

# Colonialism: A Case Study of British Malaya

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## British Presence in Malaya (Pre 1870)

- British East India Company sought to establish trading bases through signing treaties in the region
  - ◆ To protect trade between China and India
  - ◆ Allowed traders to resupply and repair their ships
    - Wait for favorable winds to continue their journey
  - ◆ Buy Local products and sell European goods

### Penang

- British East India set up a trading port in Penang in 1786
  - ◆ Given to them by the Sultan of Kedah
  - ◆ British in turn gave protection against Siam (Thailand)
  - ◆ Accepted the offer to safeguard and protect their commerce from piracy

### Straits Settlements

- Formed in 1826
  - ◆ Made up of Melaka, Penang and Singapore
  - ◆ Ruled by a British Governor to cut costs and better promote trade

### Conclusion

- Early British presence in Malaya was rather limited
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# British Presence in Malaya (Post 1870)

## Historical Conditions

### Economic Opportunities for British Trade

Context: Industrial Revolution

- Production of machine manufactured goods in the late 19th century
  - ◆ Continuous supply of raw material needed
  - ◆ Tin was too expensive to produce
- Large tin deposits were discovered in some Malay States
  - ◆ Supply was threatened by disorder in the tin-mining areas
  - ◆ The British felt they had to intervene in local politics to protect their interests

Context: Opening of the Suez Canal in 1869

- Travelling time between Britain and Malaya from 4 months to 6 weeks
- Increased trade between South East Asia and the World
  - ◆ Encouraged European Expansion overseas
- With the increased trade in South East Asia, the British needed to find new bases in the region to protect British shipping and fight piracy along the waterways

### Competition from other European Powers

Context: The Long Depression (1873–1896)

- Caused Britain to lose dominance in the world economy to newly industrialised countries
  - ◆ Sought to maintain its dominance by seizing more territories to protect existing trade links
- However, other European powers were also keen in extending their political influence and trade (French, Dutch)

How would such a situation prompt the British to react?

- Britain's reaction was governed by fear
  - ◆ If they did not intervene in the Malay States, other European countries may secure a firm footing there and threaten economic interests

- ◆ If they failed to respond to requests by Local Malay rulers to resolve local disputes, they may turn to other European powers for help

#### Context: Change in British Colonial Policy

- Prior to 1873
  - ◆ The Government believed in free trade
  - ◆ Disinterested in Overseas Possessions due to costs in Administration
- After 1873
  - ◆ New Government aimed to boost Britain's prestige through colonialism and to pre-empt any possible threat from other powers

#### Developments in Local Circumstances

##### Succession Disputes

- Succession Disputes were common to break out in Malay States as when a King died, the eldest son did not automatically become the next king
  - ◆ This was brought about by how the rulers often had many wives, and sons of rival wives would compete for the throne
- The rotation process in Perak further complicated the process by allowing for heirs to the throne to be rotated amongst the descendants of the 3 royal families
  - ◆ The successor had to move through a series of appointments before becoming the Sultan
- The different appointments were
  - ◆ Raja di Hillir (1st One, also known as the Ruler of the Downstream Region)
  - ◆ Raja Bendahara (2nd One, also known as a chief minister)
  - ◆ Raja Muda (3rd one, also known as a Crown Prince)
- The rationale of the rotation system
  - ◆ Ensure that sons from each of the 3 royal families could become Sultans successively
  - ◆ Ensure that only men with administrative experience came to the throne
- In 1871, Sultan Ali died
  - ◆ Naturally, you would expect the Raja Muda (who at the time was Raja Muda) to take over

- However, Malay Custom required the next sultan to be at the funeral to receive the royal regalia and acknowledgements
  - ◆ Raja Abdullah feared travelling through Raja Yusuf's territory and did not go to the funeral
    - He lost claim to the throne
- Thus, Raja Ismail eventually became Sultan of Perak
  - ◆ Resulted in him being challenged by both Raja Abdullah and Yusuf

