



*Vroege Chinese miniaturen. De ontsluiting van een cultureel fenomeen*  
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## SUMMARY DISSERTATION EARLY CHINESE MINIATURES – DISCLOSURE OF A CULTURAL PHENOMENON

The dissertation answers the key question: what is an early Chinese miniature, or, how can the concept of early Chinese miniature be defined? To answer this question the original definition by Paul Singer 'It is an object that must also exist in large size' had to be tested on the basis of the following seven specific questions: 1. Are there any similarities between miniatures from China and from other cultures? 2. What was the function of early Chinese miniatures? 3. Which materials and techniques were used and how was production and sales organized? 4. Which representations occur and what meaning can be assigned to them? 5. What are the benefits of placing ten special groups of miniatures in their literary and cultural context? 6. What are the benefits of placing the phenomenon of early Chinese miniatures in a broader context? 7. How did the process of musealisation proceed?

Initially, the research resulted in the following definition: miniatures are autonomous, three-dimensional man-made objects of a 'handy' size, in other words no larger than ten centimetres, which are small or greatly scaled-down versions of their full-size counterparts. Two questions that arose during the research necessitated clarifying this intrinsically workable definition. One concerned what is referred to here, for the sake of brevity, as the 'sliding scale' issue: the question of whether miniatures such as vases, pots and boxes, that constitute the smallest variant of a series of increasing sizes, can be termed 'miniatures'. Drawing on examples from other cultures, such as paintings or crucifixes, it was clear that the sliding scale was no obstacle to categorising a small object as a miniature. The decisive criterion here is, after all, the 'handy' size. The second point concerned a similar thing, namely whether small objects such as a water dropper in the shape of a lion, can be considered miniatures. Although in a functional sense they do not meet the requirement because they are 'life size', they are nonetheless deemed miniatures when the subject depicted, in this case a lion, is a scaled-down version of a larger variant.

The first specific question 'are there similarities between miniatures in China and beyond?' has been answered through literature research. This research showed that small sculptures and miniatures from prehistory form the first parallel. They were used worldwide for fetish, to enchant enemies and prey and to promote fertility, or as insignia.

A second parallel can be seen in the use of small bronze, gold and silver objects. Their diminutive size means they are suited to personal use. Skilfully produced from costly material, these items were lucrative merchandise, and crucial to the cultural exchange between East and West. That is why we can speak of globalization here.

Since the sixth century B.C., the rise of luxury articles for personal use, such as jewellery and toiletries, was also accompanied by a growing tendency towards realism in both Western and Chinese sculpture. Craftsmen started to create more realistically proportioned human figures, and to incorporate details taken from everyday life. Whether this development was shaped by the teachings of major philosophers and thinkers such as Confucius and Laozi in China, Buddha in India and Socrates and Plato in Greece, who were emerging at that time, is unclear. But it is nonetheless a development worth noting.

Western small-scale sculptures and miniatures share a common feature with early Chinese miniatures: tactility. Clearly, the owner took pleasure in examining the piece from every angle, touching it, and carrying it on his person as a personal possession and cherished object. Evidence of such use is often visible to the naked eye.

The third parallel concerns the role of devotional items. In the Greek and Roman world, mass-produced miniatures in bronze and earthenware were particularly popular as competition prizes, dedications to the gods, or talismans. With the advent of Christianity, miniatures acquired great significance as religious souvenirs in the form of pilgrims' badges and votive offerings. In China, miniatures fulfilled a similar function; monasteries along the Silk Roads were also anxious to sell their gilt-bronze depictions of Buddha and the bodhisattvas to pilgrims. What applies to the trade in devotional objects applies equally to the trade in antiquities, *curiosa* and objects of the natural kingdom. Prosperous collectors in the West and East encountered the wonders of an exotic wildlife and culture in this way. In the West, such objects often found a home in the '*Wunderkammer*'; in China, they occupied the writing tables of *literati*. In both cases, they bore testament to their owner's erudition.

