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CHAPTER

1

THE ESTABLISHMENT OF THE
COLONIAL RÉGIMES

From the late eighteenth century, the involvement with Europeans, with things and ideas European, deepened and affected the whole of Southeast Asia; but it varied in intensity from people to people and from place to place; it increased through time but at no constant pace; and it took differing forms. Furthermore, it was always a matter, to a greater or lesser degree, of interaction, rather than simply of Western initiative or challenge and indigenous response. Nor were Western initiatives and challenges the only ones. Others came to Southeast Asia, too, though in some sense they themselves had already been stimulated by the Western ones. Islam, for example, had increased its hold on archipelagic Southeast Asia in the preceding period of European enterprise: linked more closely with its homeland by better communications in the nineteenth century, it was deeply involved in many of the social and political changes which that region now underwent.

The capacity of Europe to affect Southeast Asia increased in this period on a number of counts. First, the industrialization of Europe enhanced its economic power and political potential, though proceeding in different countries at varying rates with varying degrees of completeness. Second, the world-wide improvement of communications—the introduction of steamships, the building of railways, the construction of the Suez Canal, the development of the electric telegraph—tied world and region more closely together. Third, European states became individually more integrated, more able to control their people and command their resources. Fourth, although (or because) they had so much in common, the states were at odds with each other, and the rivalry overseas that had long affected the fortunes of Southeast Asia continued to do so, though in new ways. At the same time as the Western states became more powerful, they also, though to differing degrees, became more democratized. A fifth factor, this did not necessarily work against an imperialist approach: it might intensify the rivalry among states, reducing their ability to manoeuvre; it might also commit them more irrevocably to expansionist policies, turning them into missions difficult for governments to abandon. The capacity of the Europeans to influence Southeast Asia was, sixth, enhanced by the growth of their power over the great neighbouring centres of population that had so long influenced it in a number of ways, India and China. But the changes in India and China did not eliminate

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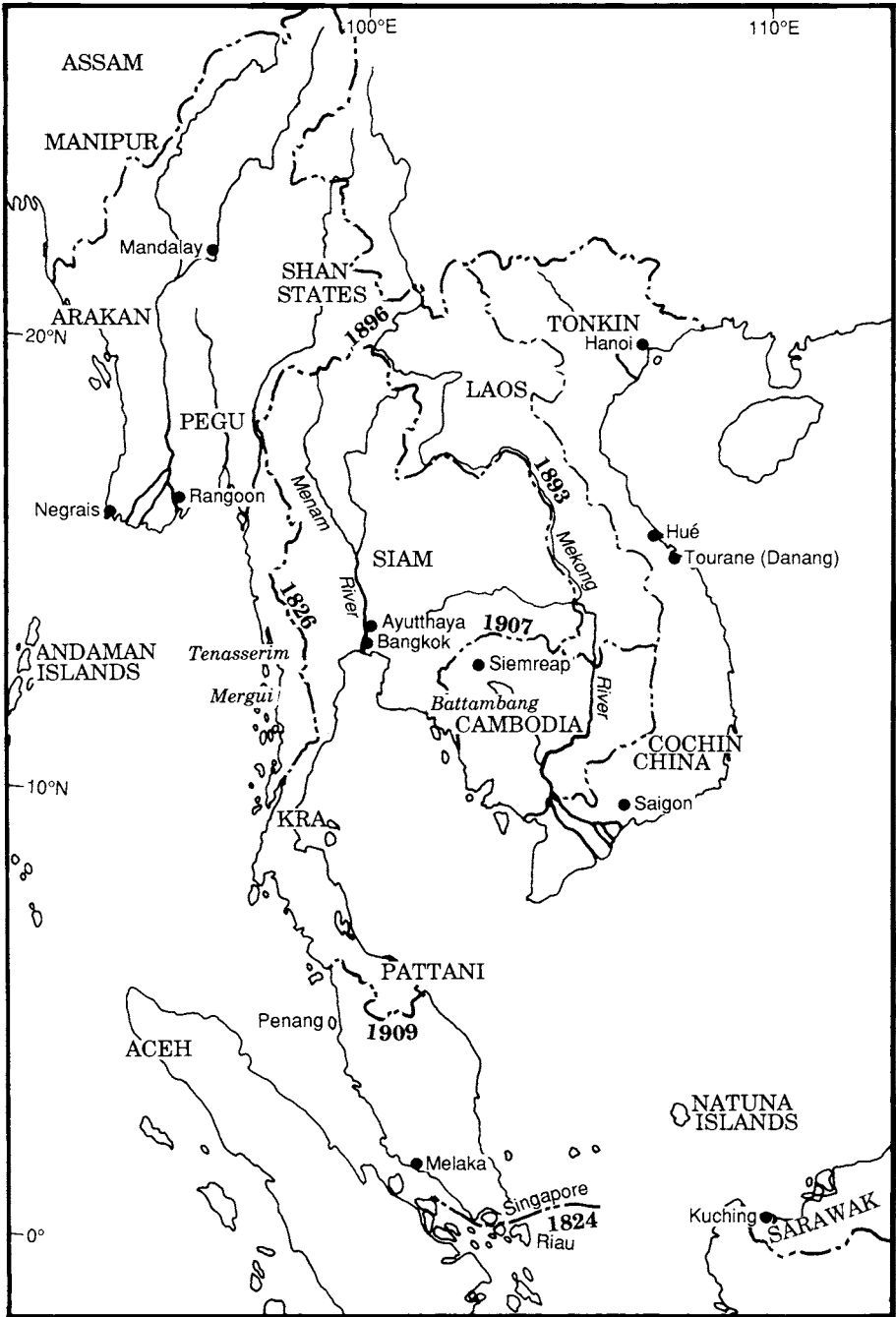
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their influence: they gave it new forms, and the modernization of Japan was both inspiration and threat. These factors were effective in Southeast Asia at different times, in different combinations, and in different ways.

