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East India Company Strategies in the Development of Singapore

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Abstract

Singapore in the Malay Peninsula was targeted by the British East India Company (EIC) to be the epicentre of their direct rule in Southeast Asia. Seeking new sources of revenue at the end of the 18th century, after attaining domination in India, the Company sought to extend its reach into China, and Malaya was the natural region to do this, extending outposts to Penang and Singapore. The latter was first identified as a key site by Stamford Raffles. The EIC Governor General Marquess Hastings (r. 1813-1823) planned to facilitate Raffle's attention on the Malay Peninsula from Sumatra. Raffles' plan for Singapore was approved by the EIC's Bengal Government. The modern system of administration came into the Straits Settlements under the EIC's Bengal Presidency. In 1819 in Singapore, Raffles established an Anglo-Oriental College (AOC) for the study of Eastern languages, literature, history, and science. The AOC was intended firstly to be the centre of local research and secondly to increase inter-cultural knowledge of the East and West. Besides Raffles' efforts, the EIC developed political and socio-economic systems for Singapore. The most important aspects of the social development of Singapore were proper accommodation for migrants, poverty eradication, health care, a new system of education, and women's rights. The free trade introduced by Francis Light (and later Stamford Raffles) in Penang and Singapore respectively gave enormous opportunities for approved merchants to expand their commerce from Burma to Australia and from Java to China. Before the termination of the China trade in 1833 Singapore developed tremendously, and cemented the role of the European trading paradigm in the East.

Keywords

Bengal Presidency, British East India Company, Malay Peninsula, Marquess Hastings, Singapore, Stamford Raffles

1. Introduction

The EIC was among the gang of European trading companies who arrived in the East to seek riches in the Indies. The EIC came to focus on direct control (aside from widespread trading activities) initially on Bengal, then on the rest of the Indian Subcontinent, and subsequently China and Southeast Asia. In the 18th century, the Dutch hub of Malacca was a potential threat to the EIC hegemony in Malaya, while in India the EIC had three presidencies in Calcutta, Bombay, and Madras, from which it could expand its trading network. The most important presidency town was Calcutta (Bengal), from which the EIC made its firm foundation in the eastern world. It was this presidency which was instrumental in extending the Company's reach to Penang. Raffles took the opportunity to make a secret plan with the heir of Sultan Mahmud Shah III (r. 1761-1812) of Johor Lingga, namely Hussein, who the Company favoured over the elder son, Abdul Rahman (Note 1). Raffles recognised Hussein as the rightful ruler of Johor and in February 1819 signed a formal agreement with Sultan Hussein Mohammad Shah (r. 1819-1835), and with the Temenggong. This increased influence over the local Malay courts was contemporaneous with the consolidation of spheres of British and Dutch authority in Southeast Asia, signified in the Anglo-Dutch Treaty (1824) (Note 2). The EIC subsequently controlled Penang, Singapore, and Malacca directly as the Straits Settlements. Singapore grew rapidly as Europeans, Malays, Chinese, Indians, and Arabs thronged to enjoy the Company's privileged trading facilities there (Note 3). Consequently, in 1832 Singapore replaced Penang as the new capital of the Straits Settlements, and Singapore continued to grow rapidly as the EIC's hub, and subsequently as a British naval and air base.

2. Description of the EIC

The EIC, founded in 1600 (Note 4), gained hegemony in Bengal during the early 18th century, with its power centred in its presidency towns of namely Calcutta, Bombay, and Madras. The growing scale and success of the EIC was mainly due to its monopoly on tea, cotton and opium trading. The EIC had many advantages in Bengal and accrued astonishing riches in its usurpation of native governance. In 1698 they established Calcutta, building Fort William there in 1700 to safeguard the city (Note 5). The EIC got the Mughal status of *Dastak*, rendering them exempt from their ships and cargoes being stopped, searched, or taxed, subject to a minimal annual tribute of Rs 3,000, as adumbrated in Farrukhsiyar's *farman* of 1717. The principal articles of trade of the Company in Bengal during this period were silk, cotton, saltpetre, and sugar (Note 6). Each presidency functioned by itself, but was answerable to the Court of Directors in London (Note 7).

Because of the privileges enjoyed by the EIC, it grew aggressively. This caused animosity and a number of battles rose against the EIC. Nonetheless, it defeated all the local and European enemies. Among the battles, the most important battles in Bengal won by the EIC were the Plassey (1757) and Buxar (1764), led by Robert Clive (Note 8). These battles helped the EIC to conquest of Bengal, which was a turning point for the EIC. In 1765, the Company obtained from the Mughal Emperor a Charter,

making the Company the *Diwan* or administer of the *Subah* of Bengal. By this time the EIC sought to accrue absolute power, seeking to control the land, revenue, economy, and people of the EIC. In addition, the EIC was also interested in eastern knowledge, thus they translated all Indian subjects into English. In terms of military strength, its new scheme created staunch political power that led to the total collapse of the Mughal Empire. Thus the EIC had progressed from a trading company to a political power (Note 9).

After that triumph the EIC's main aim was to extend its trade and influence to China, which included the intermediary realm of the Malay Peninsula. Skilfully, the EIC got opportunities from Francis Light and the Sultan of Kedah for this purpose. Like Bengal (Calcutta), Bombay and Madras, in 1805 the EIC made Penang a presidency town. Fort William was the heart of the EIC's eastern Presidency, from which all the correspondence and the system of governance were formed. Although the British gained power, under the EIC's growth in Bengal, numerous wars were fought against the EIC, i.e., the Anglo-Mysore Wars (the First 1767-69, the Second 1780-84, the Third 1790-92, and the Fourth 1799), and the Anglo-Maratha Wars (the First 1775-82, the Second 1803-1805, and the Third 1816-1819). These wars were ruinous for the people of Bengal and the whole of India. At the same time, the EIC maintained its international trade, including with China, and its key position in Penang was essential in mitigating disruptions occurring in its Indian heartland. From this time onwards, the EIC looked for a suitable place in the Malay Peninsula besides Penang. In this time Raffles emerged and chose Singapore (Note 10).

