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Cambodia

Aid dependence in Cambodia: How foreign assistance undermines democracy

By SOPHAL EAR

New York: Columbia University Press, 2013. Pp. 185. Figures, Tables, Notes, Bibliography, Index.

The Cardamom conundrum: Reconciling development and conservation in the Kingdom of Cambodia

By TIMOTHY J. KILLEEN

Singapore: NUS Press, 2012. Pp. 354. Maps, Figures, Tables, Photographs, Notes, Index.

doi:10.1017/S0022463414000423

These volumes offer two very different, but complementary, perspectives on contemporary development questions in Cambodia. Both argue that they address the core issues that are shaping not only development in Cambodia but around the world and both offer insights which the authors hope will affect development pathways for the best. For Timothy Killeen the most pressing issue is how nations like Cambodia balance the need for economic development and wealth generation with the preservation of biodiversity and precious natural resources. For Sophal Ear the issue is that of aid dependence and the way that such dependence works to cripple national economies and stunt not only economic growth, but also social and political change towards a more equitable society. Read in tandem these two books provide valuable insights into what is happening in Cambodia and offer worthwhile advice to development agencies, donors, and governments about how best to shape their engagements.

To begin with *The Cardamom conundrum* by Timothy Killeen. Killeen frames his book around a bit of a straw man, i.e. the ‘conundrum’ of the title in which Cambodia is faced with making a choice between economic development based on resource exploitation versus a ‘green’ choice of

conserving the biodiversity and natural habitats of the Cardamom Mountains. As he argues from the beginning, the perceived tradeoffs are a false dichotomy. Killeen's argument is that the construction of a modern economy relies on sustainable exploitation of renewable natural resources, alongside wise investment of revenues from non-renewable resources. In the introduction Killeen offers the reader a vision of the future through three different scenarios: 'business as usual', a 'utilitarian' scenario in which some concessions are made to sustainability but economic growth is the driving concern, and a 'utopian' scenario which sees the creation of an economy based on green energy and limited exploitation of non-renewable resources. Killeen's take-home point is that a 'green development pathway' is possible, if only Cambodia can make wise decisions around five key investment strategies: renewable energy, forest conservation, sustainable fisheries, agricultural intensification and a diversified tourist industry. The remainder of the book promises to show the reader how and why this is not only possible but necessary.

Reading this introduction, however, I felt I was reading about a Cambodia that was not familiar to me: a 'Cambodia' that can be spoken of as if it had its own agency and is an entity that can take advantage of the 'opportunity' to 'choose an innovative development trajectory'; a Cambodia where the future is predictable, where shaping development is simply a matter of getting the right policies in place. Recognition of the immensely complex political and social realities of life in Cambodia seems absent here, and it is an omission that is only partially rectified in the body of the book.

If social and political realities are brushed over, however, the volume certainly succeeds in providing a much deeper vision into Cambodia's natural resources and the potential for better resource management. In chapter 2 'Natural landscapes' Killeen is on stronger ground as he begins to build the factual data upon which his argument is based. In this chapter he offers a comprehensive and detailed discussion of Cambodia's natural resources. Likewise in chapter 3 'Human landscapes' and chapter 4 'Institutional landscapes', he is building a picture of human and institutional resources through which future development can take place. There is very useful information here and Killeen provides comprehensive accounts of environmental, human, and institutional factors, reporting on the available data on such things as ecosystems and biodiversity, population and health, and the government structures in place for promoting sustainable development.

Yet the tone of the text through these chapters is so neutral that I found it disturbing reading. It is as if Killeen has simply taken received wisdom about how development takes place and teamed it up with a set of statistics, without really stopping to engage critically with the material. It is good to

see such a breadth of data brought together, but the lack of attention to social, cultural and political complexities is problematic. In chapter 3, for example, he claims that reconciling conservation and development will 'depend on the ability to engage individuals, families, communities and corporations in activities that are simultaneously productive and yet promote sustainable use', but how that is to happen and what the specific challenges of the Cambodian context are to that he does not mention. In chapter 4 Killeen discusses the declining role of aid agencies in Cambodia and mentions that 'the country's leaders' will now make decisions instead, as if that were a straightforward thing in a country so rife with corruption.

