

### Book Review: Kitamura, Yuto, et al. (eds), The Political Economy of Schooling in Cambodia: Issues of Quality and Equity

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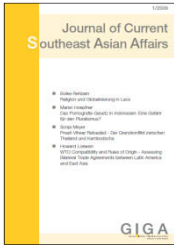
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# Journal of Current Southeast Asian Affairs

The Early Duterte Presidency in the Philippines

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Kitamura, Yuto, D. Brent Edwards Jr., Chhinh Sitha, and James H. Williams (eds) (2016), *The Political Economy of Schooling in Cambodia: Issues of Quality and Equity*

Palgrave Macmillan US, ISBN: 978-1-137-45599-4, XII + 245 pages, (ebook ISBN: 978-1-137-45600-7)

Cambodia has made rapid strides in terms of its education system since the latter was dismantled by the Khmer Rouge. During the Khmer Rouge regime (1975–1979), Cambodia was still following a Western educational model developed under the latter part of the French colonisation period in the 1960s. In post-Khmer Rouge Cambodia, the country also went through a period of sanctions imposed by the United States and isolationist practices, which hindered the development of the education system. It was not until the early 1990s that Cambodia began to pick up the pieces and to set education as a policy priority. Since then there have been impressive gains in access to education as well as substantial challenges related to equitable access, quality, poverty, and corruption. The swiftness of changes to the education system requires a current look at education today in Cambodia.

Written by a diverse group of academics and development practitioners from Cambodia, Japan, and the United States, and edited by Yuto Kitamura, D. Brent Edwards Jr., Chhinh Sitha, and James H. Williams, *The Political Economy of Schooling in Cambodia* provides an overview of the state of education in modern-day Cambodia and highlights the primary challenges that must be addressed. These challenges include dropout rates, teacher and training issues, inclusion of marginalised students, private tutoring, disparities between policy and practice, and resources. The editors consider these issues unique to this book, as compared to several previously published books on education in Cambodia. They further articulate that the notions presented in this book are not limited to Cambodia. As many low- to middle-income countries worldwide face education challenges similar to Cambodia, scholars or practitioners working on modernising education systems may benefit from the viable policy recommendations offered in this book.

The first part of the book considers the unique history of the education system and the factors that impact Cambodian education policy. The context given in the initial chapters includes a historical overview of pre-primary school through higher education since 2000 by Takayo Ogisu and James H. Williams (Chapter 2). Chapter 3 follows nicely, as D. Brent Williams Jr. and William Brehm provide information on how civil society organisations responded to the challenges in the aftermath of the genocide, with the analysis focusing on NGO interventions via practice

and policy. While these interventions, to a certain extent, are potentially impacting the quality of education, authors Takayo Ogisu (Chapter 4), Makiko Hayashi, D. Brent Edwards Jr., (Chapter 5) and William Brehm (Chapter 6) remind us in the following chapters that various barriers, culturally and/or practically, could hinder the maximal effectiveness of the intended policy recommendations. These barriers include teachers' beliefs and philosophies about teaching and learning (including beliefs that hindered the implementation of the MOEYS policy regarding child-centred pedagogy), inadequate attention towards marginalised groups of students by both the government and individual actors within the education system (inclusive education), and corruption related to the system and the practice of teachers providing extra classes to students outside of their official classes ("shadow education").

These problems set the stage for the next chapters, which discuss the educational outcomes of students in primary and secondary levels in terms of dropout rate. The points raised extend beyond the discussion of the factors related to the political economy of education and takes a more micro-system perspective, with gender, parents, and family-school connections as the main focus. Thomas Zimmermann and James Williams in Chapter 7 show that the factor of parents' expectations is predictive of student retention and that it even provides a buffering effect on student dropout, regardless of family background. Chapter 8 is guided by complexity theory, described by D. Brent Edwards, Jr., Thomas Zimmermann, Chhinh Sitha, James H. Williams, and Yuto Kitamura, as theory that embeds development problems "in a web of influences that can propitiate or stifle positive change" (p. 147). This approach provides a holistic view of student dropout rates, highlighting, among issues covered in other chapters, health factors: "Moreover, given the unavailability of social-psychological services in the health sector or from schools in particular, student performance can continue to suffer, thereby raising the likelihood of dropout" (p. 161). As health has rarely been discussed by, and has received little attention from, both academics and policy-makers, this chapter is undeniably unique as it contributes to our overall understanding of student outcomes.

The final section of the book examines issues in higher education such as expansion and quality, teacher training and placement, and education and research at higher-education institutes (Chapters 9–11). In Chapter 9, James H. Williams, Yuto Kitamura and Sopheak Keng give an overall picture of the state of higher education in Cambodia and highlight the difficulties that accompany the successes of increased higher-education enrolment: challenges related to quality and equality of access

in terms of gender and social and geographic origin. Chapter 10, by James H. Williams, Yuto Kitamura, Takayo Ogisu and Thomas Zimmermann, provides a look at the profession of teaching and teacher training in higher education, and the challenges that higher-education institutions face such as low interest in teaching as a career and the loss of teachers after their first few years of teaching. The authors stress that the teacher training provided by institutes of higher education has implications for educational policy. Chapter 11, written by Yuto Kitamura, Naoki Umemiya, Yasushi Hirosato and Sam Sideth Dy, considers quality in higher education by comparing the conditions and level of satisfaction reported by faculty at public and private higher-education institutions, concluding that policy change is needed to ensure that faculty at higher-education institutions are able to deliver quality instruction and research.

The authors employ a variety of quantitative and qualitative methods in the exploration of education in Cambodia including, for example, a broad examination of national statistics and narrative analysis. This allows for both a comprehensive perspective on the five overarching issues addressed in the book, as well as an in-depth and descriptive look at nuanced issues within the Cambodian context. For example, a narrative analysis in Chapter 8 describes the challenges facing families in ensuring that students transition from primary to secondary schools. This allows readers to experience the education system as lived by students, families, and communities and provides balance in a field of study that can sometimes lose sight of those impacted by the education system. Chapter 4, a discussion on pedagogy in schools, addresses teachers' understanding of pedagogy through the cultural mindset, *paccekteeb*, described as "a set of legitimate steps that lead you to arrive at the solution to the problem" (p. 61), as a cultural barrier to improving quality in teaching. The authors describe teachers' relationship to power by their possession of legitimate knowledge and the *paccekteeb* (technique) to transmit that knowledge. This chapter provides rich context to the global challenges surrounding quality education in emerging education systems. Conversely, a quantitative study on gender (Chapter 7) and a mixed-methods study on teacher training and experience (Chapter 10) widen the scope of the research.

Overall the book fills an important niche in the comprehension of Cambodia's unique educational situation. Researchers, students, policy-makers, and others who wish to gain an expansive understanding of the situation of education today in Cambodia would benefit from reading it. The issues are well researched and provide jumping-off points for further exploration. We find that this book is particularly applicable to many

post-conflict societies struggling to rebuild, expand, and modernise their educational systems in the wake of globalisation. Further, graduate students will find this book helpful in terms of various research methodologies from employing existing data on education to conducting qualitative interviews and quantitative data analyses.

Future considerations for an all-encompassing work that addresses the current successes and challenges of the Cambodian education system could include an in-depth look at educational programmes being developed and implemented in Cambodian schools, which range from STEM projects and school health programmes to current attempts to foster curriculum development, develop early-childhood education programmes, and improve professional development for teachers. A deeper exploration of equity issues could include schemes that support gender equity, career and university preparation, and programmes that bolster family and community involvement in the education system.

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