Timothy P. Barnard

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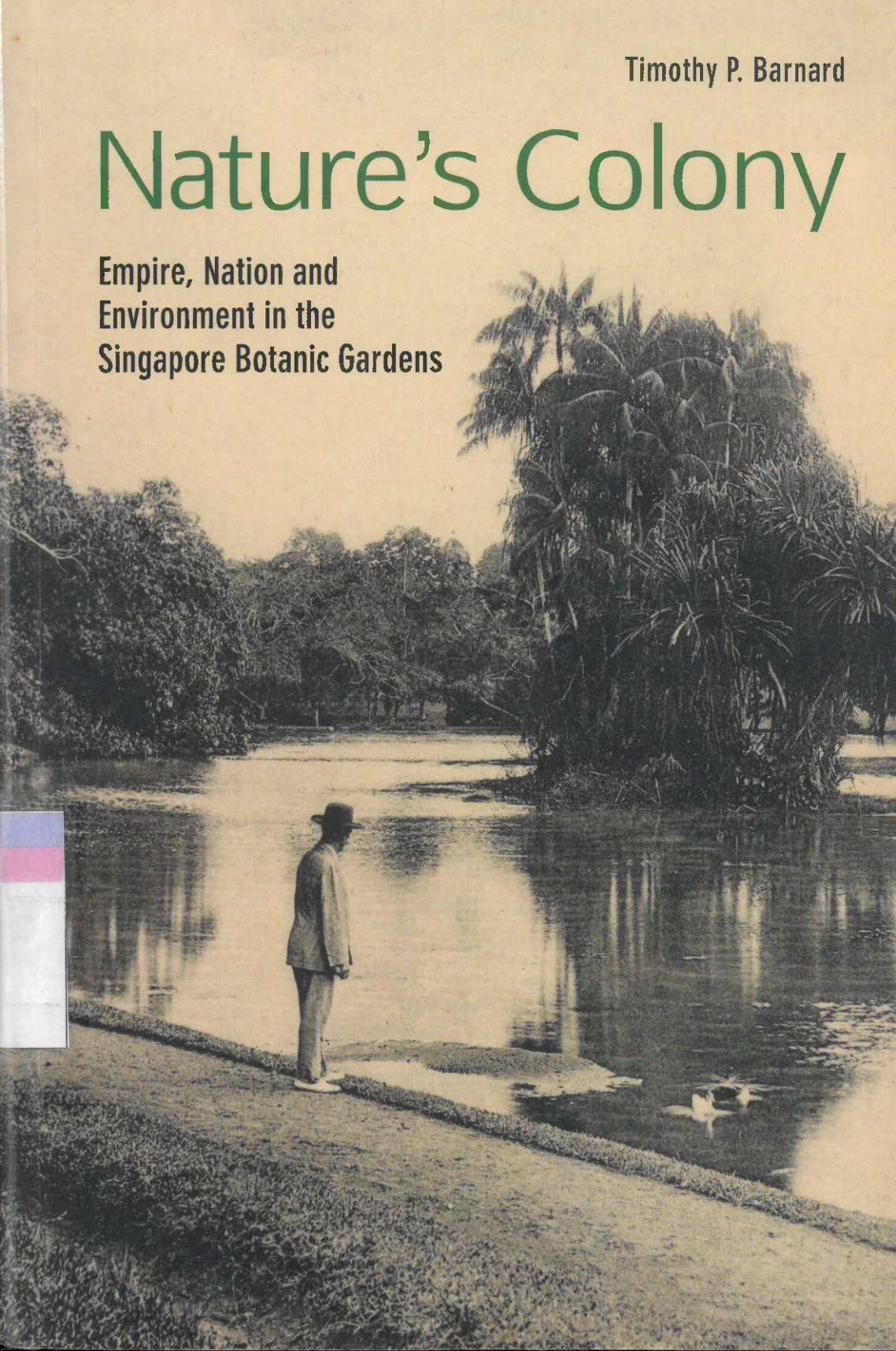

