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Introduction to Special Issue: The Cambodian People's Party's Turn to Hegemonic Authoritarianism: Strategies and Envisaged Futures

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In July 2018, the Cambodian People's Party (CPP) claimed 77 per cent of the popular vote in national elections, winning all 125 seats in the country's National Assembly. The CPP had ran effectively unopposed after the dissolution of the Cambodian National Rescue Party (CNRP) the previous year. This brought to an end two and a half decades of competitive authoritarianism and ushered in a new era of hegemonic authoritarian rule.[1] Prior to this development, scholarship on contemporary Cambodian politics had focused on explaining the CPP's "success" under competitive authoritarianism.

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Yet this only provided a limited set of tools to understand and analyse the CPP's strategies as it steered the country into a new era of non-competitive politics during the fifth decade of CPP domination. By focusing on issues of regime reproduction and innovation, this special issue of *Contemporary Southeast Asia* explores how the CPP has navigated the shift from competitive to hegemonic rule, and uses this regime transition as a starting point to examine how the CPP seeks to engineer and model Cambodia's political future.

The 2018 one-horse race election was the culmination of a gradual narrowing of space for the political opposition, civil society, free media and other voices contesting the CPP's dominance. In August 2017, the Cambodian government—headed by Hun Sen, who was first installed as prime minister in 1985 during Vietnam's occupation—launched a crackdown on the country's independent media by aggressively pursuing tax and other grievances that were largely a facade to quieten critical voices. In September, Kem Sokha, President of the country's main opposition party, the CNRP, was arrested on charges of treason. In November, the CNRP was dissolved by the Cambodian Supreme Court for plotting an alleged "colour revolution" with foreign backing. The CPP then went on to win all 125 National Assembly seats in the July 2018 national elections, which were neither free nor fair.

Yet the timeline of this transition is necessarily more complex. It is rooted in a longer arc of events stretching back to the imposition of democracy by the United Nations in the early 1990s, after which competitive elections were held but which were characterized by the intimidation and coercion of voters, opposition parties, and the CPP's critics, and with the playing field overwhelming tipped in favour of the ruling party. It was shaped by the inconsistent conceptions of democracy and national identity that emerged since,[2] as well as conflicting pulls on the CPP as it navigated the competing demands between its evolving ruling coalition and those who had benefitted far less from the country's post-conflict reconstruction.[3] The 2018 transition was, in this sense, the final conclusion to the country's 2013 electoral crisis. The opposition CNRP had finished a close second to the CPP in the 2013 national elections, breaking the CPP's steady vote share increase in each election since the reintroduction of multi-party elections in 1993. The CNRP rejected the official election results and organized mass protests, until the government banned demonstrations in January 2014. A one-year political truce, from 2014 to 2015, ended with the violent repression of the CNRP as government security forces took to the streets to quell opposition

protests involving workers and other demonstrators, after which a string of lawsuits were levied by the government against leading opposition parliamentarians and grassroots activists. Despite this, the CNRP performed extraordinarily well in the 2017 commune elections, suggesting that it could have possibly defeated the CPP in 2018 had it been allowed to run.

What was different about the 2013 elections was not primarily the strength of the opposition's electoral performance, which in terms of the percentage of the popular vote was far superior to 2008 but similar to the string of national elections since 1993 up until then.[4] Instead, the crucial difference was the unification of previously fragmented opposition groups into one political party, enabling it to pose a credible challenge to the CPP.[5] This was a threat that continued to grow after the 2013 elections. This development was accompanied by a sense of optimism among opposition supporters. Campaign rallies followed by post-election protests built up a democratic momentum that saw Cambodians taking to the streets to demand political change.[6] A variety of political figures—advancing different democratization agendas—moved from the fringes of national politics to the centre stage.[7] This momentum for political change, however, gradually faded. It flared up briefly following the murder of grassroots activist Kem Ley in 2016, but was conclusively extinguished with the transition to hegemonic authoritarianism.

