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## On the Relevance and Potential of Auction Catalogues as Sources for Art Market Research on Asian Art

### ABSTRACT

The article is published close to completion of the research and digitalisation project “German Sales”, funded by the German Research Association (DFG), which will make an entire corpus of more than 5,800 auction catalogues from German-speaking areas between 1901 and 1929 available online. This simplified access will offer new perspectives on the trade in Asian art at auction and present opportunities for further art market research. In the context of the present article, an initial quantitative analysis could be undertaken with respect to the field of Asian art which concluded that this category took up a relatively small portion of the art market, based on auction catalogues allocated to this category: only two percent of auctions were

dedicated to it. For these Asian sales, the two main auction centres were Frankfurt am Main and Berlin, with the local dealers Rudolf Bangel and the duo Hugo Helbing and Paul Cassirer. Nevertheless, Asian art was also often included in mixed catalogues, which should be explored in greater detail in future in order to give a more comprehensive picture of this section of the trade. Both the relevance of auction catalogues as a source for art market research and their potential became apparent in the project. Auction catalogues not only contain descriptions of works and information about their material value. Above and beyond these, they offer insights about collection profiles, sources, networks between museums, academics and the art trade, and questions of deaccessioning.

### Introduction

Based on the research and digitalisation project “Art – Auctions – Provenance. The German Art Trade as Reflected in Auction Catalogues from 1901 to 1929”, funded by the German Research Association (DFG), the following article offers a perspective on possible analyses of the auction trade in Asian art. The objective of the project is a bibliographical recording and digitisation of German-language auction catalogues from 1901 to

1929.<sup>1</sup> With the conclusion of the project in September 2018, the entire corpus of these sources will be available online for the first time. As a result, a total of more than 5,800 catalogues could be traced, based on a comparison of the holdings of over thirty institutions in Germany, Austria and Switzerland. In capturing the catalogues, one of the focal points was a classification of auction sales by the categories of art object on offer.<sup>2</sup> This permitted an overview to which extent they were spread across the market. In view of the numerous auction catalogues and the limited timescale of the project, an approximate approach was adopted which gave an auction catalogue to a specific category if two thirds of the objects listed in the contents conformed to this category. Through this categorisation, auction sales with a predominant portion of Asian objects could be extracted from the body of 5,800 catalogues and inspected in greater detail.<sup>3</sup> The resulting corpus of Asian art catalogues forms the basis for the following initial exemplary analyses, in order to provide suggestions and ideas for further research and greater methodological differentiation.

An initial key question concerned time and location, in other words, when Asian art was offered, in which city and through which auction house. The resulting findings are then put into context with auction sales of other categories such as fine art, applied art, antiquities, ethnographic objects, books and coins. As a second step, a qualitative first analysis of the auction catalogues with predominantly Asian objects is undertaken, focusing on collecting and art market trends, specialist networks and provenance, based on information gleaned from the catalogue introductions. Furthermore, this raises the question who was active as an author or art expert in writing introductions for auction catalogues of Asian art, and the institutional affiliation of these writers. The result conveys a first impression of the German-speaking auction scene in the first three decades of the twentieth century, while clearly demonstrating the potential and relevance of auction catalogues as a source for wider art market research on Asian art.

## Quantitative analysis of the auction catalogues

During the above-mentioned research and digitalisation project funded by the DFG, the body of 5,800 auction catalogues of fine and applied arts for the years from 1901 to 1929

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- 1 Partners of the project are the Kunstbibliothek of the Berlin State Museums, the University Library of Heidelberg and the Getty Research Institute in Los Angeles. In a second step, the Getty Research Institute undertakes further research into the sale catalogues for Fine Art and enters results into the Getty Provenance Index® (<http://www.getty.edu/research/tools/provenance/>). The project is funded on the German side by the German Research Association (DFG), and for the Getty Research Institute by the J. Paul Getty Trust.
  - 2 The main focus of the preceding project “German Sales 1930-1945. Art Works, Art Markets, and Cultural Policy” had been on documenting annotated catalogues as comprehensively as possible. This first tranche of the project was funded by the German Research Association and the National Endowment for the Humanities in the transatlantic “Bilateral Digital Humanities Program”, as well as by the VolkswagenStiftung. The cooperation had originally been initiated by the then director of the Getty Research Institute, Thomas Gaehtgens.
  - 3 Auctions of Asian art which were not accompanied by a printed catalogue were excluded from the analysis.

was found to comprise fine and applied art, books, coins and antiquities, as well as Asian art and ethnographic objects. Among these, a group of 1,200 auction catalogues could not be matched to a majority categorisation. A further 120 auctions were purely business or household clearance sales. At the same time, almost eighty percent of auction catalogues could be assigned to a specific category. For such a match, at least two thirds of the lots on offer needed to fall into one art or antiques category. Consequently, the auction catalogues on which the following analysis is based were listed as Asian sales because at least two thirds of their listed lots were East Asian objects.<sup>4</sup> In addition, Asian art objects were offered at many more auction sales without forming a predominant category. Conversely, important auctions such as the sale of Asian porcelain from the Saxonian State Collection in Dresden at the auction house Rudolf Lepke in 1919 and 1920<sup>5</sup> were therefore excluded from the Asian art trade analysis, because they were part of an auction including other categories.<sup>6</sup>

An initial result of categorisation was the fact that only 97 of all 5,800 German-language catalogues were Asian sales, in other words: less than two percent. A comparison with other categories illustrates the small contingent of Asian sales: for example, there were more than 2,200 fine art auctions (including paintings, prints, drawings and sculptures), amounting to thirty-eight percent of all auctions. Other main categories are sales of applied arts, for example porcelain, glass, metalwork or textiles, at over 920 auctions and sixteen percent, coins, medals and plaques at over 600 auctions and ten percent, or Books and Autographs at 517 auctions and nine percent (fig.1).

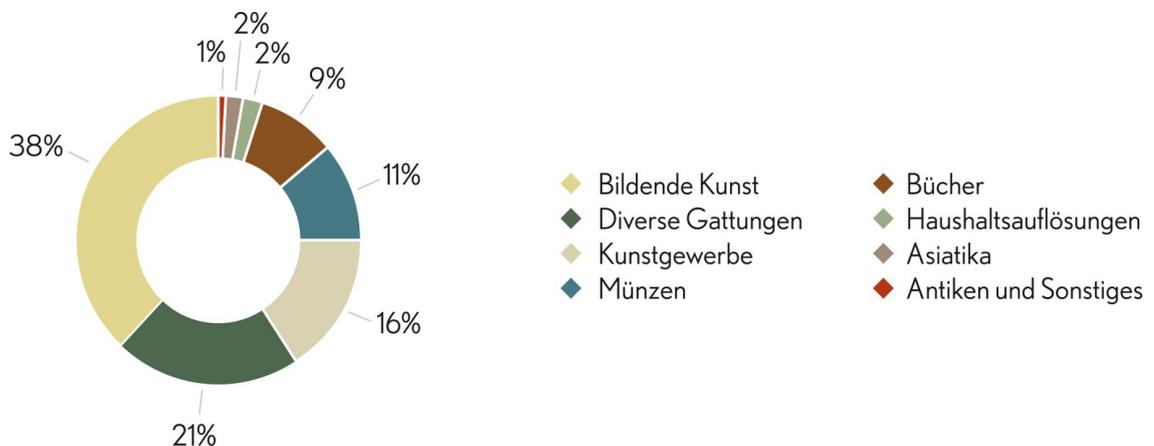


Fig. 1: Percentage of German-language auction catalogues from 1901 to 1929, according to categories to which the catalogues were allocated when the catalogue index contained two thirds of lots from a single category. Graphic design: ©Florian Conrads.

