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Copying and Competition: Meissen Porcelain and the Saxon Triumph over the Emperor of China

Abstract It was faithful copies of Japanese porcelain in the Kakiemon style that brought about a crucial change in the appreciation of Meissen porcelain around 1730, two decades after the foundation of the first porcelain manufactory in Europe. The fact that distinguished collectors initially believed them to be East Asian commanded widespread attention and admiration for the Saxon copies in France. It was even stated that some connoisseurs preferred them to the Japanese prototypes. Their unexpected success in Paris, the foremost market for art of the time, also altered the understanding of this native product in Dresden. Convinced that his porcelain had finally trumped the highly-rated imports from the Far East, Augustus the Strong abandoned the plans for his “porcelain palace,” the so-called “Japanese Palace.” Henceforth, the central throne gallery of the palace was to be reserved for Meissen copies in the Kakiemon style to testify the superiority of Saxon porcelain. By staging an imaginary public audience of a Far-Eastern delegation whose porcelain gifts he rejected as inferior, Augustus the Strong went so far as to present the success of his unique and much-envied manufactory as a triumph of the Saxon Elector and King in Poland over the almighty Emperor of China. To this end, he eclectically copied and adapted the most successful patterns of absolutist representation in order to emulate previously existing examples of absolutist representation. Being his last, most ambitious, though ultimately unfinished project, the designs for the Japanese Palace sum up Augustus the Strong’s constant quest to bolster the royal dignity and imperial aspirations of his dynasty.

Keywords Dresden, Augustus the Strong, Japanese Palace (Dresden), Versailles, Imperial Palace (Beijing)

Copying and competition

When the first Chinese porcelain arrived in Europe in the early sixteenth century, it soon fired in European hearts a desire to find out how to copy this highly-treasured exotic material. Europeans were fascinated by the mysterious processes that turned simple clay into gleaming white translucent wares adorned with enduring and brilliant colors, very delicate and at the same time resistant to heat. Nothing comparable had ever been produced in Europe. When, in 1710—after two hundred years of vain experimentation—Augustus the Strong proudly announced the establishment of Europe’s first porcelain manufactory at Meissen, it was a major triumph for the Elector of Saxony and King in Poland. The royal manufactory was a unique trump card that distinguished him from all other European princes. For two decades after the manufactory at Meissen was founded (during which time the method and techniques for making porcelain were mastered), East Asian porcelain remained the model against which the new Saxon products had to compete. Within a very short time, Augustus the Strong assembled the largest collection of Chinese and Japanese porcelain in Europe, which served his manufactory as a permanent source of inspiration, stimulus, and incentive. The Saxons honed their skills and recipes by making copies, which made it easy for all concerned to compare the quality of the new Saxon porcelain with the much-admired East Asian wares. The contest between the copies and their prototypes is reflected in the design of the Japanese Palace, which is situated on the northern bank of the Elbe in Dresden’s New Town (“Neustadt”), in which Augustus the Strong planned to house and display his enormous collection (fig. 1).



Figure 1: Japanese Palace in Dresden’s New Town, 1727–1733.

Once his royal manufactory was finally capable of imitating not only the smallest and simplest, but also the biggest and most technically-demanding Far Eastern pieces, the former *maison de plaisance* was extended to residence-like proportions with four wings surrounding an inner courtyard. Surviving floor plans and elevations dating from 1730 reveal that the walls of each room were supposed to be decked out with porcelain of a certain type and color (fig. 2).¹ Augustus the Strong was the only European ruler capable of designing and carrying out such an ambitious project, because only he was able to add to his immense yet still insufficient stock of East Asian porcelain by ordering the necessary complementary pieces from his own royal manufactory.

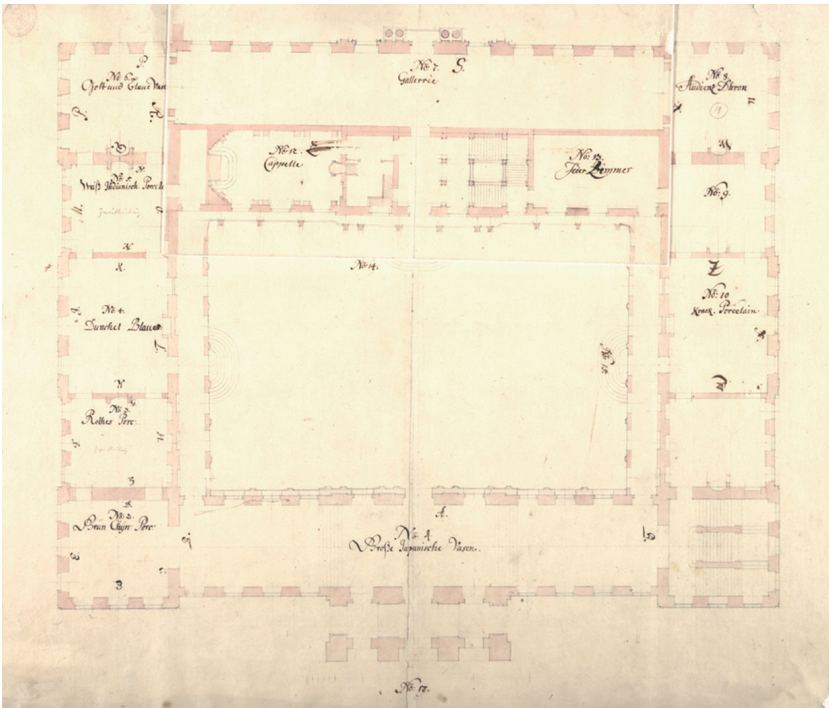


Figure 2: Japanese Palace, floor plan of the upper floor, 1730.

In March 1730, the king submitted an initial commission to Meissen for nearly fifteen hundred vases and dishes after East Asian examples.² As can be gathered from surviving drawings and contemporary documents, the initial plan was to show the copies side by side with their prototypes.

1 For a valuable outline of the Japanese Palace's history, see Wittwer 2004, 32–58.
2 The order list is published in Wittwer 2004, 257. For additional documents concerning this royal commission, see Boltz 1980, 20.

For the two corner rooms on the upper floor, for instance, where vases in blue and gold were to be displayed, at least twenty-six so-called birdcage vases—easily recognizable on the elevations for their characteristic outlines—were needed to complete the symmetrical wall compositions (figs. 3–4). Yet the inventory of the royal collection lists only twenty of these extremely rare Japanese pieces.³



Figure 3: Birdcage vase, Japan, ca. 1700.

In his commission, the king therefore asked for additional “birdcages” painted in blue and gold to compensate for the lack of originals. The palace’s castellan responsible for coordinating deliveries from Meissen would also have shown visitors around the Japanese Palace. When he pointed out to guests that these exact copies were actually produced in Meissen, they would have been compelled to acknowledge that the astoundingly deceptive Saxon porcelain was indeed the equal of the much-admired and hitherto unique imports from China and Japan.

3 Staatliche Kunstsammlungen Dresden, archive of the Porzellansammlung, inventory no. 234, 348–349.

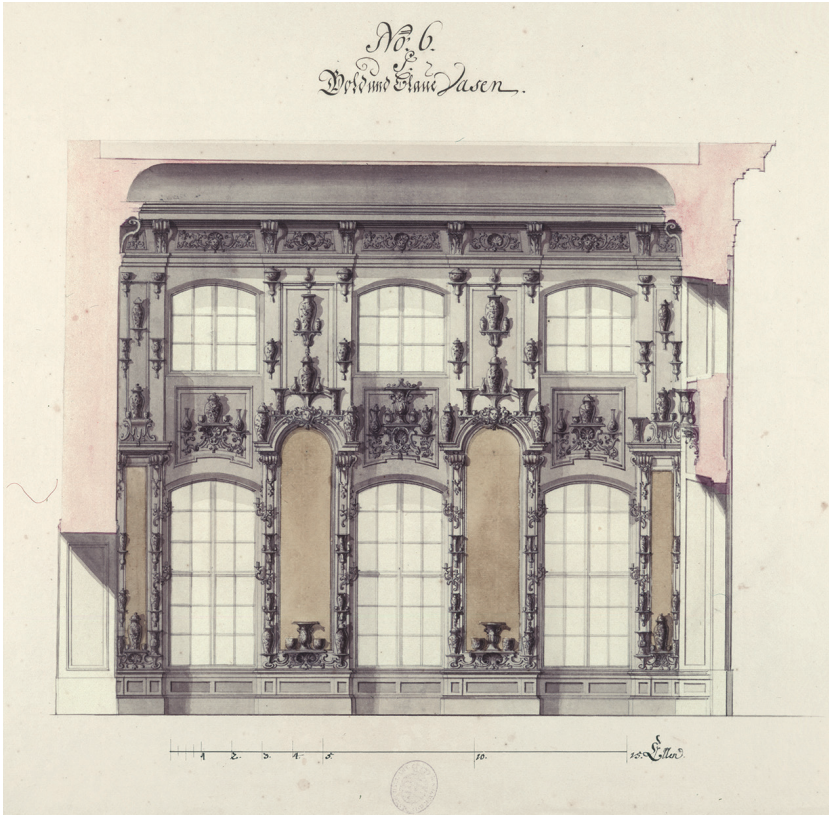


Figure 4: Japanese Palace, elevation of one wall of the corner room in the upper floor for vases in gold and blue, 1729.

Fakes for the Parisian art market: A turning point

Even before the year 1730 was out, however, the plans for the Japanese Palace, then still under construction, were completely revised to mirror a new understanding and appreciation of Saxon porcelain that had its roots in a scandal derived from the practice of marketing Meissen copies as East Asian originals.⁴ Since 1729, a Parisian dealer by the name of Rodolphe Lemaire had been ordering exact copies of (mainly) old Japanese porcelain in the Kakiemon style (fig. 5).

This was then very popular in France, but since it was no longer being produced in Japan, it could only be bought second-hand and at high prices. That Lemaire's aim was to reap large profits by selling the Meissen copies in Paris as Japanese originals was obvious from the beginning, because

4 For an extensive discussion of this aspect citing all relevant archival documents as well as prior literature on this topic, see Weber 2013, vol. 1, 33–59.



Figure 5: Meissen six-sided vase copying a Japanese example in the Kakiemon style, Meissen porcelain manufactory, ca. 1729/1731.

he expressly asked for his pieces not to be marked on the underside with crossed swords.⁵ At first, Lemaire received Meissen porcelain with no marks at all or with pseudo-Chinese letters as he had requested. Not long afterward, however, Augustus the Strong ordered that every single piece had to be marked with the crossed swords, explicitly stating that the pieces for Lemaire were also to bear this mark, in order to prevent the French merchant from continuing to sell them as anything other than Saxon porcelain. Understandably, the king was interested in promoting the products of his unique manufactory all over Europe. Nevertheless, Lemaire managed to obtain copies with the crossed swords in blue enamel on the glaze and not under the glaze, as was customary (figs. 6–7).

The suspicion that immediately springs to mind is confirmed by a hitherto overlooked document in the Dresden archive, the duplicate of a

5 This mark, derived from the Saxon coat of arms, would have clearly indicated Saxon provenance.



Figure 6: Meissen cups and saucers copying Japanese examples in the Kakiemon style, Meissen porcelain manufactory, ca. 1729/1731.