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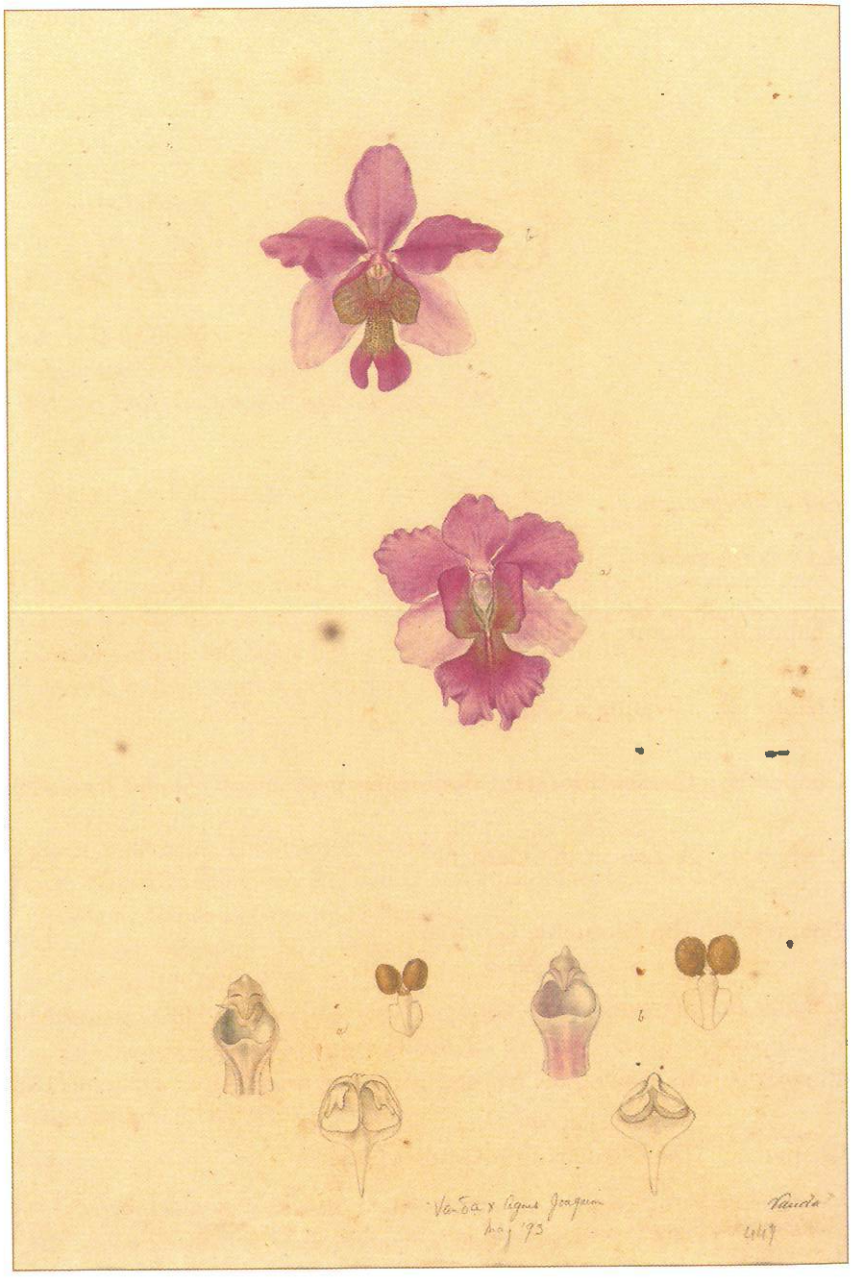

Illustration of Vanda Miss Joaquim. The work is unsigned, but is dated from 1893. Image courtesy of the Library and Archives of the Singapore Botanic Gardens.

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Botanical illustration of *Cyrtophyllum fragans*, better known as the Tembusu tree, by Charles De Alwis. As early as 1888 H.N. Ridley argued that this species held great potential for forest conservation programs in Singapore. Image courtesy of the Library and Archives of the Singapore Botanic Gardens.