This special issue argues that the 2013 elections fundamentally shook the CPP's rule as envisaged and practised from 1993. It triggered a range of responses from the CPP, responses that anticipated and were implicated in the imposition of hegemonic authoritarian rule. The 2013 election results revealed that the CPP's project of rule was flawed. The CPP was not steadily becoming a formidable hegemonic party, election by election, as previously believed.[8] For one, CPP mass patronage had evidently not succeeded in buying the party the electoral clients it thought it had. The CPP and scholars of Cambodia alike had assumed that the party's provincial patronage system—delivering development goods in return for steady support at the ballot box—was a secure foundation for its electoral success.[9] Yet, a 2013–14 study of Cambodian voters from across the political spectrum revealed that voters had rejected the CPP's gift-giving and local development patronage practices and did not reciprocate with votes.[10] This tension revealed how the party's excessive pandering to regime elites, through the expropriation of resources from ordinary Cambodians, had undermined its performance legitimacy and, ultimately, its patronage system and electoral stability.[11] Young

people, who made up the majority of the electorate in 2013, sought political change[12] as a result of their political and economic marginalization under the CPP.[13]

The democratic momentum that built up in connection with the 2013 elections further eroded the CPP's hold on power. The opposition's growing presence in rural areas, the CPP's traditional electoral base, signalled to the party that its system of domination was also being challenged in the countryside, and that its electoral core was far less robust than had previously been assumed.[14] This became clear in the 2017 commune elections, in which the CPP won 50.76 per cent of the vote compared to the CNRP's 43.83 per cent. This was a significant shift from the previous commune elections in 2012, in which the CPP won 61.8 per cent while the then-fragmented opposition won only a combined 30.7 per cent. Commune elections have reflected the villagers' high levels of dependence on local authorities for resources, gifts, local development and support, meaning that the CPP has typically performed stronger in local than national elections.[15] The 2017 commune elections revealed how the CNRP was now challenging the CPP, not only in the cities but also in the provinces.

The realization that the competitive authoritarian formula was far less stable than previously assumed prompted an immediate recalibration by the CPP, in tandem with a pause as it attempted to take stock of the "countermovement" that had arisen to threaten its grip on power.[16] Cambodia's "democratic moment" was at once an opportunity for the CPP to restructure and rebuild its bases. The CPP granted economic concessions which included the tripling of salaries for civil servants and garment workers.[17] The youth, who were intensely courted in the lead-up to the 2013 elections, were pulled into a variety of initiatives, including the newly rebranded Union of Youth Federations of Cambodia (UYFC). The CPP also attempted to address the worst excesses of the land crisis that had engulfed the country in the 2000s and early 2010s.[18]

The shift to hegemonic authoritarianism, the product of the CPP's intensive reflection and recalibration, cut the Gordian knot by forcing a complete reset of the political scene. The transition, this special issue argues, is an attempt by Hun Sen and the CPP to rebuild stability and reconfigure the "pillars" of repression, legitimation and co-optation.[19] It involves the redefinition and careful reconstruction of linkages with the electorate (as shown by Kevin Doyle, Astrid Norén-Nilsson, and Jing Jing Luo and Kheang Un in this issue), roughly half of whom were effectively disenfranchised through the

dissolution of the CNRP, as well as efforts to strengthen Hun Sen's coalition within the state and among the elites inside and outside the CPP who have come to dominate Cambodia's politics and economy (as demonstrated by Neil Loughlin and Norén-Nilsson in this issue). Studies demonstrate that Hun Sen has elaborated a set of innovative and adaptive strategies for autocratic legitimization since 2017,[20] many of which point in the direction of the monarchy, to create new political possibilities for the prime minister.[21] In parallel with closing down "pockets" of independent media,[22] the CPP state has also relied on state-sanctioned digital media for enabling, legitimizing and seeking to craft support for hegemonic authoritarianism.[23] The shift to hegemonic authoritarianism, we thus argue, represents a significant turning point in Cambodia's political development. This is not to deny that the regime had remained authoritarian under the thin veneer of multi-party politics before 2017–18. The coercive backbone of the CPP ruling coalition, which publicly resurfaced in the transition, had remained a constant foundation for the CPP's survival.[24] Yet, the shift represented a dramatic rupture, not only in terms of government-challenger interactions and in the texture of everyday life, but also in how it cut short the democratic promise of the inter-election years. The implication is that concentrating narrowly on the events of 2017 and 2018 can only give us a partial understanding of the transition.

