

14 Thailand and Beyond

Just as today, around 1900 China's immense population was looked upon in the West as a huge potential consumer market; making China a promising destination for exports and for money to invest; especially, some reasoned, after economic development would give rise to a large group of Chinese having money to spend (Chambre 1898a: 450-1). It was thought that building up an infrastructure, in particular the promised construction of railways, would produce big profits and would greatly facilitate trade. Foreigners were also eager to exploit China's natural resources. One of the regions where competition between the powers became intense was southern China. Having reached a stalemate in Thailand, the Anglo-French rivalry came to focus on Guangxi (Kwangsi), Guangdong (Kwantung) and Yunnan; three Chinese provinces, Lanessan (1895: 109) concluded in 1895, with which French trade was still very small. A fourth commercial target lay more to the north, in Sichuan, thought to be one of the richest provinces of China.¹ Access to Sichuan was easier from the east along the Yangtze River than from the south, though it took until 1898 when a small British steamer succeeded in sailing upriver as far as Chongqing. Nevertheless, the French were still hoping that they might beat the British there. One of the aims of the Lyon mission was to investigate whether the province could be incorporated into the 'direct commercial or political sphere of influence' of France (Chambre 1898: vii; Morrison 1895: 72, 149; Colquhoun 1902: 389). At that moment much still had to be done. French China trade was still predominantly characterised by imports from and not exports to that country, and the number of people on the spot who could introduce French products was still small; indeed, according to the Lyon mission, 'very small' (Chambre 1898a: 444-8).

The British felt that due to their position in Hong Kong Guangxi, Guangdong and Yunnan, or as it was sometimes also phrased the West River valley, should be theirs when spheres of influence had to be delineated. As Beresford (1899: 477) exclaimed on one of the last pages of his book, if any nation had 'any reasonable claim to exclusive influence' there, it was Great Britain. Beresford (1899: 323) also claimed Sichuan for the British by including it in the Yangtze provinces. What drove him to do so was an encounter with French railway surveyors in Sichuan who had told him that should a

1 Yet another province occasionally popping up in the Anglo-French rivalry in the south was Guizhou (Kweichow), in between Guangxi and Sichuan.

Figure 17 French Indochina at the turn of the century



Source: Doumer 1905

division in spheres of influence in China become a reality Sichuan would fall within that of France. Rivalry, or rather British suspicion, extended to Portuguese Macau, close to Hong Kong, where the British tried to prevent Frenchmen from acquiring property (Cunningham 1902: 32-3).

Figuring prominently in Franco-British rivalry over trade with south China was Yunnan, bordering in the south with French Indochina and in the west with British Burma. In the 1890s Yunnan was still impoverished after the Islamic rebellion of years before and its ruthless suppression by Beijing. Westerners could only guess at the size of its population with estimates ranging from four to twelve million (Chambre 1898a: 129). This did not deter those pleading enthusiastically for the opening up of the province. They were sure that recovery had set in, and that potentially Yunnan was among the richest regions in China with good trading prospects and abundant natural resources. There was also fierce competition regarding access to the Xi or West River (Sikiang, Si Kiang, Xi Jiang), which with its tributaries was the pre-eminent waterway of south China. Rising in Yunnan and running through Guangxi and Guangdong, it empties into the South China Sea near Chinese Guangzhou, British Hong Kong, Portuguese Macau and Taiwan (Japanese since 1895). What struck contemporary observers was that the Treaty of Shimonoseki of April 1895 had not mentioned allowing trade by foreigners in the cities along the West River. Opening up the West River had been one of Tokyo's demands, but had not been included in the peace treaty. The culprit, people were sure, was France, with its own plans for gaining preponderance in southern China. The French wanted the West River to remain closed to trade by foreigners, not looking forward to challenges to their own gateways into south China.

Trade with Yunnan and the rest of south China had been on the British and French agenda for decades; that is trade by European merchants and preferably in larger quantities; goods already found their way to and from China by local trading networks. And, when he steamed up the Red River in 1877, the French consul in Hanoi must have been unpleasantly surprised to see that 'Manchester goods from Burmah ... were being freely exchanged for the produce of the local mines' (Norman 1884: 186). Commercial ambitions had inspired the Mekong expedition by Doudart de Lagrée and Francis Garnier in 1866; while trade with southern China had been a main reason – if not the only one – for the occupation of Tonkin, and was presented as such in the negotiations with the British government to persuade the latter not to deny France that trade (Chandran 1971a: 21).

The British had not stayed behind. A British expedition headed by Edward Bosc Sladen traversed Yunnan in 1868. In 1874 the combined pressure

of the advance of France in continental Southeast Asia and a lobby of British commercial interest seeking to promote trade between Lower Burma and China resulted in a second expedition, this time headed by Colonel Horace A. Browne (Bugrava n.d.: 3). It had, the Under-Secretary of State for India, George Hamilton, explained, 'to report upon the trades, routes, and prospects of trade between Burmah and Western China'.² The expedition had the approval of Beijing but took place at an unfortunate moment when China had just re-established its authority over Yunnan. Consisting of some fifty men and guarded by Burmese soldiers, the expedition experienced a sorry fate. In February 1875, just after Browne had crossed the Burmese-Chinese border, his interpreter-to-be Augustus Raymond Margary and five other members of his staff on their way from Shanghai to join the expedition were murdered in south Yunnan. Margary would be honoured with a monument in Shanghai. When the main body was also attacked the expedition was discontinued and its members returned to Burma. The prospect of London demanding redress from Beijing rekindled French efforts to have China allow foreign traffic on the Chinese part of the Red River.³ Great Britain would use the incident to enforce the Yantai (Chefoo) Convention of 1876 upon China. The convention was negotiated in Tianjin with gunboats at the ready nearby along the coast of the Bohai Sea in order to strengthen the British position. The outcome was like other treaties before and after. Beijing was forced to pay an indemnity, send an official delegation to London to apologise for what had happened in Yunnan, and open yet more ports to trade by foreigners.

The Race for Yunnan

The Anglo-French Declaration accelerated what was dubbed the 'Race for Yunnan' (Chandran 1971a: 37). Inspired by political motives and over-optimistic expectations about trading prospects, Great Britain and France tried to extend their commercial presence in Yunnan and the rest of south China. In their quest they had to face a reluctant Chinese government, refusing to throw open the country to trade by foreigners, at times a hostile, if not xenophobic, population and local officials equally opposed to Western penetration. For Great Britain the security of India was an additional

2 Hamilton in House of Commons 12-7-1875 (hansard.millbanksystems.com/commons/1875/jul/12/india-burmah-and-western-china-question).

3 Decazes to Rochechouart 3-7-1875 (cited in Norman 1884: 164).

motive. For the French the intention to keep the British out of most of southern China and to gain special privileges for itself there were just as important incentives. Even Haas, the former French Chargé d'Affaires in Mandalay, had a role to play. In 1894 he re-emerged in British sight as French consul in Chongqing in China, assigned with the task of redirecting trade from Sichuan via Yunnan to Tonkin, away from the Yangtze River. Being an Australian, Morrison (1895: 42, 149), who met him in Chongqing, did not give Haas much chance of success. He noted that 'no man can venture to assert that any other trade route [to Sichuan] can exist, than the River Yangtse; and all the French commissioners in the world can no more alter the natural course of this trade than they can change the channel of the Yangtse itself'.