Figure 7: Meissen crossed swords mark in blue enamel overglaze on one of the saucers in fig. 6.

letter by an anonymous Frenchman and self-appointed specialist for the Saxon court who makes reference to the Parisian trade in Meissen copies of East Asian prototypes. The writer begins by praising Saxon porcelain, the standard of which had by then equalled—and in some respects

even outstripped—that of the Far-Eastern imports. He assures his reader that the Japanese originals are by no means better than the Saxon copies, as is shown by the fact that even the most distinguished of connoisseurs is wont to err when confronted with the latter. This, he continues, was proven by the example of a certain porcelain dealer called Plâtrier who had rubbed off the Saxon marks (in blue enamel on the glaze) with the help of a diamond and had succeeded in passing them off as originals to the Marquis de la Faye, the Countess de Verrue, the marshal d'Estrée, and the Duc de Gramont—amongst a number of other Parisian *amateurs* and merchants.⁶ The fact that highly-respected collectors had initially believed them to be East Asian attracted widespread attention and provoked even greater admiration for the Saxon copies in Paris. An article in the *Mercur de France* of February 1731 also states that the quality of the Meissen copies was such that the most skilful connoisseurs were often duped by them, even preferring them to Far Eastern originals—to the outrage of a number of stubborn *amateurs* still devoted to the East Asian wares.⁷

Reconception of the Japanese Palace in Dresden

The unexpected success of the Meissen copies in Paris, the foremost art market of the time, did not go unnoticed in Saxony, where it led to a new evaluation and understanding of the local product. Augustus the

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- 6 “Les porcelaines de Saxe sont parvenües à un degré de perfection, qui égalle celle des anciennes de la Chine et du Japon et même quelquefois les effacent tant pour la blancheur de la pasté que par leur poids. [...] L'ancienne porcelaine de Indes à cause de sa rareté est cent fois plus chere que celle de Saxe, et cependant elle n'est guere plus belle, puisque les plus fins connoisseurs sy trompent souvent, témoin l'exemple du nommé Plâtrier marchand de porcelaine à Paris qui en a vendu plusieurs fois à M. Delafayé, à Madame de Verruë, à M. Le Maréchal d'Estré, à M Le Duc de Granmond, et à un nombre d'amateurs et de marchands de Paris. Il est vray que l'on assure qu'il en ostoit la marque de Saxe avec un Diamant, et que cela luy à attiré de facheuses affaires, et altéré sa réputation.” Sächsisches Staatsarchiv, Hauptstaatsarchiv Dresden, 10026 Geheimes Kabinett, Loc. 1341/4, fols. 45a–45b.
- 7 “Nous ne connoissons pas cette nouvelle Manufacture de Porcelaines à Vienne, mais pour celle qui est établie à Dresde, Capitale de l'Electorat de Saxe, nous osons assurer sans craindre qu'on puisse nous accuser d'exagerer, qu'elle a fait un tel progrès depuis deux ou trois ans, qu'on a envoyé de Paris des Modeles, des Desseins et des personnes intelligentes, qu'il en vient aujourd'hui quantité de Pieces comparables à ce qui vient de plus beau de la Chine et du Japon, et communément de plus belles formes, les Figures, les Animaux, les Arbres, les Plantes et les Fleurs, &c. mieux dessinez et plus de variété et d'union dans les couleurs; les Reliefs, Broderies et Ornemens, sont traités avec beaucoup de cimétrie, de précision et de goût; de telle sorte que les plus habiles Connoisseurs sont souvent en deffaut, prenant cette nouvelle Porcelaine pour l'ancienne, et souvent même lui donnent la préférence, au grand scandale de divers Curieux d'un gout trop raffiné, ou peut-être mal sûr, et en qui abonde quelquefois plus d'entêtement ou d'ostentation que de justesse, et qui esclaves du préjugé, lui laissent exercer sans la moindre résistance, toute sa tyrannie [...]” *Mercur de France* (February 1731), 329.

Strong quickly became convinced that his porcelain not only equalled but also surpassed the East Asian wares. Henceforth the Saxon porcelain was to be displayed separately in the *piano nobile* of the Japanese Palace, as is first documented in a well-informed travel report by Johann Georg Keyssler dating from 23 October, 1730.⁸ Keyssler reports that the porcelain intended for the central hall of the upper floor, the throne gallery (fig. 8), was none other than the Meissen porcelain in the old Indian style, that is, the very same Meissen copies in the Kakiemon style that were so sought after in Paris.

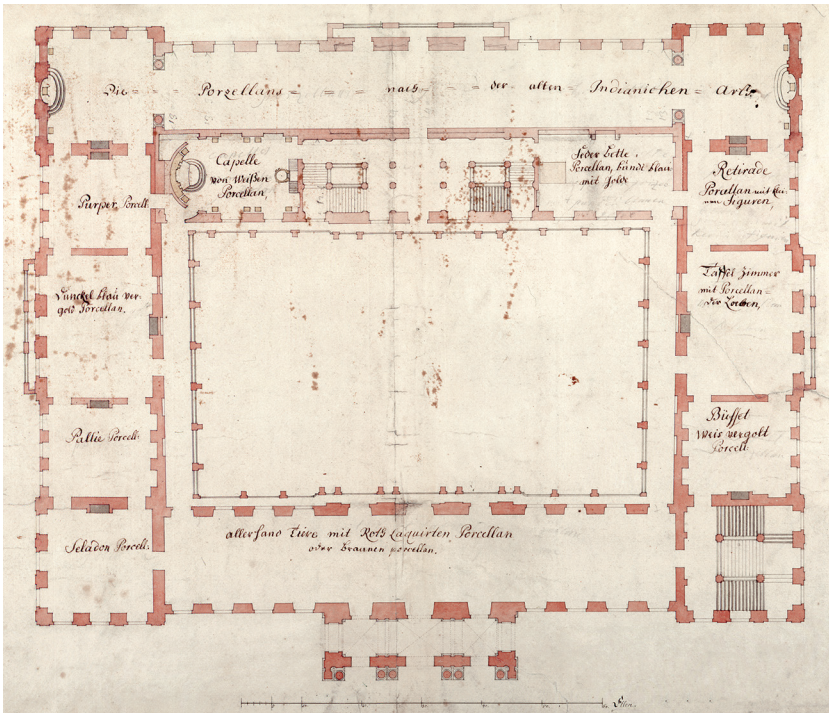


Figure 8: Japanese Palace, floor plan of the upper floor, 1730.

Although the plans were never realised, a written concept for the intended iconographic programme of the throne gallery has survived.⁹ The concept was based on the imaginary idea of Augustus the Strong receiving a delegation from the Far East bringing with them examples of their renowned porcelain as diplomatic gifts. These highly-treasured exotica were to be judged by Minerva, the goddess of wisdom and the patron of the arts, and compared with the Meissen porcelain presented by Saxonia. Minerva was

⁸ The relevant passage is published in Wittwer 2004, 255–256.

⁹ Published in Wittwer 2004, 256–257.

to give the crown to the latter, rejecting the gifts offered by the visiting delegation as inferior. Allegorical figures representing Jealousy and Chagrin were to give a sign to the Japanese to take their porcelain back home, as there was no longer any need for it, now that the Meissen manufactory could satisfy European demand. Augustus the Strong was convinced that Saxony was about to be enthroned as king of Europe's lucrative porcelain market. The Meissen copies in the Kakiemon style that had conquered Paris and were to be displayed on the walls of the throne gallery were supposed to serve as actual proof of the Saxon victory.

Even before entering the Japanese Palace, the visitor was to be introduced to the crucial message of Saxony's triumph. In accordance with the redesign of the interior, the leading court architect Jean de Bodt drew up a new scheme for the facade, featuring an allegorical relief in the entrance pediment (figs. 9–10), at the centre of which Saxonia sits enthroned, the palm trees casting their shadows upon her, already promising her victory.

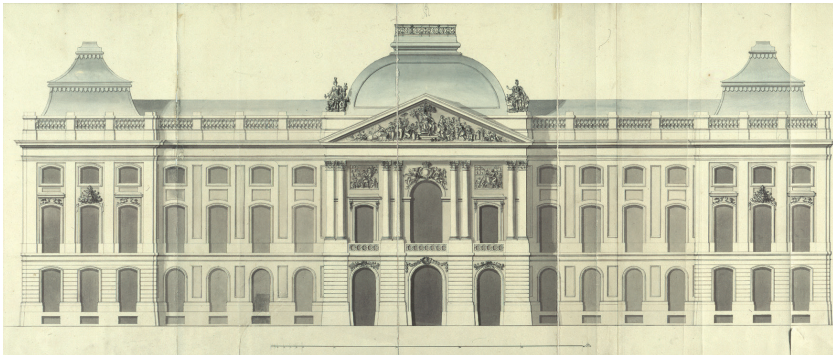


Figure 9: Japanese Palace, elevation of the front side by Jean de Bodt, 1730.

Saxonia looks down from her throne to the Asians on her right, humbly presenting their shipment of porcelain. The Saxons approach with their vases and vessels from the left. In contrast to the Asian kneeling opposite her, the personification of Dresden—bearing a mural crown—confidently places one foot on the first step to the throne. The facade thus anticipates the outcome of the competition that was supposedly carried out inside. The acroteria just over the depictions of the rivers Yangtze and Elbe in the two corners of the pediment represent Asia and Europe, thus turning the encounter into a contest between what were considered the two most developed continents of the time, with Saxony defending Europe's pre-eminence. In their turn, the coat of arms and the royal crown just underneath the personification of Saxony were to ensure the identification of the land with the Saxon elector and “king in Poland.” The two small flanking reliefs displaying allegories of the arts of modelling porcelain and

decorating the fired wares, which were likewise not executed, were to show that the celebrated Saxon triumph was ultimately based on the success of the Meissen manufactory.



Figure 10: Detail of fig. 9.

A tour of the projected new interiors

Having entered the Japanese Palace, the visitor was first to marvel at the quality and diversity of Augustus the Strong's Chinese and Japanese porcelain, "which for beauty, & quantity exceed[ed] any other collection of Europe."¹⁰ The East Asian works, grouped according to types and colors in the rooms of the ground floor, set widely-admired standards which were to be outrivalled by the Meissen porcelain on the *piano nobile*. Stepping out of the stairwell into the gallery of the upper floor facing Dresden's New Town, the guest would have first been confronted with monumental Meissen figures and vases fit for demonstrating what the Saxon genius could—on the basis of European artistic principles—make of this exotic material: first and foremost, namely, the gallery was to house a complete menagerie of life-size porcelain animals which were without precedent even in China (fig. 11).¹¹

The culmination of the circuit, however, was the grand throne gallery overlooking the garden and the Elbe, which was so designed as

10 Quotation from a travel report by the English clergyman Jeremiah Milles of 1736; the relevant passage is published in Weber 2013, vol. 1, 127–128.

11 For a profound discussion of this menagerie of porcelain in the context of the Japanese Palace, see Wittwer 2004, 212–216.



Figure 11: Saber-toothed tiger, Meissen porcelain manufactory, model by Gottlieb Kirchner, ca. 1733.

to stand at the centre of a sequence of rooms with the layout of a state apartment in a princely residence.¹² Before arriving there, the visitor had to traverse an exceptionally long enfilade of four antechambers.¹³ In the floor plan of 1730, these are inscribed with different colors in accordance with the Meissen porcelain to be displayed on consoles on the walls (fig. 8). While the vases and dishes in these rooms were painted with the ground color allocated to the room, the reserves on all the pieces bore decoration in the Kakiemon style, thus anticipating the dominant motif of the throne gallery (fig. 12).

