

## CHINESE AND JAPANESE PORCELAIN IN ST PETERSBURG'S PALACES IN THE 18TH AND THE 19TH CENTURIES COLLECTIONS AND THEIR COLLECTORS

*Tatiana B. Arapova*

*Translated into English by Anatoly Zhukov*

THE PROBLEMS SURROUNDING CULTURAL CONTACTS between China and Russia are well known and not for discussion here, although I would like to stress once again Peter the Great's role in the formation of the first Russian collection of oriental art in the late 17th and early 18th centuries.

Before turning to the theme of this article, it must be stressed that in Russia every scholar interested in the history of private collections in the 18th and 19th centuries faces numerous obstacles. After the 1917 revolution all palaces belonging to members of the royal family and to the Russian aristocracy were nationalised by the State. The problem immediately arose of what to do with the works of art amassed by their owners, sometimes over many generations.

There are relevant documents in the archives of The State Hermitage Museum. Thus, after the nationalisation of Count Stroganov's palace in Nevsky Prospect and an inventory taken of its contents, there was disagreement among museum scholars and members of the new administration as to the fate of the property. In the archives, there is a memorandum from Alexander Benois, an artist, brilliant art historian and for six years (1918-1924) head of the picture gallery in the Hermitage Museum. He considered that as the Stroganov collection was more than one hundred years old it should stay *in situ*, whereas the palace itself should be transformed into a museum. In the same memorandum Benois discussed two other aristocratic homes, the Yusupov and the Shuvalov palaces, arguing that they should be preserved intact as typical examples of 18th and 19th century palaces. In Benois's words "the interiors of the Shuvalov palace illustrate the everyday life of high society where the most prominent men of arts and letters of the romantic period socialised. Some minor changes could be made, but this should be done in such a way that the general physiognomy of the palace is preserved and all its characteristic features kept. As



Figure 1, A. Benkendorf, Lacquer room in Monplaisir Palace in Petershof, 1900s, watercolour (inv. no.43389, The Hermitage, St Petersburg)

for the Stroganov palace, where everything points to the exquisite taste of one individual; it should remain intact. The palace and its collection are a single monument".<sup>1</sup>

According to the opposite point of view, objects from the Stroganov palace should be considered part of the National Museum Fund (which received all property from the nationalised palaces). Consequently, all could be removed and, if necessary, transferred to other museums. At first, Alexander Benois's opinion prevailed and for some time the Stroganov palace remained untouched, although it later shared the fate of other palaces. It is quite obvious that today the archival material – various inventories from different times and their contents in various museums throughout Russia – have become our main source for studying the collections from the St Petersburg palaces. Archival material relating

to the history of the construction of these palaces is of considerable importance here, as are the inventories concerned with furniture and interior decoration and, of course, contemporary memoirs.

For identification of the Chinese and Japanese collections in the 19th century palaces, drawings and paintings depicting their interiors are an important source of information, as are the inventories. Some idea of the character of 18th and 19th century collections can be gathered from studying the objects themselves, objects identified by these means. Naturally, it is not possible to discuss all the palaces where Chinese porcelain was used, but we have selected some typical examples relating to specific periods. These demonstrate the evolution, both in attitude to these objects and their existence in the palaces, as well as changes in their repertoire in the course of two centuries.

We know that Peter the Great purchased his first large consignments of Chinese porcelain ware through the Dutch East-India Company. Thus, a quantity of crockery is mentioned in the list of objects Peter had at his disposal in his cabin on board the ship *Apostle Peter* (dated 1699). Namely “nine porcelain cups, large and small, including three yellow, three white cups, three small ones of lemon



Figure 2, Chinese porcelain dish with floral motifs, with overglaze decoration in famille verte colours, China, 1700-1722, 15 inches (38 cm) diameter (inv. no. Li-105, The Hermitage, St Petersburg)

Figure 3, Seated official holding a scroll in his left hand, possibly the poet Hitomaro (late 7th century-729 AD?), Japan, Satsuma (Kyoto?) kilns, late 19th century, stoneware with overglaze polychrome colours with gold, 10 inches (25 cm) high (inv. no. YK-985, The Hermitage, St Petersburg)



colour, the exterior painted with sky-blue grass and also six white Chinese cups with floral decoration, two green porcelain cups”<sup>2</sup> etc.

