PERSONAL IDENTITY THROUGH ARCHITECTURE IN SINGAPORE AT THE TURN OF THE NINETEENTH CENTURY

by

VALERIE A. WINGFIELD

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Student: Valerie A. Wingfield

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This thesis has been accepted and approved in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the Master of Art degree in the Department of Art History by:

Albert Narath	Chair
Erin Cunningham	Member
Charles Lachman	Member

and

Kimberly Andrews Espy	Vice President for Research & Innovation/Dean of the Graduate School

Original approval signatures are on file with the University of Oregon Graduate School.

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THESIS ABSTRACT

Valerie A. Wingfield

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Department of Art History

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People from many different ethnic backgrounds settled in Singapore over the course of the nineteenth century, making new lives for themselves on an island with very little recent human habitation. The homes they chose to build for themselves reflected new, sometimes aspirational, hybrid identities. A close observation of these structures helps to form a more complete picture of social conditions in turn of the century Singapore.

CURRICULUM VITAE

NAME OF AUTHOR: Valerie A. Wingfield

GRADUATE AND UNDERGRADUATE SCHOOLS ATTENDED:

University of Oregon, Eugene, Oregon

Mills College, Oakland, California

University of Edinburgh, Scotland

Thomas More College of Liberal Arts, Merrimack, New Hampshire

DEGREES AWARDED:

Master of Arts , Art History, June 2012, University of Oregon

Bachelor of Arts, History and Minor in Asian Studies, May 2006, Mills College

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

LIST OF FIGURES

Figure Page

CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

About the Study

As many successful people in colonial Singapore enjoyed complex, multi-cultural identities, and their homes reflect this fact. Singapore's unique culture can be appreciated from many different perspectives, but one of the better ways to experience Singapore's colonial history is through an observation of various examples of colonial era architecture. A home built for oneself is an intensely personal reflection of one's identity. As such, a home would seem likely to reflect one's core identity, rather than more superficial aspects. A hybrid home in colonial Singapore is reflective, then, of a full embrasure of identity with one's ancestors but also of the heavily English cultural influence of Singapore.

This investigation can be satisfying as a glossing overview of different historical, tropical styles, but if one knows about the social history of Singapore, these structures may be read as architectural synecdoches for the greater story of this island. Although an English colonial culture was dominant, even Anglo Black and White homes were hybrid in nature, reflecting societal stress and the inescapably hybrid nature of Singaporean society.

The differences in ethnic, domestic architectural choices in colonial Singapore can be read as a reflection of the social position of the various groups that lived there. Forces that

helped to shape Singapore, such as the nature of its founding, the Raffles Plan, and the specific economic conditions all helped to create a unique social situation that was simultaneously liberating for some and pressurizing for others. In response, these anxieties and desires found expression in domestic architecture.

In the case of Tamil immigrants, their original and modest, Anglo-influenced designs spoke of a desire to take part in the dominant, prosperous culture. Chinese merchant princes found partial assimilation into the colonial structure so advantageous that they used their wealth to build themselves Beaux Arts mansions, with nearly every element imported from Europe. Homes could also express anxiety. The famous Five Foot Ways of Chinatown were a product of horrifically overcrowded conditions, which in turn reflected the heritage of the Raffles plan and persistent concerns over the "yellow peril".[1]

One of the most unique expressions of architectural identity is known today as Black and Whites. These were commissioned exclusively by middle class Anglos and remained a popular style for almost a century. Taken together, these buildings help create a compelling image of colonial Singapore's culture. Of particular interest are the homes of two groups who enjoyed (or not) a uniquely close relationship held together almost entirely through dynamic social tension: the Chinese merchant-princes and the middle class

1 "Five Foot Ways" was a term used to describe the very narrow conditions produced by severe overcrowding. Lives were lived partially in the streets, leading to as little as five feet of passable space between the two sides of the street.

British cogs in the Imperial machine. Their relationship and the tension it produced was a defining feature of life in Singapore, and their homes were often physically near to each other, rather than being in ethnic enclaves as seen in the rest of Singapore. Anglos in Singapore showed a distinct preference for Black and White style homes over an extended period. A close reading of these structures helps to shed light on the unique social pressures experienced by Anglos in Singapore, where a combination of racist and colonial ideology came into conflict with the unavoidable economic realities of their adopted home.

Research Restrictions

There are a huge number of questions that might logically come to mind in relation to the architecture of colonial Singapore and the people who commissioned and built these structures. Unfortunately, numerous hurdles face the would-be researcher. Almost no academic work has been done in relation to Singapore, with the exception of some sociological work on postcolonial Singapore development. What little work there is on architecture in Singapore frequently focuses on the changes that have been wrought upon the urban landscape since independence. As for the buildings themselves, almost the entire island has been rebuilt since the 1960s, and the destruction has continued into the twenty-first century. A handful of buildings have been spared, and indeed restored at great expense, but they are very much the exception that proves the rule.

Even the first two architects to come to Singapore are hardly documented, although both were trained in the United Kingdom. Consequently, there has been little if any scholarly work done on these men. Inquiries to the Royal Society of British Architects yielded no new leads. On R.A.J. Bidwell, who designed several of the rare preserved buildings in Singapore, they do not even have a biography available to scholars.

As a result, there is a relative dearth of appropriate sources and so the only available methodology has been to branch out into sociological texts. In doing so, it is hoped that the neighboring studies of the various ethnic groups can be used to inform the theories proposed about the homes they lived in. These homes, now gone, are referenced from photographs and planning commission submissions. In the case of the primary subject of this work, the Black and Whites, a few examples remain, and contemporary, commissioned images may be referenced. Although it is not beyond possibility that floor plans and schematics still exist for some of these structures, they are at this time either lost or unavailable to scholarly inquiry.

CHAPTER II

ESTABLISHMENT OF TERMS

Self-Identification Through Architecture

In the present day, every aspect of identity and how it might be expressed is a pressing issue, for politicians, academics, and individuals. What is not always completely understood or acknowledged is that this is not an exclusively modern concern, so such an answer may be neither accurate nor possible. The area once known as the Straits Settlements has a long and rich history of productive and relatively peaceable cultural plurality, resulting in historical examples of a variety of individuals each navigating their own complex and flexible cultural identities throughout their lives.[2]

At first thought, it may seem that claiming architecture is quite so integral to identity is an overstatement. Although architecture has recently been getting more serious consideration in the fields of art appreciation and art history, it is undeniably the case that architecture is fundamentally different from many other types of art. Perhaps alone among the manifestations commonly accepted as "art", architecture requires a degree of use-function to be properly termed "architecture" at all. The "work" that a residential

2 The area referred to as the Straits Settlements was comprised of unconnected settlements extending from the tip of the Malay Peninsula up the western seacoast with the most significant areas being modern-day Singapore, Malacca, and Penang. Although quite different and disparate from each other, they were administered jointly, first by the British East India Company, and later as a Crown Colony.

building does is to allow the people who reside within it to carry out their lives in the manner they see fit.

Although it is possible that a family might choose to live in a home built for a culture that is not theirs, and is therefore uncomfortable, it seems unlikely that without extenuating circumstances any family would choose this deliberately, and certainly would not pay exorbitantly for the privilege. It is plausible, however, that a family would choose to live in a home type that was not "theirs" if it represented the kind of life they wished to have.[3] With these considerations in mind, a look at the conditions that created Singapore will help clarify the reasons behind the unique society that developed there.

Self-identified Asiatic Britishers were not merely slavishly copying the tastes of their colonial masters, and neither were they futilely aping a culture they did not truly understand and were disallowed from participating in.[4] Rather, they seem to have genuinely felt that, as one of multiple identities, they were British in almost every sense. Thus it was quite natural that they would take pride in implementing the latest in European styles when they built their homes, a specific setting where having a European identity gave them an advantage. This change in identity can be followed and the effects it

3 Such as accepting poverty and discomfort as the opportunity cost for one's children to have a "better life".

4 "Asiatic Britishers" was the term some members of this group used to articulate the dual identities and loyalties they had. Tan, "Pioneers' Homes in the Social History of Singapore," *Journal of Southeast Asian Architecture 2*, no.1 (1997): 77.

had on the domestic architecture in various communities helps to demonstrate their changing relationship with Singaporean society.

Foundation of Singapore

East India Company and Raffles

Many of the reasons behind the complex cultural identities in Singapore can be traced back to the unique foundational conditions and history of the island colony. There is very little that may be said about Singaporean history without invoking the name of Sir Stamford Raffles and his eponymous Plan. Although Raffles spent a comparatively small amount of time in Singapore, his presence as a leader genuinely beloved by his people and his unwavering dedication to what was right for his adopted home left a legacy that saw the little island through nearly fifty years of continual efforts to abandon, squash, or neglect it out of existence.

The peculiarities of the East India Company also played an important and formative role in the foundational years of Singapore's history. The role of the Company was largely negative, both in the sense that the changes it sought to effect were not to the benefit of the island, and in the sense that the legacy of the East India Company in Singapore is one of absence—a lack of physical or effective governing presence. Finally, the continual and varied flow of immigrants into Singapore drove all forms of growth, from population

to economic. This unique mix of influences is undoubtedly the reason for the subsequent unusual growth and success of Singapore through the colonial and post-colonial eras. To better understand this early history is to be able to properly contextualize the singular nature of colonial Singapore and the architecture that resulted.

Territorial Claims

The process by which Sir Stamford Raffles came to Singapore was common enough: at the age of 24 in 1805, having worked in the London offices of the East India Company for some years previous, he found himself promoted to Assistant Secretary of the new Penang presidency.[5] This was certainly a mixed blessing: although it represented an ideal opportunity to feed his personal ambitions, the promotion was not without its risks. The journey to Penang was a long one, during which any number of things could go fatally wrong, and once in the tropics there was an interminable list of diseases that afflicted Europeans disproportionately. Sudden death from disease was a major hurdle in the proper administration of British-claimed areas around the globe.[6] Despite his inherited shortcomings of gentile poverty and a lack of formal education, Raffles' driving desire was to take what he believed to be his "rightful" place among the landed, wealthy, and aristocratic. As a result, he not only survived the tropics, but in a peculiar manner was able to thrive.

5 Turnbull, "A History of Singapore 1819-1988, 2nd ed," 6.

6 Ibid., 35.

After an initial and profound failure to profitably administer Java, during which he angered both the natives and the neighboring Dutch, while expending profligate amounts of money, he was recalled to London in 1816. At this time, he warned that British trade interests with China must be protected via the creation and maintenance of some friendly ports between China and the Cape of Good Hope (this being the most direct trade route towards England).[7] By 1818 he had been forgiven to a sufficient degree to be sent out to Bencoolen, where he once again sent frantic word to the home office that Dutch expansion must be stopped for Britain to remain competitive in the lucrative China trade.[8] This was no small matter, as tea and silk imports made many fortunes in London, and the only trade entity entitled to do business in China was the East India Company itself. Specifically, he was concerned that with Dutch control of the Straits of both Sunda and Malacca, the British would be helpless against a power play from Amsterdam. With the Charter Act of 1813, Raffles knew that the East India Company had lost all trade monopolies except their tea and China trades.

Although the offices in London rebuked him yet again, Raffles was able to get permission to visit Francis Rawdon-Hastings, 1st Marquess of Hastings, who was serving as Governor-General in India. In their conversations, Raffles tried and failed to get

7 The importance and looming presence of China can be felt through almost all of the early difficulties involving the foundation of Singapore and are sufficiently complex to warrant a separate paper. See Appendix A for a brief summation.

8 Bencoolen was the name given to a narrow stretch of land on the south-west side of Sumatra laid claim to by the East India Company from 1685 until 1824.

support for a series of small outposts throughout Dutch Sumatra (and little wonder!). Hastings did approve of setting up some sort of British presence along the Straits of Malacca inasmuch as it did not bring direct conflict with the Dutch.[9] To this end, Raffles was permitted to enlist the assistance of Colonel William Farquhar, then of Penang and preparing to retire. Having previously engaged in battle against the Dutch in the region, Farquhar had a great deal of antipathy towards them stored up and was only too happy to join Raffles' cause. Upon Raffles' landing in Penang, he promptly learned that the Dutch had annulled Farquhar's treaty of 1818, which allowed safe British trade through the Dutch controlled Straits of Malacca.

Far from being upset, high–minded Raffles saw this as a fantastic opportunity, and sent Farquhar forth to find a suitable spot for the British to put down some roots on the southern tip of the peninsula while he took care of the last of the planning stage in Acheh. Not everyone was equally enamored with Raffles' ambitions, however, and a Colonel Bannerman in Penang tried to forestall the process by demanding confirmation of the expeditionary goals from Calcutta, likely out of pique because he had not been part of the decision process to set up a new base of operations on the Malay Peninsula.

