

Imperial Creatures

*Humans and Other Animals
in Colonial Singapore,
1819–1942*

by

Timothy P. Barnard



NUS PRESS
SINGAPORE

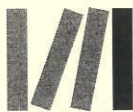
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*For the teachers and mentors
who have guided me:*

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Courtesy of the National Archives of Singapore.

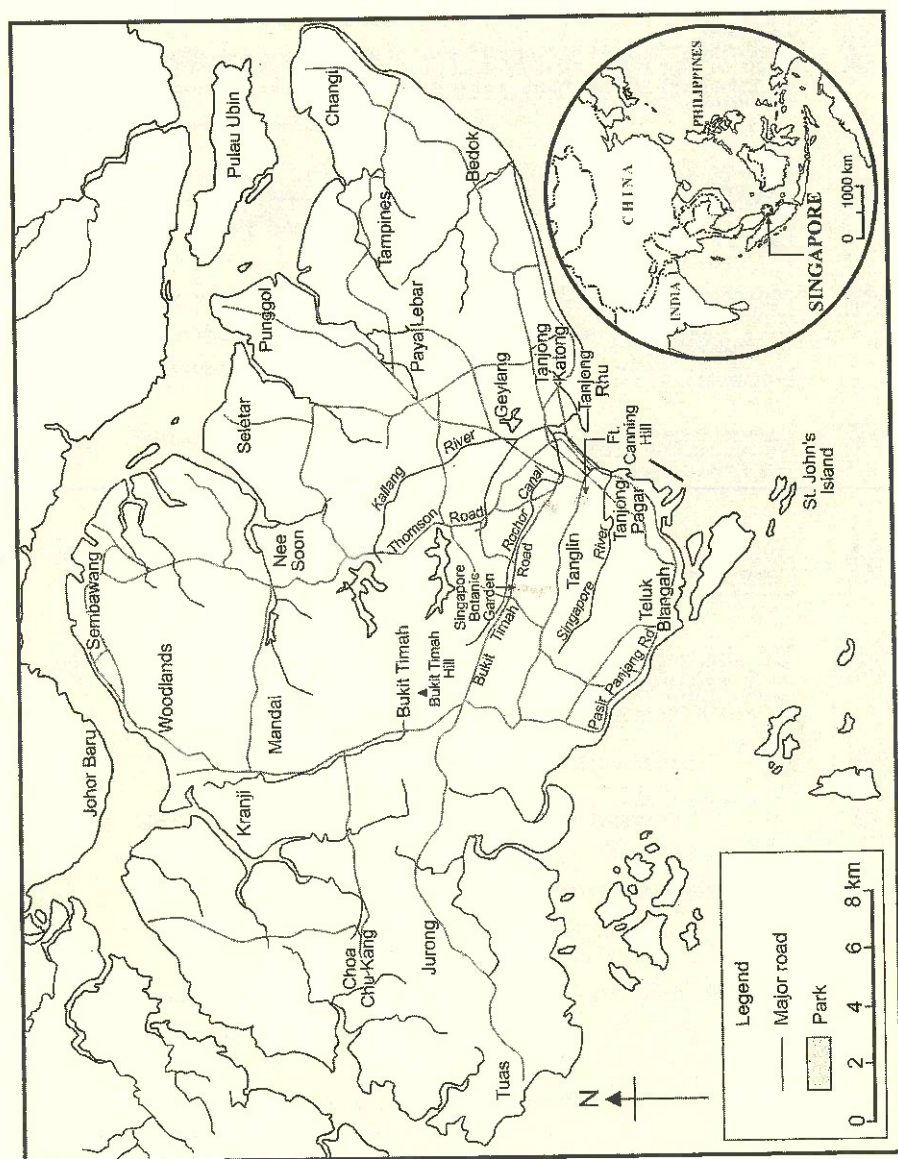
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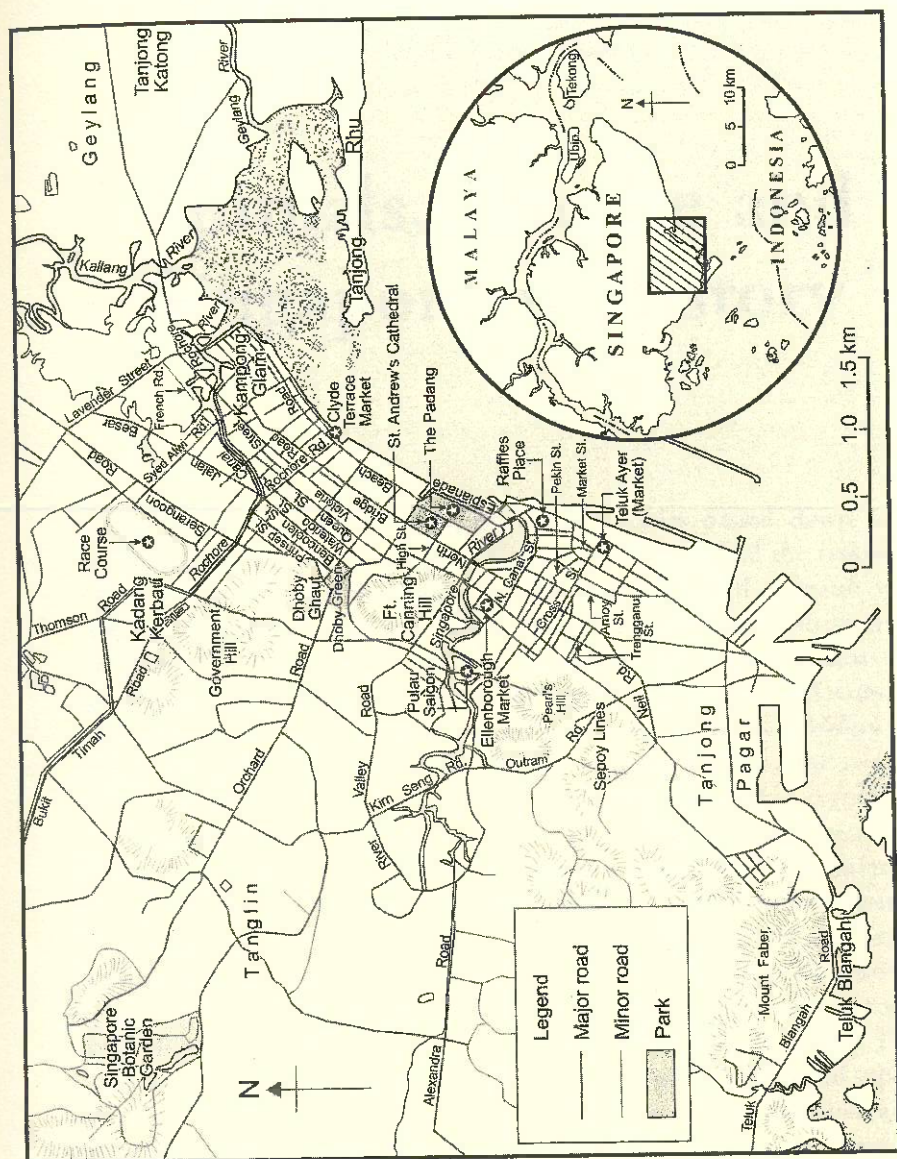
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Map of Singapore



