

the institution and the latest incumbent, are included, as expected, in this volume too. The volume also offers chapters on topics often overlooked. Khemtong Tonsakulrungruang's marvellous account of the government's quest to suppress the middle-class-favoured Dhammakaya Buddhist sect, amidst the corruption and waning authority of the state-sanctioned Sangha Council, opens a window into the fascinating world of Buddhist politics. This world is a critical domain throughout Theravada mainland Southeast Asia, but especially in Thailand and Myanmar. In sum, this book is a valuable asset for scholars and policymakers wanting a deeper understanding of the first half-decade after the Thai coup of May 2014.

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A History of Cambodia-Thailand Diplomatic Relations: 1950–2020. By Sok Udom Deth. Glienicke: Galda, 2020. 231 pp.

Sok Udom Deth's book *A History of Cambodia-Thailand Diplomatic Relations*, which is an updated version of his doctoral dissertation, has a temporal scope covering seventy years of diplomatic relations between the two neighbouring countries. The book covers five periods of Cambodia's modern political history, which are organized as the book's main chapters, comprising the Sangkum Reastr Niyum Period (1955–70), Khmer Republic Period (1970–75), Democratic

Kampuchea Period (1975–79), People’s Republic of Kampuchea Period (1979–91) and Relations in the Post–Cold War Era (1991–2020).

The book has several strengths. First, situating it within the existing literature in English about Cambodia–Thailand relations, the book makes important original contributions to scholarship. It covers a lengthy period of diplomatic relations and examines the relations from different angles. It postulates that the relationship between the two neighbours has had its ups and downs because of the competing interests among societal groups in both countries. This perspective is different from that of most of the existing literature, which tends to be “empirically selective” and “project Cambodian–Thai relations as being historically antagonistic” (p. 2). From pages 3 to 10, the author also offers a comprehensive review of existing literature in English about Cambodian–Thai relations and identifies the gaps to justify the book’s original contributions to scholarship.

Second, the book makes methodological and theoretical contributions to the scholarship on Cambodian–Thai relations by employing Lee Jones’s “social conflict” analysis as an analytical framework to explain the primary factors and reasons underpinning the fluctuations in relations between the two countries. According to Lee Jones’s “social conflict” theory, as cited in the book, we should not see states as merely unitary actors reacting to threats. Instead, we should analyse how different societal forces operating upon and within the state view potential security issues and seek to influence the security policy outcome (p. 11).

I agree with Udom Deth that the “social conflict” theory is a useful framework for analysing and explaining the complex relationship between the two countries. Rather than simply analysing what and how state actors and groups in both countries used to manipulate relations, we should, as the author suggests, try to understand the competing interests and ideologies of different societal forces seeking to augment power and advance their agenda at home. We do not gain much insight into the relations between the two countries if we simply study the historical relations, nationalism, security and

foreign policies of Thailand towards Cambodia and vice versa as independent variables or as coming from the state as a monolithic entity without scrutinizing competing interests and ideologies, power relations, and discursive perceptions of various groups in each country.

Third, Udom Deth's book provides a systematic academic analysis of Cambodian-Thai ties after the 2014 military coup in Thailand. This section (pp. 173–76) adds new knowledge and provides new insights into the relations because existing academic studies tend to cover the periods before the military coup.

However, the book has its own shortcomings. It has a controversial argument, which states:

This research argues that change in government/regime in Cambodia or Thailand affects their foreign relations positively if the two countries share relatively democratic ideals (e.g. if both are civilian, democratically-elected governments)... Conversely, change in government/regime in at least one of the two states affects their relations negatively if the new government does not share similar regime type, ideology, and/or mutual strategic interest with the government of the other state. (p. 13)

This argument is problematic for two main reasons. First, Cambodia and Thailand do not share similar political systems, whether we consider them under the banner of democracy or authoritarianism. Political scientists understand that there are many different types of democratic and authoritarian governments. Two democratically elected governments or two authoritarian governments cannot be simply categorized as sharing a similar regime type. Besides, Cambodia and Thailand do not share a similar ideology, although both are constitutional monarchies and Buddhist states and have cultural similarities.

Second, the argument does not reflect empirical nuances. Why did the relations between Cambodia and Thailand deteriorate during the “democratically elected governments” of Prime Ministers Samak Sundaravej and Somchai Wongsawat in Thailand and the “elected government” of Prime Minister Hun Sen in Cambodia? Why did the relations improve during the post-2014 military rule in Thailand

when Cambodia has a civilian government? The author is correct in using the “social conflict” theory in explaining the fluctuations in the relationship between the two countries, but he could have incorporated greater theoretical and empirical nuances into this controversial argument. If Cambodia and Thailand had a similar regime type or ideology at any one time, it does not necessarily lead to positive or negative relations. It depends on various factors and forces that influence the outcome. It also depends on who really controls political power or wields influence in each country. In Thailand, certain groups—that formed an anti-democratic alliance, described by Duncan McCargo (2005) as the “network monarchy”, with an institutionalized character that Eugénie Mérieau (2016) termed the “Deep State”—wield considerable political influence and have often intervened in the political process, preventing the democratically elected civilian governments from exercising full control over the country’s domestic affairs and foreign relations.

Another shortcoming is that the book organizes chapters based on periods of different regimes in Cambodia and uses much more data from the Cambodian side, thus giving the impression that the book is more about a history of Cambodia’s diplomatic relations with Thailand than about a history of Cambodia-Thailand diplomatic relations, as the book’s title posits.

In conclusion, the book is a good read for those who want to understand Cambodia’s diplomatic relations with Thailand during the last seventy years. It is also a welcome contribution to Southeast Asia Studies and international relations in the region.

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