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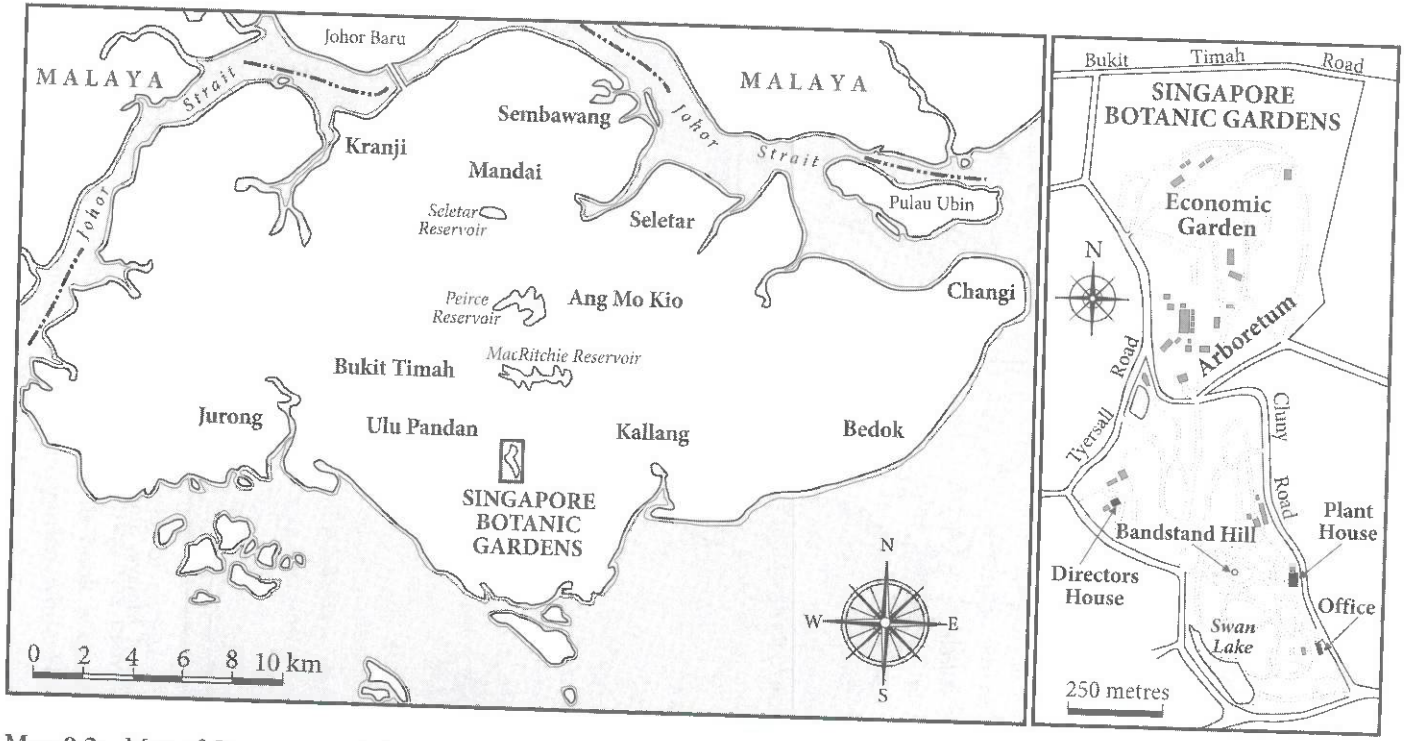
Map 0.1: Map of Malaya, Singapore and Region. Credit: Lee Li Kheng.



Map 0.2: Map of Singapore, and the Singapore Botanic Gardens. Credit: Lee Li Kheng.

CHAPTER ONE

Nature's Colony

Gardens are artificial. They are self-contained entities in which flora and fauna are cultivated, controlled and manipulated to serve the interests of the gardener. They reflect attempts to influence nature, ultimately to shape it, and are created to serve those with power over their grounds. Inside these gardens the interests of the gardeners are multifaceted. A garden can be for recreation, where the visitor strolls, exercises or relaxes while escaping the daily stresses of life. On another level a garden can function as an educational center, where plants are grown, animals kept and ecosystems conserved while visitors learn more about the natural world. The efforts to maintain the flora and fauna of these gardens can also be transferred to larger society to create a more pleasant environment throughout a city, state or region. Finally, a garden can function as a center for research that is vital to the development of scientific knowledge, which often influences the economics, politics and cultural matrix of states and societies. Gardens on all of these levels are artificial, in that they are created and reflect the needs and desires of the society and people that cultivate them.

This is the history of one such garden, located on an island in Southeast Asia. Since the mid-19th century, the Singapore Botanic Gardens has operated as a recreational park while also having a far broader impact beyond the boundaries of its grounds in environmental, political and social terms. Fundamentally, the Singapore Botanic Gardens created knowledge and became a site from which its gardeners spread their influence into numerous realms through a mastery of nature, resulting in expanded imperial control over the region and later the functioning of a small, independent nation-state.

Emerging in Europe as part of institutionalization of science during the Renaissance, botanic gardens have played a vital role in the creation of the modern world. Prior to the 18th century, gardens mostly functioned as metaphors for paradise or the ability of the ruler who sponsored their construction and maintenance to control the known universe. Such pleasure grounds are classified today as "power gardens," and they were prevalent in palaces and royal retreats throughout Europe for several centuries. A good example of a power garden is the Belvedere Courtyard (*Cortile del Belvedere*) that Pope Julius II—better known for commissioning Michelangelo to paint the ceiling of the newly erected Sistine Chapel—ordered constructed in the Vatican in the early 16th century.[1]

The modern botanical garden arose alongside such power gardens. These new institutions were initially associated with medical faculties, as the study of plants was vital to the development of pharmacology and the education of physicians during the period. Located in cities such as Padua, Leiden and Gothenburg, these gardens quickly transformed into playing a role in understanding the flora discovered in the New World and Asia as Europeans moved outward in exploration. A botanic garden thus became a fundamental component in the development of early modern societies and trade empires as commerce focused around a foundation of knowledge of the natural world, particularly plants—ranging from pepper to cloves and nutmeg—that were key trade products of the pre-industrial global economy. This made botany one of the most important instruments of colonial expansion. An understanding of plants was the basis for power, and the transformation of this knowledge into a control over land and economies in distant colonies occurred in botanic gardens.[2]

Kew Gardens, located in the outskirts of London, paralleled the rise of the British Empire in the 18th and 19th centuries and in the process became the most important botanic garden in the world.