In March 1894 Great Britain and China had concluded the Convention relative to Burmah and China. Meung Lem and Keng Hung had gone to China as part of the negotiations and London 'wishing to encourage and develop land trade of China with Burmah as much as possible' and Beijing had forged an agreement on duty-free trade between China and Burma.⁴ Despite this, the British were at a disadvantage, a fact the French were well aware of and relished; all the more so as they believed that the Red River ran through the richest and most populous part of Yunnan (Chambre 1898a: 114). As the traveller Morrison (1895: 148) observed: Yunnan City was 'within easy access at all seasons of the year of the French colony of Tonquin, whereas the trade route from here to Burma is long, arduous, and mountainous, and in its Western portion is closed to traffic during rains'. Another asset for the French – but this was a recent one – were their local representatives. Cunningham (1902: 27-9) wrote about 'ambitious and clever consular agents', the kind of officials that many a merchant complained the British were lacking in the Far East. British consular staff in south China were 'often inexperienced and weak', or, a more general evaluation suggests, were not good at bullying Chinese officials (*ibid.*: 191; Neville and Bell 1898: 337-8).

Another setback for the British was that just a few months before the Anglo-French Declaration of January 1896 was signed the French had scored two important diplomatic successes. Following the agreements of April 1886 and June 1887 with China, two complementary conventions were agreed on in June 1895, only months after the Treaty of Shimonoseki had been concluded; one on the frontier between Tonkin and China and one on commercial relations. They were a reward for – or were at least facilitated

4 The Convention between Great Britain and China relative to Burmah and China of March 1894, Art. VIII. An exception was made for the export of salt to Burma and of rice to China.

by – the French support to China in its conflict with Japan. In the first convention China, in contravention of what Beijing had promised London little more than a year before, handed over a portion of Keng Hung – the districts of Muang U and U Tai – to France.⁵ In London it was speculated that China had not wanted to, but had yielded to joint Franco-Russian pressure, and perhaps also to that of Germany.⁶ London protested in Beijing and Paris, where the treaty was defended at that time as a countermove to the British occupation of Mong Sing in May (Chandran 1977: 149-50).

Equally unfavourable to British interests was the new Franco-Chinese commercial agreement signed on the same day.⁷ In it France gained a number of important concessions. One was that it would be allowed to extend its still non-existent Indochina rail network into south China providing that China would indeed decide to build railways there.⁸ China also promised to turn to French engineers first for the exploitation of mines in Yunnan, Guangxi and Guangdong. Furthermore, it caused an outcry in Great Britain when a number of places in these provinces were opened to French trade and that in two towns France could station a representative: a consular agent in Tong-hing in Guangdong and a consul in Szemao (Simao, Se-mao) in Yunnan, a city that also figured in British plans to expand China trade. The right of France to station a consul in a third city, Mengtze, near the Tonkin border, in Yunnan, was reconfirmed. The convention was a real coup. It not only offered France special economic prospects at the cost of the British, but the treaty also raised British fear that Yunnan might end up within the French sphere of influence. Should this happen, some feared, France could well cut the communication, difficult as this in reality might have been, between British Burma and the Yangtze Valley (Chandran 1977: 176).

The trade convention called for a British reaction. Its railway concession prompted the British to speed up plans advanced by the Indian government to extend the railroad between Rangoon and Mandalay to the Yunnan frontier. The commercial and military advantages were thought to be evident. The line would 'attract a large part of the trade from south China'

5 Complementary Convention to the Convention Delimiting the Frontier between Tonkin and China of 26 June 1887 signed in Beijing, 20-6-1895 (www.chinaforeignrelations.net/node/169).

6 Dilke in House of Commons 8-2-1898 (hansard.millbanksystems.com/commons/1898/feb/08/address-in-answer-to-her-majestys-most-gracious-speech).

7 Complementary Convention to the Supplementary Convention of 26 June 1887 signed in Beijing 20-6-1895 (www.chinaforeignrelations.net/node/168).

8 In June 1897, Beijing would even promise the French that they might go as far as Kunming, the capital of Yunnan. In December 1898 the French Government would officially endorse plans for such a line; at that moment still awaiting an official Chinese concession.

and would allow the Indian Army 'to place troops on the Upper Mekong more quickly than the French'.⁹ The terminus selected was Kunlong Ferry. Having decided on this earlier, China had been forced to formally accept that the city was on Burmese territory in the Convention between Great Britain and China relative to Burmah and China of March 1894 (Chandran 1971a: 11). In November 1895, the decision was taken to build a line between Mandalay and Kunlong Ferry. For the business community it was only the beginning. They wanted a line into Yunnan (and the idea was, running from there to Sichuan, and to the Yangtze Valley and Shanghai), but met with a reluctant government, in London as well as in India.

In the political sphere, London demanded from the French government that it accept that Great Britain should be allowed the same concession in south China that France had acquired. Paris could agree but only where it concerned Yunnan and only when the province of Sichuan was included in the deal of equal commercial rights and privileges, and certainly not in Guangxi. In January 1896, London and Paris came to an understanding. In the Anglo-French Declaration in which London and Paris settled their dispute over Thailand an article was included stating that 'all commercial and other privileges and advantages conceded in the two Chinese provinces of Yunnan and Sichuan either to France or Great Britain ... shall, as far as rests with them, be extended and rendered common to both Powers'. London and Paris promised that they would 'engage their influence and good offices with the Chinese Government for this purpose'.¹⁰ The French had won the day. Their concession had been trivial. People in Great Britain were not satisfied. The cities in Yunnan where France had given up its exclusive trading rights were close to the Tonkin frontier, and thus within easier reach of French than of British commerce.¹¹

The 1896 accord regarding Thailand did little to improve Anglo-French relations, which remained delicate as a similar rapprochement could not be reached regarding Africa, where three of the trouble spots were Egypt, Niger and the Sudan. In particular, Sudan – culminating in the Fashoda (present-day Kodok) crisis of 1898 – made, as Grupp (1980: 115) phrases it, for a 'wave of nationalism' in France when, after months of an intensified patriotic, even bellicose, mood on both sides of the Channel, Great Britain

9 Elgin to Hamilton 30-7-1895 (cited in Chandran 1971a: 18), Government of India to Hamilton 30-7-1895 (cited in Chandran 1977: 177).

10 Anglo-French Declaration 15 January 1896, Art. IV (see, for instance, Chandran 1977: 350-1).

11 Reginald McKenna in House of Commons 27-3-1896 (hansard.millbanksystems.com/commons/1896/mar/27/france-and-siam).

showed its teeth and France had to back down. These conflicts over Africa intensified anti-British feelings in France. Since 1815 it was asserted by one author, Great Britain had never failed to oppose any effort by France to expand its overseas territories. The British had done so by showing their displeasure, with polemics in the press or criticism in Parliament, and with diplomatic protests. At times, they had also given the impression that they would not shy away from war to restrain the French (Darcy 1904: 1). It was Great Britain's destiny to 'fight all powers which wanted to have ports, big ships and colonies' (Darcy 1904: 19). Such sentiments made expansionists of the *parti colonial* plead for a kind of 'colonial entente' (Grupp 1980: 120), a French, Russian, German cooperation. Other reactions included expressions of *schadenfreude* when Germany got the better of Great Britain (Grupp 1980: 70, 102-7).

