CHAPTER ONE
INTRODUCTION

1.1. Purpose and Aims of the Study

A neglected aspect of study in Vietnamese history has been Vietnam’s relations with the third world countries. While numerous studies have been carried out on Vietnam’s relations with the big powers in the context of the Vietnam War, there are also studies on the post-Vietnam war era with emphasis on Vietnam’s relations with the Soviet Union and the People’s Republic of China. Research on Vietnam’s relations with the third world countries even in the region of Southeast Asia has somehow been limited to Vietnam’s relations with ASEAN as a whole, Vietnam’s immediate neighbours, namely Laos and


Cambodia, and also Thailand, another ASEAN country with the greatest proximity to Vietnam in terms of geopolitics.

This study attempts to look at Vietnam's relations with Malaysia, a country located in the same region of Southeast Asia but separated from Vietnam by the Gulf of Siam, and the Kingdom of Thailand. Both countries differ from each other in terms of political creed and socio-cultural background. The nearest work that touches on Vietnam's relations with Malaysia is Pamela Sodhy's article in Contemporary Southeast Asia which discusses Malaysia's connection with the Vietnam War; while Bradley Bowden's work is a comparative study on the communist insurgencies in Vietnam, Malaysia and Indonesia. As no comprehensive study has been undertaken on this subject as yet, it is hoped that this study will help to fill that void in Vietnamese history, and at the same time may spur

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others to conduct further research into this area of Vietnamese history.

This study attempts to identify and analyse the factors that governed the ebb and flow of Vietnam-Malaysia relations throughout the period from 1945 to 1990. In attempting to answer the main question as to what were the factors that governed the bilateral relationship, a closer look into the period concerned is necessary, as the whole period under study falls into the wider context of international politics termed as the "Cold war." The Cold War characterised the conflicting ideological struggles that separated nations into two major blocs -- pro-western capitalist and pro-communist nations. This Cold War phenomenon manifested itself in Southeast Asia in the form of communist insurgencies that began almost immediately after the end of the Second World War. Thus while the communists played the role of nationalists in Vietnam against French colonialism and emerged victor in northern Vietnam after 1954, the southern half of Vietnam was governed by successive regimes that were supported by the western nations and pro-west states including Malaysia. And in Malaysia, the 12-year long communist-led insurgency left behind a bitter experience for the Malaysian Government -- a feeling that inevitably led to a very

skeptical view of communism, and the adoption of a staunch anti-communist outlook.

This study hopes to examine critically the role of internal and external factors and forces that shaped the bilateral relationship. Internally, the RVN's struggle against the communist insurgents, its political goals, and the stability of the regime will be analysed with a view to determine the extent of their influence upon Vietnam-Malaysia relations. This study also hopes to investigate whether the DRV's main goal of reunifying the country after 1954 which led to the outbreak of war in Vietnam also played a role in shaping its outlook towards Malaysia.

Externally, the influence of larger global and regional politics upon the bilateral relationship will be examined, especially the extent to which the linkage between these external forces and the internal dynamics proved to be crucial in determining the ebb and flow of the bilateral relationship.

Thus it is also hoped that by examining these various factors, forces and trends, a clearer picture of Vietnam-Malaysia relations could be presented, especially in regard to Vietnam's attitude towards Malaysia.
1.2. Scope of the Study

This study attempts to cover the period between 1945 and 1990 -- a span of 45 years. Even though official diplomatic relations between Vietnam and Malaysia were not established until 1957 with Malaya achieving independence in that year, it is important to note that the DRV under Ho Chi Minh declared independence on 2 September 1945, although remaining a de facto government until 1954. The period between 1945 to 1957 is also important to the study as it was during this period that the direction of the foreign policies of the two Vietnams and Malaysia was moulded, especially in the context of the Cold war, which also has its origins in 1945. The period prior to 1957 is important to this study as it provides a better understanding of the colonial and political experience of both countries that later contributed to the formulation of the foreign policies of the two Vietnams and Malaysia. As for the cut-off point at 1990, it is hoped that a better picture could be presented on recent developments in bilateral relations following the demise of the Cold War by 1989.

Although it is a common feature in the study of bilateral relations between two nations to emphasise more on the political and military aspects, this study attempts as far as possible to look beyond that horizon to include
the economic aspect which, of late has become a prominent feature of international relations. This study also attempts to go beyond the practice and tradition of discarding the behaviour of smaller powers in analysing the power game. In this case, more emphasis on the bilateral relations of Vietnam-Malaysia is given, although it may not be an easy task to focus specifically on the bilateral dynamics by deemphasizing the global strategic context within which the relationship has evolved.

This study is developed through a discussion of themes and issues in chronological order in eight chapters:

**Chapter One:** Introduction, which outlines the purpose of the study, scope of study, limitation of the study, sources and methodology.

**Chapter Two:** The period between 1945 to 1957 when the foreign policy moulding processes took place. Emphasis will be given to the rise of communism in the context of the Cold War.

**Chapter Three:** Early official relations up to 1969, focussing on the bilateral (South Vietnam-Malaysia) cooperation against communism.

**Chapter Four:** The beginning of US disengagement from Vietnam in 1969, and the beginning of the shift in international politics to the fall of the RVN in 1975.

