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The early days of public relations in British Malaya: Winning the hearts and minds of the Empire

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ABSTRACT

This article traces the early form of public information services during the colonial period to provide new insights into the historical development of Malaysia's public relations. The first formal information agency created in 1910 was based in London to promote the early practices of public relations for British Malaya and its interests in Britain. British consolidation during the years of economic boom and depression, until the achievement of Malaysian Independence, was aided by the early information services. The article makes an alternative argument about the beginnings of Malaysian public relations based on colonial economic and political interest as against other previously held views

1. Introduction and literature review

A discussion about the beginning of public relations in any given country draws keen interest and debate. Tracing the origins and development of public relations can produce varying results and interpretations based on the premises of scholars. It can be equally challenging because of scarce sources and difficulty accessing materials (L'Etang, 2009).

With regard to the beginnings of public relations in Malaysia, one interpretation claims that public relations in the country existed during the time of the old Sultanates as part of the administrative bureaucracy. Adnan (1985) narrated the presence of public relations-related activities under the controlled administration of the Melaka Sultanate in the 15th century, referring to the works of court officials. Another view was that public relations was an outcome of modern history, drawing its strength from the social and political national consciousness movement against the British colonialist (Nordin, 1986). Ahmad Nordin, one of the early public relations practitioners, approached the development of public relations in Malaysia as an organized agitation in 1945 at the end of World War II (Nordin, 1986). He claimed that the field embodied propaganda-related activities that were undertaken by the British administration and the Malaysian movement for nationhood. For Nordin, this movement for independence constituted the early forms of public relations.

Idid (1980, 1995, 2004) associated the development of public relations in Malaysia with the growth of government bureaucracy, mass media and communication technologies claiming that organized public relations activities in Malaysia began with the establishment of the Department of Information of 1939 during the British administration as a World War II propaganda machinery.

Many scholarly views of public relations development in Malaysia point to British influence (Idid, 1995; Nordin, 1986). The Institute of Public Relations Malaysia (IPRM), set up in 1962, was itself influenced by the practice and ideology of the British Institute of Public Relations established in 1948 (Idid, 2005). IPRM adopted the definition of public relations from the British group. The British Ministry of Information, formed for the Second World War, nurtured the Department of Information in Malaysia, first, through the creation of the Department of Information in 1939, and then later, through the Department of Information and Publicity in 1941 (Idid, 1995). British scholars (Anthony, 2012; L'Etang, 2009, 2013; Moloney, 2000) credited the Empire Marketing Board (EMB) to the beginnings of public relations in the British Commonwealth of Nations. EMB was a small government body formed to foster research, marketing and publicity within the Empire. In the British colonies, the Empire Marketing Board (EMB) focused on coordinating the information services and in promoting inter-imperial trade. Alongside those activities, the EMB played an important role in promoting Malayan products and Malayan films were regularly featured in the Empire Marketing Board Pavilion cinema hall (Our London Letter, 1933). The history and activities of EMB are well documented, including its creative blending of the scientific and commercial knowledge of advertising, diplomacy and marketing research into the

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new discipline of public relations (Anthony, 2012).

This paper provides an alternative perspective on the development of public relations in Malaysia. Through materials gathered from the national archives (in the UK and Malaysia) and newspaper reports dating back to the early 20th century, a differing picture emerges. Documents suggest that public relations activities started in 1910, prior to the formulation of the Empire Marketing Board, when the British established an information agency called the Federated Malay States Development Agency.

This paper, by taking a historical approach, focuses on the reasons for the necessity of the Malayan information agencies, the bureaucratic set-up and their functions beginning in 1910 and follows its evolution to 1957, when it dissolved after Malaysia gained independence.

2. Method

Historical evidence in this study was gathered through both primary and secondary sources. Primary sources included original documents found in the Malaysian National Archive (Arkib Negara) and in the repository of the national archives for the United Kingdom. The researcher used keywords that were often entities like persons (Sir William Taylor, Sir John Anderson), places (British Malaya, Queen Victoria Street) or organizations (Malay States Information Agency) and in many cases the search was restricted by a time point like date (October 1st 1910), year (1910) or period (1910–1930). Searches for primary sources were also made by combining keywords (like name and date) and separating compound terms like Malay States Information Agency into individual terms like Malay States, Information, Agency. In the National Archives for the United Kingdom, most of the collections were found under the Colonial Office and Commonwealth folders and Foreign and Commonwealth Offices folders. In the Malaysian National Archive, the collections were in the form of documents and images and were placed under the category Public Archives (Federal Department). Newspaper articles were also consulted from the National Archives and digital websites like the National Library Board, Singapore and British Newspaper Archive that provided access to archived digitized newspapers. Secondary sources included books and journal articles. The materials provided information on the early growth of Malaya's public relations and public information that began with the work of the Federated Malay States Development Agency in 1910 until it developed into a trade agency in 1952. With Malaysia's independence in 1957, the Agency moved on to be called the High Commission of Malaysia.

3. Background and context: the British in Malaya

This researcher agrees with other scholars that study of the historical context around public relations development is "fundamental to the theoretical understanding of communicative actions, change and development" (Fitch & L'Etang, 2017, p. 117). Thus, to understand the functions of the Malayan information agencies, one must require knowledge of their purposes created under British imperial policy and colonial Malaya within the context of British global economy.