China was caught in-between. It was 'being bullied whilst she is down', having to suffer the 'bullying expedient of claims and counter-claims', Beresford (1899: 438-9) wrote. A chain reaction was set in motion. London demanded additional concessions from China for the promises it had made to France (and occasionally also to Russia in the north), and once these were given – or were going to be granted – it was the turn of Paris to lean on the Chinese government to gain some advantages. Confronted with British and French pressure, it seemed that Beijing was more afraid of France, which could always bring into play its Dual Alliance partner, Russia (where plans for a railway line connecting the Trans-Siberian Railway with Yunnan and Tibet were considered) (Snow 1994: 363).

London also had to settle a score with China. The Franco-Chinese agreement of June 1895 about the frontier between Indochina and China had whetted the territorial appetite of the British, seeing in the supplementary convention a good opportunity for a favourable adjustment of the border between Burma and China. Indignant British politicians decided that China had to pay for breaching the Convention between Great Britain and China relative to Burmah and China of March 1894. Salisbury even suggested a 'large-scale' modification of the frontier (Chandran 1977: 183).

At the end of January 1896, shortly after the Anglo-French Declaration, Great Britain succeeded in soliciting a promise from Beijing that the West River would be opened up to trade by foreigners. How far inland this would be would play a part in the negotiations over the Burmese-Chinese frontier, and the adjustments London wanted to make to the Convention of 1894. Great Britain was prepared to abate its territorial demands in return for the West River being opened up. China tried to make the best of the importance attached by the British to the river, suggesting that London should abandon

any territorial claim it had along the Burmese border (Chandran 1977: 233-4). At the same time, fearing what Curzon dubbed 'French susceptibilities', China was determined to make the final agreement with Great Britain the least offensive as possible to Paris. It did so by keeping a number of cities along the river, and especially the important port of Nanning, closed to foreign trade.¹²

Another British target was Kokang, yet another Shan state, considered by London to be a tributary of Burma and of special importance, located as it was just beyond Kunlong Ferry, the terminus of the railway planned for the Yunnan frontier. With railways and railway stations considered strategic assets and prime objects of foreign aggression, Kokang was seen by the British India Office as being of great value as a forward defence against a Chinese attack, should it come to an armed conflict between the two.¹³ Indeed, such importance was attached to Kokang that Salisbury was even prepared to send in troops to underscore that it was British territory; though he deemed an opening up of the West River even more urgent, overriding any claim to Kokang (Chandran 1977: 241, 244).

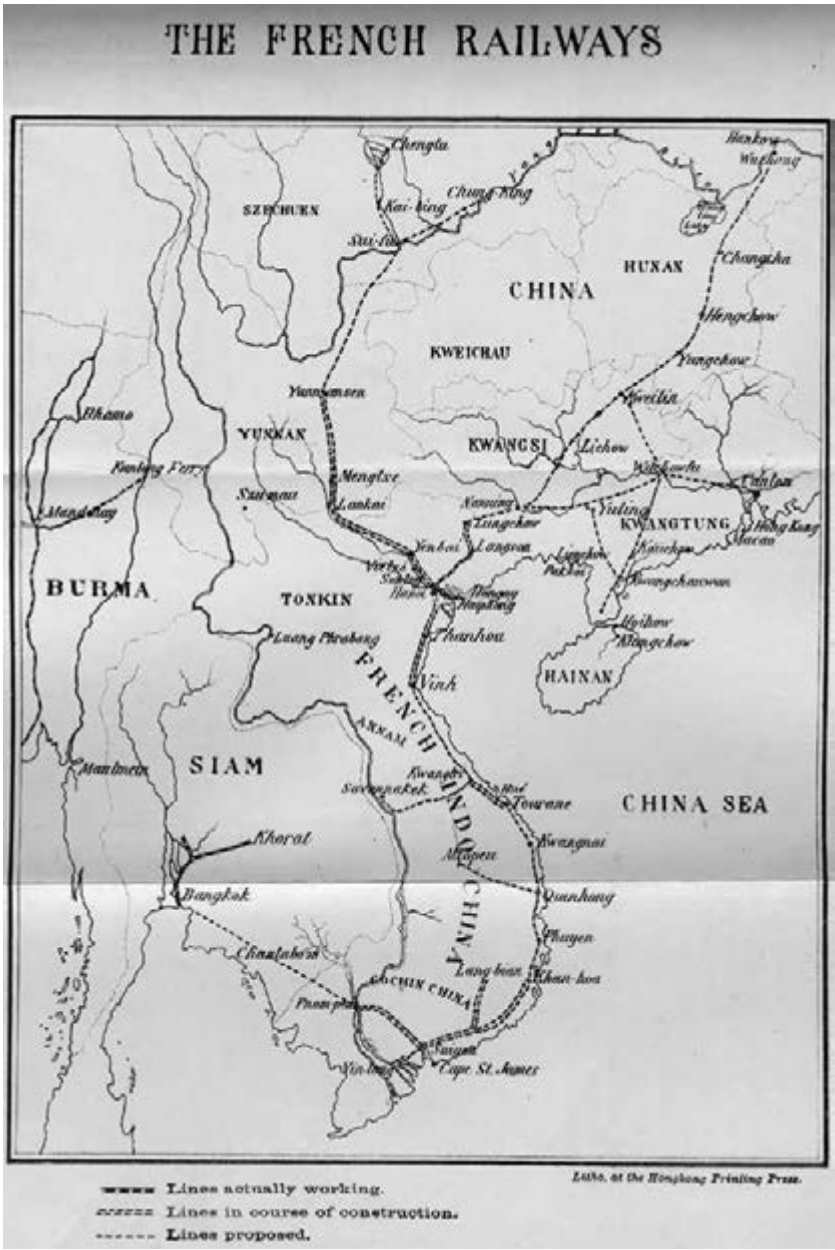
In February 1897 the Anglo-Chinese Agreement modifying the 1894 Convention was signed. In the preamble, London stated that it wanted 'to waive its objections' to part of Keng Hung becoming French (Agreement 1897: 1). China had to pay a price. Kokang – which in 1894 London and Beijing had still agreed belonged to China – became British, Great Britain was allowed to station a consul in Szemao, while Beijing also pledged to investigate whether 'conditions of trade' warranted the construction of railways in Yunnan and, if so, connect them with the Burmese railway system (*ibid.*: 4). In addition, Great Britain leased perpetually a small, triangle-shaped piece of land, about half-way between Bhamo and Kunlong Ferry, protruding into Burma. In this so-called Namwan Assigned Tract, China would 'not exercise any jurisdiction or authority whatsoever' (*ibid.*: 2). The rent was to be fixed at a later date. China, Curzon was to state a year later defending the decision to allow China to hand over part of Keng Hung to France, had paid 'liberally' for its mistake. Great Britain had 'secured a very substantial increase' of its interests and 'the opening up of great waterways'.¹⁴ In spite of these words, the treaty did not bring London what it might have expected. Some, like Morrison (1895: 239), were sure that Great Britain could easily

12 Memorandum by Curzon 8-12-1896 (cited in Chandran 1977: 247).

13 Hamilton to Salisbury 28-4-1896 (Chandran 1977: 240).

14 Curzon in House of Commons 8-2-1898 (hansard.millbanksystems.com/commons/1898/feb/address-in-answer-to-her-majestys-most-gracious-speech).