#### Larut Wars

- Discovery of Large tin deposits in Larut in the 1840s, which gave job opportunities
- Large inflow of Chinese Labourers from Penang and South China into Larut, Perak
- However, frequent clashes occurred between two groups of Chinese Miners in Larut in the 1840s
  - ◆ Secret societies often fought for control over existing and discovered mining plots and waterways as there was no clear boundary of who owned what
- The two main groups were
  - ◆ Ghee Hins
    - Cantonese
    - Mainly controlled mines around Kamunting
  - ◆ Hai Sans
    - Hakkas
    - Mainly controlled mines around Taiping

#### First Larut War (1861)

- Hai Sans cut off a water supply to a new mine discovered by the Ghee Hins
- Ghee Hins were defeated, fled to Penang to ask the British Governor for help
  - ◆ The Governor intervened and Ngah Ibrahim agreed to compensate the Ghee Hins

#### Second Larut War (1865)

- Hai Sans were STILL angry with the British for supporting the Ghee Hins (yes its been 4 years)
  - ◆ Hai Sans attacked the Ghee Hins

- Ghee Hins lost and fled to Penang
  - ◆ Governor refused to help
- Fighting spread to Penang, resulting in the Penang Riots of 1867
- A settlement was reached after the British fined everyone 5000 Spanish Dollars

#### Third Larut War (1872)

- Scandal between a Ghee Hin Leader and wife of the Hai San leader
  - ◆ But it was just an excuse to fight
- Hai Sans driven out because the Ghee Hins hired professional fighters
  - ◆ Governor refused to take action
- Hai Sans reattacked the Ghee Hins

#### Fourth Larut War (1873)

- Raja Abdullah wanted the help of the Ghee Hins
  - ◆ Promised to give them back the mines and pay for the war against the Hai Sans
- Major Civil War broke out in Larut Area in 1873

#### Pangkor Treaty

- In view of the civil war in Perak in 1873, local businessmen appealed to the British to intervene and restore law and order in the Malay States
  - ◆ Culminated in the signing of the Pangkor Treaty on 20 Jan 1874
- British recognised Raja Abdullah as Sultan of Perak
  - ◆ Raja Ismail offered a title and Pension
- Introduced a British Resident based in Perak
  - ◆ British Resident to "advise" the Sultan on
    - Collection of Revenue
    - General Administration of Perak

#### Residential System in Perak

- Pangkor Treaty opened the door for British indirect rule in Perak through the appointment of a resident and the creation of the Residential System
  - ◆ First Resident of Perak – James W. W. Birch

## Duties and Challenges of the Resident

- Maintain Justice and Order
  - ◆ However, no specific guidelines were given
- Collect state revenue and control how it was spent
  - ◆ No Police force or army at his disposal to enforce orders
- Administer the state by advising the Sultan on matters relating to law and order, economic development, etc
  - ◆ Had no formal authority to run the state
  - ◆ Faced difficulty in getting the Sultan and his chiefs to change their ways and learn new ways of governing
- Note: Sultan remained ruler of the state
  - ◆ Still in charge of matters relating to Malay Customs, tradition and religion
  - ◆ Center of state occasions and ceremonies
- Healthy relations with Sultan and Malay Chiefs were needed for the system to work

## Murder of Birch

- On 2 Nov 1875, after arriving in Pasir Salak for a tour of the state, Birch was speared to death by a Malay Chief Maharaja Lela (SO FUN)

## Reasons of Murder

- Policies he tried to implement
    - ◆ Removing Malay ruling powers to collect taxes
    - ◆ Banning of Debt Slavery
    - ◆ Introduced a Code of Civil and Criminal Law
  - Personal Weakness
    - ◆ Cannot speak Malay
    - ◆ Did not understand Malay customs and practices
    - ◆ Complacent
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# Transformation of Malaya after British Intervention in 1874

