

***Governing Cambodia's Forests: The International Politics of Policy Reform.* By Andrew Cock. Copenhagen: Nordic Institute of Asian Studies Press, 2016. Softcover: 302pp.**

***Cambodia's Second Kingdom: Nation, Imagination, and Democracy.* By Astrid Norén-Nilsson. Ithaca, New York: Cornell Southeast Asia Program Publications, 2016. Softcover: 228pp.**

Aside from being books on contemporary Cambodian politics, Andrew Cock's *Governing Cambodia's Forests: The International Politics of Policy Reform* and Astrid Norén-Nilsson's *Cambodia's Second Kingdom: Nation, Imagination, and Democracy* both share a common link: David Chandler. Chandler, the original Cambodianist, wrote the foreword to Norén-Nilsson's book and proffered a generous blurb to Cock's. Stylistically and methodologically, however, they diverge. Cock's book came about as part of his work as a forestry policy advisor (and formed the basis of his doctorate) at NGO Forum, an umbrella non-profit organization based in Cambodia, for four years in the early 2000s. This gave him an incredible vantage point, but also raised questions about how that work influenced his research, which he fully acknowledges: "generates biases and interests that colour perceptions of issues and the way they are analyzed. Observations risk becoming politicized in a way that clouds their objectivity and judgement" (p. xii). Norén-Nilsson's use of elite interviews, done for her doctoral dissertation, offers a window into the soul of Cambodian politicians.

Cock's book hones in on the idea of norm penetration, namely "how norms of appropriate state practice spread throughout the international system" (p. xi); more specifically "why international initiatives aimed at improving the management and conservation of tropical forests have achieved so little in curtailing the rate at which forest areas continue to be logged and converted into other land uses" and "second ... the inexorable penetration of peripheral terrestrial spaces throughout the 500 years since the international system first co-evolved in conjunction with one of its central modern features — the sovereign territorial state" (p. 2). Here, Cock means how the norms of the Westphalian state have not actually penetrated Cambodia's forests.

Cock argues that "externally promoted reform agendas are often manipulated by ruling elites in targeted states" (p. 6), in other words, why reform agendas are captured. Second, "Although

forestry policy reforms failed to achieve their direct goals, they channeled the ruling elite towards practices of forest governance that enhanced the political and economic integration of Cambodia's forested hinterland. The failure of forestry reforms to ensure the preservation of Cambodia's forests thus paradoxically worked to further more fundamental 'reform' aims" (p. 7).

As a critic of foreign aid's failings, I could not help but appreciate his argument that "[Foreign aid] can also have more perverse effects in that aid can reduce both the cost of reform and of delaying reform. It may induce governments to postpone making sacrifices until at least some of the promised aid is dispersed" (p. 13). On pages 115–16, Cock tabulated key events in the trajectory of the International Monetary Fund's Enhanced Structural Adjustment Facility for Cambodia, 1994–97, one that rang very true from my own recollection of the events as they unfolded. Without doubt, Cock's book is an essential read for anyone interested in what happened to Cambodian forests and policy reform in the 2000s.

Astrid Norén-Nilsson's *Cambodia's Second Kingdom* uses Ben Anderson's *Imagined Communities* as the basis of its analysis of Cambodia and its Second Kingdom. Norén-Nilsson asserts Cambodia is best thought of as an "unfinished imagined community" (p. 2), both in terms of its boundaries and its characteristics. Her discussion of dual citizenship in Cambodian League for the Promotion and Defense of Human Rights (LICADHO) NGO head Pung Chivv Kek's decision not to become the ninth tie-breaking member of the National Election Committee (p. 11) reminds this reviewer of the doctoral dissertations of Christine Su's *Tradition and Change: Khmer Identity and Democracy in the 20th Century and Beyond* and Kathryn Poethig's *Ambivalent Moralities: Cambodian Americans and Dual Citizenship in Phnom Penh*, the latter of which is described as "an ethnology of the moral discourse of Cambodian Americans as transnational citizens" although Norén-Nilsson cites Poethig's later work from an edited volume.

It is not until page 35 that we reach an outline of Norén-Nilsson's book: "This book maps out the national imaginings advanced in Cambodia since 1993 by political actors with an institutional base in Cambodia's main political parties competing electorally in the KOC [Kingdom of Cambodia] multiparty democratic system." There is the ruling party, which is neither fish nor fowl (or as the Khmer saying goes, neither male nor female) — i.e., never ideological, always pragmatic. There are the royalists or some variant of the royalists.

Then there are the anti-Vietnamese and anti-Communists, i.e., Democrats. That sums up the main strands of Cambodian politics before 1993, except for the Khmer Rouge who were vanquished in 1998.

Chapter 2 on Hun Sen and the ruling Cambodian People's Party explores the *Sdech Kân* claim, which posits that Hun Sen is the reincarnation of a sixteenth-century commoner who was unjustly persecuted by the King, overthrew him, and became a just-ruling King. Norén-Nilsson's exploration of the Khmer-Buddhist notion of *neak mean bon* (person of merit) is fascinating and enlightening (p. 42) as it plays into the commoner who becomes King (for he earned much merit in previous lives) narrative. Her discussion of *Putth Tumneay* (Predictions of the Buddha), and the royal terms *Preah Bat Thomnik* (Dharmic King or Just Ruler), *sdech* (King or prince), and *samdech* (prince but now an honorific that can be given by the King to non-royals and has been accorded to a handful of CPP leaders) is an important contribution to the existing narrative. This is where she plumbs new depths and shines. One critique of her narrative approach is methodological; how do we know what she says is the answer? It seems to me that while Hun Sen can push *Sdech Kân* as much as he would like, up to and including restoration of historical sites, etc., with the help of acclaimed *La République Khmère: 1970–1975* author and now confidant, Ros Chantrobot, is this the popular imagination of Hun Sen in the eyes of the people?

The discussion of Bun Rany as head of the Cambodian Red Cross seems misplaced; it feels like it belongs in the previous chapter (2), although I can understand why this narrative was placed in the Royalists' chapter. Needless to say, I am impressed by the access Norén-Nilsson enjoyed. Her list of interviewees is a who's who of Cambodian politicians, and her ability to extract information from one-off encounters is miraculous. Chapter 4, on the Democrats, assumes too much inside baseball knowledge, which can divide opinion. In her concluding chapter, Norén-Nilsson asserts that the post-Westphalian world order has not arrived in Southeast Asia and Cambodia is Exhibit A; this is the same thread that runs through Cock's thesis. No one can dispute it in light, especially, of Brexit, Duterte and Trump, and so many other nationalist undercurrents throughout the world. The end of the nation-state is premature, yet Cock argues that the nation-state never arrived in Cambodia's forests. Norén-Nilsson's argument is that to get to the post-nation-state, you first have to get to the nation-state.

The general methodological critique for both books, as case studies of Cambodia, is one of generalizability and selecting the dependent variable — are we looking at the lottery by looking only at winners (or losers)? We should be looking at both. Nonetheless, both *Governing Cambodia's Forests* and *Cambodia's Second Kingdom* are welcome contributions to the study of contemporary Cambodia, as are Cock and Norén-Nilsson as our newly minted Cambodianists.

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