Figure 18 French railway plans and the projected British Mandalay-Kunlong Ferry line



Source: Cunningham 1902

have gained more, weakened as China was by its war with Japan. The new agreement mentioned the opening of the West River, but only up to Wuchou in eastern Guangxi, which left Nanning, one of London's main objectives, closed to trade by the British.¹⁵ Allowing trade by foreigners would also not bring what the British might have expected. A report by the Chamber of Commerce of Blackburn of 1898 noted that since 1885 import trade to Yunnan had 'almost entirely shifted' from the West River to the 'Tonkin route'. The Blackburn Chamber of Commerce attributed this 'revolution' to 'the energy of the French in vigorously enforcing on the Chinese Government their right to transit passes', an achievement that also benefitted British trade imported via the Red River (Bourne 1898: 87). Such transit passes made imports and exports, for which duties had been paid at the Chinese Imperial Maritime Customs, exempt from the many additional local taxes or *likin* levied inland. Trade from and to Burma could not compete with this. The British had not succeeded in getting rid of such additional taxes imposed along the way, in spite of the fact that transit passes made these illegal.

Beijing also promised that if the Chinese were to construct railways in Yunnan the network would be linked with a Burmese line (a gesture presented as fitting compensation for the railway concessions Beijing had made in the north to Russia). Nanning remained high on the British agenda and was raised each time when new talks were started, whether this concerned conditions for loans to China, such as in March 1898, or concessions for China ceding territory to Russia and France; Beijing, fearing the French reaction if it consented, dragged its feet.

Keng Hung and Meung Lem continued to be Chinese, but once again China had to promise not to cede any of its territory without prior British consent. The British would not build their railway into China. The costs were too high, the terrain too difficult, and doubts were voiced about the trading prospects of Yunnan and Sichuan. Now, it was stressed that Yunnan was 'thinly populated and very malarious' and that Szemao was 'of no commercial value' (Chandran 1971a: 61, 67, 82). Responsible for the decision to stop work was Curzon, Viceroy of India since January 1899. Initially, he had been prepared to give railway plans the go-ahead, mainly to avoid rubbing up the British Chambers of Commerce the wrong way. Later he became more resolute, preferring the money required to be invested in Burma and India and speaking out against a railway into China (Chandran 1977: 282, 285; Cunningham 1902: 105). Work was discontinued about two years after

15 As compensation for the opening up of the West River, France gained permission to extend the railway connection to Lungchow to Nanning.

Curzon became Indian Viceroy. The projected line would not even reach Kunlong Ferry and would only run to Lashio. Should some still hope that construction would be resumed, Curzon made crystal clear what he thought about the project when he addressed the Chamber of Commerce in Rangoon in December 1901. He called it 'midsummer madness' to assume that 'the wealth of Szechuan would stream down a single metre-gauge line, many miles of which would lie over mountains, to Rangoon, while great arterial rivers flow through the heart of Szechuan itself, which are quite competent to convey its trade to and from the sea' (Chandran 1971a: 96).

An ambitious Governor-General

A year after the signing of the Anglo-French Declaration a person entered the scene who could upset the delicate balance in continental Southeast Asia and the adjacent part of China. It was J.A.P. Doumer, Governor-General of Indochina from 1897 to 1902 (and future President of France). His ambitions went further than those of most politicians in France. In his efforts to strengthen the French position in the Far East, Paul Doumer could count on the support of fellow expansionists (and towards the end of his term as Governor-General also on that of the Comité de l'Asie française, founded in 1901 by Étienne and of which Ferry was one of leading members). However, as he himself would sketch out a few years later, at the time he left for Indochina their lobby had not succeeded in turning around the hostile attitude of 'politicians' and the press towards pressing on in Asia (Doumer 1905: 3). It did not put him off. Almost immediately after his arrival Doumer embarked upon what one contemporary British author, Cunningham (1902: 104, 184), a journalist from Hong Kong – and who in his travel account called upon the British not to underestimate the French doings in southern China – characterised as an 'ambitious programme ... for commercial and political conquest' of southern China. Doumer was depicted as an 'ambitious, clever and energetic official'.

Doumer was certainly energetic. Being a former Minister of Finance, money and the budget of Indochina were his key concerns. Realising that the light protectorates of Cambodia and Annam had brought the French almost no economic gains and little real influence in the interior, and that an unruly Tonkin cost the French much more than it yielded, he immediately carried out reforms (Doumer 1905: 154, 234, 286). In June 1897 an administrative reorganisation was implemented in Tonkin. Subsequently, on 11 July, Doumer concluded a new treaty with Cambodia, greatly increasing France's

Figure 19 Doumer arrives at the inauguration of the International Trade Exhibition organized by him, Hanoi 1902



Source: Cunningham 1902

direct control over Cambodian affairs and allowing French citizens and companies to buy land. His instructions to French colonial civil servants in Cambodia captured what he had in mind for the whole of Indochina: 'Build roads, dig canals ... plan and construct railways, [improve] the great arteries of navigation' (ibid.: 244). His resolution must have been infectious. In 1902 the French Chief Resident of Cambodia wrote about its agricultural products being among the best of Indochina, and the excellent prospects for forestry and mining (ibid.: 245). Finally, in September 1897, Annam had to accept a greater French say in the running of the protectorate and its income, and the right of Frenchmen to own land.

With the same vigour as he had tackled the reorganisation of the administration of Indochina, Doumer set out to advance French influence in Thailand and south China, finding ways to circumvent Paris' reluctance to act. It was due to his efforts, he was convinced, that the impression gained ground that French consuls and agents in south China acted more resolutely and were better equipped for their job than their British counterparts. Money provided from the Indochina budget had seen to it that French representatives, receiving insufficient funds from the mother country, 'could cut a better figure and work more fruitfully' than the British, Doumer (1905: 377-8) wrote. After Indochina had started to earn money, that is after 1898, Doumer took steps to improve the French presence in Thailand and south China by supporting and expanding the activities of the representatives

of the French government there, also in the scholarly field. Moreover, he saw to it that the French living and working there presented a friendly face; instructing those he sent to Yunnan to establish cordial relations with the population and the local officials. To reach out to the population in south China and Thailand, French hospitals and medical posts were set up providing free medical care. Chinese children received free education at schools where, among other subjects, they were taught French¹⁶ (*ibid.*: 378–81).