Detail map of Singapore town

CHAPTER ONE

Animals, Empire and Singaporean History

Sometime in the 14th century, according to tales passed down over generations, schools of swordfish (*Xiphias gladius*) attacked the residents of Singapore. One of the most remarkable aspects of this assault was that no one on land was safe. These aquatic animals hurled themselves on shore and speared those unlucky enough to have ventured near the sea. Many died; chaos reigned. According to the *Sulalat al-Salatin*, a canonical text from the region better known as the *Sejarah Melayu* or Malay Annals, "So great was the number of those killed by the swordfish that there was a panic and people ran hither and thither crying."¹

The swordfish attack, according to the text, was a consequence of a suspicious leader who showed little concern for the populace (*rakyat*), a sign of potential problems in the trading enclave. Singapore was a prosperous port at the time, and it attracted an array of merchants and travelers. Among these visitors was a wandering religious scholar, named Tun Jana Khatib, who tried to gain the attention of the royal concubine. The ruler had the visitor executed for such behavior. This jealous and vengeful decision resulted in a curse being placed upon the island, which led to the extraordinary assault on Singaporeans. Witnessing the chaos that the swordfish had wrought, and fearing

¹ C.C. Brown (trans.), *Sejarah Melayu or Malay Annals* (Singapore: Oxford University Press, 1970), p. 40.

for his own well-being, the ruler ordered his followers to stand near the water to act as a barrier to protect the royal family. These people soon became further sacrificial victims. Realizing the folly of such an approach, a young boy offered an alternative. He suggested that banana trunks be used to line the shore. During the next attack, the piscine invaders speared themselves on the herbaceous plants, and residents then proceeded to club the fish to death. Singapore had been saved with an innovative solution to a problem. The young boy, however, now represented a potential challenge to the elite. He was too clever. Following the advice of his counselors, the ruler ordered the death of the person who had saved the society. "When the boy was executed the guilt of his blood laid on Singapore."²

This fable is one of the earliest accounts of Singapore. Originally existing as an oral tale, it was written down by at least the early 17th century, when it became an allegory to explain how a community of traders in the Straits of Melaka ultimately failed some two centuries earlier. It is part of a larger manuscript that emphasizes a core tenet of the trading culture that dominated the region for over a millennium: openness to outsiders. While the origins of the society lay with a mythically powerful ruler from Sumatra, known as Parameswara in some tales and Sang Nila Utama in others, prosperity came from its port, which was a vital link in the cosmopolitan trade that flowed through the region in the early 14th century. The society thrived for several generations, until the rulers began focusing on protecting their own interests by insulating themselves from outsiders and the knowledge they could bring to the community. Ancient Singapore was doomed, and the swordfish attack prophesied further troubles. Soon afterwards, the ruler and his *rakyat*, facing the attack of a Javanese fleet, fled up the coast of the Malay Peninsula and founded a new trade port in Melaka, and the tale of attacking fish became a metaphor employed to express local understandings of the political and social conditions that had presaged this migration.³

The legend best known as *Singapura Dilanggar Todak* (The Swordfish Attack on Singapore) represents some of the basic issues surrounding the recording of history in Southeast Asia, particularly in

² Brown (trans.), *Sejarah Melayu*, p. 40.