The Broader Relevance of Cambodia's Transition

Cambodia's transition, domestically an earthquake, is also of broader relevance to our understanding of democratic recession and authoritarian consolidation for at least three reasons. First, scholarship on hybrid regimes—regimes that combine elements of democratic and non-democratic political systems—has for the last two decades focused on the survival strategies of competitive authoritarian regimes.[25] This reflects how competitive authoritarian regimes emerged as the typical hybrid regime type in the post-Cold War era.[26] Hegemonic authoritarian regimes, by contrast, have largely been treated as a residual category in between competitive and closed authoritarianism. The consequence is that much of our knowledge on this regime type emerges from sophisticated country studies, including on Singapore, Mexico and Russia,[27] rather than from theoretical work (though a few authors have tried to distinguish between relevant characteristics of the competitive and hegemonic authoritarian regime types).[28] Consequently, we are not

as well equipped to assess what may be involved in a transition to hegemonic authoritarianism.

Second, testifying to how successful the "formula" of competitive authoritarianism has been, there are comparatively few examples of transitions from competitive to hegemonic authoritarianism.[29] The Cambodian trajectory is thus a rare opportunity for scholars to illuminate differences between regime types in a single-country context.

This leads to a third point: changes in the post-Cold War international milieu have tipped the balance on competitive authoritarianism, making Cambodia symbolic of a new political moment. Steven Levitsky and Lucan Way famously argued that external democratization efforts, through which external actors seek to influence the domestic politics and democratization of countries, were tolerated by regimes in the 1990s because they were unable to resist them without their main sponsor, the Soviet Union. This reflected the extreme political vulnerability experienced by these states immediately after the Cold War, which allowed for a moment of unique democratic hegemony.[30] That moment, however, was fleeting. Regimes that survived the initial danger of collapse were able to reassert their control via a new mode of governance. This entailed accepting limited democratic contestation, but with the playing field skewed enormously in favour of the incumbent. The resulting "competitive authoritarian" regime type emerged as a relatively stable form of government in the immediate period. However, to fall for the illusion of democratization in Cambodia was to confuse an authoritarian crisis with the genuine wave of democratization that had swept through countries in Eastern Europe and Latin America a decade earlier.

As the Cambodian case now shows, the stability of competitive authoritarian regimes is questionable. Christopher Carothers noted that the majority of competitive authoritarian regimes had now "either democratized or been replaced by new autocracies".[31] In his study, only four of the cases originally identified by Levitsky and Way could still be labelled as stable, with 19 having democratized and nine being unstable competitive authoritarian regimes. Only three, however, including Cambodia, have transitioned to full authoritarianism. And while Levitsky and Way argue that competitive authoritarianism persists by pointing to the relatively stable number of competitive authoritarian regimes in 2019 as compared to 1990–95, they recognize that this is because a new set of countries have emerged as competitive authoritarian.[32] As noted by Lee

Morgenbesser, Cambodia bucked a trend in authoritarianism with the incumbent regime transitioning to a hegemonic system rather than democratizing, collapsing, or tolerating a level of real electoral competition for its survival.[33]

