

Imperial Agents: A Study on the Motivations for the Establishment of the British East Africa Company

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ABSTRACT

Founded in 1888, the British East Africa Company was one of the four major chartered companies through which Britain extended its colonial rule in Africa during the late 19th century. However, existing scholarship—both domestic and international—has yet to produce a systematic and unified framework for understanding the complex motivations behind its establishment. This paper argues that its origins can be traced to four overlapping historical processes: the historical inertia of British informal control over the Sultanate of Zanzibar and the East African coast, the need to defend critical imperial trade routes through the Suez Canal and Indian Ocean, the intense competitive pressures generated by the great powers' scramble for Africa, and who mediated between the spheres of politics and business. Together, these forces contributed to the unexpected resurgence of the chartered company as a viable colonial tool. The company's creation thus emerged from the intricate interplay between imperial state interests and private capital accumulation, embodying the distinctive patterns of colonial expansion in the era of monopoly capitalism.

Keywords: *British East Africa Company, Chartered company, William Mackinnon, Sultanate of Zanzibar.*

1. INTRODUCTION

The “charter” system refers to the transfer of rights, privileges or immunities from the supreme state authority to individuals, groups of individuals, institutions or dependencies, usually issued in the form of a written document known as a “charter”. From the late 18th century to the mid-19th century, with the advancement of the Industrial Revolution and the development of laissez-faire capitalism, the status of chartered companies as the dominant form of enterprise gradually declined. However, in the 1880s, with the transition of capitalism to the monopoly stage and the frenzy of European powers to partition Africa, the British government reactivated the charter system to penetrate Africa and established the British East Africa Company in 1888 to develop colonies.

Regarding the study of chartered companies, Chinese scholars have mostly conducted macro discussions within the overall context of imperialist expansion at the end of the 19th century, while specialized research on the East Africa Company is

relatively weak. Most studies focus on sorting out its historical development trajectory and lack in-depth analysis of the specific motivations for its establishment. International academic research on the British East Africa Company is relatively abundant, including specialized biographies of its founder William Mackinnon and studies of the East Africa Company itself, with relevant content also scattered in general histories of Britain and Zanzibar. However, these studies often present fragmented analyses of the causes of the East Africa Company's founding and fail to form a systematic and complete explanatory framework. On the basis of fully drawing on relevant Chinese and international research, this paper comprehensively examines the historical motivations for the establishment of the British East Africa Company from a multi-dimensional perspective and reconstructs the complex historical background of British colonization of East Africa at the end of the 19th century.

2. THE HISTORICAL INERTIA OF BRITISH CONTROL OVER ZANZIBAR

Britain's influence over Zanzibar began with its anti-slave trade operations and the 1822 Moresby Treaty, which recognized the Sultan of Oman's suzerainty over the East African coast in return for his commitment to restrict the Arab slave trade. Thereafter British influence penetrated steadily into Zanzibar's political, economic and military spheres.

After the death of Sultan Sayyid Saïd in 1856, Zanzibar fell into turmoil. His will divided the kingdom between Oman and Zanzibar, with Majid bin Said succeeding in Zanzibar, an arrangement that violated Arab tribal traditions. Thuwaini bin Said, Majid's elder brother and ruler of Oman, strongly opposed the division; Zanzibar was far wealthier, and the economic disparity made Oman's demand to recover the dependencies increasingly urgent. Majid could only maintain an uneasy peace by paying Thuwaini an annual subsidy. At the same time, Barghash bin Said plotted a coup in alliance with the El-Harthi tribe, and Majid defeated the rebellion only through the steadfast defense of the Baluchi garrison and the deterrence of British Consul Hamerton. After Hamerton's death, the French consul exploited the vacuum to cultivate pro-French elements, while Thuwaini assembled a fleet for a military expedition, the El-Harthi conspired to rise, and Barghash secretly attached himself to French forces. The collusion of opposing forces brought Zanzibar to the brink of civil war. To prevent disruption of the Indian Ocean trade order, British Indian authorities intervened decisively, dispatching warships to intercept Thuwaini's force and compelling both sides to submit to British arbitration. In 1861 the Canning Award declared Majid the legitimate ruler, establishing Zanzibar's independent status solely through direct British intervention. France protested and sent warships in a show of force, but after negotiations French forces promised not to interfere in local rebellions, and Barghash was exiled to India. During his reign, Majid continued a pro-British policy and relied on British protection to consolidate his rule, demonstrating to his successors that the Sultan could survive only with British support.