Having been part of East India Company operations for almost fifteen years, Raffles had learned a thing or two about how to get things done, and so he agreed to wait for instruction from Calcutta, and then promptly snuck out of Penang in the night, seeking

9 Turnbull, "A History of Singapore 1819-1988, 2nd ed," 7.

to join Farquhar at points south. They ended up on the island of Singapore, where they were able to buy out the Sultan and the Sultan's brother, who contested the throne, for a combined $8,000 a year. Raffles promptly left to return to Bencoolen, of which he was still nominally in charge despite having been gone for almost a year.[10]

Disputed Ownership

The first year of Singapore's founding was rough. The happily bought-out Sultan promptly wrote to many members of his extended family and claimed (among other things) that the British had intimidated him into signing over the island. The Dutch got wind of the matter and, on the theory that they had laid claim to the entire archipelago, complained bitterly to Penang. Farquhar begged for reinforcements from Bannerman, but the Colonel held a grudge and instead made efforts to have Raffles called back to London. Despite Bannerman's uncharitable intentions towards Raffles, Farquhar, and Singapore generally, the unintended effect of his actions was to lull the Dutch into believing that everything would work itself out, giving the colony time to grow.

In Bencoolen, Raffles received word from the Governor-General of India that he would advocate on Singapore and Raffles' behalf with London, prodded partially by a positive hate for Bannerman, but also by the belief that a port like Singapore ought to

10 Turnbull, "A History of Singapore 1819-1988, 2nd ed," 8.

exist. The knife was twisted when Bannerman was ordered by Hastings to send troops to defend Singapore against possible Dutch incursion.[11] By the time word of events had reached London, a few members of Parliament had realized that the value of Singapore outweighed any possible nastiness with the Dutch, and were willing to negotiate to keep it. Raffles slept well, knowing that the longer the details took, the better his claim to Singapore would be. As in many other situations, possession of islands seems to have been "nine points" of international law.

Conflict of Interest

It should be noted that the Dutch had every reasonable expectation of fairly consistent behavior between the East India Company and the government of Great Britain. Although the Company was a nominally private consortium of merchants who had banded together to take advantage of certain trade opportunities as chartered from the Crown, the reality was not nearly so simple or neat. There was consistent and persistent overlap between those gentlemen who served on the Board of Directors for the Company and members of Parliament.

As though this alone did not cause enough conflict of interest, many members of Parliament who did not serve on the Board of Directors were invested heavily in the

11 Farquhar had also learned how to work the system over the course of his career in the far East, and had already diverted a company more than twice as large as Bannerman's en route from Bencoolen to India.

Company as it regularly made very healthy profits. As Parliament was responsible for regulating the Company as well as establishing where it would enjoy monopolies, it could take immense efforts to effect any unfavorable changes to official stances regarding the Company.[12]

The British government also took advantage of the degree of influence and control they had over the East India Company and regularly took action under the guise of the Company that they could not make on their own without drawing international censure. Although the veil was very thin, it afforded a degree of plausible deniability for the making and breaking of treaties across India during the period of consolidation, or for the entire duration of the opium trade with China.[13] The fiction used to explain away the use of public funds to protect or even advance private interest was a nod and a wink towards "protecting Crown interests overseas".

Strangely, the Company were the holders of almost all the Crown interests overseas until such time as these "interests" managed to be formally converted into Crown Colonies, which by odd coincidence the British public was still required to fund and

12 Indeed, the desire to protect Company profits in the American colonies resulted in the Seven Years War, the aftereffects of which directly informed the subsequent complaints of the colonists. The taxes that were levied to pay the troops that had fought to defend Company profits were a particular sore point amongst the colonists, and a point on which Parliament was uniquely reluctant to move. This was entirely typical of the British government's tendencies to use government funds (or troops, or taxes, or…) to defend and protect the Company.

13 As mentioned in Appendix A, the Imperial Court in China was well aware of the complicity, awareness, and influence Parliament had over the Company and enjoined them directly to put a stop to the trade. Naturally, Parliament did nothing, claiming their hands were tied.

protect. Such was the eventual fate of Singapore, although they had been sufficiently mistreated by the Company by that point that they were grateful for the privilege.

The literal founding of Singapore was able to progress with relatively few difficulties for a time, due to the wisdom and experience of Farquhar and the relatively close location of Penang, from whence necessary supplies could be shipped. Within weeks, Farquhar's reputation had drawn in hundreds of immigrants form Malacca.[14] The city would grow according to Raffles' grand Plan, which was truly a product of the Age of Enlightenment.

14 Farquhar had married a Malay woman and spoke Malay fluently. Combined with his reputation as a fair, accessible, and impartial ruler, it is little wonder Singapore soon attracted a crowd. Turnbull, "A History of Singapore 1819-1988, 2nd ed," 11.

CHAPTER III

THE RAFFLES PLAN

Allocation of Land

Raffles' Plan, like many city plans of the early nineteenth century, was aesthetically motivated, with a heavy admixture of features designed to influence, not to say control, society towards better outcomes. The left and right banks of the river mouth and much of the plain around it were claimed for a cantonment and various official structures, undoubtedly envisioned by Raffles as an organized, spacious distribution of stately European-styled buildings. East Beach had initially been set aside by Raffles as the primary European commercial area even though the water was so shallow as to prohibit any ships from landing there and anyway, there was an unfortunate abundance of sandbars. When traders reasonably enough complained, Raffles refused to consider a permanent solution.

This chain of events is quite illustrative of Raffles' entire approach to founding his dream colony: as with other visionaries, he was unable to allow reality to negatively affect his perfect visions. As with other stubborn dreamers, it fell to some other hapless and later personally loathed individuals to salvage the gold from the dross, in this case the realistic general Farquhar. Farquhar had been left on the island as a *de facto* administrator and Resident, and thus was stuck putting out the metaphorical fires Raffles blithely left in his

wake. He allowed the European merchants to put up brick warehouses to protect their goods, and generally did his best to rectify the other misappropriations of land that Raffles had unreasonably specified in his grand plan. He also allowed gambling to proceed, as this gave him a reliable source of revenue in a Free Port, and wasn't strict in enforcing anti-slavery measures, as this entailed yet another outlay the fledgling government could ill-afford.[15]

Social Engineering

However impractical he may have been, Raffles was undoubtedly a man of unusual vision. An ardent abolitionist, upon his 1822 return to Singapore he strengthened laws against both slavery and the slave trade. English law had only formally outlawed slavery in 1772, and even the coming *Slavery Abolition Act 1833* would continue to grant exceptions to a few distant islands and the holdings of the East India Company.[16]

Consequently, Raffles' additional declaration that any person who arrived after January 29, 1819 could not be considered a slave was fairly monumental and arguably ahead of its time. Further, he stipulated explicit limitations on how long voluntary

15 The stubbornness of almost every party concerned relating to almost any sort of income tax or port fees would continue to plague Singapore for much of its colonial period. Raffles was concerned that such measures would strangle growth, the citizens were predictably loath to tax themselves, and the East India company was dead set against either for reasons of their own. Turnbull, "A History of Singapore 1819-1988, 2nd ed," 18.

16 The historic *Somersett Case* judgement in 1772 had explicitly limited its effects to the land masses of England and Wales.

indentured servitude could last, and went so far as to set a price of $20 as the theoretical maximum that might be owed in passage money from China. Additionally, a period of no more than two years during which this fee could be worked off was set, with enforcement to be provided in the form of a contract signed before a magistrate.[17]

Although it must be mentioned that the consistent enforcement of these laws would be more than fifty years in coming, his efforts towards abolition should be recognized. Much of the difficulty of enforcement came down to the same two basic failings that would ultimately contribute to nearly all of Singapore's early issues: a nearly total inability to communicate directly with the large and growing Chinese population, and an unending severe budget shortfall.

Slavery was not the only social vice which Raffles wanted to give no opportunity to gain a foothold in Singapore: he also made efforts to stem violence by making it illegal to carry weapons and to discourage the worst excesses relating to prostitution by making male pimping illegal.[18] Although Farquhar had legalizing gambling, Raffles attempted to close all gambling dens and cock-pits. Regressive taxation was used to discourage abuses of alcohol and opium. Like many intellectuals of the Enlightenment and after, Raffles' conception of a well-ordered city was one in which citizens would behave commendably, in

17 Turnbull, "A History of Singapore 1819-1988, 2nd ed," 23.

18 Given the overwhelming percentage of immigrants who were young men, Raffles seems to have realized that outlawing prostitution totally could never succeed. Turnbull, "A History of Singapore 1819-1988, Second Edition," 23.

their own rational best interest, and with respect for the other occupants of the fair city that they inhabited. If a bit of legal prodding was needed to assist in reaching this outcome, Raffles was only too happy to oblige.[19]

Progressive Policies

The social innovations of Raffles did not end with prohibitive legal pronouncements, however. The physical manifestations of "a public good", or "public services" were only beginning to be cautiously felt in Europe as part of a general embrace of Humanism. Raffles wanted Singapore to enjoy many of these institutions from the start, and founded them accordingly. Beginning in 1819, Raffles laid claim to 48 acres and, working with the director of the Calcutta Botanic Garden, worked to discover which plants would prosper in Singapore, and which newly discovered species had the greatest commercial potential.[20] Kew Gardens in England had only begun to employ a full-time collector in 1771, so for Raffles to make this a foundation priority was striking.

Another example of Raffles' progressive tendencies involved a radical re-conception of an ancient institution, prisons. In Raffles' mind, the calling of a prison was to reform its

19 The key being "only too happy". He was not above confiscation of private property, public flogging, or the deliberate and prolonged desecration of the corpse of a Muslim criminal to make his points. Ibid., 24.

20 The Calcutta Botanic Garden itself was founded in 1787, although the Company had come into control of the area in 1698. Turnbull, "A History of Singapore 1819-1988, Second Edition," 21.

inmates, and the law mostly ought to seek recompense to the wronged.[21] The only exception was murder, where a conviction could lead to execution. The notion that a criminal could change was quite controversial at the time, and England would continue to deport "undesirables" to Australia until 1868. The reasons for "transportation" ranged from murder to petty theft, and the practice enjoyed wide support due to a pervasive belief that criminality was inborn and heritable, as well as the desire to inflict severe and non-fatal punishment on wrongdoers as a deterrent.

Ironically, although Singapore's laws supported the concept of rehabilitation of criminals, they were used as a "transportation" destination from India for many years.[22] The idea of rehabilitation seems to have permeated Singapore society, as the following anecdote makes clear:

> He once knew a lady, the wife of an Officer in high position, who told him she always selected her servants from that class [Indian convicts], and upon his asking whether she preferred thieves or murderers for service in her nursery, replied that she always chose murderers (great laughter), their crimes having been generally committed from motives of jealousy, and, those motives ceasing, they were very desirable servants.[23]

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21 Ibid., 22-3.

22 From 1825 until 1860, many Indian convicts, some known to be dangerous, were "transported" from India to Singapore; 60% returned to India when their terms were served. Of the 40% that chose to remain, more will be said later. Siddique, "Singapore's Little India," 9.

23 Buckley, "An Anecdotal History of Old Times in Singapore," 762.

Racial Policies

Even as Raffles strove to create a just and ordered society in other ways, so did he attempt to encourage interracial amicability. On the Rochore plain, he planned for a residential neighborhood where wealthy Europeans and Asians might live. Just to the east, land was set aside for Arabs to live on. By placing all these groups so close together, it was Raffles' intent that by living near to each other these populations might learn to get along with one another.

Although it was to prove woefully, shamefully inadequate, Raffles tried to provide the burgeoning Chinese population with substantial land to make their homes on: a large area west of the river was set aside for them. This bordered on what was to be the commercial quarter where he anticipated many of the poorer citizens would find employment as a matter of practicality and convenience. Further, it was his explicit intention that the area could be subdivided by the Chinese themselves into neighborhoods for each of the various dialect groups.[24]

Those Indians who did not have enough social standing and wealth to live in the mixed area were allocated land that was some distance upriver from the main town. The commercial sector was also integrated, and in this at least, Raffles was able to accomplish his goals: from the very start, money mattered more than ethnicity in Singapore.[25]

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24 Turnbull, "A History of Singapore 1819-1988, 2nd ed," 20.