³ Sophie Sim, "Fishy Tales: *Singapura Dilanggar Todak* as Myth and History in Singapore's Past," unpublished Master's Thesis, Department of History, National University of Singapore, 2005.

the era prior to colonial rule. Remembering the past was a process that wove together compelling narratives, facts, and the basic tenets of the society. The use of parables, a storytelling device much like ancient floods or epic battles have played in other traditions, allowed historians of the region to communicate information to a receptive audience in a manner in which the lessons would be remembered, becoming embedded in the collective conscious.⁴ While exaggerations did occur, and details were forgotten, the key factor is that the tale was retold, and in the process core principles and lessons from the past were remembered.⁵ It was an approach that made history in the region vibrant, and it involved the use of animals as a device to better understand Southeast Asia, and particularly ancient Singapore.

An Island in History

Although Singapore is over 700 square kilometers today, it was around 500 square kilometers historically. The island is a typical landmass in the larger Malay (or Indonesian) Archipelago, with the highest peak being a modest 130 meters above sea level, and its most remarkable bygone feature being a relatively small rock outcrop that was labeled the Dragon's Tooth, which enabled passing seafarers to orient themselves. Mangrove swamps lined most of its shores while further inland dense forest covered rolling hills for much of its history, particularly before the 19th century and the arrival of Western imperialism. This forest was one in which animals roamed, found shelter and food, lived and died.

Humans have been in Singapore alongside these animals for millennia. Living at the southern reaches of the Melaka Straits, a key trade route, these early residents began inhabiting the island as early as the Stone Age, as implements dating some 4,000 years have been

⁴ Did swordfish attack Singapore? They most likely did not hurl themselves in a wave of mass suicide, although occasionally a report will appear in modern newspapers regarding a fish inadvertently propelling itself into the air and hitting a boat or unlucky fisherman. Anonymous, "Fisherman Struck by Swordfish," *New Straits Times*, 18 Feb. 2013, p. 31.

⁵ This particular saga, with its allegorical lessons, continues to resonate in Singapore, where it is the subject of children's tales and theater productions. Sim, "Fishy Tales"; Henri Chambert-Loir, "The *Sulalat al-Salatin* as a Political Myth," *Indonesia*, 79 (2005): 131–60; Henk Maier, *We Are Playing Relatives: A Survey of Malay Writing* (Leiden: KITLV, 2004).

found on its shores.⁶ Most scholars, nevertheless, posit the beginning of history in Singapore to the early 14th century, when it reached its precolonial peak of influence as a trade port with extensive connections to merchants and sailors from throughout the region. The dynamic and cosmopolitan nature of the community at that time has been proven through extensive archaeological discoveries as well as corroboration in Chinese traveler accounts and tales such as those of attacking swordfish.⁷ After the inhabitants fled into the Straits and founded a new settlement at Melaka and subsequently Johor, Singapore continued to function as an important harbor serving this larger community. After an Acehnese raid in the early 17th century destroyed the settlement, Singapore became a bit of a backwater. It was a place where legends, such as *Singapura Dilanggar Todak*, took place or the small remaining community reportedly raided ships. Occasionally, a Western trade company official would note its existence and even propose a fortification be placed there.⁸

While little remained of its glorious past as an ancient trade port by the 18th century, Singapore was located in the center of a dynamic region in a period of disruption preceding the imposition of colonial rule. It is during this long century that residents of communities in eastern Sumatra rose in rebellion against the state of Johor, which exercised sovereignty over Singapore, while new migrants from throughout the archipelago established communities in the immediate environs. Amidst this upheaval, despite sporadic mentions in records, Singapore remained mostly a forgotten place, a site of fables from the past. By the end of the century, Ilanun raiders from the Sulu Sea further disrupted the societies in the region with devastating raids, leaving the area ripe for expanding European powers fueled by the nascent Industrial Revolution. In the aftermath of this chaos, Singapore hosted a small community of plantation workers. Under the sovereignty of the Temenggong, a high official of the nearby Riau-Johor state that had

⁶ M.W.F. Tweedie, "The Stone Age in Malaya," *Journal of the Malayan Branch of the Royal Asiatic Society* [hereafter JMBRAS] 26, 2 (1953): 69–70.

⁷ John N. Miksic, *Singapore and the Silk Road of the Sea, 1300–1800* (Singapore: NUS Press, 2013).

