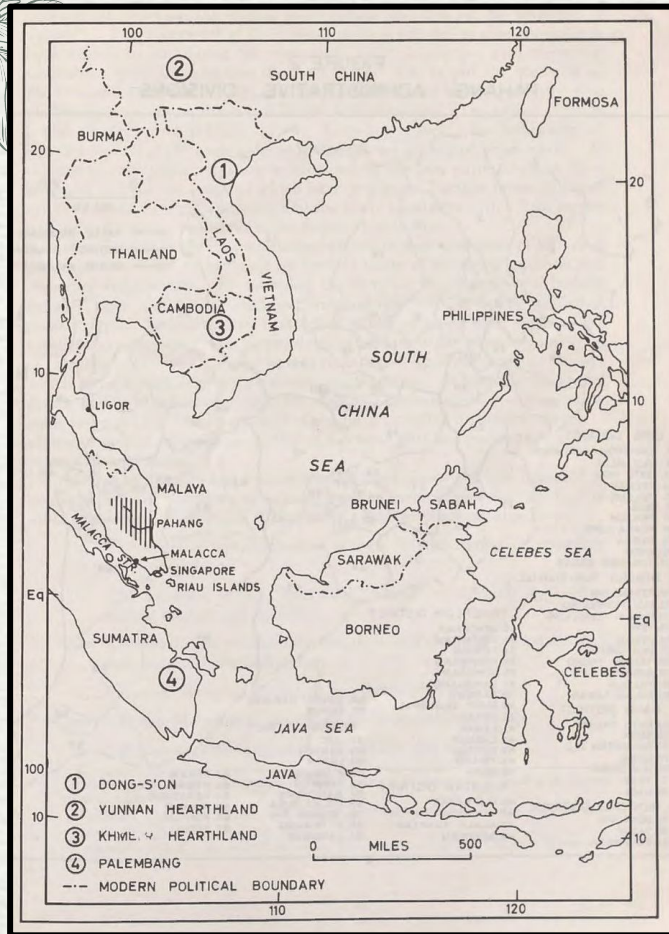


*Between Tribute and
Tide: Siam-Pahang
Relations in the
Malay World*

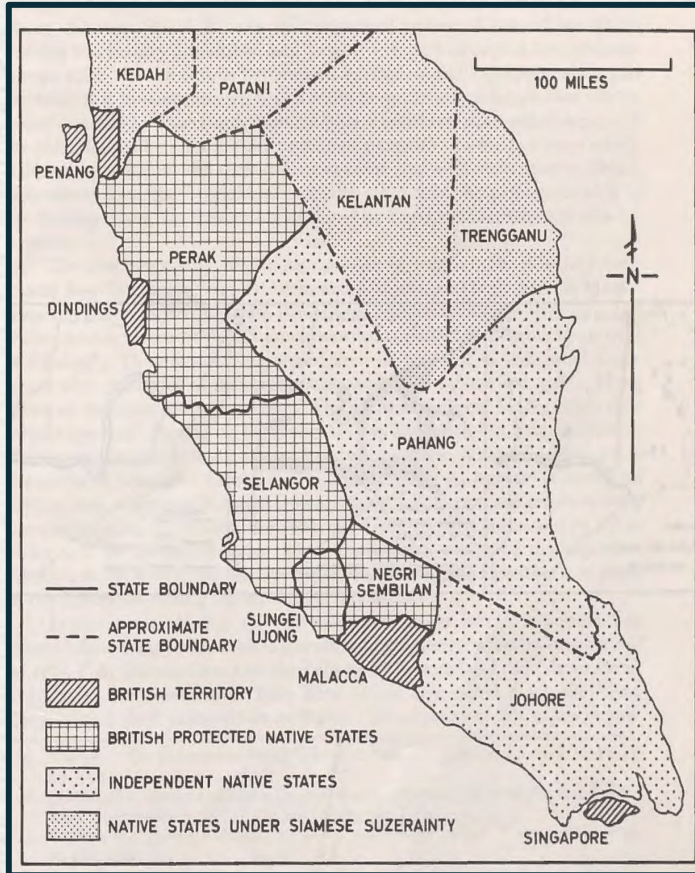




Source: William Linehan, *A History of Pahang*

- **Key Questions:**
 - If Kelantan & Terengganu were known tributaries of Siam, what about Pahang?
 - Where does it fit in the geography of Siam's southern world?
- **Historical Context:**
 - Siamese influence in Kelantan, Terengganu, Kedah, Perlis is well recorded
 - Pahang's status is not clearly documented → requires interpretive reconstruction

Problem of Evidence and Historiography



Source: William Linehan, *A History of Pahang*

Pahang's relationship to Siam recorded indirectly and intermittently

Sources are refracted through:

- Neighbouring Malay polities
- Siamese administrative archives
- Colonial historiography

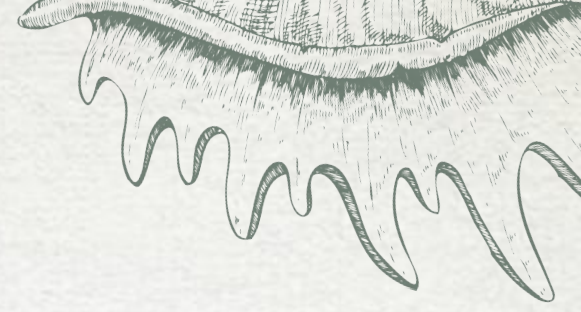
Key Historians Engaged:

- William Linehan
- Aruna Gopinath

Analytical Point: Pahang's suzerainty status cannot be taken as binary - requires reading between archival silences

Conceptual Approach

- Relationship neither fully absent nor firmly subordinate → intermittent and symbolic
- Methodological Orientation:
 - Treat Siamese power as performed, experienced, and negotiated
 - Focus on ritual forms of authority, maritime contact, and geographic crossings
- Guiding Research Question:
 - Not “Did Siam rule Pahang?”
 - But “What did the idea of Siam’s power mean in Pahang, and how did it travel across the sea?”