4 The allocation was based on the categorisation and respective number of lots in the catalogue indices.

5 [http://digi.ub.uni-heidelberg.de/diglit/lepke1919\\_10\\_07](http://digi.ub.uni-heidelberg.de/diglit/lepke1919_10_07) (last accessed 18 May 2018) and [http://digi.ub.uni-heidelberg.de/diglit/lepke1920\\_10\\_12](http://digi.ub.uni-heidelberg.de/diglit/lepke1920_10_12) (last accessed 18 May 2018).

6 The introduction to the auction catalogue for the Walter Bondy collection in 1927 especially noted the Chinese porcelain from the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries in the two sales: "... never before was such a large number of these exquisite pieces of ceramics offered for sale in Germany." In: [http://digi.ub.uni-heidelberg.de/diglit/cassirer\\_helbing1927\\_05\\_18/0009/image](http://digi.ub.uni-heidelberg.de/diglit/cassirer_helbing1927_05_18/0009/image) (last accessed 18 May 2018).

Most of the above-mentioned ninety-seven sales took place between 1906 and 1914 and between 1926 and 1929 (fig.2). This is in keeping with a general increase of overall auction sales before the outbreak of World War I in 1914 and again after the end of

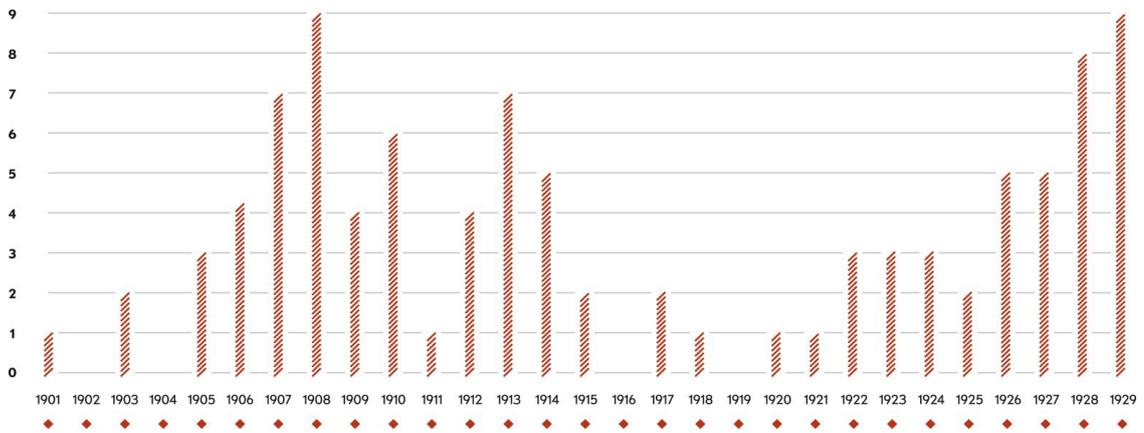


Fig. 2: Distribution of published German-language auctions of Asian Art 1901 to 1929, with at least two thirds of the listed lots allocated to the East Asian category. Graphic design: ©Florian Conrads.

inflation, from the early 1920s up to the beginning of the world economic crisis at the end of 1929 (fig.3). For example, the number of German-language auction catalogues grew steadily from over 190 in 1907 to over 290 in 1913, with only a brief setback in 1909 (at 172 sales). After World War I, 1924 saw another marked rise with nearly 225 sales. In

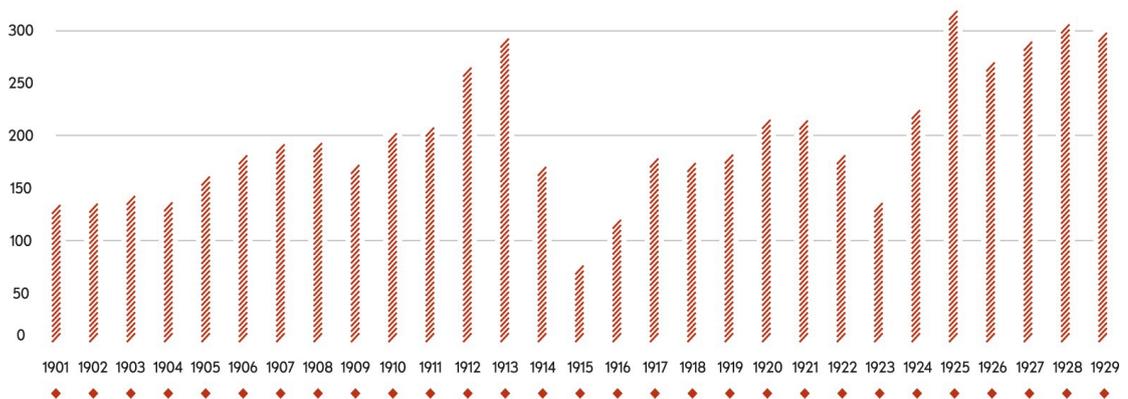


Fig. 3: Distribution of all German-language auction catalogues identified for the period 1901-1929. Graphic design: ©Florian Conrads.

the following year, sales peak at 319, in accordance with the general economic upswing after the period of hyperinflation and the currency reform of 1923. The years 1925 to 1929 are therefore, as expected, the strongest at an average of over 295 sales per year. The Asian sales developments are in line with these rises and falls in volume.<sup>7</sup>

<sup>7</sup> On the further development of the auction market from 1930 to 1945 in Germany, Austria and Switzerland see the analysis by Astrid Bähr in the context of the preceding project “German Sales 1930-1945. Art

The main centres for the trade in Asian art were Frankfurt am Main with thirty-seven sales, Berlin with seventeen sales, Cologne with fifteen, Vienna with fourteen, and Munich with nine sales (fig. 4). There was just one auction each in Hamburg, Stuttgart and Bonn, and two in Zurich. This ranking is based purely on the number of auctions, not lots. It is therefore possible that Frankfurt had the highest number of sales while the highest number of lots was sold elsewhere. Generally, the number of objects on offer is hard to determine, since multiple objects were often grouped to form a lot.

Which were the leading German-language auction houses for Asian art in the first three decades of the twentieth century? By a long way, the leaders were the firms of Rudolf Bangel in Frankfurt am Main<sup>8</sup> and Hugo Helbing,<sup>9</sup> factoring in the latter's auction house in Munich as well as his branch in Frankfurt am Main<sup>10</sup> and his partnership with Paul Cassirer in Berlin.<sup>11</sup> There were a total of twenty-seven Asian auctions at Rudolf Bangel's,

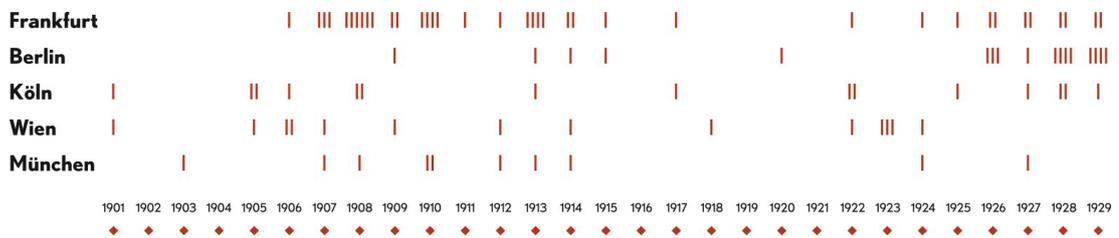


Fig. 4: Number of auction catalogues with an Asian art majority of lots published in Frankfurt am Main, Berlin, Cologne, Vienna and Munich during the period 1901-1929.