The outcome was, however, not merely the result of all or any of these factors, singly or in combination. There were other actors on the scene—from Arabia, the heartland of Islam, now in closer touch, and from the United States, an independent commercial power from the late eighteenth century, rapidly industrializing in the later nineteenth century, developing imperial aspirations at the end of it. There were, too, the peoples of Southeast Asia themselves, who interacted with the Europeans and with others in a variety of ways, fighting, resisting, accommodating, adapting, turning and being turned to account, with greater or less vision, wisdom or acumen, at the popular and élite levels. Their aims are part of the story, though less clearly defined than those of the Europeans; and indeed they faced complex changes, difficult to appraise. In most cases, the existing state structures could not cope with the pressures put upon them and existing central authorities collapsed. Their replacements were endowed with territories out of a convenience more often European than Asian, designed, in particular, to avoid dispute among Europeans. And the new authority was, in substantial part at least, extraneous.

The political map of Southeast Asia was redrawn so that the region was almost entirely fragmented among the European powers. The process of drawing the frontiers was a long one; it was not complete—even on the map, let alone on the ground—till the early twentieth century. Most of the main lines of demarcation were, however, evident by 1870, before the full effects of industrialization were felt. Only more marginal territories remained for redistribution. They were marginal more in a geographical than a political sense. For their redistribution could still prompt disputes among the imperial powers that could become more than minor; and if those disputes did not escalate, or were readily resolved, the outcome was still important for the peoples concerned as well as for the imperial powers themselves, and, ultimately, for their successors.

In the drawing of the frontiers there was something of a paradox. In Europe the concept dealt with subjects and citizens in terms of their geographical locality rather than their personal allegiance; and the state laid claim to their taxes and imposed its obligations on an impersonal basis. That contrasted with much of previous Southeast Asian practice, especially in the archipelago where, insofar as geographical frontiers existed, they might be only vaguely defined. Often more important within states, even within some of the larger ones, were personal allegiances, client–patron relations, differential connexions between court and core, court and periphery; often more important among states were overlapping hierarchies, dual loyalties. Such structures better reflected the conditions of the Southeast Asian past. But the concept that the Europeans sought to apply in Southeast Asia also contrasted with the European present. In Europe frontiers had been created over a long period of time, often as a result of struggle, and within them new loyalties had been built up. Increasingly loyalty was to the state itself, as representing the nation in whose name, it had come to be accepted, its government ruled. No such



Map 1.1 Mainland Southeast Asia

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ideology could apply to the colonial territories; nor was there a clear substitute for it. The colonial powers were utilizing a concept not only drawn from a system of international relations that differed but from one which they themselves were not in fact applying.

International relations in Southeast Asia came to be increasingly European. The frontiers were drawn so as to avoid disputes among the European powers. As a result, especially at the margins, they bore no firm relation to economic, social, cultural, ethnic or even geographical realities. The concept of a national frontier in Southeast Asia was applied in the general absence there of the relevant concept of nation. And it was applied with additional arbitrariness since it was designed to avoid conflict elsewhere.

