

# The Influence of Chinese porcelain on Meissen porcelain

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**ABSTRACT.** *At the beginning of the 16th century, Chinese porcelain began to be exported to Europe. It also promoted the development of European ceramics manufacturing industry. Europeans began to imitate Chinese porcelain very early. Until the early 18th century, European craftsman made the first mature porcelain at Meissen in Germany. The patterns and shapes of Meissen porcelain were deeply influenced by Chinese porcelain. The "Onion pattern", "Figure pattern" and "Pagod" porcelain were all copied from Chinese porcelain.*

**KEYWORDS:** *Meissen porcelain; Chinese porcelain; Onion pattern; Pagod*

## 1. Introduction

At the beginning of the 16th century, with the Portuguese coming to China, they opened up hundreds of years of trade between China and Europe. Since the 17th century, the Netherlands has established the East India Company (VOC). The Netherlands has ushered in the most glorious golden age of its history. In the past 100 years, the Dutch have shipped Chinese goods to Europe. In the whole 17th century, the United Kingdom, France, Sweden and other European countries have established the East India Company. With the development of the British economy and the beginning of the industrial revolution, Britain gradually replaced the Netherlands and became the hegemony of maritime trade. In the three hundred years of trade history between China and Europe, porcelain has become the largest trade cargoes between China and Europe. Chinese porcelain has deeply influenced the life, art, economy and history of Europe. In order to reduce the loss of silver and meet the demand for porcelain, European countries began to imitate Chinese porcelain from the 13th century, but it was not until 1709 that the European craftsman produced the first mature porcelain in Meissen porcelain factory.

## 2. Brief History of Meissen Porcelain

Meissen porcelain is one of the most famous porcelains in Europe. The manufacture of Meissen porcelain has a close relationship with Augustus II the Strong[1]. Augustus II is extremely passionate about Chinese porcelain. He has more than 20,000 collections of Chinese and Japanese porcelain, and the famous “Japanese Palace” was built to collect and place Chinese porcelain. The Augustus II spent a lot of money to buy Chinese porcelain, which led to financial difficulties within the kingdom. In order to reduce the cost of money, but also to meet their own demand for Chinese porcelain, Augustus II began to look for craftsmen to make porcelain. In 1701, Augustus II hired a young alchemist John Friedrich Böttger to find the formula of porcelain. In order to reveal the secrets of porcelain, Böttger conducted thousands of experiments in the small town of Meissen. Finally, in 1709, he produced the first mature porcelain in Europe. In 1710, the royal porcelain manufacturing factory was established in Meissen. Between 1709 and 1720, Meissen porcelain was mainly copied from Chinese Yixing red stoneware and Chinese Dehua white porcelain. After 1720, the Meissen porcelain factory gradually grasped the blue and white porcelain painting technique and began to draw various patterns on the porcelain. The patterns on the early Meissen porcelain have a strong oriental style, and the ornamentation on porcelain is relatively simple. After several years of development and transformation, Chinese-style figures, pavilions, gardens, flowers and animals began to appear on Meissen porcelain. After the initial imitation of the Chinese porcelain ornamentation, the Meissen porcelain ornamentation began to adapt the Chinese-style ornamentation to create the “Onion Pattern”, “Willow Pattern” and so on. At the same time, Meissen porcelain also imitated the Japanese Kakiemon porcelain and Imari porcelain[2]. After the mid-18th century, the Meissen porcelain factory gradually declined. It was not until the 1930s that the Meissen porcelain was gradually restored to produce the porcelain. After the First World War, Max Adolf Pfeiffer began to operate the Meissen porcelain factory and carried out reforms in the manufacture of Meissen porcelain. The reforms promoted the artistic development of Meissen porcelain, and gradually made Meissen porcelain become one of the world famous porcelains.

## 3. The Impact of Chinese porcelain on Meissen porcelain

Meissen porcelain was deeply influenced by Chinese porcelain from the beginning of production. The Meissen porcelain manufacturing factory was first funded by Augustus II in order to produce Chinese-style porcelain and Japanese-style porcelain. In order to reduce the cost of money and to meet the needs of Augustus II, the Meissen porcelain was deeply influenced by Chinese porcelain from the beginning of the experiment.