**Chapter Five:** Three years of mutual accommodation between the two countries after the fall of the RVN.

**Chapter Six:** Stalemate in official bilateral relations after the invasion of Cambodia by the SRV up to 1986.

**Chapter Seven:** The changes after the 6th National Congress of the Communist Party of Vietnam in 1986 and the progress in bilateral relations; and

**Chapter Eight:** Conclusion.
1.3. Limitation of the Study

The task of carrying out this study will invariably entail numerous limitations and shortcomings. Although it aims to examine as far as possible the bilateral relations between Vietnam and Malaysia from 1945 until 1990, with the aim of reconstructing the process to the minute detail as a historian sets out to do, several aspects which are linked to the topic will be given minor treatment. Subjects such as the Cambodian conflict and the Jakarta Informal Talks, the Non-aligned Movement and Vietnamese national development are discussed only at a level that is pertinent to the thesis. This approach is governed by the need to avoid detraction from the subject under study. Secondly most of these topics have been adequately dealt with by other scholars.

The inaccessibility of several sources from Vietnam could result in a surface-level study of several aspects of the bilateral relations, especially in the case of early DRV attitudes towards Malaysia. The scarcity of specific sources dealing directly with Vietnam-Malaysia relations compelled heavier reliance on indirect sources and references which to a great extent, inevitably presented Vietnam-Malaysia relations as part of Vietnam-ASEAN relations, although it is a fact that many facets of bilateral relations after 1975 were conducted through the ASEAN channel.
1.4. Note on Sources

It is difficult to study the recent history of Vietnam by relying entirely on archival materials. In looking at Vietnam-Malaysia relations, apart from the few agreements made, very few direct documents can be found due to the lack of direct contact. Therefore, this study relies significantly on published records, especially those revealed in newspapers and official publications of both countries. Thus, the bulk of primary materials used in this study consists of newspaper reports of both Vietnam and Malaysia. In the case of Vietnam, the main papers are The Saigon Post, and after 1975, due to the unavailability of English papers, the monthly Vietnam Courier and the Vietnam News Agency news reports. On the Malaysian side, the Straits Times and after 1980, the New Straits Times were consulted. Occasionally, other Malaysian dailies were used such as The Star and Malay Mail. Selected regional and international news reports and news monitors were used for certain areas of the study especially to corroborate local reports. For this purpose, The London Times and the Singapore Straits Times were the main sources while the Bangkok Post was used occasionally. Two international news monitors were used for the latter part of the study: the Foreign Broadcast Information Service, and the Joint Press Release Service. Both helped to verify some of the later reports in the Vietnamese and
Malaysian newspapers.

The authenticity of newspapers as primary materials in the study of history has been the subject of much controversy, mainly due to the politicised nature of news reporting. Nonetheless, reports on diplomatic relations or foreign news reporting are usually relatively immune from bias compared to domestic news reporting. Corroboration and verification of data and reports obtained domestically with external reports helped to eliminate, if not considerably reduce the margin of error.

Governmental reports and publications from the two countries were used to determine official policies of the two countries, in particular Vietnamese policy towards Malaysia. In this regard, the numerous governmental reports by the two different Vietnams and subsequently after 1975 by the Socialist Republic of Vietnam were particularly useful -- documents and statements compiled and published by the Foreign Language Publishing House of Hanoi and also the Ministry of Foreign Relations of the then Saigon Government in the Republic of Vietnam. The various volumes of Foreign Affairs Malaysia were also consulted for this study.

The more contemporary nature of this study made it impossible to undertake archival research except for selected files from the Colonial Office Records on Straits
Settlements (Great Britain Colonial Office, Straits Settlements Original Correspondence [CO273]), which were used for the discussion on the setting of the study as a whole and those sections pertaining to the Spratlys dispute. The United States intelligence reports on Southeast Asia (United States, Central Intelligence Agency Intelligence Report on Southeast Asia) were also consulted although they consisted mainly of studies made for American executives involved in the policy-making process. As such the reliability of the data could be doubted as these reports contained recommendations made by specialists who lacked on-the-field experience. However, some reports proved to be valuable because of their contemporary nature. Additionally, secondary sources have also been used to provide the necessary background information needed for understanding the significance of the bilateral ties in relation to both internal and external events.

Language is one of the many problems in carrying out this study. This is especially true in terms of Vietnamese sources, the majority of which are in the Vietnamese language. The writer's lack of proficiency in Vietnamese, which is not taught in Malaysia, has made it less easy to deal with primary sources in the Vietnamese language. Thus the bulk of the sources consulted, both primary and secondary are in English with some in Bahasa Malaysia,
Chinese, as well as French. Thus in terms of sources, this study was carried out with consultation of available primary and secondary sources which are within the reach of the writer, and which he could use with ease and good effect.

1.5. Methodology

This study is based on a historical-empirical-narrative analysis, and draws conclusions on Vietnam-Malaysia relations by examining the flow of historical events in a chronological order using both primary and secondary sources. A content-analysis approach is used to highlight the main trends and significance of different stages in the bilateral relationship. Needless to say, studies of this nature are undertaken based on the axiom that nation-state behaviour is conducted on a rational basis. In pursuing this study, the concept of the balance of power is also used in analysing Vietnamese foreign policy towards Malaysia in the context of international politics. The balance of power as a traditional instrument of foreign policy, has historically been used by states to pursue national interests. Therefore, the concept has been used to the extent that it serves as a tool of analysis for enhancing our understanding of historical proc-

esses and trends, such as the conduct of bilateral relations between Vietnam and Malaysia in the strategic region of Southeast Asia.