The history of Malaya, including the development of its public relations profession, has been greatly influenced by its relationship with Britain. Britain, in the 20th century, was the world's largest exporter of manufactured goods (textiles, heavy engineering products such as locomotives, ships and coal) and the world's greatest provider of trade and other services, like shipping, insurance and banking (Godley & Casson, 2010). The Malay lands, rich in such products as tin, rubber, copra, palm oil, pineapples, coffee and tea, provided resources for the increasing population in the British Empire and its colonies (Purcell, 1948). The Empire had established a sphere of protection in Malaya with the Treaty of Siam in 1909 and soon was focused on developing communication, transportation and infrastructure through public works like railways, bridges and postal services. Industrialization and the advent of the motor industry during the 20th century created a demand for rubber and tin making Malaya a key asset to the British Empire.

Three different forms of administration developed for the Malayan states: the Straits Settlements, the Federated Malay States and the Unfederated Malay States, which laid the foundation for the necessity of an information agency.

3.1. The Straits Settlements

The first British settlement in Malaya was in Penang in 1786 followed by Singapore in 1819. In 1826, the Straits Settlement was formed as part of the British East India Company and came under British control on April 1,1867, making the colony answerable directly to London. The Straits Settlements had a constitution and originally consisted of Penang, Malacca, Dinding and Singapore, with various other areas incorporating later.

The British military, economic and commercial power was initially concentrated in the Straits Settlements, mostly because of the region's strategic position and its trade links. Much focus of the Empire was on the rapid expansion of the Straits Settlements' trade through the management of ports, trade and advantageous geographical location. The Straits Settlements existed until 1946.

3.2. The Federated Malay States

The British Empire had introduced a 'residential system' in 1874 whereby a British officer was appointed as the Resident (agent or representative of the British government) to advise the Malay sultans on all matters except on religion and Malay customs (Sadka, 1968; Swettenham, 1907). The residential system provided the basis of the formation of the Federated Malay States on July 1, 1896. The federation was comprised of the regions of Selangor, Perak, Negeri Sembilan and Pahang placed under the indirect rule of their own Sultans, but run by Residents under the authority of a central administration in Kuala Lumpur. The Malay rulers gave up some of their political power in exchange for greater independence and less British interference, and specifically no interference on matters relating to Malay culture and Islamic affairs. The structure was supported by a well-ordered system of public administration, public services, and development of rubber and tin production. In the early 20th century, the Federated Malay States experienced wide expansions comprising of 732 miles of railway and 2344 miles of motor road that enabled easy visitation from Penang in the north to Singapore in the south, showing the expeditious development of transport facilities to carry the commodities from the hinterland to the various ports for export (Harrison, 1920). The Federated Malay States existed until 1941.

3.3. The Unfederated Malay States

Between 1885 and 1909, the Unfederated Malay States was in existence, consisting of the states of Johor, Kedah, Kelantan, Perlis and Terengganu. They were five states under British protectorate placed under indirect rule with each Sultan maintaining his own administration. The Unfederated Malay States, unlike the Federated Malay States, enjoyed greater independence and were not bound by a common institution as the Federated Malay States. The political landscape of the Malayan peninsula under the British Empire is shown below in Table 1.

4. The emergence of organized information services

The rubber boom years of 1905–1906 and of 1910–1912 convinced the British and European investors that Malaya was a profitable colony (Nonini, 1992). By the 20th century, there was a need to advertise the productions and attractions of the Federated Malay States to prospective investors, government officials and settlers. The raison d'etre for the early information agencies was economic and commercial as the British found their land and 'treasure' in Malaya.

Table 1
The political landscape of British Malaya in 1910.

The Straits Settlements	Penang and Province Wellesley The Dindings Malacca Singapore	British Territory Under the Governor
The Federated Malay States	Perak Selangor Negri Sembilan Pahang	British Protected and Administered Malay Territory under the High Commissioner / Chief Secretary to the Government
The Unfederated Malay States	Kedah Kelantan Tringganu Johore Perlis	British Protected and Advised Malay territory under the High Commissioner

It was evident that the British interest in Malaya was to exploit the country for financial gain (Vickers, 1949) and therefore expanded its focus on "shipping, financing, insuring and managing of trade" (Baker, 2008, p. 90) rather than manufacturing goods to trade; in other words, Britain began to focus on supplying raw materials. The two industries that led Malaya to a global demand were tin and rubber (Ryan, 1965). This led the British to develop more land in Malaya and strengthen the administration of the country for economic gain and to invite prospective investors to invest in the Malay lands.

After securing their geographical limits in the peninsula of Malaya in 1909 with the Anglo-Siamese Treaty, the name of the Malay states was changed to Malaya or, more often cited, as British Malaya (comprising the Straits Settlements, the Federated Malay States and the Unfederated Malay States) to reflect the British influence in the region (Harrison, 1920). In 1909, The Straits Settlements, under the direct rule of the empire, managed to maintain a balance of power on the peninsula through diplomacy and naval power. The Residents in the Malay states were under the direct control of the Governor of the Straits Settlements. Drastic measures were taken to develop the Malay lands. Land prices went up and was leased at higher prices compared to the previous years (Wright & Cartwright, 1908). The British paid extra attention to the development of the four states that covered about 27,000 square miles lying in the central and broadest part of the Malay Peninsula. Besides rice harvesting and tin mining, the lands were rich with valuable rocks and minerals like granite, quartzite, sandstone, gneiss, schist and limestone that were very much needed by machineries and inventions of the industrial world. The British began to establish themselves in these lands through tougher administration and maintenance of law and order. The administration in the Federated Malay States was controlled and directed by British officials who were recruited through a premier service called the Malayan Civil service (MCS). Land and infrastructure development required extensive labour. However, recruitment into the MCS necessitated passing an open competitive examination that was held in London and was open only to the Europeans. The non-Europeans were barred from joining the MCS, thus aggravating the discontent of the Malay elite in the states for not being able to be employed in the administration of the states (Wah, 1980).