⁸ Peter Borschberg, *The Singapore and Melaka Straits: Violence, Security and Diplomacy in the 17th Century* (Singapore: NUS Press, 2010); Kwa Chong Guan and Peter Borschberg (eds.), *Studying Singapore Before 1800* (Singapore: NUS Press, 2018); Miksic, *Singapore and the Silk Road of the Sea*, pp. 204–8.

become a regional power during this turmoil, several hundred people began cultivating pepper and gambier by 1800. When Thomas Stamford Raffles landed on the banks of the Singapore River in January 1819, he met this community and a new era began. Imperialism, and its creatures, had arrived. These were forces that would completely transform a tropical island economically, socially and physically.⁹

The status of Singapore as the epicenter of the British imperial presence, as well as its relatively small size, makes it an interesting site for the study of imperialism, as well as the administration and maintenance of the space, which is essentially colonialism.¹⁰ The intense focus that East India Company officials and later colonial government administrators placed on transforming the island meant it was a model for the hopes and desires they had for imperial rule. Accounts of this can be found in archival records stored in the United Kingdom and other countries, which exist alongside travelers' reports and literature that describe and detail developments on the island throughout the entire period. This is further supported by an active local newspaper industry that was also the locus of modern communication and technology in the port, all resulting in a range of sources that provide a fairly thorough description of the perspectives and goals of an outside economic and political force that took control over a Southeast Asian

⁹ Timothy P. Barnard, *Multiple Centres of Authority: Society and Environment in Siak and Eastern Sumatra, 1674–1827* (Leiden: KITLV, 2003); Timothy P. Barnard, "Celates, Rayat-Laut, Pirates: The Orang Laut and their Decline in History," *Journal of the Malaysian Branch of the Royal Asiatic Society* 80, 2 (2007): 33–49; Koh Keng We, "Familiar Strangers and Stranger-Kings: Mobility, Diasporas, and the Foreign in the Eighteenth-Century Malay World," *Journal of Southeast Asian Studies* 48, 3 (2017): 390–413; James Francis Warren, *The Sulu Zone, 1768–1898: The Dynamics of External Trade, Slavery and Ethnicity in the Transformation of a Southeast Asian Maritime State* (Singapore: Singapore University Press, 1981); Marcus Langdon and Kwa Chong Guan, "Notes on 'Sketch of the Land Round Singapore Harbour, 7 February 1819'," *Journal of the Malaysian Branch of the Royal Asiatic Society* 83, 1 (2010): 1–7.

¹⁰ Sean Kheraj emphasizes the role that the boundaries of a relatively "multi-species habitat" can play in providing a focus for material and research, with his own study of the urban space of Winnipeg, Canada in environmental history during a similar time period as this study. Sean Kheraj, "Animals and Urban Environments: Managing Domestic Animals in Nineteenth-Century Winnipeg," in *Eco-Cultural Networks and the British Empire: New Views on Environmental History*, ed. James Beattie, Edward Melillo and Emily O'Gorman (London: Bloomsbury, 2015), pp. 263–88.

