

*European Association for Asian Art and Archaeology*

*Online Panel no. 9*

**Collecting East Asia in Slovenia: Histories,  
Narratives, Collections**

*(Tuesday, 30 November 2021; 13:00)*

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**Date:** Tuesday, 30 November 2021

**Time:** 13:00 - 17:15 (CET time, UTC+1)

**Chair:** Maki Fukuoka

13:00 - 13:15     **Nataša VAMPELJ SUHADOLNIK:** Where to Place East Asian Collections? Categorization of Chinese and Japanese Collections in Slovenian Museums and their Representation

13:15 - 13:30     **Helena MOTOH:** Objects without collections – the case of contextualizing a late Qing missionary scroll

13:30 - 13:45     **Tina BERDAJS:** The Sleeping Vessels: East Asian Ceramics in Slovenian Museums

13:45 - 14:15     *DISCUSSION*

14:15 - 14:30     ***BREAK***

14:30 - 14:45     **Barbara TRNOVEC:** Collection of writer and world traveller Alma M. Karlin

14:45 - 15:00     **Chikako SHIGEMORI BUČAR:** Japanese Picture-postcards in Slovenia

15:00 - 15:15     **Maja VESELIČ:** Souvenir, Evidence, Collectible: Collecting practices of the Early Slovenian Collectors of East Asian Postcards

15:15 - 15:45     *DISCUSSION*

15:45 - 16:00     ***BREAK***

16:00 – 16:15     **Ralf ČEPLAK MENCIN:** Ivan Skušek Jr.'s Collection of Chinese Objects from the Ming and Qing Dynasties in Slovenia

16:15 - 16:30     **Max FRUEHWIRT, Stefan ZEDLACHER:** Stepping into a Chinese mirror frame

16:30 – 16:45     **Klara HRVATIN:** One of the oldest treasures from the Ivan Skušek Collection: Cloud-plate gong *umpan*

16:45 - 17:00     **Nataša VISOČNIK GERŽELJ:** A Fan as Ceremonial and Religious Object in Japan

17:00 - 17:15     *DISCUSSION*

## ***ABSTRACTS***

*(in alphabetical order)*

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### **THE SLEEPING VESSELS: EAST ASIAN CERAMICS IN SLOVENIAN MUSEUMS**

**Tina BERDAJS**

*Department of Asian Studies, Faculty of Arts, University of Ljubljana, Ljubljana, Slovenia*

Ceramic and porcelain pieces of East Asian origin have been enjoying great interest from people living in Slovenian territory since at least the 17th century. As in other parts of Europe, they were especially popular among nobility, where they served utilitarian, as well as decorative role. At first they presented a prestigious status symbol, but with time, became more accessible to a wider circle of people. During research on East Asian art collections (most of which include ceramics) and their collectors in Slovenia, including their collecting practices and general attitudes towards East Asia, many problems arose concerning the identification and treatment of East Asian ceramics in the absence of specific knowledge, insufficient or incorrect museum documentation, and lack of general basic information on the topic.

This paper presents the first in-depth look into, current results, and ongoing research in the field of East Asian ceramics in Slovenian museums and other public institutions. All known collections are presented and analyzed based on primary origin and dating of the individual pieces, shapes and types of objects, and, when possible, various ways of acquisition. Presented collections and known collectors of East Asian ceramics in Slovenia are also put in their respective historical contexts, which furthermore enable us to explore individual collection practices of certain collectors, unique object biographies, as well as intercultural contacts between Slovenia and the East Asian region in the past few centuries.

**Tina Berdajs** is a PhD candidate at the Department of Asian Studies, Faculty of Arts, University of Ljubljana. Her dissertation explores the complicated histories of collections of East Asian ceramics in Slovenia, as well as peculiar issues inseparably connected to research of objects' provenance and dating. Her greater area of research is East Asian art with focus on Chinese and Japanese ceramics, object biographies, and histories of collecting and displaying East Asian art.

