

# Lived-in Museum: The Early 20th Century Skušek Collection

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## Abstract

The paper focuses on an aspect of the history of the collection of Ivan Skušek Jr., an early 20th century Slovenian collector that has not yet been looked at thoroughly, namely, its “apartment” period, the time when the collection was on display in three consecutive apartments Ivan Skušek Jr. and his Japanese wife lived in. Due to the failed plans to establish a museum, the collection ended up being on display in lived spaces for the entire period between their arrival to Ljubljana and Marija Skušek’s passing, all together for 43 years—much longer than it was ever displayed in museum settings. The paper focuses on the way a lived space functioned as a setting for the display of the collection and how this combination created a place for communication, appropriation and knowledge acquisition—how the collection was lived in, lived with and lived through. The analysis thus reflects on the implications of the setting of the lived-in museum: how it impacted the collection and its parts, how it conditioned the lives of its owners and how this mode of presentation influenced the reception of the visitors. In the second part of the paper, the analysis is based on specific material—Skušek’s archive that was recently analysed in the Slovenian Ethnographic museum collections, including a number of photographs of the interiors of the apartments.

**Keywords:** Ivan Skušek, Tsuneko Kondo-Kawase/Marija Skušek, lived-in museum, apartment museum, early 20th century East Asian collections

## Muzej v stanovanju: zbirka Ivana Skuška ml. z začetka 20. stoletja

### Izvleček

Članek se ukvarja s specifičnim vidikom zgodovine zbirke Ivana Skuška ml., slovenskega zbiralca z začetka 20. stoletja, ki še ni bil podrobneje raziskan – z obdobjem, ko je bila zbirka razstavljena v treh stanovanjih, v katerih sta zaporedno živela Ivan Skušek ml. in njegova žena. Ker so načrtili, da bi iz zbirke naredili muzej, propadli, je bila zbirka v bivalnih prostorih razstavljena vse od takrat, ko je par prispel v Ljubljano, do smrti Marije Skušek, skupaj 43 let – kar je precej dlje, kot je bila zbirka kadarkoli razstavljena v muzejskem prostoru. Članek se osredotoča na to, kako je bivalni prostor deloval kot prizorišče

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razstavljene zbirke in kako je ta kombinacija ustvarila prostor za komunikacijo, apropiacijo in pridobivanje vednosti – kako so živeli v zbirki, z zbirko in skozi zbirko. Zato se analiza osredotoča na implikacije bivalnega muzeja: na to, kako je to vplivalo na zbirko in njene dele, kako je določalo življenje njenih lastnikov in kako je tovrstna predstavitev določala to, kako so zbirko sprejemali obiskovalci. Drugi del članka temelji na analizi specifičnega gradiva – nedavno analiziranega Skuškevega arhiva iz zbirk Slovenskega etnografskega muzeja, ki vsebuje več fotografij interierjev stanovanj zakoncev Skušek.

**Ključne besede:** Ivan Skušek, Tsuneko Kondō-Kawase/Marija Skušek, bivalni muzej, muzej v stanovanju, vzhodnoazijske zbirke z začetka 20. stoletja

Many people who lived in Ljubljana in the middle of the 20th century remember a particular apartment room in an old villa a few hundred meters from the main food market. In a house that is today a public kindergarten ended the story of a very unusual couple, Ivan Skušek Jr. (1877–1947), former officer of the Austrian-Hungarian Navy, and his Japanese wife, then known as Marija Skušek (1893–1963). This was not the first apartment they lived in, and in all of them they arranged their living space into what seemed like a museum display. After her husband passed away just two years after the end of WWII, Marija Skušek kept the apartment and the layout of her living room, stacked full of furniture and objects, that seemed unusual and exotic to her visitors. Tsuneko Kawase Kondō, as she was called before having been baptised Catholic and marrying Skušek, might have been the most exotic part of this apartment, a Japanese woman from China, often dressed in luxurious silk kimonos, speaking in strongly accented Slovene and telling stories of the unknown cultures of Japan and China and about the collection of furniture, porcelain items and other objects in her house.

