



THE CHINESE, VIETNAMESE AND LAMAISTIC  
COLLECTIONS OF THE NÁPRSTEK MUSEUM

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The Chinese collection ranks among the oldest and most extensive bodies of items kept by the Náprstek Museum's Asian Department. It has been built since the museum's earliest stages, initially through non-systematic acquisitions by way of gifts and purchases of individual objects on European antiques markets, or at the Paris World Exhibition of 1874 (Julius Zeyer); some items were brought from their expeditions by explorers, such as **J. Kořenský** who travelled in the Far East in 1893 - 94, and **E.S. Vráz** who visited China in 1896 and later on, in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century, after the outbreak of the "Boxer Rising". **Vojtěch Náprstek** himself would make purchases from antiques dealers in Austria and Germany. The objects thus acquired included chiefly specimens of contemporary applied art and crafts, most notably Chinese embroideries and textiles, as well as examples of cloisonné enamels, lacquer painting on metal base (Canton enamel), Qing porcelain, artifacts made of natural lacquer, etc. In exceptional cases acquired objects documented the ways of life and thinking of local societies. Among such items were the popular pictures painted on reed paper (known among collectors as "Chinese miniatures"), which first appeared in southern China (in Canton) in the second half of the 19<sup>th</sup> century in particular, under the influence of the British East India Company, to familiarize Europeans with clothes worn by various social strata; production processes used in the best known trades and crafts, such as the processing of tea, and making of silk and pottery; scenes from Chi-





Qiu Ying (16<sup>th</sup> c.), Pilgrimage to the rivers in the spring festival season (after the painting by the Sung artist Zhang Zeduan). Horizontal scroll; black ink and paints on paper. 29 x 612 cm; detail (NpM 18 292).

nese marketplaces (including methods of punishment as a favourite subject); as well as depictions of flowers, butterflies, birds, etc. These early acquisitions also include an assortment of Chinese folk colour woodcuts dating from the 1890s, from the circle of the famed Taohuawu workshop, which were presented to the museum in 1901 by the Náprsteks' friend, Mr Römer, who then worked in Shanghai. One of the first collectors was



also Professor **R. Dvořák**; his collection of Chinese applied art, picture-rolls and, most notably, folk painting, attests to the period interest in different lifestyles and ethical systems.

The Náprstek Museum's Chinese collections witnessed a period of substantial growth after the appointment of E. Herold as the museum's director, ushering in a stage of systematic building of the corpus of objects. Special credit for the collections' enlargement should be ascribed to Eva Rychterová, the then curator of the museum's Chinese collection. At that time the museum likewise acquired a significant section of the collection of Joe Hloucha, a leading Czech collector. The corpus continued to be expanded through both purchases and gifts. The most important acquisition provided by the latter means was represented by the gift of **L.M. Kuba** who presented to the Náprstek Museum the complete collection of his father, Czech musicologist, expert on folk music and well known painter Ludvík Kuba (1863 - 1956). His collection contains specimens of applied art and crafts, ceramic, wood and metal sculpture dating predominantly from the period of the Tang dynasty, wall painting from the late 13<sup>th</sup> and early 14<sup>th</sup> centuries, as well as examples of folk art (New Year pictures). Similarly important is the gift presented by **R. Kreissl**, who enriched the museum's Chinese collection among other things by a set of Han dynasty tomb ceramics and specimens of Sung stoneware and porcelain (tea bowl with saucer), as well as a Japanese album containing an assortment of Chinese and Japanese textile scraps, parts of a theatre costume of a warrior, and a number of frottages. An extensive body of folk toys (kites) was donated to the museum by the **Embassy of the People's Republic of China in Prague**. Further demonstrations of folk art (clothes, modern batik textiles, and most notably a set of wooden painted "tunkou" ladles with a protective connotation, etc.) produced by the Yao and Yi ethnic minorities were presented to the museum in 1992 by the **Museum of Yunnan Province** in the People's Republic of China.

