The publication of this monograph in 2017 was received with great fanfare in India, both in the print and electronic media and the author has been hopeful "that a critical engagement with ancient Indian political thought can perhaps help us reflect on the problem of escalating political violence in our own time" (p. x). True, the contemporary milieu of India is marked by considerable violence. Political killings by ideology-driven political parties are rampant. Brute force and violence are also creeping into the thought, words and deeds of common people on the streets and giving a name to such violence is problematic. To illustrate, extreme violence, sometimes involving even physical death, is brazenly carried out by "Hindus" in the name of cow protection. Innocent victims are usually Muslims. This phenomenon has come to be known as "mob lynching". The incidence of violence against women and socially downtrodden people is also on the rise. Do these constitute "political" or social or religious or even economic (beef trade) violence? The author may have an answer for these phenomena but we would find it difficult to classify them.

Even in its limited objective, this is not the first book on the history of political ideas. Yet, it should be welcomed by lay readers who may be curious to know about the ancient Indian pasts. Fortunately, the author has been questioning enough to refrain from dubbing these pasts as "glorious". Apparently, this monograph is not meant for subject specialists for they are likely to be familiar with most of the contents and the overall narrative. Some of them, present reviewer included, may find it to be a product of new-fangled postmodern culturalism, which is often high on decibel level.

Monastery, Monument, Museum: Sites and Artifacts of Thai Cultural Memory

By Maurizio Peleggi. Honolulu: University of Hawaiʻi Press, 2017. Pp. 280. ISBN 10: 0824866061; ISBN 13: 978-0824866068.

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Monastery, Monument, Museum is the latest book by cultural historian Maurizio Peleggi of the National University of Singapore. It discusses aspects of the social, cultural, and collective memory of Thailand through certain emblematic sites and specific artifacts. In Prof. Peleggi's words, these judiciously selected cultural landmarks and objects function as "agents and products of the transmission of religious beliefs, aesthetic principles, political ideologies, and manual and intellectual knowledge throughout the *longue durée* of Thailand's cultural history" (p. 1). In so doing, it follows French historian Pierre Nora's concept of "site of memory", popularized in his monumental collection *Les Lieux de Mémoire*.[1] It may thus refer to any place, object, or concept vested with historical significance in the popular collective memory, such as a monument, a museum, an event, a symbol, or a historical or legendary figure.

Peleggi's study is a collection of works consisting of eight chapters, four of which were published earlier as separate articles and essays (Chapters 3–6). It therefore suffers somewhat from including information that is occasionally dated; in some cases new information has not been considered. The volume is divided into three parts spanning roughly from Prehistoric times to the modern period.

[1]First published in French in seven volumes between 1984 and 1992; partially translated into English as Nora 1996.

Part 1 ("Sacred Geographies") deals with devotional art. Chapter 1 (pp. 9–29) introduces the Buddhist landscape of Thailand through a discussion of the Buddha's footprint at Wat Phraphutthabat in Saraburi, as well as sacred toponyms, and famous "great reliquaries" (*mahathat*) such as Wat Mahathat in the ancient capital of Sukhothai.[2] This chapter emphasizes perhaps a bit too much the role of the Mons who preceded the Thais and their alleged early contacts with Sri Lanka's Buddhist centers in the first millennium CE (pp. 11, 22). As far as I know, there is no epigraphic or archaeological evidence for such early direct contacts with Sri Lanka before the second millennium and, similarly, the earliest footprint found in Thailand was probably carved by Khmers in the eleventh century CE, not by the Mons in the late first millennium (Revire 2012). More could be said, however, about the fictional introduction of Buddhism in the kingdom according to Thai Buddhist narratives. For example, subsequent local legends and myths explain the introduction of Buddhism especially to northern Thailand, such as *Tamnan Phra Chao Liap Lok* ("The chronicle of the Buddha's journey around the world"), often with the "historical Buddha" establishing his footprints (Prakong 2012). *Tamnan Phra Bat Si Roi* similarly relates that Buddha Gotama imprinted his foot on top of the footprints of his three predecessors on Mount Rang Rung, possibly in today's Mae Rim district of Chiang Mai province (Sanguan 2012, pp. 609–15). Such legends also reflect the belief in the five buddhas of this "auspicious eon", according to which each buddha would preach and leave his footprint at the same sacred spot as his predecessors (Revire 2019).