3. Stamford Raffles' Contribution

At the age of fourteen, Raffles joined the EIC as a low-ranking clerk. He was posted from London to the new Penang Presidency in 1805. He had acquired a sound knowledge of the Peninsula, its language, and the way of life of its people, and he worked wholeheartedly on behalf of the EIC (Note 11). As a result, he gained rapid promotion in the service and was appointed Lieutenant Governor of Java during the British Occupation (1811-1816) by Lord Minto (Note 12). He was thwarted in his assiduous efforts to promote British colonialism in Java by the agreements of the Peace Treaty of Vienna of 1815, which restored Dutch rule (Note 13). From Java, Raffles was transferred as Lieutenant Governor of the isolated British settlement of Bencoolen or Fort Marlborough. From there in the beginning of the 19th century, he observed the independent states of Perak, Terengganu, Selangor, Negeri Sembilan, and Sumatran states. Their rulers maintained nominal allegiance to the Sultan of Johor Lingga (also known as the Johor-Riau-Lingga Archipelago). Sultan Mahmud Shah III (r. 1761-1812) of Johor Lingga died in 1812. After a long and troubled reign, he had maintained the power and prestige of the Johor Sultanate and enjoyed the respect and homage of the subordinate chiefs; however, he had little control over revenue or administration outside of his own small domain. He left two sons, namely the elder Abdul Rahman and the younger Hussein (Note 14).

The Dutch took control of Riau and acknowledged Abdul Rahman (r. 1812-1819) as the Sultan. Riau was an important native port in the Riau-Lingga Archipelago, which was the principal station of the Arab and Bugis traders, not far from Singapore. Raffles formally approached Sultan Abdul Rahman to approve his arrangements in Singapore, but realised that the Sultan's Dutch advisors would refuse any such proposal. In order to give a cloak of legality his action decided to negotiate with Hussein as the rightful Sultan (Note 15). The Governor General Marquis Hastings's (r. 1813-1823) observed Raffle's attention on the Malay Peninsula from Sumatra, and Raffles had insisted on assuming the control of Malacca Straits by means of a station in Johor, for the benefit of the EIC's commerce (Note 16).

Raffles took the opportunity to make a secret plan with Hussein to come to Singapore (Note 17). He recognised Hussein as the rightful ruler of Johor and in February 1819 signed a formal agreement with Sultan Hussein Mohammad Shah (r. 1819-1835), and with the Temenggong. Under this agreement, the Sultan and Temenggong permitted the EIC to establish a post in Singapore with a payment of 33,200 Spanish dollars, together with a yearly stipend of 15,600 Spanish dollars to Hussein, and 26,000 Spanish dollars together with a yearly stipend of 8,400 Spanish dollars to the Temenggong (Note 18). Singapore was at first placed under the control of Bencoolen or Fort Marlborough, of which Raffles was Governor (Note 19). Raffles saw the potential for a similar port that was more strategically located in Singapore (Note 20), and the EIC dispatched Raffles to secure British interests in Malaya for the progress of the China trade (Note 21). During this time the opium trade was prosperous in China and Southeast Asia. Table 1 shows the exponential expansion of opium exports to China and Southeast Asia during the period 1819-1822 (Note 22).

Table 1. Opium exports to China, Java, and Penang, 1819-1822

	1819 (S.R)	**1820 (S.R)**	**1821 (S.R)**	**1822 (S.R)**
China	34,98,188	85,85,311	67,87,154	1,09,61,651
Java	15,08,739	17,22,249	11,54,630	15,70,225
Penang	6,77,352	15,19,652	9,58,461	14,54,682

Raffles' plan for Singapore was approved by the Government of Bengal (Note 23). However, the Dutch influence in Southeast Asia remained formidable, and to realise their ambitions—which were ultimately based on China rather than the immediate Southeast Asian area of primary concern to the Dutch – the EIC began planning for what ultimately became the Anglo-Dutch Treaty (1824) (Note 24). This treaty divided the region into spheres of British and Dutch influence, corresponding to modern Malaya and Indonesia. This Treaty helped both of them to concentrate on their own trade and territories, and to cooperate to suppress piracy (Note 25). The three Straits Settlements (Penang, Singapore, and Malacca) were formed under the Governor General of Bengal, Marquis Hastings (1813-1823),

formalised as such in 1826. From 1826 to 1830 Penang became prosperous as the capital of the Straits Settlements (Note 26). In the meantime, Singapore grew rapidly as Europeans, Malays, Chinese, Indians, and Arabs lived and worked there for trading purposes (Note 27). In 1832 Singapore replaced Penang and became the new capital of the Straits Settlements. From this time onwards Singapore grew rapidly as the hub of EIC commercial and political activities in the region.

4. Political Developments

Singapore town was planned by the EIC and Raffles became its first Resident. Singapore River was the heart of the town. The East bank, the "Mayfair of Singapore", was reserved for the government and European community, while the West bank was the commercial centre, based around Commercial Square (modern Raffles Place), with the merchants' warehouses backing from the square on to the sea. In the early days, the leading European merchants had their houses along the sea front, on Beach Road, in the Eastern part of the town. The houses for the Arabs and the Bugis communities were also planned near the mosque and the Sultan's complex. Daily monitoring of the Singapore River tides was also carried out in detail. The purpose was to ensure ships could harbour in the Port safely. This was important because Singapore was intended to be a hub for local and intercontinental trade.

In 1858, following the dissolution of the Company, Captain Collier, a Madras Engineer, arrived to draw up plans for military works, including a citadel. The Governor Blundell at first welcomed the appointment, hoping that Captain Collier would create efficient public works departments. In Penang, Captain Collier merely suggested repairing Fort Cornwallis. In Malacca he warned it would cost about Rs. 75,000 to make the town defensible against an internal uprising or external attack, and the Governor Blundell (r. 1855-1859) considered this expense would not be justified in a place without trade or harbour, which no one would be likely to attack. The Military Command in Calcutta supported his view, particularly as Singapore was a healthy station for European troops and increasing in importance as a port and a link in the chain of communications with China and Australia. Following the decisive defeat of Napoleon at the Battle of Waterloo (1815) by Lord Wellesley (formerly an officer in the Indian Army), there were no major European conflicts for Britain until the Crimean War (1853-1856). During the Second Opium War (1856-1860) the British and French were allies, and French imperialism in Cochin China was symbiotic with British imperialism.

