

# The Political Implication of the Bangkok Treaty of 1909 on Kelantan

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## Abstract

Signed on 10 March 1909 and ratified on 9 July 1909, the Anglo-Siamese Treaty marked a pivotal moment in Southeast Asian history, as it ceded control of four Northern Malay states—Kelantan, Terengganu, Kedah, and Perlis—to Britain. This treaty had far-reaching implications for the political sovereignty, economic stability, and territorial integrity of these states, particularly Kelantan. This paper examines the treaty's specific effects on Kelantan, focusing on its political and territorial changes, and the broader historical context leading to its signing. The study uses archival research and secondary sources to analyse how the treaty diminished Kelantan's political power, as it lost sovereignty to British control. Post-treaty, Kelantan's internal affairs came under British supervision, while Siam relinquished its claims over the state. In territorial terms, Kelantan lost parts of its northern regions along the Sungai Golok to Siam but gained areas in Southern Legeh. The treaty also fostered growing sentiments of Malay nationalism and Muslim separatism, particularly among those in the northern regions who retained strong cultural and historical ties to Kelantan. This resistance to foreign influence and the long-term political consequences of the treaty shaped Kelantan's evolving identity and local political dynamics, underscoring its enduring impact on the region.

**Keywords:** Bangkok Treaty of 1909; Kelantan; Siam; Border demarcation; Political position.

## INTRODUCTION

The Anglo-Siamese Treaty was formally ratified in London on 9 July 1909, following its endorsement by both the British and Siamese governments on 10 March 1909. This agreement, commonly known as the Bangkok Treaty of 1909, was signed in Bangkok by Ralph Paget, representing Britain, and Prince Devawongse Varoprakar, representing the Siamese government. The treaty marked a significant shift in the political landscape of the Malay Peninsula. Under its terms, the Siamese government agreed to cede sovereignty, control, and administration over the states of Kelantan, Terengganu, Kedah, Perlis, and the surrounding

islands to the British. In return, the British government committed to a key provision: ensuring that no territory along the coastal regions of the Malay Peninsula would be leased to any foreign power for use as a naval base. Additionally, the British agreed to preserve the autonomy of the Siamese kingdom by protecting its remaining territories from foreign domination, particularly those outside British-controlled areas. This arrangement reflected a delicate balance of power and interests between the two powers, reshaping the political and territorial boundaries of the region.

While existing scholarship has addressed the effects of the 1909 Bangkok Treaty on the Northern Malay States, significant gaps persist that warrant further investigation. Azmi Arifin, Mustafa Ahmad, and Farid Mat Zain (2017) examines the impact of the 1909 Anglo-Siamese Treaty on the Kelantan-Siam border, providing a detailed analysis of the border conflict between Malaysia and Thailand. However, it doesn't fully address the broader political implications for Kelantan. Similarly, a study by Mustafa Ahmad, Azmi Arifin, Farid Mat Zain, Rashidi Pakri, and Siti Aisyah Jasni (2017), which explores the impact of the treaty on Kelantan's political position and delineation status, does not provide comprehensive details on how the border demarcation affects Kelantan or the bilateral relations between Malaysia and Thailand. In contrast, Nizamuddin Alias and Haniff Ahamat (2023) discusses how the treaty, signed without the consent of Kelantan, was later legitimised after Malaya's independence. They argue that colonial powers used different types of treaties, with the 1909 agreement falling under one that created a legal framework for sovereignty and boundary determination. The authors highlight that, according to international law, such treaties cannot be changed unilaterally without mutual consent. They also explore how the treaty's boundary delineation led to the fragmentation of Malay political identity, particularly between the Southern and Northern Peninsulas, and contributed to political discontent, especially in Patani, due to British neglect of the boundary issues.

Nik Anuar Nik Mahmud (1994) examines the border demarcation issues between Perlis and Kelantan resulting from the Bangkok Treaty. His detailed research, presented chronologically, explains how the treaty influenced the border delineation with Siam. However, the study primarily focuses on the border issues prior to the treaty's ratification and does not address its long-term effects on Kelantan. Nik Haslinda Nik Hussain (2017) examines the impact of the 1909 Treaty on the boundary dispute between Malaysia and Thailand, focusing on the period from 1973 to 2000. While the study sheds light on the treaty's contemporary implications, it does not fully explore its effects on Kelantan, suggesting the need for further research on this specific aspect. Similarly, Azmi Arifin, Nik Haslinda Nik Hussain, and Mohamad Roslaili Rosdi (2019) discuss the territorial losses experienced by the Northern Malay states, including Kelantan's loss of the Tabal region, under the 1909 Bangkok Treaty. However, their study lacks a detailed analysis of the boundary negotiations and demarcation concerning Kelantan, highlighting this as an area for future investigation. Additionally, Mohd Shazwan Mokhtar (2018) explores the economic consequences of the 1909 treaty, arguing that it solidified British control over the Malay states, a process further reinforced by the Railway Agreement of 1909, enabling Britain to exert greater political and economic influence in the region.

