

# The Chinese Gallery at the Vienna World's Fair of 1873 and Late Habsburg Exhibition Diplomacy

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The Vienna World's Fair (*Weltausstellung*) of 1873 is often regarded as the first international exhibition at which China was formally represented.<sup>1</sup> The show certainly constituted the largest and most comprehensive display there had ever been of the art, industry and natural produce of China. It was an event of enormous consequence, leading to the establishment of public and private collections of Chinese material culture across Europe, and shaping European perceptions of China during the *Gründerzeit* years, a period of unprecedented economic growth and confidence. What is more, it arguably determined the Chinese approach to World's Fairs for decades to come.

This chapter takes a close look at the important event. Making use of hitherto little-regarded diplomatic correspondence between the Austro-Hungarian representatives in Shanghai and Hong Kong, the Austro-Hungarian foreign ministry, Chinese officials, and other actors, preserved in archives in Vienna and Taipei, this text will first trace the process through which the exhibition came into being and capture the activities of the brains behind the show: Heinrich Calice, Robert Hart and Gustav Overbeck. It will

then investigate the character and composition of the display and attempt a reconstruction of its layout, based on close examination of contemporary photographs, newspaper reports, and catalogues. Finally, it will make a fresh contribution to the century-long discourse around the extent to which the Chinese empire exercised agency over the display, focusing on evidence that has often been overlooked, and arguing that, while the concept and contents of the exhibition relied almost exclusively on Europeans, the Chinese government—at least retrospectively—did indeed take ownership of the event.

## Vienna and the “Orient”

At the early World's Fairs (beginning with the “Great Exhibition of the Works of Industry of All Nations” in London in 1851, followed by exhibitions in Paris in 1855, London in 1862 and Paris in 1867) it cannot be said that presentations of Chinese material did not play a prominent role. Each of the four exhibitions included a “China court”, “grande exposition chinoise” or “salon chinois”. In 1851, a China gallery occupied a position right in the centre of London's Crystal Palace, opposite the main entrance. The fourth fair in Paris featured Chinese galleries in two separate spaces in the Champs de Mars building, and a garden area consisting of several “chinoise” halls and pavilions

<sup>1</sup> Unless noted otherwise all translations in the text are by the author. As most documents used here have not yet been transcribed and as the Kurrentschrift customary for 19th century German handwriting is often difficult to decipher, all quotations from such documents shall be provided in both German transcription and English translation.

where Chinese persons served tea and staged theatre performances.<sup>2</sup> In 19th-century Europe, an “Exposition Universelle” or “International Exhibition” true to its name inevitably required the presence of China.

The Qing imperial court, though, took no active role in the first four World’s Fairs. In the case of the Paris exhibition of 1867, we know of a formal notification that had been sent to China, which had resulted in little more than an imperial decree ordering the Superintendent-Ministers of Trade for the Northern Ports and Southern Ports (*Nanbei tongshang dachen* 南北通商大臣) to inform their subordinates and local traders and producers of the Paris show, and offering tax exemptions for exhibits.<sup>3</sup> No exhibitors from China had come forward, however, so that it was not the Chinese government but London and Paris merchants, collectors and diplomats with contacts to or knowledge of East Asia who had furnished the stalls featuring trade goods and collectibles from China. As a result, those exhibitions are often seen as projecting a China that was a construct of the European imagination, rather than offering actual insight into Chinese contemporary industry and culture.

The organisers of the *Weltausstellung* in Vienna in 1873 intended to run things differently. The city, at the time, was re-inventing itself as a modern metropolis connecting western Europe and the Orient, a vague geographic term that included the Balkans, Russia, northern Africa, and most of Asia. The opening of the Vienna World’s Fair took place after years of growing economic optimism and political aspiration in Vienna and across the Dual Monarchy. Vienna’s medieval ramparts had been demolished and replaced by the grand boulevard Ring, from which rows of multi-storey apartment blocks began sprawling in every direction. The

population had expanded dramatically, numbering more than a million inhabitants by 1873.<sup>4</sup> An administrative compromise with the Hungarian part of the empire had brought about internal stability, and a closer alliance with Germany had resulted in a more powerful political position in Europe. Modern railway lines began to criss-cross the country, facilitating an increasing industrialisation. The opening of the Suez Canal in 1869 and the quickly developing steam navigation had reduced transport costs and travel time to Asia considerably, and promised to turn the Austrian port in the Mediterranean, Trieste, into a crucial hub for European trade with South and East Asia.

The director of the *Weltausstellung*, the diplomat Wilhelm Freiherr von Schwarz-Senborn (1816–1903), a person who had a long experience with World’s Fairs, placed great emphasis on the proper inclusion of the states of the East.<sup>5</sup> Schwarz-Senborn established a special division for the Orient and East Asia in the directorate of the fair, headed by the Austrian consul general in Constantinople, Josef Ritter von Schwegel (1836–1914). Schwarz-Senborn’s and Schwegel’s quest to involve additional countries met with impressive success. The exhibition attracted 35 participating nations, with “oriental” states such as Turkey, Egypt and Persia supplying extensive displays and grand exhibition buildings. Morocco and Tunisia attended an international exhibition for the first time.

The importance given to the East becomes most apparent in the design of the monumental main gate to the exhibition grounds. Its pillars carried the names and crests in laurel wreaths of 10 nations. Among the countries the organisers chose to promote at this exalted location, we find Turkey, Persia, and, on the lower right, Japan and China (figs. 1a and 1b).

2 Gubitosi 2023; Martin 2019.

3 Duchesne de Bellecourt (1867, 710, 714) indicated that the emperor had rejected the invitation, a claim that is not entirely correct. For the actions of the Chinese government regarding the 1867 exhibition see the letter from Prince Gong to Calice, 12 August 1872, HHSTA, 145, F34 S.R. Unless otherwise noted, all letters referred to in this text come from this location in the Haus-, Hof- und Staatsarchiv.

4 Wien Geschichte Wiki n.d.

5 Schwarz Senborn had served as “General-Commissär” of the Austrian exhibition at the London World’s Fair in 1862, and had been involved in the Paris exhibition of 1867, see Engel and Rotter (1873, 105).



Fig. 1a: György Klösz (1844–1913). Main gate to the World's Fair area in the Prater with crest of China and Japan on the lower right, 1873, photograph, 30.5×40.3 cm. Wien Museum Inv.-Nr. 56564/2, CCo. <https://sammlung.wienmuseum.at/en/object/128210/>

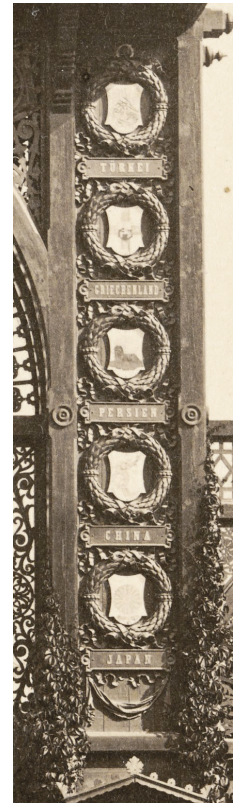


Fig. 1b: The crests of Turkey, Greece, Persia, China and Japan, detail of fig. 1a.

China was a theme in multiple areas of the *Weltausstellung*. The Chinese gallery was located at the eastern end of the gigantic *Industriepalast* (industrial palace) building, in a transept north of the *Längengalerie* (long gallery) close to the east gate (fig. 2). China and Japan were among the four countries that contributed a quantity of material to the “Pavillon des kleinen Kindes”, an additional exhibition on early learning housed in a pavilion north of the *Industriepalast*, and were given one room each in the building.<sup>6</sup> The “Pavillon des Amateurs”, designed to present ancient arts and crafts from private collections, included substantial amounts of Chinese cloisonné and porcelain provided by two Viennese collectors, the industrialist Altgraf Hugo Karl Franz zu Salm-Reifferscheidt (1832–1890) and the owner of a tea shop,

6 Stramm 1873, 1; *General-Catalog* 1873, 827.

Carl Trau (1811–1887), and, apparently, by a Persian prince whose name unfortunately remains a mystery.<sup>7</sup> Then there was the contribution of the Cercle Oriental, an association of businessmen and diplomats that aimed to promote trade with the countries of the East. The group had erected in the Prater a multi-storey building in a fanciful mixture of architectural elements from Turkey, Persia and China. It contained a coffee shop, a library, meeting rooms, a translation and information office, currency exchange facilities, and two exhibition halls. Two rooms on the upper floors, decorated in a lavish Oriental fashion, were meant to serve representatives of Eastern countries as a *pied-à-terre* on the exhibition grounds.<sup>8</sup>

7 Birnbacher 2023. For the collection of the “Persian prince and minister” in the pavilion, see Lind (1873, 308).

8 *General-Catalog* 1873, 826–27.





Fig. 2: Carl Waage (1800–1873). The *Industriepalast* and the World's Fair area in the Prater, 1873, lithography on paper, 19.8×26.8 cm. Wien Museum Inv.-Nr. 60231, CCo. <https://sammlung.wienmuseum.at/objekt/472613/>

This chapter will deal mainly with the show in the *Industriepalast*, which was the most representative and widely acknowledged exhibition of Chinese products.

## Involving China

The actions that led to the installation of a grand Chinese exhibition at the 1873 World's Fair shall be traced here in some detail as they have so far been insufficiently understood. Previous research has focused primarily on the agency of Chinese institutions and of some foreigners in the service of the Chinese government. Files discovered in the Austrian state archives allow us to reconstruct the train of events in much more detail, revealing it as far more complex than commonly assumed.

To ensure the active participation of China and Japan, Schwarz-Senborn contacted Heinrich Joseph

Aloys Graf von Calice (1831–1912), who, at the time, was travelling in East Asia as part of the Austro-Hungarian expedition to East Asia of 1868–1871 and had assumed the role of consul general and provisional diplomatic agent in November 1869. As representative of the k.u.k.<sup>9</sup> Foreign Ministry, Calice was the highest-ranking Austrian diplomat in East Asia, and it became his task to approach the governments of China, Japan and Siam regarding the World's Fair. From April 1871, the ministry appointed Calice as Minister in Residence and consul general in Shanghai, from where he was to develop the k.u.k. consular service in these three countries.<sup>10</sup>

Calice informed the Beijing authorities of the plans for a World's Fair very early, on 21 October

<sup>9</sup> K.u.k. stood for *kaiserlich und königlich*, i.e. imperial and royal, as a marker of joint institutions of the two parts of the Dual Monarchy, Austria and Hungary, from 1867 to 1918.

<sup>10</sup> For the complex process that led to the installation of Calice, see Lehner (1995, 157–68); Goldinger (1957, 94); for the expedition, see Scherzer (1872, 1873).



