

SINGAPORE'S HERITAGE LANDSCAPE CHANGES INTO A MULTICULTURAL ISLAND-CITY-NATION

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ABSTRACT

Singapore's landscape changes were initiated when the British, headed by Sir Stamford Raffles, first set foot on the island in 1819 and hoisted the British flag. From having a modest beginning, Singapore originated from a Malay island belonging to Johor in the southernmost state of Malaysia and underwent almost two centuries of development which gradually made it a prominent developed Island-City-State of the world. The island's timeline witnesses multi-faceted layers of transformation which leads to the Island losing its original heritage of a Malay island. The purpose of the study was to examine the original heritage of Singapore landscape in its early years, the historical events that followed and identify the driving factors that caused its changes. The review analysed the causes of the changes. What remains of the existing original heritage are also reviewed.

1. INTRODUCTION

Historically, Singapore was a Malay island for several centuries before the British came. During the early 19th century, intricate political events stemming from British Colonisation, became the main driving force that caused the island's landscape to change. In addition, changes

brought upon the island through urban renewal developmental plans inculcated during pre-British colonisation and post-colonisation imposed further landscape changes which produced the island-nation Singapore today.

2. STUDY

This paper is a review of various historical accounts of Singapore developments from its early years of being an unknown and unimportant island to a position it achieved today.

2.1 Method

The study uses a range of historical resources comprising of books and articles from government and private libraries. The internet was also a good source as historical books relating to Singapore were also made online since 2008.

3. ANALYSIS

The research resources were mainly analyzing through reading, comparing and summarizing the historical landscape changes through description and interpretation of historical images, sketches, travelogues and manuscripts.

The island's historical timeline furnished the chronology of important events which shows the landscape changes imposed .

3.1 Findings

Singapore's Timeline

Singapore was originally an ancient kingdom of Temasek. It remained a regional trading centre in the 14th century until wars with the Siamese and Majapahit forces lead to its destruction. The evidences of this Kingdom was found from archaeological evidences. Sang Nila Utama was said to be the true founder of old Singapore in AD 1160, then known as Temasik. The name of the island changed from Temasik to Singhapura after he saw a singa, the Malay name for lion, near the mouth of the Singapore river.

By the time the Europeans arrived, Singapore was the site of a Malay fishing village at the mouth of the Singapore River. The original inhabitants of the island used to be the several hundred of indigenous Orang Laut (Sea People). They occupied areas along the island's coast, rivers and on smaller islands. The British East India Company, led by Sir Stamford Raffles, established a trading post on the island in 1819. Early Singapore became a free trading port along the spice route and it remained an important commercial and military centre of the British Empire, and the hub of British power in Southeast Asia till the mid 20th Century.

Singapore was occupied by the Japanese after the Battle of Singapore during the Second World War. Winston Churchill indicated that particular war as "Britain's

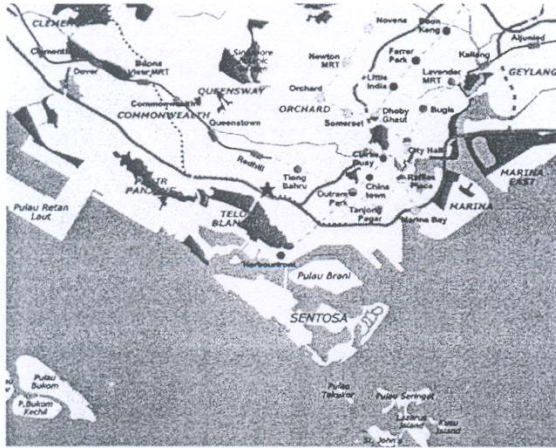
greatest defeat". Singapore returned to British rule in 1945, immediately after the war. Singapore achieved independence from Britain upon merging with Malaya, Sabah, and Sarawak to form Malaysia in 1963. In less than two years, it seceded from the federation and became an independent republic within the Commonwealth of Nations on 9 August 1965 and on 21 September was admitted to the United Nations.

Singapore is now, officially known as the Republic of Singapore. It is an island city-state off the southern tip of the Malay Peninsula, north of the equator, south of the Malaysian state of Johor and north of Indonesia's Riau Islands. Singapore is the smallest nation in Southeast Asia.

The Early Town Planning

Sir Stamford Raffles was the one responsible for bringing Singapore into British Colonialisation in 1819. Displeased with the progress made under Major Farquhar, in 1822, Raffles came back to Singapore and appointed a committee to reorganise the Town area of the island. He proposed to the Town Committee about his plans for the layout of the Town and the setting of the various major ethnic groups on the island. The poor from the three major ethnics were assigned specific areas to resettle but the rich could settle anywhere they chose to. In only three years, the large scale emigration of the Chinese from China made which made them the largest portion of the island's population at that time. The original inhabitants of the

Johor. It was the reception hall of the old Temenggong's residence.



Map 3: Present day Singapore River and its surroundings

Important historical buildings on the site today are, the Royal Mausoleum and Bathing Enclosure. In the Royal Mausoleum are the tombs of prominent people of the 19th century including the Temenggong, the Rajah (King) of Pahang, Johor, Rhio and Lingga Empire. The old bathing place of the Temenggong is now located outside the Mausoleum. The source of water came from a running stream flowing down from Blangah Hill or Mount Faber as it is called today.

The Chinese Settlement

Raffles also instructed how the streets in the Chinese settlements should be laid. The streets were designed to run as much as possible at right angles. He also wanted the artisans like the blacksmiths, carpenters and others to be placed in certain areas.

The uniformity of the shophouses and houses were a concern to Raffles too. He did the site planning of the Chinese settlement and instructed precisely on how the layout should be done. He had consideration for ventilation, light and the community activities.