Nik Haslinda Nik Hussain (2011) explores the impact of British colonisation on Kelantan, particularly in relation to land disputes. She argues that British policies worsened the welfare of the rural population, as the British facilitated land ownership for a new elite class of Malays, including nobles, affluent farmers, traders, and government officials. This led to the dispossession of the majority of Kelantan's people. Nik Haslinda suggests that British colonizers prioritised economic interests over the well-being of the indigenous population. Mohamad Roslaili and Azmi Arifin (2019) further examine the legal changes in Kelantan after British intervention. They note that Western legal principles were introduced into the region's

judicial system, particularly during Graham's tenure as Siamese advisor starting in 1903. His reforms laid the foundation for the Westernization of Kelantan's legal system, a process that was solidified after the 1909 Bangkok Treaty when Mason became the British Advisor, marking the end of Graham's influence. While these previous studies provide valuable insights into British colonial influence in Kelantan, there appears to be a gap in the literature regarding the specific impact of the 1909 Anglo-Siamese Treaty on Kelantan's political status and its boundaries with Siam. This article seeks to fill that gap by investigating and analysing how the treaty influenced both the political positioning of Kelantan and the delineation of its borders with Siam.

## **FACTORS THAT LED TO THE RATIFICATION OF THE 1909 BANGKOK TREATY**

Several factors played a crucial role in the ratification of the Anglo-Siamese Treaty of 1909. A prevailing belief among the British was that the Northern Malay states, which included Kelantan, Terengganu, and Kedah, were effectively under Siamese control, thus leading to the assumption that these states were inherently part of Siam. This perception was further reinforced by the British administration's understanding of the border demarcations, specifically the delineations between Pahang-Kelantan and Pahang-Terengganu, which were viewed as a concession of British authority over the Northern Malay States. The British administration's stance was influenced by the long-standing claims made by Siam over the region. Consequently, in British official documents, these Malay States were often referred to as the "Siamese Malay States", reflecting the prevailing belief in Siam's dominance over the northern territories. This view, underpinned by both geopolitical considerations and historical context, ultimately contributed to the formalization of the boundaries outlined in the treaty. The accompanying map further illustrates the territorial delineations as understood by the British at the time.

The ratification of the Anglo-Siamese Treaty of 1909 was heavily influenced by British concerns over potential French ambitions to construct a canal across the Strait of Kra (Nik Haslinda, 2015). This proposed canal was seen by the British as a significant threat, as it could facilitate easier transportation between France's colonies in Indochina and Europe, thereby disrupting British trade routes and undermining Singapore's strategic role as a major free port in Southeast Asia. In response to these growing apprehensions, the British sought to curb French influence in the region, particularly in the Menam Valley and the Northern Malay States, while ensuring that Siam would not enter into agreements with other European powers that might further undermine British interests. To achieve this, the British had already formalised several diplomatic arrangements with the Siamese government, beginning with the Anglo-Siamese Secret Convention of 1897. This secret convention marked a critical point in British-Siamese relations, that aimed to resolve territorial disputes between Britain and Siam, ensuring British control over key Malay states while allowing Siam to retain its sovereignty. This agreement was a precursor to the 1909 Anglo-Siamese Agreement, which formalized the territorial divisions in the region.

In 1901, British concerns over growing European influence in Southern Siam and the Northern Malay States intensified. British intelligence revealed that factions in Patani and Kelantan were seeking German support to escape the terms of the Anglo-Siamese Treaty. This, along with European powers like Germany, Russia, and the United States pursuing territorial claims in the region, increased British fears for their dominance in Southeast Asia (FO 422/45, 1896). Germany aimed to secure Langkawi as a naval base, Russia sought Phuket for a coal base, and the U.S. sought economic concessions in Terengganu and nearby islands such as Redang, Perhentian, and Kapas Islands. These competing interests led Britain to pressure Siam into signing an agreement on October 6, 1902, to consolidate British control and prevent further foreign encroachment (FO 93/95/16, 1902). The 1902 Agreement served to further entrench

Siamese authority over the northern Malay kingdoms by officially recognizing their control over various Malay states, which were collectively referred to as “the Siamese Malay States” (Nik Anuar, 2009). This agreement not only reaffirmed Siam's sovereignty over these territories but also reinforced the broader geopolitical arrangement between Britain and Siam in Southeast Asia. The final stage of this British-Siamese negotiation process culminated in the Anglo-Siamese Treaty of 1909. This treaty effectively formalized the division of power between the two colonial powers, securing Siam's full sovereignty over its southern Malay provinces, while granting Britain predominant influence and control over the Northern Malay States. This shift in political authority solidified British supremacy in the region, marking a decisive moment in the historical development of both the Northern Malay States and Siam's territorial boundaries. The 1909 Treaty, therefore, not only redefined the political landscape of the Malay Peninsula but also laid the foundation for future diplomatic and territorial relations between Britain, Siam, and the Malay States.

In addition to the looming threat posed by competing European powers, British-Siamese relations were further complicated by the actions of the Duff Development Company Limited, a private enterprise controlled by Robert William Duff, a former Acting Superintendent of Police in Pahang. The Duff Company, controlled a significant portion of economic concessions in Kelantan and secured a lease in Hulu Kelantan through a secret agreement with Raja Long Senik (Sultan Muhammad IV, 1899–1920). This lease was opposed by the Siamese government, which claimed sovereignty over Kelantan (FO 422/57, 1902). In response to Siam's refusal to recognise the concession, Duff sought British support, threatening to involve other foreign powers if the issue wasn't addressed. This pressure led to the 1902 Anglo-Siamese Agreement, which forced Siam to acknowledge the Duff Concession and limited the authority of Malay states like Kelantan and Terengganu. The intervention of the Duff Company, therefore, became a pivotal factor in altering British policy toward the Northern Malay States. What had initially been a stance of non-intervention evolved into a more assertive approach, as Britain sought to assert its influence in the region and protect its economic and strategic interests. Ultimately, the Duff Company's actions played a significant role in shifting the balance of power in favour of British involvement in the affairs of the Northern Malay States.

