

Spring 2023

The Foreign Policy of Restitution: How Antiquities Repatriations Could Help the United States Thwart Chinese Influence in Cambodia

Cameron Cheam Shapiro
Bard College

Follow this and additional works at: https://digitalcommons.bard.edu/senproj_s2023



Part of the [International Relations Commons](#)



This work is licensed under a [Creative Commons Attribution-Noncommercial-No Derivative Works 4.0 License](#).

Recommended Citation

Shapiro, Cameron Cheam, "The Foreign Policy of Restitution: How Antiquities Repatriations Could Help the United States Thwart Chinese Influence in Cambodia" (2023). *Senior Projects Spring 2023*. 314.
https://digitalcommons.bard.edu/senproj_s2023/314

This Open Access is brought to you for free and open access by the Bard Undergraduate Senior Projects at Bard Digital Commons. It has been accepted for inclusion in Senior Projects Spring 2023 by an authorized administrator of Bard Digital Commons. For more information, please contact digitalcommons@bard.edu.

The Foreign Policy of Restitution:
How Antiquities Repatriations Could Help the United States Thwart Chinese Influence in
Cambodia

Senior Project Submitted to
The Division of Social Studies
of Bard College

by
Cameron Cheam Shapiro

Annandale-on-Hudson, New York
May 2023

Acknowledgements

I would like to thank my parents, Sophiline Cheam Shapiro and John Eli Shapiro, my brother, Eli, and my friends, Elliot, Michaela, Kaleth, and Charlie, for their encouragement throughout the research and writing of this paper and for their undying love and support.

I would also like to express my gratitude for my mentor, professor, and senior project advisor Amb. Frederic C. Hof, who has helped shape not only my years at Bard, but my future career goals in public service and international affairs. There is no one I would rather turn to for advice. Thank you for inspiring me.

Abstract

This paper seeks to explore the extent to which US-Cambodia antiquities repatriations could be used to help thwart Chinese influence in Cambodia. Cultural objects, stone and bronze sculptures of gods and ancestors created throughout Ancient Cambodia, hold significant meaning for local ritualistic practices and worship. After the arrival of the French in the 19th century, these materials were extracted from temples and sold on the international art market to prominent museums and collectors. The looting of antiquities has survived to this day, but with the help of US-Cambodian cooperation, many of these extracted materials are on their way home. The paper dives into the geopolitics behind these repatriations. China, a “strategic competitor” to the US, threatens American interests in the South China Sea, relying on its ally, Cambodia, to prevent ASEAN resistance and using the country as a possible naval base. At the same time, Cambodia shows signs that it is willing to adopt a more neutral foreign policy. The paper argues that the returns present an unprecedented opportunity to bolster American soft power in Cambodia, to help rebuild ties after recent turbulent relations in a non-China-related matter. The paper explains the connection between antiquities repatriations and soft power in the form of restitution and how returns appeal to both the Cambodian general public and government alike. Finally, the paper proposes policies to aid the effectiveness of such American soft power: extending the Cultural Property Memorandum of Understanding, pushing Thailand to adopt the 1970 UNESCO Resolution on Cultural Property, maintaining interagency cooperation and funding, educational exchange, and establishing museum capacity building and research initiatives.

Table of Contents

Introduction.....	1
Cambodia and Antiquities.....	6
1. <i>An Introduction to Ancient Cambodia: History and Sculpture.....</i>	6
2. <i>A Fetish in the Making: The Commodification of Spirituality.....</i>	13
3. <i>Independence Onwards: War, Looting, and Latchford.....</i>	16
4. <i>Fighting Looting and Returning Cultural Property.....</i>	22
The Love-Hate Triangle.....	30
1. <i>The United States on China.....</i>	30
2. <i>Chinese Influence in Cambodia.....</i>	36
3. <i>US-Cambodia Relations.....</i>	40
Soft Power.....	47
1. <i>Soft Power Theory.....</i>	47
2. <i>American Soft Diplomacy in Cambodia.....</i>	50
3. <i>Antiquities Reparations as Soft Power.....</i>	56
4. <i>Criticism of Soft Power and Antiquity Diplomacy.....</i>	59
5. <i>Policy Recommendations.....</i>	61
Epilogue.....	65
Bibliography.....	68

Introduction

In early November 2022, President Joseph R. Biden began a diplomatic tour of North Africa and Asia, starting in Sharm el-Sheikh for the COP27 United Nations Climate Change Summit, before traveling to Phnom Penh for the 10th annual US-ASEAN Summit, the East Asia Summit, and Bali for a G20 meeting. November 12th marked the first time in nearly a decade that a sitting United States President visited Cambodia—the second time in the country’s history. During his two days in the Kingdom, Biden hoped to shift US-ASEAN relations to a Comprehensive Strategic Partnership (CSP), a region often overlooked in American foreign policy. The Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) was now “the heart of [his] administration’s Indo-Pacific strategy.”¹ While in Phnom Penh, Biden engaged with Cambodian Prime Minister Hun Sen, a much anticipated meeting following the deterioration of diplomatic relations starting in 2017 over the suppression of the political opposition and Cambodia’s close ties to China.

According to news reports, their bilateral meeting was eventful. Biden thanked Hun Sen for his criticism of the Russian invasion of Ukraine before mistakenly referring to him as the Prime Minister of “Colombia.”² The President further expressed his concerns over the growing suspicions of Chinese naval bases in the country and jailed political activists, pressing the Prime Minister to “reopen civic and political space.”³ Two days later, Hun Sen was diagnosed with COVID-19, as Biden met with Chinese President Xi Jin Ping in Indonesia.

¹ Jonathan Lemire, “Ahead of Xi Meeting, Biden Calls out China,” POLITICO (POLITICO, November 13, 2022), <https://www.politico.eu/article/us-president-joe-biden-cambodia-asean-china-xi-jinping-g20/>.

² Kanupriya Kapoor, Nandita Bose, and Jiraporn Kuhakan, “U.S. President Biden Slips up on Name of ASEAN Summit Host Cambodia,” ed. Christina Fincher, Reuters (Thomson Reuters, November 12, 2022), <https://www.reuters.com/world/asia-pacific/us-president-biden-slips-up-name-asean-summit-host-cambodia-2022-11-12/>.

³ Lemire, “Ahead of Xi Meeting, Biden Calls out China.”

But of the various geopolitical topics covered in their discussions across hectic events, a fascinating incident made headlines. “Hun Sen thanks US’ Biden for returning the looted statues,” wrote the Phnom Penh Post. “He said the US is the ‘number one’ country in helping repatriate looted antiquities.”⁴ As tensions remain high between the two countries, non-confrontational, non-political, non-economic dialogue between the countries seems to produce some moments of solidarity and cooperation, the most prominent of which is the return of cultural property.

Antiquities repatriations are a focal point in US-Cambodia relations and have been since the 2003 Memorandum of Understanding on Cultural Property. What is perhaps most remarkable, is the increasing number of such returns in recent years, some shipments of over thirty statues, multiple times a year. These repatriations of looted antiquities are a part of a global call to fight the illicit trafficking of antiquities, first conceived in the 1970s, now a dominating force across former colonies and war-torn nations. The United States and Cambodia stand out as the perfect case study for restitution.

Still, the timing of these accelerated repatriations comes into question. Why now? One major factor has been the numerous breakthroughs in joint US-Cambodia investigations into the global illicit art market, dealers, collectors, museums, and auction houses. Another could be geopolitics.

On his tour, Biden announced that American foreign policy would now be dedicated to helping “build an Indo-Pacific that is free and open, stable and prosperous, resilient and secure,” strengthening US commitments to an independent Southeast Asia as a key regional player.⁵ In

⁴ Chakrya Khouth Sophak, “Hun Sen Thanks US’ Biden for Return of Looted Statues,” Phnom Penh Post (Post Media Co., November 13, 2022), <https://phnompenhpost.com/national/hun-sen-thanks-us-biden-return-looted-statues>.

⁵ Lemire, “Ahead of Xi Meeting, Biden Calls out China.”

doing so, as described by Politico’s White House Bureau Chief Jonathon Lemire, the President declared that the US will “help stand against China’s growing dominance in the region—without mentioning the other superpower by name.”⁶ For American officials, Chinese influence is one of the largest concerns in Southeast Asia, one of the first regions to partake in the Belt and Roads Initiative and a prevalent recipient of Chinese aid and investment. Cambodia, in the eyes of the US foreign policymakers, remains China’s most faithful ASEAN ally.

But what is the connection between geopolitics and antiquities repatriations? Numerous legal scholars, art historians, and advocates, such as J.H. Merryman, Karin Edvardsson Björnberg, Bénédicte Savoy, and Erin Thompson, have explored both the moral and legal debates surrounding the return of cultural property.^{7 8} Fewer still have touched on antiquities returns as a diplomatic tool. This paper seeks to build upon research into the relationship between the repatriation of looted antiquities and geopolitics, exploring the extent to which American soft power, through antiquities repatriations, can be successful in thwarting Chinese influence in Cambodia, and how future policy measures can be implemented in order to develop and improve these efforts.

The first chapter covers the history of Ancient Cambodia and describes the creation of bronze and stone sculpture across temples of antiquity, the arrival of Europeans, and the conception of an art fetish that has continued to spread across the international art market. The chapter further explores the prevalence of looting following Cambodian independence, the current domestic and diplomatic efforts to fight the illicit trade of cultural property and to return extracted materials, and the moral and legal arguments used by US and Cambodian officials.

⁶ Ibid.

⁷ John Henry Merryman, “The Public Interest in Cultural Property,” *California Law Review* 77, no. 2 (1989): 339-364, <https://doi.org/10.2307/3480607>.

⁸ Karin Edvardsson Björnberg, “Historic Injustices and the Moral Case for Cultural Repatriation,” *Ethical Theory and Moral Practice* 18, no. 3 (2014): 461-474, <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10677-014-9530-z>.

The next chapter places repatriations in a geopolitical context and examines the underlying foreign policy goals and agendas of actors involved, namely the United States, China, and Cambodia. Dissecting this love-hate triangle, as this paper refers to it, is vital to understanding who benefits from these repatriations and whose objectives are being achieved in doing so. Does repatriation fit into US-Cambodian foreign policy?

The final chapter discusses how repatriations can be used to achieve the foreign policy goals of both the United States and Cambodia, a path of less resistance through Joseph Nye's soft power. The chapter not only defines soft power theory, but evaluates its applications, critiques, and how it can be implemented in the context of antiquities repatriations. This section also explores different avenues the United States can take to improve the effectiveness and expansiveness of its diplomacy surrounding the returns.

Before diving into the history of Cambodian antiquities and repatriations, some keywords and terminology require clarification. This paper refers to "cultural property," as outlined by Janna Thompson, as the "property of the collectivity," only if "it was legitimately acquired by the collective or its members—that is, not taken without consent or justification from others—or possession of it has been made legitimate by changes in circumstances" and if the item "plays an important role in the religious, cultural or political life of the people of the collectivity by functioning as a symbol of collective ideals, a source of identity for its members, as a ceremonial object, a focus of historical meaning, an expression of their achievements, or as a link with founders or ancestors."⁹ The term "antiquity" is thus a subset of cultural property that describes items made before the Middle Ages or ancient times.¹⁰ "Art repatriation," as defined by Carol A.

⁹ Janna Thompson, "Cultural Property, Restitution and Value," *Journal of Applied Philosophy* 20, no. 3 (2003):, <https://doi.org/10.1046/j.0264-3758.2003.00251.x>, 252.

¹⁰ "Antiquity," Oxford English Dictionary (Oxford University Press), accessed May 1, 2023, <https://www.oed.com/view/Entry/88333?redirectedFrom=antiquity#eid>.

Roehrenbeck, generally refers to “the return of cultural objects to their country of origin,” which can be initiated through museums, individuals, or governments.^{11 12}

¹¹ Carol A. Roehrenbeck, “Repatriation of Cultural Property—Who Owns the Past? An Introduction to Approaches and to Selected Statutory Instruments,” *International Journal of Legal Information* 38, no. 2 (2010): <https://doi.org/10.1017/s0731126500005722>, 186.

¹² *Ibid*, 198.

I

Cambodia and Antiquities

This chapter attempts to describe the tale of antiquities trafficking and repatriation efforts throughout Cambodian history. French scholar Thierry Zéphir argues that Khmer sculpture “belongs within a religious context.”¹³ To better visualize the players and perspectives in repatriation efforts and to grasp the relationship between antiquities and the people of Cambodia, civilian and government alike, it is vital to understand the origins of civilization, religion, and sculpture in the region and the movement of cultural property following Western contact. This chapter begins by exploring sculpture and religion throughout distinct periods of Ancient Cambodia—Funan, Chenla, and the Khmer Empire—before diving into the rise of French intrigue, the first extractions of Khmer antiquities to the West, as well as post-colonial lootings of temples before, during, and after civil war. The chapter then discusses the current state of repatriation efforts through diplomatic means, international treaties on cultural heritage, domestic and international policy-making, and the debate surrounding the returns.

1. An Introduction to Ancient Cambodia: History and Sculpture

Cambodian civilization can be traced as far back as the first century CE, 800 years before the emergence of the Khmer Empire. Although there remains debate over the indigenous name of the kingdom, historical evidence from Chinese envoy reports from the third century suggests

¹³ Thierry Zéphir, “Introduction to Khmer Sculpture: General Remarks,” in *Sculpture of Angkor and Ancient Cambodia: Millennium of Glory*, 1st ed. Helen Ibbitson Jessup and Thierry Zéphir (Washington, D.C.: National Gallery of Art, 1997), 130.

that it was the earliest of Southeast Asia's civilizations.¹⁴ Chu Ying and K'ang-T'ai, sent by Chinese Emperor Sun Ch'uan to "gather information about the countries of Southeast Asia," detailed their explorations of "Funan" for the court of China in books now lost to history, but heavily quoted in dynastic texts.¹⁵ Their works described a civilization centered in the Mekong Delta, an intermediate stopping-place for Indian traders, Brahmins, and Chinese merchants.

Funan's location made the kingdom a perfect "maritime highway between India and China."¹⁶ Along these trading routes, merchant vessels traveled from the Malay Peninsula all the way to the Gulf of Tonkin. It also exported goods of its own, much of which consisted of forest products, precious metals, and ivory. Commerce was far from regional—Funan's trade routes reached as far as the Eastern Mediterranean. Residing in the modern borders of Vietnam, the village of Oc-Eo was discovered in 1942 to have housed Roman coins dating back to the second and third centuries.¹⁷ As trade between India, China, and intermediary countries grew, however, piracy increased across the peninsula, which dissuaded commerce by sea. The result was a robust degree of land trade through Funan itself, aiding in the Indianization of the region.

Indianization, as described by former American diplomat and historian David Chandler, was the process "whereby elements of Indian culture were absorbed or chosen by the Cambodian people in a process that lasted more than a thousand years."¹⁸ This phenomenon, stemming from initial contact through regional commerce and trade, led to the introduction of Sanskrit, writing systems, and the idea of universal kingship. The influence of Indian culture was not imposed by armed forces, but rather gradual acceptance of new perspectives on "politics, sociology,

¹⁴ Lawrence Palmer Briggs, *The Ancient Khmer Empire*, 1st ed., vol. 41 (Philadelphia, PA: American Philosophical Society, 1951), 12.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, 22.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, 18.

¹⁷ David P. Chandler, *A History of Cambodia*, 4th ed. (Westview Press, 2008), 14.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, 11.

architecture, iconography, astronomy, and aesthetics.”¹⁹ This ancient soft power was a side-effect of trade, but sometimes described distastefully as a “civilizing” mission.²⁰ Indian and Indianized settlements were riddled across the region, bringing the “latest ideas of Indian culture and thought,” among which was religion.²¹ French scholar George Cœdès describes two major Indianizations (what he referred to in French as *Hinduizations*) of the Malay Peninsula. The first, according to local legend, was the founding of Funan itself. The second was the reign of an Indian king in 357 CE.²²

The greatest influence of Indianization, still, was the introduction of Brahmanism and Buddhism, which ultimately shaped the arts and sculpture of Funan and the civilizations to come. Indianization, as depicted by Lawrence P. Briggs, led to the development of a state cult centered around the god Śiva (The Destroyer), often accompanied by Brahmā and Vishnu from the Brahmanic Trimūti. In particular, many Funanese worshiped the Śiva-Linga, the representation of Śiva in the form of a phallic emblem, the god of change and reproduction. Stone and brick were used for the construction of religious monuments and temples in the lower valleys of the Mekong River, including the famous complex Prasat Preah Theat Toc, later housing Banteay Prei Angkor. These temples were designed to have multiple roofs, *mandapas* (halls), *kūdu* (windows), and other classical elements of Hindu temples. In many, the Śiva-Linga was built as vertical cylinder sculptures for worship. Other Hindu sculptures, including those from Vishnuism, depicted Vishnu, the earliest forms of Harihara (a combination of the gods Śiva and Vishnu), and pedestals with throats. Mahāyana Buddhism also spread, leading to the earliest Buddhist statues in the region, found in the Angkor-Borei temples. Building upon these

¹⁹ Ibid, 12.

²⁰ George Coedes, *Angkor: An Introduction*, trans. Emily F Gardiner, 1st ed. (Singapore: Oxford University Press, 1963), 11.

²¹ Briggs, *The Ancient Khmer Empire*, 23.

²² Coedes, *Angkor: An Introduction*, 46.

monuments, kings of later periods would often order the construction of sculpture and other works in and around temples. Sculptures were formed using direct-carving techniques, with many still containing their stone supports. Khmer bronzes can also be traced back to this period, one of the most famous of which is the Reclining Visnu from West Mebon.²³

The Indianization of the region continued after the fall of the Funanese in ca. 550CE following the annexation of Funan by the Kingdom of Chenla, a former vassal state which had gained independence in the beginning of the 5th century.²⁴ Chenla, according to Briggs, was the Chinese equivalent to *Kambujadesa*, from which the name “Cambodia” is derived. The new kingdom would control what is today central and upper Laos, western Cambodia, and Southern Thailand.²⁵ Historical writer Ma Taun-lin described the people of Chenla as “always armored and under arms... of a live and robust temperament,” who “[did] not fail to read or recite their prayers.”²⁶

Many of the people of Chenla worshiped Śivaism and lingas, but, much like in Funan, Māhāyana Buddhism remained prominent as some of the first Buddhist inscriptions in Cambodia can be traced to this period. During this period, renowned temples, such as Vat Phu (in modern Laos) and Prasat Baran, were built under the reign of Bhavavarman I, and later monuments such as those of Sambor-Prei Kuk erected under King Īsānvarman are regarded by Briggs as the “greatest conglomeration of buildings of pre-Angkorian Cambodia.”^{27 28} In fact, across the Chenla period, more than 300 temples were constructed.²⁹ Often built on elevation, temples consisted of vast halls of columns, false doors, colonettes, lintels, and other reliefs. And in these

²³ Zéphir, “Introduction to Khmer Sculpture: General Remarks,” 132-4.

²⁴ Briggs, *The Ancient Khmer Empire*, 38.

²⁵ Roger M. Smith, *Cambodia's Foreign Policy* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1965), 5.

²⁶ Briggs, *The Ancient Khmer Empire*, 50.

²⁷ *Ibid*, 44.

²⁸ *Ibid*, 51.

²⁹ Helen Ibbitson Jessup, *Masterpieces of the National Museum of Cambodia: An Introduction to the Collection*, 1st ed. (Norfolk, CT: Friends of Khmer Culture, 2006), 12.

temple complexes stood countless sculptures. Some that are uniquely associated with the early Chenla Period include small female statues and Harihara. Still, many statues were of natural size or larger, depicting Harihara and Vishnu, and backed by supporting arches. “Poodle lions” could also be found alongside stairways, false doors, and entrances in these complexes. It was during this period when statues of the Sambor Prei Kuk, Prei Kmeng, Kampong Preah, Phnom Da, and Prasat Andet styles were sculpted.³⁰

The Chenla Period, however, was plagued with political strife and internal conflict; Dynastic rivalries led to its split in the 8th century into Chenla-of-the-Land and Chenla-of-the-Sea. The Javanese then established suzerainty over Chenla-of-the-Sea, but it was with the rise of King Jayavarman II in 802 CE that the divided kingdom was reunified.³¹ The expulsion of Java marked the end of the Chenla Period and the beginning of the most notorious era in Cambodian history: the Khmer Empire.