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[1] Andrew Cunningham, "The Culture of Gardens," in *Cultures of Natural History*, ed. N. Jardine, J.A. Secord and E.C. Spary (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996), pp. 39–47; Lucile H. Brockway, *Science and Colonial Expansion: The Role of the British Royal Botanic Gardens* (New York: Academic Press, 1979), pp. 72–5.

[2] Paula Findlen, "Anatomy Theaters, Botanical Gardens, and Natural History Collections," in *The Cambridge History of Science, Volume 3: Early Modern Science*, ed. Katharine Park and Lorraine Daston (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005), pp. 280–2.

It originated from a private garden maintained for Princess Augusta, the mother of King George III in the mid-18th century, and it functioned as a private park for several decades, albeit one that attracted some of the leading British botanists and horticulturalists of the 18th century. Among these scientists was Joseph Banks, a participant in Captain James Cook's first voyage to the Pacific Ocean, who became an advisor to King George III on botanical matters beginning in 1773. Banks parlayed his position at Kew Gardens, as well as his prominent positions in the Royal Society and the Linnaean Society, into the development of a policy interlinking science and national interests. This made botany a key component of developing administrative structures, leading to a promotion of imperial botany, the development of knowledge of the floral world for the benefit of empire. This policy manifested itself in the support given to young botanists who would collect specimens while on official voyages. These specimens were brought back to the Royal Botanic Gardens, Kew for cataloguing and research purposes and then were transferred to new sites within the empire—such as breadfruit from the Pacific to the West Indies—where they supported the continued expansion of British power and held potential as a trade product.[3]

By the early 19th century numerous botanic gardens had been established throughout the colonial world, where they played an important role in maintaining and extending European power overseas. Some had been founded much earlier, and were models for future efforts in imperial botany. The VOC ([Netherlands] United East India Company) established the first of these botanic gardens in Cape Town in the 1650s. This garden, known as The Company's Garden, acted as a transfer point for plants as they travelled between the East Indies in

[3] Ray Desmond, *Kew: The History of the Royal Botanic Gardens* (London: The Harvill Press, 1995), pp. 85–103; John Gascoigne, *Science in the Service of Empire: Joseph Banks, the British State and the Uses of Science in the Age of Revolution* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998), pp. 16–23; John Gascoigne, *Joseph Banks and the English Enlightenment: Useful Knowledge and Polite Culture* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995); Timothy P. Barnard, "The Rafflesia in the Natural and Imperial Imagination of the East India Company in Southeast Asia," in *The East India Company and the Natural World*, ed. Vinita Damoradaran, Anna Winterbottom and Alan Lester (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2014), pp. 147–66; Lewis Pyenson and Susan Sheets-Pyenson, *Servants of Nature: A History of Scientific Institutions, Enterprises and Sensibilities* (New York: W.W. Norton and Company, 1999), pp. 150–63.

Southeast Asia and Europe, and a location where fresh fruit and vegetables could be grown to supply VOC ships. In 1735 French imperial forces founded the Pamplemousses Gardens in Mauritius, which became vital in transforming the economy and landscape of the island by supporting the development of plantations based on acclimatized foreign plants such as sugar cane and cassava. As for the English, administrators and explorers began establishing botanic gardens in the West Indies in the mid-18th century, and the English East India Company—following policies and goals that Banks encouraged from Kew—joined the trend in 1821 with the founding of the Peradeniya Gardens in Ceylon. The Dutch developed the first modern botanic garden in Southeast Asia in Buitenzorg in the outskirts of Batavia in 1817.[4]

Scattered throughout the world, these colonial botanic gardens were key components of empire, becoming repositories for the gathering of information about new lands and new plants. Within their boundaries nature could be cultivated and shaped to serve the interests of medical schools, trading companies and governments. While European botanic gardens played an important role as the center of global networks, the expansion of these scientific institutions overseas led to new understandings of distant lands. In addition, although they were created to directly serve the interests of a specific trade company or imperial government, they often cooperated and influenced each other as they functioned within an expanding transnational understanding of science and botany. The early efforts in this regard are the basis for Richard Grove's influential work *Green Imperialism*, which discusses the origins of environmental thought amid imperial expansion and the desire for an idealized environmental landscape.[5] Behind such utopian

