

tools would have provided the readers with a critical analysis of the dynamics of power in a context of transnational politics, migration, labour and neoliberalism.

SU-ANN OH
ISEAS – Yusof Ishak Institute, 30 Heng Mui Keng Terrace, Singapore 119614
email: oh_su_ann@iseas.edu.sg

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***Governing Cambodia's Forests: The International Politics of Policy Reform*, by Andrew Cock.**
Copenhagen: NIAS Press, 2016. Pp. 302.

Examining forest management issues from a political economy perspective is useful because political forces often interact with economic drivers to influence how forests are managed and used. The focus on Cambodia is vital, too, as no extensive or systematic academic work has been undertaken on this country before. Given this background, *Governing Cambodia's Forests* takes an important step in exploring pressing environment and forest conservation issues in the country.

Forest exploitation rarely occurs in a vacuum; there must be an international market that places demand on forest goods; there are also “actors” or stakeholders that feature strongly in the exploitation, consumption, or preservation of forest resources. Importantly, the whole outcome also needs to be placed in a particular setting: a clear set of property rights governing the extraction, conservation and protection of forest resources, with enforcement of such rights by courts and the state. In his book, Andrew Cock develops such a framework that looks at the “dynamics of external-internal interaction”, the interaction between the local elites/politicians and international organizations (notably, the World Bank) that subsequently influenced the type of policy reforms, institutional changes, and the outcome that occurred. His findings suggest that deforestation in the country worsened when multilateral and bilateral aid started focusing on policy reforms to manage forests.

In this book, forest management and exploitation is placed in the context of international politics, specifically the influence and pressure exerted by international organizations on the country's rulers. In Cambodia, global bodies have long endeavoured to work with the local authorities to manage forests in a sustainable manner, both economically and environmentally. More often than not, however, these organizations simply parcel out policies that they would like the Cambodian authorities to adopt. Failure to follow these guidelines would result in threats to stop funds or aid money from being disbursed to the country. These insights are particularly interesting because the author has the “insider's” view to forest management issues in the country, given the history of his policy advisor position at the NGO Forum.

The book is divided into seven chapters that highlight different aspects related to the management of Cambodia's forest landscape. Tropical forest management in the context of a global states system is discussed in Chapter 2. Economic analysis has become central towards understanding, examining and resolving the problem of deforestation, and also the prescription of policies that are likely to lead to improved forest management practices. In the following chapter, the focus is brought to the country's ruling class. Cambodia is often viewed as a patrimonial state where the ruler depends on the support from key sections of the political elite to stay in power. In turn, the ruler wins the subjects' loyalty by satisfying their material interests and needs. State power is directed at channelling rents to these political elites, and forest resources in Cambodia have traditionally been an important means to achieve this end.

Chapter 4 then looks at how international market conditions, combined with growing accessibility to the border areas, made logging a highly lucrative activity in the country. The role of international institutions like the IMF is also examined in detail, with special focus on how the organization attempted to coerce the Cambodian government into adopting policies that promote sustainable forest practices. One example is the “Cambodia Forest Policy Assessment”, which was adopted to enable institutional reforms for clearer redelineation of property rights and greater transparency in the allocation of forest concessions. Continuing the narrative, Chapter 5 explains how the ruling elite recognized their ability to turn the reform agenda proposed by the international organizations into their advantage. The author mentions that the leadership was not keen on adopting every single policy recommendation. Only those policies were adopted which assisted the state in centralizing its control over forest resources, such as laws that enhanced the taxing ability of the Department of Forestry. Changes that could potentially limit the discretion of state agencies and the ruling elite were “deflected” or evaded. Such policies would be pushed out by mid-level bureaucratic structures with limited power.

Chapter 6 details how the ruling elite’s ambition of controlling logging rents shaped the extraction of forest resources. First, Cambodia’s patrimonial character limited the bureaucracy’s capabilities in effectively preventing forest degradation; second, extraction was set in motion by the rent-seeking policies of the elite under this patrimonial system; and third, the ruling elite had learned how to selectively adopt and evade reform prescriptions from the international donors to their benefit. The final chapter concludes by identifying the factors behind the failure of the externally promoted reform agenda in countering the destructive exploitation of Cambodia’s forests. According to the author, these policies did not take into account the propensity of elites to navigate policy reform subscriptions through selective adoption and evasion. He points out “... virtually none of the profits went to the people. Why was little achieved in curtailing the rate of forest exploitation? Forest lands were cleared, replaced by plantations which, in turn, enhanced the grip of the Cambodian elite on these forestlands”. The appendices (information on concessions and maps on forest cover change) serve as useful evidence to support his arguments.

Does Andrew Cock weave a convincing story explaining why Cambodia’s forests have been overexploited even when multilateral and bilateral aid organizations were actively engaged in the promotion of forest reform? To a large extent, yes. The author has spent substantial time compiling and presenting information on forest management “malpractices”, the extent of deforestation, and the underlying nuances that made forest use unsustainable. Most of this information is not easily accessible to outsiders and observers. More importantly, the author has put forward a very logical argument by placing forest degradation in the context of a patrimonial government, which had to use timber to maintain its political support base. The extraction of timber took priority above sustainable management and conservation concerns. Detailed description of related regulations are provided systematically in this book; it would be hard to find so much information located in one single publication elsewhere.

The book will benefit scholars and practitioners interested in forest issues in Southeast Asia, especially from a political economy perspective. However, the prose employed is not always easy to follow; some parts need repeated readings before the arguments become clearer. Andrew Cock’s book is, however, important because it introduces foreign aid into the picture, making the reader think about the predatory actions of the state and how they can override the good intentions of international agencies.

LEE POH ONN

ISEAS – Yusof Ishak Institute, 30 Heng Mui Keng Terrace, Singapore 119614
email: polee@iseas.edu.sg