According to the diary of his brother, Skušek dreamed of building a museum for the collection—he even bought land to build it on—where Tsuneko would be the permanent on-site guide for the visitors (as reported by his brother, see Skušek n.d.). After Skušek passed away, the idea to make his collection into a museum was officially considered a few times. In 1950, just after her husband's death, Marija Skušek seems to have negotiated donating the collection to the government of the People's Republic of Slovenia.<sup>1</sup> A published newspaper report elaborates on the plans to make a Chinese house according to the carpenters' wooden house model in the collection and to exhibit the whole collection in it (*Tovariš* 1950, 668). At approximately the same time, talks were also held between Ms. Skušek and the Municipality of Piran for the collection to become a museum in a coastal villa (Marinac 2020, 8). However, neither of these plans were realized. Yet

1 Then part of the Federal People's Republic of Yugoslavia.

another plan was made a decade later, when the collection—then already in custody of the National Museum—was planned to be moved onto the second floor of the baroque Schweiger House in Ljubljana Old Town, where the Municipal Cultural Council envisioned opening Museum of East Asian Cultures (*Ljudska pravica* 1959, 6). This plan was never realized either, so in 1964, a year after Marija Skušek passed away, the collection, now stored in a few different places, eventually changed hands again and became the property of the Slovenian Ethnographic Museum, where it is still kept today. After partly being on display in the former venue of the museum, Goričane Mansion near Ljubljana, this outstanding collection has mostly been kept in storage for the last thirty years. The Skušek Collection has been curated by two successive museum curators—Pavla Štrukelj and Ralf Čeplak Mencin—who have also published on its different characteristics (e. g. Čeplak Mencin 2012; Štrukelj 1966). A thorough analysis of the collection, which consists of more than 500 objects, as well as a research into Skušek's collecting practices, have been one of the aims of the national research project *East Asian Collections in Slovenia* for the past three years, and the findings have been published in national and international publications.<sup>2</sup>

In the present paper I will focus on an aspect of the history of the Skušek Collection which has not yet been looked at thoroughly, namely, its “apartment” period, the time when the collection was on display in the apartments of Ivan and Marija Skušek in the three locations they lived in. Due to the above-mentioned failed plans to establish a museum, the collection ended up being on display in the lived spaces of Ivan Skušek Jr. and Marija Skušek for the entire period between their arrival to Ljubljana and her passing, all together for 43 years—much longer than it was ever displayed in museum settings. I will be interested in the way a lived space functioned as a setting for the display of the collection and how it created a place for what Lefebvre would dub “*connaissance*” (cf. Elden 2004, 190)—communication, appropriation and knowledge acquisition. Further, I will be interested in how the collection was lived in, lived with and lived through. To do this, I will draw upon the conceptualizations of the lived space as drawn by Lefebvre, while incorporating Appadurai and Kopytoff's thing-centred approach. In the first part of the paper I will thus sketch a methodological approach to the apartment collection and see how it can be reflected upon in a theoretical framework. The dialogic structure the apartment collection opens between the hosts and the guests, although it is not limited to this interaction only, but is established on an even

2 The findings from this project have been published in thematic issues of the following journals: *Poligrafi* 2019, vol. 24, nos. 93/94 (“Meeting East Asia”); *Bulletin of the Slovene Ethnological Society* 2020, vol. 60, no. 1 (“Non-European Collections in Slovene Museums”); *Ars&Humanitas* 2020, vol. 14, no. 2 (“Ideologies and Practices of Collecting and Exhibiting”).

more basic level between the objects and the owners/users themselves. The analysis will thus reflect on the implications of the setting of the lived-in museum: how it impacted the collection and its parts, how it conditioned the life of its owners and how this mode of presentation influenced the reception of the visitors. In the second part of the paper, the analysis will be based on specific material—Skušek's archive that was recently analysed as part of the Slovenian Ethnographic Museum's collections, including a number of photographs of the interiors of Skušek's apartments, of the couple and their friends within those settings and also a detailed inventory of the objects in their last apartment. The purpose of the analysis of the photographs will first be to identify the settings and link them with the known biographical references about the residences of the Skušek couple. In doing so, the arrangements of the main collection pieces will also be identified when possible, and these considered in order to reflect upon the specific situation of the lived-in museum and the implications of this.