In addition to the abovementioned travel report from 1730, the present essay will draw on two principal sources in order to reconstruct the projected interior of the throne gallery: firstly, the designs for the end walls from the same year by the Dresden court architect Zacharias Longuelune, which the king approved with a "fi[at] AR" (figs. 13–14) and secondly,

12 See Wittwer 2004, 156–157.

13 See Pozsgai 2008. In German-speaking countries, two antechambers that could be preceded by a dining room were customary.



Figure 12: Bottles and dishes with celadon green ground color for the Japanese Palace, Meissen porcelain manufactory, ca. 1730/1735.

Longuelune's written "Explication de la Galerie du Palais du Japon à la Ville neuve,"¹⁴ which he composed a few years later, at around 1734/35, by which time Augustus the Strong had died without carrying out his ambitious plans. Upon his death on 1 February, 1733, all that was more or less completed was the building structure.

For the time being, his scheme was adhered to by his son and successor Augustus III. As Longuelune, who was commissioned with a final series of designs, changed his 1730 plans only in certain details, it can be assumed that the "explanation" of the throne gallery of 1734/35 does in fact still reflect Augustus the Strong's original intentions.¹⁵

In October 1730, Keyssler noted that the visitor coming from the enfilade of antechambers then entered the grand gallery, which measured around 74 metres in length. On entering, he was supposed to see first a domed canopy with a carillon of porcelain bells suspended underneath it. To Keyssler's astonishment, the place underneath the canopy usually reserved for a chair was intended to be taken by a clock that was big

14 See footnote 9.

15 See Wittwer 2004, 44 and 53; Baur 2014, 212–214, 243. For Longuelune's final series of designs, see Sächsisches Staatsarchiv, Hauptstaatsarchiv Dresden, 10006 (OHMA), P, Cap. II, Nr. 15, fols. 22a, 22e, 23l, 23i, 24a, 24b, 24d, 24e, 25b. Individual drawings are reproduced in Franz 1953, figs. 94–96, 98, 99, 101, 104 and Wittwer 2004, figs. 37, 39.

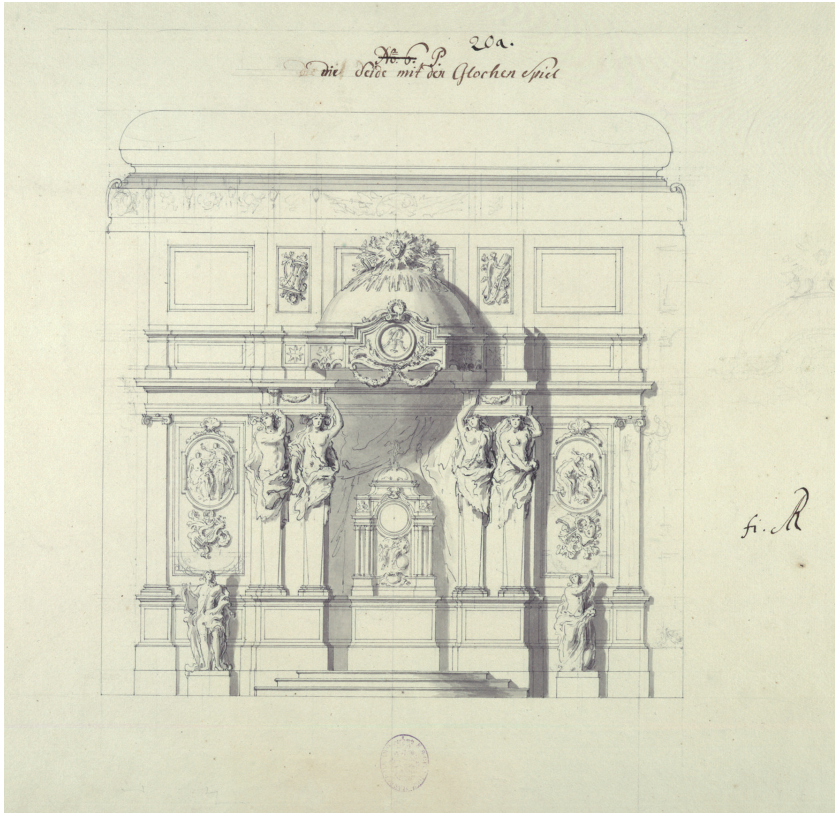


Figure 13: Japanese Palace, elevation of the wall with the clock in one of the corner rooms of the upper floor, by Zacharias Longuelune, 1730.

enough to hide an organist playing the carillon.¹⁶ According to Longuelune, the corner room with the clock which opened onto the slightly smaller middle section of the gallery was to be dedicated to the sun as the regulator of day and night, so that all ornaments had to relate to Apollo. The identification of the Roman sun god with the Saxon-Polish king would have been ensured by the cypher "AR" on the front of the canopy, in line with the head of Apollo on top of it (fig. 13). For the ceiling painting, Longuelune

16 "Hierauf folget die große Galerie von obiger Höhe und zwey hundert und sechsziß Fuß in der Länge. Gleich beim Eintritte derselben wird sich ein großer Baldachin zeigen, worunter ein Glockenspiel von Porzellan hängt. Wo sonst der Stuhl seyn sollte, wird eine Uhr, die sechs Fuß in ihrer Höhe hat, stehen, und hinter derselben wird ein verborgener Platz für einen Organisten, der das Glockenspiel regieren kann, angeleget seyn." Quoted in Wittwer 2004, 255.

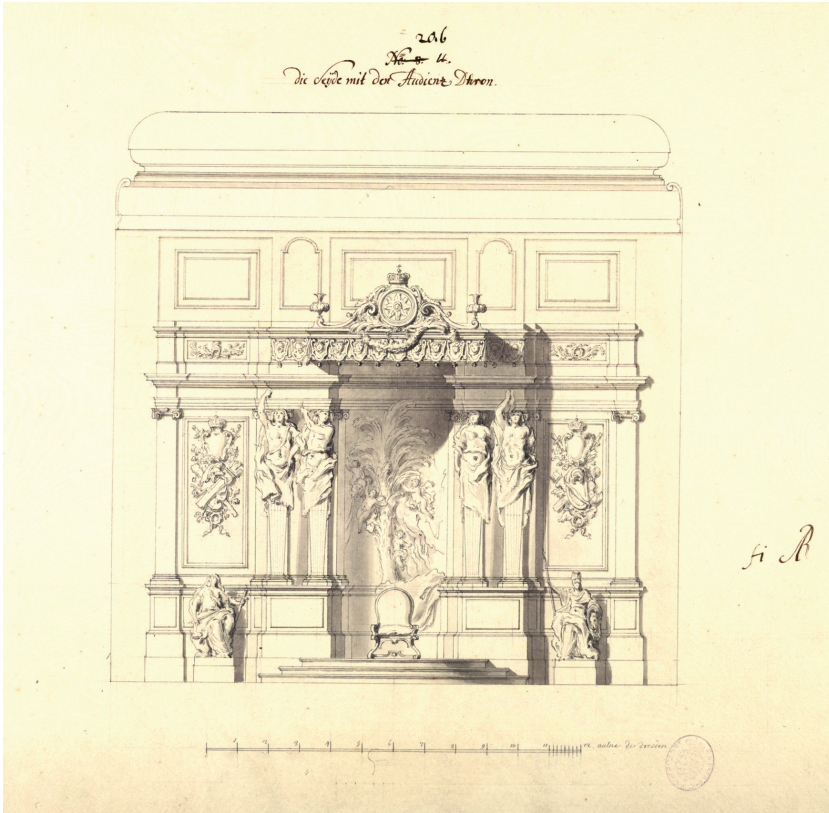


Figure 14: Japanese Palace, elevation of the wall with the throne in one of the corner rooms of the upper floor, by Zacharias Longuelune, 1730.

recommends representing the sun at its zenith, pouring out its rays and benefits on representatives of all the nations.¹⁷

At the far end of the gallery, exactly opposite the clock, an eight-metre-tall throne made of porcelain was to stand under a domed canopy with a palm tree at its back, exactly as shown in the front pediment of the Japanese Palace (fig. 14). As Longuelune states, this emblem signified that the benefits of wars, victories, and fortunate negotiations regarding the interests of states and kingdoms were due to and resulted from the just

17 "Comme le Salon du Klocken-Spiel, ou doit être l'Orloge est /: pour ainsi dire:/ consacré au Soleil, qui régle les jours et les heures, tous les ornements doivent avoir du raport à Apollon. [...] Dans le Plafond du même salon, on pourra y représenter le Soleil au plus haut de sa course, répondant sa lumiere et ses benignes influences sur toutes les Nations; les diferents caracteres des têtes de chaque nation, et leurs habillements diferents, contribueront beaucoup à donner de la variété au sujet, joint aux alégories qu'un habile Peintre y saura ajoûter." Sächsisches Staatsarchiv, Hauptstaatsarchiv Dresden, 10026 Geheimes Kabinett, Loc. 895/11, fols. 1a/b, 1b/a. The quotation in Wittwer 2004, 256 is incomplete.

resolutions and orders emanating from the throne and the royal counsel. The heads on the lambrequin of the dais in turn represented the different human affects that were subordinated to the throne as mere ornaments.¹⁸ The king could hush them by listening to Sapiencia and Prudentia, who would be seen sitting on either side of the throne. If one looks closely at Longuelune's drawing of 1730, one can see that the throne was originally to be flanked by Justice and Minerva, the Roman goddess of wisdom. This placed emphasis on the latter, who was also to be the protagonist of the ceiling painting in the scheme proposed by Longuelune, who suggested that the dispute between Minerva and Neptune concerning the naming of the city Athens should be the subject of the ceiling; this would have allowed for the depiction of all the gods of Olympus.¹⁹

Before the eyes of all nations at one end of the gallery, and of all the gods at the other end, the rivalry between the Saxon and East Asian porcelain was to be settled once and for all:

The ceiling of the gallery between the two cabinets will be divided into three sections. The middle one will represent Saxony and Japan in the presence of Minerva, competing for the preference and the perfection of their porcelain manufactories. They will be accompanied by Emulation, Taste, Invention, Imitation, Painting, Sculpture and all that contributes to the beauty of works of this kind. The goddess will put the crown, or the prize of the dispute, into the hands of Saxony. And Jealousy and Chagrin will make a sign to suggest to Japan that they should put back their porcelain vases onto the ships that had brought them. [...] The two other sections of the ceiling will represent the arts and manufactories set up in Saxony on the one side and the advantageous products of Nature born or created in the country on the other.²⁰

18 "Dans le fond du Trône, on y a représenté en bas relief un grand Palmier, duquel la Victoire vient de cueillir une branche, pour marquer les avantages qui se remporte dans les Batailles, par les victoires: [...]. Le sens de cette Emblème signifie, que les avantages des Guerres, des Victoires, et des Negotiations heureuses, qui regardent les interrets des Etats, et des Roiaumes, sont duës, et viennent ordinairement des justes resolutions, et des ordres qui émanent du Trône et du Conseil des Rois. On a mis dans le Cartouche au dessus du Dais les Armes de Pologne et de Saxe, ornez de Palmes et d'Oliviers, les Têtes, qui l'enrichit, representent les diferentes passions des hommes, pour montrer qu'elles sont assujetties au Trône, qu'elles n'y servent que d'ornemens, et que les Souverains en y montant, savent les faire taire, en n'écouter plus que la sagesse et la prudence; qui sont représentées par les deux statuës qui sont aux deux côtes du Trône. [...] On pourra peindre dans le Plafond la dispute entre Minerva et Neptune, touchant la nomination de la Ville d'Athènes: C'est un grand sujet puisqu'on y peut représenter tous les Dieux du Paganisme, et un Peintre savant, y pourra joindre des ornemens et des allégories ingénieuses." Quoted in Wittwer 2004, 256.