European imperialism was secure, and British naval hegemony meant there was no realistic threat to Britain's global colonies, and the Singapore merchant community dwelt in general tranquillity (Note 28). However, intermittent and sporadic rebellions against European colonialism continued into the 20th century, including the Acehnese resistance to the Dutch. In Malaya, the British North Borneo Company was formed in 1881 as an anachronistic new Indies company, and it struggled to contain native resistance with the assistance of Indian colonial troops. The Straits Settlements themselves were transferred to Crown authority from the Bengal Presidency, but this process was not entirely smooth. In May 1861 the Secretary of State for India ordered a stop to all military construction work in Singapore

until the transfer question was settled. However, the naval and military commanders all bore witness to the excellence of the harbour of Singapore, and it remains one of the greatest ports in the world to this day (Note 29). Besides development of Singapore, the EIC also concentrated on efforts to eradicate piracy in the surrounding sea lanes.

5. Social Developments

Fear of poverty was common for all the migrants who came to the Straits Settlements, particularly in Singapore. They comprised a diverse mixture of people who settled in this new place, including imported labourers from southern India and China and sailors from Europe. As with all port cities it was associated with various "social ills", including bohemian opium dens and associated gang activities. Poverty was common due to social instability, corruption, high mortality largely associated with epidemics, drug addiction, slavery, and natural disasters like earthquakes, cyclones, floods, etc., in Singapore itself and the surrounding lands; Singapore became a major destination of economic migration. Poverty eradication became increasingly important in British colonial governance, and a key indicator of Britain's "civilizing mission". The average life expectancy was below 38, and few people lived over 50 years. When the Straits Settlements was created, various people came and wanted to develop the Straits but many did not live long because of illness. For example, Francis Light and Stamford Raffles were both affected by tropical diseases and died relatively young. The common diseases of the Straits were dysentery, typhus, typhoid, malaria, cholera, pauper, lepers, jungle fever and smallpox. The hot wet climate all year round, marsh and swamp, rotting vegetation, filth, and stench affected public health and caused the proliferation of diseases; this was a universal system of major metropolises, including London and other European capitals (Note 30).

The port of Singapore was a planned development and for a few years it was pollution free. John Crawford (the second British Resident in Singapore) wrote in 1828 claiming that no-one had fallen victim to fever since Singapore was founded. The town remained fever free, but in the 1840s, when Europeans began moving to live on the outskirts of town, and convicts were sent to labour in swamp drainage and road construction, many cases of intermittent fever were reported. Attempts to grow rice in Singapore's plains to the east had to be abandoned because farmers fell sick with fever. This area was originally inhabited mainly by Bugis, but nearly all of them died of fever; by 1848 only two Bugis households survived. For a few years the Government kept a signal station on the island, but was forced to abandon it since most of the men died. This anomaly aroused the curiosity of doctors and sparked off an international controversy about the origin of fever, particularly malaria (Note 31). It was commonly assumed that the revolting stench of sulphured hydrogen was a major cause of malaria, as per the miasma theory of the time (later in the 19th century it came to be accepted that infected water was the main source of most urban illnesses at the time, and not pestilent air) (Note 32).

Pauperism was common in the Straits Settlements and many people suffered from it. In 1844 the wealthy merchants Tan Tock Seng contributed $7,000 to build a hospital for diseased paupers, but

while the hospital was under construction the situation became desperate (Note 33). Leprosy was another fatal disease, and there was no permanent leprosy hospital in Singapore. The EIC was reluctant to pass extraordinary legislation to empower the Straits' authorities to seize and seclude lepers when they had no intention of passing such legislation for India as a whole. The Singapore government could only make minor improvements in the new House of Correction, and in 1861-1862 a separate shed was built for twenty inmates of Tan Tock Seng's hospital who were suffering from advanced leprosy. Without a leper colony and legal powers to isolate patients in it, little could be done to rid Singapore of this scourge, which was on the increase in the last years under the Bengal Presidency (Note 34).

The worst scourge was cholera, which was endemic in the Straits towns, and there were frequently serious outbreaks. Cholera was widespread in Province Wellesley all the time, and infected George Town nearly every year. In Singapore outbreaks were somewhat less frequent, but on occasions were severe (Note 35). Up to 300 people died in an outbreak which persisted in Singapore from 1841 to 1843, and over 200 in another epidemic in the early months of 1851. The disease took a heavy toll of deaths in 1852 and 1853. Normally it was confined to the overcrowded slums of Singapore, but in 1858 it swept through the Seamen's Hospital and produced a scare among the well-to-do. In 1861-1862 over a third of the patients in the Singapore Lunatic Asylum fell ill with cholera, of whom twelve died. In 1873 more than a hundred people died of cholera in Singapore in one month (Note 36).

6. Modern Education in Singapore

In Singapore, Raffles first dreamed of resurrecting an old indigenous civilization and revitalising it through the spread of British influence and the benefits of Western economic progress and education:

> "Of my plan for a college at Singapore, I feel no doubt you will approve generally. The success of the undertaking will depend on the estimate I have formed of the character of the people. The result of my visit to Bengal has been a more intimate connection with that government, and a strong recommendation home from them in favour of all my plans, whether at Bencoolen, Singapore, or Penang, or of the whole collectively". (Note 37).

In 1819 Raffles established the Malay College, as English was the obvious choice as the lingua franca of Singapore's diverse population. As the Malay Peninsula was developed based on commerce and not by conquest, he was anxious to avoid an abnegation of responsibility for the Company's subjects, which was an increasing source of criticism of the Company in India, and he envisioned education for all citizens:

> "Commerce or finance is dangerous if not properly controlled. If money is properly used behind education, people can avoid corruption. His idea was to improve the standard of education in the native languages and to provide some additional institution in English and Western science to those who seemed best able to profit by it." (Note 38).