Cambodia's transition also appears to have bucked another trend. Michael Berhard et al., who examined the relationship between electoral competition under authoritarianism and stability over time, found that while autocratic incumbents experienced a significant risk of regime turnover during initial competitive elections, competitive authoritarian regimes generally became more stable after three elections as early risks give way to the institutionalization of electoral uncertainty enhancing authoritarian regime survival.[34] Indeed, this pattern appeared to have played out in Cambodia initially. Its first three elections were strongly contested, but by 2008 the CPP had seemingly consolidated its position within Cambodia's competitive authoritarian system. The party steadily increased its vote share and won big in 2008 and seemed poised to do so again in 2013.[35]

Outside of the analytical confines of competitive authoritarian regime transitions, Cambodia's 2013 electoral crisis, subsequent closure of democratic space, and one-party elections in 2018, may be conceived as part of the third wave of autocratization. This is defined as "substantial de-facto decline of core institutional requirements for electoral democracy… namely clean elections, freedom of association, universal suffrage, an elected executive, as well as freedom of expression and alternative sources of information".[36] This shift has been observed both in established democracies and closed autocracies that harbour democratic traits. Contemporary autocrats, Lührmann and Lindberg argue, have "mastered the art of subverting electoral standards without breaking their democratic façade completely".[37] Cambodia's continued holding of multi-party elections conforms to this pattern, but the democratic-looking institutions have been eroded to a point which suggests that the CPP is now only half-heartedly maintaining the façade.

Taken together in this comparative context, the articles in this special issue provide important insights not only on Cambodia's politics, but for the study of authoritarian politics in the twenty-first century.

On Cambodia specifically, the events of 2013 exposed a weakness in the CPP's rule and its legitimacy among many Cambodians. This is evident in the ensuing instability that threatened it, and the drastic but ultimately effective move to quash that challenge in

the short term. However, in Cambodia, contestation has never been far from the surface. Thus, having cracked down on the opposition movement and secured its power through one-party elections in 2018, this is a momentous point in time for the CPP. The articles in this special issue attempt to take stock of this moment, analysing the CPP's strategies now and as the party moves forward to rebuild, strengthen and future-proof its domination of Cambodia. This special issue goes beyond providing a chronology of the transition,[38] to anchor the analysis of current strategies in an examination of why it was needed, and what futures this may forestall for the party, and for Cambodia's politics more generally.

Contributions to the Special Issue

This special issue argues that the CPP has made significant efforts in elite renewal in the years since the transition, producing a new core of CPP elites to take up the baton from the old guard and steer Cambodia into the new era. Based on elite and other interviews with senior CPP officials, military figures, business tycoons and long-term analysts of Cambodian politics, alongside a range of data gathered over 18 months of fieldwork between 2017 and 2020, Loughlin's article analyses the process of regime management and succession planning in Cambodia since 2013 through the transition to hegemonic authoritarian rule. Challenging the current personalist literature on Cambodia, which has focused on the concentration of power in the hands of Hun Sen, Loughlin argues that the prime minister is overseeing a dynastic transition on two fronts: at once ensuring his own family's continued pre-eminence, while also maintaining the cohesion of his ruling coalition by being responsive to the interests of other elites. By shifting attention away from the prime minister himself to broader power considerations within the elite, Loughlin's article prompts a rethink of how political power is organized in today's Cambodia. Loughlin charts how Hun Sen manages "hereditary succession" within his ruling coalition, with the children of his elite backers also being groomed for leadership roles within the party, military and business. The promotion of these scions in this hereditary-based support and protection system is being repeated throughout the party-state structure, and institutionalized through intermarriages, which have created a web of political families with Hun Sen at its centre. This organization of power, Loughlin contends, also reflects a state-society schism embedded in the process of state and regime-making that started in the 1980s and which continues

to define Cambodia's politics today. Collective unity behind the prime minister by his ruling coalition, and the priming of the next generation who are to make up its future incarnation, is structured to mitigate the central threat posed by broader society, from which Hun Sen's ruling coalition is increasingly distant. This necessitates elite cohesion and, over time, elite renewal (see also Norén-Nilsson in this issue). This analysis suggests that the transition to hegemonic authoritarianism has hastened Hun Sen's nurturing of a renewed elite, who are well positioned to continue to dominate Cambodian society into the future.