[4] Juan de Cuéllar established the first colonial botanic garden in Southeast Asia in Manila in the late 1780s as a site for cultivating indigo, cinnamon and other crops while he was on a royal botanical expedition to the Philippines. This garden, however, was quickly abandoned and was eventually replaced with one through a Spanish royal decree in 1858, although this garden "was scarcely worthy of the name" by the end of the 19th century, according to Elmer D. Merrill in his survey of Philippine botany, which he wrote at the beginning of the American occupation of the islands. Elmer D. Merrill, *Botanical Work in the Philippines* (Manila: Bureau of Public Printing, 1903). Brockway, *Science and Colonial Expansion*, pp. 75–6.

[5] Richard Grove, *Green Imperialism: Colonial Expansion, Tropical Edens, and the Origins of Environmentalism, 1600–1860* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1995).

ideals, nevertheless, was the goal of harnessing nature and science to serve the needs of society. In this regard botanic gardens were one of the main tools of experimentation, colonization and exploitation in the imperial era.

Colonial botanic gardens often featured experimental grounds where plants were tested for their ability to acclimatize to new environments and provide sustenance or profit. Theoretically, botanists located in European capitals played an important role in advising and overseeing these experiments at these colonial botanic gardens, and this is the subject of Lucille Brockway's 1979 work *Science and Colonial Expansion*.[6] Two decades later Richard Drayton articulated these concepts in a more wide-ranging book, *Nature's Government*, in which he expanded the argument to consider the implications this network of botanic gardens had on a variety of issues related to nature, imperialism and the development of the modern world. Through an examination of policies and actors that were involved in the development of botany in Great Britain and its colonies, Drayton argues that the basis of the modern world was laid through an interaction of science and imperialism, in which knowledge of botany was a key element in understanding the world, and conquering it. "The knowledge of nature," Drayton argues, "would allow for the best possible use of resources."[7]

The central institution in the history that Drayton weaves is the Royal Botanic Gardens at Kew. Within the vast network of global botanic gardens, the one located on the outskirts of London transitioned from a royal botanic garden into a state institution beginning in the 1840s. The first Director of these gardens was William Jackson Hooker, who would come to dominate botanical knowledge during the 19th century. From Kew Hooker oversaw an expanding network of botanists, all in service to empire and science. As John Lindley, a prominent botanist and chair of the Parliamentary commission that oversaw the transition of the Royal Botanic Gardens into a state institution, proclaimed, one of the primary motivations for its establishment

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[6] Brockway, *Science and Colonial Expansion*.

[7] Richard Drayton, *Nature's Government: Science, Imperial Britain, and the "Improvement" of the World* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2000), p. xv; Emma Reisz, "City as a Garden: Shared Space in the Urban Botanic Gardens of Singapore and Malaysia, 1786–2000," in *Postcolonial Urbanism: Southeast Asian Cities and Global Processes*, ed. Ryan Bishop, John Phillips and Wei-Wei Yeo (New York: Routledge, 2003), pp. 128–9.

was to coordinate the efforts of "the many gardens in the British colonies and dependencies...whose utility is wasted for want of unity of purpose and central direction...yet they are capable of conferring very important benefits on commerce, and of conducting essentially to colonial prosperity."[8] While it would take several decades before Kew Gardens, and its personnel, would play a role in Southeast Asia, the methods and concepts had already been established.

The botanic elite, led by individuals such as Banks and Hooker, gave Britain the tools to shape and influence economics and trade, resulting in an understanding of the natural world corresponding to power in the wider world. Kew became a center of imperial botany, in which knowledge of flora and its economic applications was vital for the expansion and maintenance of imperial power. Hooker and subsequent Directors of Kew Gardens were the prophets of this approach to empire, and through their leadership Britain was able to extend its influence around the globe through a network of botanic gardens in the 19th century. Imperialism, ultimately, was coordinated from not only ministries and departments in the metropole, but also offices, herbaria and laboratories located in gardens on the outskirts of European capitals. The cornerstone of these efforts in the British Empire was Kew Gardens.

While imperial botany played an important role in developing knowledge of plants and ecosystems globally, similar developments were occurring in all of the sciences, and this has become a focus of historical research and interest in the late 20th century, gaining considerable momentum over the past couple of decades.[9] Much of this research centers on questions of autonomy, and the role that these institutions outside of Europe may have played in the process. While direction and oversight did come from Europe, as time passed each

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[8] Joseph Dalton Hooker, "A Sketch of the Life and Labours of Sir William Jackson Hooker," *Annals of Botany* 16 (1902): xlv; Brockway, *Science and Colonial Expansion*, p. 80; David Arnold, *The Tropics and the Traveling Gaze: India, Landscape and Science, 1800–1856* (Seattle, WA: University of Washington Press, 2006).