An equally interesting parallel is formed by the artistic freedom allowed to the makers of miniatures in the West and in China. In the West this is mainly found in mundane scenes, also known as 'drolleries', miniature images drawn or painted in the margins of religious scenes in many illuminated manuscripts dating from the late middle-ages. The same appears in misericords, the sculpted wooden structures on the underside of Gothic choir stalls which, when the seat was folded up, were designed to support the older monks when standing for longer periods. In both cases, the religious context was no barrier to depicting commonplace, or even risqué, scenes. A similar artistic freedom was also apparently permitted to the makers of early Chinese miniatures, whose choice of subject was not confined to overly elevated subjects. This is remarkable for offering us a glimpse into a culture that, in a strictly regulated official and religious world, has no place for unbound arts.

Western miniatures of a later date, such as the miniature silver furniture, or '*poppegoed*', bought by wealthy Dutch gentlewomen for the interiors of their dolls' houses, also acted as a status symbol and yardstick of good taste, just as the antiques and '*naturalia*' had done for the gentlemen. In which sense, they also differ very little from the Chinese *literati objects*.

Western toys such as the 19th century tin soldiers and steam trains and the 20th century electric toy trains, Barbie dolls and Playmobil figures fulfil a very different function. In this instance, the toys gave young and old a chance to play at 'being in control': the little girl plays at mothering her doll, while the little boy or his father play at being the 'boss' of a 'safe' miniature world, far removed from the hostilities of the real one. Not so very different, then, from the function of the oldest prehistoric figurines.

To answer the second specific question 'what was the function of early Chinese miniatures?' the whole file of data and images, consisting of a total of 5716 Chinese miniatures, including 4205 early miniatures, were examined. To the functions mentioned by Singer and later authors, called primary functions here, namely burial gifts, devotionalia, toys for children and objects used by scholars (*literati objects* / *bibelots*) could be added: insignia, fetishes and talismans, jewelry, clothing accessories, boxes, musical instruments and seals.

The miniatures from the Neolithic, the Shang, the early and the middle of the Zhou period acted as insignia, fetishes and talismans, jewelry and burial gifts. As prosperity increased in the later Zhou and Han periods, other functions were added, such as clothing accessories, boxes, musical instruments, writing instruments and seals. Devotionalia, toys for children and all kinds of luxury items followed in the Six Dynasties and the Tang period. The range became much wider when in the Song period the scholars, in addition to the writing materials that have been used for much longer, started to provide themselves with the most diverse articles "for learning and entertainment", often referred to as *literati objects* and *bibelots*.

Some miniatures, such as water-pots (brush-washers) and also brush-rests, were made to perform multiple functions at the same time. In that case it can be referred to as a dual function. Still other miniatures, especially the *literati* objects, were immediately or later given a different function than the maker intended, such as a water pot that was used as a flower vase. This happened especially when the owner wanted to show off his good taste and erudition. This is a secondary function.

A special secondary function is the functioning as an antique and as a collector's item. The collecting of excavated bronze vessels already started in the Western Han period. This was the first step in the musealisation of utensils. When in the Song period not only the imperial court, but also the lower nobility and especially the scholars started collecting antique objects to show their erudition, the next step was taken. The objects in question, including miniatures, not only fulfilled their original practical function, but also started to play a role as testimonies of a certain culture. The publication of printed catalogs with a description and image of the relevant objects contributed to this. This process developed further during the late Ming period to reach a provisional peak in the Qing period. Musealisation in the literal sense of the word occurred at the end of the nineteenth and the beginning of the twentieth centuries when private collections found their way to museums in Europe, America and Japan.

Studying the functions mainly helped to sharpen the definition. It also made it clear that there is often a difference between the functionality of the miniature itself and what the miniature depicts. The ceramic miniature handle basket could not function as a handle basket due to both its size and the material application (ceramic). However, this does not apply to objects that are the smallest variant of a series with a sliding scale, such as boxes, jarlets or vases. For example, a miniature vase, i.e., a vase no larger than 10 cm, does not represent a vase, but it is a vase, or in other words: it functions as a vase. Here only the format and therefore not the functionality is the criterion for marking the object as a miniature. This applies to a function intended by the maker, but not to another function that the user assigns to it, such as the flower vase used as a brush-washer. But even in the case of a secondary function, the functionality cannot serve as a decisive criterion. Only the format is decisive.

The function of a miniature can also be determined by the meaning of the depiction. The depiction of the Three-legged Toad, which stands for wealth, made the miniature pre-eminently act as a talisman. In this case, the intentions of the maker and the user coincide. In short, just as is the case with the material application, functionality plays a significant role as regards the suitability of the object as a miniature, but cannot be used as a criterion for marking a small object as a miniature.