25 Turnbull, "A History of Singapore 1819-1988, 2nd ed", 21.

One of Raffles' more unusual and yet successful measures to keep this early multi-cultural society content was to largely allow the various groups to adjudicate themselves. So long as native custom was in line with Raffles' grand, progressive visions he was unwilling to interfere.[26] Although he was not always the most respectful ruler when it came to his subjects' deeply-held beliefs, he did have some respect for the native culture of the Malay peninsula. To this end, and for the general long term benefit of Singapore, one of his final acts before leaving the island for the last time was to found the Singapore Institution, which he hoped would be a place for the "…cultivation of Chinese and Malaysian literature and for the moral and intellectual improvement of the Archipelago and surrounding countries".[27]

In true Raffles fashion, he sent to Calcutta for permission to found his Institution, and then promptly laid the ground stone and contributed a substantial sum of his own money to the furtherance of the cause before any approval had been granted. Initially, all the masters employed at the school were of various Asian descents, with not a single European instructor. Upon what was to be his final departure from Singapore, he gave various grand speeches in which he made clear that his deliberate intention was to equip his fledgling colony with fine, new versions of all the institutions and systems that it would need to move smoothly into a future two hundred years hence. Although the full

26 Ibid., 22.

27 Ibid., 24.

scope of the successes and failings of Raffles plan exceeds the scope of this paper, it is certainly the case that the unique conditions that he set forth resulted in a city like no other.

Social Conditions in Singapore 1860-1900

Reasons for Growth

The mid-to-late nineteenth century was a time of considerable economic growth in the entire region. Much of this was concentrated in the cities and towns within the Straits Settlements controlled regions. By 1911, a full 60% of people within the Straits Settlements would live in either cities or towns, effectively urban dwellers.[28] Rubber, tin, and trade continued to pour revenue into the region, and by 1931 Singapore, which only one hundred years before had been a jungle island of little importance to anyone, had become the single largest city in the region, with a population composed almost entirely of immigrants.[29]

Although Singapore was clearly the largest beneficiary of the influx of both money and immigrants, the other British-controlled regions like Penang and Malacca were not so far behind. Having so much of the population concentrated in urban areas ultimately

28 Lees, "Being British in Malaya, 1890-1940," *Journal of British Studies* 48, no.1 (2009): 83.

29 Ibid., 83.

proved to be a great aid to the British colonial system; having the citizenry so concentrated made it easier for the benefits of colonial rule to be felt by the everyman.

Communications, sanitation, public safety, and schools were all priorities under British rule, and the massive expansion of either English language schools or English *and* curricula made it simple and feasible for many young men to take the Cambridge qualifying exam.[30] A high score on this test allowed one to travel to the United Kingdom to study at one of the universities there, and then to return home to the Straits Settlements to serve in any number of capacities, up to and including positions of power and authority within the colonial administration.[31] Even for those who moved to the Straits Settlements as adults and who were in no position to benefit from the educational opportunities there directly would be able to provide better educations (and therefore futures) for their children, but additionally would enjoy a wide range of cultural experiences that were unavailable in less developed regions.[32]

Clearly there were benefits to living within the area under direct and explicit British control, but the proverbial bread and circuses are frequently not enough if people feel no

30 There are records of English/Malay schools as well as schools where English was taught along with one of a variety of Chinese dialects.

31 Ibid., 83.

32 For the full array of experiences available to all but the lowest paid laborer, see Lees, "Being British in Malaya, 1890-1940," *Journal of British Studies* 48, no.1 (2009): 84.

connection to the powers that are responsible for providing said bread and circuses. Merely living in an area that isn't badly mismanaged and of which one is a legal resident is hardly enough to give one a real stake in that area.[33]

Colonial Governance

The immigrant nature of the Straits settlements created a linguistic and cultural hodge-podge. This might seem to create an ungovernable situation, particularly at a time when intercultural understanding was not high. Perhaps still nervous in 1867 over events in India, a different policy was followed in the Straits Settlements, one that allowed white Englishmen to remain at the top of the pyramid while making any catastrophic misunderstandings unlikely.

In addition to the official colonial channels of power, there were also unofficially recognized headmen and appointed "Captain's China" to help govern the various Chinese groups who lived within the Straits Settlements.[34] There were also "Protectors" of Chinese and Indian immigration who might intervene on behalf of their respective

33 Clearly, there were increasing levels of enthusiasm over being full members of the British Empire in the Straits Settlements. As Lees describes in her article, the differences in spontaneous public participation between the Jubilee celebrations of 1887 and 1897 were significant.

34 This was a group of appointed individuals about whom little else is known by the author.

groups.[35] Finally, a wide variety of judges and judicial systems survived in relative harmony with each other, including the colonial system, Chinese systems, and a Muslim system run by Malaysian Muslims.

This plethora of systems could have resulted in anarchy, but the most frequent outcome was that people would choose the court most likely to give them a favorable ruling, and would approach the court in the identity most advantageous to their specific situation. The evidence shows that people enjoyed the flexibility and sense of fairness this system provided, and that generally things ran smoothly as a result.[36] Although it would certainly have been possible to confine people legally to a single identity, it was quite obvious that to do so would only create problems: no such plan was ever implemented.[37] With all the benefits stated above to being a member of a British Empire Crown Colony, it is little wonder that the younger generation, born within the colony and therefore subjects of the Queen, chose at times to emphasize this aspect of their personal identity, and might have felt genuine enthusiasm for the privileges they enjoyed as a result.

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35 Once the Straits Settlements became a Crown Colony, it was a simple matter for enterprising individuals from other Crown Colonies (such as India) to immigrate. A large Tamil population in the region was one of the results.

36 Lees, "Being British in Malaya, 1890-1940," *Journal of British Studies* 48, no.1 (2009): 83

37 Lest one be too caught up in the idea of a multi-cultural nineteenth century paradise, it is worth remembering that the white, ethnically English rulers in the region largely remained bigoted and racist against any and all brown-skinned individuals, finding them inferior in every way. This did not stop them from maintaining lucrative and cordial business relationships, however, or coveting invitations to non-whites' palatial and luxurious Western style homes.

CHAPTER IV

HOMES AS SIGNIFIERS OF IDENTITY

Introduction

One prominent way in which more may be understood about how these people thought of themselves is through the architecture of their homes. As major monetary investments and very visible public statements of identity, it may be safely assumed that these projects were not lightly undertaken. Indeed, a close investigation of the types of homes chosen by wealthy non-white members of the Straits Settlements Crown Colonies offers convincing corroborating evidence that the lived colonial experience for some individuals was overall positive enough that they chose to actively identify with "Queen and Empire" in their private lives.[38]

Of course, no colony can exist without colonizers, and so the housing choices made by rank-and-file colonial officials will also be investigated. Specifically, trying to untangle what their identity politics may have been as they lived as a white minority within a vibrant and complex society that did not always hold them in as much regard as some of the more racist individuals may have preferred. By looking more closely into the housing choices of these distinct and co-extant groups, some insight may be gained into the

38 For an effective overview of the evidence supporting this claim, see Lees, "Being British in Malaya, 1890-1940," *Journal of British Studies* 48, no.1 (2009).

complexities of creating and maintaining identity in the Straits Settlements, between the mid-nineteenth century and the first decade of the twentieth century.

Performative Identity in the Straits Settlements

Defining Terms

Identity in Malaya is best considered as a performative issue, as any other type of identity cannot be independently observed, and relies either on self-reporting or on guessing. So far as the performative aspects of cultural identity are concerned, there are quite a few pieces of evidence that can be pieced together in order to help create a coherent and compelling image of the multi-ethnic citizens of the Straits Settlements actively choosing to take on increasingly British identities for multiple compelling reasons. This in turn allows for a new confidence when discussing the hypothetical reasons for why they then chose to build for themselves and live in European style houses.

Chinese in Singapore

Working Poor

Chinese settlers arrived as the British began to build up their empire in the area, attracted by the possibility of any work at all at a time when an over-supply of labor had

crippled the economy of southern China. Called coolies and their descendants claimed as citizens of the Imperial Government of China into perpetuity, they maintained close ties with their home provinces, and frequently sent home remittances to try and help those family members left behind. Some of these immigrants were eventually able to amass wealth themselves, although they usually maintained their own social networks independent from the Straits Chinese who had lived in the Malay Peninsula for generations while maintaining a Chinese identity.

Straits Chinese were among the earliest to move to Singapore (some believe they were living on the island prior to British settlement), where they set up plantations of gambier and pepper.[39] As a result, it was estimated that by 1835 as many as three thousand Chinese called Singapore home.[40] These plantations functioned on a multi-party finance system that took advantage of the Chinese propensity for trade and the large number of Chinese immigrants new to the region that arrived on almost every junk.

A "pioneer" would approach a financier (often a local shopkeeper) for funds in order to establish a new plantation in return for a portion of the crops until such time as the debt was paid off. So long as one was more than two miles outside the town of Singapore, obtaining ownership of land on which to grow a plantation could be as "simple" as clearing

39 *Uncaria gambir*, also known as Cat's Paw, was and is a popular ingredient in traditional Chinese medicine and was a very profitable trade item as a result. See also Ping, "Chinese Society in Nineteenth Century Singapore," 27.

40 Ibid., 28.

jungle. Labor for these plantations was provided mostly by those Chinese fresh from China, who had either paid their own way and thus arrived penniless, or those who had arrived by promising to function as slave labor for a set number of years in return for their passage. In all, a plantation would likely have no more than twenty employees. Those who managed to survive their grueling tenure as indentured servants were then free to set themselves up as pioneers, and finally begin to make a profit from all their hard work.[41]

Middlemen of Trade

From a very early period, there was a second sector of the economy that was dominated by Straits Chinese, that of serving as an intermediary between the English trader and to whomever the English trader was endeavoring to sell goods. Merchandise often ended up in Singapore on consignment, meaning that the entire contents of an English vessel might be purchased by an English merchant to be disposed of as best he could, and there was no possibility of ordering goods. The goods from these ships were to be sold to the majority non-white residents of Singapore, but the English merchants neither desired, nor were able (for linguistic reasons), to sell to the wide variety of peoples living on the island.

41 Although it should be added that very few of these plantations functioned as advertised and that the unscrupulous practices of the financiers in combination with their predatory lending model meant that very seldom did anyone *except* the financier see any profits whatsoever. Ping, "Chinese Society in Nineteenth Century Singapore," 28-30.

To this end, the English merchants would sell to an enterprising Chinese merchant either for credit or for whatever desirables the Chinese had for trade.[42] It might seem as though there were many opportunities for qualified individuals to turn themselves into local merchants. In reality Europeans were chary of trusting just any person who came to them hoping to purchase goods on credit. Having been cheated one way or another many times, there were often only one or two local merchants with whom a given European was willing to do business.

This is in no way to suggest that the English merchants were upstanding fair actors. The complete inability of any European to penetrate the complexities of Chinese culture on the island often led to Chinese merchants being successfully sued after another Chinese individual had acted fraudulently and absconded to China (out of reach of the law). This was done on the basis that, since the two men had been seen together, they must be business associates and in cahoots to somehow share in the ill-gotten gains.[43] In any case, it was preferred to do business with Straits Chinese because they were felt to have a better understanding of how the Europeans wanted to conduct business, and frequently spoke some English.[44]

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42 Ping, "Chinese Society in Nineteenth Century Singapore," 15.

43 It also led to a rash of declarations in English in the *Singapore Chronicle* that various Chinese were certainly not in business relationships with other Chinese. Ibid., 17.

44 Although it is entirely true that the English as a group were rather lazy when it came to learning other languages, they ought to be given a bit of a pass in the matter of "learning Chinese" in Singapore. Teochew (潮汕话), what is called in the West Cantonese (标准粤语), and Hokkien (闽南话) which is by itself

Merchant-Princes

The palatial homes built in the Straits Settlements were, perhaps surprisingly, most frequently built by and for non-Europeans. Due to the peculiar accretions of different peoples through this region as the economy boomed, there was an unusually rich admixture of different cultures, many of which had at least one prominent family. One of the more prominent groups were the Straits Chinese, whose families had long operated trade routes between the Malay Peninsula and surrounding islands and Southern China. Some families had amassed great wealth and had a four hundred year presence in the region before the British ever considered creating a colonial outpost.