In Part 1, Chapter 2 (pp. 30–49), the author discusses the destiny and peregrinations of some famous Thai (and Lao) Buddha icons, namely the "Emerald Buddha" (Phra Kaeo), the "Lion Buddha" (Phra Sihing) – of which at least three claimants exist today in Thailand – and the "Buddha of Little Parts" (Phra Bang), as retold through "religious chronicles" (*tamnan*). The seizure and relocation of these particular Buddha images from kingdom to kingdom (*mueang*) was important since they acted as religious and political *palladia* or "tutelary images" to protect and legitimize the capital city in which they were enshrined. The fate of these itinerant icons thus mirrored the fate of the kingdom that (dis-)possessed them.[3] In addition, according to Peleggi, their legendary journeys can be seen as attempts to map the Buddhist spread of the so-called "Theravada ecumene" in Thailand and beyond. It may also emphasize the role of the Thai kingdom – with Bangkok as its modern capital – as a symbolic and sacred center of the Theravada world (Rod-Ari 2009).

Part 1, Chapter 3 (pp. 50–62), explores the role of the "Other" in Thai Buddhist art through the representation of foreign and exotic characters in mural paintings, illuminated manuscripts, or in the traditional decorative arts of the late Ayutthaya period. A case in mind is the famous wooden manuscript cabinet from Ayutthaya, now at the Bangkok National Museum (Color Pl. 2), decorated with the gilded-black lacquer technique (*lai rot nam*), depicting on its front panels a "Westerner" (*farang*) dressed in princely attire and a "Persian" or "Moghul" (*khaek*) alleged to represent a monarch. These representations of foreigners in Thai art not only reflect Ayutthaya's cosmopolitan setting in the late seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries, but also, according to Peleggi, "a cognitive map of the world that drew its coordinates from Indo-Buddhist cosmology" (p. 53), as found, for example, in various treatises on the "Three Worlds" (*traiphum*). It is no exaggeration to say that these Thai cosmological works exerted a powerful influence on the religious consciousness of the Thai people and its elite through until at least the mid-nineteenth century, when the gradual arrival of a new "scientific cosmology" from the West penetrated Thai's elite. Significantly, a recently published folded manuscript produced in the late nineteenth century, not cited by Peleggi but making his case (Skilling 2018), is interesting because it juxtaposes a Thai picturesque and traditional map of the universe with an exotic western landscape of the region. In traditional murals and illuminated manuscripts depicting

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[2]The traditional dating to the fourteenth century assigned to Wat Mahathat, followed by Peleggi (pp. 16–18), has been reassessed to around the late Ayutthaya period in the seventeenth–eighteenth century by Piriya 2018.

[3]The polarity and complementary of the Phra Kaeo and Phra Sihing are often emphasized but not discussed by Peleggi. See *inter alia* Woodward 1997.

the Life of the Buddha (or his past lives), foreigners often play an ambivalent role as both opponents and protectors of the Dharma. A sound discussion by the author thus ensues on the place and function of the Other in Thai social imagination and cultural memory.