The new governments, by necessity or design, often utilized or re-utilized old claims to suzerainty, old patterns of loyalty, old modes of administration, and at the same time they reshaped them. While their governments were relatively inactive, the discrepancy mattered less. And for a time they were to a greater or lesser degree 'law and order' states, 'arbitral' governments. The old central authorities might have been displaced, perhaps geographically as well as politically. But the new governments might still function in a limited way, adopting some Southeast Asian practices as well as European. Indeed they could give themselves—at least in their own eyes, and perhaps in the eyes of their subjects—a special role simply because of their limited function: they were there to reduce tensions among the 'opposite Interests and jarring Dispositions' to which, as Alexander Dalrymple said, colonies were so prone;¹ they were there to end tyranny, they sometimes rather more ambitiously claimed.

More tension would be felt when governments became more active—could old allegiances still be utilized?—and still more when they ceased to be arbitral—could the peoples then be held in the colonial framework? That question arose of course with twentieth-century moves—dictated by metropolitan politics but also by colonial change—towards indigenous participation in the central structures. Just because the pragmatic approach of the nineteenth century and the desire to avoid conflict among Europeans had made the territories often so heterogeneous, the tension was all the greater. A minority could live alongside an inactive government: it could accept alien arbitration. But could it accept majority rule?

The concept of the nation was developed in Europe to fill out the European concept of the state. It caused struggle enough there: it gave weapons to majorities and minorities, to those who would change frontiers and those who would insist on not changing them, to those who would challenge authorities and those who would uphold them. In Southeast Asia, the concept was again divisive as well as integrative. But, because the movements could initially challenge the Europeans, its divisiveness was at first often muted. Emerging nationalist movements could thus seek to play down tension, though their alien rulers might point it out

¹ 'Enquiry into the most advantageous Place for a Capital to the Oriental Polynesia', February 1764, Borneo Factory Records G/4/1, India Office Library.

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or even play it up, so as to preserve their role. It could intensify when the Europeans withdrew and their successors sought to rule as nation-states these territories with frontiers which were so much the product of colonial convenience. Authority was again in question: the successor states had to be turned into nation-states.

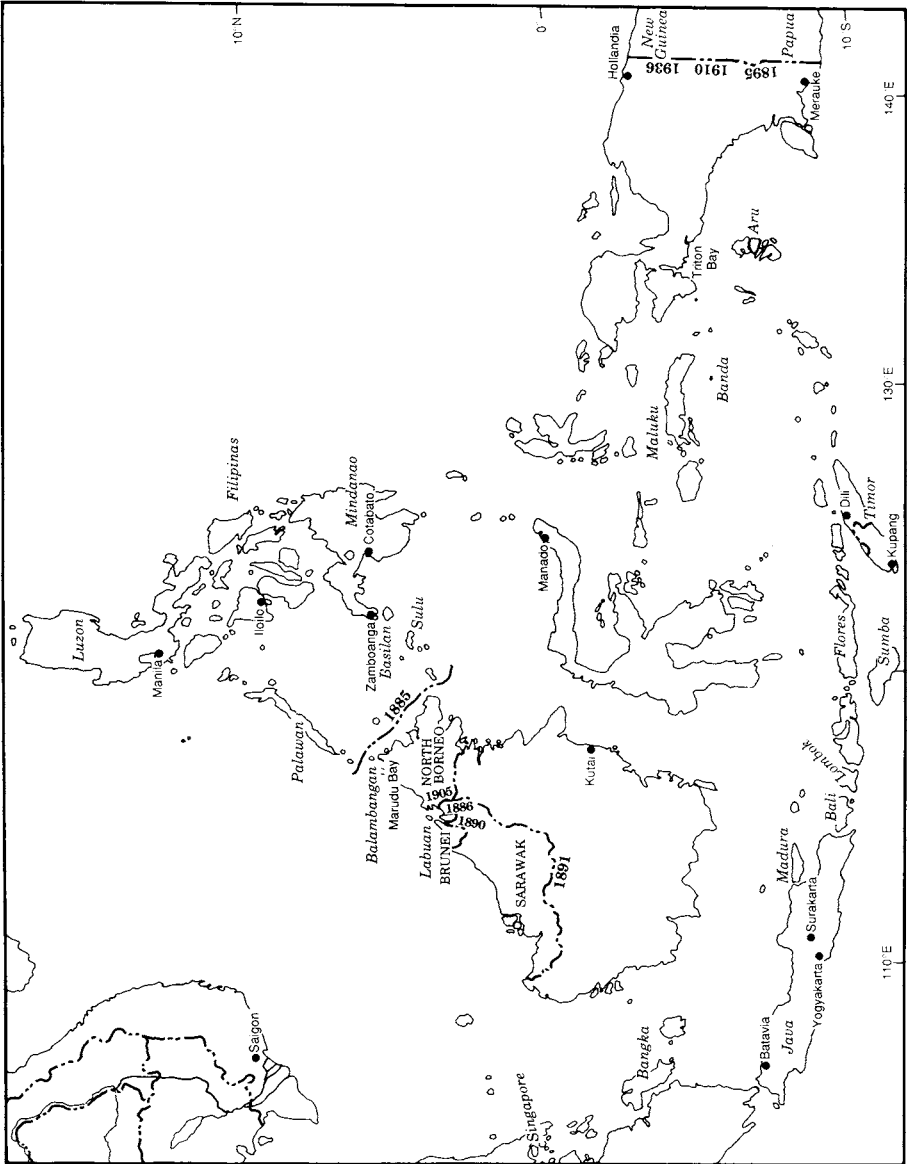
The making of the frontiers thus assumes a primal position in an account of Southeast Asian history in the nineteenth century. Itself the product of interactions between European and Asian, it becomes, too, the framework for continuing interaction. It is also important as a factor in the history of the nationalist movements of the twentieth century and of the post-colonial states.