### Lived-in Museum

Apart from providing necessities for the members of the household, apartments and/or houses also serve an important function in providing a well-structured and regulated link with the outside world. As emphasized by authors such as Miller (2001), Hurdley (2006), Money (2007) and others, the process of self-realization and identification that takes place inside one's home in contact with the outside world is not only dialogical in a verbal sense, but importantly includes a material element as well, namely the "objects" in the living space. Some objects of course have more representative value than others. Not only are the possessions often distinguished by the presentability criteria, with some objects being reserved only for special occasions when visitors are present, but some objects are ascribed a special demonstrative status—souvenirs, artwork and valuable pieces. Classified as "objectified cultural capital" in Bourdieu (1986, 246), artwork and representative cultural pieces also serve to add to the symbolic value of their owner. In the case of Skušek's large, exquisite, valuable and aesthetically pleasing East Asian collection, all these functions were doubtlessly at play. Their apartments that contemporaries from Ljubljana remembered were articulations of Skušek's multifaceted cosmopolitan identity, his former high-ranking military position and the high ambitions he nurtured<sup>3</sup>—although did not realize—until the end of his life.

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3 One of his most important goals was to again serve in the navy (of the new Kingdom of Yugoslavia), which he never succeeded in doing.

The purpose of the display, however, was not only performative and intended for the visitor's eye. The collection pieces, furniture and everyday objects were also used, and this aspect should not be overlooked when viewing their home as an attempt at a museum. Compared to a museum or any formal exhibition, the space of a house or a living room for that matter is, in essential terms, a *lived space*. This term, coined by Henry Lefebvre in his works—most notably the *Production of Space* (Lefebvre 2013)—originated in Lefebvre's intention to overcome the essentially Cartesian duality of *res cogitans* and *res extensa*, or as he developed his argument, that of conceived space and perceived space (Zhang 2006, 220). Lived space balances between the reduced idealism of purely conceived space and materialism of perceived space. Lived space, as Elden points out using Lefebvre's own well-chosen French term, is the place of *connaissance* (encompassing “knowledge” as well as “acquaintance”) (Elden 2004, 190). Lived space is the place of subjectivity, of experiences and of sense-making, the process in which a subject makes sense of its objects and itself as an objective reality. Lived space is not an empty abstract container for these processes, but is constructed through them. In this way I would like to reflect upon apartment exhibits such as Skušek's. It is too limiting to view the apartment exhibits simply as more spatially condensed, less organized and less rational versions of museum displays. They are also not, despite their superficial similarity, simply modern versions of cabinets of curiosities. The objects of lived-in collections are used as part of everyday life—be it furniture, porcelain, textiles or figurines. Even more, the owner not only uses the objects and lives with them, but also lives through them. The objects themselves also have their agency, what Appadurai wrote of as of “things-in-motion that illuminate their human and social context” (Appadurai 1986, 5). Practically speaking, not only has the Skušek collection of Chinese furniture and other objects shaped the identity of its owners in the perception of the world outside their home, but we can imagine it also shaped the everyday practices of their lives. The material reality: types, height, width and ergonomics of the furniture, shapes of porcelain, luminosity of lanterns and many other aspects of the collection they lived in also actively determined their lives there. We can even claim that although the objects were the same in the Skušek apartments and later in the museum the two realities of the collection are not the same, nor is the lived space display only a deficient version of the museum. The fact that the objects were used should not be judged by standards of museum display as simply damaging malpractice, endangering the completeness and intactness of the objects which should be preserved. Instead, the lived space can be understood as a “natural habitat” of functional objects, much more than a museum setting can ever be.

Nevertheless, the setting in which these objects were placed was very different from their original “home”. Instead of a Beijing palace or the mansion of a high

