

abandoned and burned for several days. The hard decision was made to sink the vessel, and it was towed out to sea on 25 June and sunk by a torpedo fired by the submarine HMS *Onyx*. Those who died onboard are still with the ship.

It was not only enemy forces that the RFA had to contend with. In early June 1970, the tanker RFA *Ennerdale* was lost when it struck an uncharted granite pinnacle in the Indian Ocean. The crew of 62 were rescued by the frigate HMS *Andromeda* and RFA *Tideflow*; *Ennerdale* could not be salvaged and was broken up by explosive charges. In 2017–2018 a new batch of *Tide*-class vessels were laid down, now double-hulled to comply with International Maritime Organisation protocols. These new tankers have served across the globe including supporting RN ships in recent operations in the Arabian Gulf and Indian Ocean.

The RN is still a global navy despite what some detractors might claim. From personal experience gained while working in Singapore, the frequent visits of RN warships was notable, as was the work of RFA *Diligence* (Forward Repair Ship) which was somewhat unfairly named the “Sembawang guard ship” as it was always in port awaiting the arrival of RN vessels needing maintenance, overhaul, and repair.

Overall, this is a very well-written book with extensive photos and line drawings of the various ships. While it is a niche “market item,” the dictionary is well worth the read. The RN is well known around the globe but without the logistics support of the RFA, the warships would struggle to stay at sea.

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**Antony, Robert J. *Outlaws of the Sea: Maritime Piracy in Modern China*.
Royal Asiatic Society Hong Kong Studies Series
Hong Kong University Press, 2025**

xv + 251 pp., illustrations, chronology, maps, tables, bibliography, notes,
glossary, index

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This work is a history of aspects of piracy on the southern coast of China from the 17th to mid-20th centuries. The geographic focus is Guangzhou, including historical Canton, Hong Kong, and Macau. The author wonders what it would be like to be a pirate: “Let the Pirates speak.” He fixes our time in the post-truth era and points out the limitations of formal sources. “We must fall back on novel methodologies, intuition, and imagination” (1). A chronology frames the events in the history of China and Vietnam. In the Introduction, pirate voices

are recreated in extensive passages (testimonials), including that of Cheng Yat Sou, a woman who came to command a fleet and who was eventually pardoned and taken into the Qing navy (3–4) as part of a pacification drive.

In the preface, some of the problems of language are addressed, since the story contains a names and objects in Chinese, Vietnamese, and Portuguese. The text also incorporates Chinese characters in notes, glossary and bibliography. The author alludes also to the challenge of rendering pirate names into Mandarin (2).

Chapter 2, “The Sociopolitical Culture of South China’s Water World,” describes China’s trade, centered on Canton in the years 1740 to 1840; the people who became pirates; and the extensive nature of piracy. Chapter 3, “Piracy, Empire and Sovereignty,” shows the place of piracy in forming sovereign states. Chapter 4, “Chinese Pirates and Tay Son Rebels,” demonstrates that the success of rebels in the Vietnamese civil war beginning in 1771 was supported by Chinese pirates. Following that in turn, the burgeoning in numbers, size and vibrancy of piracy in south China is described. Chapter 5, “Piracy, Empire, and the Shadow Economy,” examines piracy for what it can tell us about socioeconomic conditions in the “shadow economy” during the upsurge of piracy between 1780 and 1810. Piracy is redefined as a “business enterprise that involved a lot of buying selling” (80). Chapter 6, “Defending Canton: Chinese Pirates, British Traders, and Hong Merchants,” details the most active period of piracy. Chapter 7, “Pacification of the Seas,” describes the attempts of the Qing government to quell piracy by military suppression and appeasement. It details the contributions of Hong merchants in defence of the Pearl River Delta. Chapter 8, “Bloodthirsty Pirates?,” details the brutal nature of piracy and practices, such as cannibalism, and describes the brutality of punishment for captive pirates. Chapter 9, “Pirates, Dragon Ladies, and Steamships,” traces the evolution of piracy throughout the 19th Century with the development of steamships. It also explores roles women played. In Chapter 10, “We are not Pirates,” the Portuguese empire and its system of passes or *cartaza* enforced in the Indian Ocean from the 15th Century onwards is described as a large-scale protection racket. Portuguese involvement in the slave trade extended to China is described as the “Coolie Trade”; today “human trafficking” of which Macau was a hub. Chapter 11, “Conclusion. Piracy in China and the World,” opens the discussion to the world. He poses the question whether “One man’s pirate is another man’s hero” (199), asking whether a great national hero as Vasco da Gama might also fit the definition as pirate. The concept of piracy throughout history in China and the West is compared. A western concept related to piracy, privateering, is described as state-supported piracy and hypocrisy in Asian eyes. Finally, he touches on gender and places concepts of piracy in the context

of popular culture. The concept of piracy is shown as nuanced throughout history in terms of its definition, people engaged, and their characteristics (like gender and race). He points out that the catch-all English-language term “pirate” subsumes many varieties and shades of meaning in Chinese.

Nautical aspects of the story, such as the evolution of vessels or naval organization and tactics, are virtually non-existent throughout the book. It would be useful to have more specific information on the vessels mentioned, whether merchant or warship, and with basic specifications, which would add an important dimension. There is little differentiation between British (RN) and East India Company (EIC) ships, which obscures important details. The work is a compilation of nine of the author’s academic journal articles published over a two-decade career that has been devoted to piracy, plus two chapters to update this scholarship. The book’s physical production, using acid-free paper, is well laid out and comfortable to read. The bibliography lists works on the political, economic and social history of piracy from Chinese, Western (English and Portuguese), and Japanese sources. Graphics include simple but effective line-drawn maps and charts of the Pearl River Delta approaches to Canton that show its labyrinthine nature. Facsimiles are helpful, such as a Qing Dynasty fishing license (27). Illustrations are mostly reproductions of photographs and drawings from contemporary newspapers. Many facsimiles of drawings and photographs show lurid depictions of beheadings, torture and other acts of brutal violence against captured pirates.

The glossary contains Romanizations for the names of common terms, people, and places, as well as equivalents in Chinese characters. Definitions would be useful for Romanized terms infrequently encountered in the text or peculiar to that place and time, like “yamen,” “country ship,” “Hong,” “Consoo,” and “hoppo.” The inclusion of Chinese script in the glossary provides a useful beginning for readers trying to extend study into Chinese sources. This book deserves to be read by students of China or the history of trade.

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Boyd, Andrew. *Arms for Russia and the Naval War in the Arctic, 1941–1945* Seaforth Publishing, 2024

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On 22 June 1941, Winston Churchill took to the airwaves to address the