

ASIAN ART IN THE WORLD

Historical influences on culture and society

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— SINGAPORE

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ABSTRACT

A Transpacific Cabinet

The fall-front cabinet, also called a writing desk, is one of the most prevalent types of furniture in the early modern period. They were commonly seen in European interiors and appear frequently in inventory listings of the seventeenth and eighteenth century. Merchants, officials, and travellers favoured these cabinets for their portability and functionality, effectively making them one of the most commissioned works in Asia. While their form and function remained largely the same, those made in Asia often used various specialized decorative techniques.

This talk focuses on a cabinet made in the seventeenth century in the Philippines. It serves as an example of the confluence of cross-cultural elements, with its European form and Chinese and Filipino designs. The image of the foundation myth of Tenochtitlan, the Aztec capital city, decorating the interior of the fall-front cover suggests that this cabinet was a special commission for an important patron. Drawing on similar examples from public and private collections, this talk will explore how the cabinet can be thought of as a representative global object of the early modern world.

ABOUT THE SPEAKER

Clement Onn is the Deputy Director of Curatorial & Research and Principal Curator of Asian Export Art and Peranakan at the Asian Civilisations Museum, Singapore. His research interest lies in exchanges between Asia and Europe in the 16th and 18th

centuries. His primary focus is on trading networks and the spread of the Christian faith in Asia, particularly in the Indian Subcontinent, Japan, China, and the Philippines. He has co-curated the exhibition *Christianity in Asia: Sacred Art and Visual Splendour* (2016), *Port Cities: Multicultural Emporiums of Asia 1500 - 1900* (2016) and the most recent *Life in Edo x Russel Wong in Kyoto* (2021).