

# Contrasting Visions: Singapore's Urban Development in Reality and the Colonial Imagination, 1710-1864

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## Declaration

I, Nathan Jia Shen Goh, confirm that the work presented in my thesis is my own. Where information has been derived from other sources, I confirm that this has been indicated in the thesis.

## Abstract

This dissertation critically re-evaluates the malleability of the imperial imagination in the context of Singapore's colonial history, challenging the conventional starting point of 1819 and the portrayal of Sir Stamford Raffles as the sole visionary behind the settlement's early urban development. It argues for the inclusion of cartographic sources in the analysis of the imperial imagination, drawing on the historiography of imperial cartography to demonstrate that maps are laden with information that can reveal new dimensions of colonial perceptions and intentions. The research provides a nuanced, contextual and analytical examination of Singapore's early years, often overlooked or simplified in traditional literature. It highlights the lack of structured development and the challenging conditions under the British administration, emphasising the significant role played by non-European communities. This critical re-examination uncovers the deliberate construction of the colony's image in the 1820s and challenges the traditional triumphant ideological narratives with a more pragmatic view of Singapore's development. This work contributes to the broader discourse on colonial and urban history by challenging entrenched narratives and highlights the complexity of factors that shaped Singapore's development. It underscores the importance of a more inclusive and nuanced approach to historical analysis, recognising the contributions of diverse communities and the dynamic nature of colonial knowledge and urban development.

## Impact Statement

This thesis, which presents a detailed case study of British colonial influence on the urban development of 19th-century Singapore, holds substantial potential for beneficial use both within academia and in broader societal applications.

The re-examination of the British colonial state's role uncovers critical systemic failures that have previously been overlooked. This analysis is supported by an examination of the role of the Straits Chinese community, which identifies that many of the functions traditionally expected of the local government were fulfilled by the local population. In doing so, this thesis invites scholars to reconsider narratives of colonial urban planning and promotes the agency of colonised communities in shaping their urban landscape.

Moreover, this study offers critical methodological contributions to the existing historiography. The integration of cartographic analysis has uncovered new evidence that challenges orthodox interpretations, enshrined in the national narrative, which promote Britain's control over urban development. For example, the examination of cadastral maps provides evidence that policies such as racial segregation were not strictly enforced or adhered to. These findings are significant as they compel us to re-evaluate modern perceptions of Singapore, including fundamental aspects like the enduring names of districts which suggest the success of institutionalised segregation, such as Chinatown, Little India and Kampong Glam.

The value of incorporating maps into this study also demonstrates the potential for future avenues of interdisciplinary research which utilise other non-conventional source bases, particularly in fields such as urban and physical geography. This could result in studies that establish more detailed historical frameworks which aid in challenging traditional discourse and identifying new features of colonial development that might not be apparent through traditional textual analysis alone.

Outside of academia, this thesis has the potential to influence contemporary approaches to Singapore's urban development. The application of this study to current policies could influence planners and policymakers to adopt a more historically informed approach to development, resulting in the more deliberate safeguarding of significant historical landmarks, many of which, like Panglima Prang, have been lost to property developers in the past several decades. Protecting these locations could

strengthen Singapore's tourism industry by adding to existing attractions like Baba House, offering additional opportunities for local initiatives to enhance local heritage tourism. The development of enhanced tours and experiences showcasing Singapore's rich and diverse colonial history could potentially attract a wider audience interested in the layered history of colonial cities in the former Straits Settlements.

In addition to supporting tourism, this study also provides potential benefits to urban planners, given its focus on the geographic area which now constitutes the Downtown Core, more commonly known as the Central Business District. Institutions like the Urban Redevelopment Authority could benefit from the study's findings on the historical significance of different urban areas, which could guide future policy, such as informing zoning policy and highlighting areas with untapped potential for development or regeneration. This could take the form of repurposing historic sites and locations, such as godowns, into commercial spaces, such as heritage hotels and retail and dining centres.

## Acknowledgements

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## Currencies

In the nineteenth century, the Spanish dollar served as the predominant currency in circulation. All references to dollars and currencies designated as \$ in this thesis are Spanish dollars unless otherwise stated.

The Spanish dollar

$$\begin{aligned} 100 \text{ Spanish dollars}^1 &= 224 \frac{1}{2} \text{ Company Rupees} \\ &= 210.85 \text{ Sicca Rupees} \\ &= \text{£}20. 16\text{s. } 8\text{d. (Intrinsic Value)} \\ &= \text{f. } 208. 325. \end{aligned}$$

## Abbreviations

ACM	Asian Civilisation Museum
BL	British Library
EIC	East India Company
IOR	India Office Records
NAS	National Archives (Singapore)
NE	National Education
SSR	Straits Settlements Records
TTSH	Tan Tock Seng Hospital
VOC	Verenigde Oostindiische Compagnie/United East India Company
PAP	People's Action Party

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<sup>1</sup> Currency conversion taken from Wong Lin Ken, *The Trade of Singapore* (Singapore: White Lotus Press, 1969).

## Table of Names

**Abdul Rahman** (1755-1825)

Temenggong of Johor during the Bendahara dynasty, co-signer of the Treaty of Singapore 1819

**Emanuel Bowen** (1694-1767)

Royal Mapmaker to both King George II of Great Britain and Louis XV of France

**Francis Rawdon-Hastings** (1754-1826)

Politician and military officer, served as the Governor-General of India 1813-1823.

**Herman Moll** (1654-1732)

British cartographer, engraver, and publisher. Most renowned cartographer in early 18<sup>th</sup> century Britain.

**Hussein Mohamed Shah** (1776-1835)

Tengku Long or Tengku Hussein, last Sultan of the Johor-Riau-Lingga empire.

**James Pearl** (n.d.)

Captain of the *Indiana* in which Stamford Raffles first sailed to Singapore from Penang in 1819

**Joseph Huddart** (1741-1816)

British hydrographer, author of *The Oriental Navigator, or New directions for sailing to and from the East Indies, China, New Holland* 1801.

**Robert Townsend Farquhar** (1776-1830)

British colonial official, lieutenant-governor of Prince of Wales Island (Penang) 1804-1805.

**Seah Eu Chin** 余有进 (1805-1885)

Wealthy Teochew merchant, prominent member of the Chinese community in colonial Singapore, founder of Ngee Ann Kongsi

**Stamford Raffles** (1751-1826)

British colonial official, governor of the Dutch East Indies 1811-1816, lieutenant-governor of Bencoolen 1818-1824, founder of colonial Singapore 1819.

**Tan Kim Seng** 陈金声 (1805-1864)

Prominent Straits Chinese merchant, Justice of the Peace, significant landowner in colonial Singapore

**Tan Tock Seng** 陈笃生/陈卓生 (1798-1850)

Prominent Straits Chinese merchant, Justice of the Peace, philanthropist, founder of the Chinese Pauper Hospital, later the Tan Tock Seng Hospital (TTSH)

**Warren Hastings** (1732-1818)

British colonial administrator, served as the first British Governor-General of India 1772-1785.

**William Farquhar** (1774-1839)

British colonial official, Resident of Malacca 1813-1818, first Resident of Singapore 1819-1823.

**William Marsden** (1754-1838)

British historian, linguist, numismatist, and pioneer of the scientific study of Indonesia.

## Introduction

In the first few decades of Singapore's colonial history, the island underwent a remarkable evolution from a small fishing village at the nadir of its long and storied history as a maritime entrepot to one of the British Empire's most vital colonial ports, strategically positioned at the crossroads of international trade. To accommodate Singapore's rapid reclamation of its historic role as Southeast Asia's leading trans-shipment hub, the island underwent a significant structural and ecological transformation. Where the emergent town in the early 1820s was once constructed entirely from attap - a cheap, semi-permanent material so flammable that its use in construction was banned in Penang in 1817 – by the middle of the nineteenth century, Singapore Town was replete with imposing godowns, striking temples and palatial residences.<sup>2</sup> Initially confined to just five thousand yards along the island's southern shoreline, the town's perimeters were pushed inexorably outward.<sup>3</sup> By 1855, the town measured approximately twenty kilometres from east to west and extended approximately eight kilometres inland.<sup>4</sup> To achieve this expansion, Singapore's early population had to contend with the island's inhospitable terrain of swampland forest, mangrove forest, and dipterocarp forest.<sup>5</sup> Large swathes of impenetrable jungle had been cut back and cleared by organised Chinese labourers. Untreated marshlands, which had previously only been accessible by a single narrow mud path that wound through swamps and was impassable in wet weather, had been drained, reinforced and built upon to provide housing for new migrants.<sup>6</sup> The increased mastery over the terrain was typified in 1842 by the construction of a fifty-acre racecourse, just yards from the town's original boundaries, on top of what

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<sup>2</sup> A. H. Hill, *The Hikayat Abdullah: the autobiography of Abdullah bin Abdul Kadir, (1797-1854); an annotated translation by A. H. Hill* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1969), 85–106; Charles Burton Buckley, *An Anecdotal History of Old Times in Singapore* (Singapore: Fraser and Neave, 1902).

<sup>3</sup> Record of the 1819 Treaty of Friendship and Alliance, signed on 6 February 1819 by Sir Stamford Raffles and Singapore's Malay rulers, Sultan Hussein of Johor and Temenggong Abdul Rahman, National Archives of Singapore.

<sup>4</sup> Figures estimated from the hydrographic chart *This Survey of the Straits of Singapore, Is Respectfully Inscribed to The Honourable Colonel Butterworth*, 1855, National Archive of Singapore.

<sup>5</sup> Over the duration of Britain's colonial rule (1819-1963), approximately 11.6 km<sup>2</sup> of an initial 70km<sup>2</sup> of mangrove forest had been lost to exploitation and reclamation. A. T. K Yee, W. F. Ang, S. Teo, S. C Liew and H. T. W. Tan, 'The Present Extent of Mangrove Forests in Singapore', *Nature in Singapore*, 3 (2010): 139.

<sup>6</sup> Hill, *The Hikayat Abdullah: the autobiography of Abdullah bin Abdul Kadir*; Mai Lin Tjao-Bonatz, 'Ordering of Housing and the Urbanisation Process: Shophouses in Colonial Penang', *Journal of the Malaysian Branch of the Royal Asiatic Society*, 71 no. 2 (1998): 126; Buckley, *An Anecdotal History of Old Times in Singapore*, 53.

had previously been considered impenetrable swampland.<sup>7</sup> However, the more sweeping ecological transformation occurred in the island's interior, where forests were felled, exploited and depleted to make way for many gambier, pepper, nutmeg and eventually rubber plantations.<sup>8</sup> This deforestation devastated the island's wildlife, and by the 1860s, the island's tigers – which were initially great in number and responsible for potentially thousands of deaths amongst the settlement's early inhabitants – were all but extinct.<sup>9</sup> Gone were the days when wealthy and renowned residents, such as Abdullah bin Abdul al Kadir (known as Munshi Abdullah), would refuse to move into their newly built homes for fear of being surrounded by jungle and the tigers that lived therein.<sup>10</sup> Instead, just forty years after the establishment of the British settlement, tourists often complained of Singapore's lacklustre tiger-hunting events during which they 'never encountered anything more formidable than a deer.'<sup>11</sup> Yet despite this remarkable transformation, Singapore's physical development during this period occupies an uneasy position within the Singapore Story.

The product of the National Education (NE), a citizenship education programme introduced by the People's Action Party (PAP) in 1997, the Singapore Story is a state-approved version of Singapore's history, designed to foster a sense of Singaporean identity, promote an understanding of Singapore's major challenges and vulnerabilities and to instil core national values.<sup>12</sup> Like many national histories, the Singapore Story is a uniform and coherent narrative that validates, vindicates, and celebrates the success of the twentieth-century nation-building project.<sup>13</sup> The

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<sup>7</sup> N. G. Aplin and Quek Jin Jong, 'Celestials in Touch: Sport and the Chinese in Colonial Singapore', *The International Journal of the History of Sport*, 19, no. 2-3 (2002): 71.

<sup>8</sup> Richard Corlett, 'The Ecological Transformation of Singapore, 1819-1990', *Journal of Biogeography*, 19, no. 4 (1992), 411-420; James Jackson, *Planters and Speculators: Chinese and European Agricultural Enterprise in Malaya 1786-1921* (Kuala Lumpur: University of Malay Press, 1968).

<sup>9</sup> Peter Boomgaard, *Frontiers of Fear: Tigers and People in the Malay World, 1600-1950* (London: Yale University Press, 2001), 207-208.

<sup>10</sup> Hill, *The Hikayat Abdullah: the autobiography of Abdullah bin Abdul Kadir*, 165.

<sup>11</sup> John Cameron, 'An Early Singapore Photographer', in John Bastin, *Travellers' Singapore: An Anthology* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1994), 84.

<sup>12</sup> Yeow Tong Chia, 'State Formation and Nation Building Through Education: The Origins and Introductions of the "National Education" Program in Singapore', in *(Re)Constructing Memory: School Textbooks and the Imagination of the Nation*, ed. James Williams (Rotterdam: Sense Publishers, 2014), 61; Albert Lau, 'Nation-Building and the Singapore Story: Some Issues in the Study of Contemporary Singapore History', in *Nation Building: Five Southeast Asian Histories*, ed. Wang Gungwu (Singapore: ISEAS Publishing, 2005), 228.

<sup>13</sup> Michael Barr, *Singapore: A Modern History* (London: I. B. Tauris, 2019); Karl Hack, 'Framing Singapore's History', in *Studying Singapore's Past: C.M. Turnbull and the History of Modern Singapore*, ed. Nicholas Tarling (Singapore: Singapore University Press, 2012).

narrative's continued presence reinforces the belief that the future and security of the small and vulnerable city-state depends upon its political leaders' cleverness and benevolence.<sup>14</sup> At the heart of the national mythology is the claim that through the guidance of Singapore's colonial and post-colonial founding fathers, Stamford Raffles and Lee Kwan Yew, respectively, the city-state overcame seemingly insurmountable odds to emerge as an important participant on the world stage.<sup>15</sup> More broadly, the narrative celebrates British benevolence, Chinese ingenuity and initiative, effective governance, and the principles of survival, success, multiracialism, meritocracy, and pragmatism.<sup>16</sup> The Singapore Story has been embedded in Singaporean society and is particularly prevalent in the nation's education system - which is unsurprising given that much of the narrative originated in the first general history of independent Singapore, as will be discussed. It has provided a national template of an often-simplified perspective of Singapore's colonial history that overlooks the complex and nuanced developments crucial to Singapore's early growth.<sup>17</sup>

The authors of *Living with Myths in Singapore*, Loh Kah Seng, Thum Ping Tjin and Jack Meng-Tat Chia, have argued that in recent years, the Singapore Story has evolved into a romantic narrative that emphasises the nation's tumultuous history and 'possesses the mythical quality of being able to explain Singaporean's history and identity.'<sup>18</sup> In its new form as a myth, the Singapore Story serves as a vital foundation for the nation, reinforcing the sense of identity that unites individuals across the country. In this role, the narrative transcends questions of truth or falsity,

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ling; and T.N. Harper, "Lim Chin Siong and the 'Singapore Story', in *Comet in Our Sky: Lim Chin Siong in History* ed. Tan King Quee and Jomo K.S (Kuala Lumpur: Insan, 2001).

<sup>14</sup> Barr, *Singapore: A Modern History*, 3.

<sup>15</sup> Maria Grever and Tina Van der Vlies, 'Why national narratives are perpetuated: A literature review on new insights from history textbook research', *London Review of Education*, 15, no. 12 (2017): 287; C.F.G. Lorenz and Stefan Berger, 'National Narratives and their 'Others': Ethnicity, Class, religion and the Gendering of national histories', *Storia della Storiografia/Geschichte der Geschichtsschreibung*, 50 (2006): 59-68; and Vilashini Cooppan, *Worlds Within: National Narratives and Global Connections in Postcolonial Writing* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2009); Loh Kah Seng, 'Within the Singapore Story: The Use and Narrative of History in Singapore', *Crossroads: An Interdisciplinary Journal of Southeast Asian Studies*, 12, no. 2 (1998): 1-21.

<sup>16</sup> Mary Turnbull, *A History of Modern Singapore 1819-1975*. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1977); Carl Trocki, foreword to Barr, *Singapore: A Modern History*, xiv; Kenneth Paul Tan, 'Choosing What to Remember in Neoliberal Singapore: The Singapore Story, State Censorship and State-Sponsored Nostalgia', *Asian Studies Review*, 40, no. 2 (2016): 231-249.

<sup>17</sup> Barr, *Singapore: A Modern History*, 3

<sup>18</sup> Loh Kah Seng, Thum Ping Tjin and Jack Meng-Tat Chia eds. *Living with Myths in Singapore* (Singapore: Ethos Books, 2017), 3.

verifiable or unproven. Regardless of whether increasingly contentious narratives, such as Sir Stamford Raffles being the founder of modern Singapore, can be disproven, the myth will endure. The endurance of the Singapore Story is partly the product of a politically charged environment in the country, which has not historically lent itself to a critical re-examination of Singapore's colonial past. As such, revisionist scholarship on Singapore's early development has been relatively scarce, while traditional narratives promoted in the 1970s and 80s scholarship, namely Mary Turnbull's *A History of Singapore*, remain dominant.<sup>19</sup>

Within the last couple of decades, however, while the Singapore Story remains an essential aspect of Singapore's national identity, the shortcomings of the traditional studies have been the subject of a new wave of Singaporean historiography.<sup>20</sup> Prominent scholars, including Carl Trocki, Michael Barr, Tim Harper, Kwa Chong Guan, Derek Heng and Tan Tai Yong, have been critical of what is increasingly seen as a one-dimensional conceptualisation of Singapore's history and have even labelled its incorporation into the Singapore Story a 'misuse of history'.<sup>21</sup> This thesis seeks to engage with this growing body of scholarship that is critically re-examining the oversimplified accounts of Singapore's early colonial history. By highlighting the deficiencies in Singapore's governance, the ad hoc solutions to administrative challenges, and the reliance on opportunistic development rather than strategic planning, this study aims to offer a more nuanced understanding of the colony's early urban and economic expansion. In doing so, it contributes to the re-evaluation of Singapore's colonial history, demonstrating the need for a more complex and critical examination of the forces that shaped its development.

This thesis pursues three overarching objectives. The first is to offer a new conceptualisation of Singapore's imperial history, which moves beyond the starting point of 1819. To achieve this, the study integrates a unique source base of legal and financial documents, public and private correspondence, and, most critically, imperial

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<sup>19</sup> Turnbull, *A History of Singapore*.

<sup>20</sup> Lau, 'Nation-Building and the Singapore Story: Some Issues in the Study of Contemporary Singapore History', 221-250.

<sup>21</sup> Barr, *Singapore: A Modern History*; Tim Harper, 'Lim Chin Siong and the "Singapore Story"', in *Comet in Our Sky: Lim Chin Siong in History*, ed. Tan Jiang Quee and Jomo K.S (Kuala Lumpur: Insan, 2001); Kwa Chong Guan, Derek Heng and Tan Tai Yong, *Singapore: A 700-Year History from Early Emporium to World City* (Singapore: National Archives of Singapore, 2009).



cartography to differentiate between British imperialism as it was enacted and imagined. Through this framework, this thesis reexamines Singapore's urban development, arguing that dominant historical narratives have been disproportionately shaped by sources reflecting Britain's idealised perceptions of the settlement's growth and spatial organisation. Moreover, by deliberately engaging with the ways in which Singapore existed within the British imagination, this study challenges the conventional temporal frameworks that often address Singapore's colonial history from 1819 onwards. Instead, it extends the analysis of Britain's relationship with the island back to the eighteenth century by tracing the depiction of Singapore in British cartography as early as 1710, well before the island entered the records of the East India Company. In doing so, this thesis attempts to bridge the gap between Singapore's pre-colonial and colonial history, offering fresh insights into the settlement's previously overlooked origins within British thought and proposing innovative directions for future research.

The second objective is to critically engage with the emergent wave of revisionist studies that challenge the traditional discourse surrounding Singapore's colonial history. Specifically, this study reconsiders the narrative surrounding the roles of the East India Company and the British administration in financing, facilitating and shaping Singapore's urban development. Focusing on the tenures of Stamford Raffles and William Farquhar during the settlement's formative years, this examination addresses how these figures, despite their relatively short careers in Singapore, have come to dominate historical accounts of Singapore's development, particularly in narratives that emerged during the 1970s. While this thesis advocates for a reconceptualisation of Singapore's imperial history, it is first necessary to dismantle the prevailing British-centric framework by identifying the limitations and oversimplifications of focusing primarily on figures like Raffles. This analysis, therefore, exposes the fallacies embedded in the traditional literature and highlights the reductive nature of the existing analytical frameworks.

Building on the critique of Eurocentrism in Singapore's historiography, the third objective of this thesis is to examine the critical, yet underexplored, role of non-European communities in the development of the settlement's urban landscape. A recurring limitation in Singapore's imperial historiography has been the tendency to critically assess the efficacy of the British administration without adequately

considering the contributions of other factors. While there is a growing recognition of the importance of the colony's non-European populations, empirical evidence supporting this view has remained limited. This thesis addresses this gap by conducting an in-depth exploration of the contributions made by Singapore's Straits Chinese community to urban development. Through case studies of prominent figures such as merchants Tan Kim Seng and Tan Tock Seng, the research demonstrates that significant developments in Singapore's physical infrastructure - including private residences, commercial warehouses, public institutions, and essential services - were heavily reliant on the non-European population. Furthermore, this analysis highlights the dual nature of their contributions, both in collaboration with and independent of the British administration. By establishing a comparative framework, this study not only reveals the extent of the involvement of the Straits Chinese community but also repositions its significance concerning the contributions of British authorities.

To realise these core objectives, the structure of this thesis highlights the dichotomy between the perception and reality of Singapore in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. The study begins by examining Singapore's representation in the imperial imagination through its portrayal in eighteenth-century maps. This analysis explores the often-overlooked origin of Singapore's emergence into Britain's public consciousness and establishes a baseline of the island's representation in British media. The thesis then examines the advent of an idealised vision of colonial Singapore that emerged between 1819 and 1824 as the island became prominent within the East India Company and the British metropole. This section focuses on the process of crafting Singapore's image, offering a unique insight into the constructed nature of its representation, which dominated not only in the nineteenth century but also continued to shape the historical narrative well into the twentieth century.

Upon establishing the groundwork surrounding Singapore's portrayal within the British imperial imagination, the thesis turns towards an examination of the reality of the settlement's development, focusing specifically on the efforts of Stamford Raffles as he sought to translate his vision into reality. This section examines conflicts between Raffles and British citizens over land ownership and administration. It critically re-evaluates the Company's negligent approach to the settlement, aiming to complicate our understanding of colonial dynamics in Singapore's early development, which previous accounts have obscured. This analysis challenges the portrayal of

Britain's role in Singapore's development in much of the traditional narrative. It provides further evidence in support of the growing body of literature that has exposed the fundamental flaws in Singapore's early governance. Through an analysis of the private contributions of the prominent merchant Tan Kim Seng, the final section of this thesis shifts the focal point of analysis away from British perceptions or involvement in Singapore to examine the role of the Straits Chinese community in Singapore's urban development. While the critique of Britain's role in Singapore's development has become more rigorous in the current literature, there remains a noticeable lack of studies examining how the resulting vacuum was addressed. By placing the Straits Chinese community at the forefront of analysis, this thesis begins to address this issue and argues that much of the impetus and financing of Singapore's urban development was driven by the private sector, both in pursuit of their commercial objectives but also as philanthropic donations towards public institutions that the Company had failed to provide. Whilst there were numerous wealthy and influential non-European/British residents in Singapore, such as prominent members of the Arab and Jewish communities, no other community held as much economic, social, or political influence as the Straits Chinese. Tan Kim Seng has been chosen as the focal point of this final section as he was one of the most successful and wealthy figures in all of Singapore and, crucially, was one of the few Straits Chinese residents for whom there are records of his possessions at the time of his death.<sup>22</sup> By utilising this source base for the first time, this thesis provides valuable insight into his role in Singapore's development and a quantifiable analysis of the Straits Chinese community's wealth and economic activities.

The traditional historiography of Singapore's colonial history has its origins in mid-twentieth-century scholarship and was defined by British-centric narratives that emphasised the political, administrative and economic success of the colony under British rule. This methodological and conceptual approach led to studies that frequently attributed colonial development to British benevolence and effective governance.<sup>23</sup> Mary Turnbull was the foremost historian in the development of this traditional scholarship, with her seminal work *A History of Singapore, 1819-1975*,

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<sup>22</sup> Vivienne Tan, *Tim Kim Seng: A Biography* (Singapore: Landmark Books, 2019), 93.

<sup>23</sup> Barr, *Singapore a Modern History*, 3; H.R.C Wright, 'Raffles and the Slave Trade at Batavia in 1812', *The Historical Journal*, 3, no. 2, (1960): 186-190; Teddy Y. H. Sim, 'Through a Glass Darkly: A Fresh Look at the Stories of the Foundation of Singapore', *KEMANUSIAAN*, 20, no. 2 (2013): 1-14.

published in 1977, standing as one of the most influential and frequently cited studies in the field.<sup>24</sup> This study was republished in 1989 and 2009 under the titles *A History of Singapore, 1819-1988* and *A History of Modern Singapore, 1819-2005*, respectively, with both editions updating the temporal scope of the national history.<sup>25</sup>

Turnbull's seminal study has been fundamental in shaping and defining the nation's national identity. Key historical narratives play a pivotal role in constructing self-perception and collective memory.<sup>26</sup> In the late 1960s and 1970s, the People's Action Party (PAP), the government of the newly independent nation, grappled with creating a Singaporean identity distinct from the broader framework of British Malaya or Malaysia.<sup>27</sup> The government initially sought to fashion the nation's new identity by casting off its colonial past, declaring that 'Singapore *had no* history, that the past was irrelevant, that Singapore's history started now.'<sup>28</sup> In this environment, government suspicion fell on the two universities as potential hotbeds of radicalism and subversion and Western academics were heavily scrutinised and, on occasion, the government directly undermined their authority until by 1971, historian Mary Turnbull was the last expatriate left on the staff of the University of Singapore.<sup>29</sup> Yet, despite this oppressive atmosphere, a palpable nation-building impulse remained throughout the University of Singapore. Turnbull was highly attuned to the emerging consciousness that Singapore was beginning to be viewed as a distinct entity, and she was convinced that adopting this historical perspective would help forge a sense of nationhood where nothing had previously existed.<sup>30</sup> This belief heavily influenced Turnbull's conceptualisation of *A History of Singapore, 1819-1975*, a book she had begun work on in the late 1960s and published in 1977.<sup>31</sup> Where earlier scholarship had engaged with Singapore as either a constituent part of the Straits, Malaya or even as an international port and city, *A History of Singapore* was the first

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<sup>24</sup> Turnbull, *A History of Singapore, 1819-1977*; Ministry of Information and the Arts, *The Singapore Story: Overcoming the Odds*.

<sup>25</sup> Mary Turnbull, *A History of Singapore, 1819-1988* (Singapore: Oxford University Press, 1989); Mary Turnbull, *A History of Modern Singapore, 1819-2005* (Singapore: NUS Press, 2009).

<sup>26</sup> Turnbull, *A History of Singapore, 1819-1975*.

<sup>27</sup> Kevin Blackburn, 'Mary Turnbull's History Textbook for the Singapore Nation', in *Studying Singapore's Past: C.M. Turnbull and the History of Modern Singapore*, ed. Nicholas Tarling (Singapore: Singapore University Press, 2012), 66.

<sup>28</sup> P.J. Thum, 'Constance Mary Turnbull 1927-2008: An Appreciation', in *Studying Singapore's Past: C.M. Turnbull and the History of Modern Singapore*, ed. Nicholas Tarling, 10-11.

<sup>29</sup> *Ibid.*, 10.

<sup>30</sup> Blackburn, 'Mary Turnbull's History Textbook for the Singapore Nation', 70-71.

<sup>31</sup> Turnbull, *A History of Singapore, 1819-1975*.

comprehensive history textbook to conceive of Singapore as an independent nation-state.<sup>32</sup> This distinction is essential to understanding Turnbull's approach to Singaporean history and the study's enduring impact.

Conscious of the significance of her study as the first comprehensive study of Singapore as an independent nation-state, Turnbull's primary concern was addressing the 'loss of continuity' in the analysis of Singapore's development.<sup>33</sup> By incorporating Singapore's history into a broader Malaya framework, Turnbull believed that existing scholarship had detracted from the uniqueness of the Singaporean experience, arguing that 'there was...a tendency to deal heavily with colonial issues which had very little to do with Singapore except indirectly.'<sup>34</sup> To rectify this shortcoming, Turnbull deliberately crafted her approach to treat Singapore in relative isolation, a departure from her early scholarship, which followed the convention of incorporating Singapore's history into the history of the Straits Settlements.<sup>35</sup> As a result, significant figures, such as Stamford Raffles, feature prominently in *A History of Singapore*; however, their lives and careers outside the settlement are largely omitted. This approach resulted in a clear and cohesive account of Singapore's political, administrative, and economic developments whilst avoiding the complexities and nuances of the failings and shortcomings of imperial rule elsewhere in the region.

The intentionally nationalistic narrative that emerged in *A History of Singapore* was enthusiastically received within Singaporean academia for creating a new field for Singapore history.<sup>36</sup> The immediate appeal of Turnbull's history was surmised in a review by historian Yeo Kim Wah in the *Journal of Southeast Asian Studies*, which praised her ability to separate the island from the Malayan mainland to present a 'highly readable general history of Singapore.'<sup>37</sup> The appeal of this narrative, however,

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<sup>32</sup> Blackburn, 'Mary Turnbull's History Textbook for the Singapore Nation', 66; Harold Frank Pearson, *Singapore: A Popular History, 1819-1960* (Singapore: Eastern Universities Press, 1961); Frank Athelstane Swettenham, *British Malaya; An Account of the Origin and Progress of British Influence in Malaya* (London: J. Lane, 1907); Mary Turnbull, *The Straits Settlements, 1826-67: Indian Presidency to Crown Colony* (London: Athlone Press, 1972); Kennedy Gordon Tregonning, *A History of Modern Malaya* (Singapore: Eastern Universities Press, 1964).

<sup>33</sup> 'Remember the Past so You'll Know Just How Far You Have Come', *Sunday Times*, 19 March 1978.

<sup>34</sup> Mary Turnbull, 'Rethinking Singapore History Thirty Years On', at Roundtable on Rethinking Singapore History, National University of Singapore, 7 February 2006; Blackburn, 'Mary Turnbull's History Textbook for the Singapore Nation', 71.

<sup>35</sup> Turnbull, *The Straits Settlements, 1826-67*.

<sup>36</sup> Thum, 'Constance Mary Turnbull 1927-2008: An Appreciation', 11.

<sup>37</sup> Kim Wah Yeo, 'Review of "History of Singapore, 1819-1975"', *Journal of Southeast Asian Studies* 10, no. 1 (1979), quoted in Thum, 'Constance Mary Turnbull 1927-2008: An Appreciation', 11.

extended beyond academic circles, finding equal, if not greater, resonance in the political sphere, where it played a crucial role in shaping generations of Singaporean's sense of national identity. In the late 1970s and '80s, the PAP began to readdress their approach to the national education system in a concerted effort to align the system with their nation-building agenda.<sup>38</sup> As part of this reorganisation, the government's stance on Singaporean history backtracked from its initial disdain to advocating for its importance in fostering a national identity in students.<sup>39</sup> The success of *A History of Singapore* heavily influenced this reversal of opinion as the Ministry of Education embraced her work and used it as one of the primary references in writing the new textbooks for Secondary 1 and 2.<sup>40</sup> Incorporating Turnbull's text into Singapore's school curriculum solidified her legacy and influence over shaping the approach of successive generations of historians towards Singapore's history.<sup>41</sup>

While initially successful in providing Singapore with a distinct national history, the concise and cohesive narrative of *A History of Singapore* ultimately came at the cost of oversimplification. Turnbull's account, though thoroughly researched, was rooted in celebrating the successes of British rule, providing the origins of the Singapore Story.<sup>42</sup> Turnbull's contribution to the formation of this narrative, through her foregrounding of significant figures like Raffles and her focus on British benevolence and foresight, was an unintended consequence of her attempt to construct a cohesive narrative. Initially, she had sought to write a general history of Singapore that emphasised the experiences of the ordinary people; however, as she acknowledged in 2006, the abundance of material on colonial activities skewed her approach towards the Western expatriate community at the expense of the vast majority of Singapore's 'about which there was not really so much material.'<sup>43</sup> As such, the oversimplification of Singapore's colonial past has distorted Singapore's traditional historiography, as complex developments and non-European actors have often been overlooked in favour of a

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<sup>38</sup> Blackburn, 'Mary Turnbull's History Textbook for the Singapore Nation', 73.

<sup>39</sup> *Ibid.*, 76.

<sup>40</sup> *Ibid.*, 76.

<sup>41</sup> Turnbull, *A History of Singapore*; and Michael Barr, *Singapore: A Modern History* (London: I. B. Tauris, 2019), 5-6.

<sup>42</sup> Carl Trocki, foreword to Barr, *Singapore: A Modern History*, xiv.

<sup>43</sup> Turnbull, 'Rethinking Singapore History Thirty Years On', 2006.

straightforward narrative of a British hero and the colony's progressive and relentless march towards commercial supremacy.<sup>44</sup>

Alongside Turnbull, K.G. Tregonning was also hugely influential in shaping Singapore's traditional historiography. Founder of the immensely influential *Journal of Southeast Asian History* in 1960 (renamed *Journal of Southeast Asian Studies* in 1970). Tregonning's seminal work *A History of Modern Malaya*, which predates Turnbull's work, was instrumental in contextualising Singapore's role within the British Empire in Southeast Asia. Tregonning's regional approach to examining British policies in Malaya provided a vital backdrop for later studies, including *A History of Modern Singapore*, to analyse Singapore's specific role within overarching political and economic structures. Like Turnbull's work, Tregonning's study is highly British-centric and, while vital to Singapore's historiography, contributed to a distortion in the field by placing too much emphasis on British influence. Although Tregonning's focus was not specifically on Singapore, his overarching themes of British dominance in Southeast Asia impacted later studies of Singapore's colonial history. One of Tregonning's most significant legacies is through his student Wong Lin Ken, who became a pivotal figure in Singapore's traditional historiography.

Unlike Turnbull, whose work focused primarily on creating a narrative around Singapore's political and administrative developments, Wong's scholarship centred on Singapore's trade. His enduring influence in the field stems from his meticulous analysis of Singapore's economic records, namely the Annual Trade Statements of Singapore and C.P. Holloway's *The Tabular Statements of the Commerce of Singapore*.<sup>45</sup> These sources provide comprehensive accounts of Singapore's official trade in the nineteenth century, and the analysis of this source base began in earnest in 1960 with the publication of Wong Lin Ken's seminal *The Trade of Singapore, 1819-69*.<sup>46</sup> This study highlighted the significance of Singapore's free port status, and by documenting the flow of goods, such as pepper, gambier, tin, opium and textiles, he showed that Singapore's success as a trading hub was not an isolated phenomenon but rather part of a more extensive regional trade network. These sources remain some of the most comprehensive insights into Singapore's economic development;

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<sup>44</sup> Barr, *Singapore: A Modern History*, 28.

<sup>45</sup> C. P Holloway, *Tabular Statements of the Commerce of Singapore, During the Years 1823-24 to 1839-49 Inclusive* (Singapore: Singapore Free Press Office, 1842).

<sup>46</sup> Wong Lin Ken, *The Trade of Singapore, 1819-1869* (Singapore: White Lotus Press, 1969).

however, by their nature, Wong's reliance on these documents reinforces the narrative that positions Singapore's founding in 1819 as the beginning of its modern history. Moreover, Wong's study heavily influenced Turnbull, who frequently used Wong's economic findings to provide important context for political and administrative narratives in *A History of Singapore*. As such, although Wong's impact on the historiography is somewhat less far-reaching than Turnbull's, as he did not attempt to craft overarching narratives, he was crucial to the formation of the belief that Singapore's modern history began in 1819.

A vital consequence of the dominance of traditional interpretations of Singapore's colonial history is the persistent view of Singapore as an exceptional case within the British Empire - often celebrated as a success story of British benevolence and economic foresight. In the 1990s, this narrative was co-opted into the country's foundational myth in the 'Singapore Story.'<sup>47</sup>

The highly politicised entrenchment of this traditional conceptualisation of Singapore's colonial past, in which imperial rule is understood primarily through the lens of central constitutional, institutional and administrative functions, has inevitably influenced the development of the nation's historiography. In the 1970s and 1980s, historians who deviated from Singapore's foundational date of 1819 were considered revisionists, a label that could be career-killing for local scholars until the 1990s.<sup>48</sup> In this stifling political atmosphere, there were very few challenges to the traditional narratives, and those that did exist were primarily offered by foreign scholars, such as Carl Trocki, who eschewed the nationalistic framework in favour of producing social histories that emphasised the local rather than the colonial.<sup>49</sup> The contributions of foreign scholars, notwithstanding, the prominence of the Singapore Story has placed the nation's historiography out of alignment with much of the Southeast Asian scholarship, and re-evaluations of the nation's role in the state-building process have been applied only slowly.<sup>50</sup> For example, the reconceptualisation of the colonial state

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<sup>47</sup> Loh Kah Seng, 'Within the Singapore Story: The Use and Narrative of History in Singapore', 12, no. 2 (1998): 1-21.

<sup>48</sup> Barr, *Singapore: A Modern History*, 6.

<sup>49</sup> Carl Trocki, *Prince of Pirates: The Temenggongs and the Development of Johor and Singapore 1784-1885*. (Singapore: NUS Press, 1979); Carl Trocki, *Opium and Empire: Chinese Society in Colonial Singapore, 1800-1910* (London: Cornell University Press, 1990); Barr, *Singapore: A Modern History*, 6-7.

<sup>50</sup> David Veevers, "'Inhabitants of the universe": global families, kinship networks, and the formation of the early modern colonial state in Asia', *Journal of Global History*, 10, no. 1 (2015): 99; Philip K. Stern,



as the incorporation and empowerment of disparate communities rather than a centralisation of military, fiscal or bureaucratic power, which has emerged in both European and colonial historiography, runs counter to the widely accepted and politically endorsed narrative of Raffles, the benevolent autocrat.<sup>51</sup> As such, while recent scholarship on the European East India companies in eighteenth and nineteenth-century Asia and Southeast Asia have begun to explore the importance of families as key colonial agents and authors of the colonial state, this approach has gained little purchase in Singapore.<sup>52</sup>

However, as mentioned above, a growing body of literature has emerged in the last few years that has taken an increasingly critical stance towards the exceptionalist narrative of Singapore's colonial history. The recent publication of two comprehensive volumes, *Liberalism and the British Empire in Southeast Asia*, edited by Gareth Knapman, Anthony Milner and Mary Quilty, and *Singapore – Two Hundred Years of the Lion City*, edited by Anthony Webster and Nicholas White, have demonstrated the depth and breadth of the new approach to Singaporean history.<sup>53</sup> These studies combine various essays that critically examine the political, economic, and social transformations that have shaped the island's development. The publications challenge traditional narratives, offering new perspectives on colonial governance, the role of local communities, and Singapore's place within the broader context of British imperialism and global trade networks. The integration of revisionist approaches and interdisciplinary analysis in these studies is representative of the new wave of historiography that seeks to provide a more nuanced exploration of Singapore's complex history, taking a more critical approach to British sources and placing greater emphasis on non-European actors.

The appeal of re-visiting Singapore's colonial past has been aided by the recent bicentennial anniversary of the nation's 'modern history', as marked by the

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*The company-state: corporate sovereignty and the early modern foundations of the British empire in India* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011), 3.

<sup>51</sup> Veevers, "Inhabitants of the universe", 100; Phil Withington, 'Public discourse, corporate citizenship, and state formation in early modern England', *American Historical Review*, 112, no. 4 (2007): 1036; Nigel Barley, *In the Footsteps of Stamford Raffles* (Singapore: Monsoon Books, 2009).

<sup>52</sup> Veevers, "Inhabitants of the universe", 101; Charles Parker, *Global interactions in the early modern age, 1400-1800* (New Delhi: Primus Books, 2001), 6.

<sup>53</sup> Knapman, Milner and Quilty ed., *Liberalism and the British Empire*; and Anthony Webster and Nicholas White, ed., *Singapore – Two Hundred Years of the Lion City* (London: Routledge Taylor and Francis Group, 2020).

establishment of the British settlement in 1819. The celebration of this anniversary has once again brought Stamford Raffles to the forefront of Singaporean consciousness, highlighting the paradox inherent in his celebration. During Singapore's centennial anniversary, Raffles was presented as an icon of the empire and Singapore as the jewel of Britain's post-war empire.<sup>54</sup> One hundred years on, his significance is beginning to be reframed in a broader temporal and regional context. The Asian Civilisations Museum (ACM), in collaboration with the British Museum, presented an exhibition, 'Raffles in Southeast Asia: Revisiting the Scholar and Statesman.'<sup>55</sup> As part of this collaboration, several essays were presented that explored the nuanced inclusion of Singapore's past into its present.<sup>56</sup> Peter Carey opens his essay with a pivotal question that encapsulates the complexity of Singapore's relationship with its history: why, 'at a time when most Southeast Asian countries have striven to 'decolonise' the minds of the citizens, [is] Singapore still celebrating the anniversary of its putative colonial founder?'<sup>57</sup> To answer this question, Carey seeks to establish a more holistic understanding of Raffles, examining his life as an employee of the East India Company rather than a figurehead in order to dispel the myths cultivated by his 'numerous, mainly British, biographers.'<sup>58</sup> This methodological approach underscores a key issue with the traditional framework first established by Turnbull: while her deliberate exclusion of non-Singaporean elements was effective in crafting a distinct national history, it came at the cost of stunting more holistic and critical historical analysis. As a result, in Singapore's public history, Raffles remains a one-dimensional figure, as is necessary to maintain the exceptionality of the Singapore Story.

The re-evaluation of Raffles as an individual has become a central theme in the new wave of historiography. Alongside the work published by the ACM, several other important recent publications have challenged his traditional portrayal. Timothy Barnard's 'Commemorating Raffles' and Donna Brunero's, 'Stamford Raffles and James Brooke' both explore the construction of Raffles' mythology, examining the

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<sup>54</sup> Kwa Chong Guan, 'Editorial Foreword: The Singapore Bicentennial as Public History', *Journal of Southeast Asian Studies* 50, no. 4 (2019): 469-75.

<sup>55</sup> Stephen Murphy, Naomi Wang and Alexandra Green eds. *Raffles in Southeast Asia: Revisiting the Scholar and the Statesman* (Singapore: Asian Civilisation Museum, 2019).

<sup>56</sup> Kwa Chong Guan, 'Editorial Foreword: The Singapore Bicentennial as Public History'.

<sup>57</sup> Peter Carey, 'The First Singaporean: Raffles as Man and Myth', in Stephen Murphy ed. *Raffles Revisited: Essays on Collecting and Colonialism in Java, Singapore, and Sumatra* (Singapore: Asian Civilisation Museum, 2021), 54.

<sup>58</sup> *Ibid.*

evolution of his posthumous reputation and interrogating his heroic image.<sup>59</sup> Nadia Wright adopts a different approach to her reassessment of Raffles in 'Pragmatism in the Founding of Singapore', and instead of examining the construction of the myth, she moves beyond the liberal ideals ascribed to his actions.<sup>60</sup> Instead, she focuses on the practical realities of Britain's establishment in Singapore. By breaking away from the dominant narrative and restrictive framework of traditional historiography, these studies offer a more nuanced understanding of Singapore's early colonial history and reflect upon the role of history in constructing myths and narratives.

The re-examination of Raffles also plays a central role in this thesis, as it seeks to contribute to this new wave of historiography, challenging the traditional conceptualisation of Singapore as a product of effective British governance. The exploration of Raffles' limitations undermines the narrative that Singapore's development resulted from strategic British planning. In essence, this argument evokes John Robert Seeley's 1883 concept of empire as expanding 'in a fit of absence of mind' and in doing so, aims to dispel the exceptionalism associated with Singapore's colonial history.<sup>61</sup> It demonstrates that Singapore's development was not the product of deliberate imperial design but rather the outcome of complex, often uncontrollable factors. In this manner, Singapore's trajectory was more akin to the development of British colonies elsewhere than the national narrative suggests.

This study examines this idea of a lack of exceptionalism in Singapore's development by examining the shortcomings of British rule in shaping the settlement's urban development. To do so, it engages extensively with studies that have explored the relationship between Singapore's built environment and its colonial society. Urban histories are inextricably intertwined with the economic, social, and political histories that defined and established the systems in which they existed.<sup>62</sup> The strength of this correlation presents a previously overlooked opportunity to explore the impact of the

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<sup>59</sup> Timothy Bernard, 'Commemorating Raffles: The Creation of an Imperial Icon in Colonial Singapore', *Journal of Southeast Asian Studies*, 50, no. 4 (2019); Donna Brunero, 'Stamford Raffles and James Brooke: Colonial legacies and (post)colonial tourism?', in *Singapore – Two Hundred Years of the Lion City*, eds. Anthony Webster and Nicholas White.

<sup>60</sup> Nadia Wright, 'Pragmatism in the Founding of Singapore', in *Liberalism and the British Empire in Southeast Asia*, eds. Knapman, Milner and Quilty.

<sup>61</sup> J.R. Seeley, *The Expansion of England* (London: Macmillan and Co, 1890), 8.

<sup>62</sup> Paul Hohenberg and Lynn Hollen Lees. *The Making of Urban Europe 1000-1994* (London: Harvard University Press, 1996), 2.

Straits Chinese community's financial investment on Singapore's development through the prism of urban development. Urban development historiography is a sub-discipline of architectural history that foregrounds the symbiotic relationship between a city's built environment and its social, economic and cultural systems.<sup>63</sup> The focus on the relationship between the socio-cultural and physical dimensions of cities offers unique insights into often overlooked themes such as the effect of power relationships on urban structure, the diffusion of values and beliefs through buildings, and the influence of architecture on identity.<sup>64</sup> Within a colonial context, these themes are often magnified as architecture and urbanisation were regularly employed as integral tools to assert imperial control over both indigenous landscapes and indigenous populations.<sup>65</sup> Using this methodology to emphasise the relationship between imperial and architectural history indicates urban history's capacity to intersect with various historical fields and disciplines. It is unsurprising, therefore, that urban history has historically been a highly interdisciplinary field appealing to economists, geographers, sociologists, and historians.<sup>66</sup>

#### Source base

A challenge presented to many of the recent revisionist undertakings of Singapore's imperial history is the availability and accessibility of unexplored source bases. A widespread lack of record-keeping cultures amongst the prominent merchants in Southeast Asia, notably the Bugis and the Malay communities, has resulted in the discovery of very few Indigenous commercial records documenting the scope and scale of local trade with Singapore in the early- and mid-nineteenth-century. This issue is particularly pertinent to the study of Singapore's physical development, which has consistently wrestled with the scarcity of archival records. Before 1848 and the formation of the municipal government for the town of Singapore, there was no permanent administration for Singapore's urban development. Instead, temporary committees were formed ad hoc to address specific issues, such as building regulations. The most notable of these early committees was formed in November

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<sup>63</sup> Anthony King, *Urbanism, Colonialism, and the World-Economy: Cultural and Spatial Foundations of the World Urban System* (London: Routledge, 1990), 1.

<sup>64</sup> Anthony King, *Colonial Urban Development: Culture, Social Power and Environment* (London: Routledge, 1976), 2.; and Louis Nelson, *Architecture and Empire in Jamaica*. (London: Yale University Press, 2016), 7.

<sup>65</sup> Mark Crinson, *Modern Architecture and the End of Empire* (London: Routledge, 2003), 4.

<sup>66</sup> R. J Morris and R. Rodger, 'An Introduction to British Urban History' in *The Victorian City: a Reader in British Urban History, 1820-1914*, eds. R. J. Morris and R. Rodger (London: Longman, 1993), 1-43.

1822. It was composed of three European citizens appointed by Raffles, who were charged with establishing the allotment of ground that would comprise the site of the principal town.<sup>67</sup> The minutes of these committees have proved indispensable to the analysis of British colonialism and have informed several studies which have sought to understand the evolution of Singapore's built environment.<sup>68</sup> They are particularly beneficial in examining British policy formation and the transfer of urban planning concepts throughout Asia. However, the value of these records is inherently restricted by the constraints of the early British administration's influence over Singapore's early society, and whilst they reflect the government's intentions, there is no certainty that they also reflected the reality of Singapore's development.

Consequently, studies that rely heavily upon these records are restricted in their capability to assess the implementation or consequences of the government's urban planning in the early nineteenth century. This limitation of early government records has been an essential feature in Singapore's traditional historiography as they have formed the basis of numerous studies which have not fully addressed the implications of the disconnect between the formation and execution of British policy in the early nineteenth century. This has invariably skewed historical analysis towards the overemphasis of the significance of British policy in mid- to late-twentieth-century literature.<sup>69</sup>

However, more pressing than the limitations of the existing records is the significant absence of documents about land administration in the early and mid-nineteenth century due to Britain's neglectful and often incoherent approach to the issue.<sup>70</sup> A victim of the inconsistent implementation of a British legal system, land administration in the Straits Settlements was beset by confusion and chaos in the hundred years between the founding of Penang in 1786 and 1886.<sup>71</sup> The issuance of the Second Charter of Justice in 1826 neatly encapsulates the shortcomings of the British approach in attempting to establish a coherent legal structure in Southeast Asia and the ramifications of this failure on land ownership in Singapore. Representing a

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<sup>67</sup> Buckley, *An Anecdotal History of Old Times in Singapore*, 81.

<sup>68</sup> Yeoh, *Contesting Space in Colonial Singapore*.

<sup>69</sup> Turnbull, *A History of Singapore*.

<sup>70</sup> Vineeta Sinha, *Religion-State Encounters in Hindu Domains: From the Straits Settlements to Singapore* (London: Springer, 2011), 40.

<sup>71</sup> B. L. Chua, 'Land Registration in Singapore and the Federation of Malaya', *University of Malaya Law Review*, 1, no. 2 (1959): 318.

landmark moment in Singapore's colonial history, the Second Charter of Justice established the first formal legal system in the settlement following its incorporation into the Straits Settlements in 1824.<sup>72</sup> The Charter abolished the Recorder's Court, which had previously served only Penang, and established the Court of Judicature for Penang, Singapore, and Malacca, whose authority extended to 'civil and criminal Actions and Suits, and in all Matters concerning the Revenue.'<sup>73</sup> The new framework was designed to emulate the Anglo-Indian legal system in which officials distinguished between a 'public legal sphere', which related to the governance of relations in the marketplace, and the 'private or personal realm of the family', which was administered according to the subject's religions, customs and traditions.<sup>74</sup> This distinction was intended to encourage migration to the Straits Settlements by providing an autonomous sphere for Muslim, Chinese, and Hindu laws and customs while simultaneously providing for English law's reception.<sup>75</sup>

Notably, the charter did not confer any general legislative power on the local government - a detail that had considerable ramifications for the administration of land in Singapore.<sup>76</sup> In 1830, Robert Fullerton, the First Governor of the Straits Settlements, seemingly under the impression that the charter had indeed conferred upon him the necessary authority, passed the Singapore Land Regulation, which provided for the registration of grants, transfers and mortgages in Singapore.<sup>77</sup> This regulation dictated land acquisition, sale, and purchase in Singapore for the next four years. In the 1834 case of *Sasson v Wingrove*, however, the regulation was held to have been enacted outside the authority conferred by the Second Charter of Justice.<sup>78</sup> The issue of legislative and judicial authority in Singapore was further obscured in 1830 when the status of the Straits Settlements was relegated from the fourth presidency of India to a residency dependent upon the Presidency of Bengal under the Governor-General of

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<sup>72</sup> Letters patent establishing the Court of Judicature at Prince of Wales' Island, Singapore, and Malacca in the East Indies, 1827.

<sup>73</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>74</sup> Eleanor Newbigin, 'Personal Law and Citizenship in India's Transition to Independence', *Modern Asian Studies*, 45, no. 1, (2011): 10.

<sup>75</sup> Newbigin, 'Personal Law and Citizenship in India's Transition to Independence', 10; and Alven W.L. See, 'The Torrens System in Singapore: 75 Years from Conception to Commencement', *American Journal of Legal History*, 62, no. 1, (2022): 68.

<sup>76</sup> G.W. Bartholomew, 'The Singapore Statute Book', *Malaya Law Review*, 26, no. 1 (1984): 1-16; and See, 'The Torrens System in Singapore: 75 Years from Conception to Commencement', 68.

<sup>77</sup> See, 'The Torrens System in Singapore: 75 Years from Conception to Commencement', 68.

<sup>78</sup> *Ibid.*, 68.

India in Calcutta.<sup>79</sup> This demotion transferred the power to legislate for the Straits Settlements to Bengal and the Indian Act No. X officially repealed the Singapore Land Regulation No. X of 1837.<sup>80</sup> Although this Act clarified the redundancy of the Singapore Land Regulation, it did little to improve the state of land registration and regulation in Singapore as the effects of existing grants were preserved, and no alternative system was immediately implemented.<sup>81</sup> Only after two years was the issue addressed with the enactment of the Indian Act No. XVI of 1839 stipulated that the registration of a deed was a condition for its admission as evidence in court.<sup>82</sup> However, as has been identified in recent literature, this Act did not accord priority in a title contest, and there was, therefore, little incentive to register.<sup>83</sup> Consequently, land registration in Singapore was poorly administered and poorly documented for much of the mid-nineteenth century – until the reconstitution of Straits Settlements as a Crown Colony in 1867. Given the severity of these issues, it is unsurprising that the romanticised image of Singapore portrayed by Raffles, British officials, and travel writers has been uncritically received for so long. Moreover, it is probable that the relative shortage of studies on this period of Singapore's history, particularly in urban development, is influenced by the combination of these two shortcomings.

To circumvent the issues posed by early government written records, this thesis instead utilises imperial cartography as the primary source for analysing urban development. On a fundamental level, imperial maps represented a hitherto unprecedented source of geographic information. The influx of new cartographic knowledge at the beginning of the sixteenth century ignited expansionist aspirations amongst governments and civilians throughout Europe, leading to a greater demand for exploration and mapmaking. As a navigation tool, imperial maps were vital to Europe's capacity for territorial expansion. The production of increasingly comprehensive maps improved the ability of traders, envoys, and soldiers to navigate the globe. The discovery of a new maritime route across the Indian Ocean in 1616 by

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<sup>79</sup> Walter Woon, 'The Applicability of English Law in Singapore', in *The Singapore Legal System*, ed. Kevin YL Tan (Singapore: Singapore University Press, 1999), 232; and Andrew Abraham, 'The Transfer of the Straits Settlements: A Revisionist Approach to the Study of Colonial Law and Administration', *Journal of the Hong Kong Branch of the Royal Asiatic Society*, 42 (2002): 1-33.

<sup>80</sup> 'Act No. X. of 1837', *Singapore Chronicle and Commercial Register*, 1 July 1837; and See, 'The Torrens System in Singapore: 75 Years from Conception to Commencement', 68.

<sup>81</sup> See, 'The Torrens System in Singapore: 75 Years from Conception to Commencement', 68.

<sup>82</sup> 'Act No. X. of 1837', *Singapore Chronicle and Commercial Register*, 1 July 1837.

<sup>83</sup> See, 'The Torrens System in Singapore: 75 Years from Conception to Commencement', 68-69.

Hendrik Brouwers, for example, proved fundamental to the Dutch colonisation of Southeast Asia in the seventeenth century. Based on the theory that westerly winds prevailed along the same latitudes in the south as in the north, Brouwer discovered a route south of the Cape of Good Hope, which crossed the Indian Ocean to Java in six months.<sup>84</sup> This journey was half the length of the existing route along the coasts of Africa, Mauritius, and Ceylon, and the Dutch East India Company (VOC) immediately instructed all ships to use this new route. The improved accessibility of Southeast Asia was vital to the Dutch Republic's ability to communicate, occupy, and govern the region. In their function as navigational instruments, maps had a transformative impact on Europe's interactions with Southeast Asia and paved the way for unprecedented territorial conquest and global trade networks. Given this significance, examining the region's depiction and evolution in imperial maps produced in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries offers new and valuable perspectives on colonialism in Southeast Asia.

However, several obstacles to assessing the evolution of Singapore's pre-colonial cartographic depiction may explain the rarity of studies in this field. Perhaps the most problematic of these issues is the scarcity of sources. Although Singapore became a vital component of British imperialism in the nineteenth century, the island was largely unknown in the metropole before Raffles' landing in 1819. As a result, although the eighteenth century saw a proliferation of maps depicting Southeast Asia, Singapore featured very infrequently. Within the National Archives of Singapore's Cartography collection, which has over 10,000 maps and represents one of the most extensive publicly available collections of maps featuring the island, less than forty pre-colonial maps contain any reference to Singapore.<sup>85</sup> The shortage of these maps is further exacerbated by Singapore's limited depiction in the few pre-colonial maps that did include the island. The conventional approach to cartography typically fixated on the role of maps as conveyors of objective representations of reality. This narrow approach meant that cartographic analysis and criticism had been restricted to binary

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<sup>84</sup> W.F.J. Morzer Bruyns, 'Navigation on Dutch East India Company Ships Around the 1740s', *The Mariner's Mirror*, 78, no. 2 (1992): 143-154.

<sup>85</sup> Francesco Perono Cacciafoco and Darwin Shia Zhe Zheng 'Singapore's Pre-Colonial Place Names: A Philological Reconstruction Developed Through the Analysis of Historical Maps' *Review of Historical Geography and Toponomastics*, 15, no. 29-30 (2020): 81.



oppositions such as 'true or false,' 'accurate and inaccurate', or 'literal and symbolic.'<sup>86</sup> Under the traditional school of thought, Singapore's lack of explicit geographic knowledge would have been interpreted as a 'passive gap in the flow of knowledge' and demonstrative only of the fact that the island did not feature in the British consciousness.<sup>87</sup> Therefore, the quality and quantity of these sources are such that studies on Singapore's cartographic depiction in the 1960s and 1970s would have produced very little insight into the nature of colonial rule.

In light of this limited approach to the analysis of maps, this study instead adopts a methodological and conceptual framework that emerged in cartographic history in the 1980s pioneered by John Brian Harley.<sup>88</sup> This new cartographic school of thought reconceptualised the nature of maps and mapping by arguing that authors do not, and cannot, proscribe their maps with fixed meanings. Instead, it is the reader who gives them their life and meaning.<sup>89</sup> Maps' value is no longer understood or measured by the conventional methodology, technology, or even intent criteria.<sup>90</sup> This approach has been particularly significant in British imperial historiography as it has reframed the analysis of imperial maps as an entire source base so that a far greater onus is now placed on the relationship between cartography and empire and situates cartographic production within the discourses of ideology and power.<sup>91</sup> This development has led to a resurgence in the history of cartography and encouraged the utilisation of maps in broader fields of research, including imperial historiography.

The literature on both North America and Africa, for example, has revealed that British cartographers employed similar visual features to solicit support for imperial expansion and to facilitate territorial acquisition.<sup>92</sup> Despite being separated by three

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<sup>86</sup> John Brian Harley, 'Maps, Knowledge, and Power' in *Geographic Thought: A Praxis Perspective*, ed. George Henderson and Marvin Waterstone, 1<sup>st</sup> edition (London: Routledge, 2008), 129; and John Brian Harley, 'Historical Geography and the Cartographic Illusion', *Journal of Historical Geography*, 15, no. 1 (1989): 82.

<sup>87</sup> Harley, *Maps, Knowledge and Power*.

<sup>88</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>89</sup> Matthew Edney, 'The Irony of Imperial Mapping', in *The Imperial Map: Cartography and the Mastery of Empire*, ed. James Akerman (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2009): 12.

<sup>90</sup> Harley, 'Historical Geography'.

<sup>91</sup> James Akerman, 'Foreword', in *The Imperial Map: Cartography and the Mastery of Empire*, ed. James Akerman (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2009), 4.

<sup>92</sup> For North America see Benjamin Schmidt, *Mapping an Empire: Cartographic and Colonial Rivalry in Seventeenth Century Dutch and English North America* (United States: Omohundro Institute of Early American History and Culture, 1997); for Africa see Julie MacArthur, 'Imagining Imperial Frontiers: Photography-as-cartography in the mapping of eastern Africa', *Journal of Historical*

centuries, British cartographers on both continents facilitated imperial expansion by deliberately including 'blank spaces' in their depictions of local geography.<sup>93</sup> Whereas these blank spaces were previously understood to be unintentional consequences of geographic ignorance, the prism of imperial maps has shown that these blank spaces were often deliberately employed and should instead be considered to represent the deliberate withholding of information.<sup>94</sup> The application of imperial cartographic analysis throughout British imperial historiography has served to complicate, deepen, and connect the examination of colonialism across several geographic regions. Despite the value of this approach, however, it has not yet been applied to the study of colonial Singapore in the early nineteenth century, nor has it been widely utilised in studies on British imperialism in Southeast Asia in general. This study, therefore, is among the first to conduct a detailed analysis of Singapore's colonial history by examining imperial maps.

The analysis of imperial maps forms a central component of this research and is integrated throughout the study. The maps examined vary widely in scope, ranging from continental and regional maps to highly localised depictions of just a few miles of Singapore's interior. This dynamic scaling allows for a broad analysis of the island's significance within geographic and imperial contexts, as well as a more detailed examination of its urban development on a local scale. The analysis of regional maps, for example, requires the emphasis of analysis to be placed predominantly upon the accumulation, and representation, of maritime and terrestrial information via scientific developments and cultural exchange. Often contextualised against the backdrop of the entirety of maritime Southeast Asia, this analysis adopts a macro approach to the examination of Singapore and concentrates on the island's depiction in its entirety while paying specific attention to the accuracy of the shoreline, size, and placement within the Malay Archipelago.

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*Geography*, 76 (2022): 68-82; and Avishai Ben-Dror, 'Cartographic knowledge, colonised-coloniser spaces: Egyptian maps of Harar, 1875-1885, *Journal of Historical Geography*, 77 (2022): 85-100.

<sup>93</sup> Nate Probasco, 'Cartography as a Tool of Colonisation: Sir Humphrey Gilbert's 1583 Voyage to North America', *Renaissance Quarterly*, 67, no. 2 (2014): 425-72; Max S. Edelson, *The New Map of Empire: How Britain Imagined America before Independence* (Harvard: Harvard University Press, 2017); and Jeffers Lennox 'An Empire on Paper: The Founding of Halifax and Conceptions of Imperial Space, 1744-1755.' *The Canadian Historical Review*, 88, no. 3 (2007): 373-412.

<sup>94</sup> Harley, *Maps, Knowledge, and Power*.

Moreover, as Singapore was not the focus of these maps, the relevant visual information in these sources is often limited. The value of analysing this map requires exploring more than just the physicality of the island, so significant attention is given to the provenance of the source, the analysis of accompanying written text or symbolism, and the map's dissemination and popularity. In doing so, it portrays the unglamorous reality of Singapore's slow rise from obscurity within an imperial rather than cartographic context. By examining the minor transformations in the island's visual representation and querying the causes behind the gradual improvement in geographic knowledge, this analysis challenges the continued use of 1819 as the foundational date of modern Singapore and contributes to the relatively small body of literature that examines modern Singapore's origins before Raffles' arrival.<sup>95</sup>

On the other hand, the maps employed in the second half of the thesis often focus on specific elements of Singapore's built environment, and a greater emphasis is placed on physical representations. Far from portraying regional or national geographic information, the second set of maps contains far more localised depictions that often cover only a few miles. The maps usually examine the settlement's physical transformation within the British imagination. Maps such as the Jackson Plan (1828) are explored for their impact on shaping British perceptions of the island in the metropole, and the endurance of the map's influence is examined in the analysis of travelogues published in the late nineteenth century. Other maps, however, are used as literal depictions of Singapore's urban setting and, when overlaid with information garnered from written documents, serve to demonstrate a relatively accurate portrayal of the town's physical and cultural composition. The originality of this approach is such that, in addition to offering its own unique contributions, there is also significant potential for this study to demonstrate numerous new avenues of research, particularly for studies which seek to explore the connections between British imperialism across the globe.

At this stage, it is crucial to emphasise that although this thesis extensively incorporates the analysis of imperial maps, it is not a cartographic history. Accordingly,

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<sup>95</sup> Key texts that have incorporated Singapore's pre-1819 history into the analysis of the 'modern Singapore' include Kwa Chong Guan, Derek Heng and Tan Tai Yong, *Singapore: A 700-Year History from Early Emporium to World City* (Singapore: National Archives of Singapore, 2009) and Philippe Regnier, *Singapore: City-State in South-East Asia* (Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press, 1987).

the analysis of Singapore's urban development throughout this study is also supported by an innovative source base designed to provide an original examination into the role of both British and non-European communities. Few studies on colonial Singapore have attempted to address both the contributions of the British administration, as well as the settlement's non-European populations, to the settlement's rapid development in the nineteenth century. Presently, studies that examine the factors behind the colony's development focus either on prominent British figures, such as Stamford Raffles and William Farquhar, or, more rarely, historians, like Trocki, concentrate predominantly on the role of the Chinese in Singapore's internal economy and society.<sup>96</sup> One key reason for this disconnect is the nature of the source bases required to achieve the respective goals of each approach. As will be discussed in more detail, the imperial approach to Singapore's development, which focuses on the role of the British administration, the EIC, and prominent individuals, has historically relied upon the extensive database of official documents, including official correspondences, economic records, and legislation. Popularised by Turnbull's seminal *A History of Singapore*, this source base has provided the foundation for the majority of the traditional historiography and, more recently, has been examined by revisionist historians to give more nuance to the conclusions drawn by studies in the late twentieth century.<sup>97</sup> On the other hand, studies that have attempted to move away from the British narrative of Singapore's colonial history have relied upon an entirely separate source base. Many of these materials are situated in archives that rarely feature in English-language studies on Singapore, such as the Johor Archive, and present numerous obstacles to historians of British imperialism, foremost amongst them being language barriers and accessibility.<sup>98</sup> Thus far, the practical difficulties of consulting both source bases before even attempting to weave a coherent argument have proved almost insurmountable, as extremely few studies have attempted to achieve it in the past fifty years. Perhaps more significant, however, is the absence of studies that have used Singapore's archive of English-language sources to explore the role of the non-European population in the settlement's development. Attempts to adopt this methodological approach often encounter two significant obstacles. The first of these

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<sup>96</sup> Carl Trocki, *Singapore: Wealth, Power and Control* (London: Routledge Taylor and Francis Group, 2006); and Trocki, *Opium and Empire: Chinese Society in Colonial Singapore, 1800-1910*.

<sup>97</sup> Turnbull, *A History of Modern Singapore*.

<sup>98</sup> Trocki, *Prince of Pirates*, 2.

is the almost inescapable weight of the colonial gaze that is innately inherent in colonial documents, and the second, and more problematic, is that of the invisibility of whole communities due to British ignorance.

With these issues in mind, in addition to cartographic analysis, the source base of this thesis is comprised of a blend of underutilised materials, new archival discoveries, as well as more traditional colonial records, all of which together offer original observations into the respective contributions of prominent British and Straits Chinese figures. The more conventional sources in this thesis refer to the official British documents in the Straits Settlements Records (SSR). A vibrant collection of materials, the SSR contains a wide array of documents relating to the administration of the Straits Settlements between 1826 and 1946 and includes official correspondences, despatches, minutes of public meetings, letters from the Governor and Resident Councillors, as well as documentation on taxes, duties, and revenue/expenditure. The thorough analysis of the SSR provided the foundation for much of the traditional historiography produced in the 1960s and 1970s, and the enduring influence of these studies can be attributed to their exhaustive engagement with the source base. The unparalleled comprehensiveness of the SSR is such that the collection continues to be a fundamental feature of Singapore's imperial historiography, and recent literature has continued to engage with the collection. In this thesis, the SSR, in particular the correspondences of Raffles and Farquhar, is central to the re-examination of Britain's involvement in the settlement's development.

The value of examining the urban development of British colonial cities has been demonstrated in studies such as Louis Nelson's *Architecture and Empire in Jamaica* and Amar Farooqui's *Urban Development in a Colonial Situation: Early Nineteenth Century Bombay*.<sup>99</sup> Nelson's examination of Jamaica's urban development between the 1690s and the 1830s provides valuable insights into the physical impact of the colony's role within imperial economic and political networks.<sup>100</sup> Drawing upon extensive field research of plans and sketches, Nelson maps the development of Jamaica's built environment with unparalleled detail and precision, opening numerous research avenues. The foremost question Nelson asks with his data set is whether

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<sup>99</sup> Nelson, *Architecture and Empire in Jamaica*; and Amar Farooqui, 'Urban Development in a Colonial Situation: Early Nineteenth Century Bombay', *Economic and Political Weekly* 31, no.40 (1996): 2746-2759.

<sup>100</sup> *Ibid.*, 152.

Jamaica's urban development resembled the patterns and processes of the metropole or whether – or more precisely to what extent – local factors influenced the acquisition of unique urban characteristics. The centrality of the slave trade, for example, had a tangible impact on the nature of buildings in Jamaica, which Nelson demonstrates through the examination of structures that were central to the process of 'arrivals' and 'departures', as well as those that characterised and perpetuated violence, imperialism, and identity.<sup>101</sup> These buildings ran the whole gamut of Jamaica's domestic architecture – rather than just state buildings such as courthouses – encompassing slave cottages, brick goal cells, merchant stores, plantations, and urban mansions.<sup>102</sup> This range of construction enabled Nelson to unveil new dimensions to the working of imperial power in British colonies, with particular emphasis on the role of private merchants, plantation owners, and freed slaves in the creation and perpetuation of a hierarchical society.

Farooqui's 1996 study on Bombay utilises a comparable methodological approach to examining the impact of empire on colonial development. However, where Nelson appears to be primarily driven by a want to address an overlooked dimension of Jamaica's colonial history, Farooqui's motivation derives from his desire to re-examine and dismantle colonial mythology that has arisen around Bombay's history.<sup>103</sup> There are also many similarities in the urban development of Bombay and Singapore. The most notable and influential of these were the two cities' reliance upon the opium trade, or as Farooqui put it: 'the sordid underside of Bombay's colonial past.'<sup>104</sup> Exploring the development of Bombay's colonial trade networks, Farooqui identifies the role of indigenous merchants in thwarting the effort of the British Indian government to establish a monopoly over Bengal opium. His examination of the indigenous mercantile class led him to conclude that it was the activity of local merchants, smuggling opium independent of the British empire, that resulted in Bombay emerging as the centre of economic activity of western India.<sup>105</sup> Prominent studies into Singapore's nineteenth-century economy, particularly those by Carl Trocki, have identified similar patterns of indigenous/local involvement in the opium trade and

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<sup>101</sup> Nelson, *Architecture and Empire in Jamaica*, 132.

<sup>102</sup> *Ibid.*, 218.

<sup>103</sup> Farooqui, 'Urban Development in a Colonial Situation', 2746.

<sup>104</sup> *Ibid.*, 2746.

<sup>105</sup> *Ibid.*, 2749.

subsequent economic growth in the Southeast Asian settlement.<sup>106</sup> The parallels in the role of indigenous merchants, as demonstrated in these studies, have informed our understanding of the functioning of the British Empire in Southeast Asia, particularly its tacit and unacknowledged reliance upon non-European mercantile communities.

Farooqui's observation that colonial Bombay did not conform to conventional imperial theory is critical to our understanding of British colonialism in South and Southeast Asia. Previously, traditional historiography regularly treated British Indian urban planning as a homogenous concept, particularly in relation to its influence over Singapore's urban development. In an extensive analysis of shifting population trends, colonial laws, land regulations, and ownership, as well as a theoretical discussion of the implications of the division of labour and the rise of capitalism, Farooqui explored the process of Bombay's urban development. Amongst the most notable conclusions from his analysis were the limitations that the British government faced in their efforts to shape Bombay's development to their specifications; these include the economic autonomy of indigenous sectors of the city, the extensiveness of private Indian property investment, and the reluctance of privileged indigenous groups to provide amenities to deprived sectors of the municipality.<sup>107</sup> Many of these findings ran counter to the narratives of the traditional historiography that emphasised the efficiency of British urban planning. Significantly, although these noteworthy findings are now over twenty years old, only a few studies have applied these findings and concepts to the historiography of Singapore's own urban development.

One of the few studies that has addressed colonial Singapore's built environment was not conducted by a historian but by the geographer Brenda Yeoh in *Contesting Space in Colonial Singapore*.<sup>108</sup> Published in the same year as Farooqui's study above, Yeoh's monograph began reconceptualising the historical approach to Singapore's development, looking beyond the city as an abstract economic origination to appreciate the 'practical nature of everyday life.'<sup>109</sup> Critical of the binary nature of Singapore's traditional historiography, Yeoh challenged the established understanding

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<sup>106</sup> Trocki, *Opium and Empire*; Trocki, *Singapore: Wealth, Power and the Culture of Control*; and Carl Trocki, *Opium, Empire and the Global Political Economy: A Study of the Asian Opium Trade 1750-1950* (London: Routledge, 1999).

<sup>107</sup> Farooqui, 'Urban Development in a Colonial Situation', 2750-2755.

<sup>108</sup> Yeoh, *Contesting Space*.

<sup>109</sup> *Ibid.*, 10

of power dynamics in the settlement by exploring the complex interplay between coloniser and colonised in a physical space. By framing the analysis of colonial Singapore around the settlement's urban development, Yeoh addressed the complexities of the settlement's non-European community with a more nuanced viewpoint than previous studies had achieved. By treating the Chinese community as a heterogeneous entity, Yeoh could identify the differing perceptions that existed in the settlement of Singapore as a physical space. The divergence was primarily between the British perception of the town as a physical embodiment of colonial control, which enforced imbalanced power dynamics through segregation, structure, and uniformity, and that of the far larger Chinese community, for whom Singapore was a place where they could retain their customs, cultures, and practices.<sup>110</sup> Yeoh's focus on not only the dominant forces at work but also on the 'underside' of Singaporean society has revealed a previously overlooked space of conflict, collision, negotiation, and dialogue between coloniser and colonised. Yeoh's study utilises extensive empirical research of the Municipal Authority of Singapore, which contains crucial information on the discussions surrounding the process of Singapore's development. However, whilst this source base incorporates discussions between the British administration and prominent non-European figures, given the severe limitations of Singaporean sources, the study is almost entirely reliant upon records produced by the British, such as Town Committee documents which recorded the opinions and arguments of the Chinese community. Consequently, *Contesting Space in Colonial Singapore* represents a pivotal step forward in the methodological approach to Singapore's colonial history. It demonstrates the fruitfulness of utilising urban history to examine physical, relational, and colonial developments in nineteenth-century Singapore. This thesis seeks to advance the examination of the tension between the coloniser and the colonised and argues that this tension was essential to the town's construction.

Yeoh's seminal study notwithstanding, the limited advancement in this field of Singapore's colonial history is particularly notable given the strong correlation between the East India Company's administrative practices in India and Southeast Asia. One potential explanation for this lack of advancement in the historiography of Singapore's urban development, as suggested by Bremner in his seminal study *Architecture and*

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<sup>110</sup> Yeoh, *Contesting Space*, 10.



*Urbanism in the British Empire*, is the perception that studies that use architecture as a tool of analysis require specialist and technical qualifications.<sup>111</sup> He argues that whilst detailed architectural knowledge is unquestionably beneficial, those without specialised training have produced some of the most insightful studies on the colonial built environment and acknowledges the belief that the subject is too important to be left solely to professional architectural historians.<sup>112</sup> It is the combination of these two factors, the need for a revisionist study of Singapore's urban development that is more aligned with the imperial historiography of British India, and the possibility of conducting urban history without specialised architectural knowledge or without the need to focus solely on the physicality of the built environment, that constitute a central pillar of this thesis.