Graphic design: ©Florian Conrads.

while Helbing's held nine sales in Munich, eight in Frankfurt and another nine together with Paul Cassirer in Berlin. In addition, he organised one sale in Zurich with M. Messikommer.<sup>12</sup> Between them, Bangel and Helbing held more than half of the Asian sales. This is not surprising, considering their overall business acumen. With an average of over seventeen respectively twenty sales per year they were among the top auction

Works, Art Markets, and Cultural Policy", in: <http://archiv.ub.uni-heidelberg.de/artdok/volltexte/2013/2251> (last accessed 1. August 2018), 26-49.

8 Founded here in 1870, see <http://digi.ub.uni-heidelberg.de/diglit/bangel1920> (last accessed 1 August 2018), 7, last published auction catalogue dated February 1929 in cooperation with the department store A. Wertheim, see [http://digi.ub.uni-heidelberg.de/diglit/wertheim\\_bangel1929\\_02\\_26](http://digi.ub.uni-heidelberg.de/diglit/wertheim_bangel1929_02_26) (last accessed 1 August 2018).

9 Founded in 1885, dissolved in 1938, on Hugo Helbing and his places of business see <http://archiv.ub.uni-heidelberg.de/artdok/volltexte/2013/2251> (last accessed 1 August 2018), 460, 307 and 120, on the cooperation with Paul Cassirer: 87, see also Meike Hopp and Melida Steinke, Galerie Helbing – Auktionen für die Welt, in Deutsches Zentrum Kulturgutverluste, ed., *Provenienz & Forschung*, no. 1 (2016), 54-61, and the eponymous online exhibition curated by the authors <https://artsandculture.google.com/exhibit/VwKyXPJHKm3FJA?hl=de> (last accessed 2 August 2018).

10 The Frankfurt branch office opened in 1919.

11 The Berlin branch office opened in 1916/17.

12 Founded in 1914, see <http://archiv.ub.uni-heidelberg.de/artdok/volltexte/2013/2251> (last accessed 1 August 2018), 42.

houses with the most frequent sales overall between 1901 and 1929, rivalling Rudolf Lepke in Berlin<sup>13</sup> and the Dorotheum in Vienna.<sup>14</sup> Further important venues for Asian auctions were the Cologne firm of Lempertz<sup>15</sup> with a total of ten sales and Heberle in Cologne<sup>16</sup> with six sales. The Dorotheum also organised ten sales in the Asian category.

As all twenty-seven Asian auctions until 1917 were held at Rudolf Bangel's in Frankfurt, this city is confirmed as the centre of the trade in Asian art from 1907 to 1914, when the volume of auction sales was high.<sup>17</sup> However, from 1926 to 1929 Berlin saw fifty percent more Asian auctions than Frankfurt, with twelve sales in Berlin and eight in Frankfurt. While Frankfurt was leading in the field of Asian sales before World War I, when Berlin played no part at all, the tables were turned after the war years and Berlin now rivalled Frankfurt. Between 1926 and 1929 only Cologne had some relevance otherwise, with four auctions.

## Qualitative analysis of Auction catalogue introductory essays

Not every auction catalogue was published with an introductory text. The content evaluation made here is therefore based on forty-eight introductions out of the above-mentioned body of ninety-seven auction catalogues of Asian art dating from 1901 to 1929. The focus was on extracting information about collecting and art market trends, specialist networks and provenance. In addition, the catalogues offered an overview over those staff members of public institutions who were active in the art trade as experts, cataloguers or author of introductory essays. A selection of the resulting findings will be presented below in order to demonstrate examples of the type of information held in auction catalogue introductions and their relevance for art market research of the period in question. In the limited space of this article, it will however not be possible to present a full critical analysis and appreciation of the results in the context of national and international trade in Asian art.

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13 Founded in 1869, see <http://archiv.ub.uni-heidelberg.de/artdok/volltexte/2013/2251> (last accessed 1 August 2018), 170.

14 Founded in 1707 as Kaiserlich- königliches Versatz-, Verwahrungs- und Versteigungsamt, see <http://archiv.ub.uni-heidelberg.de/artdok/volltexte/2013/2251> (last accessed 1 August 2018), 571-572, see also Felix Czeike, *Das Dorotheum. Vom Versatz- und Fragamt zum modernen Auktionshaus* (Vienna: Jugend & Volk, 1982).

15 The firm Mathias Lempertz was founded in Bonn in 1844 and has been based in Cologne since 1903, see <http://archiv.ub.uni-heidelberg.de/artdok/volltexte/2013/2251> (last accessed 1 August 2018), 379, see also Werner Schäfke, *Kunsthau Lempertz. Eine Kulturgeschichte* (Köln: Dumont, 2015).

16 Founded in Cologne in 1802, see <http://archiv.ub.uni-heidelberg.de/artdok/volltexte/2013/2251> (last accessed 1 August 2018), 379, last recorded auction catalogue dated 1914, [http://digi.ub.uni-heidelberg.de/diglit/heberle1914\\_02\\_16](http://digi.ub.uni-heidelberg.de/diglit/heberle1914_02_16) (last accessed 1 August 2018), see also Schäfke, *Kunsthau Lempertz*.

17 While twenty-three auctions took place in Frankfurt during the period in question, there were seven in Munich, four in Vienna, and three each in Cologne and Berlin.

## Collecting and Art Market Trends 1901-1929

From the introductory essays, it becomes clear that until 1910, collectors and buyers are described as widely knowledgeable on Asian art, leading to increased demand for the “real early pieces”. Publications like Justus Brinkmann’s and Shinkishi Hara’s *Die Meister der Japanischen Schwertzierathen* of 1902,<sup>18</sup> or Woldemar von Seidlitz’s *Geschichte des Japanischen Farbholzschnitts* of 1897<sup>19</sup> had for example fostered a greater level of expertise in Japanese art. Export wares, which used to feed previous demand, was now recognised as such and rejected. To quote from an introduction to the 1906 auction catalogue for the collection of Count Gaston Pöttickh von Petteneegg at the Dorotheum: “Only a few years ago did a large number of European art lovers begin to look in greater detail at Japanese art, museums completed their collections, rejected the inferior and replaced it with pieces of great artistic merit; the inferior export ware was recognised and scorned and the price of those few genuine old pieces available in Europe rose exponentially.”<sup>20</sup> The same introduction states that “The early and artistically interesting objects in Japan had long been in collections which were owned either by museums or by outstanding Japanese aristocratic families; .... The result is a scarcity of certain pieces in the trade, even at a high price and in spite of great efforts.”

