels from Cambodia (Koh Kong) to Trat harbor in Thailand or from Cau Doc (Vietnam) to east coast of Malay Peninsula, namely Kelantan, Trengganu, Pahang, and farther away to Indonesia, Philippines, Taiwan, Hong Kong, and China (Sari, 2012).

By the end of June 1975 to 1988 about 10,722 refugees of Malay Cham ancestry have entered Malaysia and were placed in refugee camps in Kemumin, Pengkalan Chepa, Kota Bahru, Kelantan for one to two years (Nik Mohamed Nik Mohd Solleh. 2004).<sup>4</sup> In the beginning the Cham refugees in Malaysia were paid attention to with feelings of sympathy, but then it became a dilemmatic issue due to the disturbance of the socio economic balance and security issues of the country (Arzura, 2001). Then they have a policy that only Cham refugees

<sup>3</sup> Field interview with Prof. Anis, UM, July 7, 2012.

<sup>4</sup> The camp was later renamed Taman Putra, Kemumin which was administered by PERKIM.

who were mainly Muslim permitted to remain in Malaysia by the government, even after all the refugee camps were closed.<sup>5</sup> Almost 40 years the Cham diaspora live in Malaysia and their number is increasing since Cham migration to Malaysia in fact is still continuing until today. The Cham community can be found in Kelantan (Kota Bharu and Pasir Mas); Terengganu (Kuala Terengganu and Dungun); Pahang (Pekan and Rompin); Johor (Ulu Tiram, Kota Tinggi, and Muar); Melaka (Tanjung Minyak and Bukit Rambai); Negeri Sembilan (Seremban); Selangor (Klang, Banting, Sungai Buluh, Kajang, and Bukit Belacan); Perak (Ipoh, Parit Buntar, and Kuala Kangsar); Pulau Pinang (Nibong Tebal); Kedah (Alor Star); and Perlis (Kangar) (Awang, 2011).

However, until today there is no exact record of the number of the Cham population in Kelantan. According to the Kelantan statistic, the Cham are included under other categories, and some of them might be included under Non-Citizens of Malaysia or others. However, Musa estimated that the Cham people in Kelantan almost 3.000 people, mainly located in Kota Bharu, Phaya Rambai, Kampong Tendung, PCB, Penambang, and Pasir Mas (Musa, 2011: 45).

## **TRANSNATIONAL MIGRATION OF THE CHAM IN MALAYSIA**

At the turn of the last century, many immigrants experienced what is now called transnationalism. In the global economy, changes in transportation and communication (jet air travel, faxes, electronic mail, videos) have enabled immigrants to maintain closer and more frequent contact with their home country and to participate both actually and vicariously in its life, so that they “take actions, make decisions, and develop subjectivities and identities embedded in networks of relationships that connect them simultaneously to two or more nations” (Basch et al. 1994, 7). For example, Italian and Russian immigrants also kept ties of sentiment and connection with family back home by living in

<sup>5</sup> Compared to the Vietnamese, the Cham refugees of Cambodia were given two options by the Malaysian government. The first option was to transit in Malaysia and resettle in third world countries like the one offered to the Vietnamese refugees, and second option was to settle Cham refugees in Malaysia and integrate them into Malaysian society (UNHCR, 1978).

what today are called “transnational households.” In these, family members are scattered across households and they send remittances back home, including political contributions for particular causes, such as the Irish support for the nationalist cause.

In similar vein, as reported by Patterson (2006), the Chinese Diaspora in the US can influence political affairs in the home country. Furthermore: “Strategic transnationalism of brain circulation on the part of Chinese, Koreans, Indians and more recently Mexicans is a form of politico economic agency to stem the predominance of the West” (Patterson, 2006: 1895). As Choi (2003) points out:

*“Ethnic Koreans have contributed to the development of the South Korean economy by transferring their knowledge and skills - which they obtained and strengthened in the more advanced countries of their residence - to their homeland.” (p .25) The South Korean state has long maintained a network of direct and indirect means of influencing the diaspora (Patterson, 2006, 1898).*

Transnational migrants are “immigrants who develop and maintain multiple relationships (familial, economic, social, organizational, religious and political) that span borders” (Basch et al. 1994, 7). Transnational migrants forge a complex matrix of social relationships that connect two localities in two different nation-states. Thus, many migrants go to a receiving area and, rather than severing their social relationships in the sending area, maintain intense ties (Adler, R. 2002). The process of transnational migration emphasizes the deterritorialization of space by showing how migrants are able to create social networks that bind two places, separated by political borders and other boundaries, into one social space (Adler, 2002, 132-33). The experiences of the movements of immigrants are often linked with family ties.