Ligor as Southern Arm of Siam



Source: William Linehan, *A History of Pahang*

Ligor (Nakhon Si Thammarat) = administrative and military relay for Siam in the peninsula

Role of Ligor:

- Mediated Siamese authority into Malay world
- Oversaw tribute/alliances
- Balanced court politics with local dynamics

Pahang as frontier zone:

- Sometimes within Melaka's orbit, sometimes influenced by Ligor/Siam
- Sovereignty layered and situational, not fixed



The Mandala System & Cyclical Power

- Pahang River → enabled interior trade networks (gold, tin, forest produce)
- Seasonal Siamese maritime interventions via monsoon winds
- Mandala Logic:
 - Power radiated irregularly, not territorially continuous
 - Influence reaffirmed through tribute rather than administration
- Key Idea: Power followed the sea and seasons, not borders

Ligor as Southern Arm of Siam



Source: National Museum of Malaysia

- Tribute (bunga mas) transported via maritime networks
- Tribute = political recognition + economic exchange
- Malay envoys functioned as:
 - Diplomats
 - Navigators
 - Traders
- Ritualised performance upheld suzerainty → but also allowed autonomy

Negotiated Suzerainty

Relationship was triangular: Siam ↔ Ligor ↔ Pahang

Punitive expeditions occurred only when tribute or allegiance was withheld

Limits of Siamese Power:

- Monsoon constraints
- Local defensive coalitions
- Cost of sustained occupation too high

