

The acquisition of singapore by the british



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The Acquisition of Singapore by the British. The description of the Island of “Pu Luo Chung” is the original and earliest written trace or record of Singapore which was a Chinese account of the 3rd century, probably a paraphrase of the Malay Pulau Ujong, “ island at the end” . The Sejarah Melayu contains a tale of a prince of Srivijaya, Sri Tri Buana , also known as Sang Nila Utama, who landed on the island sometime during the 13th century. Catching sight of a strange creature that he thought was a lion, he decided to found a settlement called Singapura, which means “ Lion City” in Sanskrit.

It is unlikely that there ever were lions in Singapore, though tigers continued to roam the island until the early 20th century. Current excavations in Fort Canning might advocate the use of ancient Singapore as a trading post for transactions between the Phoenicians and the Malay and Chinese.

The Chinese traveller Wang Dayuan, visiting the island around 1330, described a small Malay settlement containing a number of Chinese residents. The island was appearing that a place of safety for pirates preying on passing ships.

The Nagarakretagama, a Javanese epic poem written in 1365, also referred to a settlement on the island, which it called Temasek (“ Sea Town”). During the 1390s, Parameswara, the last Srivijayan prince, fled to Temasek after being deposed by the Majapahit Empire. In spite of the legend from the Sejarah Melayu, the “ Singapura” name possibly dates to this period. Parameswara held the island for a number of years, until further attacks from either the Majapahit or the Ayuthia Kingdom in Siam forced him to move on to Melaka.

Following the turn down of Srivijayan power, Temasek was alternately claimed by the Majapahit and the Siamese. Its ramparts according to the grapevine, allowed it to withstand at least one attempted Siamese invasion. During the 17th century, it briefly regained some importance as a trading centre of the Sultanate of Johor, but eventually sank again into insignificance or obscurity. Between the 16th and 19th centuries, the Malay archipelago was gradually taken over by the European colonial powers, beginning with the arrival of the Portuguese at Malacca in 1509.

The early dominance of the Portuguese was challenged, during the 17th century, by the Dutch, who came to control most of the region's ports. The Dutch established a monopoly over trade within the archipelago, particularly in spices, then the region's most important product. Other colonial powers, including the British, were limited to a relatively minor presence. In 1818, Sir Thomas Stamford Raffles was appointed as the governor of the British colony at Bencoolen.

Raffles believed that the British should find a way to substitute the Dutch as the leading power in the archipelago, since the trade route between China and British India, which had become essentially important with the introduction of the opium trade with China, passed through the archipelago. Furthermore, the Dutch were muggy British trade within the region; the British were outlawed from operating in Dutch-controlled ports, with the exception of Batavia, where unfavourable prices were imposed. Raffles reasoned that the way to challenge the Dutch was to set up a new port in the region.

Existing British ports were not suited to becoming major trading centres. Penang was too far away from the Straits of Malacca, the main ship passageway for the India-China trade, whereas Bencoolen faced the Sunda Straits, a much less important area. Many other possible sites were either controlled by the Dutch, or had other problems. Raffles managed to convince Lord Hastings, the governor-general of India and his superior at the British East India Company, to fund an expedition to set up a new British base in the region. The island of Singapore seemed to be a natural choice.

It lay at the southern tip of the Malay peninsula, near the Straits of Malacca, and possessed an excellent natural harbour, fresh water supplies, and timber for repairing ships. He had initially set his heart on Riau, an island near Singapore, but the Dutch had already beat him to it. In late 1818, Lord Hastings, the British Governor General of India, appointed Lieutenant General Sir Stamford Raffles to set up a trading station at the southern tip of the Malay peninsula. The British were extending their authority over India and their trade with China was growing.

They saw the need for a port of call to “refit, revitalize and protect their merchant fleet” as well as to prevent any advances made by the Dutch in the East Indies. After surveying other nearby islands in 1819, Sir Stamford Raffles and the rest of the British East India Company landed on Singapore, which was to become their strategic trading post along the spice route.

When Raffles arrived, the two sons of its previous sultan, who had died six years earlier, were in dispute over the throne. Raffles backed the claim of the elder brother, Tunku Hussein Mohamed Shah, and proclaimed him sultan.

