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the stage of "authoritarian consolidation" seems to be mistaken for a previous period (pp. 324–325). Duy Trinh's chapter on the political protection in Vietnam's and China's anti-corruption campaigns also offers weak arguments as it employs weak proxies for what it aims to measure. In particular, instead of collecting stories about officials' personal ties to VCP chief Nguyen Phu Trong, the author assumes that if—and only if—a person was born in the same province, worked at the same organization, or went to the same university as the VCP chief, he or she had relevant informal connections to Trong (p. 352).

Overall, although the book does not explicitly address the "Vietnam in transition" narrative and although some chapters habitually adopt this narrative, the picture that emerges from the volume is far from aligned with this narrative. In this picture, rather than transitioning toward a market economy and democracy, Vietnam gets stuck in hard authoritarianism and crony capitalism and will tend to stay there as long as this combination serves the interests of the ruling Communist Party. What the book does not discuss, but can be inferred from Chapter 5's findings, is that Vietnam's economy may get another chance to take off when the China boom comes to an end and the global supply chains are rearranged as a result of the US-China rivalry. This moment may be coming soon. *The Dragon's Underbelly* is an excellent contribution to the literature on Vietnam's politics and economy. It also provides thought-provoking case studies for the discussion of economic development and societal modernization. Most important, it helps to debunk powerful myths about Vietnam and about the path to development.

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The Politics of Coercion: State and Regime Making in Cambodia

Neil Loughlin
Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2024.

How has coercion evolved and persisted in Cambodia? Who benefits politically and economically, and how? How and to what extent has the state constructed a clientelist system? Neil Loughlin's well-researched *The Politics of Coercion* addresses these questions, examining contemporary Cambodia through the frame of its coercive underpinnings. The author, a political scientist at City University of London, specializes in research on authoritarianism, Southeast Asia (specifically Cambodia), China, and human rights. This book is based on his dissertation.

The book commences with a puzzle: What explains the contested, unstable durability of an over-four-decade-long regime-led state in Cambodia? The author addresses this question by

explaining that besides theatrics, pageantry, and memorialization, regime-directed state coercion entrenched the dominance of ruling elites and the Cambodian People's Party (CPP) under the personalized rule of former Prime Minister Hun Sen. By coercion, the author refers to historically embedded "acts of violence" and "the regime's authority over society," which include "high- and low-intensity coercion" (p. 3). The origins of the coercive CPP-led state date back to 1975, when the Khmer Rouge violently seized power; this was followed by civil war, United Nations occupation, and the birth of a regime that relied not only on coercion but also on electoral patronage and crony capitalism. Today, stability in Cambodia is managed by kleptocratic elites who have co-opted bureaucrats, extracting and sharing rent.

Chapter 1 traces the roots of Cambodia's current-day coercive coalition to the embers of the 1975–79 Khmer Rouge regime (which itself had destroyed the country's postcolonial state and political structures). The new coalition used "coercive-intensive" (p. 21) state-society relations to retain power. As a result, by the late 1980s one party (the CPP) dominated the regime and was able to lord it over state and society ever after. This occurred despite insurgent threats, extreme economic cleavages, and foreign intervention by Vietnam. The leadership was dominated by Hun Sen, Sar Keng, and Tea Banh.

Chapter 2 considers the period 1979–89, an era in which the CPP consolidated its power over Cambodia. Vietnamese troops withdrew in 1989, and the United Nations Transitional Authority in Cambodia (UNTAC) was deployed in 1992–93. Though UNTAC oversaw the 1993 election (producing two prime ministers), the 1997 putsch secured the CPP's power for good, and the party never looked back. This was due principally to the state's use of violence rather than elections. Villagers were coerced, bureaucrats (including the military) were co-opted, and an "economic elite was nurtured" (p. 18). Ultimately, any elite challengers ended up supporting Hun Sen.

Chapter 3 contends that electoral clientelism was secondary to CPP coercion during 1999–2018. Loughlin argues that despite the CPP's use of coercion and "authoritarian rule" during this period, the country held "competitive elections" until 2018, when Cambodia returned to single-party rule (p. 60). Indeed, though electoral clientelism was a CPP tool in the 2000s, it was overshadowed by state coercion. The author then examines each election, showing the patronage as well as poll irregularities and violence that the CPP used to maintain control. The author suggests that the CPP's near losses in the 2013 general election and 2017 commune election represented a genuine threat to the ruling coalition even though the Hun Sen-led regime dominated the state. Furthermore, the chapter looks at the participation of the regime in Cambodia's endemic land-grabbing crisis. Ultimately, coercion was the preeminent factor guaranteeing the survival of the elites.