Analyzing the various functions that the early Chinese miniature fulfilled also taught that it is usually determined by the form. The stratification of this relationship sometimes complicates interpretation. An iconographic formula has been developed to provide insight into this relationship. In this, not only function and form are separated, but a distinction is also made between primary, secondary and double functions and between underlying (narrow) and upper (broad) terms. In addition to distinguishing between primary, double and secondary functions, the analysis of forms and functions and their mutual coherence made it possible to recognize all kinds of derived functions, such as those of souvenir, travel insurance, gift, bribe, status-increasing object, proof of good taste, conversation piece and collectibles.

To answer the third specific question 'which materials and techniques were used and how was production and sales organized?' a representative amount of early Chinese miniatures have been studied both 'in the flesh' and on the basis of technical data, obtained from digital museum-collection files and the literature.

This revealed that in some cases, insight into the materials and techniques is an important aid in identifying a miniature's function, because the materials were not chosen at random. Far from it: most materials were selected very deliberately. Initially, this choice was motivated by the intrinsic value and symbolic meaning of the material. Jade pendants in the shape of birds of prey or supernatural beings are considered among the oldest miniatures. Jade was a rare material, difficult to craft, and hence expensive. Moreover, jade was also thought to hold magical properties. Accordingly, the pendant was a suitable adornment for a person regarded as leader, in which capacity he possessed the ability to communicate with higher powers. It was not until much later, when the Song period began, that aesthetic preferences influenced the choice of materials. This was particularly the case for materials used for the *literati* objects. A material was selected for its rarity, beauty, durability and suitability for a particular application. The choice of a specific material or unusual type of artistry offered the owner an opportunity to flaunt his erudition and good taste. This might, for instance, also explain why certain miniatures fulfilled a secondary function, that of conversation piece.

In essence, the development of materials used to produce miniatures paralleled that of their larger counterparts, although the miniatures may have been crafted with a keener eye for detail. On the other hand, when it came to children's toys, price was a decisive factor, which explains why such a relatively large amount was mass-produced from earthenware – a material both robust and inexpensive.

The oldest miniatures, dating from the Neolithic age, were made from jade, a costly material, which, as previously described, was believed to possess extraordinary qualities. The same properties were attributed to types of stone that closely resembled jade, such as agate, turquoise, serpentine, jet, pudding stone, steatite, soapstone, and marble. Ivory or bone was also used. During this early phase, the use of fired and unfired clay was less common, and short-lived.

Miniatures in bronze date from the subsequent Xia, Shang and Zhou periods. Nonetheless, jade remained a sought-after material throughout this period, and long after. Iron, tin and lead came into use starting in the late Eastern Zhou period, and continued to be popular in the following Qin and Han periods. This era also saw a return to ceramics – a more easily workable, thus cheaper, material – but on a far larger scale than in the Neolithic age and Shang period. The same applied to glass, which had served as a jade substitute since the late Zhou period. Gold and silver came into favour during the Eastern Han and subsequent Six Dynasties period, largely due to encounters with non-Chinese peoples. In this latter period, the production of *yue* stoneware, fired and glazed at a high temperature, was further perfected. With its green glaze, this type of ceramic resembled jade and acted as a suitable replacement, thus increasing its desirability. This was also true of the costlier three-coloured (*sancai*) lead-glazed earthenware from the Tang and Liao period, and for the types of earthenware fired at a far greater temperature, as well as for a ceramic made from white-fired clay.

Ceramics became even more highly prized during the Song period, when the imperial court officially approved five types of stoneware – Ru, Guan, Ge, Jun, and Ding – for its own use. At the same time, the refinement of kilns, the use of moulds and streamlining of the labour process significantly increased production. As a result, it was far cheaper to produce stoneware in Yaozhou, Longquan, Jingdezhen, Guangdong, Henan, Cizhou and Jizhou; the products were greatly favoured by the population at large, and exported on a considerable scale, primarily to Southeast Asia. Many of these ceramics centres also produced miniatures. Throughout the Yuan period, the cobalt blue and copper-red underglaze decorated porcelain exemplified a new highpoint in technical prowess. In the Ming and Qing periods that followed, other colours and more sophisticated techniques were added, catering to ever-larger domestic and international markets accessed by over-land caravans or sea-going vessels.