Finally, there were some individuals from other parts of the empire, or even from other parts of the South-East Asian region, who were able to move to the Straits Settlements and find success and wealth on an almost unimaginable scale. These entrepreneurs frequently made their wealth in rubber plantations, tin mines, short distance trade, and in one exceptional case, by developing and patenting the pharmaceutical product "Tiger Balm". This newly formed mercantile elite had more in common with the few Europeans who had been able to carve out fortunes for themselves

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comprised of multiple mutually intelligible dialects, were all widely spoken by roughly 20% each of the total Chinese population on the island, along with a few other dialects. The Chinese tended to self-segregate not only along Straits vs. Chinese born lines, but also by dialect, and then by other means. The bewildered English saw only a plethora of societies and organizations, and likely learned the hard way that a phrase carefully practiced with one merchant could be useless with another, leading to apathy. Indeed, the general level of confusion, ignorance, and misinformation led to the phrase "speak Chinese" that is still with us today. To "speak Chinese" is even less meaningful and accurate than to "speak European", and the "European" speaker is more likely to be understood in another region of his "land" than a Chinese speaker might be.

in the region than with their poorer neighbors of similar heritage. They were only too pleased to express their tastes through the construction of their homes, which served as status symbols and helped to solidify their identities as right-thinking, "Asiatic Britishers".[45]

Relevant Conditions in China

Finally, unlike some of the other immigrants to Singapore, the Chinese came from a nation that was unified, independent, and able (at least in their own territory) to enforce their laws. A particular sticking point was the insistence of the Chinese government that all Chinese citizens "belonged" to them in perpetuity, as did any offspring they might produce, even if those children had never themselves been to China. Straits Chinese were, for obvious reasons, responsible for the majority of the trading that took place directly between Singapore and China. Additionally, it was not uncommon for Chinese living abroad to maintain close ties to any extended family that remained in China, either preparatory to being able move them away from China, or as an act of filial devotion. Difficulties arose when they were accused of activities that were criminal in China even if they had not ever lived there before.[46]

45 Naturally, not every individual of Chinese ancestry experienced Singapore or the opportunity to express multiple identities in the same way.

46 Lees, "Being British in Malaya, 1890-1940," 93-96.

Although the British government felt no particular loyalty towards the Straits Chinese, those Chinese involved in trade with Chinese ports were both necessary and highly profitable. When Straits Chinese appealed for assistance and intervention on their behalf by the British government however, there was no clear response possible; the Chinese government did not wish to acknowledge any other government's claim on "their" citizen, and the British generally didn't understand why there was any difficulty about the matter at all. Although they were willing enough to agree that yes, those born or living for an extended period in Singapore ought to be afforded some protection by British authorities, they were not able to tell legitimate claimants from illegitimate.

By 1867 some regulations had been hashed out that were agreed to by both governments, but these were fairly arbitrary and arcane, as well as extremely limited.[47] Ultimately, if a person of even partial Chinese descent desired to conduct business safely in China, they were best advised to dress in the most Western style possible, check in with local authorities at the beginning of their stay, and pray that no trouble came.[48]

47 Ibid., 94.

48 Although generally effective, these measures required that some Straits Chinese dress in ways that they found undesirable. Perhaps most upsetting to some was the implication that they should not keep their hair cut in the traditional queue, but in a Western style that effectively made a permanent return to China very difficult as the queue was legally required. Ibid., 94.

Evolution of Wealthy Chinese Identity

Architectural Evolution

In the 1860s, Tan Tock Seng and his brother Tan Kim Seng were both Straits born Chinese who chose to build their homes with frankly continental features such as louvered venetian blinds, and Doric columns which may be seen in Figure 1.[49] The European features they chose to incorporate were, rather tellingly, almost purely functional in nature as load bearing elements. Even the Doric columns exist primarily to hold up the extended eaves, an essential architectural feature in a tropical climate to help keep even the finest home livable in oppressive climatic conditions. It might be surprising, then, that a mere twenty years later Tan Kim Seng's son and heir Tan Jiak Kim chose to build a considerably more

Fig. 1: Panglima Prang, Tan Tock Seng and Tan Kim Seng, Singapore. Note the columns on this somewhat European-styled home. (Tan, Andrew. "Pioneers' Homes in the Social History of Singapore" Journal of Southeast Asian Architecture 2, no. 1 (1997): 74)

49 Straits-born Chinese is the term used in the region for those people of Chinese descent who had lived in the Straits region for generations, maintaining their language and customs. It is important to differentiate them from the Chinese who immigrated to the Straits region during the periods of economic expansion that occurred from the mid nineteenth century through WWII because the two groups remained largely separate from each other and had differing extra-British loyalties—the Straits-born Chinese to the Straits region and in some cases *also* China and the so-called coolies to their homeland of Imperial China. See also Tan, "Pioneers' Homes in the Social History of Singapore," 74.

palatial home for himself, and one much more explicitly European in design.[50] Could an understanding of identity really change that substantially within a family over the course of a mere twenty years? And since this seems to have been the case, why would the son have such a different perception of his place in the world than had his successful father and uncle?

The answer is simple, yet awash in details. Tan Jiak Kim, like many of his contemporaries, came to see himself as a full member in good standing of Queen Victoria's expansive empire. The nature of this newly acquired identity and how it came to be, however, is worth exploring in more depth, not least because in the specific case of Tan Jiak Kim there do not seem to be any explicit statements speaking to his sense of identity, but more importantly because his situation was anything but unique, and an explanation will serve to unpack the motives and chosen identities of a generation.

Chinese Investment in Community

From 1830, when Singapore became a residency of the Presidency of Bengal in British India, until 1867 when Singapore became a Crown Colony, the British East India Company ruled (or rather, mis-ruled) the region with little care for anything but the profits from the trade that passed through the port itself. Despite Singapore being the

50 See Andrews for descriptions of homes for which images are no longer extant. Ibid., 77.

administrative center for the region until 1870, it remained as woefully under-administered as every other part of the Straits Settlements. Chronic overcrowding in the inner city and all of the social and public health woes that accompany such population densities became endemic. Straits-born Chinese merchants found themselves agitating for Singapore to be granted Crown Colony status despite the British having created all of the problems they found so distasteful.

On April 1, 1867, their wish was granted, and the British East India Company transferred the administration of and care for the region to a more regular army of English bureaucrats trained for the civil service. As part of being a Crown Colony, every person born within the region from then on was considered a subject of Queen Victoria. "For Asians, Britishness could mean the assertion of social and political equality with their colonial masters. People born within the empire, whatever their skin color or status, were on an equal footing in relation to Queen Victoria and her successors: subjects of the monarch owing loyalty to the crown. Ethnicity and religion were technically irrelevant."[51]

While this might seem like a minor policy change, the effects of new children being considered full members of the empire may have given individuals like Tan Jiak Kim a sense of being full stake-holders in the society in which their families had long lived and made enormous profits. This in combination with the new, more responsive governing

51 Lees, "Being British in Malaya, 1890-1940," 77.

policies of the civil servants in charge of the Crown Colony and the ongoing increase in profits from tin, rubber, and trade made for a whole generation of people who proudly proclaimed themselves Asiatic Britishers.[52]

Malays in Singapore

First Arrivals

Immigrants came first from other parts of the Malay peninsula, although not all of these people were themselves of Malay heritage.[53] Even those who would both be identified as and self-identify as "Malay" might be from a number of locations. Immigrants from Java, either temporary or permanent, were fairly common until 1910, for example, and would have been called "Malay" for record keeping purposes. Although not all "Malay" immigrants were from Java, the vast majority of "Malay" immigrants were intentionally temporary in nature, staying only for a few years before moving either on or back to their homes.

Due to a Dutch policy that severely restricted pilgrimage to Mecca, the faithful Muslims on Java frequently took advantage of so-called "pilgrim brokers" to arrange their

52 Please see Appendix B for a fuller explanation of the social situation.

53 There is a very long and rich history of "Overseas Chinese", known as 海外华人. These people identify strongly as being of Chinese heritage despite having moved to greater Malaya as early as 1459. The possibilities to make money from trade throughout South-East Asia were so great that individuals from many of China's southern provinces chose to move and make their fortunes, later being known as Straits Chinese to differentiate them from recent immigrants.

travel from Java to Mecca via Singapore. Often of Javanese extraction themselves, and using the profits from the sales of their metal or leather work as start-up capital, these brokers would assist would-be pilgrims in finding work in Singapore either before or after their journey in order to offset the expenses incurred. This process could take anywhere from months to years, and in some cases, these immigrants chose to remain in Singapore after the terms of their financial obligations had been fulfilled. Even if they chose to return home to Java, however, the Dutch had lost out on years of economic activity, almost all of which had been to Singapore's gain.[54]

Many of the other Malays who came to Singapore were men who came alone in search of better economic opportunities. Living together in *kampongs*, these young men held a wide variety of jobs, and unlike those employed through the Javanese pilgrim brokers, rarely worked for other Malays, as relatively few Malays were business owners.[55] If they possessed some education, there were government jobs available, due to a general inability of the English to learn Chinese, while a few words of Malay were fairly

54 Li, "Malays in Singapore: Culture, Economy, and Ideology," 94.

55 According to Li, there are some very real and complex reasons for the relative rarity of the fabulously successful Malaysian businessman. Among the foremost issues are: a general lack of interest in wealth for wealth's own sake, particularly when the pursuit of that wealth interferes with other quality of life issues, and a commodification of even familial relationships that cause spouses to maintain independent financial lives, and children to expect their parents to spend their wealth on themselves and their charities during their own lives, leaving little to inherit. For a nuanced and sensitive explanation, see Li, "Malays in Singapore: Culture, Economy, and Ideology"

common.[56] Because of the transitory nature of the average Malay stay in Singapore, there is a comparative dearth of Malay architectural forms, perhaps reflecting their temporary participation in Singaporean society.

Malay Identity Through Architecture

Traditional Homes

As many of the immigrants would incorporate design features from indigenous homes into their homes as seen in Figure 2, it is necessary to establish what these homes were like. Many distinctive features, such as building on a raised platform, are clearly observable in the homes referenced in this paper. Further, as these homes were built by every family for themselves, it is reasonable to assume that any Malay builders would have familiarity with the structural details of these buildings.[57] The *Bumbung Panjang* is the oldest, simplest, and most popular type of house native to the Malaysian peninsula.[58] This should in no way be interpreted to mean that the *Bumbung Panjang* is a simplistic form; indeed, one might convincingly argue that it is the most streamlined and sophisticated of

56 Li, "Malays in Singapore: Culture, Economy, and Ideology," 96.

57 Although a family was expected to plan and build for themselves, it was also common for the construction itself to be a community project. Yuan, *The Malay House,* 34.

58 Ibid., 22.

the native homes in this region. Every detail serves a purpose to make the spaces more comfortable, with no extraneous features.

Fig. 2: Traditional Malay Home, Singapore (Davidson, Julian. Black and White: The Singapore House 1898-1941. Talisman Publishing, 2006: 14)

The construction methods used are well suited to the local conditions and materials. Mortise and tenon as well as lap and dovetail joints are used throughout, with nails or wooden pegs seen only in pin joints.[59] Wedges are used to tighten the mortise and tenon joints, but this is seen as a good thing, since it allows for the home to be dismantled and

59 Yuan, *The Malay House,* 105.

moved to another location. There is a marked lack of diagonal bracing in the traditional form, which can lead to sway from uneven loading, particularly if the joints are poor.[60]

A *Bumbung Panjang* home is characterized by its long gabled roof. It is simple to construct, in contrast to the other house forms native to this area, but highly developed to the climate and culture of the area, and so enjoyed enduring popularity. The entire home is built up on stilts dug into the earth. The standard gabled roof is supported by "king-posts", which run up through the center of the home. The pitch of the roof is quite steep, resulting in a high roof. Ventilation is further encouraged by grilles at the gable ends, ventilation joints, and through the thatch *atap* roof.[61] The grilles at either end are often decoratively carved to the owner's taste.

Stairs led up to the *anjung* or covered porch and can be seen in Figure 3. This is a public/private area, often used as a resting area or informal meeting space. Beside it is the *serambi gantung* which is a hanging verandah and is the space used for formally entertaining guests. The interior of the home is quite open, and contains eating and cooking areas as well as sleeping areas. The general lack of furniture and open quality of the floor plan means that it is easy to "repurpose" a space within the home multiple times a day. Any decoration was traditionally restricted to embellishments of functional features.

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60 The sway present in a home was seen as a negative reflection in the skills of the homeowner/builder.