1870, only a few months after the Austrian emperor Franz Joseph I (1830–1916) had approved the request to hold the exhibition.<sup>11</sup> The first reaction was encouraging. The Chinese government wrote back almost immediately, on 26 October, and agreed to Calice's requests to make announcements regarding the show, encourage businesses to participate, and to grant tariff exemptions to contributors who might come forward.<sup>12</sup>

The Chinese government charged the *Zongli Yamen* 總理衙門, the ministry handling foreign affairs, with the preparations. As had been the case in 1867, the ministry informed the Superintendent-Ministers of Trade, who in turn notified the Customs Service and local officials about Viennese plans to hold an international exhibition, instructing them “to make known to Chinese merchants and others concerned, that they will be at liberty to send whatever they may desire to exhibit free of Export duty from the Treaty Ports”.<sup>13</sup> The information moved down the bureaucratic ladder fairly quickly, but without much urgency. On 25 November, for instance, the circuit intendant of Shanghai made a public proclamation, and local port commissioners received their first notices on 31 December 1870.<sup>14</sup>

The proclamations failed to generate much interest among the Chinese public, which was still little acquainted with the concept of international exhibitions, and officials hesitated over whether to get involved. While Japan grasped the opportunity to actively craft its image and shape how it was perceived on an international stage, the Chinese government showed little ambition to take matters into its own hands. There was a clear danger that

the Chinese nation would remain on the sidelines and not present a national show, as had been the case in earlier international exhibitions. This was still the case in early 1872, just a year before the opening ceremony of the *Weltausstellung*. In April, the director, Schwarz-Senborn, intervened with the Austro-Hungarian Foreign Ministry, urgently raising concerns about the lack of progress the Chinese exhibition was making.<sup>15</sup>

At the time of Schwarz-Senborn's intervention, Calice, who had been formally installed in Shanghai as Minister in Residence of the Dual Monarchy in November 1871, was promoting the cause of the *Weltausstellung* in Japan and later Siam. After receiving the note on his return to China in late Spring 1872, Calice launched into a flurry of activity. His first move was to approach the governor-general of Guangdong and Guangxi, Ruilin 瑞麟 (who held the office—a position also referred to as viceroy, *Liangguang zongdu* 兩廣總督—from 1865 to 1874) and other Chinese dignitaries from the region to ask them to submit their significant private art collections for display in Vienna.<sup>16</sup> He then pressed the new Foreign Minister of Austria-Hungary, Gyula Andrassy (1823–1890), to grant free transport facilities for submissions.<sup>17</sup> He made the young interpreter of the consulate, Josef Haas (1847–1896), translate into Chinese and annotate the official *Weltausstellung* programme and sent it to the imperial government and other officials.<sup>18</sup> On 4 July alone, he penned more than 50 letters in several languages to engage stakeholders across the country: firstly, nine identical letters to the k.u.k. acting consuls in port cities along the Chinese coast, asking not only

11 Intentions to hold a *Weltausstellung* in Vienna were voiced from 1868. The Austrian emperor approved the request on 24 May 1870. Engel and Rotter (1873, 4); Pemsel (1989, 16–22).

12 For a discussion of the character of the notification and reply, see Tsai Weipin (2022, 8–9).

13 Translation by Robert Hart in Letter to Calice, 5 July 1871.

14 See the translation of the proclamation by Josef Haas 10/H.P. (China), ex 1871, and the letter from Hart to Calice, 5 July 1871, quoting Circular 24 of 31 December 1870, Inspectorate General of Customs.

15 Letter from Schwarz-Senborn to k.u.k. foreign ministry, 9 April 1872.

16 Letter from Calice to Andrassy, 6 September 1872.

17 Calice to Andrassy, 6 June 1872.

18 On Haas, see the most concise notes in Führer (2001, 65, 67–68), based on Georg Lehner. Translation by Josef Haas: *Aoguo gonghui tang wenjian Tongzhi shiyi nian si yue fanyi guanxiashi zuo* 奥国公会堂文件同治十一年四月翻译官夏士作 (*The Documents of the Austrian World's Fair, Made by the Translator Haas in the 4th Month of the Year Tongzhi 11* (1872)).

for exhibits but also for their support in the endeavour to interest the local authorities in the exhibition, even suggesting that the officials should turn to their superiors for further instructions.<sup>19</sup> Apparently, he hoped that some pressure from below might help convince officials in Beijing. On the same day, 18 letters went out to missionaries in many parts of China. The letters, some written in French and some in Italian, urged the missionaries to ask Chinese Christians to participate “in the cause of progress and civilisation” in order to earn “sympathy from all who share an interest in their pious work”. In most letters, Calice even included specific suggestions for exhibits of significance for the locality.<sup>20</sup> He dispatched a copy of these letters to the French minister to China, François Henri Louis de Geofroi (or Geofroy, 1822–1899).<sup>21</sup> Still on 4 July, he contacted the Shanghai representatives of eight maritime freight companies, enquiring about their willingness to transport exhibits for free or at a reduced cost.<sup>22</sup> A few days later, he posted a request to the president of the Shanghai chamber of commerce, suggesting that the chamber as an institution might take an active role in arranging the exhibition.<sup>23</sup>

Later in the month, Calice travelled to Beijing to personally promote to the government the issue of the Chinese presence at the *Weltausstellung*. Apparently, there had been little communication on the matter between him and the Peking authorities in the preceding two years. This is indicated by the fact that, in the submission to the court

which he wrote during the trip, Calice refers to the last note he had received regarding the World's Fair (following common practice in diplomatic exchanges), giving the date as 26 October 1870, the day the *Yamen* had sent the reply to the initial announcement.<sup>24</sup> On this visit, Calice first went to Tianjin to meet the powerful statesman Li Hongzhang (李鴻章, 1823–1901), at the time Superintendent-minister of Trade for the northern ports and Viceroy of Zhili province, who was known as a promoter of modernisation who shaped much of China's foreign policy. Unfortunately, there is no record of this exchange, although we do have details of meetings Calice held in Beijing with the influential prince Gong (恭親王 or Yixin 奕訢, 1833–1898) and other *Zongli Yamen* officials, in his detailed report to the k.u.k. foreign minister and in two submissions to Gong dated 28 July and 2 August 1872 (fig. 3). One submission contained a detailed elaboration of the *Weltausstellung* project, its organisation, the provisions made for foreign participants, and the benefits he saw in such an enterprise.<sup>25</sup> The texts further indicate that Calice urged Prince Gong and the *Zongli Yamen* officials to follow the examples of Japan and other countries in setting up a special national commission to arrange the Chinese exhibition in Vienna, and in sending a group of official representatives to the *Weltausstellung*. He further asked for the involvement of all provincial governors (viceroys) in addition to the Superintendent-ministers of Trade, and requested the establishment of central collecting points for submissions in Shanghai and Canton. Envisaging a grand show that included crucial resources and products of industry from across the entire empire, he even assembled and presented to Gong a list that detailed desirable items from each province of China, and suggested that the Chinese government itself should contribute objects of imperial significance, such as newly published maps, weapons from the imperial armoury in Taiyuan, a throne and official

19 Letter from Calice to acting consuls in Kiukiang, Chefoo, Tamsui, Taiwan, Newchang, Hankow, Amoy, Swatow and Ningpo, 4 July 1872.

20 Letter from Calice (in French) to Monseigneurs Dubart in Chi-li, Languillat in Kiang-nan, Desflèches, Pinchon and Lepley in Sse-tchuen, Ponsot in Yün-nan, Lions in Kouitchéau, Chauveau in Thibet, Bray in Kiangsi, Guierry in Tche-kiang, Bax in Mongolia, and (in Italian) to Monseigneurs Navarro in Hu-nan, Zanoli in Hu-pe, Chiai in Shen-si, Monagassa in Shan-si, Cosi in Shan-tung, Tagliabue in Chi-li, Volonteri in Honan, 4 July 1872.

21 Calice to Geofroi, 4 July 1872.

22 Calice to freight companies, 4 July 1872.

23 Calice to president of Shanghai Chamber of Commerce, 8 July 1872.

24 Calice to Gong and ZLYM, 28 July 1872.

25 Calice to Gong, 28 July 1872. For the annotated transcript, see Nickel 2023.



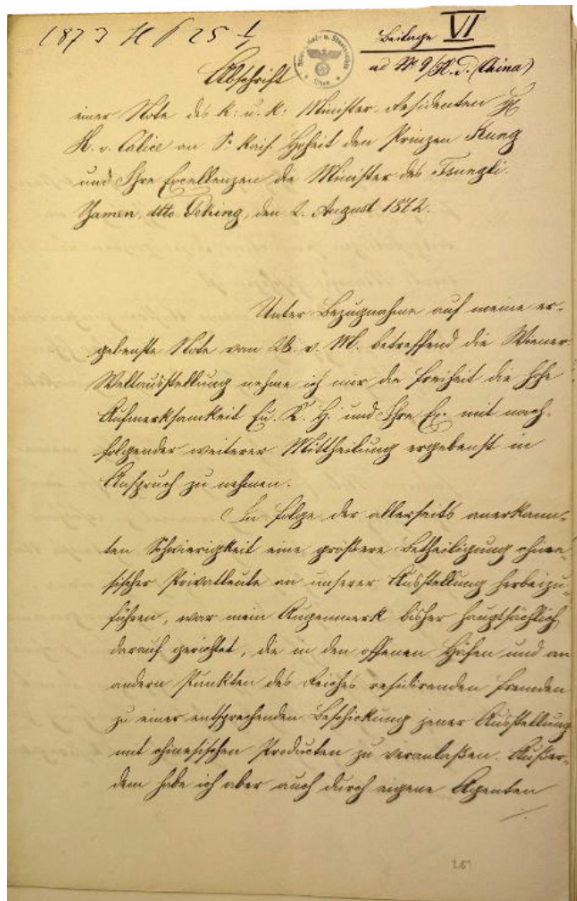


Fig. 3: Archival copy of letter from Calice to his imperial highness Prince Gong and their excellences the ministers of the Zongli Yamen, dated 2 August 1872, page 1. HHSTA, 145, F34 S.R. Photograph by the author.

chariot, and porcelain from the imperial factories in Jingdezhen.<sup>26</sup>

Calice's main priority, however, was to involve the Chinese Maritime Customs Service (*Da Qing huangjia haiguan zong shuiwusi* 大清皇家海關總稅務司, hereafter CMCS), the body that oversaw the administration of trade at the ports that allowed foreign vessels. At the time, the CMCS, which understood itself as China's most advanced ministry, employed Western (mainly British) expertise to generate duty and tax revenues for the Chinese state. The CMCS had informed its local offices about the *Weltausstellung* as early as 1870,

but had not so far taken any active role.<sup>27</sup> On 4 July, Calice wrote to the CMCS's long-serving head, the British Inspector General Robert Hart (1835–1911), with a request for samples and trade statistics that would fit section 7 of the official programme, which was “to show the international exchange of products, a representation of the commerce and trade of the world.”<sup>28</sup>