The same urge towards increasing diversity and elegance was manifest in the application of both costly imported materials such as rock crystal, amber, rhinoceros horn, coral, lacquer work and mother of pearl, as well as more basic materials such as wood and antler. In the last case, the quality was largely determined by the unusual, often labour-intensive workmanship, or by the craftsman's artistry. The lucrative trade both in the necessary raw materials, semi-finished and finished products has traditionally not only promoted the exchange of goods, but also of people and their ideas about politics, religion and culture, a process that is now called globalization.

What applied to these exotic materials also applies to several imported techniques, glass blowing, enamelling and goldsmith techniques like granulating. Conversely, China exported tea, silk, porcelain and lacquerwork, as well as important inventions such as making paper, paper money, gunpowder and cast iron.

This research into the application of materials and techniques made an important attribution to sharpening the definition and to distinguishing between the different functions of early Chinese miniatures. It also provided valuable information about the choice of materials and production processes.

The fourth specific question 'which representations occur and what meaning can be assigned to them?' has been answered by iconographic research. Not only was there a great diversity in the materials and techniques used, the miniatures also featured a wide variety of subjects. A thorough grasp of the meanings of these subjects can help to identify the more complex uses. Miniatures depict all kinds of things: human beings, supernatural creatures, (mythical) beasts, trees, plants and flowers, fruits, landscapes and natural elements such as mountains or clouds. As well as architecture, furniture, vehicles, garments and footwear, tools, weapons, religious and ceremonial objects and musical instruments. The popularity of all these themes is shown in the iconographic tables in appendix 2.

Sometimes – and this was particularly the case for miniatures that served as funerary wares – they only depict the utensils they were intended to replace. In that case, the subject was purely functional. But, far more often, the principal meaning of the subject can be deciphered if related to supernatural entities and manifestations that people revered, feared, or cherished. The miniature was designed to ward off evil, or express veneration.

Other miniatures depict events and activities that were common to daily Chinese life: marriage, the birth of children, death, war, the home, work, transportation, entertainment, eating and drinking, apparel, culture, religion and nature. The artistic freedom often taken by the craftsmen in an effort to render the subjects as realistically as possible, mean that these miniatures offer us a priceless visual complement to the impressions of Chinese society that come down to us from 'official' Chinese visual art, and classic Chinese literature.

Other than a primary meaning immediately obvious to everyone, many miniatures also have a double ('hidden') meaning: when spoken aloud, the word for one object sounds the same as another – a pun that knowledgeable listeners would appreciate. Consequently, such miniatures made excellent gifts to curry favour with relatives, business partners and influential people, or ideal ways for the owner to display his erudition. So, a study of the connections, complex at times, between the different shapes and the primary and secondary meanings of the miniatures helped to identify various subsidiary functions such as that of souvenir, guarantee of safe travel, gift, bribe, status object, token of good taste, and conversation piece.

For answering the fifth specific question 'what are the benefits of placing ten special groups of miniatures in their direct literary and cultural context?' ten special groups of

miniatures were selected to test the knowledge derived from the literature on the basis of the outcome of this research.

With regard to the first group, consisting of whistles, this resulted in a large diversity of applications, varying from whistles used by musicians, soldiers and night watchmen, to those used for signaling by shepherds and hunters. Other whistles had a religious function, served as souvenir or promotional gift, or as toys for children. It can be deduced from the caricatural representation of many whistles that people liked to mock foreigners. This provides proof that miniatures offered the possibility to produce hyper-realistic or even humorous representations.

The study of a second group, consisting of 'toggles' taught that some are 1000 years older than the nineteenth and early twentieth century specimens, which are published. These are even much older, too, than the Japanese *netsukes*. All the more remarkable is that so little has been published about Chinese toggles and so much about *netsukes*.

Luxury objects and in particular the small boxes that form a third group, derived their preciousness mainly from the applied materials like jade, gold or silver, bronze, glass and lacquer. In some cases their value was determined by the length and therefore expensive processing such as with jade and lacquer work. Their small size made it possible to wear these valuables, which explains why so many are found in tombs in the immediate vicinity of the deceased. The application of materials that were imported from far away made these valuables the bearer of exotic influences on a regular basis, while the intimate nature of boxes offered more than once room for erotic representations.