Doumer was also a railwayman, emphasising that French products and French influence travelled along the railways (*ibid.*: 378). When he arrived in Indochina it had already become clear, also to Doumer, that the Red River was not such an easy waterway to navigate with steamers as had been assumed in the days of Dupuis and Dupré. On its own it could not serve the aim of opening up south China to commerce from Vietnam and outdo the Yangtze route. Doumer revived plans that had been dormant for some years and had already been mulled over by Garnier, at least since 1873, for reaching Yunnan by rail; a venture that Doumer considered to be as politically important as it was economically significant (Norman 1884: 101; Doumer 1905: 330). In December 1897, within a year of taking up his post, Doumer had a proposal ready for a railway network in Indochina and for what he invariably called railways or lines of penetration into China (and via Phnom Phen and Battambang into Thailand, to stimulate trade that up to then had been almost absent) (*ibid.*: 346). The aim was to connect Tonkin with Kunming (Yunnanfu, Yunnan-Sen), though Doumer aimed at more, at links with Sichuan and the treaty port of Hankou (Hankow, part of present-day Wuhan) on the Yangtze (Cunningham 1902: 125, 133; Chandran 1977: 289). In the long run, these railways should turn Haiphong into a big seaport, which some dreamt – but they were exceptions – would surpass Hong Kong (Neton 1904: 239). In presenting his plans Doumer made much of the railway in Burma that the British were building in their effort to open up Yunnan and Sichuan, provinces which he stressed should be ‘reserved for our commercial penetration’. If France wanted to emerge victorious from the ‘peaceful contest’ with Great Britain it should start by constructing a railway network in Indochina that could serve as the starting point for ‘the penetration of China’ (Doumer 1905: 326). What Doumer had in mind did

16 Doumer was also responsible for what Cunningham (1902: 28) described as ‘a very aggressive post-office’ in Canton and for two shipping lines, one from Guangzhou to Hong Kong and one from Guangzhou up the West River, both established also with the intention to show the French flag in regions where it had hardly been seen before (Doumer 1905: 378).

not stop at trade and political influence. Sparsely populated and with a climate that suited Europeans much more than that of Indochina, Yunnan was a region where 'our race' could establish itself. French settlers, farmers, planters, cattlemen – all could go there. French civilisation in Indochina, and its place in that part of the Far East, would be secure (*ibid.*: 339).

As had been the case elsewhere, some assessments were hyper-optimistic. French officers surveying Yunnan would report a 'salubrious' region with 'an enormous plateau yielding three harvests of rice annually', and a 'laborious and peaceful' population. It also had minerals and coal and promised 'a great market ... for European goods' (Cunningham 1902: 132). Others, among them the well-known economist and student of colonialism P.P. Leroy-Beaulieu, questioned the feasibility of the rail line; disqualifying the markets it was to serve as poor (*ibid.*: 148). Optimism – and Doumer's persistence – won the day. In France a convention to allow for a railway to Kunming was signed in April 1898, explicitly keeping open the possibility of an extension. Doumer's only disappointment must have been that Paris did not allow Indochina itself to take on construction and exploitation of the line, but wanted a special company to be in charge. In September 1898 Doumer, who wanted his railway scheme executed as soon as possible, travelled to France to convince the government of its urgency and to attract investors. The commotion caused by Fashoda, the Dreyfus Affair and a change in government made for some complications. Doumer (1905: 328) hints that it made people in France uninterested in Indochina, but he nevertheless succeeded in having a special act in favour of his railway proposals promulgated in December 1898.

The turmoil in China at the turn of the century resulted in a delay in the building of the line and also put a damper on French geological research in the south, preceding an exploitation of its natural resources (Lorin 1906: 361). The Boxer Rebellion made Paris order all French officials to leave Yunnan. The wheels were set in motion in mid-1901, when the Banque de l'Indochine, other major French banks and French railway companies formed the *Compagnie française des chemins de fer de l'Indochine et du Yunnan* (the French Company of Railroads in Indochina and Yunnan). It was a moment of glory for Doumer. He was sure that the decision to go ahead with the French line into Yunnan had made the British decide not to continue with theirs from Burma, and that it was up to Indochina to open up Yunnan, not the British (Doumer 1905: 344). Construction of the French railway to Yunnan, which had to surmount fewer natural obstacles in the landscape than the British railway would have, started in 1904 and despite the turmoil that would culminate in the Chinese Revolution it

was completed in 1910. The stock and most of the material needed for the construction came from France.

In improving relations with Thailand and Yunnan, Doumer also assumed an active, personal role, and in doing so he disquieted the home government. In Paris Théophile Delcassé, Minister of Foreign Affairs since June 1898, feared that Doumer might complicate relations with Great Britain by going his own way in Yunnan; a suspicion fanned by a report from the, we may assume scheming, French consul in Mengtze indicating that Doumer was looking for an excuse to order troops into south China. In early 1899 Doumer was made to understand that he had to act with caution (Chandran 1977: 292-3). It does not seem to have bothered him much. In April 1899, and well-briefed in advance by Paris, which probably did not fully realise that this was an equally sensitive undertaking, Doumer paid an official visit to Bangkok. He judged it a great success. His arrival alone almost moved him to tears. On entering the city the carillon of the church in the French settlement had played the *Marseillaise*. Hearing the national anthem played in a country, a neighbour of Indochina, which 'rivals were trying to close to French influence', had touched him (Doumer 1905: 262). The rest of his visit was equally pleasant. Doumer was fêted, was greeted warmly by King Chulalongkorn (Rama V) and had amiable conversations with the king and some of his ministers. Failing to notice any animosity, he was sure that it would not be difficult for France to assume 'the place in Siam to which its strong position in Indochina entitled it' (ibid.: 262).

Doumer (1905: 340), as he later wrote, was also eager to see the route of the Yunnan railway for himself. With permission from Paris, in June 1899 he travelled to Yunnan's capital Kunming without an official escort. Indeed, Doumer travelled 'almost alone' (a French interpreter accompanied him). Riding horseback he was quite proud of his horsemanship and the distance he could cover in a day. His aim was also to establish relations with the authorities of Yunnan and to assess the mood of the population – their 'real sentiments' – and, one gets the impression, to stake France's claim in Yunnan. He wrote of assuring 'the legitimate authority of France over the province' (ibid.: 340-1). Yunnan at that moment was 'a little agitated'; but, he wrote, remaining strikingly silent about this controversial trip, he had experienced no problems at all and was well received everywhere. The members of the Lyon trade mission had an altogether different experience, writing about ill-mannered mandarins, people calling them Devils from the West, and stones being thrown at them (Chambre 1898: 108-9, 339). As in Bangkok, Doumer may have misjudged reality. Shortly after he had returned to Indochina in July, anti-French riots erupted in Mengtze. Doumer (1905:

379-81) was perplexed, in no doubt about the good rapport the French had established with the population. He considered sending troops to Mengtze, but, as could be expected, was restrained from doing so by Delcassé (*The Straits Times* 27-7-1899). It was the Chinese troops that restored order.

After he had been recalled to Paris in 1902, Doumer (1905: vii, 245, 262), singing his own praises and trying to counter views in France that Indochina was not worth the money, showed himself well pleased with what he had achieved as Governor-General. He foresaw great prospects for Indochina, not even excluding that at a certain point in the future the colony and not the home government would bear the expenses for the military necessitated by the French presence in Indochina (ibid.: 308). What had been accomplished in Indochina 'did credit to French civilisation' (ibid.: 286). Thanks to him, Indochina had experienced an extraordinary development. Revenues had increased, Phnom Phen had become a real city, as had Hanoi and Hué, and Tonkin and Annam had been pacified without much bloodshed (ibid.: 289, 299). Most important of all, France had become a player to reckon with in the competition over influence and interests in the Far East. It had failed to befriend Thailand, but for this Paris was to blame (ibid.: 262).