The British needed to restore political stability in the states that was encouraging to attract prospective European investors. They undertook several measures to pacify the resistance of the local Malays in order to control trade. One of the steps taken to showcase a favorable environment in the Federated Malay States was to increase the caliber of the natives and to relieve the existing officer's workload. Special attention was now given to train the locals to fit into administrative positions. A Malay College in Kuala Kangsar was set up to train administrators from the sons of Malay royal and aristocratic families. A Malays Administrative Services (MAS) was created in 1910. The main purpose of this entity was to train native Malays to administrative positions in the Federated Malay States. MAS later grew into a federal legislative office in 1948 and eventually became the Federation Parliament after independence in 1957 (Ryan, 1965). During this period, a federal council was created in Kuala Lumpur, by Governor Sir John Anderson (1904–1911), that ensured the centralization of power and authority with the Governor or High Commissioner. The council was headed by the High Commissioner and a committee that included the Chief Secretary (Resident General), the four Sultans, the four Residents and four nominated unofficial members (three British and one Chinese). The rapid development of the four states in rubber and tin called for the federal council to undertake expenditure in an inter-state basis. The expenditure was focused on developing the infrastructure to ease rubber and tin expansions. In order to ensure a supportive environment to the investors, the British introduced several entertainment attractions. The Federated States were noted to have the best clubs and theatres (Harrison, 1920) that fitted into the lifestyle of the British officers. The race-course in Taiping was cited as being "one of the best and oldest in the Federated Malay States" (Harrison, 1920, p. 47) and the vast virgin jungles were vulnerable to hunting and cultivation. In fact, the first public school in Malaya based on the English model was introduced in Kuala Kangsar, Perak in 1905.

The British were very keen on building the infrastructure of the country, establishing postal services, communications and railways to facilitate economic activities. Tin mining and rubber plantations brought the British to the states of Pahang, Perak, Selangor and Negri Sembilan. The British eventually gained control over these rich industries and began spreading their influence through the development of modern infrastructure such as roads and railways under a resilient government. The Director of Agriculture reported that the total area of rubber planted in 1905 covered 50,000 acres and by the end of 1906, it was 99,230 acres (Wright & Cartwright, 1908). With the flourishing British trade, demand for land in Malaya for commercial products and mining increased, pressing for cheap labour and increased capital for and in British Malaya.

The communication system in the Malay states and the Straits Settlements played a big role in territorial control. Telegraphic communications provided direct communication between towns and states like Kuala Kangsar in Perak with Penang, Klang and Kuala Lumpur, and Selangor and Malacca (Sadka, 1968). By the early 20th century, the communication and information network enabled the Governor to discharge responsibilities in land administration, road and railway construction, public works and organization of the colonial government.

At the turn of the century, tin and rubber made Malaya the richest country in Southeast Asia and this greatly supported the development of the colony (Ryan, 1965). Worldwide, the motor-vehicle industry advanced and this triggered the need for rubber and, as a result, an increase in rubber plantations. Palm oil, an important commodity in Europe, was also needed for the manufacturing of soap, candles, margarine, cooking fat and pharmaceutical products. With industrialization and ongoing development, the use of palm oil in Europe only increased over time. By 1920, Malayan states began exporting high quality palm oil. The development of infrastructure and communications played an important role in easing access to local resources. All these developments brought profit to Malaya amidst a rising demand for land for the rubber plantations and other commodities (Purcell, 1948).

Therefore, it is evident that the early interest of the British in Malaya was to enhance trade and economic prospects. While the British were said to be indifferent to internal administrative matters, they were active in ensuring greater investment and control of the colony for the exploitation of rubber, tin and palm oil, ingredients highly demanded in Europe and the united states. The statistics on the export of commodities and the economic activities of British colonial policy was contained in the reports submitted annually by the information agencies throughout their existence. Following is a discussion of the Malay States

Information Agency and the parallel development of public relations.

4.1. The Federated Malay States Development Agency: 1910- 1911

The Federated Malay States Development Agency, a precursor to the Malay States Information Agency, was launched on October 1, 1910 and situated on Queen Victoria Street (Souket, 2019). The main purpose of the Agency was to provide information on the Malay lands, Malayan products and resources to prospective investors in order to boost land cultivation and trade. It had been proposed to Sir John Anderson, Governor of the Straits Settlements and High Commissioner of the Federated Malay States (1904–1911) earlier that year in March by two unofficial members of the Federal Council: Messrs. Douglas Osborne and J.H. Matthews Robson who were keen on the promotion of the Malay states. They understood that investors were in dire need of information about the colony (High Commissioner Office Malaya, 1911).

According to the Annual Report on the Administration of the Malayan Information Agency for the year 1949, Malaya was the "first of the British dependencies to set up its own Agency in London" to deal with the country's trade, advertise products and furnish relevant information to those connected with the country. The report states that the agency first located in Queen Victoria Street moved to Cannon Street in 1911 and "as the importance of Malaya increased and the scope of the agency's work widened, it was decided to move to a more central position" and a building called Malaya House was purchased in 1927 in Trafalgar Square (Setiausaha Kerajaan Negeri Selangor Pejabat, 1950, p. 1). The agency was credited to have occupied a "worthy place among the group of dominion houses and colonial agencies in the neighborhood" (Setiausaha Kerajaan Negeri Selangor Pejabat, 1950, p. 1).

The Colonial Office was informed that the Agency, was established by the government of the Federated Malay States with the approval of the Secretary of State for the Colonies with the following objectives:

1 To advertise the production and attraction of the states of the Malay Peninsula under British protection;
2 To furnish enquiries interested in the states, or desirous of becoming acquainted with them;
3 To provide information as to the opportunities which they give for investment and the facility for travel and exploration which they have for the tourist or traveller, and
4 To supply (upon payment) publications and maps.

