



Michael W. Charney, Kathryn Wellen, eds. *Warring Societies of Pre-colonial Southeast Asia: Local Cultures of Conflict Within a Regional Context*. Copenhagen: NIAS Press, 2018. 272 pp. \$29.00, paper, ISBN 978-87-7694-229-8.

Reviewed by Faizah B. Zakaria (Nanyang Technological University)

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Commissioned by Bradley C. Davis (Eastern Connecticut State University)

Studies of precolonial warfare in Southeast Asia are meagre. H. G. Quaritch-Wales's 1952 *Ancient Southeast Asian Warfare* was the sole English-language monograph dealing with the topic before Michael Charney's 2004 monograph, *Southeast Asian Warfare, 1300-1800*. While Charney's single-authored book sought to synthesize a cultural core to regional warfare, this new, co-edited volume with Kathryn Wellen takes a different approach. The book makes a conscious decision not to make general conclusions about the "Southeast Asian" character of war practices in the case studies presented. Rather, the emphasis is on the diversity of the region, such that, according to the editors, "the local experiences is a conscious effort to put the lowland and highland, Java and Outer Islands, and 'center' and 'periphery' on as equal an historiographical footing as possible" (p. 14).

The result is a configuration of Southeast Asia that is vastly different from the modern map. Geographically, the case studies in the book cover polities along and in the Mekong River Basin, South Sulawesi, Bali, Maguindanao and Sulu, the Vietnamese coast, Burma, and the "Pacific Rimlands," islands stretching from Timor to Taiwan. This is a Southeast Asia that emphasizes fluidity: waterways and mobile peoples. Seas and rivers were the theaters of war and conflict unleashed mass

movements of people, voluntary and involuntary. Much of the book reflects on strategies to managing this fluidity, with rich empirical evidence sensitive to local context that is drawn from an integration of local and European sources. The conflicts under study were relatively unexamined and took place in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries.

Two key themes run through the case studies. The first is the relationship between war and state-making, building on the work of scholars such as Victor Lieberman, who viewed warfare as a lens into changes to economic bases and social organization that triggered and shaped state-making. The first chapter in this edited volume, by Puangthong R. Pawakapan, demonstrates such interlocking changes by examining forced migrations in the Trans-Mekong Basin during the eighteenth-century expansionist wars by Siam into what is now Cambodia and Laos. The observation that Southeast Asian states sought people rather than territory is not new, but this study's core insight is to recast such slave-taking as a tactic of war, rather than a consequence of it. Characterizing these as "depopulation campaigns," she contends that such movements were a *form* of warfare which expanded the slave-taking state's economic and military capacity, while weakening its adversary.

The next three studies show that not only did centralized states like the Siamese court engage in state-making through war, conflicts often viewed in the literature as “tribal” also embedded political dynamics that extended well beyond the polity. Kathryn Wellen’s fine-grained microhistory of the civil war engendered by South Sulawesi chief La Maddukelleng shows that what seemed to be a personal conflict could pull in many different parties due to the paramount position of the ruler and a complex system of treaties among the Bugis. This mode of warfare may have predated states, but the indigenous political landscape did not lack complexity and merits further examination. Ariel C. Lopez’s study of the Maguindanao highlights how the practice of raiding uncovered kinship networks, developed through family and religion, that were central to understanding not only how war was made but also how peace was forged. Vu Duc Liem’s chapter offers a thoughtful and detailed analysis of Vietnamese naval power that impacted the balance of power between the warring Tayson and the Nguyen. It shows how the navy was central to Nguyen Phuc Anh’s victory and the first making of a unified Vietnam.

Continuities and changes in military organization and technology is a second major theme to which this volume makes a major contribution. The final three papers in the book are especially rich in this regard and largely show slow or abortive adoption of military innovation. Hans Hagerdal emphasizes the organizational aspect by showing that, in the case of Bali, alliances were often more crucial to the outcome of an armed conflict rather than technological competence. Pre-colonial Bali had some features of a gunpowder state and expansive ambitions that waxed and waned, but cannons and muskets were not decisive advantages, at least until the nineteenth century. Michael Charney analyzes the blind spots of court chronicles as a source for insights on warfare. He cites instead the British pacification campaigns of 1885 as a “perhaps the only campaign in mainland Southeast Asia where we have indige-

nous warfare but no indigenous court” (p. 168). This approach of using a conflict with a colonial power as a window into precolonial military structures might be debatable given that it predisposes continuity rather than change. Nonetheless, Charney’s study persuasively yields insights into the military activity of small, rural folk that has hitherto been missed when attention is paid to the court standing army. His argument does indeed spotlight continuity, as he argues that “the Burmese army remained to the end a small royal standing army in a sea of armed rural folk” (p. 181). Gerrit Knaap, in the book’s final chapter, similarly suggests a certain stasis. He surveys military capacities of the Pacific Rimlands stretching from Taiwan to Timor and ultimately upholds the scholarly view that they were indeed “far behind the forefront in the ‘Asian military revolution’” (p. 200).

The volume certainly succeeds in its aim to empirically enhance the diversity of warfare studies in precolonial Southeast Asia and will provide useful teaching material for upper-level students immersed in the region. It also highlights major gaps in the field, as some authors identify but do not delve into lines of inquiry such as the environmental influence on war or philosophical underpinnings of warfare. These topics could be productively taken up in the future. Moreover, beyond its aim, the book raises the question of how this diversity could be best integrated with world history narratives. Perhaps wisely, it eschews the term “early modern” and its picture of stasis in wartime innovations. Does this indicate that Southeast Asia lies outside the general world trends in building up state and military capacity in the long eighteenth century? Put differently, if Southeast Asia is not really part of the gunpowder revolution and is best understood as affiliated, interrelated polities rather than states until the late nineteenth century, then can we speak meaningfully of an early modern Southeast Asia? It is a question that should

be considered in future work as this subfield of military history regains some energy.

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