After the 1902 Anglo-Siamese Agreement, a directive was issued in March 1904 to define the Duff Company's concession borders in Kelantan. However, tensions emerged when the Sultan, advised by W.A. Graham, rejected Duff's railway proposal and reinstated the land revenue levy (Nik Haslinda, 2011). This angered Duff, prompting him to seek British intervention to protect his interests. This dispute marked a significant turning point in British intervention in the region. Since 1902, Britain had been increasingly involved in the Northern Malay States, and the tensions between the Sultan of Kelantan and the Duff Company prompted British officials to push for greater control over the northern territories. The British government, under growing pressure from the Duff Company, engaged in discussions with Siam to facilitate the transfer of authority over the Northern Malay States from Bangkok to London. This intervention was part of a broader British strategy to extend its influence in the region, particularly in Patani and other Northern Malay States. Siam, facing increasing pressure, eventually agreed in the 1909 Anglo-Siamese Agreement to cede control over Kelantan, Kedah, Terengganu, Perlis, and parts of British-controlled areas. However, the status of Patani remained unresolved, highlighting ongoing border and sovereignty disputes.

One key reason for Siam's decision to cede administrative control over the Northern Malay states to Britain was its perception of these territories as burdensome, difficult to govern, and economically unfeasible. In contrast, Britain's efforts to exert control over the region made Siam reluctant to retain its authority, given the growing prospect of disputes and the complex situation that prompted British involvement. As a result, Siam's primary concern shifted

toward protecting its national sovereignty, which had frequently been undermined by foreign interference, leading to a degree of tolerance towards British demands to alleviate threats to its southern region (Andaya and Andaya, 2001). The Siamese government's humiliation, especially under King Chulalongkorn, was heightened by the 1897 Secret Convention, which granted the British significant control over the Northern Malay States and gave foreigners in southern Siam special privileges (Nik Haslinda, 2011). The extraterritorial rights for the British, preventing legal actions against their nationals, worsened Siam's position, prompting efforts to restore its dignity and sovereignty

## IMPLICATIONS ON POLITICS IN KELANTAN

Following the ratification of the Burney Treaty in 1826 and the Anglo-Siamese Secret Convention in 1897, British began to govern Kelantan under Siamese influence. The Burney Treaty protected British trade interests, while the 1897 agreement prevented Siam from leasing any Malay states to foreign powers, such as Germany, which sought territories like Langkawi and Kelantan. However, the 1909 Bangkok Treaty had a more direct impact on Kelantan's political landscape, especially the Kelantan-Patani border. The signing of the Bangkok Treaty of 1909 had three significant consequences for Kelantan's political status. First and foremost, it marked the strengthening of British influence and control over the state by replacing a Siamese advisor, Walter Armstrong Graham to James Scott Mason, who became the first British advisor in Kelantan (Kelantan 947/1909, 1909). Additionally, to resolve administrative conflicts involving the Duff Development Company, H. W. Thomson, who had served as Assistant to Graham, was reassigned to Kedah (CO 273/355, 1909). This change was part of a broader shift in administrative control, as Britain sought to solidify its dominance in Kelantan.

Under the terms of the 1909 Anglo-Siamese Agreement, the Siamese government agreed to cede all rights, protection, administration, and authority over the states of Kelantan, Terengganu, Kedah, Perlis, and their surrounding islands to the British government. This marked a significant departure from the previous Siamese representative administration, under which these regions were still considered to be under the sovereignty of the indigenous rulers, who regarded themselves as independent despite the Siamese presence. With the British assuming control, Kelantan entered a new phase of colonization, which was formally initiated under the Mason administration. This transition involved direct British intervention in the governance of the state. The British established control over various aspects of the state's administration, including lawmaking, security, the economy, and religious matters. The British also imposed significant changes to Kelantan's social and cultural norms, particularly through the introduction of a tax structure that disproportionately favoured British interests, thereby diminishing the authority of the local government. While Kelantan's indigenous government had previously maintained a degree of sovereignty under the Siamese administration, the 1909 treaty effectively transferred this authority to the British, ushering in a period of colonial dominance. The reforms implemented by the British altered the political and administrative landscape of the state, marking the end of Kelantan's autonomy and the consolidation of British colonial rule in the state.

The Sultan of Kelantan became subordinate to British officials, significantly reducing the political autonomy of local Malay leaders. Under Siamese rule, these leaders had more governance power. However, British control excluded them from administrative and economic positions. The 1909 Treaty led to the annexation of territories by Siam or Britain, sparking resistance, notably the 1915 Tok Janggut uprising. This uprising reflected growing discontent with British intervention, contrasting with the previous Siamese influence, while protests continued in other occupied Malay regions, revealing ongoing resistance to foreign dominance (Kamaruzaman, 1992). This arrangement mirrored earlier colonial actions, like the 1824

Anglo-Dutch Treaty, which defined British and Dutch spheres in the region. It justified British control over the Malay Peninsula, highlighting imperialist motives behind British expansion in Southeast Asia.

