

## BOOK REVIEWS IN BRIEF

**Evan Gottesman, *Cambodia After the Khmer Rouge*. New Haven: Yale University Press, 2004. 454 p. ISBN: 0300105134**

**Reviewed by Daniel A. Métraux**

The horrific Khmer Rouge regime which systematically killed at least one-fifth of Cambodia's population came to a sudden end in January 1979 when the Vietnamese army invaded the country and set up its own Communist government. Cambodians that one meets today express some degree of appreciation for the Vietnamese termination of

Khmer Rouge rule, but there is also resentment over the fact that the Vietnamese stayed too long, creating their own government and taking Cambodian resources. Any sense of national recovery did not begin to occur until the Vietnamese departed in 1989 and the United Nations moved in.

Gottesman's book is a very detailed account of the Vietnamese phase between the Khmer Rouge and the UN. He describes the Vietnamese takeover in tremendous detail, showing how they tried to shape Cambodia closely to their own image. The Cambodians in a sense were jumping from the frying pan into the fire, having to trade one rigid form of communism for another. At the same time a number of Khmer Rouge soldiers and officials and a few surviving Cambodian intellectuals, while working together with Vietnamese forces, refused to become their puppets and sought their own identity and power and became the nucleus of Cambodia's ruling group today. While this was going on, Cambodia's prolonged civil war continued as various factions including the Khmer Rouge fought for power well into the 1990s.

Gottesman spent three years in Cambodia where he served as resident liaison and deputy director of American Bar Association Cambodia Law and Democracy project. He uses a significant number of unexplored archival sources and interviews with Cambodian and Vietnamese sources to construct what is surely the definitive work on the period. At times a non-specialist reader such as myself gets mired in what seems at times to be arcane detail, but for the specialist this work is a gem.

**Anne Best, *The Monk, the Farmer, The Merchant, The Mother: Survival Stories of Rural Cambodia*. Phnom Penh: Japan Printing House, 2005. 142 pp.**

**Reviewed by Daniel A. Métraux**

Few populations on earth have suffered greater trauma and hardship in the latter half of the twentieth century than the Cambodians. They have known periods of genocide, foreign occupation, violence, and isolation as well as the loss of any wealth and well-being they might have had before. Several scholars have written magnificent tomes on what happened and why between the 1970s and the present and a whole slew of exiles have written superb accounts of what happened to them and their families during the years of Khmer Rouge rule. Nobody in Cambodia escaped the mayhem and killing of the 1970s and the ongoing dislocation thereafter. Everybody who survived that era has a graphic story to tell.

British anthropologist Anne Best has devoted considerable attention to rural Cambodia in recent years and while there came across an organization founded in 1994 by a number of Cambodian volunteers known as Friends Economic Development Association (FEDA). FEDA works with one farming village, Ksach Poy, and its surrounding area on a number of projects including credit loans, tree planting, dry-rice farming and peace workshops. All proceeds from this book go to help finance FEDA.

Best wanted the villagers to record their own history. At her request they selected four of their older citizens, a monk, a farmer, a merchant and mother-midwife. Best carefully interviewed and transcribed their stories, and what stories they have to tell! Now in their seventies and eighties, they are among the few survivors from the colonial era. They tell of the hardships of World War II when Japanese and Thai forces seized their area from the French, the return of the French and resistance to their rule, the stable royalist period of the 1950s and 1960s when each of them through hard work attained a degree of prosperity, and then the utter disaster of the Khmer Rouge and subsequent rulers. Through their eyes we get a microcosm of Cambodia's tragic modern history.

I have read extensively about modern Cambodia for several of my college classes, but this book above all conveys what it means to be Cambodian and what suffering (as well as joy) they have found in their lives. I will use this book in all of my forthcoming classes that have

anything to do with Cambodia and SE Asia. The four participants also tell us a lot about their personal lives which greatly enhances the value of the book. I found the monk's description of the monkhood and Buddhist teaching to be especially valuable. This simple little book belongs in every Asian Studies classroom and library.

**Paul L. Swanson and Clark Chilson, Eds., *Nanzan Guide to Japanese Religions*. Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 2006. 466 p. ISBN: 0-8248-3002-4**

**Reviewed by Daniel A. Métraux**

The expressed purpose of this invaluable work is to be an “aid for students and scholars engaged in research on Japanese religions...a resource guide [that] encompass[es] the entire field of Japanese religion and provide[s] tools for navigating it.” It aims to combine “(1) a broad outline of Japanese religious traditions, (2) a closer look at scholarly views on a number of subjects, and (3) practical techniques for accessing and evaluating relevant data. As such, the book should prove useful as a supplement to texts introducing undergraduates to Japanese religions and as a reference to graduate students undertaking specific research projects. For scholars specializing in one or another aspect of Japanese religions, the book offers a generous inventory of the current state of the field by representative authors. Finally, historians and social scientists whose work brings them into contact with Japanese religions will find that the clear design, incisive overviews, selective bibliographies, and detailed index make this volume an invaluable reference work.”

The Nanzan Institute for Religion & Culture is perhaps the preeminent base for the study of Japanese and East Asian religions and its journal, *The Japanese Journal of Religious Studies*, currently edited by Paul Swanson and Benjamin Dorman, is the best in its field. The *Nanzan Guide* reviewed here contains sterling work by some of the best scholars in the field, many of whom have published in *JJRS*, including Robert Kisala, Jacqueline Stone, Ian Reader, Shimazono Susumu, Helen Hardacre and many more.

*The Nanzan Guide* consists of four broad sections: Traditions, History, Themes, and Research as well as a valuable Chronology of religion in Japan. The quality of the writing and

research is superb, but may be a bit beyond the level of the average undergraduate. The subjects are covered in a broad comprehensive manner and include generous bibliographies. Every library or institution with any interest in Asian Studies must purchase this invaluable volume.

**Chris Baker and Pasuk Phongpaichit, *A History of Thailand*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005. 301 pp. ISBN: 0521016479**

**Reviewed by Daniel A. Métraux**

This book covers the past three centuries of Thai history. Over this period, a landscape of sparsely populated forest and jungle was transformed into villages and paddy fields. An older order of mandarin nobles and unfree labor was replaced by a rural society of smallholder peasants and an urban society populated mainly by migrants from southern China. Through the twentieth century, Thailand has been drawn into the international system, the American camp in the Cold War, the economic ambit of rising Japan, and the forces of globalization.

This in-depth overview of Thai history, my travel companion on a recent trip to this country, was well worth reading. It is written in a clear incisive manner that brings together the many different facets of Thai history and gives a clear explanation of its spectacular growth in the last three decades. Thailand is in fact a very modern creation and has been influenced greatly by broad Chinese immigration, Japanese investment, and American military and foreign policy. Thailand has developed broad democratic institutions, but other power blocs such as the military (which has staged numerous coups over the years) and the monarchy also wield considerable influence. The authors go to great lengths to show the great reverence that Thais have for their current monarch who has reigned for nearly 60 years and who has had a very powerful and steady influence on the country during times of political chaos. The King's influence is especially important, as the authors point out, at the present as opponents of current Prime Minister Thaksin are vying to oust him. When reading this book Thai history suddenly makes sense to me. It is a most worthwhile book.