Offering to support the new sultanate with British military strength, Raffles persuaded him to grant the British a lease allowing them to establish a trading post on the island in return for an annual rent; within a week the negotiations were concluded, a later treaty ceded the island outright to the British. Within three years the fishing village, surrounded by swamps and jungle and populated only by tigers, 200 or so Malays, and a scattering of Chinese, had become a boomtown of 10, 000 immigrants, administered by 74 British employees of the East India Company.

January 1819, a preliminary agreement was entered into with Dato' Temenggong of Johor, the chieftain of the island. February 1819, a formal treaty was concluded between the East India Company and Sultan Husain of Johor together with Dato' Temenggong. By this treaty, the preliminary agreement was ratified and the Company, among other things, agreed to pay the Sultan 5000 Spanish dollars annually as long as they maintained a factory on any part of the Sultan`s inherited dominions.

In 1824, in exchange for a cash buyout, Singapore officially came under the ownership of the British East India Company. A fresh treaty was entered into with the Sultan and the Temenggong whereby the island of Singapore became British`s property. The Company agreed to pay to the Sultan 33 200 Spanish Dollars and remuneration during his natural life of 1 300 Spanish Dollar per month, and to the Dato Temenggong 26 800 Spanish Dollars and monthly remuneration of 700 Spanish Dollars during his natural life.

By 1825, the population had passed the ten thousand mark with a trade volume of \$22 million, in comparison, the trade volume for the long-

established port of Penang was \$8.5 million during the same year. In November 27, 1826 when Singapore and Malacca were united with Penang, forming the Straits Settlements. The Charter was introduced in Malacca as a result of the Anglo-Dutch Treaty 1824 when British took permanent possession of Malacca in 1825. The objective of introducing the Charter was to extend the jurisdiction of the Court of Judicature of Penang to Singapore and Malacca.

The new Court was named as the Court of Judicature of the Prince of Wales Island, Singapore and Malacca. The effect of the Second Charter of Justice was addressed by Sir Benjamin Malkin in Malacca case of *Rodyk v Williamson* where it was stated that the Charter had introduced the law of England as it stood in 1826 so as to supersede Dutch law in Malacca. In this case, a Dutchman passed away and left his property and the issue was whether the Dutch law or the English law should be applied to settle the matter. Thus, the Dutch law was replaced by the Charter.

Later, on August 12, 1855 the third Charter of Justice, the British authority in the Straits Settlements had introduced the Court of Admiralty which composed of two divisions. One of the jurisdictions is over Singapore and Malacca consisting of a Governor or Resident Counselor and Recorder of Singapore. The other having jurisdiction over Penang consisting of a Governor or Resident Counselor and Recorder of Penang. In 1866, the Straits Settlement had ceased to be a part of India because the British had set up a new administration for the Straits Settlement under the Straits Settlements Act.

In 1868, the Court of Judicature of the Prince of Wales Island, Singapore and Malacca was abolished and replaced by the Supreme Court of the Straits Settlements with some further reconstructions. Stamford Raffles loved to learn and he liked to work hard and that brought him his first piece of good luck. In 1805 the British East India Company made him assistant secretary in Penang, and quintupled his salary. One week later Raffles married. She was “ a Madras assistant surgeon’s penniless widow, of Irish and possibly Indian extraction, who was ten years his senior but strikingly beautiful, vivacious, and intelligent. Raffles’ meager schooling had left him with a passion for acquiring knowledge. On the honeymoon voyage he taught himself Malay and embarked on a lifetime study of the history, flora, and fauna of the Malay region. On arrival he was dismayed by the distinct lack of interest in enforcing the rule of law. Despite blinding headaches, Raffles stripped the military commandment of his office, took over as resident and laid down permanent principles for the island city-state . Absolute freedom of trade was declared a permanent principle, not merely a temporary expedient to build up commerce.

