



*Chinese, Indian, and Malay boys and girls are all represented in this throng of Singapore grade-school children. The government, in the words of Prime Minister Lee, is committed to "inculcating the virtues of group discipline and the overriding calls of society upon individual rights."*

# Singapore

In 1977, the Washington-based International Monetary Fund decided that Singapore was no longer part of the Third World and set about to strip the island city-state of its "developing country" status. With millions of dollars in multilateral loans, as well as other benefits and concessions, at stake, the Singaporeans sought (and won) a reprieve. They were, they argued, being penalized for success. With no resources except its people, Singapore today is the premier banker, refiner, manufacturer, handler, and harbormaster of Southeast Asia. In two decades, Prime Minister Lee Kuan Yew has fashioned an orderly, sometimes idiosyncratic, version of modern welfare capitalism. Corruption is rare. Few go homeless, schooling and health care are available to all, and virtually everyone has enough money to buy a television set. Singaporeans pay a price, low by Third World standards, in political freedom and participation. Is the price too high? Here, historian J. Norman Parmer looks at Singapore's colonial past. Political scientist Thomas Bellows describes the mini-republic that Lee built.

## CITY OF THE LION

*by J. Norman Parmer*

For more than 2,000 years, the narrow Strait of Malacca has been among the busiest shipping routes in the world, a shallow corridor, bedeviled by shifting sandbars, between East and West. At the southern entrance to the Strait, several hundred yards off the tip of the Malay Peninsula and several leagues above the equator, lies a diamond-shaped island, roughly 30 miles across. The island has no natural resources. Its name, Singapore, means "city of the lion" in Malay, but there are no lions, and the origin of the name is obscure.

So is the history of the island before the arrival, in 1819, of Sir Thomas Stamford Raffles, then Lieutenant General of Bencoolen, a man as ambitious for Britain as he was for himself. Singapore was sparsely inhabited when Raffles first stepped ashore from the *Indiana's* longboat—home to not more than a

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few hundred fishermen and traders, ethnic Malays for the most part but even then including some Chinese on inland spice estates. There had once been a small, intermittently occupied urban settlement—known as Temasek at its birth in the 13th century and as Singapura by the time of its death three centuries later—but Raffles saw only the ruins. Chinese sources as far back as the third century A.D., and Arab sources as far back as the ninth, refer to a place that *may* be Singapore, though the association remains uncertain and not much is said about the island in any event. From later chronicles, we know that, politically, Singapore's fate was bound up with the changing fortunes of neighboring Malay, Thai, and Indonesian empires, a reality not lost on the island's leaders today.

### Going Too Far

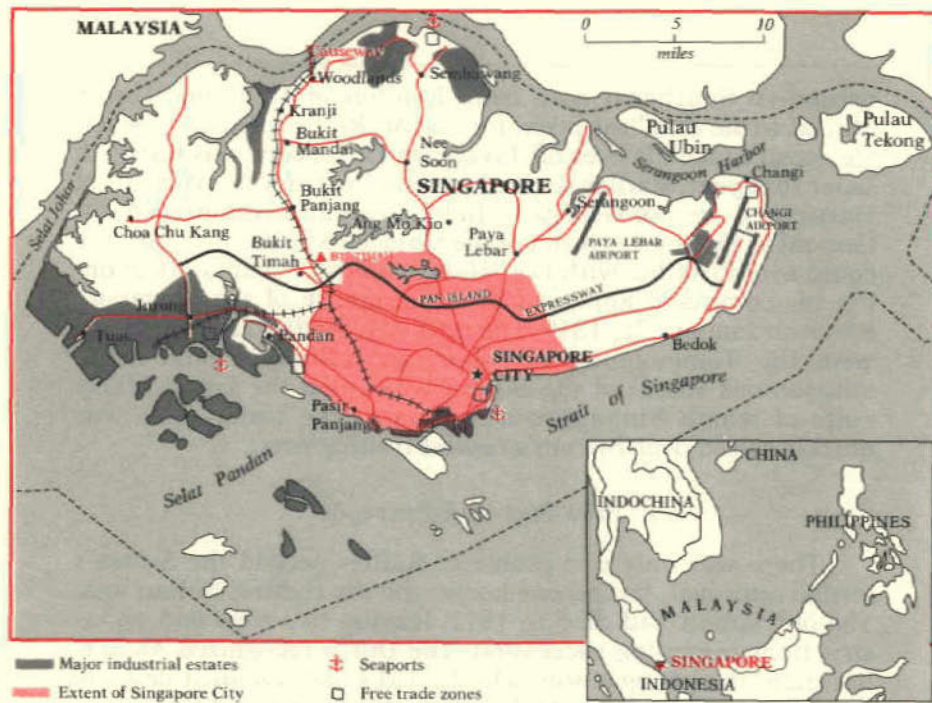
Thomas Stamford Raffles represented yet another empire. Though he could boast little formal education, Raffles was bright, perceptive, bookish, and, as he described himself, "meek as a maid." Malay scholar, botanist, historian, and founder of London's Zoological Society, he spent nearly the whole of his career in the service of the British East India Company in Southeast Asia. He sustained many bitter losses in the course of a short life—a wife and children, who died in the tropics; his plant specimens and ancient Malay manuscripts, which were lost at sea. His own health was poor, yet he drove himself with fierce energy. Raffles virtually single-handedly presented Britain with Singapore; and it became, as he foresaw that it would, one of the most valuable of all Britain's imperial possessions.