The administration of Kelantan strongly opposed the 1909 Treaty which sought to transfer control over Kelantan to the British. Sultan of Kelantan, Raja Long Senik, was not informed of the agreement until he received a letter from John Anderson, the Governor of the Straits Settlements. The letter conveyed that,

His Majesty the King of Siam has agreed to transfer to His Majesty the King of England all rights over Kelantan, and the King of England will pay to the King of Siam the amount of debt due by my friend the Sultan of Kelantan and the King of England will in future appoint and advisor to assist my friend instead of the advisor appointed by the King of Siam, and the King of Siam will no longer have anything to do with the affairs of my friend's state, and my friend will have to look only to the King of England (CO 273/354, 1909).

This reveals how the British manipulated the issue of the Sultan of Kelantan's debt to legitimise deeper involvement in Kelantan's sovereign affairs. Kelantan resisted this revelation, seeing itself as independent. Abdullah Zakaria Ghazali noted that while Kelantan paid tribute to Siam with golden flowers every three years, it didn't consider this submission (Abdullah, 1996). The agreement was viewed as a violation of Kelantan's sovereignty, as it had been semi-autonomous under Siam, not a British protectorate. During his visit to the Sultan, Anderson was warmly received, though the Sultan voiced concerns about territorial losses. Anderson praised the newly acquired territory, highlighting Kelantan's fertile land and industrious Malay population, which outnumbered the entire population of the Federated Malay States (FO 881/9573, 1909).

After the 1909 Treaty, Sultan Raja Long Senik was compelled to sign the Anglo-Kelantan Treaty on April 22, 1910, under British pressure. This agreement, following the 1909 Bangkok Treaty, reduced Kelantan's authority. Facing challenges from rival leaders and political instability, the Sultan reluctantly agreed, resulting in a significant loss of his power under the new treaty. Under Article I, Raja Long Senik was prohibited from engaging in political relations with any foreign power without British mediation (Maxwell and Gibson, 1924). This stripped him of his ability to govern independently. Article II gave the British the right to appoint advisors and assistant advisors to Kelantan, effectively placing British representatives in key governmental positions (Maxwell and Gibson, 1924). Article IV allowed for British intervention in Kelantan's affairs if the state failed to maintain peace or opposed British authority, further eroding the Sultan's sovereignty. Through a combination of pressure, threats, and manipulation, the British solidified their control over Kelantan, suppressing any opposition and diminishing the Sultan's political influence. This treaty marked a significant step in the British consolidation of power in the Malay States.

## **IMPLICATION ON KELANTAN-SIAM BORDER DEMARCATION**

Before the 19th century, the Malay states did not have the modern concept of defined borders. Instead, the structure of a state was typically based on the key geographic features, such as river basins or valleys, which were crucial for the livelihood and power of the ruler. Boundaries in the Malay context were more fluid, defined by natural landmarks like rivers and mountain ranges, rather than rigid territorial lines. Political influence was therefore more about controlling strategic regions rather than maintaining fixed territorial borders (Kamus Dewan, 2002). In early February 1908, when Britain and Siam set up a border commission to officially

survey and define their shared boundary, the commission utilised watersheds and river valleys as markers for the boundary (Nik Anuar, 1994). The boundary between Kelantan and Siam was defined starting at a point on the western coast of the Malay Peninsula, where a range of hills, acting as the watershed between the Setul and Perlis rivers, touches the sea-shore. From there, the boundary followed this range of hills in a north-easterly direction until it reached the main watershed, which divides the rivers flowing into the Gulf of Siam on one side and the Straits of Malacca on the other. The boundary continued along this main watershed in a south-easterly direction to a point called Lubang Gandang, then turned eastward along the watershed, passing through key points such as Buchang Padang, Gunung Angus, Gunung Kenarong, and Gunung Jambal Merah, leaving the valleys of Sungai Patani, Sungai Telubun, and Sungai Tanjung Mas to Siam. Meanwhile, Britain secured the entire valley of the Sungai Perak (FO 422/62, 1908).

From Gunung Jambal Merah the boundary continued along the main watershed in a south-easterly direction to Gunung Tomoh, then in a southerly direction to Bukit Ayer Kapa, then to a point on the main watershed which is the source of Sungai Sengo. From this point a straight line in an easterly direction to a point on the Sungai Pergau at its junction with Sungai Sieweh below the village of Penarait, from the point on Sungai Pergau to Bukit Naga, Bukit Langstar, and Bukit Ayerchina. From Bukit Ayerchina the boundary line goes in a northerly direction to a deserted village known as Tohtor, then to Nyor Sapahon, Sarang Boyah, Kampung Kusai, Meman Anarong, Tasik Chekati, Padang Trol, Kuala Lanchan on the Sungai Rengae crossing the said river to Bukit Phra, Tlaga Rendang, Kuala Grong, then in north-westerly direction to Rotan Tower, Kubang Ikan to Bakong Tengga on the Sungai padi following the thalweg of the said river down to its junction with Sungai Menara, known as Puchong Elong, or Nam Bang. From this point a line in a northerly direction to the sea-shore on the eastern coast of the Malay Peninsula, known as Kuala Elong (FO 422/62, 1908).

