Estaño, caucho y el dólar de los Estrechos: resumen

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El descubrimiento de estaño en Larut en 1848 atrajo a mineros chinos y capital de los Estrechos a los estados malayos occidentales, cuyos desórdenes condujeron al Tratado de Pangkor de 1874, al sistema de Residentes y, en 1896, a los Estados Malayos Federados, que hacia 1900 producían algo más de la mitad del estaño mundial. El caucho, introducido en Singapur en 1877 como plántulas procedentes de Kew y convertido en comercialmente viable gracias a los métodos de sangrado de Henry Ridley, se extendió por Malaya después de 1896, hasta que hacia 1920 la península suministraba en torno a la mitad de la producción mundial. Singapur obtuvo su parte fundiendo estaño en Pulau Brani desde 1890, clasificando, procesando y subastando caucho desde 1911, y financiando, asegurando y transportando ambas materias primas a través de sus Agency Houses (casas comerciales de agencia) y sus bancos. Los auges y desplomes de la década de 1870, de 1910, de 1920–1922 y de 1929–1932 expusieron a la colonia a violentos ciclos de precios. Los dos últimos dieron lugar a planes de restricción para el caucho y el estaño, cuya lógica terminó en la crisis del estaño de 1985. El dólar de los Estrechos, emitido desde 1899 por una Board of Commissioners of Currency y fijado en dos

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chelines y cuatro peniques en 1906, dio a la economía de las materias primas una moneda estable respaldada por reservas en libras esterlinas, un principio de pleno respaldo exterior que el dólar de Singapur conserva hoy.

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