Military campaigns and alliances through marriage and land grants cemented the Angkorian Empire’s rule across Kambujadesa over twenty years.³² Jayavarman II reigned as the “universal monarch,” seen as the “king of kings on earth.”³³ At the same time, religion became closely intertwined with royalty. His monarchy and country were under the protection of the Śiva-Linga, residing on the mountain of Phnom Kulen, the birthplace of his empire. From this point on, Cambodian kings were connected to Śiva through ritual of the Devarāja, which as a result, deified monarchs as “god-kings.”³⁴

³⁰ Helen Ibbitson Jessup and Thierry Zéphir, *Sculpture of Angkor and Ancient Cambodia: Millennium of Glory*, 1st ed. (Washington, D.C.: National Gallery of Art, 1997), 143.

³¹ Smith, *Cambodia's Foreign Policy*, 5.

³² Chandler, *A History of Cambodia*, 36.

³³ Albert Le Bonheur, “Ancient Cambodia: A Historical Glimpse,” in *Sculpture of Angkor and Ancient Cambodia: Millennium of Glory*, 1st ed. Helen Ibbitson Jessup and Thierry Zéphir (Washington, D.C.: National Gallery of Art, 1997), 130.

³⁴ Chandler, *A History of Cambodia*, 35.

As kingship was passed down through lineage and the empire expanded, the capital was relocated numerous times, from Hariharalaya (modern-day Roulous) to the city of Angkor by Yasovarman (889-910), to Koh Ker under the reign of Jayavarman IV in 928, and back to Angkor in 944. Some of the period's most famous temples can be found in these areas, including Angkor Wat, Bayon, Ta Prohm, Banteay Srei, and Prasat Thom. Still, temples and monasteries were constructed throughout the kingdom. Temple mountains, as described by Chandler, were the "homes of the gods and for deceased worthies... who had been assimilated to heaven." They also served as "tombs, housing the ashes of the king," and "astronomical observatories."³⁵ Throughout the Angkor Period, in and around temples, sculptures were also made using distinct styles: The Kulen, Bakheng, Preah Ko, Koh Ker, Pre Rup, Banteay Srei, Kleang, Bayon, Baphoun, and Angkor Wat styles.³⁶ The Empire would also see fluctuations in religious dominance between Buddhism and Hinduism.

By the early 13th century, uprisings and rebellions, their subsequent economic burdens, and, ironically, the cost of architectural projects, led to a weakening Khmer Empire. From 1243-95, under Jayavarman VIII, the last of Ancient Cambodia's stone monuments were built. Their neighbors to the west, the Siamese, were growing in strength, threatening the security of the Khmers, and, by 1431, the Siamese invaded, leading to the abandonment of Angkor and the end of the empire.³⁷ The Khmers relocated to the Phnom Penh area, where they were able to achieve greater access to Chinese trade with the Ming Dynasty. The Post-Angkor period saw the rise of Theravada Buddhism as the dominant religion, wooden art, and starting in the 16th century, Buddhist pilgrimages to Angkor Wat. The Middle Period of Cambodian history would last until the arrival of the French in the 19th century.

³⁵ Ibid, 39-40.

³⁶ Zéphir, *Sculpture of Angkor and Ancient Cambodia: Millennium of Glory*, 189-91.

³⁷ Jessup, *Masterpieces of the National Museum of Cambodia: An Introduction to the Collection*, 14.

Temples and sculpture held great meaning and value to the people of the Khmer Empire and their predecessors. According to leading Southeast Asian art historian Ashley Thompson, statues were “venerated within a context of the elite demonstrating devotion to a particular divinity, as integral to government organization... The political and religious were inseparable.”³⁸ To the elite, those of power and royalty, the creation of these religious monuments and stone and metal statues were “instance[s] of spiritual power lending its strength and authority to temporal power.”³⁹ And, to religious authorities, including Brahmans and Buddhist monks, sculpture represented “a set of philosophical and theological concepts the general public would never understand.”⁴⁰ But to the ordinary, for the craftsman and sculptor, the farmer, they “approached them first and foremost as a believer, as a worshiper...”⁴¹ Scholars, such as Zéphir, describe the meaning and beauty of these sculptures as being held to a different criteria from art of the West. In Ancient Cambodia, the greater the beauty of the works, it was believed that the gods they represented would be more likely to accept incarnation in them, and “the more capable he would be of performing actions that, so one hoped, would be beneficial.”⁴² But, gods were not the only ones the people of Ancient Cambodia hoped to celebrate and honor.

Ancestor worship remained a staple of spiritual and ritualistic practice in the region. Ancestor temples were constructed throughout the Khmer Empire, such as Indravarman I’s (877-890) Preah Ko monuments. Thai historian Nidhi Aeusrivongse argues that the royal cult of Devaraja was closely tied to the worship of ancestors. For the general public, the central temple-mountain represented “the symbol of the abode of their ancestors, radiating their force of protection over all the realm... Whether the king was Visnuite, Sivaite, or Buddhist, he could

³⁸ Ashley Thompson, interview by Cameron Cheam Shapiro, September 12, 2022.

³⁹ Zéphir, “Introduction to Khmer Sculpture: General Remarks,” 136.

⁴⁰ Ibid.

⁴¹ Ibid.

⁴² Ibid, 137.

bring forth the protective force of the ancestors through a central cult based on the mountain-temple.”⁴³ Among the ordinary, there was an “ambivalent relationship between Hindu gods and ancestral spirits,” with an ancestor becoming Indianized—male ancestors were related with gods and female ancestors with goddesses.⁴⁴ At a local level, “a village community, a clan, or a person was protected by the spirits of its or his ancestors.”⁴⁵ With the line between gods and ancestor spirits somewhat blurred, the worship of deities, who were incarnated through statues, became the worship of territorial protectors.

2. A Fetish in the Making: The Commodification of Spirituality

Throughout the early 19th century, Cambodia experienced a series of invasions by Thai and Vietnamese forces, and for brief periods, “ceased to exist as a recognizable state.”⁴⁶ It was around this time that the West first made contact in Cambodia, beginning with the arrival of French missionaries who traveled to the region surrounding the capital of Udong. As civil wars ravaged on, King Norodom sought to build Cambodia’s ties with France in hopes to find protection from invading armies and the potential of regaining land lost to newly French colonial Vietnam. In 1863, enamored with gifts and the security of the French, the king signed a treaty that set the stage for a new colonial age in the region, starting with protectorate status. The French were given resource exploration rights, and, in return, he was granted protection as the ruling monarch. Still, revolts led by royal relatives pushed Norodom to enact reforms promoted by the French in order to maintain power, accepting “all the administrative, judicial, financial,

⁴³ Nidhi Aeusrivongse, “The Devarāja Cult and Khmer Kingship at Angkor,” in *Explorations in Early Southeast Asian History: The Origins of Southeast Asian Statecraft* (Ann Arbor, MI: The University of Michigan, Center for South and Southeast Asian studies, 1976), 121.

⁴⁴ *Ibid*, 123.

⁴⁵ *Ibid*, 121.

⁴⁶ Chandler, *A History of Cambodia*, 131.

and commercial reforms which the French government [would] judge, in future, useful to make their protectorate successful.”⁴⁷ Cambodia was absorbed into French Indochina in 1887 and would remain in French hands until 1953. While colonial powers consolidated their influence on all elements of politics and regional economics, Khmer culture, too, was becoming a point of Western fascination.

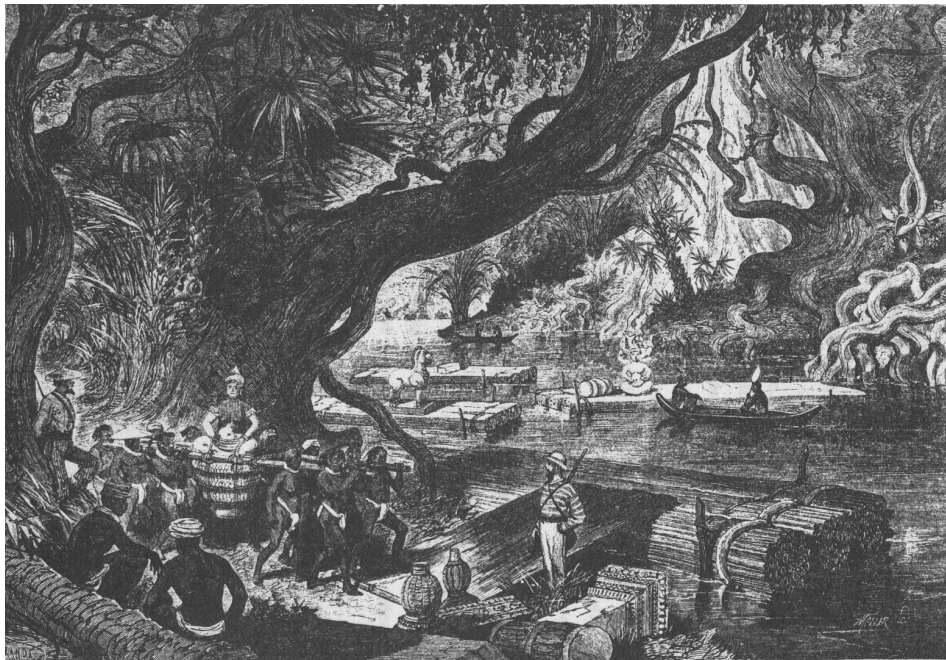


Illustration of Antiquities Extraction from Louis Delaporte’s *Voyage au Cambodge* (1880)⁴⁸

French Naturalist Henri Mouhot (1826-61), often credited with the “discovery” of Angkor Wat on his voyages through Southeast Asia, inspired many back home through tales of ancient ruins “grandeur than anything left to us by Greece or Rome.”⁴⁹ Those who followed were

⁴⁷ Ibid, 163.

⁴⁸ Louis Delaporte. *Embarquement des Sculptures sur les Radeaux à Préa-Khan*, 1880, in *Voyage au Cambodge: l’Architecture Khmer* (Paris: Maisonneuve et Larose, 1999), <http://reader.library.cornell.edu/docviewer/digital?id=sea032#page/16/mode/1up>, 13.

⁴⁹ Henri Mouhot and Charles Mouhot, “Travels in the Central Parts of Indo-China (Siam), Cambodia, and Laos, During the Years 1858, 1859, and 1860” (Project Gutenberg, August 11, 2014), https://www.gutenberg.org/files/46559/46559-h/46559-h.htm#Page_278, 279.

“pioneers of colonialism,” including Louis Delaporte, Ernest Doudart de Lagrée, and Francis Garnier, who visited on frequent expeditions into the Cambodian jungle to extract sculpture from temples and exported them to museums across the French Union, many of which now rests in Paris.⁵⁰ The majority of extractions were at the hands of individuals, rather than the government, which would later show disdain towards the removal of materials. French authorities, growing tired of excessive removals of cultural materials, eventually set up signs imploring visitors not to remove objects. Still, these half-hearted efforts did not halt extractions. Chandler describes these “unscrupulous French adventurers” as “posing as entrepreneurs and eager to capitalize on royal cupidity and the ambiguities of French control.”⁵¹ These statues and temples, once so vital for local religious and spiritual ritual, were now glorified commodities admired for their aesthetics, sent across the world for spectacles—all in the name of French *patrimoine*. Cultural objects were shipped and exhibited numerous times in the French capital throughout the colonial period, starting in 1878, then 1889 at the *Exposition Universelle*, at the 1900 *Exposition de l’Indochine*, and in 1922 at the *Exposition Coloniale* in Marseille.⁵² By 1931, these extreme showcases of Khmer heritage had led to the construction of a replica of Angkor Wat in Paris.⁵³

The French also established a variety of institutions and initiatives dedicated to Ancient Cambodian art and sculpture. The *École Française d’Extrême Orient*, conceived in 1899, sold extracted antiquities on the art market, “purportedly to try and prevent looting from monuments.”⁵⁴ In 1908, they established the Angkor Conservation Office, which aimed to house and protect sculpture.⁵⁵ As arts writer Max Crosbie-Jones points out, only sculptures of relative

⁵⁰ Chandler, *A History of Cambodia*, 160.

⁵¹ *Ibid*, 161.

⁵² William Anderson, “Commodifying Culture: Ownership of Cambodia’s Archaeological Heritage,” *Limina* 13 (2007): 106.

⁵³ Michael S. Falser, *Angkor Wat: A Transcultural History of Heritage*, vol. 1 (Berlin: De Gruyter, 2020), 2.

⁵⁴ Anderson, “Commodifying Culture: Ownership of Cambodia’s Archeological Heritage,” 106.

⁵⁵ Keiko Miura, “From ‘Originals’ to Replicas: Diverse Significance of Khmer Statues,” *Kultur Als Eigentum*, 2015, <https://doi.org/10.4000/books.gup.550>, 270.

importance were safe-guarded, and to “disincentive theft,” other items were still sold on the market. However, this did not prevent “self-appointed custodians” from taking their fill.⁵⁶ In their obsession over the grandeur of Ancient Cambodia, colonists sought a form of cultural engineering, expressing “dismay over what they saw as an increasing neglect for “ancestral traditions.””⁵⁷ To “restore the particular cultural past of Angkor,” the French founded the *École des Arts Cambodgiens* in 1918, as well as the National Museum of Cambodia in 1920, then the *Albert Sarraut Museum*, dedicated to the “restoration, safe-guarding, and propagation of this “Khmer culture,”” which “sealed off a kind of preserve in which artists in the future would simply repeat the outlines of the past.”⁵⁸

Their overt obsession with preserving Ancient Khmer culture, specifically physical materials, was fueled by French nationalist, colonialist, and capitalist ideology from the 19th to mid-20th century. Depicting themselves as conservators of sculpture and the arts, as contributors to the “cultural fabric of colonized territories,” and promoters of scholarship into Ancient Cambodian history and archeology, the French instilled a lasting fetish for Khmer sculpture that spread across the West among private collectors and museums.⁵⁹ And, as a result of their insatiable hunger for sculpture, mainly those of individuals, looting continues to plague Cambodia to this day.

⁵⁶ Max Crosbie-Jones, “Property and Theft: A History of Looting in Southeast Asia,” ArtReview (ArtReview, September 14, 2021), <https://artreview.com/a-history-of-looting-in-southeast-asia-the-real-cultural-appropriation>.

⁵⁷ Ingrid Muan, “Citing Angkor: The ‘Cambodian Arts’ in the Age of Restoration, 1918-2000” (Dissertation, Bell & Howell Information and Learning Company, 2001), 2.

⁵⁸ Ibid, 3.

⁵⁹ Anderson, “Commodifying Culture: Ownership of Cambodia’s Archeological Heritage,” 107.

3. Independence Onwards: War, Looting, and Latchford

The period that followed the French exit was riddled by corruption and ravaged by war and conflict. Newly independent Cambodia was politically dominated by Prince Norodom Sihanouk with little opposition starting in 1953. The Sihanouk Era (1953-1970) saw the birth of Cambodian nationalism and any dissent against Sihanouk was viewed as treason. Meanwhile, the charismatic leader saw in his US-backed neighbors, Thailand and South Vietnam, two adversaries imposing hostile anti-Cambodian policies and his distrust of them made way for a friendship with China's Zhou Enlai. As a result, when the Vietnam War began in 1955 and as American combatants arrived in 1965, the prince was reluctant to drag the country into the fighting, maintaining neutrality.

With growing local discontent over North Vietnamese bases in Cambodia (agreed upon by Sihanouk himself), economic mismanagement, and the rise of communist insurgents in the late-1960s, those once loyal to Sihanouk turned against him. His cousin Sisowath Sirik Matak, Deputy Prime Minister, forced then Prime Minister Lon Nol at gunpoint to sign a declaration against the prince for a National Assembly vote to remove him as Chief of State set for March 18, 1970.⁶⁰ The prince now in exile, the coup d'état effectively ended the Sihanouk Era and gave rise to the Khmer Republic (1970-75), a brutal, fiercely anti-Vietnamese, pro-United States regime met with stark resistance from internal communist Khmer Rouge forces, igniting civil war. Despite a relentless bombing campaign by the United States and violent offenses by the Republic, the capital fell to communists in 1975.

As Lon Nol fled the country, the Khmer Rouge took control of Phnom Penh and established Democratic Kampuchea (1975-9). Millions were forced out into the countryside,

⁶⁰ Chandler, *A History of Cambodia*, 204.

made to labor on communal farms over the next four years, inspired by Maoist agricultural reforms.⁶¹ Demographers estimate that approximately 1.2-2.8 million people died from disease, starvation, overwork, violence, and execution.⁶² The Cambodian population prior to the regime is estimated to have been just under 8 million.⁶³ It was not until 1998, the death of Pol Pot, when fighting between surviving Khmer Rouge forces and the government had ended.⁶⁴ And in the chaos that followed independence—the darkest periods of Cambodian history—and aftermath of the Khmer Rouge, temples were unprotected feeding grounds for looters. In the words of Tess Davis, director of the Antiquities Coalition, “when conflict erupts in an archaeologically-rich country, suddenly the art market is flooded with antiquities from those countries.”⁶⁵

Research from 2014 by Davis and Mackenzie found that modern “organized looting and trafficking is only remembered as beginning around 1970, with the start of the Civil War.”⁶⁶ They uncovered two smuggling channels dominating the antiquities trafficking ring: one in the northwest and one in the north. The northwestern channel was run by local gangs, while the north was orchestrated by Khmer Rouge soldiers, using these funds to finance military operations. Across both channels, removed objects were transported via “oxcart, truck/military truck, and occasionally even helicopter or elephant to the border,” before they were brought to Bangkok alongside the Thai military.⁶⁷ Organized gangsters competed with Khmer Rouge,

⁶¹ “Khmer Rouge: Cambodia's Years of Brutality,” BBC News (BBC, November 16, 2018), <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-asia-pacific-10684399>.

⁶² Patrick Heuveline, “The Boundaries of Genocide: Quantifying the Uncertainty of the Death Toll during the Pol Pot Regime in Cambodia (1975–79),” *Population Studies* 69, no. 2 (April 2015): 201-218, <https://doi.org/10.1080/00324728.2015.1045546>.

⁶³ Patrick Heuveline, “The Demographic Analysis of Mortality Crises: The Case of Cambodia, 1970-1979,” in *Forced Migration & Mortality* (Washington, D.C.: National Academy Press, 2001), 102.

⁶⁴ Thomas R. Kline, “The Lawyers’ Committee for Cultural Heritage Preservation,” *The Lawyers’ Committee for Cultural Heritage Preservation* (The Lawyers’ Committee for Cultural Heritage Preservation, n.d.), <https://www.culturalheritagelaw.org/resources/Documents/CPAC%20Cambodia%20LCCHP.pdf>, 2.

⁶⁵ Tess Davis, “The Scourge of Looting: Trafficking Antiquities from Temple to Museum,” *Smarthistory*, September 10, 2017, <https://smarthistory.org/scourge-of-looting-antiquities/>.

⁶⁶ Simon Mackenzie and Tess Davis, “Temple Looting in Cambodia,” *British Journal of Criminology* 54, no. 5 (2014): <https://doi.org/10.1093/bjc/azu038>, 730.

⁶⁷ *Ibid.*, 731.

paramilitary, and government forces to extract materials from temples until the end of the century, most of whom were unaware that Khmer antiquities would make their way to museums around the world. To this day, Bangkok serves as the “laundering transit point” for the Khmer statue trafficking ring.⁶⁸ The prominence of looting during conflict and the new abundance of Khmer antiquities on the international art market attracted collectors and dealers from across the globe. None were more notorious than a British socialite by the name of Douglas A.J. Latchford.

