

INTERNATIONAL BESTSELLER

6TH EDITION

A SHORT HISTORY OF SOUTH-EAST ASIA

PETER CHURCH

WILEY

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SOUTH-EAST
ASIA

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“To understand the present and anticipate the future, one must know enough of the past, enough to have a sense of the history of a people.”

Lee Kuan Yew,
then Prime Minister of Singapore,
in January 1980 on the occasion of the 25th anniversary
of the founding of the People’s Action Party

PREFACE

I had already been involved with South-East Asia for many years when I read the late Prime Minister of Singapore, Lee Kuan Yew's thought-provoking words set out on the facing page. Although I was an indifferent student of history at school in Australia, the words hit me like a sledge hammer. Whilst I was well aware of the importance to business of understanding the different cultures of South-East Asia, I had not given a lot of thought to the relevance of history to the future in general, or to business in particular.

Since that time I have read a lot of history on the region and what I have learnt has over and over again reinforced Lee Kuan Yew's message. Unfortunately, I have found much of the history of the region has either been written by scholars absorbed by their topics and writing at a much greater depth than is required to get that broad understanding of history of the people or has been written in an abbreviated form for tourists or others needing only an outline of the past.

This book is the sixth edition of *A Short History of South-East Asia*, and we continue to attempt to find a middle path which will give business and other readers enough detail to have a sense of the history of the different countries and their people. The first edition of this book was published in 1995 under the title *Focus in South-east Asia*. The original book was written substantially by two leading Australian historians who specialise in the ASEAN region, Professor John Ingleson and Dr Ian Black, then both at the University of New South Wales. They immediately understood what it was that we were trying to achieve and, through their skill, sensitivity, and experience, the original book was published.

There have been significant historical developments in much of South-East Asia since 1995 and this led us to bring the material up-to-date in 1999, 2003, 2005, 2009, and now again in late 2016. For this edition I turned to Janis Soo, formerly a senior editor

at my publishers, John Wiley & Sons, for assistance and am extremely thankful to her for her professionalism and expertise. Any mistakes which remain are mine.

The original project proved to be a far more difficult exercise than at first envisaged. Not only is it difficult to condense thousands of years of history to a few pages, but at all times, we wanted to test the material against the objective that a reader should by the end of each chapter have a feel for the history of the particular people.

When the fifth edition went to press the whole world was being battered by the Global Economic Crisis. This time there is a more pressing regional issue and that is the territorial dispute that a number of South-East Asian countries have with China over its claims to the South China Sea. Hopefully this dispute will be solved amicably as the effect could be catastrophic if it led to armed conflict.

Adding to this mix is the result of the presidential election in the United States. What President-elect Trump's actual policies will be to Asia, as compared with his various pronouncements during the campaign, is at this point unclear. However, it is likely he will be more isolationist and, if so, this is likely to be negative for the countries of South-East Asia in many ways, ranging from possible increased tariffs to export goods and services to the United States through to a reluctance of the United States to play a balancing role to China's aggressive stance in the South China Sea.

If I were going to pick one major development throughout the region since the last edition it would be the impact of the Internet and social media in all its forms on the governments of the region. We have seen the Vietnamese government prohibit discussion of politics on social media, the Thai government using its lese majeste and computer crime laws to crack down on discussion of the monarchy and dissent with the junta, and the Malaysian government blocking websites which are seen as antigovernment and charging those who it believes are using social media for the purpose of "defaming, abusing or inciting others to belittle the position of or instil hatred towards the institutions of government." Even the Singapore government has recently passed a law with civil and criminal sanctions for any discussion, debate, or criticism of cases under review by the judiciary.

Sadly, another issue increasingly present in the current history of South-East Asia is the incidence of Islamic terrorism. All of the governments in the region are doing their best to counter this scourge but one senses it will still be a major problem far into the future.

Above all, we hope you come away from reading this small book with a deeper understanding of the history of South-East Asia which might, in a small way, better enable you to understand the present and interpret the future with respect to your South-East Asia business and other interests.