## Political

### Stabilization of Malay Rule

- Established the Perak State Council
  - ◆ Comprised:
    - Sultan as the President
    - Resident & Assistant Resident
    - 2 Malay chiefs
    - 2 Chinese and British representatives
  - ◆ Discussed all matters relating to the states development → gave the Sultan and his chiefs a say in the governing of the state
- Formation of Courts of Justice
  - ◆ European magistrates assisted by Malay magistrates
- Divided Perak into districts, which was further subdivided into villages with their own headmen
  - ◆ Village headmen – kept the peace, settled minor disputes, reported accidents & helped to collect taxes on land & other revenue
- Duty of revenue collection was given to the Resident & his assistants
  - ◆ Supported by the Sultan & his chiefs as they were given due compensation
- Passed laws to regulate land use and register land titles
  - ◆ Through the sale of land & collection of taxes, state revenue increased.
- Worked closely with Raja Yusuf and Raja Idris to restore peace and order

### Ending of Debt Slavery

- Low took steps to abolish debt slavery, such as compensating slave owners for the loss of their slaves.
- Debt slavery officially abolished in 1884

### Establishment of Federated Malay States (FMS)

- Formed in 1896
- Comprised Perak, Selangor, Negeri Sembilan & Pahang
- Residents to report to a Resident-General based in KL (first to be appointed

was Frank Swettenham)

→ Result:

- ◆ Further reduced the Sultans' involvement in the administration of their states due to:
  - Centralisation of power under the Federal Government & in the hands of the Resident-General
  - Malay Sultans and chiefs were left to look after matters concerning Malay customs & religion
- ◆ Detrimental to the traditional power of the Sultans and Malay chiefs
- ◆ Beneficial to the British as it strengthened their grip/ power over Malaya

### Consolidation of British control in the Unfederated Malay States

- Britain and Siam signed the Bangkok Treaty in 1909
    - Siam transferred all its rights in the northern Malay states to the British
    - Britain took on the debts of the 4 northern Malay states
      - Gave Siam a 4 million pound loan to construct railways
    - Sultans could no longer grant economic concessions as they wished to other European powers
  - British Advisor was appointed in 1914 and took over the control of all state matters in Johor from the Temenggong (except those relating to Malay religion & customs)
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## Economic

### Reversal of Perak's debt situation

- Hugh Low settled the state's debt of 800,000 Straits dollars in 6 years
- By 1889, the state had an annual revenue of \$2 million & a surplus balance
- Revenue enabled Low to carry out reforms during his residency

### Economic Growth of Malaya

- Flourishing of the tin industry
  - ◆ Result of better tin-mining methods + encouragement of foreign investment
  - ◆ Low had used his friendship with a prominent Chinese leader to



influence Chinese miners in Perak to use modern British mining equipment

- ◆ Large tin mining companies were in the hands of wealthy European businessmen by 1898
  - Could purchase the latest & most sophisticated equipment (e.g. tin dredges)
  - Aided by political stability & higher regulatory standards of the FMS + Chinese labour
- ◆ FMS became the world's largest producer of tin by 1900
  - Tin exports rose from 26,000 tonnes in 1889 to 70,000 tonnes in 1929

→ Flourishing rubber industry

- ◆ Funded by European businessmen who:
  - Invested in large plantation estates
  - Introduced more modern production methods
- ◆ Rubber became more important than tin, was Malaya's most profitable export
  - Size of rubber estates in Malaya grew from 345 acres in 1897 to 50,000 acres in 1905

Change in the Nature of Malaya's economy

→ From a Subsistence-Based Economy to an Export-Oriented Economy

- ◆ People initially just consumed what they grew
  - No large-scale plantations producing crops for export
- ◆ Under British rule:
  - Supplied cash crops & raw materials overseas
  - People depended on wages which were linked to the prices of goods they exported

Development of infrastructure

→ New roads, bridges & railways were built to connect the tin mines and rubber plantations