Rudolf Bangel’s introduction to the 1908 auction catalogue of the collection of Japanese and Chinese art assembled by the former Imperial German Consul in China, Dr Schmidt-Leda,<sup>21</sup> states that foreign and American collectors had recognised the value of Asian art early and bought important pieces. It implies that Germany had been remiss at doing the same: “Truly excellent, early objects of Japanese and Chinese art become rarer by the day, even in the Far East as such the best pieces can hardly or only very rarely be found in the trade. The main reason is that as the appreciation of the subtleties and the intricate charms of East Asian art increased, foreign buyers, especially from Europe and America, have absorbed a large part of the stock in China and Japan, which had seemed inexhaustible to begin with.”<sup>22</sup> Bangel also mentions that the Japanese and Chinese had started to value their own heritage and preserve it: “Years ago, people in the East watched more or less dispassionately as one art object after the other was whisked out of the country through export, but suddenly especially the Japanese had an epiphany; they

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18 Hara Shinkishi, *Die Meister der Japanischen Schwertzierathen. Überblick ihrer Geschichte, Verzeichnis der Meister mit Daten über ihr Leben und mit ihren Namen in der Urschrift*, with an introduction by Justus Brinkmann (Hamburg: Reichsdruckerei zu Berlin, 1902).

19 Woldemar von Seidlitz, *Geschichte des Japanischen Farbholzschnitts* (Dresden: Jess, 1897).

20 [http://digi.ub.uni-heidelberg.de/diglit/vvamt\\_wien1906\\_11\\_19/0007/image](http://digi.ub.uni-heidelberg.de/diglit/vvamt_wien1906_11_19/0007/image) (last accessed 17 May 2018) Ggg. Archbishop Count Eduard Gaston Pöttickh von Petteneegg (1847-1918) was a genealogist, heraldist and collector of art and antiques ([http://www.biographien.ac.at/oeb1/oeb1\\_P/Poettickh-Petteneegg\\_Eduard-Gaston\\_1847\\_1918.xml](http://www.biographien.ac.at/oeb1/oeb1_P/Poettickh-Petteneegg_Eduard-Gaston_1847_1918.xml); last accessed 29 May 2018).

21 Otto Ludwig Schmidt-Leda, 1852-1907, see <https://portal.dnb.de/opac.htm?method=simpleSearch&ccqlM-ode=true&query=nid%3D1047309173> (last accessed 3 August 2018).

22 [http://digi.ub.uni-heidelberg.de/diglit/bangel1908\\_10\\_06bd1/0005/image](http://digi.ub.uni-heidelberg.de/diglit/bangel1908_10_06bd1/0005/image) (last accessed 18 May 2018), see also [http://digi.ub.uni-heidelberg.de/diglit/dorotheum1906\\_04\\_25/0006/image](http://digi.ub.uni-heidelberg.de/diglit/dorotheum1906_04_25/0006/image) (last accessed 18 May 2018).

realised the danger to their own country through reducing its holdings of early artworks and started to defend this heritage, a testament to an old and highly developed culture. Museums and private collectors began to compete with foreign collectors, dealers and agents, and prices were often paid over there for particularly high quality examples of early art which we would find extraordinary.”

When the imperial government in China collapsed in 1911 and Japan experienced a period of uncertainty after Meiji's death and the subsequent change of government in 1912, the consequences were an increased offering of Asian art on European markets. The political upheavals also led the Shanghai resident K. Blicke to put his collection up for sale in 1913. This is the only representative auction catalogue for Asian art in the selection which dates from the second decade of the twentieth century. In the introduction, Rudolf Bangel wrote that “The revolutionary upheavals in Cathay have not been without effect on our local cultural scene. We owe the recent influx of superior early Chinese objects to these radical political changes ... .”<sup>23</sup>

From 1920, as in the previous decade, there are repeated references to an increase in expertise and knowledge of Asian art and a decrease of supply. Furthermore, a clear trend is identified towards collecting artworks from the “very early archaic China”.<sup>24</sup> Major US-American art institutions launched highly successful expeditions to China in a comprehensive search for art treasures from the past.<sup>25</sup> In the introduction to the auction catalogue of the Walter Bondy<sup>26</sup> collection in 1927, written by William Cohn<sup>27</sup> from the Berlin State Museums, the situation is described as follows: “China seems almost stripped bare. What there is on the market is usually from earlier Western collections, which circulate while the earth gives up more and more cultural goods from an earlier age, never seen before. America makes an effort to grab the most valuable pieces and has succeed-

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23 [http://digi.ub.uni-heidelberg.de/diglit/bangel1913\\_11\\_25/0005/image](http://digi.ub.uni-heidelberg.de/diglit/bangel1913_11_25/0005/image) (last accessed 19 May 2018), also with the reference: “Even though the political circumstances recently led to some things leaving China...”.

24 “Today, China is undeniably fashionable, that is the very early, archaic China, (...)” In: [http://digi.ub.uni-heidelberg.de/diglit/glueckselig1924\\_11\\_24/0009/image](http://digi.ub.uni-heidelberg.de/diglit/glueckselig1924_11_24/0009/image) (last accessed 18 May 2018).

25 “And when we read these days that the great American art institutions equip new expeditions to China with their extensive means in order to wrest the secrets of its heritage from this country (...)” In: [http://digi.ub.uni-heidelberg.de/diglit/helbing1924\\_09\\_24bd1/0009/image](http://digi.ub.uni-heidelberg.de/diglit/helbing1924_09_24bd1/0009/image) (last accessed 18 May 2018).

26 The painter and art collector Walter Bondy (1880-1940) published on Chinese porcelain and colour woodcuts, see Walter Bondy, *Kang-hsi, eine Blüte-Epoche der chinesischen Porzellankunst* (München: Buchenau & Reinert, 1923), as well as *Chinas keramische Plastik der T'ang- und Vor-T'ang-Zeit* (Berlin: Werkkunst, 1927) and also *Chinesische Farbholzschnitte. Das Bilderalbum der Zehn bambushalle* (Berlin: Werkkunst, 1926). On his biography see Tano Bojankin, *Kabel, Kupfer, Kunst. Walter Bondy und sein familiäres Umfeld*, catalogue (2008), via: [http://www.ipts.at/Texte\\_Publikationen/](http://www.ipts.at/Texte_Publikationen/) ([http://www.ipts.at/Texte\\_Publikationen/Kabel,%20Kupfer,%20Kunst.%20Walter%20Bondy%20und%20sein%20famili%20Umfeld,%202008.pdf](http://www.ipts.at/Texte_Publikationen/Kabel,%20Kupfer,%20Kunst.%20Walter%20Bondy%20und%20sein%20famili%20Umfeld,%202008.pdf), last accessed 3 August 2018).

