

A Journey of Research in Central Europe

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My childhood dream of traveling to distant lands finally came true when I embarked on my doctoral studies. My first impression of Slovenia is an indelible one: a lovely country that I can only compare to a huge park, utterly safe, and stunningly clean; its inhabitants few in number, but active. Walking around the dormitory on weekends in Bežglad, I seldom met anyone. Friends often carelessly left their keys in the car or under the doormat. In my last year of study I moved to a village, Gotna Vas, near Novo Mesto, where I finished my dissertation. Novo Mesto's population is less than that of Ljubljana, and a train connects to the capital every day. Zdenka, my landlady, took good care of me, feeding me organic salad, and taking me shopping in her car. I savored life in a peaceful European village. So many times Zdenka and I made our way over land covered with snow or spring grass, and always ended up in the coffee shop. It was she who taught me Slovene; I miss her, and was saddened to read of her death.

Jana Rosker's paper and other work stimulated my first research in Ljubljana. Jana is versatile: researching as a sinologist, composing songs, and writing fictions, poems. After eight months of waiting, I was permitted to enroll in the University of Ljubljana to pursue my doctoral thesis on Trieste and Austro-Chinese Trade from 1869 to 1918. At the same time I taught Classical Chinese in Jana's department, Asian and African Studies. The department consists of only two sections, the Japanese and the Chinese; students were asked to choose their major before they graduated. There I got to know the Japanese lecturers, and am still in contact with some of them today. Slovene students have a good ear; after only a year or, even, half a year in Japan or China, they could speak the language well. Reading Chinese, though, is harder for them. One of my students, Berusan (Professor Bostjan Bertalanic), earned his doctoral degree at the University of Tokyo, and now teaches in Josai. Ten years later, at a conference in Tokyo, we remembered the good time we had drinking coffee in Ljubljana. Slovenia indeed has excellent coffee, especially with double cream.

Archivo di Stato di Trieste

Trieste was the monarchy's most important sea port. According to Kent Roberts Greenfield, in 1838 it ranked second only to Marseilles among the 15 leading ports of the Mediterranean basin. In the first half of the nineteenth century the colonial products that still entered east-central Europe by way of the Mediterranean found their chief entrepot at Trieste rather than at Venice.¹ Trieste, therefore, played a role in the project of Karl Ludwig von Bruck (1798- 1860), known as "Mitteleuropa" – the plan to bring all of Europe east of the Rhine under a single economic and political administration. Even though this project was just an empty dream, Trieste then enjoyed more governmental investment and attention than it does today, because it was the first port of the Habsburg Monarchy. After the Crimean War (1854-56) it entered a period of stagnation that lasted to the end of the century – nearly 40 years. The opening of the Suez Canal (1869) did not help. Trieste returned to prominence at

¹ Kent Roberts Greenfield, "Commerce and New Enterprise at Venice, 1830-48," in *The Journal of Modern History*, 11:3 (1939), pp. 313-333.

the turn of century.

Austrian Lloyd, the monarchy's national maritime company, with headquarters at Trieste, has dispatched steamers to Hong Kong since 1880, and to Shanghai since 1992. It's a pity that the company's archive was destroyed in World War II, and dispersed in Vienna. I did not chase it, because I had my hands full with other large archives. Austrian Lloyd was purchased by Taiwan's Evergreen in 1998.

With an introduction by Dr. Aleksej Kalc, I worked in the Archivio di Stato di Trieste for half a year. This archive contains 104,500 items, including 295 parchments, 31,204 drawings, 21 seals, and more than a thousand photos. Out of its rich collections, I used the commercial chamber archive; to me, though, the most useful source was the newspaper, *L'Osservatore Triestino*, issued by Austrian Lloyd. It reports world news, as well as Lloyd's activities. I do not know Italian, so kind and warm Archivist, Anna Spech, checked over 60 years' worth of the newspaper for me. It was while perusing this archive that I discovered that Idrija mercury had been exported to China. Then I wondered if I would make many more such discoveries about Idrija in Vienna. Fortunately, I did.

The following excerpt from *L'Osservatore Triestino* describes Austrians enjoying the good life in Tianjin.

On Sunday evening in the *Schiller* Casino, Mr. Federico Ehrenfeld, the Chief of the Austro-Hungarian police in Tianjin, held an interesting conference with slides.Here (in Tianjin) are the colonies of the (9) powers that took part in the expedition against the Boxers in 1900, including the only Austrian colony in China, the importance of which is little known or appreciated in the homeland. Mr Ehrenfeld went on to describe the administrative, military, and security organizations of this city, the activity of the Austrian companies, and the population of the Austrian sector, which has grown to 60,000. After recalling the importance of the Imperial Navy, he commemorated those who had fallen in that distant land for the greater glory of the Monarchy. The speaker was warmly applauded at the end of his conference. (*L'Osservatore Triestino*, 28 March 1911. No. 71, p. 2, "*L'Austrian-Ungheria in Cina.*")

By day I worked in the archive, and afterward I wandered along the streets, watching people. Research pushes me to travel further, and further fulfill my childhood dream. Trieste is a very interesting sea port, at the geographic nexus of the Slavic, German and Italian peoples. There I could see buildings in the Habsburg style, drink Illy coffee, and listen to the Slovene conversation at the neighboring table. People seem to have forgotten the bitter conflicts of their history. Trieste is famous for the burja, a punishing winter wind not unlike Taiwan's typhoon. I was so shocked by the rain and wind I could hardly walk.