Peter Church OAM

Singapore

10 November, 2016

INTRODUCTION

INTRODUCTION TO THE SIXTH EDITION

When the fifth edition of this brief and handy history was introduced in 2009, South-East Asia, like nearly all the rest of the world, was struggling with contagious recession. The region emerged from that and has generally resumed growth. In the biggest economy, Indonesia, there is a fair chance of broad expansion and in a couple of the smaller states there is clear improvement. Political uncertainties constrain investment and growth in some places.

But the most striking change since 2009 is the large and rapid increase in the salience of China's presence and influence. This is evident in new regional institutions, in trade, and in infrastructure funding and in an assertive claim of sovereignty over most of the South China Sea. That claim has been given physical shape by the development of reefs and islands, some newly and artificially formed, on some of which air strips or other military facilities are being installed. Despite a decision by an arbitration tribunal operating under the auspices of the UN Convention on the Law of the Sea against China's claims, regional governments have been relatively careful in their criticism of China's claims. Whether the United States, which has also disputed China's claims, will continue to do so under a Trump Administration remains to be seen. President-elect Trump's remarks during the campaign might suggest a reduction in US engagement in the region.

Sydney, 10 November 2016

Rawdon Dalrymple AO

*Former Australian Ambassador to Israel, Indonesia,
United States, and Japan*

INTRODUCTION TO THE 2009 FIFTH EDITION

The first sentence of my introduction to the fourth edition has been reinforced by the market since then. More than 150,000 copies of “this little book” have now been sold and here we are with a fifth edition. That it fills a need is more than ever obvious. Busy people who need a basic history of one or more of the countries of South-East Asia have been well-served by it.

The region, like the rest of the world in January 2009, faces formidable difficulties. Demand for exports is drying up, as is foreign investment. Economies that have a major exposure to earnings sent home by workers who have jobs in other countries are likely to be adversely affected. For example, some eight million Filipinos work overseas and their repatriated earnings are a significant part of the country’s national income. The competence of governments everywhere will be tested. Some will manage better than others, but all will come under strain. A major question is whether regional cooperation will be more effective than in 1987–88. Their histories do not enable us to predict with certainty how South-East Asian countries will be affected. But some knowledge of history certainly helps.

2009

Rawdon Dalrymple AO

Chairman, Advisory Board of Asean Focus Group

INTRODUCTION TO THE 2006 FOURTH EDITION

The continuing and increasing demand for this little book reflects not only the quality of its contents and the relevance of its format but also the prominence of South-East Asia in events which have engaged worldwide attention. Thus Islam in South-East Asia has been much discussed and many outside the region have become aware that there are more adherents of that religion in Indonesia than in any other country in the world. Political changes and developments in Indonesia, with a new and very different president, have appeared to hold out new promise, as has the change of leadership in Malaysia. Security incidents and concern about threatening networks have prompted unprecedented cooperation between the countries of the region including Australia. Most recently the natural disaster of the tsunami wave originating off Sumatra has focused world attention on the region and brought a huge supportive international response.

The East Asian solidarity movement, based on ASEAN, Japan, China and Korea, is still in an early stage, with difficulties between

Japan and China, and reservations in ASEAN about both the giant northern neighbours, seeming likely to complicate prospects. But South-East Asia continues to seek to shape this regional cooperation by, for example, insisting that candidates sign on to its Treaty of Amity and Cooperation. Both Japan and the Republic of Korea found ways of doing so without prejudice to their alliance arrangements with the United States, and the government of Australia appears to be considering doing so. Economically, South-East Asia is far from demonstrating the dynamism of China and indeed China's growth increasingly raises questions of the effects on the region. The flood of China's low-priced products is damaging South-East Asian exports to major existing markets, especially since the textiles regime changed. But some Chinese industries are investing in production facilities in South-East Asia and Chinese demand for raw materials and energy resources is benefiting some parts of the region. In any case, the rise of China seems certain to be a major influence on the region in the years ahead. The countries of the region, and especially perhaps Indonesia and the Philippines, will need to address present constraints on their economic performance in order to hold their own.

2006

Rawdon Dalrymple AO

Chairman, Advisory Board of Asean Focus Group

INTRODUCTION TO THE 2003 THIRD EDITION

The success of this book shows that it fills a need, both in Australia and beyond, and that there is continuing interest in learning about the countries of South-East Asia. That is encouraging because there have been major changes in the region since the book was first produced. Those changes probably require qualification of the optimistic last paragraph of the introduction I wrote three years ago. I will try to say briefly why that is so.

