With the enormous task of covering such a vast geographical area with such a long history, this book is unavoidably schematic, especially in its coverage of the post-colonial period to the present, which suffers by comparison with the rich description of the colonial period. One finds some details questionable, such as calling ECAFE a United Nations specialized agency when it is, in fact, a regional headquarters; the use of the politically nuanced term "Lao" in the present period, which was originally an ethnic name that was extended and adopted as a post-revolutionary term indicating national, political, and social organizations; and referring to Vientiane as the Vietnamese capital instead of the Laotian capital.

Nevertheless, this book should prove beneficial to students of Southeast Asian history and political science, environmentalists, travellers in the region, and anyone who has read too many dry descriptions of political history. This is history with a human voice.

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***Political Transition in Cambodia, 1991–99: Power, Elitism and Democracy.* By David W. Roberts.** Richmond, Surrey: Curzon Press, 2001. 259pp.

Political Transition in Cambodia provides a useful and detailed account of developments within the political parties in Cambodia, and their relationship with internationally imposed agendas. In consequence, it will doubtless become a standard reference for researchers and students alike. Roberts' book addresses two major themes: firstly, it critiques a Western approach to Cambodia variously equated with the "Liberal Project", the "Standard Total View", and the "institutional memory" of the United Nations; and secondly, it examines the ways in which Western goals in Cambodia have foundered upon the "rocks of Khmer culture".

With regard to the first theme, Roberts challenges what he sees as a prevailing body of international opinion that is overly sympathetic to the parties that emerged in the 1990s from the resistance armies of the 1980s civil war — namely, the Front Uni Nationale pour un Cambodge Independent, Neutrale, Pacifique et Cooperatif (FUNCINPEC) and the Sam Rainsy Party (SRP). In calling this body of opinion "the Standard Total View", Roberts suggests the emergence of a hegemonic discourse,

which constrains the thinking of Western commentators on Cambodia. He suggests that while Western commentators are now becoming more critical of these parties, for most of the 1990s they were seen as encapsulating Cambodian hopes for democracy. The corollary of this was a bias in Western writings against the Cambodian People's Party (CPP) — the descendent of the 1980s Vietnamese-backed regime in Phnom Penh — which has been widely viewed as an authoritarian obstacle to these hopes.

In entering this debate, Roberts offers the most substantial account to date of a contending view, which, since the isolation of the Phnom Penh regime by the West in the 1980s, has sought to cut through some of the more rabid Cold War propaganda and delineate more fairly the achievements of the CPP. In doing so, Roberts introduces much interesting primary data, including interviews with individuals long viewed as bogeymen by the West, most notably the current CPP Prime Minister, Hun Sen, and the former Foreign Minister of the Democratic Kampuchea (DK) regime, Ieng Sary. He also presents illuminating detail gleaned from interviews with former UNTAC (United Nations Transitional Authority in Cambodia) employees. A rigorous and detailed exploration of this political perspective is useful and timely, although Roberts' presentation of this as a counter-hegemonic cry in the wilderness is rather overstated. These views have long been broadly associated, in Cambodian studies, with the work of Michael Vickery and Raoul Jennar, from which Roberts quotes extensively, and the statements of former Australian ambassador to Cambodia, Tony Kevin. In fact, the published work of these individuals is, arguably, sufficiently extensive and well-known as to constitute a "Standard View" of its own in Cambodian studies, and Roberts' book sits firmly within this tradition.

Whichever "Standard View" one subscribes to, there is no doubt that these two agendas have underpinned much of the scholarship on Cambodia over the past twenty years. In summing up the latter, Roberts provides interesting data and useful explanations. He also pinpoints, accurately, the gradual disillusionment in the democratic possibilities of FUNCINPEC and the Sam Rainsy Party, felt by some of those who have long been viewed as proponents of the Standard Total View. However, significant points of difference remain between the two camps, and Roberts devotes most of his efforts to promoting his own side, rather than suggesting a new, liberated research agenda for Cambodian studies. Consequently, he offers a rather day-to-day account that devotes itself indiscriminately to every political twist and turn in the road.

In this regard, the book points up, but does not directly address, a key question facing Cambodian studies. An important question for

consideration is not whether a wealth of factual evidence can be amassed in support of one view or another — it can, as this book competently shows — but why, ten years after the Paris Peace Agreements, these different views remain reified in many respects, and why the gap between them appears to be often unbridgeable by recourse to data. For example, Roberts presents evidence (pp. 58–59), based on "interviews" and "informal, often impromptu, discussions with rural Khmers over the last nine years in Cambodia", to suggest that a broad and profound "anti-Vietnamese" sentiment, so long employed as a key assumption in explaining Cambodian politics, simply does not exist. Roberts is aware that many academics, with equal experience in Cambodia, would challenge this view — indeed, this is a part of the Standard Total View, as he portrays it. Yet, he does not attempt to explain why so many eminent Cambodian scholars should have remained wedded to this view if it is unfounded. He simply describes this as a deception perpetrated by the ideological agenda of the "Western press".

In adopting this approach, on this question and on others — in particular, on the role of Hun Sen — Roberts offers no way out of the impasse that at present pits Cambodia scholars against one another as "arch enemies imbued in a political culture of absolutism and intolerance of difference", to borrow his characterization of Cambodia's major political parties. In reading the arguments and counter-arguments ably summarized here, it is tempting to conclude that Cambodian studies, like Cambodia's transition as Roberts portrays it, itself has "foundered" on a "cultural rock" of division and intolerance (p. 206).