19 See footnote 18.

20 "Le Plafond de la Galerie entre les deux Salons, sera partagé en trois parties, celle du milieu representera la Saxe et le Japon, qui disputent ensemble, en presence de Minerve, sur la preference, et la perfection des ouvrages de leurs manufactures de Porcelaines; Elles seront accompagnées de l'Émulation, du Goût, de

The central ceiling of the throne gallery was to maintain the theme of the pediment relief over the entrance. The assumed victory of the Saxon porcelain over the imports from the Far East which, in the eyes of Augustus the Strong, had been achieved through the unexpected success of deceptively perfect Meissen copies was the core idea of the newly-conceived Japanese Palace that would convince all its visitors. In the following, an attempt shall be made to decode the complex message built around this crucial if imaginary triumph. The analysis will thereby exemplify that the visual reasoning made use of another type of copying: the eclectic quotation of different successful patterns of representation which were fused in order to surpass previously existing examples of absolutist representation.

The example of the Hall of Mirrors at Versailles

In architectural terms, the setting of the throne at the end of a long gallery extending over an entire wing of the building was exceptional. This feature of the Japanese Palace cites a prominent example which would have been familiar not only to the French-trained architects at the Dresden court, but also to Augustus the Strong, who had been introduced to Louis XIV in the Hall of Mirrors at Versailles during his grand tour.²¹ Usually the French king received envoys from European rulers standing up in the state bedroom (fig. 15: H5) or, less frequently, in the adjacent cabinet (fig. 15: H6) of the *Appartement du Roi* surrounding the inner courtyard.²²

Non-European ambassadors, who first arrived in France during the reign of Louis XIV, were granted an audience in the *Salon d'Apollon* (fig. 15: K3) of the *Grand Appartement* in the northern wing, where the King awaited them enthroned "*en majesté*."²³ On a few occasions, however, the Hall of Mirrors (fig. 15: K1) served as the venue for extraordinary audiences which attracted great public attention.²⁴ This is why—as Hendrik Ziegler asserts—this *Galerie des Glaces* became, in the collective memory, a place where the highest ranking acts of state and ceremonial performances of the king had taken place.²⁵

l'Invention, de l'Imitation, de la Peinture, de la Sculpture, et de tout ce qui contribué à la beauté de ces sortes d'ouvrages: La Déesse remettra entre les mains de la Saxe, la Couronne, ou le prix de la dispute; et la jalousie, et le depot feront signe, et sugéreront au Japon de faire rembarquer ses Vases de Porcelaines, sur les Vaisseaux qui les ont aporitez. [...] Les deux autres parties du Plafond, représenteront d'un côté, les Arts, et les Manufactures établies en Saxe, et de l'autre les productions avantageuses de la Nature, qui naissent, et qui sont produite dans le País." Quoted in Wittwer 2004, 257.

21 See Ziegler 2010, 174–175.

22 See Castelluccio 2006, 24–25.

23 See Sabatier 2009, 192, 196–200.

24 See Love 1996, 173; Castelluccio 2006, 28–33; Castelluccio 2007, 114–125.

25 Ziegler 2010, 154.

PLAN GÉNÉRAL AU PREMIER ÉTAGE DU CHATEAU DE VERSAILLES.

Distribution au premier Etage de l'avant corps dans lequel sont compris les grands appartemens de Versailles.

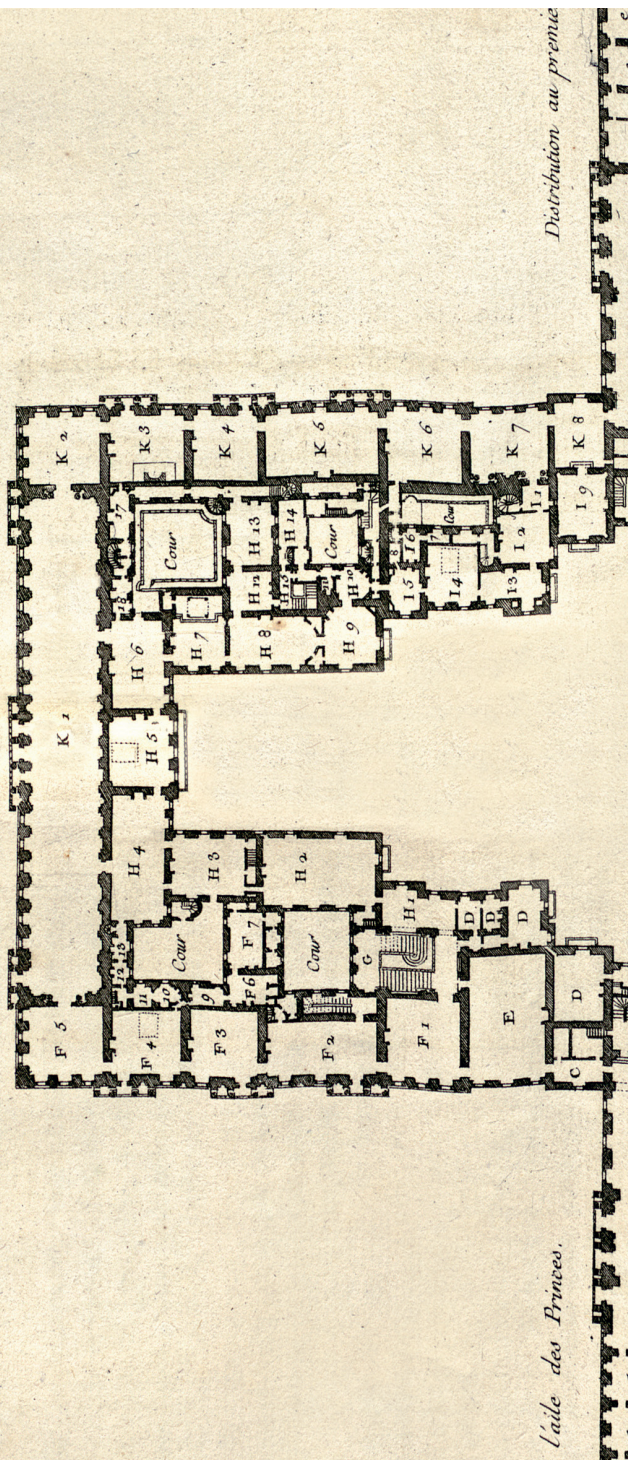


Figure 15: Versailles, floor plan of the upper floor (detail), published in the fourth volume of Jacques-François Blondel's *Architecture Française* of 1756.

On 1 September, 1686, Louis XIV was honored with an embassy from the remote land of Siam.²⁶ The delegation was escorted up the *Escalier des Ambassadeurs* to the upper floor, where it had to traverse the enfilade of the state apartment in its entirety, as far as the *Salon de la Guerre* (fig. 15: K2) and then turn left before catching its first glimpse of the French king enthroned at the far end of the long gallery. A crowd of distinguished courtiers formed a guard of honor for the envoys as they approached the king while performing the Siamese “*wai*”, a repeated deep bow (fig. 16). According to a detailed analysis by Ronald S. Love, on this occasion Louis XIV was in many respects imitating the very sophisticated Siamese ceremonial—from the sounds of trumpets and drums announcing the delegation and the spatial *mise en scène* of the ritual acts, through the courteous nods with which the king saluted his guests, not to mention his golden robe adorned with prodigiously large diamonds, which obviously resembled the one worn by Phra Narai, the Siamese king, during his audiences. In this way, Louis XIV presented himself “not as a European prince constrained by fundamental laws and the privileges of corporate bodies, but as an omnipotent Asian despot, equal to Phra Narai in power, wealth, remoteness from his subjects and even personal divinity.”²⁷ The *Mercure galant* published an extensive, twenty-six page description of the events that were



Figure 16: Versailles, reception of the Siamese delegation, drawing attributed to Charles le Brun, ca. 1686.

26 The following paragraph draws on the most extensive account and discussion of this embassy, as given in Love 1996.

27 Love 1996, 173.

then illustrated in several almanacs the following year. There can be no doubt that Augustus the Strong heard about this exceptional spectacle when visiting Versailles only a few months later, in June 1686. The staging of the Siamese audience was more or less copied in February 1715, when a delegation from Persia arrived at Versailles. This time, the magnificent ceremony was attended by Augustus the Strong's son (likewise on his grand tour), who would certainly have reported the details about it to his father.²⁸

Augustus the Strong actually copied this set up by adopting the same arrangement of rooms for the upper floor of the Japanese Palace, thus making his throne gallery analogous to the Hall of Mirrors at Versailles, with its two flanking corner rooms (figs. 8 and 15). A visiting delegation would likewise have had to walk the long enfilade in one wing of the palace and turn right (rather than left) before beholding the elevated throne at the far end of an elongated gallery. Just like Louis XIV, Augustus the Strong wished to present himself as equal to an Asian absolute ruler, which is why he transferred the highly symbolic *mise en scène* from Versailles to Dresden, in a core idea that was actually of constitutive importance for the design of the Japanese Palace because the building that had formerly been no more than a *maison de plaisance* would not only feature a residence-like state apartment suitable for ceremonies of the highest rank, but also boasted a general layout with four wings surrounding an inner courtyard that gave it the character of a small princely residence where public audiences usually took place, as did its prominent position in the ideal Baroque complex of Dresden's New Town, on the northern bank of the Elbe.²⁹

Unlike Louis XIV, however, Augustus the Strong certainly could not hope for the arrival of a real delegation from the Far East. The ideal setting for the reception of such a delegation in the Japanese Palace therefore had to be utopian. In fact, because an imaginary audience was unaffected by any possible ceremonial conflicts, this made the venue a perfect platform on which to enact the competition between the Saxon and the Far-Eastern porcelain as a shorthand for the more significant contest between the Saxon-Polish ruler and the Emperor of China. In spite of this, it was in fact copies of Japanese, and not Chinese, porcelain that were to prove Saxony's superiority, reminding us that no great distinction was then made between porcelain from China and porcelain from Japan, both of which were often called "Indian."³⁰ It was, in fact, the Chinese Emperor who was considered the only ruler so far to have mastered the prestigious art of porcelain production virtually at will.

28 See Castelluccio 2006, 37–44.

29 For a detailed discussion of this aspect, see Weber 2013, vol. 1, 76–78.

30 See Weber 2013, vol. 2, 44.

Daring the Emperor of China

In order to unmistakably challenge the ruler of the “Middle Kingdom,” however, it was planned to also embed significant copies of exceptional Chinese porcelain ordered by the imperial court into the “Siamese-French” spatial setting. Augustus the Strong’s attempts to compete directly with the Chinese Emperor in the art of porcelain making had thereby started well before this re-conception of the Japanese Palace: in two widely-read letters from the province of Jao-Tcheou published in 1717, the French Jesuit missionary François Xavier d’Entrecolles reported in detail on the production of porcelain in China. Amongst other things, he wrote with great admiration about pieces that astounded foreigners because they could not believe that such difficult objects could actually be made. In one example, Entrecolles refers to a lantern made for the crown prince which was of such delicacy that a whole room could be lit by a single flame within it.³¹ It must have been this passage that incited Augustus the Strong to order copies of Chinese lanterns of this kind from Meissen, which he insisted on doing repeatedly, even though more than forty attempts made between 1724 and 1727 failed, the thin sides cracking again and again upon firing.³² When, finally, a single lantern was delivered to the King, its sides were too thick to be translucent (fig. 17).