In the first place the global climate is more uncertain and even threatening. It is a commonplace that the early post-Cold War euphoria has dissipated. The Western alliance system is divided and possibly even endangered; the enthusiasm for international economic liberalisation has diminished; fear of terrorism has had a major effect, especially on the only superpower; and there is an historically high level of resentment and friction in the global system.

Secondly, South-East Asia has experienced some of the effects of the heightened intensity of Islamic anger spilling out of the Israel/Palestine issue, the slow economic development of the Arab

world, and various perceived grievances, especially against the United States. Some countries in the region have taken firm action to prevent violent expressions of that anger, including in the form of international terrorism. Others have been less effective. Domestic religious violence, in some places on a large scale, has also been costly.

Thirdly, recovery from the financial crisis has been patchy and slower than expected. Necessary action on failed banking and financial institutions in Indonesia, for example, is still awaited. Reform and improvement of governance and legal institutions have not been much in evidence.

Fourthly, the dynamism of the Chinese economy and particularly the growth of its exports have overshadowed South-East Asia. Foreign investment has flowed strongly to China while appearing more wary of some of the old favourites in South-East Asia.

Indeed all the last three factors have no doubt played a role in the reduction in FDI into the region in recent years.

South-East Asia has also experienced a diminution of the growth of regional solidarity. This is hard to quantify, but the authority and standing of ASEAN and of its associated FTA seem to have slipped.

If confronted by an external challenge ASEAN would no doubt show renewed solidarity and resilience. But there has been a loss of momentum. This may be partly because the region seems to be waiting to see what comes out of China. Will China emerge in the next ten or 15 years as a new superpower, and if so will it inevitably expand its zone of influence? Will it then become the dominant power in an ASEAN plus Three configuration, a realisation of Dr Mahathir's EAEC concept but with China, and not ASEAN or Japan, as the main driver?

Finally, without wishing to sound a parochial note, something needs to be said briefly about the position of Australia. The Australian perspective has become more reserved, at least at the government level, and the strenuous enforcement of "border protection" measures, as well as confusion about an Australian "deputy sheriff" role and preparedness to undertake "pre-emptive" action to stop emerging threats, have been among the factors seen in the region as evidence of a shift in Australian attitudes away from the "engagement" policy of the previous years. To some extent that perception overlooks the fact that the Australian engagement policy suffered a series of rebuffs by the region which would have made it difficult for any government to maintain. It also needs to be taken into account that Australian public opinion (to which government is highly responsive) was inevitably affected by the extensive and

graphic media coverage of events in East Timor. That coverage was far more intensive in Australia, largely because of proximity, than anywhere else in the region.

The biggest challenge for Australia is to combine realistic expectations with a determination to make every reasonable effort to understand and cooperate with the countries of the region. That includes, for example, declining to enter into argument with those like Dr Mahathir who often vilify Australia for domestic purposes or as a proxy for an attack on the United States. It means, more importantly, returning to the policy of previous governments going back 40 years. For decades Australian governments encouraged and promoted the study of South-East Asian languages and the history, politics, economies and societies of the countries of the region. That, unfortunately, has gone backwards in recent years.

Australia in the medium to longer term cannot afford to give up on the national project of building the relationship with its region. That is partly because the region will return to stronger economic growth and will be a growing market for what Australia produces. But beyond that, it would be very uncomfortable for Australia in the longer term to be faced by an indifferent or disapproving South-East Asia. And, as many in the region understand, Australia can make a significant contribution. The role of business in that regard needs to be complemented and supported by addressing the historic task of building up knowledge and linkages across the board.

I see this small book as a contribution to that and hope that it will continue to be widely read by business and other visitors to the region from around the world.