Norén-Nilsson focuses on the CPP's strategies for engaging the youth, in the context of the youth's rise to political prominence starting in the lead-up to 2013. Norén-Nilsson draws from multiple in-depth interviews with senior leaders and grassroots members of the organizations and platforms that she studies, and with national and provincial-level government officials; as well as documentation detailing the evolution and place of youth organizations with respect to the state and party, gathered through fieldwork between 2018 and 2019. Through these materials, Norén-Nilsson interrogates the emergence of youth-focused mass organizations that are closely linked to the ruling party, despite being nominally NGOs. A close examination shows that these organizations reproduce existing hierarchies within the party, state and society, with the Union of Youth Federations of Cambodia and the Cambodia Scouts mirroring existing party and state structures respectively, and the Cambodian Red Cross reproducing elite networks which merge state power with domestic capital. Resonating with patterns of hereditary succession noted by Loughlin in this issue, these organizations are headed by the prime minister's family, the party's top brass as well as economic elites, while also being embedded within the state bureaucracy, echoing earlier bases of CPP power.[39] This reinforces elite power networks and existing hierarchies in the new generation. As a mode of participation, Norén-Nilsson shows that these groups have helped expand the CPP's presence among the youth while also constraining avenues for contestation by channelling that participation into CPP-approved avenues for partaking in politics. As a political tactic, we witness the CPP trying to take ground from the CNRP, which had built a powerful movement among urban, educated youths. This includes the deployment of technologies to engage young Cambodians through consultative ideologies. Among the youth we see co-optation rather than coercion emerging as the preferred method of political control. Ultimately, we witness the expansion

of youth participation as an authoritarian strategy for disarming a politically powerful demographic.

Taken together, the two articles identify and explain the mechanisms for the renewal of the core CPP elites within different institutions and constituencies. While Loughlin demonstrates how the children of Hun Sen's loyal elites assume leadership within the party, military and business, Norén-Nilsson analyses how youth organizations reproduce party, state and economic elite structures, and function as platforms for CPP scions to take on roles within the state, while also bringing civil servants back under CPP control by placing them at the core of these initiatives. Civil servants are believed to have voted in large numbers for the CNRP in 2013, after being promised a steep wage increase. The CPP responded by tripling their salaries in the inter-election period.[40] The articles indicate that the CPP, setting out to adapt, remains the party of the state and its bureaucracy. In this sense, the CPP's adjustments can be understood as hamstrung by the particular logics engrained in the party's exercise of power so far, reproducing the exclusion of most of society. Both authors conclude that these initiatives are likely to have long-lasting consequences through the regeneration of a relatively stable core of ruling elites.

The theme of how CPP strategies have also focused on new modalities to engage and connect with the population, seen in its drive to expand youth participation, is also pursued in Kevin Doyle's contribution to this special issue. Doyle traces the transformation in digitally networked platforms, which have become sites of newly concocted hegemonic and counter-hegemonic discourses amid deepening authoritarianism in Cambodia. Doyle's analysis examines the tension between how social media has not afforded a progressive transformation of Cambodian politics, yet social media users have *felt* that social media had afforded great changes. Based on posts on Hun Sen's Facebook page, the Facebook activity of Hun Sen's son and heir-apparent Hun Manet, as well as in-depth interviews conducted with 32 influential and 28 regular social media users over 2017 to 2018, Doyle weighs the competition between hegemonic discourse and counter-hegemonic practices within social media over this period. As Doyle shows, Hun Sen has co-opted social media to create an online persona characterized by a new emotional tonality, enabled by how new media have done away with temporal and spatial constraints on self-mediation. With social media, Doyle writes, "Hun Sen no longer leaves people behind in the wake of his helicopter rotor blades—through Facebook the audience is also