A self-proclaimed “adventurer-scholar,” Latchford traveled throughout Southeast Asia in Mouhot-esque fashion, starting in the 1950s, where he grew an obsession with regional art, specifically for those of the Khmer Empire.⁶⁹ He, along with other prominent collectors and dealers, began trading cultural objects in Bangkok’s *Woeng Nakhon Kasem*, otherwise known as the old “thieves market,” with little regard for provenance.⁷⁰

Over the next 70 years, Latchford would continue to collect and sell objects, rising to fame as one of the world’s most respected Khmer antiquities dealers, a “one-man supply-and-demand for Cambodian art for half-a-century.”⁷¹ But Latchford was more than just a trader; he amassed a collection of his own “said to rival that of Cambodia’s National Museum.”⁷² In collaboration with scholar Emma Bunker, he cemented his reputation as a leading expert in Khmer antiquities through his three books: *Adoration and Glory: The Golden Age of Khmer Art* (2003), *Khmer Gold: Gifts for the Gods* (2008), and *Khmer Bronzes: New Interpretations of the*

⁶⁸ Crosbie-Jones, “Property and Theft: A History of Looting in Southeast Asia.”

⁶⁹ Matthew Campbell, “The Epic Temple Heist That Looted a Nation’s History,” Bloomberg.com (Bloomberg, June 29, 2022), <https://www.bloomberg.com/features/2022-cambodia-met-museum-art-heist/>.

⁷⁰ Tom Mashberg, “Claims of Looting Shadow Expert in Khmer Art,” The New York Times (The New York Times, December 12, 2012), <https://www.nytimes.com/2012/12/13/arts/design/us-links-collector-to-statue-in-khmer-looting-case.html>.

⁷¹ Helen Stoilas and Vincent Noce, “Federal Charges Could Lead to Deeper Scrutiny of Cambodian Art in the US,” The Art Newspaper (The Art Newspaper, September 28, 2021), <https://www.theartnewspaper.com/2020/01/01/federal-charges-could-lead-to-deeper-scrutiny-of-cambodian-art-in-the-us>.

⁷² Tess Davis, “Douglas Latchford: The Man Who Pillaged Cambodia,” The Diplomat (The Diplomat, August 22, 2020), <https://thediplomat.com/2020/08/douglas-latchford-the-man-who-pillaged-cambodia/>.

Past (2011). Latchford also gifted relics to some of the most well-known museums around the globe, including the Metropolitan Museum of Art and the British Museum. His donations to the National Museum of Cambodia earned him the equivalent of a knighthood by the country's deputy prime minister in 2008. Hab Touch, the Cambodian government director-general of the Department of Cultural Affairs, praised his generosity, hoping that it would “set a good example for others.”⁷³ To this day, his name is engraved on the front of the National Museum for his donations for lighting renovations. On August 2, 2020, Latchford died at the age of 89. A year later, the International Consortium of Investigative Journalists (ICIJ) released the Pandora Papers, unleashing a flurry of accusations against the acclaimed art dealer.

Latchford was no stranger to accusations of illegally moving antiquities. Months before his death, the United States Attorney's Office in the Southern District of New York (SDNY) announced charges against Latchford for trafficking Cambodian relics and statues, “falsifying invoices, provenance documents, and shipping information to smuggle illicitly obtained artworks internationally.”⁷⁴ The dealer previously claimed that his collections were mostly “found and dug up by farmers in fields.”⁷⁵ In reality, much of the art was bought from looters during the war.

Latchford was “one of the principal organizers of the mass looting of Cambodia in the second half of the 20th century.”⁷⁶ Looters, child soldiers at the time, have recounted Latchford's involvement in Cambodia's antiquities trafficking ring. A former looter—Toek Tik or “Lion”—revealed to investigators that Latchford “directed much of the looting through an

⁷³ Mashberg, “Claims of Looting Shadow Expert in Khmer Art.”

⁷⁴ Sarah Cascone, “The Pandora Papers Leak Reveals How the Late Dealer Douglas Latchford Used Offshore Accounts to Sell Looted Cambodian Antiquities,” *Artnet News* (Artnet Worldwide Corporation, October 18, 2021), <https://news.artnet.com/art-world/pandora-papers-douglas-latchford-2017069>.

⁷⁵ Vincent Noce, “'Adventurer Scholar' Douglas Latchford Dies in Bangkok, Aged 89,” *The Art Newspaper* (The Art Newspaper, September 28, 2021), <https://www.theartnewspaper.com/2020/08/10/adventurer-scholar-douglas-latchford-dies-in-bangkok-aged-89>.

⁷⁶ Campbell, “The Epic Temple Heist That Looted a Nation's History.”

intermediary” and “browsed temple photographs... to decide which items should be stolen.”⁷⁷ This intermediary was a Khmer Rouge official by the code name “Sleeping Giant.” Latchford also conducted excavations of his own. During the 1960s, Latchford earned the nickname “Dynamite Doug” for his use of explosives to remove sculpture from ruins.⁷⁸ At times, he would helicopter to the most remote of temples, avoiding landmines scattered across the country during the war.

The Pandora Papers revealed Latchford's larger scheme. The ICIJ published reports that he had created two separate trusts in tax havens to obscure the movement of looted antiquities. Both the Skanda and Shiva Trusts were used to avoid UK inheritance tax once they were to be passed down to his daughter, Julia Latchford. According to the ICIJ, Attorney for the Cambodian Ministry of Culture and Fine Arts Bradley Gordon accused Latchford in a leaked memo to the American Ambassador to Cambodia of donating relics to Cambodian Museums with “numerous conditions to his offer,” including immunity from criminal prosecution.⁷⁹

Once embodying the gods and ancestors of the land they originate from, antiquities from the Funan, Chenla, and Khmer Empire have become commodified on the art market. Looting, fueled by orientalist fascinations and profits, the foundation of which dates back to the time of the French protectorate, has resulted in mass extraction and transportation of antiquities over the past 40 years by the hands of collectors and dealers such as Latchford. By 1993, nearly 80% of 1070 temples had fallen victim to looting, the booty of which can be traced to museums, auction

⁷⁷ Tom Mashberg, “He Sold Away His People's Heritage. He's in the Jungle to Get It Back.,” The New York Times (The New York Times, November 21, 2021), <https://www.nytimes.com/2021/11/21/arts/design/toek-tik-cambodian-artifacts.html>.

⁷⁸ Davis, “Douglas Latchford: The Man Who Pillaged Cambodia.”

⁷⁹ Malia Politzer et al., “From Temples to Offshore Trusts, a Hunt for Cambodia's Looted Heritage Leads to Top Museums,” The International Consortium of Investigative Journalists, August 11, 2022, <https://www.icij.org/investigations/pandora-papers/cambodia-relics-looted-temples-museums-offshore/>.

houses, and private collections across the world.⁸⁰ However, looting survived into the 2000s, particularly in the northwest regions. Today, governments, such as the United States, are working with the Cambodian Government to not only combat looting and prevent further extractions, but to return antiquities in collaboration with civil society. These recent revelations have only accelerated a growing repatriation movement for Cambodian antiquities looted during times of immense turmoil and destruction, complemented by a global call for repatriations.

4. Fighting Looting and Returning Cultural Property

The fight against looting has long been a diplomatic one. One of the pioneering documents in the global movement against the looting and the trafficking of cultural materials is the UNESCO Convention on the Means of Prohibiting and Preventing the Illicit Import, Export and Transfer of Ownership of Cultural Property, first submitted to the United Nations General Assembly on November 14th, 1970 and entered into force in 1972.⁸¹ A predecessor to the vague, “watered-down” 1954 Hague Convention for the Protection of Cultural Property in the Event of Armed Conflict, the 1970 Convention has played a major role in safeguarding cultural property across the globe.⁸² More specifically, it paved the way for the “establishment of regular inventories, the establishment of export certificates, the application of controls and approval of traders, the application of criminal or administrative sanctions, and the organization of

⁸⁰ Mang Channo, “Plunder of Art Works Continues,” Phnom Penh Post (Post Media, July 30, 1993), <https://www.phnompenhpost.com/national/plunder-art-works-continues>.

⁸¹ “Convention on the Means of Prohibiting and Preventing the Illicit Import, Export and Transfer of Ownership of Cultural Property,” United Nations Educational Scientific and Cultural Organization, accessed May 2, 2023, <https://en.unesco.org/about-us/legal-affairs/convention-means-prohibiting-and-preventing-illicit-import-export-and>.

⁸² Alexander Herman, “Fifty Years On: The Meaning of the 1970 UNESCO Convention,” Institute of Art and Law, June 18, 2020, <https://ial.uk.com/fifty-years-on-unesco-convention/>.

information and education campaigns.”⁸³ Provisions in Articles VII and XIII also describe the role of State Parties in restitution efforts.

Article VII emphasizes that State Parties must “take the necessary measures, consistent with national legislation, to prevent museums and similar institutions within their territories from acquiring cultural property originating in another State Party which has been illegally exported after entry into force of this Convention, in the State concerned.” In doing so, “requests for recovery and return shall be made through diplomatic offices,” whereby the Party shall “furnish, at its expense, the documentation and other evidence necessary to establish its claim...” The provision also “prohibits the import of cultural property stolen from a museum or a religious or secular public monument or similar institution in another State Party to this Convention after the entry into force of this Convention for the States concerned, provided that such property is documented as appertaining to the inventory of that institution.”

Under Article XIII, each State Party must take measures to “prevent by all appropriate means transfers of ownership of cultural property likely to promote the illicit import or export of such property,” to “ensure that their competent services co-operate in facilitating the earliest possible restitution of illicitly exported cultural property to its rightful owner,” to “admit actions for the recovery of lost or stolen items of cultural property brought by or on behalf of the rightful owners,” to “recognize the indefeasible right of each State Party to this Convention to classify and declare certain cultural property as inalienable which should therefore ipso facto not be exported, and to facilitate recovery of such property by the State concerned in cases where it has been exported.”⁸⁴

⁸³ “About 1970 Convention,” UNESCO, March 24, 2023, <https://en.unesco.org/fighttrafficking/1970>.

⁸⁴ “Convention on the Means of Prohibiting and Preventing the Illicit Import, Export and Transfer of Ownership of Cultural Property.”

Of the 143 state parties to have ratified the document, Cambodia was the seventh to adopt the convention on September 26th, 1972. It would take another decade for the United States to ratify the Convention. To this date, this Convention acts as the basis for domestic law-making and international cooperation between the United States and Cambodia, built upon by 1995 Convention on Stolen or Illegally Exported Cultural Objects.

The Cambodian government began taking steps to follow its commitments to the 1970 Convention starting in the 1990s after two decades of conflict. The Royal Government of Cambodia, established in 1993, founded the French-trained Cultural Heritage Police in 1994, charged with guarding the Angkor region. The Authority for the Protection and Management of Angkor and the Region of Siem Reap (APSARA Authority) and the Ministry of Culture and Fine Arts were established the following year.⁸⁵ ⁸⁶ By 1996, parliament passed the Law on the Protection of Cultural Heritage, formalizing the criminalization of looting and authorized exports.

After adopting the 1970 Convention, the United States quickly passed laws to “coordinate core United States interests” in “protecting and preserving international cultural property” and “preventing and disrupting looting and illegal trade and trafficking in international cultural property, particularly exchanges that provide revenue to terrorist and criminal organizations” as a part of Convention on Cultural Property Implementation Act of 1983.⁸⁷ In doing so, the government assigned the disruption of trafficking networks to customs officers, enforced by the Executive Branch.

⁸⁵ Thomas R. Kline, “The Lawyers’ Committee for Cultural Heritage Preservation,” 3.

⁸⁶ “Law on the Protection of Cultural Heritage,” Wipo Lex, January 25, 1996, <https://www.wipo.int/wipolex/en/text/223193>.

⁸⁷ “Public Law 97-446-Jan. 12, 1983,” Office of the Law Revision Counsel (United States Code, n.d.), <https://uscode.house.gov/statviewer.htm?volume=96&page=2351#>.

Today, the Department of Homeland Security's Homeland Security Investigations (HSI), as a part of the Cultural Property, Art, and Antiquities program (CPAA), is charged with leading investigations of "crimes involving the import, export, and distribution of stolen or looted cultural property."⁸⁸ HSI has worked alongside government agencies to return over 12,000 cultural objects to 30 source countries since 2007. In 2003, Congress authorized the creation of the Cultural Antiquities Task Force (CATF), a working group under the Cultural Heritage Coordinating Committee led by the State Department's Cultural Heritage Center (CHC). The CATF, consisting of the Department of Defense, Department of State, Department of Interior, Department of the Treasury, Department of Homeland Security, and the Department of Justice, promotes inter-agency law enforcement coordination, training on U.S. and international law and agreements, and capacity building for foreign law enforcement and heritage managers.

Repatriation efforts between the United States to Cambodia have also been reliant on bilateral diplomatic agreements. Memoranda of Understanding (MoUs) have been a key intergovernmental tool to facilitate cooperation between the two countries to combat antiquities trafficking and to promote repatriations since 2003. "Pursuant to the 1970 UNESCO Convention," the 2003 five-year MoU aimed to restrict imports of certain archaeological materials from the 6th century to the 16th century from a 1999 "designated list."⁸⁹ As described in Article I, the United States would return these objects to the Cambodian Government, as well as any other material without an export license. The Cultural Property MoU would be amended

⁸⁸ "Written Testimony of Ice Homeland Security Investigations International Operations Assistant Director Raymond Villanueva for a House Committee on Financial Services, Subcommittee on Terrorism and Illicit Finance Hearing Titled 'The Exploitation of Cultural Property: Examining Illicit Activity in the Antiquities and Art Trade,'" United States Department of Homeland Security, June 23, 2017, <https://www.dhs.gov/news/2017/06/23/written-testimony-ice-house-financial-services-subcommittee-terrorism-and-illicit>.

⁸⁹ United States Department of State, *Memorandum of Understanding Between the Government of the United States of America and the Government of the Kingdom of Cambodia Concerning the Imposition of Import Restrictions on Khmer Archeological Material*, (2003), https://eca.state.gov/files/bureau/cambodia_tias.pdf

three times over the next two decades (2008, 2013, and 2018), expanding the date range of objects to 1500 BCE to 1600 CE and increasing cooperation in antiquities-related investigations.

The cooperation between the two countries, and their compliance with the 1970 UNESCO Convention, has led to numerous successful repatriations since the signing of the 2003 Cultural Property MoU, especially of objects linked to Latchford. The one of the most significant joint repatriation efforts began in 2013 when United States officials filed a lawsuit on behalf of the Cambodian Government in federal court against Sotheby's, one of the world's leading auction houses, to seize the renowned Duryodhana statue, which was to be sold for \$3 million. Accusing Sotheby's of knowing the statue's looted origins before its import into the United States and linking it to Latchford through his various email exchanges with different auction houses and buyers, the United States Attorney's Office for the Southern District of New York managed to force Sotheby's into a settlement, giving up the statue and returning it to Cambodia. The next year, a televised repatriation ceremony was held for the Duryodhana, along with two other related sculptures, in Phnom Penh. It was at this event, along with a traditional apsara dance performance, floral presentations, and prayers, when Deputy Prime Minister Sok An presented US Embassy Deputy Chief of Mission Jeff Daigle with a medal of honor in recognition of American efforts and cooperation in the repatriation of the three statues.

More recently, however, with the release of the Pandora Papers, there has been an uptick in repatriations with greater appreciation for US-Cambodia relations. On June 13th, 2022, Assistant Secretary of State for East Asian and Pacific Affairs Daniel J. Kritenbrink visited the National Museum of Cambodia for a repatriation ceremony with US Ambassador W. Patrick Murphy, where the Cambodian Minister of Culture and Fine Arts Phoeurng Sackona greeted them. In one of the largest returns of antiquities between the United States and Cambodia, 27

statues were returned with the combined efforts of the DOJ, Manhattan District Attorney, HSI, the US Embassy in Phnom Penh, and the Cambodian Ministry of Culture and Fine Arts (MCFA). With over 100 sculptures repatriated since the 2003 MoU, Krittenbrink remarked that the event was a “testament to the strong relationship between the United States and the Ministry of Culture and Fine Arts.”⁹⁰

Months later, SDNY announced the return of another 30 looted antiquities linked to Latchford, including the famous Skanda on a Peacock and the three-ton Ganesha statue. Another ceremony hosted in New York brought together the Cambodian Ambassador to the United States Keo Chhea, the Assistant Secretary of State for Cultural and Educational Affairs Lee Satterfield, and other representatives from the MCFA legal team, various US government agencies, and civil society. As announced by Satterfield, “people-to-people diplomacy” has now become a “strategic and critical component of our US foreign policy and preserving our shared cultural heritage is a vital part of these efforts.”⁹¹

Many welcome the growing frequency of returns. For advocates in the Cambodian government, such as Ambassador Chea, the matter is of national heritage. In a Newsweek opinion piece, Chea argued that Cambodia, as a nation, “cannot countenance theft of [its] heritage.” He added, “We are happy to share our cultural wealth, but ownership cannot be in dispute” and that “these items belong to the people of Cambodia.”⁹² This argument stems from the fact that a large portion of the Cambodian population see themselves as the descendants of the Angkor Empire and its predecessors. Bradley Gordon, lawyer for the MCFA, put it simply:

⁹⁰ U.S. Mission Cambodia, “Cultural Artifacts Handover Ceremony,” U.S. Embassy in Cambodia (U.S. Embassy in Cambodia, July 14, 2022), <https://kh.usembassy.gov/cultural-artifacts-handover-ceremony/>.

⁹¹ *U.S. Attorney Announces Return of 30 Looted Antiquities to Kingdom of Cambodia, Southern District of New York* (US Department of Justice, 2022),

<https://www.justice.gov/usao-sdny/video/us-attorney-announces-return-30-looted-antiquities-kingdom-cambodia>.

⁹² Keo Chhea, “Cambodia Wants Its Stolen Treasures Back-and Will Fight in Court for Them,” Newsweek (Newsweek, August 10, 2022),

<https://www.newsweek.com/cambodia-wants-its-stolen-treasures-back-will-fight-court-them-opinion-1732606>.

“It’s as if their grandmother’s jewelry was stolen.”⁹³ Others in government take a more spiritual approach. Minister Sackona’s pre-recorded speech at SDNY described repatriations of looted antiquities as “the return of the souls of Cambodia’s ancestors.”⁹⁴ Working with investigators, former looters have also expressed their regret over their actions, including Toek Tik, who told the New York Times that he wants “the gods to come home now.”⁹⁵ This argument adds a spiritual and religious component, that the ancestors still reside in sculpture.

The practice, in fact, is one of the lasting religious links between Ancient and Modern Cambodia. It was ancestor worship that “attached to forebears by the Khmer—an importance still attested by the continuing role of *Neak Ta*, or ancestor spirits, in Cambodian life—can be seen in this temple’s inscriptions invoking male and female ancestors in association with deities.”⁹⁶ Today, the Neak Ta (territorial guardian spirits) is the “founding “grandfather” and “grandmother” of a given community and also the protector of “good” people in its territory,” and are still linked to sculpture.⁹⁷

The US has taken a clear stance in the moral debate behind the return of looted antiquities. Language surrounding the returns is commonly littered with similar rhetoric to Ambassador Chea. In the words of HSI Acting Special-Agent-in-Charge Ricky J. Patel,

*These antiquities we return today were ripped from their country. Beyond their extraordinary beauty and craftsmanship, many are sacred artifacts prized from temples and palaces to be smuggled across borders and peddled by those seeking profit, without any regard to the intangible value they have to the people of their homeland... These artifacts belong to the people of Cambodia, and we are proud to participate in their recovery and their return home.*⁹⁸

⁹³ Tom Mashberg, “Cambodia Says the Met Museum Has Dozens of Its Looted Antiquities,” The New York Times (The New York Times, October 24, 2021),

<https://www.nytimes.com/2021/10/24/arts/cambodia-met-museum-looted-antiquities.html>.

⁹⁴ U.S. Attorney Announces Return of 30 Looted Antiquities to Kingdom of Cambodia

⁹⁵ Mashberg, “Cambodia Says the Met Museum Has Dozens of Its Looted Antiquities.”

⁹⁶ Jessup, *Masterpieces of the National Museum of Cambodia: An Introduction to the Collection*, 12.