While the last three chapters of the book are still plagued by this kind of political naivety, here Killeen offers a thorough discussion of the natural resources in place and potential for managing these in a more sustainable way. There is a breadth of material covered here. Chapter 5 'The inevitability of change' gives an account of changes under way across the Cambodian economy from highway infrastructure and hydropower, to mineral extraction and the expected impacts of climate change. In chapter 6 'The value of nature' there is an effort to quantify the monetary value of sustainable management of natural resources, including applying the Reducing Emissions from Deforestation and Forest Degradation (REDD+) programme to forestry and placing a figure on biodiversity conservation. The discussion is still rather general through these chapters, but in chapter 7, 'The Cardamom solution: Envisioning a green economy', Killeen offers a handful of specific examples that show what foundations may already be in place for more sustainable approaches in forestry, agriculture, fisheries and tourism. These include, for example, community-managed forests and forests maintained and cared for by Buddhist communities around particular pagodas. It is a pity Killeen did not make more of the examples to show how such foundations could be built on to make green development a reality for Cambodia.

It is refreshing to have an optimistic view of the possibilities for Cambodia's future, and the recognition that hope, and a positive, forward-looking attitude is 'one of Cambodia's most important resources' (p. 72). And Killeen's final chapter on 'The way forward' does attempt to offer some practical advice about steps that can be taken to create positive change. It is disappointing, however, that these recommendations seem to be entirely based upon achieving economic development through monetisation of natural resources with programmes such as REDD, without any mention of the critical literature that is showing how REDD is working against social development goals around equity (see A. McGregor, 'Green

and REDD? Towards a political ecology of deforestation in Indonesia', *Human Geography*, 2010). As a text on environmental management in Cambodia this book provides a useful resource and if the main purpose is to raise awareness of the opportunities for creating development pathways that are both environmentally sustainable and economically viable the book certainly achieves this. Those who are engaged in development work in Cambodia surely know the difficulties of working with the current social and political context and perhaps a dose of Killeen's optimism and vision of positive possibilities would do some good.

If the major fault of *The Cardamom conundrum* is the lack of politics, this is more than made up for by Sophal Ear's *Aid dependence in Cambodia*. Where Killeen presumes that development is all about economic growth, Ear has a broader view taking into account social and political development and giving consideration to Cambodia's record on social equity, political freedom, social justice and democracy alongside the economic goals of development.

Ear sets out to examine whether, rather than helping Cambodia leave behind the legacy of decades of conflict and establish a prosperous nation, aid is in fact crippling the Cambodian state and is in part to blame for the country's appalling levels of poverty, corruption and weak governance. The Preface and Introduction lay out the position that the author is coming from in resolving this question, including his background as a Cambodian refugee, his affection for Ronald Reagan, and his bitterness about the lack of progress made since the Paris Peace Agreement of 1991. Ear's honesty is compelling, and allows the reader to take into account his positionality when assessing the validity of his argument. However, it also sets an emotive tone which, while it allows the text to become dynamic and engaging, also allows a shift towards the polemical, especially in the Introduction. In this opening chapter Ear's damning account of the work of the United Nations in the transition towards peace and open elections provides a good counterpoint to Killeen's neutrality and apparent trust in official processes and policies. At the same time I often had the sense that Ear tended to make grand assertions, without necessarily having the evidence needed to really back them up. From the start it seems Ear is determined to blame foreign aid for Cambodia's problems, but the evidence he provides is not so convincing.

