

## Historiography of Chinese art in Europe, 1600-1950

This project deals with texts on Chinese art written in Western cultures between the 17th and mid-20th century. Its purpose is to trace the process of how knowledge of the history of Chinese art developed in Europe. This has not yet been thoroughly studied. To date, scholarship has focused mainly on the twentieth-century specialists in the subject, collectors of Chinese objects and collections they amassed, as well as particular problems related to the issue of European thought on Chinese art. The elaboration of this topic will fill a gap in the scholarship on art historiography in Europe, and understanding the mechanisms that governed the process of how the history of Chinese art was written in Europe up to the middle of the 20th century has consequences for contemporary art historiography, the art market, as well as museum strategies.

The history of Chinese art, before it gained the status of academic discipline during the first half of the 20th century, arose within the sphere of various practices relating to collecting and museum curation, the luxury goods market, and exploration of the non-European world. The crucial role in writing Chinese art history was played by amateur sinologists, collectors and merchants, and, first of all, Jesuit missionaries and members of trade embassies who sent to Europe first-hand accounts of a faraway empire. While describing buildings, sculptures, paintings, and decorative art, Europeans had to come to terms with a different aesthetic, a universe of iconographic motifs unfamiliar to them, and unknown symbolism. In order to render the unknown they had to invent a proper language as well as to refer to the concepts and canons of European art. Merchants who prepared an offer of their stores and collectors who tried to classify the objects they had amassed faced similar problems. By putting down their ideas, observations, and analyses they laid the foundations for Chinese art history that would later gain an institutional framework.

The research will encompass a diverse group of texts wholly or partially devoted to Chinese art, for example 17th and 18th century writings of Jesuits engaged in evangelical activities in China, reports by diplomats visiting the Middle Kingdom, architectural pattern-books and writings devoted to the layout of gardens, writings of amateur sinologists and collectors of Chinese things, and the first fragmentary formulations of Chinese art history. My aim is to answer the question as to how Europeans understood the term “Chinese art”, what kind of language they used to cope with unknown forms and motifs, and what factors determined the way they evaluated – usually disapprovingly – objects of sculpture, paintings, and architecture known from the publications on the Middle Kingdom.

I will also focus on the relation between the content of narratives on Chinese and the image of China and Chinese people, the array of Far Eastern objects available in Europe (as authors based their ideas on objects from their collections, commodities available on the market of luxury goods, and exhibits presented during World Exhibitions), their place in European museums, and the specialization of disciplines dealing with non-European objects. Illustrations accompanying the texts constitute an important element of research – I intend to answer the question what role they played in the process of writing Chinese art history and forming its European canons.

An important topic of research is the figure of Stanisław Kostka Potocki, a politician, collector, and versatile dilettante, the creator of the first consciously developed Polish collection of Chinese art. His activities as a collector and an article he published on the subject of Chinese art (*O sztuce u Chińczyków*, 1815; *On the art of the Chinese*, 1815) are central to my research interests. Translating the essay into English, thereby providing access to his work to scholars not proficient in Polish, constitutes one substantive element of the project.

The final result of the project will be an English-language book-length monograph on the historiography of Chinese art in Europe. Examining texts concerning Chinese art as a narrative that arose within the sphere of various practices relating to collecting and museum curation, the luxury goods market, and the exploration of the non-European world will allow us to show the cultural contexts in which the history of non-European art was written and its genesis as an academic discipline