

and security matters could have constituted the mainsprings of American actions. At the very least, the Singaporean records would engender a narrative that features the full interplay of actors interacting to create history. But they remain unavailable.

Until more Southeast Asian documents are made available for research, scholars will continue to exploit the records in countries such as Australia, Britain, and the United States to write the subregion's late-colonial and postcolonial histories. There are, of course, potential pitfalls in employing that approach to uncover Southeast Asia's past. The records generated by governments in Australia, Britain, and the United States invariably reflect Australian, British, and American views of developments in the area. If reproduced uncritically in a historical text, such viewpoints risk caricaturing or distorting local events and intentions. Employed critically, though, they can offer new insights into the history of Southeast Asia. So long as historians appreciate the limits of the sources and the predispositions of the people who generated the records, they should not be discouraged from utilising them to craft their narratives. Yet the need for local perspectives to balance or correct the foreign underscores the point that Southeast Asian records on events that occurred some half a century ago should be made available for public scrutiny. It would be strange indeed to find that the possibility of writing autonomous international histories of Southeast Asia to be no less elusive decades after the European powers had retreated from the subregion.

Notwithstanding the challenges, Benvenuti and Chua have looked at the available sources and respectively produced two laudable studies that deserve praise. Their works should stimulate further research on the postcolonial histories of Malaysia and Singapore. They should also incentivise governments in Malaysia and Singapore to make greater efforts to declassify their records — without, of course, endangering their national interests or the well-being of informants. The growing volume of works produced in the next decade or so will rely heavily on foreign records to shape their interpretations of the international history of Southeast Asia. One assumes that the Malaysian and Singaporean governments will eventually realise that they might want to make their voices heard in those narratives too.

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Cambodia

Cambodia's second kingdom: Nation, imagination, and democracy

By ASTRID NORÉN-NILSSON

Ithaca, NY: Cornell Southeast Asia Program Publications, 2016. Pp. 229.

Plates, Notes, Bibliography, Index.

doi:10.1017/S0022463419000304

Cambodia's second kingdom is a fine piece of research on elite discourses in post-civil war Cambodia. Following the first general elections organised by the

United Nations Transitional Authority in Cambodia (UNTAC) in May 1993, Prince Norodom Sihanouk (1922–2012) was reinstated as King in September 1993, whereby the second kingdom of Cambodia was reborn after having been abolished in 1970. Norén-Nilsson's book critically addresses the elite's ideological contestations to represent the nation after Sihanouk took over the throne.

Splitting the elite into three major groups—the Cambodian People's Party (CPP), the royalists, and the democrats—the book's major aim is to examine the key political actors who electorally competed with one another within the framework of a multi-party democratic system (p. 35). Prime Minister Hun Sen is the most important actor of the CPP; his efforts to build himself as the only legitimate leader have gone far beyond the ideology of his own political party. Through his manipulation of the narrative concerning a sixteenth-century anti-monarchical figure, Kân, Hun Sen worked to justify his defeat of the royalists and, at the same time, to assert himself as modern Cambodia's national hero. Hun Sen's idea of a people's democracy is the core policy of the CPP, which defines populism as a truly national form of democracy (p. 119). Sihanouk's son Prince Norodom Ranariddh is a key actor representing the royalist party FUNCINPEC, which later split into several different parties and suffered a huge defeat in the general elections in 2008. Ranariddh as well as several other key royal family members utilised Sihanouk's image and turned it into various forms of royalist democracy, including the idea of forming a national union that would allow all parties with seats in the parliament to create a coalition government. The democrats were represented by Sam Rainsy and Kem Sokha, former members of FUNCINPEC who formed the Cambodian National Rescue Party (CNRP) in July 2012. As both Rainsy and Sokha emerged from a political identity with an anti-Vietnamese and anti-Communist ideology, the two leaders claimed to represent the nation through global liberal democratic discourses and the teachings of Buddha.

Though Norén-Nilsson's focus is on the ruling elite, she brings to light a great deal of original information and interesting points useful for understanding and discussing the post-civil war Cambodian political landscape. The information that she obtained from interviewing 39 key political leaders, including Hun Sen, Ranariddh, Rainsy, and Sokha, together with her close reading of these leaders' memoirs, is one of the book's most important contributions. Her effective and skilful merging of information from primary sources with scholarship by Caroline Hughes and others display the author's deep understanding of the Second Kingdom's political ideas and events. Moreover, although Norén-Nilsson has concentrated her study on elite discourses during the post-1993 election, her comparative reflections on the Sihanouk regime (1955–70) are useful for understanding the continuities and changes in political thought, particularly among the royalists, between the two regimes.

Norén-Nilsson's extensive discussion on post-conflict Cambodia also raises some questions, however. The author realises that it was not the royalists alone who have drawn on Sihanouk to claim legitimacy and popularity. Hun Sen has also done so, and his supporters have even claimed that he has inherited Sihanouk's moral prowess (p. 194). But Norén-Nilsson does not mention Hun Sen's discourse concerning his success in registering the Preah Vihear temple as a UNESCO World Heritage Site on 7 July 2008, just 20 days before the general election. Besides helping the CPP to win by a landslide in the election, the Preah Vihear issue gave Hun Sen the best

opportunity to link himself to Sihanouk, who had brought the temple dispute with Thailand to the International Court of Justice and obtained a decision in Cambodia's favour in 1962. Hun Sen's success in putting Preah Vihear on the UNESCO list not only justifies his duty to protect and carry on Sihanouk's legacy, but also enables him to promote Sihanouk's victory over neighbouring Thailand among the Cambodian public as well as the international community.

Readers would also benefit from a more in-depth discussion of the factors that caused FUNCINPEC to collapse. A focus on the top elite's political ideas as well as their perspectives on leadership, in certain respects, is a useful approach to capture the party's core ideology. However, this method also restrains the discussion from seeing a broader picture of the story as these key actors' political ideology is not always the main factor that determines their party's success or failure. FUNCINPEC failed because of poor leadership and interference by the CPP. The party experienced its first loss in the general election in 1998 mainly because it had suffered from a conflict with the military in July 1997 in which Hun Sen took away Ranariddh's military power and forced the prince into exile. As FUNCINPEC's internal divisions are widely known to have been caused by corruption and Hun Sen's interference, leading to Ranariddh's removal as party head in 2006, its losses in the general elections in 2008 and 2013 should be interpreted above and beyond Ranariddh's efforts to embody the image of his father.

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Indonesia

Sovereign women in a Muslim kingdom: The Sultanahs of Aceh, 1641–1699

By SHER BANU A.L. KHAN

Singapore: NUS Press, 2017. Pp. vii + 317. Map, Plates, Glossary, Bibliography, Index.

doi:10.1017/S0022463419000092

In *The forgotten queens of Islam* Fatima Mernissi (1993) mentioned that the Islamic societies in the Malay Archipelago have been special, in regard to the reign of women. Nevertheless, scholarly works on female rulers in the Indo-Malay worlds of Southeast Asia are still relatively uncommon. A closer look at both oral and written local history also suggests that the reigns of women neither 'appear' nor were recorded as extensively as those of men. In the case of Aceh, for instance, while Sultan Iskandar Muda (the 'king of kings' in *Hikayat Aceh*) and other male rulers dominated historical narratives — their policies, territorial and military expansion, power struggles and wars were written about in relative detail — little was said about the queens of Aceh. Given this gap, Sher Banu Khan's work is undeniably significant, and will help to balance the existing mainstream historical discourse. Mining the limited sources such as letters and diaries left by the Acehnese queens, along with Dutch