As Entrecolles continued, “This same [crown] prince also commissioned different musical instruments, amongst others a type of small organ called *tsem* that measured nearly one foot in height and was composed of fourteen pipes [...] but it was worked upon in vain.”³³ Again, Augustus the Strong felt defiant and wanted his manufactory to succeed where the imperial Chinese manufactory had failed. From January 1732, the Meissen modelers worked on organ pipes intended for the chapel of the Japanese Palace, but failed once again, as it proved impossible to fire pipes that would produce just the right pitches.³⁴ According to Entrecolles, the Chinese were more successful with flutes, flageolets, and a carillon made of porcelain to order for the same Chinese crown prince. The Jesuit also alludes to the difficulties involved in producing bells which would strike precisely the right

31 “car il ne faut pas croire que les ouvriers puissent travailler sur tous les modèles qui leur viennent des pays étrangers. Il y en a d'impraticables à la Chine, de mesme qu'il s'y fait des ouvrages qui surprennent les étrangers, & qu'ils ne croient pas possibles. En voicy quelques exemples. J'ay vû icy un fanal ou une grosse lanterne de porcelaine qui estoit d'une seule piece, au travers de laquelle un flambeau éclairoit toute une chambre: cet ouvrage fut commandé il y a sept ou huit ans par le Prince heritier.” d’Entrecolles 1717, 338–339.

32 See Boltz 1995, 22–23, 32–33; Weber 2013, vol. 1, 27.

33 “Ce mesme Prince commanda aussi divers instrumens de Musique, entre autres une espece de petite orgue appellée *tsem*, qui a prés d'un pied de hauteur, & qui est composée de quatorze tuyaux, dont l'harmonie est assez agréable: mais ce fut inutilement qu'on y travailla.” d’Entrecolles 1717, 339.

34 See Weber 2013, vol. 1, 64 and 71.



Figure 17: Meissen lantern copying a Chinese example, Meissen porcelain manufactory, 1727.

notes.³⁵ Not surprisingly, Augustus the Strong also ordered a carillon made of porcelain for the Japanese Palace. As mentioned above, this was to be suspended from a domed canopy at the far end of the gallery from the throne. This arrangement also imitated a significant element known to be part of Chinese court ceremonies: as travel reports recorded, it was the sound of a bell that marked the start of an audience with the Emperor of

35 "On réussit mieux aux flustes douces, aux flageollets, & à un autre instrument qu'on nomme yun lo, qui est composé de diverses petites plaques rondes un peu concaves, dont chacune rend un son particulier: On en suspend neuf dans un cadre à divers étages qu'on touche avec des baguettes comme le tympanon; il se fait un petit carillon qui s'accorde avec le son des autres instrumens, & avec la voix des Musiciens. Il a fallu, dit on, faire beaucoup d'épreuves, afin de trouver l'épaisseur & le degré de cuisson convenables, pour avoir tous les tons nécessaires à un accord. Je m'imaginois qu'on avoit le secret d'insérer un peu de métal dans le corps de ces porcelaines, pour varier les sons: mais on m'a détrompé." d'Entrecolles 1717, 339–340.

China.³⁶ At the Japanese Palace, the intention was that the envoy would hear the sound of chimes secretly played by a hidden musician just as he caught sight of the distant throne for the first time.

Augustus the Strong's intention of daring the Chinese Emperor is demonstrated by other quotations: apart from these copies of exceptional Chinese musical instruments which were to serve as visual references to the court at Beijing, the clock—unusually placed under the canopy with the suspended carillon as a counterpoint to the throne—was a means of emulating the legendary ruler of China. Contemporary travel reports noted that chiming clocks had facilitated the Jesuit missionaries' access to the Beijing residence, when they were invited to explain the clocks' invisible striking mechanisms.³⁷ So amazed were the Chinese that they called chiming clocks "bell ringing itself;" Emperor Wanli even had a tower built in his pleasure gardens especially for one of them.³⁸ The Chinese emperors were highly interested in the European science of horology and its partner astronomy, one characteristic of European clocks being that they often indicated the course of the planets in addition to the time. When explaining his "Throne of the Great Moghul" (see the contribution by Corinna Forberg in this volume), Dinglinger emphasized that reliable forecasts of the sun's and moon's orbits were crucial to the Chinese,³⁹ as they allowed the Emperor to claim and maintain the Celestial

36 "Whilst we were beholding with admiration all the Pomp and Splendor of this Court, we heard the noise and jingling of a little Bell, sounding sweet and delightful to the Ear. Hardly had this Clock or Bell finish'd the Alarm, but we saw the old *Tutang*, with thirty of the most eminent Persons and chief Councillors of the Empire, in very rich Habits, go and make their Obedience in great State and Humility to the Emperor's Throne."

37 See Maurice 1980, 34–37; Nieuhof 1673, 118.

38 "Ehe die drey tag gar verlauffen / hat der König nach den Uhren gefragt/so man ihm alsbald gebracht. Un haben ime dermassen gefallen / das er den Verschnittnen das Ampt und den Sold gebessert / welches sie den unserigen bald mit frewd angezeigt. Unnd kommen noch heutigs tags täglich dero zwen zum König / das kleiner Uhrwerck zu richten / dann ers siehts im gesicht / unnd ein grosse frewd darmit hat. ... Die grösser Uhr hat im Palast/ auß mangl gnugsamer Höhe zu den Gewichten / niendert platz gefunden / derowegen der König bevolhen/ihr/ in einem schönen lustgarten ausserhalb der andern mawren/ darinn sonst auch vilkostliche sachen zusehen/einen Thurm zu bawen/darzu die unserigen die visier gemacht. Und sagt man der König komme oft dahin / wie auch andere fürneme Personen / welche alle ein grosse Frewd daran haben. [...] Es haben auch die Uhrrichter starck angehalten/die Patres dort zubehalten/ dann sie besorgt/wann die Uhr richten / möchten sie in unglück kommen/so gar lieb war sie dem König. Welches er wol erzeugt/da sein Mutter an ihn geschickt/und das Glöclin so sich selb leitte (also nennt man die Schlaguhrn in China) zu sehen begert. Dann demnach er besorgt sie werds gar behalten wollen/und er ihr mit fugen nicht abschlagen künden / hat er bevolhen/man soll sie ablauffen lassen / und ihr also bringen. Weil sie sich dann nicht gerührt/hats die alt Königin veracht/ und dem Sohn wider geschickt." Trigault 1617, 331–332 and 344.

39 "Ueber der Pussa ist in der Mitten / der Globus Coelestis / mit allen seinen Signis, der sich zwischen denen drey Ecken der Pyramiden auf allen Seiten drehet, welches von dem Astronomischen Studio der Sineser ein klares Zeugnis giebt, sintemahl die Betrachtung des Himmels und genaue Observirung des

Mandate. As European methods of calculating the times of solar eclipses proved superior to the Chinese ones, Jesuits ascended to the highest offices at the imperial court.⁴⁰ When Augustus the Strong dedicated the corner room (with its accompanying clock) to the sun, as the regulator of day and night, it was precisely this European scientific superiority that he was alluding to. While the clock referred to European supremacy with respect to mechanical instruments and astronomy, the porcelain carillon opened the contest with a discipline that had—thus far—been monopolized by the Chinese.

Finally, another element that can likewise be understood as a meaningful sign in the competition between the Saxon-Polish king and the Chinese emperor is the empty throne. As stated above, because Augustus the Strong could not expect a real delegation from China to come to Dresden, he would never actually have used the throne—which was likewise to be made of porcelain—during an audience. Nevertheless, analogue to royal portraits (again, see Forberg), the ruler was believed to be symbolically present in the empty throne which, even in his absence, had to be approached with appropriate respect and obeisance.⁴¹ In China, where the emperor hardly appeared in public at all, the reverence shown to the empty throne was of pivotal importance for court ceremonies. European observers took the fact that the Emperor of China continued to be worshipped even in his absence as further evidence for his absolute and god-like sovereignty: “They prostrate themselves not only in his presence but also before his armchair and his throne. They even kneel down when they see his clothes and his belt. His orders are sacred and his will is observed as if he had descended from the sky.”⁴² It therefore seems plausible that the empty throne in the Japanese Palace was similarly intended to demonstrate the almighty power of the physically absent but symbolically present Saxon-Polish king, who considered himself in a position to defy even the Emperor of China.

Lauffs der Sonnen, Monds und Sterne diese Völker allerältester Wissenschaft ist, darinnen diejenigen, so durch Erbrecht dazu bestimmt, sich sehr fleissig exerciren, und besteht deren vornehmstes Amt darinnen, dass sie den Lauff der Sonnen und des Mondes wie auch der Finsternüsse sorgfältigst ausrechnen und den Neu-Mond und andere Mond-Aspecten ganz accurat aufzeichnen, nachmals ihre Observationes durchs ganze Reich ausbreiten und anzeigen, was bey jedweder Zeit zu thun oder zu unterlassen.” Quoted in Watzdorf 1962, vol. 2, 396.

40 See Klaue 1997, 109, 111 and 122; Schuster-Fox 2009, 123–127.

41 See Winkler 1993, 160–167; Sander 2004.

42 “Ils se prosternent non seulement en sa presence, mais encore devant son fauteuil & devant son trône; ils se mettent même à genoux à la vûe de son habit ou de sa ceinture; ses ordres sont sacrez, & sa volonté est écoutée comme s’il étoit descendu du Ciel.” Le Comte 1700, 37–38.

The setting of an imaginary audience

Creating an idealized setting for an imaginary audience was, in fact, a brilliant way of staging the rivalry between two rulers. In the early modern period, public audiences were highly competitive ceremonial acts in the course of which the rank of sovereigns was visually demonstrated for those in attendance. Such audiences, as Barbara Stollberg-Rilinger has noted, consisted of nothing but the exchange of carefully measured symbolic messages. Every reverence accorded or denied to the visiting representative of a sovereign or the receiving prince was significant.⁴³ Exactly how competitive this spectacle was is indicated in the section on public audiences in the second volume of Friedrich Carl Moser's *Teutsches Hof=Recht* (German Court Law) published in 1755: "This matter belongs to the most common and most delicate ones at court. It is the most frequent cause of irritation and of loss of dignity, or, if it is managed cleverly, of increases in the same."⁴⁴

The imaginary audience was a perfect backdrop for a trial of strength with the ruler of the "Middle Kingdom," whose absolute sovereignty crystalized best during receptions, as the French Jesuit Louis Le Comte described tellingly in his travel report of 1696:

But the King of China never appears greater, then when he gives Audience to foreign Ambassadors; that prodigious number of Troops who are at that time in Arms, that incredible number of Mandarins in their Formalities, distinguished according to their rank and quality [...] the Ministers of State, the Lord Chief Justices of all the Sovereign Courts, the petty Kings, the Princes of the Blood, the Heirs of the Crown, more humbled before this Prince, then they are exalted above the People: The Emperor himself seated on a Throne, who beholds prostrate at his feet all this Crowd of Adorers; all this, I say, bears an Air of Sovereignty and Grandeur in it, that is to be found nowhere but in China.⁴⁵

In China, too, public audiences were highly choreographed ceremonial acts that played a major role in court ceremonies; indeed, it was the reports of receptions in Beijing that had shaped the European image of the almighty Emperor of China (fig. 18).