27 The art historian and sinologist William Cohn lived from 1880 to 1961, <https://portal.dnb.de/opac.htm?method=simpleSearch&cqlMode=true&query=nid%3D116636238> (last accessed 3 August 2018). See also Wolfgang Klose, Dr. William Cohn. Gelehrter Publizist und Advokat Asiatischer Kunst, in: *Ostasiatische Zeitschrift*, no. 12 (2006), 31-40.

ed to a great extent. Today, impoverished Europe can only be a feeble competitor in this heated competition.”<sup>28</sup>

A number of introductory essays refer to the fact that, as demand for early Chinese art grew, so did the number of fakes and copies. This exponential increase is a dominant subject for the period between 1920 and 1929. “NO art form is more disputed than the Chinese”,<sup>29</sup> as William Cohn wrote, this time in his introduction to the auction catalogue for the Franz Lissa collection in 1926. “Already, there are taunts about the admirers and researchers of an art whose very existence appears to be in doubt”, he continued. For Cohn, the widespread uncertainty about the authenticity of early Asian art objects is a welcome incentive to buy more recent and unquestionable art. “For some time, it seemed that more recent Chinese art was about to be displaced or upstaged by the discovery of early art. But on reflection, it was recognised that attractive and trustworthy works from recent times were more satisfying than dubious works dating from a dark and ancient time.”<sup>30</sup>

Overall, the auction catalogue introductions concur that wider knowledge of Asian art led to an increase in demand for authentic pieces which could no longer be fed by export ware. Furthermore, the supply of Asian art was declared to be limited by the extensive earlier purchases by the British, the French and the Americans. Finally, Asian peoples had begun to value their own cultural heritage, leading to a significant reduction in exports. The only catalogue reference to a short-term increase in the Asian art offering can be found in 1912/1913 as a result of political upheaval in Asia.

After World War I, collecting early Chinese art was explicitly referred to as fashionable. An increased demand for such rarities led to a rise in forgeries which caused a general sense of misgiving. This was used as an argument in favour of returning attention to the broader offering of Asian art from more recent times. Many auctions are advertised with a reference to collectors who had either lived in Asia, or frequently worked or at least regularly travelled there. They were deemed to be familiar with the art and the culture of the country and to have bought the objects in their place of origin. One such example was the Sproesser collection: “The AUGUST G. SPROESSER collection was created in China. With rare taste and nuanced understanding, the owner gathered a collection of high artistic merit during his long stay in Shanghai. His reports confirm that this was not always easy, as his agents often returned from the interior of the country empty-handed.”<sup>31</sup>

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28 [http://digi.ub.uni-heidelberg.de/diglit/cassirer\\_helbing1927\\_05\\_18/0012/image](http://digi.ub.uni-heidelberg.de/diglit/cassirer_helbing1927_05_18/0012/image) (last accessed 19 May 2018).

29 [http://digi.ub.uni-heidelberg.de/diglit/cassirer\\_helbing1926\\_04\\_28a/0007/image](http://digi.ub.uni-heidelberg.de/diglit/cassirer_helbing1926_04_28a/0007/image) (last accessed 18 May 2018).

30 [http://digi.ub.uni-heidelberg.de/diglit/cassirer\\_helbing1926\\_04\\_28a/0008/image](http://digi.ub.uni-heidelberg.de/diglit/cassirer_helbing1926_04_28a/0008/image) (last accessed 18 May 2018).

31 [http://digi.ub.uni-heidelberg.de/diglit/helbing1924\\_09\\_24bd1/0009/image](http://digi.ub.uni-heidelberg.de/diglit/helbing1924_09_24bd1/0009/image) (last accessed 19 May 2018), see also for example [http://digi.ub.uni-heidelberg.de/diglit/hecht1928\\_11\\_26/0007/image](http://digi.ub.uni-heidelberg.de/diglit/hecht1928_11_26/0007/image) (last accessed 18 May 2018), [http://digi.ub.uni-heidelberg.de/diglit/lempertz1912\\_03\\_19/0005/image](http://digi.ub.uni-heidelberg.de/diglit/lempertz1912_03_19/0005/image) (last accessed 19 May 2018), or [http://digi.ub.uni-heidelberg.de/diglit/bangel1913\\_10\\_07](http://digi.ub.uni-heidelberg.de/diglit/bangel1913_10_07) (last accessed 19 May 2018).

Even though the spread of connoisseurship in Asian art was frequently referred to, a comprehensive overview of all characterisations of the collections offered at auction results in the verdict that they were predominantly assembled in line with purely subjective criteria of taste, making these rather amateurs' collections. Objects were collected not so much for their art historical merit but rather for their beauty.<sup>32</sup> The joy of collecting was not to be adulterated by considering academic interests or changes in fashion.<sup>33</sup> In his introduction to the Franz Lissa catalogue, William Cohn even went so far as to say that "dreary export ware (...) had formed the core of most collections offered to the German market to date."<sup>34</sup> Important collections formed on the basis of connoisseurship and academic criteria had been sold around the turn of the century to Paris, London and Tokyo. In particular, these were the collections of "S. Bing, Paris, editor of the *Japon Artistique*, T. Hayashi in Paris and Tokyo and E. Hart in London, whose *Lectures on Japanese Art Work* are still appreciated today".<sup>35</sup>

## Specialist networks and Provenance

One example for an outstanding and very valuable collection auctioned in German-speaking areas between 1901 and 1929 was the Tony Straus-Negbaur<sup>36</sup> collection, also distinguished by its focus on Japanese colour woodcuts from the seventeenth to the nineteenth century (fig. 5). The introduction to this catalogue demonstrates that auction catalogues can offer revealing information about expert networks and provenance of collections. The objects assembled by Tony Strauss-Negbaur between 1908 and 1913 were auctioned by Paul Cassirer and Hugo Helbing in 1928. A measure of its importance were the catalogue introduction written by Curt Glaser,<sup>37</sup> then director of the Berlin Kunstbibliothek and East Asian art expert, and the cataloguing by the Japanese art specialist Fritz

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32 [http://digi.ub.uni-heidelberg.de/diglit/helbing1910\\_06\\_07/0009/image](http://digi.ub.uni-heidelberg.de/diglit/helbing1910_06_07/0009/image) (last accessed 18 May 2018).

33 [http://digi.ub.uni-heidelberg.de/diglit/helbing\\_messikommer1924\\_11\\_17/0007/image](http://digi.ub.uni-heidelberg.de/diglit/helbing_messikommer1924_11_17/0007/image) (last accessed 18 May 2018).

34 [http://digi.ub.uni-heidelberg.de/diglit/cassirer\\_helbing1926\\_04\\_28a/0007/image](http://digi.ub.uni-heidelberg.de/diglit/cassirer_helbing1926_04_28a/0007/image) (last accessed 19 May 2018).

35 [http://digi.ub.uni-heidelberg.de/diglit/lepke1920\\_03\\_16/0010/image](http://digi.ub.uni-heidelberg.de/diglit/lepke1920_03_16/0010/image) (last accessed 18 May 2018), see also for example [http://digi.ub.uni-heidelberg.de/diglit/cassirer\\_helbing1929\\_05\\_14/0008/image](http://digi.ub.uni-heidelberg.de/diglit/cassirer_helbing1929_05_14/0008/image) (last accessed 19 May 2018). The collection of Siegfried Bing (1838-1905) was auctioned at Galerie Durand-Ruel in Paris from 7 to 12 May 1906. The same gallery also auctioned part of the collection of Tadamas Hayashi (1863-1906) from 27 January to 1 February 1902. Two further auctions of the Hayashi collection took place at Hôtel Drouot in Paris in June 1902 and from 16 to 21 February 1903. A further sale took place in New York in 1913, see <https://archive.org/details/ill00amer> (last accessed 3 August 2018). The collection of Ernest Hart (1835-1898) was sold at Sotheby's in London on 7 July 1898.