⁹⁷ Miura, “From ‘Originals’ to Replicas: Diverse Significance of Khmer Statues,” 271-72.

⁹⁸ “Southern District of New York,” *Southern District of New York* (U.S. Department of Justice, August 8, 2022), <https://www.justice.gov/usao-sdny/pr/us-attorney-announces-return-30-looted-antiquities-kingdom-cambodia>.

Dialogue from both the United States and Cambodia, describing “souls of ancestors and gods,” ownership, heritage, the idea of a nation, has intensified as more and more Cambodian antiquities are repatriated. In doing so, under both legal and moral obligation, the American government has shown a strong willingness and commitment to cooperating with Cambodia in the name of repatriating stolen antiquities. However, as Thompson argues, just as the political and the religious were intertwined in Ancient Cambodia, they are “in some ways inseparable still.”⁹⁹ Geopolitics plays a key role in American efforts and, as the following will explore, it is a matter of foreign policy, grand strategy, and soft power.

⁹⁹ Ashley Thompson, interview by Cameron Cheam Shapiro, September 12, 2022.

II

The Love-Hate Triangle

Politics play a significant role in antiquities repatriations and, in the context of US-Cambodian return, three major players are key to the equation. American engagement with countries in the Indo-Pacific, such as Cambodia, is also centered around its adversaries like China, who remains influential in Southeast Asian affairs. To understand the potential geopolitics behind US-Cambodia repatriation efforts, this chapter examines the historical context between rivaling superpowers, current disputes, and a smaller nation caught in the middle. This chapter also dives into the military, political, and economic relations between the United States, China, and Cambodia, dissecting foreign policy goals, their means of achieving them, and what might come next. The first part of the chapter focuses on the battle between two giants, the US and China, before exploring Cambodia's dependency on Beijing, and then how it has affected US-Cambodia relations as a whole. The chapter concludes by predicting where relations might be headed next.

1. The United States on China

*China is the only country with both the intent to reshape the international order and, increasingly, the economic, diplomatic, military, and technological power to do it. Beijing's vision would move us away from the universal values that have sustained so much of the world's progress over the past 75 years.*¹⁰⁰

US Secretary of State Anthony Blinken
George Washington University, May 26, 2022

¹⁰⁰ "The Administration's Approach to the People's Republic of China," U.S. Department of State (U.S. Department of State, August 19, 2022), <https://www.state.gov/the-administrations-approach-to-the-peoples-republic-of-china/>.

American engagement in Asia has picked up steam over the past couple decades. The US is now contending for global hegemony with China, the world's second largest economy and a rival nuclear superpower. Spectators see that conflict is bound to occur as rising superpowers often contest those already in power, a phenomenon Graham Allison refers to as the "Thucydides Trap."¹⁰¹

Following the end of the Second World War, the United States saw the rise of a threat to the East, fearing the formation of a Communist Bloc and Soviet expansionism. The ensuing Cold War spelled out the creation of new military alliances, including NATO, and countless proxy wars in countries such as Korea, Vietnam, and Afghanistan, but no direct superpower conflict ever occurred.

Still, following the collapse of the USSR in 1991, the US emerged supreme in the fight for global hegemony, the world's largest economic and military power. Today, however, American foreign policy experts predict a "New Cold War" era is coming, one where challenges to US interests "may actually be greater than those of the 20th century" from new adversaries.¹⁰² China is now the focal point of American foreign policy, but this was not always the case. The American infatuation with China is relatively new, the origins of which began with the Obama Administration's "Pivot to Asia."¹⁰³

On November 17th, 2011, in his remarks to the Australian Parliament, President Barack Obama announced a shift in American foreign policy goals, shifting US engagement from the Middle East to the Indo-Pacific. "In the Asia Pacific in the 21st century, the United States of

¹⁰¹ Graham T Allison, "Destined for War?," *The National Interest*, 2017, <https://www.jstor.org/stable/26557386>, 11.

¹⁰² Elliott Abrams, "The New Cold War," Council on Foreign Relations (Council on Foreign Relations, March 4, 2022), <https://www.cfr.org/blog/new-cold-war-0>.

¹⁰³ Kenneth G Lieberthal, "The American Pivot to Asia," Brookings (Brookings, July 28, 2016), <https://www.brookings.edu/articles/the-american-pivot-to-asia/>.

America is all in,” he declared.¹⁰⁴ US officials at the time argued that this pivot was to draw attention Eastward to the increasing economic and military capabilities *across* Asia and not to focus on any particular country. As Former Deputy Assistant Secretary of Defense Janine Davidson explains, “China is clearly a growing regional power, but other issues, such as the threat of North Korea, the proliferation of weapons of mass destruction, terrorism, piracy and increased threat of natural disasters, all threatened the stability of the region and global trade.”¹⁰⁵ The administration’s “Pivot to Asia” included new diplomatic, economic, and military measures to assure American engagement in the region. The US embraced new regional structures, joining the East Asia Summit, negotiated the Trans-Pacific Partnership (TPP) to facilitate greater economic integration, and increased the American naval presence in the Pacific. To the Chinese government at the time, the United States was doing “everything it [could] to retard or disrupt China’s rise,” attempting to sabotage its heavy engagement across the continent.¹⁰⁶ As Xi Jinping replaced Hu Jintao as President in 2012, China began to forcefully propel itself onto the world stage, taking a more active role in global affairs. Even still, Obama hoped to engage with Xi at the Sunnylands Summit the following year to ease rising tensions. By the time President Donald Trump arrived in office, China had already become a much larger component to the reorientation of American foreign policy.

US-China relations were more confrontational under the Trump administration, following on Trump’s campaign promises to “rip up international trade deals and start an unrelenting offensive against Chinese economic practices.”¹⁰⁷ In doing so, Trump withdrew from the TPP in

¹⁰⁴ Office of the Press Secretary, “Remarks by President Obama to the Australian Parliament,” National Archives and Records Administration (The White House, November 17, 2011), <https://obamawhitehouse.archives.gov/the-press-office/2011/11/17/remarks-president-obama-australian-parliament>.

¹⁰⁵ Janine Davidson, *American Journal of Chinese Studies* 21 (2014): <http://www.jstor.org/stable/44289339>, 78.

¹⁰⁶ Lieberthal, “The American Pivot to Asia.”

¹⁰⁷ Nick Corasaniti, Alexander Burns, and Binyamin Appelbaum, “Donald Trump Vows to Rip up Trade Deals and Confront China,” *The New York Times* (The New York Times, June 28, 2016), <https://www.nytimes.com/2016/06/29/us/politics/donald-trump-trade-speech.html>.

2017 and began implementing \$34 billion-worth of trade tariffs on China, despite Xi's visit to Mar-a-lago that year.¹⁰⁸ The US and China were now officially engaged in "strategic competition," a new era of "great power competition."¹⁰⁹ ¹¹⁰ In Vice-President Mike Pence's 2018 remarks on US foreign policy towards China, he expressed American concerns over the theft of American intellectual property, estimated to have been approximately valued between \$225 billion to \$600 billion a year in 2017, Chinese naval aggression in the South China Sea, the oppression of ethnic minorities and the freedom of expression, human rights violations, its "debt diplomacy" through China's global Belt and Roads Initiative, cyber attacks, and propaganda.¹¹¹

¹¹² American foreign policy was aimed to reduce China's influence and to protect American national interests.

Heading into the presidency of Joseph Biden, the US remained in "strategic competition" with China. In October 2022, the White House's National Security Strategy (NSS) outlined the American foreign policy agenda towards its adversaries. Biden saw China as a threat not just to national interests, but to something much greater. According to the NSS, the People's Republic of China "habors the intention and, increasingly, the capacity to reshape the international order in favor of one that tilts the global playing field to its benefit," attempting to "undermine democracy and export a model of governance marked by repression at home and coercion

¹⁰⁸ "United States Trade Representative," *United States Trade Representative* (Executive Office of the President, July 6, 2018),

<https://ustr.gov/about-us/policy-offices/press-office/press-releases/2018/july/ustr-releases-product-exclusion>.

¹⁰⁹ "United States Strategic Approach to the People's Republic of China," United States Strategic Approach to the People's Republic of China § (2020),

<https://trumpwhitehouse.archives.gov/wp-content/uploads/2020/05/U.S.-Strategic-Approach-to-The-Peoples-Republic-of-China-Report-5.24v1.pdf>.

¹¹⁰ "Remarks by Vice President Pence on the Administration's Policy Toward China," National Archives and Records Administration (The White House, October 4, 2018),

<https://trumpwhitehouse.archives.gov/briefings-statements/remarks-vice-president-pence-administrations-policy-toward-china/>.

¹¹¹ The Editorial Board, "America Is Struggling to Counter China's Intellectual Property Theft," *Financial Times* (Financial Times, April 18, 2022), <https://www.ft.com/content/1d13ab71-bffd-4d63-a0bf-9e9bdfc33c39>.

¹¹² "Remarks by Vice President Pence on the Administration's Policy Toward China."

abroad.”¹¹³ Biden’s foreign policy is currently dedicated to fighting authoritarianism with a coalition of like-minded states, framing the struggle for global hegemony as a battle for the fate of democracy. The way forward, as the document explains, is to strengthen the United States’ position domestically, to collaborate with allies and partners, and to “compete responsibly” with China. This idealist world view is in stark contrast from that of Trump’s *Real Politik*, which only saw China as a rival threatening American security. Nevertheless, confronting China has remained central to American foreign policy for over a decade and has escalated over the past three presidencies.

American concerns over the PRC continue to mount for multiple reasons. These include China’s close ties to Russia, asymmetric economic practices, cybersecurity, human rights violations, espionage, but one major factor to the growing animosity between the two superpowers has been regional security. Other than disputes over the Island of Taiwan, China has also claimed sovereignty of approximately 90% of the South China Sea, a region with bountiful natural gas deposits and other resources.¹¹⁴ In doing so, it challenges the claims of other states such as the Philippines, Indonesia, Malaysia, and Vietnam. Still, Beijing has sought to expand its military presence in these maritime regions, ignoring rulings by the Permanent Court of Arbitration in favor of the Philippines and maneuvering aircraft carriers and other naval vessels across these disputed waters as a “show of force.”^{115 116}

¹¹³ “National Security Strategy,” National Security Strategy § (2022), <https://www.whitehouse.gov/wp-content/uploads/2022/10/Biden-Harris-Administrations-National-Security-Strategy-10.2022.pdf>.

¹¹⁴ Ann Marie Murphy, “America Is Back? Opportunities and Obstacles to Restoring U.S. Credibility in Southeast Asia,” *Asia Policy* 28, no. 4 (2021): <https://doi.org/10.1353/asp.2021.0060>, 69.

¹¹⁵ James Pearson and Greg Torode, “Exclusive: Satellite Images Reveal Show of Force by Chinese Navy in South China Sea,” Reuters (Thomson Reuters, March 27, 2018), <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-china-defence/exclusive-satellite-images-reveal-show-of-force-by-chinese-navy-in-south-china-sea-idUSKBN1H3135>.

¹¹⁶ Center for Preventive Action, “Territorial Disputes in the South China Sea,” Council on Foreign Relations (Council on Foreign Relations, May 4, 2022), <https://www.cfr.org/global-conflict-tracker/conflict/territorial-disputes-south-china-sea>.

The United States sees China's expanded military activity as a threat to its interests in the region. In the words of Secretary Blinken, "nowhere is the rules-based maritime order under greater threat than in the South China Sea."¹¹⁷ ASEAN security and autonomy from Chinese influence remains vital to the United States, which seeks to maintain the freedom of navigation throughout the region's strategic sea lines of communication. The US has military alliances with both Thailand and the Philippines dating back to 1951 and lasting security agreements with Singapore, Vietnam, Malaysia, and Indonesia, and other countries in the Quadrilateral Security Defense (QUAD), such as Australia, Japan, and India. Still, ASEAN has been unable to find consensus on Beijing's claims, failing to reach an official statement twice in 2012 and 2016. Member states, such as the Philippines, blame China's closest allies in the region, accusing them of being Beijing's puppet states. The most disruptive in these efforts has been Cambodia, a "loyalist of the big country C," who has repeatedly blocked and vetoed the mentioning of the disputes.¹¹⁸

2. Chinese Influence in Cambodia

Cambodia's role in the "paralysis of ASEAN" is largely attributed to the influence of China.¹¹⁹ In 2012, just before ASEAN talks surrounding the South China Sea were to commence, PRC President Hu Jintao visited Phnom Penh and asked Prime Minister Hun Sen to not proceed "too fast" in their discussions. In doing so, he offered to double bilateral trade to \$5 billion and increased aid.¹²⁰ To no surprise, an ASEAN agreement was never reached.

¹¹⁷ Murphy, "America Is Back? Opportunities and Obstacles to Restoring U.S. Credibility in Southeast Asia," 69.

¹¹⁸ "Cambodia Blocks ASEAN Consensus for Second Time," Today Online (Mediacorp Pte, July 25, 2016), <https://www.todayonline.com/world/asia/no-asean-consensus-s-china-sea-despite-rounds-talks>.

¹¹⁹ Ibid.

¹²⁰ Prak Chan Thul, "Hu Wants Cambodia Help on China Sea Dispute, Pledges Aid," Reuters (Thomson Reuters, March 31, 2012), <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-cambodia-china-idUSBRE82U04Y20120331>.

China's influence in Cambodia is no recent phenomenon; its bilateral relations are historic and stretch as far back as the beginning of the post-Independence era. Premier Zhou Enlai and Prince Sihanouk first befriended each other in 1955 at a conference in Indonesia. Just three years later, China recognized the Kingdom diplomatically, which became the first noncommunist country to receive official aid from the PRC.¹²¹ ¹²² By 1960, the two countries had signed a treaty of friendship and mutual non-aggression and, when the 1970 coup left Sihanouk exiled, it was Beijing who offered him refuge. Lon Nol and his pro-American forces fell to the Khmer Rouge soon after and President Mao Zedong built a close relationship with Pol Pot and his Democratic Kampuchea. The Khmer Rouge adopted ultra-maoist agricultural policies, inspired by the Great Leap Forward and the Cultural Revolution, while enjoying the financial backing of the PRC, who also vehemently opposed Vietnamese forces. Once the regime fell in 1979, Vietnam occupied the country into the late 1980s, levying a ban on Chinese culture, and by the time of their withdrawal, a Vietnamese-backed government was established. While a multi-party system was under construction, the Kingdom cut its ties to Taiwan and, since then, has been a firm supporter of the One-China policy. But, it was after “the Second Prime Minister” Hun Sen led a successful military coup against “First Prime Minister” Norodom Ranariddh in 1997, that the US suspended economic and military ties, leaving the door open for further cooperation with China.¹²³

China acknowledged Cambodia's new government and delegations began drafting memoranda of understanding surrounding trade and investment. As the US severed ties, Chinese

¹²¹ Michael Leifer, “Cambodia Looks to China,” *The World Today* 20, no. 1 (January 1964): <https://www.jstor.org/stable/40393529>, 6.

¹²² Paul Marks, “China's Cambodia Strategy,” *The US Army War College Quarterly: Parameters* 30, no. 3 (2000), <https://doi.org/10.55540/0031-1723.1993>.

¹²³ Sigfrido Burgos and Sophal Ear, “China's Strategic Interests in Cambodia: Influence and Resources,” *Asian Survey* 50, no. 3 (January 2010): <https://doi.org/10.1525/as.2010.50.3.615>, 617.

investment in Cambodia tripled from 1997 to 1998.¹²⁴ Hun Sen would later thank China for its “just and fair stance on the Cambodian issue” and for “adher[ing] to the principle of peaceful coexistence...”¹²⁵ Relations continued to grow when Hun Sen took a fruitful visit to Beijing in 1999, acquiring over \$218 million in aid and infrastructure loans. China would also supply the Kingdom with military vehicles, equipment, and naval vessels. From 2004-21, 101 agricultural, transport, and power infrastructure was funded through investment from the Chinese government and made up 43.9% of total foreign direct investment (FDI) between 1994-2021.¹²⁶ Cambodia was also one of the first to partake in China’s Belt and Road Initiative starting in 2013 and has enjoyed high annual GDP growth rates, an average of 7.7% a year from 1998-2019. In the wake of the COVID-19 pandemic, China has also donated vast amounts of vaccines, with which Cambodia was able to reach a 90% immunization rate.¹²⁷ The turn of the millenia has served to strengthen bilateral ties, while increasing Cambodia’s political, military, and economic dependence on China.

Xi Jinping has publicly stated that the two countries are “good neighbors, real friends who are loyal to each other.”¹²⁸ Cambodia, supporting a large Sino-Khmer minority, remains a regional partner and the Chinese government hopes to promote greater cooperation for what they see as a mutually-beneficial future. Critics, such as Sigfrido Burgos and Sophal Ear, however, argue that China foreign policy objectives surrounding Cambodia involve exacting “greater

¹²⁴ Marks, “China's Cambodia Strategy.”

¹²⁵ Ibid.

¹²⁶ Chanrith Ngin, “The Undetermined Costs and Benefits of Cambodia's Engagement with China's Belt and Road Initiative,” FULCRUM (ISEAS-Yusof Ishak Institute, November 29, 2022), <https://fulcrum.sg/the-undetermined-costs-and-benefits-of-cambodias-engagement-with-chinas-belt-and-road-initiative/>.

¹²⁷ Ibid.

¹²⁸ Prak Chan Thul, “Chinese President Xi Jinping Visits Loyal Friend Cambodia,” Reuters (Thomson Reuters, October 13, 2016), <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-china-cambodia/chinese-president-xi-jinping-visits-loyal-friend-cambodia-idUSKCN12D0NV>.

influence in the region and securing abundant natural resources” through a “charm offensive.”¹²⁹ Cambodia plays a major role in “security issues in the South China Sea... safeguarding Beijing’s claims to the disputed Spratly Islands and their resources.”¹³⁰ China also sees Cambodia as a “strategic, sea-accessible location from which to launch a response” to any Taiwan-related matters.¹³¹ Geographically, militarily, and politically, Cambodia is a valuable asset for China in regional disputes and potential conflicts.

Economic engagement is a key component of China’s “charm offensive,” but a drawback of such dependence, as some critics have highlighted, is the growing risk of a debt trap. Ear shares the common critique that, with 50% of all public debt owned by China, the PRC has economic and political leverage to encourage greater pro-China advocacy.¹³² The legitimacy of the fear, however, others argue, is questionable. Chanrith Ngin argues that the amount of debt owed to China is sustainable, with total foreign public debt only amounting to 24.9% of GDP in 2022. He further claims that there is a low risk of default even with the economic turmoils of the pandemic.¹³³ Debt trap diplomacy aside, China’s economic foothold in Cambodia remains strong, making up roughly half of total foreign investment in the country, granting China influence in Cambodian foreign policy, namely in issues relating to the South China Sea and ASEAN.¹³⁴

Another sign of China’s influence in Cambodia, other than shaping its foreign policy towards regional disputes, has been suspicions of a growing military presence. On June 22, 2019, the Wall Street Journal reported that US officials discovered a draft agreement between

¹²⁹ Burgos and Ear, “China's Strategic Interests in Cambodia: Influence and Resources,” 617.

¹³⁰ Ibid.

¹³¹ Ibid.

¹³² Sun Narin, “Cambodia Seeks New Financing from Beijing amid Fears of 'Debt Trap',” VOA (Voice of America (VOA News), February 7, 2023),

<https://www.voanews.com/a/cambodia-seeks-more-loans-from-beijing-amid-fears-of-debt-trap-/6943062.html>.

¹³³ Ngin, “The Undetermined Costs and Benefits of Cambodia's Engagement with China's Belt and Road Initiative.”

¹³⁴ Ibid.