With regard to his second theme, Roberts characterizes the liberal project of democracy promotion in Cambodia as an external force, which entails a head-on collision between the presumptions of Western intervenors and the culturally embedded perspectives of Cambodia's political élite. In his treatment of this theme, Roberts examines the impact of a cultural framework characterized by patron–client relations, and the implications of this for Western notions of Loyal Opposition. In doing so, Roberts offers an illuminating analysis of the organization of Cambodia's political parties, and the ways in which the trials of the last ten years, far from democratizing these former armies, has increased their dependence upon the personalities that lead them (p. 178).

This is a useful corrective to the simplistic early post-Cold War idealism which attempted to write out notions of culture in favour of rational choice theories of voter preferences. This attempt inhibited the explanatory power of much Western analysis in the 1990s. However, the reviewer's main criticism of this work is that Roberts is, in places, over-reliant upon cultural stereotypes and an essentialist view of

culture itself. Consequently, the account of Khmer culture that Roberts offers is curiously one-dimensional, and heavily dependent upon the received wisdom of other studies undertaken by Westerners, which are quoted at length and laboriously triangulated. One is left with a certain unease at the convenient way in which cultural predispositions can be found to determine Cambodian responses.

In bringing together a range of cultural explanations for Cambodia's failure to democratize in a suitably Western manner, Roberts does not problematize the concept of culture itself — a concept which Raymond Williams has described as "one of the two or three most complicated words in the English language". He frequently refers to the unbroken Angkorean tradition, without offering any explanation for such a remarkable conservatism in a country that has undergone so many upheavals. In particular, he does not address the question of whether Khmer culture may have long been constructed by Western analysts in just such a way as to preclude any notions of Cambodia as a country that might be capable of significant change. In the course of this omission, Roberts begs his own question of why culture — an essentially static notion as he uses it — must necessarily operate as a block to political reform, whether externally or internally promoted. While he is doubtless correct in insisting that the West has no right to demand cultural change, the more interesting research question must surely be how, rightly or wrongly, such a remarkable appearance of cultural stasis has been preserved.

In this respect, a further significant omission is any discussion of the actions, understandings and aspirations of ordinary Cambodians themselves, who, presumably, sustain and reproduce Khmer culture across generations. Apart from impromptu discussions with rural Khmer on the Vietnamese issue, Roberts' account of Cambodia's transition, and the obstacles to it, by and large fails to consider "society" as a significant matrix of power. At one stage, Roberts goes so far as to describe the CPP as having "enjoyed tenure for over a decade in a political vacuum"; if Cambodia at this time was a "vacuum", where, then, one is tempted to ask, were all the Cambodians?

Cambodians are largely treated as lacking agency or sophistication. The society is portrayed as "brutalised [and] … accustomed to the arbitrary use of violence" (p. 42); as "perverted by its brutal and traumatic recent historical experiences" (p. 52); as trapped in a "culture of violence" (p. 62); as "emotional" (p. 63); as "all-powerless" (p. 74); "subsumed to, and simultaneously… forced to serve, the … interests of elites" (p. 166); and as "sometimes relatively passive" (p. 147). Consequently, those moments when ordinary Cambodians do manage to force their way into Roberts' narrative are dismissed as "stage-managed" — an evaluation supported by the views of Western observers (p. 179).

The exception to this is Roberts' discussion of voter preferences (pp. 184–87). Attempting to determine motivations affecting voter decisions in Cambodia is a familiar game, yet it is a frustrating one. The arguments are impossible to resolve one way or another because of the blanket ban on exit polling and the promotion of the secrecy of the ballot during Cambodian elections. Attribution of motivations to voters is utterly uncheckable. Yet, Roberts' recirculation of the orthodoxy that characterizes Cambodian society as utterly powerless, except in the context of the polling booth, allows him to focus on this as the only example of social input into the political transition.

These problems represent a limitation, in this book as in many commentaries on Cambodia, in the application of political theory to the data. If "culture" is to be deployed as a key variable, it must surely be problematized as a concept capable of dynamism, as well as conservatism, and cultural stasis must thus be explained. Similarly, the treatment of an "elite" as operating free from any form of constraint from the "masses" defines out of contention any sophisticated understanding of how state-society relations operate in non-democratic societies.

The failure to offer an adequate account of culture or state-society relations, permits the recirculation, rather than the questioning, of standard orthodoxies. Roberts claims that he is rejecting the Standard Total View. Yet, this is more insidious than he appears to believe, since it does not merely dictate support for one party or another, or subordinate Khmer culture to the Liberal Project, but imposes a discourse in which the actions and understandings of ordinary Cambodians rarely even appear, let alone count, as important variables. While the book offers a highly readable, detailed and carefully researched account of an important strand of thinking in Cambodian studies, it suffers from this omission and consequently fails to push the debates in significant new directions.

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***Civil Islam: Muslims and Democratization in Indonesia*. By Robert W. Hefner.** Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 2000. 286pp.

It is soon apparent when reading this book that, for Robert Hefner, civil Islam is more than a scholarly interest; it is a passionate commitment, a cause which carries great moral weight. Hence, this book is