The emergence of the new imperial history school of thought in the 1980s brought about a profound shift in the conceptualisation of empire, moving away from disproportionately economic and political frameworks and towards a more holistic and cultural model. An essential feature of this reconceptualisation was the significance placed upon the relational dimension of empire, whether between the coloniser and the colonised, man and nature, or metropole and periphery. One of the most dynamic fields to emerge from this new epistemological framework revolves around the concepts of the colonial imagination and the closely related theme of colonial knowledge. This approach opened new avenues of research into the relationship between colonialism and popular culture within Britain and emphasised the significance of the production, dissemination, and consumption of knowledge. As a result, previously underutilised source bases, notably those of science, art, and literature created both in the metropole and the periphery, were suddenly foregrounded in historical literature. The importance of this field is now such that studies on the colonial imagination are a central feature of the literature on the British Empire, and figures such as Rudyard Kipling, Isabella Bird, and Herman Moll are now understood to have been pivotal to the rise, spread, and perception of empire.<sup>113</sup>

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<sup>111</sup> G. A. Bremner, *Architecture and Urbanism in the British Empire* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2016), 4.

<sup>112</sup> Bremner, *Architecture and Urbanism in the British Empire*.

<sup>113</sup> Tony Ballantyne, 'Colonial Knowledge' in *The British Empire: Themes and Perspectives*, ed. Sarah Stockwell (Oxford: Blackwell Publishing, 2008), 178.

The centrality of these themes in South Asian imperial historiography is particularly evident when compared with the literature of other regions of the British Empire. For example, the framework of colonial modernity, perceptions of power, representations of indigenous populations, and the formation of colonial identities do not translate well to the historiography of colonial Africa, where the priorities of British colonists and later historians were vastly different to the British experience in India.<sup>114</sup> While British Indian studies tend to concentrate on the consolidation of British rule over a vast and nuanced population, Africanists have focused primarily on the continent's natural environment and the obstacles it posed to the colonial state's project of control. Therefore, major themes in this field tend to focus on ecology, medicine, and territorial appropriation.<sup>115</sup> That is not to say, however, that studies on colonial perceptions, the creation of knowledge, and the relationships between the colonial imagination and power do not have a place or do not exist in colonial African historiography, as these issues were particularly influential in the construction of the apartheid regime.<sup>116</sup> Instead, less emphasis has currently been placed on these concepts, and their place in the respective historiography is less developed. Consequently, while this thesis adopts the concept of colonial imagination as developed within the imperial historiography of South Asia, its application to Singapore - arguably more comparable to British colonies outside of South Asia than to India - illustrates the potential for extending this analytical framework to other regions.

Inherent archival limitations notwithstanding, numerous excellent studies on Singapore's economic growth have relied heavily on the SSR. The aforementioned *The Trade of Singapore*, for example, presents an unparalleled analysis of British trade in Southeast Asia by compiling and converting a colossal amount of primary source data into easily accessible and legible tables. Utilising this information, Wong explores Singapore's economic development in the nineteenth century through the colony's trade with other nations and colonies in the region, including Java, Sumatra, Siam, and China.<sup>117</sup> This approach enables Wong to quantifiably demonstrate that

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<sup>114</sup> Frederick Cooper, *Colonialism in Question: Theory, Knowledge, History* (London: University of California Press, 2005).

<sup>115</sup> Tony Ballantyne, 'The Changing Shape of the Modern British Empire and its Historiography.' *The Historical Journal*, 53, no. 2 (2010): 429-452; and Marie-Albane de Suremain. 'Colonial History and Historiography' *Oxford Research Encyclopedia of African History*, 2018.

<sup>116</sup> Ballantyne, 'The Changing Shape of the Modern British Empire'.

<sup>117</sup> Wong, *The Trade of Singapore*.

Singapore's rise as an economic powerhouse in Southeast Asia was heavily reliant upon its role as an entrepot in intra-regional trade. This demonstration provides the bedrock for subsequent studies on Singapore's economic development and the evolution of Southeast Asian trade in both the colonial and post-colonial world.<sup>118</sup> However, given the widely acknowledged shortcomings of the source base, subsequent studies have encountered an exaggerated degree of diminishing returns as the unreliability of the statistics has discouraged more granular analysis.

Instead, to build upon the traditional economic studies of colonial Singapore, namely Wong Lin Ken's seminal *The Trade of Singapore, 1819-69*, historians have turned their attention to adjacent source bases in search of more reliable statistics and to seek out new dimensions of Singapore's role in regional trade whilst avoiding an over-reliance on problematic records.<sup>119</sup> The creativity required to circumvent the existing economic source base is evident in Atsushi Kobayashi's new study in the recently published collected volume *Singapore – Two Hundred Years of the Lion City*.<sup>120</sup> Building upon his extensive body of work on colonial Singapore and the development of the Southeast Asian economy in the nineteenth century, in this study, Kobayashi explores the origins of Singapore's economic prosperity through the lens of Britain's trade statistics for India in the early nineteenth century.<sup>121</sup> Kobayashi asserts that, despite the lack of uniformity in British Indian records at the turn of the nineteenth century, Singapore's role in intra-regional trade can be partially discerned from the volume of Indian imports and exports in Southeast Asia during that period. Therefore, by cross-referencing the data sets on Southeast Asian trade between the two colonies, he can offset the limitations of both source bases, enabling him to adopt a particularly rigorous approach to the trade statistics.

Kobayashi's circuitous approach to his economic analysis is symbolic of critical methodologies in Singapore's revisionist imperial historiography that seek to move away from the archival source base established in traditional studies, such as those by Wong and Turnbull in the 1960s and 70s. The success of this approach has nuanced our understanding of the development of international trade in Southeast

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<sup>118</sup> W.G Huff, *The Economic Growth of Singapore: Trade and Development in the Twentieth Century* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997).

<sup>119</sup> Wong Lin Ken, *The Trade of Singapore, 1819-1869* (Singapore: White Lotus Press, 1969).

<sup>120</sup> Webster and White, ed., *Singapore – Two Hundred Years of the Lion City*.

<sup>121</sup> Atsushi Kobayashi, 'The Origins of Singapore's Economic Prosperity, c. 1800-1874', in *Singapore – Two Hundred Years of the Lion City*, ed., Anthony Webster and Nicholas White. 16.

Asia and provided valuable insights into the role and influence of British imperialism in shaping emerging trade networks. However, despite these archival innovations, one of the critical shortcomings of the economic sources that has yet to be sufficiently addressed or overcome is the lack of information surrounding sources of income for Singaporean merchants outside of international trade. Inroads have been made into the exploration of private wealth in Southeast Asia through studies such as Roger Knight's *Trade and Empire in Early Nineteenth Century Southeast Asia* and Stan Neal's *Mediators, Migrants and Memories of Colonial Singapore: The Life and Legacy in Seah Eu Chin*.<sup>122</sup>

The former of these studies, *Trade and Empire*, offers one of the few micro-level economic analyses of Southeast Asian trade networks. Rather than framing his study around commerce on a national and colonial scale, Knight instead adopts a case study approach to his study which focuses on the economic activity of Scottish trader Gillian Maclaine and his mercantile house in nineteenth-century Indonesia. This methodology has previously been applied to European merchants operating in the Indian sub-continent to great effect. The conclusions of studies such as Anthony Webster's *The Richest East India Merchant* provide further nuance to the concept of 'gentlemanly capitalists' pioneered in the early 1990s.<sup>123</sup> The application of this approach to Southeast Asia has brought similar advances and posed new questions about our understanding of imperial commerce in the region. Utilising personal and commercial documents, Knight's monograph explores the role and significance of individual figures and individual commodities in the evolution of local, imperial, and global trade networks in Southeast Asia. Notably, although Knight emphasises that his study is not one of diaspora, as Maclaine operated as a non-Dutch resident in a Dutch colony, he occupied a liminal space belonging neither entirely to the Dutch nor British Empires. By analysing his economic activity, Knight sheds further light on the role and

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<sup>122</sup> Roger Knight, *Trade and Empire in Early Nineteenth Century Southeast Asia: Gillian Maclaine and his Business Network* (Suffolk: The Boydell Press, 2015); and Stan Neal, 'Mediators, Migrants and Memories of Colonial Singapore: The Life and Legacy of Seah Eu Chin' in *Singapore – Two Hundred Years of the Lion City*, ed., Anthony Webster and Nicholas White.

<sup>123</sup> Peter Cain, and A. G. Hopkins, *British Imperialism, 1688-2000* (London: Routledge, 1993). The core premise behind 'gentlemanly capitalists' was that British imperial policy in the nineteenth century was primarily driven by London financiers who had won the battle of influence over the provincial industrialists. By focusing on the specific trade networks of an individual Webster's study provides vital insight into the formation, development and significance of commercial relationships between companies and banks, the metropole with the periphery and Europeans with Indians, thus shedding further light on the nature of imperial commerce.

significance of independent merchants in forming imperial trade networks at the empire's periphery. Although there is a notable omission of Asian actors in Knight's study, similarities can nonetheless be drawn between Maclaine and some of the wealthy non-European traders in Southeast Asia, such as the Straits Chinese in Singapore.

Stan Neal's study, on the other hand, addresses the role of the Straits Chinese far more explicitly, albeit at the expense of economic analysis. The subject of his research, Seah Eu Chin, was amongst the wealthiest and most influential non-European figures in Singapore's colonial history, and yet, as he asserts at the beginning of his chapter, there are very few primary sources on him.<sup>124</sup> This restrictive source base has forced historians to rely heavily upon published primaries such as Song Ong Siang's *One Hundred Years' History of the Chinese in Singapore*, or Charles Buckley's *An Anecdotal History of Old Times in Singapore*, and this thesis is no exception.<sup>125</sup> While these sources offer unparalleled contextual and biographical information on Singapore's Chinese population, their ubiquity has meant that much of our knowledge and analysis of the community has struggled to advance in recent years. Moreover, the literature that has attempted to delve deeper into the lives and actions of the leading figures in Singapore's early Chinese community have often come in the form of biographies written by their descendants, which has been the case for Seah Eu Chin as well as Tan Kim Seng, who is a central figure in this thesis.<sup>126</sup> Often drawing upon private family documents and oral histories, these publications have been a valuable source of new information, however, as Neal notes in his study, these family histories are inherently political and regularly struggle to distinguish between personal/familial interest and historical significance.<sup>127</sup> Consequently, whilst these studies fulfil a valuable role in an otherwise under explored field, there is still a significant scope to build upon the existing literature with further rigorous historical analysis.

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<sup>124</sup> Neal, 'Mediators, Migrants and Memories of Colonial Singapore', 137.

<sup>125</sup> Song Ong Siang, *One Hundred Years' History of the Chinese in Singapore: An Annotated Edition* (Singapore: National Library Board, 2016, originally published 1923); and Buckley, *An Anecdotal History of Old Times in Singapore*.

<sup>126</sup> Seah, Shawn, *Seah Eu Chin: His Life and Times* (Singapore: National Heritage Board, 2016); and Tan, *Tan Kim Seng: A Biography*.

<sup>127</sup> Neal, 'Mediators, Migrants and Memories of Colonial Singapore', 138.

Neal begins to address this shortcoming in his chapter by revisiting the existing source material for Seah Eu Chin with a more critical approach to the analysis of his role within the Chinese community. The brief re-examination of existing primary evidence, as well as an English-language article, attributed to Seah Eu Chin, poses new questions about the structures of colonial control in Southeast Asia and specifically the role of the Straits Chinese in Singapore within the system. Specifically, the focus on a singular figure enables the chapter to explore not only Seah Eu Chin's immediate and demonstrable impact on the development of Singapore's colonial society through his quasi-official role as a British mediator to the Chinese community but the approach also supports a far longer temporal study through the analysis of the evolution and importance of his legacy in the present day, which would not otherwise be possible in macro studies. By conducting oral interviews with descendants five generations removed from Seah Eu Chin, Neal explores the divergences in the merchant's personal legacy, within his own family, and his public legacy, the image that has been co-opted and cultivated to support Singapore's national narrative.<sup>128</sup>

This framework emphasises the state's distortion and simplification of Seah Eu Chin's legacy from a multifaceted figure who navigated complex diasporic and colonial environments to a glorified symbol of economic success and philanthropic generosity.<sup>129</sup> This approach represents an essential development in Singapore's colonial historiography. It broadens the analysis of distorted national narratives from focusing primarily on British figures such as Stamford Raffles and William Farquhar to incorporating the settlement's non-European community. The extension of this form of analysis to figures that were otherwise on the periphery of the colonial narrative is significant to the deconstruction of the national narrative as the role of the Chinese-immigrant community was embellished in the creation of the 'Singapore Story' in the 1990s.<sup>130</sup> There is, however, a distinctive lack of original research into the nature of Seah Eu Chin's wealth and its direct impact on his influence in Singapore. Although Neal acknowledges the difficulties posed by the limited existence of relevant records, the chapter's reliance upon Trocki's analysis of Singapore's plantation economy and the importance of the colony's 'debt pyramid' downplays the centrality of Seah Eu Chin's wealth on his influence in Singapore. This is particularly problematic as Seah

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<sup>128</sup> Neal, 'Mediators, Migrants and Memories of Colonial Singapore', 144.

<sup>129</sup> Ibid.

<sup>130</sup> Barr, *Singapore: A Modern History*, 4.

Eu Chin was one of the wealthiest men in Singapore, and his influence was inseparable from his wealth within the colony's mercantile-centric society. The lack of focus on the origins, nature, and uses of his wealth leaves a lot of room for further research into the role and influence of the Straits Chinese community in Singapore. This thesis begins to address this gap in the historiography and forefronts the correlation between wealth and socio-cultural status through the prism of urban development. Specifically, the focus on Tan Kim Seng's property explores the relationship between capital, architecture, and growth.

Ultimately, the 'Singapore story' is far more nuanced than the conventional narrative that portrays its colonial past as an ordered, well-governed colony under benevolent British rule. The gaps that Straits Chinese figures such as Tan Kim Seng came to occupy in the later years of Singapore's colonial history emerged in the foundational years of the colony. To fully understand how non-European individuals could hold the influence and status they did, it is necessary to examine the reality of the colony's founding.

## Chapter One: The evolution of Singapore within the British imperial imagination

This chapter unveils Singapore's gradual emergence from anonymity by examining its depiction in various eighteenth-century maps, chosen for their adoption of innovative cartographic techniques and their impact on public opinion and imperial policy. By reviewing the minor transformations in the island's visual representation and querying the causes behind the gradual improvement in geographic knowledge, this analysis further discredits the dated yet persistent arguments that Singapore's acquisition was the result of well-considered imperial policy and evidence of the efficacy of the British Empire. The decision to begin the analysis of Singapore's physical development in the nineteenth century with an examination of the island's representation in the British colonial imagination in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries is grounded in the need to establish vital context that has often been either assumed or overlooked in previous studies, which was that Singapore existed in the colonial imagination before the nineteenth century. Although the British Empire first actively engaged with Singapore in 1819, British imperialism in Southeast Asia, particularly the Straits of Malacca, had been so extensive in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries that the island existed in some form or another in British collective knowledge before Raffles' landing. Therefore, the origins of colonial Singapore, particularly in Britain's colonial imagination, date back further than the nineteenth century. Any study on the British perception of the island should begin, or at least acknowledge, the influence of this earlier period, however minimal. This chapter demonstrates that a comprehensive assessment of cartographic silence allows for a more layered understanding of Singapore's position within British geographic consciousness by asking questions about the origins of British geographic information in the region, exploring which sources they deemed credible, and how minor discrepancies in the depiction of the island's coastline reflected Britain's evolving trade networks.

### The Imperial Map

In his study on the voyage of Sir Humphrey Gilbert (c.1539-1583), Nate Probesco has shown that the information conveyed in maps varied according to their intended audiences, and blank spaces were often employed to engender greater support for



imperial expansion from both investors and the Crown.<sup>131</sup> Probasco's argument is supported by several further studies that have explored the role of blank spaces in encouraging investment and interest in colonial expansion in North America. Edelson, in *A Map of the Lands, Ceded to His Majesty by the Creek and Cherokee Indians*, has shown that the land inhabited by the indigenous population was often instead represented as empty in a deliberate effort to emphasise the potential for the development of plantations.<sup>132</sup> Similarly, in his study on the founding of Halifax, Lennox argues that British cartographers renamed the region by replacing existing indigenous and ignoring the indigenous presence to create order out of the wilderness, which made Halifax comprehensible and attractive to people in Britain.<sup>133</sup> Succinctly summarising the influence of blank spaces on the imagination and development of colonial territory, Lennox concludes that 'individual map-makers could choose to exclude Aborigines from British maps, thereby denying Natives a place in the British image of Nova Scotia.'<sup>134</sup>

The application of cartographic analysis in studies throughout the British Empire has highlighted the nuances and similarities of imperial expansion across the globe. The literature on both North America and Africa, for example, has revealed that British cartographers employed similar visual features to solicit support for imperial expansion and to facilitate territorial acquisition.<sup>135</sup> Despite being separated by three centuries, British cartographers in both continents facilitated imperial expansion by deliberately including 'blank spaces' in their depictions of local geography.<sup>136</sup> Whereas these blank spaces were previously understood to be 'passive gaps in the flow of knowledge,' the prism of imperial maps has shown that often blank spaces were instead silences and represented the deliberate withholding of information.<sup>137</sup> Recent studies on British

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<sup>131</sup> Nate Probasco, 'Cartography as a Tool of Colonisation: Sir Humphrey Gilbert's 1583 Voyage to North America', *Renaissance Quarterly*, 67, no. 2 (2014), 426-7, 464-5.

<sup>132</sup> Max Edelson, *The New Map of Empire: How Britain Imagined America before Independence* (Harvard: Harvard University Press), 177.

<sup>133</sup> Lennox, 'An Empire on Paper: The Founding of Halifax and Conceptions of Imperial Space, 1744-1755', *The Canadian Historical Review*, 88, no. 3 (2007): 389.

<sup>134</sup> *Ibid.*, 390.

<sup>135</sup> For North America see Schmidt, *Mapping and Empire: Cartographic and Colonial Rivalry in Seventeenth Century Dutch and English North America* (London: Routledge, 2013); For Africa see Thomas Bassett, 'Cartography and Empire Building in Nineteenth-Century West Africa', *Geographical Review*, 84, no. 3 (1994).

<sup>136</sup> Probasco, 'Cartography as a Tool of Colonisation'; Edelson, *The New Map of Empire*; and Lennox, 'An Empire on Paper.'

<sup>137</sup> Harley, 'Maps, Knowledge, and Power.'

territorial expansion in Africa have shown a comparable use of blank spaces in cartographic representations of the continent. The adoption of blank spaces in the early eighteenth century has traditionally been understood to be a major turning point in the cartography of Africa.<sup>138</sup> It was argued that pre-colonial cartography of the interior of Africa was ubiquitously filled with animals, imaginary mountains, and flamboyant lettering.<sup>139</sup> Stone, however, has demonstrated that there is evidence of maps using blank spaces throughout the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries.<sup>140</sup> He argues that the turning point in the cartography of Africa was not in the methodological use of blank spaces, but in the intent with which they were employed. The widely accepted shift in eighteenth-century cartography of Africa hence derives from a new reading of visual features. This shift can be understood as the emergence of imperial maps in Africa, as British colonial interests began to heavily influence their production and reception. Blank spaces were no longer read as limits of geographic knowledge, but were instead interpreted as areas open for exploration and ultimately colonisation.<sup>141</sup> This more critical approach to cartographic criticism understands that maps are a fluid and ambiguous source that convey partial and ideological meanings, rather than complete and objective representations.<sup>142</sup> The application of this more holistic approach has resulted in numerous new avenues of research which treat maps as cultural texts that convey social and cultural meaning in addition to spatial knowledge.<sup>143</sup> New cartographic studies have broadened our understanding of the role of imperial maps in European expansion, demonstrating their function in constructing territorial coherency and the imposition of a colonial worldview.<sup>144</sup> The innate value of imperial maps as an insight into the formation of the colonial imagination, therefore, is central to framing this study's reconceptualisation of Singapore's colonial history.

The conceptualisation of maps as a tool to manipulate perceptions of colonised lands has also been applied within the historiography of Southeast Asia, such as in

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<sup>138</sup> Charles Bricker, *Landmarks of mapmaking: an illustrated survey of maps and mapmakers* (Ware: Wordsworth, 1989).

<sup>139</sup> Bassett, 'Cartography and Empire Building in Nineteenth-Century West Africa', 322.

<sup>140</sup> Stone, 'Imperialism, Colonialism and Cartography', 58.

<sup>141</sup> Bassett, 'Cartography and Empire Building in Nineteenth-Century West Africa', 324.

<sup>142</sup> Akerman, *The Imperial Map*, 12.

<sup>143</sup> Matthew Edney, *Mapping an Empire: The Geographical Construction of British India, 1765-1843* (Chicago: Chicago University Press, 1999), 84.

<sup>144</sup> John Brian Harley, *The New Nature of Maps: Essays in the History of Cartography* (London: John Hopkins University Press, 2001); and Nur Dayana Mohamed Ariffin, 'Maps, Colonial Vision, Race and Scientific Legitimacy of British Rule in Malaya', *SEJARAH*, 29.1 (2020): 41-55.

Thongchai Winichakul's 1994 *Siam Mapped*.<sup>145</sup> Just as the studies of North America and Africa conceive of maps not as neutral depictions of space but as ideological tools, Winichakul argues that the construction of Siam's [sic] geo-body through Western-style cartography shaped the very conception of the nation and its boundaries.<sup>146</sup> He demonstrates how the maps of Siam, framed through the lens of Western cartography, were used to establish territorial coherence and sovereignty, much like the 'blank spaces' in British maps, which portrayed indigenous lands as uninhabited and ripe for colonisation. The idea that visual silences functioned not as passive omissions but as deliberate absence meant to encourage colonial expansion reflects Winichakul's argument that the boundaries and territories represented in maps actively create national identity and perceptions of space. Engaging with maps as active shapers of spatial perceptions, Winichakul also explicitly examines the inherent tension between indigenous and colonial/scientific conceptualisations of space. The analysis of ancient maps serves to demonstrate that indigenous concepts of space often served different purposes to modern scientific approaches, which ultimately meant that the spatial perceptions and portrayals of the same region were often incompatible. Notably, Winichakul also explores how indigenous populations can utilise cartographic imagination to preserve their own sovereignty. As Siam faced the threat of Western imperialism, the process of adopting modern cartography allowed the Siamese state to imagine itself as part of the global system which, he argues, was crucial to Siam's ability to resist colonisation and maintain independence, although this came at the expense of indigenous knowledge of political space as the adoption of Western cartography cemented the hegemony of modern geography.<sup>147</sup> This exploration of indigenous engagement with Western cartography for the protection of their own sovereignty provides an important foundation for later analysis in this thesis that explores the Straits Chinese communities manipulation of imperial depictions to further their own cause.

Despite the growing prominence of the 'imperial map' in historiography and its increasing prevalence in academic literature, there remains no single, universally accepted definition of an imperial map. For some, like Colley, the imperial map is less

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<sup>145</sup> Thongchai Winichakul, *Siam Mapped: A History of the Geo-Body of a Nation* (Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 1994), x.

<sup>146</sup> Ibid. 128.

<sup>147</sup> Ibid. 129.

an actual document but instead a composite model that, when applied, foregrounds the expanse of empire while obscuring its territorial limits.<sup>148</sup> For others, however, the term 'imperial map' applies to any map that was produced as a result of a cartographic project of a foreign state.<sup>149</sup> This less Euro-centric approach, as put forward by Kobayashi, emphasises the intrinsic link between mapping and imperial force. These two differing interpretations embody the difficulties of studying imperial maps as a defined product as their role, function, appearance, and intent differs when applied to different temporal, spatial, and cultural contexts.

In his study on the nature of imperial maps, Edney goes a step further and argues that the imperial maps cannot be considered a distinct cartographic category.<sup>150</sup> This argument is based, in part, on the fact that historians, political scientists, and students of culture have yet to agree on a definition of empire or imperialism.<sup>151</sup> He argues that without an accepted definition of empire or colonialism that can be distinguished from states, nations, polities, or colonies, it is impossible to define an imperial map.<sup>152</sup> This idea that an imperial map cannot exist in the absence of concrete demarcations of empire is borne out in the studies of Chatterjee and Ramaswamy, who explore the ways in which native communities in Asia appropriated, utilised, and reconfigured Western 'imperial maps' for their own purposes.<sup>153</sup> The focus of these studies on maps that were produced by imperial powers for expansionist goals have highlighted the fluid and contextual nature of maps and suggest that they cannot be restrictively defined by characteristics such as 'imperial.'

In the face of continuous debate and contention, why does the imperial map have such enduring appeal in cartographic and imperial historiography? The answer appears to lie in the term's value as a prism of analysis rather than as a defined category of mapping. In the last forty years, a new cartographic school of thought has

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<sup>148</sup> Linda Colley, 'This Small Island': Britain, Size and Empire', *Proceedings of the British Academy*, 121 (2003): 172.

<sup>149</sup> Shigeru Kobayashi, 'Imperial Cartography in East Asia from the late 18<sup>th</sup> Century to the Early 20<sup>th</sup> Century: An Overview', *Japanese Journal of Human Geography*, 67, no. 6 (2015): 480-502.

<sup>150</sup> Matthew Edney, 'The Irony of Imperial Mapping' in James Akerman, *The Imperial Map: Cartography and the mastery of empire* (Chicago: Chicago University Press, 2009), 14.

<sup>151</sup> *Ibid.*, 11.

<sup>152</sup> *Ibid.*, 12.

<sup>153</sup> Partha Chatterjee, *Nation and its Fragments: Colonial and Postcolonial Histories* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1993); Edney, 'The Irony of Imperial Mapping', 44; Sumathi Ramaswamy, 'Catastrophic Cartographies: Mapping the Lost Continent of Lemuria', *Representations*, 67 (1999): 92-129.

emerged, and it has begun to re-conceptualise the nature of maps and mapping, particularly in its relationship with the empire. This new approach to cartography, pioneered by Brian Harley in the 1980s, developed in direct opposition to the traditional historiography that existed for much of the twentieth century.<sup>154</sup> The conventional approach to cartography had typically fixated on the role of maps as conveyors of objective representations of reality. This narrow approach meant that cartographic analysis and criticism had been restricted to a series of binary oppositions such as 'true or false', 'accurate and inaccurate' or 'literal and symbolic.'<sup>155</sup> The current approach to maps, on the other hand, argues that authors do not, and cannot, proscribe their maps with fixed meanings. Instead, it is the reader who gives them their life and meaning.<sup>156</sup> The value of maps, therefore, cannot be understood simply as an issue of methodology, technology, or even intent.<sup>157</sup> The prominence of the imperial map in recent literature thus derives from its ability to reframe discussions on the creation, usage, reception, and impact of maps during the age of European imperialism. The intention of this chapter, however, is not to further the debate of what constitutes an imperial map but to build upon cartographic and imperial studies of the past forty years and extend the analysis of the impact of Britain's imperial maps on Southeast Asia. This study explores the ways in which cartographers used elements such as colour, cartouches, blank spaces, and iconography; this chapter explores the role of these maps in the development of British imperial policy. It examines the impact they had on shaping public imagination of Southeast Asia and the influence they had on the development of Singapore's colonial society and nowhere can a better example of the inherent relationship between empire building and cartography be found than in Herman Moll's atlas *The World Described*.<sup>158</sup>

### A Map of the East-Indies and the Adjacent Countries

Of the few existing British maps that depicted Singapore in the early seventeenth century, Herman Moll's *A Map of the East-Indies and the Adjacent Countries* (1710)

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<sup>154</sup> John Brian Harley, 'Deconstructing the Map', *Cartographica: The International Journal for Geographic Information and Geovisualisation*, 26, no. 2 (1989): 1-20.

<sup>155</sup> Harley, 'Maps, knowledge and power', 129; John Brian. Harley, 'Historical Geography and the Cartographic Illusion'. *Journal of Historical Geography*, 15, no. 1 (1989): 82.

<sup>156</sup> Edney, 'The Irony of Imperial Mapping', 12.

<sup>157</sup> Harley, 'Deconstructing the Map', 1-20.

<sup>158</sup> Herman Moll, *The World Described in Thirty Large Two-Sheet Maps by Herman Moll Geographer. Being a Collection Exhibiting Many Different Issues of Each Map, commenced by the Late Henry N. Stevens and Now Gathered Together, Classified and Bibliographically Described by Henry Stevens and Henry Robert Peter Stevens* (London: Henry Stevens, Sons & Styles, 1952).

was unmatched for its influence over Britain's colonial imagination (Fig. 1). Appointed 'Geographer to the King' in 1815, an exclusive royal title which he held until his death in 1732, Moll was one of Britain's pre-eminent cartographers at a critical juncture, and his magnum opus, the atlas *The World Described* (1718) was central to both the formation of imperial consciousness and the nation's map trade. The boom in London's map trade around 1700 positioned mapmakers as arguably the most influential profession in shaping the metropole's knowledge and understanding of the empire.<sup>159</sup> With their capacity to convey and depict vast geographic knowledge, atlases, in particular, emerged as a highly marketable commodity for a consumer base that was increasingly invested in visualising and understanding Britain's expanding overseas reach.<sup>160</sup> Moreover, not only did atlases provide a convenient medium to portray the entirety of the known world, but they were also priced very competitively. Where single coloured and uncoloured maps were sold at five pence and eight pence, respectively, in the early eighteenth century, coloured and uncoloured atlases cost five and six shillings.<sup>161</sup> As Moll's *The World Described* contained between twenty-five and thirty double-folio maps (depending on edition) at best, this pricing effectively reduced the cost of an uncoloured single map to two pence.<sup>162</sup> Although we have the precise price of Moll's atlas, it is almost impossible to quantify its present, equivalent value as several factors, including the fluctuating price of commodities, products, services, taxation, and inflation, distort the purchasing power of the early eighteenth century beyond the point of comparison.<sup>163</sup> Nevertheless, it is possible to demonstrate the comparative price of Moll's atlas with other contemporary cultural commodities.

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<sup>159</sup> Alex Zukas, 'Commodities, Commerce, and Cartography in the Early Modern Era: Herman Moll's World Maps, 1700-1730', *Journal of World History*, 25, no. 2 (2014): 1-35.

<sup>160</sup> *Ibid.*, 5.

<sup>161</sup> *Ibid.* 5.

<sup>162</sup> Nine editions of *The World Described* were published in Britain between 1715-1754 with a further two pirated editions produced in Ireland.

<sup>163</sup> Robert Hume, 'The Economics of Culture in London, 1660-1740', *Huntington Library Quarterly*, 69, no. 4 (2006): 490-492.

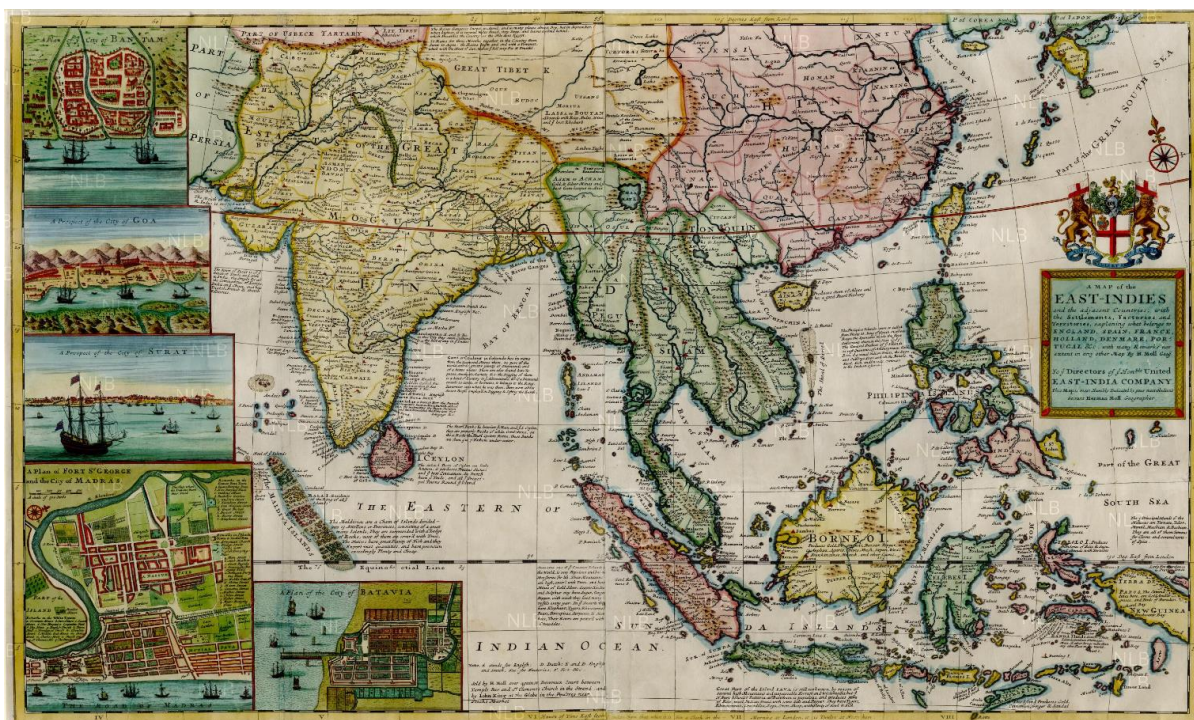


Figure 1. Herman Moll, *A Map of The East Indies and The Adjacent Countries: with the settlements, factories and territories, explaining what belongs to England, Spain, France, Holland, Denmark, Portugal & c.: with many remarks not extant in other maps*, 1717, National Library Board of Singapore.

Books, for example, were typically a more affordable medium of consumable culture and were often priced at half the cost of Moll's atlas at two shillings, whilst many were even cheaper at no more than a single shilling.<sup>164</sup> However, despite being the cheaper option, books were often not widely disseminated, as print runs were sharply limited by the publisher's willingness to risk purchasing manuscripts. In the late seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries, most publications ran between 500 and 1,500 copies.<sup>165</sup> Moreover, prior to the map trade boom, books that featured maps were amongst the most expensive listed in the *Term Catalogues*.<sup>166</sup> As Robert Hume has demonstrated in his study on the economy of culture in the late seventeenth and early eighteenth century, of the 236 books that were advertised in the Easter and Trinity terms of 1670, only seven books cost more than one pound, and the most expensive were law books and a book of maps at three pounds. Beyond affordability and availability, however, by far the most limiting factor for the dissemination and cultural influence of books was Britain's literacy rate. While the volume of book sales

<sup>164</sup> Hume, 'The Economics of Culture in London', 509.

<sup>165</sup> *Ibid.*, 509.

<sup>166</sup> A *Term Catalogue* was a serial publication compiled to inform customers of the book production as available on the book fairs.

in London increased over the eighteenth century as the gradual increase in literacy increased the potential pool of consumers, this was a slow process and by 1800 male literacy was only at about 60 per cent, with female literacy at about 40 per cent.<sup>167</sup> Consequently, although books represented one of the most affordable mediums by which the British elite could consume culture, their inaccessibility to the general public limited their influence in shaping public consciousness.

The greater accessibility of visual mediums in this period was such that engravings represent a more useful comparison to maps and atlases than books. Engravings emerged as an increasingly popular commodity in the eighteenth century as print sellers, who were otherwise faced with steep expenses and limited sales, attempted to increase their sales by marketing towards the middle class and their ever-growing demand for consumer goods.<sup>168</sup> At the price of one shilling, engravings were not necessarily a cheap cultural commodity, but according to Robert Hume's research, by the middle of the eighteenth century a growing number of potential customers could pay a shilling per print if they chose to.<sup>169</sup> Against the growing popularity of engravings, the affordability of individual double-folio maps at five pence – less than half price - is particularly notable. Moreover, although Moll's atlas was five times the price of an engraving and was, therefore, a steep outlay for the vast majority of London's population, if one could afford it, it represented fantastic value for money.

The combined advantages of legibility and affordability that maps and atlases possessed over their alternative cultural mediums were certainly borne out in the dissemination and influence that Moll was able to exert over the public consciousness. Recent scholarship on Moll's career has argued that his greatest strength was not as a cartographer but as an opportunistic tradesman who was able to exploit the growing market.<sup>170</sup> Indeed, important research into the subscription lists for British atlases in 1720 reveals that Moll's maps permeated every level of society; ten to thirteen per cent of subscribers came from the nobility, forty-one to forty-seven per cent from the gentry, eleven to fourteen per cent from merchants, and seventeen to twenty-eight per

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<sup>167</sup> Hume, 'The Economics of Culture in London', 525.

<sup>168</sup> Jonathan Barry, 'Consumer's Passions: The Middle Class in Eighteenth-Century England', *The Historical Journal*, 34, no. 1 (1991): 208.

<sup>169</sup> Hume, 'The Economics of Culture in London', 520.

<sup>170</sup> Phillip Koyoumijan, 'Herman Moll and the London Map Trade, 1678-1832', *Imago Mundi*, 70, no. 2 (2018): 252.



cent from tradesmen.<sup>171</sup> As telling as these figures are of the public's demand for Moll's work, and in particular that such a high percentage of tradesmen were willing to devote a significant proportion of their disposable income to an atlas (it is estimated that the average wage of tradesmen in early eighteenth century London was £45 p.a.), these figures only represented first-hand sales and discounted the gradual dissemination of the maps to the working class.<sup>172</sup> Although it is impossible to quantify the extent to which Moll's maps were consumed by the working class, for there are no records of second-hand sales, there is a growing consensus amongst historians that maps played an influential role in engaging, and investing, the working class into British imperialism in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. Reinhartz argues that Moll's maps reached the working classes and, as a visual medium, they were often the most accessible depictions of the empire and made an immediate impression upon those who could not read.<sup>173</sup> While authors such as Daniel Defoe and Jonathan Swift did much to engender pro-imperial sentiment amongst the middle classes, they were unable to shape the imperial imagination of the illiterate population. The economic and political symbolism of Moll's maps, on the other hand, were able to penetrate the psyche of Britain's wider population.<sup>174</sup> Indeed, by the nineteenth century, institutions were established with the express aim of educating 'poor adults and the working classes in a variety of intellectual and practical subjects', foremost among these subjects being the knowledge of empire.<sup>175</sup> During the 1830s and 1840s, for example, the Society for the Diffusion of Useful Knowledge set out to publish cheap maps explicitly aimed at 'non-elite British audiences.'<sup>176</sup> With his ability to not only appeal to but also reach such a breadth and depth of readership as early as the eighteenth century, Moll was the vanguard of shaping the British public's imperial consciousness.

Significantly, Moll's influence was not just confined to shaping the nebulous and intangible concept of imperial consciousness but also had a direct and demonstrable impact on British imperial policy. By 1715, Moll's commercial success had positioned

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<sup>171</sup> Zukas, 'Commodities, Commerce, and Cartography in the Early Modern Era', 6.

<sup>172</sup> Hume, 'The Economics of Culture in London', p. 495.

<sup>173</sup> Dennis Reinhartz, 'Shared Vision: Herman Moll and His Circle and the Great South Sea', in *Science, Empire and the European Exploration of the Pacific*, ed. Tony Ballantyne (London: Routledge, 2004), 7.

<sup>174</sup> Reinhartz, 'Shared Vision', 7.

<sup>175</sup> Ian Barrow, 'India for the Working Classes: The Maps of the Society for the Diffusion of Useful Knowledge', *Modern Asian Studies*, 38, no. 3 (2004): 677.

<sup>176</sup> *Ibid.*, 677.

him as the unrivalled leader in the map trade, with few competitors and his maps widely circulated among the political elite.<sup>177</sup> Crucially, however, these maps were not just passively consumed as depictions of the empire but were understood as the epitome of Britain's geographic knowledge. Situated in the heart of London and surrounded by the royal court, Parliament, law courts, departments of state, chartered companies and coffeehouses which served as emerging stock exchanges, Moll had access to all the newest topographical information available in a city that was quickly becoming an 'entrepôt and clearinghouse for the geographical knowledge of a far-flung territorial system.'<sup>178</sup> This advantage was one that Moll actively traded on as he marketed the scientific nature of his maps in recognition of the growing demand for precise and accurate maps. A brief examination of the full title of his work proves the extent to which he emphasised the accuracy of his maps. For example, the full title for the atlases examined in this chapter is *The World Describ'd; or a new and correct series of maps and A New and Correct Map of the World; laid down according to the newest discoveries, and from the most exact observations.*<sup>179</sup> Scholarship on Moll has subsequently contended that despite his claims of geographic accuracy, his maps embodied England's traditional school of cartography, which was one that relied upon geographic information contained in observations, journals, and writings, compiled without the application of modern technology or scientific methods.<sup>180</sup> In his study on British cartography, for example, Laurence Worms describes Moll's publications as 'the last flowering of a technology already superseded.'<sup>181</sup> Moll's tendency to favour this cartographic approach, which prioritised style and design over precision and rigour, was heavily influenced by his earlier profession as an engraver. His wont to imbue his maps with heavy symbolism and his liberal use of cartouches are likely the result of his formative experiences as an engraver rather than a geographer.<sup>182</sup> In fact, prior to the eighteenth century, cartographers were not required to have any formal training in geography, and so whether or not Moll desired to adopt new scientific

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<sup>177</sup> Laurence Worms, 'The Maturing of British Commercial Cartography: William Faden (1749-1836) and the Map Trade', *The Cartographic Journal*, 41, no. 1 (2004): 5.

<sup>178</sup> Alex Zukas, 'Commodities, Commerce, and Cartography in the Early Modern Era: Herman Moll's World Maps, 1700-1730', *Journal of World History*, 25, no. 2 (2014): 4.

<sup>179</sup> Herman Moll, *The World Describ'd; or a new and correct series of maps: A New and Correct Map of the World; laid down according to the newest discoveries, and from the most exact observations* (London: Moll, Midwinter, Davies, 1709), National Library of Scotland, EMW.X.032.

<sup>180</sup> Worms, 'The Maturing of British Commercial Cartography: William Faden (1749-1836)', 6.

<sup>181</sup> *Ibid.*, 6.

<sup>182</sup> Zukas. 'Commodities, Commerce, and Cartography in the Early Modern Era: Herman Moll's World Maps, 1700-1730', 4.

methodologies, he would have lacked the required skill set to produce more accurate maps.<sup>183</sup> This is reflected in the absence of a single map produced on the basis of an original survey in his extensive portfolio.<sup>184</sup>

While Moll's claims to scientific rigour and precision do not hold up under historical scrutiny, it is vital to recognise his claims' impact on his readership. The recency and technical complexity of the emerging scientific approach to cartography meant that the vast majority of Moll's audience lacked the required map literacy to question his claims of precision and accuracy.<sup>185</sup> In fact, the exactness of many of Moll's maps was not challenged until the second half of the eighteenth century, when his successors published more scientific maps highlighting some of the shortcomings in his geographic accuracy. Therefore, Moll's claims of scientific accuracy were often taken at face value, which meant that his symbolic and ideological representations were endowed with an impression of increased authority and legitimacy. The combination of ideology represented as scientific fact was particularly powerful in maps that portrayed and popularised lesser-known regions, such as *A Map of the East Indies*, which became one of the most familiar depictions of South and Southeast Asia within Britain. Indeed, as Moll's maps were considered one of the most reliable sources of information available in the early eighteenth century, they were regularly consulted by policymakers and established a foundation for British imperial policy. Dennis Reinhartz's study on the role of the British intelligentsia on imperial policy in the Great South Sea, for example, reveals that Robert Harley, the Lord High Treasurer (1711-1714), regarded Moll's maps as the 'best information he could obtain' on South America.<sup>186</sup> Consequently, his maps were regularly consulted and provided the framework for imperial policy in the region, ultimately culminating in the creation of the South Sea Company in 1711.<sup>187</sup> However, Moll's non-adherence to cutting-edge geographic and scientific precision meant that many imperial policies enacted in the early eighteenth century were unwittingly reliant on outdated or wrong information.

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<sup>183</sup> Zukas. 'Commodities, Commerce, and Cartography in the Early Modern Era: Herman Moll's World Maps, 1700–1730', 4.

<sup>184</sup> Worms, *The Maturing of British Commercial Cartography William Faden*, 6.

<sup>185</sup> This chapter goes on to examine subsequent maps by cartographers such as Emanuel Bowen to explore the extent in which geographic knowledge improved over the century.

<sup>186</sup> Reinhartz, 'Shared Vision', 7.

<sup>187</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 7.

Although Moll's disingenuous claims to precision and accuracy distorted the metropole's geographic knowledge, his overtly value-laden depiction of India and Southeast Asia in *A Map of the East-Indies* did much to shape Britain's perception of the region and provides a stark insight into how Singapore was perceived in the eighteenth century. Moreover, as Fig. 1 shows, Moll's decision to compose his map to include both India and Southeast Asia makes *A Map of the East Indies* a valuable resource in understanding Britain's comparative knowledge of the two regions. For example, the level of geographic accuracy Moll achieved in his depiction of the Indian coastline reflected Britain's extensive and long-standing engagement with the sub-continent. This familiarity was further evidenced by the comprehensiveness of the accompanying annotations, which provided information such as the specific location of commodities such as diamonds, topazes, amethysts, and garnets in 'Golconda', pepper mountains in 'Bisnagar', and vast quantities of sugar in 'Moultan'.<sup>188</sup> In addition to raw materials, the map also describes commodity chain processes, as shown in the note along the southern coast of India, asserting that 'above 60,000 people are employ'd once a year in Pearl-Fishery on this coast.'<sup>189</sup> To further assist private merchants and shippers, the map also depicts the location of European factories and production sites, such as the French pepper factory in 'Rigepore' along the west coast and the English and Dutch factories along the east coast in 'Masulapatan' in which 'they stain Callicoes the best of any in the Indies.'<sup>190</sup> These notes occasionally deviate from trade information to reinforce concepts such as the civilising mission, as evidenced by the description of the Danish fort 'Trankebar', which states: 'the Danish missionaries have a Malabarick School here for instructing the Pagan Children and have translated the Bible into that Language.'<sup>191</sup>

The detail with which India is portrayed in *A Map of the East Indies* accentuates the vagueness that permeated Moll's depiction of Southeast Asia. For example, rather than display the precise location of key commodities, the notes for Borneo, Sumatra, Malaysia, and Siam generalise available commodities such as gold, diamonds, iron, lead, tin, pepper, and cinnamon.<sup>192</sup> Detailed descriptions of production zones are far

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<sup>188</sup> Samuel Dunn, *A map of the East-Indies*, 1736, Lionel Pincus and Princess Firyal Map Division, The New York Public Library.

<sup>189</sup> Ibid.

<sup>190</sup> Ibid.

<sup>191</sup> Ibid.

<sup>192</sup> Ibid.

more infrequent and are often replaced by notes on the indigenous wildlife, such as elephants, rhinoceroses, tigers, and crocodiles, which were incongruent with the predominantly commercial lens of the map but appealed to the viewer's notion of an exotic land. Britain's unfamiliarity with Southeast Asia is also shown in the map's description of Java, which states that the 'greater part of the island is still unknown by reasons of several high mountains and unpassable forest and wilderness.'<sup>193</sup>

A more revealing discrepancy between the treatment of India and Southeast Asia than the ambiguity of Moll's notations, however, is the physical depiction of the region. While many inaccuracies are evident in the size and shape of several of the larger islands in Southeast Asia, namely Borneo and Celebes (Sulawesi), it is even more apparent in the depiction, or lack thereof, of Singapore. In a map distinguished by an excess of symbolic, descriptive, and geographic information, Singapore is notable only for its 'silence'. Situated at the southern tip of the heavily annotated Malay Archipelago, Singapore is represented as three distinct and unnamed islands above the 'Straits of Sincapora.'<sup>194</sup> The distortion of Singapore's basic shape is a prime example of Britain's lack of knowledge of the island in the eighteenth century, but the level of ignorance is exacerbated by the relative sizing of the landmasses. In Moll's map, the three islands that depict Singapore each appear equitable in size to his representation of Tingi (Pulau Tinggi), but in reality the land area of Singapore's main island, prior to the first land reclamation project in 1822, was 53,900 hectares (539km<sup>2</sup>), which is over thirty times larger than Pulau Tinggi's land area, which is just 1600 hectares (16km<sup>2</sup>).<sup>195</sup> The extent to which Moll misjudged the relative size of the islands in maritime Southeast Asia is particularly notable, as there is substantial evidence that British sailors frequently passed the islands when navigating the Sino-Indian trade network.<sup>196</sup> While incomparable to the importance it later assumed in the nineteenth century, long-distance merchants had identified the Straits of Malacca as an important waterway for regional trade from as early as the sixteenth century.<sup>197</sup> In 1911, Warren Barnes published a study which drew upon Chinese and European accounts to demonstrate

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<sup>193</sup> Dunn, *A map of the East-Indies*.

<sup>194</sup> Ibid.

<sup>195</sup> Richard Corlett, 'The Ecological Transformation of Singapore, 1819-1990', *Journal of Biogeography*, 19, no. 4 (1992): 411.

<sup>196</sup> C. A. Gibson-Hill, 'Singapore: Notes on the History of the Old Strait, 1580-1850', *Journal of the Malayan Branch of the Royal Asiatic Society*, 27, no. 1 (1954): 163-214.

<sup>197</sup> Ibid., 163-214.

the usage of the passageway between Singapore and the southern islands of Pulau Brani and Pulau Blakang Mati (Sentosa) three centuries before the British purported to have discovered it.<sup>198</sup> A detailed account by Dutch merchant Jan Huyghen van Linschoten showed that this passageway, now known as Keppel Harbour, was initially used by merchants travelling between Malacca and Macao as early as 1595 in a trade route that foreshadowed the major Sino-Indian network of the nineteenth century.<sup>199</sup> European ships, therefore, had sailed within a relatively close proximity to the island for centuries.<sup>200</sup> Consequently, Britain's ignorance of Singapore's topography, as demonstrated by the scale of the inaccuracies in the island's depiction were indicative more of a disinterest and indifference rather than a lack of capacity and opportunity.

*A Map of the East-Indies* had an enduring impact upon British imaginations of India and Southeast Asia and was continually republished throughout the century, long after Moll's death in 1732. Moll's work also had a profound impact on many of his contemporaries, demonstrating, and in part creating, a huge market for imperial maps depicting regions important to British trade. Moll's stylistic approach to mapmaking was increasingly considered an antiquated approach to cartography, but his choice of subject matter had an undeniable influence over the development of British cartography. Equally, the usefulness of Moll's map as a navigational tool encouraged merchants to extend their trade routes into the region. The expansion of Britain's trade interests in the region led to a notable increase in activity in the region over the course of the century, which in turn produced new cartographic information. A new wave of British merchants began operating within Southeast Asia, establishing trade networks that incorporated the commodities and resources depicted in Moll's map. These new trade networks enabled British captains to undertake increasingly comprehensive hydrographic surveys, while merchants gained further insights into the region's cultural and political environment. The information gained by these merchants was also supplemented by the surveys undertaken by captains operating along the increasingly popular Sino-Indian trade route that navigated through Southeast Asia. The influx of this new cartographic knowledge, coupled with the British public's invigorated interest

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<sup>198</sup> Warren Barnes, 'Singapore old Straits and New Harbour', *Journal of the Straits Branch of the Royal Asiatic Society*, 60 (1911): 25-34.

<sup>199</sup> Jan Huyghen van Linschoten, *his discours of voyages into ye Easte and West Indies: devided into foure books* (London: John Windet, 1598).

<sup>200</sup> Zukas, 'Commodities, Commerce, and Cartography in the Early Modern Era', 15.

in overseas territories, encouraged Moll's contemporaries and successors to expand upon his work and produce increasingly numerous and accurate maps of the East Indies.

### *A New and Accurate Map of the East India Islands*

The fervour that Moll incited for visual depictions of the British Empire's further-flung territories contributed to Southeast Asia's continued presence in British cartography over the course of the eighteenth century. This is directly evidenced in the publication of Emanuel Bowen's, Moll's direct successor as 'Geographer to the King', *A New and Accurate Map of the East India Islands*, in 1844 (Fig. 2). Bowen's depiction of Southeast Asia was particularly pivotal in the region's development in Britain's political consciousness as, although the two men were separated by only a few decades, they embodied two contrasting generational approaches to mapmaking. Moll represented the last generation of cartographers who designed their maps towards specific customers and expressed a significant degree of artistic freedom to increase the marketability of their maps and deliberately promote their ideology. On the other hand, Bowen received his training as a mapmaker during a period in which the functionality and accuracy of maps far outweighed their aesthetic purpose. As an apprentice under Charles Price in 1709, Bowen was guided by the principle that maps that did not equate to reality would have to be superseded.<sup>201</sup> This belief was reflected in his early publications' tight compositions and narrow scope, such as his six-sheet survey on his native South Wales.<sup>202</sup> Bowen interpreted this principle to apply not only to his own work but also to the works that preceded him. Consequently, while Moll's maps of the world invoked a sense of mercantilism and imperial fervour amongst his readership, Bowen's maps were designed only with accuracy and functionality in mind.

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<sup>201</sup> Worms, 'The Maturing of British Commercial Cartography', 7.

<sup>202</sup> *Ibid.*, 7.



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Figure 2. Emanuel Bowen, A new and accurate map of the East India islands. Laid down according to the latest discoveries, and agreeable to the most approved maps & charts. The whole being regulated by astronl. Observations, National Library Board Singapore.

While Moll's approach ignited interest in Southeast Asia, Bowen's far more precise and accurate depiction of the region gave the British public the opportunity to greatly improve their understanding of the region. For example, while Moll's map featured both India and Southeast Asia, as shown in Fig. 2, Bowen confined the composition to only the space between the west coast of Sumatra and the east coast of New Guinea. This enabled him to convey a far greater degree of accuracy as it minimised the spatial distortion that plagued Moll's original map. Bowen's focus on spatial precision demonstrably improved the accuracy of the map, and A New and Accurate Map of the East India Islands became the first British map to chart the longitude of the region accurately. Similarly, there are subtle but significant differences in Moll and Bowen's portrayal of Singapore. Both maps depict three distinct islands to the north of the 'Straits of Sincapora', but the dimensions of the islands in Bowen's map are far more accurate. While both men overcompensated for the size of Pulau Ubin and Tekong Island, where Moll depicted three similarly sized islands, Bowen showed that



Singapore's main island was at least twice as large as the two other islands. Moreover, where Moll portrayed Singapore as a generic oval shape, Bowen depicted a far more realistic coastline with an outcrop on the island's western coast. Ultimately, although this shape was not a particularly accurate reflection of reality, it is evidence that Britain's topographical knowledge of Singapore evolved in the first half of the eighteenth century, albeit marginally. For all intents and purposes, Bowen's map can be considered a success, crowned with the accolade of being the first map to accurately chart the longitude of the region.

However, while Bowen's map represented a significant development in British cartography, his impact on Britain's imperial consciousness was far more limited. Moll's often-simplified geographic depictions and complex textual features actively engaged readers, and his stylistic approach to his maps meant that they were received and consumed as more than just tools for navigation, also invoking a sense of nationalism, patriotism, and expansionism. This significantly broadened the appeal of his maps, and as demonstrated, he was able to reach a vast audience and left an indelible imprint upon the public's imagination of the region. Bowen's pursuit of precision, on the other hand, eliminated these emotive aspects of Southeast Asia's depiction, and whilst his maps were remarkable for their pioneering precision and contribution towards the improvement of British geographic knowledge, they failed to capture public interest to the same degree. Ironically, by focussing so intently on improving the accuracy of maps, Bowen presented images that were seen as more abstract to the general public. His disconnect with the general public meant that, despite his royal appointments and cartographic success, Bowen was unable to capture or evoke the imperial imagination as his predecessor had, and he ultimately died in destitution, having failed to successfully commercialise his maps.<sup>203</sup> Consequently, although there is far less available information regarding the dissemination of Bowen's work than there is for Moll, which in itself is suggestive of an underwhelming commercial reception to *A New and Accurate Map of the East India Islands*, it is likely that although Bowen can be accredited with advancing British cartography as a discipline, he was also probably equally responsible for regressing the popularity of maps amongst the general public.

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<sup>203</sup> Laurence Worms, 'Thomas Kitchin's 'journey of life': hydrographer to George III, mapmaker, and engraver' *The Map Collector*, 62-63 (1993): Part I, 2-8; Part II, 14-20.

## The Straits Of Singapore With Those Of Drion, Sabon, Mandol & ca and Southern Part Of Malacca Straits

Although the eighteenth century witnessed significant technical advancement in British cartography and increased interest in Southeast Asia, it was not until the very end of the century that there was any considerable development in the portrayal of Singapore. Originally compiled by British hydrographer Joseph Huddart, *The Straits of Singapore* underwent several revisions, first in 1787 and then in 1793, before appearing in its final iteration in *The Country Trade East-India Pilot* in 1799.<sup>204</sup> *The Country Trade East-India Pilot* was a collection of 105 Dutch and British maps showing the coasts between England and the East Indies, designed to aid in navigating ships eastwards of the Cape of Good Hope.<sup>205</sup> The 1799 revised edition of *The Straits of Singapore* depicted Britain's most accurate understanding of Singapore at the end of the eighteenth century. The map represented the culmination of the corporate knowledge of country traders gathered during their commercial activities throughout the century. Maps of the region would often undergo numerous revisions as returning traders shared their acquired knowledge as they surveyed and chartered an increasing number of bays, estuaries, and straits.<sup>206</sup> Consequently, when *A Map of the East Indies* was published for public consumption, the maps published in this collection were designed to facilitate the commercial activities of private merchants. The publishers of these maps, Robert Laurie and James Whittle, therefore placed a greater onus on geographic accuracy than Moll had ever previously done in his maps of the region.

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<sup>204</sup> Après de Manneville, Jean-Baptiste-Nicolas-Denis d', Wellesley, Richard Wellesley, Stephenson, John, Heather, William, Horsburgh, James, Heather and Williams and Robert Laurie and James Whittle, *The country trade East-India pilot, for the navigation of the East-Indies and oriental seas, within the limits of the East-India Company, extending from the Cape of Good Hope to China, New Holland and New Zealand, with the Red Sea, Gulf of Persia, Bay of Bengal, and China Seas* (London: Robert Laurie and James Whittle, 1799).

<sup>205</sup> Manneville, *The Country Trade East India Pilot*.

<sup>206</sup> W.G. Miller, 'English Country Traders and Their Relations with Malay Rulers in the Late Eighteenth Century', *Journal of the Malaysian Branch of the Royal Asiatic Society*, 84, no. 1 (2011): 41.

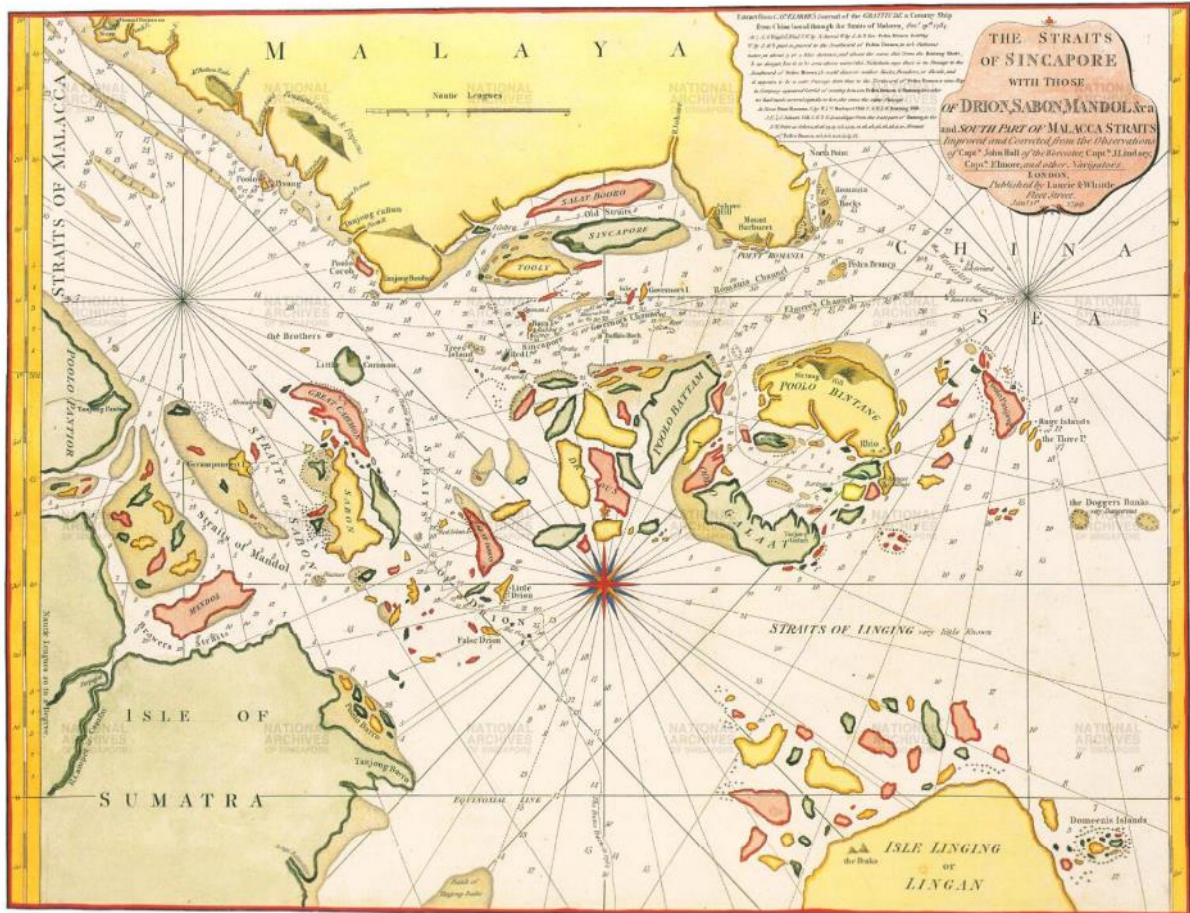


Figure 3. Captain John Hall, Captain Lindsey and Captain Elmor, *The Straits Of Singapore With Those Of Drion, Sabon, Mandol & ca and Southern Part Of Malacca Straits*, National Archives of Singapore, CM-44

The map (Fig. 3) features the tip of the Malay Peninsula, beginning at Malacca. It moves southward to include Singapore, the islands of 'Poolo Battam' and 'Poolo Bintang', and the adjacent eastern coast of Sumatra before ending at the northern coast of the 'Isle of Linging'. While the composition of the map emphasises the region's waterways, foregrounding the South China Sea and the Singapore or Governor's Channel, it remains a useful tool in understanding Britain's knowledge of the region's geography. Even though the only topographical features are the depiction of mountains along the western coast of Malaysia and the northern coast of 'Poolo Bintang', the map crucially shows Britain's understanding of the coastlines of the surrounding island. Most notably, the map persists in the depiction of Singapore as three distinct, relatively equally sized islands, as was the case in 'A Map of the East Indies', over seventy years prior. The primary change in Singapore's representation over the seventy years is the addition of names to the three islands. The northernmost island is labelled 'Salat Booro' and probably refers to the significantly smaller island of

Pulau Ubin, the central island is 'Singapura', and the southwestern island is identified as 'Tooly'. There are several explanations for why Laurie and Whittle arrived at this depiction. It may have been a misrepresentation of Sentosa, formerly Pulau Blakang Mati, or the Jurong Islands, which are situated in very similar positions, or as Gibson-Hill has argued, pointing to the significant size discrepancy, *Tooly* might instead have been a product of cartographers such as Horsburgh cutting off the west end of the island.<sup>207</sup> Regardless of how the creation of this fictional island came to be, however, the sheer extent of Singapore's geographic distortion demonstrated Britain's lack of interaction with the immediate region as charting mistakes of this magnitude for an island approximately 0.3% the size of the United Kingdom could only have been borne of extremely limited experience or interest.

Most of the improvements and corrections in the 1799 edition of 'The Straits of Singapore' were based on the information of the merchants Captain John Hall of the Worcester and Captain Elmore of the Gratitude provided.<sup>208</sup> The role of private traders and low-level EIC employees in the formation of the British Empire in Southeast Asia has come to the fore in recent scholarship as part of a conscious effort to move away from Eurocentric understandings of European expansion in Asia.<sup>209</sup> These studies have traditionally conceived European imperialism in Southeast Asia as a process dictated by the monopolisation of violence and aggressive commercial policies that firmly pitted imperial states against rival Asian states.<sup>210</sup> This institutional approach and focus on the combative promotion of national interests provides an excellent framework for the analysis of European imperialism; however, it tends to overlook the role of individual employees and independent traders in shaping the political environment through their integration into local regimes.<sup>211</sup> David Veever's study, *The Origins of the British Empire in Asia*, demonstrates the importance of adopting this

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<sup>207</sup> Gibson-Hill, 'Singapore: Notes on the History of the Old Strait, 1580-1850', 174.

<sup>208</sup> The Straits Of Singapore With Those Of Drion, Sabon, Mandol & ca and Southern Part Of Malacca Straits, National Archives of Singapore, CM-44

<sup>209</sup> David Veevers, *The Origins of the British Empire in Asia, 1600-1750* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2020), 5.

<sup>210</sup> Ibid., 5-8; Nicholas Tarling, *Imperialism in Southeast Asia* (London: Routledge, 2002); Stern, *The Company-State*; John Brewer, *The Sinews of Power: War, Money and the English State 1688-1783* (London: Routledge, 1989); Larry Stewart, 'Global pillage: Science, commerce, and empire', in *The Cambridge History of Science, IV: The Eighteenth Century* ed. Roy Porter (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003); Karl Hack and Tobias Frederick Rettig, 'Imperial Systems of Power, Colonial Forces, and the Making of Modern Southeast Asia', in Karl Hack and Tobias Rettig eds. *Colonial Armies in Southeast Asia* (London: Routledge, 2006), 3-36.

<sup>211</sup> Veevers, *The Origins of the British Empire in Asia*, 5.

more nuanced approach to European imperialism through his exploration of the East India Company's efforts to establish a presence in Southeast Asia.<sup>212</sup> His work traces the Company's successive failures to forcibly assert its authority in the region during the first half of the seventeenth century through ill-judged confrontational acts such as seizing Chinese shipping in Bantam harbour.<sup>213</sup> After three decades of 'harsh lessons' Veevers argues that Company servants, individuals distinct from the leadership in London and Asia, learnt to integrate themselves in Southeast Asia under the jurisdiction of local elites.<sup>214</sup> This approach, he argues, enabled the Company to overcome its fragile authority in the seventeenth century and indirectly secure its legitimacy in the face of VOC opposition, thereby providing opportunities to establish customs-free trade and even monopolies in the Indonesian archipelago.<sup>215</sup>

By reconceptualising the origins of the British Empire in Asia in this manner, Veever demonstrates that the process of empire-building is a longer and often more hidden process than studies have previously acknowledged.<sup>216</sup> The analysis of country traders and Company servants is equally applicable to British expansion in the late eighteenth and nineteenth centuries as it is to the early empire-building era of the sixteenth century, as even a cursory examination of British records reveals that there were at least a couple of hundred country traders operating in Southeast Asia between 1750 and 1820.<sup>217</sup> Drawn to the Malay archipelago by the burgeoning trade in spices, opium, pepper, and cotton goods, these merchants, traders and employees also submitted themselves to the jurisdiction of the local elites.<sup>218</sup>

While their integration into the local commercial, social and political hierarchies was often in the pursuit of personal gain, their presence in the region helped lay the foundations for establishing a British factory in Singapore. During their interactions with local communities throughout the Malay Archipelago, many country traders developed a competency in spoken Malay and cultivated close relations with local

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<sup>212</sup> Veevers, *The Origins of the British Empire in Asia*, 5.

<sup>213</sup> *Ibid.*, 37.

<sup>214</sup> *Ibid.*, 12.

<sup>215</sup> *Ibid.*, 181.

<sup>216</sup> *Ibid.*, 5.

<sup>217</sup> Miller. 'English Country Traders and Their Relations with Malay Rulers in the Late Eighteenth Century', 25.

<sup>218</sup> Emily Erikson, and Peter Bearman. 'Malfeasance and the Foundations for Global Trade: The Structure of English Trade in the East Indies, 1601–1833'. *American Journal of Sociology* 112, no. 1 (2006): 213.

rulers.<sup>219</sup> Their adoption of local trading practices enabled them to integrate disjointed markets and establish nascent trade networks, which were fundamental to the explosive growth in trade throughout the nineteenth century. The specialised local knowledge that country traders attained as intermediary merchants placed them in a unique position with the European administrations. This meant the EIC often engaged them to undertake diplomatic tasks with the Malay Archipelago. These tasks ranged from delivering letters to directly participating in local politics.<sup>220</sup> Every interaction integrated the Malay Archipelago further into imperial networks and increased the corporate knowledge of the EIC, merchants and country traders.

In addition to indirectly legitimising and bolstering British authority in the region, a side-effect that was less significant than in the sixteenth century when their position was more precarious, these individuals were also an indispensable source of knowledge. The importance of knowledge and information gathering to colonial governance in Asia was first comprehensively examined by Christopher Bayly in his study *Empire and Information*.<sup>221</sup> Bayly's study established that knowledge functioned as a fundamental tool of empire, playing a role in social change on par with other key drivers such as technology and capitalism. Until the 1780s, most of Britain's knowledge of north India was not the product of direct observation but hearsay, and there were few areas in which they could proclaim a degree of expertise, namely commercial information about Indian textile production. Some of this information was collected by private traders who hired cultural intermediaries and interpreters so that they could interact with local bleachers, dyers and weavers to better understand the economic structure of Indian textiles.<sup>222</sup> Despite their efforts, however, the EIC's knowledge was still inferior to the Dutch, who had gained access to Mughal customs records.<sup>223</sup> Although incomplete, unreliable and inferior to that of their competitors, the collection of this knowledge enabled the emergence was nonetheless a vital step in

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<sup>219</sup> Miller. 'English Country Traders and Their Relations with Malay Rulers in the Late Eighteenth Century', 30.

<sup>220</sup> Ibid., 32.

<sup>221</sup> Christopher Bayly, *Empire and Information: Intelligence Gathering and Social Communication in India, 1780-1870* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press).

<sup>222</sup> Ibid., 45.

<sup>223</sup> Ibid., 46.

Britain's expansion and control over north India as it enabled the emergence of a robust private trade, which proved central to the expansion of British power.<sup>224</sup>

This knowledge-gathering process was paralleled in late eighteenth-century Southeast Asia as figures such as Francis Light, James Scott, and Thomas Forrest engaged with local informants to gather vital information for the expansion of British dominance in the Malay Archipelago.<sup>225</sup> With years of sailing and trading experience behind them in areas rarely frequented by EIC ships, these men had developed local expertise unsurprised by any British citizen. However, as discussed later in the chapter, much like in north India, their knowledge was also secondary to the Dutch. Nevertheless, these men provided pivotal geographic and economic information for the future expansion in Southeast Asia and were instrumental in forming the British perception of the region. By filtering information based on their judgements of the interest and value to their intended audiences, Britain's knowledge of the Malay Archipelago was gradually expanded through published travel accounts and official reports. While Light and his contemporaries gained reputations as authorities in Malay societies, they were far from the only source of British information for traders, merchants and Company employees operating in the Malay Archipelago. Barbara Andaya has shown that the information-gathering process was not confined to captains or adults in her analysis of the letters of John Adolphus Pope, a fourteen-year-old Third Officer on the English country ship, the *Princess Royal*.<sup>226</sup> Andaya's study reveals the limitations and fallibility of knowledge gathering during this period by country traders, as Pope's letters reflected the crew's limited knowledge of the evolving political landscape, demonstrated by their arrival at ports to find them already blockaded or attempting to purchase tin only to discover the VOC possessed a monopoly.<sup>227</sup> Perhaps most interesting, however, is Pope's account of the fall of Malacca to the Dutch in 1641 as a result of the treachery of the Portuguese governor.<sup>228</sup> This account, which has recently been proven to have no basis, was widely accepted as fact and shaped opinions, prejudices and potentially even policies

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<sup>224</sup> Bayly, *Empire and Information*, 46.

<sup>225</sup> Miller, 'English Country Traders and Their Relations with Malay Rulers in the Late Eighteenth Century', 30.

<sup>226</sup> Barbara Watson Andaya, 'Gathering "Knowledge" in the Bay of Bengal: The Letters of John Adolphus Pope, 1785-1788', *JMBRA*, 87, no. 2 (2014): 1-19.

<sup>227</sup> *Ibid.*, 9.

<sup>228</sup> *Ibid.*, 9.

for over a century.<sup>229</sup> The persistence of this inaccurate narrative highlights that, during this period, the collection of information was more important than its accuracy or reliability, largely due to the scarcity of material in the region. As a result, regardless of its veracity, nearly all information conveyed by British actors played a significant role in shaping the British imagination of Southeast Asia and potentially influenced subsequent imperial expansion. Within this conceptualisation of empire-building, as put forward by Bayly and, more recently, Veever, it is possible to trace the origins of colonial Singapore back beyond 1819 and to the knowledge gathered and shared by merchants and traders, despite their unwitting participation.

Returning to the contributions of Captains John Hall and Elmore, it is important to note that they were not country traders but instead employed in long-distance trade networks, an important distinction to when assessing the geographic information they relayed. Captain Hall's ship, the *Worcester*, was a three-deck, full-rigged ship designed for long-distance trade between Britain, India, and China. Hall was captain of five voyages that brought him throughout the East Indies and China, docking in Madras (Chennai), Whampoa (Pazhou), Bencoolen (Bengkulu), Bengal, and Penang.<sup>230</sup> Hall had sailed through the Straits of Singapore at least four times during these voyages, allowing him to undertake numerous hydrographic surveys. The *Worcester*, however, was too large to navigate many of the bays and estuaries within the Malay Peninsula. Hall's experience of the region was limited to the larger waterways, such as using the Singapore or 'Governor's Straits' over the 'Old Straits' which would have brought him into closer proximity to Singapore's coastline. Hall's observations, which provide the basis for the improvement of 'The Straits of Singapore', were entirely hydrographic in nature, and by not journeying through the 'Old Straits', he was unable to rectify the long-held assumption that Singapore comprised three roughly equidimensional islands. Similarly, the *Gratitude* was a country ship designed for long-distance trade routes and was too large to participate effectively in trade within the Malay Peninsula effectively. Captain Elmore's only experience of the region was the navigation of the Straits of Malacca and Singapore as he sailed between India and China. Nonetheless, it was an extract from Elmore's

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<sup>229</sup> Andaya, 'Gathering "Knowledge" in the Bay of Bengal', 9.

<sup>230</sup> *Worcester to Bencoolen and Back: Logbook Kept by Searles Wood*, LOG/C/36, National Maritime Museum; and *Worcester to Bombay and Back: Logbook kept by Searles Wood* LOG/C/37, National Maritime Museum.



journal recounting the location of a safe passage through the Straits of Malacca, devoid of rocks, breakers, or shoals, that informed the revision of 'The Straits of Singapore'.<sup>231</sup>

Two main conclusions can be drawn from Laurie and Whittle's decision to base the revisions of 'The Straits of Singapore' on the observations of country traders not actively involved in the Malay Archipelago. Firstly, it reinforces the argument that Britain's only investment in the region was its role in the burgeoning Sino-Indian trade network. The prioritisation of trade over territorial acquisition meant that the Straits of Singapore deviated from the normal process of imperial mapping in the region. The typical mapping process at the time was to map coastlines from the sea which was seen as an important step in the process of subjugation in Southeast Asia, and therefore often took precedence over maritime mapping.<sup>232</sup> In the area around Singapore however, it was the sea that was mapped at the expense of the land. This deviation from normal mapping practices was so great that the extent of hydrographic surveying around Singapore by the end of the eighteenth century remained largely unrivalled for a century.<sup>233</sup> This approach meant that Britain's topographical knowledge of the region did not advance throughout the eighteenth century. Given the value the British typically placed on surveying coastlines, the failure to accurately survey Singapore conclusively demonstrates Britain's total disregard for territorial acquisition in the immediate area.

Secondly, the absence of observations from those actively engaged in the Malay Archipelago suggests that the British networks did not extend to the southern tip of the peninsula by 1799. *The Straits of Singapore* was one of the few Southeast Asian maps published in *The Country Trade East India-Pilot* that was not informed by country traders. Miller has shown that maps depicting the Sunda Straits and the Straits of Bangka were heavily informed by country traders working within the archipelago.<sup>234</sup> Their influence is evident in the inclusion of additional information relevant to trade in

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<sup>231</sup> The Straits Of Singapore With Those Of Drion, Sabon, Mandol & ca and Southern Part Of Malacca Straits, National Archives of Singapore, CM-44; and Charles Hardy, *A register of ships, employed in the service of the Honourable the United East India Company, from the year 1760 to 1810* (London: W Heseltine, 1811).