Supported by a committee comprising European officials and merchants, with representatives of the various Asian ethnic groups, Raffles drew up a town plan and resettled a large part of the population according to their different communities. He established a magistracy administering English law, with Malay social custom where appropriate for the indigenous people. Prohibiting slave trading, he provided for existing debt slaves to work off their obligations in five years. He banned the carrying of arms, gambling, and cock-fighting outright, and introduced deterrent taxation on alcohol and

opium. Raffles also founded a university (now the University of Singapore) with generous donations and a pledge for annual funding from the East India Company. His ideal was to revive Asian cultures in alliance with the best of Western tradition. Raffles initiated a town plan for central Singapore. The plan included leveling one hill to set up a commercial centre which is today's Shenton Way, and constructing government buildings around Fort Canning.

Raffles, and the first Resident of Singapore, William Farquhar, gradually molded Singapore from a jungle-ridden backwater with poor sanitation and little modern infrastructure to a successful entrepot and colonial outpost. Hospitals, schools and a water supply system were built. Soon, boatloads of immigrants from India and China were coming to Singapore, in search of prosperity and a better life. Sooner or later Singapore became one of the most vital commercial and military centers of the British Empire. The island was the third British acquisition in the Malay Peninsula after Penang, 1786 and Malacca, 1795.

These three British Settlements, which are Singapore, Penang and Malacca became the Straights Settlements in 1826, under the run of British India. By 1832, Singapore became the center of government of the three areas. On 1 April 1867, the Straights Settlements became a Crown Colony and was ruled by a governor under the jurisdiction of the Colonial Office in London. Following years of campaigning by a small minority of the British merchants, who had chafed under the rule of the Calcutta government, the Straits Settlements became a crown colony on April 1, 1867.

Under the crown colony administration, the governor ruled with the support of executive and legislative councils. The Executive Council included the governor, the senior military official in the Straits Settlements, and six other senior officials. The Legislative Council included the members of the Executive Council, the chief justice, and four nonofficial members nominated by the governor. The numbers of nonofficial members and Asian council members gradually increased through the years. Singapore dominated the Legislative Council, to the annoyance of Malacca and Penang.

By the 1870s, Singapore businessmen had extensive interest in the rubber, tin, Gambier, and other products and resources of the Malay Peninsula. Conditions in the peninsula were highly lopsided, however, marked by fighting between immigrants and traditional Malay authorities and rivalry among various Chinese secret societies. Singapore rose out as an entrepot for the resources of the Malay Peninsula and, at the same time, the port of debarkation for thousands of immigrant Chinese, Indians, Indonesians, and Malays bound for the tin mines and rubber plantations to the north.

Some 250,000 Chinese alone disembarked in Singapore in 1912, most of them on their way to the Malay states or to the Dutch East Indies. Even though most Chinese immigrants only passed through Singapore, the Chinese population of the island grew rapidly, from 34,000 in 1878 to 103,000 in 1888. The colonial government established the Chinese Protectorate in 1877 to deal with the serious abuses of the labor trade. William Pickering, the first appointed Protector of Chinese, was the first British official in Singapore who could speak and read Chinese.

Pickering was given power to board incoming ships and did much to protect the newly arrived immigrants. In the early 1880s, he also extended his protection to Chinese women entering the colony by working to end forced prostitution. Because of his sympathetic approach and administrative ability, the protector soon spread his influence and protection over the whole Chinese community, providing intercession of labor, financial, and domestic disagreements, thereby undermining some of the powers of the secret societies.

Although no longer able to engage in illegal immigration practices, the societies continued to cause problems by running illegal gambling houses and supporting large-scale riots that often paralyzed the city. Governor Sir Cecil Clementi-Smith sponsored a law to ban secret societies, which took effect the following year in 1889. The result was to force the societies underground, where many of them degenerated into common lawlessness, engaging in extortion, gambling operations, gang fights, and robbery.