Cambodia and China that would give Chinese forces exclusive rights to use parts of the Ream Naval Base, a US-funded naval installation near the port city of Sihanoukville.¹³⁵ The 190-acre naval base, located 40 miles from a large airport constructed by a private Chinese firm, would be able to “post military personnel, store weapons, and berth warships.”¹³⁶ The two countries involved have denied the existence of such an agreement. Although admitting to Chinese-financed renovations, the Cambodian government has claimed that it “does not permit any foreign military base on its sovereign territory.”¹³⁷ The following year, the Washington Post claimed that Western officials had gathered intelligence that China had already begun construction on the naval base, potentially making Ream one of two of China’s overseas naval outposts and the first in the Indo-Pacific. Although demolition of the base has been captured on satellite footage, the Prime Minister has declared the issue “fake news.”¹³⁸ If true, however, these reports of a possible foreign naval presence in Cambodia demonstrate China’s powerful influence in the country, no longer shaping ASEAN decision-making via economic coercion and political security, but threatening regional security.

3. US-Cambodia Relations

News coverage surrounding Cambodia’s political and economic dependence on China, as well as the demolition of the Ream Naval Base, does not bode well for US-Cambodia relations.

¹³⁵ Jeremy Page, Gordon Lubold, and Rob Taylor, “Deal for Naval Outpost in Cambodia Furthers China's Quest for Military Network,” *The Wall Street Journal* (Dow Jones & Company, July 22, 2019), <https://www.wsj.com/articles/secret-deal-for-chinese-naval-outpost-in-cambodia-raises-u-s-fears-of-beijings-ambitions-11563732482>.

¹³⁶ Ibid.

¹³⁷ Sokvy Rim, “Cambodia Has Little to Gain from Hosting a Chinese Military Presence,” *The Diplomat* (The Diplomat, June 11, 2022), <https://thediplomat.com/2022/06/cambodia-has-little-to-gain-from-hosting-a-chinese-military-presence/>.

¹³⁸ Cate Cadell and Ellen Nakashima, “China Secretly Building Naval Facility in Cambodia, Western Officials Say,” *The Washington Post* (WP Company, June 7, 2022), <https://www.washingtonpost.com/national-security/2022/06/06/cambodia-china-navy-base-ream/>.

Alarmed United States officials worry that Cambodia is becoming a Chinese pawn in Southeast Asia, immobilizing ASEAN in the South China Sea and allowing for the extension of China's military capabilities in the Gulf of Thailand.

During a visit by Deputy Secretary of State Wendy Sherman in 2021, she raised questions over the demolition of the American-funded installation and urged the government to “maintain an independent and balanced foreign policy,” further warning that a Chinese presence would “negatively impact U.S.-Cambodia relations.”¹³⁹ Just over a week later, the American defense attaché in the US Embassy in Phnom Penh was first denied full access to Ream, to which the United States responded by sanctioning involved Cambodian officials.¹⁴⁰ In December, the US was completely banned from the base. On August 4th, 2022, Anthony Blinken visited Phnom Penh and expressed his concerns over the transparency about Ream, warning that “an exclusive presence would risk damaging Cambodia's sovereignty, regional security, and ASEAN unity.”¹⁴¹ During his visit months later, President Biden repeated his administration's worries to no avail. The string of US visits proved fruitless as the Cambodian government has continuously denied the allegations. As a result, relations have worsened with the United States, which remains adamant about their concerns.

Suspicious activity at the Ream Naval Base and concerns over Chinese influence, however, have only added to already turbulent diplomatic relations. The US played an important role in the 1991 Paris Peace Agreements, which helped formally end the civil war and construct

¹³⁹ “US Department of State,” *US Department of State*, June 1, 2021,

<https://www.state.gov/deputy-secretary-of-state-wendy-shermans-visit-to-cambodia/>.

¹⁴⁰ Prak Chan Thul, “U.S. Says Denied Full Access to Cambodia Naval Base during Visit,” ed. Ed Davies, Reuters (Thomson Reuters, June 11, 2021),

<https://www.reuters.com/world/asia-pacific/us-says-denied-full-access-cambodia-naval-base-during-visit-2021-06-11/>.

¹⁴¹ David Brunstrom and Martin Petty, “Blinken Urged Transparency from Cambodia PM about Chinese Base Activity - U.S. Statement,” ed. Angus MacSwan, Reuters (Thomson Reuters, August 4, 2022),

<https://www.reuters.com/world/blinken-urged-transparency-cambodia-pm-about-chinese-base-activity-us-statement-2022-08-04/>.

Cambodia's democratic institutions. Two years later, the Royal Government of Cambodia was established. However, with the deterioration of relations following the 1997 coup, Congress passed the into law a ban on government-to-government assistance. It was not until 2007 when the prohibition was lifted after various constitutional reforms strengthening democratic institutions were introduced. Politically, strengthening Cambodian democracy has been a vital component to US engagement. Today, the US has also shown concerns over the Cambodian People's Party's (CPP) repeated attacks on civil society and democracy, and its abysmal track record for human rights and corruption.

In 2017, the government cracked down on a union of opposing parties known as the Cambodian National Rescue Party (CNRP), which had grown in popularity since the last national elections, winning 44.6% of the popular vote in 2013. The Cambodian Supreme Court ruled in favor of dissolving CNRP with Hun Sen accusing the party of "conspiring with the United States to overthrow the government," a statement to which US Ambassador William Heidt called "inaccurate, misleading, and baseless."¹⁴² Hundreds of opposition members and activists were detained, and charged with "crimes against the state," including CNRP leader Kem Sokha.¹⁴³ At the same time, the Government ordered the closure of human rights NGOs, radio stations, and other news media, including the Cambodia Daily, also accused of colluding with the US. Voice of America, as well as Radio Free Asia, were both closed. By the end of the election, CPP had won 77.5% of the vote and all 125 parliamentary seats.¹⁴⁴ Hun Sen's crackdown on democracy, civil society, and news media, just as the 2018 elections were to take place, prompted swift and harsh responses from the West.

¹⁴² Thomas G. Lum, "Congressional Research Service," Congressional Research Service § (2022), <https://crsreports.congress.gov/product/pdf/R/R47311/2>.

¹⁴³ Ibid, 6.

¹⁴⁴ "Cambodia Election: Ruling Party Claims Landslide in Vote with No Main Opposition," BBC News (BBC, July 30, 2018), <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-asia-44999358>.

The US imposed visa restrictions on government officials involved in the crackdown, issuing a White House statement that the 2018 election would not be “legitimate, free, or fair.”¹⁴⁵

¹⁴⁶ In 2021, Congress passed the Cambodian Democracy Act, imposing sanctions on individuals “responsible for acts to undermine democracy in Cambodia... directed at senior Cambodian government, military, or security forces officials responsible for such actions,” most in accordance with the Global Magnitsky Human Rights Accountability Act.¹⁴⁷ Phay Siphon, a spokesperson for the Cambodian government declared the act “an anti-Cambodia law as well as anti-good cooperation between Cambodia and the US.”¹⁴⁸ But as a consequence of such actions, Cambodia was pushed politically closer to China.

The US remains in a difficult position. Democratic backsliding in Cambodia, rampant corruption, and a worsening human rights record have hindered US-Cambodia relations over the past two decades. The Kingdom is, indeed, an authoritarian, kleptocratic de facto one-party state with a Corruption Perception Index (CPI) score of 24/100 in 2022, within the top 30 most corrupt countries in the world.¹⁴⁹ With increasing economic reliance on Beijing and the potential of a Chinese military presence at the Ream Naval Base, however, the US wants to work with Cambodia to pull it out of China’s sphere of influence. How can the United States promote democratic values in an increasingly oppressive state, while rebuilding its relationship? Can

¹⁴⁵ Leonie Kijewski, “US to Issue Visa Sanctions against Cambodian Officials ‘Undermining Democracy,’” The Phnom Penh Post (Post Media Co, December 7, 2017), <https://www.phnompenhpost.com/national-politics/us-issue-visa-sanctions-against-cambodian-officials-undermining-democracy>.

¹⁴⁶ Amy Sawitta Lefevre and Prak Chan Thul, “Cambodia Faces U.S., EU Action after Banning Opposition,” Reuters (Thomson Reuters, November 17, 2017), <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-cambodia-politics/cambodia-faces-u-s-eu-action-after-banning-opposition-idUSKBN1DH033>.

¹⁴⁷ U.S. Congress, Senate, *Cambodia Democracy Act of 2001*, HR 4686, 117th Cong., 1st sess., introduced in House July 26, 2021, <https://www.congress.gov/bill/117th-congress/house-bill/4686>.

¹⁴⁸ Kimseng Men, “U.S. House Passes Cambodia Sanctions Bill,” VOA (VOA Cambodia, July 27, 2018), <https://www.voacambodia.com/a/us-house-passes-cambodia-sanctions-bill/4502948.html>.

¹⁴⁹ “2022 Corruption Perceptions Index,” Transparency International, 2022, <https://www.transparency.org/en/cpi/2022>.

US-Cambodia relations be saved? Cambodian foreign policy makers seem to be asking similar questions.

According to those close to the Cambodian government, such as Raymond Leos, a former senior parliamentary advisor to the National Assembly and USAID consultant, Cambodian foreign policy officials also worry about their deteriorating relationship with the US and their over-reliance on China. Leos believes that Hun Sen's foreign policy today is similar to that of Sihanouk, aiming to straddle the line between China and the United States during the Vietnam War.¹⁵⁰

Beginning in 1954, Sihanouk's government adopted neutrality in the conflict and, as a non-combatant, received military and economic aid from the US.¹⁵¹ Still, Sihanouk maintained a close relationship with Beijing, eventually rejecting American aid in 1963, refusing to meet US Ambassador Randolph Kidder, and severing ties with Washington altogether. Soon after, however, he restored diplomatic relations in 1969 and allowed Americans to pursue the Viet Cong in underpopulated areas, all in an attempt to "rebalance" and remain neutral. Cambodian foreign policy leading up to 1970 was centered around "hedging," balancing between the United States and China to prevent hyper-dependency on a single country using both cooperative and confrontational measures. Despite popular rhetoric, Leos' view is also shared by other scholars, such as Chhean Vannarith and Thearith Leng from the Asian Vision Institute, who also claim that Hun Sen is attempting to emulate foreign policy of the Sihanouk era.

Cambodia's contemporary foreign policy, although pro-China in many cases, does show signs of hedging and a potential for a rebalancing of relations. In early 2022, having assumed Chairmanship of ASEAN, Hun Sen was criticized for legitimizing the Junta, the ruling military

¹⁵⁰ Raymond Leos, in person conversation, July 26, 2022.

¹⁵¹ Kenton J. Clymer, "The Perils of Neutrality: The Break in U.S.-Cambodian Relations, 1965," *Diplomatic History* 23, no. 4 (1999): <https://doi.org/10.1111/0145-2096.00187>, 613.

dictatorship in Myanmar, with an official visit. The Junta has long been supported by China, which has advocated for its inclusion into the ASEAN-China Special Summit, but after the execution of activists in July of that year, Cambodia refused to invite the Junta to ASEAN meetings. Another major foreign policy measure, conflicting with Chinese objectives, is Cambodia's criticism of the War in Ukraine, beginning in March of 2022.¹⁵² Hun Sen's "clear condemnation" of Russia's invasion of Ukraine earned him praise by US officials and appreciation of President Biden on his visit in November of 2022.¹⁵³ China, on the other hand, has been building its relationship with Russian President Vladimir Putin, committing to a "no limits" friendship just weeks before Russian troops set foot on Ukrainian soil in February of 2022.¹⁵⁴ Some experts see these moves as a means of "diversifying" Cambodia's foreign policy, to "not put all its eggs in only China's basket."¹⁵⁵

Rebuilding US-Cambodia relations is also a matter of economics. In 2021, the United States made up 30% of Cambodia's total export market, a total of \$7.4 billion, most of which includes textiles from the country's garment industry. American FDI in Cambodia only accounts for \$6 million in stock, but, for the past 30 years, the US has provided over \$3 billion in aid.^{156 157}

¹⁵² Prak Chan Thul, "Cambodia PM Condemns Russian Invasion of Ukraine," ed. Kanupriya Kapoor, Reuters (Thomson Reuters, March 28, 2022),

<https://www.reuters.com/world/cambodia-pm-condemns-russian-invasion-ukraine-2022-03-28/>.

¹⁵³ Matt Viser and Yasmeen Abutaleb, "Biden Works to Convince the World U.S. Is Back as Asia Tour Starts," The Washington Post (WP Company, November 15, 2022),

<https://www.washingtonpost.com/politics/2022/11/12/biden-asean-summit-american-leadership/>.

¹⁵⁴ "Why China's Stand on Russia and Ukraine Is Raising Concerns," AP NEWS (Associated Press, February 20, 2023),

<https://apnews.com/article/russia-ukraine-politics-government-antony-blinken-china-6ad43aa87f086acce31a1de63c6caf15>.

¹⁵⁵ Melinda Martinus and Chhay Lim, "Commentary: Can Cambodia's Future Foreign Policy Diverge from China?," Channel News Asia (Mediacorp Pte, March 16, 2023),

<https://www.channelnewsasia.com/commentary/cambodia-china-influence-proxy-myanmar-hun-sen-3348576>.

¹⁵⁶ "Cambodia," United States Trade Representative (Executive Office of the President), accessed May 1, 2023,

<https://ustr.gov/countries-regions/southeast-asia-pacific/Cambodia->

¹⁵⁷ "The United States-Cambodia Relationship," U.S. Department of State (U.S. Department of State, August 3, 2022), <https://www.state.gov/the-united-states-cambodia-relationship/>

China remains Cambodia's most important economic partner, but the US is still vital to the country's economy and development.

Cambodia sees the US as a counterbalance to China, although it is often aggravated by American criticism over its democratic failures and human rights violations. The US recognizes this and if the two countries are to rebuild diplomatic relations, then the US and Cambodia must overcome their "serious lack of strategic trust."¹⁵⁸ There is no easy answer as to how this can be achieved. But if Hun Sen is open to rebuilding US relations as Leos suggests, the US is going to need a more creative foreign policy approach—one that brings together Cambodian and American interests in a non-confrontational, non-China manner. The US cannot compete with China in economic or military influence, but what it does have is the power of restitution. Antiquities repatriations can act as a form of soft power through which the two countries can strive for a mutual goal, a beginning to better relations, for a potential rebalance of Cambodian foreign policy. The next chapter explores the theory behind soft power and how antiquities repatriations can be a valuable tool in reshaping US-Cambodia relations.

¹⁵⁸ *Cambodia-US Relations in the New Era*, New York Southeast Asia Network (Columbia University Weatherhead East Asian Institute, 2021), <https://nysean.org/events/2021/5/6/cambodia-us-relations-in-the-new-era>.

III

Soft Power

Economic and military engagement by the US has proven futile in pulling Cambodia away from China's reach. If the US is to take a different approach to Cambodian engagement other than traditional foreign policy measures, then ensuring a counterbalance will require much creativity. Today, with the rise of global concerns over antiquities trafficking, there is an unprecedented opportunity to rebuild relations. This chapter discusses the theory of "soft power" as described by Harvard Professor and former Assistant Secretary of Defense for International Security Affairs Joseph S. Nye Jr., the importance of the concept and its history, as well as its practical applications. The next section dives into previous attempts at American soft power influence in Cambodia, before exploring how soft power can be used in the context of antiquities repatriations. The chapter then examines popular criticism and weaknesses of soft power and in the return of antiquities. Finally, the chapter concludes with policy suggestions to improve the effectiveness of American soft power in Cambodia surrounding antiquities trafficking and repatriations.

1. Soft Power Theory

Power plays an essential role in international politics, but what does that mean? What makes an actor more powerful than another? Where does power come from and what is it used for? Realists describe "the "rational" statesman as ever striving to accumulate more and more power."¹⁵⁹ Neorealists, such as Kenneth Waltz, also remain fixated on power as a "possibly

¹⁵⁹ Kenneth N. Waltz, "The Origins of War in Neorealist Theory," *Journal of Interdisciplinary History* 18, no. 4 (1988): <https://doi.org/10.2307/204817>, 616.

useful means, with states running risks if they have either too little or too much of it.”¹⁶⁰ In contrast, liberals, neoliberals, and liberal institutionalists often reject “realism’s emphasis on power” and focus on the possibility and necessity of international cooperation, but as noted by Michael Barnett and Raymond Duvall, they “have neglected to develop how power is conceptualized and operates within their theories.”¹⁶¹ A neoliberal himself, Nye’s theories shed light on where power resides and how the United States could use its strengths to engage with Cambodia.

“Soft power,” first coined by Nye in the 1990s, is a concept that often perplexes some politicians and military experts.¹⁶² Even former Secretary of Defense Donald Rumsfeld himself admitted to having never heard of the term before.¹⁶³ “Power” is the ability for an actor to purposefully influence the behavior of another or to achieve an intended outcome using its available resources. As Nye explains, power can take different forms.

The traditional form of power, more familiar to those such as Rumsfeld and President George W. Bush, involves coercive measures to influence behavior. “Hard power” often takes the form of economic and military foreign policy—“carrot and stick.” Economic sanctions, such as those imposed on Cambodian officials following the democratic freefall in 2017, are an example of hard power. Punishing officials using targeted economic strangulation is, in theory, an attempt to force others to change their course of action, and, in this case, pressuring them to release political prisoners and reinstate democratic practices. There is an illusion, however, that hard power is likely to achieve desired outcomes. Economic sanctions, as Richard J. Haas argues,

¹⁶⁰ Ibid.

¹⁶¹ Michael Barnett and Raymond Duvall, “Power in International Politics,” *International Organization* 59, no. 01 (2005): <https://doi.org/10.1017/s0020818305050010>, 41.

¹⁶² Joseph Nye, “Soft Power: The Origins and Political Progress of a Concept,” *Palgrave Communications* 3, no. 1 (2017), <https://doi.org/10.1057/palcomms.2017.8>.

¹⁶³ James Traub, “The New Hard-Soft Power,” *The New York Times* (The New York Times, January 30, 2005), <https://www.nytimes.com/2005/01/30/magazine/the-new-hardsoft-power.html>.

“are blunt instruments that often produce unintended and undesirable consequences.”¹⁶⁴ Reducing tariffs, on the other hand, might serve to persuade others to conduct their behavior in a particular fashion. Military power, the ability to wage war through military capabilities and strategic positioning, is another form of hard power. With an army, one can coerce and threaten another to dissuade them from action. A military intervention, if successful, can directly lead to changes in another actor's behavior, a.k.a. regime change, but even then, unintended consequences may occur. Establishing a democracy by force, as the Iraq War demonstrated, does not always lead to one that prospers.

“Soft power,” is the ability to co-opt allies, “to get what you want from attraction rather than coercion or payments.”¹⁶⁵ This is the attractive force that indirectly influences the objectives of another actor. Soft power affects agenda setting rather than direct action and can be done through a number of means, drawing from three key intangible resources: culture, political values, and foreign policy.

Cultural resources can play a powerful role in aligning the agendas of others. American music, televisions, movies, and radio all serve as cultural resources for soft power, attracting others to have more favorable opinions of the US. As for political values, the US also garners powerful democratic institutions, which can attract the like-minded or those who hope to democratize. Foreign policy can also bring allies closer when others see action as just or morally correct.

Another important attribute to the “hard-soft-power continuum,” as explained by US Deputy Chief of Mission to Sri Lanka Robert B. Hilton, is time. In a speech, he remarked that “hard power can be generated and deployed fairly quickly. Spend money on the military, and use

¹⁶⁴ Richard N Haass, “Economic Sanctions: Too Much of a Bad Thing,” Brookings (Brookings, July 28, 2016), <https://www.brookings.edu/research/economic-sanctions-too-much-of-a-bad-thing/>.

¹⁶⁵ Joseph S Nye, *Soft Power: The Means to Success in World Politics* (New York, NY: PublicAffairs, 2004), 10.

it. In contrast, soft power takes relatively long to build. It is the development of intangible resources over a long period of time.”¹⁶⁶

The accumulation of soft power is a lengthy process, but so may seeing its effects be long term in fruition. Although foreign policy, Russia’s Invasion of Ukraine for example, has damaged its soft power capabilities greatly in a short amount of time, other sources of cultural soft power may take longer to impact others. But as Nye also notes, in a more connected, globalized world, soft power plays a more important role than ever. The Internet has increased American soft power capabilities with the introduction of social media. The speed at which soft power can be utilized is enhanced as the world becomes more connected through the Internet and greater accessibility to mobile devices. The results of aligning other actors with the goals and aspirations of yourself can still be difficult to track, but as Nye points out, public opinion is a vital tool to measure changes in perception. Public opinion across the world is highly responsive to soft power.

