Crown Colony: Government, Courts and Commercial Law after 1867: summary

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The merchants of Singapore, frustrated by currency policy, convicts, weak policing and neglect from Calcutta, petitioned in 1857 for Crown rule and obtained it when the Straits Settlements became a Crown colony on 1 April 1867 under the Straits Settlements Act 1866. The colony was governed by a Governor with an official Executive Council and a Legislative Council in which officials held a narrow majority and unofficial members, including the first Asian member Hoo Ah Kay from 1869, spoke for commerce. Its legislation combined criminal codes adopted from British India, beginning with the Penal Code of 1871, with English common law and mercantile law in civil and commercial matters, supplemented by ordinances on bankruptcy, bills of sale and companies. The Supreme Court of the Straits Settlements, established in 1868 and given appellate jurisdiction in 1873, together with the Privy Council in London, a growing legal profession and a sterling-backed dollar issued by a currency board from 1899, gave the colony a legal

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and monetary infrastructure that merchants and banks trusted. That infrastructure made law a commercial asset of colonial Singapore, although it rested on a non-democratic colonial order whose features partly survived into the independent state.

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