The power of the secret societies, however, was broken. The largest Chinese dialect group in the late nineteenth century were the Hokkien, who were traditionally involved in trade, shipping, banking, and industry. The next largest group, the Teochiu, engaged in agricultural production and processing, including gambier, pepper, and rubber production, rice and lumber milling, pineapple canning, and fish processing. Cantonese served as artisans and laborers and a few made their fortunes in tin. The two smallest groups, the Hakka and Hainanese, were mostly servants, sailors, or unskilled laborers. Because wealth was the key to leadership and social standing within the Chinese community at that time, the Hokkien dominated

organizations such as the Singapore Chinese Chamber of Commerce and supplied most of the Chinese members of the Legislative Council and the Chinese Advisory Board. The latter, established in 1889 to provide a formal link between the British government of the colony and the Chinese community, served as a place to air accusation but had no power.

The well heeled among Singapore's Chinese community increasingly saw their prosperity and fortunes tied to those of the crown colony and the British Empire. Western education, customs, and pastimes were adopted, and the sons of Chinese businessmen were often sent to Britain for university training. The Straits Chinese British Association was formed in 1900 by Baba Chinese leaders to promote loyalty to the British Empire as well as to advance the education and welfare of Singapore's Chinese. Visiting British royalty were warmly received and British causes and victories enthusiastically supported.

The Straits Chinese contributed munificently to the British war effort in World War I. In 1901, Malays had been continuously to be drawn to Singapore from all over the archipelago, reaching a population of 36, 000. Malay traders and merchants lost out in the commercial competition with Chinese and Europeans, and most Malay immigrants became small shopkeepers, religious teachers, policemen, servants, or laborers. The leadership positions in the Malay-Muslim community went to the Jawi-Peranakan, because of their facility in English, and to wealthy Arabs.

In 1876, the first Malay-language newspaper of the region, *Jawi Peranakan*, was published in Singapore. Several other Malay-language journals

supporting religious modification were begun in the early twentieth century, and Singapore became a regional focal point for the Islamic revival movement that swept the Muslim world at that time. An amount of events inauguration in the late nineteenth century strengthened Singapore's position as a major port and industrial center. When the Suez Canal opened, the Strait of Malacca became the preferred route to East Asia.

Steamships began replacing sailing ships, necessitating a chain of coaling stations, including Singapore. Most of the major European steamship companies had established offices in Singapore by the 1880s. The development of colonialism in Southeast Asia and the opening of Thailand to trade under King Chulalongkorn (Rama V) brought even more trade to Singapore. The spread of British influence in Malaya increased the flow of rubber, tin, copra, and sugar through the island port, and Singapore moved into processing and light manufacturing, some of which was located on its offshore islands.

To serve the growing American canning industry a tin smelter was built in 1890 on Pulau Brani (pulau means island). Rubber processing expanded rapidly in response to the demands of the young automobile industry. Oil storage facilities established on Pulau Bukum made it the supply center for the region by 1902. In the early twentieth century, Singapore had expanded its financial institutions, communications, and infrastructure in order to support its booming trade and industry.

British banks predominated, although by 1905 there were Indian, Australian, American, Chinese, and French-owned banks as well. Telegraph service from

India and Europe reached Singapore in 1870, and telephone service within Singapore was installed in 1879 and extended to Johore in 1882. The more than sixty European-owned companies in the Straits Settlements crown colony in the 1870s were largely confined to Singapore and Penang. Far more prosperous were some of the Chinese firms in Singapore that were beginning to expand their business links throughout Asia.

Singapore's port facilities failed to keep up with its commercial development until the publicly owned Tanjong Pagar Dock Board (renamed Singapore Harbour Board in 1913) set about replacing old wharves and warehouses and installing modern machinery and a new graving dock (dry dock). Trucks gradually replaced ox carts for transporting goods from the harbor to the town, and by 1909 it was possible to travel from Singapore to Penang by train and railroad ferry. The Johore Causeway linked road and rail transportation between Singapore and the peninsula after 1923.

At the turn of the century, social advancement lagged far behind economic development in Singapore. While the wealthy enjoyed their social clubs, sports facilities, mansions, and suburban estates, the lower classes endured a grim existence marked by poverty, overcrowding, malnutrition, and disease. Malaria, cholera, and opium addiction were chiefly responsible for Singapore's mortality rate, which in 1896 was higher than that of Hong Kong, Ceylon, or India. A 1907 government commission to investigate the opium problem found that the majority of opium deaths were among the poor, who were reduced to smoking the dregs of used opium. Campaigns by missionaries and European-educated Chinese to ban opium use were successfully opposed by tax farmers and businessmen. By 1900 the opium

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tax provided one-half of the revenue of the colonial government, and both Asian and European businessmen resisted its replacement with an income tax. As an alternative, the government in 1910 took over all manufacture and sale of opium, setting up a factory at Pasir Panjang.

