

Introduction

We are pleased to invite you to the Interdisciplinary International Conference titled: **"East Meets West: Cultural and Economic Contacts between Croatia and Asia from Marco Polo to the Present"**, organized by the Faculty of Croatian Studies at the University of Zagreb. The conference is scheduled for May 2024 (**Wednesday 8 to Saturday 11 2024**) in Zagreb and Korčula, Croatia.

We are currently trying to acquire the most favourable conditions for the Conference, sparing the delegates from as many expenses as possible, but at the same time obtaining the best venue and conditions for everybody. We shall be back to you with more information pertaining to these matters later on, around February and in our 2nd Circular, you shall be informed about everything with all the necessary details.

The official languages of the Conference will be English and Croatian.

Please feel free to come back to us with your abstract paper and poster proposals, as well as to send us your inquiries, should you have any.

Kindly, do not forget to fill in the REGISTRATION FORM and send us your abstracts until **18th January 2024**. You will be notified about the acceptance of your abstracts by the end of February 2024. The 2nd Call for Papers will probably follow with the programme at that time.

1st Call for Papers

On the occasion of the 700th anniversary of the death of the great explorer Marco Polo, we propose the organisation of a scientific Conference that will explore and discuss the historical, economic, and cultural relations between Croatia and Asia.

While Marco Polo is known for his travels in Asia, his legacy in Croatia, especially on the island of Korčula, inspires exploring the deep connections between these two regions.

The aim is to enrich the understanding of the mutual relations between Croatia (and South East Europe in general) and Asia, both in the past and the present, and to encourage further research and cooperation between the two regions.

The conference is primarily envisioned as an Interdisciplinary Scientific gathering where prominent historians, archaeologists, economists, ethnographers, sociologists, linguists, and cultural critics will present their research. It will also include a student section where students of all levels will have the opportunity to present their papers or posters.

The main themes of the Conference are:

1. Marco Polo: A Journey through Life and Legacy

Marco Polo, a name synonymous with exploration and discovery, embarked on an extraordinary journey that forever changed the map of the world. Born into a Venetian merchant family in the late 13th century, Polo's travels took him far beyond the familiar confines of Europe, deep into the heart of Asia. One intriguing aspect of Polo's story involves the island of Korčula, located in modern-day Croatia. Legend has it that Polo was born here, although historical records predominantly point to Venice as his birthplace. This debate forms a fascinating part of Polo's narrative, blending myth with historical facts. The truth of Polo's connection to Korčula remains a subject of scholarly discussion, adding a layer of mystery to his already captivating story. Polo's travels in Asia, particularly his extended stay in the court of the Mongol Emperor Kublai Khan, opened a window to the East for Europeans. His detailed accounts of the wealth, customs, and technology of Asia sparked a surge in curiosity and ambition among European explorers. This led to an era of exploration that pushed the boundaries of the known world. Polo's influence on later explorers like Christopher Columbus and Vasco da Gama is undeniable, as his accounts fueled their quests and shaped their journeys.

2. Historical Relations between Croatia and Asia

The history of trade relations between Croatia and Asia is a narrative rich with early trade routes and diplomatic missions, marking centuries of significant commercial interactions. These trade routes, both overland and maritime, were pivotal in establishing and maintaining a network of trade between Croatia and various regions in Asia. Initially, these routes were bolstered by diplomatic missions aimed at securing and facilitating trade agreements. These missions were instrumental in building trust and understanding between

Croatia and its Asian counterparts, ensuring the smooth exchange of goods. They were the backbone of a thriving trade network that spanned vast geographical areas. Over time, these routes became lifelines for the exchange of a diverse array of goods. This exchange was not just a commercial activity but a bridge connecting distant lands, fostering a trade relationship that would endure for centuries. It's a story of how trade transcends borders, connecting people and places across vast distances.

3. Cross-Cultural Exchange: The Influence of Asian Culture on Croatia and Beyond

The intertwining of Asian and Croatian cultures has created a rich tapestry of cross-cultural influence, marked by historical and contemporary interactions. This exchange, evident in various aspects of life, has been shaped by missionary work, monastic activities, and modern cultural initiatives. Historically, the individuals played a pivotal role in introducing elements of Asian spiritual and philosophical thought to Croatia and the South European region, or Europe in general. Conversely, European culture also made its way to Asia through similar channels. Missionaries and monks, through their travels and teachings, introduced aspects of European religious and cultural heritage to Asian communities. This two-way exchange fostered a deeper understanding and appreciation of each culture's uniqueness. In contemporary times, this cultural exchange has expanded through various initiatives and cooperative endeavours. Art exhibitions, cultural festivals, academic exchanges, and collaborative projects have become common platforms for showcasing the richness of both Asian and Croatian cultures. These contemporary initiatives not only celebrate the historical connections but also pave the way for future collaborations and mutual enrichment.

4. The Interplay of Science and Economic Relations in Knowledge Exchange:

The exchange of knowledge has been a driving force behind scientific progress and economic relationships. This ongoing process of information sharing has significantly influenced the advancement of science, shaping our understanding and interactions with the world. Throughout history, this dynamic exchange has been essential for growth and innovation in various scientific fields. At the heart of this knowledge exchange is language, a vital tool for conveying, adapting, and conserving information. Language enables the articulation of complex scientific ideas and theories, allowing for these concepts to be shared across different cultures and epochs. It's the mechanism through which scientific knowledge

is not only communicated but also preserved and built upon over generations. In the current landscape, the convergence of science and economics plays a pivotal role in knowledge transfer, presenting opportunities and challenges. Economic collaborations between nations and organizations drive the dissemination of technological innovations and best practices, propelling development and economic expansion. These partnerships often lead to the creation and enlargement of markets, benefiting economies worldwide. However, such collaborations also bring forth challenges, including issues related to intellectual property, fair access to technology, and balancing commercial objectives with scientific advancement. Addressing these challenges is essential to ensure that knowledge exchange continues to foster scientific and economic progress.

Preliminary Draft of the Programme

Wednesday, May 8th 2024

- Welcome & Opening Remarks
- Keynote lecture
- Session 1
- Coffee Break
- Session 2
- Lunch Break
- Session 3
- Student Workshop
- Book Presentation
- Concert
- Evening Reception

Thursday, May 9th 2024

- Session 4
- Coffee Break
- Session 5
- Lunch Break
- Poster presentation
- Round Table Discussion
- Concert
- Closing Ceremonies

Friday, May 10th 2024

- Departure to Korčula, Croatia (optional)
- Visit to Interpretation Centre

Social and Cultural Activities

Saturday, May 11th 2024

Free time

Leaving for Zagreb in the afternoon

**Please submit your abstracts by the 18th of January 2024
to the following e-mail: 2024ConferenceAsiaCroatia@gmail.com**

On behalf of the Organizing Committee
Eva Katarina Glazer & Zvonimir Stopić