Calice assumed correctly that the challenge of contributing to this particular theme of the world exhibition would capture the attention of the capable administrator Hart. On 5 August, Hart replied: “I have the honor to state that the attempt will be made to give effect to your wish, but I am afraid that the shortness of the notice will interfere with the value and the completeness of the Customs' contribution.” He included in his letter a circular which he had distributed two days earlier to the port commissioners detailing his minute instructions regarding the preparation for the show.<sup>29</sup> Judging from the dates of the exchanges, Hart became active before Gong or the *Zongli Yamen* had a chance to react to Calice's suggestions or issue any order to the CMCS. Somewhat sneakily, in his submission of 2 August, Calice asked Gong for permission to contact the CMCS, about four weeks after he had actually approached Hart.<sup>30</sup>

Still, while providing tentative answers to many of Calice's requests, the *Zongli Yamen* seems to have been perfectly happy to cede responsibility for the exhibition to the CMCS.<sup>31</sup> Calice's initiative to involve Hart proved to be consequential, as the presentation that Hart assembled in Vienna became the blueprint for China's participation in many international exhibitions over the following decades.<sup>32</sup>

Robert Hart set out to accomplish his part in the first official Chinese display at a World's Fair

27 Hart to Calice, 5 July 1871, quoting Circular 24 of 31 December 1870, Inspectorate General of Customs.

28 Calice to Hart, 4 July 1872.

29 Hart to Calice, 5 August 1872.

30 Calice to Gong and ZLYM, 2 August 1872.

31 Gong to Calice, 12 August 1872.

32 For a discussion of the role of the CMCS in later exhibitions, see Tsai Weipin (2022, 5–6).

26 Calice to Gong and ZLYM, 28 July and 2 August 1872.

with the utmost bureaucratic efficiency. Closely following Calice's suggestions and following to the letter the guidance given in section 7 of the programme, he decided to arrange the exhibition around the fourteen harbour cities that welcomed foreign trade at the time, planning for no less than an encyclopaedic collection of all goods traded at each port (both imported and exported) on board foreign vessels (the Customs Service had little control over the local commerce on Chinese ships). He required local CMCS representatives to purchase samples of three groups of objects: items imported from abroad, items exported abroad, and items traded along the Chinese coast, which were to be marked as classes A, B, and C respectively. Each sample was to be listed in catalogues arranged according to the classification system published by the organisers of the Viennese World's Fair. The catalogues would include the name of each object in English, German and Chinese, comments on its "origin, nature or method of preparation" and its various usages, as well as information on places of production and consumption, the value, and statistical trade data for the year 1871.<sup>33</sup> Finally the commissioners added labels to each object that contained some of the information from the catalogue.

Hart's idea was to showcase "a complete set of specimens of the complete trade of each individual port",<sup>34</sup> which made his show something close to a scientific and statistical enterprise visualising the state of maritime trade of China. His collection included anything that was shipped in and out of the ports, ranging from established trade goods such as enamels, porcelains, wood-carvings, tea and silks, to much more mundane objects such as coal and wood samples, silk waste,<sup>35</sup> scrap paper,<sup>36</sup> human hair,<sup>37</sup> old copper coins used for medical

purposes<sup>38</sup> and even human excrement.<sup>39</sup> Other exhibits which some visitors may have been surprised to find in the Chinese gallery were watches and clocks produced in America and imported into China,<sup>40</sup> or a large set of samples of wool and cotton fabrics made in Britain and other parts of Europe, that had been shipped to Shanghai.<sup>41</sup> Hart's plan was clearly an endeavour of scientific quality that aimed at visualising the state of Chinese trade for the display of world trade announced in section 7 of the Viennese programme: a category, incidentally, with which few other countries bothered to engage. Further, it certainly served to underline to his superiors and the public the efficiency and importance of the CMCS.<sup>42</sup> It stretches the imagination, however, to envisage this material being exhibited as representative of China.

In November 1872, following Calice's suggestion, Hart relieved the commissioner of the port of Canton, Edward Charles Bowra (1841–1874), of his regular duties and ordered him to serve as organiser of the CMCS show for Vienna.<sup>43</sup> Bowra realised that the assembly of trade samples, however complete and comprehensive it may have been, might fail to form an attraction for the Viennese audience. He thus created a fourth class of items (next to goods imported from abroad, goods exported overseas, and items shipped in coastal trade) whose purpose was not to illustrate trade statistics but to give some insight into Chinese society and social environment at the specific port, a class D he called "Detached and Miscellaneous Specimens of Articles used in, or peculiar to the locality".<sup>44</sup> This special class included, in the case of the Tientsin (Tianjin) port, locally used felt stockings and rain-proof reed coats, passenger and goods carts and

33 See the most thoughtful assessment of the *Port Catalogues* in Tsai Weipin (2022).

34 Circular by Robert Hart, quoted in *The London and China Telegraph* 1873, suppl. 2.

35 *Port Catalogues* 1873, 70.

36 *Ibid.*, 474.

37 *Canton Catalogue* 1873, 14.

38 *Port Catalogues* 1873, 142.

39 *Ibid.*, 146.

40 *Ibid.*, 280.

41 *Ibid.*, 180–86.

42 The significance of international exhibitions for the CMCS discusses Zhan Qinghua (2010, 83–86).

43 Calice suggested Bowra in a letter to Hart, 15 September 1872. On Bowra's activities see Baird 2015.

44 *Port Catalogues* 1873, vii.



litters, a fire engine and a wheelbarrow, large sets of locally famous clay figurines showing popular customs and theatre scenes, paintings on glass and nautical and architectural models.<sup>45</sup> Exhibits of this class proved to be highly popular in Vienna. Many observers praised the technical ingenuity of the wheelbarrow, and the German journalist Julius Rodenberg (1831–1914) spent much of his time in the gallery examining the figurines.<sup>46</sup> Later in the process, Hart and Bowra even deviated one step further from the original plan. From January 1873, they added classes E and F and authorised commissioners “to receive and forward to Vienna curious or valuable miscellaneous objects” belonging to private owners,<sup>47</sup> leading to the inclusion of private collections of curios and antiquities intended for the *Exhibition des Amateurs* (section 24, Objects of Fine Arts of the Past). The new submissions included the famous antique collection of Archdeacon John Henry Gray (1823–1890) for the port of Canton, and the Shanghai port listed 20 “Curios exhibited by R.H. Boyce, Esquire” (apparently Robert H. Boyce, an architect and surveyor in the Works Department of the British Foreign Office who was active in China between 1867 and 1900)<sup>48</sup> in addition to 145 more “curios” collected by a certain Shanghai banker named as Hoo Taou-tai (see below), and items by G. C. Stent (the translator and employee of the Maritime Customs Service George Carter Stent, 1833–1884). More artworks were assigned to section 23, “Art applied to Religion”.<sup>49</sup>

The inclusion of art and antiques promised to make the exhibition much more palatable to a European audience. Hart, however, even after the display had been installed in Vienna, remained stubbornly convinced that none but the trade samples of classes A to C had any scientific significance and that the contribution to section 7 was the only one

that mattered, regarding the collectors’ items he felt forced to include with thinly veiled contempt. In his introduction to the *China Trade Statistics* discussed below, at least, he explained that:

The Chinese collection, under the letters D. E. and F. contains some attractive and interesting articles, but it is under the letters A. B. and C. that what is really valuable is to be found. Whoever desires to study the ‘international exchange of products’ will do well to cast an eye on that homely but complete array of samples and specimens, for, supplemented by Catalogue and Special Statistics, it will be found to explain the mutual wants which Foreign Countries and China in turn feel and in turn supply, and also to indicate, to some extent, the nature of the traffic kept up between some important points in the Empire itself. That the collection is but a small contribution to be sent from China, is apparent; but it is to be remembered that only one experiment has been attempted, namely, to assist in the illustration of ‘the international exchange of products.’<sup>50</sup>

The CMCS collected the exhibits in the ports of Shanghai and Canton and shipped them to Trieste. As the Austrian frigate *Fasana* that had been assigned to take on board the cargo from Japan, China and Siam proved too small, the shipment had to be split into various batches and transported by commercial steamers. Hart appointed a group of six employees—Charles Hannen (unknown dates), Emile de Champs (unknown dates), Edward Bangs Drew (1843–1924), Gustav Detring (1842–1913), Bowra and William Cartwright (unknown dates)—to take care of the shipment and the setting up of the exhibition in Vienna. He sent them with precise instructions even regarding the uniforms they were to have tailored in Vienna.<sup>51</sup>

Previous research based on the publications and notes left by the CMCS has concluded that

<sup>45</sup> Ibid., 34–37.

<sup>46</sup> Rodenberg 1873.

<sup>47</sup> Circular no 13 of 1872, quoted in *Port Catalogues* 1873, VIII.

<sup>48</sup> *Port Catalogues* 1873, 288.

<sup>49</sup> Ibid., 296.

<sup>50</sup> *China Trade Statistics* 1873, 5.

<sup>51</sup> Tsai Weipin 2022, 18.

Robert Hart was the brain behind the Chinese exhibition in Vienna. The correspondence in the state archives, however, makes clear that it was Heinrich Calice's vision that guided many of Hart's decisions. The idea that Hart might go beyond a mere presentation of the state of Chinese trade and include private collections, for instance, came from Calice, after he received Archdeacon Gray's offer of his collection. It was Calice who had urged Hart to make Bowra a "special agent" for the CMCS Vienna exhibition, and to send a group of CMCS representatives to Vienna.<sup>52</sup> Calice befriended Bowra early in the process, and appears to have discussed with him frequently the design and progress of the CMCS section of the exhibition, giving advice and pointing out possible obstacles. Calice also remained in close contact with several other CMCS port commissioners.<sup>53</sup> He even put into Hart's mind the idea of procuring a "magnificent entrance gate" to the Chinese exhibition, although what Calice envisaged was "a full frontispiece of a Peking-shop" rather than the *pailou* (牌樓) honorary gate that Hart finally had installed.<sup>54</sup>

Although Hart largely accepted his advice, Calice did not leave the creation of the Chinese gallery solely in his hands and those of the CMCS. He remained determined to present the products of the art, industry and natural resources of the whole nation and procure an exhibition representative of China, not just a display of trade goods handled in Treaty Ports, such as the CMCS was able to provide. To this end, in addition to the section assembled by Hart, Calice prepared a second section for the Chinese pavilion. He continued to collect the submissions provided by the Christian missions working in the interior of China, the Austrian consulates, and several other stakeholders. This group was shaped by what might be called an ethnographic approach. The display that came together included agricultural produce, staples and everyday products that were of significance locally—missionaries from Inner Mongolia province, for instance, sent

Mongolian costumes, cutlery, pots, a shotgun, arrows, wooden cups and two yurts, while the Hubei mission provided local tobacco, cotton, silk, and baste fibre samples as well as ordinary household utensils and jewellery<sup>55</sup>—thus giving an insight into everyday life in parts of China that were, at the time, little known to Europeans.