However, the clause in the draft Boundary Protocol regarding the Kelantan-Legeh boundary was amended as follows,

Leaving the main watershed at this point, the frontier thence goes in a north-easterly direction along the range of hills which is the dividing line or watershed between the Sungai Pergau on the one hand, and the Tanjong Mas and Sungai Telubin on the other hand, to Bukit and Pass Dan Popo, which is the headwaters of the Sungai Golok. Thence the frontier follows the thalweg of the Sungai Golok to the sea at a place called Kuala Tabar. Subjects of each of the parties may navigate the whole of the watershed of the Sungai Golok. All the islands adjacent to the eastern state of Kelantan and Trengganu, southern of a parallel of latitude drawn the point where the northern boundary of Kelantan reaches the coasts are transferred to Great Britain, and all islands to the north of that parallel shall remain to Siam.” (FO 422/62, 1908)

The Boundary Protocol was subsequently amended again because the Head of the Mining Department, J.H. Heal, found that many of the points indicated in the previous drafts were either non-existent or incorrect (FO 422/62, 1908). Thus, the new amendment to the Boundary Protocol regarding the Kelantan border was as follows: commencing at a point on the western coast of the Malay Peninsula, where a range of hills which is the watershed between the Setul and Perlis Rivers touches the sea-shore, then following the said range of hills in a north-easterly direction until it reaches the main watershed or dividing line between those rivers which flow into the Gulf of Siam on the one side, and into the Indian Ocean on the other. Following this main watershed passing through the said watershed to a hill which is the main source of the Sungai Tomoh, leaving the valleys of the Sungai Patani, Sungai Telubin, and Sungai Tomoh to Siam, and the whole valley of the Sungai Perak to Great Britain. Then, from the hill which

is the main source of the Sungai Tomoh following the watershed between Sungai Tomoh and Sungai Pergau to a point on the said watershed from which the waters of Sungai Tomoh, Sungai Pergau and Sungai Golok divide, then following the watershed between Sungai Pergau and Sungai Golok to the main source of the Sungai Golok at or near the hill called Bukit Jeli, thence the frontier follows the thalweg of the Sungai Golok to the sea at a place called Kuala Tabar (FO 422/62, 1908). The revised amendments to the boundary protocol draft further stipulated that the subjects of each party are permitted to traverse the entirety of the waters of the Sungai Golok. In early January 1909, another amendment to the draft Boundary Protocol was made by the Committee before it was adopted by both governments (FO 422/62, 1908).

When the Bangkok Treaty was signed and ratified, a new boundary protocol was appended to the treaty, outlining the boundary between Kelantan and Siam as follows,

Commencing from the most seaward point of the northern bank of the estuary of the Sungai Perlis and thence north to the range of hills which is the watershed between the Sungai Perlis on the one side and the Sungai Pujoh on the other; then following the watershed formed by the said range of hills until it reaches the main watershed or dividing line between those rivers which flow into the Gulf of Siam on the one side and into the Indian Ocean on the other; following this main watershed so as to pass the sources of the Sungai Patani, Sungai Telubin and Sungai Perak, to a point which is the source of the Sungai Pergau; then leaving the main watershed and going along the watershed separating the waters of the Sungai Pergau from the Sungai Telubin, to the hill called Bukit Jeli or the source of the main stream of the Sungai Golok. Thence the frontier follows the thalweg of the main stream of the Sungai Golok to the sea at a place called Kuala Tabar.

This line will leave the valleys of the Sungai Patani, Sungai Telubin, and Sungai Tanjung Mas and the valley on the left or west bank of the Golok to Siam and the whole valley of the Sungai Perak and the valley on the right or east bank of the Golok to Great Britain.

Subjects of each of the parties may navigate the whole of the waters of the Sungai Golok and its affluents.

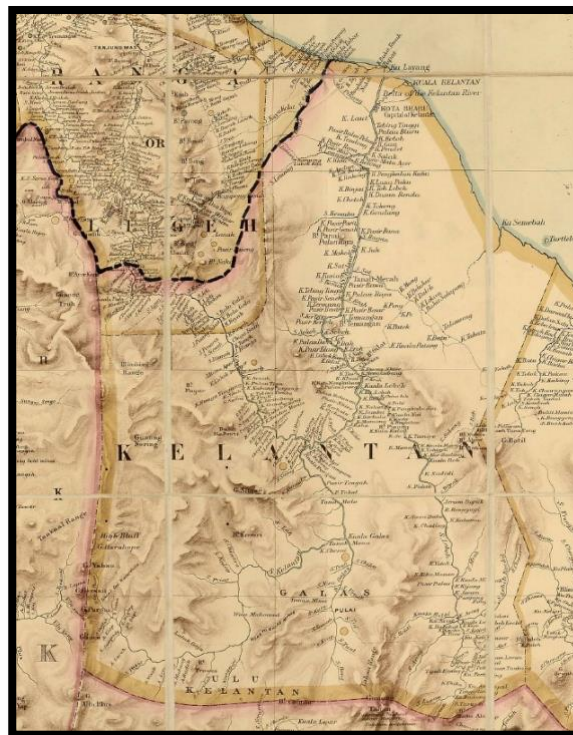
(....) All islands adjacent to the eastern States of Kelantan and Tringganu, south of a parallel of latitude drawn from the point where the Sungai Golok reaches the coast at a place called Kuala Tabar shall be transferred to Great Britain, and all islands to the north of that parallel shall remain to Siam.” (10883/32–38, 1909)