There is a reference to “a mug with nine inset beakers, a Chinese emperor’s gift” among the items that decorated the interior of Peter’s Marly pavilion in Peterhof.<sup>3</sup> Regrettably, the fate of these pieces is unknown to us and we can only guess what kind of objects they were by comparing them with Chinese porcelain of Peter’s time. As for the Chinese porcelain from yet another of Peter’s palaces in Peterhof, Monplaisir, this had a happier fate. Peter bought approximately 500 pieces for his palace and some pieces remain there to this day (fig. 1).

In 1711, the Ekateringof palace was built on the banks of the Ekateringofka river, near the site of the Peter’s first naval victory over the Swedes. It was intended as a country residence for his wife, Catherine the First. Peter the Great liked to use this palace as a private residence. After his death the palace fell out of use more or less until his daughter Elizabeth succeeded to the throne. During her reign it was restored and a few additions made. The items which had belonged to Peter were carefully preserved. When Elizabeth died the palace ceased to be used as a royal residence, although her belongings and those of her father were kept.

Many Chinese objects are described in the guide



Figure 4, Luigi Premazzi, Large drawing room in the Mikhailovsky Palace, 1848, watercolour with heightening in white (inv. no. 27737, The Hermitage, St Petersburg)

book published in 1903. For example, in Peter the Great’s bedroom there was a “small cupboard with Chinese cups” and in a room on the first floor was “a porcelain screen depicting a ceremonial procession of the Chinese emperor and his retinue”.<sup>4</sup>

The palace survived until 1926 when it was destroyed by fire.

Chinese and Japanese porcelain (almost no distinction was made between them) was to be found in the palaces which belonged to Peter’s closest associate, Prince Alexander Menshikov, the first Governor General of St Petersburg. His interest in Chinese works of art goes back to the time when he accompanied Peter the Great on his first foreign journeys.

In the course of these journeys, Menshikov, in his capacity as Peter’s private treasurer, purchased rarities including porcelain that had been brought over on East-India Company ships. The inventories from the Prince’s Moscow residences, as well as those of the Oranienbaum Palace, refer to Chinese porcelain in their interior decoration. We are also informed that, in 1716, Menshikov bought a whole cupboard of Chinese porcelain ware for the sum of 160 rubles from the daughter of Admiral L. Lang.<sup>5</sup> This was intended for his palace in St Petersburg. There seem to have been many Chinese pieces because they are recorded in the inventory made of Menshikov’s property after he left St Petersburg.<sup>6</sup> Among those

listed are: “thirteen painted dishes with a yellow ground, eleven painted dishes with azure and white ground... six painted cups with floral decoration on a white ground... one Chinese openwork cruet painted with gilt foliage scrolls on an azure ground”<sup>7</sup> etc.

From this it is possible to identify various porcelain wares decorated in *famille jaune* palette, blue-and-white pieces, those made in *bleu poudre* technique with gilt designs and pieces with *famille verte* decoration.

Unfortunately, very few objects belonging to Prince Menshikov have survived. After Peter the Great’s death, as a result of palace intrigues at the court of his widow Catherine the First and grandson Peter II, Menshikov was exiled to Siberia where he died in 1728. His property was confiscated and passed to the State Treasury. Among the extant objects that can be identified as belonging to him there is no Chinese or Japanese porcelain.

In 1712, Peter the Great presented a plot of land on the banks of the Fontanka river to the famous Field-Marshal Count Boris Petrovich Sheremetev, where he built a small country estate, a farmstead.