Group four showed that miniatures which represented artists were popular. A large number of these musicians, dancers, actors, story tellers, acrobats, jugglers, magicians and animal tamers can be related to the Silk Roads that were exploited by Central Asians. Dwarfs also earned a living by performing. All these artists not only performed on markets and fairs, but also at festivities and burials. That is why these miniatures are regularly found in tombs.

The lions from group five show that the Chinese had great difficulty portraying these animals, which they mainly knew from images and texts of Buddhist origin. As a result, the distinction between lions and leopards is sometimes difficult to make.

Group six is formed by a small number of miniatures that represent a *cong*. The study of this group provided new arguments to support the theory that the shape and decoration refer to heaven and earth, the masculine and the feminine, and the four wind directions. That argues for the function of insignia. Archaeological finds have shown that these miniature *cong* at least have been used as such.

The miniatures that make up group seven are shaped as landscapes and clouds. They show that they mainly served as writing accessories and decorative objects on the tables of the *literati*. With the help of incense, they enabled the owner to imagine themselves in higher spheres or to show their erudition. They are part of the same Chinese tradition that produced phenomena like 'learned stones', miniature trees (in the West better known as 'bonsai' trees) or the little dogs (Pekingese) that had to pass for lions.

That the heads of the women and children from group eight had been broken off deliberately, made it clear that these figurines were buried by pregnant women or by their family, in order to prevent the danger of a miscarriage. Similar finds in South-East Asia show that this practice was widespread.

A large number of ceramic miniatures of the Cizhou type distinguishes themselves from other specimens by their multicolored, often figurative, painted decoration. All the examples, belonging to group nine, show this feature. However, a miniature vase with a painted representation of a mandarin who is walking home, is

unique. It shows a clear relationship with similar representations on the painted pillows, provided with the private label of the famous Wang family, that produced these pillows.

The tenth and last group consists of a large number of early miniatures showing a remarkable realism. The same characteristic is shown by a few paintings that provide us with an image of the merchants who sold miniatures and other trinkets as well as of the markets where these wares were sold. The realism of these miniatures and paintings is so convincing that they form a worthy counterpart to the Dutch drawings "after life" from the seventeenth century.

To answer the sixth specific question 'what are the benefits of placing the phenomenon of early Chinese miniatures in a broader context?' once more the information obtained from the literature has been combined with the knowledge that this research has yielded. The data relate to political, economic, technological, religious, cultural and other relevant developments that directly or indirectly influenced the development of the early Chinese miniature. A point of attention was the developments that are important for the aspects of musealisation and globalization.

The image that emerges is a society that in the Neolithic era still consisted of clans, led by tribal elders and shamans. These clans settled on the banks of the major rivers and lived on agriculture and animal husbandry. In the earliest phase, miniatures fulfilled two functions: as a sign with which a chief could distinguish himself or as a fetish. The preciousness of the material, jade or ivory used for the first function, underlined the special place that the wearer occupied. Fetishes, to ward off accident or to make a wish come true, were mainly made from bone and unbaked clay and were available to everyone.

With the establishment of first the Shang and then the Zhou kingdoms, the first step was made towards a feudal society, in which all power was concentrated in the king, who rewarded his relatives and vassals with territories. In addition to powerful palace complexes, the power of these kings was expressed in prestigious gifts in the form of bronze vessels and bells. Inscriptions on these vessels and on oracle bones provide the oldest historical data. In addition to bronze casting, the production of silk, ceramics, lacquerware and ivory also flourished. Although the function of miniatures did not change much, the repertoire was expanded in the later Shang period to include images of people and all kinds of animals.

In the Zhou period, the authority of the monarch weakened and the increasing power of vassals led to the formation of individual states. The invention to extract and process iron enabled the production of stronger weapons as well as agriculture tools. As a result, production and also prosperity increased. The rise and writing of moral and natural philosophies such as Confucianism and Daoism are closely related to the increasingly important role of literate officials. Under the influence of Confucianism, the grave culture changed: to replace the people, animals and goods that were previously sacrificed, specially crafted *mingqi* were given to the deceased in the grave. They had to deviate from their examples in terms of format or production. Personal property of the deceased (*renqi*) was also buried. The growing number of cities, technological progress, increasing prosperity and contacts with neighboring peoples led to an increase in the need for luxury goods. The functions of miniatures were extended with those of *mingqi*, writing supplies, including brushes, paper weights, incense burners and seals, as well as personal items such as boxes and toilet articles made of jade, glass, bronze, gold, silver, turquoise, ivory, lacquer or glazed pottery.

