combat corruption and reduce monopolistic tendencies, and an effective 'poll watch' scrutiny of elections" (p. 79). While this group did not have the upper hand from the mid-1990s, they were still a significant force, allied with technocrats in the bureaucracy.

Girling's work provides a helpful synthesis of the major writings on Thai political economy during the past decade or so. It has copious footnotes, but sorely lacks a bibliography to help illuminate the way through them. The book is not an introductory text, nor is it intended for the general reader. Its target audience is the advanced student of either Thai politics or the comparative politics of newly-industrializing countries.

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***Sihanouk: Prince of Light, Prince of Darkness*. By Milton Osborne.** NSW, Australia: Allen & Unwin Pty Ltd., 1994. 283 pp.

Cambodia's monarch-turned political leader, Norodom Sihanouk, has been viewed by Cambodia historian David Chandler as "one of Asia's most flamboyant and enduring figures". This assertion makes Milton Osborne's book under review worth reading, partly because of Cambodia's endless tragedies in the last few decades and partly because the Prince has outlived many of his enemies. The leading figures such as former Defence Minister Lon Nol and Prince Sisowath Sirik Matak (Sihanouk's cousin), who had put him out of power in a *coup d'etat* in March 1970, have long been dead. The Khmer Rouge leadership, whom Sihanouk had helped fight its way to power in 1975, has been internationally isolated and has now disintegrated. But Sihanouk was reinstated as King in September 1993, and still reigns. Although the book does not focus on Sihanouk's re-emerging role in Cambodian society, the author provides a critical but helpful look at the monarch's early personal and political life.

Some of Osborne's critics may feel uncomfortable with his approach: the author presents a critical, unauthorized biography of the Cambodian Prince, but did not seek the latter's assistance in view of the fact that doing so could jeopardize his ability to write "in the frank terms" that he did. One could, therefore, point out that by not having conducted personal interviews with Sihanouk, the author did not listen to the Prince's side of the story and did not give him a fair

hearing. Osborne is indeed frank, but his book is not one-sided or unreasonably biased against the Prince.

Unlike others who tended to give Sihanouk credit for his political accomplishments in terms of his support for the country's educational efforts and his success in keeping Cambodia out of the Second Indochina War, which was raging in neighbouring Vietnam and Laos, Osborne took a second look at the Prince's "successes". For sure, the author does not dispute Sihanouk's attempts to expand the educational system. The number of primary school pupils, and high school and university students had clearly increased under his rule. Medical clinics and hospitals had also been expanded. The Prince had early adopted a foreign policy of "neutrality" that would prevent his country from getting involved in the Indochina War, but in which Cambodia later did after the coup that deposed and sent him into exile.

But Osborne was not about to leave out the Prince's mistakes. As he put it: "my own judgment ... places strong emphasis on the negative side of his years in power" (p. 274). Throughout the book, the Prince is judged harshly: from his personal life to his public affairs. Sihanouk's love life is critically assessed against those who overlooked the Prince's alliances with many women, especially his wife Monique, whose greed "played an essential part in Sihanouk's overthrow" (p. 4).

What troubled Osborne most, however, was Sihanouk's lack of balance in his personality and judgment. The Prince is viewed as a "fantasist", who ignored "reality when that reality has not coincided with [his] views of himself and his country" (p. 265–66). His "[personal] enthusiasm for a particular policy or project was followed by a swift change of mood that pushed previous preoccupations into the background" (p. 266). Sihanouk's critics were reluctant to criticize his inadequacies, and those who dared to challenge him found themselves outside the power establishment.

Osborne's powerful critique of Sihanouk is based on the problem of unchecked power the Prince enjoyed: "Backed all too often by sycophantic advisers who would not, or dared not, contradict his decisions, Sihanouk in his heyday seemed set endlessly to dominate Cambodian politics, both domestically and in the international sphere" (p. 3). He is also viewed as having a "never-ending thirst for recognition as a figure of importance on the world stage" (p. 10). Osborne thus sees Sihanouk's love for women and for power as having influenced his actions and decisions, which "contributed to the political malaise that finally tore Cambodia apart" (p. 11).