61 Ibid., 24.

Decorative window grilles and verandah railings are often seen. Natural colors predominated in historically, and pigments were used primarily to accentuate decoration.[62]

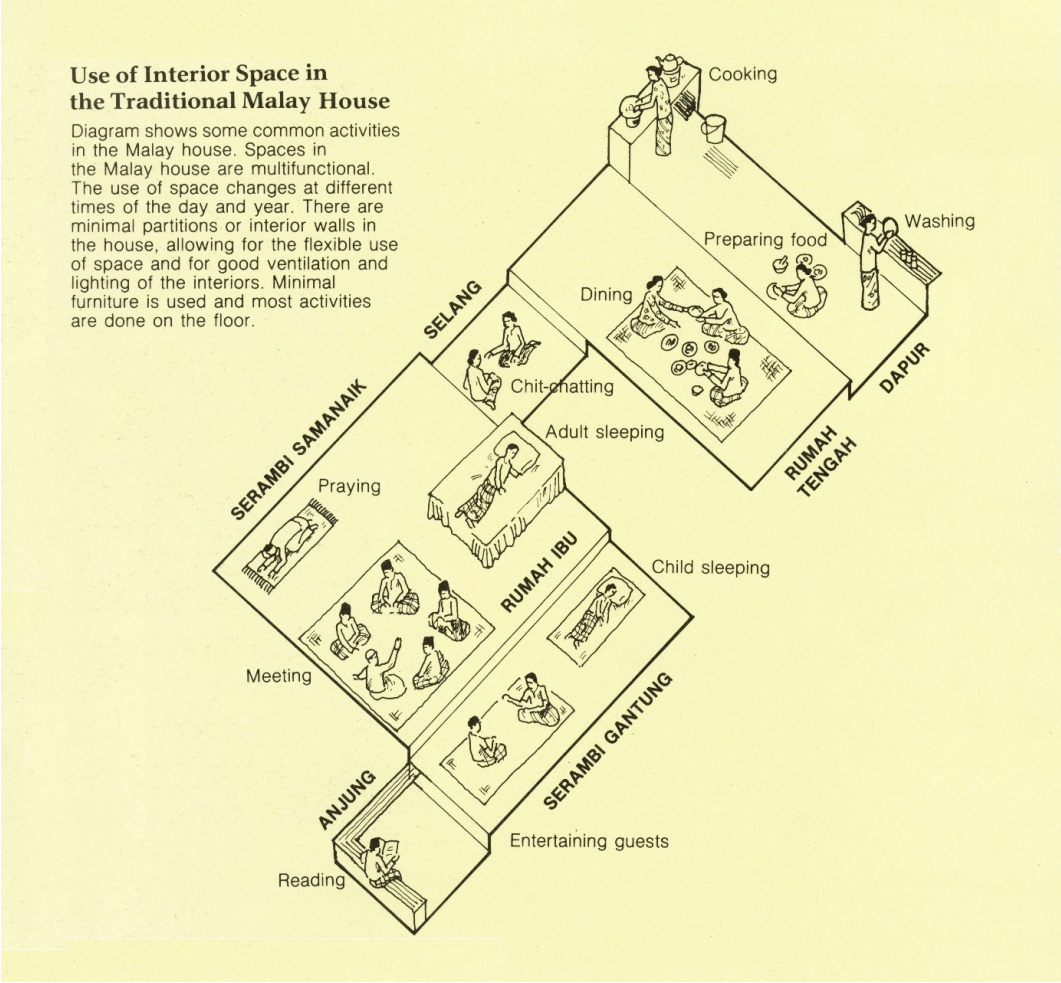

Fig. 3: A standard floor plan in a traditional home. Yuan, Lim Jee. (The Malay House: Rediscovering Malaysia's Indigenous Shelter System. Pulau, Pinang, Malaysia: Institute Masyarakat, 1987: 36)

62 Yuan, *The Malay House,* 40.

These buildings are very well adapted to their native climate, which is warm, humid, and generally equatorial. Figure 4 illustrates this clearly. Despite moderate cloud cover, the solar radiation is still quite strong especially near the coast, where glare can be a problem. As much as 300 cm of rain a year during the monsoon season can lead to periodic flooding in many areas.[63] To keep the occupants comfortable through changing seasonal conditions, the Malay home has many adaptive features.

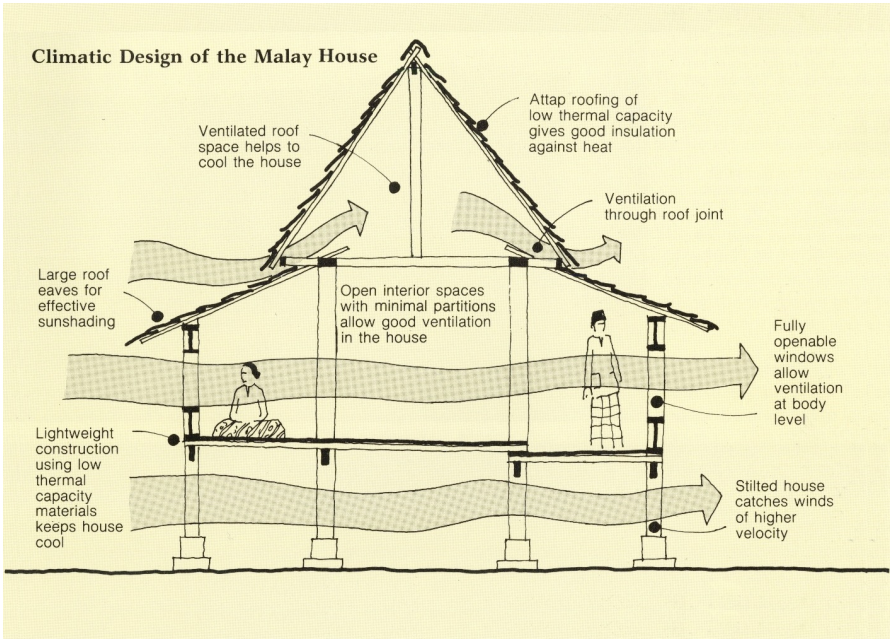

Fig. 4: How a traditional home stays cool. Yuan, Lim Jee. (The Malay House: Rediscovering Malaysia's Indigenous Shelter System. Pulau, Pinang, Malaysia: Institute Masyarakat, 1987: 36)

The materials used to construct traditional Malay dwellings have a very low thermal capacity, so that they do not retain much heat from the day, and the lightweight

63 Yuan, *The Malay House,* 68-9.

construction techniques allow for increased ventilation. The stilts the homes are built on help protect against seasonal flooding, but also help catch the faster winds that occur a little above ground level. Windows reach almost from floor to ceiling, allowing winds to blow through the house at body level where they will feel most cooling. The large eaves that extend well over the edge of the verandah allow for effective sun shading and also to reduce glare.[64] A generally open interior with few partitions and ventilation between the roof layers work together to help keep the air inside from growing hot and stagnant. Even with modern materials and techniques, it would be difficult to improve upon this design for un-air conditioned comfort anywhere in the Straits Settlements.[65]

Malay Domestic Conditions

As mentioned above, there is a general dearth of uniquely Malay domestic architecture in Singapore, due to the transitory nature of many, if not most, Malays' experience of living on the island. The vast majority of Malays living in Singapore at any given time were living in group homes, and were constantly on the move between such establishments.

64 Although the benefit is entirely psychological, the dim lighting created by these features causes the interior to be perceived as cooler than it actually is.

65 Yuan, *The Malay House,* 71.

The Malays native to Singapore had maintained multiple modestly-sized sultanates, which were variously bought out or manipulated by the British as they consolidated their control over the region. A few of the more flexible and enterprising members of the old guard were able to find new identities for themselves in Her Majesty's Crown Colonies.

Those Malays who did make more permanent homes for themselves seem to have settled contentedly into the Muslim areas of Indian neighborhoods, building their mosques mere blocks from local Hindu temples. Along Serangoon Road, the Muslim area was primarily Racecourse Road and those streets connecting south towards Serangoon Road.[66] This area was populated by Indian and Malay Muslims, and included a very lucrative pineapple preservation factory. The waste from this facility, as well as the husks left from nearby sesame oil presses and wheat grinding sheds, went to feed cattle who were brought to cowsheds and slaughterhouses.[67] This efficient system allowed businesses to flourish together and would have employed many of the local men.

Analysis of a Typical Malay Home in Singapore

An example of the type of home built in this area can be observed in the proposal of a Mr. Salaman seen here in Figure 5. The plan submitted for his structure is especially

66 Siddique, "Singapore's Little India: Past, Present, and Future," 48-9.

67 Intriguingly, the Hindu population that was virtually across the street from these beef processing plants does not seem to have caused any civil strife over what must have been for some a rather offensive neighbor.

useful, as it provides a sense of the structure, as well as the finished external appearance.[68] To begin with the lowest point featured, a note informs the viewer that the piles on which the home sits are to be driven into the ground if necessary. As the building is situated on land that would have been subject to periodic flooding, the use of an inexpensive technique like mud sills would have been uniquely inappropriate. Instead, square pillars with socles are used to hold the structure almost a full story off the ground. Although the use of pillars is typical to traditional Malay homes, the forms of these pillars are distinctly hybrid, and nearly Doric in appearance.

The living space of the structure appears to have been divided down the middle, allowing two families to live in it. Each residence has two flights of stairs that lead up to the balcony that exists on either side of the symmetrical building. The railing along both the stairs and the balcony is decorative and quite open. More pillars of the same design are used to hold up the extended eaves of the house, which extend over the balcony considerably, protecting the walls from direct sunlight and heavy rain. The balcony as drawn seems to have nearly the same area as the interior space of the home, and is provided with what appear to be rattan blinds between each of the pillars to give privacy or block the elements while still permitting some ventilation. The relative size of the

68 I am unaware of the precise street address of this proposed structure and whether or not it was built as designed. Additionally, the religious preference of this individual is presumed, not known. Finally, it is possible that this individual was not Malay himself, although he would certainly have Malay neighbors in similar homes.

balconies and the provisions for them to be used as outdoor living space is strikingly similar to many traditional Malay domestic structures.

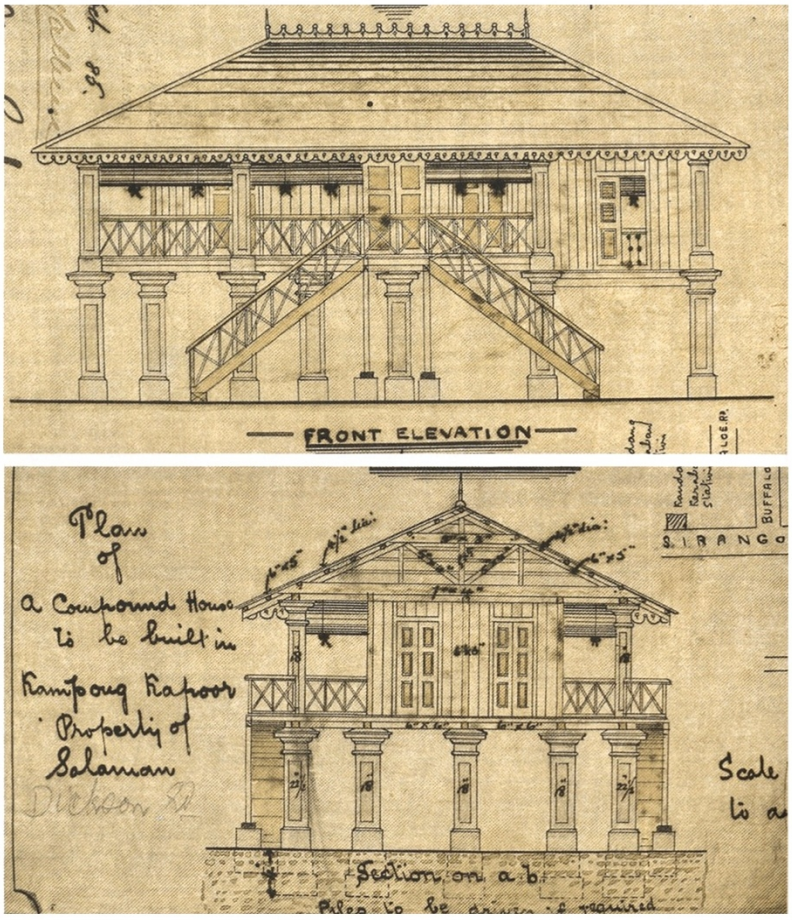

Fig. 5: Front and side elevations of a typical home. (Siddique, Sharon and Shotam, Nirmala Puru. Singapore's Little India: Past, Present, and Future, Second Edition. Institute of Southeast Asian Studies: Singapore, 1990: 54)

As no cross-section exists, it is impossible to say exactly what the narrow interior of this home would have looked like. However, with such a limited area available it seems

probable that there would have been only a few internal divisions, if any. There seem to be four double windows along each of the long sides of the building, and they are covered with louvered shutters. The shutters are European in appearance, and would have allowed the resident to control airflow while keeping out direct sunlight or driving monsoon rains.

The end-on view of the building provides clear evidence for a post-and-lintel method of construction, including numerous joists to give strength. These joists were quite necessary to counteract the forces created by the high gabled roof. There is only a single floor of living space, and the height of the roof is nearly ¾ that height again. This would allow for greater air circulation through the house, as warmer air could rise into the attic area, thus allowing for cooler air to be drawn in through the windows. The roofline along the long side of the structure is decorated with gingerbread that resembles eyelet lace, while the peak of the roof has more pointed and delicate gingerbread.

The obvious and extensive European styling seen in this example may speak to the desire of the designer to fit in with the broader multi-cultural Singaporean community. The mixture of features indigenous to Malay architecture with European details makes for an attractive and practical hybrid structure. Certainly, there would have been suitable and sophisticated buildings of more Islamic styling known to an individual wealthy enough to put up their own home. Although certainly not every individual building a new home would make these choices, a plurality did. A few affluent Arabs lived in the well-heeled areas of Singapore, and Mosques frequently feature more conservative and Islamic

architecture. The aspiration this home represents, then, would have been to be just another businessman working to make his fortune in Singapore, and not primarily as a person of any particular ethnicity or faith.

