

Sea Nomads of Southeast Asia: From the Past to the Present

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Sea Nomads of Southeast Asia: From the Past to the Present offers a fresh perspective on sea nomad-related issues by presenting, linking, and formulating new insights through a multidisciplinary lens. The book's contributors, who previously focused on different research areas, bring a broader perspective to studying maritime culture, history, archeology, and area studies related to sea nomads. Their research findings, fused into one cohesive volume, shed light on the sea nomads of Southeast Asia and highlight the importance of further exploring this topic.

This book delves into the nuanced issues faced by the Sama-Bajau, Orang Laut, and Moken/Moklen communities within their local contexts. Through case studies spanning Indonesia, Malaysia, Thailand, and Myanmar and some that mention sea nomads in the Philippines, readers are presented with ethnographic and longitudinal data critically analyzed through various approaches and methodologies. The volume covers topics ranging from history and archeology to diaspora, genome, language, and intercultural trading across its 14 chapters.

This book is the second synthetic research project on sea nomads in Southeast Asia. The first research book on them was written by David E. Sopher (1965), an edited version of his PhD dissertation. Sopher used the literature review method to present the relationship and single identity of sea nomads in insular Southeast Asia. He profiled the general information of each sea nomad group through a single lens as a cultural geographer. However, since his research method was based on armchair philosophizing, details and grassroots issues regarding sea nomads were not considered in his book, titled *The Sea Nomads*. However, *Sea Nomads of Southeast Asia* highlights diverse aspect of sea nomads, such as their nomadic nature, cultural time frame, language, and history. One minor limitation of this book is that it uses data and issues irrelevant to the complexities of sea nomads in the contemporary world (even though the subtitle of the volume is *From the Past to the Present*)—for example, differences and differentiations within subgroups and emerging challenges such as land title issues, borders, nationalities, massive tourism development, conservation agenda, and climate change. In addition, it seems that the writing style for each chapter uses an ethnographic approach rather than action research. As the world is fast evolving, action research is urgently needed for sea nomads to increase their self-determination, increase their rights to resources, improve their livelihoods, and deal with other development alternatives.

As outlined in the book, a multidisciplinary approach is one of the keys to tackling developmental challenges, acknowledging the sea nomads' marine transboundary activities, and protecting their historical pledges. The contributors have dedicated their efforts to illuminating the unique obstacles faced by sea nomads, aiming to increase awareness and inspire action. By examining the intersection of various issues, the contributors have underscored the importance of sea nomads

within the broader context of development and maritime culture in insular Southeast Asia. Chapter 11 in particular, by Ayesha Pamela Rogers and Richard Engelhardt, offers valuable insights into resilience and adaptive capacity that can inform co-management programs involving sea nomads and other stakeholders. Such knowledge is essential for navigating contemporary developments in marine resource governance.

This book offers a comprehensive exploration of nomadism from prehistory to modern times, including the Holocene and the transition to the Anthropocene. Despite extensive research on sea nomads, there is still much to be uncovered, as the identification and interpretation of these communities are multifaceted. The contributors to this volume have made several attempts to trace the evolution of sea nomadism through archeological records and modern genetics, as explained in Chapter 7 by Pradiptajati Kusuma *et al.* However, sea nomad communities have faced a particular bias due to a lack of cultural remains, leading to their archeological invisibility. Examining their cultural beliefs and movements is rudimentary to understanding sea nomadism. Cynthia Chou's analysis in Chapter 5 offers a fascinating look at the ontology and cultural pledges of the Orang Suku Laut, including their movements and mapping. Such a critical analysis is invaluable for gaining a deeper understanding of sea nomadism.

Unfortunately, the demographic data provided in this volume is not up to date. For instance, there are two identical maps (Maps 1.1 and 6.1) with different titles, both of which use old data and do not detail the present locations of sea nomads. In the case of Thailand, neither Map 1.1 nor Map 6.1 shows the Urak Lawoi (Orang Laut). The contributors may have assumed Urak Lawoi to be part of the Moken/Moklen group, whereas actually they are a different subgroup of sea nomads. Nagatsu Kazufumi (Chapter 14) has mapped the Sama-Bajau diaspora in the Philippines, Malaysia, and Indonesia (Map 14.3). However, the data is neither up to date (a data source from 2000 has been used) nor valid, due to the division of villages and changing names. One example of outdated data in the map is the Sama-Bajau population in Wakatobi Regency, Southeast Sulawesi Province (for further details, see Ariando and Narumon 2022). Mola Bajau, Wakatobi Regency, now has five villages while earlier it had only two. Likewise, the data on Orang Laut in Chou's chapter (Map 5.1) is out of date. There have been some changes in the village names and locations in Batam, Rempang, and Galang Island.