Figure 5, Jules Meyblum, Dining-room in the Stroganov house, 1860s, watercolour with heightening in white (inv. no. 41835, The Hermitage, St Petersburg)

The splendid palace built there later by the Field Marshal's son Peter Borisovich Sheremetev, an art connoisseur and collector, still stands. He kept a *kunstkammer* for which he bought works of art during his foreign journeys. There is no direct reference to his purchase of Chinese and Japanese porcelain in the records of the State Historical Archives, yet the very existence of Chinese style interiors in the Sheremetev palace presupposes their use in the decoration of the palace.

We should not forget that Peter Borisovich Sheremetev was married to Varvara Alekseevna Cherkasskaya, daughter of the former owner of the Ostantkino palace in Moscow, which housed one of the first Russian collections of Chinese porcelain, assembled by the princes Cherkassky. In the 1750s and 1760s, when the estate was finally completed, a park with a fountain and grotto appeared. According to the archives, the Hermitage pavilion was built at Fontanka in 1757 in "Chinese taste", "with an oval table for six persons".<sup>8</sup>

By the early 1780s the Fontanka palace became Peter Sheremetev's second residence in the capital, St

Petersburg. It is worth noting that the Sheremetev's Hermitage pavilion was built much earlier than Catherine the Great's "Chinese Kiosk" at Tsarskoe Selo. Sadly, no designs relating to Sheremetev's "Chinese Hermitage Pavilion" have survived.

Another difficulty arises in the identification of Chinese porcelain from the Fontanka palace. This is because Peter Borisovich Sheremetev removed many furnishing and decorative objects from the St Petersburg palace to the newly built palaces in Moscow and to his country estates, such as Kouskovo and Nikolskoye.

Catherine the Great's Winter Palace stands out among the 18th century St Petersburg palaces. According to the archives there was a wooden mezzanine in the palace in the mid-1780s which connected to Catherine's library, by that time situated in the Little Hermitage building. On this mezzanine were several rooms where the Empress kept works of art. In a letter to Baron Grimm she called them the "Imperial museum". The display in this "museum" was changed frequently.

From the mid 1780s the rooms were used for housing oriental objects and the mezzanine began to be known as the "Chinese mezzanine". It consisted of four rooms, where the Empress would receive only her closest associates. Their decoration seems to have been extremely sumptuous and exotic and greatly impressed visitors. One of them, Count Peter Borisovich Sheremetev, wrote in 1787: "Last night I visited the mezzanine, which is the name for a suit of staterooms, a sort of museum... to tell the truth, they are magnificently furnished and with great taste; there are many curiosities around, especially those which look like Chinese pieces".<sup>9</sup> Despite the abundance of Chinese objects (the inventory lists small lacquer tables, painted screens, tortoiseshell cups and saucers", etc.), there are only two references to porcelain; there was a coach in the picture rooms with a shelf on which Chinese porcelain statuettes were displayed and, in the third room, "there were two porcelain lanterns and six tall pottery figures".<sup>10</sup>

Unfortunately, all the Chinese rooms in the Winter Palace perished in the 1837 fire and have never been restored, although Chinese objects continued to be a part of Winter Palace interior decoration as long as it remained the residence of the Russian tsars.

Although the fashion for chinoiserie in Russia was not on the same scale as in Europe, Chinese and Japanese objects were found outside the imperial palaces in the 18th century. Prince Nikita Repnin was one of the most distinguished grandees of Catherine's time, a soldier and diplomat, field-marshal, general and a freemason. According to his contemporaries, he preferred to live on his country

Figure 6, Blue and white porcelain plate painted with The Crucifixion, China, late 17th-early 18th century, 8½ inches (22 cm) diameter (inv. no. Li-5, The Hermitage, St Petersburg)



estate in a "house, built in an entirely Chinese taste". This was a wooden structure consisting of a great number of small rooms. The walls were lined with Chinese wall-paper and the floor was covered with Chinese carpets, the rooms themselves were filled with Chinese furniture, made of porcelain, with countless figures of similar (porcelain) material, as well as bronze objects and statues, which filled all corridors and passages in the house. The garden was also laid out in Chinese taste.<sup>11</sup>