The Austrian State Archive

Needless to say I had to go to Vienna, and stayed there for eight months. Vienna preserves and nurtures all kinds of versions of itself: Fin-de-siecle Vienna, Biedermeier Vienna, opera and waltz Vienna, Sisi's Vienna... Endless tourists make their pilgrimages.

In Vienna I lived in a Catholic girls' dormitory, and met very many talented girls from a number of countries. Summer brought us several medical students from Germany who had obtained trainings and were spending their holidays there. With

them we drank Taiwanese tea, and went to operas on half-priced tickets. Others, from Korea, were there to study music. I still remember Sophia, who, though seriously ill, diligently practiced the organ before her exam. I had no idea that the organ is such a complex instrument to play. A six-year-old Polish girl violinist lived in our place all by herself. American girls were training in the ballet school. The Naschmarkt, however, was my favorite place, because I could get cans of Taiwanese and other Asian food there.

While the reference consultants in the Austrian State Archive are very professional – some experts could explain things in both English and Italian – I nevertheless continued to rely on Dr. Walter Lukan for help. Students, researchers, and writers were busy at work within. One man told me he was a writer, and that he had written six books about war, and was now working on the seventh. I met a nice girl who collected and copied material about the Jews for the Israeli Government. The reading room was bright and comfortable, and users were allowed to make photocopies themselves.

It was a moving experience to pass my hands over the original old papers. Among them I found the personal details of Hermann Kobxxxx, an Austrian merchant in Manchuria.

He was born on March 21, 1865. He married. His wife, Rosalie Kleinmann, born May 25, 1873 in Odessa, provided founding capital for his business. Their marriage seems to have been in trouble, because she often traveled to Switzerland, France, and Spain with their three children, with him in Siberia. On January 15, 1906 Kobxxxx moved to Hamburg, renting a flat in Schaeferkampsallee 28 at the price of 4,000 Marks. In addition, he rented another three offices for his company, Hermann Kobxxxx & Co., in Raboisen 5 for 1,600 Marks. He traveled to Siberia every summer on business, while his brother, Samuel Gabriel Kobxxxx, remained in Moscow for long periods to oversee the firm in Russia, Siberia, and Manchuria. He exported iron and steel wares and agricultural tools and machinery, and imported raw materials from Siberia and Manchuria. During the Russo-Japanese War, the Japanese army in Port Arthur confiscated goods to the value of about 2600 Rubles from him because he had helped the Russians. Despite this setback, he seems to have profited from the war. His business progressed well in 1906 and 1907, but later he seems to have had financial problems. Until 1912 his company had branches in at least four cities: Hamburg, Moscow, Harbin, and Vladivostok. In 1911 he helped establish the first Chinese Manchuria Export Company, and became its European representative in view of the large amounts of capital he had in both China and Hamburg. (He had, for example, two million marks in the Hamburg firm Rickmers & Co.) Previously he had held shares in the German company, Schenker & Co.; but a disagreement ended their relationship, and he turned to Rickmers. They had established the Rickmers Siberia Line, which carried all of Kobxxxx' goods, and he had major credit with them, all of which led the Hamburg-America Line to accuse him of renegeing on their agreement. He was famous for his extraordinary diligence, capability, cleverness, and unlimited entrepreneurial spirit, and also for being an expert on East Asia. Austrian merchants had difficulties with credit, but Kobxxxx could get credit with more than one German company. When he learned that Austria intended to appoint an honorary consul in Harbin, he vigorously lobbied for the position. (HHStA AR F 8/108, Konsularsitze 1880-1918 Charbin)

Skoda Archive

Today Pilsen is famous for its beer and for Skoda, a very important company in the Czech Republic. In the monarchical era Skoda sold the Chinese not cars, but weapons and industrial facilities. (Today, of course, their cars are driven in Taiwan.) Founded by Emil Ritter in 1866, in 1899 it became competition for Krupp, especially in Manchuria. Fortunately, unlike Austrian Lloyd, Skoda has preserved records documenting the development of the company from the very beginning up to recent times (2005), including current publicity material. Visiting this archive with the help of Dr. Ivana Bakešova, a Czech specialist in Chinese history, I discovered major transactions between Skoda and China, as shown in the following table. In Prague I lost my bag and my passport, and had to apply for a new passport and for every visa, because the Taiwanese did not yet have the right to use a Schengen visa.

