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## **Опыт создания Музея Востока в Лиссабоне в контексте современных подходов к изучению азиатского искусства**

В последнее время в научных кругах растет интерес к теоретическому обобщению процесса деколонизации азиатских коллекций музеев Европы. Пафос таких публикаций сводится к тому, что музейные предметы должны быть освобождены от интерпретаций с точки зрения колониальной политики прошлого, что позволит музеям воссоздать первоначальный культурный контекст экспонатов.

На фоне исторического экскурса в особенности средневековой колониальной политики Португалии в Азии в статье анализируется опыт создания коллекций азиатского искусства в Музее Востока в Лиссабоне. Описаны основные коллекции, проанализирована актуальная информация по экспозиционной и социальной деятельности музея.

**Ключевые слова:** Музей Востока; Museu do Oriente; Лиссабон; Португалия; азиатское искусство; колониальная политика; диалог культур.

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## **The Experience of the Oriental Museum in Lisbon in the Context of Contemporary Approaches to the Study of Asian Art**

Recently, there has been a growing interest among academic circles in the theoretical generalization of the process of decolonization of Asian collections of museums in Europe. The pathos of such publications is that museum objects should be freed from interpretations in terms of past colonial policies, allowing museums to recreate the original cultural context of the exhibits.

Against the backdrop of a historical excursion into the specifics of Portugal's medieval colonial policy in Asia, the article analyzes the experience of building Asian art collections at the Museum of Oriental Art in Lisbon. The main collections are described and the relevant information on the exposition and social activities of the museum is analyzed.

**Keywords:** Museum of the Orient; Museu do Oriente; Lisbon; Portugal; Asian art; colonial policy; dialogue of cultures.

Recently, there has been growing interest among academic circles in the theoretical generalization of the decolonization process of Asian collections in museums in Europe, as evidenced by a recently published study on "decolonial processes" in Swiss cultural institutions and universities

[19, p. 4–13]. The main pathos of such publications is that museums should reflect the cultural diversity around them by giving voice to the communities that produced the objects on display [7, 17]. By tracing the provenance of objects and examining the history of their acquisition, a growing number of scholars and museum profession-

als are calling for an epistemological shift in the way collections are handled [6]. According to supporters of this trend, museum objects should be freed from “coloniality” [10, p. 243] of interpretations and contextualized in their original cultural field [20, p. 201–218].

A vivid example of this kind is the activity of the Museum of the Orient (Museu do Oriente), established in Lisbon in 2008.

### Portugal's Colonial Policy in the East

Portugal's interest in the East is largely due to the active colonial policy it has pursued for a long time. Portuguese overseas expansion began in the 15th century. The Portuguese slowly but surely “mastered” the west coast of Africa, which gave a powerful impetus to their further advancement to the south. They soon rounded the southern end of Africa, and in 1498 Vasco da Gama reached the Malabar coast of India.

With the discovery of the sea route to India, the Portuguese colonial empire began. Portugal was too weak to conquer vast territories — so it established strongholds along the seaway from Lisbon to India and Southeast Asia in the 16th century. By taking control of the Moluccas Islands, the Portuguese began to control Europe's maritime trade with the East. Portugal's monopoly in the spice trade was so extensive that even Egyptian and Persian merchants in the 15th century received their spices through the Portuguese.

Among the reasons that pushed Portugal to the path of early colonial conquests, it is necessary to note the special geographical position of the country located in the extreme west of Europe. The Portuguese were interested in finding new transportation routes across the Atlantic Ocean. The early colonial conquests were driven by factors such as the search for financial means to eliminate fragmentation, the need to repay debts to moneylenders by small and medium-sized nobles, many of whom were left idle after the end of the Reconquista.

Colonial expansion was also in the interest of the Catholic Church in Portugal, which hoped to acquire a new flock and income. The merchants of the coastal cities of the Iberian Peninsula also supported colonization aspirations. They wanted to take the place of Italian and Hanseatic merchants in European trade. The townspeople were interested in obtaining spices without Venetian intermediaries [1, p. 35, 37–38].

Three stages can be distinguished in the Portuguese expansion to the East. The first stage began in 1415 with the capture of the Moroccan port of Ceuta by crusaders and ended in 1497–1499. In the first phase, the Portuguese began to explore the west coast of Africa, slowly at first and then more rapidly.

The second phase of the Portuguese expansion in the East, which began in 1497–1499, lasted until the end of the 16th century, when the Portuguese colonial empire was being formed. The Portuguese had to fight their rivals, mainly the Arabs, for supremacy in the Indian Ocean. In

this, the Portuguese were aided by their navy. Over time, in addition to the navy, the Portuguese relied on their strongholds to fight their rivals. They were built all along the sea route from Lisbon to India and Southeast Asia. The most important strongholds of the Portuguese in the East in the 16th century were Socotra Island at the entrance to the Gulf of Aden; Ormuzd in the Persian Gulf; Goa, Diu, Daman and Bombay on the west coast of India; the Malacca Peninsula; Siam (Thailand), China, Japan, Burma.

