

Inner Asian and Altaic Studies Lecture
Harvard University

April 7, 2021

1:15 pm EST

Online event

[Register for Zoom link](#)

Sarah Laursen

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Chinese Art at the Harvard Art Museum



Sarah Laursen. Photo credit: Keith MacDonald

The Invisible Outsider: Non-Chinese “Chinese” Art in the Harvard Art Museums

The Harvard Art Museums’ database identifies over 6,600 objects in the collection as “Chinese.” But are they really? At least one third of China’s dynastic history—from its unification by the first emperor in 221 BCE until the fall of the Qing dynasty in 1912—took place under foreign rule. Even when an emperor could claim Han Chinese ancestry, his domain was frequently home to sizeable non-Chinese populations. This talk will explore the identities of so-called “Chinese” objects in the collection that might more rightly be associated with groups like the Xianbei. The logic behind the categories of “culture” and “place” in museum metadata will also be considered, along with possibilities for increasing the visibility of the ethnic minorities all too often erased from Chinese art history.