Indians in Singapore

Modes of Arrival

The people from India who arrived throughout the nineteenth century in the greatest numbers came mostly from the southern, Tamil-speaking areas of India. Much of this area was under Hindu rule for most, if not all, of its pre-colonial history, and thus has an identity distinct from northern India. One of their ethnically distinct neighborhoods, Serangoon Road, was already established as an Indian Hindu neighborhood as early as 1836.[69] There were many reasons for an Indian to arrive in Singapore. Typically, an individual or family might move voluntarily, probably for the same reasons that most other immigrants chose to try their luck in Singapore. This was especially easy before 1867, when the Straits Settlements were grouped for administrative purposes with British India. This meant that no papers or passes of any sort were needed, other than a ticket.

Another, less happy route came about as a result of the 1825 Anglo-Dutch treaty that was effectively forced by Raffles' fortuitous land-grab. Bencoolen had been

69 Siddique, "Singapore's Little India: Past, Present, and Future," 8.

functioning as a British penal colony for Indian criminals. When the island was transferred to Dutch ownership, the convicts were packed up along with the rest of the British government functions. It was decided to move this population to Singapore, and ships bearing criminals continued to arrive over the protestations of locals until 1860. The convict labor of these unfortunates continued to be used as late as 1873.[70] These convict laborers assisted in the road and building construction that was taking place at a great rate at the time.[71] Thousands labored in Singapore over the years, and only a few ever made it back to India; they either died of injury or disease, or chose to remain outside India. As many as 40% of these convicts chose to remain in Singapore once their sentences were served.

Additionally, as any immigrants from India would likely be moving from one region under British control to another, they were considered quite desirable as they were likely to already speak some English and be familiar with imposed laws. The combination of voluntary and involuntary immigration from many different regions of India and even more castes was seen as a tremendous advantage by the ruling British, who saw the heterogeneity of their Indian population (to say nothing of the mix of Hindus, Sikhs, and

70 Siddique, "Singapore's Little India: Past, Present, and Future," 9.

71 Ibid., 26-7.

Muslims who arrived in various numbers) as a sort of guarantee against effective revolts.[72] Another indirect consequence was that a dearth of female convicts led some of the Indian men to convert to Islam and take Malay wives. This, combined with the fact that a few of the new arrivals from India were already Muslim, resulted in the early intertwining of the Malay and Indian communities.

Indian Domestic Conditions

Serangoon Road was one of the earliest Indian settlements and had been set aside as land suitable for that purpose. There was grassy land across the area, becoming increasingly marshy nearer a canal. Being some distance from the city center, there were two hospitals, a lunatic asylum, and a leper hospital for women just to the north of the main street.[73] Although this is a far from ideal neighborhood, given Raffles' total lack of concern for the mere vagaries of geography in other cases, it seems unlikely that the Indian community was singled out for poor land.

Various castes made efforts to segregate themselves as they had in India, but the overall number of Indians living in Singapore was too small for all the boundaries to be effectively enforced. Members of the highest castes were able to provide themselves with

72 Siddique, "Singapore's Little India: Past, Present, and Future," 9.

73 This area was obviously disease-prone, and therefore not really a good spot to concentrate sick people, but the land was inexpensive for this very reason. Ibid., 21.

separate neighborhoods and water sources, as were a great glut of mid-level castes, leaving only those of the lowest castes restricted to specific areas and water sources.[74]

Many Indians, however they arrived in Singapore, ended up working in one of only a few fields. If they spoke English, they could easily find work with the government. Some had traditional crafts (such as goldsmithing) that they could practice. Many were able to find employment as shopkeepers selling goods that catered specifically to the Indian neighborhoods in which they lived. Food stalls were also a profitable venture, for many of the same reasons.

This fertile and unique mix of cultures that quickly arrived in Singapore in an almost completely free-market context was soon able to establish a tremendously profitable city that experienced explosive growth for decades under the negligent and less-than-watchful eye of the East India Company. Fortunately, they were able to benefit enormously from the forward-thinking and outrageously liberal policies of Raffles. Although the Company took great exception to these laws, it proved too difficult to legally rescind many of his statutes, and they settled for uneven enforcement instead.

The neighborhood went on to experience explosive growth in the late nineteenth century, due to Singapore's generally surging economy. One section of the area along Serangoon Road was built up primarily between 1884 and 1900. By this point,

74 Interestingly, this inability to police themselves as they would ideally wish has resulted in a wide-spread tendency for Singaporean Indians to conflate "caste" with "class", referring to individuals of a "polluted caste" such as barbers as being "of low class". Siddique, "Singapore's Little India: Past, Present, and Future," 12.

Singapore's local government was able to make and enforce such niceties as making the submission of plans for new structures compulsory.[75] These documents provide a priceless record of the area, as Singapore's relentless drive towards economic success has resulted in few of its historic structures surviving into the twenty-first century.

The submitted designs reflect the mixed-used default zoning of Serangoon Road at the time, being mostly shophouses, dwellings, and various minor additions thereto. The plans reflect the ethnic variety of the neighborhood at this point, evident primarily through the surnames of the individuals that submitted them. To judge exclusively by the names, many Europeans hoped to build their dream homes along this stretch of road, once again showing the general diversity within Singapore.

The area to the south of Serangoon Road was a mostly Hindu area. It bordered not just on a canal, but also on Nipah Swamp and the upper reaches of the Rochar River.[76] This meant that flooding in this area was a consistent and persistent, if not entirely predictable, issue. Perhaps because of this, the local architecture took on a distinctly Malay feel. Specifically, many of the homes here were built on pillars so that flooding would not affect the main living areas. In most cases, the ground floor area was screened off from the main road and provided extra storage space during the dry season.

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75 For more information about this fascinating process, chapters two and three are strongly recommended. Siddique, "Singapore's Little India: Past, Present, and Future," 33.

76 Siddique, "Singapore's Little India: Past, Present, and Future," 49.

Analysis of a Typical Indian Home

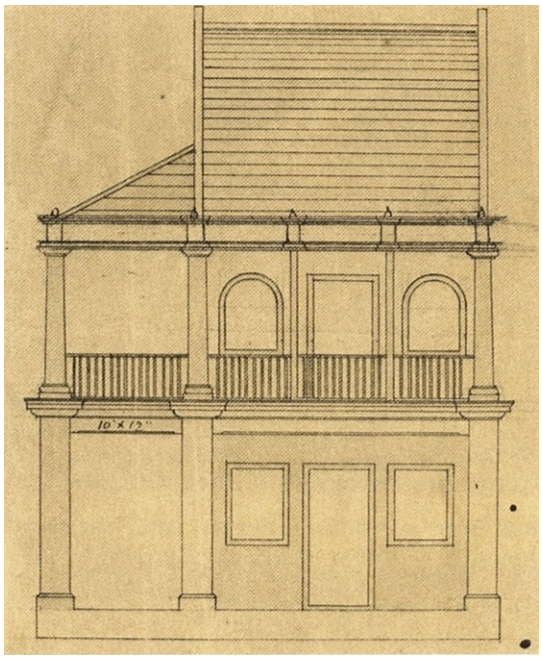

Fig. 6: Side elevation of shophouses. (Siddique, Sharon and Shotam, Nirmala Puru. Singapore's Little India: Past, Present, and Future, Second Edition. Institute of Southeast Asian Studies: Singapore, 1990: 52)

A common type of structure built in the Indian neighborhood was exemplified by the row of shophouses commissioned by a Noordin Butcher in 1888 and seen in Figure 6. This two story building seems to be composed of a shop space below and living quarters above. This building is not built on stilts, but seems to sit on an elevated beam, perhaps a mud sill. Sadly, there is no indication of what, if any, foundations were intended in this case. This is a very simple structure, seemingly stripped to the minimum required to function effectively. In Singapore, this meant large windows on the side of the structure and a wide balcony off the front. As mentioned previously, it appears in other cases to have been clearly borrowed from indigenous architectural practices. Although in this case the source is less definitive, it might be that this amateur designer was following where others led.

Pillars or possibly columns can be seen at the corners of both floors, and an additional element helps to support the roof over the balcony. As seen in previous cases,

they are nominally Doric in styling, and these have a horizontal element reminiscent of an entablature running between them. In this instance, the eaves do not overhang the balcony, although the depth of the balcony back towards the main structure may in itself be enough to provide protection from sun and rain. A simple railing runs around the exterior of the house, and may suggest that the balcony may wrap around three of the house's four sides.

A final observation possible from this limited illustration is the extreme height of the seemingly gabled roof.[77] The space defined by the roof is equal to another story in height, and would have provided quite a lot of ventilation for the floors below. This seems to have been done in imitation of the homes of the original inhabitants of the Malay Peninsula, once again demonstrating a pattern of hybrid architecture that is unique to the Malay Peninsula.

Presumably, aesthetically pleasing elements cost extra money for materials and labor, so the owner must have actively wanted this end result. In choosing this style of home, the owners were selecting a practical form, well suited to their neighborhood and (like Singapore itself) fundamentally hybrid in nature. The prominence of the European elements might indicate an attachment to or identification with the colonial government. To choose to incorporate these elements into one's home might imply a sort of aspiration

77 Although it is not possible to state definitively if this roof is gabled or not, virtually every other roof on a similar structure from this time was, and so it seems a safe guess.

to be an active part of the dominant culture. This decision was not a universal one, but it was very common. Evidently, even a person of fairly modest means felt that they were part of the broader cultural plurality of Singapore.

CHAPTER V

DEFINING THE ANGLO EXPERIENCE

Postcolonial Considerations

Of course, the story told so far in this paper ignores any specifically postcolonial understanding of the complex situation under discussion. Left alone, this would represent an irresponsible ignorance of an important and growing body of scholarship, in addition to being ethically troublesome. Jim Jose's article "'Like Prussic Acid in a Bottle of Medicine': Liberal Principles and Colonial Rule" explores racial tensions between white Englishmen and Asians of any culture through the lens of the Straits Philosophical Society.

Existing primarily in Singapore, Penang, and Malacca from 1893 onwards and consisting of colonial elites, the trajectory of this society coincides nicely with just the regions, populations, and time periods that have been previously discussed in this paper. The opening assertions in Jose's article, specifically regarding the presumed ineffectuality of the previously mentioned "Unofficial" Chinese advisors within the Straits Settlements government, also implies through omission that these "Unofficials" represent the extent of high ranking Chinese involvement in the administration of the Crown Colony in question.[78]

78 Jose, " 'Like Prussic Acid in a Bottle of Medicine': Liberal Principles and Colonial Rule," *Postcolonial Studies* 13, no. 2 (2010): 201.

The evidence does not seem to bear out this assertion; in 1899 there were sufficient Straits Chinese barristers and members of the Legislative Council to band together to launch a formal objection to the problems that arose between the Crown Colony and Imperial China in relation to Straits Chinese being detained (or worse) while on merchant voyages to China.[79] Jose later acknowledges that the colonial understanding of the situation in the Straits Settlements was fundamentally different from colonial understandings prevalent in other British-held regions of the world. However, he vaguely attributes this to the fact that as previously discussed, much of the population of the Crown Colony was made up of immigrants, which was obviously not the case in locations like India or South Africa, and the fact that there was a pervasive (although not disloyal) sense that London did not know best.[80]

Given a broader reading of the nature of governance in the Straits Settlements, it seems at least possible that the more explicit and accurate understanding of the fundamental difference that both Jose and the members of the Straits Philosophical Society had so much trouble articulating was that in the Straits Settlements, neither *de facto* nor *de jure* racism dominated to as great an extent as in other corners of the British Empire—and the results were a Crown Colony that was clearly superior.[81]

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79 Lees, "Being British in Malaya, 1890-1940," *Journal of British Studies* 48, no.1 (2009): 95.

80 Jose, " 'Like Prussic Acid in a Bottle of Medicine': Liberal Principles and Colonial Rule," *Postcolonial Studies* 13, no. 2 (2010): 202.

81 It is ironic that, while the members of the Straits Philosophical Society perhaps could not bear to

A clear example of this increased acceptance of non-whites is then offered by Jose himself, who points out that there were two Chinese members of the Straits Philosophical Society, and that their extensive (and lauded) presence within the records kept by the group "…suggests that neither can be fitted easily into a stereotype of submissive tokenism."[82] Indeed, the perceived identity of the Chinese members (as being equivalent to the white members of the Society) seems to have been a perception shared by all concerned.