<sup>232</sup> Tagliacozzo. 'Hydrography, Technology, Coercion: Mapping the Sea in Southeast Asian Imperialism, 1850-1900'. *Archipel* 65 (2003): 97.

<sup>233</sup> *Ibid.*, 97.

<sup>234</sup> Miller, 'English Country Traders', 28.

the region, such as the location of useful places to obtain provisions, like Malay towns. The Straits of Singapore was devoid of any information regarding inhabitants, watering places, or wildlife, suggesting that there were no British country traders with any experience of inland Singapore that Laurie and Whittle could draw upon. In lieu of this source of knowledge, it can be assumed that the entirety of the map's information was based upon maritime observations, which explains the consistent misrepresentation of Singapore's northern shore as British sailors rarely, if ever, ventured to that part of the island subsequent to the discovery of the new Straits of Singapore along the southern shore.

The uneasy balance between public appeal and accuracy, a challenge to which Bowen in particular succumbed, is a concept that is notoriously difficult to quantify. In the introduction to this chapter, the inconsistency of Singapore's toponyms and their frequency in British newspapers were employed as imprecise indicators of the island's prominence within the public's knowledge and imagination. In contrast, the commercial success of maps produced by Moll and Bowen offers a more tangible framework for assessing their influence. However, such an assessment for *The Straits of Singapore* proves more challenging, as sales data for this map are far less accessible. Nevertheless, the map's design was pragmatic, intended as a practical resource for sailors, making it reasonable to assume that its impact was more akin to Bowen's modest success than to Moll's more elaborate and decorative maps from the earlier part of the century. Consequently, whilst *The Straits of Singapore* represented Britain's most accurate depiction of the Malay Archipelago in the eighteenth century and reflected the full extent of the empire's knowledge of Singapore, its influence on the general public would have been limited. It is likely, then, that the advancements in geographic accuracy went largely unheeded in the metropole in years immediately prior to the establishment of a British factory in Singapore.

### Marsden, A Map of the Island of Sumatra

The final representation of pre-colonial Singapore that this chapter will examine undoubtedly had the greatest influence over Raffles himself and, by extension, the island's eventual colonisation. Published in 1811, the third edition of William Marsden's monograph *History of Sumatra* featured a detailed map of Sumatra and the Southern

tip of the Malay Archipelago (Fig. 4).<sup>235</sup> While not a cartographer by trade, Marsden was highly invested in improving Britain's geographic knowledge of Southeast Asia and, as was the case with many members of the Royal Society at the time, he was particularly interested in the development and application of longitudinal measurements.<sup>236</sup> As such, despite his lack of technical training, Marsden was a keen advocate of the use of new scientific methods and he strove to produce a depiction of Sumatra and its immediate surroundings that was informed by 'authenticated facts.'<sup>237</sup> Marsden combined his strict adherence to the emergent scientific ideals with the most comprehensive geographic information available to him, the majority of which had been chiefly gathered by Alexander Dalrymple, the first Hydrographer of the British Admiralty.<sup>238</sup>

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<sup>235</sup> 'A Map of the Island of Sumatra in the East Indies', in William Marsden, *The History of Sumatra: Containing an Account of the Government, Laws, Customs and Manners of the Native Inhabitants, 3rd Edition* (London: J. McCreery, Black-Horse Court, 1811).

<sup>236</sup> Robert Hampson, *Cross-Cultural Encounters in Joseph Conrad's Malay Fiction: Writing Malaysia* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2000), 22.

<sup>237</sup> Marsden, *History of Sumatra*, vii.

<sup>238</sup> *Ibid.*, 3.

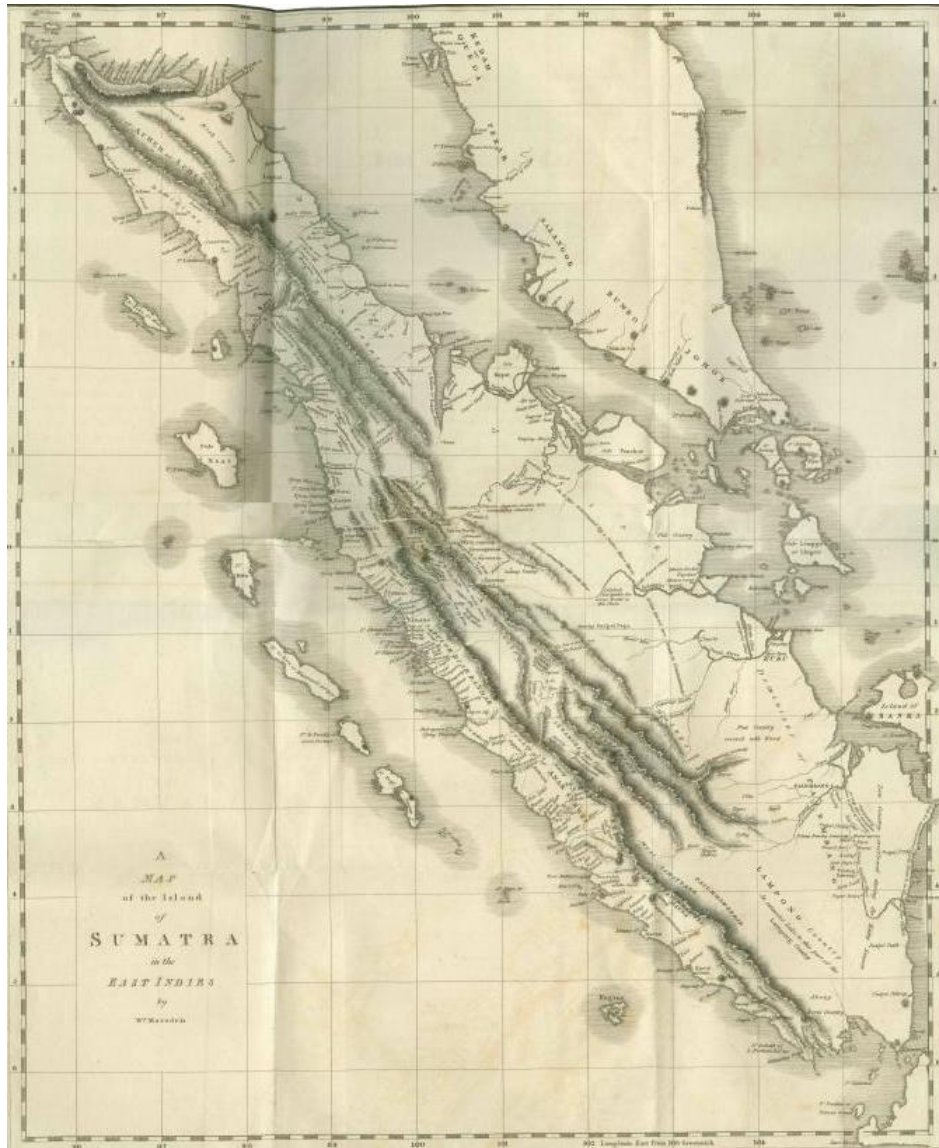


Figure 4. 'A Map of the Island of Sumatra in the East Indies', in William Marsden, *The History of Sumatra: Containing an Account of the Government, Laws, Customs and Manners of the Native Inhabitants*, 3<sup>rd</sup> Edition (London: J. McCreery, Black-Horse Court, 1811).

Dalrymple was a hugely influential, if now somewhat overlooked, figure in the development of the British Empire.<sup>239</sup> Author of the first English manual on nautical surveyance as well as thousands of charts, Dalrymple provided the bedrock of British geographic knowledge in Southeast Asia as well as the North and South Pacific in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries.<sup>240</sup> During his tenure as Hydrographer of the East India Company and later the Admiralty, Britain emerged as a world leader in the science of hydrography, and the significant improvement in British charts underpinned the successful expansion of imperial commerce.<sup>241</sup> In addition to

<sup>239</sup> Andrew Cook, 'Alexander Dalrymple and John Arnold: Chronometers and the representation of longitude on east India company charts', *Vistas in Astronomy*, 28, no. 1 (1985): 189-195.

<sup>240</sup> Howard Fry, *Alexander Dalrymple*, p. xiv.

<sup>241</sup> *Ibid.*, xvi.

researching, collating, and publishing this geographic information, Dalrymple also forwarded several hypotheses that proved revolutionary to the development of the British Empire. His work in the South Pacific famously led him to conclude that a vast and populous continent existed in the region, which he termed the Great South Land.<sup>242</sup> His theory was ultimately disproved, but his insistence proved a pivotal driving force behind the 1768 expedition to the South Pacific, the first of Captain James Cook's three Pacific voyages.<sup>243</sup> In Southeast Asia, his theories were equally influential, as his study of the trading prospects of the region led him to conclude that the ancient trade routes may 'not only be regained but extended much beyond what it ever was.'<sup>244</sup> Amongst the first to identify the region's commercial potential, he attempted to divert the China trade from Canton to a free trade port in the Sulu archipelago. Whilst this attempt was ultimately unsuccessful, his efforts established a precedent for the eventual foundation of Penang and Singapore and laid the conceptual foundation for a 'second British empire' that focused more on markets than colonies.<sup>245</sup> Marsden's use of Dalrymple's redoubtable geographic information therefore ensured that the value and accuracy of *A Map of the Island of Sumatra and the East Indies* could not be discounted. Consequently, whilst the map depicted in Fig. 4 is but one element of Marsden's comprehensive study on Sumatra, it stands in its own right as one of the most accurate maps of a region in Southeast Asia published in Britain by the turn of the nineteenth century.

*A History of Sumatra* was published to an overwhelmingly positive reception with all three editions, published in 1783, 1784, and 1811 respectively, becoming bestsellers and receiving translations into French and German.<sup>246</sup> In addition to the monograph's commercial success, lengthy excerpts of Marsden's work were also published in major journals, including the *Edinburgh Weekly Magazine*, *English Review*, *European Journal*, *Scots Magazine*, and *London Review*.<sup>247</sup> The popularity of the publication revealed a widespread interest in the region that was not necessarily

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<sup>242</sup> Alexander Dalrymple, *An Historical Collection of the Several Voyages and Discoveries in the South Pacific Ocean* (London: J Nourse, 1770).

<sup>243</sup> Lynne Withey, *Voyages of Discovery: Captain Cook and the Exploration of the Pacific* (London: University of California Press, 1989), 19.

<sup>244</sup> Howard Fry, *Alexander Dalrymple*, 15.

<sup>245</sup> *Ibid.*, xiii.

<sup>246</sup> Diana Carroll, 'William Marsden, The Scholar Behind *the History of Sumatra*', in *Indonesia and the Malay World*, 47, no. 137 (2019): 66.

<sup>247</sup> Carroll, 'William Marsden', 66.

reflected in imperial policy, nor was it particularly serviced in the existing literature. Whilst Marsden's was not the first study on the region to be published in English, it was 'the first detailed account of Sumatra' to appear in any European language.<sup>248</sup> The continued success of his subsequent editions demonstrated an enduring interest and investment in Southeast Asia amongst the British public, particularly as this was not an 'entertaining book' but a study of 'authenticated facts.'<sup>249</sup> For the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, Marsden's study became the touchstone for the public's knowledge of the region, and the maps that appeared in the opening pages were formative to Britain's visual conception of Southeast Asia.

The success of *A History of Sumatra* also had a seismic impact on the future literary representation of Southeast Asia. The scholarly culture of British geography in the late Enlightenment period was characterised by precision, rigour, and nationalism.<sup>250</sup> Whereas the work of geographers in the late Renaissance was regularly built upon citations of Latin and Greek authors, studies at the end of the eighteenth century were required to engage with a far broader and more current source base.<sup>251</sup> While geographers sought to utilise more current and precise information, their source selection also reflected a notable national bias. In John Pinkerton's *Modern Geography*, for example, Mayhew notes that a staggering 64% or nearly two-thirds of all references' in his depiction and discussion of Europe were British.<sup>252</sup> However, this over-representation of British sources did not extend to the extra-European arena, and his source material for Asia and the Americas relied on almost as many French sources as British.<sup>253</sup> One explanation Mayhew provides for this shift in source base is that the status of Europe was the most significant concern to Britons after the French Revolution. So, it was in the depiction of this continent that Pinkerton felt the greatest pressure to adhere to nationalistic lines.<sup>254</sup> However, another more practical concern may have influenced his reduced reliance upon British sources. Maps increasingly relied upon the latest accounts in the emerging pursuit of geographic precision and perfection. Since Southeast Asia was not a priority of the

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<sup>248</sup> Hampson, *Cross-Cultural Encounters*, 44.

<sup>249</sup> Marsden, *A History of Sumatra*, vi-vii.

<sup>250</sup> Robert Mayhew, 'Mapping Science's Imagined Community: Geography as a Republic of Letters, 1600-1800', *British Journal for the History of Science*, 38, no. 1, (2005), 91.

<sup>251</sup> *Ibid.*, 88.

<sup>252</sup> *Ibid.*, 86.

<sup>253</sup> *Ibid.*, 86.

<sup>254</sup> *Ibid.*, 86.

British empire by the end of the eighteenth century, Pinkerton could draw upon far fewer British sources. Marsden's *A History of Sumatra* represents a comprehensive, current, and essential British source base in this scenario. Therefore, Pinkerton relied upon Marsden's study to depict Sumatra and the surrounding area. *A History of Sumatra* was also extensively quoted in other 'modern geographies' such as George Alexander Cooke's *Modern and Authentic System of Universal Geography*.<sup>255</sup>

However, the greater influence of Marsden's work was its role in the emergence of a new literary genre. As Gareth Knapman and Mary Quilty have noted, the success of *A History of Sumatra* created a genre of lavishly illustrated encyclopaedic volumes about various islands and states of Southeast Asia written by former colonial administrators.<sup>256</sup> Raffles was notable amongst this new style of scholars, having developed a deep interest in the Malay language, literature, customs, and laws during his time in Southeast Asia.<sup>257</sup> Having first been posted to the region in 1805, Raffles had begun systematically collecting information on the area as early as 1808, and in 1817, he published his study *The History of Java*.<sup>258</sup> An encyclopaedic study of the island, the two-volume book considers Java's geography, anthropology, agriculture, economics, law, linguistics, art, religion and archaeology.<sup>259</sup> This was the first English publication of Java to make a significant impression amongst scholars and the reading public and has often been cited as the beginning of a new era of sophistication in the historical treatment of Java.<sup>260</sup> Seen as a foundational text in the history of Java, Raffles' work provided important groundwork for later scholarship, including Wilhelm von Humboldt's seminal linguistics study, *On the Kawi Language on the Island of Java*, considered the first comparative grammar of non-Indo-European languages, and

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<sup>255</sup> Carroll, 'William Marsden', 66; George Alexander Cooke, *Modern and Authentic System of Universal Geography: Containing an accurate and entertaining description of Europe, Asia, Africa and America* (London: McDonald and Son, 1802).

<sup>256</sup> Knapman, Milner and Quilty ed., *Liberalism and the British Empire*, 5.

<sup>257</sup> Hampson, *Cross-Cultural Encounters in Joseph Conrad's Malay Fiction*, 57.

<sup>258</sup> *Ibid.*, 57.

<sup>259</sup> Wayan Jarrah Sastrawan, 'Raffles as a historian of Java', in *Raffles Revisited*, ed. Stephen Murphy, 182.

<sup>260</sup> Sarah Tiffin, 'Raffles and the Barometer of Civilisation: Images and Descriptions of Ruined Candis in The History of Java', *Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society*, 18, no. 3 (2008): 341; Sastrawan, 'Raffles as a historian of Java', 182.

Raffles' study was also cited in Karl Marx's *Capital* (vol. 1) in his discussion of seventeenth-century Dutch capitalism and colonialism.<sup>261</sup>

Recent scholarship has revealed that although Raffles often presented his research on the island as pioneering, his work was heavily reliant upon pre-existing colonial Dutch scholarship and that his reliance on intermediaries limited his access to source materials and compromised his judgement.<sup>262</sup> As scholarship has evolved, these limitations have, unsurprisingly, rendered *The History of Java* unusable as a reliable source of information about premodern Javanese history.<sup>263</sup> However, as Raffles' work represented some of Britain's first forays into studying Southeast Asia, similar to the information gathered by country traders, the act of gathering knowledge was more important than its accuracy. In the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, the establishment of nation-states and colonial power increasingly depended on determining, codifying, controlling and representing the past.<sup>264</sup> This was a particularly important tool of empire in nineteenth-century Southeast Asia, where the earlier forms of European colonialism, which had been founded on narratives of religious conflict, were replaced with progressive narratives of development and progress.<sup>265</sup> As historian Farish Noor succinctly put it, 'at the height of the imperial era, collecting Asian and African antiquities went hand-in-hand with collection Asian and African colonies too.'<sup>266</sup> In this context, as the first prominent colonial official to amass a large personal collection of local artefacts and systematically study their history, Raffles was very influential in the legitimisation and enforcement of colonial authority in the region.<sup>267</sup> Consequently, although Raffles' interest in Southeast Asia appears genuine, it was the interest of a colonial ruler who wished to know his possessions better.<sup>268</sup>

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<sup>261</sup> Floris Solleveld, 'Expanding the comparative view: Humbolt's *Über die Kawi-Sprache* and its language materials', *Historiographia Linguistica*, 47, no. 1 (2020): 52-82; Sastrawan, 'Raffles as a historian of Java', 182.

<sup>262</sup> Sastrawan, 'Raffles as a historian of Java', 182.

<sup>263</sup> *Ibid.*, 192.

<sup>264</sup> Bernard Cohn, *Colonialism and Its Forms of Knowledge: The British in India* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1996), 3.

<sup>265</sup> Farish A. Noor, 'Collecting power, collecting as power: Raffles, the East India Company, and the legacy of nineteenth-century colonialism', in *Raffles Revisited*, ed. Stephen Murphy, 36.

<sup>266</sup> Noor, 'Collecting power, collecting as power: Raffles, the East India Company, and the legacy of nineteenth-century colonialism', 43.

<sup>267</sup> Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism*, Revised Edition. (London: Verso, 2006).

<sup>268</sup> Noor, 'Collecting power, collecting as power: Raffles, the East India Company, and the legacy of nineteenth-century colonialism', 37.



Returning to the impact of Marsden's publication, the compositional decisions in *A Map of the Island of Sumatra* reflected his scientific approach to its creation. Sumatra is not only located at the centre of the map, but it dominates the entire depiction, with the borders of the image dictated by the island's northern and southernmost points. This hyper-focused composition enabled Marsden to fix the triangulation of key British locations, such as Fort Marlborough, along the longitudinal and latitudinal axes. This use of longitude and latitude set Marsden's map apart from the general maps of Asia produced by Moll and Bowen, whose primary use of the measurement was to provide a framework by which they could combine multiple surveys to create their final product.<sup>269</sup> This meant that whilst including coordinates in general maps provided navigators with approximate coordinates, their large-scale scope prevented them from achieving the same exactitude as Marsden's depiction of Sumatra. Marsden emphasised his commitment to achieving geographic precision in his textual description of Sumatra in the opening pages of his monograph, observing that:

The only point of the island whose longitude has been settled by actual observation, is Fort Marlborough, near Bencoolen, the principal English settlement, standing in three degrees forty-six minutes of south latitude. From eclipses of Jupiter's satellites observed in June preparatory to an observation of the transit of the planet Venus over the sun's disc, Mr. Robert Nairne calculated its longitude to be  $101^{\circ} 42' 44''$ ; which was afterwards corrected by the Astronomer Royal to  $102^{\circ}$  east of Greenwich. The situation of *Achin Head* is pretty accurately fixed by computation at  $95^{\circ} 34'$ ; and longitudes of places in the straits of Sunda are well ascertained by the short runs from Batavia, which city has the advantage of an observatory. By the general use of chronometers in latter times, the means have been afforded of determining the positions of many prominent points both on the eastern and western coasts, by which the map of the island has been considerably improved...

This new degree of accuracy with which the East Indies could now be imagined contributed to a wider movement in British cartography that increasingly framed the globe in precise relation to the Greenwich prime meridian.

Greenwich had been established as the baseline for British mapping and astronomical work from the late 1760s following the publication of Nevil Maskelyne's *Nautical Almanac and Astronomical Ephemeris*.<sup>270</sup> Britain's move away from using multiple meridians and the subsequent adoption of Greenwich as the prime meridian

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<sup>269</sup> Edney, *Mapping an Empire*, 17.

<sup>270</sup> Charles Withers, *Zero Degrees: Geographies of the Prime Meridian* (London: Harvard University Press, 2017), 14.

for oceanic navigation proved pivotal to the development of British cartography. While it would not be universally adopted until 1884, in Britain, the prime meridian became the basis of a new map language that promised eventual geographic perfection and encouraged ever-greater attempts at precision.<sup>271</sup> In 1791, for example, under the leadership of William Roy and William Mudge, the Ordnance Survey undertook the triangulation of Britain, and in 1801 began the one-inch-to-one-mile mapping of Kent.<sup>272</sup> Whilst this level of precision far exceeded Marsden's own, his application of longitudinal science to the empire's periphery nevertheless marked a significant advancement in British and European knowledge.

Within Britain, *A Map of Sumatra* was notable for providing a frame of reference for a region previously rarely featured in British nautical materials. For example, the publication of *Nautical Almanac and Astronomical Ephemeris* in the 1760s provided estimated longitudes of countries across the globe from the Americas to Bombay, but with the notable exception of Southeast Asia.<sup>273</sup> The Almanac was distributed to mariners throughout the British Empire to improve nautical navigation and refine imperial trade networks. Southeast Asia's omission from this reference book demonstrates Britain's low priority on exploration and expansion in Southeast Asia. This attitude of indifference was reflected in the East India Company's policy of containment rather than expansion. Against this backdrop of geographic ignorance, Marsden's map provided vital information for British navigators and facilitated Britain's more aggressive approach to the region in the nineteenth century.

*A Map of Sumatra* also represented a significant advancement of knowledge within nations that pursued a more proactive imperial policy in Southeast Asia, such as the Dutch. In his accompanying monograph, Marsden highlighted the inaccuracies of all previous maps of the island, arguing that Francois Valentyn's 'great work is so extremely incorrect, even in regard to those parts immediately subject to the Dutch government, as to be quite useless.'<sup>274</sup> Published as part of a seminal five-volume study on all the major settlements of the Verenigde Oost-Indische Compagnie (VOC), Valentyn's *New Map of the Island of Sumatra, 1724-26* was one of the most detailed

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<sup>271</sup> Matthew Edney, 'Cartographic Culture and Nationalism in the United States: Benjamin Vaughan and the Choice for a Prime Meridian, 1811', in *Journal of Historical Geography*, 20, no. 4 (1994): 387.

<sup>272</sup> Withers, *Zero Degrees*, 110.

<sup>273</sup> *The Nautical Almanac and Astronomical Ephemeris, for the year 1769*, Commissioners of Longitude, National Maritime Museum, NAO1769, 199.

<sup>274</sup> Marsden, *A History of Sumatra*, 3.

maps of the region in the eighteenth century. It was the model upon which many subsequent maps were based.<sup>275</sup> The unprecedentedly comprehensive depiction of the region lent Valentyn's map a great deal of geographic authority. When coupled with his extensive experiences as Minister of the East Indies, his work was widely considered a foundational text in the history of Dutch colonialism. It influenced colonial policy into the nineteenth century.<sup>276</sup> Yet, despite his tenure in Southeast Asia, Valentyn had visited neither Sumatra nor Malacca, and – as was the case for much of his written work – his information was likely derived from secret and confidential VOC documents.<sup>277</sup> While the VOC actively sought to confine the dissemination of their geographic knowledge of Southeast Asia for fear that competitors would exploit it, many of their employees had received academic training. They were genuinely interested in using their research to aid the company and serve the progress of science and the enlightenment of the European public.<sup>278</sup> The tension between the ideals of the company and its employees meant that prohibitions on official documents, including maps and charts, were frequently broken, and many returning officers retained their duplicates of official papers.<sup>279</sup> When Valentyn announced his intention to write his history of the East Indies, many retired officials came forward to offer copies of Company knowledge to assist his research.<sup>280</sup> Consequently, the underhand nature of his source base notwithstanding, the sophistication of Valentyn's *New Map of the Island of Sumatra* provided a rare insight into the extent of the VOC's geographic knowledge of Southeast Asia.

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<sup>275</sup> Francois Valentyn, *Oud en Nieuw Oost-Indien, vervattende Een Naaukeurige en Uitvoerige Verhandeling van Nederlands Mogendheyd In die Geweesten*. (Amsterdam, J. van Braam & G. onder de Linden, 1724-26).

<sup>276</sup> Siegfried Huigen, 'Repacking East Indies Natural History in Francois Valentyn's *Oud en Nieuw Oost-Indien*', *Early Modern Low Countries*, 3, no. 2 (2009), 235.

<sup>277</sup> Sinnappah Arasaratnam ed., *François Valentijn's Description of Ceylon: (Oud en Nieuw Oost-Indien, 1726)* (London: The Hakluyt Society, 1978), 17, 25.

<sup>278</sup> Siegfried Huigen, Jan L. de Jong and Elmer Kolfin eds. *The Dutch Trading Companies as Knowledge Networks* (Leiden: Brill, 2010), 237.

<sup>279</sup> Arasaratnam ed., *François Valentijn's Description of Ceylon*, 25.

<sup>280</sup> *Ibid.*, 25.

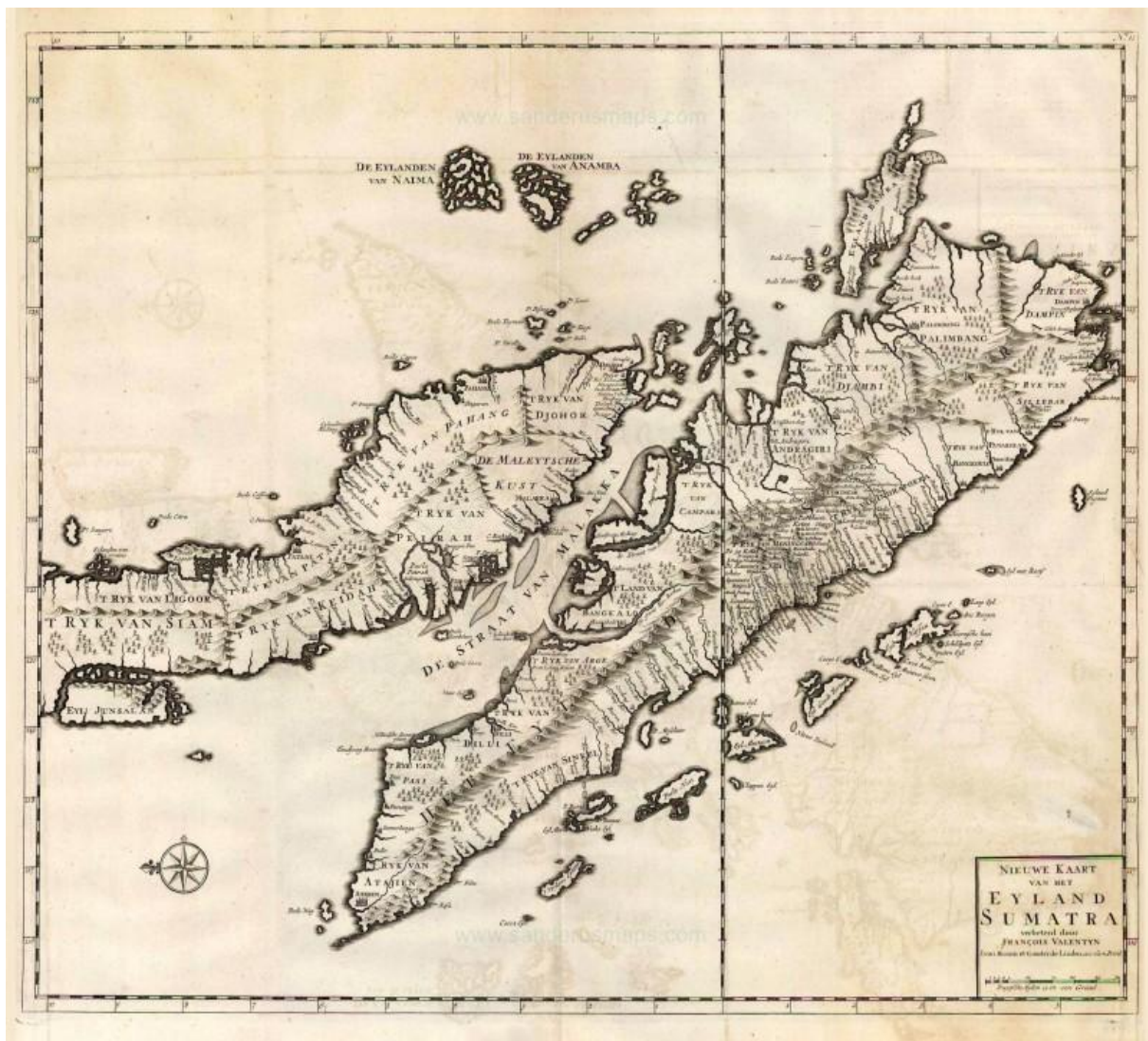


Figure 5. Valentyn F., *Oud en Nieuw Oost-Indien, vervattende Een Naaukeurige en Uitvoerige Verhandeling van Nederlands Mogendheyd In die Geweesten*. (Old and New East Indies, Containing an Accurate and Comprehensive Treatise of the Dutch Power in those Regions)

An examination of Valentyn's map (Fig. 5) reveals that the Dutch had developed a considerably sophisticated understanding of the internal politics of Sumatra and the Malay Archipelago. In addition to identifying natural features, such as rivers and lakes, Valentyn's map contains upwards of a hundred annotations detailing the locations of cities, settlements, and seven separate polities within the peninsula.<sup>281</sup> His representation of the southern tip of the Malay Archipelago, which, due to its eastern orientation, is located towards the centre of the map, is particularly detailed. Here Valentyn denotes eight settlements, including Johor – represented as the largest city – and Passir (roughly located at the current city of Pasir Gudang) and Sincapoera.<sup>282</sup>

<sup>281</sup> Frederic Durand and Dato Richard Curtis, *Maps of Malaya and Borneo: Discovery, Statehood and Progress: The Collections of H.R.H Sultan Sharafuddin Idris Shah and Dato Richard Curtis* (Singapore: Editions Didier Millet, 2013), 49-50.

<sup>282</sup> Valentyn, *Oud en Nieuw Oost-Indien, vervattende Een Naaukeurige en Uitvoerige Verhandeling van Nederlands Mogendheyd In die Geweesten*.

The level of local knowledge displayed in this small segment of Valentyn's *New Map of the Island of Sumatra* indicates that the VOC's secret documents contained a significant amount of information likely derived from their extensive interactions with the local population. Consequently, whilst Valentyn never visited the territories, his utilisation of Company documents meant that his map relied heavily on cross-cultural interactions. Moreover, Valentyn's limited topographic and hydrographic information in his otherwise finely detailed map suggests that the VOC placed a greater onus on understanding the region's human, rather than its physical, geography in the eighteenth century.

In contrast, Marsden's map (Fig. 4) is only a vague representation of Sumatra and the Malay Archipelago. The map's northern orientation immediately implies a divergence in the purpose and means of creation from Valentyn's map. Whereas Valentyn appeared to favour a composition that complimented his heavy annotation style and enabled him to convey much non-topographic information, Marsden's composition emphasises geographic precision and accuracy. This orientational adjustment also had a significant effect in reinforcing the centrality of Sumatra whilst side-lining the Malay Archipelago, which gives the impression that its inclusion was borne entirely from geographic necessity. The omission of almost any textuality further underpins Marsden's authorial dismissal of the peninsula. Unlike Valentyn's highly detailed approach, Marsden's portrayal of the archipelago's interior is so devoid of detail that it is almost indistinguishable from his depiction of the sea.

The utilisation of blank spaces is also evident in the interior of Sumatra, where Marsden appeared reluctant to include specific topographical information unverified by European sources. Many undetailed areas of Sumatra's interior are often accompanied only by vague annotations such as 'an extensive lake in this part of the Lampong country' and 'flat country covered with wood'. As shown in Fig. 4, the only natural features actually depicted on the map are mountain ranges and rivers, both of which were observable from sea or colonial settlements. This approach is particularly evident in his treatment of the Indragiri River, the Jambi River (Batang Hari River), and the Sagu River (Siak River) along Sumatra's eastern coast. In his map, these three rivers are portrayed as entirely independent, yet Marsden acknowledged that: 'In a

Map constructed by a Native these three Great Rivers were made to Communicate.’<sup>283</sup> While the inclusion of this annotation indicated Marsden’s uncertainty about the geographic reality, the visual deviation between his own map and the indigenous map he references highlights his distrust of local knowledge. Therefore, whilst Valentyn’s map was complete with local knowledge, in his pursuit of precision and ‘authenticated fact’, Marsden preferred to include blank spaces over unsubstantiated information. Marsden’s more selective use of geographic knowledge meant that whilst he conveyed less information, the knowledge he depicted carried more authority amongst his European readership.

For the most part, Marsden’s portrayal of Singapore was deserving of the map’s wider reputation for accuracy and precision. In the twelve years between the publication of *The Straits of Singapore* and *A Map of the Island of Sumatra*, Marsden had managed to once again improve upon the British knowledge of the island. Despite his overt prioritisation of the representation of Sumatra, it is clear that Marsden also consulted new and more accurate geographic information about Singapore, the majority of which appears to have been gathered on the southern half of the island. The most evident development across the two maps was the portrayal of southwest island *Tooly*. Where Laurie and Whittle’s map portrayed the island as a regular horizontal oval approximately half the size of the main island of *Sincapore*, Marsden significantly reduces its size and presents a more defined and complex depiction of its coastline. He also separates the single landmass into a collection of closely situated smaller islands. These changes significantly improved British knowledge of the south of Singapore. Although Marsden’s depiction continued to overstate the size of the smaller islands, it was nevertheless a far more accurate portrayal of the Jurong Islands. While we have far less information regarding the provenance of Marsden’s information than we do of Laurie and Whittle’s, it can be safely assumed that his refinement of Singapore’s southern coast was the product of an increase in both quantity and quality of surveys that accompanied the expansion of intra-Asian trade, the vast majority of which was shipped along the Straits of Singapore.<sup>284</sup> However,

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<sup>283</sup> Marsden, *A Map of the Island of Sumatra in the East Indies*, 1811.

<sup>284</sup> Kaoru Sugihara, ‘The Resurgence of Intra-Asian Trade, 1800-1850’, in *How India Clothed the World: The World of South Asian Textiles, 1500-1850*, ed. Giorgio Riello and Tirthankar Roy (Leiden: Brill, 2009); and Anthony Reid, ‘A New Phase of Commercial Expansion in Southeast Asia, 1760-1850’, in *The Last Stand of Asian Autonomies: Response to Modernity in the Diverse States of Southeast Asia and Korea, 1750-1900*, ed. Anthony Reid (London: Macmillan Press Ltd, 1997).

Marsden's reliance on this new and expanded source of information meant that whilst his depiction of Singapore's south side improved, his depiction of the north remained rooted in outdated and incorrect knowledge. Like Moll, Bowen, and Laurie and Whittle before him, Marsden believed that Singapore was divided into two similarly sized islands through which the old straits of Singapore used to run. The century-long endurance of this highly inaccurate portrayal of Singapore's northern perimeter is perhaps the most telling evidence that Britain's engagement in the region was limited solely to maritime trade.

In comparison, a brief return to Valentyn's map (Fig.5) demonstrates that despite being published in the 1720s, he had already exhibited the VOC's greater geographic knowledge of the north of Singapore. His depiction of Pulau Ubin as a far smaller island located to the northwest of the main island, in particular, is a more sophisticated portrayal than the British achieved before they colonised the island. The discrepancy in British and Dutch knowledge was attributable to the VOC's territorial interest in Singapore in the seventeenth century and their willingness to engage with local geographic knowledge. As Borschberg identifies, before the establishment of the Dutch settlement at Batavia, the VOC had recognised Singapore as a potential site for their Asian base, and their knowledge of the region was in large part gathered from discussion with Abdullah Ma'ayat Shah, the ruler of Johor.<sup>285</sup> A quick comparison of Dutch and British depictions of Singapore provides insight into both nations' differing imperial policies. The VOC's more extensive accumulation of knowledge, as reflected in the greater accuracy of their map, demonstrated their territorial objectives in the region, whilst Britain's increasingly sophisticated understanding of the southern coastline reflected their interest in trade and maritime networks. By the time Raffles established a settlement on the island, the evolution of British maps shows that they had developed a sophisticated understanding of Singapore's value as a port along a busy maritime trade network and had little to no appreciation of anything else.

The incremental, systematic, and consistent improvement of Britain's geographical understanding of Singapore over almost a century, coupled with the East India Company's gradual recognition of the island's potential significance, was starkly juxtaposed by the island's abrupt emergence within Britain's imperial consciousness

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<sup>285</sup> Peter Borschberg, 'Singapore and its Straits, c. 1500-1800, *Indonesia and the Malay World*, 45, no. 133 (2017): 384-6.

just two decades into the nineteenth century. Where knowledge of the island was previously restricted to, and of interest to, a limited number of cartographers, scholars, and Company officials, by the early 1820s, the island's fate was national news, debated in both Parliament and national newspapers. However, as this chapter's exploration of Singapore's slow, almost incidental, manifestation at the periphery of the empire has demonstrated, knowledge of the island – whether geographic or otherwise – was exceedingly scarce, and so the perceptions of Singapore that emerged during this period did so devoid of any contextual knowledge. In this sense, Singapore represented a blank slate in the British imagination, upon which differing visions were projected. In contrast to the methodological and scientific process of Singapore's depiction explored in this chapter, the following chapter examines the process of the almost artificial construction of Singapore's identity over the course of the nineteenth century, seeking to discover the origins of the island's distorted portrayals in the British imagination.



## Chapter Two: From a Nameless Isle to the 'Charing Cross of the East'

For the vast majority of the nineteenth century, the conceptualisation of Singapore within the British imagination was shaped by Western figures. The settlement first appeared in the British consciousness through the lens of Raffles' idealised vision of a colony that embodied the most noble of British ideals.<sup>286</sup> This projection of Singapore's potential was quickly subsumed by the British public's nationalistic desire to promote the Empire's goals whilst curtailing those of rival imperial nations.<sup>287</sup> In this far less personal and more abstract projection of Singapore, the colony was perceived primarily through its strategic importance and potential. While it became the subject of national debate in the early 1820s, there were remarkably few descriptions of the island's natural and urban appearance. The abstracted view of Singapore was further reinforced when Britain's powerful economic institutions began to dominate the national discussion towards the end of the Anglo-Dutch negotiations.<sup>288</sup> This chapter explores Singapore's perception within Britain during this period, arguing that it was viewed less as an island with an indigenous population and nascent British settlement but instead as an arena in which the opposing economic ideals of free trade and protectionism were fought. This abstract image of Singapore eventually began to take on a more personal form in the 1860s with the arrival of prominent travel writers to the settlement, who discovered that the reality of Singapore's development did not conform to the image that had accompanied Raffles' rehabilitated reputation.<sup>289</sup> Consequently, the image Singapore envisioned towards the end of the century was a return to Raffles' personal image of the settlement that first emerged decades earlier. The simplicity of the development of Singapore's perception – from a settlement of commercial potential to a well-structured colony that reflected British ideals – held significant appeal to biographers and historians in the late-nineteenth and early twentieth centuries and has, therefore, been perpetuated and gradually incorporated into national narratives.

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<sup>286</sup> Tze Shiung Ng, 'The ideological origins of the founding of Singapore', 76-77.

<sup>287</sup> Raffles to Colonel James Young, 12 January 1819, in Kevin Tan and Lim Chen Sian, *Raffles' Letters: Intrigues Behind the Founding of Singapore*; and Raffles to Lansdowne, 19 January 1821, in Bastin, *Raffles and Hastings*.

<sup>288</sup> Peter Borschberg, 'Dutch Objections to British Singapore, 1819-1824: Law, politics, commerce and a diplomatic misstep', *Journal of Southeast Asian Studies*, 50, no. 4 (2019).

<sup>289</sup> Bastin, *Travellers' Singapore: An Anthology*.

This chapter addresses four principal considerations in Singapore's transformation in the British imperial imagination. The first aspect of Singapore's elevation is Stamford Raffles' personal ambitions and motivation. While it is becoming increasingly clear in the current historiography that Raffles' role in Singapore's development has been previously overstated in traditional literature, his place in Singapore's colonial history is undeniable. It is widely accepted that, as the founder of the British colony, Raffles exerted unparalleled influence over Britain's initial conceptualisation of Singapore, yet how he was able to convey his romanticised image of the colony has yet to be fully examined. To provide further understanding and insight into this process, the first section of this chapter is structured around the examination of key materials produced by Raffles in the period between 1819 and 1824, including personal and public letters written to acquaintances and political allies, self-published texts that rationalised his actions, and policies enacted in the settlement.

After examining Raffles' personal ambitions and early developmental visions for Singapore, the analysis scrutinises how Raffles' portrayal of Singapore was received in the metropole. This analysis is structured around the negotiations between the British and the Dutch, culminating in the Treaty of London 1824. Given Singapore's lack of representation in British cartography up until the turn of the nineteenth century, it is very plausible that the island's colonisation would have had far less impact upon the British consciousness had the settlement's future not been contested by the Netherlands, at the time, were Britain's primary imperial rivals in Southeast Asia. As it was, however, Singapore burst into the public consciousness as the focal point of diplomatic negotiations between the two European empires, the conclusion of which had seismic ramifications upon the shape of imperialism in Southeast Asia throughout the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. As such, an examination of the British metropole, encompassing politicians, mercantile communities, and the general populace during the diplomatic negotiations between the British and the Dutch, is fundamental to establishing the extent to which Raffles' ideals and hopes for Singapore were able to influence British opinion and, conversely, to understand the degree to which perceptions of the settlement developed independently of him.

After examining Singapore's portrayal in the metropole, the analysis of Singapore's image revisits the significance of cartography and imperial maps on the evolution of the British imagination. Revolving around a detailed examination of a town

planning blueprint known as the Jackson Plan, this section explores the symbolic significance of the map as a visual representation of British imperial supremacy over the island, with a detailed examination of the map's composition establishing the framework for the first visual representation of empire in Singapore, which has endured for much of the nineteenth century.

Finally, this chapter concludes with a more historical perspective of Raffles' legacy and influence over Singapore's image in the British imagination. Where the chapter begins with an examination of his actions, this third section explores Raffles' posthumous influence over the British imperial imagination. Recent studies have demonstrated that the version of Raffles regularly portrayed in Singapore's traditional literature as a visionary and colonial icon was, in fact, an artificially manufactured portrayal of a figure who, in reality, died ostracised and discredited by the Company and many in the metropole. It was not until the mid-nineteenth century and the emergence of Singapore as a central component of the British Empire in Southeast Asia that his reputation was rehabilitated and elevated to the stature he enjoyed in orthodox historiography and contemporary political narratives.<sup>290</sup> Examining this rehabilitation provides vital insight into the enduring legacy of Raffles' vision of Singapore and demonstrates the malleability and manipulability of the British colonial imagination. Moreover, this examination of Raffles' posthumous reputation provides essential context for the magnified influence of documents he produced or contributed to, such as the Jackson Plan.

The analysis of this chapter is built upon a source base of Raffles' public and private correspondence, official documents, and first-hand accounts. Where the delicate nuances and complexities of these sources may have been previously overlooked in favour of a more cohesive narrative; however, they have been used to explore the discrepancies in Singapore's portrayal and highlight the complicated nature of Singapore's incorporation into the British Empire. The framework in which these sources are approached is also more critical than in orthodox historiography, surpassing an examination of the narrative surrounding Singapore's inception to delve into a nuanced exploration of its underlying causes and mechanisms.

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<sup>290</sup> Timothy Bernard, 'Commemorating Raffles: The Creation of an Imperial Icon in Colonial Singapore', *Journal of Southeast Asian Studies*, 50, no. 4 (2019): 581.

## Tracing Raffles' Vision: The Genesis of Singapore's Colonial Blueprint

The founding of British Singapore was not the result of a thoughtful and deliberate colonial policy but rather the opportunistic gambit of a lone Company official.<sup>291</sup> Yet, the spontaneity of Raffles' land grab belied his longstanding and well-considered ambition of establishing his ideologically ideal colony in Southeast Asia. In Singapore, Raffles saw the opportunity to combine his overarching political objective of 'forming a permanent British Establishment in the Malayan Archipelago, by which the progress of the Dutch Supremacy may be checked and all our Interests, political and commercial secured' with his more personal desire to create a colony that reflected his philosophy of governance.<sup>292</sup> Heavily influenced by his earlier career in Southeast Asia, and especially his time as Resident in Bencoolen, Raffles had developed a more holistic attitude towards governance than the Company's typically commercial approach.<sup>293</sup> Primarily, he sought to establish an atypically humanitarian colonial government large enough to intervene in the market and protect local industry.<sup>294</sup> Instead of viewing his role as just a Resident in charge of protecting and enhancing Britain's commercial interests, he saw himself as a political agent in Indigenous affairs and highly valued the impact colonial governance could have on the region.<sup>295</sup> In Singapore, Raffles saw the potential to establish a government that uniquely combined the Company's private commercial interest with a public political interest. His intention was to restore the order between 'commercial principle', 'equitable governance', and Christian philanthropy through a contradictory policy of deregulation for the European merchant and protectionism for the native market.<sup>296</sup>

On 22 February 1819, just three weeks after he had signed the formal treaty with Tengku Hussein, Raffles wrote to his long-term correspondent, the Duchess of Somerset, to inform her of his success, mentioning:

It has been my good fortune to establish this Station in a position combining every possible advantage, geographical and local...I must, however, tell you

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<sup>291</sup> As primarily evidenced by the almost unanimous admonishment of Raffles' action from Company officials in the years immediately subsequent to the event; Borschberg, 'Dutch Objections to British Singapore, 1819-1824', 540-561.

<sup>292</sup> Raffles to Charlotte, Duchess of Somerset, 22 February 1819, cited from John Bastin, *Raffles and Hastings: Private Exchanges behind the Founding of Singapore* (Singapore: National Library Board Singapore, 2014)

<sup>293</sup> Raffles to John Adam, 16 November 1818, D6: Straits Settlements Records.

<sup>294</sup> Tze Shiung Ng, 'The ideological origins of the founding of Singapore', 76-77.

<sup>295</sup> *Ibid.*, 77.

<sup>296</sup> *Ibid.*, 80.

where you are to look for it on the Map – Follow me from Calcutta within the Nicobar & Andaman Islands to Prince of Wales Island, then accompany me down the Straits of Malacca, past the Town of Malacca, and round the South Western Point of the Peninsula – You will then enter what are called the Straits of Singapore and in Marsden’s Map of Sumatra you will observe an Island to the North of the Straits called Singapura – this is the spot or the site of the ancient Maritime Capital of the Malays and within the walls of their fortifications raised no less than six centuries ago, I have planted the British flag...<sup>297</sup>

While seemingly innocuous, this letter provides an essential insight into the British public’s knowledge, or lack thereof, of Singapore before 1819. The recipient of the letter, Charlotte Seymour, the Duchess of Somerset, is a particularly good individual through whom to assess the metropole’s upper classes’ awareness and imagination of the Malay Archipelago. The second wife of Charles Seymour and daughter of Daniel Finch, 7<sup>th</sup> Earl of Winchilsea and 2<sup>nd</sup> Earl of Nottingham, Charlotte Seymour, was well-connected amongst London’s elite. Furthermore, as both her husband and father were members of the Royal Society, Seymour was also heavily involved with Britain’s intelligentsia and even had close correspondences with the country’s leading poets, including Byron and Samuel Rogers.<sup>298</sup> She had also been in communication with Raffles from 1817. During that time, he regularly informed her of developments in Southeast Asia. He sent her first editions of his books *Substance of a Minute...on the Establishment of Land Rental on the Island of Java*, *Malayan Miscellanies* and the *Proceedings of the Agricultural Society*.<sup>299</sup> Strikingly, Raffles’ letter to Seymour worked on the assumption that she would not have been aware of Singapore’s geographic location despite being a prominent member of Britain’s intelligentsia. This also suggests that Raffles rarely, if ever, mentioned Singapore in their correspondences before 1819, which indicates that the island featured very infrequently in British imperial policy during this period. This is supported by the fact that *Singapura* is only mentioned twice in Raffles’ *The History of Java*, the first of which is about a fourteenth-century Malayan romance and the second in his account of the rise of Pangeran Trangana in fifteenth-century Java.<sup>300</sup> From Raffles’ assumption of Seymour’s

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<sup>297</sup> Bastin, *Raffles and Hastings Private Exchanges Behind the Founding of Singapore*, 99.

<sup>298</sup> *Ibid.*, 146 n37.

<sup>299</sup> Stamford Raffles, *Substance of a minute recorded by the Honourable Thomas Samford Raffles: on the introduction of an improved system of internal management and the establishment of a land rental on the island of Java* (London: Cox and Baylis, 1814).

<sup>300</sup> Stamford Raffles, *The History of Java, Vol II* (Java: John Murray, 1830), 98, 149; and Soenoto Faizah, ‘Panji Romance, Love story in Malay Version’, *Rivista Degli Studi Orientali* 78 (2007): 195-200.

ignorance of Singapore's location, despite her keen interest in the region, it can be extrapolated that the island had a very limited impact on the public imagination prior to 1819.

Raffles wrote several more letters to Seymour informing her of developments in Singapore, including two letters in June 1819, clearly conveying his passion for the settlement. Raffles' effusiveness for the newly formed settlement and his personal connection to Singapore was evidenced in the habitual use of possessive terminology in his private correspondences. This was illustrated in the letters he wrote to London just a few months after his arrival/in Singapore, in which he referred to Singapore as '**my** new colony' and described the fledgling settlement as 'a Child of **my** own.'<sup>301</sup> In Raffles' other letter to Seymour that month, he informed her of the potential risk that the settlement may not remain a British possession, but he framed this issue in a typically cavalier manner, writing:

We only require confidence in the permanency of our tenure [for it] to rise rapidly into importance – My proceedings have met with the unreserved approbation of Lord Hastings and altho I have had much to contend with from the narrow views of the Penang Government there is little reason for apprehension provided we can manage the Dutch.<sup>302</sup>

Given Seymour's extensive contacts, which included the President of the Royal Society, Sir Joseph Banks, and the leading figure of the Whig party, Henry Petty-Fitzmaurice, 3<sup>rd</sup> Marquess of Lansdowne, it is likely that Raffles' announcement that Singapore's future was dependent upon British 'confidence' was an indirect effort to generate support for the settlement amongst London's social elite.<sup>303</sup> The political contacts that Seymour's friendship provided proved fruitful to Raffles' cause, and he quickly struck up a correspondence with the Marquess of Lansdowne, who became a firm political ally. In January 1821, Raffles wrote what would turn out to be a highly influential letter to his close political contact – the implications of which are explored below – in which reasserted his personal connection and possessiveness of the settlement, as he conveyed his 'satisfaction in reporting that **my** Settlement of

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<sup>301</sup> Raffles to Charlotte, Duchess of Somerset, 11 June 1819, cited from John Bastin, *Raffles and Hastings: Private Exchanges behind the Founding of Singapore*. Emphasis own.

<sup>302</sup> Raffles to Charlotte, Duchess of Somerset, 9 June 1819, cited from John Bastin, *Raffles and Hastings: Private Exchanges behind the Founding of Singapore*. Emphasis own.

<sup>303</sup> Chambers, *The Letters of Sir Joseph Banks*, Letters 118, 121, 122, 124 in John Bastin, *Raffles and Hastings: Private Exchanges behind the Founding of Singapore*.

Singapore continues to advance, steadily but yet rapidly.<sup>304</sup> It is clear then that although Singapore certainly held merits as a British colony when Raffles envisioned and conveyed the settlement's potential, his idealised vision was as much based upon his personal ambitions as it was upon its imperial merits. While it is impossible to quantify the emergence of a colony within a nation's imperial consciousness, given Seymour's status as a well-connected member of London's upper-class intelligentsia, it is probable that she widely shared and discussed Raffles' very favourable and idealised conceptualisation of Singapore, thus prejudicing the social elites' opinion of the settlement.

In his public correspondence, however, Raffles presented a far more impartial image of Singapore, and his support for the settlement was expressed within the framework of British imperialism. In his *Statement of the Services of Sir Stamford Raffles*, in which he presented and defended his tenure in Southeast Asia to the Company's Court of Directors, Raffles stated:

...while I pursued throughout one unvarying purpose of upholding the honour and interests of my country, and benefiting, to the utmost of my power, the countries and people placed under my authority, at the risk of all personal considerations, the result has, in a public point of view, proved no less creditable to the national character, than the establishment of Singapore has proved advantageous to our commercial interests in that quarter of the world.<sup>305</sup>

The emphasis on his nationalistic motivations in this public publication was also supported by a subtle shift in his language, whereby he dropped the possessive use of 'my' in favour of more collective terminology. So, when providing a public report on the settlement's development, he wrote of 'the rapidity with which the population of the surrounding countries recently flocked to Singapore at the sight of **our** flag.'<sup>306</sup> The significance of Singapore's role also changed in his public correspondence to appeal more directly to the public's renewed imperialist zeal. So, he placed greater weight on the settlement's ability to curb Dutch influence in the region, its ability to protect the China trade, and its potential to dominate regional trade in its own right.<sup>307</sup> Whilst it is

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<sup>304</sup> Raffles to Lansdowne, 1 March 1822, cited from John Bastin, *Raffles and Hastings: Private Exchanges behind the Founding of Singapore*, 158. Emphasis own.

<sup>305</sup> Stamford Raffles, *State of the Services of Stamford Raffles* (London: Cox and Baylis, 1824), 5.

<sup>306</sup> Raffles, *State of the Services of Stamford Raffles*, 68. Emphasis own.

<sup>307</sup> Raffles to Colonel James Young, 12 January 1819, in Kevin Tan and Lim Chen Sian, *Raffles' Letters: Intrigues Behind the Founding of Singapore*; and Raffles to Lansdowne, 19 January 1821, in Bastin, *Raffles and Hastings*.

impossible to quantify the impact of Raffles' change of tone in his letters, this chapter will argue that it is undeniable that when news of Singapore's establishment reached London, it was received overwhelmingly positively by the press and the general public.

Raffles' commitment to create a settlement distinguishable from other British colonies for its implementation of 'equitable governance' was not just confined to his letters. The sincerity of this desire was perhaps best demonstrated in his unwavering stance on the abolition of slavery within his colony. Throughout his career in Southeast Asia, Raffles held a staunch anti-slavery stance and often denounced the Dutch, Chinese, and Arab influences as the cause of slave culture in the region.<sup>308</sup> His enthusiasm for the abolition of slavery even led him to mistakenly believe that the 1807 Act for the Abolition of the Slave Trade heralded the end of the practice in British Southeast Asia, despite it being widely held knowledge amongst British officials that the text of the act explicitly referenced to the African trade and had no bearing on Asia.<sup>309</sup> When the settlement in Singapore was founded, he used the opportunity to outlaw slavery years before the Slavery Abolition Act was officially passed in 1833. When pushed on the issue by Farquhar, who had allowed the slave trade to exist to 'an unlimited extent' in the settlement's early years, Raffles asserted that 'the acknowledgement of Slavery in any shape in a Settlement like Singapore founded on principles so diametrically opposed to the admission of such a practice is an anomaly in the constitution of the place, which cannot I think be allowed to exist.'<sup>310</sup> His abolitionist policy was officialised in May 1823 with the passage of *A Regulation for the Prevention of the Slave Trade at Singapore*, which prohibited the slave trade and granted freedom to all persons who had been imported, transferred, or sold as slaves or slave debtors in the Settlement since 26 February 1819.<sup>311</sup> This decision revealed a willingness to risk Singapore's commercial success for issues central to his ethos. It demonstrated that any analysis of Raffles' decisions in Singapore's development must factor in his personal philosophy of governance. Thus, we can see that the Singapore

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<sup>308</sup> Gillen D'Arcy Wood, 'The Volcano Lover: Climate, Colonialism, and the Slave Trade in Raffles' History of Java (1817)', *Journal for the Early Modern Cultural Studies*, 8, no. 2 (2008): 35.

<sup>309</sup> Wright, 'Raffles and the Slave Trade at Batavia in 1812', 184.

<sup>310</sup> Raffles to Nathaniel Wallich, 8 March 1823, in John Bastin, 'The Letters of Sir Stamford Raffles to Nathaniel Wallich 1819—1824', *Journal of the Malaysian Branch of the Royal Asiatic Society*, 54, no. 2 (1981): 23.

<sup>311</sup> John Bastin, 'The Letters of Sir Stamford Raffles to Nathaniel Wallich 1819—1824', *Journal of the Malaysian Branch of the Royal Asiatic Society*, 54/2 (1981), n. 184.



Raffles envisioned and shared was one he actively worked towards but was already compromised by reality.

Significantly, Raffles' commitment to his other ideals, notably his stance on economic policy, was not so unequivocal that they endangered Singapore's future. Raffles has often been credited for revolutionising commercial networks in imperial Southeast Asia by breaking from the colonial practice of protectionism and instituting a free trade policy.<sup>312</sup> Rooted in private enterprise, free trade was a policy that was ideologically held to be able to bring forth the maximum production of wealth.<sup>313</sup> The implementation of this economic policy in Singapore was designed to establish a central entrepot within Southeast Asia that held such appeal and popularity that it would undermine Dutch commercial ambitions and deter the emerging interests of the French, Russians, and Americans.<sup>314</sup> As has been well established in the historiography, Singapore's status as a free port was central to its success in the early nineteenth century, and its reliance upon this economic policy was evident when the settlement's commercial significance waned following the acquisition of Hong Kong, which provided unparalleled access to the China market, in 1842.<sup>315</sup> This very success has often led historians and politicians to accredit the implementation of the policy to Raffles as it conformed to the narrative that Singapore's success was the product of his strategic aptitude and foresight.<sup>316</sup> However, recent studies now dispute that Raffles was responsible for Singapore's adoption of free trade and even contend that he was initially an opponent of the policy. An examination of Singapore's early development reveals that rather than the keen proponent of free trade that he has frequently been portrayed as, Raffles was instead a staunch critic of the economic policy, believing it promoted reckless market speculations, indulgences, and unscrupulousness.<sup>317</sup> In his recent study on Raffles' ideological approach to empire, Ng has argued that Raffles was not a practising free-trade economist, nor did he

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<sup>312</sup> John Gallagher and Ronald Robinson, 'The Imperialism of Free Trade', *The Economic History Review*, 6, no. 1 (1953): 8.

<sup>313</sup> Wong Lin Ken, 'Singapore: Its Growth as an Entrepot Port, 1819-1941', *Journal of Southeast Asian Studies*, 9, no. 1 (1978), 59.

<sup>314</sup> *Ibid.*, 56.

<sup>315</sup> Wong, 'The Trade of Singapore'; Huff, *The Economic Growth of Singapore: Trade and Development in the Twentieth Century*; and Kobayashi, 'The Origins of Singapore's Economic Prosperity, c. 1800-1874'.

<sup>316</sup> Barr, *Singapore: A Modern History*.

<sup>317</sup> Tze Shiung Ng, 'The ideological origins of the founding of Singapore'; Turnbull, *A History of Singapore: 1819-1975*, 68.

establish Singapore as a free port on the principles of Adam Smith and *laissez-faire*, as has been previously argued.<sup>318</sup> Instead, Raffles opposed Smith's theory of the 'invisible hand', believing that private interest would result in more public vice than public benefit.<sup>319</sup> This position was partly influenced by the debate on the immorality of commerce, which had been renewed following the impeachment of Governor-General Warren Hastings for financial corruption in 1795.<sup>320</sup> By the early 1820s, however, Raffles had few allies who shared his economic stance, as the rise of anti-monopoly sentiments gave rise to a surge of support for free trade. Notable amongst the proponents of free trade were the leading conservative liberal politicians Frederick Robinson, Thomas Wallace, and William Huskisson in the House of Commons and, crucially, Raffles' ally Lansdowne in the House of Lords.<sup>321</sup> The influence of the free traders was demonstrated in 1821 when the Select Committee on Trade with the East Indies for both Houses published reports arguing for the opening up of trade in Asia for commercial and security purposes.<sup>322</sup> Lansdowne argued that a free port under British protection would be of 'the greatest benefit to both commerce and civilisation' and cited Singapore's success as the foundation for this belief.<sup>323</sup>

While the future of British imperial policy in Southeast Asia was debated primarily in the metropole, the decisive moment that determined the outcome of the ideological struggle fittingly occurred in British India when the premier agency house, Palmer and Co., was embroiled in a corruption scandal over a monumental loan to the Nizam of Hyderabad.<sup>324</sup> The 'notorious Palmer affair' centred around accusations made in 1821 by Charles Metcalfe, the British Resident in Hyderabad, between 1820 and 1825, who believed that the agency house had engaged in illegal and usurious business practices in contravention of the East India Act 1797.<sup>325</sup> Designed in response to the commercial abuses and exploitations of the eighteenth century, the Parliamentary Act restricted British subjects from lending money to Native Princes. It prohibited the imposition of

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<sup>318</sup> Tze Shiung Ng, 'The ideological origins of the founding of Singapore'; Turnbull, *A History of Singapore: 1819-1975*, 50; Harry Marks, *The First Contest for Singapore, 1819 – 1824*, Verhandelingen van het Koninklijk Instituut voor Taal-, Land-en Volkenkunde, 27 (1959).

<sup>319</sup> Tze Shiung Ng, 'The ideological origins of the founding of Singapore', p. 77.

<sup>320</sup> *Ibid.*, 77.

<sup>321</sup> Knapman, 'The liberal security experiment in Southeast Asia', in Gareth Knapman, Anthony Milner and Mary Quilty eds. *Liberalism and the British Empire in Southeast Asia* (London: Routledge Taylor Francis and Group, 2020), 200.

<sup>322</sup> *Ibid.*, 200.

<sup>323</sup> Knapman, 'The liberal security experiment in Southeast Asia', 200.

<sup>324</sup> Tze Shiung Ng, 'The ideological origins of the founding of Singapore', 68-74, 85.

<sup>325</sup> *East India Company Act* (13 Geo, c. 63); *East India Act 1797* (37 Geo 3, c. 31).

usury rates exceeding 12 per cent.<sup>326</sup> However, whilst Metcalfe's accusation that Palmer and Co.'s position as chief creditor of the Nizam's government was in direct violation of British law, the agency house had previously applied for leave to lend money to the Nizam's state to 'alleviate the land's distress and the administration's poverty.'<sup>327</sup> Moreover, upon investigation by Bengal's Account-General John Walter Sherer in 1816, it was found that Palmer and Co. were not technically in violation of this Act because their chief partner was 'a native of India' and the law applied only to 'full-blooded British subjects only.'<sup>328</sup> Additionally, Sherer clarified that the legislation, particularly the prohibition on interest rates greater than 12 per cent, only applied to transactions within the Company's territory and, therefore, inapplicable to agency houses operating in the independent state of Hyderabad.<sup>329</sup>

The legality of Palmer and Co.'s actions did not deter Metcalfe, who, spurred by both his personal dislike for the Palmers' central social position and his objection to the agency house's political power in Hyderabad, continued to protest to Governor-General Hastings that the agency house was engaging in illegal usury. Similarly unyielding, Hastings continued to decline to interfere in the agency house's activities as Sherer's assessment had effectively cleared the company from wrongdoing.<sup>330</sup> However, Hasting's refusal to act would ultimately prove disastrous for both his career and the political influence of agency houses in the ongoing ideological struggle with free traders. While upholding the legitimacy of the commercial relationship, in 1821, Hastings insisted on liquidating Palmer and Co.'s claim, which, at this stage, had reached loans of 10 million rupees (\$4,459,308).<sup>331</sup> To contextualise the size of this loan to colonial Singapore in the same period, this figure equated to just under half of the value of the settlement's total exports and imports for the year 1823-24.<sup>332</sup> Unable to repay his debt, the Nizam instead signed a deed relinquishing in perpetuity his claim to the annual payment of 700,000 rupees by the Company as quit-rent for the Northern

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<sup>326</sup> Edward John Thompson, *The Life of Charles, Lord Metcalfe* (London: Faber and Faber Limited, 1937), 194; *East India Company Act; East India Act 1797*.

<sup>327</sup> Thompson, *The Life of Charles, Lord Metcalfe*, 194.

<sup>328</sup> *Ibid.*, 195.

<sup>329</sup> *Ibid.*, 194.

<sup>330</sup> Thompson, *The Life of Charles, Lord Metcalfe*, 194.

<sup>331</sup> Leonard, 'Palmer and Company: an Indian Banking Firm in Hyderabad State', *Modern Asian Studies*, 47, no. 4 (2013): 1157-1169; Value calculated from currency conversions detailed in Wong Lin Ken, 'The Trade of Singapore, 1819-69'.

<sup>332</sup> C. P. Holloway, *Tabular Statements of the Commerce of Singapore, During the Years 1823-24 to 1839-49 Inclusive* (Singapore: Singapore Free Press Office, 1842).

Circars.<sup>333</sup> Upon receiving this deed, Hastings remitted the sum of 10 million rupees to Hyderabad to settle the outstanding claim of Palmer and Co.<sup>334</sup>

The validity of Palmer and Co.'s business notwithstanding, Hasting's actions were received poorly by the Court of Directors in Calcutta and the Board of Directors in London as members of both bodies had slowly been turned against the agency house's position in Hyderabad.<sup>335</sup> While Metcalfe's personal grievances against the Palmers had made little impression upon most senior Company officials, his suggestion that an entirely British firm could replace the agency house's role as the Nizam's chief creditor gained notable traction.<sup>336</sup> Although constrained to a lower interest rate, Metcalfe's proposal included a charge of six per cent accompanied by territorial guarantees, which were viewed as a more favourable scenario for the Company.<sup>337</sup> As the tide of opinion increasingly turned against Hasting, greater scrutiny was placed on his conduct, and his support for Palmer and Co. drew particular criticism with allegations centred upon his personal relationship with senior figures in the agency house.<sup>338</sup> The mounting pressure against Hastings culminated on November 28, 1821, when the Court of Directors drafted a dispatch ordering him immediately to cancel all contracts of Palmer and Co. with the Nizam. Most significantly, however, the dispatch also contained his 'resignation', although this was far more of a termination of employment and signified the end of his career in India, as well as fundamentally undermining the credibility and moral authority of the East India Company.<sup>339</sup> The ramifications of 'the Palmer Affair' were seismic, both for the economic and political landscape of British India, as the collapse of Palmer and Co. heralded the end of the supremacy of agency houses in the region and the dawn of free trade economics.<sup>340</sup>

Significantly, in the past decade, the legacy of the incident and its position within the British imperial imagination has also come to the fore of historical discussion. The episode permanently tarnished the reputation of those involved in one of the most

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<sup>333</sup> Leonard, 'Palmer and Company: an Indian Banking Firm in Hyderabad State', 1169.

<sup>334</sup> *Ibid.*, 1169.

<sup>335</sup> *Ibid.*, 1170.

<sup>336</sup> *Ibid.*, 1170.

<sup>337</sup> *Ibid.*, 1170.

<sup>338</sup> Paul David Nelson, *Francis Rawdon-Hastings, Marquess of Hastings: Solider, Peer of the Realm, Governor-General of India* (New Jersey: Fairleigh Dickinson University Press, 2005), 182.

<sup>339</sup> *Ibid.*, 182.

<sup>340</sup> *Ibid.* 182.

notorious scandals of British Indian history, yet, as this chapter has briefly covered, the key accusations against Palmer and Co. were largely baseless. Historian Karen Leonard has argued that the propagation of Metcalfe's accusations resonated within the metropole.

With the future of British imperialism in Asia comprehensively heading towards economic liberalism, Raffles was seemingly aware that if Singapore were to have a future as a British colony, it would have to be under the auspices of a free-trade settlement. Armed with this knowledge, he was content to compromise on opposing economic policy. When he wrote to Lansdowne in January 1821, he promoted the value of free trade to gain further support for the settlement, writing:

[Singapore's] whole charge scarcely exceeds £10,000 a year, ten times which amount might be collected where I to allow of the Collection of even moderate duties – but I am so satisfied that all our more Eastern Settlements should be in the strictest sense of the word free Ports that I will not admit of even the shadow or supposition of a Custom House restriction or duty.<sup>341</sup>

Raffles' willingness to not only accept the inevitability of the success of free trade liberalism but his commitment to endorsing the ideology to garner further support for the colony's retention is a stark demonstration of the extent to which his pragmatism outweighed ideological considerations.

This pragmatism was also displayed in the changeability of Raffles' vision of Singapore in his letters to his close acquaintances and political allies between 1819 and 1823. To some, he described Singapore as an opportunity to establish a colony with a uniquely humanitarian government, where morality would take precedence over pragmatism in decisions such as the abolition of slavery.<sup>342</sup> However, Raffles demonstrated a far greater degree of ideological flexibility than others. For example, the examination of his letters to his premier political contact, Henry Petty-Fitzmaurice, 3rd Marquess of Lansdowne, demonstrates a willingness to establish the settlement as a free trade port in exchange for supporting the colony's retention. Raffles' biographers have consistently stated that he always intended and desired to create a free trade colony in Southeast Asia.<sup>343</sup> This argument, however, was first propagated by his widow, Sophia Raffles, in the 1830s as she sought to rehabilitate his reputation

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<sup>341</sup> John Bastin, *Raffles and Hastings: Private Exchanges behind the Founding of Singapore*, 146.

<sup>342</sup> Raffles, *State of the Services of Stamford Raffles*, 5.

<sup>343</sup> Demetrious Boulger, *The Life of Sir Stamford Raffles* (London: Horace Marshall and Son, 1897).

by attributing the settlement's economic success to his decisions. Despite the provenance of the argument, it was subsequently adopted and reiterated by historians over a century later.<sup>344</sup> Recent literature, such as Tze Shiung Ng's '*The Ideological Origins of the Founding of Singapore*', has since challenged this long-held belief by exploring the complex ideological struggle waged in the metropole, which eventually dictated Singapore's economic policy.<sup>345</sup> The examination of Raffles' willingness to compromise on some of his ideals and his propensity to alter his portrayal of the settlement's appearance and potential to suit the political tides lends further credence to the recent opposition to the established narrative that Raffles was the architect of Singapore's free trade status. This argument once again challenges the traditional discourse surrounding the settlement's origins, particularly the denial of the jeopardy of Singapore's status as a British colony. Raffles' stream of correspondences and his preparedness to concede on his principles, for example, starkly contrasts Turnbull's assumption of inevitability and her claim that while negotiations between the British and Dutch extended, 'Raffles was placid about the delay.'<sup>346</sup> Moreover, the changeability of Raffles' descriptions of the island and his willingness to conform his portrayal to the expectations of his respective audience suggests that the perception of Singapore in the British imagination was perhaps shaped more by the metropole than the periphery.

### Imagining Colonial Singapore: British Diplomatic Constructs and Negotiations

The culmination of four years of official negotiations between the British and the Dutch (albeit with a three-year hiatus), the Anglo-Dutch Treaty of 1824 was a defining document in the colonial development of Southeast Asia. The Treaty redefined the two empires' spheres of influence within the region, artificially dividing the historically socio-politically cohesive region of the Malay Peninsula, Sumatra, and the Riau Islands along imperial lines.<sup>347</sup> The machinations that drove the discussions between the British and the Dutch have been the subject of numerous studies, the most recent and comprehensive being Peter Borschberg's 'Dutch Objections to British Singapore,

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<sup>344</sup> Charles Wurtzburg, *Raffles of the Eastern Isles* (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1954); D.G.E Hall, *A History of Southeast Asia* (London: The Macmillan Press, 1955); Tze Shiung Ng, 'The ideological origins of the founding of Singapore'.

<sup>345</sup> Tze Shiung Ng, 'The ideological origins of the founding of Singapore', 68-95.

<sup>346</sup> Turnbull, *A History of Singapore, 1819-1975*, 12.

<sup>347</sup> Hamzi Rusli, Roman Dremluga and Wan Talaat, 'The Anglo-Dutch Treaty 1824: Was the Partitioning of the Malay Archipelago Valid?', *Journal of East Asia and International Law* 13, no. 1 (2020): 194.

1819-1824'.<sup>348</sup> These studies have been instrumental in aiding our understanding of the events leading up to the Treaty itself, which resulted in the British retention of Singapore and the division of Southeast Asia between the two imperial powers. Significantly, they have also hinted towards the evolution of perceptions of Singapore in both British and Dutch imperial imaginations. However, while the political, economic, and legal ramifications of the Treaty have been thoroughly explored in several studies over the past several years, the impact of the negotiations on Singapore's perception within Britain has largely been overlooked. It represents a rich and untapped resource for analysing Singapore's evolution in the British imagination.<sup>349</sup> The implementation of this approach combines further analysis of Raffles' correspondences and supplements them with the examination of British newspapers to offer novel insights into the nature of Britain's perception of Singapore. The significance of Raffles' letters extolling the economic potential of Singapore, for example, is heightened when considered in tandem with rising support for the settlement as an economic outpost amongst business groups and agency houses within the metropole.

Before 1819, Singapore was an almost entirely unknown entity to the EIC and the metropole. Indeed, before Raffles established a settlement on the island, all mentions of Singapore in British documents referred to the adjacent waterway rather than the island itself.<sup>350</sup> Moreover, the region's name featured so infrequently and was of seemingly so little import that British documents had no standardised spelling. These spellings ranged from *Siniapore*, *Sincapure*, *Singahpura*, *Singapoor*, to *Singapore*.<sup>351</sup> By August 1819, however, Singapore was frequently featured in newspapers across Britain and became a major discussion topic amongst politicians and the public. The following section first explores the impact of Singapore's contentious origins on the perception of both the colony and Raffles within the EIC. The focus of the analysis then moves towards the metropole and considers the impact of the international

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<sup>348</sup> Borschberg, 'Dutch Objections to British Singapore, 1819-1824, 1819-1824.'

<sup>349</sup> See Harry Marks, *The First Contest for Singapore, 1819 – 1824*; Borschberg, 'Dutch Objections to British Singapore, 1819-1824.'

<sup>350</sup> See maps featured in Chapter One including Emanuel Bowen, A new and accurate map of the East India islands. Laid down according to the latest discoveries, and agreeable to the most approved maps & charts. The whole being regulated by astronl. Observations, National Library Board Singapore.

<sup>351</sup> Francesco Perono Cacciafoco and Yong Chloe Gan Jing, 'Naming Singapore: A Historical Survey on the Naming and Re-naming Process of the Lion City', *Annals of the University of Craivo*, 1, no. 2 (2020): 128; John Bastin, *Raffles and Hastings Private Exchanges Behind the Founding of Singapore* (Singapore: National Library Board Singapore, 2014); *Leeds Intelligencer*, June 1805, The British Library Newspaper Archive.

discussions on the development and solidification of Singapore's image amongst the British public.

At the heart of the Anglo-Dutch Treaty of 1824 lay the disputed legality of Raffles' establishment of a British settlement within Singapore. This territory sat squarely within the Dutch sphere of influence established by the London Convention of 1814.<sup>352</sup> In principle, the London Convention of August 1814 committed the British to restore most of the former Dutch colonies to the Kingdom of the Netherlands that had been lost in the Napoleonic Wars.<sup>353</sup> This commitment significantly impacted Britain's economic interests in Southeast Asia, as colonies such as Malacca had become increasingly central to the empire's commercial networks. Raffles placed great significance on the development of British commerce in Singapore and was a particularly vocal opponent of the return of Malacca, arguing that its return was not necessary or justified as the Convention focused on returning colonies lost after the Treaty of Amiens and the British had initially taken over the colony to hold in trust in 1785 during the War of the First Coalition.<sup>354</sup> Raffles' objections and those of the country traders who also contended that the commercial benefits of Malacca were too valuable to surrender ultimately lost the argument, and the colony was returned in 1818, which signified a substantial blow to Britain's economic prospects in the region. To counteract this setback, Raffles sought to establish a new British colony along the southern entrance of the Straits of Malacca, and on 29 January 1819, Raffles and his expedition landed in Singapore.<sup>355</sup>

Upon his arrival, Singapore was part of the Sultanate of Johor, a political order headed by a Sultan based in Lingga that consisted of further fiefdoms in Muar, Pahang, and mainland Johor.<sup>356</sup> Johor fell within the Dutch sphere of influence, which Raffles was instructed not to interfere with. So, under normal circumstances, the British would not have been able to establish a settlement on the island. However, the Sultanate had been embroiled in a succession dispute since 1812, when Sultan Shah

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<sup>352</sup> Convention Between Great Britain and the Netherlands, Volume 31, June 1815, UK Parliament; Marks, *The First Contest for Singapore, 1819 – 1824*; Borschberg, 'Dutch Objections to British Singapore, 1819-1824.