Sydney, 12 June, 2003

Rawdon Dalrymple AO

*Chairman, Advisory Board of Asean Focus Group; Former
Australian Ambassador to Indonesia, Japan and the United States*

INTRODUCTION TO THE 1999 SECOND EDITION

South-East Asia has for many centuries been a part of the world whose fortunes were largely determined by centres of power elsewhere. It was a theatre for the intersection of Indian and Chinese influence—religious, commercial, cultural and political. Later, it was the easternmost extension of the spread of Islam. It saw rivalry and conflict for commercial and political control between the rival European colonial powers and then a long period of subservience to

those powers until the brief ascendancy of Japanese imperial power in the 1940s.

In the 1980s and up until 1997, South-East Asia experienced economic growth on a scale and at a rate which was unprecedented in world history. The region saw the beginning of a sense of shared purpose, and a confidence that the South-East Asian nations would become prosperous and influential in the world. In the words of the American pioneer of developmental state theory, Professor Chalmers Johnson, they looked forward to achieving not only enrichment but also empowerment. There was a vigorous debate in the international financial institutions and in academic circles about the factors which had made it possible to achieve such spectacular economic progress. One dimension of that debate concerned the influence of the “Japanese model.” The “flying geese” theory had it that as Japan moved out of labour-intensive industry it invested in South-East Asia and other emerging economies which were able to take off into export-driven economic growth with a high degree of state direction. Opposed to that was the theory that the South-East Asians had achieved record-breaking economic growth by opening their economies increasingly to the world market which forced them to become highly competitive and made them attractive investment opportunities. On that theory, deregulation and openness were the keys to continuing success.

The crisis which started with the collapse of the Thai baht in June 1997 was widely seen in the West as discrediting the Japanese model and Japanese leadership in the region. The International Monetary Fund’s rescue operations in the region were driven by a belief that the crisis economies needed strict control of public expenditure, transparency in regulation of the banking and finance sector, and liberalisation of financial flows in particular and their economies generally. Debate continues about the wisdom of the Fund’s policies which were modified after an initial period, especially in Indonesia. It is probably fair to say that no one would now believe that South-East Asia can return to strong growth in the long term without substantial reforms of governance. But there remains in the region a strong belief that these countries cannot afford to place themselves totally at the mercy of international financial markets and that some measures of control are necessary.

It will be some time before these policies and other problems are resolved but, in the meantime, the sense of achievement seen as based on national and more broadly Asian cultural traditions and values, and not simply derived from the West, has been diminished.

The sense of regional solidarity based on the shared economic success and on the growing international status of the Association of South-East Asian Nations (ASEAN) has also been affected. ASEAN as a body was shown to be largely irrelevant when the financial crisis struck. Again in September 1999 when East Timor, after voting massively for independence from Indonesia, was plunged into a frenzy of killing and destruction, ASEAN, possibly due to its long-standing policy of not commenting on or being seen to be interfering in the domestic affairs of its members, seemed unwilling or unable to play any substantial role in international efforts to re-establish order. There have been a number of other events over recent years which demonstrate the interdependence of ASEAN's members and how events in one country have the potential to severely affect another. These range from occurrences of ethnic and religious conflict to unchecked forest fires in Indonesia causing havoc in other ASEAN countries such as Singapore, Brunei and Malaysia. Events such as these have led a number of members to express the view that ASEAN needs to review its *raison d'être* and one suspects this will have to lead to substantial changes in policies if the grouping is to continue to have relevance.

But in the longer term the present situation is likely to be seen as an interlude, although in some cases—and especially in Indonesia—it might last some years. It should not be seen simply as an interruption of the remarkable economic successes of the last 20 years. High levels of economic growth will not return without substantial reforms and policies to equip these countries for success in a rapidly changing world economy. Moreover, there is substantial political change afoot in South-East Asia. That is perhaps most evident in Thailand, where democracy seems now firmly implanted and working well. There is a sense in Malaysia that change there cannot now be too far off. In Indonesia, the troubled giant of the region, there are elements of major change together with retention of elements from the Suharto New Order era. Of the two great political forces in the country, the Islamic seems to have gained ascendancy over the secular nationalist. But it is a moderate and tolerant Islamic leadership apparently committed to equal rights for all. In that country, much economic and social ground has been lost and it will be a hard task to establish a new political order and the basis for a new era of economic growth and increasing welfare for the population of more than 210 million.