This second section included items supplied by several individuals, notably the translator of the Austrian embassy, Josef Haas, the Austrian consul Rudolf Schlick, and the silk inspector August Mertens (dates for both unknown). Carl Heinrich Bismarck (1839–1879), translator at the German embassy in Beijing, had sent samples of all stages of cloisonné-making, along with detailed descriptions of the manufacturing process. The *General-Catalog* listed one more, rather enigmatic, supplier, a certain "Kia-li-che in Shanghai".<sup>56</sup> This may very well be a transcription of Calice's Chinese name Jia Li Zhi 嘉理治, but it remains unclear why he would disguise his own contributions in the official publications. "Kia-li-che" provided collections of "ordinary glass wares", a "complete set" of wax and tallow candles, artificial flowers and a model of a Chinese mansion.

A third section of the Chinese gallery was organised by the tradesman, adventurer and Austrian consul in Hong Kong, Gustav Ritter von Overbeck (1830–1894).<sup>57</sup> Overbeck had begun to prepare his presentation as early as October 1871.<sup>58</sup> Apparently, he was keen to take a leading role in the arrangement of the China exhibition. As he put it in a letter in 1872, he was convinced "that one cannot count on any kind of participation on the side of the Chinese trade and manufacturing circles as exhibitors of national or industrial products".<sup>59</sup>

52 Calice to Hart, 15 September 1872.

53 Calice to Bowra, 12 September 1872.

54 Calice to Hart, 15 September 1872.

55 *General-Catalog* 1873, 761.

56 *Ibid.*, 761–62.

57 Nachescu 2023; Lehner 1995, 95–103.

58 Schwarz-Senborn to Ministerium des Äusseren, 19 October 1871.

59 "daß auf irgend eine Beteiligung des chinesischen Handels- und Gewerbestandes, als Aussteller von Landes- und Industrieproducten, durchaus nicht zu rechnen ist." Letter from Overbeck to Minister des kaiserlichen Hofes und des Äusseren, 20 February 1872.



Overbeck had invited a diverse group of his business associates to contribute material. The contributors were foreign merchants who had representations in mainland Chinese port cities or in Taiwan. Two, however, were not based in China and bizarrely sent Japanese and Philippine goods to the Chinese pavilion. In addition, Overbeck provided a large number of objects himself, notably various kinds of hardwood furniture, soapstone, ivory and lacquer objects, porcelain and some maps and a series of paintings.<sup>60</sup>

Overbeck emblazoned the gate to the China courtyard and several other entrances with his own name in large letters, which contrasts starkly with Calice's presumed attempts to hide his name in the catalogues. His personal contributions centred on Chinese products but also included objects of other origin that were likely to attract European buyers, such as lacquer boxes, teacups, and lamps made in Japan, paper from Korea and an Indian writing set. These observations suggest that for Overbeck, desire for commercial gain and social recognition may have been a stronger incentive for participating in the Vienna World's Fair than the wish to appropriately represent Chinese culture. His stance calls to mind a comment made by the art historian Rudolf Eitelberger (1817–1885) in 1870 during the run-up to the *Weltausstellung*: “Ambitious and vain men from all strata of society grow from the ground like mushrooms when there is talk of a World's Fair. One desires a title, the second an Order, and the third needs the advertisement a World's Fair offers for other purposes.”<sup>61</sup> Indeed, the items presented in Overbeck's section were intended for sale, and before the exhibition had ended he had lobbied successfully to be elevated to the rank of *Freiherr* (Baron).

Overbeck's section in the Chinese court featured prominently in newspaper reports and in the photographs of the *Weltausstellung*. Hence, some contemporary journalists and modern researchers formed the impression that his contribution had

formed the core of the Chinese display.<sup>62</sup> In fact, what made the Chinese exhibition significant and different from what had been attempted at previous World's Fairs were the other displays—the ambitious trade exhibition by the CMCS and the more comprehensive and ethnographic show by Calice.

## What Did the Chinese Exhibition Look Like?

In their original plans, the Vienna organisers had placed the Chinese gallery in a part of the second-to-last transept (No XII b) at the very eastern end of the *Industriepalast*, the most impressive building inside the exhibition compound (fig. 2). The position of the gallery fitted the geographical approach taken in Vienna, which put Germany, as the state in the centre of Europe, in the Rotunda, France, Britain and the US in the western long gallery, and Austria, Hungary and “oriental” states such as Turkey, Persia, Romania, Tunisia, Siam, China and Japan in the eastern long gallery. When it became clear that the large quantity of goods shipped from China would not fit into the transept hall, the organisers decided to cover part of the courtyard between the transept of China and Persia and that of Japan with a roof, supported by two rows of cast iron columns and conveniently lighted by large ceiling windows.

The last-minute remodelling of the exhibition space and the late arrival of some shipments delayed the installation of the specimens and forced the Chinese gallery to remain closed until well after the official opening of the *Weltausstellung* on 1 May. The public were given access to the hall in the transept at some point in May 1873, and after frantic preparations, the courtyard finally opened its doors on 11 June.<sup>63</sup>

A ground plan of the Chinese exhibition has yet to be discovered, but a close examination of the

60 Overbeck 1873, 30 and 49.

61 Eitelberger 1871 28. I am grateful to Alexandra Nachescu for pointing me to this text.

62 See, for instance, the extensive reports in the *Tetschen-Bodenbacher Anzeiger* (1873a; 1873b; 1873c), that do not even acknowledge the installations by the CMCS and Calice, and Pemsel (1989, 50).

63 *Wiener Weltausstellungs-Zeitung* 1873, Supplement.

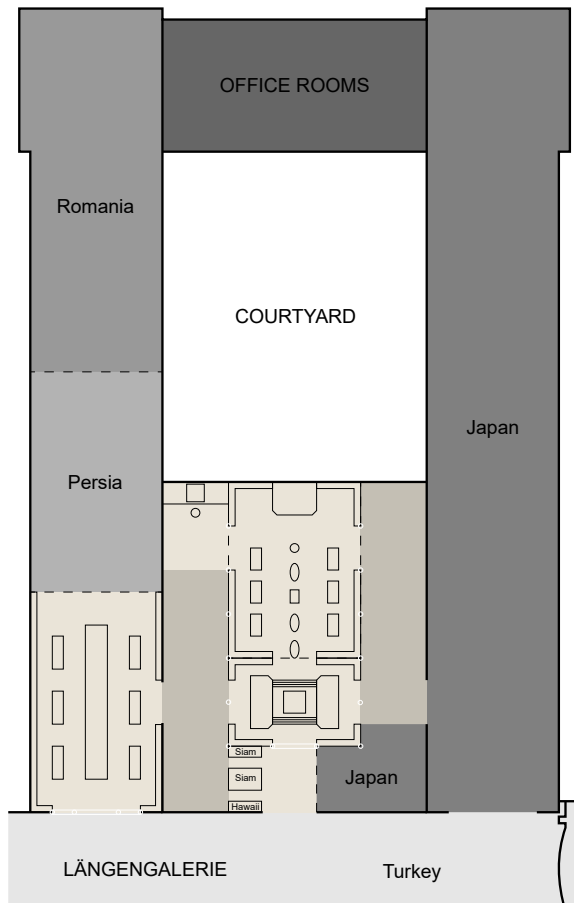


Fig. 4: Tentative reconstruction of the Chinese space in the Industriepalast. Beige areas show the Chinese exhibition, dark beige areas indicate undocumented sections of the Chinese exhibition. Reconstruction by the author, sketch by Denise Gubitosi.

photographs appears to make a tentative reconstruction feasible. The hall in the transept probably measured 15x25 m. The makeshift roof covered about half the courtyard, measuring approximately 30x37.5m. The expansion added more than 1,100m<sup>2</sup> to the exhibition, almost quadrupling the space originally assigned to China.<sup>64</sup> Smaller sections on the southern side of the courtyard were ceded to the display cabinet of Hawaii, a cabinet and a table

<sup>64</sup> A ground plan of the Chinese exhibition has yet to be discovered, so my estimates of its size remain tentative. Judging from a detailed examination of the photographs and a calculation of the outer dimensions of the *Industriepalast*, the hall in the transept measured 15x25 m. The makeshift roof covered about half the courtyard, measuring approximately 30x37.5 m.

of the Siam exhibition, and a part of the Japanese exhibition (fig. 4).

The main entrance to the Chinese gallery framed a tall, carved and partly gilt wooden gateway, modelled on a traditional Chinese gate of honour, the *pailou* 牌樓 (fig. 5). It featured green curved roofs with wide eaves and bracket sets, the circular symbol of *yin* and *yang*, a pair of curling dragons, and—in gold on red ground—the words “China” in Latin letters and *Da Qing Guo* 大清國 in large Chinese characters. A fitting couplet said to come from Confucius completed the assembly. It read *lai bai gong ye* 來百工也 (“attract the skilled craftsmen”) and *rou yuanren ye* 柔遠人也 (“treat those distant from you with gentleness”): two phrases that were part of a longer sentence outlining the proper virtues of rulers of states from the classic *Zhongyong* 中庸 (*Doctrine of the Mean*).<sup>65</sup> At the time, hardly anyone in Vienna was able to read Chinese, but design and characters sufficiently projected recognisable symbols of Chineseness and marked the entrance as unmistakably Chinese. The green flag of the CMCS crowned the gate. Three portals framed by yellow curtains led into the transept hall which contained the first part of the CMCS exhibition.<sup>66</sup>

Photographs of the time provide a good idea of the layout of the hall. A long row of tables in the centre, two rows of high glass-fronted cupboards topped by Chinese-style roofs and two more table rows along the walls formed four corridors through which the audience could pass to inspect the exhibits. Porcelain vases, plates of monumental dimensions, bronzes and tall models of pagodas crowded the tabletops. The cupboards seem to have contained thematic displays, with the first two on the left displaying bolts of cloth, and the last one on the right containing fans and wood carvings. Large numbers of figurines stood under glass covers. Judging from the large number of enamels, porcelains and pagoda models, it appears that it was the collections of Archdeacon Gray and other collectors that dominated this first room of

<sup>65</sup> Translation by Robert Eno 2016, 32.

<sup>66</sup> Rodenberg 1875, 64–65.





Fig. 5: György Klösz (1844–1913). Honorary gate at entrance to CMCS transept, 1873, photograph, 9.8×14 cm. Wien Museum Inv.-Nr. 174005/8, CCo. <https://sammlung.wienmuseum.at/objekt/343763/>



Fig. 6: Michael Frankenstein (1843–1918). Wiener Photographen-Association, The CMCS transept seen from the north, 1873, photograph, 20×25.5 cm. Wien Museum Inv.-Nr. 78080/419, CCo. <https://sammlung.wienmuseum.at/objekt/1028604/>





Fig. 7: Michael Frankenstein (1843–1918). Wiener Photographen-Association, North end of western nave of the Chinese courtyard with furniture and paintings belonging to the CMCS section, 1873, photograph, 20.4×25.4 cm. Wien Museum Inv.-Nr. 52334/16, CCo. <https://sammlung.wienmuseum.at/objekt/422635/>

the CMCS show. The six tall pagoda models on the central table, at least, were part of Gray's property (fig. 6).<sup>67</sup> A portal to the right led into the courtyard where the CMCS display continued.