During his exile, Barghash realized that cooperation with Britain was essential to secure the throne. Yet after becoming Sultan in the 1870s, he initially resisted abolition; when he refused to sign

an abolition treaty in 1873, Britain imposed a naval blockade and forced him to sign a comprehensive treaty in June of that year. As European penetration intensified, Barghash gradually recognized that Zanzibar could neither bear the costs of inland governance nor withstand imperial encroachment on its mainland possessions, while continued British control could bring tariff revenues and help resist external powers. He therefore actively sought cooperation with Britain. In the 1870s the Sultanate's military organization came under British control, and Zanzibar's economic dependence deepened: Britain became its largest trading partner, with trade volume twice that of Germany and three times that of the United States. A hurricane in 1872 nearly destroyed the clove industry, prompting Barghash to promote trade and facilitate the opening of the India–Zanzibar route by Mackinnon's company. During a state visit to Britain in 1875 he formally invited British capitalists to develop East Africa, and in 1877 he proposed leasing the customs administration of the East African coast to Mackinnon, though the plan failed without Foreign Office support. In 1881 Barghash again requested that Britain act as regent after his death, effectively placing his kingdom under British protection. Although the British government declined, Barghash's active overtures laid the political foundation for the subsequent establishment of the British East Africa Company.

3. ECONOMIC DEPRESSION AND THE STIMULUS OF PUBLIC OPINION

The prolonged economic depression that began in the 1870s forced British industrial and commercial capital to urgently seek new overseas markets and sources of raw materials. Meanwhile, explorers' exaggerated reports of the rich resources in the interior of East Africa greatly stimulated the investment desire of the British business community, and Britain's anti-slave trade policy since the 19th century became an important motivation for the establishment of the British East Africa Company.

3.1 Demand for Market Expansion amid Economic Depression

After the 1870s, Britain's economic development slowed down significantly, while facing increasingly fierce competition from the United States and Germany. At the same time,

Britain experienced a series of severe industrial and agricultural crises after 1870, leading to declining profits for capitalists, unemployment among workers, bankruptcy among farmers and social unrest. In addition, European and American countries successively adopted protective tariff policies, causing British industrial products to lose significant ground in traditional markets. Industrial and commercial capital therefore urgently demanded the opening up of new markets to absorb excess goods and capital.¹

At the same time, Africa was the only remaining continent in the world that had not been completely partitioned by the great powers. In 1876, nearly 90% of Africa's land remained uncolonized. Decades of geographical exploration, advances in transportation technology and improvements in medicine had made it possible to penetrate deep into tropical Africa. Therefore, expansion into Africa became an important way out for the British bourgeoisie to extricate itself from the economic crisis. As Cecil Rhodes put it: "To save the 40 million inhabitants of the United Kingdom from a bloody civil war, we colonial statesmen must acquire new territories to settle the surplus population and find new markets for the goods produced in our factories and mines."

3.2 Public Opinion Stimulus from Exploration Reports

Although the potential resources of Africa were still largely speculative at that time, reports from explorers and other pioneers fueled excessive expectations. Since David Livingstone issued his famous call to "open Africa for commerce and Christianity" in 1857, a large number of explorers had crossed the African continent. Most of them described Africa's economic prospects in enthusiastic terms, believing that European enterprises could expect substantial profits[12].