It would, in my view, not take long if stability and economic recovery prevail for the sense of optimism and confidence to return to South-East Asia, and this time it could be enhanced by a much wider

public acceptance and sense of participation. In Indonesia, where the outlook is still uncertain, there is already an enormous change in the atmosphere with a novel and unaccustomed frankness and exchange of opinions in the media and a sense of relevance and indeed of power in the elected parliament. If economic recovery takes hold across the region we are likely to see a move to try to enhance the role and relevance of ASEAN. The proposal to establish an East Asian Monetary Fund has support in South-East Asia and the initiatives which flow from the Miyazawa Fund could lead to an invigorated cooperative arrangement supported by Japan. Global currents caused havoc in the region in 1997 and 1998 and that has led some to think in terms of building defences and walls. Globalisation will, however, affect South-East Asia in positive ways—socially, politically and economically. Indeed they cannot afford not to respond to it, and one of the questions which faces them is whether or how they can best support each other in that enterprise.

Sydney, 1 January, 2000

Rawdon Dalrymple AO
Chairman, Asean Focus Group

1 BRUNEI

6th–9th centuries

Kingdom of Puni on the north-west coast of Kalimantan paying tribute to China

14th century

Brunei claimed as part of the Majapahit Empire

1521

Magellan visits a flourishing trading community linked to South-East Asia and China

16th–17th centuries

Brunei becomes a major regional Kingdom extending to southern Philippines, Sabah, and Sarawak

18th century

Brunei's area of economic and political influence gradually declines

1839

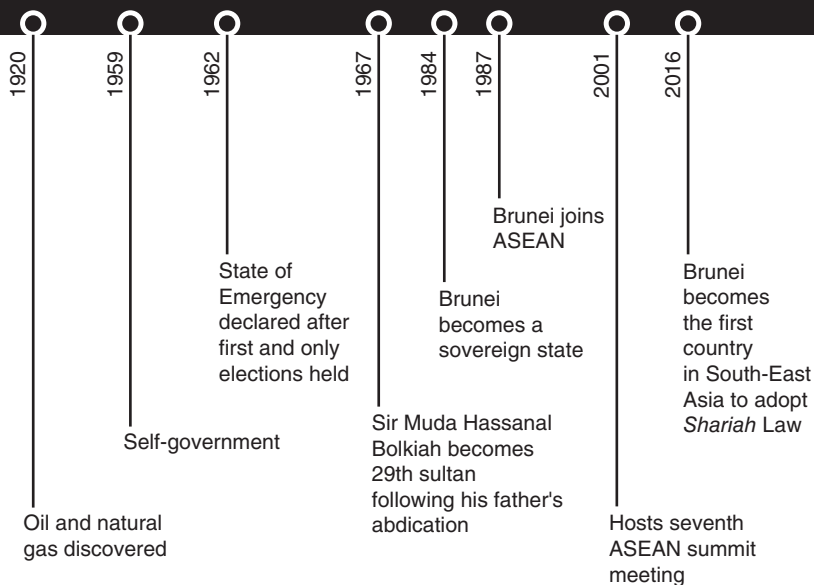
James Brooke arrives and becomes the governor and “White Rajah” of Sarawak (then part of Brunei)

1888

Britain declares Brunei a protectorate



Jame'Asr Hassanil Bolkiah Mosque



1 BRUNEI

Brunei is a small state of just 2,226 square miles located on the north-west coast of the island of Kalimantan, or “Borneo” (a Western term derived from “Brunei”). It is an Islamic State where the sultan, Sir Hassanal Bolkiah, the 29th Sultan in the dynasty, rules by decree. Its population is about 426,000, of whom nearly 60 percent live in urban areas. Malays comprise about 64 percent of the population, Chinese about 20 percent, and indigenous tribes about 8 percent. It would be an unremarkable territory were it not that underneath its soil and under its territorial waters lie huge oil and gas reserves which have enabled the country to boast the highest per-capita income in South-East Asia at around US\$36,000. This underground wealth has also enabled one of the world’s few remaining absolute monarchies to survive into the 21st century. The sultanate has considerable financial reserves invested overseas.

