Maritime piracy, past and present: politics, trade, popular culture and a face-to-face encounter
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Theme introduction

Piracy and robbery in the Asian seas

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Murray addresses the economic and cultural significance of piracy along China’s southern coast in the early modern period, a co-habitation of rulers, peasants, fisher people and ‘froth of the sea’, as pirates were called. In Southeast Asia, many coastal zones and their hinterlands started out as frontier societies where all kinds of illicit activities took place; coastal areas were ruled for centuries by kingdoms that thrived on trade and raiding. In her article Esther Velthoen addresses the political implications of raiding for booty and slaves in Eastern Indonesia, and Dutch colonial attempts to suppress it. Ota Atsushi focuses on the role of piracy in transforming inter-regional trade patterns in the late eighteenth century, where local raiding groups competed and cooperated with the Dutch. East India Company, British country traders and Chinese merchants. Three articles address contemporary maritime piracy. Eric Princon defends the necessity of studying everyday piracy out of the limelight of sensation and romanticism, and takes us on a journey to some of the pirates living in the vicinity of Singapore operating in the Strait of Malacca. Adam Young explores the strategic sea-lanes, and brings the reader back to the timeless issue of poverty. Finally, Stefan Eklöf argues that piracy stems from the necessity to exist precisely because it remains insignificant for the shipping industry and for that matter, Indonesia - and concludes with a call for a broader research agenda on human insecurity in coastal areas.

The guest editors hope the issue of maritime piracy will remain on the international research agenda after the imminent link with terrorism and cataclysm has faded away.}

References


Academic workshops on maritime piracy have repeatedly stressed the need to view contemporary maritime piracy within what has imaginatively been called the ‘tapestry of maritime threats’. Social scientists still need to fully understand the knots in this tapestry. While undertaking this research, academics should bear in mind that their purpose and priorities fall under the purview of scientific research, not Southeast Asian governments or private organizations. There is a need for research on the human dimensions of maritime piracy: the pirates and their socio-economic backgrounds.

The articles compiled here address different aspects of Asian maritime piracy in historical and contemporary perspective. Three articles address piracy in the past. Robert Anthony addresses the economic and cultural significance of piracy.