(Setiausaha Kerajaan Negeri Selangor Pejabat, 1924, p. 9)

There were several reasons for establishing the Federated Malay States Development Agency. The first was to encourage investment by providing the necessary resources and assistance (Mills, 2001, p. 226). The Agency was a vehicle used to generate attention to develop and support economic growth in the Federated Malay States. Sir John Anderson had indicated to the Secretary of State, "…. it should not be a commercial agency. But to bring the country prominently under the notice of investors and travellers, (and) with a view to further develop its resources it would need to open up land for commercial cultivation and plantation as the commodities were badly needed in the manufacturing industry in Europe" (Setiausaha Kerajaan Negeri Selangor Pejabat, 1924, p. 6).

The second was to be a central repository of information on Malaya. A room, set aside for the convenience of visitors, contained books, newspapers, maps of various states and government publications to provide information on the Federated Malay States (The F.M.S., 1910, p. 13). It was apparent that one of the Agency's main function was to provide information in the form of a library. Visitors could avail themselves of the materials on Malaya and gain knowledge about the country (e.g. its weather, its geography). At the time, Malaya was an unknown colony and such information was badly needed to increase awareness and encourage the British to visit the colony and encourage investment.

The third reason was for the Agency to create and maintain rapport between the British officers who had served in Malaya and the interested parties in London. The agency was proposed to be run by retired British government servants who had served as residents or resident-generals in the Malay States and therefore, had enough knowledge about the trade and lifestyle in Malaya. The former civil servants in Malaysia who had thorough knowledge about the colony would be able to provide information based on their experience and personal knowledge.

The agency was run by a Board of Advisors, consisting of the Agent, a Deputy Agent, a Publicity Officer and two other officers. Sir William Taylor was appointed as the first Agent and F. J. Ballantyne Dykes, a former Senior Warden of Mines, was appointed Deputy Agent. Sir William Taylor was Resident-General for the Federated Malay States from 1904 to 1910 and shaped the early development of the Agency for ten years from 1910-1920. At a later period, the services of T. H. Reid, a former editor of the Straits Times, was recruited in advertising the Malay States and promoting publicity.

The agency started early to popularise and advertise Malaya to the British Empire by having lectures, writings and posting articles and notices in British papers. This form of media promotion was often handled by the press agent. Besides publicity, the Agency looked into providing information and advice to prospective travellers. It is worth noting that the Agency had already undertaken steps to promote Malaya through the media, a channel that was found to be effective (Setiausaha Kerajaan Negeri Selangor Pejabat, 1921, 1923, 1925). Some of the subjects supported foreign trade of British Malaya, food and labour in British Malaya, gold and tungsten in the Federated Malay States, tin and tin-ore in the Federated Malay States, coconut growing in Malaya, trade expansion in British Malaya, coal in British Malaya and progressive Malay States (Kelantan and Kedah). Information and statistics for articles were also supplied to publicists (such as T.B. Browne Ltd. to illustrate articles on the Malay Peninsula). Articles and writings were sent to London and provincial newspapers like Birmingham daily Press, Daily Chronicle, Daily Telegraph; to professional, commercial and trade publications like British Trade Journal, Journal of Forestry, World's Paper Trade Review and maps and photographic prints for illustrating purposes were also lent to organizations like Foreign Office (News Department) and Norfolk Studios (Setiausaha Kerajaan Negeri Selangor Pejabat, 1923).

In 1911, Sir William Taylor termed the word "Development" as inappropriate and called for a change in name to reflect the role of the Agency. A new name, the 'Malay States Information Agency' was accepted as the new name on July 13, 1911.

4.2. The Malay States Information Agency: 1911-1928

The new office of the Malay States Information Agency at 88 Cannon Street was strategically located near a railway station. It was a busy intersection but officials knew it would be able to attract the attention of potential investors given its strategic location. The windows and walls of the building were decorated with pictures of Malaya depicting rich rubber estates, the art of weeding and tapping, tin mining sites and majestic government buildings. There were also blocks of rubber and samples of tin and tin ore on display in the lobbies. The main reason for this drastic approach to the building and relocation was due to "public interest in the valuable tin mining and agricultural lands in the Peninsula" (Advertising the F.M.S., 1911, p. 7) and the Agency strived to feed the public with rich literature on Malaya.

With the boom in rubber industries and tin production, the principle work of the Agency now centred on commerce and this entailed a call for extensive advertising to promote Malaya. Primarily, most of their activities included conducting interviews from those who enquired on the conditions and resources or providing information to those who were offered employment in Malaya. Many candidates offered positions in the Malayan public service were referred to the Agency for information on Malaya. Thus, most of the work taken up by the Agency focused on providing information related to trade, food and labour, tin and rubber prospects in Malaya. The Agency also focused on promoting emigration to the colonies and, as a result, expanded investment opportunities in the Federated Malay States.

Regular updates on exports (of rubber) from the Federated Malay States were sent to the Agency. The Agency continued with aggressive promotions of Malayan lands and products through agricultural exhibits that were sent from the agriculture departments in the peninsula, exhibitions of tropical products and proposals for prospective industries. As noted in one of the early advertisements, “the soil of the Malay States has only to be tickled with a hoe to laugh with a harvest, while the mineral deposits stand for riches beyond the dreams of avarice, and the climate is such that, with care and prudence in living, Englishmen can readily assimilate themselves to their surroundings” (The Malay States, 1913, p. 2).

The Malay States Information Agency made efforts to popularise the commodities to the British Empire. Malayan pineapples, gambier (a wild shrub used in tanning), coconuts, tin and rubber were presented in various exhibitions. The Rubber Exhibition held in London in July 1914 was assisted by the Department of Agriculture of the Malay States to promote the various forms of rubber products (The Rubber Exhibition, 1914, p. 9).

