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## <Book Review>

Keo Duong

**Alexander Laban Hinton. *Man or Monster? The Trial of a Khmer Rouge Torturer*. Durham: Duke University Press, 2016.**

*Southeast Asian Studies*, Vol. 9, No. 1, April 2020, pp. 140-143.

**How to Cite:** Keo, Duong. Review of *Man or Monster? The Trial of a Khmer Rouge Torturer* by Alexander Laban Hinton. *Southeast Asian Studies*, Vol. 9, No. 1, April 2020, pp. 140-143.

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Powers operation of Japan (1945–52). It did not mention Asia, and it banned the Japanese imperial—but local—term “Daitōa Sensō” (Greater East Asian War) together with “Greater East Asia Co-Prosperity Sphere” in order not to resurrect Japan’s “foolish” empire and democratize the state. The Japanese literary critic Etō Jun wrote that this change erased the presence and meaning of Daitōa Sensō and filled the void with the selective account that the war was fought only between Japan and its Pacific neighbor, the United States. Through this change, the United States was able to redesign the co-prosperity sphere in the region with the ushering in of entrepreneur capitalism during the Cold War era. In this new US-created sphere, Japan was able to recover its economy and even develop it rapidly by re-allying with the capitalist countries in Southeast Asia. If Yellen aims at dismantling the “Orientalist” image of the Greater East Asia Co-Prosperity Sphere, he might need to reconsider the United States’ postwar treatment of the sphere and the ways in which narratives of the war were regulated in the shadow of American intervention in the region.

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## *Man or Monster? The Trial of a Khmer Rouge Torturer*

ALEXANDER LABAN HINTON

Durham: Duke University Press, 2016.

The Khmer Rouge regime (1975–79) oversaw a tragic period in Cambodian history in which people were forced to work extremely hard, provided with little food, and offered no proper medical treatment. There were extralegal executions of civilians, soldiers, cadres, and party members who were accused of being enemies of the regime. Security centers across the country played a significant role in eliminating those who were accused of being enemies, and the S-21 Security Center was at the top of the regime’s security system. S-21 was under the direct leadership of Duch, a former mathematics teacher who joined the Communist movement in 1965, later to become known as the Khmer Rouge. He was arrested by government police and put in jail for two years. Upon his release in 1970, he became the chief of the M-13 Security Center, a Khmer Rouge detention center during the civil war (1970–75). After the Khmer Rouge victory in 1975, he became chief of the S-21 Security Center from 1976 to 1979 after which he lived in the Khmer Rouge stronghold of Samlaut District, Battambang Province, until his arrest in 1999. In 2012, he was sentenced to

life in prison by Extraordinary Chambers in the Courts of Cambodia known as Khmer Rouge Tribunal to try top leaders and the most responsible persons during the Khmer Rouge regime.

There have been many publications about Duch and the security center under his leadership. David Chandler (2000), a well-known historian, published a book titled *Voices from S-21: Terror and History in Pol Pot's Secret Prison* explaining the role of S-21 in serving the paranoid policy of the Khmer Rouge leaders, who systematically purged their own cadres and soldiers. François Bizot (2004), on the other hand, has described his mixed interaction with the prison chief when the latter headed M-13 Security Center, which operated before the Khmer Rouge took power in the entire country. Bizot was a prisoner but was later rescued by the prison chief, Duch, which made him view Duch as both a torturer and a lifesaver.

This 350-page book with its defaced cover picture of Duch, and graffiti of “A Cruel Man” along with the catchy title *Man or Monster*, is written by the well-known anthropologist Alexander Hinton, author of the award-winning *Why Did They Kill?* The novel-like book narrates Duch’s background and the Khmer Rouge Tribunal procedure of case 001 in a lively manner. Duch, whose official name was Kaing Guek Eav, was the chief of the S-21 Security Center, where nearly twenty thousand people were arrested, detained, tortured, and executed during the Democratic Kampuchea (DK) regime from 1975 to 1979. The complexity of Duch’s personality and background, with his responsibility during the DK regime, became a source of interest to Hinton. The author discusses the problem of viewing Duch as a complete monster when he describes the book’s cover photo that was taken at Tuol Sleng Genocide Museum. The graffiti on the photo reads “A killer, the hell will not pardon you” and is written next to a defaced picture of Duch, seeming to represent Duch as completely evil. Hinton argues that Duch was a complex human being and could not be described as a completely articulation of man or monster. Hinton collected information about Duch through extensive interviews and investigated the whole court procedure of the Khmer Rouge Tribunal in case 001 in order to find a possible answer to the question of “man or monster?”

The book is organized in thematic chapters to characterize Duch, using his entire background and the court procedure of case 001 as the main sources. Part 1 consists of six chapters focusing mainly on the argument of Duch as a “man,” presenting different arguments claimed by Duch himself as well as his defense lawyer. Duch is presented as a normal human caught up in ideological circumstances, a cog in the machine just following orders from the upper echelons, embroiled in a political culture of patronage, and recognizing his own mistakes. For example, the book highlights Duch’s love of teaching before, during, and after the DK period. During the DK period he was the chief of the S-21 Security Center but still associated himself with teaching. He used the former school as a detention center where he taught his subordinates in political training sessions and about interrogation techniques. His connection with education and teaching demonstrates that his claimed goal of being a teacher was reasonable, and this can be considered characteristic of a normal human. In the courtroom, Duch delivered his testimony like a history lecturer, command-

ing everyone's attention.