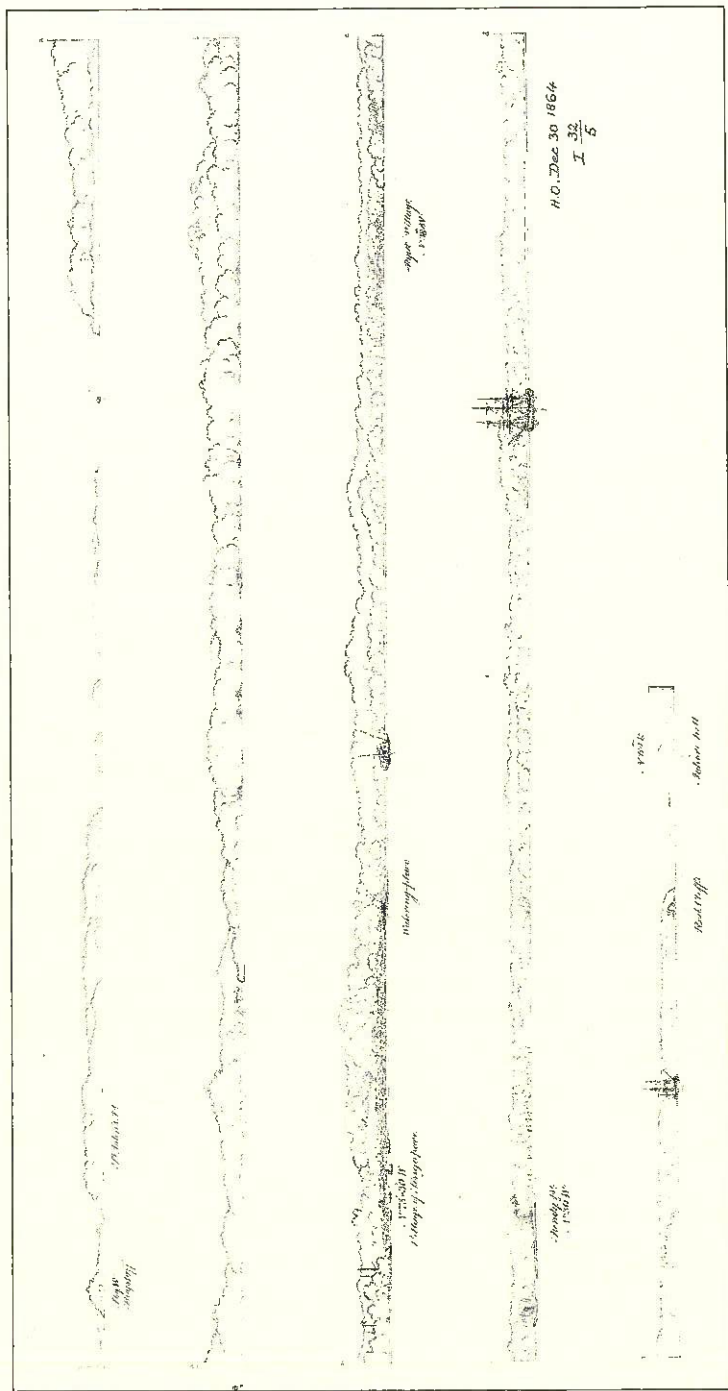


Image 1.1: Singapore as seen from the deck of British vessels soon after East India Company officials first arrived to establish a settlement. Sketch of the Land Round Singapore Harbour 7 Feb 1819 (ADM 344/1307), courtesy of the National Archives of Great Britain.

island. Ultimately, Singapore is a site of tales in which the reader can gain greater insight into numerous developments in the past, particularly during the era of imperialism.

The arrival of Western trade companies and governments also introduced new approaches to the recording of history in Southeast Asia. While Singapore had a precolonial past, the imperial transformation was so revolutionary—moving from a jungle-covered island of less than 1,000 inhabitants in 1819 to a deforested, vibrant commercial port of 800,000 by 1942—that any history prior to the 19th century was considered irrelevant, or at least difficult to incorporate into the master narrative as it seemed to have little importance for a modern, colonial emporium and its understanding of society. Imperialism had created a blank slate on which the goals and desires of the new inhabitants were recorded. Singapore's history now became one in which facts were found in archival records of foreign governments or corporations stored in distant capitals, not in legends that master storytellers passed down orally.¹¹

The influence of imperialism on the development of historiography, and a general historical understanding of the past, in Singapore has resulted in a focus on the administrative decisions of great men, an approach that is framed rather rigidly by those in power, whether it be the merchants of a trade company, colonial administrators or even the post-independence national government. The actions and decisions of these great men thus become the key element for understanding the past and what is considered to be germane. This would be an apt description of much of the written history of Singapore, a place in which empire and nation are often intertwined and retold in increasingly involute detail and research becomes an expedition into factuality instead of intent and result. The most conspicuous example of the focus on empirical, positivist history of the island is C.M. Turnbull's *A History of Singapore*, which has gone through numerous editions and has even

¹¹ While it was the focus of a short debate in the 1980s, most historians of Singapore simply continued to use these sources in a fairly rigid manner to follow the traditional, empiricist narrative, particularly for the colonial era. Anthony Milner, "Colonial Records History: British Malaya," *Kajian Malaysia* 4, 2 (1986): 1–18; Yeoh Kim Wah, "The Milner Version of British Malayan History: A Rejoinder," *Kajian Malaysia* 5, 1 (1987): 1–28 Karl Hack, "Framing Singapore's History," in *Studying Singapore's Past: C.M. Turnbull and the History of Modern Singapore*, ed. Nicholas Tarling (Singapore: NUS Press, 2012), pp. 17–49; Miksic, *Singapore and the Silk Road of the Sea*; Timothy P. Barnard, *Raja Kecil dan Mitos Pengabsahannya* (Pekanbaru: Pusat Pengajian Melayu, Universitas Islam, 1994).

merited a separate study that discusses its impact on historiographical trends in the modern nation state. While not all scholarship of the society fits the rigid, political approach that Turnbull represents, with the work of Jim Warren on the social lives of rickshaw coolies and prostitutes being the most prominent exception, most studies of the Singaporean past simply fit into an imperial framework that mines trivia to recount the political and economic expansion of Western powers and ultimately an independent national government.¹²

Outside of traditional Singaporean historiography, however, numerous scholars throughout the world have been employing multidisciplinary frameworks over the past few decades to the study of history. Much of this began in the 1960s and 1970s when historians began to provide new perspectives of the past as they asked different questions from archival materials, as well as employed non-archival sources, to move beyond a rigid consideration of politics, economics and military endeavors when seeking to understand the multilayered influences that have played in the development of societies throughout the world. These historians, loosely grouped under the rubric of "new cultural history," soon came to influence the study of histories outside the nation state. While this "imperial turn," as Durba Ghosh has pointed out, may have become a many-headed monster that many believe is exasperating, others employed such approaches to take the study of the past in a variety of interesting directions, as it allowed for diverse and insightful studies on a wide range of subjects and perspectives.¹³ In Singaporean historiography such an approach is relatively unexplored, although it has resulted in some interesting studies of topics such as the colonial prison system or the role that underclass migrants have played in the development of the society.¹⁴

¹² C.M. Turnbull, *A History of Modern Singapore, 1819–2005* (Singapore: NUS Press, 2008); Nicholas Tarling (ed.), *Studying Singapore's Past: C.M. Turnbull and the History of Modern Singapore* (Singapore NUS Press, 2012); James Francis Warren, *Rickshaw Coolie: A People's History of Singapore, 1880–1940* (Singapore: NUS Press, 2003); James Francis Warren, *Ah Ku and Karayuki-san: Prostitution in Singapore, 1870–1940* (Singapore: NUS Press, 2003).

