

The nineteenth century was the age of Europe's industrialisation. That technological revolution played a major—many would agree *the* major—part in accelerating the search for colonial possessions overseas. Colonies, in the simplest form, were seen as essential elements in the economic pattern that required the supply of raw materials to the industrial countries of Europe. Once processed these raw materials could be sold to the markets of the world, including, if possible, the colonies from which the processed materials originally came. Seen in retrospect the whole system seems quite remarkably unbalanced in Europe's favour. Southeast Asians in Burma, Vietnam or the Philippines, for instance, were expected to play an uncomplaining role in a process that enriched their colonial masters but offered little reward to them or their fellows. The fact that an imbalance existed and that this did not trouble the bulk of the Europeans concerned with the colonies may be hard to believe, but it was certainly true. An essential feature of the expanding imperial age and the economic developments that went with it was a belief that what they were doing was right and

proper. For most European colonisers questions of equity simply did not arise. They saw the world in different terms and thought in grandiose fashion, so that the prominent mid-nineteenth-century French colonialist and explorer, Francis Garnier, an intelligent and in many ways a cultured man, saw nothing unrealistic or unreasonable about stating the proposition that 'nations without colonies are dead.'

His observation avoids examination of a whole range of questions, not forgetting the fundamental issue of whether or not those who were colonised wished to undergo this experience. As a statement of the kind of drives that urged men to develop rubber estates, to exploit tin mines, and to grow copra palms, the Frenchman's view cannot be ignored. And Southeast Asia could, like Africa, supply many of the materials that became, during the nineteenth century, essential to the needs of modern Europe and America. Tin from Malaysia and Indonesia could help meet the industrial nations' demand for cheap tinsplate and the bearings so essential to the development of fast-running factory machinery. Rubber from Southeast Asia as a whole, but particularly from Indonesia, Malaysia and French Indochina, could help meet the multiple needs of societies that expected constant improvement in a range of items from motor car tyres to surgical equipment. Copra could play a major part in the vast expansion of the soap industry as rising standards of living in Europe and America made personal cleanliness the norm rather than the exception.

Since Southeast Asia in the nineteenth century came to meet new demands from Europe it will be readily understood that a new kind of economic relationship developed between Southeast Asia and the industrial world during that century. The old system, characterised by the Dutch-monopolised spice trade, faded into unimportance as the new pattern developed.