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

Through the 1991 Paris Peace Agreement, the international community imposed multi-party democracy on Cambodia. Since then, Cambodia's democracy has evolved into a hybrid form, with a liberal framework but illiberal substance. Most studies on Cambodia's democratization stress the social, cultural and political-economy factors that have hindered liberal democracy from taking root there. *Cambodia's Second Kingdom: Nation, Imagination, and Democracy* by Astrid Norén-Nilsson — a Swedish scholar on the faculty of Lund University — departs from this common pattern of analysis of Cambodia's democratization. The book offers a novel argument, centred on the Cambodian elite's conceptualizations of political legitimacy, national identity, and representation and on the impact of these conceptualizations on both elite perceptions of democracy and democratic outcomes. In other words, the book offers an analysis of democracy from the perspective of the Cambodian elites. Starting with the idea that modern nations rest on “invented tradition and symbols of tradition” (p. 1), *Cambodia's Second Kingdom* enters the unsettling terrain both of elite perceptions of Cambodian politics — more specifically, elite perceptions of the country's characteristics and boundaries — and of the question of who has the legitimacy to represent “the true Cambodian nation” (p. 4).

Utilizing process tracing based on a multidisciplinary approach and rich field research including elite interviews, the book examines the ways in which the country's main political parties — the Cambodian People's Party (CPP), the Royalist FUNCINPEC party, and the democratic parties that coalesced into the Cambodian National Rescue Party (CNRP) — construct their respective, conflicting discourses with reference to imaginings about the meanings of “embodiment, genealogy, and elected leadership” (p. 27).

The book's most original contribution to Cambodian studies is its analysis of Prime Minister Hun Sen's systematic attempt to “imagine” himself through the *Sdach Kan* narrative, his own royal connections

and his democratic discourse. The discussion demonstrates that Hun Sen's "imagined" project aims not only at the construction of his domestic legitimacy but also at countering the liberal democratic discourse imposed on his regime by the international community. Drawing on an alternative narrative of the mythical King *Sdach Kan*, previously seen as a villain who usurped the throne, Hun Sen imagines this past monarch as a revolutionary and visionary king who charted new and in many instances progressive paths for Cambodia. Norén-Nilsson argues that, by invoking the name of *Sdach Kan*, Hun Sen imagines his own journey as one that parallels to that of *Sdach Kan* — an imagined journey that embodies a nation with distinctively Cambodian national roots. Like the career of *Sdach Kan*, Hun Sen's rise to the pinnacle of Cambodian politics from a humble background discursively projects a path of social mobility through merit. Like *Sdach Kan*, Hun Sen single-handedly ended Cambodia's civil war after the United Nations' misadventure of the early 1990s. This achievement clearly demonstrates his prowess and therefore predetermines blessings for his lifelong rule of Cambodia. Allegedly like *Sdach Kan*, Hun Sen invokes the concept of "people's democracy", a distinctive form of democracy that values economic development over other values embedded in Western liberal democracy.

Norén-Nilsson further contents that, in post-Paris Peace Agreement Cambodia, political royalism revolved around former King Norodom Sihanouk, whom royalists imagined as the embodiment of the Khmer nation. Other members of the royal family were by extension seen as similarly destined to embody the Khmer nation. As a son of Norodom Sihanouk, Prince Norodom Ranariddh imagines himself, therefore, as possessing the legitimacy to lead by following the footprints of Sihanouk's *Sangkum Reastr Niyum* movement and ideology. Among the crucial elements of this idealized 1955–70 period were direct democracy through a national congress and fulfilment of the people's needs. However, discord among members of the royal family, along with Ranariddh's impotence and lack of resources, enabled Hun Sen to outmanoeuvre the royalists. Not

least, he displayed a superior ability to offer largess via his deeply entrenched networks of patronage.

For the democrats, democratic imagination entails representing the people-cum-nation. In other words, the notion of democracy is a form of representative politics that ensures “national preservation” from foreign threats, and especially that emanating from Vietnam (p. 119). Therefore, the struggle for democracy, cast as a struggle for national survival, envelops the quintessential element of “people’s will”. According to this understanding, CPP self-interest and Vietnamese influence have trapped Cambodians in fear, hunger and ignorance. Consequently, they have been unable to express their will through electoral politics, and the task for the democrats is to liberate Cambodians from darkness by changing their mentality and habits through political activism in the form of protests. The democrats represent in essence a nation in waiting.

Cambodia’s Second Kingdom is a fine addition to Cambodian studies. Beyond its sound and novel analysis, the book also includes perspectives from all sides, including that of Prime Minister Hun Sen. Norén-Nilsson should be commended for the astuteness with which she gained interview access to him. Furthermore, the balance of theoretical discussion and empirical analysis of the imagination and representation of the nation renders *Cambodia’s Second Kingdom* significant in helping scholars as well as policy practitioners and foreign leaders to understand the trajectory of democracy and economic development from the perspective of Cambodian leaders themselves.

The book, however, contains a few weak points. First, it does not sufficiently discuss the driving forces underlying each political party’s successes and failures. The epilogue suggests that the CNRP’s better-than-expected performance in the 2013 elections stemmed from its nationalistic imagination, which resonated with Cambodia’s younger generation. Elsewhere in the book, the author suggests that FUNCINPEC’s and Ranariddh’s failures derived from their inability to transcend Sihanouk’s legacy to create an up-to-date royalist identity. However, the book is unclear about the bases of Hun Sen’s

and the CPP's electoral performance. The author states, "Hun Sen's success depends primarily on whether he will be judged to embody the model of just leadership he invokes" (p. 64). It is apparent that Hun Sen's success in perpetuating his power does not rest only on the appeal of his imagined roots — an imagination trapped in the past. Arguably, one could see a narrative of that kind as antithetical to the forward-looking and less superstitious youth of contemporary Cambodia. In the final analysis, Hun Sen's success in perpetuating his power lies in his pragmatism and his skilful use of both sticks and carrots in dealing with his political opponents.

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Hamka's Great Story: A Master Writer's Vision of Islam for Modern Indonesia. By James R. Rush. Wisconsin: The University of Wisconsin Press, 2016. xix+286 pp.

Notwithstanding the growing tensions between Muslims and non-Muslims in the capital Jakarta today, scholars have praised Indonesia for producing progressive and moderate Islamic scholars (ulama) of international repute. One individual who fit those labels was Professor Haji Abdul Malik Karim Amrullah (1908–81), popularly known as Hamka. During his lifetime, he published numerous books, from commentaries on the Qur'an to fiction. Hamka's writings are still widely read in the Malay world, even after more than three decades since his passing. Until today, some of his publications serve as textbooks in religious classes.

James R. Rush's *Hamka's Great Story: A Master Writer's Vision of Islam for Modern Indonesia* analyses the scholar's life story and thought-styles through his writings. It begins with an overview of Hamka's childhood and teenage years, and his passion for writing and