The Singapore Institution was founded in 1823, where he put forward his ideas for the political, economic, and cultural future of Southeast Asia (Note 39). He saw the proposed Institution as a means of instructing the Company's officials about the background against which they worked, educating the sons of native chiefs, and creating a class of Asian teachers and government servants. He anticipated a great demand for education from all over Southeast Asia (Note 40). In 1835 a public meeting was called with a view to reviving the Singapore Institution. In 1838 the school was divided into an upper school, in which English was the medium of instruction, and a lower school in which boys studied partly in English and partly in their own vernacular languages, particularly among the Malays. Since appeals to the rulers in neighbouring states to send their sons and their chiefs' sons to the Institution produced no pupils, the Committee invited all the influential Malays in Singapore to attend a meeting in 1838 to support an appeal for Malays to send their sons to the school. Five hundred copies of the appeal were printed, some for distribution in Singapore and others to be sent to Sumatra, Celebes, Java, and the Malay States. In 1843 the Straits authorities opened the Department of Chinese, Tamil and Bugis Studies, but they were unsuccessful. The Institution could not provide much history of the past; their curriculum was mainly Eurocentric, teaching the history of Greece, Rome, and the ancient Near East. The major course was entitled "The Age of Cyrus to Alexander the Great"—possibly chosen with a view to appealing to Malay Sultans, who claimed descent from Alexander, traditionally identified as the Quranic Dhul Qarnain. A girl's school was added to the Institution in 1844, but the response was disappointing. After nine months there were only eleven pupils, six of them orphans (Note 41).

Roman Catholic missionary education had arrived in Malacca during the Portuguese period, and later Catholic preachers established mission schools in Penang in 1826 and in Singapore in 1852 (Note 42). A French priest, Father Jean-Marie Beurel, was the main pioneer of the Singapore Catholic School. He then went to France and brought back six brothers. Three of them worked at the St. Joseph's Institution, which was opened in Singapore in 1852. Another three brothers worked for St. Xavier's Institution in Penang, which was renamed St. Francis Xavier's Free School (Note 43). While primarily intended for Roman Catholic boys, St. Joseph's quickly gained a good reputation and non-Catholic children were admitted. The EIC could not (or *would* not) provide sufficient funding for these initiatives, thus the Catholic school relied on private donations, contributions from the French Government and the Singapore Masonic Lodge, and on Father Beurel's private income, which he devoted entirely to the church and the schools (Note 44).

Edmund Augustus Blundell's (1855-1859) appointment as Governor of the Straits Settlements in 1855 coincided with a change in the EIC's educational policy, which was embodied in the Wood Despatch (named after Charles Wood, the President of the Broad of Control, who addressed the despatch to the Government of India), in which he recommended Anglo-Vernacular Schools throughout the districts from primary level to university. Blundell was in support of the Company's new policy. Not content merely to continue his predecessor's lukewarm support for English education,

he wished to revive Raffles' educational ambitions (i.e., to promote a comprehensive system of vernacular teaching in the Straits, and to make Singapore the centre of education in Southeast Asia) (Note 45). The *Straits Times* newspaper urged that every local born child belonging to Chinese, Malay, Keling, or other Asiatic parentage should be taught English, to bring the mass of the population in touch with the ruling class. With Western-type schools such as the Penang Free School, and familiarity with the ways of the British, a multi-cultural English speaking professional class emerged (Note 46).

In 1860 Charles Wood was President of the Board of Control and demanded the development of Western education in the Straits Settlements. Governor Cavenagh urged the setting up of schools in the rural areas to provide Western education in the Malay language. In 1862 Calcutta sanctioned his schemes, which involved an annual increase in expenditure of Rs. 12,760 ($5,800), and the Governor Cavenagh opened many village schools, particularly in Malacca. He persuaded Calcutta to allot an extra $180 a month towards the salary of Chinese teachers at the Singapore Institution, and in 1864 a Chinese class was opened with 26 pupils. Several British residents of Singapore gave money for scholarships and prizes for Chinese studies, and in 1865 Tan Seng Poh raised a further $500 from Chinese merchants, to encourage Chinese education for Europeans and Eurasians (Note 47).

Keasberry's School opened by Governor Cavenagh was the model for Westernised Malay education. Keasberry succeeded only in educating a handful of upper-class Malay boys from the Temenggong households (Note 48). He provided trained men who were to build up administration in Johor, and he taught Abu Bakar, Temenggong Ibrahim's heir. Keasberry School was largely responsible for the subsequent Westernization and the spirit of religious toleration among the Johor ruling class, but it did not provide a basis for the spread of Malay education throughout the Straits Settlements, and in later years it was the English and Chinese media which eventually prevailed. After years spent encouraging education in the Straits Settlements, the Governor Cavenagh was depressed as he could not get enough sympathy of all classes towards education (Note 49).

The British authorities finally came to conclusion that women's freedom is the backbone of a civilized society, and the old system was seen as one of religious bigotry and misogyny (Note 50). Thus, to improve society, greater numbers of European women (*memsahib*) came to the East and spread everywhere, mingling with the local society. For the protection of women and girls, after 1856 many boarding schools made separate sections for girls and boys. Many parents in the Straits were prepared to send girls to school for a better future. In 1864, the Roman Catholic Convent School in Singapore had an enrolment of 145 girls, of whom 82 were orphans. It was divided into two departments, one for the well-to-do and the other for the poor, each class receiving the education suitable to their position in life, and some of them were awarded full scholarships (Note 51).

7. Economic Developments

The Straits Settlements under the Bengal Presidency was the Golden age for the British imperial capitalism, a time of confidence and easy resources, with entrepreneurs ready and willing to invest in plantations furnishing commodities for the industrialised world. Crawford commented that gambier and pepper were the main crops grown in Singapore, although they rapidly exhausted the soil (Note 52). Short-term commercial investments in plantation ventures were ideal for Chinese immigrants in Singapore, who were not interested in settling permanently. Gambier leaves had to be boiled soon after picking, so that it was necessary to have large areas of forest to supply wood for the burners, and the jungles of Singapore were ideal for this purpose (Note 53). When the British arrived in Singapore in 1819, there were about twenty gambier plantations on Singapore Island, some worked by the Chinese and others by the Malays. More Chinese began to move in, planting gambier and pepper. At the beginning of 1831 gambier fetched between $1.30 and $ 1.75 a picul, but within three years the price rose to between $3 and $4 a picul, which encouraged the rapid opening up of new plantations. In 1836 Singapore produced about 22,000 piculs of gambier and 10,000 piculs of pepper. Three years later production of gambier had more than doubled, and pepper production was up by fifty percent. By that time there were some 350 plantations scattered across the interior of the island, employing about 3,000 labourers (Note 54).