bank of the Siamese territory. The 1909 Treaty significantly redrew the boundaries of Kelantan and other Malay states, incorporating regions like Patani, Singgora (Songkhla), Menara (Narathiwat), Jalor (Yala), and Setul into Siamese sovereignty. These areas shared deep historical, cultural, and familial ties, with Kelantan historically appointing the King of Patani with rulers like Raja Bakal (1688-1690), Raja Mas Kelantan (1690-1707), Raja Mas Dayam (1707-1710, 1724-1726), and Sultan Muhammad (1845-1856). In addition, Kelantan often came to Patani's defense, assisting in repelling Siamese attempts to conquer the region (Abdullah, 2016). However, the agreement disregarded the interests of the local populations, severing long-standing political and cultural connections. The changes not only shifted territorial ownership but also had broader implications for the relationships between the local populations on both sides of the border, further solidifying the colonial divide in the region. Patani's territorial reorganisation, which altered the historical landscape of Malay governance, turned Patani into an entirely Siamese territory. Despite this political change, the people of Patani have long rejected the decision and have persistently resisted the imposed boundaries, mounting an ongoing and unforeseen reaction to their new status. The British colonial administration's control over Kelantan led to negotiations between Britain and Siam to resolve the Patani issue. However, the resolution was shaped more by colonial interests than Patani's historical claims, sidelining local priorities for geopolitical agendas. A key manifestation of this legacy is the Muslim separatist movements in Southern Thailand, linked to disappointment of border demarcation. The Siamese government's response to Patani's resistance, particularly under Prime Minister Phibun Songkhram (First Term: 1938-1944, Second Term: 1948-1957), was harsh, enforcing policies that forced the Patani population to adopt Siamese names and suppress the Malay language and culture in education. These repressive measures fueled widespread discontent and led to an enduring resistance movement, driven by a strong desire to reclaim the cultural and political autonomy lost to colonial and imperial powers (Nik Anuar, 2009).

Figure 2: Kelantan-Siam Boundary, 10 March 1909



Source: Adapted from FO 93/95/20, New Boundary between Siam and Great Britain, 10 March 1909, The National Archives, Kew.

Another notable change of the Bangkok Treaty towards the Kelantan-Siam boundary was the transfer of several important territories that had historically been under Kelantan's control, particularly those surrounding the Sungai Golok. The 1909 Treaty significantly altered the role of rivers in the traditional Malay political system. Prior to the treaty, rivers were vital connectors, facilitating trade and movement across regions without the constraints of political boundaries. They were essential to the social and economic life of local communities. However, the new border protocol, especially along Sungai Golok, disrupted this dynamic. One of the most affected parties was Raja Long Senik of Kelantan, as the treaty resulted in the loss of several important territories north of Sungai Golok, including areas like Kuala Tabal, Pulau Che Him, Menara (Narathiwat), Golok, Sungai Padi, Mundok, Kayu Kelat, Kampung Tanjung, Kampung Belawan, Layar, Elong, Becah Herong, Jakang, dan Kubang Yu. These areas had not only been historically part of Kelantan but were also crucial for its economic and political stability, generating income of \$8,000 annually. The loss displaced many Kelantanese people who relied on these resources, creating both economic hardship and a deep sense of injustice. The populations in these territories, with long-standing ties to Kelantan, were now placed under Siamese rule, which further emphasised the colonial disregard for local autonomy and historical connections. For instance, Menara (Narathiwat), home to 15,000 people from diverse backgrounds, had been part of Kelantan for centuries but was now governed by Siam. This shift illustrated the broader impact of colonial border decisions, which prioritised geopolitical agreements over the cultural and historical realities of the affected populations.

According to the *Tarikh Kelantan*, the issue of territorial transfer is framed within the broader context of the relationship between the Siamese government and the British government, particularly regarding the states of Kelantan, Kedah, and Terengganu. As part of this arrangement, certain areas of Kelantan were ceded to Siam, with the Sungai Tabal becoming the boundary between British-controlled Kelantan and Siamese territory. The "loyalty" between the two powers influenced the boundary's creation (Sa'ad, 1971). Despite agreements, the Siamese government delayed the transfer of territories, making the Sungai Tabal a "de facto" border, though some areas remained disputed. The district of Legeh, initially set for transfer, was excluded from the agreement, suggesting that not all territorial changes were implemented.

However, the dissolution of the state of Legeh led to Kelantan acquiring several southern territories, including Jeli, Batu Melintang, Lakota, Legeh, Kemahang, Rantau Panjang, Bukit Kwong, Gunung Reng, Gemang, Bukit Bunga, Ayer Satan, Ayer Lanas, Batang Merbau, Bukit Panau, Jedok, Panglima Bayu, Lubok Bangor, and Belimbing. The demarcation set by the colonial powers in 1909 left Jeli in the Legeh region within Kelantan under British control, while Tabal, part of Kelantan, was incorporated into the Bukit Menara (Narathiwat) area under Siam.