The Malay Peninsula

London not only looked to the north, to Yunnan and the rest of south China. It also directed its attention to the south, to the Malay Peninsula; a region that Great Britain had not been very interested in for a long time (Tregonning 1964: 180). In the same period that Great Britain and France tried to include Yunnan in their trading networks, London proceeded to consolidate its position in the Malay Peninsula. A week after the signing of the Anglo-French Declaration of London regarding Siam, the Niger and Tunis in January 1896, Great Britain started negotiations with Thailand to thwart any German penetration. Thailand should be prevented from granting special concessions to any other power in the south western coastal region not yet under British supervision, the Isthmus of Kra and the Thai Malay, Muslim states. An occupation of any part of the Peninsula or the many islands along its shore by another power was seen as a potential threat to British shipping in the Bay of Bengal, the Andaman Sea and the Straits of Malacca, thus affecting the important trading routes between the east coast of India and the west coast of Burma with China, with Singapore as its intermediate port. The power that was in control of the Malay Peninsula 'must, to a great extent, command the route to the Far East', a memo of the

British Colonial Office asserted in 1896 (cited in Thio 1969: 282). Singapore would suffer, 'half of the value of Singapore would be gone if to the north of it a neck of the Peninsula were held by some other Power', the memo continued.

Great Britain had gained its first foothold on the Malay Peninsula in 1786 when the Sultan of Kedah had ceded the Island of Penang to the East India Company in return for protection against the threat to his sultanate posed by Thailand and Burma. In the early nineteenth century the founding of Singapore in 1819 and the taking over of Malacca from the Dutch in 1824 gave Great Britain its three ports, its 'Straits Settlements', along the Malay coast. For the moment London was satisfied. It ignored persistent demands in Singapore (since the 1840s) to penetrate deeper into the Malay Peninsula. A source of inspiration for such calls must have been the venture of James Brooke, Rajah of Sarawak, who had acquired a large tract of land in Borneo in return for helping to suppress a rebellion in 1841. Those in favour of territorial expansion on the Malay Peninsula cherished the same inflated economic expectations of profits to be gained as would later be expressed about the islands in the South Sea. The Malay population and the British would both profit. An appeal from 1844 predicted a transformation of the Malays, made indolent because the incompetence of their rulers and 'insecure in their possessions, and without a motive to exertion'. Instead of peasants only cultivating 'scanty fields of paddy' and harvesting 'a few cocoanuts, which surround their villages' they would become people happily and energetically toiling the soil, yielding 'those rich and abundant crops for which nature intended it'. Their growing prosperity would create 'a large demand for the manufactures of England', and Great Britain would also 'receive those supplies of sugar which she so much requires, besides an abundance of other tropical productions' (Buckley 1902 II: 421-2).

Before the early 1870s London had invariably reined in ambitious local officials by impressing upon them that it did not want to hear of any interference in the affairs of the Malay States in the Peninsula (Tregonning 1964: 181). This policy was ignored when, in 1873, news reached the British that the Sultan of Selangor and other local rulers were looking for assistance by other powers to maintain domestic order, cut out local rivals to their position and control warring Chinese factions, drawn to the Peninsula by the prospects offered by tin mining. Uppermost in their minds was Germany, an indication that the German victory over France must have made a great impression, also in this part of the world. Bismarck would have rejected such a request, but London did not know that. Consequently, Kimberley, at that moment Colonial Secretary, maintained that it would be

'impossible' for Great Britain 'to consent to any European power assuming the protectorate of any state in the Malay Peninsula' (ibid.: 183).

The task of restoring order in the States on the Peninsula should be taken on by the British. In line with this, in September 1873 Kimberley instructed the new Governor of Singapore, Andrew Clarke, to 'consider whether it would be advisable to appoint a British Officer to reside in any of the States ... of course, only ... with the full consent of the Native Government'; not failing to mention that the Straits administration had to bear the costs. Kimberley did not allude to any German threat. Instead, he stressed the need to 'rescue, if possible, those fertile and productive countries from ruin' and the importance 'to secure protection to trade and commerce with the native territories'.¹⁷

Clarke, who arrived in Singapore in November 1873, took Kimberley's hint to heart. He grabbed the opportunity provided by the request of Raja Abdullah in Perak to his predecessor, Harry St. George Ord, to recognise him as the Sultan of the State in return for sending a British officer 'to teach him how to rule', not awaiting advance approval by London to act (Swettenham 1907: 175). In January 1874, in the Pangkor Engagement, Raja Abdulah, Sultan of Perak, had to accept a British Resident, who practically came to rule his state, except in matters of religion and Malay customs (this would also become the rule in the other Malay States). According to James Alexander Swettenham (1907: 177), though he is not a detached observer as he took an active part in placing Perak under indirect British rule and would move on to become the most important British official in the region, Clarke's action was 'received with high approval by all classes and nationalities' in the Straits Settlements. Selangor followed in February of the same year. These steps assigned Great Britain with command of much of the west coast of what now is Malaysia, where it also interfered in parts of Negeri Sembilan. In the following decade Pahang had to allow a British Resident, while Johor became a protected state, for the time being not having to accept the presence of a Resident. In this way, Great Britain also secured a great part of the Peninsula's east coast. Some British may have convinced themselves that their moving in was an act of altruism. In retrospect, Swettenham (1948: vi-vii) would write that the British role was 'due to the simple fact that 70 years ago the British Government was invited, pushed, and persuaded into helping the Rulers of certain States to introduce order into their disorderly, penniless, and distracted households'.

17 The text can be found, among other places, in Swettenham 1907: 174-5.

To the north of them lay the equally small states of Kelantan, Terengganu, Perlis, Kedah and Patani (Pattani). Culturally, these statelets were akin to their southern neighbours, having a Malay Muslim population. Politically, they were vassal states of Thailand, but for long this link had not amounted to much. In 1888 Browne (1888: 443) could still write that Thailand's power in the south was 'almost *nil*'. Partly in an effort to create a modern state, partly to forestall foreign intrusions, Bangkok started to try to assert its sovereign rights in the southern states. Its claim did not go uncontested in Great Britain and its colonies, and in the states themselves, some of which resisted effective Bangkok rule in the habitual fashion of states fearing for their existence, they would look for support from abroad. In 1826, in the (Henry) Burney Treaty of that year, the East India Company had recognised their Thai vassal status, but British expansionists, well-represented in the business community and the colonial administration of Singapore, could point to a loophole in the text. They had their doubts about its validity with regard to the two states bordering those under British dominion, Kelantan and Terengganu, where, according to Article 12 of the treaty, Great Britain and Thailand had 'equal rights' (Thio 1969: 281).

Internationally, London sought assurances that no other power would be able to arrange a coaling station or naval base there or gain important economic concessions. Their coast, Chamberlain wrote in September 1895, was 'a most dangerous vantage ground for France or Germany'.¹⁸ The fear that the latter might gain a foothold in the Malay Peninsula was a major reason for London to expand British hold over the southern Thai tributaries. Such strategic considerations linked up with economic expectations – some unrealistic – of profits to be gained (Thio 1969: 283). Economic hopes were focused on tin and other mining products. Rubber, the export product of the Malay Peninsula, of which production only took off after 1900, seems to have hardly entered British considerations, and was barely mentioned at all.