Chinese official, these pieces were now crammed inside apartments in a small Slovenian city and lived with according to the lifestyle of a moderately rich Ljubljana family of the time. These processes made the biography of things (Kopytoff 1986, 67) radically more complex—it entailed recombination, transformation, repurposing and alterations, all of which also made the apartment collection essentially different from that of a museum. The objects were themselves adapted to be used as part of the lifestyle of the Skušeks, while also themselves determining the lived space, experienced spatial reality of their owners and shaping the way they lived inside their collection. An interesting comparison can be made to the example of a collector “gone-native”, Sophus Black, whose life inside a collection is analysed by Minna Törmä (2021). The period and origins of the objects in the Skušek and Black collection are surprisingly similar, both men have obviously developed a liking for exquisite furniture, porcelain and Buddhist figures. Even more importantly, both collections were used as furniture and equipment inside a lived space. The reasons and circumstances, and therefore also the outcomes of a similar inclination, were however markedly different. Most importantly, for Black going native seems to have been a logical consequence of having had lived in China for a long period of time, during which adaptation to the Chinese ways of living went hand in hand with progressively Chinese interiors of his homes. What started as mere decoration pieces slowly took larger portion of his homes, especially when living outside the expat communities. Skušek on the other hand can hardly be said to have “gone-native”. The years he lived in China he was mostly limited to the confined areas for the prisoners of war, and developed his interest in Chinese objects from the perspective of a buyer/collector. The situation was even more complex with his wife. An ethnic Japanese who spent her childhood in Japanese occupied Manchuria and early adulthood in Beijing in what seems to have been a mostly Japanese expat community,<sup>4</sup> her attitude towards the Chinese lifestyle must have also been complex to say the least. Anyhow, we can imagine that her first-hand understanding of Chinese habits and lifestyles still surpassed her husband’s. When the collection was shipped to Ljubljana, Tsuneko Kawase Kondō soon took on an active role of being simultaneously the alleged owner of the collection<sup>5</sup> and an actor playing in it. She even performed together with her daughter at commercial fairs where the collection was exhibited (Motoh 2020, 37), and at other social events where she would stage a Japanese environment and then perform certain

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4 This can be assessed from a large number of photographs showing her life before she met Skušek, which are also part of the same archive, kept by the Slovenian Ethnographic Museum.

5 The couple forged a story according to which she inherited the objects from her father, allegedly a court architect. While the story was not too credible, it was still adopted in media and general public and successfully served to silence any doubts about where and how Skušek bought the items (Čeplak Mencin 2012, 109).

Japanese actions (a tea ceremony, etc.) (cf. *Jutro* 1927; fig. 1). After Skušek passed away, she also took on the role of curator and was finally the person who successfully negotiated the transition to museum ownership that kept the main part of the collection together.



Figure 1. Tsuneko Kondō Kawase performing a tea ceremony. (Source: *Jutro*, June 2, 1927)

Finally, it was the lived-in situation of the collection that made it memorable and informative to the many visitors. The objects were seen and interpreted by being used, which presented the cultures of East Asia in a more complex way compared to what a standard, distanced museum display would allow.

## The Moving Collection

One of the most fascinating parts of the history of the Skušek Collection is how it was moved many times despite its incredible size and the immense proportions of its largest objects. Due to the number and size of pieces in the collection, the fact that Skušek was able to store them in the time he was living in China and then to arrange the shipping is already incredible.<sup>6</sup> The recently unexpectedly rediscovered photo archive shows us the collection displayed in lived spaces in a few different settings. The photo collection is neither organized nor labelled, with all different photographs found mixed in several envelopes, so the dates and locations are only

<sup>6</sup> For the details of shipping packages, see Berdajs (2021).

to be identified by analysis of the photographs and are not available from other, external sources. In the analysis I will especially focus on those photographs which show the collection as displayed in lived-in settings, out of which approximately 10 show larger arrangements of collection pieces, one shows the Skušek couple with visitors, nine show Marija Skušek in the rooms, and two show her with her visitors in the rooms. Four locations can be identified from the photographs: a larger empty setting, which is most probably some sort of a storage room, and three apartment settings, out of which photos of living rooms prevail. What the first group of photos represents—set in an empty space with an obviously provisionally spread rug underneath them—is unclear. They could have been taken in a storage room when still in China, or were perhaps taken to record the objects before shipping. If this was not the case, they were most probably taken when the boxes were being unpacked in Ljubljana. When the objects were shipped through Hamburg to Ljubljana, the shipping and subsequent storage was done by the “Špedicija Balkan” transport company,<sup>7</sup> which had an office and large storage rooms at Dunajska cesta 33<sup>8</sup> (see fig. 3).



