

# Chinese style in the Baroque city: A Report on the SKD Programme

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According to the cooperation plan of the British Museum and the Staatliche Kunstsammlungen Dresden (SKD), as a member of International Training Programme (ITP), I am very honored to have participated in the research project of Porcelain Museum (Porzellanmmlung) in Dresden from October 19, 2014 to January 16, 2015. Now, I would like to summarize my work and learning there over the past three months.

## 1. About the Programme

I joined the research project "China and Japan: Ceramics of the 17th -18th century", focusing on the porcelain wares that were purchased by August the Strong (r. 1670-1733).

Collections of August the Strong can be divided into two parts: one is Chinese and Japanese porcelain purchased from the East India Company in the Netherlands, the other is Meissen porcelain produced in the small town near Dresden. Because this cooperation programme is aimed at the collections of "17-18<sup>th</sup> century Chinese and Japanese ceramics", I mainly worked in the Chinese and Japanese porcelain storeroom. Mostly purchased by August the Strong during the early 18th century, these porcelain wares date from the Ming dynasty, Wanli reign, to the Qing dynasty, Kangxi reign (1573-1722), and are considered to have been manufactured in such important kilns as Jingdezhen, Dehua, Zhangzhou, and Yixing in China.

August the Strong commissioned the first inventory for his collection in 1721. But unfortunately, he was not able to identify the kilns of the porcelain wares correctly. Therefore there are mistakes and confusions in this inventory. In the First and the Second World Wars, part of the collections were outflowed or destroyed, so my job was sorting through the collection, dating them, and identifying the kilns.

After a brief review of the whole collection, I concentrated myself on the following issues:

- (a) The Chinese official kiln wares in the August the Strong's collection;
- (b) How to produce a dragon vase - kilns in Jingdezhen during the early Qing dynasty (1644-1911);
- (c) How to display and use these wares in the European court during the 17<sup>th</sup>-18<sup>th</sup> century.

Except for the collection of August the Strong, the Porcelain Museum also collects Chinese porcelain wares gathered either by donation or by purchase during the 19<sup>th</sup> or early 20<sup>th</sup> century. Because no original inventory about these pieces is left, some of their dates and origins are uncertain. Through discussion with experts in the Porcelain Museum, I identified the dates of these pieces. Some of them are different from the previous scholar's opinions. I have sent my personal opinion and the reason in written form to the museum's curator.

In addition, I am preparing for my formal thesis now, which is about the porcelain collection of August the Strong. During the reign of this monarch, China and Europe had increasing communications. Under the circumstances, August the Strong's collection changed and expanded constantly. At the beginning, he accepted Chinese wares passively. But gradually, he was so devoted to the collection that he designed the decoration and determined the size of the vessels himself. Consequently, his design, with apparent Baroque style, also influenced and enriched the traditional Chinese porcelain style. August the Strong also imitated Chinese porcelain styles and commissioned the manufacture of Chinese porcelain wares. Finally, he created Meissen porcelain in 1709, which is the first real porcelain in European. What he had accomplished has changed the global history of porcelain. So I want to talk about the consequences and implications of his collection in my thesis, the topic of which is "Chinese style versus Baroque: the types, displaying style, and significance of August's collection". I plan to finish it this year.

## 2. Academic Lecture

On 22 November 2014, I gave a lecture in Heidelberg University. The topic is "Official Kilns and Civil Kilns during the Period from the Late Ming to Qing Dynasty". I addressed ten issues in the lecture, including the concept of official kilns, official kilns and workshops at Jingdezhen, the use of official ware by the imperial court, production and funding, official models, supervision of official kilns, craftsmen for the official kilns, unsuccessful products, transportation routes of the official kilns, and civilian kilns.

## 3. Visits and Trips

In order to do my research, I have visited museums and castles near Dresden, including Pillnitz, Residenzschloss, Japanisches Palais Jagerhof, and Furstenzug,. From the traditional architecture to the art collections, I found Dresden a true Baroque city in Germany. Most pieces were collected by August the Strong, and a

majority of the heritage buildings were constructed in that period. Especially, almost every castle or building has a Chinese style room or a Chinese pavilion. It is a very fashionable idea to use the Chinese porcelain to decorate the room. I know the proportion and the status of the Chinese porcelain wares in the European royal art collections during the 17<sup>th</sup> to 18<sup>th</sup> century.

Meissen, a small town in the northwest of Dresden, is the birthplace of European porcelain. I visited the Albrechtsburg, where Bottger and Tschirnhaus invented the porcelain 300 years ago. I also visited the porcelain manufactory and the museum and understand the development history of the German royal porcelain factory.

During the Christmas holiday, I visited some museums and castles in the other cities. Such as the Grassi Museum in Leipzig, The museum island in Berlin. Because I focused on the dragon vase in the Porcelain Museum in Dresden, I visited Charlottenburg in Berlin. Before being displayed in Zwinger, the dragon vase was kept in this castle in the reign of Friedrich I, the Kingdom of Prussia. The castle is also decorated with a number of Chinese porcelain vessels.

#### 4. Gains

Firstly, in my professional field. Because of their similar historical backgrounds and functional properties, both the Palace Museum and the SKD are former royal palaces. They share many characteristics in common. As for the porcelain collection, they are both the emperor's collections from hundreds of years ago. The Chinese emperors collected and displayed the official kiln wares, so I had the opportunity to admire and study the official kiln wares in the Palace Museum. On the contrary, August the Strong purchased and collected most of the civil kiln wares. Finding out the difference between the two collections, I have a comprehensive view of the whole history of Chinese porcelain. It is very important for my research.

Secondly, about display. As soon as I stepped into to the Porcelain Museum, I felt as if I was travelling back to the Baroque period. Displaying objects in the original format is a good method for the royal palace museum. In the Palace Museum, we also adopt this method to design exhibitions which restore the traditional court life during the dynastic period. But obviously, this is very different between the Chinese and European court. How to display the Chinese porcelain in the Palace Museum, which is widely known as the Forbidden City? That is an important issue to tackle. We could have more exchanges on exhibitions in the future, which I think can be helpful for both curators and visitors.

Thirdly: apart from porcelain wares, August the Strong also collected different kinds of treasures. So the two museums also have more opportunity to cooperate in this territory.

Finally, thanks so much to the SKD, my colleagues from the International Relations and the porcelain department. They have given me so much help in my study and life in Dresden. Their generous help and assistance facilitates my overseas professional research a great deal and is highly appreciated.