The nineteenth century was, more than any other, an age of migration: the economic transformations it witnessed set in motion or speeded up movements of people on an unprecedented scale. Europeans left Europe to help build up or to create new states elsewhere, in the Americas and Australasia, in Africa and, much less, in Asia. But other peoples also moved in increasing numbers as economic change picked up pace. Southeast Asia, always a recipient of Indians and Chinese, received them on a new scale, particularly in the territories which the British came to control. There was also migration, again not entirely novel, within Southeast Asia, within the frontiers that were being established and across them. For a colonial authority, again, these movements posed few problems and offered economic and political advantages. But in the twentieth century, those movements would make it more difficult to establish a participatory political system, or even an accepted central authority ruling on a national basis.

THE ROLE OF THE BRITISH

If there was varied interaction between Southeast Asia and Europe, the Europeans were also divided. Rivalry was a factor in their expansion, for the most part spurring them on. But the process of frontier-building and its outcome were also affected by the shifting distribution of power among the Europeans, the result in a sense of the differing impact on them of common factors. For much of the nineteenth century, Britain was the predominant state in Europe and thus in the world. The French presented a challenge in the eighteenth century, but they were defeated at sea in 1805 and on land in 1815. Politically secure in Europe, Britain also took the lead in the Industrial Revolution. That gave it yet greater strength, but also shaped the application of its power. Overseas its interests became substantially commercial and economic rather than territorial and political. It saw its dominion in India, begun in the earlier phase, as essential but exceptional. Elsewhere, a combination of strategic positions and economic and political influence should suffice to protect its interests. In Southeast Asia Britain sought security and stability; it did not necessarily seek to rule, though its power might be felt in other ways.

The nineteenth-century patterns of interaction in Southeast Asia were



Map 1.2 Island Southeast Asia

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naturally much affected by the influence and interests of the British, particularly during the period of their predominance. That predominance they did not use to eliminate their European rivals, but rather to constrain them. The Netherlands and Spain were now minor states in Europe; they were left with substantial holdings in Southeast Asia, with claims that the British were unlikely to challenge, with the option of implementing them in their own time provided they did not undermine Britain's interests. Even France, the eighteenth-century rival, was not obstructed in its Vietnam venture. In earlier centuries, European rivalry had rarely worked to the advantage of Asian states: it spurred the Europeans on, while the chance of playing the Europeans off against one another was often a chimera. But the new pattern of intra-European relations was perhaps still less advantageous. The fact that minor European powers could rely on Britain's restraint might indeed mean that they could refrain from enforcing their claims or establishing *de facto* occupation in other than immediately essential areas. But the autonomy which indigenous rulers might thus enjoy was somewhat illusory: they had no real chance of playing Britain off against the minor powers, and their status as independent actors on an international stage was diminished by this kind of semi-condominium. The British set the agenda for lesser European powers, and for the indigenous states also. Siam (Thailand) alone retained real independence at the end of the period: it had seen that it was no longer a matter of playing off one alien power against another, but of coming to terms with the British, and it was able to do so. Directly or indirectly, Britain's influence and interest were often decisive in determining the frontiers of the new Southeast Asian states, in locating the central authorities within those frontiers, even in shaping the policies those authorities pursued.