[9] Brett M. Bennett and Joseph M. Hodge (eds.), *Science and Empire: Knowledge and Networks of Science across the British Empire, 1800–1970* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2011); Mark Harrison, "Science and the British Empire," *ISIS: A Journal of the History of Science* 96 (2005): 80–7; Roy MacLeod (ed.), *Nature and Empire: Science and the Colonial Enterprise*, Special Edition of *Osiris*, 15 (2000): i–323.

colonial botanic garden took on unique characteristics, reflecting the individual personnel attached to them as well as differing colonial contexts and environmental landscapes.

One of the most important nodes for these developments was in Singapore, where scientists and administrators oversaw one of the premier tropical botanic gardens in the world. If Kew was the capital of "Nature's Government" within this network of botanic power, in Drayton's rendering of this system, then the Singapore Botanic Gardens was "Nature's Colony," the jewel in its crown. From its grounds located at the intersection of Napier Road and Cluny Road, scientists directed efforts to acclimatize plants to new environments and learned how to exploit them in tropical Southeast Asia, while also exploring the region looking for new wonders of the floral world, all in service to empire. In the process, the Singapore Botanic Gardens became a model for imperial botany while also being rooted in British colonial structures and Southeast Asian landscapes.

Colonial botanic gardens were initially focused on the acclimatization of foreign plants but their influence soon came to expand into surrounding regions, as their personnel began to document the extent of the flora and conduct research on how it could contribute to the betterment of local, or regional, society as well as global botany. Although the Singapore Botanic Gardens, like its colonial counterparts, operated under the distant supervision of the European elite, it began to achieve its place as one of the more important scientific institutions in the world when it began to exercise greater independence by the early 20th century. This resulted in a complex autonomy for local researchers, as they transitioned from the role of collectors of materials for European mentors to developing facilities and research agendas focused on agriculture, horticulture and local understandings of the environment, while also negotiating the relationship the institution had with the immediate society and political powers.[10]

[10] There has been a long-term debate on this topic, which originated in the work of George Basalla and Donald Fleming. George Basalla, "The Spread of Western Science," *Science* 156 (1967): 611–22; Donald Fleming, "Science in Australia, Canada, and the United States: Some Comparative Remarks," in *Proceedings of the Tenth International Congress of the History of Science, Ithaca 26 VIII–21X 1962* (Paris: Hermann, 1964), pp. 179–96; Paolo Palladino and Michael Worboys, "Science and Imperialism," *ISIS* 84, 1 (1993): 91–102.

This growing autonomy is evident in shifts in the archival records, and the research relationship between Kew and Singapore. In the early phases of the history of the Singapore Botanic Gardens the vast majority of correspondence was directed to Kew Gardens. After several decades, however, the British Directors of the Singapore Botanic Gardens increasingly hosted and shared their research with scientists and scholars throughout the world. This resulted, for example, in co-operation with Dutch botanists in an attempt to harness gutta-percha, while also borrowing their techniques for cultivating orchids that were gathered during visits to Java. At the same time the Singapore Botanic Gardens hosted a variety of multinational visitors such as Robert Koch—the pioneering microbiologist who discovered the causative agents of cholera, tuberculosis and anthrax—who came to the Gardens in 1899 and 1900 in search of leads in research related to malaria, while American William Louis Abbott collected specimens for the Smithsonian Institution alongside Henry Nicholas Ridley, the Director of the Gardens.[11] This outpost of imperial science, thus, played a role beyond its contributions to "British" imperial botany. The Singapore Botanic Gardens was a node in a "polycentric network"—a descriptor that David Wade Chambers and Richard Gillespie have proposed—that played an important role in the British colonial network of gardens while also contributing to international science, as is true of similar institutions situated in Ceylon, India, Mauritius, South Africa and the Netherlands East Indies.[12] This had global implications as it implies the development of a vibrant research culture and influence that broke away from the centralized overlord in Europe.[13]

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[11] Anonymous, "Professor Koch," *The Straits Times* (hereafter *ST*), 13 Sep. 1899, p. 2; Paul Michael Taylor, "A Collector and His Museum: William Louis Abbott (1860–1936) and the Smithsonian," *Treasure Hunting?: Collectors and Collections of Indonesian Artefacts*, ed. Reimer Schefold and Han F. Vermeulen (Leiden: Research School CNWS/National Museum of Ethnology, 2002), pp. 221–40.

