LOSED STACKS

ANGLO-GERMAN RIVALRY IN THE MALAY PENINSULA AND SIAM,
1870-1909

by

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ABSTRACT

Germany was used to rationalize and justify the extension of British rule in the states of the Malay Peninsula between 1873 and 1909.

Germans gained considerable influence in the trade and shipping of the Straits Settlements, and virtually controlled Siam's railways and her export of rice. Yet, Germany refused to get politically entangled in the affairs of the Malay Peninsula and Siam, consciously avoiding any confrontation with Britain.

From the 1870s onwards, certain Straits officials and non-officials propagated the rhetoric that if British rule was not quickly installed in all the Malay states, Germany would establish a foothold on the peninsula and threaten British interests between India and China. In preparation for British expansion, the colonial authorities obstructed German shipping, blocked Germany's recruitment of "coolies", and hindered German capital and enterprise from entering the Malay states not yet under British control.

To preserve the Siamese Malay states for future British expansion, the Foreign Office refused to consider Siam's wishes to involve Germany in an international agreement that would guarantee her independence. The Foreign Office also tried to wrest from the Germans the management and control of Siam's railways.
Thus, what looked like a reaction to the German threat to British interests and security was nothing else than the manifestation of a concealed desire for expansion.
ABSTRAK
Dalam usaha meluaskan pengaruhnya ke negeri-negeri di Semenanjung Tanah Melayu antara 1873 dan 1909, pihak British telah menggunakan pihak Jerman bagi memberi rasional serta justifikasi ke atas dasar perluasan kuasanya itu.

Pada masa yang sama, pihak Jerman berjaya meluaskan kepentingan perdagangan dan perkapalannya di Negeri-negeri Selat sehingga telah berjaya juga menguasai perkhidmatan kereta api dan juga ekspot beras Siam. Walau bagaimanapun pihak Jerman enggan melibatkan diri dalam hal ehwal Tanah Melayu atau Siam sematamata bagi mengelakkan sebarang pertikaian dengan pihak British.

Dalam pada itu pula, mulai 1870-an terdapat beberapa pihak dari kalangan pegawai Negeri-negeri Selat dan juga bukan pegawai yang menyebarkan pandangan bahawa sekitanya British tidak meluaskan kuasanya di Semenanjung Tanah Melayu dengan secepat mungkin maka sudah pasti pihak Jerman akan berbuat demikian. Ini juga bererti pihak Jerman pasti akan dapat menguat kedudukan British dari India ke China. Dalam usaha persediaan ke arah perluasan kuasa, pihak berkuasa Negeri-negeri Selat juga telah memulakan tindakan-tindakan bagi menyekat perkembangan perkapalan, pengambilan buruh dan perluasan modal serta perdagangan Jerman daripada memasuki negeri Melayu walaupun
Negeri-negeri Malaya masih belum menjadi jajahan British ketika itu.

Bagi mengekalkan kepentingan masa depannya di Negeri-negeri Melayu di bawah naungan Siam pula, Penjabat luar Negeri Britain menolak permintaan Siam yang berhasrat melibatkan Jerman dalam suatu perjanjian antarabangsa yang akan mengekalkan kemerdekaan Siam. Selain itu, Pejabat Luar Negeri Britain juga telah berusaha menguasai semua kepentingan Jerman dalam perkhidmatan keretapi di Siam.

Jadi adalah hampir tepat untuk dikatakan bahawa alasan Jerman ini telah digunakan bagi membentuk British Malaya.
NOTE ON THE USE OF SOURCES

This dissertation focuses mainly on Britain's attitude and response towards the German factor in relation to the extension of British control over the Malay states.

Since emphasis was on Britain's perspective in the "Anglo-German Rivalry in the Malay Peninsula and Siam", more weight was accorded to the study of British rather than German documentary materials.