<sup>353</sup> Borschberg, 'Dutch Objections to British Singapore, 1819-1824', 542.

<sup>354</sup> *Ibid.*, 542.

<sup>355</sup> Bastin, *Raffles and Hastings: Private Exchanges Behind the Founding of Singapore*, 45; Tan, *Raffles Letters: Intrigues Behind the Founding of Singapore*, 38.

<sup>356</sup> Tan, *Raffles Letters*, 39.



died without naming an heir, and both his sons sought to succeed him.<sup>357</sup> The Dutch had endorsed Shah's younger son, Abdul Rahman, and considered the entirety of the Sultanate still within their influence. Raffles, however, had sought to exploit the political situation by recognising the legitimacy of Tengku Hussein, the elder son, thereby circumventing Dutch claims over Singapore.<sup>358</sup> Thus, on 1 February 1819, Tengku Hussein arrived in Singapore and, with the local Temenggong, also named Abdul Rahman, discussed establishing a British settlement on the island with Raffles. Amenable to Raffles' proposal, the first treaty was concluded, and in return for the establishment of an East India Company factory on the island's southern coast, Hussein and Rahman would receive an annual payment of five thousand and three thousand Spanish dollars, respectively, and Rahman would also be entitled to half the duties collected on Asian vessels in the British port.<sup>359</sup>

Much like the foundational myths that this thesis seeks to re-examine, the national narrative surrounding the signing of this treaty elevates the importance of Raffles and the British and downplays the role of non-European actors. This has primarily been achieved by presenting the treaty as a relatively unilateral negotiation by an imperial agent who successfully exploited local divisions. More recently, however, this interpretation of Singapore's foundation has come under increasing scrutiny following the publication of an English transliteration and commentary of over eighty Malay documents on the negotiations between the British and independent rulers.<sup>360</sup> The new materials provided by Ahmat Adam's 2009 study have allowed historians to emphasise the political manoeuvring of Hussein and Rahman, and the resulting literature has discovered that their motivations for signing the treaty were more complex than was previously believed. This revision has shown that Tengku Hussain was a dynamic and active participant in the negotiations and attempted to improve his political capital by communicating with the British and the Dutch. Crucially, whilst Hussein welcomed the payment and Raffles' formal confirmation of his political position, neither he nor the Temenggong were willing to declare independence from

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<sup>357</sup> Tan, *Raffles Letters*, 40.

<sup>358</sup> Bastin, *Raffles and Hastings*, p. 47.

<sup>359</sup> *Ibid.*, 48.

<sup>360</sup> Ahmat Adam, *Letters of Sincerity: The Raffles Collection of Malay Letters (1780-1824), A Descriptive Account with Notes and Translation* (Kuala Lumpur: Malaysian Branch of the Royal Asiatic Society, 2009).

the Dutch.<sup>361</sup> Instead, in letters to Yamtuan Muda Raja Jaafar (the Bugis crown prince who had significant political influence in Johor) and his younger brother and rival to the Sultanate, Hussein denied his active role in creating the treaty. He argued that he had no prior knowledge of Raffles' arrival and could not prevent his landing.<sup>362</sup> Similarly, on 16 February, the Temenggong wrote to Adriaan Keok, a senior member of the Dutch council at Melaka, explicitly stating that 'we in no way separate ourselves from the Dutch.'<sup>363</sup> In late February 1819, Farquhar attempted to provide further clarity on the legal status of Singapore by producing a declaration signed by both Hussein and Rahman, which asserted that they had both consented to the initial treaty and that 'from the arrival of the Honourable Sir Thomas Stamford Raffles no troops or effects were landed, or anything executed but with the free accord of myself and the Sultan of Johor.'<sup>364</sup> This declaration, however, arrived too late to avert the international dispute, as the Dutch had issued letters of protest to Raffles' actions within days of receiving the news of the establishment of the settlement in Singapore.<sup>365</sup> Furthermore, although it is now apparent that indigenous actors could exert significant influence over imperial relations, both the British and the Dutch had consistently demonstrated a lack of regard for local sovereignty – this is starkly demonstrated by the terms of the Treaty of London 1824 which divided the Malay world without the consent of the local sovereign rulers – and it is therefore likely that Hussein and Rahman's declaration that they had willingly entered into negotiations with Raffles would have carried very little weight.<sup>366</sup> Nevertheless, Singapore's establishment relied more on the politicking of local actors than it did on Raffles' manipulation of indigenous politics, as traditional historiography has often claimed. In this sense, Singapore's colonial origin acts as a microcosm for the settlement's development throughout much of the nineteenth century, in that while national narratives have primarily focused on the role of imperial figures, local actors were primarily responsible for driving growth and success.

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<sup>361</sup> Bastin, *Raffles and Hastings*, 48.

<sup>362</sup> *Ibid.*, 48.

<sup>363</sup> *Ibid.*, 188-189.

<sup>364</sup> Buyong Adil, *Sejarah Johor* (Kuala Lumpur: Dewan Bahasa dan Pustaka, 1971), 171-174.

<sup>365</sup> Borschberg, 'Dutch Objections to British Singapore, 1819-1824' p. 548.

<sup>366</sup> Hamzi Rusli, Roman Dremluga and Wan Talaat, 'The Anglo-Dutch Treaty 1824: Was the Partitioning of the Malay Archipelago Valid?', *Journal of East Asia and International Law* 13, no. 1 (2020): 191.

The indignation that Raffles' actions caused amongst the Dutch meant that any British valuation of Singapore's merits was, by necessity, weighed against the immediate threat of conflict. This was particularly true of the senior officials of the EIC, for whom the immediacy of the issue was most pressing. In the weeks and months immediately following the establishment of the settlement, there was a genuine concern within the EIC that, as Raffles had arrived at the island with just thirty European military officers and civilians and a hundred Indian sepoy, the Dutch would launch a retaliatory attack on the settlement. This possibility forced the senior official John Bannerman, Governor of Penang, to make a hurried valuation of Singapore's importance to the British Empire and, having found that 'the establishment of Singapore cannot be supported by justice or reason', he urged Farquhar to evacuate the island.<sup>367</sup> Bannerman's evaluation of Singapore was shared by most of the EIC leadership. Raffles received little political support from the India Board of Control, who believed that his bullish efforts to usurp Dutch authority risked disturbing the delicate status quo in the region.<sup>368</sup> The tide seemed squarely set against Raffles, and in the wake of the controversy that he had created, his best course of action was to quietly resume his duties as Lieutenant-Governor in Bencoolen where he 'hope[d] to remain quietly until we hear decidedly from Europe.'<sup>369</sup> However, his attempt at retreating into relative obscurity was not received well within the EIC. When news of Raffles' decision to return to Bencoolen reached Penang, Bannerman surmised the general opinion within the company, describing Raffles as 'like a man who sets a house on fire and then runs away.'<sup>370</sup>

When news of Raffles' actions reached London, the reception amongst senior politicians was similar to their EIC counterparts. Although Raffles believed that the British could 'combat [Dutch] arguments without any difficulty', senior officials in the metropole were less assured of the outcome.<sup>371</sup> For example, historian Tze Shiung Ng argues that George Canning, the President of the Board of Control (the arm of the government that oversaw the EIC and the chief official in London responsible for Indian

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<sup>367</sup> Borschberg, 'Dutch Objections to British Singapore, 1819-1824', 559.

<sup>368</sup> Borschberg, 'Dutch Objections to British Singapore, 1819-1824', 559; and Turnbull, *A History of Singapore 1819-1875*, 30.

<sup>369</sup> Buckley, *An Anecdotal History of the Old Times in Singapore*, 40; and Nigel Barley, *In the Footsteps of Stamford Raffles* (Singapore: Monsoon Books, 2009).

<sup>370</sup> Barley, *In the Footsteps of Stamford Raffles*, 197.

<sup>371</sup> Letter from Raffles quoted in Charles Assey to Rev. Thomas Raffles, 9 August 1819, Bastin, *Letters and Books*, 278.

affairs), was aware of Raffles' desire to establish a Malay Commonwealth as early as 1817. Ng, therefore, suggests that Singapore's establishment 'which is generally acknowledged to have been unauthorised...was not unknown of beforehand.'<sup>372</sup> Yet despite this foreknowledge and support of Raffles' intent before 1819, the contentiousness surrounding Singapore's establishment was such that when the issue was first raised in London, Canning denied any knowledge.<sup>373</sup> Crucially, Canning's disownment of Raffles was not reflective of his opinion of the value of Singapore but rather demonstrated his disapproval of Raffles' methods.<sup>374</sup> A similar distancing of Raffles' actions occurred in London in January 1820, when a secret committee at East India House accepted that legally, Singapore remained under the jurisdiction of the Sultanate of Johor, which was, in turn, a dependency of the Dutch.<sup>375</sup> Amongst Britain's political elite, the overriding opinion of Singapore in 1819 and early 1820, therefore, was one of tentative appreciation of its potential but scepticism at the value of retaining the settlement at the risk of endorsing Raffles' evidently illegal acquisition of the colony.

There was one significant outlier to this general consensus amongst British senior officials, and his judgement arguably proved the most influential to the trajectory of Singapore's colonial history. Like Raffles, the Governor-General and Commander-in-Chief in India, Francis Rawdon-Hastings, 1st Marquess of Hastings, was convinced that the British needed to act decisively in Southeast Asia to protect their economic interests and curb Dutch expansion. He initially tasked Raffles with discovering a new outpost within the Straits of Malacca on the proviso that he 'abstained from all negotiation and collision' with the Dutch.<sup>376</sup> Aware of the negativity with which his actions in Singapore had been received, Raffles sought to improve both his and the settlement's reputation within the Company by writing to Hastings in June 1819, declaring that he hoped his actions in Singapore 'prove[d] to your Lordship that my first and only object is to act in strict compliance with your Lordship's wishes, and to devote the humble portion of my Services in aid of the great and enlightened views

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<sup>372</sup> Tze Shiung Ng, 'The ideological origins of the founding of Singapore', 81.

<sup>373</sup> *Ibid.*, 81.

<sup>374</sup> *Ibid.*, 81.

<sup>375</sup> Borschberg, 'Dutch Objections to British Singapore, 1819-1824', 545.

<sup>376</sup> Bastin, *Raffles and Hastings*, 48.

which distinguished your Lordship's brilliant and unparalleled administration.'<sup>377</sup> It is possible that this letter had its intended effect on Hastings as, despite Raffles' flagrant disregard of this instruction, Hastings decided that Singapore was initially worth the effort of defending. Consequently, when Bannerman recommended the evacuation of the island, Hastings decided to invest a significant number of resources into the construction of defensive military infrastructure. In his instructions, Raffles was emphatic that the construction of forts, barracks, and warehouses for military stores were to be prioritised.<sup>378</sup> Working within the constraints of a budget of just \$5,500 of tools and provisions, limited natural resources, and little support from India, these defensive constructs often came at the expense of civic infrastructure and, as will be shown, the government often lacked even basic resources and equipment.<sup>379</sup> This military prioritisation continued for the next few years as Singapore's status remained unresolved, and by 1821 military spending had increased to \$36,000.<sup>380</sup> The majority of this sum had been spent on the construction of a couple of houses, defensive batteries at the foot of Fort Canning, and huts for the local garrison, with a further \$1512 spent on the erection of 108 huts the following year to accommodate two additional Companies of the 20<sup>th</sup> Regiment.<sup>381</sup> The priority on preparing these defensive structures occasionally outstripped the settlement's financial capabilities, and some military detachments were required to bear the upfront cost of construction for almost six months before they were recompensed by the Singapore government.<sup>382</sup> The heavy investment, however, did leave an indelible mark on the settlement's administrative development, as the denial of resources towards civic infrastructure severely limited the capacity of Farquhar's administration and, as will be discussed further, created an environment in which the government's capacity was drastically reduced and much of the responsibility for the settlement's development was ultimately forfeited. Nevertheless, Hastings's stalwart response to the threat ensured that the British settlement survived long enough to become a topic of national

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<sup>377</sup> Raffles to Hastings, 22 June 1819, cited from John Bastin, *Raffles and Hastings: Private Exchanges behind the Founding of Singapore*.

<sup>378</sup> Buckley, *An Anecdotal History of Old Times in Singapore*, 43-44.

<sup>379</sup> Nadia Wright, 'Pragmatism in the Founding of Singapore', in Knapman, Milner and Quilty eds. *Liberalism and the British Empire in Southeast Asia*, 59; Buckley, *An Anecdotal History of Old Times in Singapore*, 43-44.

<sup>380</sup> Buckley, *An Anecdotal History of Old Times in Singapore*, 43

<sup>381</sup> Letters to and From Raffles, L.N Hull to Lt Col Farquhar, 16 December 1822, L:11: Raffles Museum and Library: Straits Settlements.

<sup>382</sup> Captain Manly to Farquhar, 11 Jan 1819, L10: SSR; L10: Raffles to Farquhar, 12 June 1819, SSR.

discussion, which ultimately proved crucial to the formation of an overwhelmingly positive impression of the colony in the metropole.

In stark contrast to the anger and disappointment that greeted Singapore's establishment within the EIC, in London Raffles was widely lauded for his 'provident vigilance.'<sup>383</sup> Removed from the tension and uncertainty of colonial dynamics in Southeast Asia, the British press paid little heed to the dangers that accompanied Raffles' antagonistic actions. Instead, it tunnelled in on Singapore's potential to become a harbour of great importance in Southeast Asia. The initial wave of public support for Singapore was of unusual import within British colonial acquisitions, as it has been argued that Parliament's eventual decision to retain the colony was influenced by public opinion.<sup>384</sup> Indeed, when the official negotiations between the British and the Dutch stalled, British newspapers actively worked to encourage a groundswell of public support. In the *Morning Chronicle*, for example, an extract of a letter from Prince of Wales Island was published arguing that the Dutch 'will exert every nerve to injure the success of the establishment; but if it be only supported from home, its eventual success, and the advantages that must accrue, are in no way doubtful.'<sup>385</sup> The patriotic framing of these articles hugely influenced public perception of the island as Singapore was suddenly transformed from an unknown quantity to a key battleground of imperial rivalries. For many readers, it is very likely that in the absence of any other information about the island, Singapore's most redeeming quality was the Dutch objection to it.

The sustained press campaign was vital in keeping the issue of Singapore's future at the forefront of Britain's public consciousness at a time when support for the colony amongst the political elite was wavering. The *Star*, for example, sought to apply pressure to Britain's policymakers by generating further zeal for Singapore amongst its readers by publishing an article that claimed:

Unless the natural course of things is greatly thwarted by want of adequate and liberal encourage from home, of which we cannot permit ourselves to entertain of any apprehensive, there can be little doubt of Singapore becoming ere long

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<sup>383</sup> *Star (London)*, Wednesday 4 August 1819, British Newspaper Archive; and *General Evening Post*, Thursday 5 August 1819, British Newspaper Archive.

<sup>384</sup> Borschberg, 'Dutch Objections to British Singapore, 1819-1824', 560.

<sup>385</sup> *Morning Chronicle*, Thursday 5 August 1819, British Newspaper Archive.

as general an emporium for the Eastern trade as either Malacca or Prince of Wales's Island have ever yet been.<sup>386</sup>

The efforts of the British press continued throughout the early 1820s. They became particularly important between 5 August 1820 and 15 December 1823, when the official negotiations between the British and Dutch lapsed into a three-year hiatus. Singapore's continued feature in British newspapers was often accompanied by public endorsements and calls for support throughout the five years of Anglo-Dutch negotiations. An article in the *London Packet and New Lloyd's Evening Post*, published just before the hiatus in July 1820, referenced the ongoing discussions as one of 'extreme importance to British commerce in the Eastern Ocean' and, in a potential effort to discredit their rivals, reminded the reader that the Dutch Government 'owes this country a very large sum of money (not far short, we fear, of a million sterling)' and questioned why they objected to the settlement in Singapore, speculating that it may have been their intention to impose tolls on British trade in Southeast Asia.<sup>387</sup> Similarly, in August 1822, the *New Times (London)* sought to generate further support for Singapore by publishing an extract of the settlement's export and import accounts, which reported an aggregate surplus of five million Spanish dollars between May 1820 and October 1821 which it described as 'proof of the rapidly increasing prosperity of the interesting settlement.'<sup>388</sup> Within the British colonial imagination, Singapore had emerged from the depths of ignorance and obscurity to become a symbol of a new wave of commercial imperialism. By the early 1830s, the colony was referred to as the 'Queen of the Further East' and, by the end of the century, was also known as the 'Charing Cross of the East.'<sup>389</sup>

The rhetoric used by the British press to create an upswell of support for Singapore's retention amongst the general public summoned much of the same imagery as Raffles' own defences of the island. By 1822, the newspapers printed the settlement's export and import accounts. Although this study draws no definitive link between Raffles' decision to forgo his own economic ideology and to portray

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<sup>386</sup> *Star (London)*, Wednesday 4 August 1819, British Newspaper Archive.

<sup>387</sup> *London Packet and New Lloyd's Evening Post*, Monday 31 July 1820, British Newspaper Archive.

<sup>388</sup> *New Times (London)*, Friday 2 August 1822, British Newspaper Archive.

<sup>389</sup> George Windsor Earl, *Eastern Seas: or Voyages and Adventures in the Indian Archipelago in 1832-33-34, Comprising a Tour of the Island of Java – Visits to Borneo, The Malay Peninsula, Siam &c.* (London: Wm. H. Allen and Co, 1837), 145; Mark Ravinder Frost and Yu-Mei Balasingamchow, *Singapore: A Biography* (Singapore: Editions Dider Millet, 2009), 135.

Singapore solely through an economic lens in his interactions with the metropole with the rapid evolution of Britain's perception of Singapore as a colony of 'extreme importance to British commerce', it appears apparent that these events are connected.<sup>390</sup> Given the aforementioned untapped richness of the sources, there is undoubtedly much to be gained by further research into the evolution of Singapore's representation in British media and national discourse during the Anglo-Dutch negotiations, perhaps including a more definitive connection between Raffles' early descriptions of the settlement and the endurance of the overtly economic perspective of the island.

### Unravelling the Jackson Plan

While Singapore's fate was being decided in Europe, Raffles continued to pursue his personal objectives within the settlement. Although he would eventually have to compromise on Singapore's economic policy, when it came to the settlement's physical development, he could operate with little oversight as neither the Company nor the metropole took much interest in the colony's inland development.<sup>391</sup> Although Raffles had repeatedly stressed that his 'object is not territory, but trade', he was heavily invested in Singapore's physical growth, and once the settlement's commercial prospects seemed assured, he turned his attention to establishing his idealised large government.<sup>392</sup> The first requirement for establishing this large administration was acquiring land within the settlement. Raffles envisioned the government occupying a prime position in Singapore, as demonstrated by the allocation of the administrative sector in the centre of the settlement in the Jackson Plan – a rare example of a strategic overview of Singapore's urban development.<sup>393</sup>

Despite Singapore's significance to British trade networks, visual descriptions and depictions were rare by the middle of the nineteenth century. The inhospitality of the island's environment discouraged extensive surveys for several decades, and due to their focus on maritime trade, the British were content for the settlement to be confined

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<sup>390</sup> *London Packet and New Lloyd's Evening Post*, Monday 31 July 1820, British Newspaper Archive.

<sup>391</sup> While this chapter focuses specifically on Raffles' formation of the Jackson Plan, the exact workings of Singapore's administration, and Raffles' role within it, throughout the Anglo-Dutch negotiations, are explored in the following chapter.

<sup>392</sup> Sophia Raffles, *Memoir of the life and public services of Sir Thomas Stamford Raffles: particularly in the government of Java, 1811-1816, Bencoolen and Its Dependencies, 1817-1824* (London: James Duncan, 1835), 379.

<sup>393</sup> H.F. Pearson, 'Lt Jackson's Plan of Singapore', *Journal of the Malaysian Branch of the Royal Asiatic Society*, 42, no. 1 (1969), 161.



to the coast. The preference towards Singapore's maritime strengths is evident in the production of highly detailed hydrographic graphs, which were fundamental to navigating the waterways around Singapore's southern shore and, therefore, central to promoting maritime trade. Inland surveys, however, were far less extensive and, as this thesis argues, far less accurate. The infrequency with which geographic and cartographic surveys were conducted in Singapore lent weight to the few produced in the half-century after colonisation. It is why the Jackson Plan left such an enduring impression on the perception of Singapore in the nineteenth century and why it became a symbol of Raffles' importance to Singapore's success in the twentieth century. Moreover, although vastly different in composition and scope from the maps analysed in the first chapter, the Jackson Plan was also an imperial map and carried an equal amount of cultural weight, and although the map did not reach nearly as large an audience as Moll's or Bowen's achieved, it compensated with its far greater detail. As such, this thesis places equal value on the Jackson Plan as a reflection of Singapore's representation within the British imagination.

Devised in 1822/3 but only published in 1828, the Jackson Plan (Fig. 6) was the product of extensive discussions between Raffles, engineer and land surveyor Lieutenant Phillip Jackson, and a Town Committee specifically formed to assist with town planning. Originally thought to be a street plan of Singapore, comparative studies have since discovered numerous discrepancies between the map's features and the depictions of later maps. The Jackson Plan is now understood to be an idealistic representation of the colonial city and an outline for development rather than an accurate depiction.<sup>394</sup> Nevertheless, although many of the specifications laid out in the Jackson Plan were never realised, as demonstrated later in this thesis, the publication of the map left a lasting impression on the British consciousness and was arguably more influential in shaping the imperial imagination of Singapore than any of Raffles' policies that had more tangible effects on the settlement. The enduring impact of this image was often demonstrated in the incongruity of the well-ordered descriptions of Singapore that appeared in late nineteenth-century European and

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<sup>394</sup> Pearson, 'Lt Jackson's Plan of Singapore', 164.

American travel writing and the far more chaotic reality of the settlement's urban development.<sup>395</sup>



Figure 6. Lieut. Jackson, (a) *Plan Of The British Settlement Of Singapore By Captain Franklin And Lieut. Jackson* (b) *Plan Of The Town Of Singapore, 1828*, Survey Department, National Archive Singapore

Much of the Jackson Plan's significance derived from its uniqueness as one of the earliest depictions of inland Singapore. Before Raffles arrived in Singapore, the British

<sup>395</sup> Henry Norman, 'A City of Orientals', in *Travellers' Singapore: An Anthology*, ed. John Bastin (Oxford: Oxford: University Press, 1994); and William Hornaday, *Two Years in the Jungle: The Experiences of a hunter and naturalist in India, Ceylon, the Malay Peninsula and Borneo* (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1885).

Empire had a decided disinterest in the island, and no British surveys had been conducted, nor had any geographic information been garnered from the local Malay population.<sup>396</sup> For a long time, the maps, drawings, and blueprints produced by Raffles and other early colonists were the sole source of information and shaped the perception of the colony for much of the nineteenth century. Within this context, the publication of the Jackson Plan in 1828 takes on a far greater significance to Britain's perception of Singapore, as Raffles was provided with a blank slate upon which he could project his vision of the new colony. Consequently, the following analysis of the Jackson Plan will not only provide an understanding of the practicalities that Raffles faced in the colony's early development. It will also demonstrate his ideals and motivations in shaping a town initially unhindered by economic, political, or logistical realities. Moreover, the analysis of the blueprint establishes the values underpinning the idealised vision for Singapore, which this study will later compare with the realised vision of the colony that has only begun to be examined within imperial historiography.

One of the most notable features of the Jackson Plan, as shown in Fig. 6, was Raffles' implementation of urban planning concepts that had originally been developed in British India, including a distinct separation of the settlement's ethnic populations. This was visualised in the strict delineation of the Malay, Chinese, Bugis, Arab, and Indian quarters within a regimented grid-based system. This design drew on colonial planning principles that suggested the division of ethnicities would allow the British to achieve political and economic control over the indigenous population.<sup>397</sup> This demarcation served a secondary purpose in Singapore, as the varying quality and habitability of land allowed Raffles to reinforce the British concept of racial hierarchy. In 1814, before the concept of racial theory as an explanation for differences between humans emerged as a key concept of debate within the European intelligentsia in the mid-nineteenth century, the emerging scholar and future Resident of Singapore, John Crawfurd, had established the foundations for racial theorising in Southeast Asian historiography.<sup>398</sup> Crawfurd's conception of racial theory was rooted in his belief that race was a fundamental component of understanding the transition from the savage

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<sup>396</sup> Miller, 'English Country Traders and Their Relations with Malay Rulers in the Late Eighteenth Century', 23–45.

<sup>397</sup> Teo Siew Eng, 'Planning Principles in Pre- and Post-Independence Singapore', *The Town Planning Review*, 63, no. 2 (1992): 165.

<sup>398</sup> Gareth Knapman, *Race and British Colonialism in South-East Asia, 1770-1870: John Crawfurd and the Politics of Equality* (London: Routledge, 2017), 104.

to the civilised.<sup>399</sup> Central to his thesis, and what set him apart from Raffles and Marsden, was the emphasis that Crawford placed on the physical manifestation of race.<sup>400</sup> He believed that there were two aboriginal races of humans in Southeast Asia, the 'brown and negro races', which, he argued 'may be considered to present, in their physical and moral character, a complete parallel with the white and negro races of the western world. The first has always displayed as eminent a relative superiority over the second as the race of white men has done over the negroes of the west.'<sup>401</sup> Whilst this philosophy became a core tenet of mid and late-nineteenth-century Western racial thought, it was uncommon amongst Crawford's contemporaries in Southeast Asia, including Raffles, who instead understood race as a mutable structure.<sup>402</sup> Raffles subscribed to the blank-page hypothesis and believed that primitive states shared languages, customs, and physical characteristics but could be imbued with civilisation, creating a new identity.<sup>403</sup> Nevertheless, despite the relatively nuanced differences in Raffles' racial ideology, he persisted in making a racially segregated town based primarily on what he believed were practical considerations. It has been argued that by segregating the population, Raffles sought to wield planned social control as a tool to assert British dominance over the settlement and also to compartmentalise the economy and labour market along racial lines.<sup>404</sup> Thus, the European quarter was located at the heart of the settlement in the administrative and commercial centre. At the same time, the Chinese, who the British generally considered as the most favourable of the non-European races, were allocated the largest plot of habitable land and located near the European quarter on the southwest of the Singapore River. The Bugis Camp was relegated to the far north of the settlement, a relatively isolated location with no immediate access to the Singapore River and port. In addition to racial segregation, the Jackson Plan contained a separation and designation of residential, commercial, and civic sectors, a feature unique to a new settlement.<sup>405</sup> Without the need to conform to pre-existing structures, Raffles attempted to create his ideal

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<sup>399</sup> Knapman, *Race and British Colonialism in South-East Asia, 1770-1870*, 110.

<sup>400</sup> *Ibid.*, 110-111.

<sup>401</sup> *Ibid.*, 111.

<sup>402</sup> *Ibid.*, 108.

<sup>403</sup> *Ibid.*, 107.

<sup>404</sup> Subramaniam Aiyer, 'From Colonial Segregation to Postcolonial 'integration' – constructing ethnic differences through Singapore's little India and the Singapore 'Indian' (PhD Thesis, University of Canterbury), 37.

<sup>405</sup> Teo Siew Eng, 'Planning Principles in Pre- and Post-Independence Singapore', *The Town Planning Review*, 63/2 (1992), p. 165.

planned city by drawing a line between 'the classes engaged in mercantile speculation and those gaining their livelihood by handicrafts and personal labour.'<sup>406</sup> This distinction was designed to prioritise Singapore's mercantile class and thus reflected Raffles' stated objective of prioritising trade above all else.<sup>407</sup>

Further analysis of the Jackson Plan suggests that even though Raffles believed Singapore could be of territorial value to the EIC, his initial interest in the island extended only as far as the coastline. When creating the Jackson Plan, Raffles instructed Jackson to mark the town's boundaries as 'generally inland as far as practicable up the slopes of hills, as may be likely to be required.'<sup>408</sup> This was an unusually vague directive, especially in the context of Raffles' other instructions, which used more precise language to delineate space.<sup>409</sup> A likely explanation for this ambiguity was a belief that the growth of Singapore would not necessitate maximising the available land. Raffles was, therefore, content to delegate establishing the settlement's exact parameters. However, Raffles' blasé approach to the perimeters of the settlement was not unprecedented. For example, the initial treaties between Raffles, Sultan Shah, and Temenggong Rahman stipulated that the settlement's inland border extended only as far as 'cannon shot range all around from the factory.'<sup>410</sup> Ultimately, the Jackson Plan represented a settlement that encompassed approximately five thousand yards of coastline, stretching from Tanjong Katung in the east to Tanjong Mallang in the west, but only extended one mile inland.<sup>411</sup>

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<sup>406</sup> Notices of Singapore, *Journal of the Indian Archipelago and Eastern Asia*, 8, 1854.

<sup>407</sup> Sophia Raffles, *Memoir of the life and public services of Sir Thomas Stamford Raffles*, p. 379.

<sup>408</sup> Buckley, *An Anecdotal History of Old Times in Singapore*, 83.

<sup>409</sup> *Ibid.* 83.

<sup>410</sup> Letters from Bengal to the Resident, J. F. Bernard, Government of the Colony of Singapore, M2 Singapore: Raffles National Library Archives; and Letters from Bengal to the Resident, J. F. Bernard, M2 Singapore: Raffles National Library Archives.

<sup>411</sup> The settlement's limited size is exhibited in Fig. 4. Plan of the Island of Singapore including the new British Settlements and adjacent islands.

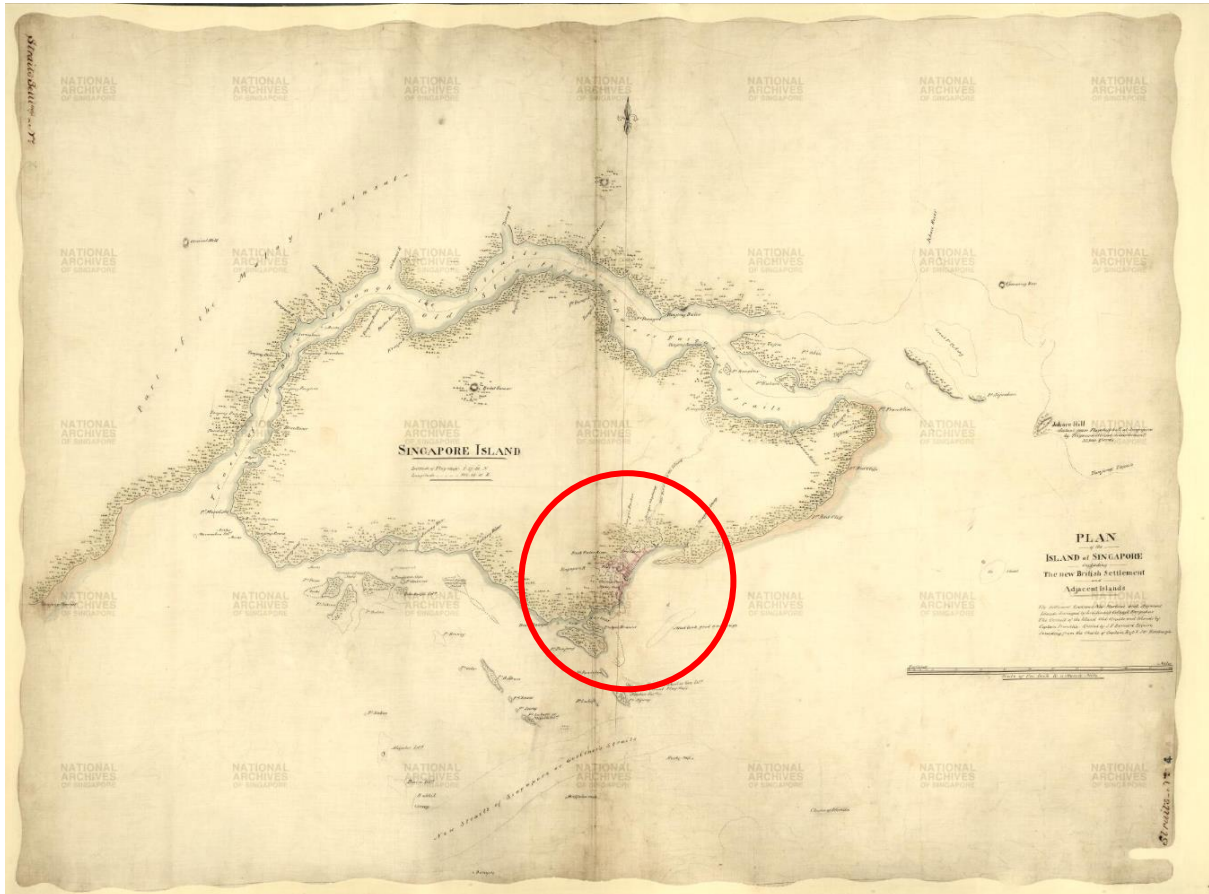


Figure 7. 'Plan of the Island of Singapore including the new British Settlements and adjacent islands', National Archives Singapore

Moreover, the composition of the Jackson Plan was designed to contain very little topographical information. The mouth of the harbour is represented as empty space and dominates the map's composition, whilst the urban features of the settlement are relegated to the top half of the image, leaving little room for the depiction of Singapore's interior.<sup>412</sup> Significant inland topographical features were omitted to emphasise the settlement's position relative to Singapore's coastline. Among the notable absences was a hill northwest of the Chinese Kampong, the site of numerous Chinese gambier plantations. Whilst some omissions from the Jackson Plan can be attributable to the dense jungle coverage that obscured early geographic knowledge of the island, the elevation and cultivation of this hill meant that Raffles and Jackson would have been aware of its position. Therefore, its exclusion from the plan was a deliberate choice rather than the result of ignorance. This suggests that Raffles valued the inclusion of Singapore's harbour as a reference point for the entire settlement in

<sup>412</sup> Plan of the British Settlement of Singapore by Captain Franklin and Lieut. Jackson, 1828, Survey Department, National Archive of Singapore

favour of incorporating topographical information of the island's interior. Viewers of the map would have innately recognised the importance of trade to the settlement, and within the public imagination, Singapore would have been understood primarily via its relationship to the sea.

The restricted composition of the Jackson Plan, as demonstrated by Fig. 7, also had the added effect of accentuating the projected orderliness of the town. Whether intentional or not, by limiting the map to only a few miles inland of Singapore's southern coast, Jackson removed the necessity of displaying the extent to which the island was still inaccessible and unexplored. Instead, the orderliness of the gridded, divided, and segregated blueprint exudes a sense of imperial mastery conveyed through the imposition of structure and civilisation onto a wild and barren land. Despite this composition, the town's physical limitations would not have escaped the attention of EIC officials or policymakers, and, as the following chapter explores, the realities of the blueprint's restricted scope meant that the population quickly outstripped the capacity of the Jackson Plan which resulted in overcrowding, homelessness, disease and the emergence of 'wild' communities beyond the town's perimeters. For the casual viewer, however, who had no knowledge or understanding of Singapore or its position in the world, the Jackson Plan would have reinforced the concepts of British superiority and dominion and, most importantly, presented the abstract and alien land within a digestible framework of colonisation. These concepts of control, order, and systematic design endured throughout the nineteenth century. But how can we attribute these ideas' association to the Jackson Plan's publication? Typically, even within a vacuum of knowledge – as was initially the case with colonial Singapore – the publication of a single blueprint would not naturally have had such an impactful or abiding influence over the development of Britain's imperial imagination. It is likely that had it not been for external influences, the Jackson Plan would have represented little more than a constituent part of a wider corpus of material that contributed to the metropole's impression of the island. The answer appears to lie in the incorporation of the map in the rehabilitation of Raffles' reputation in the second half of the nineteenth century.

#### Raffles' posthumous legacy on British imagination

By the end of the nineteenth century, Raffles had been thoroughly embedded in the Victorian pantheon of colonial heroes, alongside such figures as Clive of India and

Rhodes of Africa.<sup>413</sup> Through the posthumous creation and valorisation of his deeds and virtues, Raffles had been elevated within British society to a near-mythical status that embodied the Empire's new ideals – the figurehead of a new wave of merchants and administrators that had usurped political and military leaders in furthering the imperial cause.<sup>414</sup> This veneration was, of course, the result of an artificial process of rehabilitation that swept aside many of Raffles' shortcomings and failures to justify British colonialism in the region. Far from the venerated icon he would become, at the time of his death on 5 July 1826, Raffles was widely viewed as a figure of controversy and disrepute. Faced with extensive criticism for handling diplomatic crises, arrogant manner, and questionable staffing decisions, Raffles had tarnished his relationship with senior Company officials irreparably.<sup>415</sup> As Nadia Wright has pointed out, Raffles' fall from grace was perhaps best demonstrated by the usually generous EIC's decision to not only refuse him a pension but also to present him a bill for £22,272, citing the irregularities in his returns for the past two decades.<sup>416</sup> Unable to repay this sum in life, most of Raffles' estate went to the EIC to cover his obligations upon his death.<sup>417</sup>

Raffles' fraught relationship with the Company during his life made him an unlikely subject for character rehabilitation in the second half of the century. Still, there were two significant factors that worked in his favour. The first was the tireless efforts of his widow, Sophia Raffles, to repair his reputation. In 1830, Sophia published the *Memoir of the Life and Public Services of Sir Thomas Stamford Raffles, which contained a curated selection of letters and accounts written during his tenure in Southeast Asia* and was designed to provide favourable context to many of his more controversial decisions.<sup>418</sup> In addition to this publication, Sophia also sought to commemorate her husband as a hero of the British Empire by commissioning a white Raffles statue placed in Westminster Abbey.<sup>419</sup> These efforts were certainly successful, and many

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<sup>413</sup> Timothy Bernard, 'Commemorating Raffles: The Creation of an Imperial Icon in Colonial Singapore', *Journal of Southeast Asian Studies*, 50, no. 4 (2019): 581.

<sup>414</sup> *Ibid.*, 582.

<sup>415</sup> *Ibid.*, 581.

<sup>416</sup> Nadia Wright, 'Stamford Raffles – A Manufactured Hero?', in 17th Biennial Conference of the Asian Studies Association of Australia in Melbourne 1-3 July 2008, 9.

<sup>417</sup> Bernard, 'Commemorating Raffles', p. 581.

<sup>418</sup> Raffles, *Memoir of the life and public services of Sir Thomas Stamford Raffles*'

<sup>419</sup> Bernard, 'Commemorating Raffles', 582.



biographies published in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries drew heavily upon *Memoirs* and bordered upon that hagiographic.<sup>420</sup>

The more pertinent factor, however, was Singapore's rapid and spectacular rise. As Singapore became the centre of British administration in Southeast Asia and a vital component of Britain's commercial success, the colony 'needed a founding figure on which the developing cloak of ideals of the society could be draped.'<sup>421</sup> It is probable that Singapore would not have become as central to Britain's economic success in the mid-nineteenth century. Raffles' reputation would never have been rehabilitated to the extent it has been. However, the success of Singapore as a free trade emporium in the decades after his death in 1826 meant that the colony was inextricably linked with the economic policy of free trade and the dawn of new imperialism in Southeast Asia. Significantly, there was consistent reinforcement of the association between Raffles and Singapore's free trade origins in the British media throughout the nineteenth century, as exemplified by the following extract from the *Manchester Times* in 1841:

[Raffles] possessed a most excellent heart, and as a parent and husband his private life was most exemplary. He was the delight and ornament of the social circle, and his memory is still venerated in Java and Singapore. The emporium of free trade which he established in the Eastern Archipelago is the noblest monument that can be raised to him as a statesman, evincing alike his sense of justice and his far-sighted sagacity.<sup>422</sup>

Consequently, as the British figure most closely tied to the colony within the British imagination, Raffles too became intimately tied to the commercial success of free ports within the British imagination, despite his initial objections and his powerlessness to oppose its implementation.<sup>423</sup> Moreover, the inextricable link between Raffles' reputation and Singapore's success meant that any materials he published concerning the settlement were elevated to unparalleled regard.

Within this context, the Jackson Plan became a defining feature of Singapore's image within the British consciousness. Rather than fading away as an unrealised vision for Singapore, the blueprint was held as a symbol of the superiority of British

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<sup>420</sup> For such biographies see: Boulger, *The Life of Stamford Raffles*; Reginald Coupland, *Raffles of Singapore* (London: Collins, 1946); and Emily Hahn, *Raffles of Singapore: A Biography* (London: Francis Aldor, 1948).

<sup>421</sup> Bernard, 'Commemorating Raffles', 581.

<sup>422</sup> *Manchester Times*, 4 September 1841, British Newspaper Archive.

<sup>423</sup> Tze Shiung Ng, 'The ideological origins of the founding of Singapore', 68-74' and Koen Stapelbroek, 'The Failure of the Dutch Free Ports in the Nineteenth Century: Commerce, Colonialism and the Constitutions', *Global Intellectual History*, 8, no. 6 (2023).

urban planning and attributed as a key feature of the settlement's success. Thus, from the 1830s to the late twentieth century, Raffles was seen as the sole architect of Singapore's development. The settlement's success was largely portrayed as the result of British ingenuity as an immaculately considered and constructed planned city.<sup>424</sup>

The enduring importance of the Jackson Plan can most plainly be seen in its influence over the British and American travelogues that emerged in the 1860s. The Jackson Plan ultimately had little bearing on Singapore's development, having failed to translate Raffles' ideas into reality, and its relevance to Singapore's urban growth lessened as the century progressed. This was particularly due to the expansion of the settlement's original boundaries to accommodate the island's burgeoning population. By the second half of the century, the territory that fell under the Company's direct jurisdiction was significantly greater than when Raffles left the colony. In the final years of the nineteenth century, Singapore boasted a thriving and densely populated town that stretched roughly six miles along the southern coast.<sup>425</sup> Basic infrastructure had also been established throughout the island, with a main road connecting the northern and southern coasts and a series of minor roads stretching east to west, as shown in Fig 8.<sup>426</sup> However, for all these significant developments not reflected in Singapore's town structure when the Jackson Plan was created, the descriptions of the settlement provided by European and American travel writers far more closely resemble the Singapore depicted in the Jackson Plan than they did in reality.

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<sup>424</sup> Ellen Cangi, 'Civilising the people of Southeast Asia: Sir Stamford Raffles' town plan for Singapore, 1819-23', *Planning Perspectives*, 8, no. 2 (1993).

<sup>425</sup> Map Of The Island Of Singapore And Its Dependencies 1898, Topographic Map, Survey Department Singapore, National Archives Singapore.

<sup>426</sup> Ibid.

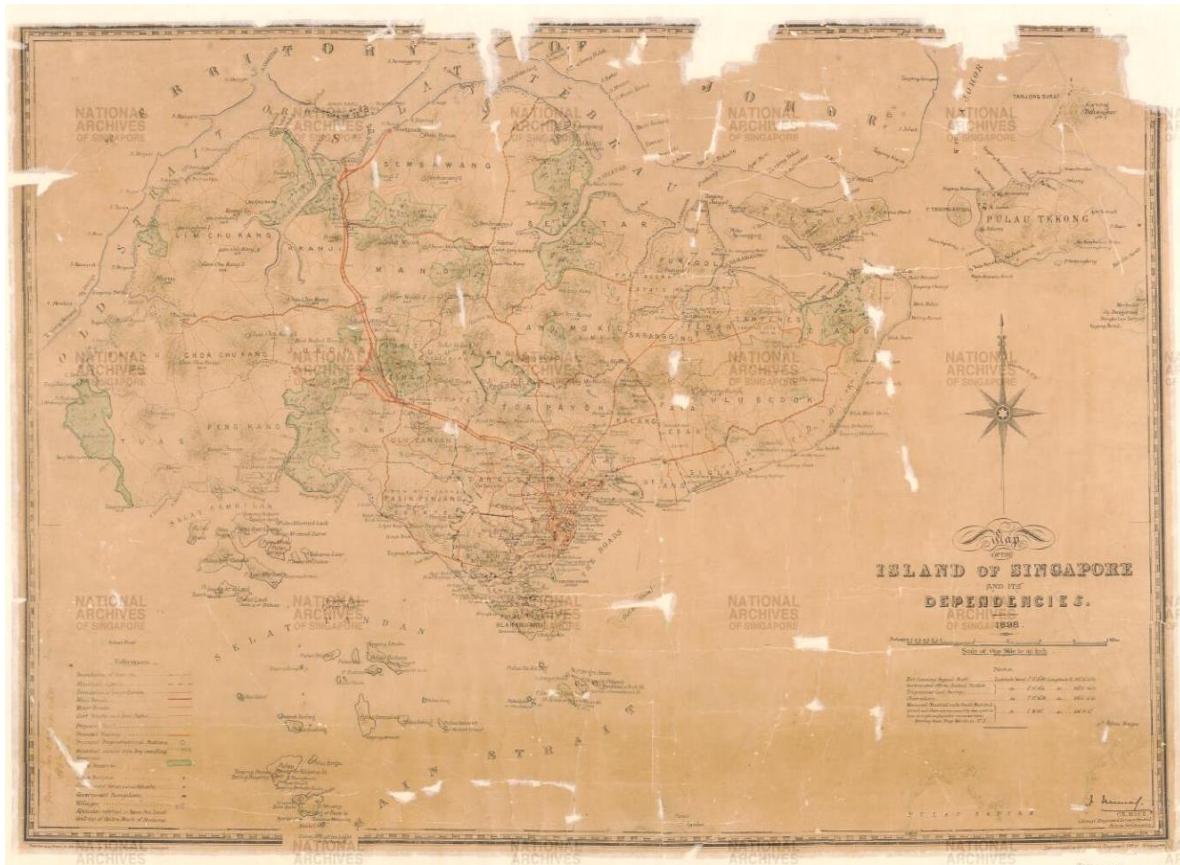


Figure 8. 'Map Of The Island Of Singapore And Its Dependencies 1898', Topographic Map, Survey Department Singapore, National Archives Singapore.

An account of Singapore by the British journalist Henry Norman described the settlement as 'a city of Orientals' in which: 'all this mixed humanity exists in order and security and sanitation, living, thriving and trading, simply because of the presence of English law and under the protection of the British flag.'<sup>427</sup> An even more flattering account of the town appeared in the 1885 travelogue of the American writer and zoologist William Hornaday, which described Singapore as: 'the handiest city I ever saw, as well planned and carefully executed as though built entirely by one man. It is like a big desk, full of drawers and pigeon-holes, where everything has its place and can always be found in it.'<sup>428</sup> These two accounts extolled the efficacy of the British administration, and their popularity presented an image of Singapore that conformed to the colonial imagination. Through these writings, Singapore and Southeast Asia, in

<sup>427</sup> Henry Norman, 'A City of Orientals'.

<sup>428</sup> William Hornaday, *Two Years in the Jungle: The Experiences of a hunter and naturalist in India, Ceylon, the Malay Peninsula and Borneo*, 294.

general, were incorporated into the wider colonial discourse that lauded European supremacy, the introduction of civilisation, and mastery over nature.

These accounts contain little to no mention of the overarching and unignorable issues that afflicted much of the population, particularly those living within the commercial district, which was the primary contact zone for the settlement's numerous ethnicities. Within the colony, for example, European residents complained of the lack of order and structure, which manifested in the difficulty of 'driving through the narrow streets of Singapore [without] running over some of the crowd', and there were even petitions for the forced removal of the 'public nuisance' that was the 'increasing numbers of sick Chinese that crowd our roads and streets.'<sup>429</sup> Similarly, there is no mention of the haphazard urban development that resulted in the outbreak of a great fire in 1830, which devastated Singapore's commercial district. Fires were not an uncommon occurrence in the Straits Settlements at this time. In Singapore, haphazard construction methods, cheap materials, and poor infrastructure resulted in frequent accounts of houses and small attap buildings going up in flames.<sup>430</sup> These fires, however, had typically been isolated incidents, but as the town continued to grow without the oversight of enforced building standards, the danger posed by outbreaks to the rest of the settlement grew exponentially. And so it proved when, in 1830, a fire broke out in the crowded streets of Chinatown. Beginning in a blacksmith's shop on Circular Road, the fire swept through the street's densely packed buildings and several houses were blown up as stores of gunpowder were ignited.<sup>431</sup> As the fire intensified, it spread to adjacent roads, destroying the entirety of Phillip Street, which housed the Yueh Hai Ching Temple, one of the oldest Taoist temples, and one side of Market Street, one of two major arteries in the commercial district.<sup>432</sup> Significantly, the fire even threatened the buildings at the heart of Singapore's mercantile activity in Commercial Square, including some of the settlement's few two and four-storey buildings, which, had they caught ablaze, would have devastated Singapore's

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<sup>429</sup> James Cameron, *Our Tropical Possessions in Malayan India: being a descriptive account of Singapore, Penang, Province Wellesley, and Malacca: their peoples, products, commerce and government* (London: Smith, Elder and Co, 1865), 67; and *Singapore Chronicle and Commercial Register*, 23 April 1829.

<sup>430</sup> Trocki, *Prince of Pirates*, 63; Hill, *The Hikayat Abdullah: the autobiography of Abdullah bin Abdul Kadir*, 229; and Buckley, *An Anecdotal History of Old Times in Singapore*.

<sup>431</sup> Hill, 'The Hikayat Abdullah', 229.

<sup>432</sup> Dhoraisingam S. Samuel, *Singapore's Heritage: Through Place of Historical Interest* (Singapore: Elixir Consultancy Service, 1991), 346.

mercantile activity and resulted in significant casualties.<sup>433</sup> While the fire ultimately stopped just short of these buildings, this appears to have been more the result of coincidence than design and even without this additional damage, fuelled by an almost unbroken line of wooden and attap shophouses, the conflagration lasted for three successive days and nights.<sup>434</sup> The severity of the fire was also amplified by Singapore's ineffectual infrastructure and over-built roads, which blocked off access routes and severely hampered the mobility of the teams of convicts who attempted to fight the fire with buckets of water.<sup>435</sup> The rapidity with which the fire spread and the ineffectualness of the firefighting efforts provided a stark illustration to Singaporean locals of the dangers of a weak government that was unable to exert influence over urban planning. British officials in Bengal, however, were seemingly unmoved by the scale of the disaster and made little effort to empower the local government to prevent a similar tragedy from occurring again.

Although Hornaday's and Norman's impressions of Singapore were not formed in the crowded streets of Singapore's marketplace, as Mui Ling Han points out, were drawn from the veranda of a hotel, a seat in a rickshaw, and the floor of a ballroom, the discrepancies between their descriptions and the reality remained exceptional.<sup>436</sup> It is highly probable, therefore, that their writings would have been highly influenced by the settlement they had already expected to see, which reflected Raffles' vision. The likelihood of these authors deliberately pandering to Raffles' rehabilitated reputation is further supported by the fact that by focusing on familiar concepts such as governance and commerce and describing their experiences from a position of privilege, Hornaday and Norman provided an accessible framework for their European readership to engage with, and appreciate, the 'otherness' of Singapore and Southeast Asia. Consequently, descriptions of the exotic or oriental were often framed in familiar imperial settings. For instance, accounts of the main ethnic groups in Singapore were based on the respective role of each ethnicity within the colonial marketplace.<sup>437</sup>

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<sup>433</sup> Song, *One Hundred Years' History of the Chinese in Singapore*, 38.

<sup>434</sup> *Ibid.*, 39.

<sup>435</sup> *Ibid.*, 39.

<sup>436</sup> Mui Ling Han, 'From Travelogues to Guidebooks: Imagining Colonial Singapore, 1819-1940', *Sojourn: Journal of Social Issues in Southeast Asia*, 18, no. 2 (2003): 273.

<sup>437</sup> Han, 'From Travelogues to Guidebooks: Imagining Colonial Singapore, 1819-1940', 260.

Through their 'colonialists' gaze on the other', Hornaday and Norman created an image of Singapore that was consumed in the metropole but which existed only in the minds of imperial travellers.<sup>438</sup> This approach to travel writing fits into a wider body of nineteenth-century colonial scholarship that Farish Noor has termed 'books in the era of gunboat epistemology.'<sup>439</sup> In addition to Hornaday and Norman, these authors included Raffles, Crawford, Brooke, Anderson, Snodgrass and Keppel – all of whom created an image of Southeast Asia that was fashioned by empire, colonialism, radicalised capitalism, and pseudo-science.<sup>440</sup> As such these flattering accounts of Singapore, which extolled the efficacy of the British administration, adhered to the ongoing concepts of progress and order that was employed to justify colonial expansion in India throughout the eighteenth century.<sup>441</sup> The analogy of Singapore representing a big desk with everything in the right place was a romanticised idea of colonialism that conformed much more to the military-commercial outlook of company boardrooms than the reality of the settlement's urban development.<sup>442</sup>

In contrast to the incremental development of Singapore's depiction in the eighteenth century, within the nineteenth century, it had suddenly lurched from an overlooked island to an embodiment of the greatest traits valued within the British Empire in under a century. Although historical analysis in the twentieth century has subsequently tempered some of this gleam from this projection of Singapore, the main undercurrents of an orderly settlement designed to the specific vision of its founder still remain to this day. Where this chapter has sought to explore the origins of this image and demonstrate the malleability and artificialness of Singapore's portrayal within Britain's nineteenth-century imagination, the following chapter seeks to explore the conflicting realities of the settlement's urban development. A critical re-examination of Singapore's extensive colonial records reveals that far from the product of British foresight and colonial mastery, the British were regularly unable to exert any meaningful influence over the settlement's development.

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<sup>438</sup> Han, 'From Travelogues to Guidebooks: Imagining Colonial Singapore, 1819-1940', 260.

<sup>439</sup> Farish Noor, *The Discursive Construction of Southeast Asia in 19<sup>th</sup> Century Colonial-Capitalist Discourse* (Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press, 2016): 187.

<sup>440</sup> Noor, *The Discursive Construction of Southeast Asia*, 188.

<sup>441</sup> Noor, *The Discursive Construction of Southeast Asia*, 187; and John Marriott, *The Other Empire: Metropolis, India and progress in the colonial imagination*, (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2003), 212.

<sup>442</sup> Hornaday, *Two Years in the Jungle*, 294; and Noor, *The Discursive Construction of Southeast Asia*, 187.

## Chapter Three: Shortcomings of British Rule in Singapore

Far from the product of a cohesive, organised and efficient imperial administration, Singapore's urban development in the first half of the nineteenth century was overseen by a British administration that was a maelstrom of disorder, tension and scarcity as the local government strove to fulfil even the most basic of executive functions. It was not until the rise of revisionist historiography that a critical examination of the gap between the portrayal of Raffles' envisioned plans and the actual trajectory of Singapore's development began.<sup>443</sup> This chapter delves into Singapore's growth as a series of hesitant and fragmented advancements. The administration, plagued by chronic underfunding and insufficient staffing, constantly struggled to meaningfully impact the settlement's urban expansion. The ensuing analysis contends that, despite Raffles' ambitious plans and intentions from 1819 to 1824, he was largely ineffective in driving significant and deliberate urban development. Furthermore, it highlights that, in the wake of Raffles' failure to execute his vision for Singapore's growth, Farquhar effectively assumed the mantle of governance, whose endeavours were crucial for the settlement's development.

At the root of the chaos within Singapore's government was the settlement's ambiguous status within the British Empire and the subsequent lack of a defined imperial hierarchy or responsibility. On paper, there existed a defined and straightforward chain of command. At the top was the Governor-General of India, the highest level of executive authority in the sub-continent with absolute control over foreign policy – answerable only to the British government and the Court of Directors.<sup>444</sup> Between 1813 and 1823, this position was held by Francis Rawdon-Hastings, 1<sup>st</sup> Marquess of Hastings, and he was directly responsible for the foundation of a British settlement in Singapore.<sup>445</sup> Second to Hastings was Stamford Raffles, the Lieutenant-Governor of Bencoolen who, on 28 November 1818, had been instructed by Hastings to 'secure the free passage of the Straits of Malacca' by 'the establishment of a Station beyond Malacca, such as may command the southern entrance of the

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<sup>443</sup> Ian Tan, 'The Colonial Port as Contact Zone: Chinese Merchants and the development of Godowns along Singapore River 1827-1905', *Architectural History*, 8, no. 1 (2020); Anderson, *Imagined Communities*.

<sup>444</sup> Anthony Webster, *The Richest East India Merchant: The Life and Business of John Palmer of Calcutta, 1767-1836* (Woodbridge: Boydell and Brewer, 2007), 8.

<sup>445</sup> *East India Company Act 1784* (24 Geo. 3. Sess. 2. C. 25).

Straits.<sup>446</sup> A lack of specificity in these instructions presented Raffles with a significant degree of autonomous authority which he utilised when he settled upon Singapore as the site of the British settlement without consulting Hastings. In addition to providing the jurisdiction to choose the location of a new colony, the ambiguity of the instructions also gave Raffles the authority to negotiate the conditions and parameters of the settlement independently. These terms proved central to both the nature of Singapore's early development and its legal standing within the British Empire and are the subject of extensive examination in this chapter. Beyond his mandate to locate and found a new British settlement, Raffles was able to cement his authority in Singapore in June 1819 when he placed the settlement under the jurisdiction of Bencoolen.<sup>447</sup> The final figure of note in Singapore's imperial hierarchy was William Farquhar, a former Resident of Malacca whose expertise in the region led to his specific appointment to Raffles' mission by the Supreme Government with 'a view to your remaining in local charge of the British Interests in that quarter.'<sup>448</sup> The definitiveness of this structure reinforced the orthodox perception of Singapore that has argued Raffles was a fundamental feature of the settlement's growth and that Singapore's early success resulted from a well-considered imperial policy.<sup>449</sup>

### Financial Constraints and Administrative Challenges

The establishment of the Singaporean colony coincided with Southeast Asia's second trade boom from 1815-1913. This boom was driven by four key factors; the removal of long-standing mercantilist policies, the introduction of new steam engine technologies, the rise in demand for manufacturing goods, and the dominance of the British Empire sought a trade-stimulating peace following the turbulence of the Napoleonic War.<sup>450</sup> Singapore's commercial success depended upon its appeal to local and regional traders, and Britain intended to provide the most competitive market in Southeast Asia. This was largely achieved through the settlement's free trade policy but supplemented by affordable provisions and cheap administrative costs. However,

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<sup>446</sup> Adam, Chief Secretary to Supreme Government, to Raffles, 28 November 1818, Java Factory Records, vol. 71, British Library; and John Bastin, *Raffles and Hastings: Private Exchanges behind the Founding of Singapore* (Singapore: National Library Board, 2014), 76.

<sup>447</sup> Kevin Y. L. Tan, 'A Short Legal and Constitutional History of Singapore', 30.

<sup>448</sup> Letters to Bencoolen, 1819-1920, L10: National Archive of Singapore; and Supreme Government to Farquhar, 28 November 1818; Bastin, *Raffles and Hastings*.

<sup>449</sup> Turnbull, *A History of Modern Singapore*.

<sup>450</sup> Jeffrey Williamson, 'Trade, Growth, and Distribution in Southeast Asia 1500-1940', in *Routledge Handbook of Southeast Asian Economics*, ed. Ian Coxhead (London: Routledge, 2014), 14-15.



the scale of military expenditure had left the settlement without the necessary infrastructure to sustainably provide this environment. For example, although the settlement was regularly supplied with provisions from Prince of Wales Island, the government lacked sufficient godowns to store these goods, resulting in very high levels of wastage of perishable goods such as rice, ghee, flour and sugar.<sup>451</sup> Complaints by government officials of the 'utmost impossibility of procuring shelter' meant these foodstuffs were regularly damaged by prolonged exposure to both heavy rainfall and unmitigated heat or stored in temporary sheds where they were liable to be stolen.<sup>452</sup> This material loss was further compounded by the absence of even more basic tools, such as weights and scales, required for the inspection of such deliveries. Without suitable measurements, officials were forced to purchase items, such as bags of rice, for a fixed price. This inevitably led to exploitation, and the government's already strained coffers were drained by paying for underweight and deficient bags of rice, rotten onions and chillies.<sup>453</sup>

Moreover, the government could only afford to assign one official to inspect the goods of several boats, which proved particularly problematic as the desire to appease local traders meant that rather than forcing merchants to wait for their goods to be examined, most of the ships were not detained and their cargo was neither inspected nor recorded. In his report of a particularly sizable shipment from the Prince of Wales Island, Samuel Garling, the Acting First Assistant and future Resident of Malacca, complained that this system resulted in inconsistent and inaccurate record-keeping as the ships that were not detained rarely delivered accounts of their goods. These systematic shortcomings became characteristic of the challenges that faced Farquhar's underequipped and underfunded administration. With little external support, these issues remained unaddressed for months on end as the government sought to operate without even the most basic of resources. In September 1819, a shortage of rope prevented the government from securing Company boats that had arrived with new supplies. The solution to this issue, as it often proved with the myriad of challenges that Farquhar's administration faced, was to suffer an 'immense

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<sup>451</sup> Samuel Garling to Farquhar, 5<sup>th</sup> July 1819, L10: SSR.

<sup>452</sup> Samuel Garling to Farquhar, 5<sup>th</sup> July 1819, L10: SSR; and Francis James Bernard to Wm. Farquhar, 16<sup>th</sup> July 1819, L10: SSR.

<sup>453</sup> Samuel Garling to Farquhar, 5 July 1819, L10: SSR.

expense.<sup>454</sup> In this particular case, the additional expense went towards hiring a large workforce to compensate for the absence of fundamental apparatus and without whom it would have been 'impossible to land heavy articles.'<sup>455</sup>

These unforeseen expenses were occasionally passed onto consumers, but it was more common for the government to absorb them. Much like the settlement's free trade policy, this approach was designed to establish an inviting financial environment for the region's merchants and traders to promote and encourage growth. Individually, both policies placed a heavy financial burden on the government, and when combined, they created an unsustainable cycle of financial loss as free trade prohibited the taxation of trade – the sole source of a potential income in 1819, as Singapore was as of yet incapable of supporting extensive excise farms - thereby denying the government the ability to recoup on the losses they sustained in promoting growth. Consequently, although Singapore's government operated with a skeleton staff consisting of only eight staff and whose total expense was just \$1,100 a month, the addition of these unanticipated costs atop the excessive military spending in the settlement's first few months meant that by July 1819 total expenditure in the settlement had exceeded \$50,000.<sup>456</sup> In addition to this financial support, the Company also invested a significant sum into Singapore in the form of shipments carrying civil stores and merchandise. In August 1819, for example, the settlement received a delivery worth over \$40,000.<sup>457</sup> Many of the items that arrived in these shipments were intended for resale, exploiting the opening of a second market in Singapore and securing profit from goods that were 'almost totally unsaleable' in Penang.<sup>458</sup> However, before the goods became available for public sale in Singapore, Farquhar was authorised to requisition any articles that he believed would be 'advantageous to the public interests', further indebting his government to the Company.<sup>459</sup> Considering these material investments, it is likely that by the time of Hastings' announcement in October, the Company had invested in excess of \$100,000 in Singapore.

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<sup>454</sup> F. J. Bernard to Farquhar, 27 September 1819, L10: SSR.

<sup>455</sup> Ibid.

<sup>456</sup> Raffles to Farquhar, 6 February 1819. L10: SSR; Raffles to Farquhar, 25 June 1819, L10: SSR; Wm Farquhar to P. O. Travers, 27 July 1819, L10: SSR.

<sup>457</sup> Raffles to Farquhar, 25 August 1819, L10: SSR.

<sup>458</sup> John Anderson to Clubley, 26 May 1819, L10: SSR.

<sup>459</sup> Raffles to Farquhar, 25 August 1819, L10: SSR.

This figure of \$100,000 was exceptionally high in the context of British spending in Southeast Asia, which was otherwise characterised by a policy of limiting expenditure. This was evidenced in the Company's approach to Penang in the mid-1800s as once it became clear that the colony had very limited value as either 'a naval base or a political objective', the Directors of the East India Company withdrew almost all financial support.<sup>460</sup> Throughout the early decades of the nineteenth century, therefore, public spending in the colony was very low, and despite the expectations that the colony was to become a key port for the British Empire, very few amenities were provided for early settlers.<sup>461</sup> Living conditions quickly deteriorated as Penang outgrew its existing infrastructure. However, Bengal remained steadfast in only sanctioning public projects accompanied by the most modest estimates of projected costs.<sup>462</sup> This reluctance to commit resources to Penang was epitomised by the criticism that followed Robert Farquhar's efforts to improve the island's infrastructure. Robert Farquhar – not to be confused with and with no relation to William Farquhar – was a highly influential Southeast Asian administrator, having been appointed Lieutenant-Governor of Penang in 1804.<sup>463</sup> Robert Farquhar was, in some senses, Raffles' spiritual predecessor, as he was a staunch advocate of cementing a British presence in the Malay Straits. He played a significant role in convincing Bengal and the metropole that Penang represented the best opportunity to achieve this goal.<sup>464</sup> The most notable and most condemned of Farquhar's projects in Penang was the construction of water works to improve supplies in the settlement. The proposed system involved constructing a series of pipes connecting the six miles between the waterfalls and rivers in the hinterlands to the town and ports. Robert Farquhar would then charge residents and ship owners for access to the freshwater supply with an estimated annual income of \$24,470 in order to recoup the initial outlay.<sup>465</sup> When he

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<sup>460</sup> Nordin, *Trade and Society in the Straits of Melaka: Dutch Melaka and English Penang, 1780-1830* (Singapore: NUS Press, 2007), 143; Nurfadzilah Yahaya, 'Legal Pluralism and the English East India Company in the Straits of Malacca during the Early Nineteenth Century', *Law and History Review*, 33, no. 4 (2015): 950.

<sup>461</sup> Tomotaka Kawamura, 'Maritime Asian Trade and Colonisation of Penang, c. 1786-1830', in *Hinterland Commodities: Place, Space, Time and the Political Economic Development of Asia over the Long Eighteenth Century*, ed. Tsykasa Mizushima, George Bryan Souza and Dennis O. Flynn (Leiden: Brill, 2014), 156.

<sup>462</sup> Anthony Webster, 'British expansion in South-East Asia and the role of Robert Farquhar, Lieutenant-Governor of Penang, 1804-5', *The Journal of Imperial and Commonwealth History*, 23, no. 1 (1995), 8.

<sup>463</sup> *Ibid.*, 2.

<sup>464</sup> *Ibid.*, 2.

<sup>465</sup> Nordin, *Trade and Society in the Straits of Melaka*, 251.

first pitched this project, Robert Farquhar had estimated the total cost of the waterworks, in combination with a separate canal works project, to be \$28,000 – a figure low enough to receive approval from Bengal.<sup>466</sup> This estimate, however, was grossly misjudged, and by 1806, after severe delays and labour shortages, the waterworks had already cost \$27,000 and remained some distance from completion.<sup>467</sup> Although this figure was dwarfed by the spending on Singapore just over a decade later, Bengal was furious with the expenditure, and although Robert Farquhar had already departed for England, having been replaced as Lieutenant-Governor in 1806, his tenure was excoriated by his contemporaries and early historians of the region. His reputation has since been somewhat rehabilitated in a new wave of historiography that has placed a greater emphasis on the underlying conditions surrounding Robert Farquhar's poor financial understanding and management, namely the inflated evaluation of Penang's economic potential inherited from Francis Light. Nevertheless, the ire and condemnation that he incurred for overspending on a project that was not only partially funded through taxation but also designed to generate future income demonstrated how reluctant the Company was to commit resources to Southeast Asia at the beginning of the nineteenth century.

Although there is little evidence of a cohesive colonial policy designed to influence the metropole, as Tarling argued, the injection of an unprecedented level of financial support enabled Raffles to promote Singapore as one of Southeast Asia's most attractive and busiest ports. From the perspective of the agency houses, banks, and politicians in London, Singapore appeared to be a thriving settlement full of commercial potential that was destined to grow larger and more influential. This ultimately won the support of the agency houses and business groups in the metropole. The reality within the settlement, however, was very different. Farquhar's administration had received very little of the Company's \$100,000 investment in capital and resources, and while the private sector flourished, the settlement's civic infrastructure was sorely under-provisioned. Nine months after its inception, the settlement still needed vital administrative buildings, such as a general treasury, public

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<sup>466</sup> Webster, 'British expansion in South-East Asia', 8.

<sup>467</sup> *Ibid.*, 9.

office or courthouse, all of which were otherwise fundamental features of British colonial governance.<sup>468</sup>

The disproportionate allocation of funds had initially been intended as a temporary measure. In what would turn out to be a defining moment of Singapore's colonial history, in October 1819, Hastings announced significant cuts to staffing and operational expenses in Singapore.<sup>469</sup> This decision was partly a response to the settlement's escalating costs but was principally the culmination of Hastings' successive efforts to appease the Netherlands Government by any means short of ceding the island to the Dutch.<sup>470</sup> Moreover, despite the build-up of defences on the island, there was a growing belief within the British government and the East India Company in late 1819 and early 1820 that they had little legal footing to refute Dutch claims.<sup>471</sup> With the cession of the settlement appearing the most likely outcome, the reduced investment in Singapore also insulated the Company from any potential losses. However, whilst Hastings' concerns of Dutch retaliation and destabilisation of European imperialism in Southeast Asia were well-founded, when this decision was made, funds for the construction of any administrative buildings had still not been made available, and it became evident that the temporary absence of these fundamental resources would be extended indefinitely. Unsurprisingly, the announcement that Singapore would not receive the necessary funds to construct these buildings proved disastrous to Farquhar's administration. Already overstretched and under-provisioned, Hastings' decision consigned the government to attempt to administer a settlement of over five thousand inhabitants without any of the necessary infrastructure needed and with very little recourse to raise the finances to rectify the issue.<sup>472</sup>

The denial of financial support to Southeast Asian colonies was not uncommon in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries and was reflective of the Company's prioritisation of maximising commercial returns, as was the case in Penang. What was

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<sup>468</sup> Letters to and From Raffles, No. 173 Farquhar to Lieutenant L. Nelson Hull Acting Secretary and to the Lieutenant Governor, 22 March 1823, L:11 SSR.

<sup>469</sup> Nadia Wright, 'Pragmatism in the Founding of Singapore', in *Liberalism and the British Empire in Southeast Asia*, ed. Knapman, Milner and Quilty, 59.

<sup>470</sup> Peter Borschberg, 'Dutch Objections to British Singapore, 1819-1824, 540-561.

<sup>471</sup> *Ibid.*, 545.

<sup>472</sup> Wright, 'Pragmatism in the Founding of Singapore', 59.

notable in Singapore was the refusal to invest in key institutions, such as a courthouse, that were otherwise central to the exertion of Britain's imperial authority. In the first few months of 1819, the settlement did not particularly suffer from the absence of a courthouse, and because Raffles had not considered the settlement large enough – or sufficiently foreseen its rate of growth - few provisions had been made for the establishment of law and order.<sup>473</sup> The decision not to establish 'any precise regulations' and to vest Farquhar with the authority of the Chief Magistrate allowed for the occasional exercise of judicial control without necessitating further staff or buildings.<sup>474</sup> This solution, however, significantly added to Farquhar's responsibilities and, in what became a recurring theme, spread the government's resources extremely thin. Their lax approach to establishing legal authority prevented Farquhar from accessing funds to finally build a dedicated courthouse, and when Hastings announced his intention to cut funding for the settlement, it became evident that its construction would be delayed indefinitely. It is worth noting that when the settlement finally got its first dedicated courthouse in 1827, the building had not been constructed for that purpose, nor had it even been built by the government. Instead, the building belonged to the successful Scottish merchant John Maxwell who had purchased the large plot of land close to the Singapore River in order to build a private mansion.<sup>475</sup> Administrative zoning laws, however, prevented Maxwell from using his building for its intended residential purpose, and so he instead decided to rent it to the government, whereupon it became the settlement's first courthouse for just over \$200 a month.<sup>476</sup>

Significantly, the Company's refusal to provide the required funds and the subsequent eight-year absence of a court in Singapore marked a significant shift in British colonial policy. Before the acquisition of Singapore, the East India Company had primarily pursued a policy of indirect imperialism that placed a greater emphasis on asserting the legitimacy of their rule through non-militaristic means. One of the primary ways they achieved this was by asserting their legal authority. By subjecting local individuals that they deemed politically and economically influential to English

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<sup>473</sup> Raffles to Farquhar, 25 June 1819, L10: SSR.

<sup>474</sup> Ibid.

<sup>475</sup> Tan, 'The Colonial Port as Contact Zone: Chinese Merchants and the development of Godowns along Singapore River 1827-1905'.

<sup>476</sup> Buckley, *An Anecdotal History of Old Times in Singapore*, 198-199.

Common Law in Company Courts, they could wield law as a colonising force.<sup>477</sup> The success of this approach in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries meant that when Raffles first arrived in Singapore, the Company's legal authority had become pervasive throughout the eastern end of the Indian Ocean without having resorted to territorial conquest.<sup>478</sup> The British initially adopted a similar approach in Singapore, agreeing treaties with the local rulers and offering financial compensation for the right to establish a settlement on the island. Similarly, in the second half of the nineteenth century, the Company again utilised this method to establish imperial authority by British customs in Singapore, which is explored in later chapters. In the crucial period of Singapore's history between 1819 and 1824, however, this approach was almost entirely neglected, and very little attention was paid to establishing any legal presence in the settlement. Consequently, although the absence of a courthouse was not an overt detriment to Farquhar's administration, the Company's commitment to a negative fiscal policy after October 1819 resulted in a significant deviation from the colonial policy previously employed in Southeast Asia.

Where the implications of the absence of a courthouse were primarily borne out over the course of the nineteenth century, the want of a general treasury, public office and police station proved more immediately jeopardising Farquhar's administration. Farquhar believed that the absence of these three institutions placed his government in a position of 'total inadequacy...for the due performance of the public duties...which fell immediately under the Resident's Superintendence.'<sup>479</sup> Yet, despite these shortcomings and Farquhar's status as one of Southeast Asia's most experienced and successful British administrators, his continued complaints to Raffles and Hastings went unheeded. Even when British public opinion and business lobbies began to support the retention of the settlement in 1823 vociferously, both Raffles and Hastings remained steadfast in objecting to any proposal increasing funding to the government, arguing that they saw 'no cause for making any immediate alteration' to the present establishment.<sup>480</sup> The Company's continued refusal to provide Farquhar with the

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<sup>477</sup> Yahaya, 'Legal Pluralism and the English East India Company in the Straits of Malacca during the Early Nineteenth Century', 946.

<sup>478</sup> *Ibid.*, 946.