The story begins, as does so much of recorded 19th-century Asian history, in Europe. For two decades, Britain had been preoccupied with defeating or containing Napoleon, and after Waterloo, Lord Castlereagh, the British Foreign Minister, was determined to help the Kingdom of the Netherlands remain strong as a bulwark against a possibly resurgent France. For this and other reasons, the British agreed to return to the Dutch most of their former colonial possessions, seized during the Napoleonic Wars. In Asia, this meant Java (which Raffles had helped subdue in 1811 and had administered for several years) and Malacca, among other places.

Raffles was angered and disappointed by the move, for Java

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*Singapore Island is half the area of Los Angeles and, on average, no more than 50 feet above sea level. Reclamation has added six square miles to Singapore and doubled the size of many offshore islands.*

had long seemed to him a perfect base for British operations in the Far East. As it was, "the British have not now an inch of ground to stand upon between the Cape of Good Hope and China, nor a single friendly port at which they can water and obtain refreshment." Sir Stamford argued his case to friends in London and to his superiors at the East India Company in Calcutta, contending that the Dutch were aggressively expanding their claims in Asia in order to exclude British trade altogether. Raffles's motives, it should be noted, were as much idealistic as commercial. He was a passionate free-trader, an opponent of slavery, and a believer in "economic man." He was firmly convinced that "the cause of humanity and the improvement of society" would be well served in Southeast Asia by the establishment of a British presence.

Yet, for a time, Raffles made little headway. He was, to put it frankly, not universally liked. Among other things, he had a penchant for insubordination, forever going "beyond the limit," as Castlereagh once complained. Not surprisingly, the Dutch regarded him with downright mistrust. When Sir Stamford re-

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turned to Southeast Asia from London in 1818, one Dutch official wrote that "the proximity of Mr. Raffles please[s] us not. He doesn't take his eyes off Java." Dutch concern was justified. Later that year, Raffles secured permission from the Marquis of Hastings, Governor General of India, to found a commercial settlement at the southern end of the Malacca Strait—providing he could avoid trouble with the "Netherlandish." A small fleet under his command appeared near the mouth of the Singapore River on January 28, 1819. The next day, Raffles came to terms with the Temenggong of Johor, an influential and semi-autonomous vassal of the Sultan who ruled the larger Malay state of which Singapore was a part. The Union Jack was quickly raised over Britain's newest trading post.

### Free Port and Entrepôt

There was only one problem: Raffles needed the Sultan's formal approval, but no one knew who the rightful Sultan was. The old Sultan had died in 1812, leaving two sons and no instructions regarding succession. The Dutch recognized Abdu'r-Rahman, the younger son, who by 1819 had assumed de facto control of the crumbling Malay state. (Hussein, the elder son, removed himself to Pahang.) There was no chance, Raffles realized, that Abdu'r-Rahman would risk Dutch displeasure by ratifying the British agreement with the Temenggong.

The stage was set for an episode that illustrates the kind of behavior Sir Stamford's colleagues found so infuriatingly impulsive, even as they conceded that it could be quite effective. Raffles learned that Abdu'r-Rahman had never been officially crowned: The late Sultan's widow, who preferred Hussein, had refused to relinquish the royal regalia. Aided by the Temenggong, Raffles secretly brought Hussein to Singapore, where he was coronated amid all the pomp that circumstances would allow. And the treaty was signed.

The Dutch, of course, were furious, but from Calcutta, Lord Hastings supported Raffles, and London supported Hastings. British replies to impassioned protests from the Netherlands were polite, wordy, slow in coming, and devoid of offers to withdraw. Eventually, Britain did admit that some sort of territorial tidying up was necessary in the East, and a suitable Anglo-Dutch treaty was worked out in 1824. Under its terms, Britain agreed to give up all claims and possessions on Sumatra and the islands south of Singapore, while the Dutch did the same with regard to the Malay Peninsula, Malacca, and Singapore; the Netherlands also gave up its few territories in India and agreed

not to seek commercial or political hegemony in Southeast Asia. Thomas Stamford Raffles died two years later, aged 45, with the East India Company not only ignoring his application for a pension but also seeking reimbursement for money he had spent on its behalf.