Moreover, most British documentary sources relevant to the present study, such as Colonial and Foreign Office records, were easily available in Malaysia and Singapore. A comprehensive search in Germany's archival holdings at Potsdam, Merseburg, Bonn, Koblenz, Freiburg, Hamburg, Bremen and Berlin* was not possible due to financial constraints. Nevertheless, a number of published German records, memoirs, reports, private papers, as well as contemporary books and articles were used in this study.

*For a guide to the locations and contents of original documentary materials relating to Germany in the Pacific and Far East in the period 1870-1914, see J.A. Moses and P.M. Kennedy (eds.), Germany in the Pacific and Far East, 1870-1914, St. Lucia, Univ. of Queensland Press, 1977, pp.349-83.
THE MALAY PENINSULA AND SIAM

(This map shows only places mentioned in the text.)
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Bibliography
INTRODUCTION

In 1964 a short article appeared in the "Asian Studies" journal with the title "How Germany Made Malaya British". In it, K.G. Tregonning claimed that the fear of Germany caused Britain to establish formal control in the western states of the Malay Peninsula in the 1870s. Tregonning further maintained that the extension of British rule over the Siamese Malay provinces more than a quarter of a century later was again caused by the fear of Germany. In Tregonning's view, therefore, "It is almost possible to say that Germany made Malaya British."

For his interpretation, Tregonning relied heavily on studies prepared by the historians C.D. Cowan and W.D. MacIntyre. He also used an account written by the retired Straits Governor F. Swettenham. Yet, further investigation by the Malaysian historian Khoo Kay Kim revealed certain legitimate reservations regarding the "German Argument", especially when it is applied to the

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first escalation of British expansion in 1873-4." This was nearly thirty years ago, and since then this topic has been so neglected as to make us wonder why it has not received further attention over the years. Was it because the "German Argument" had become the conventional interpretation which seemed "to relegate previous interpretations to the limbo of historiographical curiosities"?

When I first began to examine German interests and policy in Eastern Asia, I could not help but feel a certain degree of scepticism with Tregonning's "German Argument". Closer analysis only raised further questions over critical issues. Why did Britain view Germany as a rival in the Malay Peninsula and Siam? How did Germany affect British expansion? If Germany posed a threat to British security, how serious was that threat? And in what way was it measured?

Another reason for my hesitation at fully accepting the "German Argument" relates to the validity of evidence. Almost all documentation cited to explain the German role in Britain's expansion was built on an incredible amount of contemporary rumours depicting German intentions and intrigues. In whose interest were these rumours made? Were

"Khoo Kay Kim, "The Origin of British Administration in Malaya", Journal of the Malaysian Branch of the Royal Asiatic Society, vol.39, pt.1, 1966, pp.52-91. I will continue to use Khoo's phrase, the "German Argument", when referring to Tregonning's or similar explanations.

they "trotted out" to frighten British authorities into action? Were rumours enough to set off Britain's expansion mechanism?

The fact that the process of extending British rule over the entire Malay Peninsula was comparatively slow raises other points of uncertainty. It took Britain nearly thirty-five years to secure the relatively small area between Singapore and Siam, while almost the entire African continent was carved up among the imperial powers within just twenty years. Why was the extension of Britain's control over the peninsula so delayed? If Germany really posed a security threat, why was it not dealt with sooner? What does Britain's piecemeal expansion demonstrate?

Viewed from the debate on imperialism in general, the "German Argument" also seemed too narrow. Imperialism is a product caused by a push and pull of a whole variety of special forces. To say that "Germany made Malaya British" places all emphasis on one single factor. What about the multitude of other possible causes? Should the not so obvious reasons for acquiring territory be excluded from any explanation?

My own historical perspective of imperialism was largely formed while researching for my M.A. thesis which was an attempt to find out what triggered the "Scramble for Africa" among the Western powers. From the beginning

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I found myself desperately struggling with a whole variety of conflicting theories and interpretations of European imperialism. It was just as one scholar put it: "To write on imperial issues is immediately to enter a world of controversy. Conflicting views and purposes of Empire have coloured all aspects of history which touch upon matters imperial."  