The scope of Part 2 ("Antiquities, Museums, and National History") concerns issues related to Thai museology and art history as a nascent discipline in the kingdom. In Chapter 4 (pp. 65–83), Peleggi discusses the rise of royal interest on their kingly antiquities in the second half of the nineteenth century. Anecdotal episodes relate to the "miraculous" discovery by Prince Mongkut – the future Rāma IV (r. 1851–1868) – of the Phra Pathom Chedi in Nakhon Pathom (a ruined and modest *stūpa* then lost in the jungle before its massive reconstruction), traditionally regarded as the "first and foremost" *stūpa* in the kingdom, as well as the discovery of the famous Ramkhamhaeng inscription in Sukhothai, considered the earliest example of Thai script. It is no surprise that the inscription had immense influence over the development of Thai historiography from the late nineteenth century onwards, since Sukhothai came to be regarded as the first ideal Thai kingdom. Despite the modern controversies surrounding authenticity, the epigraph was inscribed on the UNESCO Memory of the World Register in 2003 (Terwiel 2010). Other prominent Thai royal figures discussed in this chapter include Prince Damrong Rajanubhab (1862–1943), half-brother of King Chulalongkorn (Rāma V, r. 1868–1910), who became the celebrated "Father of Thai history". Prince Damrong was an architect of Thai's periodization of art styles later adopted by the Bangkok National Museum in its classification of the archaeological collection described in Chapter 5 (pp. 84–99). Foreign experts and scholars of the colonial era, such as George Cœdès, Corrado Feroci, and A. B. Griswold, were often solicited at this early stage to help build a history and art history for the emerging Thai nation, the birthplace of which they unanimously agreed should be located in Sukhothai.

This western methodology of stylistic classification, however, has been challenged on several occasions by Thai art historian Piriya Krairiksh, most recently in his book *The Roots of Thai Art* (2012) cited, but not discussed, by Peleggi. Although Dr Piriya is quite critical of Prince Damrong and Cœdès' early classification of Thai art, his own new approach to "sectarian affiliations" to explain Buddhist art in Thailand is not without problems. Not only does it argue against empirical evidence and religious practices (Revire 2013), but – one could contend – it also fosters a "nationalistic" reaction to what western and earlier scholars of Thai art have proposed, perhaps in a manner reminiscent of Ananda Coomaraswamy's "indigenous" reaction (1927) against the pioneer work of French scholar Alfred Foucher concerning the origin of the Buddha image in early South Asian Buddhist art. Where this comes from is probably a desire to see Thai Buddhist art anchored in a more local (or indigenous) category.

But in my own view, modern Thai narratives and museology wish to anchor the so-called roots of "Thainess" even deeper than Sukhothai. The "Land of Gold" or Suvarnabhumi is indeed another important foundation myth for today's Thai Buddhists (Revire 2018). King Mongkut and Prince Damrong were instrumental in asserting that central Thailand is Suvarnabhumi and regarded the early Buddhist monuments and artifacts found around Nakhon Pathom as evidence for the introduction of (Theravāda) Buddhism in the kingdom following the Indian missions sent by King Asoka, approximately 1,500 years before the Sukhothai era. Several Thai intellectuals and academics still hold to this traditional view and continue to publish extensively on the myth of Suvarnabhumi (e.g. Bunchar and Somchet 2019).

The search for Thai national origins and the issues of who inhabited pre-modern Thailand is directly at stake in Part 2, Chapter 6 (pp. 100–117). In this chapter, Peleggi moves the reader to the terrain of "Prehistory" – or more properly "Protohistory" – spanning the late Neolithic to early Bronze Age transition. Following the discoveries and early excavations of bronze fragments and ancient painted pottery vessels in the late 1960s–early 1970s at Ban Chiang in Isan (northeast Thailand), the site was initially and sensationally dated to as old as 3600 BCE and was dubbed the world's oldest bronze culture, even pre-dating the blossoming Chinese metallurgy and early urban developments of the Indus Valley in South and East Asia. New data and radiocarbon (calibrated) dating of comparative excavated material from Ban Chiang and other sites in northeast Thailand,

however, corrected this faulty assumption concerning the origin of bronze at Ban Chiang and clearly demonstrated that it is far less old than originally thought. In this dating game, a scientific consensus has yet to be found regarding the exact chronology of the Bronze Age in northeast Thailand (and, by extension, mainland Southeast Asia), spurring an ongoing debate, ignored by the author, in the archaeological community.[4] Whatever the situation, Peleggi feels that the case study of Ban Chiang, in the context of the Vietnam War and the Cold War with a strong presence of US military forces in Thailand and the establishment of an Air Force base in nearby Udon Thani (Fig. 6.1), contributed to the rise of "American neo-colonial archaeology". According to him, this "new archaeology" attempted to stress the *local genii* and challenged earlier conceptions of European "colonial archaeology's" theory of diffusionism from India and China into Southeast Asia.[5] But at the end of the day, no connection could be made whatsoever between these earliest Isan settlers and the Tai-speaking groups who came to populate the region later in the second millennium CE. Nonetheless, despite the marginal position of Isan Pre- or Protohistoric culture in Thai cultural memory, the Ban Chiang archaeological site was inscribed on the World Heritage list in December 1992.