Chapter 4 scrutinizes the regime's efforts to legitimize its control. Using various narratives such as "stability" (p. 78), "peace" (p. 92), and the "threat of 'color revolution'" (p. 81), the CPP sought to justify its continued right to dominate the state and country, thanks to which leading elites could share in the exploitation of national resources. Such claims were leveraged also to

justify coercion against the regime's opponents and to guarantee the regime's survival. The regime also used "lawfare" to legally repress dissent while relying on quiescent security forces to ensure "law and order in the name of stability" (p. 89). The completely uncompetitive 2018 general election, which garnered the CPP victories in all electoral seats, was touted by the regime as proof of its democratic legitimacy. This claim was made despite any effective opposition, amid allegations of coercion, and with the CPP's mobilization of voters. The regime's effort to present itself as a democratic, stabilizing, electorally legitimate force was an attempt to prevent change, protect the coalition, and hold on to power.

Chapter 5 looks at the internal security apparatus that has guaranteed the CPP-led regime's survival. The chapter goes into extreme detail to explain the two levels of security for Hun Sen and the regime. The first is the regular armed forces, supported by the police, which has been co-opted by the CPP and is institutionally dominated by the prime minister through the allocation of patronage and other benefits. This first tier is bloated at the top and relatively inefficient. The second level is made up of the elite "bodyguard" units (p. 110). This tier is well armed, trained, and tasked with acting as a sort of Praetorian Guard to ensure security for CPP officials, particularly the prime minister and his family.

Chapter 6 focuses on Cambodia's capitalist tycoons, who—working in league with state elites such as Hun Sen, CPP heads, and senior bureaucrats—are allowed to predatorily siphon off resources for their venal interests in return for their eager support of the regime. As a result, Cambodia has evolved into a veritable kleptocracy where society is exploited by the wealthy few at the expense of the marginalized majority. These few oscillate around a highly stratified economic system that is manipulated and arbitrated by Hun Sen. But in fact the state expects subservience from its elite tycoon clients and has been willing to use compulsion and coercion to ensure lasting control.

The Conclusion restates the book's initial purpose, which is to explore the durability of the authoritarian regime in Cambodia. The author restates that the use of coercion has been a central reason for the persistence of Cambodia's CPP-led regime. State coercion, utilized for the regime's survival, as well as tycoons' support for the regime have led to a widening of the gap between rich and poor as well as an increasingly entrenched widening of state-society cleavages. The author then considers the 2023 decision by Hun Sen to step down as prime minister in favor of his son Hun Manet. With the father still retaining much of the power, the accession of the son (with other family members in leading political positions) inaugurated the political dynasty of the Hun family. The author argues that Hun Sen will likely try to "steward" (p. 139) this succession arrangement from his post as CPP president. Indeed, the coalition of party-state, economic, and military elites that he created will likely endure in power for some time to come.

The Politics of Coercion offers a fresh appraisal of Cambodia's political order, updated to 2024. Among the book's strengths are that it relies on valuable methodology—18 months of fieldwork,

previously unpublished internal CPP documentation, and 150 interviews. The study is also clearly written, with useful detail and comprehensible conclusions. Among the book's drawbacks are, first, that it traces the historical underpinnings of the CPP's modern-day use of coercion back to the Khmer Rouge era. Actually, coercion was common in Cambodia also under French colonialism as well as the regimes of Norodom Sihanouk and Lon Nol. Second, the author seems driven by a need in every chapter to prioritize coercion over other determinants (e.g., clientelism) of regime making in Cambodia, becoming almost coercion-deterministic. Perhaps some parts of Cambodia were affected more by other determinants. A third drawback is that the book does not grapple with the extent to which Cambodia might have ever considered a limited democracy. Since the author does discuss democracy, it would have been useful to see literature on that subject.

Nevertheless, this study represents a newly published, up-to-date, and important source for understanding the evolution of the Cambodian state and regime. It is highly informative and easy to read. I would recommend it not only for academics and journalists but also for laypeople. It is a useful addition to the literature on contemporary Cambodian and Southeast Asian politics.

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The Apathy of Empire: Cambodia in American Geopolitics

James A. Tyner
Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2024.

James A. Tyner's *The Apathy of Empire: Cambodia in American Geopolitics* is a meticulously researched study of Cambodia's importance to US policymakers after World War II. Moving beyond the highly cited cases of Richard Nixon's invasion of Cambodia in 1970 and the "secret" carpet bombings from 1969 to 1973, Tyner's study critically positions US military intervention in Cambodia within the context of the United States' shifting grand strategy and national security interests during the Cold War, as they applied to Vietnam and Indochina more broadly. Framing his project as an exercise in critical geopolitics in general—"making arguments about geopolitical conjunctures and about trying to understand those conjunctures" (p. 23)—and practical geopolitics in particular—the contingent and contextual "domain of policymaking and geopolitical reasoning whereby officials articulate national interests and rationalize concrete diplomatic overtures and military operations" (p. 2)—Tyner articulates how Cambodia as a case study unsettles the seemingly straightforward question of center and periphery that underlies the execution of US grand strategy and the constitution of a spatially conditioned American *nomos*.