[12] David Wade Chambers and Richard Gillespie, "Locality in the History of Science: Colonial Science, Technoscience, and Indigenous Knowledge," in *Nature and Empire: Science and the Colonial Enterprise*, ed. Roy MacLeod, Special Edition of *Osiris*, 15 (2000): 223; Bennett and Hodge (eds.), *Science and Empire*.

[13] These networks, however, were not free-flowing and inequalities, in which larger institutions controlled issues and attitudes, remained. Joseph M. Hodge, "Science and Empire: An Overview of the Historical Scholarship," in Brett M. Bennett and Joseph M. Hodge (eds.), *Science and Empire: Knowledge and Networks of Science across the British Empire, 1800–1970* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2011), pp. 19–21.

The influence of the Singapore Botanic Gardens on society, culture, economics and geography has often been overlooked. In most narrative histories of the island Singapore is simply a trade port, easing the exchange of goods in the wider economic and mercantile history of the region. The products that were traded, however, often originated from experiments initially conducted in the Singapore Botanic Gardens, where scientists learned how to harness flora to serve larger interests. The knowledge that imperial botany created at the Singapore Botanic Gardens was a tool for expanding and dominating the region. Ultimately, the power of the British Empire in Southeast Asia was based in not only the imperial navy's control of the seas, but also the ability of scientists, administrators, merchants and agriculturalists originating from a variety of societies to harness nature to serve their needs. Founded in 1859, the Gardens were a site of colonial power that reflected the larger extension of the British Empire as it came to dominate a vast swathe of the world in the 19th century while also allowing other nations and societies to transform their landscapes and understanding of them. European expansion into the hinterlands of Southeast Asia could only occur if the flora that covered this landscape was understood, and then directed to the benefit of colonizing power. The shifting relationship of this scientific institution with local administrators, as well as distant mentors in Britain, created opportunities for it to become part of society in Singapore, the Straits Settlements and the larger region. Even when power shifted to a new government, following independence, botany also shifted to serve the needs of this new nation, despite efforts to assert their own autonomy. Botany has always been in service to the state, and science had an influence beyond the grounds of a botanic garden.

* * *

While botany has been a key component of imperial government as well as independent rule in Singapore, the Singapore Botanic Gardens, and its role in society, has shifted and changed over time. This book examines the changing relationship of the Singapore Botanic Gardens and its relationship to larger Singaporean, imperial and Southeast Asian society and science. To understand these shifts, Chapter 2 of this book discusses the creation of a recreational park on the outskirts of a colonial port, and how early efforts to create links between botanic gardens in Kew and Singapore resulted in the latter becoming an important

venue for colonial influence that flowed directly from Great Britain to an island in Southeast Asia as well as the other Straits Settlements of Penang and Melaka as colonial control over the port expanded. When the colonial government began to directly control the Singapore Botanic Gardens after 1875, they turned to officials from Britain for advice and assistance in its operation, and it began its history as an extension of imperial control with its Supervisors and Directors often working more directly for Kew Gardens than the local colonial authorities in Southeast Asia.

For the remainder of the 19th century, the Singapore Botanic Gardens was the center of environmental policy in British territories in Southeast Asia. One of the important challenges the institution faced in its first few decades was balancing the needs of the local society with the demands of a distant botanical network. At times these needs converged, as occurred when individuals at the Singapore Botanic Gardens were tasked with developing a solution to a devastated landscape, the result of agricultural policies that encouraged plantation cultivation that exhausted the soil and timber resources. Based in a concern over how this deforestation would influence the climate and health of the port, Nathaniel Cantley inaugurated conservation programs in the 1880s to revive the forests of Singapore, which would influence the development of Nature Reserves and forestry in the Malay Peninsula and is the subject of Chapter 3 in this book. Cantley's successor, Henry Nicholas Ridley, continued these programs until budgetary restraints and administrative conflicts led to the entire program shifting to new offices and authority in Kuala Lumpur, thus reflecting the difficult relationship between local government and international science in late 19th-century Singapore.

Fundamentally, although scientists and officials at the Singapore Botanic Gardens worked at studying and developing knowledge of the flora of the region, they had to fulfill the desires and needs of the government that funded it. At the time forest conservation programs were promulgated, the Gardens also housed a menagerie. Scattered mainly around the Bandstand Hill, cages, pens and enclosures housed a range of animals including elephants, tapirs, monkeys and birds, as well as the occasional tiger and panther, which were the main attraction the Gardens held for the general public in the later part of the 19th century. These animals provided no economic profit to the imperial system, but instead acted as a metaphor for the spread of British influence in the region as well as its control over nature, which was

subjugated and displayed for the entertainment of visitors. The presence of this zoo from 1875 until 1905 is the subject of Chapter 4, and provides insight into how nature, and its domination, was a cornerstone of expanding colonial power and knowledge in the region.