Figure 2. House at Pred Škofijo 3. (Source: Krisper, *Sistory: Zgodovina Slovenije*, 1950)



Figure 3. Newspaper advertisement for “Balkan” transport company. (Source: *Slovenec*, October 28, 1910)

7 Information from the handwritten memoirs of Franc Skušek (Skušek n.d.).

8 Not the Dunajska cesta 33 of today, due to the change in the length of Dunajska cesta and the fact that the street has been renamed several times over the years.



In Ljubljana the Skušeks lived at three locations, at Pred Škofijo 3, at Prule 19 and at Strossmayerjeva 3. Upon their arrival in Ljubljana, the couple first moved to Skušek's parents' home on the first floor of the 16th century building at Pred Škofijo 3<sup>9</sup> (see fig. 2). The diary of Franc Skušek reports that he was helping his brother with unpacking most of the boxes "in a smaller space on the way to the attic" (Skušek n.d.), "except for the extremely large boxes" (ibid.), which were still kept unpacked at Špedicija Balkan warehouses. We can only speculate that the auxiliary rooms in Skušek parents' apartment might be the location of the storage room photos (see figs. 4 and 5).



Figures 4 and 5. A display, most probably in an unidentified storage room. (Source: Photo Archive of the Slovene Ethnographic Museum, Ljubljana)

9 The house at Pred Škofijo 3 (today Ciril-Metodov trg 3) is a multi-apartment 16th century building, also known as Codelli Canonry.

One of the earliest photos in the collection, judging by the rather young age of Ivan Skušek Jr. and Tsuneko Kondo Kawase, shows the couple in a living room setting with a man in uniform and a woman (see fig. 6). The two can be identified as King Alexander's adjutant, Velja Dimitrijević, and his wife.



Figure 6. The Skušeks with the Dimitrijevićs. (Source: Photo Archive of the Slovene Ethnographic Museum, Ljubljana)

The diary of Skušek's brother claims that Ivan Skušek Jr. tried to re-enter the navy after having retired from it with the dissolution of the Austrian-Hungarian Empire, and that Dimitrijević was a connection he hoped would help him achieve this ambition. He allegedly (Skušek n.d.) even tried to curry the favour of the new king by sending an offer through Dimitrijević to give him a large carved mirror frame that he claimed to be from the Imperial Palace in Beijing—an offer that King Alexander had never responded to. A tiny detail on the uniform worn by Dimitrijević can help us date the photo to the first place where the couple stayed on their return from Asia, namely, Skušek parents' apartment at Pred Škofijo 3. In the written mentions of Skušek's connection to Dimitrijević (sometimes misspelled "Dimitrović") it is noted that he was a colonel (*ibid.*). One of the few

mentions of Adjutant Velja Dimitrijević in Slovenian newspapers, an article titled “Sokolska slavnost v Beogradu” in daily *Slovenski narod* on April 13th 1926 also refers to him as a “colonel”. The photo, however, shows him with two-star epaulettes, indicating that he has not yet reached the rank of colonel—which would be marked by three stars. The photo must thus be dated pre-1926, and was therefore taken in the Pred Škofijo 3 apartment.

As is evident from the two couples’ partly staged photograph—with Dimitrijević holding chopsticks and his wife a Japanese parasol in one hand and a fan in the other—the room occupied by the Skušeks was full of items from the collection. Among the recognizable furniture we see the rose chair Dimitrijević is sitting on, the Korean chest of drawers behind Skušek and a silk screen in the neighbouring room which can be seen through the door. A silk lantern is hung just above the table, a vase is visible behind in the corner, a (now lost) lamp in the shape of a Japanese woman is behind on the chest of drawers. The Chinese table is decorated with two Buddhist figures, an enamelled “Smiling Buddha” and a bronze Buddha statue, both of which are still in the collection today.

The same room is shown in another photo (see fig. 7), where a lower, ornately carved table with a mirror frame is shown while the mirror itself is covered (or perhaps replaced) with a textile. The corner arrangement of a textile wall decoration and the set of bells,<sup>10</sup> as well as the door itself, show us that this is the same setting—the living room in Pred Škofijo 3. Skušek’s collection of Buddhist statues is displayed on a sideboard. According to the 1965 museum inventory, the collection included 22 statues, and the display on the sideboard and in front on a small table shows at least 19 of them. The arrangement also includes two vases and a large metal vessel, listed as a “Mongolian stove” (possibly an incense burner).