- ◆ 1885: 1st railway line was opened → allowed trains to operate between towns & plantations
- ◆ Formation of the FMS → allowed for better coordination of railway lines
- ◆ By 1896: 4 railway lines in operation → supported the tin & rubber

industries

- ◆ Created jobs and lead to rapid growth of towns

### Standardisation of currencies

- British established the Currency Board in 1899 to standardise & regulate the currencies used in Malaya
    - ◆ Only the Currency Board could issue notes
    - ◆ Started issuing Straits dollar notes
  - Straits Dollar made the only legal currency in the Straits Settlements in 1904
    - ◆ Adopted in Malay states controlled by the British
  - Made trade easier
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## Social

### Growth of Plural Societies & Townships

- Change in Malaya's ethnic composition as a result of the migration policy
  - ◆ Little restrictions to the number of people entering Malaya to work, trade & live
- Beginnings of a plural society were laid down
  - ◆ More female immigrants were allowed
  - ◆ Migrants began forming families in Malaya
    - Participation in society became more evident from the 1920s and 1930s onwards

### Improvement in Health Conditions

- British officials brought knowledge of Western medicine
- Wealth from the tin-mining & rubber industries funded research into diseases
- Late 19th century: Sanitary Boards were set up
  - ◆ Laid down regulations regarding:
    - Drainage
    - Cleanliness of food
    - Design of building ventilation
    - Disposal of waste
- Colonial government built hospitals in towns (mostly along the west coast) to

support earlier hospitals established by charitable or missionary organisations

- ◆ However, health conditions in the Northern & Eastern parts of the Peninsula remained in poor condition

#### Increased availability of Western education

- Government ran a few English schools to develop a group of English-educated locals who could meet the demand for English-speaking clerks in the British administration
    - ◆ Became the avenue to secure government & commercial employment
    - ◆ Those who attended these schools could go beyond primary education & some had the opportunity to study overseas
      - Creation of an elite group of Western-educated young people who had ideas & aspirations that were different from those of their peers
  - Western education was usually available only to the wealthy or Malay aristocrats who served in administrative positions, as well as children of wealthy members of the Chinese & Indian communities
    - ◆ Gave opportunities for children of different races to intermingle
  - Opportunities to take on professions such as law & medicine also opened to young people of all ethnic groups
  - Provided a system of free, compulsory education for the Malays
    - ◆ However, education for them did not go beyond the primary level
    - ◆ Syllabuses leaned towards agriculture & the rural way of life
      - Did not prepare the Malays for a life in modern society
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#### Impact of British Intervention

- Uneven across Malaya and Varied amongst the different communities
  - Colonialism may not necessarily be harmful
    - ◆ (IF) colonial masters are willing to respect locals and their traditions
    - ◆ Establish Mutually Beneficial relationships with their subjects
    - ◆ Introduce Developments that improve locals' lives in the long run
      - Over focusing on Economic Profits
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# Local Responses to British Rule

## Cooperation and a Lack of Resistance

- Other than the Perak War, when the Residential System was introduced, the relationship between British and Malay rulers was largely peaceful

### Malay Sultans

- Benefitted from British Policies
- Symbolic Prestige was preserved
- Secured positions against enemies
- Enjoyed sufficient compensation and generous incomes
- British maintained good relations with them
  - ◆ Respected the local way of life and could speak Malay

### Members of the Aristocracy

- Served in the colonial administration, could maintain their authority and means of wealth

### Malays in Rural Areas

- Ruled by Malay Chiefs and Village Headmen
  - ◆ Little contact with the British
- British policies helped to preserve the traditional way of life

### Chinese

- Generally not concerned with political developments in Malaya
- Labourers cooperated as it was their means of securing a living
- Preservation of businesses and jobs
- Prominent and Wealthy Chinese formed close relationships with the British

### Indians

- More concerned with events in India
- Benefitted from Law and Order brought about by British Rule

## Beginnings of Nationalism in Malaya

- Pre war Nationalism in Malaya was Mild, Weak, and nearly non existent

