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British Colonial Strategy in Malaya in the 19th Century: Deliberate Global Strategy or Geopolitical Necessity?

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ABSTRACT

The Industrial Revolution drove Britain's globally strategy in the 19th century, which saw the Malay Peninsula's geographic location and resources as key. The process of British colonization in Malaysia was as much the result of deliberate strategic planning as it was of geopolitical rivalry and flexibility. Britain progressively increased its authority over the Malacca Straits by managing tin and rubber assets. And it would strengthen her hold over the area. Britain first focused mostly on the security of shipping in the Indian Ocean. It did not see the strategic value of the Malay Peninsula until rivalry with other powers increased. Adopting "informal imperialism" and "sub-imperialism," Britain indirectly controlled the Malay area by means of trade control and co-operation with local the rich and famous. And its lower the cost of conflict but also causing social divisions and laying the seeds of later ethnic conflicts and independence movements. British colonial advances on the Malay Peninsula mixed global strategies and geopolitical reality is unspoken threats due to the variety and complexity of imperialism.

1. Malaysian Colonization's Historical Past Spans Early Trade to Imperial Expansion

From ancient times, the Malay Peninsula—which is now Malaysia—has been a center of East-West trade and a major marine transportation route. The Malay Peninsula traded regularly with China, India, the Arab world for dozens of years BC.^[1]The political scene of Southeast Asia changed drastically sixteenth century with the introduction of European powers like Portugal and the Netherlands. Portugal invaded Malacca, and the Netherlands seized the adjacent Dutch East Indies—today's Indonesia. But Britain's engagement came very late and first con-

centrated on its interests in India ^[2]Exporting cotton, textiles, and opium from India to China let the British East India Company enjoy enormous monetary advantages.

Britain's colonial aspirations first started to spread into Southeast Asia slowly into the 19th century. The Malay Peninsula's geographical orientation made it a vital site between the Indian and Pacific oceans. ^[3]For Britain, control of the Malay Peninsula guaranteed the safety of its shipping in India. And it offered it access to quite rich resources, mainly tin ore and rubber. Rubber became a major raw resource in the course of global industrialization. Whereas the extracting of

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tin ore made the Malay Peninsula a major worldwide source of tin output.^[4] The colonization of the Malay Peninsula was thus for Britain both a product of global strategic imperatives and also closely related to Britain's competition with other powers in Southeast Asia, particularly that of the Netherlands and France.

2. Economic Reasons for Imperialism and the Methodical Framework of Colonial Policy

Particularly the Industrial Revolution, which greatly raised resource demand, the global economic scene of the 19th century changed dramatically. Britain's colonial policies at this time clearly had a strong economic incentive. Britain, the first nation to go through the Industrial Revolution, needed markets and plenty of raw resources to enable its industrialization. Key in promoting Britain's economic development were tin ore, rubber, and other agricultural resources.^[5] Britain's interest in the Malay Peninsula expanded as the value of tin ore and rubber grew. Deepened as tin ore and rubber grew more valuable, Malay Peninsula became widely employed in metallurgy, electronic devices, and weapon production. And tin ore was one of the most valuable industrial raw resources available in the nineteenth century. Given that the colonial era coincided with a boom in manufacturing, the British colonial authority gave the tin business in Malaya great value. Britain mainly expanded its grip over the commercial routes in the Malay Peninsula by managing major ports like Penang, Malacca, and Singapore, not directly occupying this area.^[6] For the first half of the nineteenth century, the British purpose was "trade rather than territory." The sole value the early colonies brought to Britain was their protection and enhancement of trade with China. The textiles and metal products imports and exports mostly from Britain, tea and silk from China, opium and cotton textiles from India, tin ore from the Malay Peninsula, and pepper and gold from the island of Sumatra. Then Singapore became the British "gateway to Southeast Asia." It was also a hub for travel connecting East Asia, Europe, and India. In the mid-nineteenth century, the price of tin soared from 20 to 30 Straits dollars per quintal. Through Singapore, Britain was able to readily access the Malay Peninsula and increase its economic reach.^[7] The tin export tax became the principal source of income for the colonial administration between 1875 and 1896. It amounted to Straits 25 million, far more than the railway and land taxes. Thus, the economic pillar of British colonial control in

Malaya turned to be tin mining. Conversely, rubber took front stage in industrial manufacturing and worldwide conveyance, particularly in the automotive sector and tire manufacture. The Malay Peninsula became the hub of world rubber output as demand for rubber grew.^[8]

Britain started gradually tapping into the Malay Peninsula's resources, especially in tin mining and rubber plantations, over time. Britain thus brought in plenty of Chinese migrants and set up a sizable mining and plantation-based economic system^[9]. It was not just for the purpose of economic gain that Britain engaged in colonial expansion. And it assisted the country in establishing its position within the global capitalist economic system.