The Chinese collection is divided into several sections, the foremost position among which is occupied by a body of paintings on silk or paper in the forms of vertical or horizontal scrolls, album sheets, and paintings on fans. In consonance with the Chinese tradition, they are subdivided thematically, into the categories of figure painting, landscapes, painting of flowers and birds, and religious subjects (classified under folk art). The collection's oldest painting dates from the final period of the Yuan dynasty; apart from that, the body includes several anonymous works from the Ming dynasty period. The most plentifully represented period is that of the



Qing dynasty, notably the 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup>-century production (the pictures include e.g. a work by Gao Qipei painted with bare fingers, fine replicas of Ming painters including Liang Lin, etc.). Examples of modern 20<sup>th</sup>-century painting in the collection include works by Qi Baishi, Fu Baoshi, Li Keran, Huan Binhong, Lin Fengmian and others. Wall painting is represented by a few examples dating from the late stages of the Yuan dynasty. The collection contains smaller sets documenting other painting media, such as underpainting on glass, or pictures on reed paper and tree leaves.

A highly specific body of articles, comprised of pictures of ancestors, was collected thanks to the efforts of E. Rychterová. The individual scrolls, painted by master craftsmen, convey a good deal of information about Chinese society during the past two centuries.

The collection's prints section contains prints with Buddhist motives, as well as ones depicting revolutionary themes from the war against Japan. A comparatively extensive set of colour woodcuts is dealt with in a more detailed way here in the note relating to folk art.

The sculpture section comprises a body of ceramic tomb fig-



Huang Binhong (1864 - 1956), Landscape. Black ink and paints on paper. The artist's seal: Huang Zhi, zhi yin. 84x26 cm (NpM 35 858).





Bodhisattva Guanyin. Carved wood. China, early Tang dynasty, 8<sup>th</sup> c.  
H. 83 cm (NpM A 21 881).



ures dating from the periods of the Han and Tang dynasties, supplemented with figures from the final period of the Yuan dynasty and from the Ming dynasty era (stoneware and porcelain with late three-colour glaze).

The collection contains a rather extensive assortment of Buddhist sculpture, including wood carvings and mixed media sculptures. Predominant among the Buddhist figures are representations of the bodhisattva Quanyin (Avalokiteshvara). The oldest specimens date from the periods of the Sui and Tang dynasties. Also represented is Sung wood carving (1127 - 1279), as well as plentiful examples of 18<sup>th</sup>- and 19<sup>th</sup>-century production. The collection's oldest specimens of Buddhist metal sculpture are votive steles dating from the 4<sup>th</sup> - 5<sup>th</sup> centuries, with several examples of production dating from the Tang period, while the bulk of this corpus dates from the periods of the Ming and Qing dynasties. An interesting category of objects is represented by stone carvings (sandstone, marble, and hard stones). These include heads of the bodhisattva Quanyin, as well as full figures, dating from the Tang dynasty period and later. The dry-lacquer technique is represented by a single specimen, a late-17<sup>th</sup>-century figure of Quanyin (Kangxi period, 1662 - 1722).

Apart from Buddhist sculpture, the collection contains a group of small figures carved in hard wood, depicting Taoist deities. Some of these were originally located in Taoist temples, while others, carved in hard wood often inlaid with silver thread, featuring congratulatory themes, exemplify handicraft production from south-eastern China, dating mostly from the 19<sup>th</sup> century. Taoist bronze figures are represented on a smaller scale; they include notably a statue of the god of warfare Guandi, the goddess of Mount Taishan, etc. These are dated approximately to the Ming and Qing dynasties.

The category of Confucian items also includes wood carvings, mostly highly decorative, such as steles in tribute to sovereigns, commemorative steles, a head of a Confucian official, etc. Folk art production is documented e.g. by wood carvings with theatrical motives which represent a standard feature of southern Chinese architecture.

The largest section of the museum's Chinese collection is formed by applied art objects. The largest body is constituted by ceramics, a corpus which provides a considerably representative picture of the evolution of Chinese ceramics, with the exception of neolithic pottery which is represented by only a few rather untypical items. Specimens of Han glazed pottery and three-colour ritual pottery of the Tang dynasty are supplemented by examples of Tang and Sung monochrome glazes on stoneware





Bottle. Porcelain, painted with cobalt under glaze; motive of the return of maid Mulan from the army to her aged parents. China, early transitional period, 1625 – 1635. H. 29 cm (NpM A 19 025).

