

Object Stories: Intra-imperial Wars and Collecting in Southeast Asia

Recent scholarly works examining collecting as an activity in South Asia and other world regions (Jasanoff 2005, Barringer and Flynn 2012) have yielded interesting conclusions regarding the processes by which colonial collections were formed and the effects of their presence in Europe. Most recently, there have been attempts at gathering similar scholarly work in South East Asia (ASEASUK 2016 Conference and Panel Papers on Thomas Stamford Raffles in Singapore, William Marsden and his collection of Malay and Indonesian manuscripts, Clas Fredrik Hornstedt as collector in Batavia, in 1783).

This panel hopes to push this Southeast Asian focus further by presenting four papers on collecting as a result of wars between competing imperial powers in South east Asia. As the Dutch or the British sought political, economic and even cultural ascendancy over Spain or Portugal in South east Asia, what sorts of object transferences occurred? What informed the collecting policies or proclivities of the collectors and what effect did these collections have?

When Britain occupied Manila in 1762 for example, the naval officers and men who eventually received portions of their war booty, had among their spoils, Roman Catholic religious ivories, old Spanish paintings, Chinese porcelain, Spanish incunabulum and/or manuscripts. Outside the realm of typical collections of “indigenous” objects that end up in Museums, these collected objects often remained in private collections as family heirlooms, or sometimes travel the circuit of manor house auctions as falsely categorized hybrid objects of questionable provenance. These types of objects set in motion by wars between empires present an interesting addendum to the study of Southeast Asian colonial collecting.

Convener: Dr Cristina Juan with 3 other paper presenters.

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