The establishment of the empire by Qin Shihuang not only confirmed the unification of China, but also consolidated the feudal system. Although his Qin dynasty collapsed after a few decades, his political, military and economic reform measures were largely taken over and expanded by the subsequent Han dynasty. Their policies aimed at

military and economic expansion led to territorial expansion in the west and southeast and to the development of trade contacts, including the Silk Roads. The greater stability not only increased the standard of living of the elite, but also that of the normal population. This is reflected, among other things, in the miniatures that, in addition to luxury, also represent ordinary utensils. Glass, imitating jade, was added to the range of materials, as well as amber and git.

During the Six Dynasties period, the empire disintegrated temporarily as a result of fighting warlords and raids from neighboring peoples. The supply of jade was temporarily interrupted, as a result of which the appreciation for objects made of gold and silver and jewelery forging techniques taken over from Central Asia rose considerably. This turmoil led to true migrations from North to South, putting the economic and cultural center of gravity in the South. The growth of the silk industry, the production of paper and of the green glazed yue stoneware were a direct consequence of this. Buddhism imported from India gradually gained ground, which involved the construction of countless monasteries and temples, especially along the Silk Roads. Here gilt bronze figurines were sold, that copied the larger Buddhist sculptures present there, to pilgrims and business travelers. These devotionalia also include the miniature shrines of jade, rock crystal, gold, silver and bronze in which relics of the Buddha or his disciples were kept.

When the Sui dynasty reunited the empire at the end of the sixth century, peace returned and the foundations were laid for a new period of prosperity. The subsequent Tang period was characterized by strong governance and military strength. These were accompanied by an open-border policy and a great tolerance towards other religions and cultures, with the result that trade, arts and sciences flourished, in which admitting all kinds of exotic influences was not shunned. This is why many people regard this period as China's "Golden Age". This heyday was mainly reflected in the burial culture that provided not only monumental wall paintings, but also a true abundance of *mingqi* and *renqi* of tricolor glazed *sancai* earthenware and richly decorated tableware of bronze, gold and silver. The many miniatures that have been preserved from this period are a true reflection of this. In addition to *mingqi*, the pottery centers of Changsha in Hunan and Ding in Hebei also started to make ceramic toys. What is striking here is the realistic representation of people and animals, while the portrayals of Westerners, on the other hand, display caricatural traits. Gilt bronze devotionalia continued to be popular during this period.

From the mid-eighth century, the power of the Tang Dynasty gradually declined due to weaker emperors, abuse of power, corruption and raids by Tibetan armies. One of the consequences was that the influence of Buddhism was stopped. After the fall of the Tang dynasty at the beginning of the tenth century, great unrest broke out in the north during the Five Dynasties, while in the south it remained relatively calm during the Ten Kingdoms period. As a result, many northern people could take refuge there and the industry and trade could develop further. The production of green-glazed yue stoneware in particular benefited from this. In the meantime, the increased power of the nomadic Qidan people led to the establishment of the Liao dynasty in northwest China. They soon took over many Chinese institutions, customs and goods. Their different grave culture as well as their preference for materials such as rock crystal, gold and silver and for representations of hunting and trade, however, confirmed their other orientation.

From the middle of the tenth century onwards, the Song, with the exception of the northwest controlled by the Qidan, managed to restore the unity of the empire. The stability that led to this brought prosperity, but also a strong growth of the population that took refuge in the rapidly growing cities. This urbanization led to a true boom in industry, commerce, science and the arts. The more and more specialized craftsmen and highly trained civil servants, the *literati*, profited from this development. The introduction of

paper money and the development of trade over land and at sea with foreign countries were of great economic importance. The invention of printing was of comparable importance to the arts and sciences.