Two rows of cast-iron columns divided the courtyard into three naves. While the central nave appears on multiple photographs, much of the design and content of the side naves remain unclear. The second part of the CMCS exhibition of trade samples began opposite the doorway from the transept. Long tables presented seeds, plant samples, minerals and a collection of wood specimens. Others showed all stages of tea and tobacco production, while cabinets to both sides featured leather

goods, paper products such as artificial flowers and fans, and assortments of brushes, ink and coloured paints. The CMCS show extended, according to one report, along the western nave towards the north. The text speaks of assemblies of silk, leatherware, and wood samples. The side nave may have contained a whole group of tools and machines mentioned in the *General-Catalog* but not visible in photographs, such as a plough, an irrigation machine, a water mill, a weaving loom and a spinning wheel.<sup>68</sup> Some photographs show the northern end of this nave, featuring a large wooden bed, furniture, carpets, nautical models and a considerable number of drawings and paintings hanging from

<sup>67</sup> *Canton Catalogue* 1873, 48.

<sup>68</sup> *General-Catalog* 1873, 760.





Fig. 8: Wiener Photographen-Association, Central nave of the Chinese courtyard, seen from the north, 1873, photograph, 10.3×11.5 cm. Wien Museum Inv.-Nr. 174006/26, CCo. <https://sammlung.wienmuseum.at/objekt/344070/>

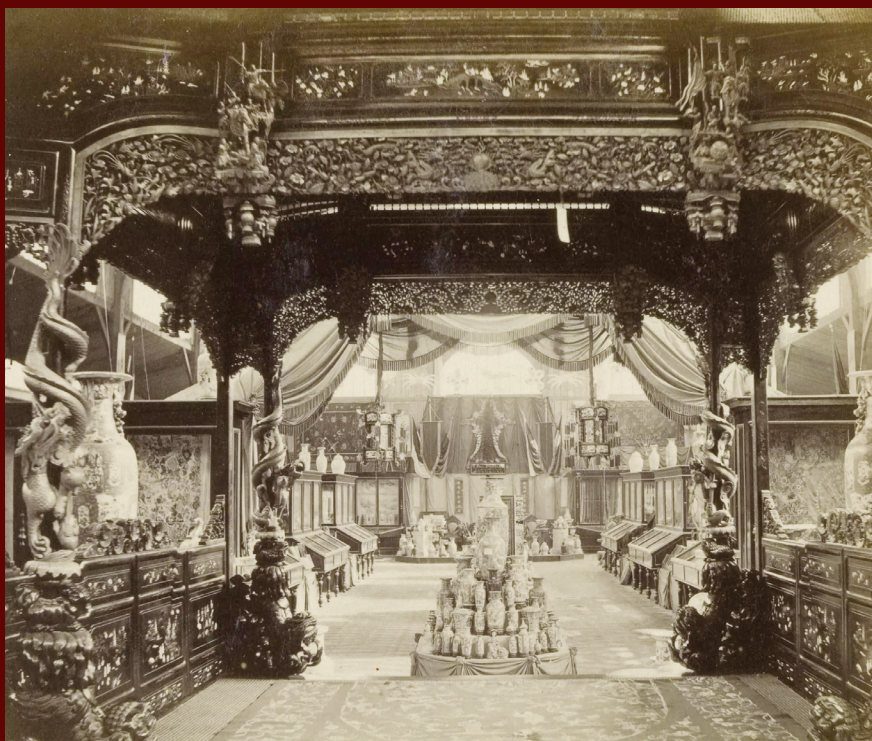


Fig. 9: Wiener Photographen-Association, Central nave of Chinese courtyard, seen from the south, 1873, photograph, 10.6×11.2 cm. Wien Museum Inv.-Nr. 174006/32, CCo. <https://sammlung.wienmuseum.at/objekt/344082/>



makeshift walls (fig. 7). The Ningbo bed decorated with carvings, inlay and drawings was certainly one of the bulkiest exhibits in the CMCS show. Apparently it was part of Bowra's property.<sup>69</sup>

We do not know what proportion of the goods that the CMCS had collected at the ports and brought to Vienna was actually displayed. The shipment from China was substantial—the number of objects included in the almost 500 pages of the *Port Catalogues of the Chinese Customs' Collection at the Austro-Hungarian Universal Exhibition, 1873; To Illustrate the International Exchange of Products, published by Order of the Inspector General of Chinese Maritime Customs*, hereafter the *Port Catalogues*, cannot be precisely determined, but the port of Canton alone listed 279 entries, many of which refer to whole sets of objects, plus a further 1,247 entries referring to the property of private owners.<sup>70</sup> Even if the space originally assigned to China had been expanded considerably, we may safely assume that the final exhibition showed only a selection of the items shipped to Vienna.

Further, it remains unclear if the limited space in the *Industriepalast* allowed a separate installation for each of the 14 Treaty Ports as originally intended by Robert Hart. The *General-Catalog* and reports in newspapers, at least, do not refer to fourteen distinct displays. The layout we can infer from the few detailed descriptions of the Chinese galleries seems in fact to have been adjusted to the order suggested in the *Weltausstellung* programme, which had sorted all crafts and industries into 26 groups. Hence, tables presented wood samples, tea and tobacco products, and showcases featured silk fabrics, leather goods, paper samples, brushes, pigments and ink, as well as porcelain.<sup>71</sup> In the end, the exhibition arranged by the CMCS received praise from some journalists, that is, at least before

the full show had actually opened.<sup>72</sup> Later, a more critical observer called the CMCS exhibition merely a collection of “interesting but unattractive treasures”.<sup>73</sup> Robert Hart himself, however, who remained in Shanghai and learned about what had gone on in Vienna only through the reports sent by the commissioners present in Austria, considered the exhibition “a decided success”.<sup>74</sup>

No photographs or descriptions of the eastern nave have survived, but the central nave of the Chinese courtyard building features in multiple depictions (figs. 8 and 9). A dark, fancifully draped curtain divided the large area into a northern and a southern space. Calice's section was assigned to the northern part, although it is currently not possible to identify specific objects from his collection on the photographs. A report speaks of cabinets showing artefacts and natural specimens along the walls and in two additional rows of double-sided glass cases parallel to it, plus displays of porcelain in the centre. It also mentions the presence of the missionaries' collections in showcases on the main wall; it remains unclear which wall that may have been,<sup>75</sup> but it is likely that the ordinary agricultural tools placed on top of some cabinets and the small objects visible inside (fig. 10) had been contributed by the missionaries. One may speculate that large-scale exhibits such as the two Mongolian yurts stood in the photographically undocumented eastern nave, or were not presented at all.

The group of tables, armchairs and porcelain screens at the northern wall and the huge number of vases on the tables in the centre of the room probably belonged to Overbeck's section. The lack of clear separation between Calice's and Overbeck's sections may result from the fact that both had put the arrangement of the display into the hands of the same agent, the company Gebrüder Schönberger, an emporium run by Hugo

69 *Port Catalogues* 1873, 319.

70 For the *Port Catalogues*, see the discussion below, Baird (2011, 155–59), and the excellent study by Tsai Weipin (2022, 20–26).

71 *General-Catalog* 1873, 757–61; *Wiener Weltausstellungs-Zeitung* 1873, Beilage; *Tetschen-Bodenbacher Anzeiger* 1873c, 295–96.

72 *The London and China Telegraph* 1873a, Supplement: 1.

73 *The London and China Telegraph* 1873b, 551.

74 Unpublished diary of Robert Hart, 22 July 1873, quoted in Pitman 2002, 42.

75 “China in der Weltausstellung” in *Wiener Weltausstellungs-Zeitung* 1873, Beilage.



Fig. 10: György Klösz (1844–1913). Wiener Photographen-Association, Northern side of the courtyard with the section arranged by Calice, 1873, photograph, 10.6×11.2 cm. Wien Museum Inv.-Nr. 56729/4, CCO. <https://sammlung.wienmuseum.at/objekt/128374/>

(1838–1900) und Victor (1844–1893) Schönberger. Victor Schönberger had participated in the 1869 Austro-Hungarian expedition to East Asia and South America and knew Calice and Overbeck personally. The company was to handle the sale of Overbeck's items after the exhibition, and soon made a name for itself as a leading trader in East Asian objects in Vienna.<sup>76</sup>

The bulk of the display assembled by Overbeck occupied the front part of the courtyard, that is, the southern area accessible through a wide gate from the Turkish exhibition in the long gallery (fig. 11). The gate stood inside the courtyard, leaving space for a table and two cabinets containing the displays of Siam and Hawaii to the left. On the right-hand side, a curtain of Japanese fabrics visible on the photograph indicates

the outer edge of the Japanese exhibition. Overbeck's section was dominated by a monumental carved wooden bedstead, inlaid with ivory, that was raised on a central platform, with steps leading up to it on the northern and southern sides (fig. 12). Assemblies of tables, chairs, carpets, and cupboards were arranged to resemble living rooms at the four corners of the platform. Porcelain and enamel bowls, vases, pagoda models and sculptures covered most of the tables as well as the remaining surfaces of the platform and the stairs, making a decidedly crowded impression. Picture scrolls and framed paintings hung from the ceiling and makeshift walls were covered with curtains. Here we do not find any indication that the composition followed the groupings of the programme. One may imagine that, on the contrary, the display was arranged so as to profile

<sup>76</sup> Ibid.





Fig. 11: György Klösz (1844–1913). Entrance to the Chinese courtyard and the Overbeck section seen from the Turkish exhibition in the long gallery, 1873, photograph, 9.8×13.8 cm, Wien Museum Inv.-Nr. 174005/54, CCo. <https://sammlung.wienmuseum.at/objekt/343914/>

the various trading companies who had joined Overbeck's section to enhance their business in Europe. Regarding the furniture, one observer noted that it did not look genuinely Chinese, but seemed to be adjusted to European taste, and claimed that the appearance of the objects suggested "some kind of middle ground between Chinese and diverse European styles. The various motifs overlap and create bastard products with a sometimes unpleasant, sometimes capricious and interesting touch".<sup>77</sup>

In setting up the show, the Schönbergers may have faced the same challenge as the CMCS

<sup>77</sup> "eine Art Mittelstufe zwischen chinesischem und mannigfachem europäischen Style. Die verschiedenen Motive kreuzen sich und bringen Bastardproducte hervor, die oft unangenehm berühren, oft auch capriciös und interessant sind." *Tetschen-Bodenbacher Anzeiger* 1873c, 307.

exhibition managers. Again, it is difficult to establish precise numbers of exhibits but it is apparent that the quantity of items sent from Asia was substantial. We have little information on the size of Calice's section and many of the 1,558 entries in Overbeck's *Special Catalog* refer to groups of objects. The trading house Carlowitz und Company from Canton alone provided two large and four small dark wood tables, a sofa, fourteen chairs, and four seats. Its vast collection of porcelain included 626 enamelled vases, some of which were close to one metre tall, and 430 porcelain figurines.<sup>78</sup> The photographs of the crowded central nave of the courtyard give the impression of a shop salesroom rather than an exhibition presenting the natural resources and industry of a nation

<sup>78</sup> Overbeck 1873, 27–28; Lott 1874, 48.