Cham people of Malaysia have encountered a long and winding road to be successful in Malaysia. Fleeing from Cambodia with no money has been experienced by most of the Cham people. Working hard is the main strategy to survive and to live in prosperous life, enough food, clothes,

and house. There have been many sad stories, starting from being able to flee from Cambodia which was in deep trouble, reaching Malaysia, struggling for survive, to being able to have own income for living. Often, informants could not stand when they told their sad experiences. The Cham refugees at that time tried to survive by linking or looking for patron could be local people of Malaysia or families/ relatives who live in Malaysia before. More limited employment opportunities available for Cham refugees due to the language barriers, no capital and skill, and also discrimination have been observed to drive them to self-employment or work to their patron that secures their livelihood. How the Cham refugees use patron client as survival strategy will be illustrated in the paragraph below.

As mention previously, the Cham refugees from Cambodia were placed in the refugee camp in Pangkalan Chepa, Kelantan for at least one-two years. They had nothing and all of their necessities, such as food, clothes, and other necessities were provided by PERKIM (Malaysian Islamic Service Organization) on behalf of the Malaysian government (An interview with Ismail, Malacca, June 2012). They would be allowed to leave the camp only if they had a guarantor/ sponsors that provided them with jobs in batik factories or as farmers in plantation fields, either they stayed together with sponsors or separated from them. At that time, the guarantor was local people (a Kelantanese) or Cham people who lived in Malaysia for long time (*penduduk Melayu tempatan*). After getting sponsorship, they lived with the guarantor to look for a job and live temporary in Malaysia. Some of the guarantors were owners of Batik factories, estate owners, farmers or rice planters who need a work force during harvesting seasons. They were allowed to work in *kilang*, guarantor’s farm of palm oil, and to sell fabric and cloth door to door (*berniaga*). Some of them work as domestic servant as well. In case that those who wish to stay separated from sponsors will get a financial assistance of amount around RM400 from PERKIM (Mohd. Zain Musa, 2006). With the financial assistance they can purchase any kinds of goods such as clothing, household utensils from plastic, cradle and other necessities

and start a new business by selling from door to door (Abdullah, Musa and Mat Zain, 2009, 138).

After left the refugee camps in Kelantan or Pahang, many Cham refugees were tried to look for a better life in other states in Malaysia including Malacca. Beside economic purposes, another reason to move to Malacca was family reunification or follows the previous immigrants. One of our informant, Haji Husein with his family moved to Malacca because his sponsor was his uncle who have been reside in Malacca. He stayed together with his uncle in Malacca and assisted him in running a small business on selling clothes. From his uncle, he got experiences how to sell clothes, create clothes trading network and collect some money to run his own businesses. While Mrs. Fatimah could leave the camp due to her older brother who lived in Malacca since 1979 became her sponsor. From 1984 until now, she lives in Tanjung Minyak, Malacca helps his brother to take care of his clothing shop (*kedai baju*) in Masjid Tanah trading center.

Different reason was mentioned by Mr. Azhari bin Abdullah who entered Malaysia in 1989, he said:

*“I followed my brother in Malaysia and assisted my uncle (mak cik) to sell clothes (niaga kain). Thus, I had worked in factory (kilang) in Syah Alam, Selangor for 9 years. I have been living in Malacca for 5 years and married with Cham Malay in Malacca”.*

From the cases above, network, particularly ethnic networks have been formed between migrants and natives in the host country and between migrants and their home country. In the migratory process, network based on personal relationship, family or common place of origin help in social and cultural matters such as to provide shelter, work, assistance in coping with bureaucratic procedures and support in personal difficulties, such as in obtaining credit, and/or adaptation to a new environment (see Castles, Stephen and Mark J. Miller, 1998; Wahlbeck, 1996). The migration networks also provide the basis of processes of settlement and community formation in the immigration area. Even, migrant groups develop their own social and economic infrastructure, such as worship place, association,

shops, cafes, etc (Castles, Stephen and Mark J. Miller, 1998).