3. Informal Imperialism and Sub-Imperialism: an Adaptable Method of Colonial Control

The British colonial approach showcased a great degree of adaptability and flexibility in its execution. Although economic considerations played a significant role in shaping British colonial policy in the Malay Peninsula. Unlike conventional imperialist tactics of direct military occupation and administration, the British colonization of the Malay Peninsula used a lot of "informal imperialistic" instruments and "sub-imperialist" techniques. The term "informal imperialism" describes the empire's indirect control over the resources and governance of the colonies via non-military means, such as economic, cultural, and political means. It depended less on military occupation or administrative jurisdiction and more on diplomacy, trade relations and control of the local government.^[10]

The concept of "sub-imperialism" is intricate. It involves certain colonies or districts that evolve into "sub-colonies" through regulated autonomy or appointments. And it possesses a measure of independence yet being reliant on the dominant power for significant matters.^[11]

Britain kept the power of nominal local rulers in many areas on the Malay Peninsula under essentially control of economic resources and trade channels by signing agreements with local native governments.^[12] For instance, the British combined Penang, Malacca, and the nation of Singapore into a single administrative area in 1867 and used political measures of consolidation of their rule over the territory. Singapore turned into a "free port" in Southeast Asia, free from direct local government action and totally free from

direct Malay Kingdom control. This not only helped Britain to quickly become a globally significant entrepot but also considerably enhanced British control over the resources of the Malay Peninsula ^[13].

Furthermore, Britain strengthened its economic dominance over the Malay Peninsula by means of cooperation with local kings. Britain adopted a new expansionist program, the annexation policy, directed against the Malay Peninsula states from the 1870s forward. First, the consequence of internal conflicts, anarchy and Chinese uprisings in the Malay states on the commercial interests of the Straits Settlements; second, the pleas of the Chinese community. Thirdly, the need to prevent invasions and occupation by other empires. And lastly, Britain's "humanitarian" concerns to protect and promote the states. And the need of the Straits Settlements' commercial interests. Britain intervened in local matters under "humanitarian" pretext to safeguard and advance the welfare and peace of the states.^[14] The proclamation issued by the British Secretary of State for the Colonies on 20 September 1873 was made according to this name and carried under this name. The declaration said it was abundantly evident the British Crown had no intention of meddling in the Malay states' domestic affairs. To keep its long and close ties with the States, the British Crown believes it is therefore obliged to make use of its already existing power in support of the local princes. And it safeguard these rich and productive nations from devastation as far as it is practical. These states would definitely face extinction if the current condition of chaos kept unbridled.^[15] This proclamation launched the British Malaya "protection" system. The princes of the Malay republics were still ostensibly local leaders, but Britain entirely controlled both political decisions and economic management. Britain's "sub-imperialist" approach of government helped it to unite its control over the Malay Peninsula without resorting to major military operations.

4. British Approach of Ethnic Distance Applied in Malaysia

As the colonial economy grew in 19th-century Malaya, immigrants arrived in great numbers. Though Chinese outnumbered Malays. At that time Malaya's largest ethnic group accounting for 49.2% of the total population, the 1947 census shows that the total population of Malaya was 5,808,000, of which Malays accounted for 43.3%. ^[16] The British followed the "di-

vide and rule" strategy to sow strife between the immigrants and the Malays. While it facilitated the Chinese and Indians to blend into the local population. First, it states that the particular status of Malays in the government service was a protective mechanism against non-Malays. The British neglected to include the Chinese and Indians into the colonial administration on the grounds that they lacked the status as *Taukei* natives. The fact that only the Malays could own land and cultivate rice further represented their particular unique status. ^[17] Meanwhile, non-Malays became dominant in the contemporary economic sector since Britain limited Malay land use through the Malay Reserve Act. It was not affordable to them. It aimed at fostering inter-ethnic hostility. Such British policies have helped to limit contact between non-Malays and Malays in terms of domicile, occupation, and social life and have resulted in their living in divided racial and cultural circles. This split socioeconomic structure produced a Malayan society with three groups: Malays, Chinese, and Indians without a shared national and cultural identity. Its greatly affected political growth. At last, the colonial era's educational system was essentially split into English language education and native language education. English education was first predominantly intended to equip civil personnel for the colonial authority so facilitating its management. English progressively evolved into the common language of education over time. However English education's great cost limited its appeal since only the top strata of society could afford it.^[18] But many of the Malay government workers and social elites who adopted Western concepts developed by the English educational system subsequently become nationalist leaders. This profoundly affected Malayan political growth and resulted in a coalition of the higher echelons of the ethnic communities. Britain built a westernized form of government in Malaya. Before World War, a western-educated elite governed legislative and executive institutions. Though officially copying the Western political system, these administrative structures were in fact merely an extension of British colonial control and lacked real democratic methods and power control. The British authorities greatly centralized the decision-making authority of the colonial government, limiting the local elites to participate in the management just to a limited degree. The actual control stayed in the hands of the British officials. Therefore, despite the seeming modernity of the administrative structure. And it remained basically an authoritarian regime fail-