always along for the ride." Social media has been used to project a discourse that justifies his right to rule unchallenged. Similarly, the Facebook page of his son and heir-apparent Hun Manet displays the curated accumulation of symbolic capital of an emotional and moral kind, which Doyle notes may speak to a possible formal succession of political power between father and son one day. The engagement of everyday users with social media, meanwhile, is defined by contrasting considerations of fear and opportunity, resulting in a form of dissimulated communication which disguises the dissenting views of a population which is increasingly critically and civically aware. The contradiction between this growing critical civic awareness and hardening authoritarianism may, according to Doyle, "contain the seeds of new political subjectivities and future contestations to Hun Sen's hegemonic project".

The CPP's creative adoption of new technologies of rule also extends to the legal sphere, with Benjamin Lawrence demonstrating that Cambodia's shift from competitive to hegemonic authoritarianism has been "embodied in a parallel shift in constitutionalism". Based on a comparative reading of new authoritarian legislation, close attention to changing political dynamics, and supplemented by expert and other interviews, Lawrence's analysis draws attention to Cambodia's evolving authoritarian constitutional practices alongside legislative and institutional changes. Lawrence situates Cambodia's transition within a broader conversation on authoritarianism globally, in which authoritarian regimes borrow, emulate and learn from each other. As Lawrence notes, the CPP's authoritarian borrowing has supplemented rather than supplanted longstanding rhetorical practices that pay lip service to liberal democratic principles. The party has become adept at adopting liberal laws and reforms, only to strip them of their original intention and enforce them as a means of restricting or completely denying critics space to operate in. As evidence of this borrowing, Lawrence cites examples such as the introduction of the crime of *lèse majesté*, that has proved a powerful tool for suppressing dissent in Thailand; a new law on political parties borrowed from Thailand's 2008 Constitution, which proved decisive in the dissolution of the CNRP; as well as constitutional amendments that appear to be borrowed from China. These changes to Cambodia's institutional legal structures provide the basis for ongoing legal harassment of the CPP's opponents. We also witness the entrenchment of the principle of consultative bodies also seen in China, as a participatory legal practice in the absence of an effective opposition. Together, these point to a realignment of

CPP practices that maintain in part the facade of democratic politics and participation (see also Norén-Nilsson in this issue) but which in effect provide the tools and legal cover for an extension of the CPP's authoritarian control over society.

Control is also a key theme running through Sokphea Young's contribution to this special issue. Drawing on a range of interviews and close analysis of factors inhibiting Cambodian labour's capacity to effect democratic change, Young argues that Cambodian labour has not been able to form a sufficiently strong coalition with other important social groups which share similar political goals, and has therefore been unable to contribute to the country's democratization. A number of key factors are identified in support of Young's argument. First, Young highlights the regime's violent suppression of the labour movement over time, as the CPP has continually sought to keep a lid on labour activism and de-couple it from politics. Critically, Young also points to an asymmetry and lack of coordination between the labour movement and its interests with those of various other important social forces and societal elites such as student activists or Buddhist monks, limiting their capability to form a united front for change. Young also suggests that in Cambodia there is little chance of a cohesive cross-class coalition as a democratizing force. Economic elites have no incentive to align with the labour movement, given the former's inclusion in the CPP's ruling coalition and the benefits and wealth accrued through the maintenance of the status quo. Young thus argues that Cambodia's labour movement is severely repressed by the government, weakly organized, and without political allies. The labour movement in Cambodia has therefore not been the democratizing force often studied in comparative literature on labour and democratization.