1. The materials of the building was brick and tiles.
2. The houses and shophouses was laid in rows with the centre having an air well open to the sky.
3. Each house had a verandah or covered passage five feet wide. It was to provide an open space where the residents in the crowded houses. The open space was also for ventilation and fresh air. It was also to allow the operation of food hawkers.
4. The houses and shophouses were built in neat rows and in the centre was an air-well open to the Sky. This served for the collection and storage of water for ventilation and light.

Chinatown became a crowded place up to this day. In the early days the living conditions was hard but facilities for cultural and religious purposes were added to the area. Many Chinese Temples were built in the area for religious purposes. They even had their own singing halls and 'wayang' (opera) theatres. There were secret societies operation, licensed opium dens, illegal gambling and brothels which form the problems of that time.

The main activities of the Chinese were as workers in the tongkangs, twakows and lighters which were used to ferry goods from sea going vessels to the several warehouses

along the Singapore River. There were also spice plantations in Singapore and many of the Chinese worked as agricultural workers. Others worked in the Singapore Harbours and the Dockyard.

However, there were also a number of other ethnics who dwelled within the Chinatown. Evidences of the other ethnics living in Chinatown could be seen in the presence of old Tamil Muslim Mosque and Hindu Temples. Some of the early Indians were spices traders and boatman. Some Indonesian settlements were known as 'pondoks'(lodging houses). There were also some Malays and a Jewish settlement.

There were several urban renewal projects carried out over the years but Singapore had managed to maintain many parts of Chinatown.

The Indian settlements

Raffles instructed that the Indians be located in the upper parts of the Singapore River around Tanjung Pagar, according to the early town planning in 1822. In the early years of Singapore, the Indians were brought into Singapore as workers in different economic activities. They came from mainland India particularly, South Indian Muslims, Bengali Hindus, Tamils and Telegus. Some of the streets or roads had connection with the type of activities engaged by the Indians. (See Table 1)

Indians were also attracted to Serangoon Area. Initially, Serangoon area used to have agricultural areas where crops like gambier, nutmeg, coconuts and even rice were

Table 1: Location of the Indians in the 19th Century Singapore

Name of Streets/Zone	Ethnic	Activities
Chulliah Street	(Chulliah) Indian Settlements	Money lenders
Telok Ayer Street		
South Bridge Road		
Upper Cross Street (Kampong Susu/Tamils'Pal Kampong)		Milk Vendors
Tanjung Pagar (Little India)	Indian Office and houses	Chettiar (money lenders)
Bras Basah	Indian convicts resettlements	
Serangoon Road		Agricultural plantation workers and cattle rearers
Kampong Kapor	Peranakan Indian	
Potong Pasir	Tamils	

grown. However, agriculture did not fair well and gradually failed. Some of the agricultural activities were moved to Johor by the Temenggong. Because of the presence of water from the rivers and the natural

vegetation of grass, the Indians started cattle raising and made it their main occupation. The other Indian economic activities in Serangoon area in the 19th Century were wheat-grinding, sesame oil presses, rattan works and pineapple preserving factories.

In the 19th century, bullock carts became one of the cargo transport for slaughter houses. Slaughter-houses were located in Syed Alwi and Sungei Roads. Tamil Muslims were also engaged in the abattoir activities. Serangoon Road attracted the Peranakan Indians from Malacca too. Some of them settled in Kampong Kapur.

Other ethnic communities who settled there include some Chinese and Baweanese (Indonesians). The Chinese became vegetable growers in the Lavender and Balestier areas. The Indonesian Baweanese were employed as horse trainers at the Race Course, carriage and bullock-cart drivers and gardeners. They lived in 'pondoks' (lodging houses).

19th Century : Agriculture and financial activities

Early 20th Century: Opening of Naval Base, Seletar and Changi Air Bases.

1930's: It became residential and commercial areas. Some areas were taken by the Chinese and redeveloped

1941: Many Indians returned to India but some remained.

After 1945 : After the Japanese Surrender and British return, Serangoon Road retained some of its Indian shops and some 19th century male dormitories.

Some of British Heritage in Singapore

When Raffles reached Singapore in the early 1800s he found a rain forest with orchids and monkeys roaming

freely. He was drawn by the island's historical significance and panoramic view, Stamford Raffles was attracted to the island's history and appreciated the panoramic views from Blangah Hill now known as Mount Faber. He then built his bungalow when he returned to Singapore in 1822. The first Botanical Gardens was also established in the same year. There were foreign community in Singapore in the 1800's. One of the popular garden among the foreigners was the Botanic Gardens. The Botanic Gardens had well maintained gardens, water elements and a bandstand pavillion.

Raffles' bungalow on the hill became the official residence of the British governor until the late 1850s. It was later demolished to make way for a military fort bearing the name of Viscount Charles John Canning, Governor-General and first Viceroy of India.



19th Century Singapore at Sunrise

(Source: Cameron, 1865)

The fort is named Fort Canning and used by the British army in the pre-war and post-war period, the Japanese army during World War Two and up to the 1970s by the Singapore Armed Forces.

4. CONCLUSION

The landscape of Singapore has changed tremendously over the last two centuries. By 2009, the Economist Intelligence Unit ranked Singapore as the tenth most expensive city in the world in which to live in. It is the third in Asia, after Tokyo and Osaka. Singapore has a modest start of a small island with sparse population of several hundred Malays. In modern Singapore, the small island nation has already a 4.99 million population, highly cosmopolitan and diverse with Chinese people forming an ethnic majority with small populations of Malay, Indian and other people. English, Malay, Tamil, and Chinese are the official languages.

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