The advent of the First World War affected the fortunes of Britain and that of the British colonies despite increasing the production of raw materials and providing manpower for an imperial army during the war. It saw the loss of European economic power and the rise of the United States as the world’s leading industrial power. British colonies were imposed with heavy taxes, lower standards of living and raised tariffs on imports and exports; these changes eventually led to the great depression in the late 1920s.

The period immediately after the First World War was in dark contrast to the booming years when the Malay Information Agency was first set up in 1910. During the boom period (1909–1914), many new rubber estates were created. Malaya’s economy which solely depended on tin and rubber in the world market, was hit hard during the post-war depression. The high demand for tin and rubber before the war encouraged increased investments and productions but there was less demand post-war, causing hardship in the colonies. A fall in overseas market demand during the depression period in the 1920s left Malaya with excesses of tin and rubber with prices falling below the cost of production (Jessy, 1961). The year 1929 witnessed an increase in slumps, bankruptcy and unemployment all over the world.

The aftermath of the war saw an imperial government increasingly playing a more active role in managing the colonies, making final decisions, imposing control of all shipments related to tin and rubber and restricting dealings in rubber lands (Mills, 2001). It was obvious that the Malay States Information Agency was not contributing much during this war period. In fact, there was officially no deputy agent hired mainly due to the war in 1914. The main role of the Agency up to the War was focused on general publicity and the furnishing of information to prospective investors. However, during the war years, there was a halt in activities. The Malay States Information Agency was soon to lose its significance after the War as a result of the declining colonial economy. Later with the advent of peace, the agency began furnishing information on products other than rubber and tin.

4.3. The Malay States Information Agency during the depression years

This section traces the changing role of the information agency given the different political and economic scenario. The colony continued to develop as reported by the annual reports which detailed the activities of the information Agency although it was not as active as it was before the war. The FMS government had spent a large amount of money in opening up the country, notably in the building of roads and railways before the war. The information agency’s role being mainly commercial, focused on providing valuable information about the country to investors and prospective officers but, more importantly, to draw capital to the colony. The depression years caused the Agency to reduce its recruitment of officers and strictly chose members who had some form of commercial experience in Malaya because there was a drop in the demand for tin and rubber. However, the global economic condition was later to improve in the late 1930s.

Sir Edward Brockman, former Chief Secretary to FMS from 1911 to 1920, succeeded Sir William Taylor as Agent of the Information Agency in 1920. The depression period and financial inconsistency saw greater control of administration. The press agent was discontinued in 1923 with the deputy agent taking over the functions. The cost of running the Agency was felt by the officers who saw a cut in their bonuses. Hence, the agents who worked under E. L. Brockman only received fixed salaries minus bonuses in 1924 (Setiausaha Kerajaan Negeri Selangor Pejabat, 1925). The activities still continued when H. B. Ellerton, a former District Officer in Kuala Kangsar, succeeded Sir Edward Brockman and spearheaded the agency from 1925 to 1929.

In November 1927, the Malay States Information Agency opened its new office in 57 Charing Cross. The Agency was administered under the direction of a Board consisting of an agent (a retired high official, who is also a member of the board), a deputy agent, a representative of mining interests, a representative of plant interests and a senior member of the FMS service in Malaya. The people who ran the Agency were former British Malayan servants or those who had some form of financial interest or experience in Malaya. An annual report was published every year for the government and the proceedings of the Agency were laid to the Legislative Assembly.

The Agency continued advertising products and attractions of the Malayan states. Other objectives included furnishing enquirers and prospective candidates on investment opportunities and travel experiences, supplying tourists with maps and publications on the natural resources of the Malayan States and finally, providing information on employment prospects and details to those interested. The Agency continued to publish books, maps and contributed articles in newspapers on Malaya and its resources.

The work of the Agency mainly comprised of tasks related to public communication like public relations, advertising and journalism. The Agency included a post for a press agent who arranged for lectures, published articles and notices in British newspapers. The press agent’s role was similar to the role and tasks of a public relation practitioner of today. The press agent was also in charge of producing clippings. Some of the other public relations work undertaken included sending out articles and photographs by the Agency to newspapers and publications with most of the articles focusing on commercial benefits and investment opportunities in Malaya.

The Agency acquired additional functions. Besides the primary objectives of the Agency with trade promotions, the British government promoted education by encouraging Malayans to send their children to schools in the United Kingdom. Hence, caring for the welfare of Malayan students in the United Kingdom was added as its core functions and this was undertaken by three officers.

The information gathered by the Agency was disseminated to various other companies and departments for their use. Information in the form of maps, photographic prints or negatives were lent to companies and publicists for illustration purposes. For example, the *Canadian Newspaper Co.* used maps and photographic prints to illustrate articles on the rubber industry, *the Railway Gazette* carried information to illustrate articles on the Federated Malay States railways and the Foreign Office (News Department) used the information for propaganda purposes. The Agency further helped arrange interviews between prospective travellers and those who had experience living in Malaya such as retired officials. This enabled the travellers to hear and learn from real-life experiences and decide on their prospects in the colony.

During the depression period, advertising in newspapers was discontinued except for occasional advertisements published in the *Times Weekly Edition* and *Trade Supplement* (Setiausaha Kerajaan Negeri Selangor Pejabat, 1921). The economic condition in the Malay states caused friction between the Malay States and the Straits Settlements as both entities fought to obtain more attention from London on the export of their products. Several factors were affecting the British colony after the end of WW1. There were cuts in tin and rubber production due to the low demands in Britain of Malayan products. Hence, information from the Malay States Information Agency on job opportunities and investment was not as significant as before. While there was caution among officials of the Federated Malay States on investment in the colony, the limited demand caused the settlers in the Straits Settlements to claim for a share in the activities of supplying information to Britain. Relationship between the Federated Malay States and the Straits Settlements over trade and investment was not cordial as the latter was very critical of the functions of the Malay States. This friction caught the attention of the British government that undertook to restructure the Malay States Information Agency, eventually leading to the formation of a new information agency, the Malayan Information Agency.