<sup>479</sup> Letters to and From Raffles, Farquhar to Lieutenant L. Nelson Hull Acting Secretary, 20 March 1823, L:11, SSR

<sup>480</sup> *Ibid.*

necessary finances to construct the basic institutions required to govern Singapore effectively became so damaging to the settlement's administration that, in the eyes of the European population at least, amounted to almost an absolution of responsibility on the part of the Company.<sup>481</sup> For the government to survive and to exert any form of authority and control over Singapore, it was imperative that private individuals took on the responsibility and burden that the Company had discarded. As the absence of even the most fundamental public buildings was one of the government's most pressing concerns, Farquhar assumed the mantle of duty himself and converted the Residency, his private dwelling, into a multifunction government office that served as 'various public purposes for which it has been casually in requisite.'<sup>482</sup> The Residency, one of the first buildings constructed in Singapore, occupied a prime location near the Singapore River. When Lieutenant Jackson purchased the property following Farquhar's departure in 1827, it was revealed that the building encompassed an area of 32,680 square feet.<sup>483</sup> By converting the Residency into a government building, not only did Farquhar forfeit any personal benefit from the size and location of the Residency, but he also incurred great expense in its maintenance. As one of the oldest buildings in the settlement, the Residency was under almost constant repairs, having been built from 'light and not very durable materials...at a time when materials of every description and workmen were extremely scarce'.<sup>484</sup> These structural issues were exacerbated by the building's frequent use, which far exceeded its intended residential purpose. Moreover, perhaps due to Hasting's ongoing refusal to invest in the settlement in general, Farquhar did not make any claims on the East India Company to compensate him for using his property as the settlement's primary government building. On top of this outlay, the conversion of the Residency left no space for Farquhar's family to reside, and he was required to incur another expense of purchasing another property in Kampong Glam in 1821.<sup>485</sup>

Farquhar's personal and financial sacrifice provided Singapore's beleaguered government with a physical space to operate, without which it is unclear how the

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<sup>481</sup> *The Singapore Free Press and Mercantile Advertiser*, 4 January 1844.

<sup>482</sup> Letters to and From Raffles, No. 173 Farquhar to Lieutenant L. Nelson Hull Acting Secretary and to the Lieutenant Governor, 22 March 1823, L:11, SSR.

<sup>483</sup> Leong Foke Meng, 'Early Land Transactions in Singapore', *Journal of the Malaysian Branch of the Royal Asiatic Society*, 77, no. 1 (2004): 26.

<sup>484</sup> Letters to and From Raffles, No. 173 Farquhar to Lieutenant L. Nelson Hull Acting Secretary and to the Lieutenant Governor, 22 March 1823, L:11, SSR.

<sup>485</sup> Leong Foke Meng, 'Early Land Transactions in Singapore', 28.



administration would function. Farquhar's personal contributions to the settlement's governance, however, were not restricted to the provision of this public space but also extended to the employment of essential government personnel. The early administration of Singapore was defined by a recruitment strategy that valued availability, expediency, and nepotism over capability or careful selection.<sup>486</sup> In addition to Farquhar, the government was comprised of: Lieutenant Francis Crossley, Assistant Resident; Francis James Bernard, Master Attendant; Lieutenant Henry Ralph, Assistant Engineer; Lieutenant Dow, Temporary Cantonment Adjutant; Mr Montgomery, Assistant Surgeon; and Mr Prendergast, Acting Assistant Surgeon.<sup>487</sup> Given the priority of expediency, Raffles made these appointments from a combination of existing company officials in the Straits of Malacca and Bencoolen as well as from the local European population, and the qualifications of the new employees were often questionable.<sup>488</sup> Despite being appointed Master Attendant, Bernard, for example, had very limited prior experience in colonial administration. Having first joined the Marine Service in Calcutta in 1810, just five years later, Bernard was struck off, rather than dismissed, as noted in Wright's comprehensive study of his career, without an official reason provided in the records.<sup>489</sup> While his career was off to an inauspicious start, Bernard's personal life was more successful, and in 1818 he married Esther Farquhar, William Farquhar's daughter, at St John's Church in Calcutta before relocating to Malacca where his new father-in-law was Resident and Commandant.<sup>490</sup> In keeping with his limited qualifications, Bernard was given command of a 130-ton brig by Farquhar. This occupation, however, lasted for a short four months as not long after he arrived at the colony the British returned Malacca to the Dutch.<sup>491</sup> Consequently, when Raffles appointed Bernard as Singapore's Master Attendant in 1819, a position of significant responsibility and with numerous duties -including the provision of freshwater, food supplies, firewood and timber for vessels in the harbour, the

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<sup>486</sup> Kathirithamby-Wells, 'Early Singapore and the Inception of a British Administrative Tradition in the Straits Settlements (1819-1832)', *Journal of the Malaysian Branch of the Royal Asiatic Society*, 42, no. 2 (1969): 48; Jon S. T. Quah, 'The Evolution of the Singapore Civil Service (1819-1959)', in *Public Administration Singapore-Style: Research in Public Policy Analysis and Management*, Vol. 19, ed. Jon S. T. Quah (Bingley: Emerald Group Publishing Limited, 2010).

<sup>487</sup> Quah, 'The Evolution of the Singapore Civil Service (1819-1959)'.

<sup>488</sup> Kathirithamby-Wells, 'Early Singapore and the Inception of a British Administrative Tradition in the Straits Settlements (1819-1832)', 49.

<sup>489</sup> Nadia Wright, 'The Career of Francis James Bernard: Nepotism and Patronage in Early Singapore', *Journal of the Malaysian Branch of the Royal Asiatic Society*, 89, no. 311 (2016): 26.

<sup>490</sup> *Ibid.*, 26.

<sup>491</sup> Wright, 'The Career of Francis James Bernard', 26.

supervision of an outpost on St John's Island and the collection of anchorage fees - his only relevant qualification for the role was his relationship with Farquhar.<sup>492</sup> Over the course of his career in Singapore, Bernard was subject to frequent criticism and disparagement, notably by Raffles and Crawford (Farquhar's successor as Resident), although Wright has argued that many of these critiques were unjust and that despite his lack of qualifications he managed to fulfil his duties as Master Attendant efficiently.<sup>493</sup> Nevertheless, his appointment as one of the most senior staff in Singapore exemplified the lack of experience and expertise of the settlement's new administration.

More detrimental than the lack of qualifications, however, was the restricted size of the Singapore administration. In his creation of Singapore's first civil service, Raffles failed to predict the settlement's rapid growth, and the government suffered from a lack of junior administrative staff and more senior, specialised officials required to oversee crucial aspects of Singapore's development. Sympathetic to the challenges facing Farquhar's administration, Raffles expanded the government's workforce in the subsequent months. In late June 1819, nine days before he left the settlement to return to Bencoolen, he employed three additional writers.<sup>494</sup> The employment of just these three clerks significantly enhanced the government's administrative capabilities as before their appointment, no one had been capable or responsible for recording and translating Malay documents despite the extensive dealings with Sultan Hussein and Temenggong Shah.<sup>495</sup> These new employees were vital to the settlement's management, significantly easing Farquhar's administrative duties, which enabled him to pay greater attention to Singapore's development, and their employment appeared to reflect a willingness to invest in and expand the settlement's government. In October 1819, however, after Hasting decided to withdraw financial support, the trajectory of the government's growth suddenly switched from expansionary to contractionary. In accordance with the Company's new negative fiscal policy, the government workforce was downsized to just eight staff.<sup>496</sup>

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<sup>492</sup> Wright, 'The Career of Francis James Bernard', 26.

<sup>493</sup> Ibid., 26.

<sup>494</sup> Raffles to Farquhar, 25 and 26 June 1819; Crossly to Farquhar, 26 June 1819, L10: SSR.

<sup>495</sup> Ibid.

<sup>496</sup> John Bastin, *Raffles and Hastings: Private Exchanges behind the Founding of Singapore*, 146.

As Raffles had returned to Bencoolen over three months before Hasting's decision, Farquhar was alone in facing the challenges of the settlement's development. Farquhar, therefore, acted independently at the end of 1819 when he expanded the government once more by creating two new administrative positions. The first appointment was made in response to Raffles' shipment of clove and nutmeg plants from Bencoolen to Singapore with the intention of establishing spice plantations on the island.<sup>497</sup> As this process was of great import to Farquhar and Raffles, both of whom were invested in utilising Singapore's uncleared land for spice plantations, Farquhar provisionally hired Brooks, a European gardener, on a salary of \$40 per month to operate as the settlement's botanist and oversee the cultivation of both large plants in situ and smaller plants in nursery beds.<sup>498</sup> In addition to overseeing the cultivation of Singapore's future plantations, Farquhar also deemed it necessary to expand the island's police department in response to an increase in crime that had arisen as a result of Singapore's population growth.<sup>499</sup> In particular, Farquhar targeted the emergence of underhand monopolies of opium and arrack, which he intended to curtail by introducing licences and regulations on their sale.<sup>500</sup> To enforce these new rules and regulations, Farquhar employed David Napier, a prominent figure within the European community and in line to be appointed Resident of Pahang had the British established a settlement in the Malay state, as Assistant in the Police Department.<sup>501</sup> Significantly, while Farquhar had no plan to finance Brooks' salary outside of an increase in funds from Bengal, his proposal to expand the police department was more self-sufficient as the additional cost was to be defrayed by the funds raised from the licensing fees.<sup>502</sup>

The appointment of both Brooks and Napier enabled the government to extend its influence beyond the skeleton staff's capacity and to exert direct authority over two important aspects of Singapore's future development. Moreover, though Farquhar was aware that both employments were dependent upon Company approval, given Brooks' modest salary of \$40 per month and the self-financing model proposed for Napier, he

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<sup>497</sup> Farquhar to Raffles, 28 October 1819, L:10: SSR.

<sup>498</sup> Ibid.

<sup>499</sup> Nadia Wright, 'The Career of Francis James Bernard: Nepotism and Patronage in Early Singapore', 28.

<sup>500</sup> Farquhar to Raffles, 2 November 1819, L:10: SSR.

<sup>501</sup> Kathirithamby-Wells, 'Early Singapore And The Inception Of A British Administrative Tradition In The Straits Settlements', 51.

<sup>502</sup> Farquhar to Raffles, 2 November 1819, L10: SSR.

was confident that they would both be confirmed. However, despite the importance of these new posts, when Farquhar's requests reached Raffles in Bencoolen in early 1820, he rejected both hires in accordance with Hasting's adoption of a negative fiscal policy towards the settlement.<sup>503</sup> These rejections were extremely damaging to the government's ability to influence the direction of Singapore's early development, and Raffles' role in the decision was particularly egregious as he shared many of Farquhar's goals, as directly evidenced in the initial shipment of spices to Singapore which prompted the employment of Brooks. Even more infuriating for Farquhar, however, were Raffles' financial decisions in the months immediately following his rejection of Brooks and Napier's employment.

In April 1820, Raffles decided to replace Bernard as Master Attendant with his brother-in-law, Captain Willaim Flint. Besides exposing the undercurrent of nepotism that characterised Singapore's early government, this decision has been identified by historians such as Kathirithamby-Wells as the root cause of the ill-feeling that developed between Raffles and Farquhar and which plagued their working relationship until the latter's dismissal in May 1823.<sup>504</sup> However, whilst Farquhar was undoubtedly frustrated by Bernard's replacement, it is likely that his more pressing vexation stemmed from the hypocrisy of Raffles' approach to government staff and salaries.<sup>505</sup> As part of the streamlining of Singapore's personnel following October 1819, Bernard's post as Master Attendant was merged with that of the General Warehouse Keeper, significantly increasing the already burdensome duties of the position. Faced with the responsibilities of two senior positions, Bernard's workload was further intensified by removing several members of his department staff, which presented him with an entirely unachievable range of duties, as was characteristic of the entirety of the government after the funding cuts.<sup>506</sup> To accompany this significant increase in responsibility, the Master Attendant's salary was also greatly reduced from \$350 to \$150 per month, the salary junior staff received before the funding cuts.<sup>507</sup> This drastic inequity between responsibility and salary exemplified the impossibility of the working

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<sup>503</sup> Farquhar to Raffles, 2 November 1819, L10: SSR.

<sup>504</sup> Kathirithamby-Wells, 'Early Singapore And The Inception Of A British Administrative Tradition In The Straits Settlements', 51.

<sup>505</sup> *Ibid.*, 50.

<sup>506</sup> Nadia Wright, 'The Career of Francis James Bernard: Nepotism and Patronage in Early Singapore', 28.

<sup>507</sup> *Ibid.*, 28.

conditions that Farquhar consistently protested against and provides a clear insight into the extent to which the administration was stretched to its limit to fulfil even the most basic demonstrative duties. However, when Flint replaced Bernard, Raffles' approach to government funding underwent a sudden reversal. In what appeared to be an arbitrary decision, possibly motivated by nepotism, he raised the Master Attendant's salary to \$250 per month and reinstated many of the department's staff who had been dismissed during Bernard's tenure.<sup>508</sup> The reinstatement of these, albeit junior, jobs and the increase in Flint's salary demonstrated that Raffles had the authority and independence from the Company to contravene Hasting's policies towards Singapore directly, and while they eased some of the demands on the government, this decision served to infuriate Farquhar who had had his repeated requests for the provision of more funds consistently denied.<sup>509</sup> As a consequence of Raffles' otherwise overly stringent approach to funding, and with no other recourse, Farquhar had been forced to personally and privately hire two additional staff at a combined expense of \$100 per month, without whom 'the Public Duties of the Office could not have been performed.'<sup>510</sup> Consequently, while Raffles was willing to provide his brother-in-law with a \$100 per month pay rise, he was not willing to invest the same amount for the employment of two further crucial staff, and so the continued success of the government was dependent upon Farquhar's own personal financial contribution. Given Raffles' personal connection to the settlement and his commitment to its success, it is unclear why he enacted such damaging measures in 1819 and 1820, and his stance is even more inscrutable when his far more laissez-faire approach to government in the latter half of 1820 is taken into account. Nevertheless, regardless of his motives, Raffles' decision to uphold Hasting's ruling to reduce the size of Singapore's government, even in a scenario where the salary of new employees would not burden the Company, cemented Bengal's absolution of duty to the settlement.

Suddenly languishing in the financial backwaters of the East India Company, for the next four years, Singapore's government was perpetually underfunded and understaffed. Farquhar's administration, therefore, was unprepared to oversee the

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<sup>508</sup> Wright, 'The Career of Francis James Bernard: Nepotism and Patronage in Early Singapore', 28.

<sup>509</sup> Farquhar to Raffles, 2 November 1819, L10: SSR.

<sup>510</sup> Letters to and From Raffles, Farquhar to Lieutenant L. Nelson Hull Acting Secretary, 20 March 1823, L:11, SSR.

settlement's rapid development and entirely ill-equipped to meet the challenges posed by acute immigration growth. A brief examination of Singapore's population growth in the first half of the nineteenth century provides an invaluable insight into the size of Farquhar's task and highlights one of the primary factors preventing the government from exerting much influence over the colony's physical development. Unfortunately, the statistical data for Singapore's population before 1871 is notoriously problematic, largely due to the government's lack of funds to regularly or effectively conduct censuses for much of the century. By 1836, eight censuses had been attempted by the government, but for varying reasons that almost always originated from an unmanned police force and an all-encompassing ignorance of the non-European population; these statistics were crude, narrow in scope and subject to serious errors.<sup>511</sup> The 1833 census, for example, was reported to have been carried out by just two constables, an already impossible task made even harder because they had not been given special dispensation to complete the survey and were also required to carry out their original duties.<sup>512</sup> On top of the lack of manpower, these efforts were also plagued with methodological issues and inconsistencies, one of the most problematic being the haphazard inclusion of Singapore's floating population of convicts and military personnel and followers, who were estimated to number in the thousands.<sup>513</sup> The 1829 census exposed the government's profound ignorance, shattering their previously held and 'well-authenticated' belief that agriculture was declining.<sup>514</sup> Upon consulting 'some of the principal and best-informed Chinese,' it was revealed that, far from diminishing, the number of Chinese operating in the interior had actually increased by nearly a thousand in just two years.<sup>515</sup>

### Chronic Underfunding and the Weight of Responsibility

Another hugely damning demonstration of the Company's lack of financial support for Singapore post-1819 was the reluctance to provide aid to secure the harbour and local trade routes from piracy. Singapore's importance to the British Empire was measured by its success as an entrepot and its ability to reconfigure local and regional trade networks. However, the growth of Singapore's commerce was far more tenuous

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<sup>511</sup> Saw Swee-Hock, 'Population Trends in Singapore, 1819-1967', *Journal of Southeast Asian History*, 10, no. 1, Singapore Commemorative Issue 1819-1969 (1969): 5.

<sup>512</sup> Makepeace, Brooke, Braddell, *One Hundred Years of Singapore*, 348.

<sup>513</sup> *Ibid.*, 346.

<sup>514</sup> *Ibid.*, 346.

<sup>515</sup> *Ibid.*, 347-348.

than has often been depicted in traditional historiography. The survival and success of maritime entrepôts in Southeast Asia, from Srivijaya to Penang, have historically been subject to their ability to withstand raiding and piracy, and Singapore was no exception. Singapore's early success, therefore, was heavily dependent upon Britain's capacity to ensure safe trade networks in the region. However, the economic value of Singapore represented a relatively unique issue for the East India Company. The Company's reluctance to invest in the settlement between 1819 and 1824 also translated to inadequate naval support. Although the legality of the colony was eventually ratified, the precedent of a negative fiscal approach had been established so there was very little change in their approach to the island's defence.

Maritime raiding, or piracy as the Europeans perceived it in the nineteenth century, was an integral feature in the history of the littoral communities of Southeast Asia. For centuries, maritime raiding was one of the key tools for statecraft in Southeast Asia, as the balance of power in the region was regularly dictated by naval warfare. In addition to the political application of maritime raiding, it also comprised a significant portion of the income for native Chiefs who were reliant upon the domination of passing trade in a region that had relatively scarce natural resources. By the turn of the nineteenth century, Southeast Asian history had been heavily shaped by the application of maritime raiding, and it remained an active component in the politico-economic structure of the region. The period of intensified colonial influence in Southeast Asia, beginning around the middle of the eighteenth century, triggered an escalation in maritime raiding, which was exemplified in the years immediately following the fall of Riau in 1784. By the mid-eighteenth-century Riau was flourishing as an important centre of trade in the Straits as well as part of a wider network that extended to China and the Indian subcontinent but a period of volatile politics with Dutch Melaka culminated in open conflict and the defeat of Riau to the Dutch.<sup>516</sup> Following their defeat at the hands of the Dutch, the resident Malays, Bugis and Illanun were scattered throughout the Malay Archipelago and relied upon raiding and marauding as their primary source of survival.<sup>517</sup> In nineteenth century Southeast Asia therefore, piracy was not only a more contentious issue than it had ever been, but was also more prevalent.

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<sup>516</sup> Hussin, *Trade and Society in the Straits of Melaka*, 10.

<sup>517</sup> Trocki, *Prince of Pirates*, 40.

For clarity, this research will hereafter refer to maritime raids as piracy, which eventually became the common understanding throughout the Malay Archipelago as European influence progressed throughout the century. It is important to note that before the nineteenth century, not all forms of maritime raiding were legitimate in Southeast Asian culture, as those operating without the permission of a native Chief were seen as *perompak*, outlaws, the most comparable concept to Western piracy. Thus, despite referring to all maritime raiding as piracy, where applicable, this research will distinguish between forms of piracy that were considered legitimate and illegitimate in the local context.

A key characteristic of piracy during this period was the concentration of raids on local vessels rather than their European counterparts. One of the main reasons for this imbalance was the overwhelming discrepancy in the number of local and European ships. Drawn to Singapore by the harbour's favourable location – a direct advantage over its economic rival Penang – and the adoption of a free trade policy, the vast majority of ships trading in Singapore hailed from the Malay Archipelago, Siam, Cambodia, Kelantan, Trengganu, Pahanag, Brunei, Sambas, Pontianak, Celebes, Siak, Indragiri, Jambi, and the Riau-Lingga Archipelago.<sup>518</sup> These local traders were essential in maritime trade as they were able to navigate the multitude of waterways that were inaccessible to the far larger European vessels. Shipping figures for Singaporean trade were first recorded in 1822, and it was documented that 1,434 native crafts traded in Singapore, compared to just 139 European square-rigged vessels.<sup>519</sup>

Within a decade, it became clear that Singapore's establishment as a free port had the potential to restructure, rather than simply facilitate, regional and interregional trade. In 1829 over 300,000 ships arrived and departed from Singapore.<sup>520</sup> The scarcity of records makes it almost impossible to directly compare shipping statistics for British colonies in the early nineteenth century but to contextualise Singapore's

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<sup>518</sup> Wong, *The Trade of Singapore*, 71.

<sup>519</sup> Buckley, *An Anecdotal History of Old Times in Singapore*, 71.

<sup>520</sup> Wong, *The Trade of Singapore*, 295.



shipping figures, in 1802, less than 7,000 ships arrived and departed from Penang.<sup>521</sup> In addition to demonstrating the scale of shipping in Singapore, the shipping statistics also provide a simplified breakdown of the type of ships that arrived at the colony. This information provides valuable insight into the nature of Singaporean trade as it reveals the extent of commercial activity in the colony and not just the value of that trade. For example, in 1829, seventy-seven per cent of ships arriving and departing from Singapore were square-rigged vessels, and the remaining twenty-three per cent were prows.<sup>522</sup> It is safe to assume that European merchants owned the vast majority of the square-rigged vessels as it was very uncommon for Southeast Asian or Chinese traders to own these large ships during this period; it was estimated that in 1838 there were only seven or eight Chinese-owned square-rigged vessels trading in Southeast Asia and that by 1848 the Siamese King only owned ten of the ships.<sup>523</sup> The remaining 71,951 prows, however, would have been almost exclusively owned by local traders such as Malays and Bugis. The sheer scale of this local shipping activity, only a decade after the colonisation of Singapore, reflected the emergence of entirely new trade networks as regional trade gradually reorganised around the port. It also meant that there were far more opportunities for pirates to raid local rather than European vessels.

Another fundamental reason for the imbalance in the victims of piracy was the comparative design of Southeast Asia and European vessels. The pirate attacks that characterised trade in the Malay Archipelago were usually perpetrated by flotillas of five prahus, a ship that typically measured between six to eight tons and sixty to seventy feet long.<sup>524</sup> Two hundred paddles propelled the largest war prahus and significantly outsized the average trading ship.<sup>525</sup> Crucially, even the largest of these native *prahus* struggled to compete with the European vessels, whose advantages were starkly demonstrated in the rare occasions they were targeted. A report of an attack in 1836 involving the British Opium brig *Lady Grant*, who at the time was carrying 400 chests of opium, revealed that despite being outnumbered by five large *prahus* off the Sambalang Islands, the European vessel managed to escape the attack

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<sup>521</sup> Nordin, *Trade and Society in the Straits of Melaka*, 114.

<sup>522</sup> Wong, *The Trade of Singapore*, 295.

<sup>523</sup> *Ibid.*, 81, 149.

<sup>524</sup> Buckley, *An Anecdotal History of Old Times in Singapore*, 208.

<sup>525</sup> Henry Keppel, *A Sailor's Life under Four Sovereigns* (London: Macmillan and Co, 1899), 290.

after disabling the *prahus* by firing broadsides of grape and canister.<sup>526</sup> The effectiveness of European vessels against the native ships of the Malay Archipelago was also demonstrated by the success of the British ships in destroying or deterring pirates on the rare occasions they were deployed in the first two decades of Singapore's colonial history. Nevertheless, despite the supremacy of European vessels, few were deployed to protect Singapore's maritime trade, as the severity of the impact of piracy on Singapore's early economic growth seemingly made little impression on the EIC.

Although Singapore's European community were rarely directly hindered by the proliferation of piracy in the region, the loss of trade to the settlement was so impactful that the mercantile community repeatedly lobbied for action to be taken in defence of local merchants. Numerous petitions were drawn up and addressed to both the King and the Governor-General of India, requesting aid in the suppression of piracy in the years immediately following its incorporation into the British Empire.<sup>527</sup> It should be noted that in lieu of supporting evidence, the estimated commercial harm of piracy is based primarily upon the reports of the mercantile community who were liable to overstate the financial damage either in a bid to strengthen their arguments and who were largely unaccustomed to the culture of maritime raiding that existed in Southeast Asia. Together, the complaints of the British and the actions of the Chinese suggest that in addition to the increase in raiding after the fall of Riau, an unusual number of pirates were attracted to the increased trade in the Malay Archipelago following the arrival of the British. Consequently, the continued growth of Singapore and the Southeast Asian economy was severely hindered by the intensification of piracy.

For decades, these petitions had little demonstrable impact on Company policy, and no concerted policies were devised or implemented to protect Singaporean trade. It was not until 1838 that the first plan to curtail piracy in the region was proposed by the Governor General of India, George Eden, 1<sup>st</sup> Earl of Auckland. The suggested policy involved introducing a system of flags and passes that would 'render the Character of Native Vessels more easily distinguishable.'<sup>528</sup> The failure of any ship to

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<sup>526</sup> Buckley, *An Anecdotal History of Old Times in Singapore*, p. 277.

<sup>527</sup> *Ibid.*, 272.

<sup>528</sup> Operations for the Suppression of Pirates in the Malay Archipelago 1837-1839, BL, IOR/E/4/758.

possess either flag or pass would be considered as justifying a suspicion of piracy, and where this suspicion was further corroborated by 'other circumstances', then it would authorise the detention or even destruction of the offending ship.<sup>529</sup> Implementing this proposal would remove the British disadvantage of not recognising Malay ships by forcing every ship on legitimate business to declare themselves. This plan was adopted from the Company's strategy in the Indian Ocean, which had capitalised upon the external threat of piracy to extend and consolidate imperial influence in the region. The conference of power to individual ports to issue passes to legitimise trade effectively decentralised power from Bombay throughout the region and created a 'leviathan' of colonial influence that extended to wherever and whenever the authority of the EIC held sway.<sup>530</sup> This policy enabled the British to capture a vessel carrying a pass issued from Surat in 1797, effectively utilising the suppression of piracy as a tool for imperial expansion.<sup>531</sup> There were, however, several issues with this proposed system that led the India Marine Department of the East India Company to question its propriety and instead forward their own blunter strategy of 'punishing or even destroying all places affording them countenance and protection.'<sup>532</sup> Ultimately, neither policy was enacted in the 1830s as they had fundamentally failed to factor in the cultural aspect of maritime raids and thus jeopardised the stability of British influence in Southeast Asia.

While the British response to piracy fluctuated between inaction and disagreement, the damage caused by the largely unchecked raids was such that residents within Singapore took it upon themselves to confront the threat. The most notable participants in the retaliatory strikes were prominent merchants of the settlement's Straits Chinese population. In 1832, for example, the Straits Chinese merchants raised funds to equip four large trading boats with several guns and thirty well-armed Chinese sailors to attack a band of pirates who had been positioned undisturbed outside of Singapore's harbour.<sup>533</sup> The cost of provisioning the four ships is unknown, but it is recorded that in addition to financing their outfitting, the

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<sup>529</sup> Operations for the Suppression of Pirates in the Malay Archipelago 1837-1839, BL, IOR/E/4/758.

<sup>530</sup> S.H. Layton, 'Hydras and Leviathans in the Indian Ocean World', *International Journal of Maritime History*, 25, no. 2 (2013): 220.

<sup>531</sup> Layton, Hydras and Leviathans in the Indian Ocean World, 219.

<sup>532</sup> Operations for the Suppression of Pirates in the Malay Archipelago 1837-1839, BL, IOR/E/4/758.

<sup>533</sup> Song, *One Hundred Years History of the Chinese in Singapore*, 45.

benefactors also offered \$200 for every pirate boat attacked and \$200 to the relatives of anyone killed in the expedition. Once equipped, the privately funded fleet successfully engaged the small pirate flotilla and, at the loss of two sailors, destroyed a marauding *prahus* and drove another off before returning to Singapore.<sup>534</sup> According to Song's history, the investment of the Straits Chinese merchants, as well as the success of the expedition, proved enough to shame the government into action, and soon after, two boats were built at Malacca intended to bolster the defence of local trade. These vessels were equipped with 24-pounder guns, which comfortably outmatched the capabilities of any individual pirate ship in the region.<sup>535</sup> Nevertheless, this was seemingly little more than a token gesture, as the addition of two ships had a negligible impact on suppressing widespread piracy. The characterisation of the Straits Chinese community's assumption of responsibility as shaming the government into action is interesting as it suggests that their fulfilment of government responsibilities was an unusual and embarrassing occurrence. This thesis, however, will demonstrate that far from being a unique circumstance, much of Singapore's early development was underpinned by the private sphere's assumption of public responsibility. Specifically, it will argue that the Straits Chinese community, in particular, shouldering much of the burden.

Nowhere was this dynamic more evident, and arguably more consequential, than in the evolution of Singapore's urban landscape, where previous policy missteps and oversights exposed the local government's deficiencies. The following section explores the broader context of the government's initial land administration strategies, which significantly constrained its capacity to effectively manage Singapore's urban development. This limitation ultimately afforded the private sector – largely dominated by affluent merchants – the opportunity to exert considerable influence over the city's growth.

### The Incoherence of Singapore's Land Administration

The uncertainty surrounding the nature of land administration in Singapore was emblematic of the British failure to establish a coherent policy towards land ownership in the region. In accordance with the East India Company's negative fiscal approach

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<sup>534</sup> Buckley, *An Anecdotal History of Old Times in Singapore*, 225.

<sup>535</sup> Song, *One Hundred Years History of the Chinese in Singapore*, 45.

towards the governance of the Straits Settlements, no survey was conducted, nor was a plan conceived to administer the allocation of land throughout the residency. This decision was particularly impactful to Singapore's development as the newly established local government could not adopt a pre-existing cultural norm as the British had partially done in Malacca and Penang, as the indigenous population's land system was too limited in scope and structure to accommodate the demands of colonisation. This issue was further compounded by the Company's limited geographic knowledge of Singapore as, for several decades, Britain's topographical knowledge of the island was largely confined to the island's coastlines. Without a codified policy towards land administration, establishing local land systems fell to the understaffed, ill-organised and overwhelmed Straits Settlements Government. Further attempts were made to implement an efficient land system, which, if executed efficiently, represented a much-needed source of income for the state. Notably, Robert Fullerton, the First Governor of the Straits Settlements, drew upon his experience in service of the Madras Presidency and attempted to establish a co-ordinated land system which involved instituting District Officers on the model of the Collectors in Madras.<sup>536</sup> In addition to contributing to the police force and municipal works, this position was intended to establish a structure for land sales and leases through supervision and rent collection.<sup>537</sup> Although Fullerton's plan to apply the Indian land system to the Straits Settlements could have resolved the existing structural inconsistencies, it was highly unlikely to succeed, as the proposed administration required significantly more resources than the Company was willing to allocate to the Residency.<sup>538</sup>

In many colonial cities within the British Empire, local governments imported the Western concept of property to usurp the indigenous land system and assert their authority over the land. This was often manifested in the measurement and registration of land and accelerated urbanisation. In Singapore, however, Fullerton's failure to implement his vision meant that rather than having two competing land systems, as was typical, it was hard to identify even one.<sup>539</sup> Consequently, for several decades,

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<sup>536</sup> Kathirithamby-Wells, J. 'Early Singapore And The Inception Of A British Administrative Tradition In The Straits Settlements', 65.

<sup>537</sup> *Ibid.*, 65.

<sup>538</sup> Kathirithamby-Wells, J. 'Early Singapore And The Inception Of A British Administrative Tradition In The Straits Settlements', 65.

<sup>539</sup> Hans-Dieters Evers, 'Urban Expansion and Landownership in Underdeveloped Societies', *Urban Affairs Review*, 11, no. 1 (1975): 125.

land administration was conducted in an extremely ad hoc manner, with little oversight and a total absence of a long-term strategic policy. While the government did not have the resources to survey, let alone police, the majority of land in Singapore, the burgeoning population frequently forewent notifying the local government of their land occupation, and there were rumours of large Chinese communities living in the island's uncleared jungle.<sup>540</sup> Even outside of these cases, the government exerted very little control or organisation over land acquisition as grants were awarded almost indiscriminately in the form of verbal and documentary licenses to clear and occupy.<sup>541</sup> The lack of record keeping for these interactions meant that there was little awareness of which land was occupied and by whom. There is evidence of disorganisation and confusion even in the few official grants issued during this period. Despite being limited in number, there is no evidence of a registration system for these official grants. The few records that did exist were a source of dispute in themselves as there was often a discrepancy between the area described in the grant and the actual area of occupation.<sup>542</sup> Additionally, the duration of land leases varied wildly from 15 years to 999 years, with little surviving evidence justifying which length was decided upon, and perhaps more significantly, the government forfeited its authority over the use of land by omitting conditions of tenure or the right of resumption.<sup>543</sup> The consequence of this chaotic period of land administration meant that by 1850, the government had sacrificed a vital source of income, as they were unable to locate or identify many of those liable for the payment of rent, and they had also surrendered much of their control of the nature of Singapore's urban development through long leases with no stipulations and a severely inadequate catalogue of leases.<sup>544</sup>

Despite these systemic issues, for much of his tenure as Resident of Singapore, Farquhar strictly adhered to Hasting's instruction to not treat Singapore as a fixed settlement, and this was particularly evident in his reluctance to issue titles to land.<sup>545</sup> Raffles, on the other hand, fell into the habit of treating Singapore as an official British

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<sup>540</sup> Buckley, *An Anecdotal History of Old Times in Singapore*, 76.

<sup>541</sup> B. L. Chua, 'Land Registration in Singapore and the Federation of Malaya', 318.

<sup>542</sup> *Ibid.*, 318.

<sup>543</sup> *Ibid.*, 318.

<sup>544</sup> Chua, 'Land Registration in Singapore and the Federation of Malaya', 318.

<sup>545</sup> C.H. Wake, 'Raffles and the Rajas: The Founding of Singapore in Malayan and British Colonial History', *Journal of the Malaysian Branch of the Royal Asiatic Society*, 48, no. 1 (1975); and Meng, 'Early Land Transactions', *Journal of the Malaysian Branch of the Royal Asiatic Society*, 23.

possession and referred to it as 'my new colony.'<sup>546</sup> Between 1819 and 1823, Raffles sought to benefit from the lack of direction by assuming responsibility for Singapore's urban development through an almost authoritarian approach to land allocation and management. Before he left the settlement for the first time in February 1819, Raffles issued Farquhar with instructions for the settlement's physical development. As part of these instructions, he outlined that the land on the north bank of the Singapore River was to be reserved for government buildings, and the land between the public offices and the Rochar River was to be allocated to European merchants.<sup>547</sup> Over the ensuing months, however, the infeasibility of the location became apparent, and Singapore's mercantile community raised several complaints over the location, which was too far from the river to transport the bulky produce that was imported and re-exported efficiently.<sup>548</sup> Farquhar acknowledged the infeasibility of Raffles' initial plan and acquiesced to the requests of the European merchants to relocate their warehouses to the north bank of the Singapore River – an area previously reserved for government buildings.<sup>549</sup> This decision improved the efficiency of transshipment in Singapore. Farquhar's willingness to cooperate with the local population, a policy he had previously pursued in Malacca, contributed to Singapore's appeal and encouraged further migration.<sup>550</sup>

Nevertheless, when Raffles returned to Singapore on 10 October 1822, he took issue with Farquhar's decision to supersede his instructions to reserve the land on the north bank for government buildings.<sup>551</sup> Within two weeks of his arrival, he established the Land Allotment Committee with the express aim of prohibiting European merchants from constructing further buildings on 'ground reserved for the Company.'<sup>552</sup> Raffles' solution was twofold: firstly, he allowed the existing buildings to remain, but under the condition that the owners were to be refused land titles and that the properties could neither be transferred nor new buildings could be erected on the

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<sup>546</sup> Wake, 'Raffles and the Rajas', 64; Wurtzburg, *Raffles of the Eastern Isles*, 521-522.

<sup>547</sup> Buckley, *An Anecdotal History of the Old Times in Singapore*, 57.

<sup>548</sup> Nadia Wright, 'Pragmatism at Play: Farquhar, Raffles and the founding of Singapore', in *Liberalism and the British Empire in Southeast Asia*, ed. Knapman, Milner and Quilty.

<sup>549</sup> Buckley, *An Anecdotal History of the Old Times in Singapore*, 57; and Wright, 'Pragmatism at Play'.

<sup>550</sup> Barley, *In the Footsteps of Stamford Raffles*; and Wright, 'Pragmatism at Play'.

<sup>551</sup> Wright, 'Pragmatism at Play'.

<sup>552</sup> Letter from Raffles to James Lumisdaine, Nathaniel Wallich and Captain Francis Salmond, in Buckley, *Anecdotal History of the Old Times in Singapore*, 79-80.

site.<sup>553</sup> Secondly, he allocated a new parcel of land for the European mercantile community, which was located on the opposite bank of the river and enjoyed many of the benefits as the north bank.<sup>554</sup> The land on the south bank of the river, however, had already been settled by some of Singapore's Chinese population, who were drawn to the proximity to the river.<sup>555</sup> Furthermore, the ground at Raffles' suggested location was at a lower elevation than the river, so the land was too marshy to provide a suitable foundation for the European warehouses. Undeterred by these obstacles, Raffles ordered the relocation of the existing Chinese inhabitants in return for a 'moderate compensation' and ordered the construction of an embankment that stretched along the southern bank for 'six or seven hundred yards.'<sup>556</sup> The newly raised and drained land was structured in a similarly rigid fashion as the proposed European town and could accommodate 'between twenty-nine and thirty separate and commodious' buildings one hundred feet from the wharf.<sup>557</sup> To achieve uniformity in the construction of the embankment, Raffles instructed that the project was to be carried out under the immediate superintendence of the government. However, following the Supreme Government's instructions to cease all but essential public works in 1820, Farquhar's administration could not afford to finance this project.<sup>558</sup> Raffles' solution was to defray the cost of construction onto the price of the warehouses once they had been completed so the investment would be repaid by individual members of Singapore's mercantile community.<sup>559</sup> This approach to financing large government projects via the private sector was not unusual in Singapore's early development, and, as this thesis will later explore, the mercantile community continued to fund infrastructural improvements even after the settlement's ratification as a British possession.

This response to the encroachment of private warehouses on reserved government land demonstrated the lengths Raffles was prepared to go to preserve his vision for Singapore's urban development. The relocation of the Chinese inhabitants threatened to undermine the positive relationship Farquhar had established between

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<sup>553</sup> Letter from Raffles to James Lumisdaine, Nathaniel Wallich and Captain Francis Salmond, in Buckley, *Anecdotal History of the Old Times in Singapore*, 79-80.

<sup>554</sup> *Ibid.*, 79-80.

<sup>555</sup> *Ibid.*, 79-80.

<sup>556</sup> *Ibid.*, 79-80.

<sup>557</sup> *Ibid.*, 79-80.

<sup>558</sup> Wake, 'Raffles and the Rajas', 48.

<sup>559</sup> Letter from Raffles to James Lumisdaine, Nathaniel Wallich and Captain Francis Salmond, in Buckley, *Anecdotal History of the Old Times in Singapore*, 79-80.



the local administration and Singapore's burgeoning migrant population – upon whom much of the settlement's early success depended. His insistence that warehouses would be built on the south side of the river, at far greater expense, illustrated his willingness to anger the European mercantile community regardless of their importance to Singapore's commercial success. Raffles, therefore, should not be considered as the architect of Singapore's early success as Buckley and Tarling have argued, but equally, his uncompromising reaction to Farquhar's deviation from his instructions suggests that, whilst he was absent from Singapore for three years, his attitude towards Singapore was not one of 'benign neglect', as Nadia Wright has suggested.<sup>560</sup> Instead, his preservation of government land can be seen as a reflection of the single-minded pursuit of his 'national policy', which sought to establish a strong government.<sup>561</sup>

Raffles did not foresee many of the challenges that arose as Singapore developed. This meant that the instructions he left for Farquhar were often insufficient. For example, Raffles left no guidance regarding the issuance of land grants, and as Farquhar was unwilling to condone permanent allocations until the legality of the settlement was confirmed, the local government prevaricated on acknowledging individual property ownership.<sup>562</sup> It was ironic, then, that Pearl's purchase of land was one of the few instances in which a Public Act officially acknowledged property ownership, as Raffles had previously intended to claim the land on behalf of the East India Company.<sup>563</sup>

#### Collision of Interests: Land Ownership in the Public and Private Spheres (Pearl's Hill)

Raffles' uncompromising approach to Singapore's urban development invariably led him into further conflicts with other prominent inhabitants. One of the most notable disputes was with James Pearl, Captain of *Indiana* – the ship that first brought Raffles to Singapore – over his possession of a large parcel of land that Raffles had also intended to reserve for government use. The dispute between two of Singapore's most prominent European figures was particularly notable for Pearl's unusual possession

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<sup>560</sup> Buckley, *An Anecdotal History of the Old Times in Singapore*, 41; Nicholas Tarling, *The Anglo-Dutch Rivalry in the Malay World* (Brisbane: Cambridge University Press, 1962); and Wright, 'Pragmatism at Play'.

<sup>561</sup> Tze Shiung Ng, 'The ideological origins of the founding of Singapore'.

<sup>562</sup> Turnbull, *A History of Singapore*, 16

<sup>563</sup> Letters from Bengal to the Resident, L. Nelson Hull Acting Secretary to Lieutenant Colonel Farquhar, 21<sup>st</sup> February 1823, M2: SSR.

of an official land title before the start of British land sales, and the measures Raffles took to regain the land demonstrated his almost fervent adherence to his town plan, and it further revealed the extent to which he was willing to push the limits of his authority.<sup>564</sup>

In May 1822, Captain James Pearl began purchasing titles and rights to land on a hill half a mile inland to the west, southwest of the British settlement.<sup>565</sup> This land was comprised of small gambier plantations run and owned by Chinese landholders under the jurisdiction of the Temenggong.<sup>566</sup> Pearl's intention was to combine the individual plots of land into a single large plantation with a house and offices for himself and habitations for his cultivators.<sup>567</sup> Pearl named the plot of land Mount Stamford in honour of the settlement's founding, and the hill later became an important institutional colonial site, the location of the Tan Tock Seng Hospital and barracks.<sup>568</sup> His estate was notable for being one of the first issuances of land rights in Singapore.

For much of Farquhar's tenure as Resident of Singapore, the issuance of land titles was scarce. Raffles had left no instructions regarding property ownership, and Hastings had advised against treating the settlement as a permanent possession.<sup>569</sup> Permission to occupy land, therefore, was often secured through non-binding verbal agreements.<sup>570</sup> This system was comparable to early land occupation in Penang, where Francis Light received similarly little guidance from Bengal and resorted to giving verbal permission on his own initiative.<sup>571</sup> Unlike in Penang, however, the British were not the sole arbiters of land in Singapore, and their jurisdiction was confined to a limited section of the island.<sup>572</sup> Pearl was, therefore, able to circumvent Farquhar's reluctance to issue land rights by purchasing land from outside the British settlement directly from Temenggong Rahman.

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<sup>564</sup> Letters from Bengal to the Resident, L. Nelson Hull Acting Secretary to Lieutenant Colonel Farquhar, 21 February 1823, M2: SSR.

<sup>565</sup> Letters from Bengal to the Resident, James Pearl to Holt Mackenzie Secretary to Government Territorial Department, 19 January 1824, M2: SSR.

<sup>566</sup> Letters from Bengal to the Resident, J. F. Bernard, M2: SSR.

<sup>567</sup> Letters from Bengal to the Resident, James Pearl to Holt Mackenzie Secretary to Government Territorial Department, 19 January 1824, M2: SSR.

<sup>568</sup> Makepeace, Brooke and Braddell ed., *One Hundred Years of Singapore*.

<sup>569</sup> Turnbull, *A History of Singapore*, 16

<sup>570</sup> Willie Tan, 'The Development of Cadastral Systems: An Alternative View', *Australian Surveyor*, 44, no. 2, (1999): 162.

<sup>571</sup> K. G. Tregonning, 'The Early Land Administration and Agricultural Development of Penang', *Journal of the Malaysian Branch of the Royal Asiatic Society*, 39, no. 2 (1996): 37.

<sup>572</sup> Letters from Bengal to the Resident, M2: SSR.

The boundaries of the British settlement were dictated by several treaties agreed upon by Raffles, Temenggong Rahman and Sultan Hussein in 1819. Under the terms of the 6 February 1819 treaty, the East India Company had the right to 'maintain a factory, or factories on any part of His Highness' [Shah's] hereditary dominions' and that the Port of Singapore was 'subject to the regulations of the British authority.'<sup>573</sup> These two articles were the bedrock of Singapore's colonisation, though the terminology was such that outside of the port, the location and extent of Britain's territorial possessions remained unclear. A second agreement was therefore required to establish the precise boundaries of Britain's territory and to determine 'where all the different casts [sic] are to reside.'<sup>574</sup> On 26 June, it was agreed that the boundaries of the land under the control of the English encompassed approximately five-thousand yards of coastline from Tanjong Katung in the east to Tanjong Mallang in the west.<sup>575</sup> The settlement's landward boundary, however, extended only as far as 'cannon shot range.'<sup>576</sup> Crucially, all territory outside of the British factory remained under the sovereign control of Sultan Hussein and Temenggong Rahman, and they had uncontested authority to sell and transfer their land.<sup>577</sup>

Pearl's acquisition of his estate occurred over several months in 1822 as he was required to purchase individual titles from numerous small landholders. Before he began negotiations, Pearl was first required to submit his request to the Temenggong as proprietor of the land in an act that reaffirmed Malay sovereignty over the land.<sup>578</sup> The Temenggong, who had previously permitted Farquhar to create a plantation on his land, also acceded to Pearl's request but stipulated that the Chinese owners of the pre-existing plantations were to be reimbursed for all expenses they incurred.<sup>579</sup> The negotiations between Pearl and the plantation owners were facilitated by the local Chinese captain, Tan Howsing, and Singapore's first police chief, Francis James Bernard.<sup>580</sup> Tan Howsing witnessed all agreements and was responsible for

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<sup>573</sup> Letters from Bengal to the Resident, M2: SSR.

<sup>574</sup> Ibid.

<sup>575</sup> Ibid.

<sup>576</sup> Letters from Bengal to the Resident, M2: SSR.

<sup>577</sup> It is worth noting that, as C. H. Wake rightly argued, there was no cession of sovereignty or even a transfer of property in these treaties and that the Temenggong remained the original proprietor of the soil that was under Company control (See Wake, 'Raffles and Rajas', 60). This point, however, was ultimately of no great concern to the outcome of Raffles' and Pearl's dispute as the land in question, which later became known as Pearl's Hill, lay outside of the negotiated boundaries.

<sup>578</sup> Letters from Bengal to the Resident, J. F. Bernard, M2: SSR.

<sup>579</sup> Letters from Bengal to the Resident, J. F. Bernard, 10 May 1822, M2: SSR.

<sup>580</sup> Letters from Bengal to the Resident, J. F. Bernard, M2: SSR.

transferring finances. Bernard officiated the transactions, which was important in legitimising the purchases within the British administration.<sup>581</sup>

From Bernard's records, it is possible to ascertain that over the course of numerous negotiations, Pearl managed to acquire the entirety of the land on and around Mount Stamford for a sum of approximately two thousand Spanish dollars.<sup>582</sup> These records, however, contain very little information regarding the transferred land, and it is only through the price of the transactions that we can gain an appreciation of the size and condition of the plantations Pearl purchased. On 10 May 1822, Pearl purchased the land of the Chinese planter Tan Aloo for a sum of one thousand Spanish dollars, which was the single most expensive transaction in the formation of his estate.<sup>583</sup> Located on the south-west side of Mount Stamford, the price of this plantation suggests it was the largest plantation that Pearl purchased and also the most developed as Bernard records that that land was replete with pepper, vine and gambier trees as well as several buildings.<sup>584</sup> In comparison, Pearl purchased the plantations west of the hill for five hundred Reals – which converted to four hundred and forty-four Spanish dollars.<sup>585</sup> It is unclear how many people originally owned the land in question, as the negotiations were all conducted by the Chinese captain Tan Howsing. With the combined price of these lots valued at less than half of Tan Aloo's single estate, it is almost certain that the land on this side of the hill would have been a collection of smaller and less developed plantations.<sup>586</sup> The price of five hundred Reals is notable for its recurrence in Pearl's purchases.

On 13 May 1822, just three days after he purchased land on the west of the hill, Pearl paid the exact same amount to the Chinese landholder Hang Tovan for the rights to two separate plantations, which were situated on the north-east and the south-east sides of the hill respectively.<sup>587</sup> In three days, Pearl had acquired land on all sides of Mount Stamford and made three separate payments of precisely one thousand Spanish dollars, five hundred Reals and five hundred Reals. As these sales represented some of, if not the, earliest land purchases in Singapore, there was little

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<sup>581</sup> Letters from Bengal to the Resident, J. F. Bernard, 10 May 1822, M2: SSR.

<sup>582</sup> Letters from Bengal to the Resident, J. F. Bernard, M2: SSR.

<sup>583</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>584</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>585</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>586</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>587</sup> *Ibid.*

precedent for land value, and the repeated use of round figures suggests a relatively arbitrary valuation. Furthermore, while the documents recording the official transfer of titles and rights suggests that the small Chinese landholders were willing to sell their land to Pearl, there is no record of how these negotiations were conducted, particularly in arriving at a mutual evaluation of the land. This also raises a wider question concerning the nature of the negotiations between Pearl and the Chinese landholders. Whilst the treaty between the Malay rulers and Raffles upheld the sovereignty of indigenous rule, Sultan Hussein and Temenggong Rahman had previous experience of European imperial rule under the Dutch and would have been aware that their status in Singapore was precarious. It is possible, therefore, that the Temenggong did not feel he had enough authority to refuse Pearl's purchase request. Having waived his own rights, it is unlikely that the small landholders would have been given the option to retain their land. There is, however, evidence that at least some of the previous landholders were willing to cooperate with Pearl.

In September 1822, Pearl purchased a plot to the south-west of the hill that measured one hundred and fifty fathoms square (fifty-four thousand square feet) in a transaction that suggested at least a degree of negotiation and barter as the owner sold the land in return for a Cask of Rum.<sup>588</sup> This was the only one of Pearl's purchases that documented the size of the plot and was also his first acquisition of uncleared, or waste, land, which meant that the plot was not fit for cultivation until roots, tree trunks and other encumbrances had been removed.<sup>589</sup> Uncleared land was very common in the early days of Singapore, and in 1823, the British implemented a system to facilitate the development of this land by distributing location tickets or cutting papers, that granted the right to settle or cultivate land on the proviso that the individual cleared the land themselves.<sup>590</sup> Given the labour necessary to prepare this land for cultivation, it was primarily Singapore's Chinese population that applied for location tickets, whereas the European population preferred to purchase more immediately accommodating land.<sup>591</sup> Pearl was undeterred by the condition of the land, and he placed a far greater priority on the location as he sought to create a single large plantation. In addition to the rum cask, Pearl paid the previous owner of the land one hundred and ten Spanish

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<sup>588</sup> Letters from Bengal to the Resident, J. F. Bernard, M2: SSR.

<sup>589</sup> Ibid.

<sup>590</sup> Tan, 'The Development of Cadastral Systems: An Alternative View', 162.

<sup>591</sup> Song, *One Hundred Years History of the Chinese in Singapore*, 35.

dollars in return for his labour preparing the ground for cultivation by clearing the jungle and providing two further labourers to work the ground.<sup>592</sup> In another example of collaboration with the smallholders, Pearl purchased the land of the Chinese smallholder Alooboo but retained his services in the maintenance of the plantation and provided an advance of fifty Spanish dollars, which enabled Alooboo to continue planning the cultivation of new pepper vines.<sup>593</sup> These two small episodes suggest that whilst we have no evidence of the willingness of the previous smallholders to sell their land, there were at least a couple of occasions in which the previous owners were prepared to continue to work with Pearl.

To contextualise Pearl's outlay of approximately two thousand Spanish dollars, this study will briefly consider the commencement of British land sales. In September 1822, a few months after the Temenggong granted Pearl permission to purchase land, Raffles commenced official land sales within the boundaries of the British settlement despite opposition from both Farquhar and the Dutch.<sup>594</sup> To facilitate the process, Raffles created the post of Assistant to the Resident of Singapore and appointed Samuel George Bonham, formerly of the Bencoolen civil service.<sup>595</sup> In his correspondence with Farquhar, Raffles deliberately enumerated the office's duty as Register for the Registry of Land and the Judicial Department.<sup>596</sup> The creation of this new post almost solely to administer land registration, which is particularly notable given his previous reluctance to expand the civil service, suggests that Raffles anticipated a significant quantity of sales. The decision not to include the role in the Resident's duties was also perhaps an indication of Raffles' displeasure with Farquhar, who, in regard to Pearl's purchases, maintained that he 'declined giving Captain Pearl any title to the Hill under my hand, but that with reference to the Tummongong [sic], I considered him at liberty to act as he thought best on the business.'<sup>597</sup>

A proclamation issued on 1 January 1823 formalised Raffles' decision to instigate land sales and officially required the registration of 'all appropriated land in the Island of Singapore...whether retained by the Sultan or Tummongong [sic] or ceded to the

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<sup>592</sup> Letters from Bengal to the Resident, J. F. Bernard, M2: SSR.

<sup>593</sup> Ibid.

<sup>594</sup> Meng, 'Early Land Transactions in Singapore', 23; and Borschberg, 'Dutch Objections to Singapore', 551.

<sup>595</sup> Letters to and From Raffles, Letter from Raffles to Farquhar 1823, L11: SSR.

<sup>596</sup> Ibid.

<sup>597</sup> Letters from Singapore, L13: SSR.

British Government.<sup>598</sup> The establishment of the registry provides the first reliable data for land ownership in Singapore, and the early records demonstrate the demand for land in the settlement. By 21 January 1823, Raffles had already reported, in two separate correspondences, that 'land which was the other day covered with primeval forest or in a State of Swamp has already a high value' and lots of 'about sixty feet front, in a convenient situation for mercantile purposes, realised at public sale upwards of fifty thousand Spanish dollars in the course of half-an-hour.'<sup>599</sup> A scarcity of documents makes it difficult to draw direct comparisons between the value of land in Singapore and the other constituents of the Straits Settlements, but it is worth noting that the price of fifty thousand Spanish dollars far exceeded the majority of land sales in the far more established colony of Penang. In 1807, a Company spice plantation was sold at public auction for a total price of 9,656 Spanish dollars, and more tellingly, in 1811, the real estate of James Scott, the principal merchant and wealthiest man in Penang, was sold to several Chinese, Malay and European buyers for a total of 35,721 Spanish dollars.<sup>600</sup> This crude comparison suggests that members of Singapore's mercantile community were prepared to gamble on the settlement's commercial potential, which was perhaps also reflective of growing support in the metropole.

The land sales in Singapore emphasise the disparity in price between purchasing land from small landholders and the British government. Pearl's outlay of two thousand Spanish dollars for his plantation was just four per cent of the price of a single warehouse lot along the bank of the Singapore River. This price differential was not solely attributable to the circumventing of British land claims but also reflected the different commercial potentials of trade and cultivation in Singapore. Gambier plantations provided the economic backbone of the Temenggong and were the key industry for most of Singapore's Chinese population.<sup>601</sup> By the middle of the nineteenth century, gambier plantations comprised three-quarters of cultivated land and contributed three-fifths of Singapore's agricultural exports.<sup>602</sup> As one of the few

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<sup>598</sup> Raffles, *A Memoir of the Life and Public Services of Sir Thomas Stamford Raffles*, 781.

<sup>599</sup> Letter from Sir Thomas Stamford Raffles to Lord Lansdowne, 1823 January 20, SSR; and Letter from Sir Thomas Stamford Raffles to Mr Marsden, 1823 January 21 in Raffles, *A Memoir of the Life and Public Services of Sir Thomas Stamford Raffles*.

<sup>600</sup> F. G. Stevens, 'A Contribution to the early history of the Prince of Wales' Island', *Journal of the Malayan Branch of the Royal Asiatic Society*, 7, no. 3 (1929): 391.

<sup>601</sup> Trocki, *Prince of Pirates*, 10.

<sup>602</sup> Tan Gia Lim, *An Introduction to the Culture and History of The Teochews in Singapore* (London: World Scientific, 2018).

resources produced in Singapore, the value of gambier continued to develop for much of the nineteenth century, and some of Singapore's most prominent inhabitants, such as Seah Eu Chin, leader of the Chinese community and Justice of the Peace, earned their fortunes through the industry.<sup>603</sup> However, the crux of Singapore's commercial success lay in the settlement's trade networks and products like opium generated far greater wealth than gambier.<sup>604</sup> The price of mercantile lots, such as the warehouses on the Singapore River, therefore, reflected the far higher value of Singapore's commercial industry in comparison to the agricultural industry.

The disparity in the value of agricultural and commercial land was further underscored in 1828 when Pearl retired to Europe and sold the hill to the government for less than five thousand Spanish dollars.<sup>605</sup> Despite having benefited from directly purchasing his land from individual Chinese planters, the value of Pearl's plantation increased by approximately three thousand Spanish dollars, which is a particularly low sum when considering the rapid development of the settlement and the subsequent demand for land. Furthermore, whilst the registered sales show that Pearl spent approximately two thousand Spanish dollars purchasing the land, in 1824, he claimed that he had expended nearly eight thousand Spanish dollars on his estate.<sup>606</sup> In addition to the land, this expenditure included constructing buildings and expanding the plantation by planting at least three thousand more pepper trees.<sup>607</sup> Despite this financial investment, it is unlikely that Pearl's plantation had been particularly successful as the government did not retain the land for cultivation but instead converted it into a site for institutional buildings such as the Tan Tock Seng Hospital.<sup>608</sup>

### The Chasm Between Vision and Reality: Raffles' Struggles

Pearl had faced no objections to the formation of his plantation in 1822, and with the approbation of Farquhar, his transactions were registered in Singapore's public records.<sup>609</sup> When his affairs took him away from the settlement for a few months

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<sup>603</sup> Tan Gia Lim, *An Introduction to the Culture and History of The Teochews in Singapore*.

<sup>604</sup> Wong, 'The Trade of Singapore, 1819-69'.

<sup>605</sup> Harold Frank Pearson, *People of Early Singapore* (London: University of London Press, 1955), 47-52; Wong, 'The Trade of Singapore', 8.

<sup>606</sup> Letters from Bengal to the Resident, James Pearl to Holt Mackenzie Secretary to Government Territorial Department, 19 January 1824, M2: SSR.

<sup>607</sup> Letters from Bengal to the Resident, J. F. Bernard, Raffles National Library Archives, Government of the Colony of Singapore, M2: SSR.

<sup>608</sup> Makepeace, Brooke and Braddell ed. *One Hundred Years of Singapore*.

<sup>609</sup> Letters from Bengal to the Resident, James Pearl to Holt Mackenzie Secretary to Government Territorial Department, 19 January 1824, M2: SSR.



between 1822 and 1823, Pearl was confident that his purchases would be ratified and had employed Claude Queiros, a member of Singapore's European mercantile community, to apply to Raffles for a Certificate of Registry for the Property.<sup>610</sup> Unbeknownst to Pearl, however, in his brief absence from the settlement Raffles had returned to Singapore and was frustrated to find that the plantation had encroached upon land he had reserved for the government. Thus, when Pearl returned to Singapore in February 1823, rather than obtaining a Certificate of Registry, he found that Raffles had not only declined to recognise his claim to Mount Stamford but had ordered its repossession, asserting that 'the Land in question was necessarily resumed by Government, under the late proclamation.'<sup>611</sup> Raffles directed Farquhar to oversee the repossession and used the opportunity to vent his frustration with the Resident whilst also exonerating himself from fault, stating:

You will be pleased to inform Captain Pearl, that, if he feels aggrieved by this measure, he must seek his redress from you personally, as Government have not recognised any authority vested in you to give a sanction to the transaction in question. You will, at the same time, inform Captain Pearl that, it is with considerable regret the Lieutenant Governor, has found himself forced to adopt this measure.<sup>612</sup>

The proclamation in question was issued on 17 October 1822, months after many of Pearl's purchases, and stipulated that the erection of buildings, as well as any outlay of money on further construction, was strictly prohibited on land that had been 'reserved exclusively for public purposes.'<sup>613</sup> This was issued in response to Raffles' displeasure at the number of buildings he discovered had been built around the Singapore River in his three-year absence from the settlement.

Raffles' attempt to requisition this land drew heavily upon the colonial concept of wasteland that had been introduced into Indian Law in 1793 and had been used as the basis for land acquisition throughout colonial Southeast Asia. 'Wasteland' was a categorical term loosely referring to land that did not accrue revenue for the colonial government.<sup>614</sup> This classification drew heavily upon Lockean theory, which asserted

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<sup>610</sup> Letters from Bengal to the Resident, James Pearl to Holt Mackenzie Secretary to Government Territorial Department, 19 January 1824, M2: SSR.

<sup>611</sup> Letters from Bengal to the Resident, Nelson Hull to Farquhar 18 February 1823, M2: SSR.

<sup>612</sup> Letters from Bengal to the Resident, Nelson Hull to Farquhar 21 February 1823, M2: SSR.

<sup>613</sup> Buckley, *An Anecdotal History of the Old Times in Singapore*, 80-81.

<sup>614</sup> Rajib Handique, 'Colonial Wasteland Grants and their Impact on the Ecology and Society of Assam', *Proceedings of the Indian History Congress*, 70 (2009): 733-740; Gorky Chakraborty, 'Roots and Ramifications of a Colonial "Construct": The Wastelands in Assam', *Kolkata: Institute of Development Studies* (2012); and Judy Whitehead, 'John Locke and the Governance of India's

that the privatisation of land and the safeguarding of property rights were the best incentives for economic growth and political stability.<sup>615</sup> In accordance with this theory, when the term was applied to British colonies, it was used to describe barren and infertile land as well as supposedly unproductive uses of land.<sup>616</sup> 'Unproductive' was an intentionally vague term that could refer to land that was left idle, or as was common practice in India, communal land. When Cornwallis stated that one-third of the land in Bengal was lying waste in the late nineteenth century, he referred predominantly to the cultural use of land that did not adhere to British conceptions of private ownership and cultivation.<sup>617</sup> Indeed, subsequent studies have since estimated that rather than 'lying in waste' most of the province was instead fully occupied and cultivable.<sup>618</sup> Raffles' implementation of this concept to further his own objectives, therefore, relied upon the deliberate conflation of land types with land usage. Consequently, given that the land did not fulfil the necessary requirements to be technically classified as wasteland and that Raffles stood to benefit personally, there is a strong case that this incident was demonstrative of Raffles abusing his authority in a personal land dispute.

In addition to this controversial conduct, Raffles' efforts to repossess Pearl's land were already based on dubious grounds as the land in subject originally belonged to the Temenggong and, therefore, did not fall under British jurisdiction. This meant that Raffles could not reserve it for public or governmental use. Pearl made this argument to Raffles, stating that he considered the proclamation to apply only to the occupation of wasteland.<sup>619</sup> This approach would have likely informed his claims to Mount Stamford, but as Pearl pointed out, most of his purchases were existing plantations and would not have been classified as wasteland under any implementation of the term in the region. The proclamation issued in 1822, therefore, had ambiguous legal grounding to include Pearl's property. Raffles, however, was undeterred by this argument and offered no further justifications for his decision.

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Landscape: The Category of Wasteland in Colonial Revenue and Forest Legislation', *Economic and Political Weekly*, 45, no. 50 (2010): 83-93.

<sup>615</sup> Whitehead, 'John Locke and the Governance of India's Landscape', 85.

<sup>616</sup> *Ibid.*, 86.

<sup>617</sup> *Ibid.*, 85.

<sup>618</sup> Irfan Habib, 'Usury in Medieval India', *Comparative Studies in Society and History*, 6, no. 4 (1964): 393-419.

<sup>619</sup> Letters from Bengal to the Resident, James Pearl to Holt Mackenzie Secretary to Government Territorial Department, 19 January 1824, M2: SSR.

On the morning of 25 February 1823, Singapore's local police force 'violently entered' Pearl's dwelling and took forcible possession of Pearl's grounds, plantations and gardens.<sup>620</sup> This act was indicative of Raffles' belief in his almost unchecked authority, which was the result of his influence as founder of the settlement combined with the Company's reluctance to introduce a formal administrative structure or legal charter before the Anglo-Dutch Treaty was concluded. This meant that whilst the Sultan and Temenggong were responsible for settling disputes amongst the local population, the residents of the British settlement had no direct access to legal recourse. Raffles attempted to remedy this in 1823 when he formulated a code of law to be administered in Singapore, and pertinently, the first codified regulation stated that no transfer of land would be recognised until it was registered.<sup>621</sup> These regulations provided the British settlement with its first legal system; however, in creating the regulations, Raffles had acted far outside of his scope of legal power, and it has been argued that they must surely be considered illegal.<sup>622</sup>

The office of Lieutenant-Governor endowed Raffles with the authority to place the settlement in Singapore under the jurisdiction of Bencoolen in 1819, though this did not grant Raffles the power to legislate in either settlement as that authority ultimately resided in Bengal.<sup>623</sup> However, despite this clear transgression, the Company did not denounce the regulations, nor did they provide Singapore with its own Charter of Justice due to their fear of destabilising the negotiations with the Dutch.<sup>624</sup> This non-interventionist stance meant that Raffles' illegal regulations remained Singapore's only judicial regulation for three years.<sup>625</sup>

Given Singapore's local legal system, Pearl realised that he had no other option than to seek redress from either the Supreme Government or the Supreme Court of Calcutta in the hope that they would intervene in the settlement.<sup>626</sup> On the same day as the repossession he began the preliminary process of his appeal by lodging a Public

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<sup>620</sup> Letters from Bengal to the Resident, Protest by James Pearl to the Assistant Resident S. G. Bonham, Notary Public, 25 February 1823, M2: SSR.

<sup>621</sup> Kevin Y. L. Tan, 'A Short Legal and Constitutional History of Singapore', 30-31.

<sup>622</sup> *Ibid.*, 30.

<sup>623</sup> *Ibid.*, 30.

<sup>624</sup> *Ibid.*, 31.

<sup>625</sup> Kevin Y. L. Tan, 'A Short Legal and Constitutional History of Singapore', 30.

<sup>626</sup> Letters from Bengal to the Resident, James Pearl to Holt Mackenzie Secretary to Government Territorial Department, 19 January 1824, M2: Singapore; and Letters from Bengal to the Resident, Protest by James Pearl to the Assistant Resident S. G. Bonham, Notary Public, 25 February 1823, M2: SSR.

Protest against Raffles, Farquhar and 'all and every person, and persons' involved with the repossession with the Bengal Presidency Territorial Department.<sup>627</sup> Pearl also sent a copy of this protest to Raffles in the hope that it would encourage him to end 'the apparent necessity of my proceeding to Calcutta.'<sup>628</sup> The Supreme Government did not directly intervene in the situation, and it is unclear whether they even responded to Pearl. Nevertheless, his threat of escalation had the desired effect and two days later, on 27 February 1822, Raffles wrote to Pearl informing him that 'there will now be no objection to your receiving a Grant for the Grounds in question on the same terms as Europeans in general are allowed to hold lands in Singapore.'<sup>629</sup> By the end of February, all of Pearl's land had been returned to him, and the Assistant Engineer was sent to survey the ground in order to officially register the extent of the property.<sup>630</sup> Once he had resumed possession of his land, Pearl decided not to apply for a grant as he believed that to do so would 'render him liable to future imposts, from which I believed that the Tenures, by which I held the lands entitled me to exemption.'<sup>631</sup> More than six months after he began acquiring land around Mount Stamford, Pearl successfully secured the legitimacy of his property. However, due to the distress and frustration caused by his antagonistic dealings with Stamford Raffles, Pearl decided to rename the area Pearl's Hill, a name it retains to this day.

Raffles denied having received a copy of Pearl's protest, but the threat of involving the Supreme Government was almost certainly the catalyst for his drastic change of stance. The introduction of his Regulations demonstrated that Raffles' authority in Singapore was subject to very little oversight, and he would have been extremely reluctant for the Bengal Presidency to intervene and assert itself as the highest authority in the settlement. Moreover, it is unlikely that Raffles would have enjoyed much support from India as the contentiousness that surrounded his founding of a settlement in Singapore saw his powerful allies, such as George Canning, President of the Board of Control, disavow him.<sup>632</sup> It was in Raffles' best interests, therefore, to

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<sup>627</sup> Letters from Bengal to the Resident, James Pearl to Holt Mackenzie Secretary to Government Territorial Department, 19 January 1824, M2: SSR.

<sup>628</sup> Letters from Bengal to the Resident, Jas Pearl to Raffles (222), M2: SSR.

<sup>629</sup> Letters from Bengal to the Resident, Nelson Hull to James Pearl, 27 February 1823, M2: SSR.

<sup>630</sup> Letters from Bengal to the Resident, Nelson Hull to James Pearl, 25 February 1823, M2: SSR.

<sup>631</sup> Letters from Bengal to the Resident, James Pearl to Holt Mackenzie Secretary to Government Territorial Department, 19 January 1824, M2: SSR.

<sup>632</sup> Tze Shiung Ng, 'The Ideological Origins of the Founding of Singapore'.

avoid bringing any attention to his administration of Singapore if he continued governing the settlement as though it was already a British possession.

However, Pearl's disputes with the local government did not end with the return of his plantation in 1823. In the ensuing months, Pearl recorded several instances of the government's seemingly ruinous approach to the administration of his plantation. The first occurrence related again to the legitimacy of Pearl's land rights as his land was auctioned off in a public sale.<sup>633</sup> The land included in this public sale was predominantly uncleared, and according to Pearl, their exact position obscured the 'thickness of Jungle with which they were covered.'<sup>634</sup> The sale of this uncleared land was another example of the government's use of wasteland to extend its territorial authority. Having claimed the right to sell unproductive land, even though it lay outside of the bounds of the settlement, the government could incorporate the land into its jurisdiction once the jungle had been cleared and utilised, either for cultivation or habitation. In this particular instance, Pearl complained that two hundred acres of his land had been included in the sale and purchased by European residents, including Lieutenant Jackson.<sup>635</sup> Whilst the sale of uncleared land, by necessity, often involved a degree of geographic ignorance, it is unlikely that the local government would have been unaware of the boundaries of Pearl's land, having recently conducted a survey of the grounds when the plantation was returned to him only months prior. It is more likely that the inclusion of some of his property in these land sales was a pernicious measure resulting from the result of his dispute with Raffles, or at least pecuniary as his decision to not apply for a grant meant that if the land remained in his possession, it would be untaxable.<sup>636</sup>

While Pearl brought this episode to the attention of the Bengal Presidency, there is no record that he submitted a complaint to the local government for the sale of this land. There is, however, evidence to suggest that he was vocal in his objections to the sale, as in May 1823, Raffles informed him that he could bring his case to court where 'the case will be tried before a jury according to specific rules intended to apply

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<sup>633</sup> Letters from Bengal to the Resident, James Pearl to Holt Mackenzie Secretary to Government Territorial Department, 19 January 1824, M2: SSR.

<sup>634</sup> Letters from Bengal to the Resident, James Pearl to Holt Mackenzie Secretary to Government Territorial Department, 19 January 1824, M2: SSR.

<sup>635</sup> Letters from Bengal to the Resident, James Pearl to Holt Mackenzie Secretary to Government Territorial Department, 19 January 1824, M2: SSR.

<sup>636</sup> Ibid.

hereafter generally in all such cases.<sup>637</sup> However, as the court in reference was created by Raffles and operated under Raffles' regulations, Pearl was unwilling to rely on its justice. Pearl's conviction that he would receive an unfair trial had been borne out a month earlier when he sought redress from 'my Chinese labourers, whom I had detected in purloining the produce of my Plantation to the value of about five hundred Rupees.'<sup>638</sup> Pearl's decision to take his case to the local court, over which Raffles presided, rather than the Bengal Presidency was presumably due to the relatively low value of the incident and the fact that the Supreme Court had yet to intervene on his more grievous claims. There is no legal documentation for this case as the courts were not legally constituted, but according to Pearl's account:

The Lieutenant Governor [Raffles] required the production of the original papers, forming the documents of my Title to the Plantations, and after obtaining possession of those, not only decline to restore them or to grant me redress against the Cultivators, but directed me to complete the contract, into which I originally entered with them by allowing them the full proportion of the produce of the plantation, as if they had conducted themselves with fidelity, and had never been guilty of peculation. The alternative allowed me, in case I declined conforming to this order, being absolute possession from my property, I was obliged to comply and accordingly paid in addition to the loss of 500 Rupees already sustained, upwards of 2,000 Rupees to those, who had thus defrauded me.

This ruling demonstrated Raffles' almost unchecked authority in Singapore and demonstrated to Pearl that in the face of a hostile local government and unresponsive Supreme Government, he had no future in the settlement. In January 1824, he submitted a request to the Governor General in Council to either grant him reparations for the losses he had sustained or to purchase his land directly from him, stating that 'I have already suffered from its possession I shall therefore be fully contented to escape the risk of future annoyance with the loss only of the time and trouble already bestowed on the property.'<sup>639</sup> Informed by the Bengal Presidency's lack of intervention, Pearl stated that he would probably have retired from Singapore when the government acted upon his case. And this was thusly proved when almost four years later, Pearl's agents received a correspondence announcing that whilst 'the Government is precluded at present from purchasing the estate, but in the event of the Inspector

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<sup>637</sup> Letters to Singapore (Farquhar), Nelson Hull to James Pearl, 17 May 1823, L19: SSR.

<sup>638</sup> Letters from Bengal to the Resident, James Pearl to Holt Mackenzie Secretary to Government Territorial Department, 19 January 1824, M2: SSR.

<sup>639</sup> Letters from Bengal to the Resident, James Pearl to Holt Mackenzie Secretary to Government Territorial Department, 19 January 1824, M2: SSR.

General considering the possession of it to Government likely to be useful and the proprietors would be disposed to accept the sum of Ten Thousand Rupees; the Governor in Council will submit a recommendation to the Supreme Government in favour of its purchase.<sup>640</sup> On 18 March 1828, after both men had permanently retired from the settlement, Raffles' objective of bringing the land around Pearl's Hill was finally achieved. Pearl received ten thousand Rupees (approximately 4,545 Spanish dollars), almost certainly representing a financial loss.<sup>641</sup>

Captain Pearl's seemingly innocuous decision to purchase small plantations from local Chinese cultivators would become a defining moment in determining the nature of Singapore's development in the first half of the nineteenth century. His successful negotiations with the Temenggong revealed a willingness to forfeit his sovereignty over land in Singapore. His dispute with Raffles exposed the lack of structure, oversight, illegality, and abuse of power involved in Singapore's governance between 1819 and 1824. The dispute over Pearl's Hill illustrated the lack of cohesion in the policies of Farquhar and Raffles, the colony's two most senior officials. In this case, Farquhar's practical approach to land grants encouraged more rapid development in Singapore, but this came at the expense of Raffles' more structured approach. Raffles' subsequent failure to browbeat Pearl into surrendering his land effectively ended his attempt at imposing his overarching strategy on Singapore's development.

Although just a single case study, Raffles' conflict with James Pearl encapsulates the government's inability to exert their authority over the direction of Singapore's urban development. Far from William Hornaday's aforementioned description of the town layout as a 'big desk, full of drawers and pigeon-holes, where everything has its place, and can always be found in it', Raffles' failure to secure specific sites for government usage demonstrates the government's inability to perform even the most fundamental acts.<sup>642</sup> Within this environment, the settlement's expansion was invariably haphazard and disjointed as lots were often secured, cleared and developed without the government's authorisation or sometimes even knowledge. This lack of a clear, coherent development policy that emerged between 1819 and 1824 continued

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<sup>640</sup> Miscellaneous Letters, John Anderson Secretary to Government to John Prince Resident Councillor, 27 September 1827, General Orders 1827, I32: Penang: SSR.

<sup>641</sup> Miscellaneous, Civil Order by the Honble the Resident Council'r, Singapore, 18 March 1828, Q2: SSR.

<sup>642</sup> Hornaday, *Two Years in the Jungle*, 294.

throughout much of the nineteenth century as successive British administrations showed little interest in Singapore's interior development.<sup>643</sup> This deficiency created a void in responsibility and duty within the settlement's urban development. As Singapore's economy developed over the course of the nineteenth century and the private sector grew wealthier, this gap was increasingly filled by local communities who sought to improve their working and living conditions. This private assumption of public responsibility is explored in the following chapter through the lens of the Straits Chinese community and, in particular, the wealthy merchant Tan Kim Seng.

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<sup>643</sup> Robert Fullerton to the Honourable the Court of Directors for the Affairs of the United Company of Merchants of England trading to the East Indies, 2 December 1824, B8: Penang Letters to London, SSR.