43 See Stollberg-Rilinger 1997, 155–156; Stollberg-Rilinger 2008, 160–161.

44 "Diese Materie ist eine derjenigen, so am häufigsten bey Hof vorkommen, welche die meiste Pointillen mit sich führet, wo am leichtesten angestossen und der Würde was vergeben, oder selbige durch klügliche Einleitung erhöht werden kann." Moser 1755, vol. 2, 550 (translation by the author).

45 Le Comte 1697, 177.



Figure 18: The Chinese Emperor Shunzhi, frontispiece of Joan Nieuuhof's *Embassy from the East-India Company of the United Provinces, to the Grand Tartar Cham, Emperor of China*, first published in 1665.

The obedient deference shown towards his person during receptions, culminating in the three-fold kowtow, demonstrated his absolute power to best effect. Subjects as well as European envoys were obliged to kneel

and to touch the ground three times with their chest, in a ritual that was humiliating and offensive to Europeans because it reminded them of the prostrations that were part of the Catholic liturgy.⁴⁶

What is more, the Chinese emperor did not receive European envoys as proxies of princes of equal status, but as delegates of his vassals, and he regarded their sumptuous gifts as tribute. Europeans were very acutely conscious of this, as is clear from Le Comte's dedication to Louis XIV in the French edition of his account:

To date, this proud and arrogant nation has not thought that it was dishonoring the kings by regarding all of them as subjected to their rule. This idea was confirmed in their minds by the fact that the ambassadors of the most prosperous states consistently consented to being received as vassals. And when all Europe flattered itself that it was the universal monarchy, it was in fact somehow under the Asian yoke.⁴⁷

The impressions that European envoys gained during their audiences in Beijing were therefore twofold. While, on the one hand, they were highly impressed by the almighty power of the emperor as shown to best advantage during these ceremonies, they also felt humiliated when they were forced to subject themselves to the Chinese ruler.

The Saxon revenge for the Chinese hubris

This abasing experience was surely the reason why the Chinese were widely presumed to be arrogant. In the 'History of the Court of the King of China,' first published in Paris in 1626, the French historian Michel Baudier spread an anecdote that could not help but hurt Europe's pride:

the Greatness of his Treasures, the Puissance of his Forces, the Fertility of his Countrey, and the Extent of his State, have carried the Pride of his Spirit to that degree of Insolence, as to contemn all the rest of Men, and to esteem only those of *China*. He sayes often, and the same Vaunting is in the mouth of his Subjects, *That the Chineses have two Eyes, the Europeans one, and that all the other men of the Earth are blind.*⁴⁸

46 See Demel 1992, 127–142.

47 "Jusqu'alors cette nation fiere & orgueilleuse, ne croyoit pas deshoner les Rois, en les regardant tous comme soumis à son Empire; Les Ambassadeurs des Estats les plus florissans, qui n'y ont jamais esté receus que comme tributaires, avoient par leur propre aveu establi plus fortement cette idée dans les esprits; & l'Europe entiere se trouvoit en quelque sorte sous le joug en Asie, lorsqu'elle se flatoit de la Monarchie universelle." Le Comte 1696, vol. 1, "Epistre".

48 Baudier 1682, 68–69 (emphasis in the original).

This tale was told in Saxony, too, as Johann Ehrenfried Böttger, the inventor of the Meissen porcelain, noted in a memorandum to Augustus the Strong in 1709:

Although the Indians attribute to themselves great wisdom and outstanding ability in the sciences and arts in comparison with all other nations, and for all that they—because of this arrogance—are not afraid to ascribe to themselves two eyes in this regard and only one eye to the Europeans, this assumption is not borne out by their porcelain manufactories when one considers the bad designs, the mostly clumsy shapes and the absurd painted decoration of the white and red Indian vessels.⁴⁹

Johann Melchior Steinbrück, the first inspector of the manufactory in Meissen, was convinced that the Chinese were robbed of all their illusions of being the only men with two eyes as soon as they received the first examples of Saxon porcelain sent to the East Indies in the manufactory's earliest days.⁵⁰ Both Böttger and Steinbrück assured the king that—having wrested the secret of porcelain-making from the Chinese—he now possessed a compelling argument to mock them and punish their hubris. Even as late as 1737, a letter from the Meissen town council states that the late king had proved that, with regard to porcelain, the Saxons were in no way inferior to the highly-clever Chinese people and the inhabitants of the island of Japan.⁵¹

If Augustus the Strong therefore chose the setting of an imaginary audience to demonstrate the triumph of Meissen porcelain, then he surely did so in order to take his revenge for the degradations suffered during receptions in Beijing. In the iconography in the Japanese Palace, contrary to ceremonial convention, he does not even accept the porcelain presented as tribute in the ceiling fresco, which surely represents a deliberate provocation. As a result, the European visitors to the Japanese Palace would have

49 "Obwohl in die Indianer sich eine große Klugheit und besondere Geschicklichkeit in Wißenschafften und Künsten vor allen andern Nationen beymeßen, und aus solcher Arroganz keinen Scheü tragen, sich selbst in hoc passu zwey, denen Europaern aber nur ein Auge zuzuschreiben: So wil doch solches aus ihren Porcelain-Fabriquen, wenn man die schlechten Erfindungen, die meist plumpen Façons, und die absurden Dessesins ihrer Mahlerey an denen Indianischen weißen und rothen Gefäßen betrachtet, nicht erhellen." Sächsisches Staatsarchiv, Hauptstaatsarchiv Dresden, 10036 Finanzarchiv, Rep. IXb, Loc. 41910, Nr. 205c, fol. 17a.

50 "Es ist auch ein Ruhm vor das Land, wenn schöne Manufacturen darinnen aufkommen: und weils gleich Anfangs von dem Sächßischen braunen porcellain etwas durch den Residenten Bertry aus Amsterdam nacher OstIndien geschicket worden; sowird nunmehr auch dieser Ruhm Sachßens in Indien erschollen seyn, und die Chineser sich vielleicht desabusiret befinden, da sie geglaubet, sie wären in Wißenschafften die klügsten, und hätten diesfalls alleine 2. Augen, dargegen die Europaeer nur eines hätten, die übrigen Nationes aber blind wären." Steinbrück 1982, vol. 2, 179.

51 See footnote 81.

been compelled to acknowledge that they owed the re-establishment of Europe's honor to the Saxon-Polish king. While Europe had already proven its superiority in the sciences of astronomy and astrology that were so important to the Chinese, it was Augustus the Strong alone who had been capable of defying the Emperor of China in the most sophisticated of all the arts of his land, namely the art of making porcelain.

The Meissen triumph as a prime example of mercantilism

The manufacture of porcelain, however, was not only perceived as an art, but as an industry that bore important yields for the sovereign prince. Just like "the Corn, the Mines of Gold and Silver, the precious Stones, the Pearls, [...] the Wool, the Cottons and the Silks," porcelain was a product gained from the rich Chinese soil that brought the emperor a "great and puissant Revenue."⁵² These sources of income were believed to form the basis of his boundless authority: "It is these extraordinary revenues that make this prince so powerful and that enable him to always have such mighty armies at his disposal in order to keep his people under obligation to him."⁵³ What is more, the Emperor of China could command the revenue and even levy new tributes as he pleased, a matter that Le Comte emphasizes, as it constituted a significant difference between the Chinese and the European forms of absolutism.⁵⁴

As for Augustus the Strong, he did not rule with absolute sovereignty. When he became king in Poland, it was only by election and thanks to military pressure. His power was restricted by the laws of the aristocratic republic, and his finances were controlled by the Sejm. Earnings from royal properties were not sufficient to keep the royal household in Warsaw and considerable additional funds from the Saxon budget had to be granted.⁵⁵ Similarly, in Saxony, Augustus the Strong was dependent on the approval of the three estates to cover the state budget. Even though he managed to introduce indirect consumption taxes, he urgently needed more independent sources of income to sustain his claim to absolute power.⁵⁶ This is why he set his hopes on Böttger, who had initially promised to make gold before he finally discovered the recipe for porcelain. But even with this "white gold"

52 Baudier 1682, 64.

53 "Ce sont ces prodigieux revenus qui rendent ce Prince si puissant, & qui luy donnent la facilité d'avoir toujours sur pied de si nombreuses armées, pour contenir ses peuples dans le devoir." Le Comte 1696, vol. 2, 15.

54 "Premierement toutes les charges de l'Etat sont à sa disposition, il les donne à qui il luy plaist, & il en est d'autant plus le maistre qu'il n'en vend aucune. [...] Secondement, quoique chaque particulier soit maistre de ses biens, & paisible possesseur de ses terres, l'Empereur peut neanmoins imposer de nouveaux tributs, quand il le juge à propos, pour subvenir aux pressans besoins de l'Etat." Le Comte 1696, vol. 2, 13–14.

55 See Lileyko 1997; Vötsch 2001, 58; Neuhaus 2004, 187.

56 See Vötsch 2001, 57–58; Neuhaus 2004, 181–182.

Augustus the Strong still counted on being able to fill up his treasury with sales revenue, as exemplified in the ceiling fresco of the throne gallery. Fueled by the unexpected success of the Meissen porcelain in Paris, he anticipated being able to drive the imported wares out of Europe and to wrest the lucrative porcelain market from the grasp of China and Japan.

In a certain sense, the secret knowledge of porcelain-making was indeed considered a goldmine: contemporaries were fascinated by the fact that it consisted of nothing else but simple clays that a mysterious chemical process transmuted into gleaming white translucent luxury goods.⁵⁷ Not only were the necessary clays plentiful in Saxony, but they belonged directly to the king and cost him “almost nothing but the cartage.”⁵⁸ Owing to Saxony’s advancements in the sciences, technology, and the arts, these intrinsically worthless raw materials could be turned into treasured artefacts that not only helped to avoid costly imports from the Far East, but could also be exported for hard cash, thereby improving the trade balance. This approach corresponded perfectly to the mercantilist ideal of enhancing the wealth of a country (and its regent) by fructifying previously unused resources.⁵⁹ This is what the intended ceiling painting of the throne gallery was to allude to when it depicted the rich natural resources in Saxony, on the one hand, and its prospering arts and manufactories on the other. In this context, Minerva—the inventive patroness of the sciences and arts who teaches men craftsmanship and technical progress—was the perfect judge in the exemplary contest between Saxon and Far-Eastern porcelain. The royal porcelain manufactory was thus to serve as a model of Augustus the Strong’s exemplary mercantilist policies.

The Meissen triumph as a prime example of good government

In his chronicle of the Meissen manufactory of 1717, Steinbrück explicitly stresses that the new enterprise not only generated new income for the country but also raised the public welfare by feeding a goodly number of artists and workers.⁶⁰ He compared its establishment directly with the mercantilist measures of Louis XIV and his ministers Fouquet and Colbert, who had promoted the sciences and commerce in every way.⁶¹ Following the example of Louis XIV, it belonged to the glorious duties of a regent to initiate new industry and to act as an entrepreneur in the best interest

57 See Weber 2013, vol. 1, 17–18.

58 “Solche kostbaren Waaren werden aus LandesMaterialien gemachet, die bey nahe nichts als den Fuhrlohn erfordern [sic]; und bishero sonst zu nichts gebrauchet worden. Dadurch wird frembdes Geld ins Land gezogen, und in dem Lande mancher Künstler und Arbeiter ernehret.” Steinbrück 1982, vol. 2, 178. See also Mücke 1990, 33.