In Chapter 1 (pp. 16–21) the editors provide a comprehensive overview of the interrelated topics highlighted in the book, from the past to the present. However, upon closer examination, certain chapters only touch on some aspects of sea nomad communities, while others appear unrelated to the broader topic. It is worth noting that the chapters represent sea nomadism from different perspectives, particularly when it comes to intercultural relations. Some contributors explore the subject through the lens of intercultural trading and archeology, focusing on Austronesian groups or other missions. Topics in their chapters include, for example, the maritime Silk Road; inter-island exchange and language in Tetun-Terik, East Timor; the history of trading between insular

and mainland Southeast Asia; as well as maritime archeology in the South China Sea.

Apart from historical documentation, a new form of post-positivist research has made significant progress in addressing the current issues faced by sea nomads in Southeast Asia. Issues that intersect with the study of sea nomads include institutional complexity in marine governance (Ariando *et al.* 2023), marine collaborative management (Ariando and Narumon 2022), systematic local knowledge and development alternatives (Narumon 2017), marine resources and fishing practices (Stacey 2007), and even the challenges faced by sea nomads during the Covid-19 pandemic (Wianti and McWilliam 2023). Although some current issues are briefly mentioned in the book, they are not explored in depth.

Overall, the chapters in this volume are not entirely interconnected, so readers may selectively concentrate on those that interest them most. The book would have benefited from explanations of information written in sea nomads' local languages. This would have helped general readers to better understand their way of life. The book could also benefit from the inclusion of sea nomads' folklore and tales as researched by local historians to connect the past, present, and future. Additionally, greater consistency in the use of Bajau and Bajaw terminology is needed in Chapter 7.

One particularly noteworthy sentence in the book is: "a significant portion of Southeast Asian history may need to be revised to include sea nomads" (p. 22). This concise statement encapsulates the book's significance and makes it a valuable research resource. We sincerely appreciate the authors and editors for their exceptional work, and we are confident that this book will offer crucial insights for future endeavors. Its historical records are of particular value in the study of sea nomads and mark a significant addition to the existing knowledge about this group of people in Southeast Asia. We encourage continued research, collaboration, and cultural exchange on sea nomads in the region propelled by this remarkable contribution.

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Infiltrating Society: The Thai Military’s Internal Security Affairs

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All of the Thai rulers’ traditional rivals—Burmese, Khmer, Lao, and Vietnamese—were demilitarized by being subjected to European colonialism. As a result, the “modern Thai” army (and navy) had no serious external defense function, and indeed virtually never fought except against “domestic” forces (compare Japan!). The Thai military was mainly a means for internal royalist consolidation; it was, in addition, an emblem of modernity for the outside world. (Anderson 1978, 202–204)

In his controversial account of Thai studies, titled “Studies of the Thai State: The State of Thai Studies,” Benedict Anderson (1978) pointed out why and how the modern Thai military’s deep penetration into the domestic political arena was understudied. Thanks to the scholars who heeded his critique, there gradually emerged studies focusing on the political role of the Thai military, particularly its role in the modernization and democratization processes in Thailand.

The importance and contribution that Puangthong Pawakapan’s *Infiltrating Society* makes to Thai studies should be understood in this context. Before the early 1980s, the Thai military’s political role and its active involvement in Thailand’s nation-building processes under the influence of the popular monarchy were rarely studied. In the “post-counterinsurgency” era from the 1980s, there was a brief uptick in studies on the political role of the Thai military. Yet, as the author astutely points out, most of these studies did not pay sufficient attention to the ways in which the Thai military, with substantial aid from the palace, strived to control civil society through its nebulous “civil affairs projects (*kitchakan phonlaruean*).” *Infiltrating Society*’s revelation of the deep permeation of the military in civil society in the cities and rural areas completes the puzzle,