By comparing the palace inventories with 18th century palace interiors, we can imagine how the prevailing taste was changing, leading to changes in the use of Chinese and Japanese objects in interiors. We see that in Peter the Great's time oriental objects, then considered rarities, often predominate, although they were also put to utilitarian use. There were cups, dishes, goblets, tumblers, etc. By the mid and second half of the 18th century decorative pieces became predominant, such as porcelain figures, lights and even furniture, etc.



Figure 6a, Blue and white cylindrical vase, painted with a lion and phoenix in a landscape, Japan, late 17th century, 23¼ inches (59 cm) high (inv. no. YK-1070, The Hermitage, St Petersburg)

While the storerooms for porcelain services contained Chinese wares as well, they were not as common as at the European courts. Surprisingly, I could not find any traces of large porcelain figures in the palace collections although they are listed in the inventories.

Taste changed in the 19th century, new architectural styles came into fashion leading to new styles of interior decoration. Chinese and Japanese wares continued to be used for decorative purposes, but in a rather different way – they were no longer regarded as exotic and quaint. They became an essential feature of interior decoration. Their role in the entire furnishing scheme and the manner, in which they were used, was to change more than once during the century. In the late 18th and early 19th centuries it



Figure 7, Barbers-bowl decorated with the figure of a troubadour in a garden painted in overglaze polychrome colours, China, 18th century, 13 inches (33 cm) (inv. no. Li-183, The Hermitage, St Petersburg)

was fashionable to use monochrome types of Chinese porcelain wares often with ormolu mounts.

Main staircases and mantelpieces featured Japanese Imari porcelain. In the memoirs of Count Mikhail Buturlin, referring to the years 1815-16, when the author was a young boy of seven or eight, he recalls his first visit to the Winter Palace accompanied by his mother. He writes: “We also looked in at Empress Maria Feodorovna’s apartments (in her absence), where we were greatly amused at the sight of Chinese porcelain figures, which were the size of a man; they stood in the drawing room in two rows, and started to bow when one stepped on the spring near the door.”<sup>12</sup>

Between 1830 and 1840 Chinese and Japanese porcelain were merely components in eclectically oriental decoration, using contemporary and older Chinese and Japanese pieces. They were sometimes randomly dispersed because they were inconsistent with the style of the interior. A new development in the second half of the 19th century was evident in the interiors of the Anichkov and Winter Palaces. The Anichkov palace was owned by the Romanov family and was the residence of different family members. In the second half of the 19th century, for nearly twenty years, it was home to the future emperor Alexander III and his spouse Maria Feodorovna (the Danish princess Dagmara). Maria Feodorovna was very well informed about European collections of Far-Eastern art and was an avid collector of oriental art, including Chinese porcelain. The Anichkov Palace inventories feature works by

Chinese and Japanese ceramic artists, among them Chinese *blanc de chine* pieces: “the figure of Guan Yin with an infant, the head broken off, has an impressed mark; another figure of white porcelain – a seated deity; a Satsuma vase with the top and bottom made of wood, etc.” The inventory also lists soup and dessert plates and an East India Company compotier ornamented with the designs of flying cranes, birds and flowers.<sup>13</sup>

In the late 19th century another group of Far Eastern objects was added to these pieces, acquired by the future emperor Nicholas II during his Far Eastern tour. After the Anichkov palace was nationalised, it shared the fate of other royal residences. Its holdings were dispersed to other museums and judging by the archival information, some of the objects were transferred to the Kuskovo Museum of Porcelain.

At present a small number of Chinese and Japanese pieces from the Hermitage collection can be identified as coming from the Anichkov palace. Among these is a beautiful dish with floral decoration in *famille verte* colours (fig.2).