36 The collector Tony Straus-Negbaur (died 1942) came from a Brooklyn family and had married the banker Caesar Straus (<http://d-nb.info/gnd/117311677>, last accessed 3 August 2018)

37 Curt Glaser (1879-1943) published the catalogue for the exhibition "Ausstellung Ostasiatischer Alter Kunst" at the Royal Academy of the Arts (Königliche Akademie der Künste) in Berlin 1912. He later published *Die Kunst Ostasiens* in 1913, *Die Entwicklung der Gewanddarstellung in der ostasiatischen Plastik* in 1915 and *Zur Geschichte der Seidenweberei in Ostasien* in 1916.

Rumpf,<sup>38</sup> who worked in the library of the Berlin Japanese Institute. The introduction refers to an exhibition of loans from the Straus-Negbaur collection in Dresden which had

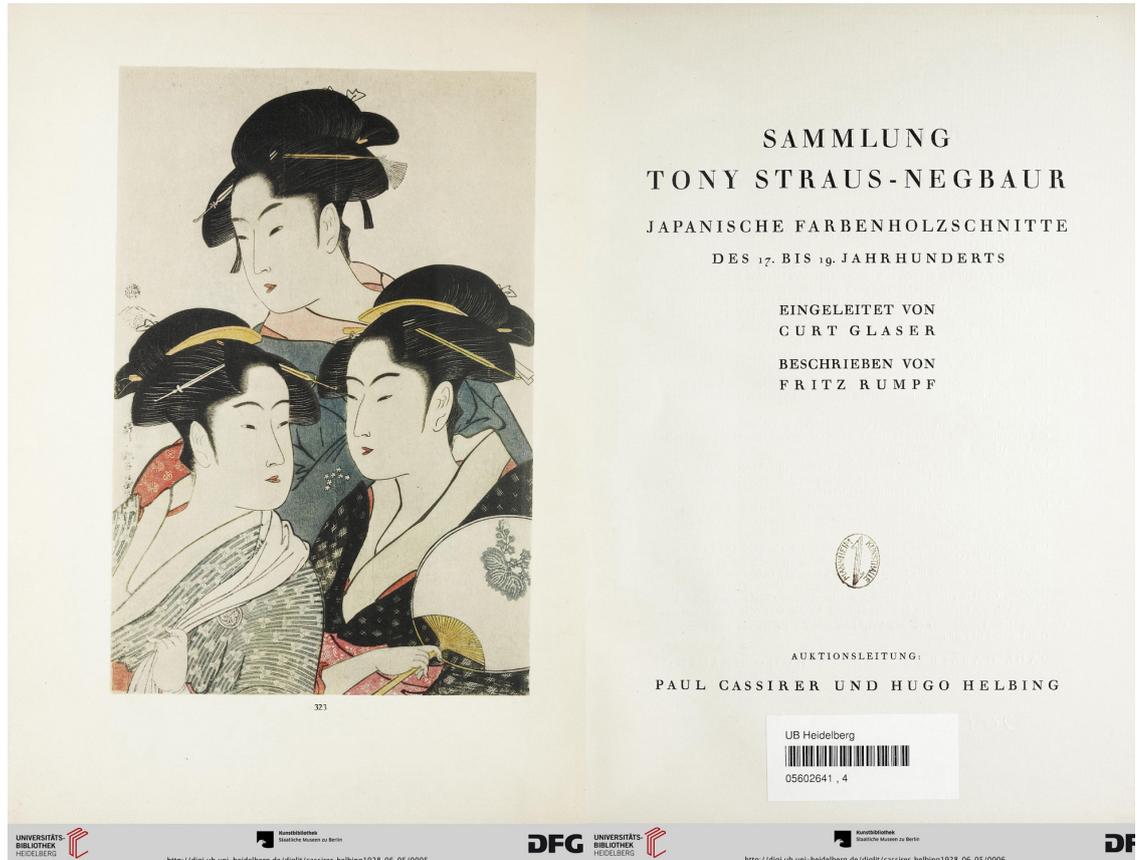


Fig. 5: Title page and frontispiece of the auction catalogue for the collection of Tony Straus-Negbaur, sold by Paul Cassirer and Hugo Helbing on 5 and 6 June 1928. Catalogue caption (translation): The “three beauties” (Kwanseibijin)” of the Kwansei period Takashimaya Ohisa, Tomimoto Toyohina, Naniwaya Okita. Sheet from a series of bust portraits of beautiful girls. Signed: Utamarohitsu. Censorship stamp: Kiwame. Publisher: Tsutaju (Tsutaya Jusaburo). Circa 1791-1795.

been curated by the Japan specialist Woldemar von Seidlitz.<sup>39</sup> Naturally, the participation in such exhibitions was seen as evidence of the high quality of these works on paper, while also highlighting the saleability of the works on offer.

Of particular interest for art market research is the following passage in the introduction, where Glaser mentions some of the sources for the prints in the collection: “... frequently prints from famous collections eventually came into her possession. We find

38 On the Japanologist Fritz Rumpf (1888-1949) see Hartmut Walraven, ed., *Du verstehst unsere Herzen gut. Fritz Rumpf (1888-1949) im Spannungsfeld der deutsch-japanischen Kulturbeziehungen*. Handbuch zur Ausstellung des Japanisch-Deutschen Zentrums, Berlin, im Japanisch-Deutschen Zentrum, im Museum für Ostasiatische Kunst, SMPK, Berlin, und im Japanischen Kulturinstitut, Köln (= Nachrichten der Gesellschaft für Natur- und Völkerkunde Ostasiens, no.s 139-142 [1986-1987], Weinheim 1989).

39 Until 1919, Woldemar von Seidlitz (1850-1922) occupied the position of a “Vortragender Rat” (an advisory higher civil servant) at the Royal Collections in Dresden, see <http://d-nb.info/gnd/117465224> (last accessed 3 August 2018), see also fn. 19.

numerous examples of prints formerly owned by a connoisseur as great as Hayashi. Other collections which contributed their share were those of Wakai, Gillot,<sup>40</sup> Bing, Barbouveau,<sup>41</sup> Haviland in Paris,<sup>42</sup> the Germans Jaekel – Greifswald,<sup>43</sup> Vautier – Düsseldorf,<sup>44</sup> Herman Smidt – Bremen,<sup>45</sup> Julius Kurth<sup>46</sup> and Succo.<sup>47</sup> Some of the most valuable series up to and including the hexptychs which are rarely found complete were purchased from the collections of Happer – London, Thornicraft – sold at Sotheby’s in 1909,<sup>48</sup> as well as American collections like those of Clarence Buckingham – Chicago, Francis Lathrop – New York, Hamilton Field, Brooklyn, and from Samborn, Kerfoot.<sup>49</sup> In addition, Straus-Negbauer is mentioned to have been in close contact with eminent scholars such as William Gookin in Chicago and the German Julius Kurth.<sup>50</sup> Detailed information about provenance from private collections can only be found in three further auction catalogues. The auction catalogue for Dr. A. Breuer<sup>51</sup> included a painting from the collection