If nothing else, he had the satisfaction of knowing that his gamble was already paying off. With its excellent harbor, the Singapore settlement was an immediate commercial success. A British-style city with formal squares and parks was soon established on the site of ancient Temasek. Ethnic *kampongs* (a Malay word meaning village) sprang up in and around the European downtown. Raffles laid out much of the city himself. He also laid down the law regarding Singapore's economic function: It was to be an entrepôt and a free port—collecting no import or export duties but providing a variety of lucrative services for commerce and shipping.\* After only one year of British rule, Singapore's population had grown to 10,000, and no fewer than 160 ships had called at its port. As one of the three Straits Settlements—Malacca and Penang were the other two—the island was administered initially by the East India Company from Calcutta. In 1867, Singapore was elevated to the status of a Crown Colony, its governor general answering directly to London.

### Luring the Chinese

By then, Singapore City with its bustling port had become a crowded, polyglot metropolis, attracting a population of 70,000, including Chinese (the largest group); Malays (the second largest); Javanese and Bugis from the Dutch East Indies; Filipinos; Bengalis, Sikhs, Tamils, and Parsees from India; Jews from Calcutta; Jaffna Tamils from Ceylon; Arabs; and Japanese. It was quite a collection. "The Native festivals here are, of course, numerous," a Major James Low wrote in 1840. "If every class was to have its own way, the town would be in a continual clamor by noisy and riotous processions."

Every group did not always get its way, but the Chinese, who made up more than half the island's population, often did. Singapore, as visitors never failed to remark, was essentially a Chinese city. Even Raffles had noted early on the "peculiar attractions of the place for that industrious race." The most im-

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\*The Dutch tried to apply this formula themselves—as Southeast Asian nations still do—but could find no location as strategic as Singapore. The acquisition of Hong Kong by Great Britain in 1842 and the opening of British "treaty ports" in China at first spread panic among Singapore merchants, but in the end, these developments simply augmented Britain's total volume of trade in Asia, to Singapore's benefit.

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portant attraction was its absence of regulation, taxes, or other government interference. Overseas Chinese merchants had great freedom to do what they pleased. No sooner was the settlement established than hundreds of Chinese traders, mostly from the Straits region, set up shop in Singapore. Thanks to long association with, first, the Portuguese, then the Dutch, and then the English, many of them were already familiar with Western ways. Not a few spoke English. This was precisely the type of immigrant Raffles had hoped to lure.

### The Coolie System

The so-called Straits Chinese became the most visible Chinese class in Singapore—to the British. A few, such as Seah Eu Chin, risked their fortunes cultivating pepper and gambier—the island's only export crops. But most, such as the renowned Tan Che Sang, built on their experience as merchants, middlemen, and outfitters. Tan, perhaps the richest man in Singapore during its early years, was a miser with a paradoxical taste for gambling. (Torn between conflicting passions, he once cut off part of a finger in a futile attempt to curb his lust for gaming.) Yet, according to historian Song Ong Siang, he was so respected in the city—10,000 people attended his funeral in 1837—that “any day he said the word he could empty the place of all the Europeans but he never tried.”

The influx of Tans and Seahs did not make the Chinese a majority. Their success did. As Singapore's economy expanded, merchants and retailers required an ever-increasing supply of workers. Because neighboring states in Malaya, Indonesia, and Indochina had for centuries been short of labor, the Chinese turned, as they would have preferred to do anyway, to China, specifically, to south China. There, in Hokkien and neighboring provinces, isolated from the rest of the Middle Kingdom by rugged hills, lived a hardy people whose menfolk had a long tradition of seeking their fortunes abroad. The coolie system was born.

It was wonderfully efficient, its costs merely human. Singapore merchants and businessmen paid recruiters to round up *sinkhehs*, or newcomers, in South China and bring them to the island. They were put up in lodging houses and then contracted out to Chinese and European employers. The *sinkhehs* were mostly young and had never before been away from their farm communities. The overcrowding and enforced intimacy of shipboard life fostered outbreaks of disease. Commonly, as many as a fifth of a vessel's passengers failed to make port alive.