Later I came to realize that it is possible to separate most theories and interpretations dealing with imperial history into two categories according to how a country's colonial expansion was explained: was it deliberate and internally motivated, or was it externally determined by uncontrollable circumstances? Clearly Tregonning's "German Argument" belongs to the latter group of interpretations.

Psychologists trying to explain human behaviour could not agree for a long time whether a person's actions is essentially formed according to deeply rooted instincts, or whether it is primarily conditioned by social/cultural forces. Some newer studies have tried to show that the way a person behaves and acts is determined by a complicated mixture of both innate and acquired impulses."

Much in the same way of fusing perspectives, is it


not possible to say that a country's expansionist actions were determined by a blend of inherent and extraneous factors? If so, is it not reasonable to interpret the extension of British control over the Malay Peninsula by viewing Britain's "internal" inclinations coupled with the "external" conditions created by Germany? This is what the present study tries to do.

It might be opportune at this point to briefly outline the findings of this investigation which shall be supported by the data offered in the coming chapters:

1) Although commercially very active and successful in Eastern Asia, Germany did not possess political ambitions in either the Malay Peninsula or Siam. Germany readily acknowledged the fact that much of this area lay in Britain's sphere of interest.

2) Inherent in the British attitude towards the Malay states was an inclination that desired more control, more territory, and more power. A major concern, therefore, was the question of how to justify placing these states under British rule.

3) Certain British expansionist forces used the rhetoric that if Britain failed to extend her control quickly over all the Malay states, Germany would find a pretext for intervention. What looked like a reaction to the German threat to British interests and security was nothing else than the manifestation of a concealed desire for expansion.

The thesis to be developed in this dissertation will be
along the following lines: Britain's desire for expansion
determined the role played by Germany - and at the same
time, Germany helped determine the method of British
expansion.

Before going any further, it is necessary to make
clear the framework within which this interpretation
rests. As in any other analysis of history, the writing of
this study calls for the use of some kind of
periodisation, however loosely applied. This study is
primarily concerned with the period when Germany first
came into the picture of Colonial Office consideration in
1870, and continues until 1909, the year Britain acquired
from Siam her Malay provinces.

To better grasp why Germany was portrayed as a rival,
it is necessary to enter into certain details as regards
German interests and activities in the Straits Settlements
and Siam. The link between the Straits Settlements and the
Malay Peninsula, and between Siam and the Malay Peninsula
is obvious. Singapore was the seat of the British colony's
government from where the frontiers of British control in
the peninsula was extended. Kedah, Perlis, Terengganu and
Kelantan were dependencies of Siam.

A few remarks as to the selection of data and
structure. As already noted above, this study is based on
the hypothesis that certain forces responsible for
Britain's policy formulation desired British expansion in
the Malay Peninsula, and Germany was used as a convenient
excuse to justify that expansion. This hypothesis became
the principle of data selection, guiding my choice and arrangement of facts. As to the structure, I found it best for the sake of simplicity and clarity to organize this study into four parts, each discussing a relatively broad set of topics rather than being strictly linear and sequential. To create a balanced picture, I have separated as far as possible the discussion of Germany's interests and policy (Part One), from the discussion of the British colonial authorities' attitude towards Germany (Part Two), and the discussion of the German element in British Foreign Office considerations (Part Three). The final part pulls together the strands of my argument (Part Four).