(celadon wares from both northern and southern kilns, "temmoku" types, brown glazes, Junyao wares, white glazes, qingbai glazes, early porcelain). The evolution of ceramics from the 13<sup>th</sup> century is classified in the collection according to decorative techniques: monochromes (including an assortment of 18<sup>th</sup>- and 19<sup>th</sup>-century red glazes, supplemented with a set dating from the 1950s), and painting under glaze (wares from folk kilns of the Cizhouyao type, cobalt under glaze, famille verte, famille rose, painting



on biscuit). The core of this section is formed by items dating from the 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> centuries.

A smaller body of vessels made from various metals, most often bronze, comprises predominantly objects dating from the late periods of the Ming and Qing dynasties. Ancient bronze vessels are exemplified by



Storage vessel. Carved red lacquer on metal core; figural scenes from the lives of sages. China, 18<sup>th</sup> c. H. 24 cm (NpM 47 830 ab).



only a few items; a larger assortment comprises antique-style Ming bronzes and decorative Qing bronzes. Another comparatively small section is taken up by an assortment of cloisonné and champlevé enamels. The earliest of these date from the final stage of the Yuan dynasty and early Ming dynasty. The core of this section is constituted by objects dating from the 18<sup>th</sup> (Yongzheng and Qianlong periods) and 19<sup>th</sup> centuries. The champlevé technique is exemplified by only a small number of items dating from the 18<sup>th</sup> - 19<sup>th</sup> centuries and from the first half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century (Beijing and Canton workshops). The technique of fired enamel painting on metal base is documented by objects produced by southern Chinese workshops (Canton enamel) and by the imperial workshops of Beijing.

Another major category comprises carvings in various materials: soft and hard stones (talc, marble, nephrite, jadeite and other semiprecious stones), mother-of-pearl, bone, and ivory. Prevailing in this group are likewise objects dating from the 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> centuries, earlier items being exceptional. A smaller assortment of items exemplifies artifacts cut in natural lacquer or decorated by other methods involving the use of lacquer (lacquer painting). The earliest of these is an object from the late Ming period, the rest dating predominantly from the 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> centuries. A category in its own right is formed by a small array of snuff bottles. These document diverse techniques: porcelain decoration by painting under glaze; hard-stone cutting; layered glass; inside painting; decorating metal containers with colour stones or glass; as well as ivory and bone cutting, engraving and painting. The dating of this category of objects ranges from the 18<sup>th</sup> - 20<sup>th</sup> centuries.

The collection's section of fans (painted, embroidered, made by mixed media, woven from bamboo, palm leaves, etc.) is very small in terms of quantity. The various items date mostly from the 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> centuries, with only a few exceptions dating from the 18<sup>th</sup> century.

The textiles section comprises several groups of objects. The first of these is formed by complete sets of clothes, both male and female, made by various textile techniques: multicoloured brocade, silk gobelin (kes), embroidery, etc. They include formal dresses of officials, as well as complete dresses of Manchurian and Chinese women, dating mostly from the 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> centuries, and several specimens of theatrical costumes and theatre aids. Another group consists of clothing accessories: miscellaneous holders, bags, purses, head covers (men's and children's), footwear (men's, women's "lotus buds", Manchurian women's shoes, children's footwear). A separate group consists of a comparatively extensive



corpus of embroideries and appliqué textile decorations. These include hangings (fixed over beds, front sides of tables, framing doorways, etc.) and so-called sleeve embroideries, as well as other types of ornaments which used to be sewn onto completed dress. A special subcategory is formed by "officials squares" (fangbu), embroidered or made by the silk gobelin technique. The bulk of the objects date from the Qing period, predominantly from the 19<sup>th</sup> century.