Gambier planters began to move to the mainland in search of virgin soil, and in 1844 the first permit was given by the Temenggong of Johor for a plantation to be opened up on the Skudai River (in Johor). During the first six months of 1845 some 500 Chinese moved over to Johor and opened up over 50 Gambier Plantations along rivers running into the Johor Straits. The immigrants obtained concessions or Surat Sungei from the Temenggong (i.e., permits to clear and farmed land within specified boundaries. The Chinese headman, who was known as the *kanchu* or master of the river, was responsible for keeping law and order, and received monopoly rights over trading, gambling, pawnshops, opium, spirits, and pork. By 1848 about 9,000 acres had been brought under gambier cultivation in Johor, producing 30,000 piculs of gambier a year, and by the middle of the century there were about 200 plantations (Note 55). The Teochew and Hokkien communities from China were the main gambier planters in Singapore and Johor.

A group of enthusiasts who were beginning to experiment with various tropical crops formed the Singapore Agricultural and Horticultural Society in 1836. Dr. William Montgomery, the Company's Resident Surgeon, a nutmeg expert, also began growing sugar in 1836. Joseph Balestier, the American Consul, was second pioneer in sugar cultivation. Jose d'Almeida began cotton planting in 1836 and experimented with cloves, coffee, and cinnamon. His brother-in law, T. O. Crane, followed d'Almeida's lead in growing cotton, and also experimented with coconuts. The press reported that the Society marked the birth or the start of a bright new era in Singapore's agricultural development, and the optimists were further encouraged when John Turnbull Thomson was appointed in 1841 to begin the first systemic survey of Singapore Island (Note 56). Coconut grew well on the southeast coast of

Singapore, and was the second most important crop in 1848. Coconut trees did not produce marketable fruit for the first ten years, and only a modest profit thereafter. Thomas Crane, the leading coconut producer, spent over $18,000 on his estate and after eleven years had realised only $200 net profit (Note 57).

Other crops like cotton and indigo were attempted unsuccessfully (Note 58). Only pineapples flourished, but no one tried to grow them commercially due to their easy spoilage during transit. Some Chinese cleaned pineapple leaf fibres for export to China, and J. R. Loghan tried to stimulate interest in the pineapple fibre industry, but nothing came of this venture (Note 59). However many attempts were made with sugar cane, pepper, nutmeg, cloves, gambier, tea, cinnamon, cotton, indigo, tobacco, coffee, and coconut for the purpose for land revenue. Notably, sugar and coconut plantation owners became successful.

Under the EIC, the trade grew rapidly with the new innovations of modern technology such as railway, telegraph, and steamships. In 1813, the EIC's trading monopoly in India ceased, and India was opened to free trade. Free trade was also introduced by Francis Light and (later) Sir Stamford Raffles in Penang and Singapore respectively, which gave enormous opportunities for merchants to expand their commerce from Burma to Australia, and from Java to China. When the Straits Settlements were officially constituted in 1826, Singapore was already prosperous from its trade. Lady Raffles commented:

> "We must be satisfied with the entrepot which we have established at Singapore, whether their junks regularly come with a large portion of the produce of the country, and can afford to sell it at a lower rate than foreigners can procure the same articles in Siam itself; and now under the protection of the British flag the exchange must take place. In the extension of this trade, the King and his court are so much interested, that he will in a manner feel dependent on us for the accommodation and protection afforded" (Note 60).

It is interesting to compare the relative value of trade in Singapore, Penang, and Malacca. Table 2 shows the value of their imports and exports for the period 1827-1828: (Note 61).

Table 2. Value of Imports and Exports, 1827-1828

	Singapore	Penang	Malacca
Imports (1827-28)	$14,885,999	$6,437,042	$1,266,090
Exports (1827-28)	$13,872,010	$5,586,707	$7,918,163

In 1833 the EIC's China trade monopoly was closed, but before that the EIC had already created a firm buttress for its activities in the Straits Settlements. The strategic importance of Singapore as a port was immense, such that it was able to replace China as a source of revenue for the Company,

as it funnelled the majority of European and world trade to and from China, which was second only to India as a market. Among the important articles for the China markets from the Malay Peninsula were pepper, nutmegs, cloves, mace, cinnamon, and timber (Note 62). Those items were in a considerable demand for the Chinese market, as well as for Arabia and Persia. In addition pearls, mother-of-pearl, tortoise-shell, ivory, swallows' nests, sea-slug, fish-maws, sharks-fins, ebony, black and coloured woods, for furniture and dye-stuffs, were actively imported yearly to the Chinese market from the Malay Peninsula. The quantity of pepper yearly required for the Chinese market had been estimated at 50,000 piculs, that of sandal-wood about 6,000 piculs, and a variety of valuable gums, the production of which was nearly confined to the Malay territories (Note 63). All the merchants involved in these trades could be considered as the pioneers who contributed to the development of Straits' trade (Note 64). The Straits Settlements under the Bengal Presidency was the golden age of the Company, with entrepreneurs ready and willing to invest in plantations furnishing commodities for the industrialised world. Thus, the EIC concentrated on agriculture and land revenue to avoid repeating its infamous mistakes in Bengal. Revenue was an essential economic resource of the Straits Settlements for the Company.

8. EIC Commercial Strategy

The EIC developed modern technology and military discipline for growth of the trade, including important developments in astronomy and navigation necessary for shipping (Note 65). Pepper was the most important commodity from Southeast Asia, and most of the pepper production area was controlled by the Dutch. The total amount of pepper from Aceh was 54.97 per cent, while 43.82 per cent was from Sumatra, and 1.19 per cent was from Siam; this was mainly exported to Bengal, China, and Europe. At first many regular traders from Malacca, such as the Malays, Bugis, and Acehnese were attracted to shift their trade to Penang. Because of the pepper's trade in Penang (also known as Prince of Wales Island), Bengal's trade with China prospered (Note 66).

Textiles were a very important commodity in Penang's trade. Among the textiles that came from various places like India, Celebes, Britain, and China, Indian textiles were of the highest quality and were in greatest demand for all traders. They came in many colours and various qualities, such as cotton, silk, calicoes, and voiles produced in Bengal (noted for its quality cotton and muslin), Gujarat, and Coromandel (Note 67). Those textiles were imported from India to Penang and were then exported to China and the European markets. Opium from Bengal was exported to China as well as to Penang (where locally grown opium was also exported, mainly locally). In 1828-1829 the major importers of opium from Penang were Aceh (69.48 per cent), China (10.32 per cent) and Sumatra (6.41 per cent). In addition, camphor, beeswax, coffee, ebony, antimony from Borneo, tortoiseshell, bechedemer, swallows' nest, gold dust, rattan, ivory, sago, wax, resin and sapanwood, and valuable medicines such as bezoar stones, sourced mainly from Sumatra and from the interior of the Malay Peninsula, were exported from Penang and Singapore (Note 68).