The challenges to the patterns thus established that emerged towards the end of the nineteenth century did not merely, nor even primarily, result from the changes and tensions within Southeast Asia. They reflected changes in Europe and the world at large, in particular the external challenges to Britain's power, as industrialization affected other parts of Europe and the world, and Britain and indeed Europe itself lost their extraordinary primacy. But by the late nineteenth century the major loci of authority in Southeast Asia had been settled, and the revived rivalry of the period affected only the rounding-out of frontiers. In this phase the British moved readily from tolerating others towards compromising with them. The conference on Africa and West Africa that met in Berlin in 1884–5, and included the European powers, Turkey and the United States, provided a principle: European states would accept the frontiers established by their rivals if their claims were backed by effective occupation. The recrudescence of rivalry was thus no more to the advantage of indigenous autonomy than its earlier diminution: indeed it clearly conduced to the establishment of outside control. Intensifying rivalry in Europe and the emergence of non-European powers, the United States and Japan, had the same effect. The former urged on compromise between Britain and France, helping to determine the frontiers of Burma, Malaya, Indochina and Siam. A combination of factors helped to ensure that Spain was replaced in the Philippines by the United States and that the authority of

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the Moro sultanates was finally destroyed. But in a sense these were adjustments of a system that had developed during the British primacy of the nineteenth century. The system was overthrown only by the Japanese incursion of 1941–2.

The making of the new frontiers in Southeast Asia in the nineteenth century had depended in some sense on British decisions. They in turn were affected by the essentially economic nature of Britain's world-wide interests; by its desire for European stability; by its acquisition of the raj in India; and by the importance attached to its trade with China. These concerns affected Britain's view of different parts of Southeast Asia in different ways. For this reason, though also for others, the outcomes differed. Much depended on the relationship of Britain with specific European powers. Where they were minor, it tended not to displace them, but to connive at their imperialism so as to avoid that of any powers that might be more threatening, and paradoxically that might reduce their immediate need to establish full control. Against major European powers, however, it might have to take more direct precautions, but that did not necessarily mean exclusion.

The attitudes and policies of other European powers have thus to be taken into account. The Dutch, whose dependence was underlined by British conquests and retrocessions, were prompted all the more to concentrate on Java; on areas that could be made profitable; on development, peace and order. *Onthouding*, or abstention, was possible as well as desirable in the outer islands. The increased rivalry of the later nineteenth century, as well as new economic opportunities, spurred them on to round out their empire. Their concern over Islam was another factor. Generally they tried, as in earlier centuries, to avoid provoking it, and their war with Aceh was a challenge they found difficult to handle. Spain, whose weakness the British had also underlined by capturing Manila in 1762, recognized that it too was dependent on them and permitted them major economic opportunities in Luzon and the Visayas. The international rivalry of the late nineteenth century, and the challenge of Islam, led the Spanish into bloody but indeterminate efforts to make their claims over the Moro lands effective. In the late eighteenth century the French had seen a venture in Southeast Asia as a way of compensating themselves for British success in India and China. Their revival of interest in Vietnam in the 1850s, not opposed by the British, responded to a need to demonstrate the greatness of France overseas. That seemed all the more necessary under the Third Republic, when its position in Europe was under challenge.

The opportunities for these European states were determined not only by the British, but also by the Southeast Asians. Their states might attempt to adjust to new circumstances: they might not; if they did, they might fail; if they began the task, they might not realize that further adjustment would be needed. Even in the early nineteenth century, it seemed that Asian states would have to modernize to survive, and that they might need a greater or lesser degree of European influence to ensure that they did so. Such in itself might destroy ancient authority without replacing it, and make them weaker rather than stronger. The alternative might be

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piecemeal partition, itself weakening the core structure. If either or both of these outcomes determined their position by the late nineteenth century, the new pressures then exerted by international economic expansion and political rivalry might bring about a final dissolution.

THE DUTCH REALM IN THE INDONESIAN ARCHIPELAGO

While Britain occupied only Fort Marlborough in West Sumatra, two European powers were already established in Southeast Asia at the outset of the period, the Dutch and the Spaniards. Their empires differed in character. That of the Dutch did not involve widespread control. But the determination of the British, at once not to challenge their supremacy in the archipelago, nor to permit that to be done by others, assisted the Dutch to establish their power during the nineteenth century and reduced the possibility that Indonesian states could sustain their independence. An occasional rift with Britain urged the Dutch on, though they were usually careful to provide British merchants with commercial opportunities. More generally, the relationship enabled them to defer their empire-building till they were strong enough, or till they found it necessary or desirable because of the risks of the intervention of others or because of their own needs and urges. The Asian states might enjoy a practical, albeit misleading, freedom from Dutch intervention in the meantime.

