

## **Workshop: From Arts to Economy: Nineteenth-Century Iran in Global Contexts**

February 8, 2026 at the Hongo Satellite, Tokyo University of Foreign Studies

### **Abstracts**

#### **Qajar Iran in the ‘Glocal’ History of the Kashan Lustre Tile Panel: Re-Use and Re-Framing in Persian Islamic Architecture**

Markus Ritter

The history of re-framing and re-use of the celebrated lustre tile panel from the mihrab of the Maydan Mosque in Kashan has hitherto been a modern European one: it was acquired for an English private collection of Persian art by 1897, and then, in 1927, for Germany’s first and foremost museum of Islamic art, where it was placed on public display in dialogue with artworks from other regions. In a previous study, I showcased this panel as a protagonist in the modern reception of Persian Islamic art and a catalyst in the art-historical study of lustre tiles. Like other media, it participates in a larger ‘glocal’ history across time: locally produced but globally disseminated and perceived as Islamic art in the modern period.

This paper expands such histories once more to Iran, reminding that the lustre tile panel must already have been re-used before it was taken to Europe. While the Maydan Mosque was founded in the 15<sup>th</sup> century, the panel is more than two centuries older, dated to the 13<sup>th</sup> century. Scholars have assumed that it survived from a predecessor mosque or was taken from a Shiite shrine and installed in the mosque. I demonstrate, based on evidence from the building, that the panel was indeed added, and that textual sources suggest the late 19<sup>th</sup> century. The paper raises the question of spolia and re-use in Persian Islamic architecture, and of re-framing a medieval artefact in a later building and at a much later time. It asks how the installation of the panel in the mosque, preserved and restaged as mihrab, might be explained in light of local history and the rising historical interest in monuments in late Qajar Iran.

Emigration, the Madrasa, and the Library: The Life and the Legacy of Mohammad Hoseyn Khan Marvi

Nobuaki Kondo

After Aqa Mohammad Khan Qajar chose Tehran as the capital of his new state, Tehran gradually became the center of religious studies. At the end of the 19th Century, 43 madrasas existed there, surpassing the number in Mashhad or 'Atabat at that time. The number of students reached 1,463, only slightly smaller than the 1,710 in 'Atabat. By 1880, the year of the Sepahsalar Madrasa (now known as the Mottahari Madrasa), the most prominent madrasa in the city was the Marvi Madrasa, established in 1816 by Mohammad Hoseyn Khan Marvi (d. 1819). According to the French traveler Rochechouart (1867), the madrasa had two chairs of theology and philosophy, 40 rooms, and 80 students. It held rich endowments, including 75 shops in the city, which contributed to its social and economic influence. The most prominent mojtaheds in Tehran were appointed as waqf administrators. It also served as a mosque, and police records noted 300 visitors on one day during Ramadan in 1888. The madrasa had a rich library, and Mohammad Hoseyn Khan Marvi endowed it with 272 books. Although Markus Ritter addressed this madrasa in his monumental monograph on religious architecture in early Qajar Iran, its social and cultural importance in Tehran's religious landscape remained largely unexplored, emphasizing its role in community development.

This presentation examines how an emigrant from Marv, via Bukhara, established such an important institution. The presenter will first discuss his career as an emigrant, then analyze the features of his madrasa and library. Several unpublished documents regarding the madrasa are reviewed, revealing the process of its construction and its significance in the development of Tehran's religious education.

## **Writing the History of Economy and Trade in Qajar Iran - Challenges and Perspectives**

Christoph Werner

Economy and trade of nineteenth-century Iran have not received the attention they deserve despite their obvious importance. Political history and intellectual and religious developments have dominated the field, often within the overarching concepts of modernity and modernization.

It is true that, for most of the Qajar period, economy and trade in Iran remained traditional and self-contained. They were limited in scope, variety, and volume. This is not surprising given the small population numbers and limited natural resources during most of the nineteenth century.

On the other hand, Qajar economy and trade do not cover a homogeneous period. All sectors underwent significant changes and transformations, accelerating from the 1870s onward and continuing into the early twentieth century. These changes affected lifestyles, culinary cultures, clothing and fashion, agricultural production, artisanal activities, modes of transportation, proto-industrialization, manufacturing, life expectancies, and health and sanitation. Economic transformations fermented social unrest and instability, while also leading to population growth, which in turn laid the groundwork for the urbanization that would become so prominent a century later.

Foreign influence, or "penetration," has been used as a dominant motif to describe these changes, reflecting an imperial and colonial mindset. Recently, this motif has been reframed as "entering or becoming part of the global economy," disregarding the fact that Iran has certainly never been an isolated island but has formed an integral part of global trade networks since the early modern period. The indigenous, local, or native perspective has often been disregarded, partly due to a lack of sources and partly due to a persistent lack of interest in the economic lives of ordinary Iranians from all social classes. Marxist perspectives, popular in the 1970s, have lost ground. Meanwhile, diasporic Iranian elites writing their family histories tend to overestimate or underplay their roles.

This presentation will outline some of the major arguments of past research and focus on new sources and trajectories for the future.