The CPP is also shifting its terms of engagement with the international sphere, as explained by Katrin Travouillon who explores how the "international community" has shifted in meaning in the CPP's discourses. Travouillon's in-depth study of Hun Sen's speechmaking draws important insights into his conceptualization and engagement with the idea of an international community beyond Western and liberal notions, which point towards an illiberal future in which Cambodia is able to carve a new space to manoeuvre. Hun Sen navigates between Western/opposition and China/CPP binaries to argue that Cambodia should forge an independent path, rejecting opposition efforts to mobilize a pro-democratic international coalition while appealing to domestic and international actors to recognize

Cambodia's—and thus his—achievements. Hun Sen has appropriated defensive and assertive themes in his rhetoric to achieve these goals. Defending his record in facilitating the liberal peace afforded by the UN's intervention in Cambodia, Hun Sen has called out perceived personal biases against him and questioned the moral authority of the international community in its current conception. He asserts that Cambodia's integration into the international community is irreversible, having augured rapid economic development from a very low base. This rhetoric thus makes the case for his legitimacy and is mobilized to push back against moral—and economic—exclusion from the international community and diffuse opposition efforts to mobilize a pro-democratic international coalition against him. Travouillon's findings suggest that zero-sum scenarios—as frequently evoked by the opposition who sees Cambodia as drifting away from the West and towards China—are undermined by how Hun Sen demonstrates that there is sustained engagement with Western actors, necessitating alternative modes of engagement among the political opposition, human rights activists and other domestic and international actors wishing to influence Cambodia's political trajectory.

Jing Jing Luo and Kheang Un also address the CPP's quest for legitimacy since 1993, focusing on recent Chinese engagement—specifically, China's investment, trade and aid. They draw on fieldwork conducted in Cambodia between 2018 and 2020, comprising interviews and the collection of new data, and focus on the key growth areas supported by China, namely infrastructure, manufacturing and exports. For Luo and Un, the CPP has worked to steadily advance its performance legitimacy over two decades by gradually improving the living standards of ordinary Cambodians, particularly through patronage-based development projects. They suggest that Cambodians have been particularly responsive to the CPP's clientelism, which has raised living standards. Moreover, as standards of living improve, Cambodians have come to expect more from their government, providing an incentive for the CPP to deliver on its promises if it wishes to remain stable. Here China plays a key role, with Chinese investment the engine now driving the CPP's economic project. They also note that the CPP's continued neo-patrimonialism tempers the success of its performance legitimacy in some respects. They provide a wealth of empirical evidence on Chinese investment schemes in Cambodia, including in the province of Preah Sihanouk, to illustrate the advances in

living standards that buttress the CPP's legitimacy claims. In the process, the province's capital Sihanoukville is revealed as a site where weak state capacity and neo-patrimonialism have focused negative attention upon the CPP. In their analysis, China emerges as an important partner for the CPP, allowing the party to continue to strengthen its performance legitimacy in the future.

Together the articles in this special issue shed light on the CPP's attempts to reformulate and recalibrate its mode of governance, which, we argue, before 2013 was far weaker as a strategy for long-term stability than had been previously understood. The articles in this special issue should provoke a rethink of the orthodoxies in our understandings of Cambodia's politics by sparking reflection on the continuities and changes in the CPP's elite politics, its broader relationship with the society it governs, and its engagement with the international sphere. The articles reveal a party that is adaptive and innovative, repressive and responsive, more than 40 years since it first came to power.

NOTES

1 In competitive authoritarianism, the electoral arena "is a genuine battleground in the struggle for power", whereas in hegemonic authoritarianism, the electoral arena "is little more than a theatrical setting for the self-representation and self-reproduction of power". Andreas Schedler, "The Menu of Manipulation", *Journal of Democracy* 1, no. 2 (2002): 47.

2 Astrid Norén-Nilsson, *Cambodia's Second Kingdom: Nation, Imagination, and Democracy* (Ithaca, New York: Cornell University Press, 2016).

3 Neil Loughlin, "Reassessing Cambodia's Patronage System(s) and the End of Competitive Authoritarianism: Electoral Clientelism in the Shadow of Coercion", *Pacific Affairs* 93, no. 3 (2020): 497–519.

