Suez, Steam and Telegraph: Singapore in the First Globalisation: summary

Dr Alexander Ressos, TEP
Attorney-at-Law (Switzerland and Germany),
Solicitor (England & Wales and Hong Kong)
Of Counsel, KGP Legal LLC
alexander.ressos@kgplegal.com.sg
www.ressos.com.sg

The opening of the Suez Canal in 1869 and the spread of the compound steam engine made steam the dominant mode of shipping between Europe and Asia, so that steamers overtook sailing ships at Singapore in 1870 and the port grew into a hub of ocean and feeder lines. Coaling, docks and repairs moved the centre of the port to New Harbour, where the Tanjong Pagar Dock Company of 1864 built a near monopoly until the colonial government expropriated it with generous compensation in 1905 and created the Singapore Harbour Board. The submarine cable of 1870–1871 linked Singapore to London, Hong Kong and Australia, accelerated trade, opened markets to new firms and made the port a hub of imperial communications. Chinese and Indian migrants arrived by the hundreds of thousands, regulated from 1877 by the Chinese Protectorate and from 1907 by the Tamil Immigration Fund, and their remittances through the *qiaopi* houses created some of the earliest Asian financial networks of the city. Between the wars Britain

© 2026 Dr Alexander Ressos. General information only, not legal, tax or investment advice. No client relationship is created. All Singapore law advice is provided by a duly licensed and regulated firm of Singapore advocates and solicitors only on the basis of an express written letter of engagement. More information at SingaporeIQ.com and ressos.com.sg.

built the naval base at Sembawang as the keystone of its Asian strategy while the depression closed the gates to migration, until the fall of Singapore on 15 February 1942 showed how closely the colony's prosperity had depended on imperial power.

Disclaimer

This article is provided for general information only. It is based on publicly available sources as at its date of publication. These sources have not been independently verified against licences, regulatory registers or the records of the entities concerned. It is not legal, tax, financial or investment advice. Nor is it a recommendation to invest in, transact with or use the services of any entity mentioned. Law and regulation change frequently, so the content may be incomplete or outdated. To the fullest extent permitted by law, Dr Alexander Ressos and the publisher of SingaporeIQ exclude all liability for loss or damage arising from the use of or reliance on this article. Readers should obtain advice on their specific circumstances before acting or refraining from action.

Names and trademarks of the entities discussed belong to their owners and are used for identification only. Their mention implies no endorsement, affiliation or allegation of wrongdoing. All Singapore law advice is provided by a duly licensed and regulated firm of Singapore advocates and solicitors only on the basis of an express written letter of engagement. Corrections and updates: contact@ressos.com.

© 2026 Dr Alexander Ressos. This article may be quoted with attribution to SingaporeIQ (SingaporeIQ.com). Reproduction in full and any commercial use require prior written consent. The Legal Terms at https://singaporeiq.com/legal-terms apply.

Author contact: Dr Alexander Ressos, TEP · contact@ressos.com