At the beginning of the twelfth century, the Jurchen nomads expelled the Qidan in the northwest and established their Jin dynasty there. The Song were forced to retreat to the south where they managed to survive for another century through sophisticated diplomacy. During the Song period, industry, in particular the ceramics industry, developed to such a level that a number of state-controlled companies were allowed to supply the imperial court. That, but also the interest that the *literati* received for these products, raised the status of the potters and other craftsmen. This boom also benefited the production of miniatures. The number of already existing functions has been expanded to include 'toys' for adults in the form of writing supplies and decorative objects intended for the writing tables of the *literati*. This development from simple utensil to status symbol and collector's item led to a new phase in the musealisation of miniatures. At the same time, ceramic miniatures were increasingly being produced en masse by the pottery centers that also supplied ordinary consumer pottery. Their sales were not only increased by reducing the cost price, but also by choosing everyday, genre-like subjects that appealed to a wide audience.

The subjugation, not only of the Chinese empire, but also of large parts of South-East and Central Asia, the Middle East and Eastern Europe, enabled the Mongolian khans for a century and a half to intensify international trade contacts and through transfer of specialized craftsmen, to promote industry. To increase tax revenues, roads and canals were built or improved and new waterways developed both inland and at sea. This economic policy includes the production in Jingdezhen of the blue and white decorated porcelain, as well as the introduction of the enamel cloisonné technique and the art of carpet weaving. In the religious and spiritual field, the strengthening of ties with Tibet was particularly important. The emergence of a professional painting school broke through the dominating role of the *literati* in this area. The miniatures from the Yuan period, apart from the introduction of the aforementioned new techniques and the continuation of the realistic trend that has already emerged, do not differ significantly from those from the Song period. The same applies to the early Ming period, the period in which the first Ming emperors largely took over not only the Mongolian state system, but also the socio-economic policy pursued. With the death of Emperor Yongle in 1424, an abrupt end came to that.

Trade in raw materials, semi-finished and end products was the most important factor in the process of globalization of the miniatures phenomenon. Between China, Central Asia, Europe and India, this trade already ran from the Han Dynasty along the Silk Roads, while the trade to Southeast Asia was mainly conducted by sea. This reciprocal import and export was not only of great influence on the transfer of technology, but also on the exchange of ideas in the social, religious and cultural fields. The musealisation of miniatures is part of this globalization. Whereas the Han emperors, as the first collectors of Chinese antiquities, were mainly able to legitimize their rule through excavated archaic bronzes with inscriptions, the nobility and scholars since the Song period were keen to gain knowledge about past times and unknown areas. The latter also applied to the growing number of collectors in the Middle East, Europe and America that were supplied with exotic goods through trade.

My own experience, information obtained from literature as well as interviews with private collectors and museum curators have been used to answer the seventh and last specific question 'How did the process of musealisation proceed?'

The development that the musealisation has undergone has been studied, including the most recent developments. The state of affairs with regard to managing, exhibiting,

researching and publishing has also been investigated and problems that arise are described. A possible solution has been proposed for the problem concerning exhibiting.

The collecting of antiquities by the imperial court already began in the Han period, but became a real craze when scholars started to do so in the Song period.

In Europe the collecting of Chinese porcelain really started in the sixteenth century, where it was shown as exotic ware in the showrooms of the powerful and the rich. In the nineteenth century the purpose of collecting was mainly to emphasize Western colonial superiority. Since the twentieth century, art-historical importance has become more prominent, be it, that under the influence of archeology and sinology an Eurocentric approach took the lead. With the rise of disciplines such as cultural anthropology, sociology and museology, grew, especially during the last decades, the interest in the significance for the societies that these artefacts produced and for the interaction between societies of these artefacts for the societies who produced them in the past and present. Parallel to that an international regulation came into being, that has to protect cultural heritage against illegal practices, with the result that the pedigree of objects is becoming increasingly important.

Numerous European, American, Canadian, Japanese and Chinese private and public collections of early Chinese antiquities, which were founded in the early 20th century, also included Chinese miniatures. This is particularly true of famous private collections such as those of George Eumorfopoulos and of Sir Percival David, which found their way into London's Victoria & Albert Museum and the British Museum, respectively, and for the collections of George Crofts, Dr. James Mellon Menzies, bishop William Charles White and Dr. Herman Herzog Levy that were gifted to the Royal Ontario Museum in Toronto. There is, however, no evidence suggesting that these collectors had a special interest in miniatures.