The Cham people reside in groups in Malacca and they can be found in *Taman Sri Champa*, Kampung Datuk Bin, Malacca. However, they are also formed groups in other place, like in Serkam, Bukit Rambai and Masjid Tanah. The *Taman Sri Champa* was located 15 kilometer from Malacca city (*Bandar raya*). The pioneer of this community was Haji Thayib (he was a Cham refugee from Cambodia) who bought 3 Ha (ekar) of land for RM 36.000 from the Chinese. Previously it was *tanah bajak* or land loan from the government, so there had no land title. After clearing of the land and establishing the community, Haji Thayib was followed by his families and relatives who have started to live in *Taman Sri Champa*. They built 22 houses for 22 Cham families which has square 13.5 meters for wide and 35 meters for length per house (Field interview with H. Husein, Kampong Datok Bin, Tanjung Minyak, Malaka, June 12, 2012). Until today, this community was inhabited by 500 of Cham people or 70 households from Cambodia, both the Cham refugees in 1975 and recent migrants who moves to Malaysia voluntarily for economic reasons (Field interview with Ahmad, Kampong Datok Bin, Tanjung Minyak, Malaka, June 12, 2012).

Based on interview with Cham people in Kelantan, Cham communities could be found in many kampongs or areas, including Kampong Banggol, PCB and Kampong Bunga Mas, Penambang. They can be divided into “orang lama” or old people (migrant who moved to Malaysia since 1975) and “orang baru” or new people (Cham people who moves to Malaysia in 2000s till present time). From interview with Cham people in Kampong Banggol, PCB, some of them are rent a house from the local Kelantan and others have their own house. Their houses are behind the Malay house which is quite far from the main road. Only 3-4 families of Malays are living together with the Cham in this kampong. Kampong Banggol located in the PCB road, along the river bank, so they can catch fish easily for daily consumption or growing fish farm in the cages. I can see the river stream from the window. Similar in Cambodia, the Cham people cannot

be separated from the river and they prefer to eat fish than meat (interview with Haji Yakoob, Kelantan).

In my observation in Kampong Banggol, in the daily live they used to gather in the coffee shop and food stalls which become a meeting centres for men, women and children every morning, since the Cham women usually did not prepare breakfast for the family members. Every morning, men and children went to the coffee shop or stall to buy ready cooked food for their breakfast, such as Cambodian mie soup or *nasi air* (porridge) before going to work or school. In the coffee shop in Kampong Banggol, Cham men usually chat to each other and share experiences, such as the problems they were facing, how to expand their market for clothes business. In this place, those who are newcomers can collect information from the previous migrant about job opportunities, temporary settlement, immigration processes, and transportation to get around, place to shop and to eat, and so forth. Sometimes, they also discuss the politic and economic change that has happening in Cambodia. Soon after the men and children left the village, the second group, usually women and men who worked within the village, had their breakfast, such as Cambodian mie soup. The villagers had a number of choices; they could buy breakfast in Ramli's coffee shop, Cik Fatimah or Aini's stalls because these premises operated every morning serving a breakfast to either Cambodian or Malaysian taste.

From discussion with Cham men in the coffee shop, I can conclude that there are some reasons why the new Cham migrants choose Kelantan to settle, not Johor Bharu or other states in Malaysia. Firstly, live in Kelantan is easy or "selesa" to live. Mostly the local people in Kelantan are old people, so they do not have a high competition to get a job or to earn money. In addition the local Kelantanese are very welcome with new migrants, especially similar Muslim fellows. Secondly, they can take their children to get Islamic education in Kelantan. It is very easy for them to send their children to Islamic school and mostly the Kelantanese are very helpful. Thirdly, the situation or environment in Kelantan is not so far different in Kampong Cham in Cambodia. As we know that Kelantan is the

least developed states in Malaysia if we compare with other states. So there is a few shopping mall or modern live. According to them, Kelantan is really Islamic city, in terms of religiousity. They have a public holiday on Friday, not Sunday because Friday is a big day for Muslim. Every woman should wear *baju kurung* with hijab. Fourthly, it is easy to find halal food, masjid, or preacher (majelis taklim) in Kelantan and they are really accepted us. Finally, there are a lot of Cham who reside in Kelantan so they feel like a home because they can gather with their relatives, family, and other neighbour from Cambodia.