Opium sales continued to constitute half of the government's revenue, but the most dangerous use of the drug had been curtailed. Education was generally in a backward state. Most primary schools in which Malay, Chinese, or Tamil was the medium of instruction were of poor quality. English-language primary schools were mostly run by Christian missionaries, and the only secondary education was provided by Raffles Institution beginning in 1884. In 1902 the government formulated an Education Code, under which it took responsibility for providing English-language primary schools; the following year it took over Raffles Institution.

With the support of the Chinese community, the government opened a medical school in 1905 that had a first class of twenty-three students. Upgraded to the King Edward Medical College in 1920, the school formed the cornerstone of the future Singapore University. The affluent of Singapore sent their children to the English-language schools, which had steadily improved their standards. The brightest students vied for the Queen's Scholarships, founded in 1889, which provided for university education in Britain for Asian students.

Many prosperous Asian families themselves sent their children to school in Britain. An English-language education at either the secondary or university level provided many Asians with the key to government, professional, or

business employment. It also created a bond among the upper classes of all ethnic groups. Under the leadership of reformist Chinese, Singapore's Chinese-language schools were also expanded and modernized at this time. A scientific curriculum was added to the traditional education in Chinese classics and Confucian morality.

Students from Chinese-language schools often continued their education in China, where a school for Nanyang students had been opened in Nanjing in 1907 to prepare them for a role in Singapore's Chinese community. At the turn of the century, schools were even established in Singapore for Chinese women, who before that time had led severely cloistered lives under the domination of their husbands and mothers-in-law. By 1911 Chinese women were receiving instruction in Malay, English, Chinese, music, sewing, and cooking.

Malay and Tamil-language primary schools continued to decline, and few students were able to progress from them to the English-language secondary level. Responsibility for Singapore's defense had been a contentious issue between London and Singapore almost since its founding. The Singapore merchants resisted any attempts to levy taxes for fortifications and even objected to paying the cost of maintaining a small garrison on this island. In 1886 troubles with Russia over Afghanistan and worry over the Russian navy in the Pacific, prompted the British to begin fortifying the port area and building new barracks and other military facilities.

The Singapore business community resisted strenuously London's proposal to double the colony's annual military contribution, insisting that the island

was a critical link in the imperial chain. The colony, nonetheless, was required to pay a larger sum although slightly less than originally demanded. The British signed a defensive treaty with Japan in 1902. The Japanese defeat of the Russian navy in 1905 removed that threat to Britain's seapower in Asia, thus enabling Britain to concentrate its navy in its home waters in response to a German naval buildup.

Singapore basically sat out World War I. Terror that the island would be attacked by German; East Asiatic Squadron never materialized. Singapore's German business community, nonetheless, was rounded up and interned comfortably at their Teutonia Club. The only incident of the war period was the mutiny of Singapore's small garrison, the 800 troops of the Fifth Light Infantry Regiment. The regiment, composed entirely of Punjabi Muslims, was angered that Britain was at war with Muslim Turkey.

When the regiment was ordered to Hong Kong in February 1915, rumors spread through the unit that they were actually being sent to fight in France or Turkey. On the eve of its departure, the regiment mutinied, killed the officers, and terrorized the town. Within ten days the rebellion had been put down by a combined force of the Singapore Volunteer Artillery (a unit of 450 volunteers formed in 1914), police, Malay troops from Johore, the crews of British, French, Japanese, and Russian warships in port, and several hundred civilians.

After the mutineers were rounded up, thirty-six were shot in public executions and the others were imprisoned or sent on active duty elsewhere. Subsequently, hard feelings were created in Singapore's Indian community

by a requirement that its members register with the government. A small British detachment was brought in to garrison the post for the rest of the war, with the aid of the Singapore Volunteer Artillery.