

A HISTORY OF CAMBODIA: Fourth Edition. By David P. Chandler, Boulder (Colorado): Westview Press, 2008. xiv, 365 pp. (Photographs.), paper. ISBN 978-0-8133-4363-1.

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The fourth edition of David Chandler's superb book, 'A History of Cambodia', offers important revisions and updates to the 2000 edition. This latest version includes much of the new scholarship in Cambodian studies and more of the author's own knowledge and insights on the subject. Most notably the chapters addressing the early period of Cambodian history through the fall of Angkor have been revised and the final chapter of the book has been extended up to the present.

Chandler takes a wide approach to Cambodia's history by drawing on a variety of sources including an assortment of archival documents, Cambodian myths and folklore, archeological findings, and secondary sources from a number of disciplines. This approach, together with his admirable knowledge of Cambodian and Southeast Asian history, allows him to contextualize and vivify the events and personalities that shape Cambodia's past. This book thus provides readers with a view of Cambodian history that is at once broad in scope and nuanced in insights and details.

Theoretically, four major themes govern the text. The first of these that Chandler identifies is concerned with Cambodia's geopolitical relations with Thailand and Vietnam. This topic is discussed throughout the book but is given special attention in chapters 6 and 7. The second theme relates to contemporary Cambodian interpretations of

their past and queries the question as to why certain periods of Cambodian history are monumentalized (such as Angkor over the past century) while others are forgotten. The third theme addresses how Khmer practices of patronage and hierarchy have impacted historical events. And finally, the fourth theme addresses and challenges the view that Cambodian society is largely static and changeless.

Chandler's exploration and analysis of these themes throughout his presentation of Cambodian history is one of the book's major triumphs. For me one of the most striking demonstrations of Chandler's scholarly aptitude is lodged in the third theme relating the ways in which the collective memory of Cambodian people today interfaces with the major historical events that occurred in their past. Because Chandler has an appreciable knowledge of Khmer folklore and myths in addition to his knowledge of historical facts, he is able to provide readers with some insight into how Cambodian people may view their own past and how and in what form this past becomes part of the collective memory. A brilliant example of this is seen in his analysis of the *Preah Ko Preah Kaev* myth discussed in Chapter 5. Here Chandler suggests that although the myth generally relates to the capture of Lovek in the 16<sup>th</sup> century, it may in fact be rooted in the final fall of the Angkorean Empire. Going a step further, he alludes to the possibility that the myth may make other appearances or gain attention later in history at moments that resonate with the events depicted in the tale. Chandler thus illustrates the relationship between Cambodian history and myth and provides the readers with a channel with which to begin to understand how Cambodian people collectively interpret and transmit their collective past.

Overall the book is, however, much more an objective history of Cambodia than an anthropological or sociological study of collective memory. It effectively guides the reader through the events that have shaped Cambodia into what it is today. Chandler ends the book on a philosophical note that is hopeful despite the tragedy of much of Cambodia's past and its troubled state today.

In summation, the book is clear, concise, insightful and thought-provoking. I enthusiastically recommend it to anyone interested in Southeast Asian and Cambodian history and culture. It is an invaluable resource for scholars of this region and would be an excellent addition to any class reading list for courses on the topic of Southeast Asian or Cambodian Studies.

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