On the other hand, miniatures were at the heart of a collection amassed by Paul Singer, a psychiatrist who emigrated from Vienna to America, via London, in 1939. Singer bequeathed his collection to the Sackler gallery in Washington D.C. It was Singer who first coined the definition of 'miniature' in his catalogue for the exhibition *Early Chinese Miniatures*, at the China House Gallery / China Institute in America in New York, in 1977. His study was the departure point for this dissertation.

As far as we know, since the end of the 20th century, (early) Chinese miniatures have been the focus of only seven private collections distributed across China (3), Japan (1), Europe (2) and the United States of America (1). Five of these collectors have made their collections publicly accessible (wholly or in part) through exhibitions or publications in the form of a journal article or accompanying exhibition catalogue.

Museum collections provide limited access to miniatures for research purposes. This is largely because their efforts are spent on increasing visitor numbers through exhibitions with wide-ranging appeal, and they suffer from a lack of manpower, and time. That said, a growing number of museums have digitised their collections, which are now accessible online. And, of course, while it's wonderful to be able to search a museum's collection electronically, real life research is irreplaceable.

The problems with what is referred to as 'public accessibility' lie in another area. In museums, miniatures are rarely exhibited for what they are – namely, as a separate category. There are, however, several exceptions to this rule. The first concerns the three miniatures of Yazhou earthenware on display in a separate showcase at the Yaozhou Ceramics Kiln Museum in Weinan, unaccompanied by any details about the phenomenon of miniatures itself. The second exception relates to the groups of early miniatures exhibited at the Royal Ontario Museum as part of the permanent display of early Chinese art, amidst their life-size counterparts. The third exception is the inclusion of bronze miniatures in group presentations in various museums, to trace the development of early Chinese Buddhist sculpture.

That museums display such a relatively small number of miniatures is due to unfamiliarity with the phenomenon of miniatures, their lesser presentation value compared to larger objects that speak more to the imagination and, lastly, because the attractive presentation of small objects like jewellery poses challenges. The vast number of objects in a museum that compete for visitors' attention, is another sticking point. The 'less is more' approach, so typical of the presentation mode favoured by Asian collectors, couldn't be more different. Such difficulties are compounded by the very thing that makes miniatures so fascinating: their diminutive size. A tiny object, held and admired by its owner from every side, almost never translates well into a museum setting. Almost never.

For which reason, the dissertation concludes by proposing a way to circumvent this issue, by adopting a method that appeals especially to children. The proposal refers to the 'Show (Look, Hear, Touch, Smell) & Tell Carousel', a way for children to discover miniatures and, through them, Chinese culture in general by offering an experience that engages all the senses.

This study led to an improved definition of early Chinese miniatures, as well as to more insight into their functions, material application, representations and meanings. Placing them in their direct literary and cultural context produced some interesting coincidence hits, too. This is especially true for the attribution to the ongoing discussion about the function of the *cong*, for the 'discovery' of the early Chinese *toggle*, and for signaling of the fetish-function of Chinese mother and child figurines, whose heads are broken off, a phenomenon until now was only known from later Thai Sawankhalok figurines.

Furthermore, it is useful that someone, at a time when an increasingly specialization necessarily leads to countless detailed studies, occasionally sees the whole. For this research it was necessary to take into consideration the entire field of Chinese arts with the exception of painting and calligraphy, ranging from architecture to sculpture and all the applied arts.

To describe the development of the phenomenon in all its facets it turned out to be necessary to examine per discipline how miniatures relate to their 'big brothers'. In many cases, but not always, this development ran parallel. It was precisely these differences that yielded interesting information.

Another aspect is the fact that this category of objects stayed out of sight for so long both in China and the West. This study provides no explanation, or at least none that is supported by evidence. A possible explanation is, that all miniatures were long regarded as toys and therefore not important enough for a serious investigation. That fact is even more striking when it comes to mind how much attention has been paid to the Japanese *netsuke* both by collectors and in scholarly literature.

An equally interesting aspect is the space that the miniatures offered their makers for a realistic portrayal of everyday, or even intimate and humorous, matters. All the more, because this was virtually impossible in secular and religious art. This addition to our image of the early Chinese society provided by the official visual arts and literature is valuable.

More insight has been provided, too, into the musealisation and globalization of Chinese miniatures. The current developments in these fields appear to be topical. The study of these developments has drastically changed my own view of dealing with cultural objects from other societies.