Raffles, high-minded as always, had abolished slavery in his



*Chinatown as seen from Government Hill in 1852 and (inset) a bust of Sir Thomas Stamford Raffles. Settlements hugged the harbor, while the island's interior, where tigers roamed, went unexplored for years.*

island outpost, but the coolie system replaced slavery with a highly profitable regime of indentured servitude. The ambitious south Chinese had to pay his way to Singapore. Along the route, money was demanded by the recruiter (always Chinese), by the ship captain (usually a European), and by the lodging-house owners (again, always Chinese). Few *sinkhehs* had enough money up front. They paid for their passage after the fact, in sweat. "Truck," the practice of supplying immigrants with food and other necessities (including opium) at high prices against future wages, exacerbated the newcomers' plight. For the individual worker to survive and get free of his employer took a minimum of three years, plus a great deal of self-discipline, good health, and luck. But many did so.

For several decades, the character of Singapore was that of a frontier boom town. The colony had been created, more or less, from whole cloth. Most of the streets were unpaved and the buildings made of wood; fires and floods did heavy damage in the early years. There were no local institutions to be co-opted and exploited—a far cry from the British experience in India. A thin veneer of civil authority belied the underlying chaos. Pros-



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titution was legal and thriving, abetted by the fact that 90 percent of the island's population was male. Gangs of Chinese—a hundred or more at a time—occasionally roamed the streets armed with *parangs*, a machete-like knife still used today to slash through jungle underbrush. (Skillfully wielded, it can decapitate a man with a single blow.) No police force was established in Singapore until 1843; until then, unemployed British sailors were deputized as needed.

Public order was undermined in part by public policy—the practice of “tax farming” in particular. Because both the British and local merchants eschewed excise taxes, the cost of administering the settlement was borne by levies on liquor, opium, and gambling. The rights to collect these taxes were auctioned off to Chinese entrepreneurs, the government being anxious to avoid “frequent and odious collision with the natives.” It was thus in the interest of Chinese tax farmers to promote the very activities that helped give Singapore its reputation as the most dangerous town in the Wild East.

### Scrambling for Asia

The form of lawlessness most feared by traders was, to use the British word, piracy; the Malays who engaged in this pursuit might have preferred the term “revenue enhancement.” Exact-ing tribute from passing merchant ships had for centuries been regarded by local rulers as a legitimate activity. A 14th-century Chinese account of Singapore noted that “everything the inhabitants possess is a product of their plundering of Chinese junks.” As Singapore became the major choke-point of Oriental trade, a clearinghouse for manufactured goods heading East and produce heading West, Malay pirate fleets from as far away as the Philippine and Indonesian archipelagos flocked to the Malacca Strait like bees to a honey-pot. And they did so with seeming impunity, putting into Singapore City itself for a respite between engagements. Goods lost to pirate attacks could often be bought in the open-air markets of Singapore a few days later.

The situation was so serious that George Bonham, who became Singapore's Governor in 1833, warned of the “total annihilation” of Britain's Asian trade. The British responded by sending two Royal Navy gunboats for a brief tour in the Strait. Steamships were not then a common sight in Southeast Asia, and the gunboats, not dependent on the wind, struck terror in the hearts of becalmed freebooters. But a new wave of piracy commenced during the 1850s. Piracy was never entirely suppressed in the Strait, where flotillas of *perhau* could easily elude

pursuers in coastal mangrove swamps. Piracy exists even today on a small scale, as attested to by occasional newspaper reports, and its adjunct, smuggling, continues to thrive in parts of Southeast Asia.

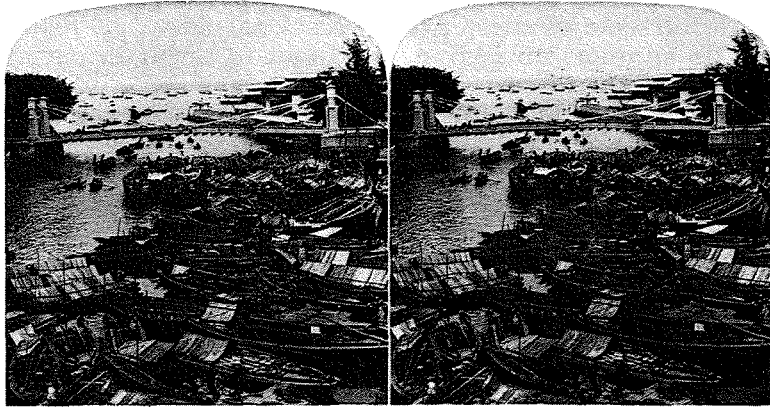
The opening of the Suez Canal in 1869 transformed Singapore from a useful outpost into a strategic asset. The canal reduced the distance between Singapore and London by 3,500 miles, and spurred a new scramble by European powers for "unclaimed" parts of Asia and Africa. Commercial activity picked up rapidly, much to Singapore's advantage. During the four years after France's Empress Eugénie aboard the *Aigle* led the first procession of ships from the Mediterranean via the canal to the Red Sea, the value of trade passing through Singapore increased by 50 percent. After the Treaty of Pangkor in 1874, Britain began to extend its control north over the Malay states.\* Vast quantities of tin and, by the early 20th century, rubber, began flowing down the peninsula and out through Singapore's New Harbour. Oil storage tanks were built on the island during the 1890s, and Singapore, by then the seventh busiest port in the world, became the principal oil distribution center for all of Asia, a function it retains.