Verney Lovett Cameron, the first European to cross equatorial Africa, described Africa's resources in his 1877 book *Across Africa* with phrases such as "almost indescribable fertility" and "immeasurable wealth". He declared to the British business community that Africa provided a vast market outlet for Britain's surplus economic products and proposed the establishment of an enterprise modeled on the East India Company to

develop Africa. Horace Waller, Edward Hutchinson and others also actively advocated for the British bourgeoisie to extricate itself from the economic crisis. In a speech to the Society of Arts, Waller stated that Africa must be thoroughly developed to become "the great heart that drives commerce into the country".

However, these reports of Africa's vast wealth were rarely supported by reliable factual data and underestimated the difficulties of transporting inland goods to coastal areas. In the late 1870s, the palm oil trade in the Niger experienced a downturn due to falling prices, and there was no longer a strong economic incentive for further European commercial activity or political intervention. The resources of the African interior remained shrouded in mystery. At that time, huge elephant herds roamed most of the African continent, and ivory trade could yield substantial profits if transportation costs were reasonable. However, overland transportation was expensive, as it depended mainly on African porters. In 1890, George Mackenzie estimated that the freight rate for transporting goods from the east coast to Lake Victoria was as high as 30 francs per ton. In addition, with the large-scale hunting of elephants, the supply of ivory declined rapidly. In 1890, Sir Charles Dilke pointed out that the Arabs in East Africa were hunting elephants so rapidly that unless the British East Africa Company implemented restrictive measures, ivory would probably be exhausted in another fifteen or twenty years.

Despite the lack of reliable factual support and the underestimation of transportation challenges, these reports successfully created an atmosphere of "Africa fever" in the British business community, laying the social foundation for the establishment of the British East Africa Company.

4. THE SITUATION OF THE SCRAMBLE FOR AFRICA AND BRITISH STRATEGIC CONSIDERATIONS

The international situation in Africa changed dramatically in the 1880s. Germany's rapid expansion in East Africa, the new colonial rules established by the Berlin Conference, and Zanzibar's dependence on Britain together constituted strong external pressure, forcing Britain to abandon its long-standing policy of informal control and adopt a more active policy of colonial expansion.

1. Gao Jinyuan, "British Colonial Expansion in Africa at the End of the 19th Century", *West Asia and Africa*, No. 3, 1983.

4.1 *Pressure from German Expansion*

After the unification of the German Empire in the 1870s, its capitalist economy developed rapidly, and its industrial output rose to second place in Europe. With the formation of monopoly capitalism and the economic depression of the 1870s, the German monopoly bourgeoisie urgently needed to develop overseas sources of raw materials and markets for goods. At the same time, the emerging German Empire also regarded overseas colonial expansion as an important means to demonstrate its status as a great power and enhance its diplomatic voice in Europe. Against this background, colonialist ideology rose rapidly in Germany, and Carl Peters was an enthusiastic advocate and practitioner of this ideology. In 1884, he founded the German Colonial Association and prepared for colonial expansion in East Africa.

Before the arrival of German colonizers, no unified central state had formed on the East African coast. The power of the Sultanate of Zanzibar actually only extended to a narrow coastal strip, and the political and economic relations between various tribes within its territory were very loose, which provided an opportunity for Germany's rapid expansion. On November 4, 1884, Peters and three companions secretly arrived on Zanzibar Island disguised as mechanics. Although the German government initially adopted a cautious attitude towards his unauthorized actions, fearing damage to relations with Britain, Peters did not give up. He crossed the strait and landed on the East African mainland on the night of November 8. In just six weeks, Peters traveled through regions such as Usagara and Useguha and signed so-called "protection treaties" with numerous tribal chiefs. These treaties were highly fraudulent, as local chiefs could not understand due to language barriers that the treaties would deprive them of their right to rule over their land and people.² In February 1885, Peters returned to Germany with these treaties and threatened to sell the territory to King Leopold II of Belgium, forcing the Bismarck government to recognize his colonial acquisitions. That same month, the German government granted a charter, and the German East Africa Company was established. The company immediately launched exploration and colonial activities, invading Britain's sphere of influence.