The largest of the Chinese collection's sections dedicated to folk art embraces the production of colour and additionally coloured woodcuts (New Year pictures). The core of this group is formed by colour woodcuts produced by the workshops of Taohuawu and its environs, dating from the 1880s and '90s. They depict scenes from well known stage plays and diverse congratulatory themes, as well as "entrance guardians" (men-shen). Other items include coloured woodcuts from the northern workshops of Yangliuqing. These date from the early 20<sup>th</sup> century, from before World War I, from the final stages of the war period, and from the 1920s - '30s. Apart from the standard subjects, such as entrance guardians, congratulatory motives, and stage plays, these pictures also feature educative and political themes topical at the turn of the 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> centuries: women's education, modern schooling, modern transportation, foreigners, etc. The above two basic groups are supplemented by acquisitions from various parts of China, mostly pictures on congratulatory themes. A smaller part is formed by New Year cards printed with the use of old plates during the 1980s and '90s, and an assortment of modern-day Taiwanese prints, most of them originals.

An interesting section is formed by painted scrolls depicting various themes from the worlds of drama and literature, as well as Confucian subjects (stories of filial devotion, *siao*). These are anonymous works which served a wide variety of purposes, from illustrative accompaniment to narrative productions, through decoration of walls in homes. In terms of style, they oscillate between the archetypal folk art aesthetics and the idiom of professional master painters.

Further examples of folk art in the museum's Chinese collection include an assortment of toys dating from the 1950s and 1980s; embroideries, clothes and clothing accessories; and puppets (shadow puppets, marionettes and rod-puppets). An array of folk pottery contains chiefly wares from southern Chinese and Shandong kilns, dating from the 17<sup>th</sup> - 20<sup>th</sup> centuries. The collection's body of cutouts, representing a characteristic form of Chinese folk art, dates mostly from the 1950s.





Ong To (The Match maker God) coloured woodblock print, Dong Ho, Workshop, half of the 20<sup>th</sup>. 24 × 20 cm (NpM A 12 525).



Apart from folk art of the Han (Chinese) people, the museum's collection contains examples of folk art produced by China's ethnic minorities, notably the Yao and Yi peoples in the south of the country. These items include dresses and individual parts of clothing, toys, protective symbols, etc.

### The Vietnamese Collection

The Náprstek Museum's Vietnamese collection is one of those departments which have been formed largely over the past few decades, and which have been built up (according to possibilities) in a rather systematic way. The collection's principal section comprises folk colour woodcuts collected by painter and print-maker **Pavel Sivko**. They include sheets printed with the use of vintage plates, featuring congratulatory, historical



Temple guardian. Carved wood, gold lacquer. Vietnam, late 19<sup>th</sup> c. - early 20<sup>th</sup> c.  
H. 45 cm (NpM 20 131).



and theatrical subjects. An interesting thematic group consists of depictions of heroes of popular Chinese novels as folk deities. This section is supplemented by examples of decorative production dating from the 1950s and '60s. Another group of items comprises illustrations for Vietnamese novels composed in the form of horizontal scrolls. These are made by the technique of colour or additionally coloured woodcut, and are represented in the collection by several thematic series. The collection's prints section also contains a set of sheets depicting Buddhist "arhats" which is anonymous yet does not fall within the category of folk art. Another distinct part of the collection is represented by its body of ceramics. Its oldest items date from the 13<sup>th</sup> century (stoneware with monochrome white and celadon glazes). Further specimens, documenting cobalt painting under glaze, date from the 15<sup>th</sup> century, and imitation celadons decorated with enamel paint date from the 16<sup>th</sup> century. The collection's pottery section includes examples of wares exported to the Vietnamese royal court by southern Chinese porcelain manufacturers in the late 19<sup>th</sup> century, as well as their imitations. Ceramics of Vietnamese provenance are supplemented with wares which were acquired in Vietnam but whose origin is obscure, since they exemplify the standard types of folk utility stoneware (bowls, bottles), decorated with cobalt painting under glaze, and their occurrence spreads over a vast area encompassing China, Japan and Vietnam. In addition to the above two core sections, the collection contains individual specimens of Vietnamese applied art and crafts (wicker bowls and baskets, partition wall panels inlaid with mother-of-pearl, boxes and containers, water pipes, etc.), examples of modern lacquer painting and objects of everyday use decorated with natural lacquer. Artifacts exemplifying the use of natural lacquer include applied art objects dating from the 1950s.