## IVAN SKUŠEK JR.'S COLLECTION OF CHINESE OBJECTS FROM THE MING AND QING DYNASTIES IN SLOVENIA

**Ralf ČEPLAK MENCIN**

*Slovene Ethnographic Museum, Ljubljana, Slovenia*

The paper is going to present Ivan Skušek Jr.'s Chinese collection, which arrived almost 100 years ago to Slovenia. Ivan Skušek Jr. was an Austro-Hungarian army navy officer on the Kaiserin Elisabeth protected cruiser, who was captured in the famous Siege of Tsingtao (31 October–7 November 1914) and transferred to Beijing. He had a chance to move freely and assembled an impressive Chinese antiquities collection. During the time of his “captivity” he met a Japanese lady, married her, and in 1920 returned home to Ljubljana with her and two railway carriages full of Chinese antiquities, intending to found a Museum of Asian Arts. Through researching Skušek Jr.'s notes and museum documents we could establish that most of the objects were carefully selected and bought through antique shops in Beijing. The main objective of Ivan Skušek Jr. was the acquisition of objects which would best portray a distant country and serve to satisfy the curiosity of people, while offering a possibility of better understanding far-away lands in East Asia, specifically China. Through further research of overall taxonomies of objects we also found a common theme of variability in colour, shape and material, as well as the high quality of objects, while the types of objects themselves are as diverse as possible (furniture, porcelain, clothing, coins, Buddhist sculptures, photographs, etc.). In 1963 the collection finally ended up in the Slovene Ethnographic Museum and has since, as a permanent exhibition, attracted many generations of museum visitors.

**Ralf Čeplak Mencin** is a curator with 37 years of experience in different museums in Slovenia. 1990 – 2001 head of the Museum of Non-European Cultures. Since 2001 he works as a curator for Asia, Oceania and Australia in the Slovene Ethnographic Museum. He published 201 articles and three books and organised (as author or co-author) 40 museum exhibitions. His last exhibition Afghanistan - Slovene views (2016-2017) with an emphasis on the humanitarian and refugee crisis was nominated for the state professional Valvasor museum award, which he won in 2006 and 2011. He has given numerous lectures in Slovenia and abroad (Austria, Belgium, Bosnia & Herzegovina, China, Croatia, France, Germany, Hungary, Italy, Peru, Romania, Serbia). He is a member of several professional associations. On the 25th General ICOM Conference in Kyoto (September 2019) He was elected chair of ICME (International Committee for Museums and Collections of Ethnography). Since January 2020 He is a member of the ICOM Define (the new museum definition) group.

## STEPPING INTO A CHINESE MIRROR FRAME

**Max FRUEHWIRT and Stefan ZEDLACHER**

*Institute of Architecture and Media (IAM), University of Technology Graz, Graz, Austria*

As part of the bilateral workshops “Application of new technologies for the presentation of East-Asian collections in Slovenian museums”, the Slovenian Ethnographic museum’s collection of Ivan Skušek was examined for the first time. Part of this collection is a wooden Chinese mirror frame, dateable around 1900. The proposed presentation will provide insight on the data preservation, generation and presentation of said mirror frame.

The methodology employed to gather the necessary data for the later generation of 3D models of the mirror was mainly surveying, measuring and photographing the mirror frame as well as sighting all possible additional data connected to it. This was done in order to allow as adequate a reconstruction as possible. To generate a first, rough 3D model, the acquired data was once more sorted and input into a range of 3D photogrammetry software. Said model would then, through manual use of a multitude of 3D CAD software, be refined and prepared for a wide range of possible 3D representations. The challenges and gained insights of the employed workflow will be presented as a general process and used to support further progress. For open access and better understanding while exploring the datasets, the generated images, videos and WebGL (3D data) were provided online and continuously updated. Beside a webpage there is a simple backend to edit and process ongoing information from the research. Tags and search functionality is also added to the objects by the researchers.

Connecting underlying data and process information is the next step of the workflow. From the newly generated 3D model - a digitally visible but empty shell - tags and graph data modeling is employed to enhance the representation of database information in the ‘informed 3D model’. For better search queries and interconnectivity linked open data is used to provide access to our datasets and/or connect existing databases of dictionaries.

**Max Frühwirt** is a student assistant at the Institute of Architecture and Media (IAM) of the University of Technology (TU Graz), Graz. The research project he is currently working on is called „Digital Chamba“ and as part of it, he deals with preservation, reconstruction and presentation of cultural heritage, be it architectural or otherwise. Main focus of his work is the creation of realistic 3D models, that allow for a more accurate preservation and representation than conventional archiving techniques while also allowing for creation of data and acquisition of new knowledge from it. As a secondary focus of his research, he is also responsible for new forms of visualisation and presentation of the acquired research data.

**Stefan Zedlacher** is a research assistant at the Institute for Architecture and Media, Project - Digital Chamba - The Cultural Heritage of Chamba Digitalisation. Currently he is working in the research project “Digital Chamba” developing a graph database network, linked open data resources and an interactive, digital representation of the research data. Main goal in the field of research is the synergy between code and pixels for a better understanding of processes and underlying information in architectural buildings. A link between BIM (building information models) from contemporary architecture and historic, invisible and hidden information from old architectures (available through digital humanities projects) is the second goal he aims to achieve with his research.