2. <https://www.deutschlandmuseum.de/en/history/calendar/1884-03-28-formation-of-the-society-for-german-colonization/>, last accessed April 16, 2026.

Britain's initial reaction to Germany's expansion was relatively lukewarm. Prime Minister Gladstone even stated: "If Germany becomes a colonial power, the only thing I can say is 'God speed her'". However, the British government soon realized the seriousness of the problem. After Lord Salisbury succeeded Gladstone as Prime Minister in June 1885, Britain's policy towards Germany began to change. If Germany were allowed to expand unimpeded in East Africa, Britain's influence over the Sultanate of Zanzibar would completely collapse, thereby threatening British interests throughout East Africa. In the Foreign Office, Percy Anderson and his successor Clement Hill began to attach importance to the commercial and strategic value of East Africa. Their opinions had an important influence on Salisbury's decision-making, ultimately leading to a consensus within the British government that a foothold must be maintained on the East African mainland. Anderson pointed out that "a chartered company will save our position on the East Coast, and there is every reason why the government should give it the necessary support and guarantees". It was against this background that Britain began to seriously consider establishing a chartered company to counter German colonial expansion.

4.2 *Constraints of International Rules*

The Berlin Conference held from 1884 to 1885 established a new set of rules of colonial international law, the most important of which was the principle of "effective occupation". The General Act of the Berlin Conference stipulated that any power occupying a territory on the coast of the African continent must submit relevant documents and declarations to the signatories of the Act and was obliged to establish a regime in the occupied area capable of protecting acquired rights as well as freedom of trade and transit. In terms of European international relations, one of the important purposes of Germany in leading the conference was to unite France to teach Britain a lesson and make it understand that "it cannot claim control over Africa and other regions without effective occupation".

Prior to this, Britain had pursued the traditional policy of "trade not rule" in East Africa, operating in the form of an informal empire. This policy had been sustainable for two main reasons: first, Britain's colonial power in the region was relatively strong, allowing it to maintain its colonial interests by controlling and manipulating the Sultan of Zanzibar; second, Britain had not yet encountered

strong rivals, and behind-the-scenes government activities could avoid unnecessary diplomatic disputes. Under the principle of effective occupation established by the Berlin Conference, if Britain could not quickly convert its sphere of influence into administrative rule capable of exercising actual power, the entire East African continent would be legally re-partitioned by other powers according to the new rules. Therefore, establishing the East Africa Company and issuing a royal charter, allowing it to carry out actual occupation and governance in East Africa on behalf of the British government, became an inevitable choice for Britain to safeguard its interests under the new international rules.

4.3 British Geostrategic Considerations

The first is the control of the Upper Nile. The opening of the Suez Canal in 1869 made Egypt and the Red Sea vital regions of the British Empire. East Africa became a key area for controlling the water sources of the upper Nile and protecting Egypt's security. After Germany's invasion of East Africa, the British government realized that it must not allow Germany to establish a dominant position in strategic areas closely related to the Nile Basin. An 1884 memorandum from the British Foreign Office pointed out that the political future of the East African region was of practical importance to India and imperial interests, and therefore Britain should seek territorial compensation on the East Coast while ceding territorial responsibilities in West Africa to other countries. Britain's strategic objectives in East Africa prompted the approval of the British East Africa Company's establishment, authorizing it to expand inland in East Africa to ensure that the upper Nile did not fall into the hands of other powers. During the decade from the early 1870s to the early 1880s, British policy had shifted from relatively limited and passive intervention in East African affairs to more active and extensive interference.