While Osborne presents Sihanouk in a more negative light than other writers, it is misleading to judge the author's assessment as

unfair. More closely read, the book also sheds much light on the Prince's numerous dilemmas. First, the author acknowledges that the Prince's intentions for his country were good: "Beyond any shadow of a doubt, Sihanouk has acted as he has ... with the good of his country in his mind" (p. 265). Secondly, the author also recognizes the fact that Sihanouk operated within a constrained political environment that perhaps made him behave the way he did. Although Cambodia gained its independence from France in 1954, French colonialism did not leave Cambodia with a legacy of a strong state; the former colony did not inherit a system of administration, or a corps of administrators, who "could confidently confront the problems of independence". Osborne adds further: "Cambodia's lack of trained administrators, engineers and doctors was shared by many Third World countries emerging from colonial rule" (p. 273). While harshly judging Sihanouk, the author warns against any judgment that fails to balance the Prince's advantages against his "severe disadvantages of a political system that used Western forms without the support of any political traditions that could easily accommodate the practices and institutions of the West". (p. 273)

Thirdly, evidence provided by Osborne suggests further that Sihanouk's rule was shaky from early on. The Prince's "pathological inability to accept criticism" may be rooted in Cambodia's "God-king" political culture, reinforced by the fact that Sihanouk struggled, like any other politician, to enhance his political legitimacy. He was hand-picked by the French and may have felt the need to prove himself as a monarch who had the right to rule in a society capable of discrediting or undermining his leadership as well as a leader who could do no wrong. Despite his popularity, Sihanouk was not invincible. Osborne is most likely correct when asserting that "[one] of the great myths of modern Cambodian history — a myth promoted by Sihanouk himself — is that the peasantry provided the essential support that sustained Sihanouk throughout his years as Cambodia's leader" (p. 83) The fact that the Prince thirsted for international recognition may also have to do with his desperate need to enhance his political legitimacy at home. International recognition has indeed been a major source of political legitimacy for most state leaders.

Although critical of Sihanouk's foreign policy conduct, Osborne can also be seen as sympathetic towards the Prince's plight. With regard to his policy shift towards China in the mid-1960s, for instance, Osborne does not blame him: "Given the world in which he [Sihanouk] had to operate, Sihanouk's decision to look to China as the guarantor of his country's sovereignty must appear ... an understandable and,

considering the time at which he made the decision, a logical one" (p. 271)

If read between the lines, the book should not be seen as too unfair a verdict on Sihanouk's political career. He may be a Prince of tragedy in the sense that he failed to build Cambodia as an unfailing modern state, but he was also an unfortunate Prince, who was tightly bound by a history of tragedy and bad circumstances, that is, the Cold War. The "Khmer empire" had long disintegrated, and subsequently been subjected to foreign invasions and domination. The structural breakdown of the state made it almost impossible for any single leader to perform wonders. It is unclear to me if anyone else could have done better. Those after him, like Lon Nol and Pol Pot, did worse. Sihanouk was no superman and should be given credit for admitting that he was "a man, with his good points and his bad" and that he was "neither more or less virtuous than [his] brother men, created, in the words of 'Genesis', in the image of God, but having to assume the inheritance of original sin" (p. xi).

My sympathy with Prince Sihanouk does not negate the author's assessments and conclusions, nor does it lie in what the Prince did or failed to do, but in what he had to endure. Having read the book, knowing a little bit about Cambodian history, and still struggling to learn more about why weak states fail, I am tempted to describe Sihanouk not only as a "prince of light" and a "prince of darkness", or a "prince of tragedy" but also as a victim of a tragic history. Leading a broken state without enjoying unconditional political legitimacy, Sihanouk could not afford to delegate power to those under his authority, because doing so would be suicidal.

I enjoyed the book very much and would recommend it to anyone interested in Cambodia under Sihanouk's rule and after. If I could draw one important lesson from the book, I would say that weak state leaders' use of violence against their political opponents, while understandably difficult to resist doing so, does not pay. Still operating within a weak state, the current Cambodian leadership may end up repeating history, but it must also bear the responsibility for refusing to learn from past mistakes. This point should temper anyone who takes the view that "war makes states".

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