A small group of items documents Vietnamese sculpture. In most cases - with a few exceptions of bronze sculptures decorated with lacquer - these are wood carvings decorated with varnish paints. All of the sculptures fall within the context of Buddhist art, dating from the 17<sup>th</sup> century through the first half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. Vietnamese textiles are represented in the collection by individual objects (embroideries, modern batik). The collection also contains several demonstrative examples related to the dramatic art: puppets and water puppets.

### **The Lamaistic Collection (the Art of Tibet and Mongolia)**

Lamaistic art in the Náprstek Museum's collections is divided into two separate sections: one, covering the art of Tibet and Mongolia, has the





Ushnishavijaya, shakti of Avalokiteshvara. Hot-gilded bronze. Mongolia, 18<sup>th</sup> c. H. 43 cm (NpM 20 324).

status of an autonomous collection, while the other, embracing the art of Nepal and Sikkim, is attached to the Indian collection. The collections were built up gradually, with the bulk of acquisitions reaching the museum after 1945. In the 1990s the collections were enriched thanks to an extensive gift of small-scale sculptures (mostly of the “tsatsa” type), from Mrs **Ludmila Formanová**, which had originally formed the collection of Bedřich Forman. The museum’s Lamaistic collections have likewise benefited from the pursuits of archaeologist **Lumír Jisl**, as well as from the museum’s own systematic restorative endeavours which have been instrumental in the salvaging of several unique items. The core of the collection is constituted by paintings featuring Buddhist motives, done in





Padmasambhava. Hot-gilded bronze, remnants of polychromy. Tibet, 18<sup>th</sup> - 19<sup>th</sup> c.  
H. 20.2 cm (NpM 13 782).

distemper paints on priming canvas (thanka), dating mostly from the 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> centuries. This group is complemented by an assortment of miniature pictures done in the same media: scapulary insets, mostly dating likewise from the late 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> centuries. Of considerable documentary value is a set of woodcuts on Buddhist themes, printed by members of the Tibetan minority in Nepal, from the 1890s. The collection also includes several books illustrated by woodblock prints, and several manuscripts.

The collection's body of sculpture consists of a group of bronzes made by the *cire perdue* technique, frequently decorated by polychromy (most of the items are small-scale, with only a few exceeding 40 centimetres).



These date from the 18<sup>th</sup> - early 20<sup>th</sup> centuries, with the predominance of 19<sup>th</sup>-century items. This section is supplemented by a series of miniature bronze scapulary insets, dating mostly from the 19<sup>th</sup> century. The Mongolian production in particular is exemplified by sculptures beaten in copper or bronze sheets, dating mostly from the 17<sup>th</sup> - 18<sup>th</sup> centuries. Wood carving is represented by only a very small number of specimens. On the other hand, the collection features a comparatively extensive body of small-scale reliefs, mould-pressed and fired at low temperatures, or merely dried (including some specimens of Tibetan provenance). The majority of these are of the "tsa-tsa" type, including several miniatures. Characteristic for the Mongolian area are statuettes made of dried or moderately fired clay.

Mongolian and Tibetan applied art and crafts are represented chiefly by bronze, copper and mixed-media vessels, dating mostly from the 18<sup>th</sup> - 20<sup>th</sup> centuries. These include ritual vessels and other ritual objects, such as mandalas, vajras, bells, Buddhist symbols, ritual cups made of skull-bones, bowls for offerings, as well as a series of scapularies made of metal or wood, decorated by miniature sculpture or painting. While the dating of those objects is uncertain, the majority can be situated to the 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> centuries. Apart from objects related to Buddhism, the collection contains a dress of a Mongolian female shaman, complete with all accessories. A very small section of the collection is devoted to Tibetan and Mongolian jewellery and dresses, of modern-day make yet traditionally styled. A noteworthy feature of the collection is a complete Mongolian yurt including basic furnishings, plus several scale models of yurts, riding-gear, saddles, whips, and wooden knives used in currying horses. Apart from that, the collection contains an assortment of objects of daily use, including traditional metallic and wooden, a set of dishes from birch bark, tableware, smoking outfits, etc.

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