The second is the protection of Indian Ocean Routes. The East African coast was also of great significance for maintaining Britain's maritime supremacy in the Indian Ocean and protecting the ocean trade routes to India. The East African region was closely linked to Britain's two major strategic strongholds of Egypt and South Africa. During his tenure as boundary commissioner, Kitchener explicitly expressed concern that a German fleet based on the east coast of Africa would directly threaten British security in the Indian Ocean. He

therefore urged the Royal Navy to establish at least a naval base in Mombasa to counter the strategic pressure formed by Germany's occupation of Dar es Salaam and France's occupation of Diego Suarez in Madagascar.

In addition to strategic security, Zanzibar was the commercial center of the entire tropical East Africa and a vital trade and commercial area between Britain and India, with self-evident commercial value. Most of East Africa's commerce, banking, finance, wholesale and retail trade was in the hands of Indian merchant communities, a large number of Indians had settled there, and local import and export trade was mainly controlled by British and Indian merchants. "Indian interests" thus became an important component of Britain's overall interests. Protecting the trade routes between India and Zanzibar also became part of Britain's East African policy. Furthermore, in his report on his inspection of East Africa, then Consul to Zanzibar Holmwood concluded: "I believe this report contains sufficient information to guide the managers of British enterprises and our entire business community to proceed with the development of the resources of this new and vitally important market." This report contributed to the establishment of the Imperial British East Africa Company.

5. THE PERSONAL ROLE OF WILLIAM MACKINNON

Sir William Mackinnon was not only the main funder and leader of the East Africa Company but also the key hub connecting imperial strategy, monopoly capital and merchant ambition. His commercial ambitions and colonial ideals, along with those of other British capitalists, led to the establishment of the British East Africa Company.

5.1 Commercial Interest Motivation

William Mackinnon was born in 1823 in a small village in Scotland. He left school at an early age to work as a grocer's apprentice and later moved to India to do business. In 1856, he founded the Burma Steam Navigation Company, which later developed into the British India Steam Navigation Company (referred to as "BI").³ By the 1870s, BI had become one of the major shipping companies in the Indian Ocean.

3. For the history of BI, see <http://www.bishop.com/history.htm>, last accessed April 12, 2026.

Mackinnon's connection with East Africa began in the 1870s. In 1872, Britain decided to provide subsidies for the mail route from Aden to Zanzibar to combat the East African slave trade, and BI was awarded this ten-year government subsidy contract, marking its first involvement in East African shipping. The mail transport contract itself was not profitable, but East Africa was in the early stages of development at that time. In the port of Aden, BI ships could take over from the large vessels of the Peninsular and Oriental Steam Navigation Company (P&O) to transport a variety of manufactured goods from Europe and the United States. They could also bring back local specialty products - various forms of coconut, cloves and rare woods.⁴ Between 1872 and 1882, driven by BI shipping, British imports to East Africa increased by 43% and exports by 197%. High-profit commodities such as cloves and ivory made Mackinnon see the huge commercial potential of East Africa. He began to attempt to build inland roads in East Africa and compete for colonial concessions, gradually making East Africa a new growth pole for his commercial empire. However, all these plans failed.⁵

5.2 Pursuit of Moral Ideals

In addition to commercial interests, Mackinnon also had strong colonial ideals. He was deeply influenced by former Governor of Bombay Sir Bartle Frere, whose vision of "promoting legitimate trade in East Africa through steam shipping and

ending the slave trade" became Mackinnon's lifelong pursuit. At the time of its establishment, both Mackinnon and the British government made the suppression of the slave trade an important mission of the British East Africa Company. The royal charter issued on September 3, 1888 explicitly required the company to undertake the obligation to suppress slavery. The company declared that it would replace the slave trade by promoting "legitimate trade" and eradicate barbaric customs in Africa through commerce and civilization.