ing to attain broad popular participation or political freedom.^[19]

5. The Multidimension and Complexity of Imperial Expansion: Strategic Intention and Historical Accident?

Basically, was imperial thought primarily responsible for the British annexation of Malaysia? This question addresses historical contingency, geopolitical rivalry, and colonial means' adaptability as well as Britain's worldwide strategy's architecture. This process exposes British imperialism's responsiveness and adaptation to changes in the geo-environment. And it represents Britain's strategic vision in the global economic system.

First of all, from the standpoint of strategic aim, Britain's colonial operations were somewhat meticulously scheduled. The Industrial Revolution and the spread of global capitalism was dawn. At the same time Britain progressively developed worldwide strategic and economic needs in the 19th century. The Malay Peninsula's geographical location, resources, and trade paths became essential components of its Southeast Asian policy. Simultaneously, the Malay Peninsula's tin mining and rubber businesses supplied essential raw resources for British manufacturing. All things helped the Malay Peninsula progressively become more significant in Britain's worldwide policy. Britain's colonial growth was founded on a well-considered perspective of global economic interests and the configuration of her empire.

The issue was that Britain's initial interest in the Malay Peninsula was not exactly unambiguous. When Britain's goals were to protect trading interests with Asian markets and ensure shipping in the Indian Ocean, the Malay Peninsula received little attention in early 19th century. Britain did not discover the strategic and resource potential of the southeast region until the deepening of rivalry with the Dutch and other nations. Thus it advocated further control over the Malay Peninsula.

Especially in the execution of the forms of "informal imperialism" and "sub-imperialism". Britain's colonial approach also displayed considerable adaptability and flexibility. Unlike many other empires that directly seized territories, Britain started its conquest of the Malay Peninsula with a partial military presence. Britain cooperated with local elites and controlled trade channels. Therefore it indirectly conquering the Malay area. This strategy not only lowered the possi-

bility of armed confrontation but also gave access to the colonies' resources and less expensive economic gains. Particularly in the several kingdoms and areas of the Malay Peninsula, Britain managed to keep its economic influence and lower the degree of direct engagement by means of treaties or agreements with local traditional rulers.

Still, these approaches are not without controversy. It aggravated the complexity of political systems and the polarization of local societies. By means of the "divide and rule" strategy, the British strengthened the division among various ethnic groups. It was particular in the context of the ties among Malays, Chinese, and Indians. Although this colonial approach helped to bring about short-term security, it also prepared the ground for political unrest and ethnic strife down ahead. Under British control, the changes in the Malay Peninsula's social structure and economic system planted the seeds of the late colonial period's independence movement. It also gave the historical foundations of the socioeconomic issues Malaysia encountered following its independence.

From these angles, Britain's colonial activities resulted from a mix of historical and geopolitical diverse elements rather than only depending on logical imperialist design. Britain's colonial development on the Malay Peninsula was a flexible reaction in the face of international rivalry and changes in the regional environment as well as a result of global strategy and economic interests. It embodied both imperialist planning and Britain's strategic flexibility and fortitude in trying circumstances. Especially in relation to the usage of "informal imperialism" and "sub-imperialism". This process emphasizes the variety and complexity of imperialism in practice.

This makes us question whether the British conquest of the Malay Peninsula may offer us some historical understanding. In the face of growing globalization, competition and international cooperation remain difficult and dynamic. We need to analyze the Britain's strategic flexibility in the process of colonizing Malaysia. This would help us to better grasp how to balance immediate authority and indirect influence in global competition and how to modify our policies and reactions to the interaction of historical contingency and strategic intentions.

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