2. American Soft Diplomacy in Cambodia

The United States exercises great soft power, more than most Americans presume. Survey data from the Pew Research Center’s Spring 2021 Global Attitudes Survey showed that, across 16 advanced economies, people believe that the US is the best/above average in various categories of soft power compared to other developed countries. Researchers found that the 16 publics had widespread respect for American technologies and entertainment. 72% (the median

¹⁶⁶ U.S. Embassy Colombo, “Soft Power, Hard Power and Public Diplomacy: Deputy Chief of Mission Robert B. Hilton’s Remarks at BIDTI,” U.S. Embassy in Sri Lanka (U.S. Embassy in Sri Lanka, June 9, 2018), <https://lk.usembassy.gov/soft-power-hard-power-and-public-diplomacy-deputy-chief-of-mission-robert-b-hiltons-remarks-at-bidti/>.

of the 16 advanced economies surveyed) of people believed the United States is the best or is above average in technological achievements. At the same time, 71% (median) described American entertainment as best or above average among advanced economies. Respondents also held positive views on American higher education, which stood at 59% (median). Other survey data showed that only 64% of Americans see their technological advancement as the best or above average, 68% for entertainment, and only 47% for higher education.¹⁶⁷ Americans downplay key soft power resources compared to their other economically-advanced counterparts. American soft power is even more respected globally.

Portland's Soft Power 30 has sought to quantify soft power through other means. Taking into account objective (government, digital, enterprise, education... etc) and polling data (cuisine, tech products, foreign policy... etc.), the United States ranks fifth in global soft power, behind France, the United Kingdom, Germany, and Sweden. In categories like digital, cultural and educational soft power, the US ranks first and is fourth in enterprise and engagement.¹⁶⁸ Although the methodology of the rankings is heavily skewed towards democracies, ranking China at 27th worldwide despite its wide appeal of political stability, which is low for a country that boasts tremendous soft power, American tech, culture, and education remains valuable assets for public diplomacy.

In Cambodia, some of the greatest potential for US soft power resides in higher education, especially when working with the government. Nye uses the example of Aleksandr Yakovlev to demonstrate the influence of higher education as soft power. Yakovlev, one of the most powerful Soviet reformers under Former Soviet President Mikhail Gorbachev, was heavily

¹⁶⁷ Laura Silver, "Americans Differ from People in Other Societies over Some Aspects of U.S. 'Hard' and 'Soft' Power," Pew Research Center (Pew Research Center, November 1, 2021), <https://www.pewresearch.org/fact-tank/2021/11/01/americans-differ-from-people-in-other-societies-over-some-aspects-of-u-s-hard-and-soft-power/>.

¹⁶⁸ "Soft Power 30," Soft Power 30 (Portland, 2019), <https://softpower30.com/>.

influenced by political scientist David Truman through his studies at Columbia University.¹⁶⁹ Cambodian officials, as noted by Leos, often send their children to Western universities, many of which are in Australia, the Netherlands, UK, and the US. Within the country, the American University of Phnom Penh is regarded as the most prestigious of domestic institutions, another hub for government children. The US does not just hope that this new generation of Western-educated government elites will favor democratic values; it has sought to influence Cambodian leadership, military, and foreign policy through the children of some of Cambodia's highest ranking political and military figures—including the Prime Minister.

In December 2021, Hun Sen announced his political endorsement of his 45 year old son to take his place as prime minister in the upcoming 2023 elections. He declared, “I have not been training him to be the leader of a gang of thieves. To be clear, Hun Manet is one among the candidates to become the next prime minister, and his father is fully supporting him.”¹⁷⁰ A four-star general and Deputy Commander-in-Chief of the Royal Cambodian Armed Forces popular among the country's youth, Hun Manet has long been groomed to take power after his 70 year old father steps down. Since 2018, he has become a permanent member of the Cambodian People's Party and was elevated to chairman of the CPP's youth wing. Before his rise to fame, however, Hun Manet, nominated by the US Embassy to Cambodia, was the first Cambodian to have graduated from the United States Military Academy at West Point. In addition to being trained by the US military, he also holds a masters degree in economics from New York University, as well as a doctorate from the University of Bristol in the UK.

¹⁶⁹ Nye, *Soft Power: The Means to Success in World Politics*, 44.

¹⁷⁰ Sopheng Cheang, “Cambodia's Leader Hun Sen Endorses Oldest Son as Successor,” AP NEWS (Associated Press, December 2, 2021), <https://apnews.com/article/army-cambodia-hun-sen-armed-forces-7332e70d20f2989154f8391af56b98e2>.

If he is to become Cambodia's next prime minister, some observers, such as Craig Etcheson, former Chief of Investigations in the Office of Co-Prosecutors at the Extraordinary Chambers in the Courts of Cambodia, believe that "given that his father waged war against the US—while he [Manet] was trained in war by the US—Manet's deeper understanding of US society, culture, and politics may enable him to display more nuance in balancing Cambodia's interests between the US and China than has his father."¹⁷¹ Although there is no guarantee that Hun Manet will "fully reorient Cambodia in the way the West might like," as noted by the Center for Strategic and International Studies Fellow Charles Dunst, educational soft power may still be able to shape the future of relations, which will rely on continued US-Cambodia engagement.¹⁷² Still, higher education is only part of the picture.

A large component to US public diplomacy in Cambodia has also been its cultural engagement through programs such as OneBeat program, a State Department-funded global music residency, allowing young international artists to come to the US. In 2013, a Cambodian musician by the name of Yorn Young was brought to the US as a part of OneBeat, through which he traveled the country. After returning to Cambodia, he wrote an album titled "Lovin' USA: Yorn Young's Journey Across America," and, in 2017, received \$10,000 from the American Embassy in Phnom Penh to fund a concert in the province of Kampong Thom.¹⁷³ Since then, he has performed on some of the country's most prominent television channels, including the Cambodian Television Network. Monica Davis, a US cultural affairs officer, commented that such arts and cultural diplomacy can "bring us closer together."¹⁷⁴

¹⁷¹ Richard S Ehrlich, "Cambodia: Will Hun Manet Be More pro-US than His Father?," Asia Times (Asia Times, February 17, 2022), <https://asiatimes.com/2022/02/cambodia-will-hun-manet-be-more-pro-us-than-his-father/>.

¹⁷² Charles Dunst, "What's next for Cambodia's Princeling?," Center for Strategic and International Studies (Center for Strategic and International Studies, January 13, 2023), <https://www.csis.org/analysis/whats-next-cambodias-princeling>.

¹⁷³ Prak Chan Thul, "U.S. Turns to Music in Bid to Woo Cambodians," Reuters (Thomson Reuters, March 7, 2018), <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-cambodia-usa-music-idUSKCN1GJ14E>.

¹⁷⁴ Ibid.

The most influential aspect of American soft power in Cambodia is perhaps American media. Voice of America (VOA), the largest and oldest American international broadcaster, provides services in over 40 languages, including Khmer. Across the country, VOA Cambodia is highly popular, consisting of eight different radio and TV programs. Today, VOA Cambodia is the second most popular profile on Facebook (Cambodia's most dominant social media platform) in the country with 7.8 million followers, dwarfing national news media, such as the Khmer Times, which currently has only a million.¹⁷⁵ ¹⁷⁶ VOA Cambodia facebook page is only second to the Prime Minister's, which has 14 million followers.¹⁷⁷

American soft power, through its higher education, engagement in arts and culture, media, along with technology, commerce, and more, targeting both the Cambodian general population as well as future leaders in government, has bolstered public opinion in favor of the US. American experts, such as Randall Schriver, former US Assistant Secretary of Defense for Indo-Pacific Security Affairs, who has built a relationship with senior Cambodian officials, claims that the US remains popular in Cambodia.¹⁷⁸ The Cambodian government seems to believe so. Former Cambodian Ambassador to the United States Chum Sounry also agrees that "Cambodians have a positive view of the United States."¹⁷⁹ The 2023 State of Southeast Asia survey report, conducted by the Institute of Southeast Asian Studies at the National University of Singapore, reaffirms this sentiment in a more geopolitical context. When asked if ASEAN were forced to align itself with one of the two strategic rivals, which they believed it should choose, 73.1% of Cambodian respondents felt that the region should align itself with the United States

¹⁷⁵ VOA Khmer, Facebook, accessed May 2, 2023, <https://www.facebook.com/voakhmer/>.

¹⁷⁶ Khmer Times, Facebook, accessed May 2, 2023, <https://www.facebook.com/khmertimes>.

¹⁷⁷ Samdech Hun Sen, Cambodian Prime Minister, Facebook, accessed May 2, 2023, <https://www.facebook.com/hunsencambodia/>.

¹⁷⁸ Richard Schriver, in person conversation, November 7, 2022.

¹⁷⁹ Chum Sounry, "Is Cambodia the next Asian Tiger? America Should Hope So," Newsweek (Newsweek, October 27, 2021), <https://www.newsweek.com/cambodia-next-asian-tiger-america-should-hope-so-opinion-1642788>.

over China.¹⁸⁰ Evidently, the US has a foothold over public opinion in Cambodia, with a large majority of the population giving preference to Washington over Beijing.

Still, why should the US care about public opinion in an authoritarian government? Why should it put resources into appealing to a public that has no say in its foreign policy? For the new generation of government officials, even in a competitive authoritarian regime, Cambodian public opinion will be vital for succession leadership. Durst points out that “Hun Manet lacks the charisma and political legitimacy of his father,” despite his popularity among Cambodian youth.¹⁸¹ Political legitimacy in East and Southeast Asia, as Edward et. al write, is heavily reliant on traditional social values, especially in countries such as Cambodia. They argue that the “persistence of traditional social values is a key reason that authoritarian regimes in Burma, Cambodia, China, and Vietnam still enjoy wide popular support even amid social change so rapid and disorienting that it might be expected to breed instability.”¹⁸²

In order to appeal to the Cambodian public and government, while providing political legitimacy to Cambodia’s new leaders, the US can orient its soft power around these domestic traditional social values. Antiquities repatriations could be the key to rebuilding American-Cambodian trust in a mutually beneficial manner.

¹⁸⁰ Sharon Seah et al., “The State of Southeast Asia: 2023 Survey Report” (ISEAS-Yusof Ishak Institute, February 9, 2023), <https://www.iseas.edu.sg/wp-content/uploads/2025/07/The-State-of-SEA-2023-Final-Digital-V4-09-Feb-2023.pdf>, 37.

¹⁸¹ Dunst, “What's next for Cambodia's Princeling?”

¹⁸² Andrew J. Nathan, “The Puzzle of Authoritarian Legitimacy,” *Journal of Democracy* 31, no. 1 (January 2020): <https://doi.org/10.1353/jod.2020.0013>, 164.

3. Antiquities Reparations as Soft Power

Restitution, as Alexander Herman describes, is a major factor in antiquities repatriations, returning stolen cultural property “as a way of doing justice for past wrongs” and “an attempt to make amends for the crimes of history.”¹⁸³ In the context of US-Cambodia returns, museums are righting past wrongs by giving up ownership of illicitly-traded statues, repatriating ancestors and gods to a country where they hold great spiritual and religious meaning. The act is an apology, a mild remedy for exploitation, but it is also a sign of growth. Restitution is a diplomatic soft power tool to attract others who have previously been harmed by a country’s actions or to rally them around a joint cause. In a speech at the US Military Academy’s annual Student Conference on US Affairs, keynote speaker US Ambassador to the UN Linda Thomas-Greenfield spoke of the attractive power of restitution. In remembrance of the abolition of slavery among the UN Security Council, the distinguished Black career diplomat had discussed the legacy of slavery domestically and abroad and the different steps the US was taking to address those still impacted today. She condemned modern slavery and the treatment of Uighers, to which the Chinese representative struck back, declaring her statements blasphemy and proceeded to berate the US for its history of slavery once again. As she described to the West Point audience, no one in the room took his criticism seriously; he had no power. She had just presented on the issue, a clear message that the US, not forgetting its past, will be moving forward to help combat the lasting impacts of slavery. Condemning the US was redundant and served no purpose. Other council members sided with her later after convening.¹⁸⁴

¹⁸³ Alexander Herman, “Restitution-What’s Really Going on?,” *The Art Newspaper* (The Art Newspaper, September 29, 2021), <https://www.theartnewspaper.com/2021/09/28/restitutionwhats-really-going-on>.

¹⁸⁴ Thomas-Greenfield, Linda. “Keynote Address.” Lecture, Student Conference on United States Affairs, United States Military Academy, Westpoint, NY, November 3, 2022.

The ability to admit mistakes and their consequences, while committing to change, is a soft power tool that can bolster a country's foreign policy position. It is a co-optive measure that unites others around a shared goal. Restitution also brings with it national prestige, improving soft power capabilities to influence attitudes towards the US and to affect the agenda of others. Restitution can also be applied to antiquities returns. Herman points to the case of reparations to Africa. During a speech in Burkina Faso in November 2017, French President Emmanuel Macron declared his commitment to “temporary or permanent restitution” of cultural property extracted during colonial rule in Africa.¹⁸⁵ In doing so, restitution is more than just a moral or legal obligation, but a way to mend and build relations. As he argues in the Art Newspaper,

*The restitution debate has afforded certain governments a new way of establishing themselves through diplomatic links and geopolitical influence, a particularly cultural form of ‘soft power’. Macron’s Burkina Faso speech can be seen not merely as a way of doing good, but also as a way for France to reassert its validity in francophone Africa. Delivered six months after he became President, the speech offered the now-familiar Macron hallmarks: a break with the past, an eschewing of France’s role as colonial power in favour of international relations based upon partnership and economic mutual interest, and a hint of the executive diktat. The goal of expanding French spheres of influence is well served by an engagement with African countries around questions of restitution.*¹⁸⁶

In similar fashion, antiquities repatriations offer the US an unprecedented opportunity to improve relations with countries from which the cultural objects were extracted. The global movement against the illicit art market and the shift towards the return of cultural property has enabled the US to become more aggressive in its approach. The restitution, the correction of past wrongs, can greatly appeal to the general Cambodian population, who remain attached to Neak Tā or local ancestral spirits (traditional social values), as well as the government, who publicly

¹⁸⁵ Herman, “Restitution-What's Really Going on?”

¹⁸⁶ Ibid.

demands the return of “the souls of generations of Khmer ancestors” and seeks domestic political legitimacy.¹⁸⁷

At the American Chamber of Commerce in Cambodia’s Charity Gala Dinner in March 2023, a fundraiser for the Cambodian Treasures Foundation, a non-profit established to help research and fund the return of looted antiquities, Hun Manet publicly addressed the importance of antiquities repatriations. In the words of the likely-future prime minister, “this shows that we are not alone.” He added in his speech, “tireless efforts of American friends and relevant authorities in the US have contributed a lot to bring back home our national treasures.”¹⁸⁸ He later donated \$5,000 to the organization. About the fundraiser, Brad Gordon spoke on behalf of the Ministry of Culture and Fine Arts, arguing that “this was an extremely meaningful and historic event, especially for the relationship between the United States and Cambodia.”¹⁸⁹

Despite rising tensions over Chinese influence in the country and democratic backsliding, US-Cambodia relations can still improve through productive cooperation in antiquities repatriation and the soft power deriving from the idea of restitution. If the US hopes to bring about a more balanced Cambodian foreign policy, antiquities repatriations may work as a trust-building exercise, a form of cultural diplomacy that can remain mutually-beneficial and sustained over a long period of time. The return of cultural property is non-China related and thus will not provoke outrage from Beijing, which also has a history of colonization. The foundation for future cooperation, antiquities repatriations serve as a means to pull Cambodia

¹⁸⁷ Sopheng Cheang, “Cambodia Celebrates Return of 'Priceless' Stolen Artifacts,” AP NEWS (Associated Press, March 17, 2023), <https://apnews.com/article/art-artifacts-sculpture-stolen-art-cambodia-culture-looted-antiquities-c903a41f82c8363f36027ab771839ebf>.

¹⁸⁸ Manoj Mathew, “AmCham Raising Fund for 'Treasure Hunt' Foundation,” Khmer Times (Virtus Media, March 2, 2023), <https://www.khmertimeskh.com/501248658/amcham-raising-fund-for-treasure-hunt-foundation/>.

¹⁸⁹ Steve Noble, “Cambodian Treasures Foundation - the Importance of Returning Stolen Cambodian Antiquities & Artifacts,” B2B CAMBODiA (B2B CAMBODiA, March 10, 2023), <https://www.b2b-cambodia.com/articles/cambodian-treasures-foundation-the-importance-of-returning-stolen-cambodian-antiquities-artifacts/>.

towards a more neutral foreign policy stance, while increasing American prestige and soft power, and legitimizing Cambodia's future leaders.

4. Criticism of Soft Power and Antiquity Diplomacy

Soft power still has its opponents. To unfamiliar ears, it implies a form of weak or ineffective power. Historian Niall Ferguson is one of these critics. In a 2003 article, Ferguson spoke of what he believed to be the ineffectiveness of soft power. To him, “the trouble with soft power is that it’s, well, soft.”¹⁹⁰ “All over the Islamic world,” he continues, “there are kids who enjoy (or would like to enjoy) bottles of Coke, Big Macs, CDs by Britney Spears, and DVDs starring Tom Cruise. Do any of these things make them love America more? Strangely not.”¹⁹¹ In theory, soft power may sound extensive and influential, but how can you measure the true effect of soft power on foreign attitudes and its subsequent impact on foreign policy? Ferguson is right, of course, that soft power alone cannot change the way the world views the United States, it can just be “soft.” What Ferguson fails to understand, however, are the impact and scope to which soft power can be applied and the extent to which states use soft power alongside complementary hard power.

Soft power, despite its critics, can indeed be influential in real world foreign policy decision-making. A study by Goldsmith and Yusaku analyzed the effects of international public opinion on the foreign policy of other states in 2003, the beginning of the War in Iraq. Their regression analysis suggests that “the feelings of non-US publics toward US foreign policy have significantly positive effects” on whether or not states sent troops to Iraq, signed the Bilateral

¹⁹⁰ Niall Ferguson, “What Is Power?,” Hoover Institution (Board of Trustees of Leland Stanford Junior University, April 30, 2003), <https://www.hoover.org/research/what-power>.

¹⁹¹ Ibid.

Immunity Agreements with the US to protect Americans from the International Criminal Court, and whether or not their votes in the United Nations General Assembly aligned with the United States.¹⁹² They concluded that soft power does, in fact, have “real ramifications for international relations.”¹⁹³ But to enhance effectiveness, the US must garner “smart power.”

Smart power is another element of Nye’s power theory. It is the ability to use both soft and hard power to achieve strategic goals, best directed by pragmatic and competent leadership. In coordination with hard power, soft power can be additive. A champion of smart power, as Nye claims, was US President Teddy Roosevelt, whose key to foreign policy was to “speak softly, and carry a big stick,” famously using the US navy to both “display the country’s new military power and to advertise America as a force for good.”¹⁹⁴ ¹⁹⁵ The problem here is that the United States must coordinate *both* its hard and soft power resources if it is to be effective in engaging in Cambodia. The ability to do so will be reliant on American leadership and focus on the region.

The challenge for soft power in the case of US-Cambodia relations is long-term strategy. Sustainability is key to soft power as it takes years for its intangible resources to build up and to see its effects on major foreign policy issues. As policy towards Cambodia shifts on a nearly day-to-day basis, it will be difficult to sustain and realize soft power. If the United States is going to implement soft power-focused diplomacy to win over the hearts and minds of the Cambodian people and government, it will need fortitude in its foreign policy decision-making and its engagement despite the government’s human rights violations and democratic

¹⁹² Benjamin E. Goldsmith and Yusaku Horiuchi, “In Search of Soft Power: Does Foreign Public Opinion Matter for US Foreign Policy?,” *World Politics* 64, no. 3 (2012): <https://doi.org/10.1017/s0043887112000123>, 576.