## Chapter Four: Straits Chinese – Growth through Enterprise

As Singapore emerged as one of Southeast Asia's pre-eminent port cities and as non-European merchants became increasingly entrenched in the emergent imperial commercial networks, the architecture of the nascent cosmopolis developed to reflect its new economic status. Even as the government struggled to function under oppressively restrictive financial constraints, the district of Singapore Town underwent a drastic transformation in the first half of the nineteenth century. While Raffles had initially intended for this transformation to be driven and guided by the government, the financial and logistical struggles explored in the previous chapters ultimately proved too prohibitive for this to be the case. Instead, the impetus and means for growth stemmed primarily from the increasingly prosperous and wealthy mercantile community, the vast majority of whom invested in developing private infrastructure to accommodate the increased commercial activity. By the 1830s, this commercially driven, privately funded growth was reflected in Singapore's new vista, dominated by looming godowns, shophouses and agency houses rather than the government buildings and plazas that Raffles had envisioned. The prominence of these distinctly non-British buildings in an area Raffles had originally sought to ringfence for government infrastructure ultimately showcases the extent to which the settlement's multi-cultural society shaped Singapore's urban landscape. Crucial to this deviation from Raffles' plans was the private sphere, which drove fundamental aspects of Singapore's urban development. National narratives and histories, however, have continued to regularly attribute Singapore's mid-nineteenth-century development to successful British colonial management and planning.

This chapter seeks to reframe this discussion by shifting the analytical emphasis onto key individuals who were paramount to Singapore's growth. Previous chapters in this thesis have focused on the impact of the Company's negative fiscal approach on the local government's capacity to administer Singapore's growth. Employing underutilised English-language Straits Chinese records, this chapter explores the ways in which the non-European mercantile community shaped Singapore's urban development. In particular, this chapter analyses the real estate holdings of Tan Kim Seng, the leading landowner in mid-nineteenth century Singapore and the preeminent mercantile figure. As a non-European resident in Singapore's colonial society bound by the realities of racial hierarchies, Tan Kim Seng's ability to shape the settlement's

development in an official capacity was limited by the inability to attain a high political position. However, because of his wealth and standing amongst the Chinese community, he exerted almost unparalleled direct and indirect influence over the settlement's physical growth. Focusing specifically on his property acquisitions within the confines of the original borders of Singapore Town, this chapter explores the way in which Tan Kim Seng's private investments defied colonial urban planning philosophy and helped redefine social and cultural norms.

Within the small group of exceptionally wealthy businessmen driving Singapore's architectural development in the first half of the nineteenth century, Tan Kim Seng stood alone in the scale and scope of his influence over the settlement's urban landscape. Born in Malacca in 1805 to the moderately successful merchant Tan Swee Poh and his wife Goh Kan Neo, Tan Kim Seng migrated to Singapore in the early 1820s and went on to become one of the most successful men in early colonial Singapore and the epitome of the wealthy and influential Straits Chinese merchant. A second-generation Straits-born Chinese, Tan Kim Seng grew up with all the benefits these trappings entailed, most notably a multilingual education. Brought up with Malay as his mother tongue, Tan Kim Seng attended a private Chinese school where he studied the classics and, under his father's and clansmen's instruction, learnt to speak his dialect, Hokkien.<sup>644</sup> As will be explored later, this Hokkien education would prove fundamental to his success as a cultural leader of a large section of Singapore's Chinese population and was equally pivotal to his appointment as Justice of the Peace.<sup>645</sup> In addition to learning Malay and Hokkien, Tan Kim Seng also attended a missionary school in Malacca, where he was taught English, Portuguese and Dutch.<sup>646</sup> This multilingual upbringing was at the heart of the Straits Chinese success in the nineteenth century, as the ability to successfully navigate Singapore's cross-cultural social and cultural circles provided the foundation for his wide-ranging economic partnerships. However, whilst Tan Kim Seng was armed with the linguistic tools and cultural knowledge required to succeed under British colonial rule, his youth meant that when he migrated to Singapore, he was not amongst the more prominent Straits

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<sup>644</sup> Kwa Chong Guan and Kua Bak Li, ed., *A General History of the Chinese in Singapore* (Singapore: World Scientific, 2019), 137; and Vivienne Tan, *Tan Kim Seng: A Biography* (Singapore: Landmark Books, 2019), 36.

<sup>645</sup> Song, *One Hundred Years' History of the Chinese in Singapore*, 66.

<sup>646</sup> Tan, *Tan Kim Seng*, 36; Kwa Chong Guan, Jackie Yoong, John Teo and Daphne Ang, ed., *The Great Peranakans: Fifty Remarkable Lives* (Singapore: Asian Civilisation Museum, 2015).

Chinese figures such as Seah Eu Chin and Tan Tock Seng and instead arrived as a relatively anonymous figure. Despite his relatively humble beginnings, by the time of his death in 1865, Tan Kim Seng had reached the pinnacle of Singapore's colonial society and had even appeared in a British magazine edited by Charles Dickens.<sup>647</sup> Tan Kim Seng was a leading figure in Singapore's mercantile community and an extremely successful merchant. Through the combination of the success of his mercantile firm, Kim Seng and Company, as well as his extensive investments in Singaporean real estate, by the middle of the century, he was widely considered to be the wealthiest man - of any ethnicity - in the settlement.<sup>648</sup> While the chronic lack of record keeping amongst Singapore's Straits Chinese community during this period makes it impossible to quantify his wealth, contemporary anecdotal evidence places his personal fortune at half a million Spanish dollars and asserts that he owned over fifty per cent of land in Singapore.<sup>649</sup>

The analysis of Singapore's urban development is loosely structured around the chronological expansion of the boundaries of the British settlement. Commencing with scrutiny of Tan Kim Seng's real estate acquisitions spanning from 1819 to 1838, the opening segment of this chapter scrutinises Tan Kim Seng's role in shaping the development of the district of Singapore Town. This exploration encompasses an analysis of the parameters delineated in the treaty brokered among Raffles, Tengku Hussein and the Temenggong in 1819.<sup>650</sup> The district of Singapore Town was, and largely remains, the heart of Singapore, now home to landmarks such as City Hall, Parliament House and the Supreme Court. Notably, the district was represented in the Jackson Plan and was, therefore, one of the first reference points of Singapore in the nineteenth century. The analysis in this section examines the process by which Tan Kim Seng was able to, occasionally unintentionally, subvert the government's efforts at exerting control over the landscape through his purchase of land and the construction of both commercial and residential buildings. It analyses his tangible

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<sup>647</sup> Charles Dickens, *Household Words: A Weekly Journal, Volume V, March – September 1852* (London: Bradley and Evans, 1852).

<sup>648</sup> Tan, *Tan Kim Seng: A Biography* (Singapore: Landmark Books, 2019), 36.

<sup>649</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>650</sup> Bastin, *Raffles and Hastings: Private Exchanges Behind the Founding of Singapore* (Singapore: Marshall Cavendish International, 2014), 48.

influence in shaping this symbolically significant area of Singapore and examines the social implications of his actions.

Following this analysis, the chapter then explores the British settlement's initial expansion into the Claymore district. It explores the manner of the settlement's natural growth into more rural areas and examines the district's early plantation history. The analysis then shifts towards Tan Kim Seng's pioneering role in transforming the purpose and perception of the district from a failed plantation venture into a reputable residential area for Singapore's wealthiest residents. The final geographic region explored in this analysis is the initial expansion into Pasir Panjang in the early 1860s. Now a residential, recreational, and industrial area, in the early 1860s, the region was a large, unmapped, largely inhospitable region that hugged Singapore's southwestern coastline. The undesirable nature of the land presented Tan Kim Seng with the opportunity to purchase a plot of 2,859 acres, a significant amount of land that comprised the majority of his land ownership by the time of his death in 1864. Despite the area's rich history, from Malay cultivation to state-owned opium factories in the early twentieth century, as Tan Kim Seng acquired the land only two years before his death, this chapter only considers the early ramifications of his role in the expansion of this boundary.

### The District of Singapore Town

To contextualise and examine the impact of Tan Kim Seng's acquisition of private property on Singapore's urban development, this chapter cross-references information contained in court inventories with the 1854 cadastral map of the *Plan of the Town of Singapore and its Environs* (Fig. 9). Based on a survey conducted in 1842 by the Government Surveyor, the map comprehensively depicts the district of Singapore Town. It serves as a rare visual depiction of land division and land leases in the settlement. Framed by the Strait of Singapore and the mouth of the Singapore River at the south of the composition, the map encompasses most of the town's built environment in 1842. It extends from Orchard Road in the north (modern-day Dhoby Ghaut MRT station), to the Rochor River in the east (modern-day Crawford Street), and to Telok Ayer Street/Amoy Street in the west. The information in this source is largely unsurpassed by other maps produced during this period. It is important to note, however, that it still suffers from many of the issues inherent to colonial sources, namely that the restricted reach of the government limited the information portrayed.

In their study on the socio-economic history of the Baweanese in Singapore, for example, Hadi Osni notes that the *Plan of the Town of Singapore and its Environs* represented the built environment through a relatively narrow and European perspective, heavily prioritising European-style brick buildings over those of a more traditional Singaporean attap style. These attap buildings, therefore, were omitted from the cadastral map. Given the scarcity of other sources during this period, this effectively erases the community's architectural history from the colonial gaze, removing the richness and complexity of attap building architecture (timber buildings with thatch and tile roofs) from the understanding of Singapore's landscape. Despite this innate issue, the *Plan of the Town of Singapore* remains a valuable source of information on Tan Kim Seng's holdings. The Straits Chinese community's desire to emulate and adhere to European culture and trappings meant that the properties listed in the inventory of his estate – mostly European-style buildings – were all represented on the map. The limitations of British surveys and cadastral maps regarding nineteenth-century Singapore were undoubtedly significant. Yet, for the purposes of this study, their shortcomings are mitigated by their focus on imperial conceptualisations of urban development. Ultimately, this methodological approach reveals that Tan Kim Seng was influential in the development of three primary areas within Singapore Town: Commercial Square/Chinatown, the Bras Basah area, and Boat Quay.

The analysis in this chapter builds upon the existing literature, primarily regarding the discussion around how different communities perceived and interacted with space. Yeoh's *Contesting Space in Colonial Singapore* has led the charge in reconceptualising the historical approach to Singapore's development, looking beyond the city as an abstract economic origination to appreciate the 'practical nature of everyday life.'<sup>651</sup> Her focus on not only the dominant forces at work but also on the 'underside' has revealed a previously overlooked space of conflict, collision, negotiation and dialogue between coloniser and colonised. As more historians explore this tension between the government and the local communities, it has become increasingly evident that this relationship was fundamental to the growth and development of Singapore. Furthermore, this chapter advances this concept of tension

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<sup>651</sup> Brenda Yeoh, *Contesting Space in Colonial Singapore: Power Relations and the Urban Built Environment* (Singapore: NUS, 2003), 10.

beyond just the analysis of varying perceptions of and interactions with space to explore how this tension was essential to the town's very construction. Whereas previous studies that have explored the role of the Chinese community have relied heavily upon anecdotal accounts of travellers and workers, this chapter reconstructs the property portfolio of Singapore's wealthiest merchants to provide a uniquely empirical insight into the role of non-Europeans in the town's expansion.



Figure 9. 'A Plan of the Town of Singapore and its Environs', Survey Map, National Archives of Singapore, embellishments own.

Property ownership was a symbol of status within the structure of overseas Chinese society. The Chinese community in Singapore, predominantly itinerant workers, can broadly be divided into two major groups: merchants (Shang) and workers (Kung).<sup>652</sup> Within the merchant class, there were two main sub-divisions, which Yen Ching-Hwang has termed 'capitalists' and 'general merchants.'<sup>653</sup> The capitalists were the significantly wealthier sub-class and were often plantation owners,

<sup>652</sup> Wang Gungwu, *Community and Nation: Essays on Southeast Asia and The Chinese*, (Singapore: Heinemann Education Books, 1981), 162.

<sup>653</sup> Yen Ching-Hwang, 'Class Structure and Social Mobility in the Chinese community in Singapore and Malaya, 1800-1911', *Modern Asian Studies*, 21, no. 3 (1987): 418.

tin-mining proprietors and property owners, whilst the general merchants were shopkeepers, general traders and small plantation owners. However, the flexibility of Singapore's social and economic structures was such that this division was often unclear. By the mid-nineteenth century, many of the Straits Chinese residents could be considered both capitalists and general merchants. Property ownership, therefore, was employed as a distinct identifier of social status and respect within Chinese society. Therefore, the extent of Tan Kim Seng's real estate was not only an important component of his wealth but was also outwardly befitting of his status as a leader of the Hokkien community. This relationship between status and property was epitomised in Tan Kim Seng's construction of his showpiece home Panglima Prang, which is discussed in further detail in the following chapter.

Private property and infrastructure were also key status markers outside of the Straits Chinese community. For example, in addition to the tangible improvements to the standard of living wrought by their construction, the provision of vital infrastructure in Southeast Asian colonies held a further, unquantifiable value within the context of European imperialism. British colonialism, particularly in South and Southeast Asia, was justified and legitimised by the nebulous notion of the 'civilising mission' for much of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries.<sup>654</sup> The tenets of the civilising missions were ever-shifting to aid the universal application of this concept throughout the empire.<sup>655</sup> At its core, however, the civilising mission entailed the moral and material uplifting, improvement and development of 'backward' people.<sup>656</sup> Notably, the material aspect of the civilising mission included the presence of architecture and infrastructure in an otherwise untamed landscape. A prime example of this imperial mindset is the account of John Prince, the former Resident Councillor, recounting his visit to Batavia in 1828. Despite the tension and rivalry between the two European empires during this period, Prince's account of the Dutch colony was notably favourable. It made particular note of the quality of the local infrastructure, stating:

'the roads to this place [do] the highest credit to the Government. They are said to be the smoothest ever seen, bordered on each side with hedges of cut shrubs and lying through a country of surpassing beauty.'<sup>657</sup>

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<sup>654</sup> Carey A. Watt and Michael Mann, ed., *Civilizing Missions in Colonial and Postcolonial South Asia: From Improvement to Development* (London: Anthem Press, 2011), 1.

<sup>655</sup> *Ibid.*, 1.

<sup>656</sup> *Ibid.*, 1.

<sup>657</sup> *Singapore Chronicle and Commercial Register*, 14 February 1828.

That Prince deemed this description of Batavian roads worthy of inclusion in his otherwise brief account was suggestive of the value that European officials placed on the ability to introduce what they perceived as civility to Southeast Asia that was valued in the West, such as orderliness and cleanliness. This was further evidenced in English reports throughout the nineteenth century that often emphasised the physical appearance of local towns, either to emphasise the value of colonialism or the 'backwardness' of the indigenous regimes.

The concept of civilisation through architecture similarly unpinned Raffles' original vision for Singapore's development in which he sought to 'upgrade the masses, Europeans and natives alike' through the medium of cultural institutions such as theatres, botanical gardens and colleges.<sup>658</sup> Of these institutes, the construction of colleges was particularly designed to civilise the local population, and, in Raffles' own words, the Singapore Institution was intended to 'educate the sons of the higher order of natives and others.'<sup>659</sup> Raffles' desire to engender civilisation via education was heavily influenced by his belief that:

'the weakness of the Chiefs is an evil which has been long felt and acknowledged in these countries and to cultivate and improve their intellectual powers seems to be the most effectual remedy. They will duly appreciate the benefit conferred and while it must inevitably tend to attach them more closely to us we shall find our recompense in the stability of their future authority and the general security and good order which must be the result.'<sup>660</sup>

Nevertheless, his ostensibly lofty ambitions notwithstanding, Raffles repeatedly failed to implement most of his architectural plans in Singapore. Yet despite his shortcomings, the posthumous rehabilitation of his reputation was successful enough that the traditional historiography regularly maintained that much of Singapore's early success and urban development was the product of Raffles' attributes as:

a thoughtful and imaginative town builder. [Who]...sought not only to impose order on the physical landscape but to influence the moral and social habits of the people as well.<sup>661</sup>

Moreover, these traditional narratives also maintained that Singapore's urban development adhered closely enough to Raffles' ideals that 'despite the fact that

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<sup>658</sup> Cangi, 'Civilising the people of Southeast Asia', 178.

<sup>659</sup> Charles Wurtzberg, *Raffles of the Eastern Isles* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1984), 630.

<sup>660</sup> *Ibid.*, 631.

<sup>661</sup> Cangi, 'Civilising the people of Southeast Asia', 182.



Crawford had ignored his utopian ideas, Singapore's physical development at mid-century would have pleased Raffles no end.<sup>662</sup> Given the value the British Empire placed upon the provision of infrastructure, the individual contributions, such as those of Tan Kim Seng, cannot be taken in isolation, nor can their significance be overlooked.

For example, the precise year Tan Kim Seng migrated to Singapore is unclear. One of the few indicators of when he arrived in the settlement is provided by John Cameron, the owner and editor of the *Straits Times* between 1861 and 1881, and a key source of primary information for early colonial Singapore, who, writing in 1864, stated that he arrived 'about thirty years ago.'<sup>663</sup> More current studies have often worked on the assumption that Tan Kim Seng arrived in Singapore a few years earlier than Cameron accounts for, but can offer no more precision than sometime in the 1820s.<sup>664</sup> Recently, in her biography of Tan Kim Seng, Vivienne Tan has narrowed the date down slightly by pointing out that his eldest son, Tan Beng Swee, was born in Singapore in 1829, and it is therefore likely that he arrived several years earlier, perhaps as early as 1824.<sup>665</sup> While his son's birth proves that Tan Kim Seng had migrated by the 1820s, little evidence has supported Vivienne Tan's assumption that he arrived years prior. An examination of Tan Kim Seng's property portfolio reveals that he acquired his first official property in Singapore in 1826, when the earliest titles to the landed property were distributed.<sup>666</sup> His acquisition of this deed placed him among Singapore's first thirty-two Chinese landowners, alongside hugely influential figures such as Tan Che Sang and Choa Chong Long.<sup>667</sup> This information conclusively placed Tan Kim Seng in Singapore in 1826. It supports Vivienne Tan's assumption that he arrived as early as 1824, as these leases were issued in exchange for the clearance and development of the land. This meant he would likely have spent at least a couple of years establishing himself in the settlement, earning the parcel of land through his industry.

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<sup>662</sup> Cangi, 'Civilising the people of Southeast Asia', 182.

<sup>663</sup> Cameron, *Our Tropical Possessions in Malayan India*, 139.

<sup>664</sup> Ching-hwang Yen, *Ethnic Chinese business in Asia: History, Culture and Business Enterprise* (London: World Scientific, 2013), 290.

<sup>665</sup> Tan, *Tan Kim Seng*, 40.

<sup>666</sup> Last Will and Testament of Tan Kim Seng of Singapore, NA 1490/242, National Archives (Singapore); and Song, *One Hundred Years' History of the Chinese in Singapore*, 35.

<sup>667</sup> Song, *One Hundred Years of the Chinese in Singapore*, 35-37.

Notably, Tan Kim Seng's property portfolio reveals that in addition to this first property, he also bought three of the one hundred and ninety-nine leases issued to the settlement's Chinese population in 1827.<sup>668</sup> By 1827, there was empirical evidence that Tan Kim Seng had already migrated to Singapore and established himself as an established landowner. While the location and significance of these early properties will be examined in further detail later in the chapter, the mere fact that Tan Kim Seng owned four properties before 1830 offers important insight into his otherwise unknown early experiences in Singapore. In the aforementioned John Cameron account, for example, it was stated that Tan Kim Seng arrived in Singapore 'a poor man.'<sup>669</sup> It is likely that in this context, 'poor' was a highly subjective term, as it is very unlikely that a third-generation Straits Chinese man who had come from a family with an established trading business and received the luxury of extensive education could ever be described as 'poor' at a time when the vast majority of Singapore's migrant population was comprised of indentured labourers. It is far more likely that Cameron, writing a year after Tan Kim Seng's death, used the term poor in contrast to the wealth he eventually accumulated over his lifetime, which some contemporary estimates placed at two million Spanish dollars, the equivalent of twenty-five million pounds sterling today, which would have made him one of, if not the, wealthiest men in Singapore.<sup>670</sup> Nevertheless, even within this context, Cameron's claim of Tan Kim Seng arriving as a poor man does not align with the evidence provided in his portfolio, as the ability to purchase four leases before 1830 would have required insufficient wealth.

Tan Kim Seng's early property ownership and wealth notwithstanding, given the lack of surviving records from Singapore's Chinese community in the first half of the nineteenth century, little is known of his early commercial activity. His later, more publicised success as a trader suggests that he utilised his multilingual education to develop an extensive commercial network during this period. However, there has previously been no real record of who he was trading with nor any concrete indication

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<sup>668</sup> Last Will and Testament of Tan Kim Seng of Singapore, NA 1490/242, NAS; and Song, *One Hundred Years' History of the Chinese in Singapore*, 36.

<sup>669</sup> Cameron, *Our Tropical Possessions in Malayan India*, 139.

<sup>670</sup> Cameron, *Our Tropical Possessions in the Malayan India*, 139; In his statistical analysis of Singaporean trade from 1819-1869, Wong Lin Ken established the currency conversion for 100 Spanish dollars = 224 ½ Company Rupees, 210.85 Sicca Rupees and £20. 16s. 8d; Bank of England Inflation Calculator.

of how successful he was. While his property portfolio does not offer any insights into the nature of Tan Kim Seng's business, the quantity and value of lease acquisitions during this period suggest that his business was thriving. Between 1831 and 1838, he purchased ten leases in Singapore Town, most of which were located in the lucrative commercial district, with the most expensive lease costing \$16,000 (lots depicted in red in Fig. 9).<sup>671</sup> Nevertheless, it was not until 1837, when he entered into a business partnership with the major English merchant Edward Boustead, that he emerged as a prominent figure within British society and began appearing in contemporary English language accounts.<sup>672</sup> Boustead arrived in Singapore in March 1828, whereupon he excelled in the mercantile firm Robert Wise and Co. for two or three years before starting up his firm, Boustead and Co.<sup>673</sup> In the early 1830s, Boustead was widely considered one of Singapore's most active and influential entrepreneurs, with strong business and political ties in London and China.<sup>674</sup> Boustead's standing and influence in the settlement were reflected in Singapore's architecture as his godown, commissioned in 1832, towered over the Elgin Bridge along Boat Quay.<sup>675</sup> Known colloquially as the House of Seven-and-Twenty pillars in reference to the building's distinctive Doric columns, the building was designed by the architect George Coleman, who was also responsible for the construction of Singapore's courthouse and government offices and remained a landmark until 1935 when the building, by then converted into The Grand Hotel de l'Europe, was demolished and replaced by the old Supreme Court at the Padang.<sup>676</sup>

Within just a few years of his partnership with Boustead, Tan Kim Seng established himself as a politically, culturally, and economically influential figure within Singapore's European community. While correlation is not causation, and there is little hard evidence to suggest that this partnership was the root cause of Tan Kim Seng's social and political ascension, it appears he benefited from Boustead's public standing. In 1840, for example, Kim Seng and Co. was one of the two Chinese members

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<sup>671</sup> Last Will and Testament of Tan Kim Seng of Singapore, NA 1490/242, NAS

<sup>672</sup> Roderick Maclean, *A Pattern of Change: The Singapore international Chamber of Commerce from 1837* (Singapore: Singapore International Chamber of Commerce, 2000), 17-27.

<sup>673</sup> Song, *One Hundred Years' History of the Chinese in Singapore*, 60; and Richard Edward Hale, *The Pioneer Merchants of Singapore: Johnston, Boustead, Guthrie and Others* (London: World Scientific, 2022), 129.

<sup>674</sup> Hale, *The Pioneer Merchants of Singapore*, 129; and Anthony Webster, 'The Development of British Commercial and Political Networks in the Straits Settlements 1800 to 1868: The Rise of a Colonial and Regional Economic Identity?', *Modern Asian Studies*, 45, no. 4 (2011): 917.

<sup>675</sup> Hale, *The Pioneer Merchants of Singapore*, 135.

<sup>676</sup> Buckley, *An Anecdotal History of Old Times in Singapore*, 208.

admitted into the Singapore Chamber of Commerce.<sup>677</sup> The Chamber of Commerce was a private sector representative organisation founded by leading figures of the mercantile community several years earlier in 1837 to apply organised, quasi-political influence over the EIC's administration.<sup>678</sup> Singapore's Chamber of Commerce reflected the settlement's innately multi-cultural mercantile community, and as such, numerous Straits Chinese merchants, including Tan Tock Seng and Whampoa, were amongst the organisation's founding members.<sup>679</sup> Given the prominence of these figures within European social circles, Tan Kim Seng's inclusion in the organisation in 1840 reflected his new standing in the settlement. Similarly, throughout the 1840s, Tan Kim Seng developed personal relationships with the higher echelons of Singapore's administration and frequently engaged in political issues. In 1844, he chaired a public meeting addressing public concerns over the Government of Bengal's mishandling and misunderstanding of the need for a new hospital in the settlement.<sup>680</sup> In 1847, he wrote a public letter to the Governor of the Straits Settlements, William Butterworth – a man with whom he had a friendly personal relationship – in an attempt to pressure the government on behalf of 'British subjects interested in the Bugis Trade', to adopt a more proactive role in the suppression of the ongoing issue of piracy.<sup>681</sup> In 1850, he was appointed as a member of the committee appointed to arrange for the sending of exhibits to the Great Exhibition of 1851 held at the Crystal Palace in London.<sup>682</sup>

Tan Kim Seng often used his newfound political influence and standing within the European community to represent Singapore's Chinese population and campaign for greater living standards. In March 1850, he was a prominent co-signer of a petition to Governor Butterworth that campaigned for:

[the] liberty to observe the rites and customs appertaining to marriages and funerals and which are essential to their due celebration, the annual oblations to the names of the deceased in the open air in the front of each house; the oblations of the Fokien and Kwantung temples and the Chohi or plays in the enclosures in front, in honor of the Sin or defied mortals on their respective birthdays the New Year's festivities and worship, extending over fifteen days, the annual procession and offerings to the Queen of Heaven, of the people of

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<sup>677</sup> Song, *One Hundred Years' History of the Chinese in Singapore*, 66.

<sup>678</sup> Buckley, *An Anecdotal History of Old Times in Singapore*, 313.

<sup>679</sup> Song, *One Hundred Years' History of the Chinese in Singapore*, 66.

<sup>680</sup> Buckley, *An Anecdotal History of Old Times in Singapore*, 409-410.

<sup>681</sup> *The Singapore Free Press and Mercantile Advertiser*, 7 December 1847.

<sup>682</sup> Song, *One Hundred Year's History of the Chinese in Singapore*, 68.

the Junks from Chin, and the beating of Gong s on board the Chinese Hunks in the harbour on the arrival and departure of a Junk.<sup>683</sup>

Tan Kim Seng's contributions to the Chinese population also extended to financial investments in public infrastructure. In November 1857, Tan Kim Seng contributed \$13,000, a more significant sum than his average property purchase, to construct an improved water supply in the town. Although he provided the entirety of the finances, he stipulated that the Government or the Municipality would take charge of the new infrastructure and 'always maintained in an efficient state.'<sup>684</sup> However, as the previous chapters have demonstrated, even with this donation, the government's innate inefficiency was such that it was not until 1877 that waterworks were completed.<sup>685</sup> In addition to his involvement in efforts to improve the living conditions of the Chinese in Singapore, in 1850, Tan Kim Seng was appointed Justice of the Peace and became a quasi-official spokesperson for Singapore's Hokkien community. This appointment formalised and contextualised the British Tan Kim Seng's existing standing within the Hokkien dialect group or *bang*.<sup>686</sup> Consequently, when the large-scale riots between the Hokkiens and other dialect groups broke out in 1854, it was to Tan Kim Seng, amongst the other Chinese business leaders, that the British turned to in an effort to restore the peace.<sup>687</sup>

As previously mentioned, Tan Kim Seng's first property was acquired in 1826, when the earliest official leases in Singapore were sold.<sup>688</sup> Given the centrality of Singapore's maritime trade to the settlement's success and identity, it comes as no surprise that the vast majority of these initial leases were located on the southern shore of the mouth of the Singapore River in the areas that Raffles had initially demarcated as the 'Public Quay' and 'Mercantile Establishments' in the Jackson Plan.<sup>689</sup> Moreover, although the sale of these leases was officially registered in 1826, the land would almost certainly have been occupied and fulfilling an important role in Singapore's

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<sup>683</sup> *The South Australian*, Tuesday 9 July.

<sup>684</sup> Song, *One Hundred Years' History of the Chinese in Singapore*, 71.

<sup>685</sup> *Ibid.*, 71-72.

<sup>686</sup> Kwa Chong Guan and Kua Bak Lim, *A General History of the Chinese in Singapore*, 119; Trocki, *Singapore: Wealth, Power and the Culture of Control*, 27.

<sup>687</sup> Kwa Chong Guan and Kua Bak Lim, *A General History of the Chinese in Singapore*, 124.

<sup>688</sup> Song, *One Hundred Year's History of the Chinese in Singapore*, 35; In the Goods of Tan Kim Seng, Deceased, 24 January 1865, Court of Judicature, Straits Settlements, Overseas and Private Records, NA 1490/293, National Archives of Singapore

<sup>689</sup> Plan of the Town of Singapore By Lieut. Jackson, 1828, Survey Department, NAS; and Song, *One Hundred Year's History of the Chinese in Singapore*, 35.

burgeoning economic growth within just months of Raffles' arrival in Singapore in 1819. It has been well established that the reorganisation of intra-regional commercial networks, which was at the heart of Singapore's rapid ascension, relied heavily on Straits Chinese merchants' role as facilitators of multilateral trade relationships.<sup>690</sup> The pattern of trade established during this period involved the Straits Chinese selling a variety of British imperial commodities, such as cotton piece goods originating from both Britain and India, to local traders in exchange for regional commodities.<sup>691</sup> The local Malay and Bugis traders would then distribute the British commodities throughout the rest of the region. In this way, the British could leverage the colonisation of Singapore to penetrate deep into Southeast Asia's regional trade networks. To effectively operate within Singapore's transshipment economy, Straits Chinese merchants required large warehouses to cheaply store the vast quantity of manufactured and regional goods that passed through the settlement. In addition to storage, early Straits Chinese merchants also required quick and easy access to the harbour in order to conduct their transactions with local traders on behalf of British merchants. Large godowns were quickly erected by the most successful Straits Chinese merchants along the Singapore River's southern shore to fulfil this dual function.<sup>692</sup>

The godown is an architectural product from Southeast Asia's cross-cultural maritime trading history. On the most fundamental level, a godown is defined as 'a warehouse; an outbuilding used for stores; a storehouse' and, although the term is subject to extensive translation across a range of language groups, this definition has remained largely consistent.<sup>693</sup> However, despite the relative uniformity of its meaning, godowns possessed a secondary purpose as a liminal space which endowed the structures with subtle complexity and implicit values.<sup>694</sup> Based primarily upon its usage in nineteenth-century British India, for example, Mishka Sinha has argued that in a mercantile context, a godown 'implies security, protection for both goods and status;

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<sup>690</sup> Wong Lin Ken, *The Trade of Singapore*, 12; and Kobayashi, 'The Role of Singapore in the Growth of Intra-Southeast Asian Trade', *Southeast Asian Studies*, 2, no. 3 (2013), 445.

<sup>691</sup> Kobayashi, 'Origins of Economic Prosperity c. 1800-1874', 23.

<sup>692</sup> Letter from Raffles to James Lumsdaine, Nathaniel Wallich and Captain Francis Salmond, in Buckley, *Anecdotal History of the Old Times in Singapore*, 79-80.

<sup>693</sup> Henry Yule and A.C. Burnell, *Hobson-Jobson: The Definitive Glossary of British India*, selected edition, Kate Teltscher ed. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013), 244-5; and Mishka Sinha, 'Godown', *South Asia: Journal of South Asian Studies*, 40 no. 2 (2017): 316.

<sup>694</sup> Sinha, 'Godown', 316.

yet is also a liminal space, where illicit dealings might pass unseen, and illegal goods might be hidden...Godowns might be collected together in places empty of shops and residences, where robbery and murder could go unobserved and unpunished, a place of uncertainty, anxiety and insecurity.<sup>695</sup> This implicit connotation may have initially been attached to godowns in the first several decades of Singapore's colonial history when contemporary sources report a significant degree of lawlessness and murder was commonplace.<sup>696</sup> The potential for lawlessness was certainly enhanced by the segregation of Chinese godowns on the southern bank of the river from European godowns on the north. According to Song, the leases issued to Chinese residents in 1826 and 1827 were primarily located on roads such as Telok Ayer Street, Market Street, Philip Street, and Church Street, all of which were within roughly 1.5km of each other.<sup>697</sup> Given the severe limitations that the government operated under during this period, they were unable to field any effective police presence outside of the European district. By 1821 several European merchants, unnamed in the few English sources of the period, voted to establish the 'Night Watch Fund' - a voluntary subscription to finance the expansion of the police force.<sup>698</sup> According to Song's account, which relied heavily upon English perceptions of events, there was an underwhelming response amongst Chinese merchants until an increase in the frequency of robberies ignited a renewed interest in the scheme.<sup>699</sup> Nevertheless, whilst the early Chinese godowns may have been subject to theft and robbery, the admittedly limited sources from the period provide no evidence that they were the source of illegal activity, unlike their counterparts in India.<sup>700</sup>

Before officially recognising Singapore as a British colony in 1824, the administration often offered 'cutting papers' – a quasi-official document recognising property ownership – on any parcel of land that had been cleared and settled.<sup>701</sup> This approach enabled Farquhar's administration to accelerate the settlement's development at minimal cost to the East India Company. Tan Kim Seng's rapid

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<sup>695</sup> Sinha, 'Godown', 316.

<sup>696</sup> Song, *One Hundred Years' of the Chinese in Singapore*, 37, 40, 42, 84; and Buckley, *An Anecdotal History of Old Times in Singapore*, 98, 213.

<sup>697</sup> Song, *One Hundred Years' of the Chinese in Singapore*, 36; and A General Plan of the Town of Singapore and Environs, 1852, NA 1417, NAS.

<sup>698</sup> Song, *One Hundred Years' of the Chinese in Singapore*, 14.

<sup>699</sup> *Ibid.*, 14.

<sup>700</sup> Sinha, 'Godown', 317.

<sup>701</sup> Buckley, *An Anecdotal History of the Old Times in Singapore*, 57.

acquisition of several leases close to each other in this area in 1826 and 1827 confirms that he was an active and successful member of the Straits Chinese mercantile community in Singapore's earliest years. Moreover, given his ability to secure godowns in such prominent positions, it is very likely that he was a key member of the group of merchants, as discussed in the previous chapter, who had originally been allocated space along the East Beach to construct their warehouses, but after discovering the difficulties of transporting goods from the area to the port, relocated to the bank of the river that Raffles had attempted to reserve for the construction of government buildings.<sup>702</sup> While he was not alone in clearing land, establishing godowns and promoting trade, this first phase of property acquisition demonstrated that Tan Kim Seng was a fundamental figure in the settlement's early development. Furthermore, as he was likely one of the merchants who relocated to the bank of the river in spite of Raffles' efforts, Tan Kim Seng also contributed to the establishment of an urban development precedent that saw the economic needs of the settlement overrule government intervention.

Tan Kim Seng's first deviation from property ownership in Singapore's mercantile zone occurred in 1832 with the acquisition of six leases locally situated along Bras Basah Road at the junction between Bencoolen Road and Church Street.<sup>703</sup> Running parallel to the Singapore River, Bras Basah Road was one of the oldest north-western streets in Singapore, leading from the southern shoreline into the island's interior. In the Jackson Plan, the road was depicted as a straight street originating at Beach Road within the European Town and tapering off into a sparsely annotated map region labelled simply Seligi Hill.<sup>704</sup> However, rather than a single entity, the road was instead presented as two separate roads; the section closest to the shoreline and which would have run through the most developed section of the European Town was named Church Street after the Missionary Society Chapel, whilst the section leading into Singapore's unmarked interior was labelled Selegy Street after the only annotation in the locality.<sup>705</sup> Notably, a comparison with the map *Part of Singapore Island*, published

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<sup>702</sup> Buckley, *An Anecdotal History of the Old Times in Singapore*, 57.

<sup>703</sup> Plan of Singapore Town and Adjoining Districts from Actual Survey by John Turnbull Thomson, Government Surveyor, Singapore, NA 1417, NAS.

<sup>704</sup> Plan of the Town of Singapore By Lieut. Jackson, NAS.

<sup>705</sup> Victor Savage and Brenda Yeoh, *Singapore Street Names: A Study of Toponymics* (Singapore: Marshall Cavendish International, 2013).



in 1825 - several years after the Jackson Plan was conceived (but three years prior to its publication in 1828) – reveals that Singapore’s infrastructure was not as developed as the blueprint portrayed. Like many of the features in the Jackson Plan, the inclusion of the Selegy Street section of what would become Bras Basah Road was not a reflection of reality but an idealised vision of the nascent town.<sup>706</sup> Instead, with little infrastructure built that far inland on the north bank of the Singapore River, by 1825, the government had still yet to commit their scarce resources to the internal road networks. Given the administration’s general disinterest in the expansion into Singapore’s interior, Bras Basah Road was clearly intended as a significant feature in the settlement as one of only two prospective roads connecting the original town with Singapore’s interior.

When Bras Basah Road was finally extended in the late 1820s and 1830s, its significance to Singapore’s development was reflected by the adjoining public institutions.<sup>707</sup> Already home to the London Missionary Chapel and the Singapore Institution, by the early 1830s, it was planned that the road would also accommodate the aforementioned Chinese Pauper Hospital, a new Roman Catholic Chapel, the settlement’s first Convict Jail and the Esplanade – a site of British recreational activities that became the home of the Singapore Cricket Club in 1852.<sup>708</sup> The construction of these four institutions was a significant milestone in Singapore’s urban development.

Located to the southeast of the Bras Basah area, the Esplanade was a central feature of British society in early Singapore. At first glance, it appears counterintuitive that an undeveloped plot of land in the city’s centre came to embody British mastery over the terrain in a colony where progress was otherwise defined by land clearance and urbanisation. However, by the late 1820s and early 1830s, creating a recreational space had become a pressing issue for the European community.<sup>709</sup> While Singapore’s environment lent itself to recreational activities such as sailing and shooting, the desire to establish a social and controlled form of sport led to the

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<sup>706</sup> Plan of the Town of Singapore By Lieut. Jackson, NAS.

<sup>707</sup> Ibid.

<sup>708</sup> Buckley, *An Anecdotal History of Old Times in Singapore*, 16.

<sup>709</sup> N.G Aplin and Quek Jin Jong, ‘Celestials in Touch: Sport and the Chinese in Colonial Singapore’, *The International Journal of the History of Sport*, 19, no. 2-3 (2002): 73.

establishment of the Billiard Club in 1829, the first sporting club established in the settlement.<sup>710</sup> Ultimately, the juxtaposition between the manicured lawn of the Esplanade and the sprawling buildings or the untamed jungle imbued such social significance. Whilst many British colonial societies were defined by segregation, exclusion and exclusivity, in Singapore, there was a greater-than-normal level of parity between the ethnic classes as status derived more directly from mercantile wealth.<sup>711</sup> The Esplanade, therefore, presented the opportunity to establish a rarified class of Western society that enabled the British inhabitants to establish a defined social stratification.

Founded at a meeting held at the home of Boustead – prominent merchant and Tan Kim Seng’s future business partner – the Billiard Club was a private club complete with a strict set of membership rules around attendance and subscription fees. In 1830, for example, the Treasurer of the club, George Armstrong, was fined \$6 for missing a meeting, a decision he opposed stating:

I protest against the resolution condemning me to pay a fine for non-attendance, upon the plea that the members of the Club present did not consider sickness a sufficient excuse. Perhaps at the next meeting some member will produce his diploma, otherwise I must be permitted to doubt the medical knowledge of the Club in toto.<sup>712</sup>

The creation of arbitrary and self-policing rules was an important component in the formation of organised sports in the colony as it established sports clubs as the preserve of the elite with codified means of segregation.<sup>713</sup> Thus, when Singapore’s Cricket and Swimming clubs were established in 1852 and 1894, they both created rules stipulating that non-Europeans could not become members.<sup>714</sup> Much like the segregation of the European district, the manufactured elitism of sports clubs reinforced the concept of British superiority in a society that was otherwise largely dictated by wealth. The esoteric nature of cricket, which made the sport identifiable but not understandable to Singapore’s non-European population, meant that the Cricket Club, located at the Esplanade, became the most significant sporting symbols

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<sup>710</sup> Aplin and Jong, ‘Celestials in Touch’, 73.

<sup>711</sup> Carl Nightingale, *Segregation: A Global History of Divided Cities* (London: The University of Chicago Press, 2012).

<sup>712</sup> Buckley, *An Anecdotal History of Old Times in Singapore*, 267.

<sup>713</sup> Aplin and Jong, ‘Celestials in Touch’, p. 70.

<sup>714</sup> *Ibid.*, 71.

of imperial superiority in the settlement.<sup>715</sup> Although it was not until the 1880s that the Straits Chinese were permitted to participate in the Club, the general desire amongst the community's most prominent members was to increase their social standing by emulating British society. This was evident in the Straits Chinese community's involvement in the Singapore Sporting Club. Founded to promote horse racing and trading in 1842, the Sporting Club quickly became one of the premier sources of recreation in the settlement and, crucially, was the first form of organised sport that permitted the involvement of the Chinese population.<sup>716</sup> In Song's account of nineteenth-century Singapore it is recorded that:

The first race-meeting was in 1843, and for the first twenty-five years or so racing was confined to gentleman riders exclusively. The first record of any interest taken by Chinese in this form of sport was the ball given in May 1861 during Race Week by Mr Tan Kim Seng.<sup>717</sup>

Given the scarcity of recorded information regarding the Straits Chinese community, the veracity of this statement is questionable. What is undeniable, however, was that by the early 1860s, not only was Tan Kim Seng involved in sports, but he was also a prominent enough figure in British society to be recorded as the first Straits Chinese man to do so. The community's interest and involvement in organised sport was further demonstrated by establishing the Straits Chinese Recreation Club in 1885.<sup>718</sup> Consequently, although it is difficult to quantify, it is highly likely that the fact that Tan Kim Seng's Bras Basah residence was within a kilometre of the Cricket Club would have reinforced, and even enhanced, the area's desirability.

In the early 1830s, therefore, the Bras Basah area was an area of both import and proximity to the colonial elite. The undesirable character of certain public institutions, however, made the area less appealing as a natural choice for the development of new, affluent residential quarters. Nevertheless, as the following section will demonstrate, by the 1840s, the area had become a prime location for Singapore's more prominent and affluent members who, for various reasons – largely to do with ethnicity – could not settle in the European quarter. It is therefore likely, as both an early and sizable landowner in the area, that Tan Kim Seng's decision to defy the

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<sup>715</sup> Aplin and Jong, 'Celestials in Touch', 71.

<sup>716</sup> *Ibid.*, 71.

<sup>717</sup> Song, *One Hundred Years' History of the Chinese in Singapore*, 215

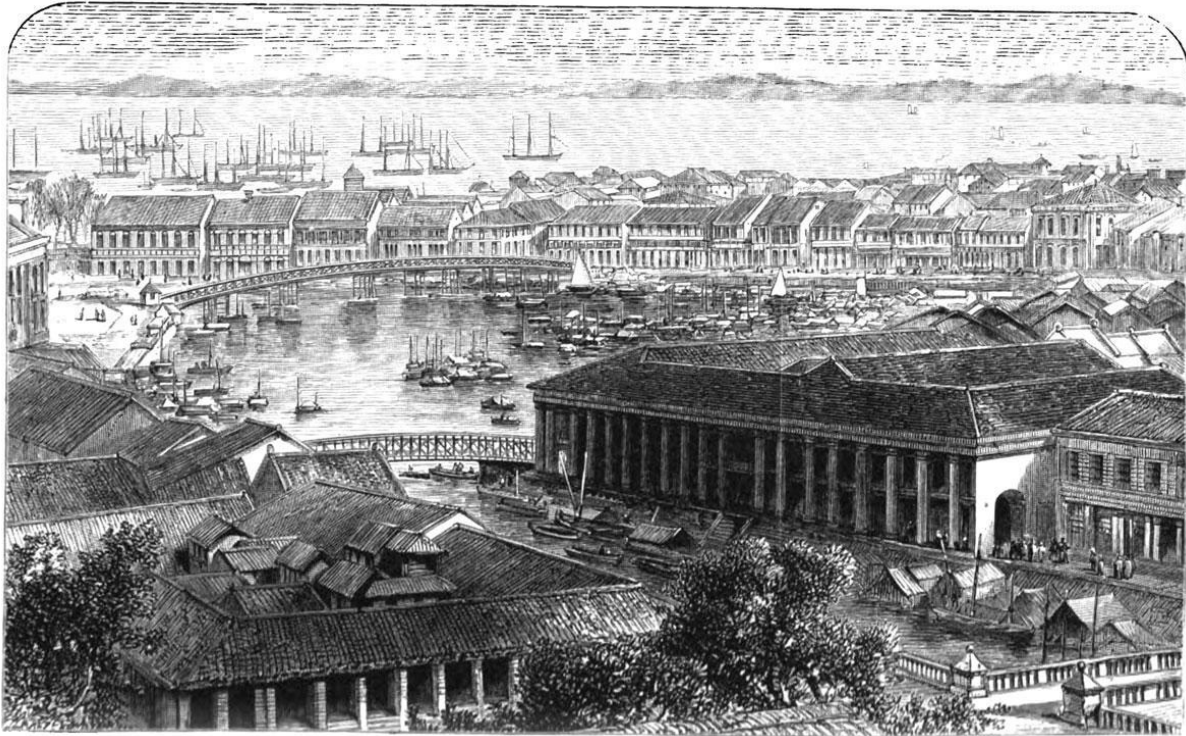
<sup>718</sup> Aplin and Jong, 'Celestials in Touch', 71.

loosely held segregationist town-building philosophy of the British administration had a significant impact in improving the reputation and attractiveness of Bras Basah.

Having established himself early on as a significant property owner in the Bras Basah area, Tan Kim Seng acquired several more properties on the north bank of the Singapore River, but these purchases were often for single, isolated lots. Their purpose is unclear, but it is likely they were small residences either for members of his family or for leasing. Unlike his block purchases in Bras Basah, however, the location and size of these leases were unlikely to have had any notable impact on Singapore's urban development. Instead, Tan Kim Seng returned his attention to the river's south bank and the settlement's commercial heart. By far, the most influential of this new wave of commercial properties was the acquisition of the two plots of land along Boat Quay in 1842.<sup>719</sup> At this time, Boat Quay had emerged as a central district in Singapore's economy. Further inland than the commercial square where the original Chinese-owned godowns had been established between 1819 and 1824, the buildings in Boat Quay were slightly larger, and the European presence notably greater. Thus, when Tan Kim Seng purchased two lots in this district, he was not pioneering a new commercial or residential neighbourhood for the Straits Chinese community, nor was he driving infrastructural development, but he was instead expanding his economic and social standing.

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<sup>719</sup> In the Goods of Tan Kim Seng, Deceased, 24 January 1865, Court of Judicature, Straits Settlements, Overseas and Private Records, NA 1490/293, NAS.



SINGAPORE.

Figure 10. *Boat Quay on Singapore River. To the right of the truss bridge in the midground are the two adjoining godowns, which appear indistinguishable in this view of the continuous façade connecting them. The one closest to the bridge belonged to Edward Boustead and the other to Tan Kim Seng. A.S. Bickmore, Travels in the east India Archipelago (London: J. Murray, 1868) quoted in Tan, 'The Colonial Port as Contact Zone'.*

The two lots, combined to form a single property, neighboured the well-known House of Seven-and-Twenty Pillars (Fig. 10) owned by his business partner Boustead.<sup>720</sup> The first of Tan Kim Seng's commercially oriented properties since the beginning of their partnership, the acquisition of this large eye-catching godown reflected the expansion of his mercantile business, but perhaps more importantly, was a physical manifestation of his elevated status in the settlement. While the godowns Tan Kim Seng established in Singapore's nascent years were constructed and utilised for commercial purposes – primarily as warehouses – from the outset, it was evident that the godown on Boat Quay was intended as a socio-cultural tool. In Sinha's previously mentioned study on the concept of godowns, the acknowledged liminal space of the distinctly non-British structure was often framed in a predominantly negative light.<sup>721</sup> Whether perceived as a nucleus of theft, smuggling and forgery or a place of imprisonment and torture, the British perception of a godown in nineteenth-

<sup>720</sup> Tan, 'The Colonial Port as Contact Zone', 6.

<sup>721</sup> Sinha, 'Godown', 316.

century India and China was of a dangerous and immoral place.<sup>722</sup> In Singapore, however, the perception was a world apart. Perhaps as a result of leading figures of the European population, such as Boustead, adopting the practice of owning and operating godowns, the structure was seen as a fundamental aspect of the settlement's economy, as well as a social space of either residency or entertainment. Tan Kim Seng himself demonstrated this social dimension to godowns in February 1852 when he used the new property on Boat Quay to host a ball and supper for the 'European community and his native friends.'<sup>723</sup> The offices that comprised the commercial structure's upper floor were converted for 'the front room overlooking the river being fitted up as a dancing saloon.'<sup>724</sup> Such was the standing of Tan Kim Seng at this stage that an account of this event was published in the *Household Words* under the title *A Chinaman's Ball* on 19 July 1852, an English weekly magazine edited by Charles Dickens in the 1850s.<sup>725</sup> The article, written by James Augustus St John, a British journalist and traveller who had recently arrived in Singapore, provides some key insights into not only the physical appearance of Kim Seng's godown but also into both how the Straits Chinese attempted to engage with European society and how they were perceived – although for the latter part, St John's unfamiliarity with local customs meant he would not have represented the views of the more acclimatised European population. Of Tan Kim Seng, his godown and the event in general, St John wrote:

Kim Sing, a merchant well-known as an Antoino on the Rialto of Singapore, conceived a few weeks ago the intrepid design of giving the first Chinese ball ever beheld in this part of the world. Having recently erected a spacious Godown, or suit of chambers and warehouses, he resolved to convert one of these into a magnificent banqueting-hall and dancing-room. Europeans probably aided him in organising the preliminaries of the entertainment, in selecting the musicians, and in the judicious provision of refreshment for his guests. Numerous invitations were issued to gentlemen and ladies of all tribes and tongues, who were requested to be present in their respective costume on the appointed evening at the Godown of Kim Seng.<sup>726</sup>

St. John later expounded upon his description of Tan Kim Seng's 'spacious Godown', describing the ballroom as 'no smaller than the body of a good-sized English church,

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<sup>722</sup> Sinha, 'Godown', 317.

<sup>723</sup> Song, *One Hundred Years' History of the Chinese in Singapore*, 68.

<sup>724</sup> *Ibid.*, 68.

<sup>725</sup> Charles Dickens, *Household Words: A Weekly Journal, Volume V, March – September 1852* (London: Bradley and Evans, 1852).

<sup>726</sup> *Ibid.*

with a row of pillars under the galleries behind which spectators thronged.<sup>727</sup> In size and appearance, therefore, the Boat Quay godown seemed as impressive as Boustead's adjoining structure, which, given the latter's reputation as a leading British merchant, is indicative of the degree of Tan Kim Seng's standing in the settlement and also demonstrates the capacity of non-Europeans to own some of the finest properties in Singapore by the mid-nineteenth century. As for the nature of the ball itself, held as it was by a Straits Chinese resident, St John recounted:

A detail of the ethnological display made at this party might be taken for a bad joke, but I am perfectly serious and deliberate in stating generally that the company included Englishmen, Frenchmen, Dutchmen, Scotchmen, Irishmen, Germans, Portuguese from Malacca, Spaniards from the Philippines, Malays, Klings, Bombayises, Cambodians, Tonquinese, Mandarins from Cochin China, Siamese, Peguans, Arabs, Javanese, Jews, Parsees, Chinese and half-castes... I had of course about me (as everybody else had) the usual prejudices of my own race, and therefore, on being presented to the master of the house, with his pig-tail, sharp features, and Mongolian eyes it was with much difficulty that I kept my mirth under polite restraint... The cluster of faces peering out from between the pillars was no and then lighted up with laughter, as odd groups of dancers whirled past; even the dancers themselves often found it impossible to preserve their gravity. Some little awkwardness, moreover, was occasionally displayed by the strangely united couples. For example, a young lady from Calcutta, dressed after the most elaborate fashion of the city of palaces got fearfully entangled in the Schottische with a Chinese Mandarin, whose large, jet-black tail descended considerably below his waist. As he hopped and frisked, the tail flew about in the most dangerous manner. No doubt could be entertained, however, that the gentleman had been taking lessons for a fortnight or three weeks, because he really went through the business of the dance very respectably.<sup>728</sup>

The bemusement with which St John perceived the array of nationalities and ethnicities at Tan Kim Seng's ball highlights the uniqueness of Singaporean society at this time. Although the colony retained distinctly hierarchical features, such as structural segregation and cultural elitism via sports exclusivity, there was nonetheless a distinctively cross-cultural and inclusive social dynamic that differed from Europe's more rigid hierarchical attitude. For example, Tan Kim Seng's ability to own some of the largest and most remarkable properties in the settlement was not only accepted but also fundamental to Singapore's development stood in stark contrast to St. John's instinctive response of having to keep his mirth under 'polite restraint' upon a

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<sup>727</sup> Tan, 'The Colonial Port as Contact Zone', 7.

<sup>728</sup> Charles Dickens, *Household Words: A Weekly Journal, Volume V, March – September 1852* (London: Bradley and Evans, 1852).

'Chinaman' as the host of a public ball. However, despite his more prejudiced mindset toward Singapore's society, St John nonetheless identified some unique cultural features, such as the Straits Chinese community's efforts to acclimatise to British culture, such as the 'Chinese Mandarin' who had taken dancing lessons to participate in the ball.<sup>729</sup>

Although St. John's account of Tan Kim Seng's ball was included in the *Household Words* as a novelty, his appearance in a British publication in the mid-nineteenth century was remarkable for a Straits Chinese figure. His inclusion in this journal to be intimately tied to his property, even indirectly, highlights the intrinsic value of property ownership in British perceptions of non-Europeans in a colonial context. Furthermore, the success and publicity of the ball were likely significant factors in cementing the reputation of godowns within Singapore as buildings of repute and respectability, unlike their counterparts elsewhere in the British Empire.

This transformation was reflected in a microcosm in Tan Kim Seng's own property portfolio in the district. The first four properties in his portfolio, godowns at the heart of Singapore's transshipment economy, were earned through the private land clearance and development industry. Crucial as they were to both his and the settlement's commercial success, these distinctly non-British buildings had dubious reputations as centres of illicit and underhand trade.<sup>730</sup> These commercial buildings successfully provided the foundation for the development of his company, Kim Seng and Co., which enabled him to turn his attention to the acquisition and development of residential buildings on the north side of the Singapore River. This foray outside of Raffles' proposed racially partitioned town plan was an influential component of a wider movement of Singapore's wealthy non-European population taking advantage of the excess land in the settlement to distinguish themselves as a new economic class. The continued commercial success of the Straits Chinese, Eurasians, Jews and Arabs during this period cemented their position within Singaporean society and had a transformative impact on Singapore's social, cultural and economic landscape. This was evidenced in Tan Kim Seng's return to the river's south bank in the early 1840s with the purchase of his new godown. No longer were godowns viewed as necessary

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<sup>729</sup> Dickens, *Household Words*.

<sup>730</sup> Sinha, 'Godown', 317.



components of colonial trade networks, but they were symbols of prosperity that translated directly to standing and prestige in Singapore, perhaps more than anywhere else in the British Empire. Tan Kim Seng's decision to host the first Chinese ball at his godown, therefore, succinctly encapsulated the unique traits of Singapore's colonial society by physically manifesting the relationship between trade, wealth and standing that broke many of the social and racial hierarchies that governed British society. Moreover, even before this event, godowns had become so commonplace and integral to trade that European residents had widely appropriated the structure. This undefined, and likely even unintentional, co-option of foreign architecture into the British colonial identity was crucial in diffusing the tension that existed between the manifestation of colonial and local (non-European) influence in the settlement.<sup>731</sup> Specifically, it allowed British officials, travel writers and merchants – both locally and in the metropole - to continue to see Singapore as a product of superior European planning principles, whereas the reality was that much of the urban landscape was the result of migrant-driven architecture. Consequently, despite the proliferation and prominence of godowns in the settlement, British officials could continue to claim that Singapore was – to return to Yeoh's apt summation – 'a British creation to be governed and moulded according to British principles.'<sup>732</sup> As for the role that Tan Kim Seng played in Singapore's urban development, without further supporting evidence, it is difficult to quantify the precise impact he had as an individual in the early establishment of godowns on the south bank or the influence his property in Bras Basah had over the area's development. What the pattern of these purchases does reflect, however, was that he was part of a wider Straits Chinese community that was responsible for shaping the appearance of Singapore's commercial and residential architecture. As an individual, his standout architectural contribution was evidently his purchase of the Boat Quay godown in 1842. However, as the architecture of this building emulated the existing godown owned by Boustead, the impact of this purchase was felt more keenly on a social level than a physical one.

### Expanding Boundaries

In the late 1830s, after almost two decades of inaction, the East India Company turned its attention to the state of land development and urbanisation in the Straits

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<sup>731</sup> G. L. Ooi, *Future of Space – Planning, Space and the City* (Singapore: Eastern University Press, 2004).

<sup>732</sup> Yeoh, *Contesting Space in Colonial Singapore*, 3.

Settlements. The cadastral map of Singapore shows that by 1837, over one thousand parcels of land had been leased/sold in Singapore, but as shown in Figure 9, this was heavily concentrated around the district of Singapore Town.<sup>733</sup> Outside of this concentrated area of urban growth, Singapore remained very sparsely populated as early British attempts at penetrating the dense jungle found only 'irreclaimable salt creeks, brooks and marshes.'<sup>734</sup> The inhospitality of the land discouraged early British attempts at cultivation, and even the possibility of livestock farming was undermined by the prevalence of lalang (cogongrass), a highly flammable grass that cattle refused to eat.<sup>735</sup> In the early nineteenth century, the cost of clearing this weed was the same as clearing the original forest at an estimated fifty Spanish dollars an acre. The inhospitality and unprofitability of Singapore's interior meant that for the first two decades of the settlement's colonial history, the European community had made virtually no effort to clear, much less cultivate, the land that lay outside of the settlement's urban boundaries.

This indifference to the expansion and administration of the rural land outside of the Town's original borders came to an end in February 1837, when, driven by the desire to increase the colony's profitability, the Company appointed W.R. Young as Land Commissioner for the Straits Settlements.<sup>736</sup> Young arrived in the Straits Settlements from India tasked with encouraging the clearance and cultivation of land.<sup>737</sup> Young's appointment to the Straits Settlements was a more significant moment in the Company's administration of the colony than it initially seemed. Before 1837, the Company's policy towards the Straits Settlements had been largely defined by a negative fiscal policy that sought to restrict expenditure further. The adoption of this policy resulted in a severe reduction in civil service. Over the course of the 1830s, nineteen senior positions in the Straits Settlements had been condensed to just eight.<sup>738</sup> In addition to the downsizing, the officials who retained their jobs suffered from salary cuts. Despite having their workload significantly increased by the

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<sup>733</sup> Plan of Singapore Town and Adjoining Districts from Actual Survey, NAS.

<sup>734</sup> John Crawford, 'Land Regulations,' *Singapore Free Press and Mercantile Advertiser*, 11 October 1838.

<sup>735</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>736</sup> K.G. Tregonning, 'The Early Land Administration and Agricultural Development of Penang', *Journal of the Malaysian Branch of the Royal Asiatic Society*, 39, no. 2 (1966): 34-49.

<sup>737</sup> John Crawford, 'Land Regulations,' *Singapore Free Press and Mercantile Advertiser*, 11 October 1838; and Buckley, *An Anecdotal History of Old Times in Singapore*, 330.

<sup>738</sup> Turnbull, *A Modern History of Singapore*, 35.

retrenchments, the three Resident Councillors, who represented the main authority within their respective settlement and were second only to the Governor, had their salaries reduced from 27,660 rupees in 1827 to 24,000 in 1830.<sup>739</sup> Once the Company had established this new precedent of frugality, its stance remained largely unchanged, which meant that the Straits Settlements civil service remained relatively static until its transfer to the Colonial Office in 1867.<sup>740</sup> Young's appointment in 1837, therefore, represented a rare instance of investment into the colony amidst a wider framework of acute austerity measures. Significantly, Young's appointment not only increased the size of the recently downscaled government but also substantially impacted the Company's expenditure. Transferred directly from India, Young's salary was based upon the Bengal wage structure rather than the newly reduced structure in the Straits Settlements, and so when he arrived at the colony; he did so with a comparatively astronomical wage of 36,000 rupees, fifty per cent greater than the salary of the Resident Councillors.<sup>741</sup> This wage discrepancy, therefore, underscored the extent to which the Company had cut their expenditure in Southeast Asia compared to its operations elsewhere. More pertinently, the Company's willingness to appoint Young to the Straits Settlements on this exorbitant wage indicated the priority they placed upon addressing the state of land ownership in the Straits Settlements. Given their repeated failure to establish a reliable source of income, it is likely that this prioritisation on land regulations reflected the Company's desperation to establish the Straits Settlements as a self-sustaining colony.

In pursuit of their goal of profiting from land in the Straits Settlements, Young was first tasked with assessing the pre-existing land regulations.<sup>742</sup> The Company's long-standing detachment from policy creation in the Straits Settlements meant that when they decided to sell land, they had a poor grasp over the myriad systems implemented across Penang, Singapore and Malacca in previous decades. Before they could implement their own land regulations, therefore, they needed to first understand which systems had failed to generate the desired revenue. Upon completing this deceptively difficult task, Young was then instructed to devise a new system – grounded in the

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<sup>739</sup> Kathirithamby-Wells, 'Early Singapore and the Inception of a British Administrative Tradition in the Straits Settlements (1819-1832): 66.

<sup>740</sup> Turnbull, *A Modern History of Singapore*, 35.

<sup>741</sup> Buckley, *An Anecdotal History of Old Times in Singapore*, 300.

<sup>742</sup> Buckley, *An Anecdotal History of Old Times in Singapore*, 300; and Commissioner Young's Records vol. 1, NA1173, Straits Settlements Records.

principles of English property law – that could be uniformly implemented across the three settlements.<sup>743</sup> However, the complexities and nuances in the development of land ownership across Penang, Singapore and Malacca were such that Young’s task of creating a homogeneous policy was nigh on impossible – and so it proved, but not before distorting Singapore’s physical development.

After having spent just over a year familiarising himself with the colony, in September 1838, Young published his assessment of land regulations in the Straits Settlements.<sup>744</sup> His appraisal revealed a tumultuous relationship between local governments and land policies across all three settlements. In Penang, for example, the issue of land registration had plagued the local administration for years. Between 1819 and 1837, several attempts at regulating and taxing the land had been adopted by successive governors. These measures included: the introduction of a Superintendent of Lands in 1825, a position responsible for granting and taxing land; the formulation of a new land policy in 1827 that invalidated all titles that had been granted via Cutting Papers and verbal licences and required them to be exchanged for leases; the implementation of twenty and fifty-year leases; the elimination of the Superintendent of Lands in 1830; the introduction of Collector of Land Revenues; and the 1831 Land Regulation which proposed to replace all existing grants with a new one which would become the only recognised title to land.<sup>745</sup> Whilst the issues in Penang were arguably the most complex in the Straits Settlements, by the late 1830s, certain parallels were beginning to rear their head in the more nascent settlement of Singapore, such as the difficulties surrounding the registration and accounting of land infrequently visited, and poorly documented, by the British administration. Consequently, the frequency of the implementation, and subsequent failure, of these land regulation policies in such a short period is indicative of the almost insurmountable obstacles that faced the financially and logistically restricted administrations in the Straits Settlements and illustrates the infeasibility of Young’s

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<sup>743</sup> Buckley, *An Anecdotal History of Old Times in Singapore*, 300; Commissioner Young’s Records vol. 1, NA1173, SSR; and Webster, ‘The Development of British Commercial and Political Networks in the Straits Settlements 1800 to 1868: The Rise of a Colonial and Regional Economic Identity?’, *Modern Asian Studies*, 45, no. 4 (2011): 899-929; and Webster, ‘The Development of British Commercial and Political Networks in the Straits Settlements’, 916.

<sup>744</sup> Commissioner Young’s Records vol. 1, NA1173, SSR

<sup>745</sup> Tregonning, ‘The Early Land Administration and Agricultural Development of Penang’, 49.

task to create a regulation that could successfully be implemented in multiple settlements each with their own set of priorities and challenges.

The complicated history of land regulations notwithstanding, Young revealed his proposal for the Straits Settlements' new land regulation alongside his report on the colony. Having identified some of the key issues that undermined earlier iterations of land regulation, Young's new plan rejected the reimplementing of fixed quit-rents, arguing that the financial outlay of establishing an administration capable of efficiently cataloguing and collecting the requisite tax outweighed, or at best nullified, the potential economic benefits of the system.<sup>746</sup> The limitations of a quit-rent system were further compounded by the risk of falling into significant arrears, as was the case in Penang, where insufficient administrative capacity, combined with the settlement's transitory population, created a scenario whereby much of the revenue generated through the system, was ultimately unrecoverable. The shortfalls of the quit-rent system were not unique to Southeast Asia either. Concurrent efforts to regulate land using quit-rents were also made in Van Diemen's Land (Tasmania), but ultimately the local government's inability to effectively record and trace the sale and ownership of land resulted in a similar level of failure as in Penang.<sup>747</sup> To solve this issue, Young proposed an overhaul of the existing systems and recommended the implementation of the absolute and unconditional lease of crown lands by public auction.<sup>748</sup>

By establishing the Government as the universal landlord in the Straits Settlements, Young's solution to the colony's land issue essentially entailed the absolute of private property rights. This new strategy represented a radical divergence from the liberal issuance of freehold titles, as had been the policy in Penang, or 999-year leases in Singapore.<sup>749</sup> Before Young's scheme, British policy in Southeast Asia had centred upon incentivising the local population to take a vested interest in land development. The distribution of freehold titles via verbal licences, cutting papers, or even retroactively acknowledging settled land encouraged new

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<sup>746</sup> Tregonning, 'The Early Land Administration and Agricultural Development of Penang', 49; and Commissioner Young's Records vol. 3, 1837-1838, NA1173, SSR.

<sup>747</sup> John Crawford, 'Land Regulations,' *Singapore Free Press and Mercantile Advertiser*, 11 October 1838.

<sup>748</sup> Tregonning, 'The Early Land Administration and Agricultural Development of Penang', 49; and Commissioner Young's Records vol. 3, 1837-1838, NA1173, SSR.

<sup>749</sup> Leong Foke Meng, 'Early Land Transactions in Singapore: The Real Estates of William Farquhar (1774-1839), John Crawford (1783-1868), and their families', *Journal of the Malaysian Branch of the Royal Asiatic Society*, 77, no. 1 (2004): 77.

waves of immigrants to claim, clear, and cultivate the land at their own expense.<sup>750</sup> The British government's utilisation of private industry via this land-for-labour scheme ensured that vital land developments were completed without the expenditure of (very limited) public funds. The enactment of Young's plan in 1838 exchanged this prioritisation of growth for revenue, under the new system replaced freeholds and indefinite leases with short-term leases on advancing rent scales.<sup>751</sup> The adoption of this policy had two major benefits for the government. The first and primary benefit was the potential to generate a significantly higher revenue. By limiting leases to twenty years, with a potential extension of a further thirty years dependent upon a new assessment, the government could frequently increase rent to reflect the land value more effectively in the settlement. This static rent issue had been raised in Penang by Robert Fullerton, the first Governor of the Straits Settlements, in 1827. Using the numerous clove plantations in the settlement as the basis of his argument, Fullerton argued that the rent price was grossly disproportionate to the revenue these plantations generated.<sup>752</sup> Early entrepreneurs had demonstrated that once a clove plantation had been fully established, a process which Fullerton contended took seven years and an initial investment of \$40,000, they were then able to generate an annual revenue of \$33,000, yet as rent remained frozen, the plantation was still paying just \$20 a year.<sup>753</sup> It is worth noting, however, that whilst Fullerton's issue with static rent was important and evidently shared by Young, as a Governor, Fullerton had demonstrated no aptitude for dealing with issues unique to the Straits Settlements.<sup>754</sup> Moreover, like Young, Fullerton's experience was confined to the Madras presidency, which heavily influenced his attitude towards land administration and his desire to treat land as an important source of revenue.<sup>755</sup> Consequently, despite being separated by over a decade, the consistency in thinking between the two men demonstrated how deeply embedded colonial Indian thinking was in Company officials and how unwilling they were to adapt to the different circumstances in Southeast Asia.

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<sup>750</sup> John Braddell, *The Law of the Straits Settlements: A Commentary* (Singapore: Kelly and Walsh Limited Printers, 1915), 52-53.

<sup>751</sup> John Crawford, 'Land Regulations,' *Singapore Free Press and Mercantile Advertiser*, 11 October 1838.

<sup>752</sup> Tregonning, 'The Early Land Administration and Agricultural Development of Penang', 47.

<sup>753</sup> *Ibid.*, 47.

<sup>754</sup> Kathirithamby-Wells, 'Early Singapore and the Inception of a British Administrative Tradition in the Straits Settlements (1819-1832): 65.

<sup>755</sup> *Ibid.*, 65.

Secondly, the shorter leases allowed the government to exert a far greater level of authority over the nature of Singapore's physical development. By retaining ownership of the land and conducting new assessments every twenty to thirty years, the government could attach several stipulations to their leases, such as the requirement to cultivate a particular crop. As a failure to adhere to the attached stipulations would result in the forfeit of the lease, for the first time in Singapore's colonial history, the government possessed, in theory, the influence to direct the settlement's development that traditional historiography always claimed it possessed.

Although Young had spent over a year in the Straits Settlements when he devised this policy, he drew heavily upon colonial principles developed elsewhere in the British Empire, most notably Canada, Australia and Ceylon.<sup>756</sup> Based on the successful implementation of this policy in these other settlements, Young and the Company had anticipated that applying short-term leases would result in far greater utilisation of land and thus generate a significant income.<sup>757</sup> This approach, however, revealed a fundamental misunderstanding of the unique challenges presented by the geographic composition of the Straits Settlements.

In 1838, John Crawford, a former Resident of Singapore, published a critique of land regulations in the Straits Settlements at the behest of the Committee of the East India and China Association.<sup>758</sup> Although writing from London, twelve years after his posting in Singapore, Crawford remained a leading expert on British policy in the Straits Settlements given his extensive experience as an employee of the EIC in Southeast Asia and his ongoing involvement with the Committee of the East India and China Association and the Glasgow East India Association.<sup>759</sup> Crawford's report, therefore, is an excellent source of British knowledge of Singapore's arable land in the 1830s, and his criticisms reveal that Young's general ignorance of Singapore's topography was not reflective of EIC officials who had spent far greater proportions of their career stationed in Southeast Asia. In his report, Crawford outlined that Young's

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<sup>756</sup> Tregonning, 'The Early Land Administration and Agricultural Development of Penang', 49

<sup>757</sup> John Crawford, 'Land Regulations,' *Singapore Free Press and Mercantile Advertiser*, 11 October 1838.

<sup>758</sup> Ian Nish, 'British Mercantile Cooperation in the India-China Trade from the End of the East India Company's Trading Monopoly', *Journal of Southeast Asian History*, 3, no. 2 (1962): 74.

<sup>759</sup> Yukihiisa Kumagai, 'Kirkman Finlay and John Crawford: Two Scots in the Campaign of the Glasgow East India Association for the Opening of the China Trade, 1829-1833', *Journal of Scottish Historical Studies*, 30, no. 2 (2010): 175.

assumption that Singapore possessed approximately 115,000 acres of cultivable land and a rural population density of seventeen agriculturalists per square mile was based upon calculation relied upon applying a colonial model used in Bengal that worked on the assumption that one-third of the unexplored land was either water, barren or irreclaimable.<sup>760</sup> However, this approach did not consider multiple environmental factors that invalidated the model's applicability. Young, for example, did not account for the poor quality of soil in Singapore, especially in comparison to Bengal, Java or Siam, which fundamentally undermined calculations on the value of agricultural land.<sup>761</sup> The model also failed to factor in the climate of the Straits Settlements, which Crawford argued was incompatible with the established cultivation practices for produce such as rice, which was typically a staple of British colonies in warm climates.<sup>762</sup> Nevertheless, despite the London East Indies and China Association's efforts to publicise these shortcomings in an effort to get the Company to reconsider their approach, the implementation of Young's model went ahead unimpeded. The misunderstanding of the nature of the crops suitable for cultivation in Singapore proved particularly problematic.

To dictate the production of goods in Singapore and tailor the settlement's exports to meet the demands of Britain's imperial market, one of the stipulations that Young's regulations added to plantation leases was the requirement to cultivate particular crops to qualify for a thirty-year renewal. The list of qualifiable crops included pepper vines, gambier and nutmeg, as there was a strong demand within Britain for these commodities.<sup>763</sup> Crops that were not included in this list, and therefore could not have plantations dedicated solely to their cultivation but could only be grown in conjunction with approved crops, were all kinds of corn, pulses, garden vegetables, cotton, coffee, indigo and sugar.<sup>764</sup>

Notably, the crops excluded from Young's stipulation were amongst the easiest to cultivate in Southeast Asia, and commodities such as sugar and indigo were

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<sup>760</sup> John Crawford, 'Land Regulations,' *Singapore Free Press and Mercantile Advertiser*, 11 October 1838.

<sup>761</sup> Ibid.

<sup>762</sup> Ibid.

<sup>763</sup> James Jackson, *Planters and Speculators: Chinese and European agricultural enterprise in Malaya, 1786-1921* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1968) 8.

<sup>764</sup> John Crawford, 'Land Regulations,' *Singapore Free Press and Mercantile Advertiser*, 11 October 1838.



particularly valuable.<sup>765</sup> The suitability of these crops to Southeast Asia's climate was such that they had become commonplace in most European colonies in the region. By 1835, it was estimated that about 900 acres of land had been devoted to sugar planting in Penang alone.<sup>766</sup> Similarly, the Dutch implementation of the Cultivation System in Java, a programme that obligated the Javanese population to grow specific commodities in exchange for crop payments, meant that sugar, coffee and indigo cultivation significantly increased in the settlement in the 1830s.<sup>767</sup> The success of the cultivation scheme in Java meant that in the course of a single decade, the value of Java's exports increased from 11.3 million guilders to 66.1 million, and the quantity of crops produced meant that the weight of their exports increased from 36.4 to 161.7 million kilograms in the same period.<sup>768</sup> Therefore, the implementation of Young's land regulations came at a time when the production of sugar, coffee and indigo considerably increased elsewhere in the region. Even in Singapore, the commercial appeal of sugar cultivation meant that even though dedicated sugar estates could not be established, the crop was often included in larger plantations despite the significantly reduced cost-effectiveness. For example, Joseph Balestier, the American Consul in Singapore, invested a large amount of capital to establish a 1,000-acre estate, 220 acres of which was devoted to sugar cane by 1848.<sup>769</sup> Given the popularity of these crops, it is probable that their exclusion from Young's regulations in Singapore was borne from a fear that in an oversaturated market, their value would not justify their cultivation.

Promoting pepper and gambier plantations during this period reflects a keen awareness of market demands. Young's approach to land regulation coincided with a notable rise in pepper prices, from five Spanish dollars per picul (approximately 60kg) in 1831 to seven Spanish dollars in 1839.<sup>770</sup> By the late 1830s, the profitability of pepper, and to a lesser extent gambier, had positioned these crops as the 'only forms

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<sup>765</sup> Cornelius Fasseur, 'The Cultivation System and its Impact on the Dutch Colonial Economy and the Indigenous Society in Nineteenth Century Java', in *Two Colonial Empires: Comparative Essays on the History of India and Indonesia in the Nineteenth Century*, ed. C.A. Bayly and D.H.A. Kolff (Lancaster: Martinus Nijhoff Publishers, 1986), 137.

<sup>766</sup> Lynn Hollen Lees, *Planting Empire, Cultivating Subjects: British Malaya, 1786-1941* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2017), 24.