As we see from the inventories of the Winter Palace, Chinese and Japanese objects decorated the private rooms of Nicholas II and his wife Alexandra Feodorovna, alongside other oriental pieces. There were artefacts bought at European auctions, items that Nicholas II received as gifts during his tour of China and Japan and other pieces he purchased himself. Among these was a small figure of a seated man wearing an official headdress and holding a scroll (fig.3).

This may be a portrait of the celebrated poet Hito-Marō (second half of the 7th century – 729 AD) made in a Satsuma workshop (possibly Kyoto).

Among gifts from the Chinese emperor, received on the occasion of Nicholas’ coronation, there were “five polychrome-painted vases and five polychrome-painted dishes as well as a vase with *sang-de-boeuf* glaze delivered by Li Hungzan”.<sup>14</sup> According to the inventories, Nicholas’ rooms in the Winter Palace were decorated with Satsuma wares.

Chinese and Japanese porcelain was used to decorate the interiors of other royal palaces as can be seen in watercolours and prints of these interiors, such as of the large drawing-room in the Michalovsky palace which belonged to Grand Duke Mikhail Pavlovich (fig.4). As has already been said, Chinese and Japanese porcelain could be found in almost every royal and aristocratic palace in St Petersburg in the middle and the second half of the 19th century.

However, among the owners we should single out a few prominent collectors. Firstly, there is Count Pavel Stroganov (1823-1911) from the well-known

Stroganov family. He maintained the family tradition of collecting art. In his palace, there was a large collection of paintings, drawings and decorative art, including Chinese and Japanese porcelain. The watercolour, by the students of the Baron Stieglitz School of Technical Drawing, shows how porcelain was used in the interior decoration of Count Stroganov’s house, for example, in the dining room (fig.5). Count Stroganov ceased collecting in 1870, which means that the above-mentioned objects cannot be any later in date.

As with the holdings of all aristocratic palaces, the Stroganov collection was de-accessioned, transferred to the central stores of the Museum Fund and dispersed to other museums.<sup>15</sup> Then, in 1928 and 1930, more than eighty pieces from Stroganov’s home were given to the Hermitage Museum. Many were sold later through the “Antiquariat” shop and about fifty pieces of Chinese and Japanese porcelain ended up in the Hermitage. A study and comparison of documents and items help us identify the porcelain wares from Stroganov’s home.

Among the late 17th century objects there is a plate, showing *The Crucifixion* and painted in cobalt and gold (fig.6). In addition there is a group of pieces from a service – Chinese porcelain made for the East India Company and Japanese porcelain from Arita kilns (fig 6a), etc. Comparison of the 1928 Museum Fund inventory with the Hermitage items supports us in assuming that Count Pavel Stroganov’s main interest was in export wares.

Among other St Petersburg collectors the family of the Princes Gorchakov should be singled out. Alexander Michailovich Gorchakov, a prominent diplomat who did lengthy service abroad, was a keen art collector in the first half of the 19th century. He mainly concentrated on Western European painting. His son Constantine and grandson Mikhail continued collecting, although, in addition to painting, they were also interested in the decorative arts of Western Europe, Russia and the Orient. After the October Revolution some items were sent to the Museum Fund, while others were offered for sale in antique shops. In the inventories preserved in the archives of the State Hermitage Museum mention is made of a group of objects from Constantine Gorchakov’s house in Monetnay Street. These include a number of Chinese and Japanese wares, for instance, faience barber’s bowls (417 pieces), some of which entered the Hermitage collection, such as that with *famille rose* decoration showing a troubadour (fig.7).