Mackinnon believed that the East Africa Company was a tool for the British Empire to control East Africa and a way to realize his self-worth and personal ideal of anti-slavery. After Germany's invasion of East Africa, Mackinnon brought together diverse interest groups in British society. In 1885, he organized like-minded industrialists, financiers and influential political figure projects to jointly promote the establishment of the British East Africa Association (the predecessor of the East Africa Company). In February 1887, Barghash cabled Mackinnon, proposing to restart the previous concession cooperation and use the association formed by Mackinnon to maintain Zanzibar's remaining sovereignty. Mackinnon thus restarted his East African. Most of the initial investors in the East Africa Company were motivated by the belief that they were contributing to noble national goals by investing in a chartered company. While they also expected to make money, profit was not their only goal, and in many cases not even their primary goal. As East Africa Company executive Charles Hobley put it: "No body of shrewd practical business men would have embarked on so vast and distant an undertaking as the pacification and occupation of Uganda without the definite support and guarantee of the government." It was this combination of patriotism and philanthropy that transformed the British East Africa Company from a mere commercial enterprise into an important tool of British imperial expansion.

6. THE CHOICE OF THE CHARTER SYSTEM

Britain had strong strategic and economic interests, but the British government, out of fiscal conservatism, was unwilling to bear the high costs of direct colonial rule. Therefore, the agency model of authorizing private companies to carry out colonial expansion through royal charters became

4. See <http://www.bishop.com/history.htm>, last accessed April 12, 2026.

5. In 1876, Mackinnon attended the Brussels International African Association Conference. British representatives supported his plan to build transportation lines deep into the African interior, but Foreign Office Permanent Under-Secretary Lord Tenterden questioned the feasibility of the plan, and Treasury legal adviser Thring argued that private institutions were incapable of abolishing the slave trade and that the association might harm British interests. Ultimately, the Prince of Wales refused to serve as chairman of the committee, and the establishment plan collapsed. In December, Sultan Barghash, fearing Egyptian expansion into the upper Nile and the Great Lakes region, supported Mackinnon's East African development plan. Mackinnon proposed a road project and sought cooperation with General Gordon, but the cooperation was shelved when Gordon was ordered by the Duke of Cambridge to return to Egypt. In February 1877, Mackinnon drafted an East African concession bill, planning to establish an association to take over the Sultan's continental territories with his consent. Mackinnon sought British government support for the concession but only received vague encouragement. In February 1878, the British Cabinet finally expressed support for the plan, but negotiations completely broke down due to the rude provocation of translator Badger towards the Sultan and the Sultan's renunciation of the ivory monopoly and customs lease interests.

the best choice for the British government. For this reason, the East Africa Company is defined as an “administrative company” in some works.⁶

6.1 Fiscal Cost Considerations

The British government was strongly averse to bearing the high administrative and military expenses of new colonies, believing that no overseas expansion should impose a burden on the national treasury. In the early 1880s, no British official was willing to take responsibility for governing East Africa. In 1882, when Sultan Barghash requested the British government to serve as regent after his death, the British Foreign Office declined citing its unwillingness to take on long-term commitments. The Permanent Under-Secretary, Lord Tenterden, pointed out that “the regency might last a long time, and Britain would have to protect the young Sultan indefinitely” to avoid unnecessary expenditure.

The establishment of the British North Borneo Chartered Company and the Royal Niger Company in West Africa provided successful precedents for the East Africa Company. Gladstone argued that “a charter is a means of lightening the burden of government, since the irresistible tendency of British enterprise to extend the range and area of our commerce and settlements beyond the limits of our sovereignty”. Granville also assured the House of Lords that the charter did not imply the establishment of imperial rule, nor did it oblige the government to assist the company or take over the territory. Returning to the agent colonial model could achieve imperial strategic goals without the government bearing financial risks, thus winning the favor of the British government.

6.2 Outsourcing of Colonial Rights and Responsibilities

Although the chartered company system had been unpopular since the time of Adam Smith, who had opposed this method in the 18th century on the grounds that turning merchants into sovereigns was inappropriate and that such concessions imposed almost no substantive responsibility on the British Crown, the Gladstone government was reluctant to pursue an aggressive policy in Africa and believed that the chartered company approach was far better than simply retreating in the face of European

competition. When imperial expansion could not be advanced through this method, Britain declared the relevant territories as protectorates. After 1887, the Salisbury government also considered this approach much safer than rashly leading the government into territorial conflicts with other powers in Africa.