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- 40 The collection of Charles Gillot (1853-1903) was auctioned in Paris in two parts, first from 8 to 13 February 1904 at Galerie Durand-Ruel and then on 15/16 and 18/19 April 1904 at the Hôtel Drouot.
- 41 Pierre Barbouveau was the author of the publication *Catalogue descriptif d'une collection d'objets d'art, rapportés de son voyage au Japon* (Paris: Leroux, 1893). The collection P. Barboutau was auctioned in Paris on 3 June 1904 and in Amsterdam on 6 to 8 November 1905 by de Vries.
- 42 The collection of Ch. Haviland was auctioned in parts from 14 to 15 December 1922, from 16 to 17 April 1923, from 19 to 21 November 1923 and from 4 to 7 February 1924 at the Hôtel Drouot in Paris.
- 43 This was probably the collection of the palaeontologist Professor Dr. Otto Max Johannes Jaekel (1863-1929), who is recorded as having worked in Peking, see <http://d-nb.info/gnd/11705898X> (last accessed 10 August 2018). An introduction by Geheimrat Prof. Dr. O. Jaekel was published in the book *Japanische Holzschnittbücher: Holzstöcke und Holzfarbenschnitte* (Leipzig: Hiersemann, 1924).
- 44 The merchant and collector Paul Louis Vautier (1865-1930), who had also worked in Yokohama (<http://d-nb.info/gnd/174382219>), was co-author with Otto Kümmel of the publication *Japanische Stichblätter und Schwertzieraten: Sammlung Georg Oeder, Düsseldorf* (Berlin: Oesterheld & Co, 1916).
- 45 Herman Smidt (1854-) was the author of two books on the political situation in Japan, published in 1915: *Japan und der Westen* and *Japan im Weltkriege und das Chinaproblem*.
- 46 Julius Kurth (1870-1949) was a theologian, art historian and collector who published among other subjects on Japanese woodblock prints
- 47 Friedrich Succo published on the Japanese woodblock print artists Utagawa Toyokuni (1913/14) and Katsukawa Shunshō (1922).
- 48 No catalogue or further information could be found on this auction.
- 49 [http://digi.ub.uni-heidelberg.de/diglit/cassirer\\_helbing1928\\_06\\_05/0011/image](http://digi.ub.uni-heidelberg.de/diglit/cassirer_helbing1928_06_05/0011/image) (last accessed 21 May 2018). Clarence Buckingham (1854-1913) was an art collector and director of the Chicago Art Institute. Francis Lathrop (1849-1909) was an artist and collector (<http://research.frick.org/directoryweb/browserecord.php?action=browse&recid=6751>; accessed on 29 May 2018). Hamilton Field was also an artist (cf. William Green, Hamilton Easter Field (1873-1922), in *Impressions*, vol. 8 [1983]).
- 50 [http://digi.ub.uni-heidelberg.de/diglit/cassirer\\_helbing1929\\_05\\_14/0008/image](http://digi.ub.uni-heidelberg.de/diglit/cassirer_helbing1929_05_14/0008/image) (last accessed 19 May 2018). William Gookin (1853-1936) was a banker, collector, scholar and expert consultant. He was also curator of the Clarence S. Buckingham Collection of Japanese prints at the Art Institute of Chicago (<http://research.frick.org/directoryweb/browserecord.php?action=browse&recid=7460>; accessed 29 May 2018). Julius Kurth (1870-1949) was a scholar, priest and artist; see *Julius Kurth: die Strahlkraft von Wissen und Glauben*, exhibition catalogue (Berlin: Museum Lichtenberg, 2017), see also fn. 46.
- 51 The collection of the ophthalmologist Adam August Breuer (1868-1944) was temporarily exhibited at the East Asian Art Museum in Berlin. He was also a lender to the great Berlin exhibition of Chinese art in 1929 at the Akademie der Künste on Pariser Platz, see Patrizia Jirka-Schmitz, A.A. Breuer (1868-1944). Ein

of the Freiburg private lecturer Ernst Grosse.<sup>52</sup> The Japanese art objects of the Munich architect V. Oppenheimer<sup>53</sup> were mostly acquired from the collection of the connoisseur of Japanese art G. Iguchi in Tokyo, with additions from the collections of Count Bourbon Bardi (1851-1906) in Venice and Count Pettenegg in Vienna.<sup>54</sup> The Japanese pottery and the tobacco containers from the collection “Alexander D.” came from the large Paris collection of A. Huc, the soapstone figures from the sold duplicates of the Johanneum<sup>55</sup> and the lacquerware from the former collection of Queen Caroline of Saxony.<sup>56</sup>

## Museum Sales

Six further important auctions are notable during the period and for the region covered in this article, as they consisted of museum deaccessions. In 1923, part of the so-called World Travel Collection of the Austro-Hungarian heir to the throne Arch-Duke Franz-Ferdinand was auctioned at the Dorotheum.<sup>57</sup> Originally, it had been purchased for the ethnographic collection of the Natural History Museum in Vienna.<sup>58</sup> In 1917, 1926 and 1927, the Cologne Museum for East Asian Art parted with some of its holdings,<sup>59</sup> while the Berlin State Museums deaccessioned part of its collection in 1920.<sup>60</sup> A further fifty-five lots were offered with the general information “property of a German museum” in a mixed consignor sale at Paul Cassirer and Hugo Helbing’s in 1926.

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Sammler ostasiatischer Kunst, in *Mitteilungen der Deutschen Gesellschaft für Ostasiatische Kunst*, no. 7 (April 1994) 15ff.

52 [http://digi.ub.uni-heidelberg.de/diglit/cassirer\\_helbing1929\\_05\\_14/0008/image](http://digi.ub.uni-heidelberg.de/diglit/cassirer_helbing1929_05_14/0008/image) (last accessed 19 May 2018). Ernst Grosse (1862-1927) was an ethnologist who began collecting East Asian art around 1900, both for his private collection and for the Berlin museums (<https://www.deutsche-biographie.de/gnd117564273.html#ndbcontent>; accessed on 29 May 2018).

53 See <http://d-nb.info/gnd/1045294381> (last accessed 10 August 2018)

54 [http://digi.ub.uni-heidelberg.de/diglit/helbing1925\\_05\\_18/0006/image](http://digi.ub.uni-heidelberg.de/diglit/helbing1925_05_18/0006/image) (last accessed 19 May 2018). The Museo d’Arte Orientale in Venice houses a collection of over 10,000 objects, acquired by Count Bourbon Bardi (1851-1906) in Japan in 1889, cf. Isao Kumakura and Josef Kreiner, Notes on the Japanese Collection of Count Bourbon Bardi at the Museo d’Arte Orientale di Venezia, in *Bulletin of the National Museum of Ethnology*, vol. 25, no. 4 (2001), 641-668. On Pettenegg see fn.20.

55 In 1876 the Electoral Saxon porcelain collection moved into three rooms on the upper floor of the Dresden Johanneum. The Historical Museum followed in 1877.

56 Carola (1873-1907) was a Wasa Princess who married the Crown Prince of Saxony, Albert von Wettin (1828-1902), in 1853. When he ascended the throne in 1873, she became Queen of Saxony, [http://digi.ub.uni-heidelberg.de/diglit/helbing1925\\_05\\_18/0006/image](http://digi.ub.uni-heidelberg.de/diglit/helbing1925_05_18/0006/image) (last accessed 19 May 2018).

57 On the world trip of the crown prince Franz Ferdinand of Austria-Este (1863-1914) see the preface in the following catalogue: [http://digi.ub.uni-heidelberg.de/diglit/dorotheum1923\\_12\\_10](http://digi.ub.uni-heidelberg.de/diglit/dorotheum1923_12_10) (last accessed 21 May 2018).