Thus, Part One is an enquiry into early German trade and policy in Eastern Asia (Chapter 1); Germany's competitive growth in the trade, shipping and "coolie" transport of the Straits Settlements (Chapter 2); her foreign policy, railway and mercantile enterprise in Siam (Chapter 3); and her need for naval stations in the East, including the bid for Pulau Langkawi (Chapter 4). Part Two deals with the German factor and the colonial authorities' decision to intervene in the Western Malay states in 1873 (Chapter 5); their antagonistic response to German

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10 The reason for this separation was due to the fact that Britain extended her control first over the "free" Malay states and then over the "Siamese" Malay states. Since 1868, the colonial authorities of the Straits Settlements dealt directly with the Malay states not under Siam, while Siam and her Malay dependencies remained the responsibility of the Foreign Office. (C.O. Correspondence, No.14, Kimberley to A. Clarke, 20 September 1873.)
ascendancy in the carrying trade of the Straits Settlements (Chapter 6); their efforts to prevent the introduction of German capital and enterprise into the Malay states not yet under British control (Chapter 7). The subject-matter of Part Three focuses on the German element in Britain's foreign policy towards the area between Burma and the Federated Malay States (Chapter 8); as well as Britain's response to Siam's aspiration of remaining an independent state (Chapter 9). Finally, Part Four is an attempt to use the data offered in Parts One to Three to consider the question: Did Germany Make Malaya British? (Chapter 10).

When setting out to examine the German side of the story, I naturally had to rely heavily on German sources and studies, both old and new. With the help of some friends and a trip to Europe, I managed to acquire valuable German material from Humboldt University in Berlin as well as from Vienna University. As for the British side, I relied mostly on sources available in the archives of the University of Malaya, and to a lesser extent on those in the National University of Singapore.

I would like to mention a few outstanding studies upon which I have frequently drawn. The first is G. Meyer's doctoral thesis "Das Eindringen des deutschen Kapitalismus in die niederlaendischen und britischen Kolonien in Suedostasien von den Anfaengen bis 1918".11

11G. Meyer, "Das Eindringen des deutschen Kapitalismus in die niederlaendischen und britischen Kolonien in (continued..."
Although primarily concerned with the Dutch East Indies, this study gives a comprehensive and systematic review of German commercial expansion in Southeast Asia. The second fine German study is E. Boehm's, "Ueberseehandel und Flottenbau", which is a detailed discussion on the relationship between German naval policy and enterprise abroad. Most important to me was Boehm's treatment of the German endeavours to acquire Pulau Langkawi. Both studies draw heavily on unpublished German material.

I must also mention Cheong Weng Eang's excellent study "German Interest in the Malay Peninsula, 1867-1909". Considering that this 1959 effort is the best single investigation on this topic I have come across in English, it is lamentable that it has been ignored for so long. Cheong's sources are impressive - unpublished British records. I acknowledge a debt to his study from which I identified many relevant sources for further investigation.

\[11\] (...)continued


Because the present work deals to a large extent with the German question in the Straits Settlements, the Malay states, and Siam, it might appear that I have paid insufficient attention to the histories of particular German firms and individuals. Other than in areas where explanations were required, I have refrained from narrating their stories because they are simply too numerous and would have required too much space. Information on some of the more important German firms and individuals can be readily found in the very entertaining series "Twentieth Century Impressions of British Malaya". Also, a study of the wider causes and movement of British and German imperialism, and British-German relations, falls outside the scope of this work, but references are made where it is required for explanation.

It might be meaningful to agree on some of the terms used in the text. Regarding the phrase the "Malay Peninsula", the Colonial Office tended to view it meant the territories which lay between India and the Federated Malay States. The Foreign Office, however, held that the "Malay Peninsula" only described the area south of Moung Bang Tapan. Throughout this dissertation the narrower meaning referred to by the Foreign Office is adhered to.


¹See for example F.O.422/59, No.83, Co. to F.O., 17 June 1905, confidential; and F.O.422/59, No.88, Lansdowne to Paget, 26 June 1905, telegraphic.
Moreover, I often used the term "Eastern Asia" by which the area encompassing East and Southeast Asia is roughly implied.

This study is an attempt to supplement already existing contributions by re-examining correlations between the German factor and British activities in the Malay Peninsula and Siam. I sincerely hope that it will fulfill the intention of adding some clear and useful insights and thus be considered a contribution to the knowledge of Malaysia's and Thailand's past. Also, I would be happy if this new analysis constructively contributed to the ongoing debate on 19th century imperialism.