

non-governmental organizations. In today's Cambodia, however, the space for such movements is relentlessly squeezed by Hun Sen's authoritarian regime.

In this context, Zucker and Kiernan are not unnecessarily pessimistic when they conclude that Southeast Asia is "at what may appear to be a pivotal moment in history", as the political powers that be "have proven increasingly resistant to the checks and balances of governmental institutions or to the concerns of [their] citizenry..." (p. 14). A cycle of violence and authoritarianism is exemplified in Alfred McCoy's chapter on extrajudicial killings under President Ferdinand Marcos and, more recently, those under President Rodrigo Duterte taking on the guise of a war on drugs. As the editors highlight, the result is that this "volume stands as a warning that what has happened before may happen again, and in some cases already is" (p. 14). Perhaps adding to the pessimism, McCoy's chapter also highlights the context of rising regional authoritarianism with a global rightist drift and under the sway of the politics of distrust and violence.

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*Returning Southeast Asia's Past: Objects, Museums, and Restitution.* Edited by Louise Tythacott and Pangah Ardiyansyah. Singapore: NUS Press, 2021. xv+303 pp.

Repatriation of looted Southeast Asian antiquities has been regularly reported in the news recently. The largest repatriation hoard was the return of thirty Khmer Buddhist and Hindu objects in 2021 from the United States to Cambodia. Another important return was of two Khmer lintels from the Asian Art Museum of San Francisco to Thailand in 2021. Southeast Asian countries celebrated the return of these pieces with religious ceremonies because they are considered

sacred religious objects. Thus, this book is published at a time when museum curators, scholars and others have a strong interest in this subject.

Edited by two Southeast Asian art and curatorial specialists, Tythacott and Ardiyansyah, this anthology is divided into three parts: Artefact Ownership; Object Biographies and Colonial Legacies; and Museums, Restitution, and Cultural Identities. The introduction summarizes the history of looting and repatriation, and the relevant laws, in five Southeast Asia countries: Myanmar, Thailand, Cambodia, Vietnam and Indonesia. Many articles address the “1970 UNESCO Convention on the Means of Prohibiting and Preventing the Illicit Import, Export and Transfer of Ownership of Cultural Property”, which most Southeast Asian countries, except Indonesia and Thailand, have ratified (p. 17).

The book also addresses the laws of provenance, object ownership and political issues in each country during the colonial era of Southeast Asia by the British, French and Dutch from the late nineteenth to the middle of the twentieth century. Thailand (Siam) was the only country not colonized during this period. In addition, information is provided on the process, practices and politics of acquiring and returning Southeast Asian art, which has never before been published (p. 22).

Chapters 2 and 3 focus on religious artefacts that were looted from Khmer temples. Surprisingly, the selling of these objects was initiated by the *École française d’Extrême-Orient* (EFEO), which was established in 1900 with the aim of “studying and preserving ‘Indochinese’ heritage” (p. 41). In chapter 2, Abbe provides detailed information on how George Groslier, a French scholar involved in the protection of Khmer heritage, initiated the idea of selling original Khmer artefacts (p. 44). Photographs taken in the 1930s clearly document the artefacts that were sold. Chapter 3 elaborates on the subject of the looting of large stone Khmer images and their repatriation between 2013 and 2016. Socheat, Chanraksmeay and Tythacott highlight that the collaboration between the Denver Art Museum and the National Museum of Cambodia helped reconfigure

gains in knowledge, relationships and understanding accrued by the process of negotiation and repatriation (p. 76).

In chapter 4, Rod-Ari addresses the repatriation of small potteries from Ban Chiang sites in the Northeastern region of Thailand. She explains why these small vessels are an important reflection of national identity, how they were looted and taken outside of Thailand, and why their repatriation is significant.

Part 2 covers the biographies of objects and how to appropriately display religious objects in a museum setting. In chapter 5, Clarke provides historical information regarding the royal regalia of the Kongbaung dynasty of Burma (1752–1885), the last absolute monarchy, and the reactions by the new political leaders and government during the postcolonial period. Clarke states that this collection of regalia “has continued to form a new palladium of state linking Socialist Myanmar to an ancient and glorious past” (p. 134). In chapter 6, Duyen addresses the question of object repatriation in curatorial practice. He explores issues such as the appropriate way to display Buddhist images, and questions whether curators should treat them as art objects or sacred images. In chapter 7, Ardiyansyah interestingly compares the attitudes towards two Western-style portrait paintings by the Indonesian artist Raden Saleh (1807–80): while *The Arrest of Prince Diponegoro* (1857) became a national treasure, *Posthuum portret van Herman Willem Daendels* (1838) was rejected.

Written by the Dutch cultural heritage specialist van Beurden, chapter 8 focuses on the repatriation of Indonesian objects by the Netherlands. He divides repatriation objects in the 1910s and 1970s into four categories: booty, gifts, archaeological objects and objects in private collections that were smuggled (pp. 187–90). It took forty-five years to return the most sought-after *kris* that belonged to Prince Diponegoro!

The three chapters in part 3 deal with different issues. In chapter 9, Sapardan explains that objects bring unity and natural consciousness to diverse communities of people in Indonesia. A thirteenth-century Prajnaparamita image, discovered near the Singasari ruins by the Dutch in 1818, not only represents the cultural biography and

history of the Indonesian people, but also helped to reconcile the Dutch and the Indonesian governments at the time. Phacharaphorn Phanomvan in chapter 10 shows the importance of social media and websites that serve as tools to expand local understanding of regional and local history. Social media have helped to make the Plai Bat Avalokitesvara statue and the Prakhon Chai sculptures a regional pride and promoted local heritage in the Northeastern region of Thailand. In chapter 11, Galloway traces important historical Burmese repatriation objects such as Pagan Buddha images and the Lion Throne, which were taken from Myanmar to British India in 1902 and returned in 1948. Interestingly, she points out that Buddhism and the worship of Nats spirits discourage an attachment to objects that are linked to bad luck, which is why repatriation never became an important issue in Myanmar.

*Returning Southeast Asia's Past: Objects, Museums, and Restitution* provides important case studies on the subjects of repatriation, the law of provenance, object ownership and related political issues. It also has important bibliographic sources for Southeast Asian studies, art history, history and museum studies.

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*Return Engagements: Contemporary Art's Traumas of Modernity and History in Sài Gòn and Phnom Penh.* By Việt Lê. North Carolina: Duke University Press, 2021. xxi+315pp.

In this elegantly produced study of contemporary art in Cambodia and Vietnam, Việt Lê explores the multiple valences of return—as a yield that is more than financial, a journey that is deeply personal and a recurrence of history that is multi-temporal. His lyrical and immersive preface reflects on past journeys and unhealed wounds. In this jewel of an essay, Lê invites the reader to share the visceral