¹⁹³ *Ibid*, 583.

¹⁹⁴ John Judis, “Speak Loudly and Carry a Small Stick,” Carnegie Endowment for International Peace (Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, March 12, 2014), <https://carnegieendowment.org/2014/03/12/speak-loudly-and-carry-small-stick-pub-54985>.

¹⁹⁵ Harvard Business Review, *Harvard Business Review* (Harvard Business School Publishing, November 2008), <https://hbr.org/2008/11/smart-power>.

back-sliding. This can be difficult with polarized American politics and shifting foreign policy administration to administration. The State Department will require discipline and dedication to its engagement with Cambodia in order to fend off growing Chinese influence. In the case of antiquities repatriations, this means consistent funding for investigations and operations for agencies and departments involved, as well as commitments to the cultural property MoUs.

5. Policy Recommendations

American soft power through antiquities repatriations will be vital to American objectives in the region, namely rebalancing of Cambodian foreign policy. This section provides domestic and foreign policy recommendations to not only sustain current efforts and investigative cooperation, but to further improve ties and bolster American relations with the Cambodian public and government at a larger scale involving Khmer sculpture and returns.

Extending the Cultural Property Memorandum of Understanding

- The basis for past and current cooperation between the United States and Cambodia on combating the illicit art market and continuing antiquities repatriations has been its MOUs on cultural property. Every five years since 2003, MOUs have played an important role in directing both countries' domestic and foreign policy regarding antiquities. The latest of the five-year agreements has been the Memorandum of Understanding Between the Government of the United States and the Government of the Kingdom of Cambodia Concerning the Imposition of Import Restrictions on Categories of Archeological Materials of Cambodia, signed on September 12th, 2018. It has been

nearly five years since then and the MOU will expire later this year, most likely after the July 2023 Cambodian general elections. If and when Hun Manet becomes the next Prime Minister, it would be in the best interest of his government to amend and extend the Cultural Property MoU, as a symbolic gesture of good faith with the US, which would also further establish his political legitimacy. The US, if it wants to sustain engagement and soft power in Cambodia, must take the opportunity to extend the MOU in 2023 for another five years in order to continue antiquities repatriations and enable future cooperation.

Pushing Thailand to adopt the 1970 UNESCO Convention on Cultural Property

- The 1970 UNESCO Convention on the Means of Prohibiting and Preventing the Illicit Import, Export and Transfer of Ownership of Cultural Property has been extremely influential in the implementation of domestic laws in each signatory state and helps push forward greater multilateral coordination in investigating and impairing the international illicit art market. Thailand has long been a hub for illegally extracted Cambodian antiquities and has refused to sign the 1970 Convention. Thai-Cambodia relations are “rooted in an historical legacy of hostility and mistrust.”¹⁹⁶ Persuading Thailand, a US ally in the region, to adopt the 1970 Convention would be the first in many steps needed to mend Thai-Cambodian relations and would help weaken the illicit trade and export of Khmer antiquities.

¹⁹⁶ Kimly Ngoun, “Thai–Cambodian Conflict Rooted in History,” East Asia Forum, January 26, 2012, <https://www.eastasiaforum.org/2012/01/27/thai-cambodian-conflict-rooted-in-history/>.

Maintain funding and cooperation between US agencies, civil society, and law enforcement antiquities trafficking

- The process to sustain domestic efforts and promote intergovernmental cooperation involves the coordination of numerous government agencies and NGOs. Homeland Security Investigations, the Cultural Heritage Center, Department of Defense, Department of State, Department of Interior, Department of the Treasury, and Department of Justice all work together under the Cultural Antiquities Task Force. Maintaining and increasing resources available to these bodies as well as the task force itself will be crucial in the coordination of investigative and repatriation efforts. But the government is not the only party involved. Civil Society plays a powerful role in the process, such as the Antiquities Coalition, in facilitating dialogue, informing the general public, and lobbying for the return of cultural property. Smart power, the ability to coordinate the implementation of soft and hard power, requires structured and efficient liaison between parties involved.

Provide educational and cultural exchange opportunities

- Education is already a large aspect of American soft power in Cambodia. To promote greater accessibility and awareness of returns, Cambodia will need more curators, conservators, art historians, and museum management. Numerous American universities are home to world class higher educational programs (degrees or certificates) in art history, curatorial studies, religion, arts management, and archeology. Scholarships and exchange programs would provide the training in areas necessary for local engagement in Khmer antiquities repatriations.

Capacity building for local museums and research initiatives in Cambodia

- Cambodia's most prominent museums, such as the National Museum of Cambodia, harbor thousands of Khmer antiquities, displayed for both local populations and tourists. At many of them, Cambodian monks come to pray and worship statues representing ancestors and gods. Still, there are many provincial museums, such as Takeo Museum, Angkor Borei Museum, Prey Veng Museum, and Pursat Museum. In 2013, the US collaborated with six museums on the Provincial Museum Collection Database Project, intended to help produce an online database for materials in smaller museums across the country.¹⁹⁷ To increase American and Cambodian public engagement in antiquities repatriations and Ancient Cambodian history, the US should focus on supporting museums across the country to build capacity for greater accessibility and safety. The Cambodian Treasures Foundation also hopes to construct another museum purely for returned antiquities, which would also serve as a research base for scholars. To help fund this new museum and research initiatives in Phnom Penh would be an opportunity the US cannot afford to miss. Capacity building also allows for greater employment for Cambodians in the museum sector, especially for those who return from programs in the US.

¹⁹⁷ Ry Sochan, "Museums Department Launches Online Catalogue of Six Provincial Collections," Phnom Penh Post (Post Media Co., September 16, 2022), <https://www.phnompenhpost.com/national/museums-department-launches-online-catalogue-six-provincial-collections>.

Epilogue

The goal of this paper was to shed light on the history of sculpture and art in Cambodia, argue how antiquities repatriations could be a useful tool to help the United States in its foreign policy objectives, and to provide policy suggestions to better achieve these objectives.

Cambodian antiquities, those sculpted during Funan, Chenla, and Khmer Empire representing the gods and ancestors of the peoples who lived across Mainland Southeast Asia, were first commodified and extracted under the French. They became valuable objects on the illicit art market, making their way into some of the world's most prominent museums and art collections, especially after Cambodian independence in 1953. The arrival of Douglas Latchford triggered a mass exodus of cultural property, as he worked alongside the Khmer Rouge, government forces, and gangs to remove material from unprotected temples as the country drowned in violence and war. Meanwhile, the global efforts in the Hague to hinder the illicit art market and the international trafficking of cultural objects have encouraged countries, such as the US and Cambodia, to enact laws to combat illegal movement of antiquities. In doing so, Cambodia and the US, starting with the 2003 MoU, began collaborating to investigate and return antiquities linked to Latchford and his associates, still on display at American museums, such as the Metropolitan Museum of Art, Denver Art Museum, and the Norton Simon Museum. Both American and Cambodian officials share eagerness to confiscate and return Khmer cultural objects, using similar justifications, referring to statues as “gods and ancestors” that must be returned.

The paper then discussed the deeper motives driving antiquities repatriations, the foreign policy justification behind returns, which involve the US, China, and Cambodia. Since the

Obama Administration's "Pivot to Asia," China has become the focus of American foreign policy. Now its new "strategic competitor," the US worries about China's increasing influence in ASEAN and growing security concerns over the South China Sea. A major obstacle in combating such influence has been the ineffectiveness of ASEAN decision-making, often blamed on the power afforded to states loyal to China, including Cambodia. China and Cambodia have remained close in economic and military ties starting from the Sihanouk Era. Chinese influence in Cambodia, however, has strengthened over time, recently leading to rumors of potential foreign military bases in the country, threatening regional security. The US has sought to punish Cambodia for its ties to a strategic competitor using sanctions, as well as for its democratic backsliding and human rights violations, damaging US-Cambodia relations. Still, attitudes are shifting; there are signs that the US and Cambodia both want a rebalancing of Cambodian foreign policy. If both countries hope to mend relations, the paper argued that antiquities repatriations are the perfect non-China-related policy tool to recalibrate Cambodian alignment.

Finally, the paper explored *how* antiquities repatriations would help achieve a more neutral Cambodian foreign policy. This theory revolves around Nye's soft power, and how the US could win over the hearts and minds of Cambodians to promote change. The US has already implemented soft power measures to appeal to Cambodians, focused on ensuring engagement with a potentially new, and younger government. New Cambodian leadership is dedicated to establishing political legitimacy and the US can help provide that through antiquities repatriations. A symbol of restitution, returns of cultural property act as a powerful attractive force for the US, appealing to both Cambodian civilians and government. Despite criticism, soft

power, in coordination with hard power, can—when combined as smart power—rebuild relations and potentially align Cambodian-US foreign policy objectives in the long run.

The paper also suggests domestic and foreign policy measures to help promote engagement in antiquities repatriations and increase the effectiveness of American soft diplomacy in Cambodia, including the extension and amendment of MOUs on Cultural Property, pushing Thailand to adopt the 1970 UN Convention on Cultural Property, maintaining clear dialogue between US agencies and civil society, establishing educational exchanges to expand Cambodia's museum sector, as well as capacity building for museums and research initiatives to encourage greater civic engagement in antiquities repatriations.

Still, Cambodia is only one of many countries across the globe, former colonies or war-ravaged states with rich cultural heritage now found in American, European, and Australian museums and private collections, fighting to retrieve extracted cultural property. This also provides opportunities for countries, in which materials now reside, to engage with states from which the objects originate. Antiquities repatriations could be an influential soft power tool in a multitude of foreign policy contexts and could bolster global perceptions, as well as building bilateral relations to serve policy objectives. The case of US-Cambodia serves to show that antiquities repatriations, supported by a global movement for returns, could act as a catalyst for others to follow.

Bibliography

- “2022 Corruption Perceptions Index.” Transparency International, 2022.
<https://www.transparency.org/en/cpi/2022>.
- “About 1970 Convention.” UNESCO, March 24, 2023.
<https://en.unesco.org/fightrafficking/1970>.
- Abrams, Elliott. “The New Cold War.” Council on Foreign Relations. Council on Foreign Relations, March 4, 2022. <https://www.cfr.org/blog/new-cold-war-0>.
- Aeusrivongse, Nidhi. “The Devarāja Cult and Khmer Kingship at Angkor.” Essay. In *Explorations in Early Southeast Asian History: The Origins of Southeast Asian Statecraft*. Ann Arbor, MI: The University of Michigan, Center for South and Southeast Asian studies, 1976.
- Allison, Graham T. “Destined for War?” *The National Interest*, 2017, 9–21.
<https://www.jstor.org/stable/26557386>.
- Anderson, William. “Commodifying Culture: Ownership of Cambodia’s Archaeological Heritage.” *Limina* 13 (2007): 103–12.
- “Antiquity.” *Oxford English Dictionary*. Oxford University Press. Accessed May 1, 2023.
<https://www.oed.com/view/Entry/8833?redirectedFrom=antiquity#eid>.
- Barnett, Michael, and Raymond Duvall. “Power in International Politics.” *International Organization* 59, no. 01 (2005): 39–75. <https://doi.org/10.1017/s0020818305050010>.
- Bill, Congress.gov § (2021). <https://www.congress.gov/bill/117th-congress/house-bill/4686>.
- Björnberg, Karin Edvardsson. “Historic Injustices and the Moral Case for Cultural Repatriation.” *Ethical Theory and Moral Practice* 18, no. 3 (2014): 461–74.
<https://doi.org/10.1007/s10677-014-9530-z>.
- Briggs, Lawrence Palmer. *The Ancient Khmer Empire*. 41. 1st ed. Vol. 41. Philadelphia, PA: American Philosophical Society, 1951.
- Brunstrom, David, and Martin Petty. “Blinken Urged Transparency from Cambodia PM about Chinese Base Activity - U.S. Statement.” Edited by Angus MacSwan. Reuters. Thomson Reuters, August 4, 2022.

<https://www.reuters.com/world/blinken-urged-transparency-cambodia-pm-about-chinese-base-activity-us-statement-2022-08-04/>.

Burgos, Sigfrido, and Sophal Ear. "China's Strategic Interests in Cambodia: Influence and

Resources." *Asian Survey* 50, no. 3 (2010): 615–39.

<https://doi.org/10.1525/as.2010.50.3.615>.

Cadell, Cate, and Ellen Nakashima. "China Secretly Building Naval Facility in Cambodia,

Western Officials Say." *The Washington Post*. WP Company, June 7, 2022.

<https://www.washingtonpost.com/national-security/2022/06/06/cambodia-china-navy-base-ream/>.

Cambodia-US Relations in the New Era. New York Southeast Asia Network. Columbia

University Weatherhead East Asian Institute, 2021.

<https://nysean.org/events/2021/5/6/cambodia-us-relations-in-the-new-era>.

"Cambodia Blocks ASEAN Consensus for Second Time." *Today Online*. Mediacorp Pte, July

25, 2016.

<https://www.todayonline.com/world/asia/no-asean-consensus-s-china-sea-despite-rounds-talks>.

"Cambodia Election: Ruling Party Claims Landslide in Vote with No Main Opposition." *BBC*

News. BBC, July 30, 2018. <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-asia-44999358>.

"Cambodia." United States Trade Representative. Executive Office of the President. Accessed

May 1, 2023. <https://ustr.gov/countries-regions/southeast-asia-pacific/Cambodia->

Campbell, Matthew. "The Epic Temple Heist That Looted a Nation's History." *Bloomberg*.

Bloomberg, June 29, 2022.

<https://www.bloomberg.com/features/2022-cambodia-met-museum-art-heist>.

Cascone, Sarah. "The Pandora Papers Leak Reveals How the Late Dealer Douglas Latchford

Used Offshore Accounts to Sell Looted Cambodian Antiquities." *Artnet News*. Artnet Worldwide Corporation, October 18, 2021.

<https://news.artnet.com/art-world/pandora-papers-douglas-latchford-201706>.

Center for Preventive Action. "Territorial Disputes in the South China Sea." *Council on Foreign*

Relations. Council on Foreign Relations, May 4, 2022.

<https://www.cfr.org/global-conflict-tracker/conflict/territorial-disputes-south-china-sea>.

Chandler, David P. *A History of Cambodia*. 4th ed. Westview Press, 2008.

Cheang, Sopheng. "Cambodia Celebrates Return of 'Priceless' Stolen Artifacts." *AP NEWS*.

Associated Press, March 17, 2023.

<https://apnews.com/article/art-artifacts-sculpture-stolen-art-cambodia-culture-looted-antiquities-c903a41f82c8363f36027ab771839ebf>.

Cheang, Sopheng. “Cambodia's Leader Hun Sen Endorses Oldest Son as Successor.” AP NEWS.

Associated Press, December 2, 2021.

<https://apnews.com/article/army-cambodia-hun-sen-armed-forces-7332e70d20f2989154f8391af56b98e2>.

Chhea, Keo. “Cambodia Wants Its Stolen Treasures Back-and Will Fight in Court for Them.”

Newsweek. Newsweek, August 10, 2022.

<https://www.newsweek.com/cambodia-wants-its-stolen-treasures-back-will-fight-court-them-opinion-1732606>.

Clymer, Kenton J. “The Perils of Neutrality: The Break in U.S.-Cambodian Relations, 1965.”

Diplomatic History 23, no. 4 (1999): 609–31. <https://doi.org/10.1111/0145-2096.00187>.

Coedes, George. *Angkor: An Introduction*. Translated by Emily F Gardiner. 1st ed. Singapore:

Oxford University Press, 1963.

“Convention on the Means of Prohibiting and Preventing the Illicit Import, Export and Transfer

of Ownership of Cultural Property.” United Nations Educational Scientific and Cultural Organization. Accessed May 2, 2023.

<https://en.unesco.org/about-us/legal-affairs/convention-means-prohibiting-and-preventing-illicit-import-export-and>.

Corasaniti, Nick, Alexander Burns, and Binyamin Appelbaum. “Donald Trump Vows to Rip up

Trade Deals and Confront China.” *The New York Times*. The New York Times, June 28, 2016. <https://www.nytimes.com/2016/06/29/us/politics/donald-trump-trade-speech.html>.

Crosbie-Jones, Max. “Property and Theft: A History of Looting in Southeast Asia.” *ArtReview*.

ArtReview, September 14, 2021.

<https://artreview.com/a-history-of-looting-in-southeast-asia-the-real-cultural-appropriation>.

Davidson, Janine. *American Journal of Chinese Studies* 21 (2014): 77–82.

<http://www.jstor.org/stable/44289339>.

Davis, Tess. “Douglas Latchford: The Man Who Pillaged Cambodia.” *The Diplomat*. *Diplomat*

Media, August 22, 2020.

<https://thediplomat.com/2020/08/douglas-latchford-the-man-who-pillaged-cambodia/>.

Davis, Tess. “The Scourge of Looting: Trafficking Antiquities from Temple to Museum.”

- Smarthistory, September 10, 2017.
<https://smarthistory.org/scourge-of-looting-antiquities/>.
- Delaporte, Louis. *Embarquement des Sculptures sur les Radeaux à Préa-Khan*. 1880. In *Voyage au Cambodge: l'Architecture Khmer*. Paris: Maisonneuve et Larose, 1999,
<http://reader.library.cornell.edu/docviewer/digital?id=sea032#page/16/mode/1up>, 13.
- “Deputy Secretary of State Wendy Sherman’s Visit to Cambodia.” US Department of State, June 1, 2021. US Department of State.
<https://www.state.gov/deputy-secretary-of-state-wendy-shermans-visit-to-cambodia/>.
- Dunst, Charles. “What's next for Cambodia's Princeling?” Center for Strategic and International Studies. Center for Strategic and International Studies, January 13, 2023.
<https://www.csis.org/analysis/whats-next-cambodias-princeling>.
- Ehrlich, Richard S. “Cambodia: Will Hun Manet Be More pro-US than His Father?” *Asia Times*. Asia Times, February 17, 2022.
<https://asiatimes.com/2022/02/cambodia-will-hun-manet-be-more-pro-us-than-his-father/>.
- Falser, Michael S. *Angkor Wat: A Transcultural History of Heritage*. 1. Vol. 1. 2 vols. Berlin: De Gruyter, 2020.
- Ferguson, Niall. “What Is Power?” Hoover Institution. Board of Trustees of Leland Stanford Junior University, April 30, 2003. <https://www.hoover.org/research/what-power>.
- Goldsmith, Benjamin E., and Yusaku Horiuchi. “In Search of Soft Power: Does Foreign Public Opinion Matter for US Foreign Policy?” *World Politics* 64, no. 3 (2012): 555–85.
<https://doi.org/10.1017/s0043887112000123>.
- Haass, Richard N. “Economic Sanctions: Too Much of a Bad Thing.” Brookings. Brookings, July 28, 2016.
<https://www.brookings.edu/research/economic-sanctions-too-much-of-a-bad-thing/>.
- Herman, Alexander. “Fifty Years On: The Meaning of the 1970 UNESCO Convention.” Institute of Art and Law, June 18, 2020. <https://ial.uk.com/fifty-years-on-unesco-convention/>.
- Herman, Alexander. “Restitution-What's Really Going on?” *The Art Newspaper*. The Art Newspaper, September 29, 2021.
<https://www.theartnewspaper.com/2021/09/28/restitutionwhats-really-going-on>.
- Heuveline, Patrick. “The Boundaries of Genocide: Quantifying the Uncertainty of the Death Toll