By issuing a royal charter, the British government granted private companies administrative, judicial, military and taxation powers over specific regions, as well as monopoly rights over land, minerals and trade. In return, the companies undertook to suppress the slave trade, respect the rights of indigenous peoples and relieve the imperial authorities of financial and administrative responsibilities. After the signing of the charter, the East Africa Company assumed the heavy responsibility of development, building transportation arteries, establishing administrative systems, conducting in-depth investigations of local climate and soil conditions, and opening up potential markets for British goods.

There were also contradictions between Britain’s “hands-off” colonial policy and private companies. Salisbury’s primary concern was maintaining peace with Germany, and all British activities in East Africa had to conform to the overall situation of Anglo-German harmony; while Mackinnon was committed to building a vast East African trading empire to contain Carl Peters and others who attempted to encroach upon Britain’s rightful interests. Mackinnon expected the government to provide more support and assistance, while Salisbury was only willing to offer limited support that would not trigger international conflicts. This divergence in their goals laid the groundwork for the subsequent failure of the British East Africa Company.

7. EVALUATION AND SIGNIFICANCE OF THE BRITISH EAST AFRICA COMPANY

From the strategic dimension of British imperial expansion, although the East Africa Company dissolved in 1895 due to financial problems, it penetrated deep into the East African interior on a large scale in just a few years. By signing protection treaties with coastal and inland tribes and establishing colonial outposts, it curbed the expansion momentum of the German East Africa Company to a certain extent and defended Britain’s sphere of influence in Zanzibar. During the period when Britain and other European empires were “scrambling” for Africa at the end of the 19th

6. See Griffiths, Percival Joseph, *A Licence to Trade: The History of English Chartered Companies*, London: E. Benn, 1974, Table of Contents.

century, the task of expansion was mainly entrusted to chartered companies. However, the East Africa Company differed from its prototypes of the 16th and 17th centuries. Early companies were mainly private monopoly organizations whose business policies were consistent with the government's general economic policies. In contrast, the companies of the 1880s were not granted the same monopoly rights as earlier chartered companies. Their responsibilities were more imperial than commercial, and they mainly served as buffer zones between the imperial government and other foreign countries.

In terms of the practice of colonial models, the rise and fall of the British East Africa Company embodied the inherent value and congenital limitations of the chartered company colonial model at the end of the 19th century. The remnants of British government fiscal conservatism and the "informal control" ideology of the free capitalist era promoted the revival of the chartered company model. Through the East Africa Company, the British government transferred colonial governance, development investment and operational risks to private capital, completing the expansion of nearly one million square kilometers of territory without large-scale financial expenditure, while avoiding direct diplomatic conflicts with other powers. However, there were also deep-seated conflicts between the government and capital. The British government prioritized the balance of Anglo-German interests and was only willing to provide limited policy support; while private capital represented by Mackinnon, combining commercial profit demands with colonial expansion ideals, longed for strong government support. This fundamental contradiction between conservative state strategy and radical private capital was an important reason for the company's severe financial crisis. It only existed for seven years before transferring its territories to the British government, demonstrating that the chartered company model could only serve as a transitional tool for colonial expansion and could not fulfill the role of long-term colonial rule.

From a long-term historical perspective, the development of East Africa by the British East Africa Company changed the modern historical trajectory of the East African continent. Economically, the company suppressed the slave trade and promoted shipping expansion, port construction and the building of trade networks, which to a certain extent broke the geographical isolation between the East African interior and the

coast, integrated the originally scattered tribal economies into the world capitalist system, initiated Britain's strategic objectives in East Africa prompted the approval of the British East Africa Company's establishment, and at the same time constructed an economic model dependent on the British mainland. The integration of Mackinnon's personal business network and colonial ideals further revealed the deep interaction between state power and private capital, and between macro-level strategies and micro-level individual actions in imperial expansion.