The tendency to an emotive and polemical tone extends into the main chapters of the book, although to a lesser extent. In chapter 1 'Aid dependence and the quality of governance' Ear examines the relationship between aid and governance, aiming to provide a critical assessment of whether aid dependence damages effective governance by the state. I am not convinced

that the evidence used through this chapter is entirely the right way to answer that question, and was left with the feeling that the data does not really provide an adequate foundation for the conclusions the author draws from them. There is still some very good material here, however. The 'Elite survey', in which Ear conducted interviews with key actors asking them about aid effectiveness, is an interesting way to deal with doing research in a country where official data sources are scarce and not particularly reliable. The results provide important insights into levels of corruption and the lack of rule of law in Cambodia.

Through chapters 2, 3 and 4 a much more measured tone comes in thanks to the reliance on empirical case studies and the strengths of the text come to the fore. In chapter 2 'Growth without development', Ear takes the reader on a journey through three case studies that highlight the workings of industry and investment in Cambodia: in the garment industry, rice production and livestock. He provides an excellent account of the 'Oknha economy' — the patronage system that plays a considerable role in political, social and economic life — although does not quite convince me that these examples show clearly how 'aid dependence exacerbates problems in the Cambodian economy' (p. 84). Chapter 3 'An international problem: The Cambodian response to Highly Pathogenic Avian Influenza', is an excellent account of the problems of coordinating so many parallel agencies where the body that should be holding them all together — i.e. the state — is so ineffective. In chapter 4 'Shallow democracy: Human rights activism and the international community' Ear discusses the politics of aid and, although his account is rather damning, he also provides insights into the power that donors can sometimes wield towards positive change. It may have been helpful here to contrast the situation in Cambodia with that of neighbouring Thailand where the political situation was similarly oppressive in the 1970s and 1980s, and where popular protest and the support of aid agencies and development workers did contribute to significant change as the political climate shifted (see K. McKinnon, *Development professionals in Northern Thailand: Hope, politics and power*, 2011). The Conclusion of the volume revisits the central argument, but by this time the tone is more measured and concludes with worthwhile suggestions for better ways to provide aid assistance, including prioritising acting on corruption and supporting civil society.

Overall *Aid dependence in Cambodia* is an excellent contribution to the literature on development on the region (and globally). However, it does need to be read with care. There is a tendency to polemic and to make large claims that are not entirely supported by the evidence at hand. At other points, however, the engagement with empirical material is excellent

and Ear provides the reader with some really important insights into the entanglements of politics, economy, aid and governance. Everyone hoping to do some good in Cambodia ought to read this book; it would be even better if they read it alongside Killeen's *The Cardamom conundrum*. Together they give valuable insights into how development in Cambodia could proceed to the greater benefit of both people and the environment.

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Indonesia

Money, power, and ideology: Political parties in post-authoritarian Indonesia

By MARCUS MIETZNER

Singapore: NUS Press, 2013. Pp. 301. Maps, Plates, Notes, Bibliography, Index.

doi:10.1017/S0022463414000435

As Indonesia enters an important election year, this book provides a timely analysis of the evolution of political parties in the country since 1998. Drawing on comparative sources and unprecedented access to influential political figures, *Money, power, and ideology* challenges the characterisation of Indonesia's party system as one that is either de-institutionalised or cartelised. Instead, the book argues that political parties have played a largely positive role in the ongoing consolidation of Indonesian democracy. However, the dysfunctional party financing system is identified as an enduring problem that often leads to perverse outcomes. State-financing of parties is proposed as a solution.

A major portion of the book problematises the application of Richard Katz and Peter Mair's cartelisation theory to Indonesia by Dan Slater and Kuskridho Ambardi. The Indonesian case is evaluated against all four dimensions of the cartelisation thesis to conclude that the Indonesian system does not meet these criteria. First, it is argued that political alliances between parties have been too 'anarchic' to be characterised as a cartel (p. 151) and President SBY has struggled to impose discipline among his contentious allies. Most significantly, PDI-P's consistent role as an opposition party, at the expense of lucrative ministerial positions, is cited to challenge the existence of a party cartel. Second, the decline in state subsidies to political parties since *Reformasi* is used to argue that parties in Indonesia have not fused with the state in a way that is predicted by the cartelisation