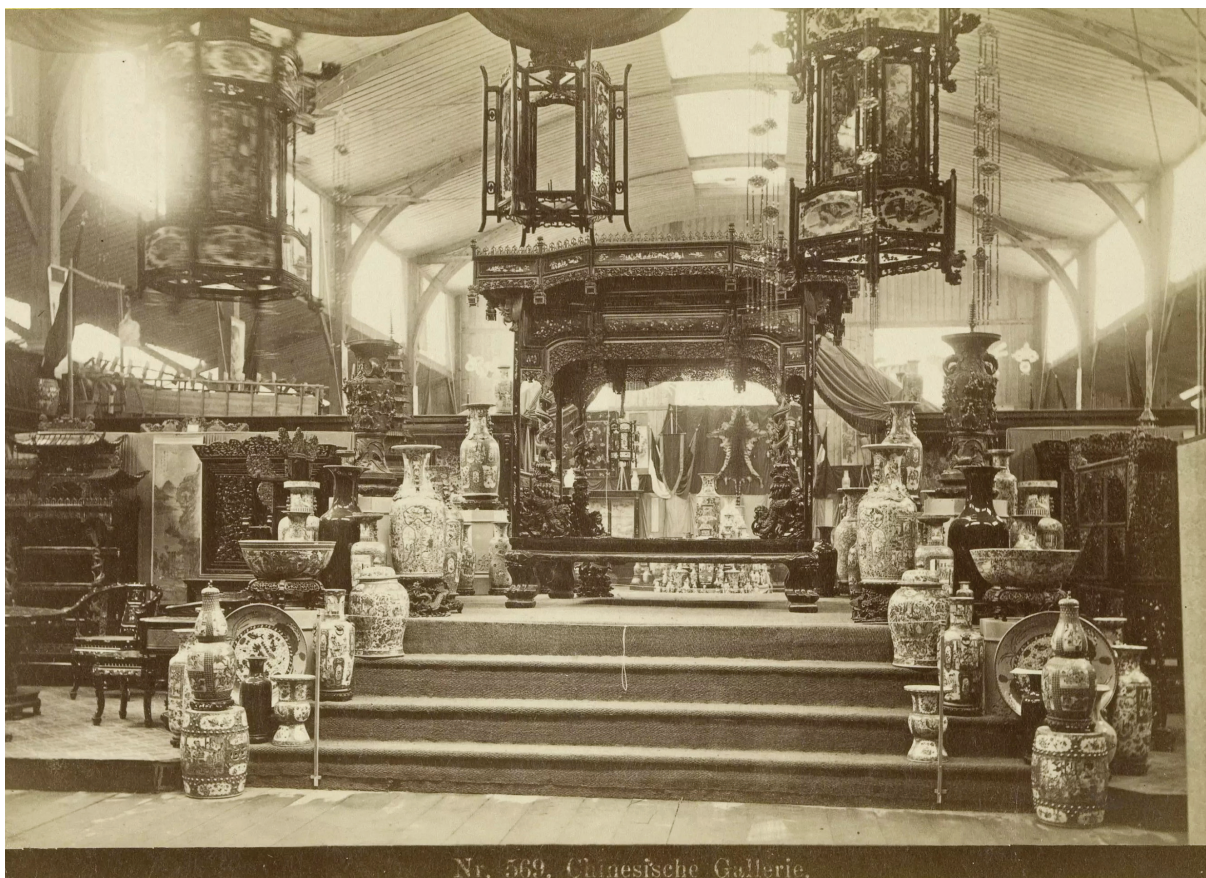


Fig. 12: Michael Frankenstein (1843–1918). Wiener Photographen-Association, Platform with bedstead in the Overbeck section of the Chinese courtyard, 1873, photograph, 9.7×14 cm. Wien Museum Inv.-Nr. 174004/5, CCo. <https://sammlung.wien-museum.at/objekt/347711/>

to the world. In this regard, the Schönberger display came close to what had been done at earlier World's Fairs.<sup>79</sup> Rather bluntly, one unnamed observer described Overbeck's Chinese exhibition as "a sort of bazaar, full of objects of curiosity and merit, illustrating the knick-knacks and minor objects of art which enter into Chinese ordinary life".<sup>80</sup>

The objects in each of the three sections bore labels as well as markers that indicated if they had been sold already. In the CMCS section, the exhibits had pre-printed labels in standardised format that were partly filled out manually. They indicated the number of the group according to the World's Fair programme, a letter for the class according to

Hart's categorisation, the port from which the object originated, its number in the *Port Catalogues*, as well as its name and price. Some of these labels are still extant. A lacquered cigar case now kept in the Weltmuseum Wien was part of a consignment of "Lacquered Ware" listed as number 137 from the port of Foochow (Fuzhou).<sup>81</sup> Another pair of examples, held in the Technische Museum Wien, are a figure of a bird made of painted charcoal that bears a label from Foochow<sup>82</sup>, and a small box containing a Guanyin figure made of the pith of the rice paper plant, *Tetrapanax papyrifer*, marked as no 5 of class D from the port of Amoy (Xiamen).<sup>83</sup> We do not know yet what kind of labels Calice's

79 Gubitosi 2023.

80 *The London and China Telegraph* 1873b, 551.

81 *Port Catalogues* 1873, 342, see Budweiser (2023, fig. 13).

82 Hemmelmayer 2023.

83 *Port Catalogues* 1873, 399; see Kayal (2023).

suppliers employed, but we do have some of the labels that the contributors of Overbeck's section applied to their exhibits.<sup>84</sup>

Some thought had been given to the protection of the exhibits. Cords separated objects from the areas that were accessible to visitors. Signs in four languages asked viewers not to touch the objects, an order given emphasis by the presence of an Austrian security officer in the gallery.<sup>85</sup>

Financially, the Chinese show was apparently a success. Rodenberg complained that many of the more attractive exhibits bore signs reading "verkauft, Lord Dudley" even before the exhibition had officially opened.<sup>86</sup> This label probably referred to William Ward, 1st Earl of Dudley (1817–1885), an exceptionally rich English mining magnate who attended the opening of the show with his wife in early May.<sup>87</sup> We do not have sales records from Vienna, but Jennifer Pitman has shown from the purchase receipts for the Centennial Exhibition in Philadelphia of 1876—the next international exhibition in which the CMCS participated—that the Chinese sales in that year were significant:<sup>88</sup> cloisonné and ceramics proved the most popular, commanding the highest returns in absolute numbers, while furniture virtually sold out. Most of the jade items and half of the silk exhibits, on the other hand, had to be returned to China.

In Vienna, the CMCS commission was in a position to donate the extraordinary sum of 10,000 Gulden, equivalent to 20,000 *Weltausstellung* entry tickets or more than 130,000 Euro in modern money,<sup>89</sup> for a concert at the prestigious Musikverein. Directed and performed by the most acclaimed conductors and musicians such as the director of the Hofoper, Johann Herbeck (1831–1877), and Johann Strauss jun. (1855–1899), the

concert presented music by Haydn, Mozart, Beethoven, Schubert, and the Donauwalzer. With an audience of 1,700 invited guests, the "Chinesisches Abschlusskonzert" on 4 November became the social event of the season.<sup>90</sup>

## Catalogues

The *Wiener Weltausstellung* surpassed its predecessors not just in size and ambition, but also in the vast number of publications produced to document the event. Many of the reports and catalogues contain valuable information on the Chinese gallery. Most still await scientific scrutiny, but it may be helpful at this point to make a few remarks on the publications.

The most comprehensive publication of the *Weltausstellung* was the *Officieller Ausstellungs-Bericht*.<sup>91</sup> The authors—more than one hundred professionals, intellectuals and officials from all over Austria-Hungary—completed the last of its 95 volumes only in 1878. Structured not by nation but according to the sections and sub-sections of the programme, the series refers to Chinese contributions in almost every volume.

Then there was the *Officieller General-Catalog*. Its more than 800 pages were arranged by country. The information on the Chinese gallery is extremely condensed, covering just eight pages.<sup>92</sup> Still, the catalogue is especially valuable as it lists the exhibits of the three sections of the Chinese show separately, thus giving some insight into Calice's section for which no special catalogue was collated.

Robert Hart and the CMCS produced the extensive catalogue mentioned above, the *Port Catalogues*. One might be tempted to say that the *Port Catalogues* were the crucial output of the CMCS exercise, with the objects constituting more of an adjunct to the catalogue than a comprehensible exhibition.

84 Grünsteidl 2023, fig. 2.

85 Rodenberg 1875, 72.

86 Ibid., 73.

87 See the text by Agnes Schwanzer in this volume.

88 Pitman 2002, 55.

89 For tentative valuations of the Gulden, see <https://www.eurologisch.at/docroot/waehrungsrechner/#/> and <https://www.1133.at/document/view/id/475>.

90 Pemsel 1989, 85; Riccobono 2023a; *Neue Illustrierte Zeitung* 1873, 4; Helm 1873.

91 For the types of publications during the *Weltausstellung*, see Pemsel (1989, 63–64).

92 *General-Catalog* 1873, 757–65.

The 500-page *Port Catalogues* were published only after the exhibition had ended, printed in Shanghai with an introduction by Robert Hart dating from December 1873. A draft had been finished as early as January, and Bowra had been tasked with editing it on his journey to Trieste and printing it in Vienna.<sup>93</sup> This apparently did not happen. During the exhibition, however, several visitors mentioned having seen a catalogue. This may refer to a manuscript that had been made available to the public.<sup>94</sup>

The manuscript shown at the exhibition may have been much more extensive than the printed version available now. The journalist Julius Rodenberg used information he had found in the catalogue manuscript provided in the Chinese gallery as the basis for his detailed discussion of plays that were apparently performed by two sets of theatre figurines from Tianjin. The catalogue version printed in December 1873, however, reserves just a few terse lines for these objects, with no reference to any stage play.<sup>95</sup> It is thus likely that Hart omitted or condensed some information when preparing the *Port Catalogues* for print.

An additional catalogue has so far been largely overlooked. The *Catalogue of Articles Collected at the Port of Canton by Order of the Inspector General of Customs, For Transmission to the Austro-Hungarian Exhibition of 1873* provides much of the same information as the Canton section of the *Port Catalogues*, including the annex with a text on “Sericulture de Canton” submitted by the German company Arnhold, Karberg & Cie, a firm Jacob Arnhold, Peter Karberg and Alexander Levysohn had established in Hong Kong and Canton in

1866.<sup>96</sup> The catalogue was compiled by the CMCS clerk at Canton, the German sinologist Friedrich Hirth (1845–1927) and printed in March 1873, in very good time for the opening of the Vienna fair.<sup>97</sup> It appears to be a *tiré-à-part* of the Canton contribution to the *Port Catalogues* with comparable contents, but presented in different format. As none of the visitors to the exhibition mentioned seeing this particular publication it remains unclear if the book was distributed during the *Weltausstellung*. Further, there is no indication if any other of the 14 ports had an individual catalogue printed.