The most important commodity passing through the island continued to be people. Whetted by the influx of British and European capital, the appetite for cheap labor became insatiable in Southeast Asia. Hundreds of thousands of workers were required to build roads and railroads and to work the British-owned tin mines and rubber estates. Strong backs were needed on the wharves and skilled hands in the factories. The demand now went far beyond Singapore, but Singapore's entrenched coolie system showed the way to a supply. A mechanism was already in place; it needed only to be expanded.

### \* The Good Life

What had been a relative trickle of immigrants—amounting to mere tens of thousands of Chinese coolies a year during the 1830s and '40s—swelled to a quarter of a million annually during the later decades of the 19th century, with most of the newcomers destined for jobs in Malaya. The coolie trade was a Chinese operation from start to finish, and many of Singapore's most prominent Chinese residents, friendly to British rule, were

\*Under the treaty, the Sultan of Perak agreed to accept a British Resident whose advice he would heed in all matters save those relating to Malay religion and custom. Sultans of other states in subsequent years signed similar accords. Four of these entities were grouped together in 1896 to form the Federated Malay States.



*A stereoscope of Singapore, 1901. One British journalist described the Singapore River as such a "packed mass of boats that you hardly know when your foot has left dry land."*

known to be deeply involved in this traffic.

Colonial administrators looked the other way. There was no constituency for interference. When employers complained to the government, it was not about the wretched living conditions of immigrants but about "crimping"—the stealing of one businessman's workers by another. If anything, such petitions indicated that the coolie system would benefit by growth.

The many Chinese secret societies (commonly referred to as *hueys* after the name of the most powerful one, Tean Tay Hueh) were deeply involved in the coolie trade. Secret societies, the principal form of Chinese organization in Singapore during the 19th century, were broadly political in conception, the aim being to overthrow the alien Ch'ing or Manchu dynasty back home in China. But their function in Southeast Asia was, on the one hand, to provide (however imperfectly) physical security, discipline, and social identity for incoming coolies and, on the other, to guarantee the enrichment of society leaders, who comprised employers, labor contractors, recruiting agents, lodging-house owners, and proprietors of brothels. So lucrative was the trade that rival societies often competed for business in the streets, with murder and mayhem as by-products.

The colonial government usually remained aloof from such disputes. Its strategy was to cultivate a few influential, English-speaking Chinese leaders and, in times of violence, to try to cajole and pressure them into persuading the combatants to make peace. Only rarely, as during the Post Office riots in 1876, did

the British intervene directly with troops.\* Not until 1877, when William Pickering was appointed "Protector" of the Chinese community in Singapore, did colonial authorities even attempt to regulate immigration or inhibit forced prostitution.

Yet for the affluent—English and Chinese primarily—life was good in Singapore. The town itself began to take shape, with handsome new buildings in the commercial core and comfortable stucco and tile villas in the suburbs. Theater groups and country clubs amused prosperous residents, who could also indulge in tennis, cricket, and golf. On Tuesday and Friday evenings, there was music. "The band," wrote *Straits Times* editor John Cameron, "which is that of the regiment on the station at the time, or from one of the men-at-war which occasionally visit the port, plays on a raised mound on the center of the esplanade green." At dinner parties, the fare rivaled that of London, and the drink, at least in volume, was often superior. "The good folks of Singapore," Cameron noted, "are by no means inclined to place too narrow restrictions on their libations."

### Looking Homeward

Yet, a certain insecurity always existed—had existed, in fact, since the founding of the settlement in the face of Dutch hostility. Who would defend the place? Great Britain was, of course, Mistress of the Seas, and her warships prowled the Indian Ocean and adjacent waters. But not until the 1870s, when Singapore's strategic significance was plain, did London begin contributing financially to the island's defense. (Until then, local merchants grudgingly chipped in on an *ad hoc* basis when crises arose—a procedure that helps explain the persistence of piracy.) The revival of European imperialism during the last half of the 19th century prompted considerable concern in Parliament over Singapore's safety, but for years nothing was done about it.

