

Material culture, heritage and national history in Southeast Asia

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Double panel: 5-6 participants and a discussant

Recent scholarship on Southeast Asian manuscripts, particularly those of Islamic cultures, has focused increasingly on material and codicological aspects, including illumination and paratexts. Digitisation projects and greater cooperation between Western institutions with their counterparts in Asia, have also stepped up in recent years.

Manuscripts and other inscribed artifacts, such as textiles, regalia items, and other ritual objects, but also photographs, have now found a place in the pantheon of national heritage and the discourse of patrimonialisation. But while they are increasingly displayed in museums and described in catalogues, this increased visibility has not been used for historiography, even when these artifacts have much to contribute towards a better understanding of political, intellectual and literary history in the region. The panel proposes to tackle this issue by discussing the meaning of those artifacts in relation to national history, material heritage, and historiography. By doing so, we intend to emphasize the connection and disconnection between those three domains, as well as the sociohistorical reasons which explain it. By bringing together Southeast Asianists from different disciplines, we propose to reflect on how different approaches to study and consider these artifacts may serve the present-day national histories of the different countries.