Firstly, the imitation prototype of Meissen porcelain is Chinese porcelain. There are more than 20,000 pieces of Chinese and Japanese porcelain in the palace of Augustus II. Meissen craftsman even smashed Chinese porcelain in the experimental

stage for research. In 1709, Böttger cracked the formula of Chinese porcelain and produced a red pottery and white hard porcelain. The red pottery imitated the Chinese Yixing red stoneware, and the white porcelain imitated the Chinese Dehua white porcelain. At the beginning of the 17th century, Dehua porcelain began to be exported to Europe. Due to its low price and its production location was very close to the harbor, so a large number of Dehua porcelain was sold to Europe. There are many Dehua porcelains founded in shipwrecks in Southeast Asia and many European museums.

Secondly, Meissen porcelain began to imitate the ornamentation of Chinese porcelain in the early stage of production, especially after 1720. In 1720, painter Horoldt resigned from the Vienna porcelain factory and later worked in the Meissen porcelain factory. He is very passionate about Chinese porcelain. In 1709-1720, due to the immature painting technology of Meissen porcelain and manager Böttger did not like Chinese porcelain, there was almost no China-style pattern on the surface of the Meissen porcelain during this period. Between 1720-1731, Horoldt began to draw the China-style patterns on Meissen porcelain and the most famous "Onion Pattern" was created during this stage. According to the research of Dr. Ulrich Pietsch, the "Onion Pattern" was born in about 1728. The source of "Onion Pattern" is the Chinese "Three-fruit Pattern" blue-and-white porcelain plate produced in Jingdezhen during the Kangxi period. The "Three-fruit Pattern" consists of three kinds of fruits: "Peach", "Pomegranate" and "Chayote". In Chinese culture, peaches symbolize longevity, chayote symbolizes many blessings, and pomegranates symbolize many children. From the perspective of the model, the "Onion Pattern" of Meissen porcelain is drawn on a kind of big plates. The "Onion Pattern" plate is very similar to the "Three-fruit Pattern" plate. They are all wide-mouthed plates. In addition, the layout of "Onion Pattern" and "Three-fruit Pattern" is so similar too. The "Three-fruit Pattern" and "Onion Pattern" is divided into three parts—the mouth pattern, the middle pattern and the center pattern. The Meissen "Onion Pattern" is decorated with a large number of oriental plants, such as bamboo, chrysanthemum, peony, peach, etc., and Meissen's craftsman adds onions in decoration. The historical materials do not record why Meissen's painter painted onions on porcelain, the author believes that the "Onion Pattern" is likely to be a misunderstanding of the pomegranate by Meissen painter. Europeans can only observe Chinese artwork from the surface, but they can't really understand the meaning of the Chinese ornamentation, so the Europeans can only try to imitate the outline of the Chinese art. Because of the Pomegranate and Chayote are very rare in Europe, the painter mistakenly treats the pomegranate as an onion. In the three hundred years history of Meissen porcelain, "Onion Pattern" has become the most classic ornament of Meissen porcelain. Many of Europe's famous porcelain kilns, such as the Delft Kiln in the Netherlands, the Sèvres Kiln in France and the Chelsea Kiln in the UK, mimic the "Onion Pattern".

In addition to the classic "Onion Pattern", between 1720 and 1740, the early Meissen porcelain also painted some very special characters, these characters wearing traditional Chinese clothes, but with Western faces. There is also a sculpture called "Pagod" in Meissen porcelain. This sculpture is derived from the hop-pocket

monk produced in Dehua kiln in China. These monks are so fat and always smile. The smile of hop-pocket monk represents a happy attitude towards life. The craftsmen in the Meissen porcelain factory imitated a porcelain sculpture called "Pagod" based on the hop-pocket monk porcelain sculpture. The "Pagod" sculpture was obviously thinner than the hop-pocket monk, but still kept smile.

In the two decades of 1720-1740, in addition to the common "Onion Pattern", Chinese figure patterns, "Pagod" Meissen porcelain also imitated Chinese "Willow Pattern" and Chinese "Garden Pattern". After 1740, Meissen porcelain gradually innovated a new style of European ornamentation and getting rid of the oriental elements.

### References

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