Historiographical Consensus: Suzerainty = recognition based, not coercion based

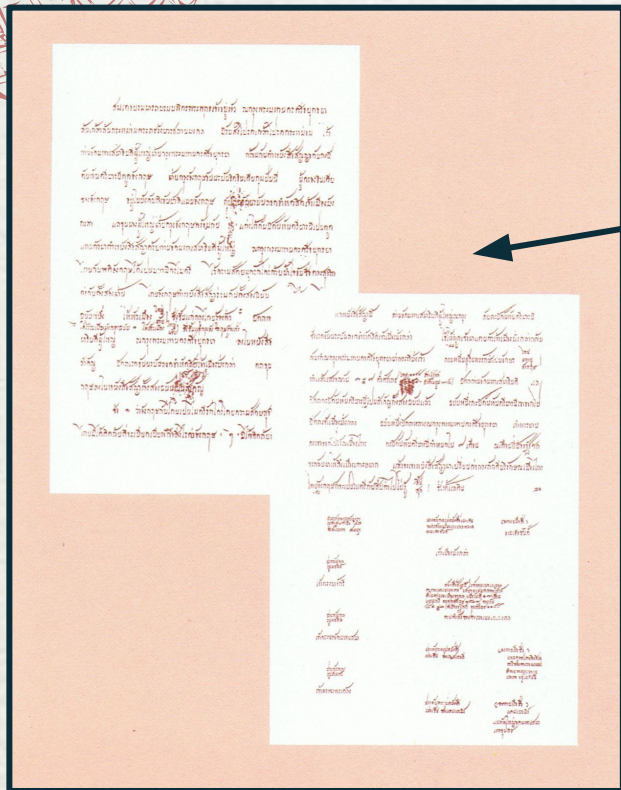
Colonial Freeze & Treaties

Pre-colonial order = fluid,
seasonal, negotiated

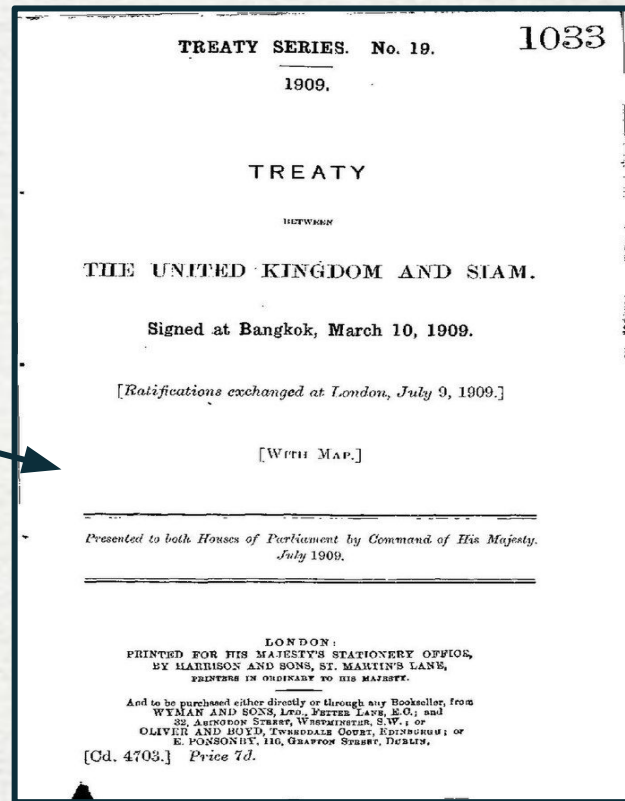
1826 Burney Treaty → British
and Siamese “spheres of
influence”

1909 Anglo-Siamese Treaty →
hard borders imposed

Ligor's role recedes but remains
powerful in memory and identity
narratives



Source: Thai duplicate of Burney Treaty



Source: Front cover of 1909 Treaty

Interpretation & Broader Significance



Source: M. Henri Mouhot, *Travels in the Indo-China (Siam)*

Suzerainty functioned through:

- **Ritual hierarchy**
- **Symbolic exchange**
- **Recognition of status rather than land control**

Challenges colonial-national historiography framing sovereignty as territorial

Encourages re-framing Southeast Asia as:

- **A region of overlapping sovereignties**
- **Maritime connected rather than land divided**

**Thank
you!**