Hart published another weighty monograph for the Austro-Hungarian exhibition, namely, the 360-page *China Trade Statistics of the Treaty Ports, For the Period 1863–1872, Compiled for the Austro-Hungarian Universal Exhibition, Vienna, 1873: To illustrate the International Exchange of Products* (hereafter *China Trade Statistics*). The volume available to the author of this chapter contained forewords by Robert Hart dated 25 July and 12 December 1873, suggesting that it was published only after the exhibition had ended. Nevertheless, the fact that Detring was able to send 24 copies of the *China Trade Statistics* to the Austrian Foreign Ministry from his Vienna office on 8 December indicates that some volumes may have been printed earlier.<sup>98</sup>

A special catalogue for the second section arranged by Calice, however, never materialised, even though it had been announced in newspaper reports.<sup>99</sup> Some missionaries and other contributors had prepared lists and contextual notes for their submissions. The Catholic mission of Eastern Tibet, for instance, added a “räsonierenden Catalog” which consul Schlick forwarded to Vienna.<sup>100</sup> In the exhibition, though, viewers had to rely on the large labels visible in some of the

93 Schlick to Andrassy, 16 January 1873.

94 Rodenberg 1875, 71; *The Times* 1873, 5.

95 *Port Catalogues* 1873, 35; Rodenberg 1875, 99–107; Riccobono 2023b. Some researchers misunderstood Rodenberg’s writings as descriptions of plays performed inside the Chinese gallery (Kaminski 2011, 15), though there is no record of any theatre performances staged at the exhibition. In addition to the Tianjin figurines, the Chinkiang (Zhenjiang in Jiangsu) port commissioner provided a model of a Chinese theatre, which Rodenberg may have seen as well, see *Port Catalogues* (1873, 119).

96 Smith 1994, *passim*.

97 *Canton Catalogue* 1873.

98 Detring to Ministerium für Auswärtige Angelegenheiten, 8 December 1873; Löwenthal (1873, 36 and 44) refers to statistical material available in the Cercle Oriental.

99 *Die Presse* (1873a, Beilage: 9), for instance, announced the publication of the special catalogues for sections 1 and 2 “in a few weeks time”.

100 Schlick to Andrassy, 16 January 1873.



photographs, and on the brief listings in the *Officieller General-Catalog*.

For the third section, Overbeck produced a *Special Catalog der chinesischen Ausstellung, III. Abtheilung*. His catalogue, which was hastily collated, turned out to be the only one that came out more or less on time, becoming available just a few days after the opening of the Chinese courtyard on 11 June 1873.<sup>101</sup>

## How Chinese was the Chinese Exhibition?

In current Austrian and German scholarship and popular literature there is one recurrent piece of misinformation regarding the World's Fair in Vienna that needs correcting. Many texts claim that the Chinese emperor had turned down the Austrian invitation to participate in the exhibition.<sup>102</sup> The only scholar who added a verifiable reference to the claim is Jutta Pemsel in her landmark study *Die Wiener Weltausstellung von 1873*, but in the document box in the Haus-, Hof- und Staatsarchiv she refers to, there is nothing among the hundreds of handwritten notes it contains to substantiate this assertion.<sup>103</sup> What is more, the emperor was not in the position to decline the invitation, as there had been no formal invitation in the first place. As was common practice in World's Fairs, the events were announced, but participation was not “by invitation only”. Instead, the organisers expected nations to come forward and declare their willingness to take part. Calice followed this procedure. He merely informed the Chinese government and requested the passing on of information and the granting of tax exemptions, but there was no invitation which China could choose to accept or decline. In August 1872, after Calice personally urged the *Zongli Yamen* to direct the preparations of the show, its directors and Prince Gong answered,

according to Calice: “We have considered the proposal and feel that we nurture the desire to participate in the matter at hand.” However, no concrete action followed this positive note.<sup>104</sup>

Although the *Wiener Weltausstellung* was the first international exhibition in which—through the participation of its Customs Office—China had some formal representation, the important event does appear to have taken place without much involvement of native Chinese. The persons responsible for the display were Europeans, even if some of them worked in the service of the Chinese government. Most individual contributors, again, were foreigners, though all of them lived in East Asia and knew China well.<sup>105</sup>

Again, there is no record of Chinese visitors attending the fair—besides a certain Soan-pan, a Chinese assistant to one of the CMCS officers, who had handled the prayer- and calculating machines in the Chinese gallery and was mentioned by Julius Rodenberg.<sup>106</sup> We know of no commentaries in Chinese publications of the time.<sup>107</sup> The Chinese public began to take note of international shows abroad only in 1876 when Chinese travellers first reported on the Philadelphia Centennial Exhibition. From the 1890s, exhibitions became part of the Chinese political rhetoric, and it was at this time that ideas of holding fairs on Chinese soil began to emerge.<sup>108</sup> In 1910, shortly before the collapse of the Qing imperial house, China finally opened the first World's Fair of her own in Nanjing.<sup>109</sup>

101 Overbeck 1873.

102 Payer 2009, 45; Kaminski 2011, 42; Gethmann and Eckhard 2023, 10.

103 Pemsel 1989, 50.

104 “Wir sind mit uns zu Rathe gegangen und finden, daß wir den aufrichtigen Wunsch hegen, in der Sache mitzuwirken.” Letter from Prince Gong to Calice, 12 August 1872.

105 For the question of whether the Chinese presence at the Vienna show can be regarded as a formal representation by the Chinese state, see also Wu Songdi (2009, 43–48).

106 Rodenberg 1873.

107 I rely here on the excellent study by Hyungju Hur (2012, 23–35).

108 Hyungju Hur 2021, 23–36. For the Chinese presence in Philadelphia, see Pitman (2002). A list of international exhibitions and the modes of native Chinese participation therein is provided by Chao Yu-chih (1996, 289–94).

109 The “*Nanyang quanye hui* 南洋勸業會” (Exhibition of all Trades of Nanyang) opened its doors on 5 June 1910. Godley 1978.

The apparent lack of interest in the 1873 World's Fair in Vienna among the Chinese government and public alike, despite all the efforts on the part of Austrian diplomats, generated some discussion at the time. In a circular to his commissioners, Hart expressed his fear that "on the Chinese side, apathy, and, on the foreign, the difficulty of doing anything considerable, will have severally tended to make a credible display impossible".<sup>110</sup> Prince Gong himself argued that rulers should not concern themselves with commercial matters of the lower classes. "It follows the nature of things that the low-ranking professions of crafts and trade should be at liberty to decide how to pursue their businesses; the state whose sole task is ruling these people shall not interfere in their matters of business."<sup>111</sup> Calice noted in Gong a general ignorance regarding the benefit of competition in commercial—that is, non-literary—matters and quoted him as saying: "If some other person has a better coat than I, fine, then he keeps his and I keep mine."<sup>112</sup> Still, Calice was considerate enough to acknowledge that negative experiences with European powers in recent history, such as the plundering of the Summer Palace in Beijing by French and British troops in 1860, had an influence on Gong's position. In the same letter, he cites Gong's answer to the French *chargé d'affaires* Henry de Bellonet (1831–1881) who had suggested China's participation in the Exposition Universelle of 1867: "What? You want us to send valuable things to your exhibition? I gathered that since the plundering of the Summer Palace you have more of the sort in France than we have in China."<sup>113</sup>

110 CMCS Circular No 4 of 1872.

111 "Es liegt nun zwar in der Natur der Sache, daß es den untergeordneten Gewerben der Handwerker und Handeltreibenden überlassen bleiben muß, über die Art und Weise, wie sie ihre Geschäfte betreiben wollen, selbstständig zu disponieren, und daß der Staat, dem nur obliegt, diese Leute zu regieren, sich mit den Erwerbsverhältnissen derselben nicht befassen kann." Gong to Calice, 12 August 1872.

112 "Wenn ein Anderer einen beßren Rock hat als ich, gut, so behält er den seinigen und ich den meinigen." Calice to Andrassy, 6 September 1872.

113 "Was? Sie begehren dass wir werthvolle Dinge zu Ihrer Ausstellung schicken? Ich dächte seit der Plünderung des

Overbeck, on the other hand, in a blunt comment to the Austrian minister of Foreign Affairs, saw the reason for the Chinese inaction in a sense of superiority he perceived in China:

The belief deeply rooted in people and government in being superior on every level to anything foreign has so far frustrated any effort to introduce to China the world-shaking ideas of modern times. It would be a waste of energy to attempt to impress on the Chinese ruling circles the importance and enormous significance of a national enterprise such as the Vienna World's Fair for the cultural development of our time.<sup>114</sup>

This author argues, nevertheless, that the assumption that the Chinese gallery in the *Weltausstellung* was merely an affair of foreigners—a stage simply projecting European imagination rather than Chinese reality, as arguably had been the case in earlier international exhibitions—is an oversimplification. In support of this argument, three points are submitted for consideration.

First of all, the exhibitors were not exclusively foreign. On the contrary, they included several prominent Chinese individuals: the *Port Catalogues* mentioned one "Shanghai banker Hoo Taou-tai" who sent a large consignment of high-quality porcelain, silks, and especially cloisonné, of which Bowra said: "The collection sent to Vienna is undoubtedly the largest and most complete ever seen in Europe."<sup>115</sup> As *daotai* 道臺 refers

Sommerpalastes haben Sie mehr dergleichen in Frankreich als wir in China." Calice to Andrassy, 6 September 1872.

114 "An dem im Volke und Regierung festgewurzelten Glauben an die eigene Ueberlegenheit, in jedweder Beziehung über alles was der fremde angehört, scheiterte bisher jeder Versuch, den weltbewegenden Ideen der Neuzeit in China Eingang zu verschaffen, und würde es aus diesem Grunde auch verlorene Mühe sein, den chinesischen Regierungskreisen die Wichtigkeit und hohe Bedeutung für die Cultur-Entwicklung unserer Zeit eines solchen National-Unternehmens wie die Wiener-Weltausstellung begreiflich machen zu wollen." Overbeck to Minister des kaiserlichen Hofes und des Äusseren, 20 February 1872.