And, for a while, nothing need have been done. When World War I erupted in Europe, Singapore was barely affected. The German cruiser *Emden* shelled nearby Penang in October 1914, but that was the closest the Germans ever came, and the *Emden* was sunk in November. Most Singaporeans simply looked for-

\*Chinese residents in Singapore generally remitted part of their earnings to families in south China. Because the mails were slow and untrustworthy, they relied on an alternative mail system created by Teochew merchants in Singapore. The British attempted to replace this with a special remittance service, even though it was widely known that, while the Crown could effectively convey mail to distribution centers like Amoy, it had no access inland. The Crown's effort resulted in a general strike, instigated by secret societies, and punctuated by urban violence.

### THE CHINESE MERCHANTS

*In their First 150 Years of Singapore (1969), Donald and Joanna Moore observe that the difference between British and Chinese merchants in 19th-century Singapore was summed up in an epigram: "Englishman have five dollar, make one dollar business; Chinese have one dollar, make five dollar business." They go on:*

The British possessed one inestimable advantage over their oriental colleagues: Their links with Britain enabled them to secure all the profitable agencies, or nearly all, for themselves.

But if an accident of birth placed an agency in British hands, an accident of race conferred upon each Chinese businessman an acumen so acute, so ingenious, and so resourceful, that he was more than a match for any monopolist. His improvisatorial style often concealed an approach to genius. While he appeared to peck at the crumbs that fell from the rich man's table, he was quietly amassing a fortune.

When the British merchant installed himself in a sumptuous mansion, his Chinese counterpart would tend to remain (but not invariably) in a more humble abode, lest those from whom he bought or borrowed stiffen their terms at the sight of so much opulence. He was accustomed to frugality, and he was never trammelled with the absurdity of bolstering a national ethnic superiority by a recourse to gracious living.

And if the British merchant inherited a racial bond with the manufacturer in the West, the Chinese merchant inherited one just as important with the consumer in the East. And again, if the British merchant was the principal exporter of raw Southeast Asian produce from Singapore, the Chinese was its collector, for he was dealing with his own kind who, even if they did not understand his language, understood his ways and he theirs. Throughout Southeast Asia, and most particularly in Singapore, the Chinese became the binding agent of international commerce.

In Singapore a partnership was forged which was eventually to transcend even political considerations. What the British lack, the Chinese provide; what the Chinese lack, the British provide.



*Wealthy merchant  
Tan Jiak Kim*

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ward to the end of hostilities and the resumption of business.

In British Burma, Dutch Indonesia, French Indochina, and the American Philippines, the decades after the war saw the emergence of popular nationalist movements. In China, Chiang Kai-shek strove to modernize his country while fighting off Communist revolutionaries and Japanese invaders. In India, Mahatma Gandhi galvanized his countrymen and moved the subcontinent toward self-rule. In Singapore, politics were different. What exercised most Chinese was not Singapore's own status but rather China's. The Chinese-language press in the city, led by Tan Kah Kee's *Nanyang Siang Pao* and Aw Boon Haw's *Sin Chew Jit Poh*, treated events in the increasingly troubled ancestral homeland almost as a local story.

### Language and Loyalty

The overthrow of the Manchu dynasty and creation of the Republic of China in 1911 was greeted with enthusiasm by Singapore Chinese. Sun Yat-sen, father of the revolution, had visited the island several times and received considerable financial support from wealthy merchants. As early as 1912, a branch of Sun's Kuomintang (KMT) Party was established in Singapore. Later, the Nationalist government sent teachers and textbooks from China to Singapore to provide instruction in Chinese history and politics and, not to be overlooked, inculcate loyalty to the motherland. The language employed in the new private schools was not English or one of the south China dialects but Kuo-yu, or Mandarin, the national language of China.

Most Chinese favored the extension of education, but not all welcomed instruction in Mandarin. Singapore's Chinese community was not monolithic. It was divided by district of origin in China, by dialect spoken, by education, income, and occupation, by family history in the Straits. Millionaire entrepreneurs such as Aw Boon Haw, Tan Kah Kee, and Tan's son-in-law Lee Kong Chian (founder of the Oversea-Chinese Bank), were typical of the Chinese-oriented elite. They were educated in Chinese, supported Kuo-yu schools, dominated the Chinese Chamber of Commerce, and had little contact with colonial officials.

By contrast, the Straits-born (also called Malacca, or Baba) Chinese made up the Western-oriented elite. Their leaders, educated in English at a handful of secondary schools such as Raffles College, were British subjects and proud of the fact. They adopted Western dress and many Western customs, played cricket, read English newspapers, and gratefully accepted honors from the King. Some embraced Christianity, and a few, like

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Goh Hood Keng, a Methodist, entered the ministry.