¹³ Durba Ghosh, "Another Set of Imperial Turns?," *American Historical Review* 117, 3 (2012): 772–93; Lynn Hunt, *The New Cultural History* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1989).

¹⁴ Anoma Pieris, *Hidden Hands and Divided Landscapes: A Penal History of Singapore's Plural Society* (Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press, 2009); John Solomon, *A Subaltern History of the Indian Diaspora in Singapore: Gradual Disappearance of Untouchability, 1872–1965* (New York, NY: Routledge, 2016).

This work is an attempt to apply these new perspectives to explore the history of animals in Singapore to better understand how the imposition of colonial rule transformed an island. Such an approach with unique subject matter allows for a reconsideration of the imperial past in Southeast Asia, and particularly Malaya and Singapore, that incorporates a variety of multidisciplinary approaches ranging from zoology to cultural studies. The fauna of Singapore, and how they were perceived, regulated, domesticated and even slaughtered, thus become a vehicle to better understand the expansion of imperialism on the island, which allows for greater insight into issues of governance, economics, the environment and society during a period in which external, transformative ideologies of control were imposed. While the usual sources—archival reports, newspaper accounts, and traveler's tales—from the period are employed, such an approach allows for a deeper consideration of the material. Much like the swordfish that attacked ancient Singaporeans, animals and their relationship to humans can act as a metaphor for how we can interpret the past on a small island, and the forces of imperialism that shaped the society on it.

Animals and Empire

The interaction of humans and animals is one of the key experiences in history.¹⁵ The domestication of animals and the harnessing of their power for cultivation of the land and the provision of steady supplies of food created civilizations, while the development and reinforcement of control and differences helped separate the civilized from the savage. As humans moved into new lands for discovery and conquest, animals accompanied them. Pigs rapidly populated islands, providing protein for the new settlers; horses and cattle altered agriculture, travel and landscapes; rats carried disease. These are just a few of the numerous

¹⁵ It needs to be clarified that while humans are a type of animal, non-humans will be referred to in this work as animals for the sake of clarity and simplicity. There are numerous works that discuss the implications of this decision, although Harriet Ritvo and Joyce Chaplin—as well as a series of articles in the December 2013 issue of the journal *History and Theory*—provide good summaries of the arguments. Harriet Ritvo, "On the Animal Turn," *Dadalus*, 136 (2007): 118–22; Joyce E. Chaplin, "Can the Nonhuman Speak?: Breaking the Chain of Being in the Anthropocene," *Journal of the History of Ideas* 78, 4 (2017): 509–29; Erica Fudge, "Milking Other Men's Beasts," *History and Theory* 52, 4 (2013): 13–28.

species that moved alongside humans, transforming societies and continents, and creating histories.¹⁶

The study of the historical relationship between humans and animals in academic discourse—often referred to as human-animal studies or animal studies—is relatively young, much like new cultural history, having only become a focus of scholarship in the late 20th century. In this regard it is part of larger trends in which traditional disciplines have used a broader range of tools and approaches to understand the development of societies and how we understand them. The earliest contributions to the subfield reflected how illuminating such an approach could be, providing new insights into a variety of issues, with the work of Alfred Crosby on the environmental factors assisting the expansion of Europe in the previous millennium and the role that animals played in the Victorian Age in Britain by Harriet Ritvo leading the way.¹⁷ These pioneering studies promoted the use of a host of multidisciplinary material from zoology to philosophy in an innovative manner to ask unconventional questions while interpreting a range of historical sources. The result has been a wide variety of publications that focus on topics ranging from how the extinction of native species in America led to racial anxieties and conservation to the development of zoological gardens.¹⁸ In each case, animals provide a focus for the consideration of the material.¹⁹

¹⁶ Alfred Crosby, *Ecological Imperialism: The Biological Expansion of Europe, 900–1900* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1986); Virginia DeJohn Anderson, *Creatures of Empire: How Domestic Animals Transformed Early America* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004).

¹⁷ Crosby, *Ecological Imperialism*; Harriet Ritvo, *The Animal Estate: The English and Other Creatures in the Victorian Age* (Cambridge, Mass: Harvard University Press, 1987); Aaron Skabelund, "Animals and Imperialism: Recent Historiographical Trends," *History Compass* 11, 10 (2013): 801–7.