<sup>767</sup> Fasseur, 'The Cultivation System and its Impact on the Dutch Colonial Economy and the Indigenous Society in Nineteenth Century Java', 137.

<sup>768</sup> Fasseur, 'The Cultivation System and its Impact on the Dutch Colonial Economy and the Indigenous Society in Nineteenth Century Java', 137.

<sup>769</sup> Jackson, *Planters and Speculators*, 13.

<sup>770</sup> *Ibid.*, 13.

of cultivation on the island which [had] yet assumed any degree of commercial importance.<sup>771</sup> This economic viability and Yong's land regulations triggered a marked expansion in pepper plantations. In 1836, an estimated 2,350 acres were dedicated to pepper cultivation, but by 1841, that figure had more than doubled between five and six thousand acres.<sup>772</sup> This trend continued throughout the mid-nineteenth century, and by the 1850s, pepper and gambier plantations occupied over three-quarters of the cultivated land in Singapore and accounted for nearly three-fifths of the island's total agricultural output.<sup>773</sup> In the short term, Young's land policies proved highly successful, both in expanding cultivation on a large scale and in demonstrating the government's capacity to shape Singapore's physical and economic development.

By the 1850s and '60s, just as the first wave of twenty-year leases was due for renewal, the long-term issues of Young's regulations began to appear. With his limited experience in Southeast Asia and having based his promotion of pepper and gambier on market value, Young had failed to consider the impact of these crops on Singaporean soil. As an exhaustive crop, the cultivation of pepper vines often took a significant toll on the land, and so, when combined with the lower quality soil in Singapore, pepper plantations did not survive longer than thirty years without becoming unproductive and, crucially, young vines would not thrive on worn land.<sup>774</sup> It was necessary, therefore, for pepper plantations to relocate on a relatively frequent basis, leaving behind infertile land. In some ways, the heavily cyclical nature of pepper cultivation lent itself to the introduction of short-term leases, as planters were not inherently tied down to their plot of land. The exhaustion of the soil, however, meant that at the expiration of the lease, the land held very little appeal to prospective leaseholders.

Furthermore, the policy's initial success belied the distortive effect the regulations had on the ownership of land in Singapore's interior. Although pepper and gambier cultivation flourished in the 1840s and '50s, the new plantations were owned only by a few wealthy residents, such as the aforementioned Balestier, as pepper cultivation was amongst Southeast Asia's most labour-intensive forms of agriculture. To ensure

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<sup>771</sup> *The Singapore Free Press and Mercantile Advertiser*, 28 March 1839 quoted in Buckley, *An Anecdotal History of Singapore*, 335

<sup>772</sup> Jackson, *Planters and Speculators*, 8.

<sup>773</sup> *Ibid.*, 8.

<sup>774</sup> *Singapore Chronicle and Commercial Register*, 11 September 1834.

maximum yields, the soil of a pepper plantation was turned twice annually for the first five to six years, a task typically performed by Chinese labourers who had previously established themselves as the foremost authority in pepper cultivation in Penang in the last decade of the eighteenth century.<sup>775</sup> Similarly, the quality of pepper produced depended upon the harvesting process, which involved the delicate operation of skilled labourers in gathering and drying the crop.<sup>776</sup> Given the quantity and quality of the required manpower, the operational costs of pepper plantations were typically higher than plantations of less intensive crops. Critically, pepper plantation costs in the Straits Settlements were also higher than their counterparts in Indonesia, which perhaps reflected the more limited supply of skilled labourers in the British colony.<sup>777</sup> These increased costs were offset by the high yields of the Straits Settlements pepper vines, which produced an extraordinary seven times as much pepper per acre as the Bencoolen vines.<sup>778</sup> These yields kept pepper production in the British colony competitive, however it meant that profit margins were far more dependent upon good harvests to offset the higher operational costs. Pepper plantations in the Straits Settlements, therefore, operated on an inherently riskier financial model than those in the Dutch East Indies. Consequently, the larger pepper plantations in Penang were generally owned by Europeans, who could afford to provide and risk the capital required to finance the process and who, in turn, employed Chinese contractors to run the operation.<sup>779</sup> Chinese planters owned numerous smallholding pepper plantations, but these were often just two *orlongs* (2  $\frac{2}{3}$  acres) and maintained by a single labourer.<sup>780</sup>

The size and location of the large Chinese community in Claymore remained poorly documented in this period. When European surveys expanded to include the district in the 1840s, the only acknowledgement of their presence was shown in the large Chinese burial grounds and single temple.<sup>781</sup> One of the few accounts of this community appears in Sir James Brooke's diary, which describes them as 'habitually prudent and frugal' and estimates there were 'nearly 2,000 [of] these people who,

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<sup>775</sup> Jackson, *Planters and Speculators*, 100.

<sup>776</sup> *Ibid.*, 100.

<sup>777</sup> Jackson, *Planters and Speculators*, 100.

<sup>778</sup> Jackson, *Planters and Speculators*, 100.

<sup>779</sup> *Ibid.*, 100.

<sup>780</sup> *Ibid.*, 100.

<sup>781</sup> Plan of Singapore Town and Adjoining Districts from Actual Survey, NAS.

straying from the fold of civilisation, become wild and lawless on its very confines.<sup>782</sup> By claiming ownership of all land in Singapore, including the unexplored interior, part of Young's strategy was to impose a tax on these smallholding plantations, thereby profiting from the industry of the Chinese population. However, the key issue with this policy was that it pushed an already financially perilous occupation into the realms of impossibility. Establishing a pepper plantation in Singapore's interior was difficult, dangerous, and labour-intensive. Operating in the inhospitable jungle, labourers first needed to clear the land under the real and frequent threat of tiger attacks before establishing fencing and finally tilling the land.<sup>783</sup> In purely financial terms, it was estimated that the cost of this process was fifty Spanish dollars an acre, although this figure would have been significantly lower for the Chinese labourers who operated independently outside of the British settlement. It was due to these almost prohibitively expensive startup costs in Singapore that previous administrations had originally adopted the policy of freeholds and indefinite leases as an incentive for the population to undertake the expense on their own account. When Young introduced new short-term taxes, he compounded the already restrictive barrier to entry, and the cost of establishing a new plantation became untenable for the vast majority of the population. In Crawford's public denouncement of the new land regulations, he argued that:

If rent be as low as a rupee an acre, supposing the cost of clearing the land as already stated to be 50 dollars or 105 rupees, then every acre will cost him 120 rupees, and the clearing of an estate of 500 acres, without any reference to the cost of growing produce, will amount to 60,000 Rs. or £6,000, a sum sufficient to purchase the fee simple of a simple extent of better land in many counties of England.<sup>784</sup>

Instead of incentivising the establishment of new pepper plantations in Singapore, therefore, the implementation of a short-term, scalable tax simply presented a new impediment to the utilisation of the settlement's uncleared land. When the policy was officially enacted in 1843, a public meeting was held in Singapore attended by prominent merchants and planters, where they argued that:

...the grand mistake which the Authorities seem to be committing is that in fixing the rates they only look to present results, forgetting or not choosing to take into account by what means these results have been brought about. They seem to

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<sup>782</sup> Brooke, *Narrative of Events in Borneo and Celebs, Down to the Occupation of Labuan*, 9-10.

<sup>783</sup> John Crawford, 'Land Regulations,' *Singapore Free Press and Mercantile Advertiser*, 11 October 1838; and Buckley, *An Anecdotal History of Old Times in Singapore*, 219.

<sup>784</sup> John Crawford, 'Land Regulations,' *Singapore Free Press and Mercantile Advertiser*, 11 October 1838

put aside altogether any consideration of the very large expenditure of capital which has in every case been required to produce the flourishing plantations of Spiece &c, which now seem to fair and precious in their eyes. They forget that in no case has a tythe of that Capital been returned, and that in very few, if any, do plantations as yet yield enough to pay the Current outlay.<sup>785</sup>

For those intimately acquainted with the demands unique to the Straits Settlements, it was evident from the outset that Young's regulations would not achieve the Company's objective of increasing revenue. In addition to creating this inordinately expensive cost of land in the settlement, the regulations further deter new leaseholders at the risk of an individual losing their lease at public auction after just twenty years. Young's regulations, therefore, were clearly not fit for purpose, as instead of establishing a new source of revenue for the government, the policy succeeded only in pushing small Chinese plantations further inland, where they remained beyond British control.

#### Claymore – Land Use Reimagined

The unsuitability of Young's attitude towards land administration, notwithstanding, the implementation of his regulations catalysed territorial expansion in Singapore. As small-scale Chinese plantations relocated further into Singapore's interior to avoid the new taxes, the vacated land was incorporated into the settlement's expanding boundaries. Outward expansion was quick, and by 1846, the town measured approximately twenty kilometres from east to west and approximately eight kilometres inland from the southern shore and boasted twelve new districts.<sup>786</sup> Of the new rural districts, the most developed was the district of Claymore, now Orchard Road. Located inland to the north of Singapore Town in what was previously dense jungle land, by the 1840s, the district of Claymore had been extensively cleared, and several roads had been constructed to connect the district to Singapore Town.<sup>787</sup> The earliest plots of land sold in the district were almost exclusively large plantations sold under Young's new regulations. Given the huge costs of establishing these new plantations, the wealthiest and most influential residents in Singapore generally purchased the leases. A few of the leases had been purchased by prominent Straits Chinese residents, such as See Boon Tiong, a successful merchant who had invested heavily in properties, as

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<sup>785</sup> *The Singapore Free Press and Mercantile Advertiser*, 23 January 1845

<sup>786</sup> Figures estimated from the hydrographic charts *This Survey of the Straits of Singapore, Is Respectfully Inscribed to The Honourable Colonel Butterworth*, 1846, NAS.

<sup>787</sup> Figures estimated from the hydrographic charts *This Survey of the Straits of Singapore, Is Respectfully Inscribed to The Honourable Colonel Butterworth*, 1846, NAS..

well as Tan Kim Seng, although it should be noted that Kim Seng's plot of land was too small to establish a plantation.<sup>788</sup> The vast majority of the leases, however, were sold to members of the government.<sup>789</sup> For example, one of the largest plantations in this district, known simply as Claymore Estate, was owned by the Harbour and Post Master of Singapore, Captain William Scott.<sup>790</sup> With over five thousand nutmeg trees, the production of the Claymore Estate alone was estimated to equal the output of the entirety of the small Chinese plantations in the settlement.<sup>791</sup>

That the majority of the leaseholders were also government employees speaks more to the private wealth and influence of men like Scott than it did to a level of nepotism. In fact, by 1845, it appeared as though their status as government employees was more of a hindrance than a benefit. In addition to being amongst the first leases sold under Young's new regulations, the leases were also the first to undergo the Resident Councillor's erroneous interpretation of the policy. The implementation of the new regulations was predicted to significantly increase the start-up costs of establishing a plantation in Singapore by introducing a fixed rate of 5 and 10 rupees dependent upon the quality of the land; the Resident Councillor in Singapore, Thomas Church, had decided to implement his own dynamic rates based upon his own discretion.<sup>792</sup> Crucially, it was well noted within the European community that while Church was a good judge of house prices in the settlement, he had no practical experience in cultivation, owning no agricultural land himself, and so when he set prices at his own discretion, he did so in the ignorance of many of the costs of establishing a new plantation.<sup>793</sup> As a consequence, the new charges were so egregiously high that it was widely suggested that Church was wilfully misinterpreting the regulations to increase government revenue significantly. In January 1845, *The Singapore Free Press and Mercantile Advertiser* published an article 'condemn[ing] the manner in which the Resident Councillor is proceeding' and stating that:

The intention of the Resident Councillor in the course he is taking is also very obvious. His selection of Claymore District to begin with is a proof of his acuteness. Most of the larger landholders in it are Government servants, uncovenanted ones chiefly, and of course it would be dangerous in them to cry

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<sup>788</sup> Last Will and Testament of Tan Kim Seng of Singapore, NA 1490/242, NAS

<sup>789</sup> Song, *One Hundred Years History of the Chinese in Singapore*, p. 105.

<sup>790</sup> Buckley, *An Anecdotal History of Old Times in Singapore*, 406.

<sup>791</sup> *Ibid.*, 406.

<sup>792</sup> *The Singapore Free Press and Mercantile Advertiser*, 16 January 1845

<sup>793</sup> *Ibid.*

out against the rates which are imposed upon them. They must perforce accept them, and with the greater appearance of thankfulness the better for them, and thus at once has the sagacious Resident Councillor a number of precedents to refer to as the value of land in dealing with other parties *and in representations to the Supreme Government*, for it is in this last case that they will be availed of most effectually, their worth being rather too well ascertained here to be used with much effort.<sup>794</sup>

The first leaseholders in Claymore, therefore, had evidently purchased their land at an unsustainably high price which immediately jeopardised the commercial success of the early plantations in the district. Moreover, like Church, many government employees who purchased the first leases in Claymore had little to no experience with cultivation but were enticed by the high prices and prospects of a good investment.<sup>795</sup> The general level of ignorance of the early leaseholders may go some way to explaining why they were willing to pay the excessive prices, but more importantly the inexperience of the plantation owners ultimately proved fatal to the future of nutmeg cultivation in Singapore.<sup>796</sup>

At the time the Claymore leases were sold, in the mid-1840s, the nutmeg market was booming and production flourishing. In 1848 there were an estimated 71,400 nutmeg trees in Singapore, 20,021 of which were bearing fruit for an annual gross value of \$31,574 Spanish dollars within the settlement.<sup>797</sup> While this figure was dwarfed by the nutmeg production of Penang, which boasted 216,505 trees and generated an annual revenue of \$106,450.80 Spanish dollars, given the initial success in Singapore, it was hoped that the gap in production would rapidly diminish.<sup>798</sup> In the 1850s, however, the industry was in disarray following the emergence and rapid spread of the 'nutmeg canker', a disease that destroyed the trees and caused nuts to open prematurely, and since they were unripe, they held very little value.<sup>799</sup> By the end of the decade, every plantation in the Straits Settlements was suffering from the ravages of the disease, but very little was known about its cause or treatment. Initially, the disease was blamed upon Chinese squatters as the early wave of the disease

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<sup>794</sup> *The Singapore Free Press and Mercantile Advertiser*, 16 January 1845.

<sup>795</sup> Jackson, *Planters and Speculators*, 126.

<sup>796</sup> *Ibid.*, 126.

<sup>797</sup> Comparative Estimate of the Produce of Cultivated Nutmegs in the Eastern Archipelago for 1848, R15: Governors Letters to Bengal, Raffles Museum and Library.

<sup>798</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>799</sup> Jackson, *Planters and Speculators*, 125.

appeared to disproportionately affect the smallholding plantations, but no efforts were made to address the problem.<sup>800</sup> As the disease spread, in their ignorance, plantation owners responded with apathy and with no solution in sight. Many began to abandon their land, and the trees died around them.<sup>801</sup> Within the span of a decade, Singapore's newly flourishing nutmeg industry came to an abrupt and total standstill and European spice planting was abandoned completely in the settlement.<sup>802</sup> The atmosphere of despondency was surmised by an article submitted to the Singapore Free Press in 1861 which read:

Sitting one fine day by the window of a house in an expensive by neglected Nutmeg Plantation, I could not help thinking how its owner and with him all our European Merchant planters, intelligent and enterprising as they are, have set themselves on a par with the ignorant Chinese planters in not taking proper means to discover the causes of the infernal disease that affect the Nutmeg tress in this place. It may perhaps not have been worth their while, in a pecuniary point of view, to do so, in consequence of the high price of land: but as members of a civilised nation and which boast to be one of the foremost in agriculture, they should not have left a stone unturned without discovering it.<sup>803</sup>

Several decades after the blight ended nutmeg cultivation in Singapore, the botanist and Director of Singapore's Botanical Gardens between 1888 and 1894, Henry Ridley, argued that the disease had been brought about by a small beetle, the *Phloesinus cribratus*.<sup>804</sup> Based on this finding, it became apparent that the emergence and spread of the disease was eminently avoidable, but as many plantation owners in Singapore, and Claymore specifically, had little experience with cultivation, it was their lack of attention to the conditions of the plantations that invited the infestation of the beetle.<sup>805</sup> Church's decision to take it upon himself to set the cost of leases in Claymore, which priced out more seasoned plantation owners in favour of enthusiastic amateurs, therefore, cascaded into the termination of spice cultivation in the settlement.

In addition to its impact on cultivation, export production and the financial repercussions for many European residents, the failure of European plantations in Claymore also had a significant impact on the nature of Singapore's physical

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<sup>800</sup> *Penang Gazette and Straits Chronicle*, Vol 13, 3 March 1855.

<sup>801</sup> Jackson, *Planters and Speculators*, 126.

<sup>802</sup> *Ibid.*, 127.

<sup>803</sup> 'Correspondence', *The Singapore Free Press and Mercantile Advertiser*, 17 January 1861.

<sup>804</sup> Henry Ridley, *Spices* (London: Macmillan and Co, 1912), 126-127.

<sup>805</sup> Jackson, *Planters and Speculators*, 126.



development. Following the abandonment of the plantations, the value of land in Claymore predictably plummeted as the early investors sought to offload their leases. This allowed enterprising property investors to purchase what had been some of the most expensive land in Singapore just ten years prior for a far lower price. This was the case for Tan Kim Seng in 1855, who had not built a plantation on his land and therefore avoided the financial loss of the collapse of cultivation, when he bought the lease of William Renshaw George, proprietor of *The Singapore Free Press*, in his effort to expand his land in Claymore.<sup>806</sup> In 1862 Tan Kim Seng purchased another lease in Singapore, further expanded his holdings in the district and although the respective size and costs of these leases are not revealed in his will, it is likely that this second purchase was also of abandoned plantation land and therefore significantly larger than the first lease he bought in 1846. Tan Kim Seng's purchase of these two leases marked the beginning of his effort to lead the transformation of Claymore from prime plantation land to Singapore's premier residential district.

It is notable that Tan Kim Seng's significant investment coincided with a period of slight decline in Singapore's overall trade. Specifically, the decline in total trade was triggered by a reduction in the value of trade with the settlement's two largest trade partners, Britain and China.<sup>807</sup> Straits Chinese merchants were central to Singapore's trade with these two nations, and the wealth of the community was largely derived from opium exports to China and the transshipment of cotton-piece goods imported from Britain.<sup>808</sup> The decline in trade with Britain reduced the availability of manufactured goods which were the key products that the Straits Chinese used in their commodity-based investments to local industries.<sup>809</sup> The timing of the expansion of Tan Kim Seng's property portfolio, therefore suggests that Straits Chinese wealth was not as reliant upon their mercantile activity as previously believed. In Tan Kim Seng's case, his acquisition of the Claymore lease in 1846 suggests that his earlier land investments provided a significant source of income.

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<sup>806</sup> Last Will and Testament of Tan Kim Seng of Singapore, NA 1490/242, NAS.

<sup>807</sup> In the Goods of Tan Kim Seng, Deceased, 24 January 1865, Court of Judicature, Straits Settlements, Overseas and Private Records, NA 1490/293, NAS.

<sup>808</sup> Annual Trade Statements of Singapore, 1856-1866.

<sup>809</sup> Huff, *The Economic Growth of Singapore: Trade and development in the twentieth century*.

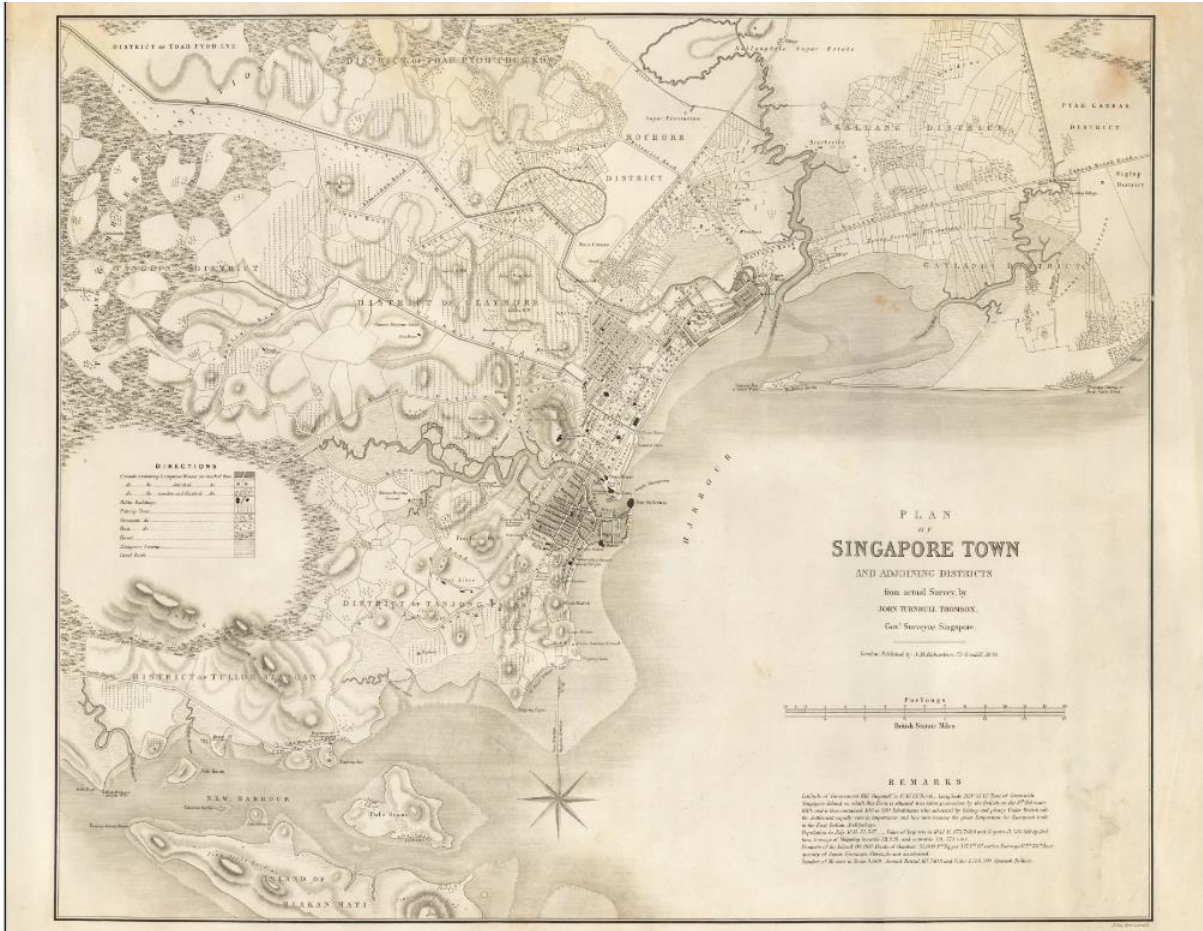


Figure 11. John Turnbull Thomson, *Plan of Singapore Town and Adjoining Districts from Actual Survey, 1846*, Government Surveyor, Singapore, National Archives of Singapore.

As one of the first Chinese residents to settle outside of Chinatown, the significance of Tan Kim Seng's 1846 Claymore lease went beyond a demonstration of Straits Chinese wealth. His decision to build residential property in the newly cleared district, rather than plantations as many of his contemporaries sought to do, had important social repercussions for the development of the Straits Chinese identity. Affluence was a key determinant of social status in Singapore's Chinese community. Within a few decades, the Straits Chinese had quickly established themselves as amongst the wealthiest residents in Singapore, having either arrived with or made vast fortunes. Material displays of wealth were often used to establish status and prestige within the social hierarchy until the 1840s. The racial guidelines for Singapore's urban development proved a major obstacle to the Straits Chinese community as it restricted their residence to Chinatown. However, when many of the Straits Chinese residents possessed the necessary wealth to build large and ostentatious homes, Chinatown had become overcrowded and lacked the space for such material displays of wealth.

As such, many of the Straits Chinese lived in shophouses and terraced houses on Telok Ayer Street and Amoy Street. Moreover, the 1840 census showed that outside of Chinatown and the rural communities, the only alternative location for Chinese residents to settle was in the Kampong Glam district, designated for the local inhabitants.<sup>810</sup> While there was more space in this part of Singapore Town to construct large residences, the location did not confer the status and prestige that the wealthiest merchants sought to attain. Consequently, the Straits Chinese community sought other outlets for their displays of wealth.

The most regular exhibition of wealth was expressed through dress. The Straits Chinese community initially created a distinct social identity by wearing Chinese jackets and robes made of expensive material imported from Soochow and Hangchow.<sup>811</sup> Attempts to draw lines of distinction between the higher and lower classes of the Chinese community continued throughout the nineteenth century, with the most formalised and extreme effort occurring in 1869 when a circular was issued amongst the wealthy Chinese requesting the adoption of stockings. To enforce this new fashion, the signatories bound themselves to pay a fine of thirty Spanish dollars for failure to observe this self-imposed regulation.<sup>812</sup> While this was an extreme example of material differentiation, it highlights the importance the Straits Chinese placed upon distinguishing themselves from the lower working classes in Singapore.

The issuance of land in Claymore in the 1840s gave the Straits Chinese community an opportunity to break free from the restraints of racial segregation and acquire land vast enough to build households that reflected their social standing. Kim Seng was among the first Straits Chinese to invest in this district alongside leading residents such as See Boon Tiong and Hoo Ah Kay.<sup>813</sup> The social standing of these early investors immediately distinguished Claymore from Chinatown and Kampong

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<sup>810</sup> Census of Singapore taken in the Month of December 1840, *The Singapore Free Press and Mercantile Advertiser*, 21 January 1841.

<sup>811</sup> Yen Ching-Hwang, *Class Structure and Social Mobility*, 420.

<sup>812</sup> Song, *One Hundred Years History of the Chinese in Singapore*, 213.

<sup>813</sup> See Boon Tiong (1807-1888) was one of Singapore's most successful merchants through the facilitation of trade missions between the British and Pahang and Kelantan. He retired to Malacca in 1848 but continued to heavily invest in house property in Singapore. Hoo Ah Kay (1816-1880), also known as Whampoa due to his birthplace, was one of the wealthiest men in Singapore having inherited his father's firm Whampoa & Co which was the main provider and ship chandler to HM Navy by 1840.

Glam as a prestigious district. The reputation of the district was further enhanced by the residential properties constructed in the area as Straits Chinese residents utilised the larger available plots of land to build mansions that conveyed their wealth and status (shown in Fig. 11). Among these buildings, Tan Kim Seng's residence, Panglima Prang, merged Eastern and Western architecture. The house's exterior aesthetic drew heavily from colonial-style mansions but included more regional features such as a Chinese-tiled roof.<sup>814</sup> The hybrid aesthetic continued in the house's interior as traditional Chinese features such as ancestral halls, tables and artefacts were accompanied by Victorian-style furniture, including chairs, cabinets, chandeliers and mirrors. There were even concessions to the layout of these new buildings, such as large colonial-style living rooms, which were not featured in the old houses in Singapore Town, which became a regular feature. There was functionality to the inclusion of both Chinese and European architecture in Straits Houses as they were often the setting for the most important social and cultural gatherings such as religious ceremonies and the celebration or solemnisation of births, deaths, marriages and anniversaries.<sup>815</sup> The wealthiest Straits Chinese residents also hosted numerous European guests in their homes. Hoo Ah Kay regularly invited members of the European community, most commonly naval officers, due to the relationship between his firm and the Royal Navy. The diaries of these naval officers often provide some of the most useful evidence on the design of these houses.<sup>816</sup> Thus, the stylisation of the interior of these houses was equally important to the exterior in conveying the emerging quasi-European identity of the Straits Chinese community.

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<sup>814</sup> Peter Lee and Jennifer Chen, *The Straits Chinese House: Domestic Life and Traditions* (Singapore: National Museum of Singapore, 2006), 22; Norman Edwards, *The Singapore House and Residential Life 1819-1939* (Singapore, National Library Board, 1990), 48-49.

<sup>815</sup> Lee and Chen, *The Straits Chinese House: Domestic Life and Traditions*, 22.

<sup>816</sup> See Sir Henry Keppel, *A Sailor's Life under Four Sovereign* (London: Macmillan and co, 1899) for a detailed account of Hoo Ah Kay's country house.



Figure 12. Group photograph of Tan Soo Bin (man standing on the right) and family taken at his residence, the Panglima Prang in Jalan Kuala off River Valley Road. Tan Soo Bin is the eldest son of Tan Jiak Kim and great-grandson of Tan Kim Seng who built the bungalow before 1860. The brass fountain in the background (left) was a gift to Tan Jiak Kim from businessmen and community leaders. National Archives Singapore.

The legacy of Tan Kim Seng's relocation to Claymore was twofold. In the short term, the extravagant display of wealth that accompanied the construction of Panglima Prang (Fig. 12) catalysed many of the wealthiest Straits Chinese residents to follow Tan Kim Seng's lead and resettle in Claymore. Following the collapse of nutmeg cultivation in the 1850s and '60s, the large plantations that dominated the district were broken up, and the European landowners sold smaller leases to the Straits Chinese, who were eager to replace large farms with residential property. In this manner, Claymore became increasingly inhabited, and by 1862, there were around thirty-eight houses situated in former nutmeg plantations. Therefore, Tan Kim Seng's acquisition of his lease in Claymore in 1848 can be seen as the first step towards the urbanisation of the district, which contributed to the inward expansion of the town in Singapore.

In the longer term, Panglima Prang, the house partially shown in Fig. 12, became the familial home of the Tan family for six generations before it was finally demolished in 1982. The house became central to Tan Kim Seng's legacy and rooted his family in

Singapore. Therefore, in addition to being a display of wealth, there was a functionality to large houses that could accommodate Straits Chinese families. As one of the few communities who could afford to settle in Singapore and establish large families, the Straits Chinese were often characterised by their extensive families. Moreover, it was a common practice for wealthy men to have numerous wives and by the 1850s several of the most prominent men in Singapore had upwards of fifteen children. The family nucleus thus became a central feature of the Straits Chinese community. It was fundamental to maintaining its economic status as the wealthiest merchants outside the community would often marry into the culture. Tan Kim Seng was somewhat of an anomaly in that he only married twice, first to Lim Chai Neo and later to Lim Tiew Neo, following Chai Neo's death in 1844. As a result, his family was of a modest size: four sons, one stepson, two daughters and an adopted stepdaughter. Nonetheless, the early houses built in Claymore were designed for multi-generational families, and Panglima Prang had multiple wings around the main house for different generations and families. Work continued on the house throughout the nineteenth and twentieth centuries as his descendants became increasingly wealthy and their families expanded. The additions to the house emphasise the size of Tan Kim Seng's lease as they included storerooms, residences, outhouses, and servants' quarters.<sup>817</sup> Panglima Prang and the Straits Chinese presence in Claymore remained a mainstay of the community's identity throughout these expansions.

### Pasir Panjang – Becoming Singapore's leading landowner

In 1862, Tan Kim Seng acquired his first and only lease in Pasir Panjang, covering 2,859 acres. This was likely the largest single plot of land in Singapore at the time, giving him control over such a vast portion of the recently surveyed land to the west of the settlement's original boundaries, that by 1905, 'A Map of Singapore and Its Dependencies' (Fig. 13) referred to the area as 'Kim Seng's Pasir Panjang.' The size of the lease, however, was not reflected in its value, which was evaluated at eight thousand Spanish dollars in 1864, ten times less than Tan Kim Seng's land in Claymore.<sup>818</sup> Pasir Panjang was a large stretch of agricultural land situated along Singapore's southwestern coastline before extensive land reclamation works

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<sup>817</sup> Additions and Alterations Panglima Prang, Building Control Division, National Archive of Singapore.

<sup>818</sup> In the Goods of Tan Kim Seng, Deceased, 24 January 1865, Court of Judicature, Straits Settlements, Overseas and Private Records, NA 1490/293, NAS.

extending the settlement's border. The first known settlers in Pasir Panjang were Malay fishermen, *orang laut*, who may have been related to the fishing community in Pulau Berani, an island off the southern coast of Singapore.<sup>819</sup> Grants were first issued in Pasir Panjang in the mid-nineteenth century following the construction of Pasir Panjang Road at some point between 1841 and 1853, which first connected the region to Singapore Town.



Figure 13. 'Map of the Island of Singapore and its Dependencies 1905,' Tanjong Pagar Dock Board, NAS

Two of the earliest leases in Pasir Panjang were granted to the Straits Chinese residents, Yeo Hooding, Yeo Chi Guan, Yeo Hoot King, Yeo Hoot Seng and Yeo Hoot

<sup>819</sup> David Sopher, *The Sea Nomads: A Study of the Maritime Boat People of Southeast Asia* (Singapore: National Museum Singapore, 1965), 105.

Hin, who were in co-partnership under the firm of Hooding & Co chop Kong Cheang.<sup>820</sup> The two leases were merged into a single property, known as Hooding Estate, and included 128 acres.<sup>821</sup> The land owners established a burial ground called 'Hiap Guan Sun', which was designed for the burial of all persons of the Hokkien tribe, the surname of which was 'Yeo', free of any cost or expense.<sup>822</sup> That the earliest leases in Pasir Panjang were not purchased by landowners seeking to establish either plantations or residential property suggests that this region was not considered a valuable investment. This was probably due to the widespread failure of nutmeg plantations as well as an oversaturation of the property market due to the recent development of the districts of Claymore, Tanglin and Kallang. Nonetheless, Tan Kim Seng saw the potential for investment in the region, and the lack of investment in Pasir Panjang enabled him to purchase his vast stretch of land at a very discounted cost.

Tan Kim Seng's acquisition of this lease in Pasir Panjang may have been his greatest investment, but he did not see the fruits of this asset as he died two years after its purchase. While Tan Kim Seng's investment in Claymore set a trend for relocation amongst many wealthy Straits Chinese residents that materialised within a decade, it was not until the 1920s that Pasir Panjang became prime retail as Straits Chinese residents began to build seaside houses. The sudden influx of residential investment was so great that by the 1930s, Pasir Panjang Road, which had previously led to little more than a Chinese burial ground, was referred to as 'millionaires' road.'<sup>823</sup> It is unclear whether he had any specific designs for the land, and no development plans were mentioned in his will, which is one of his most detailed surviving documents. Consequently, the land remained part of Tan Kim Seng's estate for several years until it was turned into the limited liability company Kim Seng Land Co Ltd.<sup>824</sup> The company converted most of Tan Kim Seng's land in Pasir Panjang into a two-thousand-acre rubber farm. The plantation had mixed fortunes as it was largely successful throughout the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries until the Great Depression of 1929 brought rubber prices down from thirty-four cents to five cents a pound. However, this great reduction in the value of rubber was not the biggest

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<sup>820</sup> Song, *One Hundred Years History of the Chinese in Singapore*, 139.

<sup>821</sup> *Ibid.* 139.

<sup>822</sup> *Ibid.* 139.

<sup>823</sup> Edwards, *The Singapore House and Residential Life 1819-1939*, 81.

<sup>824</sup> Song, *One Hundred Years History of the Chinese in Singapore*, 166.



disaster that struck the plantation. Pasir Panjang was host to one of the fiercest battles during the Japanese occupation of Singapore (1942-45), and many of the plantations were either requisitioned or destroyed. The only references to surviving industries were opium packing and distribution plants, so the fate of Kim Seng Land & Co's plantation is unclear.

Tan Kim Seng's will provide one of the most comprehensive insights into the values and ideals of the Straits Chinese community. The importance of his will is amplified by the lack of written documents belonging to the Straits Chinese community, as they did not have a record-keeping culture for much of the nineteenth century. By examining Tan Kim Seng's will, this section will focus more on the motivation behind the Straits Chinese use of wills and will also explore the intentions and ramifications. Given his prominence within Singaporean society and the significant value of his estate, the inheritance of Tan Kim Seng's estate was of considerable import to the Straits Chinese community, particularly as he sought to preserve his family's political and economic prominence within Singapore. Moreover, his will and inventory of his estate offer one of the most comprehensive insights into the Straits Chinese identity by providing unparalleled evidence of Tan Kim Seng's wealth, values and ambitions.

In 1865, the Tan Kim Seng estate was valued at \$467,938.83, which included his land, property, shares in his firm and liquid capital. The court-mandated inventory revealed that his company shares and cash assets each comprised a quarter of his estate. It reported the valuation of his trading firm, Kim Seng Co., at \$106,898.47 and documented his cash holdings at \$105,783.36.<sup>825</sup> The majority of his estate, however, consisted of his sixty-eight separate parcels of land and property, thirty-nine of which were in Singapore and twenty-nine in Malacca, worth a combined total of \$255,250.<sup>826</sup> Despite the relatively even split of his land and property across the two colonies, almost ninety per cent of the total value was situated in Singapore.<sup>827</sup> One of the main explanations for the inequity in the value of his property in Singapore and Malacca was that early settlers in Singapore often secured extremely valuable property as they

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<sup>825</sup> In the Goods of Tan Kim Seng, Deceased, 24 January 1865, Court of Judicature, Straits Settlements, Overseas and Private Records, NA 1490/293, NAS.

<sup>826</sup> Ibid.

<sup>827</sup> His land and property in Singapore and Malacca were valued at \$226,200 and \$26,050 respectively; In the Goods of Tan Kim Seng, Deceased, 24 January 1865, Court of Judicature, Straits Settlements, Overseas and Private Records, NA 1490/293, NAS.

benefited from the government's early scheme, which was designed to encourage migration. In the early years of Singapore, residents could acquire location tickets, which entitled them to clear and build upon allotted land before being allowed to exchange their tickets for official titles to their property in 1826. The leases were often situated in Commercial Square, Telok Ayer Street, Boat Quay and Circular Road, forming the centre of Singapore's commercial district. This system encouraged Singapore's early growth, limiting the Company's expenditure and providing migrants with a vested interest to settle in the colony. This system was especially beneficial to the Straits Chinese as they were often the wealthiest migrants in the early nineteenth century and were, therefore, most able to clear and build upon the land. Consequently, when the first fifty-one leases were issued in April 1826, twenty-two were registered in favour of the Chinese, including Kim Seng, who acquired the third lease ever issued in Singapore.<sup>828</sup> The value of this scheme for the early settlers was such that despite acquiring thirty-eight further leases in Singapore, by the time of his death in 1864, this lease remained his single most valuable at \$34,000, eclipsing the total value of his property in Malacca.<sup>829</sup>

Tan Kim Seng devised his will in 1862, directing that it was to be written in English. This had become an increasingly common practice over the intervening years. However, many Straits Chinese residents, including Tan Kim Seng, still chose to sign their names in Chinese characters, which could reflect a deliberate intention to retain their Chinese identity. Still, it is also possible that many of this generation had not learnt to write in English. Significantly, rather than establishing and revising his will over several years, the documents appear to have been devised with the knowledge of his imminent death. The cause of Tan Kim Seng's death is unclear, but he had likely been suffering from an illness for a couple of years. He appeared to be in fine health in 1861 when he hosted a Ball for the European community, one of the year's most notable events and indicative of his standing in Singaporean society.<sup>830</sup> He wrote his will just eleven months later, however, which suggests he had either been given a diagnosis or prognosis of a potentially terminal illness in the intervening period. By

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<sup>828</sup> Song, *A Hundred Years of the Straits Chinese in Singapore*, 35; and *In the Goods of Tan Kim Seng, Deceased*, 24 January 1865, Court of Judicature, Straits Settlements, Overseas and Private Records, NA 1490/293, NAS.

<sup>829</sup> *In the Goods of Tan Kim Seng, Deceased*, 24 January 1865, Court of Judicature, Straits Settlements, Overseas and Private Records, NA 1490/293, NAS.

<sup>830</sup> Song, *A Hundred Years of the Straits Chinese in Singapore*. 72.

1864, he had returned to his native Malacca and was ultimately buried with his ancestors despite living most of his adult life in Singapore. The likelihood that Kim Seng had foreknowledge of his death when he wrote his will could explain his emphasis on familial inheritance.

The primary objective of Tan Kim Seng's will was to uphold the economic status of his family across numerous generations via the preservation of his estate. He divided his will into three constituent parts and separately addressed the inheritance of his sons, daughters, and distant relatives. Tan Kim Seng directed that most of his real and personal estate was to be held in trust, the proceeds of which were to be divided equally between the 'Descendants Fund' and the 'Sinchew Fund'.<sup>831</sup> These two funds were created for the inheritance of his four sons and more distant relatives, including all his grandchildren and future descendants, respectively. The remainder of his estate was bequeathed directly to his daughters and wife on the condition that she did not marry in the form of property and fixed sums. To assess the motivations, intentions and outcomes of his will, this section focuses on each distinct part, beginning with the Sinchew Fund, which was the most important element of Tan Kim Seng's will as it was central to the legality of his perpetuity.

The desire to preserve their property to provide *sinchew* ceremonies was the shared feature that tied together the vastly differing wills of Tan Kim Seng, Choa Chong Long and Tan Che Sang. Yet, whilst Choa Chong Long and Tan Che Sang sought to establish perpetuities solely for ancestral worship, the sincerity of Tan Kim Seng's commitment or interest in *sinchew* is far more questionable. As previously shown, Choa Chong Long's desire to fund *sinchew* ceremonies was such that he directed the entirety of his estate to be persevered for this function at the expense of providing for his descendants. His single-mindedness ultimately proved detrimental to his cause by negatively influencing Maxwell's attitude towards the practice, who stated that:

...it would require very strong evidence to establish that it was regarded as a duty, in any religion, to disregard the claims of natural affect, and, in this case, to dispose of the bulk of one's property in providing for the supposed benefit

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<sup>831</sup> Last Will and Testament of Tan Kim Seng of Singapore, NA 1490/242, NAS.

and comfort of his own soul, while he left his sons and daughters almost wholly unprovided for.<sup>832</sup>

The same charge, however, could not have been levied against Tan Kim Seng, who ensured that his family inherited the majority of his wealth, whilst the provisions for *sinchew* received very little attention.

Tan Kim Seng's will was created in the twelve years between the two rulings in Choa's case, the only time in Singapore's history when the construction of perpetuities for *sinchew* was legally permissible. Given this context, Tan Kim Seng's will appears to use the Sinchew Fund as an ostensible justification for a perpetuity designed primarily for his descendants' financial benefit. When Tan Kim Seng delineated the purpose of the Sinchew Fund, the provision of finances towards *sinchew* ceremonies featured as the penultimate function, ahead only of returning the surplus funds to his four sons.<sup>833</sup> The fund's priority was that the annual sum of three hundred Spanish dollars would be remitted to his brother in China, which passed on to his male descendants upon his death.<sup>834</sup> While Tan Kim Seng had never visited China, he retained his ancestral tie to the country through his brother's family, demonstrating the appeal and importance of Chinese heritage to the Straits Chinese. The second function was the payment of twenty-thousand Spanish dollars to his eldest grandson and all his existing and future issues, the sum of ten thousand Spanish dollars for sons and four thousand Spanish dollars for daughters upon attaining the age of twenty-one.<sup>835</sup> This device was Tan Kim Seng's primary means of safeguarding his family's prominence for numerous generations as the construction of the trust increased the likelihood that the inheritance of later generations would not have been squandered. To perform these functions, the profits of Kim Seng's trust were divided equally amongst the Descendants Fund and the Sinchew Fund even though the money in the former fund was only divided amongst his four sons. Consequently, the performance of *sinchew* ceremonies received only a fraction of the proceeds of Kim Seng's trust despite ostensibly being one of the key purposes of the perpetuity. Furthermore, whilst every other function of the Sinchew Fund had a fixed sum, Tan Kim Seng left it to the

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<sup>832</sup> 'Choa Cheow Neo v. Spottiswoode, 1869', Robert Carr Woods, *A Selection of Oriental Cases decided in the Supreme Court of the Straits Settlements*, (Pinang: Northam Road, 1869) Appendix, 10.

<sup>833</sup> Last Will and Testament of Tan Kim Seng of Singapore, NA 1490/242, NAS

<sup>834</sup> Ibid.

<sup>835</sup> Ibid.

discretion of his Trustees to ‘annually or as often as shall be proper pay and apply such sums of money as they shall deem proper in the performance of the rites and ceremonies styled ‘Sin Chew.’<sup>836</sup> This laissez faire approach to frequency with which *sin Chew* ceremonies were to be performed stood in stark contrast to Choa’s instruction that these ceremonies were to be performed a minimum of four times annually for himself and his wives.<sup>837</sup> It is also important to note that since Tan Kim Seng appointed his two eldest sons as the executors of his trust, they possessed the discretionary power to determine the regularity and expense of *sin Chew* ceremonies but were also the recipients of any excess money in the Sin Chew Fund. Tan Kim Seng’s willingness to entrust his sons with this authority despite the clear conflict of interest is evidence of his trust in them to faithfully continue this practice and demonstrates the importance of *sin Chew* to the Straits Chinese culture in the mid-nineteenth century. However, it is also suggested that his sons would have performed *sin Chew* ceremonies for their parents without the establishment of this trust, which supports the argument that rather than being the priority of his will, the construction of the Sin Chew Fund was a device intended to exploit the exceptions to perpetuities.

While the Sin Chew Fund was ostensibly the purpose of Tan Kim Seng’s trust, the true purpose appears to have been to finance the Descendants Fund, as the beneficiaries of this fund received far greater sums. However, whilst Tan Kim Seng directed that his four sons were to be the initial recipients, this fund was designed primarily for the benefit of future generations. Kim Seng authorised his sons and their descendants, in turn, to ‘appoint the person or persons, being one or more of my male descendants’ to inherit this fund’s recipient role.<sup>838</sup> In this manner, Tan Kim Seng ensured that his descendants would continue to benefit from his wealth in perpetuity and thereby retain his family’s prominence in Singaporean society. Moreover, such is the nature of trusts that the later generations will increasingly benefit from the compound wealth of his estate.

Tan Kim Seng’s primary motivation for creating the Descendants Fund was to establish his legacy and influence the culture of later generations to preserve his family’s and community’s identity. The process of succession provides the testator

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<sup>836</sup> Last Will and Testament of Tan Kim Seng of Singapore, NA 1490/242, NAS.

<sup>837</sup> ‘Chong Long’s Estate, 1857’, Woods, *A Selection of Oriental Cases decided in the Supreme Court of the Straits Settlements*, 16.

<sup>838</sup> Last Will and Testament of Tan Kim Seng of Singapore, NA 1490/242, NAS.

with a final influence over their family and friends, which can be used to shape their identity, after which they surrender the agency

of their estate. In Tan Kim Seng's case, he upheld the patriarchal culture of the Straits Chinese by bequeathing twenty thousand Spanish dollars to his sons and ten thousand Spanish dollars to his daughters.<sup>839</sup> However, creating a trust enables the testator to extend their influence across numerous generations, directly or indirectly. Choa's trust was an example of the indirect influence as there were no living beneficiaries, but he emphasised the importance of *sinchew* to the Straits Chinese identity supporting the continuation of the practice in perpetuity. On the other hand, Tan Kim Seng sought to exert an active influence over the cultural identity of later generations, and the creation of his trust provided him with the means to do so as he attached stipulations to the inheritance of all his male descendants. The final clause of his will directed that:

...in case any of my said sons or their male descendants in the male line respectively shall forsake or renounce the religion and practices of the Chinese and adopt any other religion...they shall cease thenceforth to have any right, title, interest or claim in, or to, any share or shares in the income and produce of my said trust [and] shall only receive or be entitled to the sum of Five hundred Spanish dollars.<sup>840</sup>

Through this clause, Tan Kim Seng sought to project his values and ideals onto all his future descendants and protect the Chinese dimension of the Straits Chinese identity. His concern for the preservation of their Chinese heritage provides an insight into his perception of the increasingly Anglophile culture of the Straits Chinese. Throughout his lifetime, the Straits Chinese community in Singapore had cultivated extensive connections with the British community. This led to a realignment of their identity to more closely resemble Western values, including adopting British dress and providing their children with a British education. The smoothness with which they adopted British culture has suggested that there was little resistance to the Westernisation of their identity, which was perhaps most evident in their language, as it was estimated that by 1870 only twenty per cent of the Straits Chinese in Singapore could speak English.<sup>841</sup> Tan Kim Seng's desire to preserve the 'religion and practices of the

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<sup>839</sup> Last Will and Testament of Tan Kim Seng of Singapore, NA 1490/242, NAS.

<sup>840</sup> Ibid.

<sup>841</sup> M. Freedman, 'Chinese Kinship and Marriage in Singapore', *Journal of Southeast Asian History*, 3, no. 2 (1962).

Chinese' through his will, however, provides a rare source of evidence of resistance to the changes in Straits Chinese identity and contradicts the notion of a smooth transition in identity. This is particularly important given Tan Kim Seng's reputation, standing and influence within the Straits Chinese community. It probably indicates a broader, yet uncovered, resistance to the dilution of their Chinese identity.

It is important to note that Tan Kim Seng's desire to preserve his family's Chinese culture coincided with the period in which the Straits Chinese were at their most influential in Singapore society. His will was written a few years after McCausland's verdict that the Straits Chinese were crucial to the development of Singapore and that their economic contributions outweighed the transferability of the land. For most of Singapore up to this point, Straits Chinese merchants were crucial to cross-cultural trade, and they did not need to adopt further British customs to cultivate commercial networks with European trading houses. Consequently, Tan Kim Seng's experiences as a merchant were such that his principled stand on the identity of his family and community did not hinder his economic success. Therefore, when he stipulated that his descendants were not to renounce their Chinese religion and practices, he was unaware that they might suffer for their retention of this identity once the privileged position of the Straits Chinese began to decline.

A secondary benefit of Tan Kim Seng's construction of the trust was the protection of his estate from financial mismanagement. Tan Kim Seng appointed his two eldest sons, Tan Beng Swee and Tan Beng Gam. This appointment demonstrated his confidence in the fiscal responsibility of these two sons and suggests that the trust was not an attempt to ensure his children did not squander his estate. The trust did, however, provide him with some influence on the manner of his estate's management as he initially instructed that the administrators were only to sell 'all or any part of the free-hold, leasehold or personal property...and to invest the monies arising therefrom in the purchase of other real or leasehold property or on real or personal securities.'<sup>842</sup> Furthermore, Tan Kim Seng's faith in the economic aptitude of his two sons was undermined in the year following the creation of this will as he added a codicil

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<sup>842</sup> Last Will and Testament of Tan Kim Seng of Singapore, NA 1490/242, NAS.

restricting the scope of their investments 'to the purchase of other freehold and leasehold property and not in any other kinds of securities.'<sup>843</sup>

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<sup>843</sup> Last Will and Testament of Tan Kim Seng of Singapore, NA 1490/242, NAS.



## Chapter Five: Philanthropic Ventures: Leveraging the Imperial Imagination

The final element of Singapore's urban development considered in this thesis is the charitable construction of public institutions. This thesis has predominantly engaged with the notion of the imperial imagination as constructed, manipulated, and consumed by the British literati. While this approach offers new and valuable insights into Britain's relationship with Singapore in the nineteenth century, it represents only one dimension of the settlement's image throughout the British Empire – one which risks stripping Singapore's non-European population of their agency and reducing them to passive participants of British ideation. To provide a more holistic analysis of the construction of Singapore's imperial image that provides greater agency to the inhabitants of the island, therefore, this chapter seeks to extend the concept of the imperial imagination outside of the confines of the coloniser's gaze by shifting the onus of image creation to Singapore's indigenous population. As such, the focus of this chapter centres upon the Straits Chinese community's utilisation of philanthropy and the imperial imagination to augment and cement their social, cultural and political standing in Singapore. This approach demonstrates that the construction of a Singapore within the British imperial imagination was an interdependent system that was reliant upon and leverageable by many strata of Singapore's colonial society rather than merely the product of cartographers and writers in the metropole. This examination of the community's contributions to Singapore's public sphere explores the cultural significance of urban development and ultimately argues that the construction of Singapore's early urban landscape was a process that was not only essential to the colony's identity but was also deliberately utilised to further refine the identity of the settlement's Straits Chinese community.

The elevated social, cultural and economic position that the Straits Chinese community enjoyed in nineteenth-century Singapore is not a historical fact that has been lost, ignored or overlooked and neither have Tan Kim Seng's personal successes been forgotten over time. On the contrary, the history of the Straits Chinese community is persevered and celebrated in Singapore through institutions such as the Peranakan Museum, and the community continues to remain important in Singapore's recent development, producing prominent figures such as Toh Chin Chye, the founding chairman of the PAP, Goh Keng Swee, the architect of the State Development Plan

which established Singapore's long-term blueprint for economic growth, and the first Prime Minister Lee Kuan Yew.<sup>844</sup> The consequence of placing prominent Straits Chinese figures at the heart of the analysis of Singapore's physical development, therefore, does not seek to reclaim the history of an overlooked ethnic minority but instead complicates our understanding of wealthy non-European populations whose history has been distorted to one-dimensional allegorical representations of dutiful, industrious and successful Chinese immigrants.<sup>845</sup> This approach demonstrates the capacity of wealthy individuals to not only shape the physical appearance of Singapore's early urban landscape but also to redefine the colony's social and cultural dynamics, thus providing much-needed nuance to the role of non-British actors in Singapore and the wider Straits Settlements. Significantly, the prism of analysis also exposes a tension that underpinned colonial Singapore's governance between wealthy individuals, British and otherwise, and the East India Company administration. By exploring the origins and manifestations of this tension, this thesis offers an original insight into the nature of British imperialism in Southeast Asia that highlights the implications of the absence of a strong central government and a heavy reliance upon indigenous populations and immigrants.

Central to this analysis is the examination of the Straits Chinese community's involvement in the development of Singapore's basic infrastructure in the early and mid-nineteenth century, including the construction of vital transport links, their involvement in the development of education independent of the state and, most significantly, their contribution to the expansion of Singapore's healthcare in the construction and maintenance of the Tan Tock Seng Hospital. While the availability of new sources dictates that Tan Kim Seng will remain the focal point of the analysis, this chapter also explores the contributions of his contemporaries, such as Tan Tock Seng and Seah Eu Chin, as well as briefly examining the generational impact of constructing vital public infrastructure through the analysis of the community's ongoing support for the relocation and expansion of the Tan Tock Seng Hospital, with particular emphasis on the role of the merchants Tan Kim Seng and Tan Tock Seng's direct descendants.

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<sup>844</sup> Kwa Chong Guan, Jackie Yoong, John Teo and Daphne Ang ed., *Great Peranakans: Fifty Remarkable Lives*.

<sup>845</sup> Barr, *Singapore: A Modern History*, 52.

## Straits Chinese

Since the turn of the twenty-first century, the Straits Chinese communities in Singapore, Penang and Malaysia have been the subject of numerous historical studies. Drawn to the complexity of their multifaceted identity, recent literature on the Straits Chinese has ranged from studies on their involvement in commercial and political networks, the evolution of their material culture through food and dress, the development of art and literature and their social contributions to Singapore's colonial society.<sup>846</sup> These studies have been fundamental in explaining the evolution of the Straits Chinese identity. The explicit focus on the community's cultural hybridity has significantly contributed to the historical discussions surrounding the conflicted nature of colonial and postcolonial loyalty and identity.<sup>847</sup> One of the outcomes of this historical attention has been the politicisation of defining and categorising the Straits Chinese community.<sup>848</sup> For example, the term 'Peranakan' is currently the most commonly accepted name for the community in Singapore and Malaysia. Yet, it has proven problematic as it technically refers to any group whose heritage derives from intermarriage between a non-local male and an indigenous female. As such, the term applies to numerous Southeast Asian communities, including Indonesia, Thailand and the Philippines.<sup>849</sup> Moreover, increasing recognition of the community's evolving identity has significantly complicated efforts to define their demographic consistency across various regions and historical periods.

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<sup>846</sup> Karen Teoh, 'Domesticating Hybridity: Straits Chinese Cultural Heritage Projects in Malaysia and Singapore', *Cross Currents: East Asian History and Culture Review*, 5, no. 1 (2016): 117; Ai Lin Chua, 'Imperial Subjects, Straits Citizens: Anglophone Asians and the Struggle for Political Rights in Inter-War Singapore', in Michael Barr and Carl Trocki ed., *Paths Not Taken: Political Pluralism in Post-War Singapore* (Singapore: National University of Singapore Press, 2008); Neil Jin Keong Khor, 'Economic Change and the Emergence of the Straits-Chinese in Nineteenth-century Penang', *Journal of the Malaysian Branch of the Royal Asiatic Society*, 79, no. 2 (2006): 59-83; Neil Jin Keong Khor, 'Malacca's Straits Chinese Anglophone Poets and their Experience of Malaysian Nationalism', *Archipel*, 76 (2008): 127-149; Brian Bernards, 'Beyond Diaspora and Multiculturalism: Recuperating Creolization in Postcolonial Sinophone Malaysian Literature', *Political Colonial Studies*, 15, no. 3 (2012): 311-329; Tzu-hui Celina Hung, "'There Are No Chinamen in Singapore": Creolisation and Self-Fashioning of the Straits Chinese in the Colonial Contact Zone', *Journal of Chinese Overseas*, 5, no. 2 (2009): 257-290; and Siew-Min Sai, 'Dressing Up Subjecthood: Straits Chinese, the Queue, and Contested Citizenship in Colonial Singapore', *The Journal of Imperial and Commonwealth History*, 47, no. 3 (2019): 446-473.

<sup>847</sup> Zarine L. Rocha and Brenda Yeoh, "'True blue', or part Peranakan? Peranakan Chinese identity, mixedness and authenticity in Singapore', *Asian Ethnicity*, 23, no. 4 (2022): 805

<sup>848</sup> Teoh, 'Domesticating Hybridity', 118.

<sup>849</sup> *Ibid.*, 118; and Charles Coppel, 'Chinese Overseas: The Particular and the General', *Journal of Chinese Overseas*, 8, no. 1 (2012): 1-10.

Initially determined by intermarriage, as the current term Peranakan suggests, as the community rose to prominence in nineteenth-century Singapore, so too did their active efforts at self-identification. Factors such as bilingualism became increasingly important, whilst others, such as wealth and mercantile connections, emerged as new, highly significant traits.<sup>850</sup> The deliberateness of this ongoing process of self-identification was unique in Singapore's colonial society and was a fundamental feature in forming the country's post-colonial identity.<sup>851</sup> Given the importance of the Straits Chinese to Singapore's post-colonial development, the majority of the literature on the Straits Chinese identity has focused on the twentieth century. At the same time, far less attention has been given to the deliberate shaping of their identity during the early nineteenth century.

In the early formation of the Straits Chinese community, the primary distinguishing characteristic of the group was their Chinese-Malay ethnic heritage. Initially, this racial identification served as the foundational marker of the community. However, the Straits Chinese identity quickly acquired a political dimension as the burgeoning community sought to distinguish themselves from the wider Chinese migrant community to insulate themselves from the widespread animosity towards the Chinese in Southeast Asia.<sup>852</sup> This separation was a paramount concern in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries when the hostility towards Chinese immigrants culminated in numerous massacres all across Southeast Asia, resulting in tens of thousands of deaths.<sup>853</sup> To survive in this hostile political environment, the Straits Chinese culture became one of transition as the community sought to assimilate into Bumiputera culture.<sup>854</sup> This process typically entailed setting aside many Chinese customs, adopting local traditions and practices such as Malay clothing and cooking styles, and, most significantly, converting to Islam.<sup>855</sup>

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<sup>850</sup> Patricia Ann Hardwick, "Neither Fish nor Fowl": Constructing Peranakan Identity in Colonial and Post-colonial Singapore', *Folklore Forum*, 38, no. 1 (2008): 44.

<sup>851</sup> Daniel Goh, 'Unofficial contentions: The postcoloniality of Straits Chinese political discourse in the Straits Settlements Legislative Council', *Journal of Southeast Asia Studies*, 41, no. 3 (2010): 483-597; and Brian Bernards, 'Beyond Diaspora and Multiculturalism: Recuperating Creolization in Postcolonial Sinophone Malaysian Literature', *Political Colonial Studies*, 15, no. 3 (2012): 311-329.

<sup>852</sup> Hardwick, "Neither Fish nor Fowl", 41.

<sup>853</sup> *Ibid.*, 41.

<sup>854</sup> Zariné L. Rocha and Brenda Yeoh, "True blue', or part Peranakan? Peranakan Chinese identity, mixedness and authenticity in Singapore', *Asian Ethnicity*, 23, no. 4 (2022): 806.

<sup>855</sup> Rocha and Yeoh, "True blue', or part Peranakan?", 806; Ellen Rafferty, 'Languages of the Chinese of Java', *The Journal of Asian Studies*, 43, no. 2 (1984): 247-272 (p. 254); and Leonard

However, with the arrival of European imperialism and mercantilism, the political landscape through much of Southeast Asia was transformed, and arguably, no community was as impacted as the Straits Chinese. The territorial expansion of the British Empire in the late eighteenth century, in particular, heralded a change in the fortunes of Southeast Asia's Chinese population, which evolved from persecution to being sought after following Francis Light's active encouragement of Chinese immigration to support the development of the newly founded colony of Penang in 1786.<sup>856</sup> However, the formation of new imperial trade networks was more significant than the revitalised demand for labour. While trade was consistently a fundamental dimension of Southeast Asia politics, it was especially important in the eighteenth century as it was the primary vehicle by which the British extended and cemented their growing political authority in the region.<sup>857</sup> The most consequential and profitable of these commercial developments during this period was the intensification of the opium trade, which, in the eighteenth century, was dependent upon Southeast Asian trade networks.<sup>858</sup> Before the Treaty of Nanking in 1842 and the opening of China's treaty ports, Canton, Amoy, Foochow, Ningpo and Shanghai, the Sino-British opium trade was primarily conducted between English country traders and Chinese merchants in prominent trading hubs throughout the Malay Archipelago, such as Riau, and later Penang and Singapore.<sup>859</sup> The sudden demand for Chinese traders in the facilitation of the most lucrative trade network in the region had seismic repercussions on the evolution of their identity as their ethnicity was no longer discriminated against. Consequently, the Straits Chinese community lost the major incentive to assimilate into local culture, and their own identity began to emerge. This early identity was heavily influenced by the community's multilingualism, which enabled them to engage with the British, Chinese and Malays, which proved extremely valuable in the

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Blusse, '1619-1740: The Rise and Fall of a Chinese Colonial Town', *Journal of Southeast Asian Studies*, 12, no. 1 (1981): 159-178.

<sup>856</sup> Hardwick, "'Neither Fish Nor Fowl'", 42.

<sup>857</sup> W. G. Miller, 'English Country Traders and Their Relations with Malay Rulers in the Late Eighteenth Century', *Journal of the Malaysian Branch of the Royal Asiatic Society*, 84, no. 1 (2011): 25.

<sup>858</sup> Mark Frost, 'Transcultural Diaspora: The Straits Chinese in Singapore, 1819-1918', *Asia Research Institute, Working Paper Series*, 10 (2003): 5-6.

<sup>859</sup> Gregory Bracken, 'Treaty Ports in China: Their Genesis, Development, and influence', *Journal of Urban History*, 45, no. 1 (2018): 168; and Song-Chuan Chen, *Merchants of War and Peace: British Knowledge of China in the Making of the Opium War* (Hong Kong: Hong Kong University Press, 2017), 103.

development of commercial networks in Penang and Malacca. In the years immediately preceding the founding of British Singapore, therefore, the Straits Chinese communities throughout Southeast Asia became increasingly wealthy and influential.

With a few notable exceptions, the early Straits Chinese settlers in Singapore arrived as prosperous merchants, and the British quickly associated wealth as a feature that distinguished the community from the Chinese community. Many Straits Chinese merchants entered the British commercial networks as middlemen in commercial traffic within Southeast Asia.<sup>860</sup> To manage the growing Chinese community in Singapore, the British built upon their economic relationship with the Straits Chinese community and employed them as political representatives. Historians who have adopted an imperial and economic approach to Southeast Asia, such as Wong Lin Ken, Webster and Kobayashi, have largely confined their analysis of the Straits Chinese to their role as intermediaries within commercial networks.<sup>861</sup>

Contemporary accounts in Singapore widely agree that the Straits Chinese merchants were the wealthiest residents in Singapore throughout the first half of the nineteenth century. Yet, little quantitative information has been provided to support this belief. The lack of demonstrable evidence was partly due to the prominence of barter in Singapore's early economy.<sup>862</sup> As Singapore emerged as the foremost entrepot in Southeast Asia, the flexibility of this system was ideally suited to the settlement's economic growth. Establishing the barter system circumnavigated many of the difficulties faced by Singapore's economy, most notably the variety of currencies in usage and an overall shortage of specie. Moreover, it removed the need for merchants to possess large amounts of cash, which was particularly important in the

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<sup>860</sup> Mark Frost, 'Emporium in Imperio: Nanyang Networks and the Straits Chinese in Singapore, 1819-1914', *Journal of Southeast Asian Studies*, 36, no. 1 (2005): 40.

<sup>861</sup> Anthony Webster, 'The Development of British Commercial and Political Networks in the Straits Settlements 1800 to 1868: The Rise of a Colonial and Regional Economic Identity?', *Modern Asian Studies*, 45, no. 4 (2011): 899-929; Carl Trocki, *Singapore: Wealth, Power and the Culture of Control* (London: Routledge, 2006); Atsushi Kobayashi, 'The Role of Singapore in the Growth of Intra-Southeast Asian Trade', *Southeast Asian Studies*, 2, no. 3 (2013): 443-474; Wong Lin Ken, 'Singapore: Its Growth as an Entrepot port 1819-1941', *Journal of Southeast Asian Studies*, 9, no. 1 (1978): 50-84; and Leonard Andaya, 'A History of Trade in the Sea of Melayu', *Itinerario*, 24, no. 1 (2000).

<sup>862</sup> W.G. Huff, 'Bookkeeping Barter, Money, Credit and Singapore's International Rice Trade, 1870-1939', *Explorations in Economic History*, 26, no. 2 (1989): 161-189.

first half of the nineteenth century as the first bank was only established in 1846.<sup>863</sup> The combination of Singapore's barter system and the commodity-based investments of Chinese merchants provides a significant obstacle in ascertaining the wealth of Singaporean traders in the nineteenth century. There are few financial records for Chinese merchants owing largely to the absence of banks, and the Chinese community did not share the record-keeping culture of the British. Moreover, a contemporary English account of the wealthy merchant Tan Che Sang (1763-1835) suggests that large sums of cash ownership was unusual. Che Sang is described as a:

'miserly old man...[whose] sole aim has been the acquirement of riches, and he is supposed to possess immense wealth. His cash is deposited in a number of iron chests, among which he always sleeps.'<sup>864</sup>

Given these limitations, since most Chinese capital was invested in the expansion of Southeast Asia commerce, the development of Singaporean trade can be used as an indicator of Chinese wealth.

Due to the vital function of Chinese merchants in Southeast Asian trade networks and their commodity-based investments, it is reasonable to assume that many merchants' personal wealth mirrored the consistent growth in Singaporean trade. However, Singapore's capacity to maintain consistent growth throughout periods of instability was primarily attributable to its function as an entrepot and its abundance of trade partners. Singapore's extensive trade networks with a variety of local and global countries enabled the settlement to absorb significant reductions in trade with specific countries by increasing trade with other partners.<sup>865</sup> For the Chinese mercantile community, however, this system would not have ensured the same steady increase in wealth as few could afford to diversify their trade sufficiently, and they were likely subject to the volatility of trade with specific countries.

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<sup>863</sup> The first three major banks in Singapore were The Oriental Bank, the Mercantile Bank and the Chartered Banks of India, Australia and China established in 1846, 1855 and 1859 respectively.

<sup>864</sup> Earl, *The Eastern Seas or Voyages and Adventures of the Indian Archipelago*, 364-365.

<sup>865</sup> For further analysis on the development of Singapore's trade in the nineteenth century see Wong Lin Ken, *The Trade of Singapore, 1819-1869*; Webster, 'The Development of British Commercial and Political Networks in the Straits Settlements 1800 to 1868'; and Kobayashi, 'The Origins of Singapore's Economic Prosperity, c. 1800-1874'.

The importance of commercial networks to Singapore's development has overshadowed the wider influence of the Straits Chinese, and there have been far fewer studies on the social dimension of the community. Moreover, these economic studies have set a precedent for analysing the usefulness of the Straits Chinese to the British Empire, which has influenced social studies to emphasise the importance of imperialism. Both Clammer and Rudolph's studies, which remain two of the most influential histories on Straits Chinese social identity in the nineteenth century, assign British colonialism as overwhelmingly the most important factor in the development of the community's identity.<sup>866</sup> In one of the more recent studies on identity in colonial Southeast Asia, Lynn Hollen Lees adopts a more fluid definition of identity by exploring the impact of imperialism on the creation of multiple identities.<sup>867</sup> Yet even in this study, Lee confines Straits Chinese to the role of middlemen by assigning them a dual identity that was developed to effectively operate as intermediaries.

As a region, Southeast Asia has been overlooked in scholarly discussions of philanthropy in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. Paralleling nineteenth-century British beliefs, historians have worked under the assumption that Chinese benevolence was either anomalous or a tool for self-serving elites.<sup>868</sup> Despite the omission of the region in this discussion, Southeast Asia experienced unprecedented growth of institutionalised giving in the twentieth century, whilst much of the colonial growth in the nineteenth century was dependent upon individual giving.<sup>869</sup> The concept of the individual working as a stimulus for colonial development in Southeast Asia is particularly prescient as comparisons can be drawn between the East India Company's negative financial policy in the Straits Settlements and current austerity measures and the downsizing of social services.

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<sup>866</sup> John Clammer, *Straits Chinese Society: Studies in the Sociology of the Baba Communities of Malaysia and Singapore* (Singapore: Singapore University Press, 1980); Jurgen Rudolph, *Reconstructing Collective Identities: The Babas of Singapore* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 1998).

<sup>867</sup> Lynn Hollen Lees, 'Being British in Malaya, 1890-1940', *Journal of British Studies*, 48, no. 1 (2009): 76-101.

<sup>868</sup> Joanna Handlin Smith, 'Chinese Philanthropy as Seen Through a Case of Famine Relief in the 1640s', in *Philanthropy in the World's Traditions*, ed. Warren Ilchman, Stanley Katz and Edward Queen (Indiana: Indiana University Press, 1998), Glen Peterson, 'Overseas Chinese and Merchant Philanthropy in China: From Culturalism to Nationalism', *Journal of Chinese Overseas*, 1, no. 1 (2005).

<sup>869</sup> For a recent study on the development of philanthropy in twentieth century Southeast Asia see Rosalia Sciortino, 'Philanthropy, Giving, and Development in Southeast Asia', *Austrian Journal of Southeast Asian Studies*, 10, no. 2 (2017).



Since the 1980s, there has been an increase in literature on Chinese philanthropy, as historians have concentrated on the emergence of local elite philanthropy during the late Ming dynasty. Rapid commercialisation profoundly impacted the position of merchants in late Imperial Chinese society. Merchants had previously occupied the bottom rung of social status and prestige as Confucian social thought identified the profession as attracting those interested only in selfish interests and private gain.<sup>870</sup> The increased importance of money enabled merchants to convert their wealth into social status through philanthropic donations, demonstrating a commitment to public interests rather than selfish ones. Studies on Chinese philanthropy have branched out to include the role of overseas Chinese, especially the successful merchants in Southeast Asia. These studies, such as Peterson's *Overseas Chinese and Merchant Philanthropy in China*, predominantly focus on China-bound philanthropy of sojourners rather than settled communities like the Straits Chinese.<sup>871</sup> Peterson argues that philanthropy was in large part motivated by social standing, which occurred mainly through the introduction of Qing imperial titles acquired through financial donations towards causes such as the North China famine, but which could also be achieved through the influence obtained by establishing schools, lineage halls and temples in their native villages.

The analysis of overseas Chinese philanthropy has not yet incorporated either the motives of settled communities or philanthropy in their immediate locality. Settled communities, whilst part of the Chinese diaspora, had a less direct link to China than sojourners. In Singapore, the identity of the Straits Chinese was heavily influenced by their Chinese heritage, but by the mid-nineteenth century, the community was composed of third and fourth-generation immigrants, many of whom had never visited China. Connections to native places, therefore, were far more diluted, if they remained, and the importance of imperial Qing titles only extended to their value in establishing new commercial ties. This greater degree of disconnect with China meant that the philanthropic incentives of sojourners were less applicable to the Straits Chinese. Equally, the causes to which the Straits Chinese donated differed from China-bound

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<sup>870</sup> Peterson, 'Overseas Chinese and Merchant Philanthropy in China: From Culturalism to Nationalism', 90.

<sup>871</sup> Ibid.

philanthropy as the infrastructure in Singapore was incomparable to even the poor villages in China.

### Infrastructural contributions

While Tan Kim Seng's property portfolio offers considerable insights into his contributions to Singapore's urban landscape, an analysis of his residential and commercial buildings does not capture what may be his most significant architectural impact - the development of a relatively extensive system of transport infrastructure. Tan Kim Seng's willingness to push both the social and physical boundaries of Singapore's urban development meant that his investments in the settlement often outstripped the government's provision of even the most basic roads and bridges. Notably, this discrepancy between private investment and public provision was not unique to Tan Kim Seng but was instead a characteristic of Singapore's development from the outset.

Despite the self-professed civilising ideals of British imperialism in Southeast Asia, the government had an extremely limited influence over Singapore's urban development for much of the nineteenth century, as little effort was made to improve the plight of the settlement's non-European population. Publicly funded roads, for example, whilst lauded in other colonies, were scarce in Singapore as the government regularly sought to avoid the responsibility of developing the early settlement. This was evident in the complaints of early landowners, many of whom had speculatively purchased their lots based on a plan submitted to the mercantile community, which outlined the government's intention to construct basic infrastructure.<sup>872</sup> This proposal included the clearance of Commercial Square, the introduction of vital roads and bridges and the construction of a quay along the southeast bank of the Singapore River.<sup>873</sup> This project promised to connect the east and west sides of the river, greatly enhancing the value of the sea-facing lots whose commercial value was, at the time, undermined by their isolation. Working under the assumption that the government would honour their proposal, many of the owners of sea-facing plots erected large mercantile buildings at great private expense.<sup>874</sup> By 1823, however, eighteen months after the government first proposed the urbanisation of the western bank, all progress

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<sup>872</sup> *Singapore Chronicle and Commercial Register*, 30 June 1831.

<sup>873</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>874</sup> *Ibid.*

on public works had been suspended with no indication of resuming.<sup>875</sup> No official explanation was provided for this decision, and it was not until the affected merchants lobbied the government that any clarity was shed on the issue. In response to a letter issued by the affected inhabitants requesting transparency, John Crawford publicly addressed the subject, backpedalling on the previous regime's commitments, stating:

...[I] do not perceive in the conditions any pledge given by the government for the accomplishment of the works referred to in your letter, and the tenor of the general instructions which I have received on similar subjects is certainly averse to incurring any new expense. Having however made particular enquiry of the officers of Government who were present at the sale, and making due allowance for the circumstances of the occasion, I have no hesitation in stating that when you made your purchases, there was unquestionably an understanding that certain public works should be executed on the part of Government. Under this belief, I shall proceed to complete such portions of the works as for the execution of which it appears to me on mature enquiry the word of Government was pledged, or even implied to be pledged.<sup>876</sup>

Operating under the financial restrictions mentioned in his response, however, Crawford rejected the responsibility of removing and levelling the hill in Commercial Square, which would have come at great expense. Nevertheless, recognising the importance of promoting Singapore's commerce through infrastructure construction, Crawford agreed to honour his predecessor's commitments to connect the newly built warehouses and godowns with the rest of the town by constructing a 'practicable road' and a wooden bridge.<sup>877</sup> The road that was eventually built became one of the major arteries in the early settlement. Stretching 1,800 yards, it was the fifth longest road in Singapore, but crucially, at sixteen yards wide, it was one of the few roads built to accommodate carriages and, as such, quickly became a key thoroughfare.<sup>878</sup> The construction of wider roads was also utilised as a tool to improve security in the new colonies as the additional space 'destroy[ed] the means of concealment which afforded shelter to those who live by preying on the community.'<sup>879</sup> Consequently, not only did the construction of this road provide vital access through the settlement, but it was also an important 'civilising' feature that separated the European and commercial districts from the 'miserable hovels and dirty intricate passages' that were

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<sup>875</sup> Buckley, *An Anecdotal History of Old Times in Singapore*, 68.

<sup>876</sup> *Singapore Chronicle and Commercial Register*, 30 June 1831.