59 See Weber 2010, 157–158.

60 See footnote 58.

61 Steinbrück 1982, vol. 2, 177.

of the country and its inhabitants. Colbert's most significant economic measures were actually incorporated in the form of allegories into the iconographic programme of the *Grand Appartement* at Versailles and thus praised as meritorious aspects of Louis XIV's wise government.⁶² In contrast with the state apartment, the Hall of Mirrors laid emphasis on the conquering warlord, whose victories are allegorized in the ceiling paintings of the gallery. As exemplified in the adjacent *Salon de la Paix*, the ultimate aim of these military campaigns was to pacify Europe under French hegemony.⁶³ As Hendrik Ziegler has shown, the aggressive and triumphalist undercurrent of the picture cycle did not go unnoticed by contemporaries, leading to criticism of Louis XIV's autocratic conduct and expansive foreign policy.⁶⁴ Steinbrück also makes reference to his minister of war as the martial Louvois. According to Steinbrück, the expensive wars imposed on France by Louis XIV thwarted the positive effects of his mercantilist policies.⁶⁵

When Augustus the Strong presented himself in the Japanese Palace as a peaceful ruler who mainly excelled on the diplomatic parquet, he was possibly consciously distinguishing himself from the belligerent Louis XIV. His government program was to be presented in the throne cabinet, where the ceiling painting was to depict the dispute between Athena/Minerva and Poseidon/Neptune in naming the city of Athens. The two deities were vying for predominance in Attica and tried to win the mortals over with gifts. According to popular tradition, Neptune made a spring burst forth, but its water was salty. A preliminary sketch by the Dresden court painter Louis de Silvestre (fig. 19) reveals that the artist actually drew on a less common version of the myth: In the sketch, Neptune is seen offering the citizens of the unnamed Attic town a horse, a useful gift in times of war, while Minerva presents them with a fertile olive tree, a symbol of peace. The gods of Olympus, who had to pass judgement, decided in favor of the latter.

The mythological contest was ultimately a parable of the basic struggle between uncontrolled passion (symbolized by the god of the sea) and rationality (represented by the goddess, who was born from the head of Jupiter).⁶⁶ At the same time, the decision between Neptune and Minerva was also understood as a choice between two opposing concepts of government. As a 1632 commentary on an English edition of Ovid's *Metamorphoses* says: "Moreover, this fable decides, and by the sentence of the Gods, that a City is not so much renowned for riches and empire, purchased by

62 See Milovanic 2005, 36–44.

63 See Ziegler 2010, 148.

64 Ziegler 2010, 179–180.

65 "Wenn in Franckreich ein Fouquet und ein Colbert, deren einer die Gelehrsamkeit und gute Künste, andere die Kaufmannschafft liebet, Directores derer Commerciens sind, so siehet man, daß Academien derer Wißenschafften aufgerichtet, pensiones vor gelehrte Leüthe geordnet, und die Commercias auf alle weise befördert werden. So bald es aber an einen Martialischen Louvois kombt, so fallen die Wißenschafften wieder; dargegen erhebet sich der Kriegs-Etat destomehr." Steinbrück 1982, 176–177.

66 See Brumble 1998, 42.

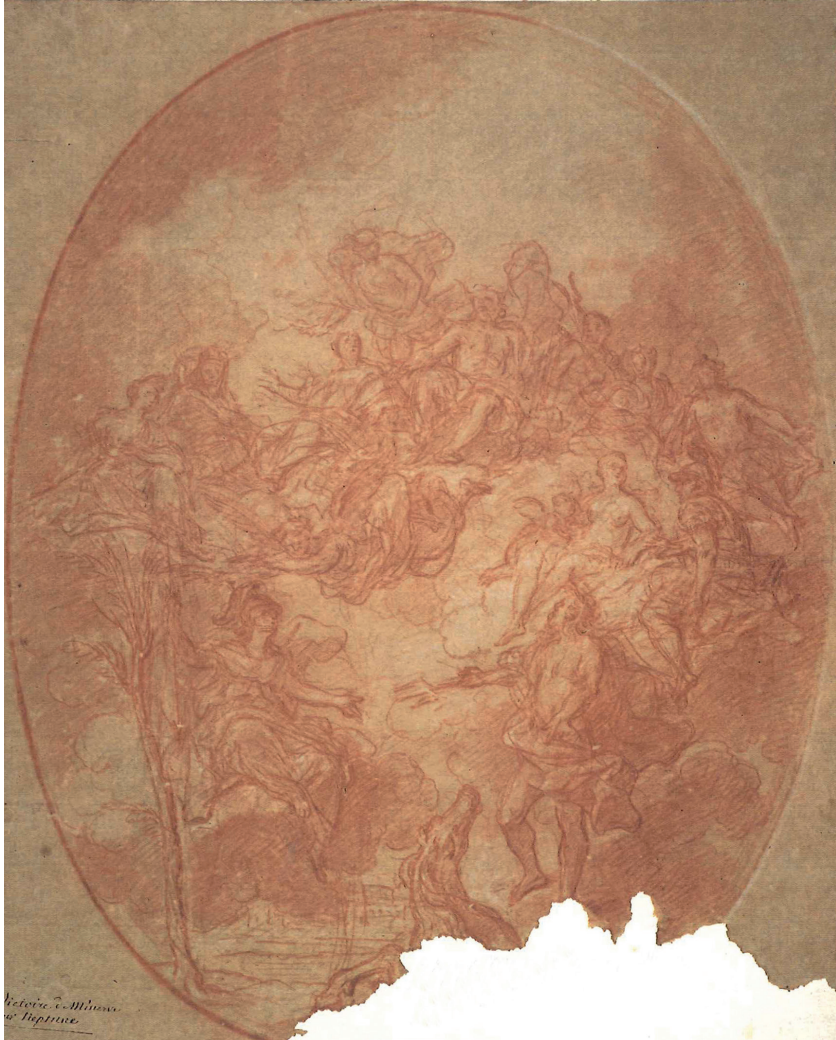


Figure 19: Japanese Palace, preliminary sketch for the ceiling painting in the corner room with the throne in the upper floor by Louis de Silvestre, ca. 1735.

naval victories; as by civil arts and a peaceable government."⁶⁷ The iconographic program of the throne cabinet emphasizes the benefits of just and wise government led by discernment and rationality rather than passion and allows the sciences, arts, commerce, and trade to flourish for the benefit of the common good.

67 Quoted after Brumble 1998, 33.

The Meissen triumph as a means of legitimizing the claim to absolute sovereignty

Augustus the Strong thus presented the alleged Meissen triumph as a result of his exemplary government, which at the same time provided him with the necessary means for his claim to absolute power. However, economic strength was a prerequisite, but no guarantee for the actual enforcement of sovereignty. Aside from the German Emperor and King of Bohemia, Augustus the Strong was, in 1697, the first elector to have been crowned king. Although the law of nations theoretically granted him equal rank with the other crowned heads of Europe,⁶⁸ this did not necessarily mean that they would pay him the respect his title was due. As mentioned above, he had only become king in Poland by election. His sovereignty was constrained by the laws of the aristocratic republic, and the royal crown was not linked by succession to the Saxon electorate. The established kings had no interest in broadening their circle “to remain even more distinguished,”⁶⁹ and the Emperor insisted emphatically on the traditional hierarchy within the Holy Roman Empire, which was in opposition to the principle of the equality of all sovereigns in the law of nations. Augustus the Strong therefore had to assert his new position vigorously. As Gottfried Wilhelm Leibniz stated prior to the coronation of the Prussian king in 1701, it was not until the most distinguished Christian potentates—according to Leibniz, most notably the German Emperor and the kings of France and England—accorded him the appropriate ceremonial honors that a pretender effectively gained royal dignity.⁷⁰ For “he is a king who is called a king, and who is [actually] accorded the honors traditionally associated with the name [of king].”⁷¹ Or, as André Krischer summed up the matter,

68 “& quoique cette dignité & souveraineté Roïale soit plus ancienne ou plus moderne l'une que l'autre, elle leur donne un même caractère, un même honneur & une même prérogative.” Rousset de Missy 1746, 59.

69 “je höher diese Würde, je schwerer ist es, sie zu erlangen. Die Könige, die es am meisten angehet eyfern auch am meisten darüber; und wollen nicht gern, um desto mehr unterschieden zu bleiben, die Zahl ihrer Mitgenossen vermehren, noch andere, die es nicht sind, zur Gemeinschaft dieses ihres Vorzuges lassen.” Lünig 1720, 120.

70 “Ist ein Herr frey, so kann ihm niemand wehren, wenn er sich in seinem Lande als ein könig oder gar als Kayser tituliren lässet, ist er aber nicht mächtig gnug, umb sich bey denen Auswärtigen erkennen zu machen so, wird er damit nichts als Spott erhalten! Dieweil es demnach mit der Königlichen Würde kein Domes-ticum, sondern res juris Gentium, so ist nöthig, sich Anderer zu versichern. Ein mächtiger freyer Herr hat Potentiam proximam; aber weilen andere in Possession, gewisse Ehren von ihm zu empfangen, und gewisse Ehre ihm zu geben, so erscheinet, daß die Annehmung königlicher Würde nicht pure und allerdings merae facultatis sey, sondern eine gewisse Autorität zu deren Erlangung erfordert werden.” Leibniz 1966, 308.

71 “Ein König ist, der also heißet, und dem die dem Namen, der Gewohnheit nach, anhängende Ehrenrechte zukommen.” Leibniz 1966, 306.

“the essence of royalty in the eighteenth century was primarily founded on social esteem and only secondarily on power.”⁷²

As there was “not a more illustrious Mark of Sovereignty than the Right of sending and receiving Embassadors,”⁷³ the mutual acceptance of sovereignty became most clearly evident during audiences. These state events were the public acknowledgement of royal status. While Augustus the Strong could not force other European princes to honor him with an official embassy, by staging the imaginary reception of a Chinese delegation he essentially claimed that the almighty Emperor of the “Middle Kingdom” acknowledged him as his equivalent. His purpose was surely to compel all European crowned heads to follow suit. The triumphal message of the Japanese Palace was not principally directed at the Emperor of China, who would hardly have taken notice of the one-sided challenge. Meissen porcelain had in fact been sent to China to proclaim Saxony’s victory, but to no great effect. The real addressees were the high-ranking envoys from European courts who would have been guided through the palace on the occasion of their visits to Dresden.

Instead of maintaining his equal (if not superior) status in direct comparison with his potential opponents, Augustus the Strong played the game indirectly by defying the Emperor of China, a ruler who was considered to possess status on par with the German Emperor, as Susan Richter has established with reference to contemporary travel reports and legal treatises on princely ranks:

China was described as a centralized absolutist state with a complex and vigorously hierarchical administration and also with a form of rule legitimized by religion, at the head of which stood the ruler. [...] European treatises on the law of nations used these descriptions as evidence for their arguments and thus determined China’s coequal status and equality as well as the highest status of the Emperor of China. [...] From a European perspective, the Chinese Emperor was thus granted a legal position alongside the head of the Holy Roman Empire, the French and Spanish kings and also the Russian tsars.⁷⁴

72 “Das Wesen des Königtums im 18. Jahrhundert gründete zuerst in sozialer Schätzung und dann erst in Macht.” Krischer 2009, 17.

