英国东印度公司与对华贸易

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介于贸易与帝国之间的公司

1600年获得特许状的英国东印度公司，到十九世纪初已成为一个空前的混合体：它既是一家股东在伦敦开会的股份公司，又是一个凭借自己的军队和文官体系统治印度次大陆大片地区的主权力量。公司的职员同时是商人、行政官员和外交官，他们的决策既受商业算计影响，也受英国国家战略利益和公司驻亚洲官员个人抱负的影响。[1]

议会通过定期续期公司特许状来监督公司。《1813年特许状法》终止了公司在印度的商业垄断，但茶叶和鸦片贸易以及对华贸易除外。[2]自1813年起，英国私商可以自由与印度通商，而对华贸易仍由公司独占，直到《1833年印度政府法》再次续期特许状为止。[3]新加坡正是在这两部法律之间的间隔期建立的。当时，对华贸易是公司最有价值的业务，也承受着来自私商日益增大的压力。

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对华贸易与茶叶垄断

对华贸易的核心是茶叶。整个十八世纪，英国对中国茶叶的需求不断增长，公司在广州的采购成为其利润的主要来源，也成为英国国家财政收入的主要来源之一，因为茶叶运抵英国时要被课税。中国当局将对外贸易限于广州，并限于一个持牌商人行会即行商（Hong merchants），外国人必须以白银向他们购货。[4]

从印度到广州的航线经过马六甲海峡和新加坡海峡。从加尔各答、马德拉斯或孟买驶往中国的船只，需要能够躲避风暴、补充淡水和给养并等候季风的港口。公司拥有1786年建立的槟城。1818年，公司仍期望保有在拿破仑战争期间占领的马六甲和爪哇。根据和平安排，这些领地归还荷兰，海峡的南部出口因而落入荷兰的影响之下。[5]

港脚商人、鸦片与白银问题

公司以一种将影响东南亚经济长达一个世纪的方式，解决了对华贸易中的白银问题。英国和印度的私商即港脚商人，将印度商品运往中国和群岛各港口，其中最主要的是棉花和鸦片，而孟加拉的鸦片生产由公司控制。港脚商人在中国赚取的白银，被缴入公司在广州的金库，换取可在伦敦或印度兑付的汇票。公司再用这些白银购买茶叶。[6]

这一机制值得关注，因为它在本质上描述了一个金融体系。货物朝一个方向流动，白银朝另一个方向流动，汇票则朝第三个方向流动。加尔各答、广州、伦敦和海峡各港口的商人，凭借这些汇票以及对彼此信誉的了解，相互提供信贷。航线上的港口既是贸易场所，也是信贷网络中的节点。新加坡自建立之时起就进入了这一网络。本书第B部分所考察的代理行（agency houses），正是从中发展起来的。

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鸦片贸易也是这一体系在道德和法律上的阴影。由于中国当局禁止鸦片进口，这项贸易依赖走私和官员腐败。在海峡各港口，鸦片是合法的并须纳税。如下文所述，鸦片销售收入成为新加坡公共财政的一大支柱。港口的发展与一项后世所谴责的贸易之间的关联，是金融中心历史的一部分，将在第B部分中加以考察。

1818年的战略难题

1818年，公司驻亚洲的官员面临一个战略难题。马六甲和爪哇归还荷兰，可能使荷兰控制印度洋与南中国海之间的两条通道，即马六甲海峡和巽他海峡。荷兰人1784年在廖内已经表明，他们愿意以武力强加控制。此外，他们的垄断和税费体系对英国私人贸易怀有敌意。槟城位置过于偏北，无法保护南部航线。

1818年，印度总督黑斯廷斯勋爵（Lord Hastings）被说服出资组织一支远征队，在该地区建立一个新的英国基地，但附带条件是不得与荷兰人为敌。[7] 这一授权十分审慎。公司希望在南部航线上取得一个据点，同时避免与荷兰发生冲突，因为拿破仑战争之后英国在欧洲看重与荷兰的友谊。这两个目标之间的张力——既要取得一个削弱荷兰控制的基地，又不能激怒荷兰人——塑造了建埠过程及其后的外交争端。

注释

1. 关于十九世纪初东印度公司作为商业企业和领土权力的双重性质，参见 Philip Lawson, *The East India Company: A History*, London, Longman, 1993，以及 H.V. Bowen, *The Business of Empire: The East India Company and Imperial Britain, 1756–1833*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 2006。↩

2. Wikipedia，“Charter Act of 1813”（2026年9月访问）：“the Company's commercial monopoly was ended, except for the tea and opium trade and the trade with China”。↩

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3. Wikipedia，“Charter Act of 1813”（2026年9月访问）：特许状此后由《1833年印度政府法》（Government of India Act 1833）续期。↩
4. 关于广州体制、行商以及对华贸易中的白银问题，参见 Paul A. Van Dyke, *The Canton Trade: Life and Enterprise on the China Coast, 1700–1845*, Hong Kong, Hong Kong University Press, 2005。↩
5. 爪哇于1816年、马六甲于1818年9月归还荷兰；关于荷兰人于1818年9月重返马六甲，参见 Wikipedia，“William Farquhar”（2026年9月访问）。↩
6. 关于印度、中国与英国之间的三角贸易以及鸦片和汇票的作用，参见 Michael Greenberg, *British Trade and the Opening of China 1800–42*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1951。↩
7. Wikipedia，“Founding years of modern Singapore”（2026年9月访问）：黑斯廷斯于1818年被说服“fund an expedition to establish a new British base in the region, but with the proviso that it should not antagonise the Dutch”。↩

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