Moreover, for Cham people, networking-building among them, specialty with their families and relatives, is very important not only with those who living in Malaysia but also those who living in Cambodia and other countries. For the beginning, a contact and communication among them has been done by those who stay overseas through collecting any information about Cham people, their brothers, sisters and relatives in Malaysia with assistance from national and international concerning agencies on refugees. If collected information is relatively enough, a trip agenda to Malaysia then is made in order to find and meet their families and relatives. A number of informants explained that Cham people living outside Malaysia have no any handicaps or problems about cost spent for overseas travelling, as governments where they stay always support the elder residents with welfare assistance program.

The relationship with Cham people in Cambodia has been initiated by Malaysian Cham due to their very bad collective memory in the past and strong willingness to assist those who living in poverty. Even though Cambodia after Pol Pot regime has changed in many aspects and it is now in developing process, most Cham people are found still marginalized (An interview with Ismail, Malacca, June 2012). Variety of assistance has been drop in the past and it looks likes will be continued in the future. However, the activities do not only involve the Cham Muslims, but also some Malay and Chinese people in Malaysia. This happened long before the 1990s, but grew even more remarkably starting 1993 and became dynamic in the 2000s. The activities can

be divided as follows: humanitarian or charitable work, visiting families or genocide sites, religious education and mosque construction, business or trade relations, and marriages across countries (So, 2014).

The most visible forms of relationship are those established through humanitarian or charitable work, especially through *Qurban* (sacrifices), religious sacrifices feast and donation in the form of money, food, and medicines during Ramadhan (fasting month) from Cham Muslim in Malaysia both individually and collectively to receiver by certain Cham Muslim in Cambodia. According to Awang (2011, 197), sending money to family in Cambodia is very important for bonding amongst the family. The spirit of being 'Cambodian' is also expressed in this kind of remittance built by Cham people in Malaysia with their families in Cambodia. The close relationship between the Cham in Malaysia and the Cham in Cambodia is also acknowledged by the informant, Haji Thayib. who told us that the Cham in Malacca still have close relatives in Cambodia with whom they keep in contact. Thanks to the budget airline services, people can fly from Kuala Lumpur to Phnom Penh and vice versa. Though they have painful memories of Cambodia, Cambodia is still important to them. When we visited Pak Haji, his family was watching a Cambodian TV Channel; to keep up with what is happening in that country.

In her research on Cham Diaspora in Malaysia and Thailand, So (2014) claimed that most Cham Muslims in Malaysia still have a stronger attachment to Cambodia than their fellows in Thailand. This is happened because (1) their migration is more recent, (2) many relatives in their home country are still recognized and identified, and (3) the relationship between the Cambodian government and the Malaysian government is good. This connection is facilitated by modes of transportation, better economic conditions, and security.

Many old Cham Muslims still consider Cambodia their home country; only a few feel reluctant to make such a claim because of their long separation from Cambodia and because their relatives are gone or have already reunited

in Malaysia. And only a small proportion of native-borns view Cambodia to be like their own country because it used to belong to their predecessors.

## **ETHNIC ENTREPREUNERSHIP OF THE CHAM DIASPORA IN MALAYSIA**

Comparing with Cham in Cambodia who mostly involved in primary sector, the Cham diaspora in Malaysia engaged in secondary sectors, such as trading or working in home industry. The Cham in Malacca, Kelantan, Johor Bharu, Trengganu mainly engaged in clothes household home industry and petty trading. Some of them also work in Batik factories, small clothing shop, food stall, and selling fabric and clothes door to door independently. While the Cham in Pekan and Pahang are fisherman on cage and fish traders. Other occupations are running a food stalls, labour construction, raising cattle, and farmer. While the Cham in Kuala Lumpur, Selangor, Seremban engaged as labour in some companies, domestic helper, and petty traders. When their economic condition better off, they began selling clothes, both small and large scale (Sari, 2012). The Cham's economic life of the first generation in Malaysia is characterized by trading activity as a simple choice as well as an available chance to do at that time in Malacca and Kelantan, particularly clothing trade. This situation caused by the social environment in Malaysia, especially in Malacca and Kelantan, has changed their basic human resource capacity as farmers and fishermen when they lived in Cambodia to become merchants (Manan, 2012). Moreover, the Cham refugee from Cambodia previously did not have a high education or other skill, so they can not apply any job in Malaysia. The last opportunity for them to earn money just from selling door to door (Interview with Romlah, Cham trader in Pasar Tok Guru, Kelantan, May 2013).