## ONE OF THE OLDEST TREASURES FROM THE IVAN SKUŠEK COLLECTION: CLOUD-PLATE GONG *UMPAN*

**Klara HRVATIN**

*Department of Asian Studies, Faculty of Arts, University of Ljubljana, Ljubljana, Slovenia*

Gong belongs to the largest collections of Chinese objects in Slovenia, so called *Collection of Ivan Skušek*. Together with other objects such as samples of court furniture, pavilion, clothing, fans, weapons, bronze Buddhist statues, old coins, various utensils such as pipes and cutlery, albums with photography, instruments etc., it forms a collection of around five hundred object, which quartermaster Skušek brought from Peking, where he stayed from 1913 to 1920. Permanently held in depository of the Slovenian Ethnographic Museum, the gong was in the past exhibited as a part of the permanent collection of non-European objects in the museum, a baroque castle Goričane, which as a special department of the Slovene Ethnographic Museum took care of non-European collections.

This presentation will provide an insight into a case study of the gong, which dating in the year 1675 could be considered as one of the oldest object from the collection. In the shape of the cloud, this kind of cloud-plate gong is *umpan* (雲版), usually made of bronze and used in the buddhist monasteries for the daily life of the monks. It will first revise the so far existing inventory considering the gong, as well as other so far written records, and verify its Chinese inscriptions on the front side of the plate. Moreover, it will focus and define its use and possible provenance; all which could provide the necessary data for the object to be evaluated, as well as its place and importance inside the Skušek collection.

**Klara Hrvatin** is a lecturer and researcher at the Department of Asian Studies, Faculty of Arts, University of Ljubljana.

## **OBJECTS WITHOUT COLLECTIONS – THE CASE OF CONTEXTUALIZING A LATE QING MISSIONARY SCROLL**

**Helena MOTOH**

*Department of Asian Studies, Faculty of Arts, University of Ljubljana, Ljubljana, Slovenia  
Science and Research Centre Koper (ZRS Koper), Koper, Slovenia*

The proposed paper focuses on a methodological problem of contextualizing singular museum objects in cases where the provenience is almost completely missing. Due to the historical circumstances in the late 1940s in Slovenia (Yugoslavia), many objects were separated from their contexts. The haste and non-transparent process of confiscation and subsequent re-appropriation took many objects from collections which they were part of and placed them in new contexts, often leaving them unexhibited due to their problematic origin. The paper aims to reflect on how the perception, interpretation and (potential) exhibiting is determined and transformed by their singularity.

This presentation will take up one such singular object as a case study for analysis, found as part of a national research project of identifying East Asian objects in the depots of Slovenian museums. It constitutes a surprising discovery among entirely unrelated objects – a rare late 19th-century Jesuit missionary scroll from Shanghai that was left with no information about its provenience or the former owner. The paper will first present the steps taken in the identification of the object, its content and background. Then the struggle of contextualizing the object and its historical provenience will be presented, along with the reflection on the limitations of this process.

**Helena Motoh** is a sinologist and philosopher with a PhD in philosophy (Sino--European cultural contacts). She is a Senior Research Associate at the Science and Research Centre Koper and an Assistant Professor at the Department of Asian Studies, Faculty of Arts, University of Ljubljana. She is one of the founding members and board members of the European Association for Chinese Philosophy (EACP).

## **JAPANESE PICTURE-POSTCARDS IN SLOVENIA**

**Chikako SHIGEMORI BUČAR**

*Department of Asian Studies, Faculty of Arts, University of Ljubljana, Ljubljana, Slovenia*

In today's Republic of Slovenia, old Japanese picture-postcards are archived in various institutions. For most of these postcards we know the names of individual collectors and their backgrounds, but there are also some known and unknown private collectors.

This paper presents all picture-postcards found in today's Slovenia, produced in Japan and some of them used for correspondence between 1890s and 1920s. They are analyzed according to the background of collectors/collections, types of photos or pictures on the front, printing technology, persons involved in correspondence etc.

Picture-postcards were important means for cultural contacts and communication between distant places, such as Japan (East Asia) and Slovenia (Central Europe), in the period when the postal service was rapidly developing, but the international telephone and telegraph were still expensive, and airplanes were not yet used by the masses.

**Chikako Shigemori Bučar** is an associate professor in Japanese studies at the Department of Asian Studies, Faculty of Arts, University of Ljubljana.