It has been much more difficult to identify objects from the collection of Mikhail Gorchakov, because the inventories give no descriptions. They read as follows, for example; “four Chinese groups of



Figure 8, French gilt metal mantelclock from the Japy brothers workshop (1850-1850) decorated with early 19th century Chinese porcelain figures of Guanyin, a seated boy and a bird (inv. no. E2-7594, The Hermitage, St Petersburg)

figures, two Chinese figures... a big covered vase of blue colour”, or “two tall vases on feet, two plates with a design of flowers”, etc.<sup>17</sup> In spite of the inadequacy of this information, it is possible to conclude that Constantine Gorchakov was collecting mostly Chinese and Japanese export wares, as well as Satsuma wares and that in his household Chinese export services were put to daily use. In fact, Chinese and Japanese porcelain could be found in all 19th century palaces in St Petersburg and it is thanks to their owners’ taste, that we now find some interesting pieces in the museum collection. Thus, for example, the fine Chinese pieces decorated by the Dutch artist Cornelius Pronk (1691-1759) and his circle, whose provenance can be traced back to the Shuvalov collection.

Another interesting collection, unfortunately only known from archival inventories, is that of Vorontsov-Dashkov and his wife, lady-in-waiting, Countess Elizabeth Andreevna (nee Shuvalova). It occupied a mansion on the English embankment in St Petersburg, built in the 1770s in classical style. Unfortunately we do not possess any contemporary paintings of the interiors, but, according to the inventories of the palace, oriental wares could be found in almost every room. There were: “flowers pots, Chinese porcelain vases with recessed sides

decorated with Japanese scenes, ornamented all over with flower sprays in relief...<sup>18</sup> etc.

In the Green Drawing Room there were two Japanese vases with yellowish glaze, a gift from the Grand Dukes Alexander and Sergey Mikhailovich. These vases seem to have been the products of the Satsuma or Kyoto workshops. In the Red Dressing Room there were “two small Chinese porcelain vases; and an old Chinese bronze clock with three (actually four) ceramic figures and enamelled flowers and leaves (fig.8). The drum of the clock and the polychrome porcelain flowers are European workmanship; the clock mechanism bears the hallmark of the Japy brothers workshop and dates from the 1840-1850s. The ceramic statuettes represent a twice-repeated figure of Guan Yin, sitting with a scroll in her left hand, a seated smiling boy and a bird. There was a certain meaning behind this composition, which seems to illustrate one of the legends connected with Guan Yin. According to a tradition the bird accompanying Guan Yin is a parrot, which vowed to follow her at all times as a sign of gratitude to the Bodhisattva, who had saved his parents. These figures were made in the Dehua workshop (Fukien province) in the first half of the 19th century.

The Vorontsov–Dashkov family appear to have taken great interest in Chinese and Japanese porcelain. The inventory of property from the estate of the Prince Vorontsov, by Count J. Vorontsov, mentions “six red Chinese vases, two old Chinese porcelain dishes, another three old Chinese vases as well as above-mentioned Japanese vases, a gift from the Grand Duke”. In addition, there were many utilitarian wares – flowerpots, tea services, etc. The inventories also featured “36 tea cups, 34 saucers, 1 tea caddy, 2 tea pots, a sugar-basin, a cream-pot”.<sup>19</sup>

In the late 19th century Chinese and Japanese porcelain could also be found in the houses of the Princes Dolgoruky, Feodor Paskevich, the Musin-Pushkins and others. Some of the pieces from these collections, preserved in the Hermitage, are of considerable interest, although they do not allow us to make a full assessment of the collections as a whole.

Our research of archival material has enabled us to trace not only “the life-stories” of Chinese and Japanese porcelain found in Russian royal and aristocratic homes in the 18th and 19th centuries, but also to form an opinion about the tastes of their owners. Through these objects we gain knowledge of individuals and of their particular passions. The whole body of the researched material has demonstrated how the role of Chinese and Japanese porcelain changed with shifts in taste. Thus, it is possible to illustrate with the aid of concrete

evidence, the evolution in society right up to the revolutionary change in the second decade of the 20th century.