The final part, Part 3 ("Discordant Mnemoscapes"), deals with modern Thai political and civic art. Chapter 7 (pp. 121–42) discusses the mnemonic – if not schizophrenic – urban landscape following the erection of new national and military memorials and the rise of cultic statues of past Thai kings and other historical or legendary figures as popular objects of devotion.[6] These new public memorials include the Democracy and the Victory monuments (*Anusawari Prachathipatai* and *Anusawari Chai Samoraphum*), which now occupy busy traffic roundabouts in the center of Bangkok, and are amongst the city's most familiar landmarks. The Democracy Monument was commissioned in 1939 by Field Marshal Plaek Phibunsongkhram (1897–1964) to commemorate the "Siamese Revolution" of 1932, which led to the establishment of a constitutional monarchy in what was then still the Kingdom of Siam. Phibun saw the monument as the center of a new westernized Bangkok, making Ratchadamnoen Road ("Royal Walk Way") the "Champs-Élysées" and the Democracy Monument the "Arc de Triomphe" of Bangkok. The monument has since served as a rallying point for later generations of Thai democracy activists. It was thus the focus of mass demonstrations against different military regimes in the 1970s and early 1990s. During the more recent Thai political crisis (2009–2014), the monument was successively a rallying point for the so-called "Red" and "Yellow Shirts". As recalled by Peleggi, these events have given the monument a legitimacy it lacked for much of its history.[7]

As for the Victory Monument, it was erected in 1941, also during Phibun's regime, to commemorate the alleged and much exaggerated Thai victory in the so-called "Franco-Thai War" during the

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[4]White and Hamilton 2018–19 now place the first evidence for bronze technology at Ban Chiang in about 2000 BCE, while Higham et al. 2015 pinpoint the transition into the Bronze Age at *circa* 1000 cal. BCE. The cultural implications of a different date are important for ascertaining the origin of knowledge for smelting and casting bronze in Southeast Asia.

[5]This assumption, however, must be toned down by the fact that even the new generation of international archaeologists now identifies the external origin of bronze at Ban Chiang either by means of direct contact with specialists of the Seima Turbino metallurgical tradition of central Eurasia (White and Hamilton 2018–19), or through Chinese stimuli via a southward expansion of technological expertise rooted in the early states of the Yellow and Yangtze valleys (Higham et al. 2015).

[6]In the same vein, one is immediately reminded of the modern "Rajabhakti Park" located in the vicinity of Hua Hin, southern Thailand. The name of the park refers to "Royal Bhakti", that is, in an Indian context, the devotional worship directed to one supreme deity, usually Viṣṇu (especially in his incarnation as Rāma). The site is a historically themed park featuring gigantic bronze statues of past Thai kings from the Sukhothai period to the current Chakri dynasty. It was built by the Royal Thai Army in 2015, on Thai Army property, and soon stirred controversies following alleged corruption during construction. See for example *Bangkok Post*, 12 Nov. 2015: https://www.bangkokpost.com/thailand/politics/761924/rajabhakti-park-figure-flees-country.

[7]That is despite the recent and mysterious disappearance of the memorial plaque of the 1932 Siamese Revolution embedded in the nearby Royal Plaza, which has since been replaced by a new one bearing a different message. See *Bangkok Post*, 17 April 2017: https://www.bangkokpost.com/thailand/politics/1232906/you-say-you-want-a-revolution-plaque-well-its-gone.