58 [http://digi.ub.uni-heidelberg.de/diglit/dorotheum1923\\_12\\_10/0010/image](http://digi.ub.uni-heidelberg.de/diglit/dorotheum1923_12_10/0010/image) (last accessed 21 May 2018).

59 [http://digi.ub.uni-heidelberg.de/diglit/lempertz1917\\_11\\_13](http://digi.ub.uni-heidelberg.de/diglit/lempertz1917_11_13), [http://digi.ub.uni-heidelberg.de/diglit/helbing1926\\_05\\_04a](http://digi.ub.uni-heidelberg.de/diglit/helbing1926_05_04a) and [http://digi.ub.uni-heidelberg.de/diglit/lempertz1927\\_11\\_04](http://digi.ub.uni-heidelberg.de/diglit/lempertz1927_11_04) (last accessed 21 May 2018).

60 [http://digi.ub.uni-heidelberg.de/diglit/lepke1920\\_03\\_16](http://digi.ub.uni-heidelberg.de/diglit/lepke1920_03_16) (last accessed 21 May 2018).

Some of the introductory essays to these catalogues reveal information about the sale selection or their motivation. For example, the head of the ethnographical collection of the Natural History museum in Vienna, Viktor Christian<sup>61</sup> wrote about the merger of the World Travel Collection with the existing museum collection: “The Indian and Japanese sections of the collection are particularly rich, and it is understandable that in uniting these with the existing museum collection a number of duplicates would emerge. However, the term duplicate cannot be used in the same narrow sense as in paintings or sculptures. For ethnographical collections, shape, material and decoration are most relevant, and smaller differences in execution are of secondary importance. In this wider sense, the present auction will offer duplicate from existing collection holdings, which would incur greater costs than could be justified under the present circumstances, were they retained. Since the entire proceeds of the sale will benefit the expansion of the collection, its components will remain undiminished, and the acquisitions funded by the duplicates will close notable gaps.”<sup>62</sup> Worth noting in this explanation are the definition of duplicates in ethnographic collections and the cost-benefit analysis with view to deaccessioning them.

In his introduction, the director of the Berlin Museum for East Asian Art, Otto Kümmel,<sup>63</sup> touches on the same subjects. “Strictly speaking, there are no duplicates in East Asian art, since even the art forms with multiple reproductions have such a variety of results that each print becomes a new entity. Nevertheless, German museums must take into account their wide collection area over a long period of time and forego any attempt to collect all of these variations. They have enough to do when trying to obtain even major versions of significant examples, and they need to sort out what is expendable at regular intervals in order to generate the necessary space and means, whenever donations or acquisitions permit the replacement of good things with better.”<sup>64</sup> Clearly, the subject of museum deaccessioning was already virulent at the beginning of the twentieth century, due to limited spatial resources, personnel capacities and financial means. Museum sales were therefore no exception even in other categories between 1901 and 1929. However, the museums generally did not provide reasons or strategies in the catalogue.

Another example of a programmatic approach can be found in the introduction to the 1917 auction from the collection of the Museum for East Asian Art in Cologne. The director Adolf Fischer<sup>65</sup> explains the reasons for the sale as follows: “When the museum was developed, a principle was established not to tire the visitor by repetitions of artworks of the same type or even duplicates. These were therefore excluded from the beginning, as

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61 Viktor Christian was born in 1885 and died in 1963, see <http://d-nb.info/gnd/116509171>.

62 [http://digi.ub.uni-heidelberg.de/diglit/cassirer\\_helbing1926\\_12\\_08/0055/image](http://digi.ub.uni-heidelberg.de/diglit/cassirer_helbing1926_12_08/0055/image) (last accessed 21 May 2018).

63 Otto Kümmel (1874-1952), the head of the department for Asian Art and later director of the Museum for East Asian Art, became general director of the Berlin museums from 1934 to 1945, see <http://d-nb.info/gnd/116591021>.

64 [http://digi.ub.uni-heidelberg.de/diglit/lepke1920\\_03\\_16/0009/image](http://digi.ub.uni-heidelberg.de/diglit/lepke1920_03_16/0009/image) (last accessed 21 May 2018).

65 Following the donation of his collection, Adolf Fischer (1856-1914) became the founding director of the Cologne Museum for East Asian Art in 1909.

well as objects of purely ethnographical relevance which would not fit in with the concept of the art museum.”

As catalogue entries or introductions were often written by museum directors or curators, the latter's involvement in the art market was clearly a matter of course in the first three decades of the twentieth century. For Asian art, apart from the above-mentioned protagonists<sup>66</sup> one of the main actors was William Cohn from the Berlin museums, who cooperated with the auctioneers Paul Cassirer and Hugo Helbing from 1926 to 1929 and contributed the introductions for five auction catalogues.<sup>67</sup> This survey's overview of the participation of museum employees in the art market provides new insights into the network between museums, academics and the art trade. In addition, university lecturers and scholars who published on Asian culture also wrote entries in auction catalogues.

## Conclusion

The completion of the research and digitalisation project “German Sales”, funded by the German Research Association (DFG), will make the entire corpus of more than 5,800 auction catalogues from German-speaking areas between 1901 and 1929 available online. This simplified access will offer new perspectives on the research of the auction trade in Asian art. In the context of the present article, an initial quantitative analysis could be undertaken which concluded that Asian art took up a relatively small portion of the auction market. Based on auction catalogues allocated to this category, only two percent of auctions were dedicated to it. For these Asian sales, the two centres for auctions were Frankfurt am Main and Berlin, where the dealers who dominated the market were also based – Rudolf Bangel, and the duo Hugo Helbing and Paul Cassirer.

However, since Asian works of art were also offered at other auctions, where they were not the predominant category, future art market research should focus on an analysis based on all auctioned Asian works of art. This would allow conclusions about which type of Asian objects from which period were consigned to auction when and where. With this background information, a more informed perspective on art market trends as mentioned in the catalogue introductions could be gained, as well as a characterisation of many collections which neither met art historical standards nor were apparently considered competitive at an international level.

In a second step, it would be worthwhile to compare the market offering at auction with that in the retail section of the art trade, based on both exhibition and stock catalogues. The findings could then also be analysed in the context of the international trade. Both the relevance of auction catalogues as a source for art market research and their potential should by now be clear. Auction catalogues not only contain descriptions of works

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66 Viktor Christian, Adolf Fischer, Curt Glaser and Otto Kümmel.

67 [http://digi.ub.uni-heidelberg.de/diglit/cassirer\\_helbing1926\\_04\\_28a](http://digi.ub.uni-heidelberg.de/diglit/cassirer_helbing1926_04_28a), [http://digi.ub.uni-heidelberg.de/diglit/cassirer\\_helbing1927\\_05\\_18](http://digi.ub.uni-heidelberg.de/diglit/cassirer_helbing1927_05_18), [http://digi.ub.uni-heidelberg.de/diglit/cassirer\\_helbing1928\\_03\\_29](http://digi.ub.uni-heidelberg.de/diglit/cassirer_helbing1928_03_29) und [http://digi.ub.uni-heidelberg.de/diglit/cassirer\\_helbing1929\\_05\\_15](http://digi.ub.uni-heidelberg.de/diglit/cassirer_helbing1929_05_15) (all last accessed 22 May 2018).

and information about their material value. Above and beyond these, they offer insights about collection profiles, sources, networks between museums, academics and the art trade, and questions of deaccessioning.

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