115 Bowra 1874, 719.

not to a first name but to the municipal position of Circuit Intendant and was more widely used as an honorary address, the person in question has so far proved difficult to identify. But there are some clues. The transliterations Hu and Hoo are essentially interchangeable, and in a letter, Bowra calls the cloisonné and silks of a certain Hu a “valuable—indeed unique—collection”. He also complained that the value of Hu’s collection had mysteriously increased considerably in value on the 100-mile journey from Hangzhou to Shanghai, adding to Bowra’s financial risk, as he had personally offered to grant security for the insurance of the collection.<sup>116</sup> In the same letter, Bowra calls Hu a man of “wealth, position, and liberality”. Several letters by Bowra, Calice and Hart talk of Hoo’s shrewd business skills and mention a business base in Hangzhou. An assessment by a British merchant describes him more precisely as “the richest banker in China [and] the largest silk-cultivator in the Central Provinces”.<sup>117</sup> There was indeed a banker surnamed Hoo or Hu who was fabulously rich, ran a network of banks in numerous cities including Hangzhou, had extensive business ties to foreigners, and held (or purchased) official positions. It is likely that “Hoo Taou-tai” is the illustrious Hu Guangyong 胡光墉, also known as Hu Xueyan 胡雪岩 (ca 1825–1885), a man with assets estimated at between 10 and 20 million Taels or 3.2 to 7.2 million British pounds.<sup>118</sup> He traded in silk extensively until his manipulation of the silk market led to the Shanghai banking crises and his own bankruptcy in 1883.<sup>119</sup> As he negotiated substantial foreign loans for the Chinese government, often secured by the revenues of the CMCS, he was certainly well acquainted with diplomats or foreign officials such as Calice or Hart, and it is easy to

imagine that he would understand the potential of World’s Fairs.<sup>120</sup> Three years later, at the Centennial Exhibition in Philadelphia, Hu Guangyong (there spelling his name as Hu Kwang Yung) became one of the most successful exhibitors, and many of his antiques ended up in American collections.<sup>121</sup>

The second Chinese contributor was listed in Calice’s section of the *General-Catalog* as “Shen Ping C’heng Tao-tai von Shanghai”. He provided a collection of machines and utensils for silk production and a book on the silk industry.<sup>122</sup> This was probably the official and scholar Shen Bingcheng 沈秉成 (1823–1895) who served as *daotai* of Shanghai from 1872–1875. He authored a monograph on sericulture, *Essential Compilation of Silkworms and Mulberry Trees* (*Cansang jiyao* 蠶桑輯要)<sup>123</sup> which may well be the book given to Calice and mentioned in his report.

The contemporary publications mention several other individuals with Chinese-sounding names which are more difficult to trace. The *Canton Catalogue* describes a group of five screens and eight silk-embroidered pictures as the “property of Look-Moong-Soong, one of the deputies of H.E. the Superintendent of Customs, Canton”, a person who has so far proved unidentifiable.<sup>124</sup> His position in the CMCS hierarchy suggests that he may have been not just an exhibitor but also one of the organisers of the show. The *Port Catalogues* further list contributions by a certain Kuang Shin-hsing for Ningbo and Shin Shaongan for Fuzhou.<sup>125</sup>

116 Bowra to Schlick, 3 February 1873.

117 Letter from a certain E.C. Bourne of 9 September 1873, quoted in Baird 2015, 137.

118 Li 1981, 88. This was between 32.5 and 65 million fl in Austrian currency at the time (see *Canton Catalogue* 1873, III), equating to between 456 and 912 million Euro in modern money, according to <https://finanzbildung.oenb.at/docroot/waehrungsrechner/#/>.

119 Li 1981, 88.

120 For Hu Guangyong, see Paul Sheehan (2018, 42–51). The character of Gray’s and Hu’s contributions is elaborated in Baird (2015).

121 Pitman 2002, *passim*. Pitman was the first to suggest that Hu had exhibited items in Vienna, though without citing the source of her information (ibid., 50). Shen Huifen (2004, 110) adduced a quote from the leading Chinese newspaper *Shunbao* 申報 of 1 February 1875 indicating that Hu had sent objects to Vienna.

122 *General-Catalog* 1873, 761; *Port Catalogues* 1873, 283; the book is mentioned only in a letter from Calice to Andrassy, 6 September 1872.

123 Shen Bingcheng 1871.

124 *Canton Catalogue* 1873, 46.

125 *Port Catalogues* 1873, 319, 351.



The *General-Catalog* refers to several Chinese companies as contributors, such as the Canton silversmith Hoa-Ching (active between 1820s and 1880s) who had sent an ivory model of a boat, sandalwood chess boards and figures, and silverware,<sup>126</sup> or the well-known Canton luxury dealer Leeching (active 1840s to 1880s) who exhibited silver and gold jewellery and ivory ornaments.<sup>127</sup> The *Canton Catalogue* included the Honam and Canton companies Hoa-Ching, Acum, Yut-Shing and Ushing under the section “Class E, property of various owners, for sale”.<sup>128</sup> As Overbeck’s *Special-Catalogue* lists Hoa-Ching and Leeching not independently, but as “Erzeuger” under the auspices of Carlowitz & Co, the flourishing trading house of the German merchant Richard von Carlowitz (1817–1886) in Canton,<sup>129</sup> it remains unclear whether they indeed took an active role as exhibitors. In some cases, the catalogues may have failed to credit Chinese vendors clearly. The monumental bedstead in Overbeck’s section may represent such an instance. An identical (or, more probably, the same) bed was on sale at the Centennial Exhibition in Philadelphia three years later, marked as provided by the Ningbo company Song Sing Kong.<sup>130</sup> In Vienna, the company (spelled Sung Sing-cung in the *Port Catalogues*) had contributed some furniture as part of the Ningbo section.<sup>131</sup>

A second point with a bearing on the discussion of agency is a curious letter that Prince Gong sent to Calice in July 1873. In highly formal language, the prince and nine members of the *Zongli Yamen* (each of them mentioned by name and rank) acknowledge the receipt of a report by Robert Hart regarding the measures he had taken in preparation of the *Weltausstellung*, and of a list of the CMCS representatives (all six mentioned by name) sent to Vienna. The prince and the *Yamen* officials add

that they felt it appropriate to inform the Austro-Hungarian Minister in Residence of the matter by providing him with a copy of the report.<sup>132</sup>

At first glance, the contents of the message appear fairly dry and unremarkable. The experienced diplomat Calice, however, found it necessary to dispatch a translation to the Austro-Hungarian foreign minister Andrassy immediately after receipt, pointing out the dramatically obvious: by sending this letter in all its diplomatic decorum, the Chinese government took ownership of the CMCS exhibition, and formally accepted the CMCS officers who travelled to Vienna *as representatives of China*. In an accompanying note, Calice explains “it provides me with special satisfaction that the Chinese government has finally come out to formally adopt the measures at hand that were arranged with their approval and their money.”<sup>133</sup>

A final point is raised by a report in the newspaper *Die Presse*, according to which the Chinese Imperial court awarded honours in March 1878 to leading personalities of the *Weltausstellung* and numerous persons who had been involved in the creation of the Chinese display. Prince Gong announced on the occasion of a talk given by Robert Hart of the CMCS that the emperor of China had awarded the Order of the Dragon to fifteen persons. Among those honoured were Schwarz-Senborn, Schwegel, and Calice for the first class; Scherzer, Hochstetter, Scala and a certain Karl von Werbeck (probably Gustav Overbeck) for the second class, and Hugo Schönberger for the third class. Gong designated it “as a sign of acknowledgement for the special interest given to the Chinese empire during the Vienna World’s Fair of 1873”.<sup>134</sup> As the Chinese government established its first formal western-style diplomatic decoration, the Order of the Double Dragon, only in 1881, this may have

126 *General-Catalog* 1873, 764; Overbeck 1873, 32.

127 *General-Catalog* 1873, 763. For the companies see Shen Huifen (2004, 110).

128 *Canton Catalogue* 1873, 45–46.

129 Mak 2005, 66; Overbeck 1873, 32.

130 Pitman 2002, fig. 9.

131 *Port Catalogues* 1873, 319.

132 See Calice’s account in letter from Calice to Andrassy, 23 October 1873.

133 “es gereicht mir daher zur besonderen Genugthuung, daß die chinesische Regierung die in Rede stehenden Maßregeln, welche mit ihrer Zustimmung und mit ihrem Gelde getroffen worden sind, nun auch nach Aussen hin formell adoptirt hat.” Calice to Andrassy, 23 October 1873.

134 *Die Presse* 1878b, 9.

been a version of the early type of Dragon Order that had been used since 1862.<sup>135</sup> The early Dragon Order originally served as a medal honouring foreign soldiers for supporting the Qing government against internal uprisings such as the Taiping rebellion. The award to the Vienna organisers of 1878 appears to be the first known instance in which China used this western practice as a diplomatic device. Furthermore, it indicates that five years after the exhibition had closed its doors, the Chinese government finally assumed some agency in the first representation of China at a World's Fair. With the participation of Chinese contributors, the official adoption of the exhibition, and the diplomatic honours bestowed by the imperial court, the Chinese gallery at the 1873 *Weltausstellung* became, after all, a Chinese affair.

## Conclusion

This article set out to trace the process whereby the Chinese exhibition at the Vienna World's Fair came into being. By demonstrating that the Austro-Hungarian Foreign Ministry saw it as its task to assure a broad presence of "oriental" and East Asian states at the event, it has shown that the Austro-Hungarian approach to the World's Fair was very different from what had been attempted at earlier international exhibitions.

To achieve the participation of China, the highest-ranking Austro-Hungarian diplomat in East Asia, the recently installed Minister in Residence Heinrich Calice, employed all means available in his diplomatic toolbox. His efforts were greeted with much hesitation, not only by the public and lower administration, who were not willing to take an active role without clear instructions from central government, but also by the state representatives who regarded the fair merely as a matter for merchants, seeing no reason to involve themselves and direct the representation of China. Only very

late in the process did the *Zongli Yamen* gradually come to revise its stance and take some agency regarding the Chinese presence in Vienna.

In 1872, confronted by dragging feet and an unwillingness to get involved, and facing extreme time pressure with less than a year to go before the opening of the exhibition, Calice hatched a second plan to bring a Chinese pavilion into being. He brought together three parties with different agendas, that organised three largely independent sections in the Chinese gallery of the *Industriepalast*: the Chinese Maritime Customs Service under Robert Hart, which intended to accurately present the state of trade in and out of the international ports of China; a group of businessmen with connections to the Austrian consul in Hong Kong, Gustav Overbeck, providing merchandise for sale in Europe, and Calice's own group consisting of missionaries, lower level diplomats and private persons, whose function was to give an insight into the products and natural resources of the vast empire beyond the port cities open to foreigners. Despite his decisive influence, in the public-facing elements of the exhibition Calice kept his role almost invisible and took care to refer all honours to the CMCS.

The resulting show became so extensive that the area in the *Industriepalast* originally assigned to China had to be significantly enlarged. This paper presents a tentative reconstruction of the space for the first time.

Calice managed to make the gallery the largest and most comprehensive show of Chinese raw materials, crafts, industrial products and art works ever staged. It became widely acknowledged and well received, and provided the seed of many East Asian collections in Europe. One of Calice's achievements, however, remained less visible: he introduced the Chinese Customs Office, businessmen such as Hu Guangyong and several trading houses to the concept of international exhibitions, and turned World's Fairs into an issue the Chinese government had to take note of. The CMCS and many Chinese agents who first appeared at the Vienna fair went on to join the Centennial Exhibition in Philadelphia in 1876 and later international

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135 UBS AG 2008, 150; Chinese Medal Blog 2009. I am grateful for this information to Daniel Krause of the Deutsche Gesellschaft für Ordenskunde e.V.

shows. The Austro-Hungarian efforts to include the Orient and East Asia were, in this regard, a decided success.

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Unless otherwise noted, all archival documents and letters referred to in this text are collected in the box: HH-STA, 145, F34 S.R. in the Haus-, Hof- und Staatsarchiv.

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