In general, Straits Chinese took a dim view of a resurgent Chinese nationalism that threatened to dilute their identity and engulf their special, anglicized world. They pleaded with the British to expand public education *in English*. But the colonial government, regarding most of Singapore's population as transients, did nothing. The issue did not go away, however. It emerged during the 1950s as the single most important question of public policy facing Singapore's government.

### The 'Tiger of Malaya'

At the opposite social extreme from the Straits Baba was the mass of Chinese and Malay laborers and seamen, often living in squalor. This was the fertile soil in which, during the 1920s, communism began to flourish. Though cooperating initially with the Kuomintang, the Communists moved out on their own after the fragile truce on the Chinese mainland between Chiang Kai-shek and the Communists was shattered in 1927. The Malayan Communist Party (MCP), formed in 1930, devoted most of its energies to organizing labor unions—a new phenomenon in Singapore, and quite illegal—for rubber estate workers, tin miners, seamen, and some 60 other trades on both the island and the peninsula. Helped by the poor state of the global economy (to which Singapore's well-being was and is exquisitely sensitive), by rising anti-imperial sentiment, and by the tragic course of events in China, the MCP by the late 1930s had become a force to be reckoned with and operated through a score of front organizations.

The British, notably Sir Cecil Clementi, did a great deal to alienate many Singapore Chinese. Clementi, appointed Governor of Singapore in 1929, was fluent in Mandarin and Cantonese and had served as Governor of Hong Kong. He believed he knew a thing or two about the Chinese and how to deal with them. No sooner had the guns at Fort Canning boomed their welcome than the new Governor summoned Singapore's leading Chinese to Government House. There, he announced a ban on all political activity, on fund-raising for Chinese causes, and on displaying the Chinese flag. Later in his administration, Clementi eliminated grants-in-aid to Chinese schools—to save money—and, hoping to reduce unemployment, placed tight restrictions on Chinese immigration.

The Communists also benefited from Japan's invasion of China in July 1937, bringing a new alliance between the Kuomintang and the Communists on the mainland. In Singapore,

The last issue of the Straits Times before the British surrender, 1942. "Singapore Must Stand," said the Governor General. "It SHALL Stand." It did not stand.

**THE STRAITS TIMES**

"Singapore Must Stand; It SHALL Stand"—H.E. the Governor

SINGAPORE, FRIDAY, FEBRUARY 13, 1942.

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**CURRENCY NOTES: A WARNING**

PEOPLE in the rural areas refusing to accept currency notes issued by the Board of Commissioners of Currency, Malaya, are warned that action will be taken against them and that they are liable to severe penalties.

**Air Battle Over Java Sea**

**4 JAPS DOWN**

THE R.E.I. communiqué issued yesterday was very short and had little to report.

It read: "Apart from enemy reconnaissance over various parts of the Netherlands Indies area it may be stated that on the morning of Feb. 12 a Japanese bomber approached Sourabaya but it immediately disappeared when our fighters went up."

"No further reports have been received from various parts of the Archipelago where the fighting continues."

"Some days ago an aerial combat took place over the Java Sea between Allied aircraft and enemy fighters."

(The Straits Times, January 1942)

**JAPANESE SUFFER HUGE CASUALTIES IN SINGAPORE**

**R. A. GUNNERS STICK TO THEIR POSTS**

THE Japanese have suffered huge casualties in Singapore, according to W. T. Knox, News Chronicle war correspondent. Our gunners are sticking grimly to their guns, and there have been many cases of whole crews dying at their posts.

Ian Fitchett, official war correspondent with the A.F.P. here, says that it is almost impossible to drive the Japanese out completely, the Japanese will find the fight long and very bloody.

War correspondent for the London Daily Telegraph, J. A. Marchant, points out that the defenders are holding a long line.

(MARSHAL NEWS REMARKS)

**WHERE TO GET YOUR PAPER**

ARRANGEMENTS are being made for the widest possible distribution of the Free Press in the mornings and the Straits Times in the afternoons. For the general distribution.

the MCP wisely exploited popular passions by spearheading a virulent anti-Japanese movement. After war came to the Strait, Chinese Communists from Singapore would win further popularity by leading the resistance to the Japanese occupation of the Malay Peninsula.