¹⁸ Miles A. Powell, *Vanishing America: Species Extinction, Racial Peril, and the Origins of Conservation* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2016); Nigel Rothfels, *Savages and Beasts: The Birth of the Modern Zoo* (Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2002); Susan Nance, "Introduction," in *The Historical Animal*, ed. Susan Nance (Syracuse, NY: Syracuse University Press, 2015), p. 3.

¹⁹ When focusing on the relationship between humans and animals in the humanities, one of the key considerations is whether animals can be self-contained objects of study. Do they have their own history, or are they simply vehicles for understanding the human condition? It is my conclusion that while discussions and descriptions can focus on behavior and biological similarities of animals, humans ultimately observe and mediate this process. Animals thus are not

The study of human-animal history has primarily concentrated on developments in North America and Europe, although it has slowly become the subject of studies in other regions of the world.²⁰ In Southeast Asia, Peter Boomgaard and Greg Bankoff initiated such research by focusing on individual animals in Indonesia and the Philippines respectively, while encouraging others to consider the application of the approach across the region. Robert Cribb has also led a team that focused on how perceptions of orangutans in society have shaped their treatment and presentation in Southeast Asia and globally. Boomgaard has been particularly influential as the author of a monograph exploring the role that tigers have played in the archipelago, as well as the leader of a research group based in Leiden, the Netherlands that focused on the environmental history of island Southeast Asia. Other works, such as that of Jonathan Saha on elephants in Burma and my own interest in the Singaporean past and Komodo dragons, have recently contributed to a growing interest in animal history in the region.²¹

given their own autonomy in this work. While this can be perceived as "human supremacism" or exceptionalism, this decision has been made in light of the fact that humans are the arbitrators and interpreters of the past portrayed in this work. Brett L. Walker, "Animals and the Intimacy of History," *History and Theory* 52, 4 (2013): 45–67; Susan J. Pearson and Mary Weismantel, "Does 'The Animal' Exist?: Towards a Theory of Social Life with Animals," in *Beastly Natures: Animals, Humans, and the Study of History*, ed. Dorothee Brantz (Charlottesville, VA: University of Virginia Press, 2010), pp. 17–37; Nance, "Introduction"; Chaplin, "Can the Nonhuman Speak?"; Harriet Ritvo, "Animal Planet," *Environmental History* 9, 2 (2004): 204–20; Erica Fudge, "A Left-Handed Blow: Writing the History of Animals," in *Representing Animals*, ed. Nigel Rothfels (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 2002), pp. 3–18.

²⁰ Recent exceptions from Asia include Ian Jared Miller, *The Nature of Beasts: Empire and Exhibition at the Tokyo Imperial Zoo* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 2013); Julie E. Hughes, *Animal Kingdoms: Hunting, the Environment, and Power in Indian Princely States* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2013).

²¹ Peter Boomgaard, *Frontiers of Fear: Tigers and People in the Malay World, 1600–1950* (New Haven, Conn.: Yale University Press, 2001); Peter Boomgaard, Freek Colombijn, and David Henley (ed.), *Paper Landscapes: Explorations in the Environmental History of Indonesia* (Leiden: KITLV Press, 1997); Greg Bankoff, "Bestia Incognita: The Horse and Its History in the Philippines, 1880–1930," *Anthrozoös*, 17, 1, 2004: 3–25; Greg Bankoff and Sandra Swart (ed.), *Breeds of Empire: The "Invention" of the Horse in Southeast Asia and Africa, 1500–1950* (Copenhagen: NIAS Press, 2007); Robert Cribb, Helen Gilbert and Helen Tiffin, *Wild Man of Borneo: A Cultural History of the Orangutan* (Honolulu, HI: University of

Much of the work at the intersection of human-animal studies in Southeast Asia has focused on charismatic megafauna, such as elephants, tigers, or orangutans. The celebrated status of these animals even plays an important role in the ability of researchers to study them, as the mere sighting of one deserved a report or comment in the records, while their conservation also became an issue for consideration.²² In contrast, this work focuses on a wide variety of relatively uncharismatic and common animals, with considerable attention given to dogs, cattle and horses. As these creatures rarely appeared in reports when they were simply sighted, their presence in accounts usually occurred following an act of violence. After all, this work began with the spearing of many humans along a shore, and it will end with the death of a single animal in a cage. The nature of such activity is usually why animals appear within the records, as such a spasm of violence merited a note. The role of violence not only exposes some of the basic elements in this human-animal relationship but also that of imperialism.