Singapore also prospered because of the EIC's strategic planning, improved by daily research and meticulous record-keeping. From the beginning, Singapore carried out a flourishing trade with the Island of Lombok, east of Java. British merchants who owned several small trading vessels plied between Lombok and Singapore. Singapore's trade with the Eastern Archipelago rose from $2,981,109 in 1823-1824 to $10,954,445 in 1865-1866, by which time Singapore handled nearly half of the total British trade with the Archipelago. Because of the growth of Singapore, in 1840, the Malacca trade, particularly the European and Chinese merchants from Malacca joined with Singapore so they could sail directly to Europe, America, and China (Note 69).

In the aftermath of the First Opium War (1839-1842), Hong Kong emerged as Britain's local hub adjacent to China, during the opening of the Five Treaty Ports in China. This gave a fillip to the ambitions of private merchants, who hoped Singapore would not eclipse Canton in the China trade. The increasing prosperity of Hong Kong and Singapore helped to boost the demand for Straits produce in the China trade (Note 70). As Singapore grew as a Free Port, many Siamese traders (principally Chinese in junks) came to enjoy the advantages of a Free Port (Note 71). In 1848, the Singapore Chamber of Commerce petitioned the Governor General of India and the British to negotiate a new agreement to replace Burney's Treaty (1826). Sir James Brook was sent to Bangkok in 1850 to try to obtain, for British merchants, the right to reside and trade in Siam and to open the Siamese trade to free trade (Note 72). In 1855 Sir John Bowring, on behalf of the British Government, negotiated a Treaty which opened Siam to British trade. The British Consulate in Siam was instructed to confer on commercial and political matters with the Governor of the Straits Settlements, thus Singapore quickly became an important centre for the Siamese trade (Note 73).

After the Anglo-American Convention (1818), American vessels were permitted to trade with the Presidency Ports of Calcutta, Madras, Bombay, and Penang. American ships traded openly with Singapore until 1825, when one of their vessels was seized on the grounds of illegal trading and was taken to Calcutta for trial. After that American ships began to anchor at Batam or Riau, and conducted their trade from there with Singapore. Joseph Balestier (the first American Consul at Riau in 1833) lived in Singapore and agitated for years for the admission of American trade. He won his battle in 1840, after which American traders flocked to Singapore. The value of American trade rose from $13,382 in 1839-1840 to $118,513 in 1840-1841 and to $165,024 in 1842-1843. After the United States tariff restrictions were lifted in 1846, American trade in Singapore increased steadily (Note 74). Australian trade was opened but did not become successful. In October 1852 the first steamer from Australia arrived in Singapore, bringing great hopes that a flourishing trade would be built up (Note 75).

In 1846, the development of regular steamships like *Diana*, which travelled between Calcutta and the Straits Settlement Ports, had a strong impact on the political and social attitudes of the European community (Note 76). After the Second Opium War (1856-1860) the port facilities in Singapore were rapidly improving. The extension to the Straits Settlements in the Indian Merchants

Shipping Act of 1859 proved a great boon to sailors and ship masters, and shipping offices were set up in the Straits Settlements. After several abortive attempts to set up banks, reliable banking services were available in the Straits Settlement Ports by the 1860s. The Oriental bank was established in Singapore in 1846, the Mercantile Bank in 1855, and the Chartered Bank of India, Australia and China in 1859. In 1861 the Chartered Bank was given authority to open branches in Penang and Malacca. The New Harbour in Singapore was bustling with activity, and in 1864 the Tanjong Pagar Dock Company (TPDC) was formed and started ship repairs the following year (Note 77).

When the Straits Settlements was handed over to the Colonial Office in 1867, Singapore had 60 registered European trading companies, and in the year 1868-1869 their trade stood at $58,944,141, more than four times the figure of 1823-1824. These changes brought to an end the fears and uncertainties of the precarious and vulnerable position which Singapore held during her first half century and throughout the Indian regime. Thus, Singapore was established for permanent supremacy as the preeminent port in Southeast Asia and as the gateway to the Far East (Note 78).

9. Conclusion

The EIC incorporated governance of Bengal and subsequently all of India under various nefarious and blood-drenched escapades, and by the early 19th century it entered a period of introspection and reorientation. Southeast Asia became an essential artery and bastion of Company interest, manifest in the Straits Settlements, which dominated Southeast Asian trade and politics. Their deft and well-crafted expansionist strategies, supported by strong and shrewd leadership and British naval hegemony, enabled them to expand from their solidified position in India to control the Chinese market, via Southeast Asia, which itself was a satellite hinterland of the Company's ports in Penang and Singapore. This paper has charted the details of how EIC created Singapore as the preeminent port of Asian trade.

Stamford Raffles played a decisive role in making Singapore one of the Company's territories, and in introducing the idea of social responsibility in governance. Rising from the entry position of clerk, he was aware of the problems inherent in British imperialism in Asia, and sought to mitigate some of its worse ills, particularly emphasizing the importance of educating native elites, as Lieutenant Governor of Java and later as the mastermind of Singapore. As a strategic move he made an agreement with the then Sultan of Johor to establish a port there, and by 1826 the three port towns of Penang, Malacca, and Singapore were under direct control of EIC as the Straits Settlements, of which Singapore became the capital in 1832, reflecting is clear pre-eminence. From the outset is strategic location made it incredibly important to Asian trade and global history, and the ethos of responsibility inaugurated by Raffles laid the foundations for subsequent improvements in Southeast Asia in general, with political, social, educational, and economic development ultimately improving the quality of life of most inhabitants, albeit with uneven progress, and Southeast Asia today continues to face many of the same challenges with independence.

Notes

Note 1. L. A. Mills, *British Malaya, 1824-67* (Singapore: Malayan Branch of Royal Asiatic Society, 2003), 67-69; C. M. Turnbull, *The Straits Settlements 1826-67: Indian Presidency to Crown Colony* (Kuala Lumpur: Oxford University Press, 1972), 272-273.

Note 2. H. Morse Stephens, 'The Administrative History of the British Dependencies in the Further East', *The American Historical Review*, 246-272.