After 20 years under the guidance of Kew-trained botanists, the Singapore Botanic Gardens had accomplished little in support of empire, particularly with regard to the economy. This resulted in attempts among government officials to curb its funding, followed by proposals to abandon all of its scientific research. The Singapore Botanic Gardens was considered a failed experiment in many quarters by the late 19th century. At this time, ironically, the northern portion of the grounds, the Economic Garden, began to transform the society and economics of the region, and this is the focus of Chapter 5. This corresponded with the tenure of Joseph Chamberlain who, as the Secretary of State for the Colonies from 1895 to 1903, promoted the use of science to develop imperial territories, particularly with regard to agriculture.[14] While rubber was the most important plant to come out of the Singapore Botanic Gardens during this period, hundreds of other plants were also cultivated, with Ridley leading scientists in experimenting at how to best exploit the bounty of nature in the tropics and contributing to the development of agriculture throughout the empire. By the early 20th century rubber would expand to dominate much of the region, and influence the development of infrastructure, economics and ethnic makeup of societies. It was during this period that the Singapore Botanic Gardens made its most important long-term contribution to the region, while it also served as a primary example of the role that a tropical botanic garden could play in economic botany and imperial botany beyond its grounds.

Ridley left Singapore in 1912. His personality had alienated many in the government, leading officials to create centers for forestry and agriculture in the Malay Peninsula, far beyond his influence. To replace Ridley, Isaac Henry Burkill became the Director of the Singapore Botanic Gardens and he brought the institution in a new direction. Chapter 6 examines how researchers centered in Singapore played an

[14] Joseph Morgan Hodge, *Triumph of the Expert: Agrarian Doctrines of Development and the Legacies of British Colonialism* (Athens, OH: Ohio University Press, 2007); Michael Worboys, "Science and British Colonial Imperialism, 1895–1940," unpublished PhD dissertation, Brighton: University of Sussex, 1979.

important role in the collection and identification of the botanical riches of the region. Centered in the herbarium, these scientists developed understandings of landscapes and nature, making the Singapore Botanic Gardens one of the key sites for the production of colonial knowledge, a legacy that continues into the 21st century. While many copies of the plants did make their way to the Royal Botanic Gardens, Kew, scientists began to independently develop their own collection, creating a herbarium that represented the development of an independent, vibrant research institution in the early 20th century.

Alongside the herbarium, laboratories in the Singapore Botanic Gardens were also the setting for important botanical research, and continue to reflect a growing confidence among the botanists in Singapore to create a research agenda independent of larger imperial botany. Botanists centered in the Gardens became important actors in transnational research networks and developed an identity that was independent of direction from Kew Gardens. Focused around the creation of hybrid orchids, the efforts of these scientists went beyond the grounds and laboratories of the Gardens to create symbols of Singapore that also led to the development of the cut-flower and agro-technology industries, reflecting early efforts of the colonial port and eventual nation-state to harness and create a new environment while adding to the intangible beauty of gardens throughout the region. In the process, Singapore became a center for horticulture and urban beauty that influenced the appearance of the island. The development of these labs, and the fascination with orchids among scientists, businessmen and amateur gardeners, is the focus of Chapter 7.

The importance of orchids in the Singapore garden, and the beauty they brought to it, is also important for Chapter 8, the final chapter in this work, which focuses on how a colonial institution based in imperial botany transitioned into developmental botany, in which knowledge of the floral world and horticulture could be used as a tool for a new independent nation obsessed with economic industrialization and modernization. A cornerstone of the public image of this nation was the emphasis it placed on manufactured and manicured green spaces. The Singapore Botanic Gardens played an important role in the execution of numerous Greening Programs that culminated in the nation identifying itself as a Garden City. The transition to this new status, however, was not smooth. The Gardens and its personnel had to work within an administration that not only had to oversee the decolonization of the society but also demanded a focus on programs

that were often directed by non-scientists, and with little regard or input from those with botanical expertise. The tussles with the modernizing government resulted in the Singapore Botanic Gardens being downgraded from a research institution to a recreational park for almost two decades. The nadir in its influence and position in society was only overcome when the Singapore Botanic Gardens became a vital component of Singaporean identity in support of botanical research and horticultural diversity.

Throughout its history, the Singapore Botanic Gardens has influenced and reflected the society and governments of the port and larger region. While it was a node in a larger botanical network, it created its own networks of influence and power. It was a colonizer it in its own right, spreading a cultivation and manipulation of nature that continues to touch the lives of those throughout the region. It was a site that was nature's colony, where plants were cultivated to change our understanding of the nation, the region and the world.