The historical influence of the British East Africa Company far exceeded its short operational period, and it holds a significant place in the history of British imperialism, modern East African and imperialism at large.

First, the British East Africa Company is a paradigm of Britain's transformation from a "trade empire" to a "colonial empire", demonstrating the entire process from revival to decline of the chartered colonial model and embodying Britain's colonial logic of acting in accordance with practical interests based on colonial costs, international environment and strategic objectives.

Second, the British East Africa Company was a key factor in the modern historical transformation of East Africa. Its colonial expansion broke the traditional ethnic distribution and political pattern of East Africa, laid the historical foundation for the subsequent establishment of British East African colonies and the demarcation of borders and construction of political structures of modern countries such as Kenya and Uganda, while also sowing the seeds of ethnic conflicts. At the same time, it promoted the expansion of communication networks, trade networks and shipping infrastructure, integrated East Africa into the global capitalist system, initiated the local economic modernization process, and shaped the dependent colonial economic structure that would affect East African development for a long time.

Third, the British East Africa Company has deepened the study of imperial history. The company's slave policies, governance model, and the reasons for its failure have been extensively studied. At the same time, it has broken the single-state narrative of imperialist expansion, clearly demonstrating the interaction between state power and political and business elites in the colonial process, and providing a valuable research sample for academia to understand the diversity and

complexity of colonial expansion in the era of monopoly capitalism.

8. CONCLUSION

The birth of the British East Africa Company was the result of the combined effect of multiple historical factors under the wave of the great powers' scramble for Africa and imperialist expansion at the end of the 19th century. Although the company only existed for seven years before transferring its territories to the British government due to insufficient funds, mismanagement and conflicts with the government, it played an irreplaceable role in Britain's occupation of East Africa.

An analysis of the process of the East Africa Company's establishment shows that half a century of British penetration and economic control over the Sultanate of Zanzibar provided the political preconditions for its colonial expansion" 或 "the political foundation. The prolonged European capitalist economic depression after the 1870s and the trade protection barriers of European and American countries forced British industrial and commercial capital to export to Africa. Meanwhile, the explorer community's advocacy of African wealth and the social consensus formed by the anti-slave trade movement constructed the social foundation for colonial expansion. It was the long-term accumulation and mutual superposition of these factors that laid the preconditions for the revival of the chartered company colonial model.

Political and business elites represented by William Mackinnon played an irreplaceable role in this historical process. Existing studies often fall into two extreme narratives: either reducing them to passive tools of imperial expansion or portraying them as individual heroes with colonial ideals. Mackinnon's business layout, political and business network and colonial ideals not only provided the capital support and organizational foundation for the establishment of the East Africa Company but also integrated scattered social demands, national strategies and specific commercial interests. The deeds of figures such as Mackinnon and Kirk show that grand colonial expansion can only be implemented through concrete individual actions step by step; while individual choices and actions are always influenced by the economic, institutional and international relations environment in which they are located. It was the interaction between the macro and the micro that ultimately shaped the birth trajectory of the British East Africa Company.

An analysis of the British East Africa Company itself shows that the return of the charter system reflected Britain's colonial expansion strategy of adapting to circumstances and prioritizing interests. When European empires set off a wave of partitioning Africa at the end of the 19th century, Britain was able to change from its traditional policy of informal control, such as restarting the charter system to rule its sphere of influence and then formally establishing colonies; when the cost or risk of direct rule was too high, the British government used the power of private capital and chartered companies as agents for indirect governance.

The establishment of the British East Africa Company is not only an important chapter in the history of British colonization of East Africa but also reflects the interplay of state power, private capital, and social trends in this historical process. It reflects the complexity and diversity of imperialist expansion models at the end of the 19th century and provides a representative case for understanding Britain's colonial expansion logic in that era.

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