Note 3. Nordin Hussin, *Trade and Society in the Straits of Melaka: Dutch Melaka and English Penang 1780-1830* (Singapore: Nuss Press, 2009), 168.

Note 4. Dutch (1602), Danish (1616), Portuguese (1628), French ((1664), and Swedish (1731) East India Companies were founded for trading purposes. See, Om Prakash, *The New Cambridge History of India European Commercial Enterprise in Pre-Colonial India.* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998), 76-80; Philip Lawson, *The East India Company: A History* (London: Longman, 1993), 17.

Note 5. Philip Lawson, 48.

Note 6. *Five Letters From a free Merchant in Bengal to Warren Hastings, Esq. Governor General of the Honourable East India Company's Settlement in Asia. (1783)*, 16; Ramkrisna Mukharjee, *The Rise and Fall of the East India Company: A Sociological Appraisal*, (New York and London: Monthly Review Press, 1974), 27.

Note 7. Om Prakash, 108.

Note 8. Ibid., 132-134; Abdul Majed Khan, *The Transition in Bengal 1756-1775: A Study of Saiyid Muhammad Reja Khan* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1669), 2-3.

Note 9.The British were the forth who have possessed the Indian Empire after Portuguese, Dutch and French. 'The Early of Exclusively Oriental Period of Government Education in Bengal' *The Calcutta Review* (1844, vol III, pp, 211-263); Ramkrishna Mukherjee, 269.

Note 10. H. Morse Stephens, 'The Administrative History of the British Dependencies in the Further East', *The American Historical Review*, (Vol. 4, No. 2 (Jan., 1899), pp. 246-272).

Note 11. Raffles was born in 5th July 1781, at sea on board the ship Ann, of the harbour of Port Morant in the Island Jamaica. In 1805 he reached Penang and enjoyed the opportunity of observing the various populations congregated from all parts of the Archipelago and various places of Asia like Java, Amboina, Celebes, the Moluccas, Borneo, Papua, Cochin China and China proper. He got respect from them by giving them advice and opinion. See, Lady Sophia Raffles, *Memoir of the Life and Public Services of Sir Thomas Stamford Raffles, F.R.S. &C. Particularly in the Government of Java, 1811-1816, and of Bencoolen and its Dependencies, 1817-1824; with Details of the Commerce and Resources of the Eastern Archipelago*, (Singapore: Oxford University Press, 1991), 2, 8, 34.

Note 12. L. A. Mills, 61; Nigel Barley, *In the Footstep of Stamford Raffles* (Monsoon: Nigel Barley, 2009), 3; Jim Baker, *Crossroads A Popular History of Malaysia Singapore*, (Singapore: Times Books International, 1999), 87.

Note 13. A. H. Hill, 'Introduction to the Hikayat Abdullah,' *JMBRAS*, (Vol.28, Pt, 3, 1955, pp. 8-9).

Note 14. L. A. Mills, 67- 69; C. M. Turnbull, *The Straits Settlements, 272-273.*

Note 15. L. A. Mills, 29

Note 16. John Adam to Sir Stamford Raffles, 5th December, 1818; Amales Tripathy, *Trade and Finance in the Bengal Presidency1793-1833*. (Calcutta: Baptist Mission Press, 1956), 181.

Note 17. Rizal Yaakap 'The British Legacy and the development of politics in Malaya', *The National University of Malaysia, Malaysia Global Journal of Human social science History, Archeology and Anthropology* (2014, Vol-14: Issue 7 version).

Note 18. John Cameron, *Our Tropical Possessions in Malayan India*, (London, 1865), 11; C. M. Turnbull, *A Short History of Malaysia, Singapore and Brunei*, (Singapore: Graham Brash Singapore, 1981), 97.

Note 19. H. Morse Stephens, 'The Administrative History of the British Dependencies in the Further East', *The American Historical Review*, 246-272; L. A. Mills, 69-71; Lady Raffles, *Memoir*, 398.

Note 20. Lady Raffles, *Memoir*, 374; R. O. Winstedt, 'A History of Malaya' *JAMBRAS* (1935, Vol.13, No.1 (121). A. pp. iii-270); L. A. Mills, 75; Andrew Barber, *Penang under the East India Company, 1786-1858* (Kuala Lumpur: AB&A, 2009), 83; Joginder Singh Jessy, *History of South-East Asia (1824-1965)*, (PD: Penerbitan Darulaman, 1985), 132.

Note 21. In 1818 Raffles visited Bengal and discussed with Marquis Hastings giving permission to establish a trading ports in Singapore. See Hugh E Egerton, *Sir Stamford Raffles*, (T Fisher Unwin, 1900), 169-70; L. A. Mills, 65; 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* (Volume, 45. Issue 04/ July 2011, pp. 899-929).

Note 22. Bengal Commercial report, 1819 to 1822; Amales Tripathy, 181.

Note 23. Lady Sophia Raffles, *Memoir*, 599; A. H. Hill, 'Introduction to the Hikayat Abdullah,' *JMBRAS*, (Vol. 28, Pt, 3, 1955, p. 9).

Note 24. H. Morse Stephens, 'The Administrative History of the British Dependencies in the Further East', *The American Historical Review*, 246-272.

Note 25. Singapore was at first placed under the control of Bencoolen or Fort Marlborough, of which Raffles was governor, which gave him the opportunity to have the island and its approaches carefully surveyed. Andrew Barber, 83; Anthony Webster, 899-929; Jeremiah W. Jenks. 'English Colonial Fiscal System in the Far East'; Joginder Singh Jessy, 132-133.

Note 26. D. R. SarDesai, *Southeast Asia: Past and Present* (University of California: West View Press, 2003), 100.

Note 27. Nordin Hussin, 168.

Note 28. C. M. Turnbull, *The Straits Settlements*, 237-241.

Note 29. A.H.Hill, 'Introduction to the Hikayat Abdullah,' *JMBRAS*, (Vol.28, Pt, 3, 1955, p, 10). H. Morse Stephens, 'The Administrative History of the British Dependencies in the Further East', *The American Historical Review*, 246-272.

Note 30. Nigel Barley, 75; Andrew Barber, 118.

Note 31. C. M. Turnbull, *The Straits Settlements*, 211-212.

Note 32. Ibid., 212.