The arrangement of Buddhist statues on the sideboard seems to be a permanent element in Skušeks’ displays of the collection. We see them again in photos which belong to the second and third groups of photographs, most probably corresponding to the second and third apartments they lived in. The indirect key for the grouping of these photographs is the age of Tsuneko Kondō Kawase. In one group of photos we see her at a very old age, so they were almost definitely taken in the last of the three places where the couple lived, the apartment in the “del Cott’s villa” in Strossmayerjeva 3. The exact year when they moved to Strossmayerjeva 3 is unclear,<sup>11</sup> but it most probably happened after the end of the WWII when the building seems to

10 Both also part of the collection.

11 Some sources (Čeplak Mencin 2012, 112) even claim that she moved there after the death of Ivan Skušek Jr. in 1947, while some testimonies (*cf.* diary of the author’s grandmother, Milena Motoh, n.d.) remember them both living in the Strossmayerjeva 3 house in December 1946.

have been nationalized from its former owners, the descendants of Gustav del Cott and his wife Hermina del Cott. In any case, Tsuneko must have been only around 50 years old when the couple moved from Prule 19 apartment, while the mentioned photos show her considerably older. The del Cott's villa at Strossmayerjeva 3 was built in summer 1904 (*Slovenec* 1903a–1903f, 1904) as a replacement for the old del Cott's villa which was pulled down for the building of the new Gymnasium building. Del Cott's villa had a beautiful garden, decorated with one of the most famous historical fountains in Ljubljana, the 17th century Neptune fountain (Steska 1924, 145).



Figure 7. Interior with a display of Buddhist statues. (Source: Photo Archive of the Slovene Ethnographic Museum, Ljubljana)

Only two photos can thus be claimed to likely represent the second apartment the couple lived in after coming to Ljubljana, the apartment at Prule 19 (see fig. 8). The three-floor building into which they moved after having a church wedding on Easter Monday, 18th of April 1927 (Čeplak Mencin 2012, 112), was newly built just four years previously and had six apartments of around 100 m<sup>2</sup> each.<sup>12</sup>

12 Cf. the information available on the national public portal about real-estate in Slovenia (<http://prostor3.gov.si>).



Figure 8. Second location: Prule 19. Photo by Helena Motoh.



Figure 9. Third location: Strossmayerjeva 3. Photo by Helena Motoh.

It is unclear which of the six apartments they lived in, but they must have had considerably more space than in the Pred Škofijo 3, where the couple together with Tsuneko's two children (and eight Pekingese dogs) shared the apartment with Skušek's parents and siblings. In two photos that show the same living room

at two different times and with slightly different arrangements (figs. 10 and 11) we again see the sideboard with Buddhist statues—obviously important pieces in Skušeks' eyes—in the background behind the central table. One of the two photos shows Tsuneko sitting at the table with a dog in her lap and another woman sitting next to her. The table seems to be the same as the one in the photo with the Dimitrijevićs, while the chairs also belong to the collection. A wood-and-glass lantern hangs above the central table, while the photo also shows other pieces from the collection: a narrow cabinet to the right of the sideboard. In one of the two photos from Prule 19, we see a decorative set of swords to the left of the table with Buddhist statues, while on the other photo there is the Korean high chest of drawers on that spot. It is also interesting that on the photo with the two ladies, the mirror frame of the table is still covered in fabric, while on the second photo the mirror has obviously been installed.



Figures 10 and 11. Interiors. (Source: Photo Archive of the Slovene Ethnographic Museum, Ljubljana)