In protest of the cession of Menara to Siam, Raja Long Senik wrote a letter to Sir John Anderson, Governor of Straits Settlements and High Commissioner for the Federated Malay States, asserting that Western powers lacked the authority to transfer Kelantan's districts between Siam and Britain without his approval as the sovereign of Kelantan. He attested that Kelantan's 1902 agreement with Siam had been nullified by Siam's transfer of control to Britain, making Kelantan an independent state. Raja Long Senik also pointed out that British law did not permit interference in Malay state affairs without the state's consent, and since the 1909 Treaty lacked Kelantan's approval, it was not binding. He argued that the treaty terms regarding Kelantan were not final until an agreement was reached with Kelantan's government. As the 1909 Treaty lacked the endorsement of the Kelantan administration, Kelantan never intended to comply with the stipulation for the state to accept a British advisor. In the letter, Raja Long Senik asserted that although the 1909 Treaty was established between Siam and the British, the deal concerning Kelantan and the British had not been finalised. Consequently, the



terms of the 1909 Treaty were not applicable to Kelantan until the British negotiated and established an agreement with the Kelantan administration. On July 19, 1909, he presented a map showing the boundaries agreed upon with Prince Damrong Rajanubhab in 1904 and emphasised that the Menara region, including Jakak, Belawan, Sungai Padi, Sungai Elong, Layar and Kayu Kelat, was part of the Tumpat colony under the authority of Sultan Long Zainal Abidin bin Tuan Kundor, the “King of Tumpat”.

Figure 3: Tabal (Tak Bai) and Jeli before and after 1909



Source: Adapted from Google Maps.

Long Senik and Long Zainal Abidin’s protest was dismissed by Anderson, who stated that the border established between the British and Siam through the Bangkok Treaty of 1909 could not be altered. To thwart Long Senik’s objections, Anderson undertook several initiatives to persuade him. The British recognised him as the real Sultan of Kelantan, designating him Sultan Muhammad IV, and provided him with a monthly income of \$2,000 and an annual pension of \$4,800. He was also awarded the Knight Commander or Dame Commander of the Most Distinguished Order of St Michael and St George (KCMG) order of chivalry by the British government. Concurrently, the leaders first augmented their allowances and pensions to accommodate the British presence (Azmi et. al., 2019). Although Raja Long Senik was compelled to accept various forms of British “treatment”, the Kelantan government, similar to other Northern Malay states rulers, had no alternatives. As a little and susceptible state, Kelantan was forced to acquiesce to British imperialism, leading to the relinquishment of substantial rights and sovereignty.

Nik Anuar Nik Mahmud states that the boundary makers overlooked the Kelantan-Patani border when the Sungai Golok became the international boundary, causing Kelantan to lose the Tabal region in exchange for the Reman territory (Nik Anuar, 1994). Indeed, one of the most contentious aspects of this territorial realignment was the establishment of the Sungai Golok as the official boundary between Kelantan and Siam. In accordance with the provisions

of Article 3 of the 1909 Bangkok Treaty, a Joint Border Commission, comprising British and Siamese officials, was established in August 1909 to demarcate and define a new boundary between Siam and the Northern Malay States (Secretary of State 845/1909, 1909). Colonel H.M. Jackson headed the British boundary commission, while Major General Mom Narendar Raja led the Siamese commission, jointly establishing the Anglo-Siamese Boundary Commission to define the borders between the states of Kedah, Perlis, Perak, and Kelantan and Siam. The total cost for the boundary delimitation amounted to \$11,272.55 (Kelantan. 343/1911, 1911). J.M. Favell, the Chief Surveyor of Kelantan, was assigned to join the Anglo-Siamese Boundary Commission as the British representative for Kelantan. He began his journey on May 30, 1911, accompanied by the British Adviser and the Chief Police Officer of Kelantan, along with six transport elephants for the Commission. The Boundary Commission traveled up the Sungai Kelantan to the Kelantan-Siam boundary. Favell noted that Kuala Sat, a river divided into two main streams—Sat and Lanah—was a key point in the Kelantan-Siam boundary that was the subject of dispute (Kelantan. 343/1911, 1911). The dispute also involved the origin of the Sungai Golok, with Siam claiming it started at the larger Sungai Lanah, while Britain argued it began at the smaller Sungai Sat near Bukit Jeli (Kelantan. 343/1911, 1911).

During the journey, the British Adviser and Favell conducted thorough investigations into the section of the boundary at the source of the Sungai Golok. They discovered that the Siamese surveyors had deviated from the correct line established in the Treaty Protocol and had marked a different boundary line with boundary beacons. The Protocol stated that the boundary line,

“...shall go along the watershed separating the waters of the Sungai Pergau from the Sungai Telubin to the hill called Bukit Jeli or the source of the main stream of the Sungai Golok. Thence the frontier follows the thalweg of the main stream of the Sungai Golok to the sea.” (Kelantan. 343/1911, 1911)

According to Favell, it was important to highlight that the Sungai Golok was not locally referred to as the Golok throughout its entire course. The river that the locals called the Golok was actually a large tributary on the Siamese side, marked as the Weng on Siamese maps, where the town of Weng was located. The "Ulu" of this river was the Weng, while the lower reaches and “Kuala” were referred to as the Golok. The village situated at the "Kuala" was also known as Kuala Golok (Kelantan. 343/1911, 1911). Therefore, whenever a native heard the name Sungai Golok, they immediately assumed that the tributary was the river in question. At each “Kuala”, where a new tributary had joined the main stream, the main river had adopted a new name. As a result, the names of the river and its tributaries could not be used as reliable evidence to determine which stream was the main source (Kelantan. 343/1911, 1911).