## **COLLECTION OF WRITER AND WORLD TRAVELLER ALMA M. KARLIN**

**Barbara TRNOVEC**

*Regional Museum Celje, Celje, Slovenia*

Collection of Alma M. Karlin, held by Celje Regional Museum – the second oldest museum in Slovenia, founded in 1882 –, includes more than 800 museum items and more than 500 postcards, that she has gathered during her journey. Most of the items of her highly interesting and important collection originate from Asia. Paper will highlight the nature of the Karlin's collection and her collecting policy, with the emphasis on the objects from Japan and China. Karlin (1889–1950) was a world traveller, writer, amateur researcher, polyglot and theosophist from Celje (nowadays Slovenija, then the Austro-Hungarian Empire), who travelled the world from 1919 to 1927. Travelling alone, she journeyed continuously for eight years, surviving on what she was able to earn through her own work. The nature of her travels places her among the greatest travellers of all time.

**Barbara Trnovec** is the Curator of Ethnology and Cultural Anthropology at the Celje Regional Museum and Assistant Researcher at the Faculty of Arts, University of Ljubljana.

## WHERE TO PLACE EAST ASIAN COLLECTIONS? CATEGORIZATION OF CHINESE AND JAPANESE COLLECTIONS IN SLOVENIAN MUSEUMS AND THEIR REPRESENTATION

**Nataša VAMPELJ SUHADOLNIK**

*Department of Asian Studies, Faculty of Arts, University of Ljubljana, Ljubljana, Slovenia*

Individual objects of East Asian origin began entering Slovenian museums at the end of the 19th and beginning of the 20th centuries, and larger collections in the 1950s and 60s after the death of individual collectors. Museums began to face not only the problems of how to store and display the objects, but particularly the problems of classification and categorization. Do they belong to the category of “fine art” or is it more properly to be placed into the category of ethnography or anthropology?, and above all which museum should actually accommodate them?

The paper will offer an in-depth analysis of this kind of academic debate – where to place East Asian objects – which will further highlight the representation of this material in the last 100 years in the Slovenian museums and their historical (dis)continuity, as well as the criteria by which they were placed in either the exhibited collections or stored in the museum depositories as the “hidden East Asian collections.” Such debate, of course, reflects the deeper issue of understanding and perception of East Asian cultures in a wider Slovenian area, which will be further analyzed within the scope of academic scientific disciplines that were established simultaneously in the Slovenian university space.

**Nataša Vampelj Suhadolnik** is an Associate Professor at the Department of Asian Studies at the Faculty of Arts, University of Ljubljana. She is the initiator, co-founder and first president of the European Association for Asian Art and Archaeology, and the leader of the national research project *East Asian Collections in Slovenia: Inclusion of Slovenia in the Global Exchange of Objects and Ideas with East Asia* (2018–2021).

## **SOUVENIR, EVIDENCE, COLLECTIBLE: COLLECTING PRACTICES OF THE EARLY SLOVENIAN COLLECTORS OF EAST ASIAN POSTCARDS**

**Maja VESELIČ**

*Department of Asian Studies, Faculty of Arts, University of Ljubljana, Ljubljana, Slovenia*

This paper examines how period fashions and individual inclinations intersect in the Slovenian collections of old East Asian postcards, formed in the early 20th century. It focuses in particular on the collections of Ivan John Jager, an architect, who spent several months in China and Japan between 1901-1902; the album of navy curate Ivan Koršič, who never travelled to East Asia, but received the postcards from sailors who did; and that of the extraordinary woman traveller and writer Alma M. Karlin, who spent more than a year and a half (1922-1924) in East Asia as part of her around-the-world trip.

Based on the comparative visual analysis of the collections, supplemented by the scarce documentary sources, as well as by contextualizing the images in the broader collecting practices of the times, the paper aims to flesh out what attracted the individual collectors and how this determined the character of their respective collections.

**Maja Veselič** is an assistant professor at the Department of Asian Studies, Faculty of Arts, University of Ljubljana.

## **A FAN AS CEREMONIAL AND RELIGIOUS OBJECT IN JAPAN**

**Nataša VISOČNIK GERŽELJ**

*Department of Asian Studies, Faculty of Arts, University of Ljubljana, Ljubljana, Slovenia*

Over the course of its long history, the fan came to occupy an important role in many aspects of people's life, not only as an object for cooling down on hot days, but also as an object in ceremonial and religious rituals in Japan. Ceremonial and ritualistic objects have been utilized as a means for establishing or maintaining communication between the sacred and the profane, but they also have almost always been of both utilitarian and symbolic natures, as it is the case with hand fan. It can be used as a protective devices and markers of sacredness, and often they complete the permanent furnishings of sacred places. In addition to their utilitarian role, they are endowed with a sacred character. The presentation looks into the use of hand fan as the ceremonial and ritualistic object through the history and its development in Japan. As a case study there are presented fans in some collections of Asian objects in Slovene museums.

**Nataša Visočnik Gerželj** is an assistant professor at the Department of Asian Studies, Faculty of Arts, University of Ljubljana.