4.4. The Malayan Information Agency: 1928 – 1952

The Association of British Malaya had been against the Malay States Information Agency since its establishment in 1920. This Association actually began when a group of former straits settlers formed the Straits Settlements Association in 1868 to safeguard their commercial and political interests and to represent the Straits Settlements to the British government. The main purpose of the Association of British Malaya was to represent planting, mining and commercial interests in the Malay States. The Straits Settlements were keen to establish an official agency in London to supply commercial and other information along similar lines as the Malay States Information Agency. Based on a proposal, a joint agency was agreed upon, and a new entity was created called the Malayan Information Agency on June 13, 1928. The joint agency was projected to merge the interests that would gain support from both territories and also to establish Singapore and Penang as industrial centres. The agency occupied a building called the 'Malaya House' at Trafalgar Square, London.

The work performed by the Malayan Information Agency (MIA) was similar to that of its preceding institutions. It continued to provide information on business law, on tariffs and trade regulations. In a book it published called "British Malaya", the functions of the Malayan Information Agency was spelt out as "perform(ing) the functions of a Trade Commission for Malaya and look(ing) after the interests of, and furnish(ing) information relating to, the trade of Malaya and especially of its export trade" (LDS, 1930, p. 75). It advertised the products of Malaya by participating in exhibitions. It also furnished general information with regard to the country itself, climate, conditions of living and any other information which may be required by intending residents or tourists.

The administrative structure remained similar to the Malay States Information Agency's, headed by an Agent (V. A. Lowinger) and a Deputy Agent (E. Jago). There were three members in the Advisory Board. All names mentioned had previous experience and residence in Malaya. Lowinger took over from C.W. H. Cochrane in 1932.

MIA promoted rubber, tin and other primary products, but apparently it was able to push through the sales of pineapples in Canada and Britain with the Malayan pineapples accounting for 90% of its trade in London.

The new Agency hosted a number of exhibitions in which the Malayan government participated. Industry fairs and exhibitions boosted trade opportunities in the Malay Peninsula and mainly focused on prospective products besides rubber and tin like pineapples, dammars (also known as dammar gum used in paintings) and palm oil. Some of the exhibitions that the agency participated in included the British Industries Fair, the North-East Coast Exhibition, the International Grocers' Exhibition and the Imperial Fruit Show. The main focus of the Malayan booths in the exhibitions was on promoting the Malayan pineapples that had become a new found favourite in the society. The exhibitions hosted cooking demonstrations, new recipes and promotion of retail firms in Malayan pineapples. As the global economy improved, the Malayan participation in British exhibitions increased (Malayan Information Agency, 1938).

It was also active in promoting Malaya by placing advertisements and sending materials to the press. When faced with the budget cut of 1932, the Agency eliminated placing advertisements in the press and devoted more attention in giving short notes or written articles to the press. As was recorded, it had submitted 119 written pieces to the press in 1926, compared to 250, 330, 390, 395, 381 and 420 writings respectively between 1926–1932 (Malayan Information Agency, 1932). It therefore functioned like a press information department with its Publicity Department meeting the editors in London and also other international editors who wanted information about Malaya.

Consequently, the setting up of the Malayan Information Agency forged a link with the Empire Marketing Board, an agency formed to promote British colonial products and Britain itself to the colonies.

4.5. The Malayan Information Agency and the Empire Marketing Board

The British government's Empire Marketing Board (EMB), set up in 1926 and existing until 1933, was to foresee the empire's economic dominance globally (Rodriguez-Salcedo, 2012) The board had been entirely financed by the United Kingdom government with the main aim to promote the sales of the empire's products, mainly to increase the market for food and raw materials of the dominions and the colonies. The establishment of the Empire Marketing Board marked another development in the imperial history. The British government saw a big advantage if it were to tap into the potential economic might of the colonies. In 1928, the Colonial Office had to deal with 40 dependent governments under its colonial rule, with a population of 50 million people scattered over 2 million square miles of land. The agricultural exports of the colonies amounted to £75,000,000 or £171,000,000 if rubber was included (Prospects of the Oil Palm Industry, 1928, p. 16). More primary products had to be produced to make the empire a better place to trade.

The failure of South American countries to supply raw cotton caused the British government to encourage the growth of cotton in East and West Africa, Sudan, Rhodesia, South Africa, India and British East India for the "spindles and looms of Lancashire" (Progress in British Cotton Growing, 1928, p. 7). There were also instances such as the promotion of rubber products, research on the use of tin and pineapples that the Empire Marketing Board had a hand in.

The role of the Empire Marketing Board was to position the British empire. It was not only to promote the growth of the primary products from the colonies to Britain but also to promote trade within the empire itself. It was helping the British to recognise the value of the empire and the position that it was in. This was made widely known to the general public to generate interest in the affairs of the empire and the central role of London.

The Rubber Growers Association (RGA) had been one of the commercial agents close to the EMB to promote the use of rubber and its products. RGA was established in 1907 to promote its products, in its early years with the Malayan Information Agency and later together with EMB. It described promoting the use of rubber in the empire to its "propagandistic work" (RGAs Coming of Age, 1928, p. 3).