EARLY HISTORY

Little is known of the early history of Brunei. There appears to have been trade between the north-west coast of Kalimantan and China as early as the sixth century and Brunei was influenced by the

spread of Hinduism/Buddhism from India in the first millennium. Chinese records make mention of a kingdom of Puni, located on the north-west coast of Kalimantan, which paid tribute to Chinese emperors between the sixth and the ninth centuries. Brunei was claimed by the great Javanese empire of Majapahit in the 14th century, though it was most likely little more than a trading/tributary relationship. Brunei became a more significant state in the 15th century with a greater degree of independence from its larger neighbours. When the Chinese Admiral Cheng Ho visited Brunei in the early 15th century, as part of his exploration of South-East Asia, he discovered a significant trading port with resident Chinese traders engaged in profitable trade with the homeland.

Brunei was a small cog in the early South-East Asia trading networks but well known enough to figure in the records of the major states. The Brunei ruler seems to have converted to Islam in the middle of the 15th century when he married a daughter of the ruler of Melaka. The Portuguese conquest of Melaka in 1511 closed Melaka to Muslim traders, forcing them to look elsewhere in the archipelago. There was an outflow of wealthy Islamic traders who settled in other parts of the Indonesian archipelago, taking with them not only their business acumen but also their religious beliefs. The Islamisation of the archipelago was given a great impetus. Brunei prospered from the Portuguese conquest of Melaka as Islamic traders were now attracted to its port in greater numbers. When Magellan's expedition visited Brunei in 1521 it found a prosperous town with a flourishing trading community linked into the South-East Asia–China trading network. Throughout the 16th century it engaged in political and commercial relations with other states in the Malay world, comprising the Indonesian archipelago, the Malay Peninsula, and southern Philippines.

Brunei became a major regional kingdom in the 16th and 17th centuries, with its influence stretching into the southern Philippines and its territorial claims extending over most of the north coast of Kalimantan, including what are now the Malaysian states of Sarawak and Sabah. As the first Islamic kingdom in the area, Brunei was the base for the Islamisation of the southern Philippines and surrounding areas, frequently coming into conflict with Catholic Spain after the Spanish conquest of Luzon, the central island of the Philippines. In 1578 Spain attacked Brunei and briefly captured the capital. It was unable to hold the town, in large part because its forces were

decimated by sickness. Spain continued to try to conquer the Islamic Sultanate of Sulu in the southern Philippine islands, only finally succeeding in the last quarter of the 19th century.

Brunei did well out of the Portuguese conquest of Melaka. Not only did it become an important port for Muslim traders but it was able to negotiate a deal with the Portuguese for cooperation in the South-East Asian trade with China. Brunei was no threat to Portugal, having no territorial claims outside Kalimantan. It also shared a commercial interest in promoting the China trade. In 1526 the Portuguese established a trading post at Brunei to collect the valued products of Kalimantan and surrounding islands. Brunei became an integral port of call on the Melaka-to-Macau route.

Brunei's commercial and political power was at its peak in the middle of the 17th century. It had managed to stave off Spain and had reached a mutually beneficial accord with Portugal. From the middle of the 17th century it was increasingly challenged by the Sultanate of Sulu in the islands north-east of Kalimantan. Ostensibly under Brunei suzerainty, the Sultanate of Sulu gradually established total independence, going so far as to acquire from Brunei sovereignty over most of the area which today constitutes the Malaysian state of Sabah.

By the beginning of the 19th century the political and economic power of the Malay rulers in Kalimantan and what is now the southern Philippines was declining sharply. The rule of the once-powerful Sultans of Brunei and Sulu now barely extended outside their capitals. Their decline resulted largely from the development of European entrepôts in South-East Asia, which offered local traders a better price for their produce and were free from the taxes of the Malay ports. The development of local trade with European entrepôts, especially Singapore, Batavia, and Manila, and the decay of the older trading centres of Brunei and Sulu meant a drastic reduction in the Sultanates' revenues, with a consequent decline in political power.