The ability of an outside entity, whether a company or government, to enforce its power over a land and its inhabitants is an activity that is inherently violent. The tremendous transformation of global societies that took place during the era of high imperialism, in the 19th and early 20th centuries, involved the development of new forms of economic, political and military power. These were rooted in European (and for Singapore, mainly British) understandings of how societies should be managed and administered, resulting in the replacement of systems of governance, economy and social interaction in a process that involved coaxing, regulating and controlling, as well as occasionally outright force. Imperialism was a series of power relationships. The imposition of these relationships was a process that was often complex and messy, and it led to the creation of new communities throughout the world, one of which was the colonial port city of Singapore. The forms of control that allowed this to occur were exerted

Hawai'i Press, 2014); Jonathan Saha, "Among the Beasts of Burma: Animals and the Politics of Colonial Sensibilities, c. 1840–1940," *Journal of Social History* 48, 4 (2015): 910–32; Timothy P. Barnard (ed.) *Nature Contained: Environmental Histories of Singapore* (Singapore: NUS Press, 2014); "Protecting the Dragon: Dutch Attempts to Limit Access to Komodo Lizards in the 1920s and 1930s," *Indonesia* 92 (2011): 97–123; Skabelund, "Animals and Imperialism," p. 804.

²² Robert Cribb, "Conservation in Colonial Indonesia," *Interventions* 9, 1 (2007): 49–61.

over not only human populations but also all animals in these newly developing realms. Through an examination of animals, and how they were cherished, slaughtered, monitored and employed, greater insights into how imperial rule was imposed on a society can be achieved. In this manner fauna continue to be useful tools for understanding our past, as they allow for greater insight into how the society developed, and the institutions that helped govern it.²³ All animals, including humans, have been creatures of imperialism in Singapore. Their tales teach us lessons about the structures, the frameworks, which upheld such a society.

Structures

The chapters that follow will explore the interaction of humans and other animals in Singapore society during the period of high imperialism on the island, from 1819 until 1942. The chronology of the discussions often overlaps, like a story, as the relationships and connections are complex. Each chapter, however, does survey an aspect of colonial rule in Singapore in which animals were monitored, regulated, and often killed as human settlers took control over a tropical island in South-east Asia.

This study will begin with an exploration of what imperialism meant for the natural landscape of Singapore. As the island fell under colonial rule, so did all of the creatures that lived on it. The imposition of new perspectives and understandings of the human-animal relationship with regard to empire and global commerce resulted in a massive decline in biodiversity as the tropical forest came under the axe, mainly for the development of plantations that cultivated pepper and gambier. The fauna that had lived in this forest then faced firearms, clubs and traps to limit, or even eliminate, their presence, a practice that was translated into the programs to rid the town of pariah curs that roamed the streets. The result was an imperial settlement in which native fauna were either brought under the control of humans or eliminated.

Although the imposition of imperial rule meant a reduction in native fauna, colonial Singapore was filled with animals, and this is the focus of Chapter Three. The vast majority of these animals were

²³ William Beinart and Lotte Hughes, *Environment and Empire* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007), p. 4.

imported, having arrived via the expanding port. Once they entered the imperial society they became objects of commerce and consumption while also providing companionship, entertainment and insight into a growing knowledge of nature in the region. In this manner, animals were selected and presented alongside humans, becoming an integral part of colonial society. They reflected the ability of an imperial government to shape the landscape so that it served its cultural, political and social needs.

A consideration of how these animals were understood in this shifting milieu in which their relationship with humans would be determined by values originating from the imperial power of Britain is the focus of the subsequent chapter. Animals provided the energy that moved goods and people over the island in the 19th century. The treatment of these beasts became the focus of the ever-shifting concept of cruelty with regard to the human-animal relationship and the creation of organizations to prevent it in the imperial port. This began with concerned British residents founding a social organization, which was incorporated slowly into the government bureaucracy as imperial mores and foreign understandings were increasingly promoted in the port to protect fauna that were deemed important, in this case mainly animals that provided labor. Through such an examination, a more in-depth understanding of how foreign concepts related to governance and administration were imposed in new lands, and how the types of animals that should be monitored expanded to domestic pets as the labor of animals became increasingly irrelevant in a coming age of mechanized vehicles, will be gained.

This perception of domestic pets, and the ability of residents to control and regulate their relationship with humans, was tested in the late 19th century when rabies became endemic in Singapore in the 1880s. The treatment of this issue is the focus of Chapter Five. The appearance of the terrifying disease resulted in a clash between how the elite, mainly British in origin, of society viewed mutts in the port in contrast to the imported, high-bred canines that they used as symbols of their status in society. Efforts to limit disease, and local pariah dogs, exposed not only rifts in how the society was governed, but also new approaches to how the creatures within it could be monitored so that they were acceptable to the society. The ability of the imperial society the British created in Singapore to surveil and regulate animals was further tested when it came to the need to provide protein. Chapter Six will examine how animals, mainly cattle, pigs and fish,

were imported to sustain the human populace. The development of a system of modern markets and slaughterhouses led to the creation of a system that examined and processed animals for slaughter that was considered a model of modern imperial rule and sanitation, with over 300,000 animals passing through the abattoirs every year by the end of the time period under consideration.

The result of this human-animal relationship was the development of imperial rule in Singapore in which all of its creatures inhabited a landscape that was under the control of humans from a distant land that imposed its own understanding of how the society should function and interact. While one era of rule over the island ended with an attack of swordfish, the next one begins with an infestation of rats. The reaction of humans in Singapore to these animals is the story of the creation of an imperial society, one in which all creatures played a part.