So, while the Malayan States Information Agency was promoting Malayan products to Britain and encouraging British investment, the EMB worked to promote British products in the colonies. Some of the renowned activities organized by the Empire Marketing Board included the organization of patriotic shopping weeks, promotion of wartime appeals, successful EMB- sponsored consumer events like the Belfast

Empire week, the Edinburgh Imperial Exhibition, the Liverpool Commerce and Industry Exhibition, the Cardiff Empire Exhibition and the Norwich Grocers Exhibition, and the organization of a campaign that included the opening of a shop in Glasgow that was tenanted in turns by Scotland, England, Wales and Northern Ireland and by the dominions and the colonies. This shop had cookery demonstrations, food exhibits and displayed empire products (Anthony, 2012).

The Colonial Development Act of 1929 made economic activities and social services dependent on the development of the resources in the colonies. In general, the EMB "was the first governmental marketing organization" that looked into increasing the efficiency of the empire by tailoring to specific target markets through research (Anthony, 2012, p. 46). Britain and the dominions agreed to implement imperial preference, but by October 1, 1933, the EMB was completely dismantled.

The EMB played an important role in promoting Malayan products and Malayan films were regularly featured in the Empire Marketing Board Pavilion Cinema–hall. Film propaganda during this period was taken over by the Empire Marketing Board Film Library. The agency also relied on information related to the market for food products and research from the board. Furthermore, Malaya in particular, was affected by the demise of the EMB as the board had immensely profited the pineapple industry (Our London Letter, 1933, p. 6). Many felt that the Malayan Information Agency was inadequate in its functions and called for a better establishment. Eventually, a Colonial Empire Marketing Board was introduced that worked closely with trade representatives of the colony and the Malayan Information Agency. The Empire Marketing Board staged these activities and facilitated the exhibitions. During this period, the agency also introduced Malayan films that were shown at the Imperial Institute Cinema and North East Coast Exhibition Cinema at Newcastle. There were also plans to air these films in passenger vessels of leading steamship lines.

EMB is often regarded as a predecessor to Britain's contemporary public relations industry (Anthony, 2012; Rodriguez-Salcedo, 2012). Anthony (2012) claims that the professionalism of advertising and trade had provided clear evidence of a movement towards public relations principles. Meanwhile, Rodriguez-Salcedo (2012) points out that the EMB played a significant role in the evolution of government public relations services and was regarded as "the predecessor to the Ministry of Information established during World War II and Central Office of Information" (p. 340) that came later.

4.6. *Moving towards a 'Trade Agency'*

The period 1929–1934 marked the great depression with the greatest economic downturn in the history of the Western industrialized world with high unemployment and financial constraints experienced globally. The Depression years also affected the Unfederated Malay States. Accordingly, the policy based on the principle of "home producers first, empire producers second, and foreign producers last" (Hiroshi & Hitoshi, 1999, p. 195) was projected to increase trade within the empire. There was a suggestion for the participation of the Unfederated Malay States government in the Malayan Information Agency. By 1930, the Malayan Information Agency was involved in promoting the Straits Settlements, the Federated and the Unfederated Malay States.

Subsequently, the activities of the Malayan Information Agency changed. The agency's primary object of advertising the Federated Malay States was mainly due to the rubber boom and need to increase flow of capital to the rubber industry in the early part of the century. With the Ottawa conference held between July 21- August 20, 1932, the focus moved towards trade and the agency focused on providing statistical reports on trade. Thus, the Malayan Information Agency became more of a 'trade agency' and most of its recorded work concentrated on tin restriction and the research organization dealing with tin. It also promoted the sales of pineapples, copra, rubber and tin. It championed making known research on tin as it published the outcome of the International Tin Research and Development Council (Big Plans for in Research, 1949, p. 8).

The Agency continued to provide statistics and information for the purpose of trade and report. The 1947 Report of the Malayan Information Agency by the then Agent, Sir Geoffrey Cator, said Malayan exports of rubber in 1947 was 640,000 tons, beating the previous year's export record. The export of rubber was to meet the demands in the United Kingdom for tyres, tubes, flooring and other domestic use. According to the agency's reports, there was increased sales in palm oil and coconuts with intensive campaigns directed at rubber consumers in the United States (New Big Market for Rubber in Sight, 1948, p. 5).

V. A. Lowinger as Agent in 1932 described his role in the Malayan Information Agency during this period as a trade commissioner focused on channelling information. In the following years, the agency performed as a trade commission overseeing the production of tin and rubber. The period recorded strong efforts made by British producers of various products (like canned pineapples) to secure tariff protection against overseas producers. Under the Publicity Department, there were a few monthly contributions made to the press with articles furnished on Malayan trade figures to mainly 40 newspapers and journals of the time. Besides that, the agency continued its role to provide information to journalists and newspaper offices. The agency produced educational films to be distributed to government agencies, but by 1930, the making of all films was taken over by the Empire Marketing Board Film Library. The films were shown in all 50 cinema houses (Malayan Information Agency, 1932).

In 1939, Sir Geoffrey succeeded Lowinger as Agent to the Malayan Information Agency. He had served as the British Resident of Selangor (1932–1933) and British Resident of Perak (1933–1939) before his retirement in 1939. On September 19, 1939, with the outbreak of World War Two, it was agreed that the Malayan Information Agency be placed at the disposal of the government for war purposes. Not many activities were recorded during this period. W. A. Ward succeeded as the Agent to spearhead the Malayan Information Agency on May 1, 1948. The political situation had since changed with all states placed under the banner of the Federation of Malaya in 1948.

The Japanese had occupied Malaya during World War II. After the liberation of Malaya, together with the Straits Settlements and the Unfederated Malay States, the four protected states formed the Malayan Union. The federal formation of the government was subsequently used as a model for consolidating the independent Federation of Malaya in 1948 and later evolved into Malaysia in 1963, with the inclusion of Sabah (North Borneo), Sarawak and Singapore.