About 40,000 people lived in Brunei town and surrounding areas in the mid-18th century. By the 1830s the population had declined to about 10,000. The northern coast of Kalimantan, except for Brunei town itself, was ruled by local chiefs based at river mouths. The coastal population was predominantly Malay (and Muslim), with a small group of Chinese merchants and pepper growers and a smattering of people of Arab descent. The tribal people who

lived in the interior were neither Malay nor Muslim: they were subsistence farmers who traded with the coastal Malays but resisted attempts to bring them under Malay control. To Brunei's south the most significant tribal people were Iban, or Dayak. To the east (in Sabah) the most significant groups were Kadazan-Dusun and Murut.

In addition to its economic decay, the Brunei Sultanate was further weakened by power struggles within the Court. Omar Ali Saifuddin, who succeeded to the throne of the Sultanate in 1828, was a weak ruler. During his reign a bitter power struggle developed between two rival factions led by Brunei chiefs. The decline in the Sultan's power was evidenced by the increasing independence of provincial rulers, and by the growth in the power of formerly subservient chiefs. In the late 1830s, Sarawak, the westernmost province claimed by the Sultanate of Brunei, was in open rebellion against the local provincial ruler, whose rule had become progressively more oppressive as he became more independent of Brunei. In 1837, the Sultan tried to suppress the rebellion but without success.

THE BRITISH IMPACT

In the first half of the 19th century the interest of the British government and the English East India Company in South-East Asia was limited to the protection of the China trade routes from interference by other European nations and the provision of minimum conditions for the expansion of British trade in the area. The Anglo-Dutch Treaty of 1824, under which Britain acquired Melaka from the Dutch and relinquished Benkulen on the south-west coast of Sumatra, and the Dutch withdrew all objections to Britain's occupation of Singapore, contained articles which guaranteed British traders entry to the Dutch-administered ports and laid down maximum rates of import duties. The failure of the Dutch to carry out the commercial clauses of the Treaty led to a growing agitation by merchants in Singapore and Britain that Britain should directly challenge the Netherlands' position in the archipelago by opening an entrepot to the east of Singapore. The unsuccessful settlements in northern Australia—Melville Bay, Raffles Bay, and Port Essington—had been made partly with this end in view, but in the late 1830s attention was focused on the north-west coast of Borneo, the only part of the archipelago not recognised as lying within the Dutch sphere of influence.

Into this situation of a decaying Sultanate of Brunei, facing rebellion in Sarawak, and a growing commercial interest in the north-west coast of Kalimantan by the British community in Singapore, arrived in August 1839 a remarkable Englishman named James Brooke. Brooke was in the mould of the early 19th-century Romantics: he admired what he saw as the simple and unsophisticated life of the peoples of the Malay archipelago and wanted to improve it by bringing to them what he saw as the benefits of British civilisation, without destroying the basic simplicity of their lives. He became convinced that he had a divinely appointed mission in the Malay archipelago. With the proceeds of his wealthy father's estate, he bought a boat and journeyed first to Singapore and then to the north-west coast of Kalimantan. His timely arrival at the head of the Sarawak river with an armed yacht in August 1839 brought the rebellion of the local chief to an end. In return he received the Governorship of Sarawak.

Over the next 30 years Brooke established a personal fiefdom in Sarawak, remorselessly extending its borders at the expense of the Sultanate of Brunei. He was adroit at persuading British naval commanders in Hong Kong and Singapore to support him in forcing the Sultan of Brunei to make concession after concession. However, his attempts to persuade the British government to make Sarawak a British protectorate for the moment fell on deaf ears. The "White Rajah" was one of the more colourful oddities in the history of British colonialism.

A weakened Sultan of Brunei made further concessions of territory in 1877. This time it was to a private company, the American Trading Company, owned by an Austrian and an Englishman. The Austrian sold out to the Englishman in 1881. In order to keep the French and the Germans out of a strategically important area, Britain then granted a royal charter for the establishment of the British North Borneo Company. Further Brunei territory was successfully claimed by Sarawak in 1882, reducing the Sultanate to two small areas: the core around Brunei town and a small pocket of land inside Sarawak. In order to protect what was left of the once-great Sultanate of Brunei and finally to ensure that rival European powers were kept out, in 1888 Britain declared a protectorate over Sarawak, Brunei, and North Borneo. After a series of arrangements between the British North Borneo Company and Sarawak, which saw Sarawak add further territory, in 1906 Britain appointed a Resident to