Note 33. Ibid., 213*;* Song Ong Siang, *One Hundred years' History of the Chinese in Singapore* (Singapore: Oxford University Press, 1984), 48-52.

Note 34. SSR, W 29, Item 49; Song Ong Siang, 134-135; C. M. Turnbull, *The Straits Settlements*, 215-216.

Note 35. Lady Raffles, *Memoir*, 431.

Note 36. J. Low, 'An Account of the Origin and Progress of the British Colonies in the Straits of Malacca,' *JIA*, (1850, Vol. 4, p. 21); *Annual Report on the Administration of the Straits Settlements for 1861-62*; C. M. Turnbull, *The Straits Settlements*, 217-218.

Note 37. Lady Raffles, *Memoir*, 431.

Note 38. G.G Hough, 'The Educational Policy of Sir Stamford Raffles' *JMBRAS*, (December, 1933, Vol. XI, part II, pp. 166-70).

Note 39. C. M. Turnbull, *The Straits Settlements*, 222; G.G Hough, 'The Educational Policy of Sir Stamford Raffles' *JMBRAS* (December, 1933, Vol. XI, part II, pp. 166-70).

Note 40. C. M. Turnbull, *The Straits Settlements*, 224-225.

Note 41. C. M. Turnbull, *The Straits Settlements,* 225-226; *Singapore Institution*, *Report from* 1838-1840.

Note 42. C. M. Turnbull, *The Straits Settlements*, 226.

Note 43. St Xavier school and college were founded in South and Southeast Asia for the Roman Catholic private educational system. These institutions have been named after St Francis Xavier, a Spanish Roman Catholic Saint which was by the Society of Jesus. Song Ong Siang, 32.

Note 44. C. B. Buckley, *An Anecdotal History of Old Times in Singapore* (Singapore, Oxford University Press, 1984), 247; C. M. Turnbull, *The Straits Settlements*, 227-228.

Note 45. C. M. Turnbull, *The Straits Settlements*, 228; Directors to India, 1st April 1857, IQ, Despatches to India and Bengal, vol-104.

Note 46. Ibid., 229-230; Andrew Barber, 123; *PG*, 31 May in SFP, 26 June 1856.

Note 47. Song Ong Siang, 134; C. M. Turnbull, *The Straits Settlements*, 230.

Note 48. Benjamin Peach Keasberry was born in 1811 in India to British Parents, came in Singapore in 1839 and became a pioneer of vernacular education of Malay Peninsula.

Note 49. *Annual Report on the Administration of the Straits Settlements for 1862-63*; C. M. Turnbull, *The Straits Settlements*, 232.

Note 50. European women wanted to see the Indian Islamic art, culture history and philosophy, by which they could develop their own society and culture. For example, Hudson's story elaborated that she came to visit some of the ladies of the Mughal Empire of Jahangir's court and was amazed to see the status of women in the Mughal Empire. See, *Early Women Travellers and The East India Company*: A Special Guest Blog by Amrita Sen.

Note 51. *Annual Report on the Administration of the Straits Settlements for 1862-63*; C. M. Turnbull, *The Straits Settlements*, 231.

Note 52. J.T. Thomson , Some *Glimpses into Life in the Far East* (London, 1865), 203-205; Victor Purcell, *The Chinese in Southeast Asia* (London: Oxford University Press 1952), 294.

Note 53. C. M. Turnbull, *The Straits Settlements*, 149-150.

Note 54. Ibid., 150.

Note 55. Ibid., 152.

Note 56. T.O. Crane, 'Remarks on the Cultivation of Cotton in Singapore', *JIA*, (1851, Vol.5, pp.120-124); C. M. Turnbull, *The Straits Settlements*, 146.

Note 57. C. M. Turnbull, *The Straits Settlements, 147*.

Note 58. Ibid., 147-148.

Note 59. J.R. Logan, 'Preparation of Pineapple Fibres in Singapore for the Manufacture of Pina Cloth', *JIA*, (1848, Vol.2, p.528); C. M. Turnbull, *The Straits Settlements*, 148-149.

Note 60. Lady Sophia Raffles, *Memoir*, 529.

Note 61. Ibid., 534.

Note 62. T. J. Newbold, *Political and Statistical Account of the British Settlements in the Straits of Malacca* (London, 1839, reprinted Kuala Lumpur, 1971), 58-68.

Note 63. Lady Sophia Raffles, *Memoir, 84.*

Note 64. Nordin Hussin, 2-28, 97-98.

Note 65. Capt. John Warren of H.M. 'An Account of Astronomical Observation Taken at the Honorable Company's Observatory , near Fort St George, in the East Indies in the Years 1806 and 1807' *Asiatic Research, Calcutta*, (1808, vol, 10, Chapter VIII, pp. 513-526).

Note 66. W. M Hunter, M. D. 'Species of Pepper which are Found On Prince of Wales Island'. *Asiatic Research, Calcutta*, (1812, vol, 9, Chapter VIII, pp. 383-394); Andrew Barber, 91.

Note 67. Nordin Husain, 2-28, 97-98; Philip Lawson, 61; Anthony Webster, 899-929.

Note 68. Ibid.; L. A. Mills, 228-229; Wong Lin Ken, *The Trade of Singapore 1819-1869* (Kuala Lumpur: Malaysian Branch of the Royal Asiatic society, 2003), 52-60.

Note 69. L. A. Mills, 228-230; C. M. Turnbull, *The Straits Settlements*, 161; Anthony Webster, 899-929.

Note 70. Wong Lin Ken, 129-131; C. M. Turnbull, *The Straits Settlements, 178.*

Note 71. Lady Raffles, *Memoir*, 511.

Note 72. Wong Lin Ken, 144-45; C. M. Turnbull, *The Straits Settlements*, 174-175.

Note 73. SSR, S25, Item 315; C. M. Turnbull, *The Straits Settlements*, 175.

Note 74. Wong Lin Ken, 246; C. M. Turnbull, *The Straits Settlements*, 178.

Note 75. Ibid, 248-249; Turnbull, *The Straits Settlements*, 178.

Note 76. C. M. Turnbull, *A Short History of Malaysia, Singapore and Brunei*, 102.

Note 77. C. M. Turnbull, *The Straits Settlements*, 186-187.

Note 78. Wong Lin Ken, 167; C. M. Turnbull, *The Straits Settlements*, 188. Song Ong Siang, 8.