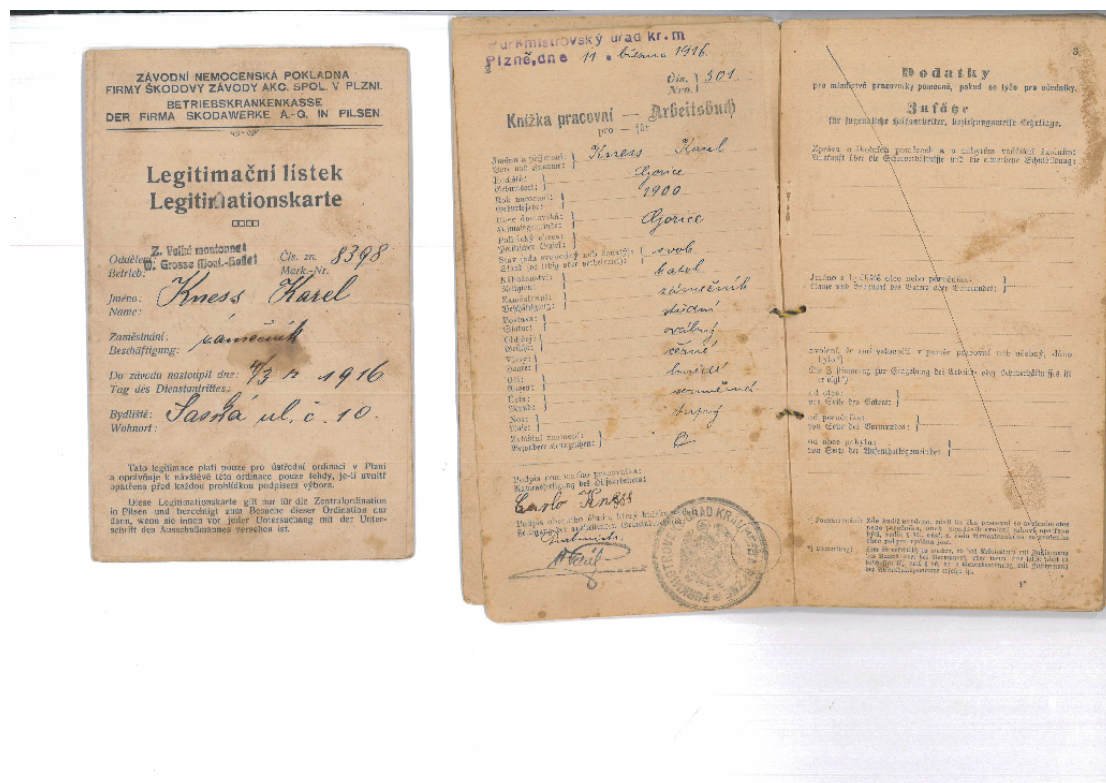
At the turn of the century the Skoda Company cooperated with the Russians on railway construction. They helped build the Chinese Eastern Railway, making everything from railroad bridges to cranes, elevators, and hydraulic presses. Their “compound tender locomotive type 229 for passenger trains” was especially suited to mountainous terrain. Skoda also sold arms in Manchuria, as the following table shows. Skoda sold weapons to the Chinese under the agency of the German company Arnhole Karberg.

Table 1: Skoda sales in China 1899-1913 (PAŠZ, Čina 1912-16, Ros)

Year	Contents
1899	1 (37mm) mountain cannon with ammunition, 7 units (57mm) automatic field cannons plus 36 (37mm) automatic cannons with ammunition.
1904	9,000 cartridges for 8 mm machine guns.
1906	3 (8mm) machine gun with 18,000 cartridges, 2 automatic cannons (47 and 37 mm), with 200 artillery shells, and 4 machine guns.
1910	18 (75mm) field cannons, with 27 ammunition cars, and three tooling and repair cars.
1911	2 (7.9 mm) machine guns.
1912	12 (7.9 mm) machine guns.
1913	96 maneuver barrels for (7.9 mm) machine guns, 4 automatic practice cannons, and 40 automatic cannons.



The Skoda Archive includes a rich collection of photographs. The above photo show Qing officials visiting for a weapons deal.



Skoda's worker's handbook of Schoda.

Professor Peter Vodopivec is my major mentor (my other two mentors are Prof. Mitja Saje and Prof. Marta Verginella), and also my permanent mentor. Before I came along, he had already helped and supervised several foreign students, and always generously encouraged the young generation. It was on his instructions that I went to the Trieste and Vienna Archives. Before I departed he arranged for me to meet Prof. Kalc and Prof. Lukan. After the work of collecting in the archives comes the challenge of organizing the material. Writing, though, is the most important and the most difficult stage of doctoral research. Prof. Vodopivec taught me to write my dissertation starting with the easiest chapter, not the first. This method I still employ today. The easiest chapter is usually either the one with the richest source materials or the one involving the deepest thinking. By the time I have finished the first chapter, the second has become less onerous. Then, when I write the second one, I revise the first with new inspiration. I submitted the work chapter by chapter over the course of a year, and we discussed each one after he had examined it. My writing process was smooth; because it proceeded smoothly, I did not waste any time, and finished my dissertation before the end of my residence visa. My excellent rapport with Prof. Vodopivec is inscribed in the book of my life's experience forever. It was he who showed me how to help and support students, and I try to do the same.