It is true that none of the above issues really address the fundamental thrust of Jose's paper, which is actually more, not less, problematic and in ways not even specifically related to the Straits Settlements, Crown Colonies, or even the colonial era in general. To make ruthlessly quick work of a generally well thought out and rationally considered work, Jose crucially fails to separate a potentially unfortunate kernel of truth from an unambiguously racist sentiment.

Specifically, politically liberal sentiments do function as prussic acid within a society if that society does not, in majority numbers (of those to whom the franchise is to be extended), fully understand, believe in, and desire democracy as practiced in the West. This is the core argument made by the white members of the Straits Philosophical

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articulate this truth (due to deeply-seated racist ideas), Jose also finds himself unable to do the same for entirely different reasons.

82 Jose, " 'Like Prussic Acid in a Bottle of Medicine': Liberal Principles and Colonial Rule,", *Postcolonial Studies* 13, no. 2 (2010): 203.

Society. Member Tan Teck Soon seems to have argued that he did not agree that the educated Straits Chinese, at least, were unready for such a franchise, and that the entire colony would benefit from an immediate extension.[83] In effect, his argument was that certain Straits Chinese already identified strongly and personally with the British Empire and with democratic principles. There was no need to withhold the franchise in fear because in many ways, educated Straits Chinese would vote no differently than the Europeans of a similar economic stance to themselves.

Attempting to Enforce a Racial Order

Given how throughly the Straits Chinese, covered in earlier parts of this paper, were educated in Western practices and voluntarily consumed large quantities of Western cultural products as part of their chosen Asiatic Britisher identity, it seems unlikely that this specific extension of the franchise would have resulted in metaphorical poisoning. Jose makes a well-articulated argument on the contradictions of liberalism and colonial rule that actually goes a full step further back. In the Imperial mind, it is an assumed duty and imperative of those who enjoy liberal representational democracy to bring it at gun point to those who do not yet have it, and to enforce rule over these peoples until such time as sufficient indoctrination has occurred.

83 Jose has done an admirable job of trying to reconstruct the arguments in question, as unfortunately the records were consumed by the passage of time.

The more reading one does on the unique colonial conditions present in the Straits Settlements, the more one is compelled to come to the conclusion that an increasing identification with Queen and country was the product of a rational thought process on the part of the various colonized groups. Indeed, one of the striking features of an extended exploration into colonial documents is the presence of many different ethnic groups all finding themselves relatively favorably inclined towards their Colonial masters.

Due to the relative availability of documentation, this paper focuses more on the experience of colonial rule in the Straits Settlements by those residents of Chinese ancestry. However, the Chinese were not the only non-white group to enjoy positions of power and influence within the colonial government, to amass great private wealth, or to view themselves as benefiting from being subjects of the Queen and citizens of her Empire. Additionally, they comprised an important and ever-growing constituency within the Straits Settlements; by the end of the Great War, 46% of new homes were owned by Chinese who were investing the profits they were still making off the old standbys of rubber, tin, and trade back into their adopted homeland.[84]

84 Tan, "Pioneers' Homes in the Social History of Singapore," *Journal of Southeast Asian Architecture* 2, no.1 (1997): 77.

Englishmen Overseas

Favored Architectural Form

Naturally, there was more to the Straits Settlements than the Asians of various ethnicities who lived there. For example, there were members of the colonizing government and industry who were of British extraction. These people, quite naturally, had their own preferences when it came to housing, and constitute the other side of the coin when it comes to defining and describing the architectural tastes of those with sufficient funds to live outside the overcrowded city cores.

In Singapore specifically, a singular style of home developed, known as the Black and White. It combined visual aspects of "Tudorbethan" timber frame structures with more indigenous architectural forms better suited to the unique climatic challenges of a tropical environment. This may be seen in Figure 7.[85] A look at the middle examples of these Black and Whites will conveniently overlap with the period already considered in terms of Asian-built structures, but will also allow for investigation into any identity-based motivating factors that may have influenced the white Straits Settlements residents who chose to live in them.[86]

85 Strangely, the earliest examples of this type of structure seem to have seen the wood frame left its natural color with a dark green shade used on the shutters and doors. Subsequent re-paintings eventually led to the famous and now omnipresent color scheme.

86 A necessary restriction, both because the main scholarly reference only considers structures from 1898 forward, but additionally because the style, generally speaking, continued to be popular for new construction through the beginnings of WWII.

Fig. 7: A typical "Tudorbethan" in England. ('Edward Ould, Wightwick Manor, 1887-1888' "Davidson, Julian. Black and White: The Singapore House 1898-1941. Talisman Publishing, 2006: 36)

Architectural Lineage

Coleman

The first trained architect to arrive in Singapore was George Drumgould Coleman. After a mere four years of architectural experience in Calcutta, India, Coleman's patron John Palmer suggested him to a colleague, and Coleman secured a job offer in Java in 1819. As India was coming every day under more secure British rule, it could be that the Malay archipelago beckoned with the glamor of the unexplored (by Europeans) and the

underdeveloped (by Englishmen). It would not have taken too great an intellect to see that whereas there was competition for the best commissions in India, at the then-extreme edge of the empire, the only formally trained architect would be first in line for any choice assignments.

After three years of under-employment on Java, Coleman moved to Singapore where he assisted Raffles in physically producing the illustrations for the famous Raffles Plan. This Plan would direct and restrict all growth and development on the island for more than 200 years, utterly impervious to reality and shifting social paradigms. This alone would have assured him a name in posterity, but after a brief return in Java in 1824, Coleman returned to Singapore where he designed many buildings of note.

Coleman designed many of the surviving structures from this period, including his famous Armenian Church, designed after St. Martin-in-the-Fields in London. By 1831 he had finished a number of government commissions, and was able to work though a series of designs intended as middle-class homes for resident Englishmen. His style, as seen in his public buildings and homes for the wealthy, is Anglo-Indian Regency, with the expected preoccupation with symmetry, classical elements, and restraint. He had returned to Britain in 1831, and would have known that Palladianism was a very popular style for new construction among the monied classes there.

The very first residences used by Englishmen in Singapore were only slight variations on the indigenous form described above. This was undoubtedly because the only builders

and designers available at this early stage were locals. Although Coleman had built bungalows in India, he soon realized that the Anglo-Indian bungalow form was not well suited to all tropical environments.

The original bungalow form upon which the English colonists "improved" was a fairly simple, inexpensive, and modest house form built of widely available materials that were well suited to Bengal India. On a raised platform of compacted rubble or pounded earth, sat a square brick-walled structure covered in very thick overhanging thatch that extended far enough to require bamboo poles on all sides. The interior of the home was subdivided very little, so as to allow for maximum airflow. A white cloth was often used as an artificial ceiling to prevent detritus or even animals from falling into the home from the thatch.[87]

Coleman would have known from his time in India about the many changes that Englishmen insisted on away from this traditional form, nearly all of which made it less comfortable, but more "English". The hybrid solution that developed gave a familiar near-neo-classical façade to the traditional bungalow, and helped the British to visually distinguish their homes from those of the natives.

Initially, Coleman brought the Anglo-Indian bungalow intact to Singapore. The issues of flooding and torrential rains soon made themselves known, and Coleman began to redesign almost at once. He no more wanted to re-invent the wheel than those earlier Englishmen who had adapted the native bungalow, so he simply borrowed many aspects

87 Morris, "Architecture of the British Empire," 59.

for his new Singaporean homes directly from the indigenous architecture of the Malay Peninsula. This would have been quite easy, as a trained architect would have recognized at once the construction techniques used. The use of woven bamboo for walls might have been new, but was still similar to traditional English wattle. The open interiors were similar to what he would have seen in India. Only the stilts would have been a new feature to Coleman.

The resulting homes were typically built with wood frames and floors on short piers, and had open floor plans as well as many large windows. Verandahs with markedly extended eaves were built, but the local use of rattan blinds was adopted to provide privacy and comfort. Steeply pitched roofs were built, and usually covered in the local *atap* thatch. The arrangement of windows and doors appears to have been influenced by his work in the Palladian style, insofar as was possible. Perhaps thinking of the wattle-like woven bamboo, Coleman finished his buildings in plaster and bright white paint, often leaving the major beams exposed, and with the trim painted a dark green.[88]

Bidwell

Until the final decade of the nineteenth century, no other trained architects ventured forth to Singapore, and the result was an almost total stagnation in the development of the Singaporean style, as semi-competent military engineers used whatever cheap labor

88 Davidson, "Black and White: The Singapore House 1898-1941," 3.

was to hand to copy designs out of pattern books. It was at this point that Regent Alfred John Bidwell, another trained and talented architect, arrived in Singapore. Fresh from England, Bidwell was full of the latest ideas and trends in English architecture.[89] As it was the early 1890s, many in London were quite taken with John Ruskin's two architectural treatises and the concurrent outpouring of related lectures and essays.[90]

The architectural theory of the Arts and Crafts movement focused on two primary ideas. First, and typical of the Arts and Crafts movement in general, was a fixation on quality hand-craftsmanship and traditional techniques, which were generally accepted as having reached their architectural apex in England during the late middle ages, under the Tudor monarchs Henry VIII and Elizabeth I. Second, the alleged moral superiority of "pure Englishness" and hand-crafted solutions, the beneficial and supposedly edifying and civilizing effects of living within such a structure, and the moral correctness of living within a structure that maintained the ideal of "truth to materials". Within the context of Singapore, this frequently worked out to be a

> …half-timbered, mock-Tudor upper story built over a Classically detailed masonry ground floor. The house is further distinguished by a huge soaring roof… A broad verandah… extends out over the centrally placed *porte cochère* in the usual fashion. What is especially significant about this building is the detailing of the half-timbered upper floor, where the pattern of timbers is clearly modeled on fifteenth- and sixteenth-century sources. Moreover, the

89 Davidson, "Black and White: The Singapore House 1898-1941," 5.

90 "The Seven Lamps of Architecture" and "The Stones of Venice" published in 1849 and 1851 respectively.

> verandah over the *porte cochère* is extended outwards on all sides, by means of cantilevered floor joists supported from below by brackets, in the manner of a medieval jetty.[91]

While this may not seem like a particularly promising home design for dealing with the vicissitudes of a tropical climate, in fact it was uniquely well suited to the challenges at hand, as seen in Figure 8. As it happens, the timber upper absorbs heat more slowly than masonry would, and the masonry of the lower story with tile floors is almost completely shielded from the tropical sun by the wrap-around verandahs and the wooden upper stories, allowing it to retain any evening coolness long into the afternoon of the following day. The addition of lateral vents and rattan blinds for the verandahs allows for maximal passive cooling, which for English men and women, far from home and in many cases stubbornly clinging to fashions designed with substantially cooler climes in mind, was a high priority in sultry Singapore.

Being able to maintain some semblance of "home" in foreign, tropical regions was of great importance to the British everywhere they went. "Britishness" seems to have been as much about lived experience as any other factor, such as language or ancestry. Wherever they went, British colonizers strove to bring their ways of life with them. Laws were enacted on foreign populations to try and bring them into line with "common decency" which was defined exclusively by the British.[92]

91 Davidson, "Black and White: The Singapore House 1898-1941," 37.

92 In some cases this insistence on change was seen as being positive, as when the British moved to outlaw the excesses of the caste system with regard to "untouchables". This group was not insubstantial in size, and

Fig. 8: A Black and White. 'Public Works Department. No 48 Nassim Road, ca. 1910, Singapore' ("Davidson, Julian. Black and White: The Singapore House 1898-1941. Talisman Publishing, 2006: 46)

Within the home, similar concerns arose. Labor was very cheap both in Britain and abroad, and no middle-class home would be conceived of without at least one servant.[93] When visiting Calcutta in 1848, visitors took special note of the fact that the modified bungalows being lived in by Anglos had no servants quarters.[94] This detail was found to be

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was very much in favor of this change. Strictly observant Hindus on the other hand, found the entire concept monstrous and polluting.

93 It should be recalled that before the invention of many labor saving devices such as washing machines, keeping house was easily a full time, backbreaking ordeal to take on alone.

94 Morris, "Architecture of the British Empire," 60.

rather appallingly distasteful: if one needed something in the night, one would have to fetch it oneself!

However inconvenient this may have been, Anglo residents of India often found it preferable to being surrounded by native Indians at all times. Although they had done their best to maintain their way of life by dividing up the largely open space of a traditional Bangala home and closing off the verandahs, there was great concern that interracial mixing might still take place.[95] To the extent possible, the British were trying to carry out a life their peers in Britain would find "respectable" even though they were thousands of miles away in utterly different circumstances.

The fear of no longer acting sufficiently British, of no longer living in an appropriately British manner, manifested itself not just architecturally, but linguistically as well. To "go native" or to "go bamboo" were both phrases that indicated a person had strayed too far from their heritage and traditions as an Englishman. These people were no longer entirely fit company, and their preference for any other way of life or environment was inexplicable to the speaker.