The third phase of Portuguese colonial policy began at the end of the 16th century. Portugal was part of the Spanish Empire. It was weakened by continuous struggles with the local populations of the Orient. Portugal was unable to resist the onslaught of the new colonial powers — the Netherlands and England. Gradually it began to cede its position in the East. By the middle of the 17th century, Portugal lost almost all its possessions in Asia. Only Goa and Daman in India, Aomagne (Macau) in China and the eastern part of Timor Island remained under its control. This period of Portuguese colonial expansion was characterized by the fact that Portugal was mainly defensive rather than seeking to expand its Asian possessions.

The peculiarity of Portugal's expansion was that it was carried out by a state with strong royal power, which took a direct part in governing the colonies [2, p. 50]. Outwardly, Portugal's expansion (especially at an early stage) had more in common with the Crusades than with colonial conquests. The ideas of spreading Christianity and fighting the “Moors”, i.e., Muslims, occupied a significant place in the justification of Portuguese colonial policy. At the same time, the Portuguese easily mingled with the local population that they had voluntarily or forcibly converted to Christianity.

Another distinctive feature of Portuguese colonial expansion was that it penetrated quite strong Asian countries (China, Japan, most of the states of India and Southeast Asia), many of which could successfully repel European attacks.

Portuguese colonialism was mainly focused on trade — the main funds were extracted from intra-Asian exchanges. The Portuguese with few European goods and Indian fabrics went to Malacca, where they left some of the fabrics and took spices. With the spices, they arrived in China, where they bought silk, and they then exchanged silk, Indian cloth, and European goods for silver in Japan. On their way back with Japanese silver, the Portuguese took silk, porcelain, and pearls from China for Malacca, Goa, and Europe. On their way to Europe via Malacca, they again took spices. Through these activities, Portugal sought to develop a trade and logistics network on the routes to Africa and Asia, often leading to conflict.

The struggle with the Portuguese contributed to the growing influence of Islam in the littoral states of the East. It was in the 16th century that Islam became established in Indonesia and Malaya, which later led to broader cultural ties of that region with India and the Near and Middle East.

### Creation of the Oriental Museum in Lisbon

The idea of creating an Oriental museum in Lisbon belongs to the Oriental Foundation (“Fundação Oriente”), founded in 1988. The Fundação Oriente aims to promote intercultural dialogue with Asian countries, especially with those regions where the Portuguese have established their presence — above all, China.

The settlement of the Portuguese in Macao, which began in the 16th century and developed over four centuries, was important for the establishment of cultural, economic and political relations with China. These relations developed vigorously in the 16th and 17th centuries due to Portuguese trade operations and Catholic missionary activities, while other European colonizers focused their attention on South and Southeast Asia. At the end of the nineteenth century, the East began to gradually “open up” to the countries of Europe, and Europeans began to equip research and trade expeditions there, during which they acquired various historical artifacts. These artifacts then formed separate collections, and later entire museums. This is how the Museum of the East appeared in Lisbon.

The museum is relatively young: it was opened in 2008. The principle that determined its creation remains to this day: the Museum of Oriental Art is a museum that introduces visitors to Eastern art. From the very beginning, the museum had considerable funds — the exhibits were collected long before it opened and were received as gifts from other private collections. These factors have allowed the Lisbon Oriental Museum to rapidly build up its collection [21].

Housed on the banks of the Tagus River, the Museu do Oriente is a sprawling six-story building (more than 10,000 square meters) occupying what was once a cod warehouse. Because of this, one of its peculiarities is the near-total absence of windows. When designing the museum, this created some difficulties with lighting and ventilation of the rooms. The building itself is symmetrical, flanked by two slightly lower wings. On the north side of the building, there are two bas-reliefs by sculptor Barat Feio. Inside the building one can notice the massive square-shaped pillars that pass through the floors and serve as frames for the shop windows [15].

In 2004, the Eastern Foundation purchased the building from the Portuguese government. The work to adapt and renovate the old room was done by the architects Carrillo da Graça and Rui Francisco. The museum project is by Fernando Antonio and Baptista Pereira. The post of the current director of the museum is held by Maria Manuela d'Oliveira Martins [14].

The collections in this museum include a variety of exhibits: works of art and artifacts collected by the Portuguese during the colonial period in Asia — China, India, Japan, Macao, Myanmar and Timor. These exhibits include religious paintings, textiles, art paintings, weapons, ancient maps, documents, ceramics, furniture, costumes, masks, and others. The concept of the museum involves the division of the exhibition fund into two main parts:

“Portuguese Presence in Asia” and “Kwok On”, which will be analyzed next.