Second World War. One could argue that the obelisk monument is entirely fascist in design, an architectural style very familiar in the 1930–40s across other fascist and communist states. Therefore, many Thais regard the monument today as an inappropriate symbol of militarism and a relic of what they now see as a discredited military regime. Peleggi then sums up the achievements of the famed Italian sculptor Corrado Feroci (1892–1962), who became a Thai citizen and later adopted the Thai name Silpa Bhirasri, and was partly the one responsible for executing the propagandistic reliefs (Figs. 7.5–7.8) and sculptures surrounding the base of both these monuments. Feroci also provided the main sculpting for the renowned Lady Mo (or Thao Suranari) Monument in the northeast city of Nakhon Ratchasima (Khorat). Palpably, the story represented by these monuments, reliefs, and sculptures was a considerable distortion of the historical truth, the topic of Peleggi's final chapter.

Part 3, Chapter 8 (pp. 143–63), revisits the social memory and public commemoration of two traumatic events in modern Thai political history; namely the popular uprising of 14 October 1973, resulting in the end of the ruling military dictatorship, and the Thammasat University massacre of 6 October 1976, which saw the return of the former military dictatorship. A memorial has been erected to each of these violent events, dedicated in central Bangkok in the early 2000s. Peleggi discusses the symbolism and didacticism behind the design of these memorials, as well as the appropriation of these events by young and new engaged Thai artists. These people paved the way for the production of very sophisticated and poignant œuvres such as *Blue October*, *Horror in Pink*, and *History Class* (Color Pls. 6–9). The goal of these political artworks is twofold. Firstly, they commemorate the Thai victims (often students) of past internal struggles against dictatorship. Secondly, they seek to contest the official and historical narrative transmitted mainly through state education. As Peleggi duly reminds us, Thai national history is often made "of selections and omissions" (p. 161).[8]

Overall, the book is a thorough and useful historiographical survey, mingled with many details and supported by an index, some lengthy notes, and a comprehensive, albeit not exhaustive, bibliography (for further and more up-to-date references, see below). It is well-written and edited and only a few misprints of French names and references pop up; the illustrations are also well chosen. This new book makes for an enjoyable read or could be used profitably in the classroom.

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[8]Further illustrating this point, it is no surprise that the former and ousted Prime Minister Thaksin Shinawatra had been eventually "forgotten" from high school historical textbooks following the 2014 Coup d'État. See *The New York Times*, 15 Sept. 2014: https://www.nytimes.com/2014/09/16/world/asia/loved-and-hated-thaksin-shinawatra-former-premier-of-thailand-is-erased-from-textbook.html.

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The Japanese Occupation of Malaya and Singapore, 1941–45: A Social and Economic History

By Paul H. Kratoska. Singapore: NUS Press, 2018. Pp. 446. ISBN 10: 997169638X; ISBN 13: 978-9971696382.

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Japanese military forces invaded Malaya on 8 December 1941 and British forces surrendered in Singapore on 15 February 1942. The Japanese military administration ruled the territory for three and a half years, and the Japanese occupation had an impact on the local society in many ways.

This book describes the Japanese military administration and the social and economic history in Malaya and Singapore from 1942 to 1945.

The author, Paul H. Kratoska, writes that, "Popular understanding is in any case full of misconceptions" (p. 1). Japanese occupation in Malaya and Singapore was often understood in the following terms: "The war caused Britain to abandon its colonial empire; Japan conquered Malaya to obtain the peninsula's rich natural resources; the Japanese ruled autocratically and used terror to control the population" (p. 1), and so on.

Yet, "These interpretations are commonplace, but are partial truths at best and include much that is inaccurate" (p. 1). And Kratoska remarks that "The events in Malaya had little to do" with "Britain's decision to give up its empire" (p. 1). And, "the colonial rule ended in Malaya through a constitutional process twelve years after the Japanese surrender" (p. 1).

Whereas the Japanese occupation is recognized as a watershed in the history of British Malaya and Malaysia, Kratoska explains the British administration and policies toward Malaya by clarifying the situation in Malaya before the war (Chapter 1) and in its aftermath (Chapter 11). He also points out that the Japanese military administration used both the British colonial administration system and the administration staff (Chapters 2 and 3).

Kratoska suggests that ethnic policy and local communities could not be explained through simple pictures like "the Chinese were hostile to the Japanese, the Malays collaborated, and the Indians were