73 Wicquefort 1716, 6.

74 “China wurde als ein absolutistisch regierter Zentralstaat mit einer komplexen und stark hierarchisierten Administration sowie religiös legitimierten Herrschaft dargestellt, an dessen Spitze der Herrscher stand. [...] Diese Beschreibungen griffen europäische Völkerrechtstraktate als Argumente auf und fixierten somit die Gleichrangigkeit und Gleichwertigkeit Chinas als Staat sowie den höchsten Rang des chinesischen Kaisers. [...] Aus europäischer Perspektive wurde damit dem chinesischen Kaiser eine rangrechtliche Position neben dem Kaiser des Heiligen Römischen Reiches, den französischen und spanischen Königen sowie dem russischen Zaren zuerkannt.” Richter 2010, 29.

The fact that Augustus the Strong even dared to raise himself above this potent monarch might also be understood as a provocative gesture towards the German Emperor. Nor would it have been the only instance of Augustus the Strong insolently laying claim not only to absolute sovereignty, but also to a leading role in the Holy Roman Empire.⁷⁵

Since the end of the Thirty Years War, German princes had gained more and more independence from the imperial court. Given, as mentioned above, that Augustus the Strong was the first to achieve royal dignity, he would have felt himself to be in a privileged enough position to step out of the Emperor's shadow and to make a bid for a leading role in Europe. Accordingly, his main aim was to cement the Polish-Saxon union prior to his death and thus secure the royal crown for the house of Wettin. An attempt to dispense with free elections in Poland and impose a hereditary succession to the throne had failed.⁷⁶ Augustus the Strong could only invoke the general acceptance of his royal rank and attempt to link it to his dynasty. On the diplomatic parquet, he actually came closer to this objective than in any other field, succeeding in accrediting ambassadors in Dresden who honored him as elector of Saxony and "King in Poland."⁷⁷ This main political achievement would have been corroborated and glorified in the Japanese Palace, at the same time raising claims that by far exceeded what Augustus the Strong actually achieved. Because the iconographic program was concentrated not so much on his own person as on his position as Saxon elector and Polish king, it was also—and even principally—also applicable to his son and successor Frederick Augustus II, for whom he tried to procure the Polish crown against the resistance of the neighboring states. This is borne out by the fact that, shortly after his election by a minority of the Sejm in October 1733 and his coronation in January 1734, King Augustus III resumed the work on the Japanese Palace in close accordance with his father's original design from 1730, though he did in fact gradually abandon it a few years later.

The public reception of the Japanese Palace

As the interiors hardly progressed beyond the planning phase, it is impossible to establish whether the intended message of the Japanese Palace was actually understood. However, various panegyric writings published after Augustus the Strong's death in February 1733 make it clear that his reading of the Meissen triumph soon became a topos, at least in Saxony. The Meissen victory over Chinese and Japanese porcelain is repeatedly emphasized, though not without a certain vein of mockery: it not only

75 See Lorenz 1995, 376; Schlechte 1990, 103–104, 113–116; regarding Augustus the Strong's hope of securing the imperial throne for his son and successor, see Schnitzer 2014, 8–10.

76 See Schnitzer 2011, 47 for more references.

77 See Staszewski 1997, 16.

proved that the Saxons were indeed endowed with two eyes,⁷⁸ but it also made the Chinese blush with shame.⁷⁹ These eulogies also reflected the fact that it was the great success of Meissen porcelain on the Parisian art market that had finally led to the Saxons' conviction that they had outdone the Asians. For example, the boastful article in the *Mercure de France* of February 1731 mentioned above is summarized and in part quoted verbatim in a biography of Augustus the Strong from 1733. The passage also explicitly points to the fact that renowned connoisseurs had been duped by the Meissen copies of Japanese prototypes, even finding the former finer than the latter.⁸⁰

The importance of the French market is also acknowledged in an enlightening letter from the Meissen city council of August 1737, which reads as follows:

It is thus not to be held against the late king that at first he kept a thing to himself, the discovery and establishment of which had cost him so much, filling up his rooms and curiosity cabinets with it, and that by means of the porcelain gifts that he made to other high courts he had proved that his beloved Saxony conceded nothing to the highly clever Chinese and the inhabitants of the island of Japan, either in the wealth of materials for the porcelain or in the artistry and skill in the preparation of the same, but, rather, outshone them by far. The latter claim does not need any proof, as the Turks and French, who are good connoisseurs of this kind of wares, would otherwise not deign to become involved in its commerce.⁸¹

78 "Denn es können die Fremden die schöne Mahlerey nicht sattsam bewundern, welche diejenige, so an dem Chinesischen Porcellin zu befinden, weit übersteiget. Daher, wenn die Europäer ein Auge haben, die Chineser aber mit zweyen Augen begabt seyn, so wird das doppelte Augen=Licht gewiß auch denen Sachsen nicht fehlen, welche die Chineser in der Mahlerey des Porcellins noch übertreffen." "Von denen zehn Merckwürdigkeiten" 1732, 73.

79 "Dich wird noch Dein Meißen nennen, / Weil es läst die Erde brennen, / Die nun China schaaamroth macht." Henrici 1733, not paginated.

80 "Ja was noch mehr? Hat nicht Sachsen unter der weisen Regierung Augusti den Chinesischen Reiche den Rang abgelauffen, und es mit Verfertigung des Porcellains so hoch gebracht, daß andere Nationen darüber erstaunen müssen? Die Porcellain-Fabrique [...] blühet noch jetzo in der Stadt Meissen, und werden daselbst die schönsten Gefässe von allerhand Gattungen verfertigt, zugleich aber so künstlich gemahlet und vergoldet, daß das Japanische und Chinesische Porcellain gar schlecht gegen dasselbe aussiehet, ja auch die Mahlereyen auf demselben an Thieren, Bäumen, Pflantzen und Blumen viel schöner und die Farben besser gewechselt werden können, so daß auch die geschicktesten Kenner sich oftmals betrogen, indem sie das Sächsische Porcellain vor dem Japanischen nicht erkennen, sondern dem Meißnischen den Vorzug vor jenem geben." *Merckwürdiges Leben Ihro Königl. Maj. von Pohlen* 1733, 26. Compare to footnote 7.

81 "so war es ja dem höchstseel. Könige gar nicht zu verargen, daß er eine Sache, deren Erfind- und Einrichtung ihm so kostbar gefallen war, noch zur Zeit vor sich behielte, seine Zimmer und Raritaeten-Kammern damit anfüllte, und durch seine an andere Hohe Höfe übermachte Pourcelaine-Praesente erwiesen, daß sein geliebtes Sachsen denen super-klugen Chinesen und Einwohnern der Insul

These lines not only provide further testimony of the great satisfaction felt in Saxony about having defeated the arrogant Asians, they specify the same favorable preconditions for this unique success as the intended ceiling painting of the throne gallery, namely, the rich natural resources of Saxony and the scientific and artistic expertise of its inhabitants. In so doing, it gives the sovereign sole credit for the establishment and glorious achievements of the Meissen manufactory.

Summary

The example of Augustus the Strong's feigned triumph over the Emperor of China staged as an imaginary audience in the Japanese Palace deals with two different types of copying: the actual physical copying of East-Asian porcelain on the one hand, and the eclectic quotation and fusion of existing successful patterns of representation in the Japanese Palace via the emulation of the cited role models on the other. The success of the first served to legitimate the claim raised by the latter.

The precondition for actually copying Chinese and Japanese porcelain was the ground-breaking reinvention of this hitherto exclusively East Asian luxury material. The throne gallery's ceiling decoration was intended to highlight why it was that this complex technology could finally be recreated in Saxony and not elsewhere: credit is given to Saxony's ruler and his wisdom in showing encouragement and support for the sciences and arts, as well as his exploitation of the natural riches in his domain. The making of exact copies of the most prestigious and elaborate East Asian originals in the royal collection was meant to visually demonstrate this much-envied success. The primary idea was therefore to present the pieces side by side with their prototypes, in order to prove their parity.

The so-called Hoym-Lemaire-Affaire, however, gave even greater meaning to the Meissen copies: the equality claimed for them was confirmed beyond doubt when highly-esteemed French connoisseurs were duped by them. The deliberate omission of the blue crossed swords mark taken from the Saxon coat of arms had turned the copies for the Parisian dealer Lemaire into deceptive fakes. The rapid uncovering of this fraud triggered a wide-reaching debate in France about the true rank of Meissen copies vis a vis East Asian originals.⁸² Arguments advanced by dealers and collectors as well as scientists and economists prove that contemporaries did not disdain the widespread practice of copying itself. On the contrary, copying

Japan weder an Reichthum der Materialien zum Pourcelain noch an Kunst und Geschicklichkeit, in Bereitung deßelben etwas nachgäbe, wollen sagen, weit überträffe. Das leztere braucht keines Beweises, denn sonst würden Türcken und Franzosen, als gute Kenner derg. Waare sich in deßen Commerce nicht so weit einlaßen." Staatliche Porzellan-Manufaktur Meissen, archive, AA I Aa 24c, fols. 194b, 195a.

82 See Weber 2014.

was a respectable means by which to improve one's reputation, particularly if recognized connoisseurs were taken in. It was, however, of primary importance that copies be identified as such in order to understand them in relation to their prototypes. Only in the undisturbed economic framework of a hierarchical order of goods was it convenient to value them as originals in their own right.⁸³

The Meissen copies were essentially viewed as incontrovertible proof of technological pioneering and achievement. They were therefore judged for their extrinsic as well as intrinsic material qualities when pitted against East Asian porcelain. As suggested in the *Mercure de France* of February 1731, the most refined Parisian connoisseurs preferred the Saxon copies to the East Asian originals. The transformative power of these copies fundamentally altered the perception and appreciation of Meissen porcelain not only in France, but also in Saxony itself: their great success on Europe's foremost art market gave birth to a wholly new understanding of the native product that culminated in the reconceiving of the then-principle royal project—the extension and rearrangement of the Japanese Palace. Copies made at Meissen were no longer intended as proof of parity with the much admired East Asian originals. The copies of Japanese porcelain in the Kakiemon style apparently preferred by Parisian opinion makers served rather as physical evidence of the superiority of Saxon porcelain.

In order to turn simple success into triumph over the Emperor of China and thus into a claim of absolute sovereignty, Augustus the Strong had his Meissen copies incorporated into an architectural setting that deliberately quoted established patterns of representation, for instance, by copying a meaningful spatial setting or quoting significant elements of foreign court ceremonials as visual references. In cleverly merging quoted examples of excellence, they were appropriated to assert Augustus the Strong's superiority as an absolute monarch. As demonstrated with regard to Dinglinger's Great Moghul (see the contribution by Corinna Forberg in this volume), Augustus the Strong did not shy away from offending and humiliating the exemplary monarchs in a process of what could be called emulatory elimination.

Meinrad von Engelberg has convincingly argued that this emulative eclecticism is characteristic of baroque architecture in the Roman Holy Empire. The innovative power of eclecticism consisted of potentizing quotations, the sources of which always shone through and stood out as recognizable benchmarks. This it did by superimposing a novel and more ideal solution upon them. This widespread design principle relies on viewers who actually understand visual references and who will admit that the refinement with which they find themselves confronted unquestionably outstrips the referenced examples. Here again this practice of quoting was

83 See Weber 2014, 136–137.

not considered a paucity of originality, but rather—if cleverly applied—a demonstration of intellect, education, ambition, and aesthetic sensitivity.⁸⁴

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84 See Engelberg 2012, esp. 32 and 35.

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