- during the Pol Pot Regime in Cambodia (1975–79).” *Population Studies* 69, no. 2 (2015): 201–18. <https://doi.org/10.1080/00324728.2015.1045546>.
- Jessup, Helen Ibbitson, and Zéphir Thierry. *Sculpture of Angkor and Ancient Cambodia: Millennium of Glory*. 1st ed. Washington, D.C.: National Gallery of Art, 1997.
- Jessup, Helen Ibbitson. *Masterpieces of the National Museum of Cambodia: An Introduction to the Collection*. 1st ed. Norfolk, CT: Friends of Khmer Culture, 2006.
- Judis, John. “Speak Loudly and Carry a Small Stick.” Carnegie Endowment for International Peace. Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, March 12, 2014. <https://carnegieendowment.org/2014/03/12/speak-loudly-and-carry-small-stick-pub-54985>.
- Kapoor, Kanupriya, Nandita Bose, and Jiraporn Kuhakan. “U.S. President Biden Slips up on Name of ASEAN Summit Host Cambodia.” Edited by Christina Fincher. Reuters. Thomson Reuters, November 12, 2022. <https://www.reuters.com/world/asia-pacific/us-president-biden-slips-up-name-asean-summit-host-cambodia-2022-11-12/>.
- “Khmer Rouge: Cambodia's Years of Brutality.” BBC News. BBC, November 16, 2018. <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-asia-pacific-10684399>.
- Khmer Times. Facebook. Accessed May 2, 2023. <https://www.facebook.com/khmertimes>.
- Khouth Sophak, Chakrya. “Hun Sen Thanks US' Biden for Return of Looted Statues.” Phnom Penh Post. Post Media, November 13, 2022. <https://phnompenhpost.com/national/hun-sen-thanks-us-biden-return-looted-statues>.
- Kijewski, Leonie. “US to Issue Visa Sanctions against Cambodian Officials ‘Undermining Democracy’.” The Phnom Penh Post. Post Media Co, December 7, 2017. <https://www.phnompenhpost.com/national-politics/us-issue-visa-sanctions-against-cambodian-officials-undermining-democracy>.
- Kline, Thomas R. Letter to Cultural Property Advisory Committee. Cultural Heritage Law. Lawyers’ Committee for Cultural Heritage Preservation, October 14, 2017. <https://www.culturalheritagelaw.org/resources/Documents/CPAC%20Cambodia%20LCCHP.pdf>.
- “Law on the Protection of Cultural Heritage.” Wipo Lex. World Intellectual Property Organization, January 1996. <https://www.wipo.int/wipolex/en/text/22319>.
- Le Bonheur, Albert, Thierry Zéphir, and Helen Ibbitson Jessup. “Ancient Cambodia: A

- Historical Glimpse.” Essay. In *Sculpture of Angkor and Ancient Cambodia: Millennium of Glory*, 1st ed. Washington, D.C.: National Gallery of Art, 1997.
- Lefevre, Amy Sawitta, and Prak Chan Thul. “Cambodia Faces U.S., EU Action after Banning Opposition.” Reuters. Thomson Reuters, November 17, 2017.
<https://www.reuters.com/article/us-cambodia-politics/cambodia-faces-u-s-eu-action-after-banning-opposition-idUSKBN1DH033>.
- Leifer, Michael. “Cambodia Looks to China.” *The World Today* 20, no. 1 (January 1964): 26–31.
<https://www.jstor.org/stable/40393529>.
- Lemire, Jonathan. “Ahead of Xi Meeting, Biden Calls out China.” *POLITICO*. POLITICO, November 13, 2022.
<https://www.politico.eu/article/us-president-joe-biden-cambodia-asean-china-xi-jinping-g-20/>.
- Leos, Raymond, and Cameron Cheam Shapiro. Personal, July 26, 2022.
- Lieberthal, Kenneth G. “The American Pivot to Asia.” Brookings. Brookings, July 28, 2016.
<https://www.brookings.edu/articles/the-american-pivot-to-asia/>.
- Lum, Thomas G., Congressional Research Service § (2022).
<https://crsreports.congress.gov/product/pdf/R/R47311/2> .
- Mackenzie, Simon, and Tess Davis. “Temple Looting in Cambodia.” *British Journal of Criminology* 54, no. 5 (2014): 722–40. <https://doi.org/10.1093/bjc/azu038>.
- Marks, Paul. “China's Cambodia Strategy.” *The US Army War College Quarterly: Parameters* 30, no. 3 (2000). <https://doi.org/10.55540/0031-1723.1993>.
- Martinus, Melinda, and Chhay Lim. “Commentary: Can Cambodia's Future Foreign Policy Diverge from China?” *Channel News Asia*. Mediacorp Pte, March 16, 2023.
<https://www.channelnewsasia.com/commentary/cambodia-china-influence-proxy-myanmar-hun-sen-3348576>.
- Mashberg, Tom. “Cambodia Says the Met Museum Has Dozens of Its Looted Antiquities.” *The New York Times*. *The New York Times*, October 24, 2021.
<https://www.nytimes.com/2021/10/24/arts/cambodia-met-museum-looted-antiquities.html>
- Mashberg, Tom. “Claims of Looting Shadow Expert in Khmer Art.” *The New York Times*. *The*

- New York Times, December 12, 2012.
<https://www.nytimes.com/2012/12/13/arts/design/us-links-collector-to-statue-in-khmer-losing-case.html>.
- Mashberg, Tom. “He Sold Away His People's Heritage. He's in the Jungle to Get It Back.” The New York Times. The New York Times, November 21, 2021.
<https://www.nytimes.com/2021/11/21/arts/design/toek-tik-cambodian-artifacts.html>.
- Mathew, Manoj. “AmCham Raising Fund for 'Treasure Hunt' Foundation.” Khmer Times. Virtus Media, March 2, 2023.
<https://www.khmertimeskh.com/501248658/amcham-raising-fund-for-treasure-hunt-foundation/>.
- Memorandum of Understanding Between the Government of the United States of America and the Government of the Kingdom of Cambodia Concerning the Imposition of Import Restrictions on Khmer Archeological Material § (2003).
https://eca.state.gov/files/bureau/cambodia_tias.pdf.
- Men, Kimseng. “U.S. House Passes Cambodia Sanctions Bill.” VOA. VOA Cambodia, July 27, 2018.
<https://www.voacambodia.com/a/us-house-passes-cambodia-sanctions-bill/4502948.html>.
- Merryman, John Henry. “The Public Interest in Cultural Property.” *California Law Review* 77, no. 2 (1989): 339–64. <https://doi.org/10.2307/3480607>.
- Miura, Keiko. “From ‘Originals’ to Replicas: Diverse Significance of Khmer Statues.” *Kultur als Eigentum*, 2015, 269–93. <https://doi.org/10.4000/books.gup.550>.
- Mouhot, Henri, and Charles Mouhot. “Travels in the Central Parts of Indo-China (Siam), Cambodia, and Laos, During the Years 1858, 1859, and 1860.” Project Gutenberg, August 11, 2014.
https://www.gutenberg.org/files/46559/46559-h/46559-h.htm#Page_278.
- Muan, Ingrid. “Citing Angkor: The ‘Cambodian Arts’ in the Age of Restoration, 1918-2000.” Dissertation, Bell & Howell Information and Learning Company, 2001.
- Murphy, Ann Marie. “America Is Back? Opportunities and Obstacles to Restoring U.S. Credibility in Southeast Asia.” *Asia Policy* 28, no. 4 (2021): 66–76.
<https://doi.org/10.1353/asp.2021.0060>.
- Narin, Sun. “Cambodia Seeks New Financing from Beijing amid Fears of 'Debt Trap'.” VOA.

Voice of America (VOA News), February 7, 2023.
<https://www.voanews.com/a/cambodia-seeks-more-loans-from-beijing-amid-fears-of-debt-trap-/6943062.html>.

Nathan, Andrew J. “The Puzzle of Authoritarian Legitimacy.” *Journal of Democracy* 31, no. 1 (January 2020): 158–68. <https://doi.org/10.1353/jod.2020.0013>.

National Security Strategy § (2022).

<https://www.whitehouse.gov/wp-content/uploads/2022/10/Biden-Harris-Administrations-National-Security-Strategy-10.2022.pdf>.

Ngin, Chanrith. “The Undetermined Costs and Benefits of Cambodia's Engagement with China's Belt and Road Initiative.” FULCRUM. ISEAS-Yusof Ishak Institute, November 29, 2022. <https://fulcrum.sg/the-undetermined-costs-and-benefits-of-cambodias-engagement-with-chinas-belt-and-road-initiative/>.

Ngoun, Kimly. “Thai–Cambodian Conflict Rooted in History.” *East Asia Forum*, January 26, 2012. <https://www.eastasiaforum.org/2012/01/27/thai-cambodian-conflict-rooted-in-history/>.

Noble, Steve. “Cambodian Treasures Foundation - the Importance of Returning Stolen Cambodian Antiquities & Artifacts.” B2B CAMBODiA. B2B CAMBODiA, March 10, 2023. <https://www.b2b-cambodia.com/articles/cambodian-treasures-foundation-the-importance-of-returning-stolen-cambodian-antiquities-artifacts/>.

Noce, Vincent. “'Adventurer Scholar' Douglas Latchford Dies in Bangkok, Aged 89.” *The Art Newspaper*. *The Art Newspaper*, September 28, 2021. <https://www.theartnewspaper.com/2020/08/10/adventurer-scholar-douglas-latchford-dies-in-bangkok-aged-89>.

Nye, Joseph S, and Diane Coudu. *Smart Power*. Other. Harvard Business Review. Harvard Business School Publishing, November 2008. <https://hbr.org/2008/11/smart-power>.

Nye, Joseph S. *Soft Power: The Means to Success in World Politics*. New York, NY: PublicAffairs, 2004.

Nye, Joseph. “Soft Power: The Origins and Political Progress of a Concept.” *Palgrave Communications* 3, no. 1 (2017). <https://doi.org/10.1057/palcomms.2017.8>.

Office of the Press Secretary. “Remarks by President Obama to the Australian Parliament.”

National Archives and Records Administration. The White House, November 17, 2011. <https://obamawhitehouse.archives.gov/the-press-office/2011/11/17/remarks-president-Obama-australian-parliament>.

Page, Jeremy, Gordon Lubold, and Rob Taylor. “Deal for Naval Outpost in Cambodia Furthers China's Quest for Military Network.” *The Wall Street Journal*. Dow Jones & Company, July 22, 2019. <https://www.wsj.com/articles/secret-deal-for-chinese-naval-outpost-in-cambodia-raises-us-fears-of-beijings-ambitions-11563732482>.

Pearson, James, and Greg Torode. “Exclusive: Satellite Images Reveal Show of Force by Chinese Navy in South China Sea.” Reuters. Thomson Reuters, March 27, 2018. <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-china-defence/exclusive-satellite-images-reveal-show-of-force-by-chinese-navy-in-south-china-sea-idUSKBN1H3135>.

Politzer, Malia, Peter Whoriskey, Delphine Reuter, and Spencer Woodman. “From Temples to Offshore Trusts, a Hunt for Cambodia's Looted Heritage Leads to Top Museums.” *The International Consortium of Investigative Journalists*, August 11, 2022. <https://www.icij.org/investigations/pandora-papers/cambodia-relics-looted-temples-museums-offshore/>.

“Public Law 97-446-Jan. 12, 1983.” Office of the Law Revision Counsel. United States Code, n.d. <https://uscode.house.gov/statviewer.htm?volume=96&page=2351#>.

Reed, Holly, Charles B. Keely, and Patrick Heuveline. “The Demographic Analysis of Mortality Crises: The Case of Cambodia, 1970-1979.” Essay. In *Forced Migration & Mortality*. Washington, D.C.: National Academy Press, 2001.

“Remarks by Vice President Pence on the Administration’s Policy Toward China.” National Archives and Records Administration. The White House, October 4, 2018. <https://trumpwhitehouse.archives.gov/briefings-statements/remarks-vice-president-pence-administrations-policy-toward-china/>.

Rim, Sokvy. “Cambodia Has Little to Gain from Hosting a Chinese Military Presence.” *The Diplomat*. The Diplomat, June 11, 2022. <https://thediplomat.com/2022/06/cambodia-has-little-to-gain-from-hosting-a-chinese-military-presence/>.

Roehrenbeck, Carol A. “Repatriation of Cultural Property—Who Owns the Past? An Introduction to Approaches and to Selected Statutory Instruments.” *International Journal of Legal Information* 38, no. 2 (2010): 185–200. <https://doi.org/10.1017/s0731126500005722>.

Samdech Hun Sen, Cambodian Prime Minister. Facebook. Accessed May 2, 2023.

<https://www.facebook.com/hunsencambodia/>.

Schrivver, Randall, and Cameron Cheam Shapiro. Personal, 2022.

Seah, Sharon, Joanne Lin, Melinda Martinus, Sithanonxay Suvannaphakdy, and Thi Phuong

Thao Pham . Rep. The State of Southeast Asia: 2023 Survey Report. ISEAS-Yusof Ishak Institute, February 9, 2023.

<https://www.iseas.edu.sg/wp-content/uploads/2025/07/The-State-of-SEA-2023-Final-Digital-V4-09-Feb-2023.pdf>.

Silver, Laura. “Americans Differ from People in Other Societies over Some Aspects of U.S.

'Hard' and 'Soft' Power.” Pew Research Center. Pew Research Center, November 1, 2021. <https://www.pewresearch.org/fact-tank/2021/11/01/americans-differ-from-people-in-other-societies-over-some-aspects-of-u-s-hard-and-soft-power/>.

Smith, Roger M. Cambodia's Foreign Policy. Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1965.

Sochan, Ry. “Museums Department Launches Online Catalogue of Six Provincial Collections.”

Phnom Penh Post. Post Media Co , September 16, 2022.

<https://www.phnompenhpost.com/national/museums-department-launches-online-catalogue-six-provincial-collections>.

Soft Power 30. Portland, 2019. <https://softpower30.com/>.

Sounry, Chum. “Is Cambodia the next Asian Tiger? America Should Hope So.” Newsweek.

Newsweek, October 27, 2021.

<https://www.newsweek.com/cambodia-next-asian-tiger-america-should-hope-so-opinion-1642788>.

Stoilas, Helen, and Vincent Noce. “Federal Charges Could Lead to Deeper Scrutiny of

Cambodian Art in the US.” The Art Newspaper. The Art Newspaper, September 28, 2021.

<https://www.theartnewspaper.com/2020/01/01/federal-charges-could-lead-to-deeper-scrutiny-of-cambodian-art-in-the-us>.

“The Administration's Approach to the People's Republic of China.” U.S. Department of State.

U.S. Department of State, August 19, 2022.

<https://www.state.gov/the-administrations-approach-to-the-peoples-republic-of-china/>.

The Editorial Board. “America Is Struggling to Counter China's Intellectual Property Theft.”

Financial Times. Financial Times, April 18, 2022.

<https://www.ft.com/content/1d13ab71-bffd-4d63-a0bf-9e9bdfc33c39>.

“The United States-Cambodia Relationship.” U.S. Department of State. U.S. Department of

- State, August 3, 2022. <https://www.state.gov/the-united-states-cambodia-relationship/>.
- Thomas-Greenfield, Linda. “Keynote Address.” Lecture, Student Conference on United States Affairs, United States Military Academy, Westpoint, NY, November 3, 2022.
- Thompson, Ashley, and Cameron Cheam Shapiro. Personal, September 12, 2022.
- Thompson, Janna. “Cultural Property, Restitution and Value.” *Journal of Applied Philosophy* 20, no. 3 (2003): 251–62. <https://doi.org/10.1046/j.0264-3758.2003.00251.x>.
- Thul , Prak Chan. “U.S. Says Denied Full Access to Cambodia Naval Base during Visit.” Edited by Ed Davies. Reuters. Thomson Reuters, June 11, 2021. <https://www.reuters.com/world/asia-pacific/us-says-denied-full-access-cambodia-naval-base-during-visit-2021-06-11/>.
- Thul, Prak Chan. “Cambodia PM Condemns Russian Invasion of Ukraine.” Edited by Kanupriya Kapoor. Reuters. Thomson Reuters, March 28, 2022. <https://www.reuters.com/world/cambodia-pm-condemns-russian-invasion-ukraine-2022-03-28/>.
- Thul, Prak Chan. “Chinese President Xi Jinping Visits Loyal Friend Cambodia.” Reuters. Thomson Reuters, October 13, 2016. <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-china-cambodia/chinese-president-xi-jinping-visits-loyal-friend-cambodia-idUSKCN12D0NV>.
- Thul, Prak Chan. “Hu Wants Cambodia Help on China Sea Dispute, Pledges Aid.” Reuters. Thomson Reuters, March 31, 2012. <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-cambodia-china-idUSBRE82U04Y20120331>.
- Thul, Prak Chan. “U.S. Turns to Music in Bid to Woo Cambodians.” Reuters. Thomson Reuters, March 7, 2018. <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-cambodia-usa-music-idUSKCN1GJ14E>.
- Traub, James. “The New Hard-Soft Power.” *The New York Times*. The New York Times, January 30, 2005. <https://www.nytimes.com/2005/01/30/magazine/the-new-hardsoft-power.html>.
- United States Strategic Approach to the People’s Republic of China § (2020). <https://trumpwhitehouse.archives.gov/wp-content/uploads/2020/05/U.S.-Strategic-Approach-to-The-Peoples-Republic-of-China-Report-5.24v1.pdf>.
- U.S. Attorney Announces Return of 30 Looted Antiquities to Kingdom of Cambodia. Southern

District of New York. US Department of Justice, 2022.
<https://www.justice.gov/usao-sdny/video/us-attorney-announces-return-30-looted-antiquities-kingdom-cambodia>.

“U.S. Attorney Announces Return Of 30 Looted Antiquities To Kingdom Of Cambodia.”

Southern District of New York. U.S. Department of Justice, August 8, 2022. U.S. Department of Justice.
<https://www.justice.gov/usao-sdny/pr/us-attorney-announces-return-30-looted-antiquities-kingdom-cambodia>.

U.S. Embassy Colombo. “Soft Power, Hard Power and Public Diplomacy: Deputy Chief of

Mission Robert B. Hilton's Remarks at BIDTI.” U.S. Embassy in Sri Lanka. U.S. Embassy in Sri Lanka, June 9, 2018.
<https://lk.usembassy.gov/soft-power-hard-power-and-public-diplomacy-deputy-chief-of-mission-robert-b-hiltons-remarks-at-bidti/>.

U.S. Mission Cambodia. “Cultural Artifacts Handover Ceremony.” U.S. Embassy in Cambodia.

U.S. Embassy in Cambodia, July 14, 2022.
<https://kh.usembassy.gov/cultural-artifacts-handover-ceremony/>.

“USTR Releases Product Exclusion Process for Chinese Products Subject to Section 301

Tariffs.” United States Trade Representative. Executive Office of the President, July 6, 2018. Executive Office of the President of the United States.
<https://ustr.gov/about-us/policy-offices/press-office/press-releases/2018/july/ustr-releases-product-exclusion>.

Viser, Matt, and Yasmeen Abutaleb. “Biden Works to Convince the World U.S. Is Back as Asia

Tour Starts.” The Washington Post. WP Company, November 15, 2022.
<https://www.washingtonpost.com/politics/2022/11/12/biden-asean-summit-american-leadership/>.

VOA Khmer. Facebook. Accessed May 2, 2023. <https://www.facebook.com/voakhmer/>.

Waltz, Kenneth N. “The Origins of War in Neorealist Theory.” *Journal of Interdisciplinary*

History 18, no. 4 (1988): 615. <https://doi.org/10.2307/204817>.

“Written Testimony of Ice Homeland Security Investigations International Operations Assistant

Director Raymond Villanueva for a House Committee on Financial Services, Subcommittee on Terrorism and Illicit Finance Hearing Titled “The Exploitation of Cultural Property: Examining Illicit Activity in the Antiquities and Art Trade.” United States Department of Homeland Security, June 23, 2017.
<https://www.dhs.gov/news/2017/06/23/written-testimony-ice-house-financial-services-subcommittee-terrorism-and-illicit>.

“Why China's Stand on Russia and Ukraine Is Raising Concerns.” AP NEWS. Associated Press, February 20, 2023.
<https://apnews.com/article/russia-ukraine-politics-government-antony-blinken-china-6ad43aa87f086acce31a1de63c6caf15>.

Zéphir Thierry. “Introduction to Khmer Sculpture: General Remarks.” Essay. In *Sculpture of Angkor and Ancient Cambodia: Millennium of Glory*. Washington, D.C.: National Gallery of Art, 1997.