

# **The Dresden Porcelain Project: Micromosm of A Global Trade**

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Japanese and Chinese Porcelain Collections of the Porzellansammlung,  
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## **Abstract**

The Porzellansammlung of the Staatliche Kunstsammlungen Dresden, Germany, has preserved one of the largest and most important holdings of Chinese and Japanese porcelain dating from the late 17th and early 18th centuries. Acquired during the reign of Augustus the Strong (1670-1733), Elector of Saxony and King of Poland, these East Asian porcelain treasures were not only exceptionally well documented, but the original written inventories are still largely extant. Such a combination of an early, extensive 18th-century collection of more than 8000 East Asian export porcelain objects and their contemporary descriptions exists nowhere else in the world and represents a unique time capsule of the history of collecting and trade between Europe and Asia at that time.

The current research project on these holdings will, for the first time, offer a complete overview of the former Royal Porcelain Collection in relation to the original and unpublished 18th century inventories. For anyone interested in the impact of East Asia on European culture, the forming of encyclopaedic collections and the history of East Asian porcelain in the West, this project will be of invaluable importance. For the overall history of East Asian Porcelain it additionally offers an in-depth survey of trade and taste of the period; it will provide a tool for more precise dating and will act as the primary reference guide to establish the authenticity of similar objects in other world collections. Moreover, a thorough evaluation of the unique inventories will provide a new understanding of the role that East Asian porcelain played during the Proto-globalization era. Beside their mere functionality, these porcelain objects served as an exotic and luxury commodity which helped to shape the knowledge, comprehension and development of cultural and artistic exchange between China, Japan and Europe at that time.

This lecture will address in which way the Asian porcelain collections were appropriated at the Dresden court where they were both used and displayed by Augustus the Strong at his palaces. The king's huge collection not only served to

underline his personal status and good taste, but it also functioned as a treasure-trove of shapes and decorations, to inspire and be used by those who were employed in his own porcelain manufactory at Meissen, where the first European porcelain was invented in 1709. At the outset Meissen wares were highly dependent on Chinese and Japanese porcelain models to meet the standards of an established international market for exotic East Asian vessels and to provide the king with copies of his Asian porcelain to attain the immense volume needed for his ambitious plans to furnish an entire castle with porcelain objects. It was only his death that prevented the realisation of this daunting project: the subsequent history of the collection since then will also be briefly examined.

**keywords:** Chinese export porcelain; Dresden Collection; Palais number; Augustus the Strong; Meissen porcelain; globalisation; Chinoiserie; history of collecting; porcelain for status and display