

Collection of rare centuries-old jewelry returns to Cambodia

By *Sopheng Cheang*
The Associated Press

PHNOM PENH, Cambodia — A spectacular collection of centuries-old Cambodian jewelry has been returned to the Southeast Asian country, the latest treasures to be retrieved from the estate of well-known antiquities collector and dealer Douglas Latchford, who was accused of buying and selling looted artifacts.

Cambodia’s Ministry of Culture and Fine Arts has announced that 77 pieces of Cambodian jewelry from the Latchford family collection arrived back in their homeland. It said the collection included items “such as gold and other precious metal pieces from the Pre-Angkorian and Angkorian period including crowns, necklaces, bracelets, belts, earrings, and amulets.” Angkor in the 9th to the 15th centuries was a powerful kingdom in the area of present-day Cambodia, and

Baidu to implement ChatGPT-like Ernie Bot chatbot

By *Zen Soo*
The Associated Press

HONG KONG — Baidu Inc., one of China’s biggest search and artificial intelligence firms, says it plans to implement its artificial intelligence chatbot Ernie into its search services.

Baidu, which is known for its search engine and autonomous driving technology, leads China’s efforts to create an equivalent of OpenAI’s ChatGPT chatbot. It said earlier in February that it will complete internal testing of Ernie Bot in March before making the service public.

In an internal memo, Baidu CEO Robin

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TREASURES RETURNED. Pictured is centuries-old Cambodian jewelry on display at a room of the Latchford family in London, on February 14, 2023. A spectacular collection of centuries-old Cambodian jewelry has been returned to the Southeast Asian country, the latest treasures to be retrieved from the estate of well-known antiquities collector and dealer Douglas Latchford, who was accused of buying and selling looted artifacts. (Union Youth Federations of Cambodia via AP)

and bronze sculptures and artifacts were sent back to Cambodia from the U.S. by their owners either voluntarily or after court action. They included items held by the Denver Art Museum in Colorado.

The statement from Cambodia’s Culture Ministry quoted its minister, Dr. Phoeurng Sackona, as saying that “the repatriation of these national treasures opens a new era of understanding and scholarship about the Angkorian empire and its significance to the world.”

She encouraged “private individuals, museums, as well as other institutions around the world that are in possession of Cambodian artifacts to cooperate with the Royal Government of Cambodia through the Ministry of Culture and Fine Arts or through Cambodian embassies to return Cambodian cultural heritage objects.”

“We consider such returns as a noble act, which not only demonstrates important contributions to a nation’s culture, but also contributes to the reconciliation and healing of Cambodians who went through decades of civil war and suffered tremendously from the tragedy of the Khmer Rouge genocide,” it quoted her as saying.

Cambodia’s western neighbor, Thailand, has in recent decades also successfully retrieved archaeological treasures that were illegally smuggled abroad, as awareness of the theft of cultural artifacts has heightened.

In November 2018, U.S federal prosecutors indicted him on charges of wire fraud conspiracy and other crimes related to alleged trafficking in stolen and looted Cambodian antiquities. It accused him of creating “false provenances” — documents about how and where the items were obtained — and “falsified invoices and shipping documents” to conceal their origins. Experts believe many or most of the items he handled were looted from Cambodia during periods of war and instability, including in the 1970s when the country was under the brutal rule of the communist Khmer Rouge.

Latchford in earlier interviews denied any involvement in smuggling or other wrongdoing. He died before he could be extradited to the United States to face charges, so the indictment against him was eventually dismissed.

After his death, at least 30 sandstone

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