### The “Portuguese Presence in Asia” Collection

This collection occupies the entire first floor of the museum and consists of three departments. The central section, where the visitor immediately enters, is dedicated to Macao, an important center of medieval international trade. The Eastern Department is divided into two sections, one devoted to the ethnographic collection from East Timor and the other to Oriental art — mainly Chinese art. The western section, Heritage, Memory and Collections, is devoted to the establishment of the Portuguese Empire in the East. The first part consists of monuments from the time of the Portuguese conquest of Asia. There are about 3,000 works of decorative and applied art — furniture, lacquerware, silver and goldware, paintings, sculptures, written monuments, carved ivory, porcelain and textiles. Among the exhibits in this collection are Chinese and Japanese screens from the 17th and 18th centuries, works of art of the “southern barbarians” Namban, and cultural monuments of the peoples of Timor.

As for the history of the exhibits, most of them were obtained during the voyages of the Portuguese to the countries of the East, through trade with these countries.

The collection contains works of art and documents of different eras which bear witness to the historical legacy of the Portuguese in Asia, and includes objects from India, China, Japan, Sri Lanka, Korea and East Timor — furniture, ceramics, paintings, ivory, sculpture, textiles, armor, graphics and silverware.

The first part of the tour route is devoted to Macao. The main exhibits are Chinese folding screens, including an extremely rare seventeenth-century example depicting the cities of Canton and Macao. The next gallery features furniture, textiles, jewelry, silver, paintings and ivory, maps and scale models representing the creation and expansion of the Portuguese Asian empire centered around Goa.

The third gallery features a set of Timorese artifacts of everyday and ceremonial use, as well as two sections dedicated to two Portuguese private collectors whose fascination with the traditional culture and aesthetics of Japan and China led them to acquire artworks from these countries. They were the politician and liberal writer Manuel Teixeira Gomes (1860–1941) and poet Camilo Pessanha (1867–1926). Teixeira Gomes resigned as president of the Republic in 1925 to devote himself to literary activities and travel. His collection includes Chinese snuff boxes (18th century), Japanese sword guards-tsuba (from the 14th century), netsuke figurines (from the 16th century), and boxes from the Edo period (1615–1868). Camilo Pessanha lived in Macao for the last three decades of his life and was considered an expert in Chinese art (painting, calligraphy, and poetry), and some of his selections are on display in this room.

### The Kwok On Collection

This collection focuses on Asian art and the folk reli-

gions of the region. In fact, it is an ethnographic collection that looks at objects according to their context, use, and symbolism. The Kwok On Collection was donated to the Oriental Foundation in 1999 by French Sinologist Jacques Pimpano, who in turn received it from collector Kwok On. While in Hong Kong in 1971, Jacques Pimpano met the Chinese banker Kwok On, who gave him the first 600 objects in the collection, which since then bears his name.

The collection now numbers around 15,000 objects — musical instruments, dolls, costumes, paintings, engravings, statues and ritual objects. Witnessing the specifics of a variety of performing arts and traditional cults, these artifacts represent Turkish, Greek, Malay and Thai shadow theaters; Balinese sacred dances, elements of puppet theater props in Indonesia — wayang golek (puppets on sticks), wayang klitik (flat wooden puppets), wayang orang (human dolls without masks), wayang topeng (human dolls with masks) and wayang beber (storytelling with painted scrolls), dolls from various regions of India, Burma and Vietnam. Some items concern the Tazieh ritual theater in Iran, Indian Kudiyyattam and Kathakali theatrical performances, traditional forms of Japanese Noh and Kabuki theater, Bunraku puppet theater, Khon theater in Thailand, Chinese opera, and deities for home altars and masks of various origins. Given the scale of its geographical coverage, this collection is considered to be the leading one in its field in Europe.

The Kwok On collection occupies the entire second floor of the museum; some of the exhibits are in storage and are on display from time to time.

Thus, through two permanent exhibitions (“The Portuguese Presence in Asia” and “Kwok On”), the Museum of Oriental Art offers to get acquainted with the characteristics and traditions of oriental art, to experience firsthand the uniqueness of Asian culture [4].

#### **Museum of Orient in the Information Space**

The Oriental Museum has a developed website, which is accessible in Portuguese and English (not all the information is in English). The interface of the site is intuitive and easy to use. The site has a main page and four links in the menu: the Oriental Foundation, the Museum, the Conference Center, and the Documentation Center. The first one leads to the Oriental Foundation website, the last one to the Oriental Foundation library page of the same website, and the other two to the sections of the museum website itself. Each of the sections contains relevant information. The home page provides information about exhibitions, performances, courses and conferences, educational services, as well as a news block.