The way that Duch was chosen to hold position as prison chief also portrays the commonality of how Cambodian "network or string" (*khsae*) works in Cambodia. The "network or string" worked in two ways during the Khmer Rouge. The first was when it came to appointing trusted people within the network in key positions, and the second was when it came to purging cadres. Additionally, the author notes that a political culture of patronage existed during the Khmer Rouge. In chapter 2, the book narrates Duch's life story during the revolutionary period, for instance when he worked as the prison chief at M-13 Security Center. Presenting Duch as a man includes a discussion of his generous acts toward Bizot as a well-known prisoner of the Khmer Rouge whom he released. In Bizot's eyes, Duch was a lifesaver. However, Bizot also argued that Duch was the prison chief in charge of torture and executions at S-21. Hinton raises the very important complexity of Duch's image in Bizot's eyes; he believes that the binary articulation of Duch as man or monster is not appropriate as Duch's personality and acts showed a certain complexity.

However, Duch is also presented as a monster. Many witnesses and much evidence show him as a monster during the period he was the chief of S-21. Hinton portrays Duch as a loyal cadre who strictly followed the Khmer Rouge policy that led to the atrocities at S-21. Duch initiated tactics and executed policy very effectively. From the victims' testimonies and evidence of Duch's atrocities, Hinton draws the attention of readers to Duch as a "monster." Duch's cruelty and torture appear in the documents and testimonies of survivors cited in the book. In the face of plenty of evidence at S-21, the final decision of the Supreme Court Chamber, sentencing Duch to life imprisonment, was welcomed by victims and the public. The sentencing lends weight to the monster image of Duch in public opinion.

Although Hinton walks us through some historical events from Duch's early life to the time he was sentenced to life imprisonment, what this anthropologist misses is a discussion of historical events. In his book, Hinton does not interpret historical events. Rather, he presents perspectives and characteristics of people involved with Duch, and also Duch himself. Additionally, the book fails to compare Duch's perspective on past mistakes with those of other Khmer Rouge leaders. Readers might be confused over whether or not Duch can be considered representative of other top leaders. To some extent, he was different from leaders such as Pol Pot, Nuon Chea, Ta Mok, and Kieu Samphan, who mostly believed that their acts were in the national interest and did not accept any mistakes. Duch differs from the others in that after the fall of DK he lived a normal life and distanced himself from the top leaders. He might have had a feeling of guilt, as he claimed in court, leading to his conversion to Christianity in order to clear his sins, which psychologically helped him deal with his guilt.

Hinton takes advantage of the Khmer Rouge Tribunal in order to gather extensive information from different people during the court procedure of case 001, which helps him to present a detailed narrative of what happened in the court, as witnessed through his own eyes, and interpret it in a

lively manner. By doing this, he provides more detailed information about Duch than Chandler or Bizot. In addition, the book brings readers to an understanding of a few other points. First, it presents the Cambodian political culture of patronage and the strings that were used during the Khmer Rouge and continue to dominate the Cambodian political landscape until today. Second, Duch shared a psychological belief with other Khmer Rouge cadres of exclusively following one idea and giving no credence to any other view. He strictly followed the Khmer Rouge's ideology and policy, which resulted in the tragedy of cadres following orders without critical consideration of its impact. Hinton, as well as Chandler, agrees that it was "unquestioning obedience to authority." Third, the articulation of Duch as either man or monster is not valid because the complexity of Duch's character proves that he was a combination of both. Hinton carefully discusses evidence and perspectives on both sides.

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## *Siamese Melting Pot: Ethnic Minorities in the Making of Bangkok*

EDWARD VAN ROY

Singapore: ISEAS - Yusof Ishak Institute, 2017.

Throughout the nineteenth century, observers estimated that non-Thai residents made up more than two-thirds of Bangkok's total population. Yet, by 1919, excepting a substantial Chinese minority, the census depicted an overwhelmingly "Thai" city. Almost everyone of Khmer, Lao, and Mon ancestry was considered Thai, and the city's other non-Thai residents were undercounted dramatically (see Grabowsky 1996, 50). On paper, it would appear that a diverse and cosmopolitan city had rapidly homogenized. This was not just statistical sleight of hand. Over the first half of the twentieth century, a growing proportion of Bangkok's local-born residents were speaking Thai, acting Thai, and identifying themselves as Thai. How did Bangkok's ethnic landscape shift so quickly? What logics underpinned Bangkok's nineteenth-century cosmopolitanism, and what new logics replaced them in the decades before and after the turn of the twentieth century?

Based on decades of ramblings on foot combined with a thorough survey of published materials on the city's communities, *Siamese Melting Pot* offers a persuasive account of the demise of