<sup>877</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>878</sup> Buckley, *An Anecdotal History of Old Times in Singapore*, 68-69.

<sup>879</sup> *Singapore Chronicle and Commercial Register*, 17 February 1831.

prevalent elsewhere.<sup>880</sup> Similarly, the bridge's construction, as the sole means of crossing the river that bisected the settlement, became one of the central features of the nascent town. Given the significance of these two features, it is clear that their construction was important not only to the select few landowners who actively campaigned for their completion but also to the success of the whole colony.

The success and importance of the newly constructed transport links had little influence over the government's future conduct throughout the Straits Settlements. Even as the Straits Settlements emerged as Britain's economic linchpin in the East, virtually no new transport links were provided in any settlements. The Company's negative fiscal approach to the Straits Settlements administration was not only a frustration to government officials but also proved a severe hindrance to the development of the private industry. By the late 1820s, the inadequacy of basic transport links throughout the Straits Settlements impelled local inhabitants to seek alternative sources of funding for their construction. One of the most publicised of these efforts was suggested by William Cox, the editor of the *Prince of Wales Gazette* and first headmaster of the Penang Free School, in 1827. Appealing to the inhabitants of all of the Straits Settlements, Cox proposed that:

as a want of Funds may prove an objection to [the construction of new roads] being undertaken immediately, we beg to suggest...whether the Establishment of a Lottery would not be an eligible and practicable mode of increasing them. To obtain the co-operation of our Singapore and Malacca Brethren, the profits of the Lottery might be given alternatively to each of the other Settlements, or they might be divided in proportion to the number of Tickets sold at each. From all accounts, these places stand as much, or more in need of improvement than our own, and it is to the legitimate and honorable Field that we hope to see the Rivalry, existing between them and ourselves, directed. By Rivalry, we mean not the petty feelings which the Hukaru taunts us with holding, but that high spirit of emulation which should always exist between the Mercantile Communities, which we hope has arisen here and will never be extinguished: that spirit of Rivalry, which British Merchants need not blush to acknowledge, and which, aided by Capital, has produced in our Country – Harbours, Quays, Canals and all those mighty Works, which have the enterprise and spirit of British Merchants the wonder and admiration of the World.<sup>881</sup>

Cox's proposition revealed the state of affairs throughout the Straits Settlements for several reasons. Firstly, and most evidently, the suggestion of establishing a lottery to

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<sup>880</sup> *Singapore Chronicle and Commercial Register*, 17 February 1831.

<sup>881</sup> *Singapore Chronicle and Commercial Register*, 26 April 1827.

finance basic improvements in the colony was indicative of the poor quality of life that existed throughout the region and demonstrated that the wealthier inhabitants of the settlements refused to accept the poor standards set by the Company's restrictive fiscal policy. Notably, Cox's call to action demonstrated that, at least amongst a few prominent residents, the determination to improve the living conditions in British Southeast Asia transcended existing rivalries that underpinned many of the interactions between the Straits Settlements' governments. This appeal to unity was supported by Cox's language, which employed a deliberate and repeated reference to 'British Merchants'. The inclusive and patriotic language cements the distinction between the mercantile community and the officials, which became a regularly occurring feature in later disputes over the management of the Straits Settlements. Whilst this sense of unified purpose was somewhat undermined by the eventual failure of the scheme due to the limited 'ticket-buying population', it did nevertheless demonstrate a growing friction between the mercantile community and the Company in regard to urban development. Another noteworthy feature of Cox's language was his intent behind using the term 'British merchant'. Although it is possible that this term was meant to refer only to those strictly categorised as British merchants – white colonisers who originated from Britain – there is also a real possibility that it was intended as an inclusive term to include all merchants of the British colony. Given that Cox's primary concern was raising funds, it is probable that he sought to appeal to as wide an audience as possible, which would have presumably included Straits Chinese merchants, who were already amongst the wealthiest communities in the Straits Settlements by this time. The use of inclusive language for a community that was otherwise regularly othered in colonial society would have been a powerful tool to galvanise support for the cause. Furthermore, much like the insistence that Singapore remained a settlement founded on British principles despite the significant social and physical influence of Straits Chinese culture, the use of such language may have been deliberately crafted to attribute Singapore's success to the virtues of the British Empire, even while heavily relying on local communities. Consequently, although Cox's lottery scheme failed to come to fruition, it did provide an essential insight into the impact that restrictive funding had on the development of the Straits Settlements and revealed a degree of willingness amongst the wealthiest residents to assume the Company's financial responsibility.

## Providing Education

Education was a central pillar of the Straits Chinese identity in Singapore. Access to schooling in the English language was a pivotal feature of the community's status in the Straits Settlements and was the primary factor behind their economic success and their social mobility. Many first-generation Straits Chinese migrants in Singapore, such as Tan Kim Seng, had benefited from an education in English and Chinese, and often Portuguese and Dutch during their childhoods in either Penang or Malacca. This distinction, perhaps more than any other, separated the Straits Chinese community from Singapore's burgeoning Chinese population. Therefore, the perpetuation of this hybrid form of education became one of the community's key priorities and, as a result, independently funded Chinese education was a constant feature of Singaporean society throughout the nineteenth century.

On an individual basis, however, Chinese schools struggled to achieve any form of longevity as they battled with financial, political and demographic obstacles, which they were often unable to overcome. The repeated closures of traditional schools did not deter the numerous investors who continually established new schools. The Straits Chinese investors rarely documented their involvement in establishing Chinese schools, and there are very limited records of the schools themselves. Moreover, records of these traditional schools appear infrequently in government records, as the British were regularly unaware of their existence. The government's inability to record the construction and closing of these schools was an issue exacerbated by the turbulent nature of migration into Singapore in the first half of the century, which was such that the settlement's population could, at no single point, be defined as static or stable, but was instead a dynamic amalgamation of both permanent and transient migrants arriving from throughout Southeast Asia. Of all the communities in Singapore, the Chinese were not only the largest but also the most transient, and the lack of effective record-keeping makes it almost impossible to establish a firm understanding of its composition. Given the settled nature of the Straits Chinese community and the documentation of their familial ties, it is possible to study both their demand for and supply of education from the ground level. Consequently, the pervading attitude of indifference towards the Chinese community and their inability to communicate with the vast majority of the population often meant that the small schools often evaded their notice. The difficulty in tracing the establishment and operations of the Chinese

schools has led to this aspect of Singaporean society being overlooked, often favouring institutional studies on governmental and missionary involvement in education. Nevertheless, an examination of Straits Chinese records does reveal some previously overlooked insights into the nature of privately funded education in the settlement and, when examined within the context of the government's more thoroughly documented attempts at providing education, reveals the precarious balance of public and private responsibility in the island.

The first half of the nineteenth century was an important period for the development of education in Singapore as the relationship between independently funded schools and formal British policy established a precedent that the colonial office relied upon in their educational decision-making after they inherited the management of the colony in 1867. Education emerged as one of the rare concerns in nineteenth-century Singapore that garnered attention from the metropole, the Bengal Presidency, and the local populace and while the extent of their influence on the nature and accessibility of education varied throughout the century, their collective impact significantly shaped the evolution of Singaporean society. The legacy of British involvement in education remains evident in Singapore's present-day identity as the only Asian country to have English as its first language.<sup>882</sup>

The impetus for establishing the earliest educational institutions came from the metropole in the form of Christian missionary schools. By the early nineteenth century, the interdenominational London Missionary Society (LMS) had established a presence in East and Southeast Asia and had been involved in the founding of schools and printing offices in Malacca.<sup>883</sup> Often funded by prominent members of British society, such as William Wilberforce, these schools were established to convert the local population to Christianity and were run by missionaries proficient in Malay or Chinese. Education in these schools often revolved around teaching local students to read the Bible in English and their native tongue, thereby combining their missionary objectives with the Company's general desire to establish English as the dominant, official

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<sup>882</sup> Yeow-Tong Chia, Alistair Chew and Jason Tan, 'An Overview: Education and Teacher Preparation in Singapore during the Long 19<sup>th</sup> Century', in *Teacher Preparation in Singapore* ed. Yeow-Tong Chia, Alistair Chew and Jason Tan (Leeds: Emerald Publishing limited, 2021), 13.

<sup>883</sup> R. L. O'Sullivan, 'The Anglo-Chinese College and the Early "Singapore Institution"', *Journal of the Malaysian Branch of the Royal Asiatic Society*, 61, no. 2 (1988), 45.

language in the colony.<sup>884</sup> However, the early arrival of the LMS in the region turned out to be a mixed blessing. On the one hand, their early presence in the Straits Settlements facilitated the creation of many schools in the region. The first LMS mission in Singapore was launched in October 1819, just months after Raffles had established a British settlement on the island.<sup>885</sup> In 1823, the Protestant missionary Rev. Robert Morrison published the pamphlet *Formation of the Singapore Institution, A.D. 1823*, that announced the transfer of the Anglo-Chinese College from Malacca to Singapore.<sup>886</sup> Although this transfer never came to pass, it is clear evidence of the LMS's ambition to establish significant educational institutions early in Singapore. Within a few decades of Singapore's colonisation, the LMS had established nineteen schools throughout the Straits Settlements.<sup>887</sup> On the other hand, the LMS's early activity in Southeast Asia meant they operated in a financially restricted environment. As demonstrated in previous chapters, the greatest issue that faced Singapore's early development was chronic underfunding. For the LMS, this meant that their activities were heavily reliant upon benefactors, and whilst they could fund the creation of numerous schools, they were often of modest size and lacked the finances to support their maintenance.<sup>888</sup> Moreover, with Singapore's early population being dominated by itinerant workers, there was also a relative scarcity of demand for education, and it has been estimated that the attendance across the 19 schools numbered no more than 700 children.<sup>889</sup> On balance, the timing of the LMS's activities in Southeast Asia ultimately proved detrimental as the lack of funding was insurmountable. The challenges faced by the LMS in maintaining schools throughout the Straits Settlements proved significant to the institution's future in Southeast Asia as it contributed to the decision to end their missions in the region and relocate to China in 1847.<sup>890</sup>

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<sup>884</sup> Incoming Correspondence: Singapore: 1817-1884: Ultra-Ganges/Southeast Asia, London Missionary Society Archive, School of Oriental and African Studies (SOAS); and D.F. Cooke, 'The Mission Schools of Malaya, 1815-1942', *Paedagogica Historica*, 6, no. 2 (1966): 376.

<sup>885</sup> Leona O'Sullivan, 'The London Mission Society: A Written Record of Missionaries and Printing Presses in the Straits Settlements, 1815-1847', *Journal of the Malaysian Branch of the Royal Asiatic Society*, 57, no. 2 (1984): 61.

<sup>886</sup> *Ibid.*, 67.

<sup>887</sup> Cooke, 'The Mission Schools of Malaya, 1815-1942', 376.

<sup>888</sup> *Ibid.*, 376.

<sup>889</sup> *Ibid.*, 376.

<sup>890</sup> O'Sullivan, 'The London Mission Society', 94-96.



For the government's involvement in education provision, scholars have often focussed on Stamford Raffles' bold and revolutionary educational ambitions.<sup>891</sup> Raffles was a keen advocate for education in Singapore, arguing that the colony's continued commercial success depended upon an educated society. Constant with his general approach to Singapore's administration, Raffles did not await permission from Calcutta before promising a grant of three hundred Spanish dollars a month, a gift of land on the sea-front (600 ft x 1140 ft), a large expanse of land (Institution Hill), and one-thousand five-hundred acres of uncleared ground towards the Singapore Institution in 1823.<sup>892</sup> The establishment of the Singapore Institution demonstrated Raffles' ambition to invest heavily in education development to the point that Singapore would become Southeast Asia's foremost centre for scientific research and collecting Malay traditions and history.<sup>893</sup> Raffles believed that the effect of the Institution would be felt by 'not less than thirty million and that its influence may eventually, and perhaps at no distant date, extend to ten times that number.'<sup>894</sup> His plan, however, exposed a poor grasp of the realities of early Singaporean society, which, as the censuses demonstrate, was mainly composed of merchants and labourers, neither concerned with furthering scientific or literary research. While the Institution eventually played an important role in Singapore's education system, it stood as a symbol of British apathy for almost two decades.<sup>895</sup> The cornerstone for the institution was laid by Raffles himself before his departure to England in 1823, yet nine years later, in 1832, the building remained incomplete and was a cause for embarrassment, described as 'an eye-sore for several years to the inhabitants of Singapore and lately a nuisance since it affords a convenient shelter for thieves.'<sup>896</sup> Raffles' aspirations for the Institute were dealt a blow in 1825 when John Crawfurd, Resident of Singapore, produced a report

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<sup>891</sup> For studies on the aims, ambitions and impact of Raffles' plans for a 'Singaporean Institution' see; T.R. Doraisamy, ed., *150 Years of Education in Singapore* (Singapore: TCC Publications Board, 1969); Ven Chelliah, *A Short History of the Educational Policy of the Straits Settlements* (Singapore: G.H. Kiat, 1960); and Peter Wicks, 'Education, British Colonialism, and a Plural Society in Western Malaysia: The Development of Education in the British Settlements along the Straits of Malacca, 1786-1874', *History of Education Quarterly*, 20, no. 2. (1980): 163-187.

<sup>892</sup> Doraisamy, *150 Years of Education in Singapore*, 9.

<sup>893</sup> *Ibid.*, 7.

<sup>894</sup> J. A. Bethune Cook, *Sir Stamford Raffles: Founder of Singapore 1819 and Some of his Friends and Contemporaries* (London: Arthur Stockwell, 1918).

<sup>895</sup> Raffles' ambition for the institution was partially fulfilled towards the end of the century when it provided pre-tertiary education and whose students received scholarships to continue their studies in England. The role and function of the Singapore Institution in the latter half of the nineteenth century will be explored in the next chapter.

<sup>896</sup> Doraisamy, *150 Years of Education in Singapore*, 10.

outlining the unsuitability of an advanced learning centre in a society dominated by poor and unskilled migrant labourers. Despite Raffles' enthusiasm, the East India Company agreed with Crawford's assessment stating:

the Native Inhabitants of Singapore have not yet attained the state of civilisation and knowledge which would qualify them to derive advantage from the enlarged system of education set out by the Singapore Institution, and that to prosecute under present circumstances that Establishment on the footing originally contemplated would be to incur a heavy expense without any early prospect of corresponding and adequate benefit.<sup>897</sup>

Despite Crawford's role in withdrawing funds for the Singapore Institution, he strongly advocated education development. His report recommended that the Company reallocate their resources towards the 'elementary instruction of the natives of Singapore.'<sup>898</sup> Given the population's unfamiliarity with European education, Crawford argued that the most constructive approach consisted of a limited curriculum that combined vernacular and English education in reading, writing and arithmetic. The move towards this more contained curriculum made it easier for the government to align their educational policies with independent schools, which previously would not have been able to engage with Raffles' far more advanced curriculum. The potential to work alongside traditional schools presented the opportunity for the government to establish a coherent and inclusive policy throughout Singapore. The Company further facilitated Cooperation with conventional schools, which provided Crawford the authority to unite them under the Board of the Singapore Institution. Ultimately, the Governor-General rejected Crawford's proposal to redirect funding towards elementary education instead of withdrawing funding altogether. Consequently, during Crawford's tenure as Resident, the funding that Raffles had secured for education in Singapore ended. Still, there was an important recalibration in the British approach to education and he laid the foundation for a system that incorporated independent vernacular schools.

The emergence of traditional schools throughout the nineteenth century, therefore, was, amongst other factors, indicative of local dissatisfaction with the educational institutions established by the Bengal Presidency and the various missionary societies. For much of Singapore's history as a Residency of the East India

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<sup>897</sup> Letter from Lushington (Secretary to the Governor-General) to Bonham (acting Resident, Singapore), 16 February 1826, Raffles Institution, National Library Board Singapore.

<sup>898</sup> Ibid.

Company, the colony received very little funding as the Company adopted a negative policy to avoid running a financial deficit. The Company's negative approach meant that Singapore struggled to cope with the rapid population growth, and providing basic services such as medical care was inadequate. From the outset, however, education provision was a central consideration for Raffles. The commitment to education of subsequent governors fluctuated throughout the century and often depended upon the Company's willingness to commit resources to schools.

In the absence of a well-established educational culture and framework, such as in China with the imperial examination, schools in Singapore did not have a focal point upon which to base a curriculum. While the Chinese migrants retained their respect for education, without the prospect of employment as either civil or military officials, the value of schooling in Singapore was incomparable to China. Most Chinese, including the Straits Chinese, were employed as merchants or unskilled labourers without access to bureaucratic jobs. In 1848, out of almost forty-thousand Chinese migrants, only a couple of thousand were employed as skilled labourers such as masons, tailors and shoemakers, carpenters, blacksmiths and goldsmiths.<sup>899</sup> Around seven thousand were classified as merchants, which included shopkeepers, public market vendors, and petty traders, and almost thirty thousand were classified as labourers – over ten thousand of whom were employed as gambier and pepper planters.<sup>900</sup> Seah Eu Chin, a prominent Chinese merchant and de facto leader of the Teochew community, provided these figures, who were privileged within the British and Chinese communities, enabling him to collect and convey this information to the government.

Eu Chin's figures differed from the official British census in 1849, which numbered the Chinese population at only 24,79, but both are problematic.<sup>901</sup> Eu Chin was significantly more involved in managing the Chinese population than the British government and would have had a good understanding of the community's composition, but there is no evidence that he conducted any form of census to support his claims. On the other hand, the British census is supported by official reports of the

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<sup>899</sup> Seah Eu Chin, 'The Chinese in Singapore No. II. General Sketch of the numbers, tribes, and vocations of the Chinese in Singapore', *The Journal of the Indian Archipelago and Eastern Asia*, 2 (1848).

<sup>900</sup> Ibid.

<sup>901</sup> *The Singapore Free Press and Mercantile Advertiser*, 1 February 1850.

police force conducting a survey in 1849, but the accuracy of the census is highly questionable. Under the administration of the East India Company, censuses in Singapore were conducted at short sporadic intervals rather than the systematic and regular intervals that characterise current censuses.<sup>902</sup> More importantly, the census was conducted by a severely under-equipped police force without trained enumerators. The inadequacy with which the censuses were undertaken before 1871 was epitomised by the 1833 census, which numbered the total population at 20,978. The data for this census was collected throughout January by the two constables attached to the settlement in conjunction with their regular duties.<sup>903</sup> The task of conducting this census within such a timeframe was clearly unmanageable, and the lack of accuracy was emphasised by the exclusion of those situated beyond the limit of the town. The common perception was that the census was under rather than above the mark, much like subsequent censuses in 1840 and 1849.

The lack of accurate censuses made it difficult to assess the demography of Singapore in the early and mid-nineteenth century, but one aspect that both the British and Eu Chin's census agreed upon was the professions of the Chinese population. Both statistics claim that around ninety per cent of the Chinese population were employed as labourers or merchants, severely weighted towards the former.<sup>904</sup> It was evident then that the employment opportunities for the Chinese in Singapore were extremely limited, and jobs that required a literary education, as in China, did not exist. As a result, whilst the Chinese respect for education was transferred to the community in Singapore, the practical value of education was not.

The hereditary nature of Straits Chinese mercantile firms further reinforced the seemingly superfluous nature of education. The prospective pupils of Chinese schools were typically children of successful Straits Chinese merchants who would have expected to inherit the family business. In the early and mid-nineteenth century, a large section of Singapore's young population came from the Straits Chinese community, as many of the successful Straits Chinese merchants had very large families, regularly

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<sup>902</sup> Saw Swee-Hock, 'Population Trends in Singapore, 1819-1967', *Journal of Southeast Asian History*, 10, no. 1, Singapore Commemorative Issue 1819-1969 (1969): 36.

<sup>903</sup> Buckley, *An Anecdotal History of Old Times in Singapore*, 226.

<sup>904</sup> Given the limited classification of the British census which contains just six professions (merchants, mechanics, agriculturalists, labourers, servants and miscellaneous), the categorisation of just over five thousand Chinese as 'miscellaneous' is likely to encompass professions that Eu Chin classified as merchants, such as petty traders and shopkeepers.

numbering between ten and twenty children. These large families often practised inheritance by primogeniture.<sup>905</sup> In the middle of the century, the renaming of firms was common practice, reflecting the passage of the firm to later generations.<sup>906</sup> As marriage was regularly used to consolidate the Straits Chinese community's wealth and influence, they were very family-orientated, and the eldest son inherited responsibility for the family in addition to the business.<sup>907</sup> Consequently, it was common for the younger sons to also work in the family firm and occasionally become joint owners, as was the case with Tan Tock Seng's sons. His firm 'Tan Tock Seng' was renamed 'Tan Kim Ching' upon his eldest sons' sole inheritance but was once again renamed 'Tan Kim Ching and Brother' following Tan Swee Lim's admittance as a partner in 1860.<sup>908</sup> Without a practical use for education beyond elementary reading, writing and arithmetic, the Straits Chinese commitment to schools reflected the regard in which they continued to hold Confucian and traditional Chinese values.

Crawford's proposal had a tangible impact on the early system of governance in Singapore, which took a greater interest in developing non-European communities. Crawford's successor, Robert Fullerton, shared his commitment to providing education in Singapore and, in the absence of Company funding, he appealed for local contributions. In 1827, Resident Councillor John Prince distributed a circular promoting the benefits of education and encouraging cooperation in establishing schools.<sup>909</sup> Before this circular, the British had limited awareness of the extent of infrastructure in the Malay and Chinese communities, and there were no statistics for traditional schools. The first state-sponsored survey of Chinese schools was conducted in 1829 by the missionary Reverend Claudius Henry Thomsen. Thomsen was appointed to the Straits Settlements in 1815 to proselytise among the Malays. He arrived in Singapore in 1823, quickly establishing a Malay school of twenty to thirty pupils whom he taught to read the Bible in English and Malay.<sup>910</sup> As a missionary, Thomsen was more integrated into Singaporean society than government officials, enabling him to produce

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<sup>905</sup> Stephanie Po-yin Chung, 'Understanding 'Chinese Customs': *Sinchew* rulings in the Straits Settlements, 1830s-1870s', in Shaunnagh Dorsett and John McLaren eds. *Legal Histories of the British Empire: Laws, engagements and legacies* (London: Routledge, 2014), 145.

<sup>906</sup> Mark Frost, 'Transcultural Diaspora: The Straits Chinese in Singapore, 1819-1918, 5.

<sup>907</sup> Po-yin Chung, 'Understanding 'Chinese Customs': *Sinchew* rulings in the Straits Settlements, 1830s-1870s'.

<sup>908</sup> Song, *One Hundred Years' History of the Chinese in Singapore*, 134.

<sup>909</sup> *Ibid.*, 36.

<sup>910</sup> Incoming Correspondence: Singapore: 1817-1884: Ultra-Ganges/Southeast Asia, London Missionary Society Archive, School of Oriental and African Studies (SOAS).

reliable reports on the Malay and Chinese communities. Thomsen's account revealed three schools; a Cantonese school at Kampong Glam of twelve boys, another at Pekin Street of eight boys and a Hokkien school at Pekin Street of twenty-two boys.<sup>911</sup> As this is the first official report of Chinese schools in Singapore, it is unclear how long the schools had existed, but given the wealth of the early settlers and their respect for education, it is likely that these schools were established well in advance of Prince's circular.

Pekin Street was located in the heart of Singapore's Chinese community and, significantly, was one of the few Chinese areas that Europeans regularly visited. The street had a reputation for being relatively safe in an area where opium shops and gambling dens were otherwise surrounded.<sup>912</sup> The moderate conditions of Pekin Street and its subsequent reputation owed much to the opening of establishments like the Victoria Hotel and Sailors Home. The Victoria Hotel was built by members of the Temperance movement who sought to use Pekin Street as a base from which they could 'strike at the root of these evils [opium and alcohol addiction]'.<sup>913</sup> Therefore, the proximity of two of the three Chinese schools on the same street was attributable to the reputation and appropriateness of the area, which was reflective of the unaccommodating nature of the rest of Chinatown for children.

The location of these schools is important in understanding the development of the Straits Chinese identity. Wealth was one of the main superficial differentiations between the Straits Chinese and Chinese migrants in the early years of Singapore and was most obviously manifested in housing.<sup>914</sup> The most common housing in Chinatown was shophouses, which accommodated between ten and twenty residents in small and basic conditions. The Straits Chinese, however, built more extensive houses towards the outskirts where they were more removed from the poor conditions that plagued the overpopulated and underfunded 'greater town' where most of the Chinese population lived.<sup>915</sup> The decision to establish the schools in the middle of

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<sup>911</sup> Incoming Correspondence: Singapore: 1817-1884: Ultra-Ganges/Southeast Asia, London Missionary Society Archive, School of Oriental and African Studies (SOAS).

<sup>912</sup> Dobbs, *The Singapore River*, 89.

<sup>913</sup> *The Singapore Free Press and Mercantile Advertiser*, 18 January 1838

<sup>914</sup> The economic success of the Straits Chinese was the primary way in which the British identified between them and the wider Chinese community.

<sup>915</sup> 'Chinese More or Less: An Exhibition on Overseas Chinese Identity', Chinese Heritage Centre, Nanyang Technological University, Singapore.

Chinatown rather than in an area closer to the Straits Chinese demonstrates the desire to emphasise their Chinese heritage, integrate the children into the Chinese community and foster a Chinese identity in younger generations.

Thomsen's report also shows that the Chinese schools were structured by dialect. Dialect and clan association was an increasingly powerful force in the management of the Chinese population in Singapore over the course of the nineteenth century, but in the early 1830s, immigration had not yet reached an unprecedented level, and the identity of the Straits Chinese had not yet become dependent upon their role in their respective dialect communities. Therefore, whilst the Straits Chinese and the Chinese relationship can be seen as a practical arrangement for maintaining their authority towards the end of the century, the structure of these early schools demonstrates that they were committed to maintaining their ties before it became a political practicality.

Moreover, multilingualism was an important feature of the Straits Chinese community/culture and their knowledge of English, in particular, was central to their success in the Straits Settlements. Yet establishing Chinese schools that were structured around dialect demonstrated the value they placed on reinforcing dialect associations. Another reason the schools for Straits Chinese students would be structured around dialect is that the teachers, some of the few skilled migrants to arrive from China, would not have been able to speak English. Therefore, the lessons in these schools were based on the curricula in China, with a strong focus on moral teachings, Chinese traditions and Confucian texts such as the *Three Character Classic*. Consequently, these early schools were unlikely to have taught reading and writing in English so that Straits Chinese families would have taught these skills to their children within the home. The disconnect between the Chinese-based curriculum and the curriculum espoused by John Prince meant that whilst the British intended to share the responsibility of education with the local communities, the teachings were often incompatible.

Therefore, for the Straits Chinese community, the provision of education was more than an act of benevolent charity. Instead, from the outset, it was used as a tool deliberately wielded to shape and reinforce the community's cultural identity and cement their socio-political position within the settlement's colonial society. Identifying this dimension of the community's attitude towards education is fundamental to

understanding the balance of responsibility in Singapore. Unlike the construction of roads and bridges or, as we will see, the provision of healthcare, the private development of schools was not indicative of the community assuming a responsibility that traditionally would have fallen under the government's purview but was a considered and concerted attempt to strengthen the community's status irrespective of the government's provision of education.

### Philanthropy and the Straits Chinese Community

There was more to Tan Kim Seng's contributions to Singapore's urban environment than his private property and transport links. Tan Kim Seng took a very active role in Singapore's growth, and as a leading member of Singapore's Hokkien community, he devoted a large amount of his time and money to improving their living conditions in Singapore. Through his philanthropic donations to improve the settlement's public infrastructure, he left an indelible imprint on Singapore's built environment. Amongst his most notable charitable contributions were the construction of the free Chinese school Chui Eng Si E and his donation of \$13,000 towards the construction of Singapore's first reservoir and waterworks.<sup>916</sup> This donation, in particular, helped cement his legacy in the settlement as the Municipal Commissions decided to posthumously commemorate his generosity with the construction of the Tan Kim Seng Fountain after having squandered much of his contribution.<sup>917</sup> Arguably, his most important contribution to Singapore's public infrastructure was his patronage and later leadership of the privately funded Chinese Pauper Hospital. The construction of the Chinese Pauper Hospital (later Tan Tock Seng Hospital) and the conditions surrounding its establishments were demonstrative of the British Empire's uncomfortable relationship with the 'civilising mission.'<sup>918</sup> Despite lauding even the most basic infrastructural developments in their overseas colonies, the Company refused to improve the woefully inadequate healthcare services for the settlement's non-European population for over a decade. Migrants who fell ill were left without recourse, and within a few years, Singapore's streets were filled with sick and starving beggars and vagrants.<sup>919</sup> The government's reluctance to finance the pauper hospital

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<sup>916</sup> Savage and Yeoh, *Singapore Street Names*, 350.

<sup>917</sup> *Ibid.*, 350.

<sup>918</sup> Carey A. Watt and Michael Mann ed., *Civilizing Missions in Colonial and Postcolonial South Asia: From Improvement to Development* (London: Anthem Press, 2011): 1.

<sup>919</sup> Y. K. Lee, 'Singapore's Pauper and Tan Tock Seng Hospitals (1819-1873): Part 1', *Journal of the Malaysian Branch of the Royal Asiatic Society*, 48, no. 2 (1975): 79.



meant that around twenty-five thousand inhabitants in Singapore were reliant on traditional medicine.<sup>920</sup> This state of affairs continued throughout the 1830s as none of the three successive Governor's, Ibbetson (1830-33), Murchison (1833-1836) and Bonham (1833-1843), demonstrated any commitment to improving the welfare of Singapore's poor community, despite Singapore becoming the capital of the Straits Settlements in 1832.<sup>921</sup> However, whilst the government appeared indifferent to the worsening standard of living, many of the inhabitants saw the issue as an abandonment of the civilising mission principles and a moral failing. *The Singapore Free Press*, for example, ran a critical article on the state of medical care in Singapore reporting in 1844:

...a number of diseased Chinese, lepers and others frequent almost every street in town, presenting a spectacle rarely to be met with, even in towns under a pagan government, and disgraceful in a civilised and Christian country, especially one under the government of Englishmen.<sup>922</sup>

The criticisms surrounding the poor living conditions in Singapore were further exacerbated by the comparatively good state of affairs elsewhere in the Straits Settlements. In Penang, for example, the Chinese community had far greater access to medical care as the Company was willing to cover the expense for the far smaller and cheaper population. A census in 1833 revealed that there was an average of one hundred and forty patients in the Chinese Poor House, Lunatic Asylum and Native Pauper Hospital in Penang. This low patient-hospital ratio was unachievable in Singapore until 1852.<sup>923</sup> The Chinese community in Penang experienced a quality of medical care that, for many British residents, was seen as a fitting reflection of the superiority of British rule.

With public pressure building in Singapore, it came as a great relief to the local government when prominent members of the Straits Chinese community, including Tan Kim Seng and led by the famous merchant Tan Tock Seng offered to finance the entire \$5000 construction of the Chinese Pauper Hospital in 1844. Tan Tock Seng began as a vegetable, fruit and fowl hawker, purchasing his produce from Malay and

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<sup>920</sup> Buckley, *An Anecdotal History of Singapore*, 348.

<sup>921</sup> Lee, 'Singapore's Pauper and Tan Tock Seng Hospitals.'

<sup>922</sup> *The Singapore Free Press and Mercantile Advertiser*, 4 January 1844.

<sup>923</sup> Singapore Chronicle and Commercial Register, 7 August 1834.

Chinese plantations and selling them in the town.<sup>924</sup> In 1829, he had accrued sufficient wealth to establish his shop at Boat Quay, in the Chinese sector of town. In the 1830s, Tan Tock Seng entered into a joint enterprise of property speculation with the British merchant John Whitehead of the mercantile firm Shaw Whitehead & Co. Through this enterprise, Tan Tock Seng earned the majority of his wealth and became one of the richest merchants in Singapore with an estimated fortune of five hundred thousand Spanish dollars at the time of his death in 1850.<sup>925</sup> It is unclear how the two men originally met, but it is documented that they established a friendship and business connections throughout the 1830s and '40s.<sup>926</sup> The partnership between these two men was the product of the economic conditions in Singapore following the closure of Indian agency houses, which forced British merchants to forge new commercial networks. In the new economic setting, Straits Chinese merchants became increasingly involved in British commercial networks and the establishment of the Singaporean Chamber of Commerce in 1837 connected the settlement to a wider network of British commercial interest groups in the region, which included other Chambers of Commerce in Calcutta (1834), Canton (1834), Bombay (1836), and Madras (1836).<sup>927</sup>

The Straits Chinese community's willingness to assist the settlement's Chinese population was instructive of their self-identification, as although much of their success in Singapore derived from Britain's perception of them as distinct from the large migrant community Tan Tock Seng's declaration that the hospital was intended as 'a place of refuge for the number of my unfortunate countrymen who, at present while suffering under loathsome disease crowd the streets of the Town, and daily obtrude themselves on the public charity having no other means of obtaining relief', portrayed a kinship with the Chinese population.<sup>928</sup> The authenticity of this claim is certainly open to debate, as successful merchants amongst the Straits Chinese shared many priorities with the British community, including a desire to clear the streets of overcrowding. Nevertheless, the sentiment alongside the financial contribution would

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<sup>924</sup> Song, *One Hundred Years' History of the Chinese in Singapore*, 98.

<sup>925</sup> *The Singapore Free Press and Mercantile Advertiser*, 1 March 1850.

<sup>926</sup> Kamala Devi Dhoraingam, *Tan Tock Seng Pioneer: His Life, Times, Contributions and Legacy* (Borneo: Natural History Publications, 2003), 23.

<sup>927</sup> Webster, 'The Development of British Commercial and Political Networks in the Straits Settlements', 914.

<sup>928</sup> Dhoraingam, *Tan Tock Seng Pioneer*, 34.

undoubtedly have resonated amongst the Chinese population, cementing their role as community leaders.

Three years after the Straits Chinese community provided the necessary funds, the construction of the hospital was completed in 1847; however, despite its importance to the colony, the Bengal Presidency did not provide the necessary financial support to cover the operating costs and the hospital remained inactive until 1849.<sup>929</sup> The local government, on the other hand, were far more appreciative and in 1849, Butterworth sent a letter of appreciation to Tan Tock Seng in which he expressed his admiration for his 'benevolence and gratuitous consideration' as well as his 'munificent and philanthropic liberality.'<sup>930</sup> This letter indicated the personal relationship between the two men, which was no doubt enhanced by Butterworth's sense of indebtedness. Publicly, in 1855 Butterworth commended the entire Chinese population and brought special attention to Tan Tock Seng's donation towards the construction of the hospital.<sup>931</sup> Similarly, upon leaving his post as Resident of Singapore, Thomas Church announced his desire to:

... commend as my last request, Tan Tock Sing's Hospital to the support and protection of the Chinese Merchants of this Settlement, and it will afford me much consolation in the evening of my days, in a far distant Land, to learn from time to time that this appeal has been responded to in a liberal and becoming manner.'<sup>932</sup>

The outpouring of public praise for constructing the Chinese Pauper Hospital demonstrated the social connection between infrastructure and legitimacy within the imperial mindset.

The construction of the Tan Tock Seng Hospital was the highest-profile case of non-European residents assuming the state's responsibility in the first half of the nineteenth century. Rather than undermine the authority of the British, however, this shift towards public donations created stronger ties between the Straits Chinese and the local government, which began to work together in public institutions such as hospitals. In 1851, the Committee of Management for the TTSH was elected by its

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<sup>929</sup> Y. K. Lee, 'Singapore's Pauper and Tan Tock Seng Hospitals (1819-1973) Part 2', 118.

<sup>930</sup> Dhoraisingam, *Tan Tock Seng Pioneer*, 38.

<sup>931</sup> *The Singapore Free Press and Mercantile Advertiser*, 21 November 1851.

<sup>932</sup> *The Singapore Free Press and Mercantile Advertiser*, 25 September 1856

Subscribers and Supporters, and there was an even representation of British and Straits Chinese. The standing members of the committee were Tan Kim Ching, the Resident, the Assistant Resident and the Senior Surgeon. The yearly members comprised three British residents, Alexander Guthrie, William Read, and Robert Little, as well as three Straits Chinese residents, Tan Kim Seng, Seah Eu Chin, and Eyo Hood Sing.<sup>933</sup> As Subscribers to the hospital, the Straits Chinese had a large degree of influence over the management of a government institution by electing some of the most prominent members of their community. The equal representation of the British and the Chinese reflected the rising prominence of the Straits Chinese in the settlement as their role developed from representatives of the Chinese community to joint administrators of their welfare. Moreover, the impetus for the donation came from Butterworth, who appealed for funds from Tan Tock Seng, so the construction of the hospital did not undermine British authority but was an unofficial dereliction of responsibility to the settlement's wealthy residents.

While Tan Tock Seng's donation was applauded within Singapore by public officials and wealthy residents, attitudes in Bengal were far more sceptical. In 1843, a public meeting in Singapore revealed that the Government of Bengal had expressed concern to Governor Butterworth, suggesting that, despite Tan Tock Seng's contribution, the hospital project was designed 'merely to please the fastidious Europeans and quasi-Europeans.'<sup>934</sup> Consequently, the Bengal government did not support the plan to impose a tax exclusively on the 'Asiatic' population to fund the hospital's maintenance.<sup>935</sup> The public meeting, chaired by Tan Tock Seng, addressed these concerns and passed several resolutions to affirm that the Chinese community was as eager as the European residents for the hospital's construction.<sup>936</sup> Based on the 1843 revenue and expenditure statements, the meeting also concluded that the hospital could be maintained without the need for a new tax, provided that the government prevented sick paupers from migrating to Singapore.<sup>937</sup> The proposal gained broad support from leading European and Chinese residents and the local press. *The Singapore Free Press* reported that 'there is now every chance of a suitable

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<sup>933</sup> *The Straits Times*, 1 July 1851; and *The Singapore Free Press and Mercantile Advertiser*, 18 July 1851.

<sup>934</sup> Buckley, *An Anecdotal History of Old Times in Singapore*, 409.

<sup>935</sup> *The Singapore Free Press and Mercantile Advertiser*, 8 February 1844.

<sup>936</sup> Buckley, *An Anecdotal History of Old Times in Singapore*, 409.

<sup>937</sup> *The Singapore Free Press and Mercantile Advertiser*, 8 February 1844.

Hospital for the reception of diseased and aged Chinese Paupers being erected, and what is still more to gratifying chiefly through the means of the Chinese themselves.<sup>938</sup>

Tan Tock Seng's reputation as a Straits Chinese provided the necessary platform to influence British perceptions through his donation. He embodied the beginning of a philanthropic culture in Singapore; however, he was not the only donor towards the hospital, nor was he the first. The original donation to the hospital came from Cham Chan Sang (Chan Cheng San), a merchant who had migrated from China and bequeathed two thousand Spanish dollars towards the hospital in his Will.<sup>939</sup> As the first donor to the construction of the new pauper hospital, Cham Chan Sang played a vital role in providing momentum to the proposal by setting an example, which it was hoped would generally be followed by fellow-countrymen in the Settlement. The cost of the hospital, however, did not exceed five thousand Spanish dollars; rather than combine the cost between the two men, Tan Tock Seng financed it in its entirety. This decision meant that Chan Sang's donation was often overlooked or forgotten. Moreover, the extensive connections between the British and the Straits Chinese would have made Tan Tock Seng a more palatable figurehead for the potentially embarrassing fulfilment of an imperial function. The inscription of the foundation stone of the hospital, which was laid six months after Chan Sang's death and donation, read: 'The funds for the erection of this building were furnished by the humane liberality of Tan Tock Sing [later corrected to Seng in the 1850s], Esq., J.P., Chinese Merchant in Singapore.'<sup>940</sup> The relative neglect of Chan Sang's donation compared to Tan Tock Seng's contribution strongly suggests that the Straits Chinese community, with its established economic and political standing, had a greater capacity to influence British perceptions than a Chinese migrant did. Consequently, whilst the British were only beginning to differentiate between the Straits Chinese and Chinese communities in the 1840s, there was a conscious acknowledgement of their different reputations.

Tan Tock Seng's philanthropy, deeply rooted in his devout Taoist beliefs, was evident in his commitment to covering funeral expenses for unclaimed bodies and those unable to afford proper burials, even before the establishment of Tan Tock Seng Hospital. However, his efforts to assist the impoverished Chinese community went

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<sup>938</sup> *The Singapore Free Press and Mercantile Advertiser*, 25 January 1844.

<sup>939</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>940</sup> Dhoraisingam, *Tan Tock Seng Pioneer*, 35.

largely unrecognised by the British, particularly in the press, where there was widespread ignorance or indifference toward the plight of the poor Chinese population. However, following Tan Tock Seng's death, *The Singapore Free Press* acknowledged his financial support of the destitute, reporting that between 1843 and 1850, he personally supplied 1032 coffins at \$1,073.03.<sup>941</sup> The posthumous recognition indicates Straits Chinese philanthropy's influence on British perceptions and awareness of Singapore's Chinese population.

The reputation Tan Tock Seng developed after 1844 enabled him to create closer ties with the government and became one of the most important residents in the settlement. Governor Butterworth regularly applauded Tan Tock Seng's donation and commended his character privately and publicly. In 1849 Butterworth sent a letter of appreciation to Tock Seng, expressing his admiration for his 'benevolence and gratuitous consideration' and his 'munificent and philanthropic liberality.'<sup>942</sup> This letter indicated the personal relationship between the two men, which was no doubt enhanced by Butterworth's sense of indebtedness. Publicly, in 1855 Butterworth commended the entire Chinese population and brought special attention to Tock Seng's donation towards the construction of the hospital.<sup>943</sup> Similarly, in a public address Resident Thomas Church 'venture[d] to commend as my last request, Tan Tock Sing's Hospital to the support and protection of the Chinese Merchants of this Settlement, and it will afford me much consolation in the evening of my days, in a far distant Land, to learn from time to time that this appeal has been responded to in a liberal and becoming manner.'<sup>944</sup>

Tan Tock Seng's reputation also extended to India as the maintenance of the hospital became a key point of contention within the British administration. The Governor and Grand Jury consistently requested assistance from the Bengal Government to provide funds to support the hospital that Tan Tock Seng had built. In September 1847, the Governor forwarded the following Presentment:

The Grand Jury would further draw the attention of your Lordships to the splendid Pauper Hospital built by Baba Tocksing, a wealthy Chinese merchant, which in the absence of an adequate fund to support it is useless, and it is with the view of carrying out the benevolent object of the Hospital in question that the Grand

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<sup>941</sup> *The Singapore Free Press and Mercantile Advertiser*, 22 March 1850.

<sup>942</sup> Dhoraisingam, *Tan Tock Seng Pioneer*, 38.

<sup>943</sup> *The Singapore Free Press and Mercantile Advertiser*, 21 November 1851.

<sup>944</sup> *The Singapore Free Press and Mercantile Advertiser*, 25 September 1856

Jury recommend the reestablishment of the Pork Farm as the best means of meeting the wants of the many destitute and diseased Chinese who are daily to be found in the streets.<sup>945</sup>

A notable indicator of British attitudes towards Tan Tock Seng and the Straits Chinese community was the honorific 'Baba' inclusion in the Presentment, a rare practice in British interactions with the Straits Chinese. This honorific was used to convey respect to the Straits Chinese community in Singapore, underscoring the unique cultural recognition extended to them by the colonial administration. Furthermore, the honorific's usage in the presentment suggests that the British were beginning to recognise the distinctions between the Straits Chinese and Chinese communities and placed significance upon that separation. Another explanation for the inclusion of the honorific lies in the incorporation of the term 'Baba' into the British lexicon to signify superiority. This is demonstrated by the British creation of the 'Baba Malay', a classification used to denote individuals who held a higher status than the majority of their ethnic community.<sup>946</sup> Both explanations for the British usage of the honorific Baba demonstrate the British's complimentary intention towards the wider Straits Chinese community. Therefore, whilst Tan Tock Seng was singularly accredited for his donation, his renown reflected positively upon the Straits Chinese community. Moreover, after being informed of Tan Tock Seng's role in the construction of the hospital, the correspondence also expressed 'the high sense of admiration with which the President-in-Council has viewed the public spirit and benevolence evinced by Tan Tock Sing.'<sup>947</sup>

The uniqueness of Tan Tock Seng's provision of medical care within the colonial context enhanced his reputation beyond the political sphere of the Straits Settlements. Leonard Wray was a prominent sugar planter who had worked in Jamaica, the Straits of Malacca and the East Indies and was a regular contributor to the Journal of the Agricultural and Horticultural Society. In 1848, he published *The Practical Sugar Planter*, a treatise on the cultivation and manufacture of sugar cane in the East and West Indies and Malacca. This publication was notable for Wray's recommendation that the labour shortage in the West Indies should be solved by encouraging mass Chinese emigration. He argued that of 'all labourers who have come under my

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<sup>945</sup> *The Singapore Free Press and Mercantile Advertiser*, 30 August 1847.

<sup>946</sup> Phylliss Chew, *A Sociolinguistic History of Early Identities in Singapore: From Colonialism to Nationalism* (Basingstoke: Palgrave MacMillan, 2012), 117.

<sup>947</sup> Y. K. Lee, 'Singapore's Pauper and Tan Tock Seng Hospitals (1819-1973) Part 2', 119.

observation, I know of none who can in any way be compared to the Chinese, for enterprise, energy, sobriety, intelligence, application, physical power, determined, perseverance, cheerfulness, and prudent economy combined.<sup>948</sup> Wray's perception of the Chinese was heavily influenced by the success of the Straits Chinese community in Singapore and by Tan Tock Seng in particular. He wrote:

Those who are acquainted with the Straits, know how true this is; but for the information of others it may be necessary to add, that several can boast of from 100,000 to 500,000 dollars; that one is a justice of the peace for Singapore and its dependencies; that the same man has built and supports, a very handsome hospital and dispensary, for the benefit of sick Chinese.<sup>949</sup>

Wray's assertion that those acquainted with the Straits would have been familiar with Tan Tock Seng's donation demonstrated the extent of his reputation. Moreover, the intended readership of Wray's publication also included those without knowledge of the Straits; Tan Tock Seng's reputation would have extended throughout the British Empire, predominantly in the metropole. Tan Tock Seng's growing reputation gradually changed British perceptions of the Straits Chinese.

Tan Tock Seng's donation to the Tan Tock Seng Hospital (TTSH) directly elevated his reputation to the extent that he symbolised the Straits Chinese community, which the British were beginning to differentiate from the wider Chinese community. From the British perspective, philanthropy became a defining feature of the Straits Chinese identity in addition to their wealth and multilingualism. For the Straits Chinese process of self-identification, Tan Tock Seng's donation also had a sizeable impact due to the political acumen he accrued, which provided political incentives for further philanthropy within the community. The construction of the TTSH, therefore, was pivotal in the development of the Straits Chinese identity, but the provision of medical care was almost incidental to this shift as the significance of the donation lay in the assumption of an imperial responsibility. This was evidenced by the philanthropy of later generations, which was characterised by the construction of state institutions such as schools and was not confined to healthcare.<sup>950</sup>

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<sup>948</sup> Leonard Wray, *The Practical Sugar Planter: A Complete Account of the Cultivation and Manufacture of the Sugar-Cane*, (London: Smith, Elder and Co, 1848), 83.

<sup>949</sup> Wray, *The Practical Sugar Planter*, 89.

<sup>950</sup> Tan Boo Liat (Tock Seng's great grandson) founded the Singapore Chinese Girls School in 1899 was emblematic of the Straits Chinese philanthropic identity by the end of the nineteenth century.



The indifference of the Bengal Presidency towards Singapore did not diminish the respect the Straits Chinese had for the British administration. When Marquis Dalhousie, the Governor-General of India, announced his intention to visit Singapore in February 1850, both the European and Chinese communities arranged extensive preparations to receive him.<sup>951</sup> Upon Dalhousie's arrival in Singapore, the whole settlement was 'drunk with loyalty' *The Straits Times* reported that the Chinese had 'arranged themselves in due order along the beach, each tribe under its peculiar and characteristic banner.'<sup>952</sup> During Dalhousie's three-day stay in Singapore, he reciprocated the respect shown by the Chinese community by visiting the TTSH and donating one thousand Company Rupees to the Thian Hock Keng Temple, which Tock Seng was chairman of.<sup>953</sup> These actions demonstrated Tan Tock Seng's pioneering role in developing the Straits Chinese identity as he was perceived as a figurehead for the community throughout Southeast Asia and India. Tan Tock Seng, a man who had arrived in Singapore penniless almost thirty years ago, would have almost certainly received the most powerful man in British India as a guest had he not been suffering from a serious illness. Tan Tock Seng would never again have the opportunity to meet Dalhousie or further build upon his burgeoning reputation as he died from his illness at the relatively early age of 52, only a week after the Governor-General's departure.<sup>954</sup>

Tan Tock Seng died at the height of his reputation, but his legacy of charity and changing the dynamics between the Straits Chinese and the British was continued through the TTSH. This section will examine the importance of Seah Eu Chin and Tan Kim Seng in enforcing and enhancing Tock Seng's legacy, which was pivotal in establishing a generational feature. Moreover, whilst Tock Seng was perhaps the single most important figure in the development of the Straits Chinese identity, the contribution of these two men added a communal dimension to his legacy that he could not have achieved alone. Therefore, Tan Tock Seng's death can be seen as the moment when the TTSH evolved from an individual project to a communal responsibility. Therefore, the hospital's maintenance and management created a

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<sup>951</sup> *The Straits Times*, 5 February 1850.

<sup>952</sup> Turnbull, *A History of Singapore*, p. 68; and *The Straits Times*, 19 February, 1850.

<sup>953</sup> Dhoraisingam, *Tan Tock Seng Pioneer*, 48.

<sup>954</sup> *The Singapore Free Press and Mercantile Advertiser*, 1 March 1850.

stronger sense of community amongst the Straits Chinese in Singapore that also spanned generations.

The construction of the TTSH was completed in 1847, but the Bengal Presidency did not provide the necessary financial support to cover the operating costs, and the hospital remained inactive until 1849. The Senior Surgeon's Annual Report for the Civil Medical Department stated that had it not been for Tock Seng's death, he may have provided financial support for the maintenance of the hospital in the absence of imperial funding. However, his lack of support in the three years after the hospital's construction suggested an unwillingness to continue to bear the responsibility of its running costs.<sup>955</sup> Moreover, there was a lack of agitation over the inactivity of the hospital in the press, which was counter to the level of coverage that the initial donation received. The inaction of the Bengal Presidency and the muted response from the Singaporean press further demonstrate that the British were not invested in the healthcare of the poor Chinese community. This indicates that the importance of Tock Seng's donation was not an example of charity but a representation of a non-European assuming responsibility for providing a public service.

#### Seah Eu Chin: British Perceptions of the Straits Chinese

Tan Tock Seng's premature death endangered both the survival of the TTSH and the reputation he created for the Straits Chinese community of charity and increased influence within Singapore. Therefore, while Tock Seng provided the catalyst for developing the Straits Chinese identity, the continuation and consolidation of his legacy depended on the actions of other first-generation Straits Chinese. Seah Eu Chin was one of the main supporters of the TTSH following Tock Seng's death and was vital to its continued existence throughout the 1850s and '60s as the hospital's Treasurer. Through the actions of Seah Eu Chin, this section will explore how Tan Tock Seng inspired further philanthropy within the Straits Chinese community and assess the significance of the TTSH in relation to the community's other charitable donations.

Seah Eu Chin was a Chinese merchant who, unlike Tan Tock Seng, was not born in the Straits Settlements but arrived in Singapore from Swatow (Shantou) in 1823. Seah Eu Chin was one of the few English-speaking, literate Chinese migrants in the

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<sup>955</sup> Y. K. Lee, 'Singapore's Pauper and Tan Tock Seng Hospitals (1819-1973) Part 2', 118.

1820s, and he used his advantage to work as a clerk on several trading vessels. During this occupation, he engaged with natives throughout the Malay Archipelago and gained a wide knowledge of the local cultures. Seah Eu Chin's early experiences in Singapore and his knowledge of English meant he had more in common with the Straits Chinese settlers than most Chinese migrants. He capitalised upon these advantages in the first half of the nineteenth century as he cultivated extensive ties with European agency houses as the principal pepper and gambier planter. In 1837, he entered the Straits Chinese community through his marriage to the eldest daughter of Tan Ah Hun, the Kapitan of Perak, which provided him with greater access to the prominent Straits Chinese networks in Singapore. As a successful Chinese merchant in Singapore, Seah Eu Chin's integration into the Straits Chinese community was characteristic of its growth throughout the nineteenth century, enabling them to retain their economic superiority. Seah Eu Chin's reputation within Singapore was comparable to Tan Tock Seng's by 1840, as both were members of the Singapore Chamber of Commerce and the recognised leaders of the Teochew and Hokkien communities, respectively.<sup>956</sup>

Seah Eu Chin's involvement in the provision of medical care began at a time similar to Tan Tock Seng's donation to the new Pauper Hospital. In 1845, Seah Eu Chin bought two sheds on an unbuilt swamp and a small house near the Chinese temple to provide the only refuge for the sick and homeless.<sup>957</sup> With no financial assistance from the Bengal Presidency forthcoming, Seah Eu Chin worked in partnership with Singapore's Superintendent of Police and the settlement's Chaplain to raise funds to improve conditions for the homeless during the construction of the TTSH. In November 1845, these three men had raised \$111.75 from 324 subscribers, most of whom were Chinese, which was used to build an attap shed that housed 100 to 120 paupers.<sup>958</sup> After this initial success, the charity was handed over solely to Seah Eu Chin, largely because of the number of Chinese supporters. With the charity as Seah Eu Chin's sole responsibility, the TTSH's annual report recorded that he raised \$8090.22 between April 1845 and June 1851.<sup>959</sup> This sum equated to an average of

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<sup>956</sup> Roderick Maclean, *A Pattern of Change: The Singapore International Chamber of Commerce from 1837* (Singapore: Singapore International Chamber of Commerce, 2000), 32.

<sup>957</sup> Y. K. Lee, 'Singapore's Pauper and Tan Tock Seng Hospitals (1819-1973) Part 2', 108.

<sup>958</sup> *Ibid.*, 108.

<sup>959</sup> Y. K. Lee, 'Singapore's Pauper and Tan Tock Seng Hospitals (1819-1973) Part 2', 108.

\$212.90 a month, almost double the amount raised through the combined efforts of Seah Eu Chin, the Superintendent and the Chaplain in November 1845. Moreover, it was reported that there was a continual decline in European contributions during this period, which meant that the Chinese community was predominantly responsible for the provision of medical care for the poor. The sum raised through the collective liberality of the Chinese was greater than Tan Tock Seng's singular donation in 1844, yet there was very little British recognition of this philanthropy even though the European community were clearly aware of the project given their initial involvement.

To compound the British community's lack of recognition for the Chinese donations *The Singapore Free Press* even ran an article in 1846 that criticised the parsimonious nature of the Chinese community.<sup>960</sup> The publication of this article suggests that despite the British community's initial involvement in Seah Eu Chin's charitable project, their lack of engagement with the issue of medical care for the poor was so great that they were unaware of Eu Chin's continued efforts. The discrepancy between British coverage of Tan Tock Seng's donation towards the TTSH and Seah Eu Chin's efforts clearly demonstrates a lack of interest in the issue of medical care. This suggests the hospital's usefulness did not drive the British interest in the TTSH to the settlement. It was not until 1852 that Seah Eu Chin and the Chinese community received recognition for their philanthropy when the details of their financial support were published in the first annual report of the TTSH. However, the impetus for the recognition of Seah Eu Chin and the Chinese community did not come from the British community; instead, it was the Straits Chinese members of the hospital's committee of management who insisted the report was included. Consequently, whilst the British were largely ignorant of the actions of the Chinese community, Seah Eu Chin's efforts demonstrated an early communal project dedicated towards the welfare of the poor community, headed by a Straits Chinese. The inclusion of charitable donations in the TTSH's annual report also reflected the increased influence the Straits Chinese community could wield through the hospital.

#### Tan Kim Seng: Cementing a Philanthropic Identity.

Seah Eu Chin's efforts to support the TTSH and to ensure Tan Tock Seng's charitable reputation survived were supported by Tan Kim Seng, and he used much

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<sup>960</sup> *The Straits Times*, 10 January 1846.

of his fortune to improve the conditions of Singapore through public institutions and infrastructure. Financially, he was the single largest donor to charitable and public projects of any first-generation Straits Chinese and possibly the entire Singaporean population. This section concentrates on Tan Kim Seng's philanthropic donations towards the TTSH and his wider contributions, which built upon Tan Tock Seng's reputation and guaranteed his legacy would reverberate throughout numerous generations.

Tan Kim Seng's trading company, Kim Seng & Co., was among the first Chinese firms established in Singapore and enjoyed considerable success, prompting his admittance into the Singapore Chamber of Commerce in 1840.<sup>961</sup> His business grew rapidly, and he set up a branch in Malacca and Shanghai, making him the first Singaporean businessman to expand into China. Tan Kim Seng's Straits Chinese upbringing provided him with local knowledge of the Malay Archipelago, which he utilised to adapt his Chinese cargo to specific ports. However, the political tensions between the British and Dutch in Southeast Asia hindered his ability to trade throughout the region. Vessels carrying cargo worth twenty thousand Spanish dollars were at risk of being detained or not being permitted access to certain ports by the Dutch Government in violation of the Anglo-Dutch treaty. His cargo was often exclusively tailored to certain markets, so these impediments threatened Kim Seng's business. Given that his trade depended on the political balance in the region, Kim Seng was involved in Singapore's political network, which allowed him to solicit the assistance of Governor Butterworth to protect his trade from the Dutch.<sup>962</sup> Kim Seng developed a social relationship with Butterworth through these political and commercial networks. In an address to the Chinese community upon his temporary departure from the settlement, Governor Butterworth highlighted the role of 'my friend Tan Kim Seng', who headed up the Tan Tock Seng Hospital's Committee of Management.<sup>963</sup> In the same address, Butterworth also singled out Tan Tock Seng and Seah Eu Chin, and whilst he had extensive interactions with them, he did not refer to them personally.

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<sup>961</sup> Song, *One Hundred Years' History of the Chinese in Singapore*, 66.

<sup>962</sup> *The Singapore Free Press and Mercantile Advertiser*, 7 December 1847.

<sup>963</sup> *The Singapore Free Press and Mercantile Advertiser*, 21 November 1851.

As one of the most successful merchants in Singapore, Tan Kim Seng's political connections also meant that he frequently consulted with the Government on issues concerning the Chinese community. He was also seen as the natural successor to Tan Tock Seng's role as a political representative, which was illustrated in his appointment as a Justice of Peace in 1850 following Tock Seng's death. Tan Kim Seng also succeeded Tan Tock Seng as the leading philanthropist in Singapore, donating to numerous civic projects. In addition to his charitable projects, Tan Kim Seng was also heavily involved in managing and financing the TTSH. As well as being a subscriber and head of the committee of management, he was also known to send a ration of pork and a few cents to each of the inmates during the Chinese New Year.<sup>964</sup> Moreover, Tan Kim Seng's philanthropy was not limited to Singapore, as he was also a financial supporter of the Pauper Hospital in Malacca, where he was born. In 1852, he was amongst the largest donors, with 38 subscribers to the hospital, of whom 30 were Chinese residents.<sup>965</sup>

It is clear from the extent of Tan Kim Seng's philanthropy and the anecdotal stories of his gifts to patients that his charity was born from a genuine desire to improve the conditions of the Chinese community in Singapore. He and Eu Chin demonstrated that Tock Seng's charitable nature was not an exception amongst the Straits Chinese community or limited to those who could relate to the poor community. Instead, through their sense of philanthropy, these three men, amongst the most financially successful and politically influential residents in the mid-nineteenth century, created a cultural identity for the Straits Chinese. This identity was important for later generations of Straits Chinese as it broke down social barriers between their community and the British. This enabled the Straits Chinese to cement their political and social prominence in Singapore throughout the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries.

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<sup>964</sup> Song, *One Hundred Years' History of the Chinese in Singapore*, 68.

<sup>965</sup> *The Singapore Free Press and Mercantile Advertiser*, 25 February 1853.

## Conclusion

The imperial imagination is an amorphous entity, easily swayed by what British ideas of their empire represented, should embody, and should project to those beyond the empire's bounds. When Raffles brought the East India Company's reach to Singapore's shores, he came with idealistic notions of what a British colony could and should be. These ideals, however, were not widely shared within the East India Company, and when faced with economic obstacles, the Company decided to retract much of its financial support. Without the financial and institutional backing of the Company, the local government funded much of Singapore's early growth with its resources. No British official exemplified this practice more than the first British Resident, William Farquhar. Outside of the public sphere, numerous individuals, often wealthy residents of the Straits Chinese community, stepped forward to provide financial and administrative support. Through their contributions, mercantile magnates like Tan Kim Seng and Seah Eu Chin came to have significant roles in shaping not only Singaporean society but also its landscape in its physical and imagined forms.

The Singapore state has for decades emphasised the 'melting pot' nature of Singapore's cultural heritage as a lodestone of public narratives, pointing to the fusion of local cuisines, architecture, and the local pidgin dialect of 'Singlish' as treasured examples of ideal multiculturalism.<sup>966</sup> Part of this narrative has always been the emergence of this multi-culturalism from its colonial past, the common root and experience binding all four official races (Chinese, Malay, Indian, and Eurasian) in the 'Singapore Story'. This neatness goes a long way towards accounting for continued reiterations of this narrative as the truth of Singapore's creation, which Stamford Raffles single-handedly envisioned and brought into being an entrepot colony with little natural or manpower resources. Singapore is plucky and dogged, savvy and discerning, a resource and land-poor island that has to rely on both its ingenuity and its able leader.

This simplified 'great man' narrative that characterises Singapore's colonial history is paralleled in the construction of Singapore's post-colonial national narrative that

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<sup>966</sup> For example, see the website 'Building a Multicultural Singapore', *SG101* <<https://www.sg101.gov.sg/social-national-identity/multicultural/>>. *SG101* is a government-initiated and -run project that was created in 2021 in order to "tell the stories of Singapore's journey as a nation, [help] Singaporeans understand what makes Singapore it is today, and what makes [a] Singaporean."

firmly places Lee Kuan Yew, Singapore's first Prime Minister, as the 'father of modern Singapore'. Lee Kuan Yew served as Singapore's Prime Minister from 1959 to 1990, but his profound influence on the nation's policies, governance, and political landscape persisted until his death in March 2015 as the first Prime Minister of Singapore. His memoirs, aptly titled *The Singapore Story*, reflect his central role in shaping the country's trajectory, and he is often credited with transforming Singapore into a first-world country.<sup>967</sup> As such, his legacy in Singapore's national narrative sits alongside that of Stamford Raffles, with both men attaining near-hagiographic status in the country's foundational story.<sup>968</sup> Lee's status in Singapore is both venerated and contentious, praised and vilified in equal measure by pundits, opponents, and his contemporaries.<sup>969</sup> However conceived, this dissertation passes no judgment on the matter beyond suggesting that, as much as Raffles' pseudo-sainthood in Singapore is undergoing significant reconsideration, it is perhaps also time to nuance parallel, modern narratives around Lee. Singapore's heritage has long roots in the administration of current policies, ranging from government housing allocation to school placement.<sup>970</sup> Probing the origins of this allows for the evolution of national identity in an equally evolving cityscape that is more inclusive, compassionate, and personal. Ground on this has already been broken, with studies such as Natalie Oswin's on Singapore's nuclear family housing policy and its implications for the queer community and identity.<sup>971</sup>

By exploring Singapore's urban development, this thesis has sought to unravel the complex interplay between reality and the colonial imagination. The undertaking of a multifaceted analysis of Singapore's transformation from a relatively uninhabited island to a densely populated and urbanised commercial centre has emphasised the complexity of British colonial ambitions, local initiatives, and the significant contributions of the Straits Chinese community. In doing so, this research has

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<sup>967</sup> Lee Kuan Yew, *The Singapore Story: Memoirs of Lee Kuan Yew* (Singapore: Singapore Press Holdings, 1998).

<sup>968</sup> Lee Kuan Yew, *From Third World to First: The Singapore Story, 1965-2000* (Singapore: Marshall Cavendish, 2012).

<sup>969</sup> Klaus-Georg Riegel, 'Inventing Asian Traditions; The Controversy Between Lee Kuan Yew and Kim Dae Jung', *Development and Society* 29, no. 1 (2000); Michael Barr, 'Lee Kuan Yew and the "Asian Values" Debate', *Asian Studies Review* 24, no. 3 (2000); Cheng Guan Ang, 'Biography and History: The Historiography of Lee Kuan Yew', *Asian Studies Review*, 43, no. 3 (2019).

<sup>970</sup> Beng-Huat Chua, 'Race Relations and Public Housing Policy in Singapore', *Journal of Architectural and Planning Research*, 8.4 (1991), pp. 343–54.

<sup>971</sup> Natalie Oswin, 'The Modern Model Family at Home in Singapore: A Queer Geography,' *Transactions of the Institute of British Geographers*, 35.2 (2010), pp. 256–68.



challenged traditional historiographies that often attribute Singapore's urban development solely to the exceptional administration of key British figures, revealing a richer, more nuanced narrative. It places particular emphasis on the local administration's efforts to translate the vision of an ideal British settlement into reality. This approach showcases the often-overlooked significance of the British Empire's perception of the colony and its periphery and has identified the ongoing, and occasionally unwitting, process by which the British portrayal of Singapore was constantly shifting in accordance with the prevailing values of the imperial society.

The exploration of Singapore within the British imperial imagination through cartographic analysis highlighted the complex dynamic between imperial aspirations and imperial capabilities. The maps, far from being just navigational tools, served as instruments of imperial ideology, moulding perceptions of the empire's domains and the potential value of unconquered lands. The shift from an obscure mention in early maps to a pivotal node in Britain's colonial network underscores the rapidity of Singapore's transformation within the imperial imagination. Given the richness of this source base, there is a need for further critical reassessment of the role of cartographic representations in shaping Singapore's position in historical narratives. The examination of the British administration in Singapore revealed a chasm between the portrayal of colonial ambitions and the pragmatic challenges of governance, underscored by chronic underfunding, incoherent land administration, and the complexities of managing a diverse settler community. These shortcomings highlight the limitations of colonial administration in Southeast Asia and suggest that Singapore's success owed as much, if not more, to the agency and contributions of non-European communities as it did to British colonial policy. The focus on the Straits Chinese community further illuminated the multifaceted role that non-European communities played within the colonial framework. Through philanthropy, infrastructural development, and commercial enterprise, prominent figures contributed to Singapore's physical landscape and its socio-cultural landscape. The influence of local elites on colonial development is far from unique to Singapore, but due to the entrenchment of the national narrative, the nation's historiography has been relatively slow to challenge the Eurocentric ideals that the settlement was supposedly founded upon.

At its core, this thesis has identified an often-overlooked tension that emerged between imperial administration and local, private individuals around issues of responsibility for the provision of fundamental infrastructure in the settlement. This may seem unsurprising, given the long-standing recognition of the Company's reticence to finance Singapore's development. However, where expected tensions might have been between coloniser and colonised categories, this study revealed a less anticipated tension between the British administrations of Bengal and Singapore – later to expand to encompass the Straits Settlements.

Contrary to Singapore's traditional national history, the settlement's growth was not evidence of effective imperial strategy nor the product of astute urban planning. Singapore prospered despite the East India Company's negative fiscal policy towards the governance of the Straits Settlements. Although the Company's indifferent approach towards Singapore has long been acknowledged, the implications of the neglect of their economic responsibilities have only recently begun to be examined. Analysis of the administration of William Farquhar's Residency in early nineteenth-century Singapore demonstrated the existence of significant ideological disagreements between the Governor-General in Bengal and Farquhar as the local Resident over the direction of Singapore's development and financial support. Public correspondence has revealed that the Company consistently rejected Farquhar's requests for further funding and the provision of basic public buildings and amenities. In contrast, an examination of Farquhar's efforts to establish a functioning administration in Singapore illustrates the extent to which he, as an individual, undertook much of the responsibility of Singapore's governance and development, significantly through the conversion of his private home into public offices or by personally paying the wages of essential public officials.

Identifying this internal tension represents a significant development in Singapore's colonial historiography, bridging the gap between the colony's contentious origins and prosperous development. Previous analysis of Singapore's abrupt transition from tenuous possession to the cornerstone of British economic policy often attributes this phenomenon to Raffles' extraordinary vision and legacy. This reductive line of argument was rooted in the near-hagiographic narratives that emerged in the late nineteenth century as Victorian society sought to retroactively create heroes who symbolised the ideals of the British Empire and, in doing so,

justified continued colonial presence in Southeast Asia. The artificial construction of this mythology invariably downplays Raffles' failings in the settlement whilst baselessly ascribing Singapore's later successes to his contributions. The uncritical acceptance of Raffles' posthumous veneration within the traditional historiography has resulted in an oversimplification of Singapore's colonial historiography, where complex and nuanced developments have been subsumed into narratives that instead promoted the inevitability of British success. The 'creation myth' of Singapore's founding, driven by visionary colonial foresight, has coloured both perceptions of Singapore back in the historic imperial metropole and has continued to persistently colour perceptions of national narratives espoused by state organs in present-day Singapore.

The shadow cast by the narratives surrounding Raffles' role in Singapore's development continues to be reinforced by the legacy of Singapore's urban landscape. There is no clearer indication of this ongoing influence than in the toponyms of Singapore's historic districts of Chinatown, Kampong Glam and Little India, which reflect Raffles' intention for racial division. These districts, all of which are still located within the settlement's original boundaries, serve not only as reminders of the endurance of Raffles' vision for the settlement but also as demonstrations of the deceptiveness of the imperial imagination. It is tempting to interpret the endurance and prosperity of these districts as indications of Raffles' success in translating his vision for the settlement into reality. In truth, however, despite the insinuation of these place names, their composition and development rarely adhered to the ideals laid out in the Jackson Plan. For a start, these districts' location deviated from their intended instructions, which, as this thesis has demonstrated, was a product of the government's early failures to exert the required authority to control land administration. A more damning divergence from the idealised urban vision, however, was that contrary to their names, there was a notable lack of racial segregation in these districts. Although many migrants often gravitated towards settling close to their respective racial, dialect, or religious communities, there was also a notable amount of diversification throughout the settlement. The exploration of Tan Kim Seng's willingness and ability to transverse the racial divisions established by the government and construct both commercial and residential property in this thesis provides granular evidence of Britain's failure to uphold its urban planning ideals. Notably, a wider inspection of these districts suggests that Tan Kim Seng was not an outlier in his

disregard for racial segregation despite his wealth and status. The Chinese Kampong, for example, housed several shrines and mosques built in the 1820s and 1830s by Muslim migrants from southern India and the spectacular Hindu temple, the Sri Mariamman Temple, all of which remain prominent landmarks and tourist attractions. This enduring perception of an idealised conception of Singapore's development, rooted in nineteenth-century imagery, underscores the pivotal function of architectural legacy in forming and commemorating national identity and highlights the importance of restoring agency to marginalised and subjugated communities.

As new imperial historiography continues to evolve, it is likely to delve deeper into the interconnectedness of the empire with broader historical themes such as globalisation, cultural exchange, and the construction of identities. This is already becoming evident in the post-colonial fields of study of regions such as Africa, Latin America, and India.<sup>972</sup> This development has led to more interdisciplinary approaches, drawing on insights from anthropology, cultural studies, and postcolonial theory to enrich the analysis of imperial histories.<sup>973</sup> The field of new imperial historiography is set to expand further and diversify, offering fresh perspectives on the complexities of imperial dynamics and their enduring influence on contemporary societies. This progression will likely encourage more critical and inclusive historiographical practices, contributing to a deeper understanding of the multifaceted nature of imperialism and its lasting impact on the world. There is much that the concept of the 'imperial imagination' could add to this, particularly in offering new ways to approach perspectives of the colonial gaze and conceptualisations of their empires and the lands within them. Such studies might explore how imperial powers used cultural, literary, and cartographic representations to construct and disseminate specific narratives about colonised regions and peoples. Doing so would reveal much to say about the underlying ideologies, assumptions, and objectives of imperial powers, shedding light on the broader processes of colonisation and its impacts. It would also highlight the role of imagination in shaping policies, practices, and the physical landscape of colonies, contributing to a more nuanced understanding of historical events and developments.

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<sup>972</sup> Bill Ashcroft, Gareth Griffiths, and Helen Tiffin, *The Empire Writes Back: Theory and Practice in Post-Colonial Literatures* (London: Routledge, 2003).

<sup>973</sup> See, for example, Antoinette Burton, 'Thinking Beyond the Boundaries: Empire, Feminism and the Domains of History', *Social History*, 26, no. 1 (2001): 60–71.

Recognising this significance, it is valuable to conclude with a reflection on Singapore's modern urban landscape in relation to the historical areas considered in this thesis. Pearl's Hill, once the site of Raffles' failed attempt to assert government control over land ownership in Singapore, is one of the few remaining significant hills in the city. After Pearl retired to Europe, the extensive plantation he had established eventually gave way to a series of significant institutions which established the area as one of the most distinguishable regions in Singapore. Between 1844 and 1846, the eastern foot of Pearl's Hill became home to both the Chinese Pauper Hospital (Tan Tok Seng Hospital) examined in Chapter 5 and the Seamen's Hospital, the settlement's fourth general hospital. In 1858, both hospitals were commandeered by the government and military authorities as temporary barracks in response to the 1867 Indian Mutiny. Eventually, both hospitals were relocated, and the hill was retained as military and police barracks for over a century, retaining its general purpose throughout the Second World War and Singaporean Independence. The western slope of the hill, on the other hand, housed the Outram Prison between 1847 and 1968, at which point it was replaced by Outram Park, a residential-cum-shipping complex built by the Housing and Development Board.<sup>974</sup>

Tan Kim Seng's familial house, Panglima Prang, located in the district of Claymore, now the district of Orchard, survived for over a century until the land was sold to a property developer in 1982, and the house was demolished and replaced by the Yong An Park condominium. By its demolition, Panglima Prang was widely believed to have been one of the oldest surviving houses in Singapore and had become a renowned symbol for the country's colonial past. Featured heavily in articles and historical publications for the authenticity of the house's interior decorations, the influence extended beyond its physical presence and embodied the rich tapestry of culture, history and identity that helped define the Straits Chinese community and Singapore's colonial society (fig. 14). Following the house's demolition, senior architects, such as Ta Khen Soon, the President of the Singapore Institute of Architects, reflected that 'it should have been kept as a national monument. Tan Kim

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<sup>974</sup> Ray K. Tyers and Siow Jin Hua, *Ray Tyers' Singapore: Then and Now* (Singapore: Landmark Books, 1993), 184.

Seng was a fusion of Chinese and Malay elements; Strait's culture is the closest thing we can come to a Singapore identity.<sup>975</sup>

#### Extent of Tan Kim Seng's original estate in the 19th century



Figure 14. *Extent of Tan Kim Seng's original estate in the 19<sup>th</sup> century*, Straits Times Graphics, National Heritage Board

This study has sought to promote the re-evaluation and appreciation of the contributions of colonial Singapore's non-European communities by demonstrating the potential depth of such studies through the analysis of the Straits Chinese. Their contributions to trade, politics, and social reforms have left an indelible mark on Singapore's development. The nuances of colonial interactions and the emergence of a distinct Peranakan identity are illuminated, challenging simplified narratives of colonial dominance and passive subjugation. This enriches our understanding of Singapore's history, emphasising the agency of local communities in shaping their

<sup>975</sup> Our Lost Treasures, *The Straits Times*, 1 April 1990.

destiny within the colonial framework. It fosters a greater appreciation for modern Singaporean society's multicultural fabric, highlighting its diversity's historical roots and the ongoing dialogue between tradition and modernity. The issues discussed here open the floor to contemporary discussions on identity, multiculturalism, and national heritage, encouraging a more inclusive approach to celebrating Singapore's history and diverse cultural legacy. Recapturing local agency, the analysis extends to the broader impact of the Straits Chinese community, demonstrating their profound influence on Singapore's urban and social fabric beyond strict racial divisions.

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