Meanwhile, the work of the Agency was reorganised along the lines of a trade commissioner's office. In 1952, the title 'Agent' was abolished and the officer-in-charge was designated as 'the Commissioner for Malaya in the United Kingdom' and the 'Deputy Agent' became 'the Trade Commissioner for Malaya in the United Kingdom'. The Malayan Information Agency at the same time became 'the Office of the Commissioner for Malaya in the United Kingdom' while the premises retained the name of 'Malaya House' (Report of the Administration of the Office of the Commissioner for Malaya in the United Kingdom for year 1954, 1942). The first Commissioner to London was YM Raja Sir Tun Uda bin Raja Muhamad who served from July 1, 1953 to October 16, 1954 (The Sultan gives his consent, 30th January 1953). During his period, F. J. A. Sullivan was appointed as Information Officer to the Commissioner for Malaya and he opened an information office in Malaya House (Information officer for Malaya in UK, 1953, p. 7). The succeeding commissioner was Dato' Othman bin Mohamad who served from October 16, 1954 until July 5, 1957. The lineage supported by this study is presented in the figure below (Fig. 1).

5. Conclusion

The Malayan Information Agency first established in 1910 and continuing until its ending in 1957, projected the image of Malaya to

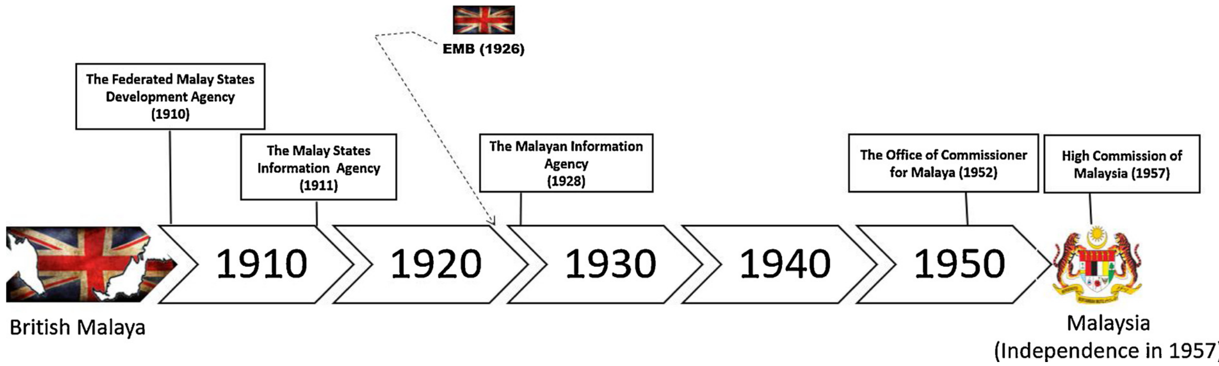

Fig. 1. Lineage of the Malayan Information Agency.

Britain and the Empire. In 1930, the Unfederated Malay States joined the Malayan Information Agency, thus making the Agency a representative of the three political entities that included the Straits Settlements, the Federated Malay States and the Unfederated Malay States in the Malay Peninsula. In 1952, it was styled as a trade agency.

The political situation was instrumental in the setting up of the agencies. The various information agencies provided information on all matters about Malaya but were more focused on trade and investment. As government entities, they were funded by the Federated Malay States and later, jointly by the Straits Settlements until the existence of the government of the Federation of Malaya. The reports were closely scrutinised in the Legislative Assembly.

The functions of the Agency in 1910 were broader compared to the functions of the Malayan Information Agency. Politics and economics had changed, making the agency in 1930 more focused on making Malaya part of the British Empire. Solely promoting Malaya to the British was replaced with promoting Malaya within a bigger political context. With the First and Second World Wars, the information agencies enjoined Malaya in a larger economic and trade imperial network.

The information agencies were public relations entities, providing information to the general public and making their presence felt by the materials written in the local and international press. They issued press releases and convened press conferences. They also organised exhibitions and in later years, collaborated with the Empire Marketing Board, to have joint exhibitions to showcase Malaya's commodities to be exported to other British colonies.

The agencies made their presence felt in government administration, with the press and with the general public. Malayan products, especially rubber, pineapple and tin, were promoted to the British and likewise, British adults and schoolchildren were exposed to the literature on Malaya as a place to visit and do trade. There were inquiries on business law, on tariffs and trade regulations. People were keen to borrow slides and photographs for their lectures (Many UK Inquiries about Malaya, 1947).

New officers wanting to take up positions in Malaya would visit the agencies to be enlightened on the cost of living, the weather and the culture of the people. The agencies were headed by agents, who in all cases, were former Malayan civil servants, whose personal knowledge and experience of Malaya added confidence that the agencies were providing credible information. Even small incidents were reported in the British and Malayan press as the agencies had the expertise to make them newsworthy.

It enjoyed a good relationship with the Empire Marketing Board that was set up by the British government in 1926 to promote trade within the empire. It shows that Malayan public relations in the early 20th century was driven by political and economic factors and in, the later stage, to be propagandistic.

Public relations in Malaysia can only be understood when envisaged within the context of British imperial history. The documents obtained from the National Archive and the numerous press reports provided another perspective on the beginning of public relations in Malaysia by linking it with British Malaya and Colonial Policy. Other scholars (Adnan, 1985; Nordin, 1986) had their own perspectives on the beginning of public relations as they saw it. But empirical documents provided a strong stand that Malaysian public relations was practiced since 1910, with the setting up of the Malayan Information Agency.

Declaration of Competing Interest

None.

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