In the closing decades of the eighteenth century, the Dutch still retained an Asia-wide empire, with Batavia (Jakarta) as its centre. But their hold even on the Malaysian-Indonesian area fell far short of territorial domination. Its failure to compete in the Asian textile and opium trades, and the decline in its spice trade, had led the *Verenigde Oost-Indische Compagnie* (VOC, the Dutch East India Company) to concentrate on Java, and to see the peninsula and archipelago rather as an outwork for its empire there. In any case, the Dutch position rested for the most part on contracts and treaties with indigenous states, more concerned with questions of commerce than questions of government, more with deliveries of produce than transfers of sovereignty. What was critical for VOC, and as a result for the indigenous states, was the exclusion of European rivals. This the Dutch sought to ensure on paper all the more because they found it difficult to ensure in practice: 'they are afraid', said the British statesman Henry Dundas, 'that the communication we may have with the Natives would lay the foundation for their total shaking off of the miserable dependence in which they are held by the Dutch'.² The British had good commercial grounds for expanding such communication: their hold on trade with Asia and, through the country traders, within Asia, had improved; the East India Company needed archipelagic goods to amplify its trade to China. But there were other arguments against alienating the Dutch in the context of the European rivalries of the time. It was important not to drive the Dutch into the hands of the French, so expanding their threat to the new dominion in India, undermining the trade to China, and indeed damaging

² Quoted H. Furber, *Henry Dundas, First Viscount Melville, 1742–1811*, Oxford, 1931, 103.

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the security of England itself. The Anglo-Dutch treaty of 1784 did not go beyond securing the right to navigate in the Eastern Seas. Remaining in West Sumatra, the British did not extend their political challenge except on the periphery of Dutch power, by acquiring Penang from the Sultan of Kedah in 1786.

A pro-French régime nevertheless survived in the Dutch Republic until the Anglo-Prussian intervention of 1787. Then the British attempted to put their interests in the Indies on a new footing while, as they thought, recognizing those of the Dutch, reaching an accord, they hoped, in the East and in Europe. Their concept involved a kind of delimitation—the first time, but not the last, that the notion was to emerge. The Dutch should remain in their settlements on the continent of India and the Malay peninsula; the British would secure the naval base of Trincomalee in Ceylon (Sri Lanka). But the VOC should transfer the right to Riau which it had lately secured from the Sultan of Johor-Lingga; this would afford protection for British ships en route for China and provide an entrepôt for British trade in the archipelago. In return the spice monopoly would be guaranteed: no British traders would operate, and no British settlements be made, east of the easternmost point of Sumatra. These ideas not even a friendly Dutch régime could accept, and the negotiations failed.

In the Napoleonic Wars that followed, the Dutch Republic again fell under French influence, and the British took over a number of Dutch possessions in India, Ceylon and the archipelago, and finally in 1811 Java itself. The defeat of France, and the establishment of the new Kingdom of the Netherlands, were the signal for the restoration of all the Dutch territories but those in Ceylon and at the Cape of Good Hope. But no provision was made in the convention of 1814 for the settlement of prewar disputes over the archipelago. By 1814, indeed, the British East India Company had no real interest in the spice trade; nor even in the archipelago trade in general, since Indian opium now substantially provided for its tea investment at Canton. But the interim administration of Java by Stamford Raffles and the opening of the trade to the East under the Company's Charter of 1813 had led to the establishment of British merchants on that island, interested in distributing British textiles and purchasing coffee. These viewed with concern the restoration of Dutch sovereignty and the prospect of a revived policy of commercial exclusion. The extensive renewal of treaties and contracts with the native states outside Java upon which the Dutch Commissioners-General embarked after the restoration of the colonies in 1816 likewise aroused the apprehension of country traders and of merchants and officials at Penang.

Raffles, like Dundas earlier, had pointed out the weakness of the Dutch position in the archipelago, but, with a wider sense of responsibility, he believed that the British should assure their trade and influence there by themselves establishing settlements and concluding treaties with Indonesian rulers. Indeed, by making the Company's Governor-General in India 'Batara', they should secure 'a general right of superintendence over, and interference with, all the Malay States', so as to support legitimate authority, suppress piracy, limit commercial monopoly and control arms