None of the other photos can be linked to the Prule 19 apartment with any certainty, but can be linked to the last apartment of the Skušeks lived in, on the first floor of the villa at Strossmayerjeva 3 in the Poljane quarter of the central Ljubljana (see fig. 9). These photos give us more detail about how they lived with the collection, also showing more different views of the apartment. Another important document was also found in the archive, the *Partial Inventory of the Furniture and Things of Marija Skušek, Ljubljana, Strossmayerjeva 3/I* (Delni seznam 1950). The inventory is signed by Marija Skušek and was made on August the 6th 1950, just three years after the death of her husband. The reason for making the list is unclear, perhaps it might have been related to inheritance issues in the family, extensively written about by Franci Skušek (Skušek n.d.). Another possible reason may have been Marija Skušek's plans to sell the collection to the Slovenian government, which also took place in 1950 (*Tovariš* 1950). The inventory is divided into four sections: Rooms I, II and III, and a list of objects. At the end of the inventory there is an interesting remark: "In addition to these there are innumerable other small objects and 10 large boxes that have not been opened (for 30 years) due to the lack of space". Despite the unopened boxes, the inventory lists an incredible number of items of furniture for each room.

Room I [living room]: 2 display cabinets, 1 large sideboard (*kredenca*)<sup>13</sup>, 1 small long table, 1 table for Buddhas, 1 small cabinet, 1 marble table, 1 Korean cabinet, 1 large book cabinet, 1 writing desk, 1 round table from the imperial palace, 3 carved chairs, 4 porcelain garden chairs, 7 carved wooden tableaus, 5 large porcelain flower pots, 2 porcelain lamps, 6 porcelain vases, 2 carved frames for handicraft, 5 handmade paintings, 2 woodcuts, 11 roof figures, 2 hand warmers, 1 silver flower stand, 2 small carved tables, 1 gong with stand, 1 Japanese gong, 4 roof bells, 4 bronze vases, 1 bronze sculpture of a Japanese woman.

Room II [single bedroom]: 1 single bed, 2 large standing mirrors approx. 900 kg, 1 small standing mirror, 2 night tables, 1 Mongolian stove with a stand, 1 small carved table, 1 small low table, 1 little chair, 3 chairs, 1 large porcelain vessel, 1 small carved cabinet, 1 "head of the cabinet" [*glava od omare*], 1 Chinese screen – tapestry.

Room III [double bedroom]: 1 large double bed, 2 large cabinets, 1 small table, 2 chairs, 6 large flowerpots, 2 small flowerpots, 2 small flowerpots broken, 1 porcelain container for tea, 1 long low cabinet.

13 From the Italian word *credenza*, a kitchen sideboard or a cabinet with upper vitrines for plates and glasses.

[Other objects]: 15 Buddhas, 1 human-skull drum, ? pigeon whistles, ? small vases, 2 Chinese instruments, 2 opium pipes, 1 brass mirror, 1 abacus, 3 stone seals, 1 water pipe, 3 *bučke za grille* [cricket flasks], 1 compass, 2 cutlery sets, 3 fans, 2 bottles painted from within, 1 thermometer, 1 *čajnica* [perhaps tea box], 6 Chinese clothes, 2 pairs of Chinese shoes, 3 mandarin hats, 10 Boxer weapons, 1 tiger skin, 4 folders of paintings, 3 giant albums of architecture, 15 lanterns, rather broken from the last moving, 1 model of a house. (Delni seznam 1950)

Several photos that can be associated with the last Skušek apartment, and some of them also show Marija Skušek (once in the company of another woman) dressed in Japanese clothes (see figs. 12–15). It is possible to link the photos to the list from 1950. For example, in some photos we see two pieces of the furniture from section I of the inventory list, one next to the other—the edge of the large carved sideboard (one adorned with Buddhist statues) and the display cabinet. On top of the display cabinet we see large porcelain flowerpots and bronze bells, while the shelves show a number of pieces from the collection—many of them also included in the inventory list (e.g. Tibetan skull drum, opium pipes and lamp, cloisonné stand and pot, etc.). Another photo of the larger room arrangement also survived, which is of much worse quality, but still very informative. It shows the room with a table in front (the same one as in the previous two settings) and a mix of Chinese and European chairs. The display—a combination of porcelain vessels and Buddhist statues—is also visible, along with a reflection in the mirror, indicating a folding screen on the other side of the room. Photos of another room also exist, which show an elderly Marija Skušek standing next to the bed, in front of a smaller mirror on a carved stand, which means that the photo could correspond to Room II in the inventory list.