But war seemed very far away to Singapore's powerful and prosperous during the late 1930s. Besides, the new naval base was now in place at Sembawang on the Johor Strait: Shore batteries were aimed south and east to fend off attack by sea. To the north, the "impenetrable" Malay jungle seemingly provided as much protection as any army. There had been some unsettling developments in the Crown Colony since the Great War, but the island's small and rather snobbish elite found life neither too demanding nor too fast. There was a sense of *tida' apa*, of all's well with the world. Tennis in the late afternoon followed by a cool shower and a *setengah*—whiskey and water—on the verandah before a good dinner bred a sense of self-satisfaction. God was, after all, an Englishman.

The "Tiger of Malaya," unfortunately, was a brilliant Japanese: General Yamashita Tomoyuki. On December 8 (Pacific time), 1941, the Japanese bombed not only Pearl Harbor but Singapore. They invaded Hong Kong, Thailand, and the Philippines. Two days later, not far from Singapore, they attacked and sank two of His Royal Majesty's battleships, the *Prince of Wales* and the *Repulse*. Yamashita now swept down the Malay Peninsula. Relying on boldness, speed, bluff, and command of the air, he outthought and outfought a larger, better-supplied force of



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Indians, Australians, and Britons.

Much has been made of the fact that Singapore's gun emplacements faced seaward, leaving the northern coast opposite the Malay States vulnerable to land attack. But Singapore fell principally because of a failure of command, a failure shared by Lieutenant General Arthur Percival, General Officer Commanding, and Field Marshall Sir Archibald Wavell, Supreme Commander in the Far East. When Percival met Yamashita at the Ford automobile plant on February 15, 1942, to discuss the terms of Singapore's surrender, the Japanese had no more than three days' supply of ammunition remaining. Yamashita suspected that Percival's willingness to talk was a ploy to buy time. He was, unfortunately, wrong.

### Starting Over

The Japanese renamed Singapore *Syonan*, meaning "light of the south." Intending their occupation to be permanent, they launched a campaign to supplant English with Japanese and purged Western influences from school classrooms. The populace was exhorted to take pride in being Asian and, following Japan's example, to undergo a spiritual revival. (General Yamashita once remarked that, since the Japanese were descended from the gods while the Europeans admitted to descent from monkeys, the choice of allegiance should not really be all that difficult.) Japanese business and banking enterprises were established in Singapore, and Mitsubishi and other *zaibatsu* took over and managed key industries.\*

The occupation was a hard, dangerous time for Singapore. The Japanese did not, in Singapore as elsewhere, behave like philosopher-kings. Already hated by the Chinese, they soothed no feelings when the Kempeitai, or military police, indulged in a murderous *sook ching*, executing thousands of locals suspected of being enemies of Japan. The Kempeitai remained in business throughout the war, its personnel by far outnumbering that of Japan's civil administration on the island. Meanwhile, living conditions in Singapore deteriorated with each passing month. For a city dependent on trade for its livelihood, where almost all

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\*The Japanese had little use for the Chinese during the occupation, except as targets of extortion. But they had special plans for the Indian population—amounting to about 12 percent of the island's 550,000 people. Those plans moved into high gear in 1943 with the arrival in Singapore from Germany of Subhas Chandra Bose, a former president of the Congress Party in India who advocated direct action against the British in India. Bose placed himself at the head of an Indian Independence League and breathed new life into efforts to organize an Indian National Army (INA) for the liberation of the subcontinent. The INA saw action in Burma alongside the Japanese but won no battlefield successes.

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food, clothing, and medicine had to be imported, war was disastrous. With scarcity, the new Japanese-imposed currency became grossly inflated, and a black market sprang up.

It was with relief that Singaporeans greeted the return of their British colonial masters in 1945. Keeping the news of the bombing of Hiroshima and Nagasaki to themselves, Japanese commanders had quietly planned for their own internment and arranged an orderly transfer of power. The end of the war was announced on August 17. British troops landed two weeks later, and the Japanese, in a public ceremony, surrendered formally on September 12 to Admiral Lord Louis Mountbatten. The crowd cheered as the Union Jack was raised once more over the Fortress of Singapore and the cheers were real enough. But the colors seemed less cheerful now, the fabric somehow frayed.

One year later, a young man known to his English friends as Harry boarded the troopship *Britannia* for the long passage from Singapore to Liverpool. A graduate of Raffles College, he had earned a Queen's Scholarship and was now, aged 23, on his way to Cambridge. He was an ardent anglophile who had watched the Japanese humiliate the British in 1942 and had understood immediately that, however the war turned out, Britain's days of empire were numbered. And he knew that, in an independent Singapore, there would be a role for him to play, perhaps even one to write and direct. He later recalled—as Prime Minister—that the Japanese “never knew what they did to a whole generation like me. But they did make me, and a generation like me, determined to work for freedom from servitude and foreign domination. I did not enter politics. They brought politics on me.”

His name was Lee Kuan Yew.

