

Malay language in these very countries. Transnational regionalism organizations such as ASEAN may not exactly be ‘Melayu Raya’; nevertheless, the formation of the association has been historically informed by such a regional spirit (Owen 2014, pp. 1–2).

Conceptualizing the Malay World is a path-breaking book which demonstrates that the colonial knowledge introduced and applied to Malaya is not contested. Nevertheless, colonial knowledge formed the structural backbone of the postcolonial modern state of Malaysia, although the competing notion of “nation-of-intent” (p. 2) remained. Soda has written a book relevant to historians and anthropologists in Malaysia and abroad. Unlike Cohn, he is a historian among anthropologists. This is a must-read book for those interested in Malaysian and Southeast Asian Studies, as well as in the sociology of knowledge.

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Unwritten Rule: State-Making through Land Reform in Cambodia.
By Alice Beban. Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2021. 258 pp.

Cambodia’s integration into regional and global economies has accelerated the demand for land for real estate development and

agricultural plantations. Rising land demand within the context of Cambodia's poor property regimes has produced high incidents of land conflicts and land grabbing. In *Unwritten Rule*, Alice Beban situates data drawn from her extensive ethnographic fieldwork within an interdisciplinary literature to provide a thick description of the complexity of land conflicts in Cambodia. More specifically, the book focuses on the land titling programme—known as Order 01 or 'leopard skin' land reform—promulgated by Prime Minister Hun Sen in 2012.

Order 01 surveys and issues land titles to rural Khmer and indigenous communities located in and adjacent to land economic concession zones. Hun Sen has taken pride in the programme's win-win strategy because it offers these Khmer and indigenous communities title to their land and thus land security while conferring large agricultural companies legitimacy over their land concessions. By mobilizing university students—perceived as trustworthy, idealistic and not corrupt—Hun Sen was confident the programme would reach Cambodia's frontiers, which were dominated by illegal logging and plantations and which previous land titling programmes had failed to reach as they had been hijacked by corrupt local officials and elites. Based on capitalist private property regimes, the government hoped that Order 01 would establish land tenure security for rural villagers—a condition that would expand access to credit, investments in land and generate employment. *Unwritten Rule's* findings, however, point to a mixed outcome. On a smaller scale, Order 01 produced relatively equitable, less corrupt and less elite-captured land titling in communities that had strong networks with informed members and deep connections to local elites. On a broader scale, however, Order 01 failed to achieve its objectives of promoting land tenure security and improved well-being for rural communities.

While the reasons underpinning the failure of Order 01 are multiple and complex, the following points raised in the book are worth examining. The first pertains to Cambodia's political economic terrain that is entrenched in patrimonial networks built and perpetuated by Hun Sen. Order 01 is thus not a clear legal document; rather, it is

Hun Sen's "oral pronouncements and secretive unwritten rules [that] guide state-actors" (p. 17). The strong man's utterances allow the elites at different levels to collude with one another to plot "anticipatory land grabs" (p. 84) through clearing forest land to stage claims or by tricking villagers into supporting their claims that encroach on state and community forest land.

The second concerns the deployment of predominantly male, ethnic Khmer students as implementers of Order 01. Not only did their positionality produce 'gendered' land titling that discriminated against women, but it also prompted them to discriminate against indigenous communities, downplaying the symbolic and economic significance of communal land ownership. The latter was exacerbated by their training in capitalistic modern farming that led them to prioritize cash crop farms and private plots over vital communal land and community forests.

The third relates to the strategies employed by non-governmental organizations "working through legal channels to gain state recognition of land rights rather than through overt protest or other forms of activism", thus perpetuating the "hegemonic social relations" (p. 168). As such, local elites have the power to employ "obfuscation, bureaucratic delay, and overcomplicated procedures" (p. 169) or even threats of violence to manufacture fear and uncertainty to divide the rural communities. The resulting sense of disunity and resignation would thus lower the possibility of resistance from the communities to the manipulative and extractive actions of the elites. The success of manipulation by the elites is evidenced by the low rate of government approval of community forest and communal land titles.

Amid fear, uncertainty, fractured communities and government repression, *Unwritten Rule* also documents evidence of community solidarity and resistance to state-capital encroachment on community land and livelihoods. Such community actions are articulated through "alternative ontologies of land" (p. 191), a discourse that attempts to empower indigenous communities through building hope and bravery focusing on the utilization of land titles as a legal base,

and indigenous traditions and intercommunity bonds as a spiritual and emotional base. It is a discourse that promotes alternative righteousness in land use that transcends the primacy of state-capital relations anchored in neoliberal economic ideology.

Its excellent analysis notwithstanding, *Unwritten Rule* does not provide meaningful discussion of two issues closely intertwined with the current land conflicts and land titling. Although in-depth discussion of these issues could be beyond the scope of the book, at least referencing them is critical for helping readers fully understand the contours of land conflicts in Cambodia. The first is the role played by Chinese companies. Over the past decade, Chinese capital has flooded the Cambodian land market. The partnership between Chinese capital and Cambodian political and economic elites deserves greater discussion. The second issue is the linkage between land titles and the explosion of the credit market. At one point, the book noted the absence of expansion of the credit market following land titling in the communities under study. The author's follow-up fieldwork noticed some level of growth. The absence of discussion of the phenomenal growth in credit markets and associated indebtedness found throughout Cambodia is a puzzle. After all, rural indebtedness and associated landlessness occurred as predatory lenders, in the context of an absence of government regulation, preyed on impoverished farmers seeking loans using their land titles as collateral. This phenomenon prompted the opposition party to campaign in 2013 on debt-forgiveness if it won the elections. The popularity of this campaign forced the government to order banks and financial institutions to advertise that they were 'private institutions'.

All in all, *Unwritten Rule* is an empirically rich and theoretically informed book that makes significant contributions to our understanding of the challenges of agrarian reform in the contexts of neoliberal economic hegemony and post-conflict state formation.

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