To the British, control over the states had become all the more imperative ever since France had annexed Annam in the early 1880s. It was not precluded that France, after having conquered Thailand, would also claim its Malay vassal states; much in the same way as it had justified its annexation of Laos. In London the British government bore such a scenario in mind, but for much of the 1880s and 1890s it had to show more restraint than seemed proper to British expansionists in the Straits Settlements. For one, the British cabinets of those years did not want to antagonise the Thai government. It was 'not for the interest of India that Siam should be

18 Chamberlain to Salisbury 4-9-1895 (cited in Chew 1969: 295).

made unfriendly and thrown into the arms of France and Germany', it was observed at the Foreign Office in 1891.¹⁹ A more pressing consideration was that should Britain act in south Thailand, France might use such a British move as an excuse to reciprocate on Thailand's eastern border, annexing the provinces of Angkor and Battambang (and, before 1893, also Laos) it had set its sights on.

An equally pressing problem was control over the Kra Isthmus. It was a contentious area. Though there were doubts about the feasibility of such a project, constructing a canal across the Kra Isthmus, linking the Indian Ocean and the China Sea, when completed might be a serious blow to Singapore; a reason why Thai consent to its digging could not help but create a severe conflict with Great Britain. For years already there had been talk about French plans for such a passage. Ferdinand de Lesseps had visited Thailand in 1882, but had failed to get the cooperation of the Thai government. A French survey mission early the following year, undertaken with the permission of the Thai king, also had no follow-up. Nevertheless, some ten years later, at the height of the conflict over Thailand the Permanent Under-Secretary at the Foreign Office, Philip Currie, still portrayed the Kra Canal as 'a favourite French scheme' (Chandran 1977: 77). Conversely, France used all the diplomatic pressure it could muster to prevent the British from digging the canal; in 1886 thwarting plans by a British dominated Anglo-French company (Thio 1969: 287).

All the time British politicians were in no doubt that would it come to a partition of Siam the states to the north of Perak and Pahang had to come under British control. In July 1893 the Colonial Secretary, the Marquess of Ripon, suggested to Prime Minister Rosebery that if Thailand 'were to fall under French influence in the future we might find it necessary to take under our Protection or into our own hands the whole of the Malay Peninsula'.²⁰ The peninsula he had in mind was larger than present-day Malaysia and included the Kra Isthmus. After reports had been published in the British press that during the 1893 Franco-Thai negotiations France might ask for permission to dig the Kra Canal, London wasted neither time nor effort to impress upon Bangkok that such a concession would be highly undesirable, and that if granted London would not hesitate to act to protect its interests. Bangkok was told that should France be allowed to dig the Kra Canal, the British government 'would reserve their entire freedom to take any action which they might consider expedient for the protection of the

19 Sanderson to Steuart Balay 20-8-1891 (cited in Chandran 1971: 145).

20 Ripon to Rosebery 22-7-1893 (cited in Chandran 1977: 78).

important British interests which would be affected'.²¹ France was equally made to understand that such a French scheme was out of the question (Thio 1969: 292-3). In London Foreign Secretary Rosebery called for alertness against Thai concessions 'affecting the Malay Peninsula whether a canal or otherwise'.²² His successor, Kimberley, was to stress that Great Britain

could not, from considerations of safety to their Indian and Colonial possessions, allow any other European Power to establish a footing in that Peninsula either by annexation, protectorate or by concessions for a maritime canal or railways and other public works of first rate importance.²³

In a letter to Rosebery (now Prime Minister) he also alluded to 'the Siamese States in the Malay Peninsula, which some day we may want to take'.²⁴

First in mind seem to have been Kelantan and Terengganu. Both sultanates were mentioned in a memorandum of August 1895 by the then Under-Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs, Curzon, as compensation for Great Britain yielding to France by giving up the idea of an upper Mekong buffer state; and again in October, in a letter by Thomas Sanderson, the Permanent Under-Secretary at the Foreign Office, to Curzon. In his own memorandum, Curzon wrote about 'long desired concessions' (Chandran 1977: 172, 188). Chamberlain, in his capacity as Colonial Secretary, in a letter to Prime Minister Salisbury in September 1895, showed himself equally prepared to swap gaining control over the west coast of the peninsula with British concessions to the French in the north of Thailand (Chandran 1971: 154-5). Salisbury himself observed in a memorandum about a Franco-British agreement on Thailand that any delimitation of influence should 'cover Tringanu and the other territories that are in the same condition, which are claimed at the present moment by Great Britain, though apparently they belong to Siam'.²⁵

The perceived threat came from Germany and to a lesser extent from France, but not from Russia. Russia was seen by Thailand and the Malay States as a possible counterbalance to British or French expansion, but stayed aloof (Snow 1994). That said, a change in Russian policy could be

21 Sanderson to the Thai Minister in London Maha Yotha 1-9-1893 (cited in Chandran 1971: 149).

22 Rosebery to Currie 27-8-1893 (cited in Chandran 1977: 80).

23 Kimberley to De Bunsen 27-10-1894 (cited in Chandran 1977: 118).

24 Kimberly to Rosebery 12-6-1895 (cited in Chandran 1977: 146).

25 Memorandum Salisbury, October 1895 (included in Chandran 1977: 340-2).

perceived. At the beginning of the 1890s St Petersburg was still rejecting an active Russian role. The reason was that 'there were only three Russian residents in Siam and no trade' (Thio 1969: 293). By the end of the decade Russia assumed some political presence in Thailand. Cordial ties developed between the courts of Russia and Thailand and in 1897 formal diplomatic relations were established. As elsewhere, the French and Russian envoys seemed to work in concert. Doumer (1905: 260) was full of praise for the assistance of the first Russian Consul General in Bangkok, Alexander Olarovsky, in improving Franco-Thai relationships (*ibid.*: 260-2).

Russia looked for expansion of its sphere of influence in China and Persia, not for a foothold in the Malay Peninsula. When an official of the Russian consulate in Singapore was contacted by a dissatisfied member of the Selangor elite, probably also an associate of the Sultan of Kelantan, he ruled out any support because Russia did 'not have interests in these countries' (Snow 1994: 364; Reid 1965: 44). In 1903 the Sultan of the South Malayan State of Johor also contemplated travelling to Berlin and St Petersburg, to ward off a full British annexation of his state (Snow 1994: 360).

With Germany it was a different matter. Its real and imagined threats played such a prominent role in British policy in the Peninsula that one Malaysian historian, Tregonning (1964), would entitle one of his articles *How Germany Made Malaya British*. Because Germany had stayed out of the Anglo-French rivalry over Thailand it had a much better image there than France or Great Britain. Through its business community in Penang and the other Straits Settlements, Germany had succeeded in expanding its economic presence in Thailand (Nasution 2006: 70-1). The way it had forced Great Britain out of the shipping sector had not gone unnoticed and, in general, Germany had, as Tregonning (1964: 185) observed, 'secured a good trade and diplomatic footing' in the country.

For Germany Southeast Asia was not a region to look for territorial aggrandisement, but one for the expansion of its trade and investment. It also formed a good location for a naval and coaling station for its ships en route to the Far East; preferably to be established near the Straits. There were two possibilities. One was along the coast of Sumatra, which, to the dismay of people in the Netherlands Indies, was indeed suggested in the German press (*De Locomotief* 21-2-1898). The other one was along the coast of the Malay Peninsula. London was made aware of these plans in 1890 when, much to the alarm of Prime Minister Salisbury and other British politicians, news reached the British that German diplomats had entered into negotiations with Bangkok to allow Germany to build a coaling station north of Penang.

