

Southeast Asia

Pirates of empire: Colonisation and maritime violence in Southeast Asia

By STEFAN EKLÖF AMIRELL

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Southeast Asian piracy and naval warfare prior to the twentieth century remains an underappreciated topic despite a significant body of sources available to historians. Prof. Amirell undertook the ambitious task of writing about this complicated and challenging topic with a focus on the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries using imperial history methodologies over that of autonomous history. The monograph's argument relates maritime violence in Southeast Asia to the rise of European and American colonisation of the region between circa 1850 to 1920 (p. viii). He links the suppression of piracy to the colonisation process of Southeast Asia during the second half of the nineteenth century by focusing (p. 3) on counter-piracy operations in the Sulu Sea, the Straits of Malacca, and the South China Sea.

The main strength of the work is its command of the historiography on the topic, not just within the areas of Southeast Asia studied, but within global piracy and maritime history in a manner few, if any, historians of Southeast Asia have accomplished. Amirell provides a well-researched analysis of the history of piracy as a concept both in Europe and Southeast Asia from classical times to the present. He challenges the repetitive arguments concerning the semantics of piracy given by a number of prominent historians of piracy in Asia, who have criticised the use of the word 'piracy' as a Eurocentric imposition on traditional maritime activities in Southeast Asia. In particular, he criticises contemporary historians' improper use of the often-cited anecdote in *Hikayat Abdullah* concerning Sultan Husain of Johor's lack of shame about piracy as being representative of a Malay perception of it (p. 13). Instead, he shows that state relations with piracy varied from active support to suppression throughout time and space (p. 41). Amirell's expansion of the dialogue on Southeast Asian piracy to historians associated with the Atlantic World such as Marcus Rediker, N.A.M. Rodger, and David J. Starkey is a positive development because Southeast Asians are too often minimised in discourse concerning global maritime history for no justifiable reason.

The structure of each section is generally ordered chronologically and narrates how Western powers combatted piracy as they grew their empires. This is particularly ambitious for the Straits of Malacca segment because of the lack of easily available materials dating before 1855 concerning piracy. Unlike their Dutch and Spanish counterparts, nineteenth-century British military and political leaders never published a remotely comprehensive account of their counter-piracy efforts in the region during the early years of the Straits Settlements, thereby making writing about these events in this form highly challenging. There are other possible interpretations concerning British counter-piracy operations during the nineteenth century in Malayan waters, particularly for the operations of the warship HMS *Andromache* (p. 109).

Two prominent works concerning sea power in the Straits of Malacca cited in this study include Carl Trocki's *Prince of Pirates* (1979) and Eric Tagliacozzo's *Secret Trades, Porous Borders* (2008). These have rather incompatible arguments concerning the issue of colonial state sea power. Trocki's argument portrays European colonial states as wielding extraordinary power during the early to mid-nineteenth century to the point where they practically wiped out Malay sea power by force (*Prince of Pirates*, p. 208). This argument fits within the national liberation framework commonly employed at the time of its publication. Tagliacozzo argues instead that the efforts of British and Dutch colonial governments during the mid-nineteenth century to enforce laws at sea came at an immense cost and encountered many challenges (*Secret Trades*, pp. 58–9, 260). *Pirates of Empire* partially addresses the limitations of power described by Tagliacozzo, and although it does not explicitly support Trocki's argument, it generally reinforces Southeast Asian national liberation narratives concerning colonial oppression and devastation. *Pirates of Empire* suggests that steam navigation and improved intelligence networks permitted the breaking down of large pirate networks (p. 159), which are points that could be developed further.

Pirates of Empire is a much-needed work that disputes previous interpretations of 'piracy' in the Southeast Asian context and commences a dialogue with Atlantic World history that scholars often ignore, though it lacks a substantially different argument from similar works. Given the ambitious nature of the monograph and multiple languages of its sources, the work is quite impressive in its scope. This book is best for scholars looking to gain a survey of maritime violence and colonialism in Southeast Asia during the nineteenth century or those wanting to find a strong bibliography of related works.

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Migration in the time of revolution: China, Indonesia, and the Cold War

By TAOMO ZHOU

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What was the role of 'migration' in China's relationship with a foreign country during the Cold War, particularly in Southeast Asia? How did Beijing's diplomacy affect the Chinese diasporic community in their settled country, and vice versa? Since Chen Jian published his monumental work *Mao's China and the Cold War*, scholarship has blossomed on the foreign policies of the People's Republic of China (PRC), especially with regard to Third World countries. Partially because the PRC Foreign Ministry Archive (despite its closure in 2013) has been far from