In general, Cham's serious effort to trade is intended to be clothing business a main commodity, even until at present time.<sup>6</sup> As stated by Ismail, an informant who also staying in Taman Sri Champa Residence, Malacca the reason why

<sup>6</sup> Although majority of Cham in Malacca and Kelantan is clothing traders, but a little bit of them sell another commodities, such as foods, plastic materials and other household equipment.

the clothing is to be the main Cham's trading commodity is just because it is a part of people's basic needs, particularly for Malaysian Muslims who do need new clothing to celebrate the two holy celebration days every year, i.e. Idul Fitri and Idul Adha Muslim's feast sacrifice. Therefore, undoubtedly that to sell clothing commodity is a prospective business, both quantity and income.

In similar vein, Haji Yakoob, a Cham entrepreneur in Kelantan mentions that Kelantan is one of the clothing or baju kurung production in Malaysia. Majority of the Muslim clothes in Malaysia, such as baju kurung, baju koko, tudung, kain telekung were produced in Kelantan. The Cham in Kelantan mainly involved in clothes home industry as tailor, cutting the fabrics, ironing, and packaging. Some of them are selling cotton, *yarn, needle, buttons, zipper*, etc. Another Cham made *baju kurung* and kain tudung with Kelantan batik in his workshop. The Cham who has big capital owns clothing shop (*kedai baju*) which sold many kinds of *baju kurung*, sarong, praying clothes, *tudung, songkok*, praying mat, tasbeih, religious books, etc. Some Cham also sell clothes in the market, small shops, and door to door (Sari, forthcoming).

The involvement of Cham people in trading activities is not a new thing. Mohamad Zain Musa (2003) explains that after leaving the refugee camp, some of the Cham refugee works as shop assistant for the local people, especially textile and clothes shop. From this previous job, he got the experience and tried to run his own clothes business at very small scale. They earn the money little by little for capital. By using such capital, they have started to run their own business. This clothes business has opened up opportunities and broader network of the other Cham communities who want to participate in the business. When clothes businesses are running well, they tried to open new business on groceries (*rungcit*) which sell daily necessities or other profitable business. Interview Mr. Azhari bin Abdullah in his stall in Kota Bharu who entered Malaysia in 1989 said:

*"I work as clothes trader door to door and in the night market. I give a credit for RM10/month for my customer. They can pay anytime when I visit their houses. Even though I got a small profit, but still I can sell clothes. When the clothing sales decrease I change to sell*

*fabric or to open small store (rungcit) which sold daily necessities, such as sugar, eggs, instant noodle, canned food, soft drinks, etc. I think rungcit is profitable since it provides daily necessities which everyone needs. During Ramadhan time, when the clothing demands high, I start to sell clothes door to door again".*

The involvement of the migrants into entrepreneurship sector can be explained by the disadvantage theory and the cultural theory. Disadvantage theory suggests that most immigrants have significant disadvantages hampering them upon arrival but which at the same time steer their behavior (Fregetto, 2004). Firstly, they lack human capital such as language skills, education and experience, which prevent them from obtaining salary jobs, leaving self-employment as the only choice. Secondly, lack of mobility due to poverty, discrimination and limited knowledge of the local culture can lead ethnic minorities to seek self-employment. This theory sees entrepreneurship not as a sign of success but simply as an alternative to un-employment. The cultural theory suggest that ethnic and immigrant groups are equipped with culturally determined features such as dedication to hard work, membership of a strong ethnic community, economical living, acceptance of risk, compliance with social value pattern, solidarity and loyalty, and orientation towards self-employment (Fregetto, 2004).

This theory can be applied into the case of Cham diaspora in Malaysia. As a refugee from Cambodia at that time they lack of education and skills. Barely they can speak Malay fluently and face a cultural gap with the local Malay. At that time, small scale trading was the only opportunities for the first generation of the Cham diaspora to survive in Malaysia because it does not need high skill. They sell clothes by uphold it and sold it door to door, even very far into the palm oil plantation from dawn to dusk. They also sell ice cream, plastic utensils, and other daily necessities from kampong to kampong (Sari, forthcoming). Malay informant pinpointed that if we look for Cham people, we need to see the street the clothes trader since they have often opened tents to sell clothes in certain areas.