To be British was to act and live in a British manner, however far from the homeland one was, and however impractical that goal might be. Even as individuals of many different ethnic backgrounds were beginning to think of themselves as being able, through

95 Notably, they were not concerned enough about miscegenation to just go home. Ibid., 59.

behavior, to "acquire" Britishness and become Asiatic Britishers, the British were battling an ongoing concern that their Britishness could be "lost" through living habits alone.

Factors in Popularity

British Pride

Although it is certainly true that all of the features mentioned work together to help make the Black and White an ideal style for Singapore, it seems unlikely that these were the only reasons why this form enjoyed such overwhelming popularity among white Crown Colony residents. In terms of chosen identity, it was the perfect style to help ethnic Englishmen emphasize the cultural heritage that is uniquely theirs. Up until the outbreak of WWII, white colonials continued to strongly favor the distinctly British Black and White as it moved slowly through various gradual and gracious changes from the most explicitly Tudorbethan influenced constructions of Bidwell through the more streamlined and modern-looking Black and Whites constructed through 1941. This was in contrast to Tan Jiak Kim's Panglima Prang home built in 1888, which was a European-styled mansion, decorated with the latest in stylish and imported Art Nouveau furnishings.[96]

96 At this time, to have had an Art Nouveau home would have been quite *au courant*. This demonstrates how connected to European artistic culture the elites of Singapore were, regardless of their ethnicity, the extent of their wealth, and the desire of the Prang family patriarch to be seen as a leader in the dominant colonial milieu. Tan, "Pioneers' Homes in the Social History of Singapore," *Journal of Southeast Asian Architecture 2*, no.1 (1997): 77.

Racial Insecurity

It would be flatly dishonest, however, to imply that a fetish for authentic Englishness was the only thing that kept self-respecting Englishmen from owning the European-styled mansions favored by Asiatic Britishers. The palatial homes of the wealthy (and mostly non-white) Straits Settlements merchant elites were made possible by the astronomical amounts of money they had been able to accumulate, frequently in only a few generations. The mansions they built for themselves involved a minimum expenditure of about seven million contemporary US dollars, at a time when the average office worker was bringing home the equivalent of two thousand dollars a month.[97] White colonial officers were certainly making good wages by local standards, but nothing like the amount needed to even consider trying to compete with the fabulously wealthy merchant class.[98]

It seems likely that, rather than be shown up in a spending war they could not hope to be competitive in, let alone win, rank and file white colonials chose instead to live in homes that did not invite direct comparison to merchant mansions in other neighborhoods in Singapore.[99] And what better way to emphasize their growing dissatisfaction with the fact that ever-increasing numbers of darker-skinned individuals

97 Ibid., 87.

98 Tan, "Pioneers' Homes in the Social History of Singapore," *Journal of Southeast Asian Architecture* 2, no.1 (1997): 73-4.

99 Perhaps the single most cost-prohibitive feature of the merchant mansions was their extensive use of objects, materials, and furnishings imported at astronomical expense from Europe. In addition to being constructed from locally available materials, Black and White homes were frequently furnished with rattan and other locally produced materials.

were claiming to be British than to create ever-more elaborate shibboleths and longer, more explicit lists of what precisely it took to be "really" British?[100]

The very homes in which they chose to live required a close familiarity with historic English architectural forms to be "read" as intended—minimally adulterated Englishness of the most traditional sort. This was perhaps of greater concern in the Straits Settlements than in many other parts of the empire; the aforementioned imprecise and flexible legal status for the various Asian groups living in the Crown Colony made some British uneasy. When combined with the prevalence of non-whites in positions of power within the colonial administration and desirability of close business and social relations with elite and wealthy non-whites it must have been an uncomfortable environment for the more trenchant racists living overseas.

The ever-increasing numbers of Asians attending the most prestigious British public schools and then progressing to the finest universities meant that not even educational differences (or indeed shibboleths, such as jokes in Latin) could be relied upon as differentiators. By proclaiming their heritage so visually on the exteriors of their homes, white colonial residents were attempting to solidify the one part of their identity that could not be acquired or purchased: the very color of their skin.

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100 The most distilled versions of this list often reference Protestantism, loyalty to the monarch, speaking English as one's first language, and perhaps more important (because it was least acquirable) having sufficiently white skin.

Even this did not provide as much security as might be expected, however, as there was an established practice of declaring sufficiently wealthy or eminent individuals "honorary whites".[101] This, so long as they were able to maintain property appearances and generally maintain their status, allowed specific individuals of any non-white ancestry to live in the white enclaves that had been set aside from the polluted and steamy ports throughout the Straits Settlements. They were also conveniently far from the overcrowded, poor, and overwhelmingly darker skinned humanity that made trade in the region possible. It was within these enclaves that the palatial western-style homes of Asiatic Britishers were most often built, capitalizing on the chosen identity they had almost totally managed to assume.

101 Tan. "Pioneers' Homes in the Social History of Singapore" *Journal of Southeast Asian Architecture* 2, no.1 (1997): 86.

CHAPTER VI

CONCLUSION

Summation

In Singapore and the rest of the Straits Settlements, where multiple ethnic groups settled into a new region all hoping for private financial gain, a rich mixing of cultures was almost inevitable.[102] Arguably, the cause of the various hybrid domestic architectural forms chosen was another type of hybridity that was fostered aggressively by the peculiar requirements of attempting to administer the Straits Settlements. Ultimately, the *raison d'être* for the entire existence of the Straits Settlements was the incredibly lucrative trade with east Asia.

The only way to even attempt administration of such a motley assortment of ethnic groups as was present in the Straits Settlements was to employ a veritable army of multilingual clerks, capable of translating endless documents, laws, and declarations so that they could be understood by all residents and visitors.[103] Although there were some talented white linguists who were able to manage a language or two after years in the region, most of the work was done by Asians of various ethnicities who had grown up

102 Although there were already a small number of Malays living on the main island of Singapore, there was a huge influx from the surrounding region as the local economy underwent explosive growth.

103 Lees, "Being British in Malaya, 1890-1940," *Journal of British Studies* 48, no.1 (2009): 85.

fluent in multiple languages, whether due to circumstance of birth or the advent of missionary schools in the region, all of which taught English.

The trade that made the region and whatever headaches (to say nothing of deadly tropical disease) involved in maintaining the Straits Settlements as a Crown Colony worth it took place on hundreds of different islands in the Malay Archipelago, any one of which might contain speakers of dozens of different languages, and in Imperial China. Multilingual individuals who excelled at fitting into different cultures at the drop of a hat were the exclusive fuel on which the Straits Settlements ran.

To be such an individual was to all but guarantee more lucrative employment than would otherwise be possible, and the assumption of a selection of identities that fit with one's differing position within the different cultures in which one could interact.[104] Such obvious financial and social incentives, combined with the clear examples of social leaders maintaining multiple identities with pride and without negative consequence naturally led to imitation in the lower ranks of society. This experience of voluntary adaptation in Singapore was not universal, but it was true for the majority of immigrants. Although they could not afford to have everything shipped at ruinous expense from Europe, these regular citizens could and did choose to have their domestic architecture outwardly reflect their inward conceptions of themselves. Moreover, in many cases the hybrids chosen

104 Called "code switching" and used to reference linguistic practices, the same theory may be applied to the different cultural expectations that are assumed within different cultural contexts.

reflect a vision of self unique to the Straits Settlements at least as much as they reflect any personal ancestry.

It should come as no surprise, then, that enterprising individuals who had the option of assuming a British identity would chose to do so in those spaces where that would result in financial and social advancement. Equally, then, it should not be surprising that some of those whose cultural identity was being, if only in their own eyes, wrongfully assumed, would try to take steps to further refine their own identity, thereby once again restricting the group to only "appropriate" membership (again, if only from their own perspective). Such a pitched and frankly personal battle would likely take place on any front available, and the act of choosing the sort of home one would live in would have been a rational, even if unconscious, outlet for such feelings to take physical (and fairly non-disruptive) shape.

Possible Further Research

The Straits Settlements in general and Singapore in particular represent an incredibly complex part of many different histories—social, architectural, colonial, and economic just to name a few—and there is really very little scholarship available on almost any aspect of this rich and fascinating location. Perhaps even more so than for other regions, the necessity of painting with a very fine brush becomes increasingly evident the

more work one does with this area. Although this paper has been able to shed some light both on the complexities of identity in the Straits Settlements (as well as some reasons for that complexity) and how some of this may be seen in the domestic architecture of the region, there is an unimaginable amount of work still to be done, and hopefully some of the issues raised in this paper will inspire further scholarly interest in the region.

APPENDIX A

ANGLO-CHINESE RELATIONS

England and China had been engaged in a profoundly uneven trade agreement since 1635, although at this early date, trade was limited in both volume and frequency. Imperial China maintained a policy of trading with other nations purely as a favor, and not as an economic necessity. This had (roughly speaking) been Imperial policy since the reign of Wu during the Zhou dynasty, 1087-1043 BCE. The trade philosophy extended to a belief that even if China needed something attainable only through trade, that the need should be denied and hidden, so as not to give negotiating power to a potential enemy. This policy remained practical for more than two thousand years in no small part because of China's sheer size. Into this understanding of trade so divergent from any European model came a currency crunch. China in the 1700s was running on a silver standard, and economic growth resulted in an huge excess of goods as compared to the amounts of silver available for coinage. This, in combination with long-standing trade policies caused China to pursue trade with European nations under two conditions: they would purchase neither raw materials nor finished goods from Europe, and would accept only silver for the tea and silk so desired in the West. As the silver drained out of Europe, including England, never to return, various economies in the west that were tied to a silver or gold standard began to experience inflation. The profits being made hand over fist by

merchants out of London was surely one of the things that Raffles was concerned about protecting when he insisted that Britain needed a foothold (or toe hold, as Singapore is very small) on the China-England route. Further, the East India company nominally stood to gain from such a port, as it would ease the passage of their own ships.

By 1839, Englishmen had decided to fight dirty and illegally import the one item they could sell to citizens of China for silver: opium. The East India Company was the only company chartered to engage in trade with China on behalf of the crown and therefore was prohibited from direct involvement; instead they grew opium in the parts of India they controlled and sold it via an elaborate system of legal and illegal markets to buyers in China, producing great profits and "solving" the currency problems of England in one fell swoop. In the meantime, there had been two separate Anglo-Dutch treaties, the first in 1814 and the second in 1824 as London and Amsterdam sought non-violent means to resolve real estate differences arising from the Napoleonic Wars that were half way around the globe. The results of the treaty of 1814 were quickly in dispute after Raffles founded Singapore on land that nominally had been ceded to the Dutch just a few years prior. The term "nominally" is used advisedly, as there were no Dutch settlements on the island at the time, and indeed, Raffles was not "discovered" by the Dutch until a few years after he put down roots. Raffles the individual is often cited as a specific cause of the second round of negotiations that led to the Anglo-Dutch Treaty of 1824.

The entire mess of Anglo-Dutch relations and the complications of trade with China that led to one of the Opium Wars were only complicated further by the unusual relationship between the East India Company and Parliament, which was transparent enough that the Chinese government made official protestations over it during the Opium Wars.

APPENDIX B

CULTURALLY PLURAL SOCIAL HIERARCHY IN COLONIAL SINGAPORE

A new dissertation has recently been published by Eric Holmberg exploring and defining the nature of the relationships between Chinese and European elites in colonial Singapore. He convincingly asserts that the post-colonial understanding of "Asians *or* Europeans" or "Asians *versus* Europeans" presents a false dichotomy that does not reflect the historical reality of "Asians *and* Europeans" among the elite classes. Holmberg describes the elites of a society as being like the stitches in a garment: while they are a tiny fraction of the total material involved, they are essential to a garment holding together.

In the same manner, social theory states that once a society is large enough that every individual cannot know every other individual, some sort of shared center is needed to hold them together. In the case of Singapore, almost nothing was shared across ethnic boundaries. The English did not have sufficient numbers, social connections, or wealth to form an elite class themselves, and the wealthy Chinese were not native members of the dominant culture. The "weak ties" between these two groups were sufficient to allow for an initial mutual appreciation of status to occur.

In short, the more shared experiences between these elites occur, the more direct and indirect social capital participating elites are able to accumulate. By acknowledging each

others' eliteness at regular intervals, participants are able to virtually coin their own social capital. The system becomes self perpetuating in a very short time, and similarly neither group is able to escape the other. The newspapers of Singapore served as a kind of record keeper, and allowed non-elites to keep track of who was more elite than whom.

Although the Chinese elites of Singapore very much maintained the Chinese aspects of their identity, their adoption of an additional British identity granted them considerable social prestige and networking opportunities. The assertion that this was a purely superficial stance, Holmberg argues, is unsupportable and incorrect.

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