his academic as well as politically active careers, he was always placing things, events and processes into larger perspectives. More challenging intellectually, this approach allowed him to give rigorous and far more nuanced portraits of what he studied or witnessed, be they Cham temples, Buddhist iconography, or events such as the Japanese takeover of Indochina in March 1945. Also, in the second part of his academic career, in both his academic and public interventions (for example in newspapers), Paul Mus retained unabatedly a multidisciplinary approach, at a time when discipline-focused work was the norm. Finally, authors in this book also recount many examples of how he tried to 'humanise the war' such as in his book *Guerre sans visage*, 1961, written after the death of his son in the Algerian war. In Paul Mus's mind, considering the enemy as *humans*, not as wild ducks to shoot at, was a prerequisite for peace talks.

Reading this collection of texts featuring uneven lengths and styles, one could be annoyed by some of the repetitive statements found. These can be deemed necessary, however, given that the ostensible objective of this collection is to cast a wide net so as to give as broad an insight as possible into the work and life of this true humanist who was Paul Mus.

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China and Vietnam: The politics of asymmetry
By BRANTLY WOMACK
New York: Cambridge University Press, 2006. Pp. 281. Maps, Tables, Figures, Bibliography, Index.
doi:10.1017/S0022463411000269

Brantly Womack has written a *tour de force* with the publication of *China and Vietnam: The politics of asymmetry*. Womack's purpose is to address a lacuna in the field of international relations by developing a theory of asymmetry to explain interactions between large powerful states and smaller weaker ones. Womack has constructed his theory from the bottom up by a detailed investigation of China–Vietnam relations from the pre-imperial period until 2006. Womack focuses his analysis on the structural aspects of the relationship and does not claim to present a full-blown historical account

China and Vietnam is divided into two parts preceded by a general overview. Part one considers the basic structure of the relationship. Womack devotes two chapters, one each to China and Vietnam, presenting what he terms the basic parameters available to each state. In China's case these include: size, centricity and localism, resource sufficiency, the challenge of sustenance and history. In Vietnam's case its basic parameters include: geography, nationalism and cosmopolitism, resource imbalance, integration and diversity, and history. These two chapters provide the basis for chapter 4 that presents Womack's theory of asymmetry.

Womack argues that 'disparities in capacities create systemic differences in interests and perspectives between stronger and weaker sides' (p. 17). The larger power always looms more importantly to the weaker than the reverse. This structural factor results in over-attention to the bilateral relationship on the part of the weaker state because more is at risk. Conversely, the stronger power is less attentive to the details of its bilateral relationship with a weaker state, a condition that Womack describes as the politics of inattention. The contrasting outlook of weak and strong states often leads to misperception and conflict.

Womack then introduces the concepts of stalemate, normalisation and the management of asymmetry to round out his theory. When both sides realise that they cannot prevail, stalemate sets in. When stalemated relations become routine, normalisation of relations becomes possible by careful management by both sides. The stronger recognises the autonomy of the weaker, and the weaker gives deference to the power of the stronger.

In part two, Womack examines the structure of asymmetry in seven historically structured chapters. He provides a different characterisation for each period: amorphous, internal, subjugated, role, disjunctive, distracted, dependent, hostile and normalised asymmetry. To take one example, Womack argues that Sino–Vietnamese hostility over Cambodia in the 1980s (which he terms 'hostile asymmetry') led to a stalemate when both sides realised that they could not prevail. This led to a period of negotiated normalisation (1990–99) in which both parties came to recognise and accept the interests of the other.

Normalcy, according to Womack, does not alter the asymmetric nature of relations; it ushers in a new phase that he terms normal or mature asymmetry. According to Womack, '[n]ormalcy might be called "mature asymmetry" because it is grounded in a learning experience and it has the capacity to be long term and stable' (p. 212). In other words, both parties adopt mutual expectations of the other's behaviour. The stronger expects deference, while the weaker expects acknowledgment of its autonomy.

Mature asymmetric relations are kept peaceful by careful management by both parties. Womack identifies a number of methods to manage bilateral relations (pp. 89–90). One method is to rely on past precedent to shape common expectations of how the relationship should proceed. Another method is through 'diplomatic ritual', or the exchange of high-level delegations, through which each party reassures the other. The weaker defers to the powerful and the powerful accepts the autonomy of the weaker.

A third method for managing bilateral relations is to remove contentious issues from the political front burner. This can be done by reformulating the issue in dispute in order to stress common interests. For example, territorial disputes can be reformulated as a border-control issue designed to promote trade. Alternatively, contentious issues can be relegated to the purview of specialist working groups for resolution. Both parties can also buffer their relations through common membership in multilateral associations and adherence to international agreements. The weaker party also has the options of joining other smaller states in a regional organisation or allying with a third party.

Is mature asymmetry the end state for powerful and weak states in an asymmetric relationship? Womack considers the possibility of change in his concluding chapter

but argues '[t]he overall conclusion is that normalcy is remarkably stable' (p. 256). Current friction in the South China Sea between Vietnam and China will test this proposition.

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Cambodia

Lost goddesses: The denial of female power in Cambodian history
By TRUDY JACOBSEN
Copenhagen: NIAS (Nordic Institute of Asian Studies) Press, 2008. Pp. xxix, 327. Maps, Illustrations, Notes, Bibliography, Index.
doi:10.1017/S0022463411000154

What a refreshing book! Challenging the 'traditional' portrayal of Cambodian women as inferior, Trudy Jacobsen asks, 'What if the true tradition of Cambodia is not one of male privilege, but dignity, value and agency for women?' (p. xi). All of us who have been interested in the status of women in Southeast Asia have found ourselves caught in an unresolved tension between a contemporary literature on sex workers and a historical literature suggesting that women held high status. Jacobsen resolves this tension by outlining a chronological transformation in the status of women over the course of two millennia. Providing compellingly rich evidence for the high status of women prior to the nineteenth century, she provocatively asks, '[w]ho or what is responsible for the denial of female power in Cambodian history?' (p. 2). Her answer lies in the changes that began during the misogynist rule of King Ang Duong in the mid-nineteenth century.

Jacobsen's book is divided into 12 chapters, each providing a careful exploration of the available evidence for different historical periods. Her remarkable breadth is made possible by her interdisciplinary training in both history and anthropology. Not only is she able to draw upon language training in Sanskrit and Old Khmer, she has extended first-hand experience living in Cambodia first as a teenager during the eventful period of 1988–95 and subsequently while conducting fieldwork after 2001. Driven by a rare intellectual curiosity, Jacobsen draws upon an impressive array of sources, ranging from historical sources – such as stone inscriptions, Chinese dynastic histories, court chronicles, court literature, popular folktales, foreign travel accounts and French colonial records – to anthropological sources based upon participant-observation and interviews.

Although the full measure of the book is in its audacity to consider the *longue durée*, each chapter is engaging in its own right and reveals noticeable shifts. While suggesting that Western scholars have portrayed Cambodian women as powerless because they 'exercise authority outside those areas of concern to Western constructs of power' (p. 6), she nonetheless shows that even within these Western constructs,