Night market could be one of popular place for the Cham to open stand for clothes.

The Cham traders are well known as work hard person, diligent, and honest which make them are being trusted by the Malay and Chinese businessman. They have got a big loan and a credit from the Chinese, Indian, and Malay tauke to sell clothes. From the interview with Cham traders in Masjid Tanah Commerce center, most of them take the clothes from the Chinese supplier in Kuala Lumpur, Pudu, Masjid India with an installment system where they pay for only 50 percent or less for down payment and the rest of payment will be done after selling the clothes. The amount of money and the time to pay depend on the agreement between the suppliers and traders. Moreover, the traders can return unsold clothes to the suppliers and change to other models. Meanwhile, the Cham entrepreneur in Kelantan also took textile and other necessities from Indian tauke, called Jackel. He got the fabric/ textile even the sewing machine from the tauke to run off their clothes business. In addition, they are very observant to look for economic opportunity both in Malacca and Kelantan which make them success in clothes business, both a small and a large scale. They are adaptable person who eager to adapt with local culture and customs and way of life of Malay people and try hard to learn Malay language in order to interact with their Malay customer (Sari, 2012).

It is admitted by many informants; Malays of Malaysia, that Cham people are hard workers. One Professor in University of Malaya told us that if people wanted to know the Cham, they simply needed to look at the clothing traders which would show that they are mostly Cham. He further said that the Cham often sell clothes door to door or erect a tent to sell clothes whenever there are events in their areas. Interview with local people of Kelantan also stated that the Cham people in Kelantan are hard workers. They woke up very early in the morning to work as ice cream sellers, traders, shop keepers, and any kind of work until midnight. They never feel shameful with his job because they believe what they do is "halal".

Ahmad, a Cham informant entered Malaysia told us that his parents, brothers and sisters in 1979 as refugee when he was nine years old. He will never forgotten his self-experience in which any kinds of trading goods had been on the backs by his parents and offered to local people from door to door from one village to another for their survival. What Cham expected is so simple, i.e taking rice home to consume by members of family, mainly as encouraged by experiences living in Cambodia during Pol Pot Regime in poverty and hunger. For Cham, the most important to reach are that ability to survive, chance to build the future and ability to take children to school (An interview with Ahmad, Malacca, June 2012).

Furthermore, Ahmad explained that the way Cham offered their trading goods from one village to another was in a positive way, so that local people conveyed deep sympathy a sense of humanism on the basis of positive social values and order within society at the time. This sympathy in fact was a real encouragement that gave them a spirit to continue their efforts. Contrary to that situation, we ensures that the intended way of trading is not suitable to be done at the present time as community's social order grows to be more complicated so that emerging negative thinking and assumption from local people to unknown persons.

In 42 years old, now Ahmad has become a successful clothing merchant mainly because his work hard and fighting spirit derived from his parent's attitude and teaching. As a successful merchant, now he is living with his family in welfare condition in which he owns a big house located at Taman Sri Champa Residence. On top of this, he owns a car, and a clothing shop situated in Seremban, Negeri Sembilan State.

This condition is really different with the first generation of the Cham refugees. If we look at their economic position of the Cham people, especially those who come around 1979 and contemporary arrival, have been improving, but have not been strong enough since they mostly engaged in petty trading or workers at garments. Based on interview with many Cham people, they have not been able to take loan from the

bank. Some people do not know how to deal with the loan and others are afraid if they cannot pay the loan. Their capitals are therefore from their own money or borrow from their relatives. As mention above that they have mostly started it from very small business. Some even sell clothes in the street or door to door (Maunati, forthcoming). Today, many Cham's second generation in Malaysia work as businessmen, teacher, doctor, lecturer in some university in Malaysia or continue their parents business as clothes traders. They got higher education and many opportunities to work in Malaysia. Even, some of them are getting married with Malaysian.

The Cham's success in trading more or less is influenced by the way they undergo that business, from traditional method by offering commodity from door to door to be centered at afternoon and morning markets<sup>7</sup> to establish shops as a new way. By this way, Cham traders, especially the Cham in Malacca take their trading commodity to afternoon and morning markets by vans as operational vehicles to several locations, such as Jasin and Malimau markets of Malacca. In addition, the Cham's possessing of a number of permanent shops in some places like in Masjid Tanah district, Seremban and Johor is an indicator of their success, such as in Masjid Tanah district. Some of them own more than one or two shops. In this district, almost all clothing shops are under Cham traders' control even though some of them are rental shops. Abdul Razak in an interview occasion said that the shop rental rate in Malacca is around MYR 1.600 a month or equivalent to IDR 5 million.