In 2020 The Museum of the East expanded its online presence: in addition to the Facebook page, it has its own YouTube channel, as well as an Instagram account [13]. The content of the YouTube channel is primarily promotional materials in video format, but there is also a video tour of the two main collections of the museum and several “commentary visits” in the form of short excursions devoted

to individual exhibitions. As a rule, news and announcements are published on the Facebook page, and promotional material and photos are posted on the Instagram account. In general, the activities on these three platforms are promotional in nature. In addition, the Museum of the Orient cooperates with YourPodcast, which produces podcasts every week about one of the museum’s exhibits on the SoundCloud platform. The podcasts are only available in Portuguese. All social media is also only in Portuguese, making it difficult for foreigners to access information.

The Museum staff makes sure that visitors have accessible information about the exhibits — bilingual descriptions of the exhibits are available at the entrance to each section of the Museum — Portuguese and English. All the exhibits are also supplied with accompanying texts, which, besides the standard information about the origin, dates, sizes and materials, also contain information about the history of each particular piece.

The Oriental Museum has a store with various souvenirs, as well as books and magazines published by the Oriental Foundation. There is also a Documentation Center, which is a collection of various books: monographs, scientific journals and fiction. The Museum of Oriental Studies has its own Conference Center, which includes several rooms for various needs, including a roomy auditorium.

#### **Exposition Activity and Social Programs of the Museum of Oriental Art**

At present, the Museum is actively engaged in exposition activities. Among its many national and international events, the Museum of the Orient regularly organizes temporary exhibitions: 115 such exhibitions were organized between 2008 and 2018. From the fall of 2020 to the beginning of winter 2021, an exhibition of contemporary art from Macao — “Frozen Land” was organized [11]. It featured photographs and paintings of four Macao artists born between 1970 and 1990. The exhibition is dedicated to time and people who are “stuck” between the past and the future, in the “gray zone” between black and white. In the spring of 2021, the museum invited visitors to view the “Chinese Opera” exhibition and look at Chinese culture through the prism of folk beliefs, rituals, through reference to the pantheon of gods and various sociocultural practices. The “Chinese Opera” exhibition features 280 different exhibits that provide a broad overview of the specifics of Chinese performing arts. It shows scenes from performances, biographies of leading actors and directors, character types, costumes, makeup, wigs and hairpieces, ceramics, paintings and prints, musical instruments, librettos and photographs, statues of deities, dolls and masks [4].

Different kinds of events are held in the Museum on a regular basis: conferences, concerts, theatrical performances, and film screenings. For example, on the 29<sup>th</sup> of December 2020, Henrik Ibsen’s play “Gedda Gabler” was staged at the Museum of the East [11]. The museum also holds an annual book festival — the last one took place between 24.11–12.12.2020 [12].

The museum organizes workshops and educational courses for children and adults. In the conditions of the worldwide pandemic, such events began to take place online. In this series we can mention the online course “Religions in Japan” (10.10–28.11.2020), a training course on Oriental dancing (2.09–31.11.2020), Asian cuisine, theater and music [11]. Some events are timed to coincide with holidays or anniversaries. For example, between March and May 2018, when the Oriental Foundation celebrated its 30th anniversary and the 10th anniversary of the Oriental Museum, a festive program was presented for eight weeks with exhibitions, concerts, and workshops. Each week was dedicated to one of the countries of the East — India, South Korea, the Philippines, Thailand, Japan, Bangladesh, China, and East Timor [16].

According to statistics, such events are very popular: in ten years from 2008 to 2018, almost 100 thousand people attended about 500 such events: concerts, theatrical performances, film screenings and dance events. During the same period, more than 34,000 people participated in courses, attended lectures, master classes, 13,500 people used the Documentation Center, and 39,317 people used various educational services [3].

The Museum of Oriental Art is engaged in international activities, organizing exhibitions in other museums. For example, in 2011 exhibits from the Kwok On collection visited the Bangkok Art and Cultural Center as part of the “Masks of Asia” exhibition [8]. The exhibition was timed to celebrate the 500th anniversary of diplomatic relations between Portugal and Thailand. The exhibition “Frozen Land”, which was held jointly with the Macao Foundation in the winter of 2020–2021, had a great public resonance.

In addition to organizing exhibitions and promoting Asian culture in Portugal, the Museum also promotes scientific events — international conferences and seminars on Asian studies [18].

Thus, the Oriental Museum in Lisbon, making full use of the many historical sources, documents and materials accumulated over centuries of international trade relations with Asian countries, is successfully overcoming the syndrome of the colonial past. Thanks to the hard work of museum workers and scholars, it is now an important historical and artistic institution and one of the main promoters of Asian culture in Portugal.

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