#### NOTES

1. State Hermitage Archives. Fund IV, inv.2, book 51, p.64-66.
2. Cit. Academ. M.M. Bogoslovsky, *Peter the First*, 1948, vol. IV, p.61.
3. Cit. M.I. Pylyaev, *Forgotten Past of St.Petersburg's Suburbs*, St.Petersburg, 1889, p.310.
4. *The Guide book on St.Petersburg*, St.Petersburg, 1903, p.277, 278.
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6. Central State Archives of Ancient Documentation. Fund 248, inv. 5, book 234, d.441.
7. Inventory of the Oranienbaum Palace. From Alexander Danilovich papers, The Schukin Collected Articles, 1905 issue 4, p.336, 337.
8. Central State Historical Archives. Fund 1088, inv.12, book 60.
9. Cit. The Hermitage, *The History of its Construction and Architecture*, Leningrad, 1989, p.142.
10. Central State Historical Archives. Fund 4768, inv. 35, book 492.
11. Cit. M.I. Pylyaev *op.cit.*, p.153.
12. Memoirs of Count. M.D. Buturlin, Russian Archives 1897, book 3, pp.414-415.
13. State Hermitage Archives. Inventory of the Anichkov Palace. Fund I inv. V book 762, pp.94, 99, 101, 131, 132.
14. State Hermitage Archives. Inventory of Objects. Presented as gifts to Emperor Nicholas II during his tour in the capacity of the Crown Prince of Russia to the Orient in 1890/91 and his voyages within the Empire. Fund I, inv.VIII, book 5, p.11.
15. State Hermitage Archives, Inventory of Objects from the Stroganov House to be transferred to Central Stores, Fund I inv.V, book 760, 1927-1928, p.57, 59, 62.
16. State Hermitage Archives, Inventory of Objects received from K.A. Gorchakov, 1919-1921, Fund IV, inv. I, book 405, pp.33, 43, 44, 46.
17. State Hermitage Archives. Inventory of Objects received from M.K. Gorchakov. 1919-1921. Fund IV inv. I, book 406, pp.11, 12, 35.
18. State Hermitage Archives. Inventory of Objects received from E.A. Vorontsova-Dashkova 1918, Fund IV, inv.I, book 372, pp.35, 121, 122.
19. State Hermitage Archives, *op. cit.*, p.121.

There were many rebellions during the late 18th century and the 19th century against the British and the dikus (landlords, moneylenders, merchants). The Mundas were able to get an able and charismatic leader in Birsa Munda who proclaimed a rebellion in 1894. He declared himself "God" and organised his people to revolt openly against the government. He urged people to stop paying debts and taxes. He was arrested and spent 2 years in jail before being released in 1897. In December 1899, he launched an armed struggle on the landlords and the government. The Mundas torched police stations, houses. St. Petersburg boasts Russia's largest selection of museums and the country's deepest reservoir of cultural heritage. RBTH has selected the top museums in Russia's Northern capital that can be equally fascinating to both adults and children. 1. The State Hermitage Photo credit: Photoxpress Unlike many of the most important museums in the world, the 18th century Hermitage was built not simply as a palace to store art, but as an imperial residence. The museum's main exhibition features extremely rich collections of classical paintings of the 18th and 19th centuries from Karl Bryullov and Alexander Ivanov to Mikhail Vrubel and Nikolai Roerich. It also houses a great selection of works from the Russian avant-garde with pieces by Malevich, Kandinsky and many others. Japanese and Chinese Porcelain marks, Chinese pottery and porcelain, Chinese Imari export porcelain, Chinese porcelain, Chinese famille rose, famille verte and Rose Medallion porcelain and an active Collector Forum. During the centuries all kinds of Chinese porcelain shards and kiln debris has been dumped and discarded as the city grew. I also wanted to study 19th and 20th century Chinese porcelain, products of less known "provincial" trade porcelain kilns in Southern China, and to get a first hand impression on the trade in antique Chinese porcelain fakes, to visit several important scholars and collectors in the area, to learn and to take part of their specific knowledge.