Salmah, for instance, is a Cham woman in Masjid Tanah district who has started her business since she was 12 years old. After renting a shop from a Chinese merchant for 8 years, she is finally able to purchase the shop to be her belonging with amount of MYR 150.000 or equivalent to around IDR 500 million. Now she takes three local women to employ as shop servants to serve local customer. Indeed, like other Cham traders, she has struggled to be like

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<sup>7</sup> Afternoon and morning markets are shopping centers that are located in certain locations or areas and conducted in certain days, including along with main roads. Malaysian authority allows traders who have license to use these areas to trade.

today situation. The struggle to survive has been a journey a long as well.

Although the Cham's socioeconomic welfare is relatively high, clothing business does not always run smoothly. Income will increase significantly around thousands Malaysian Ringgit only during a month before Idul Fitri and Idul Adha celebration days. For the whole days except the two celebration day, the daily income is usually about below MYR100 until MYR400. Even in certain situation no income is derived from consumers (An interview with Salmah, Malacca, June 2012). However, Cham traders have never been hopeless, as this kind of business is their real and main life resource which cannot be replaced by others. This has been admitted by many Malays who told us when we talked about Cham people in Malaysia.

The clothes business, both in Malacca and Kelantan is usually undergone by all members of a family where fathers take role as managers meanwhile their wives take part either as sellers or servants as well. They also involve their children, particularly teenagers, to take part and contribute in more actively outside school hours (Abdullah et.al., 2009, 141). The involvement of teenagers in this business is very important as a teaching process. Women are basically the main actors and controllers while doing transaction with consumers in shops. As managers, husbands have also another role to build a network with other trading partners, such as commodity suppliers or selling agents. For instance, Mr. Ashari, a wellknown Cham trader in Kelantan, with his father and other relatives usually going for business trip to Pasar Tanah Abang in Jakarta, Vietnam, and China to looking for fabric or material for baju kurung. They negotiate with the supplier directly and choose the materials for their clothes. He said that in the past the materials from Indonesia was cheaper, but now majority the materials and fabric come from Vietnam and China because it was much cheaper comparing to Indonesia (An interview with Mr. Ashari, Kelantan, June 2013). Meanwhile, Cham traders in Masjid Tanah district, Malacca for instance, receive trading commodity supply particularly from suppliers or big companies in Kuala Lumpur without cash payment system. They usually gain

advantages to make payment several days or weeks after transaction is made.

In terms of the division of labour, the Cham in Kelantan also employ husband, wives, children, and large family member. Mr. Ashari's shop in Pasar Lama, Kelantan provides all of the clothes for man only, like songkok, baju kurung, sarong, Al'quran, parfumes, etc, while his wives also runs one shop in Pasar Lama too. But she sells all the stuff for woman, like kain telekung, scarf, tudung, fabrics, .etc. her children always help her to manage the clothes in the warehouse.

Another economic activity involving women's participation is 'cloth trading', one of the oldest and most popular jobs among the Cham in Malaysia. My general observation was that large numbers of the Cham woman in Malacca and Kelantan were involved in this kind of business. The Cham women traders have their own skill how to attract the potential customer. They do not force the customer to buy the commodities, good service, attractive in lip service, very polite and honest. They also dare to give credit or flexible payment for their customer. For instance they sold clothes for RM80, the buyer can pay it in 5-6 months (only RM15/ month). These conditions make the Cham traders favors and popular among the local Malays (Sari, forthcoming). Similarly, in business, Cham women in Vietnam seem to be more skillful. Cham women are good/better at selling than them. Cham women know how to convince customers and they are clever at trading goods (Huynh Van Phuc, *et al*, 2011)

In Kelantan, the Cham entrepreneurs had managed to set up a wholesale market in Pasar Waqaf Che Yeh, Pasar Lama MPKB, and Pasar Tok Guru known as '*Pasar Borong*' among the Malays. This is the biggest 'wholesale' market in Kelantan. In Kelantan they also sold clothes in the night market in Kota Bharu, which operate every Saturday and Sunday evening. While on the weekend, they sell it in morning market near their community. The night and morning market is a kind of mobile market. Its mean that the traders bring their goods by car or van and sell them in the market. When the market is over (night market from 6 to 11 pm, while morning market from 6 to 12 am) they tidy up their goods

on van. They usually choose strategic location to sell clothes, such as bus station, empty land on the corner of street, near the market and *pusat keramaian* where the local people can find them easily. The commodities are clothes, long dress or *baju kurung*, ready wear *tudung*, sarong, kain batik and fabrics. The sales increase significantly during Ramadhan time or "*Hari Raya*" (Sari, forthcoming).