Figures 12–15. Interiors. (Source: Photo Archive of the Slovene Ethnographic Museum, Ljubljana)

## Life and the Collection

The Skušeks' collection, which served not only as decoration but as predominant furnishing of the three apartments where the couple lived, is a good example of how the lived space setting completely changes how the collection works and how it is perceived. Although Skušek perhaps planned to display the objects in a museum setting re-creating the Chinese original interiors (Vampelj Suhadolnik 2020, 53), the objects he bought, however, were primarily functional, although of very high quality and artistic nature. The collection consists of many pieces of furniture, lots of ceramic utensils, clothes, and textiles—all functional everyday objects. Only a smaller number of objects cannot be categorized as such, e.g. Buddhist statues, several paintings/prints and curiosities that were perhaps never used (a wooden pillow, a skull drum, etc.). The setting that Skušek put them into upon his return to Ljubljana was therefore much more natural than any of the museum settings they were later in.

The density of pieces in the three apartments was incredible. As we see in the previously quoted lists, this must have made the rooms they lived in feel like crammed, hybrid spaces, a mixture of a museum storage room and a living space. It also explains why almost no additional furniture can be seen on the photos—with the exception of a few chairs and a small table, almost everything else can be identified as pieces from the collection.<sup>14</sup> The couple, Tsuneko Kawase's children (from a previous marriage) and many visitors, were thus led to live *in, with* and *through* the collection, accommodating the collection for their needs and habits, while also accommodating their habits (and, with Bourdieu, their *habitus*) to the lived space created by the collection. The accommodation of the collection to its inhabitants we can discern especially in the arrangement of Chinese furniture to meet the living style and demands of an upper middle-class Ljubljana family of that time. Not only the use, but also the combinations of the furniture and objects were made in this hybrid fashion as well. Even the names of the furniture reflect the accommodation, using the local terminology used for the items. The mirror cabinet, for example, is listed as a *kredenca* (see note 12), using the smallest common denominator, and the tapestry folded screens are listed as described as *gublen*<sup>15</sup>. In return, the furniture and utensils must have required their users to perform tasks differently, whether this meant sitting in Chinese chairs, sleeping in canopy beds or using the Chinese containers and tools for everyday purposes. The in-between situation that Marija Skušek (born

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14 For a very good description of the analytical work identifying provenance, origin, production period and other data of material objects from East Asia, see Berdajs (2019).

15 In other words a Gobelin tapestry, as pronounced in the local dialect of the time.

Japanese and having lived for a long time in China) found herself in relation to these objects is also extremely interesting, but perhaps today impossible to entirely reconstruct.

Moreover, compared to a museum setting or even to a “period room” setting, where lived spaces are recreated, the collection objects in lived spaces do not have the aura of “sacred” and untouchable museum artefacts. They are not under the ban of being touched, used, neglected, worn out and modified in ways that suit their owners. The hypothetical “original state” of an object, in which the museum pieces are supposed to be preserved forever, is replaced in a lived space museum by a more transient identity and faced with the threat of wear, tear, repair and disintegration. The living space collection pieces are also more likely to change hands, given as a present or souvenir to visitors and friends, something which often happened with the items in the Skušeks’ collection. With a touch of poetic licence, we could say—compared to the illusion of their eternal life in museum settings—that a lived space makes the collection objects alive with every aspect of this condition, including their potential transformation, mobility and imminent disintegration or discardment. Compared to the intentional and analytic setting museum setting, the objects of lived-in collections are also not isolated, but function in forced communication with one another, in assemblages which could be functional, aesthetic or random. Finally, the thus lived lives of objects in the lived space setting are an integral part of the information about objects and the collection, or, perhaps better said, of their biographies. For the Skušek Collection there is a photographic archive and information about the collection and thus we can indeed see that the lived-in situation was crucial for the biography of the collection in many ways. Most importantly, it affected the adaptation of the objects to the needs of the Skušeks’ lifestyle and, vice-versa, shaped how their lives were lived in this museum-like setting. On the other hand, the limitations and possibilities imposed upon the couple who lived in a museum-like setting can be seen in particular in the agency of Marija Skušek as the “actor” inside the collection, at the same time living and performing (see also Visočnik Gerželj 2021), a double identity which affected so many of her contemporaries and helped them get an immediate opportunity to understand and get to know the cultural elements of East Asia.

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