Upon investigation, the border commission determined that the Sungai Sat was clearly the primary source, thereby establishing it as the boundary between Kelantan and Patani (Kelantan. 343/1911, 1911). Sungai Sat is the largest and fastest-flowing stream, with the widest width from bank to bank (Kelantan. 343/1911, 1911). The Sungai Lanah is the only river comparable in size, though it's slower and narrower than the Sat, which is about one and a half times wider. The Sat, originating near Bukit Jeli, perfectly aligns with the Treaty Protocol, making it an ideal boundary. In contrast, the Siamese chose a line starting at Kuala Sat, briefly following the Sungai Lanah, and then veering off along the insignificant Sungai Buloh. This lowland stream winds through paddy fields and villages, rising about three miles east of Bukit Jeli (Kelantan. 343/1911). Although the Siamese insisted on maintaining the boundary line marked on the “sketch map” attached to the Boundary Protocol, Jackson clarified that the map was merely a guide and not meant to be followed precisely (CO 273/390, 1911). The demarcation work was paused after the Siamese Commission refused to reconsider their position. Arthur Peel, the British Minister, protested the boundary markers between Bukit Jeli and Sungai Buloh. The Siamese Foreign Minister clarified that the markers were for

boundary assistance and ordered a suspension. Peel stated that the border team unanimously agreed on the Sungai Sat as the proper boundary (CO 273/390, 1908). Prince Devawongse, however, rejected the British view of Bukit Jeli as the turning point of the frontier and clarified the Siamese perspective, stating that the river in question was not the Sungai Sat, but the Sungai Lanah (CO 273/390, 1908).

The disagreement between Siam and Britain regarding the position of the Kelantan-Siam border was resolved when Siam agreed to accept Peel's proposal to amend the original wording. The phrase "to the hill called Bukit Jeli or the source of the main stream of Sungai Golok" was changed to "to the hill called Bukit Jeli, proceeding thence from the head of the stream called Ayer Jawa, which actually rises in Bukit Jeli, down the Ayer Jawa to the point where that stream joins the stream called Ayer Batu Hampar, along which it follows to the junction of the Ayer Batu Hampar with the Sungai Sat, from which point it follows the Sungai Sat to the junction of that river with the Sungai Sat (CO 273/390, 1912). The Border Commission ultimately decided that the Sungai Sat was the source of the Sungai Golok and that Bukit Jeli marked the turning point of the frontier (CO 273/390, 1912). With this agreement reached, the process of marking the boundary stones was carried out by the British-Siamese Boundary Marking Committee. The Boundary Commission disbanded on June 26, 1911 (Kelantan. 343/1911, 1911).

The border measurement and demarcation was completed by December 13, 1913. The 352-mile (566 km) boundary stretched from Batu Putih on the west coast to Kuala Sungai Golok on the east, dividing the British-controlled Malay States from Siamese territory (Azmi et al., 2019). Although it was thorough, the border demarcation revealed the British and Siamese's strong desire to use the river as a boundary, a decision that seemed illogical and could potentially be contested in future political conflicts (Azmi et al., 2019). This decision, largely driven by British efforts to appease the Siamese government, has developed to border demarcation problem hitherto. The Sungai Golok, with its dual streams, remains ambiguously defined in the border protocols set forth in the Bangkok Treaty of 1909, creating significant challenges in terms of clear territorial delineation.

The bilateral agreements between Britain and Siam resulted in significant territorial losses for Kelantan, including a decline of about 15,000 people along the western bank of the Sungai Golok and a reduction in valuable paddy farming and coastal areas. Kelantan's coastline shrank, diminishing Malaysia's Exclusive Economic Zone (EEZ) and maritime influence. The boundary changes weakened Kelantan's maritime territory, which would have otherwise expanded its economic advantages. The river's unclear geography has also complicated border enforcement, especially in addressing cross-border crimes like smuggling. Malaysia and Thailand have struggled to strengthen their authority along the border, as unresolved territorial disputes hinder cooperation among law enforcement and anti-smuggling agencies. These challenges highlight the long-lasting impact of colonial decisions, with significant consequences for the region's political, economic, and security dynamics today.

## CONCLUSION

The 1909 Bangkok Treaty was a geopolitical agreement between Britain and Siam that divided the northern Malay states for colonial purposes, disregarding the impact on local populations and undermining Kelantan's autonomy. Despite resistance from local rulers, the treaty facilitated British control, marking the start of British colonialism in Kelantan. The treaty imposed severe political limitations, reducing the sovereignty of its rulers to serve colonial interests. The British took control over key aspects of governance, including law, security, the economy, and religion, and introduced policies that undermined local authority, such as a tax

system favouring British interests. Geopolitically, the treaty altered Kelantan's landscape, particularly along its border with Siam, ceding several territories to Siam, including Menara (Narathiwat), Tabal (Tak Bai), and areas north of the Sungai Golok. Kelantan, however, retained parts of southern Legeh, such as Jeli, Batu Melintang, and Rantau Panjang. The treaty established the present-day Malaysia-Thailand border, but overlooked the significance of ceded territories which had been integral to the local population. The new boundary provided Kelantan with access to key catchment areas but resulted in the loss of valuable maritime territories, such as the Tabal district. Moreover, Patani, which had a significant Malay population, was excluded from the agreement, leading to ongoing resistance against Siamese rule. The treaty's broader consequence was the expansion of British influence in Kelantan, leading to political and economic reforms that benefited colonial powers but imposed hardship on the local population. This unwelcomed British presence sparked enduring resistance, especially as nationalist and anti-colonial sentiments grew in Kelantan by 1915. The treaty's long-term impact is evident in the unresolved border demarcation and the lasting resistance to Siamese (Thai) rule in Southern Thailand.

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