To keep rival powers out and to block the digging of the Kra Isthmus channel, the king of Thailand was made to promise in the Anglo-Siamese Secret Convention of April 1897 'not to grant, cede, or let any special privilege or advantage, whether as regards land or trade ... either to the Government or to subjects of a third Power, without the written consent of the British Government' in the south.²⁶ London had had to proceed with care in order to get such a guarantee. The negotiations should not alert the German or French governments who themselves were looking for concessions in the region. It was also important to avoid another power exploiting feelings of discontent in the Malay states that might be occasioned by British recognition of Thailand's rule in the south. At the same time, London should steer clear of obstructing possible future steps to establish British control in the northern Malay states. The problem was solved partly by keeping the agreement secret – not even the colonial authorities in Singapore were informed about its content – and by speaking in the first article about the rights of the Thai king in the region, avoiding words such as suzerainty and sovereignty (Chandran 1971: 158-9; Thio 1969: 301-2).

One of the places the Germans had in mind as a suitable location for a coaling station was the Langkawi Islands, located just below the present-day border of Thailand and Malaysia and not far from British Penang. In 1899 the important German plantation firm and shipping agent Behn, Meyer and Company tried to lease the islands from Kedah and place them under German *Schutz*. A report that the lease had successfully been concluded even appeared in the *London and China Express* in February 1900 (Nasution 2006: 71). Swettenham, now Resident-General of those States that were already under British protection and soon to be Governor of the Straits Settlements (and never hesitant to provide his superiors with news that might persuade them to act), informed London about the German intention, also alerting it to plans Germany might have for arranging a coaling station on Terengganu's Redang Island along the east coast (Tregonning 1964: 186; see also Reid 1965: 44). London reacted immediately. A remonstrance in Bangkok, reminding Thailand of the Anglo-Siamese Secret Convention of April 1897, made the German Langkawi plan come to nought, which in turn led to protest by the German ambassador to Thailand (Tregonning 1964: 186). Langkawi was too close for comfort for the British. The German move, moreover, came at a time when Bangkok tried to improve its relations with St Petersburg and Berlin.

26 Anglo-Siamese Secret Convention of April 1897, Art. III (cited in Thio 1969: 302).

In March 1896, defending the Anglo-French Declaration of that year regarding Thailand, Curzon still stressed that it was a misconception to assume that Thailand had been divided into a central neutral zone and 'two spheres of influence, possibly at some future day of possession, on either side, by the French on the east and the British on the south-west'.²⁷ In a similar vein, Salisbury informed the governments of Thailand and France that London had no intention of infringing upon Thai rights in the south (Thio 1969: 297). The reality was different, and at least on the French side the Declaration had been linked to the establishing of a French and a British sphere of influence, the British on the Malay Peninsula and the French on the right bank of the Mekong (Lorin 1906: 354). In the south Germany caused the British to act in a way similar to the French. On top of the reports about a German lease of Langkawi came rumours in 1901 that Malays in Patani and Kelantan, who were experiencing a political, cultural and religious encroachment by the Buddhist Thai state, were looking for German assistance to gain independence (Turnbull 1981: 182). In response, London forced a new agreement upon Bangkok in 1902. In it Great Britain was given the right to appoint advisers in Terengganu (where the Sultan refused to accept such a political agent) and Kelantan (where one was appointed in 1903). In 1905 Kedah, including the Langkawi Islands, followed (*ibid.*: 182).

Two years later London learned of the intention to have the Germans construct and finance a railway from Kedah to Bangkok, to be built with a different gauge from the British system in the southern part of the Peninsula. The British could not let such an insult pass (Nabijan 1979: 124). In 1909, in accordance with the Anglo-Siamese Treaty or 'Bangkok Treaty' of July of that year, Kelantan, Kedah, Terengganu and Perlis came under full British control after Thailand handed over suzerainty. 'There has been no action of the British Government in Malaya during the present century so notable', Swettenham (1948: 353) wrote, remaining silent about any threat by other powers, mentioning instead the menace Bangkok would have posed to these four statelets (*ibid.*: vii). In return, Great Britain provided Thailand with a loan to build a railway between Bangkok and Alor Star in Kedah. It was not much of a sacrifice, as German plans to build a line from Bangkok to the south had been among London's reasons to act (Turnbull 1981: 181-2; Snow 1994: 361). The Malay-Muslim state of Patani, which had turned in vain to the British for help in resisting tighter

27 Curzon in House of Commons 27-3-1896 (hansard.millbanksystems.com/commons/1896/mar/27/france-and-siam).

central control and modernisation efforts by Bangkok, also remained outside the deal. To this day it remains a restless part of Thailand, and has been from time to time, most recently since January 2004, the scene of a vicious war between government forces and Malay Muslims fighting for independence.

The gradual expansion of British control in the region was matched by that of France in the east. In accomplishing this, Paris could point at the British effort for a justification (Lorin 1906: 42, 357). New negotiations, presented in France as an effort to reach an Entente Cordiale with Thailand, were started in 1902. After an earlier attempt in 1902 had failed because of opposition in the French Parliament, the French could realise much of their colonial ambitions in agreements concluded on 13 February 1904 and 23 March 1907. In 1904 France left Chantaboon but gained territory in the north, in Luang Prabang, and in the south in the region bordering Angkor. The 1904 agreement, acknowledging French predominance in the Mekong Basin, was typical of those days. Among its stipulations were a commitment to build a railway between Battambang and Phnom Penh and a Thai promise that if it wanted to build railways, canals and ports in the Mekong Basin but lacked the necessary capital or qualified personnel it would contact France. In place of the 25-kilometre demilitarized zone it was now agreed that only Thai troops commanded by Thai officers could enter the Mekong Basin; an exception was made for the Gendarmerie, at that time commanded by Danish officers. In 1907 Battambang and Angkor were added to Cambodia. People like Doumer (1905: 201) had argued that such a transfer would fulfil a long-nursed wish of the Cambodians. Moreover, it returned the Angkor monuments to the country that historically was entitled to them. Thailand only received a small territorial compensation in return. Bangkok had realised, as Lorin (1906: 357-8) had already written regarding the 1904 negotiations, that it could not provoke French patience to the very end and could not count on any assistance from London in resisting justified French claims. The latter was true, not because of a lack of British resolve in terms of coming to the support of Thailand, but because France and Great Britain were able to straighten out their colonial differences in Asia and Africa and had reached their Entente Cordiale in April 1904. Though Taylor (1971: 413) ranks Thailand among the lesser disputes to be settled, as does most other Entente Cordiale literature, Frenchmen in those days thought differently. In terms of gains, Thailand was one of the prizes, and not a small one, for accepting a British *de facto* protectorate over Egypt. The territorial expansion in Thailand flattered French self-esteem. It was good for its international standing.

As Lorin (1906: 358-9) wrote, a few token French advisers to the Bangkok government would not have sufficed to give France a place comparable to that of Great Britain in continental Southeast Asia. Such appointments would not have counted for much in a country where the British acted as advisers in the fields of finance and justice, the Germans were building railways and the Danes were reorganising the army. The territory France had gained did.

