

Inevitably, for such a wide-ranging and varied collection, the contributors engage to different degrees with themes of education and translation. Some essays are more imaginative, ambitious, and extensively researched than others, but all benefit from the skillful elaboration of overarching themes and historiographical context in the editors' introduction. It is regrettable that closer attention is not given to the actual process of translation—how authority and authenticity are established, how words, texts, and clinical terms are borrowed, reworked, or rejected, in order to make one medical culture intelligible to another. And, in placing so much emphasis upon “go-betweens,” it is a pity we do not hear more from the intermediaries themselves. But overall *Translating the Body* makes a significant contribution to medical history, opens up a rich regional prospectus, and demonstrates the value of nuanced local studies.

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SVAY: A Khmer Village in Cambodia. By May Mayko Ebihara; edited by Andrew Mertha, with an introduction by Judy Ledgerwood. *Ithaca; London: Southeast Asia Program Publications [an imprint of Cornell University Press], 2018. xxxi, 331 pp. (Illustrations.) US\$35.95, paper. ISBN 978-1-5017-1512-9.*

Scholars working on Southeast Asia, and Cambodia in particular, have for decades relied upon Mayko Ebihara's beautifully written dissertation for insights into the life, culture, and politics of Cambodia immediately prior to the Khmer Rouge. Although *Svay* is an ethnographic piece about one particular village in Kandal Province near Phnom Penh between 1959 and 1960, insights from the intensive research program have informed the social sciences more broadly. Political scientists have turned to chapter 7 of the monograph, on political organization, to understand the state-society relations that precipitated the Khmer Rouge. Chapter 4 has been a goldmine for economists attempting to understand the peri-urban supply chains and organization of the economy that undergirded agriculture, aquaculture, and local crafts. Personally, my own work on Cambodia has been enriched by Ebihara's keen eye and fulsome descriptions. I am managing two field experiments in Cambodia right now on civil society resilience and local government accountability for waste management, and have been surprised how much our theories of change for both of these efforts have been informed by discoveries about village governance that were first pointed out in *Svay*.

Despite its importance, however, the monograph has never been widely accessible. Scholars passed around ancient, dog-eared photocopies or spent hours clumsily looking at an ugly, microfiche file. In this elegantly edited

book, Andrew Mertha has painstakingly reprinted the original manuscript for future students of Cambodia. Readers can now more easily locate critical observations through a thorough, updated index, and excerpts can now be more easily pulled out for use in the classroom. In preparing for this review, I saw how easily snippets could be drawn from the book that would enlighten my class on the political economy of Southeast Asia, in regard to interactions between economic actors in agriculture, religious and cultural life, and family ties. Even the chapter “Cambodia as a Whole” is a time capsule into how scholars understood the country prior to its devastating civil wars and authoritarian consolidation.

Svay comes complete with an elegantly written and erudite introduction from Judy Ledgerwood, Ebihara’s protégé and co-author, who is now a distinguished cultural anthropologist at Northern Illinois University. The introduction is a critical stand-alone piece in its own right that will undoubtedly find its way into graduate syllabi, because it connects the threads of *Svay* to academic debates over Cambodia today. I was especially struck by her probing of how Ebihara’s documentation of declines in religiosity and even growing distrust of religious actors, economic hardship and rising inequality, and growing distrust of outsiders were cited by scholars like Michael Vickery (1984) as antecedents to the rise of the Khmer Rouge.

The declining trust of outsiders is fascinating for another reason. According to the Asian Barometer, Cambodia has among the lowest levels of social trust in the Southeast Asian region (Henke and Hean, 2004), which has critical political and economic implications. Most importantly, low social trust can inhibit economic growth because it is difficult for economic actors to do business with others out of tightly defined social networks, limiting business expansion and development of capital markets. Cambodia’s lack of social trust has often been attributed to the hardships and dislocations suffered under Pol Pot, but Ebihara shows, at least in the outskirts of Phnom Penh, that a lack of trust predated Pol Pot. Ledgerwood’s introduction also does a nice job of grappling with the debate over whether the lessons of *Svay* generalize well to more rural villages and urban wards.

After Ledgerwood’s introduction, the book is divided into the nine original chapters of Ebihara’s dissertation. The introduction provides her methodology and case selection approach, which I found enlightening as a social scientist unfamiliar with ethnographic research from that era. Chapter 2 puts *Svay* into the political and social context of Cambodia at that point in time. Chapter 3 relates the social hierarchy of the village of *Svay*. Chapter 4 documents the source of income, occupational choices, and interplay between economic actors in the village. Chapter 5 looks at religious commitments and their organization and their influence on cultural life. Chapter 6 on the “Life Cycle” studies cultural rituals and decision making from pregnancy and birth to death and beliefs about afterlife. Chapter 7 provides an account of how the village institutions operated, how decisions

were made, and how villagers interacted and responded to local-level decision makers. Finally, chapter 8 discusses social and village relations between *Svay* and the capital city, in particular, as well between Svay and other provinces and regions in the rest of Cambodia.

I am a political economist by training, so it should come as no surprise that I was drawn to the political and economic discussions. What was a surprise to me, however, was that the most valuable political analyses occurred in chapter 3, on setting and social structure. Over the past two decades, political economy has been fascinated with the advantages and disadvantages of decentralizing administrative and economic decision making to local levels, and the influence of these choices on local-central relations. When decentralization includes very low levels of authority, such as the village or commune, these debates tend to hinge on how villages make redistributive allocations and how much voice villagers have in the decisions. Surprisingly, however, we often know very little about this decision-making process. While Ebihara uses chapter 7 to place the village administration within the hierarchical political architecture of Cambodia, it is in chapter 3, when she introduces Grandfather Kompha, that we learn how things actually get done.

Grandfather Kompha is not an official state actor in any way, yet he is respected as the leader of the hamlet and holds tremendous informal legitimacy. As one villager put it, “If Kompha tells you to do something, you do it” (88). No village administrative or regulatory decision was taken without his consent, he supervised local collective activities, such as festivals, and was appealed to for dispute resolution between citizens and economic actors. His power therefore exceeded the formal decision-making apparatus as well as that of Grandfather Map, the wealthiest member of the village, and Phana, the local militia chief. The discussion of informal authority remains important for understanding variation in the implementation of central policies in Cambodia today, and for understanding how this form of dispute resolution has served as an imperfect substitute for contracting institutions in enabling local economic development.

This is just one illustration of why *Svay* remains a canonical contribution to Cambodian studies, and why this lovingly prepared restoration belongs on every Southeast Asian scholar’s bookshelf.

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