As it is stated above, trade is Cham's main economic aspect to enable their socioeconomic life moving up. Nevertheless, it is not all mainly for their young generation whom were born as Malaysian people. This new looks or paradigm emerges due to current situation in which Malaysia is developing to be a country appreciating not only its economy development but also its science and technology achievement. This phenomenon indicates that Cham's first generation worldview most differs from the second generation's one. For the Cham's second generation instead, high education and universities as well are significant aspects promising them to be able to reach better future, including better social-economic status among community.<sup>8</sup> In addition to this trend, Ahmad told us that today we can find a number of Cham second generation work as civil servants in government and private offices in the country. Ahmad's daughter<sup>9</sup> who is now a university student also told us that she will run for posts whether in governmental or private sectors after graduating from the university. However, some of them also insist to continue their parent's clothes business.

Living in residences and trading the same trade commodities in the same areas can be regarded as ways how Cham build and construct its social networking, particularly among their community. To strengthen this primordial ties, Cham's first generation choose to marry Cham one and other. Malay people's world view on Cham as Cambodian is a factor leading to marriage with Cham is not an easy way.

The mindset then changes in which Cham's second generation who was born in Malaysia can marry Malay people of Kelantan

<sup>8</sup> An interview with Ahmad, Malacca, June 2012

<sup>9</sup> An interview with Nurul Saidah, Malacca, June 2012.

and outside this state.<sup>10</sup> Wider communication between Cham and Malay people in schools, university campuses, public sphere and working areas have resulted in assimilation among them to be closed, particularly Cham's second generation is also citizen of the country similar to that of the Malay people. Another strategy is that to assimilate with Malay people. Some of Cham even marry them. We also can find Cham persons actively involved in Islamic religious activities, mainly because they are Moslems and consider Islam as their main identity. Ahmad said that a praying big leader of Tanjung Minyak Mosque is a Cham. As self-identity, Cham community then can be accommodated by Malay in every life sectors.

## CONCLUSION

The relationship between Malay and Cham people are a long lasting relationship since they have emotional connection, sharing similarities in ethnic ties, language, culture, and religion. Wars and economic problems in Cambodia caused the Cham migration to Malaysia in 1975 by using inland ways and water ways. The Malaysian government and local Malays have welcomed the Cham refugees due to ethno-cultural consideration and also humanitarian factor. The Cham refugees in Malaysia were assisted by Malaysian government (through PERKIM), international agency (UNHCR) and their families who moved to Malaysia previously.

It has been a long and hard struggle for the Cham who used to be refugees from Cambodia but now show that they are successful economically. Fleeing from Cambodia with no money has been experienced by most of the Cham people. Working hard is the main strategy to survive and to live in prosperous life, enough food, clothes, and house. Moreover, informal networks based on personal relationship, family, friendship, and community ties assist the Cham diaspora settle down in Malaysia and start their business. Majority of the Cham entrepreneurs in Malaysia hire family and relatives from Kampong Cham and other provinces in Cambodia to work as their labour. They use their knowledge about

Malaysia to offer aid to fellow migrants, such as information of job opportunities, temporary settlement, and so on. Then this ethnic network plays an important role in their ethnic businesses and economic survival strategy, both for the previous migrant and new comer migrants. Clothes trading networks have been the main strategy for the Cham refugees to struggle and survive in Malaysia.

Another strategy is that to assimilate with Malays people by married with local Malays especially for Cham diaspora second generation. They get to live with Malay people in the same neighborhood, which enhanced their presence in this place of last resort. We also can find Cham persons actively involved in Islamic religious activities, mainly because they are Moslems and consider Islam as their main identity. As self-identity, Cham community then can be accommodated by Malay in every life sectors.

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<sup>10</sup> Fatimah Abdullah, et.al., Op.Cit., hlm. 140.

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