4 Caroline Hughes, "Understanding the Elections in Cambodia 2013", *Aglos: Journal of Area-Based Global Studies* (2015): 1–20.

5 Ibid.

6 Astrid Norén-Nilsson, "Kem Ley and Cambodian Citizenship Today: Grass-roots Mobilization, Electoral Politics and Individuals", *Journal of Current Southeast Asian Affairs* 38, no. 1 (2019): 77–97.

7 Ibid.

8 Lee Morgenbesser, *Behind the Facade: Elections Under Authoritarianism in Southeast Asia* (Albany, New York: State University of New York Press, 2016).

9 Ibid.

10 Astrid Norén-Nilsson, "Good Gifts, Bad Gifts, and Rights: Cambodian Popular Perceptions and the 2013 Elections", *Pacific Affairs* 89, no. 4 (2016): 795–815.

[11] Loughlin, "Reassessing Cambodia's Patronage System(s)".

[12] Kheang Un, "The Cambodian People Have Spoken: Has the Cambodian People's Party Heard?", in *Southeast Asian Affairs 2015*, edited by Daljit Singh (Singapore: Institute of Southeast Asian Studies, 2015), pp. 102–16.

[13] Netra Eng and Caroline Hughes, "Coming of Age in Peace, Prosperity, and Connectivity: Cambodia's Young Electorate and its Impact on the Ruling Party's Political Strategies", *Critical Asian Studies* 49, no. 3 (2017): 396–410.

[14] Loughlin, "Reassessing Cambodia's Patronage System(s)".

[15] Hughes, "Understanding the Elections in Cambodia 2013", pp. 7–8.

[16] Kheang Un, *Cambodia: Return to Authoritarianism* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2019).

[17] Sivhuoch Ou, "Repeated Multiparty Elections in Cambodia: Intensifying Authoritarianism Yet Benefiting the Masses", *Pacific Affairs* 93, no. 3 (2020): 567–92.

[18] During this time hundreds of thousands of urban and rural people were dispossessed and excluded from areas they had farmed, sometimes for decades, as Cambodia's land was increasingly privatized for the benefit of officials and regime supportive tycoons, spurring protests in Phnom Penh and across the country. Neil Loughlin and Sarah Milne, "After the Grab? Land Control and Regime Survival in Cambodia since 2012", *Journal of Contemporary Asia* 51, no. 3 (2021): 375–97.

[19] Johannes Gerschewski, "The Three Pillars of Stability: Legitimation, Repression, and Co-optation in Autocratic Regimes", *Democratization* 20, no. 1 (2013): 13–38.

[20] Kimly Ngoun, "Adaptive Authoritarian Resilience: Cambodian Strongman's Quest for Legitimacy", *Journal of Contemporary Asia* (2020), https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/full/10.1080/00472336.2020.1832241?src=recsys.

[21] Astrid Norén-Nilsson, "A Regal Authoritarian Turn", *Journal of Contemporary Asia* (forthcoming 2021).

[22] Alice Beban, Laura Schoenberger, and Vanessa Lamb, "Pockets of Liberal Media in Authoritarian Regimes: What the Crackdown on Emancipatory Spaces Means for Rural Social Movements in Cambodia", *The Journal of Peasant Studies* 47, no. 1 (2020): 95–115.

[23] Astrid Norén-Nilsson, "Fresh News, Innovative News: Popularizing Cambodia's Authoritarian Turn", *Critical Asian Studies* 53, no. 1 (2020): 1–20.

[24] Neil Loughlin, "Authoritarian Regime Durability: An Analysis of Cambodia's Coercion-Dominant Winning Coalition", unpublished PhD dissertation, SOAS University of London, 2005.

[25] Steven Levitsky and Lucan A. Way, *Competitive Authoritarianism: Hybrid Regimes after the Cold War* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2010); Andreas Schedler, *The Politics of Uncertainty: Sustaining and Subverting Electoral Authoritarianism* (Oxford, UK: Oxford University Press, 2013).

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