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The Inspiration for a different Eden: Chinese Gardening Ideas in England in the Early Modern Period

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In the second half of the eighteenth century, the naturalistically planted pleasure ground of England came to be known in France as *le jardin anglais-chinois*. Sir William Chambers may have contributed to this with his well-publicized panegyric on the affinity of Chinese gardeners with nature and with his matter-of-fact ascribing the latest English fashion in gardening to the influence of the Middle Kingdom.\(^1\)

Resenting what he perceived to be a French cultural snub on the English and blaming Chambers for it, Horace Walpole counter-attacked. More successfully than anyone else, he did it with an unabashedly nationalistic account of the English landscaping revolution.\(^2\) Not only did he celebrate the new horticultural naturalism of England as "[what is] only suited to the opulence of a free country, where emulation reigns among many independent particulars," but he also elevated it by belittling what he called the "fantastic *sharawadgi*" of China and the "regular formality" of France.\(^3\)

Walpole's chronology, as John Dixon Hunt points out, was "particularly tendentious, resourceful, and above all, persuasive."\(^4\) However, its real character as "[a] Whiggish narrative of garden progress"\(^5\) rather than a credible history has now been generally recognized. Since Walpole's willful denigration of Chinese landscaping has likewise been acknowledged as unjustified,\(^6\) it seems high time that the Oriental connection of the English garden, which Chambers asserted but Walpole denied, should also be given a closer look.

Although the issue deserves to be taken up again, the idea of the connection itself should not really be controversial at all. For his ideological and nationalistic purposes, Walpole may have needed to link the regularity of the French with autocracy on the one hand and the irregularity of the Chinese with whimsical inconsequenceality on the other. However, nothing he did could have changed the fact that what was done in England before the sudden popularity of the naturalistic design was a copy of what already had been done in France, Italy, and Holland, and it was strikingly similar to what was practiced in the Far East. At the time of writing his questionable history, Walpole may not have been
aware of his error, but before his death in 1797, he could very well have realized it.

In 1793-94, Lord Macartney had led the first English embassy to China. Although not successful in opening more trade, he brought back much useful information. Among other things, he recorded in his journal his visits to the imperial gardens near Pekin (Beijing) and at Jehol. Admiring what he saw and praising the Chinese gardener as “the painter of nature,” he noted his pleasant surprise at “the rural scenery of Chinese gardening...such vicissitudes of rural delight, as I did not conceive could be felt out of England, being at different moments enchanted by scenes perfectly similar to those I had known there, to the magnificence of Stowe, the soft beauties of Woburn or the fairy-land of Painshill.”

Walpole never saw what Macartney did. However, it was still odd that he should have attacked Chambers for giving the French the idea that “[the] Chinese excel in the art of laying out gardens” and “[their] taste in that is good, and what we have for some time past been aiming at in England.” If anything, it seemed a mere commonplace perception.

“There is a new taste in gardening just arisen,” as Sir Thomas Robinson wrote as early as 1734 to his father-in-law, “which has been practiced with so great success at the Prince’s garden in Town, that a general alteration of some of the most considerable gardens in the kingdom is begun, after Mr. Kent’s notion of gardening, viz., to lay them out, and work without either level or line.”

By this method, he went on to point out, gardening “is the more agreeable, as when finished, it has the appearance of beautiful nature; without being told, one would imagine art had no part in the finishing, and is, according to what one hears of the Chinese, entirely after their models for works of this nature, where they never plant straight lines or make regular designs.”

The new fashion was not without its detractors, but even their criticism confirmed the alien origin of the recent change. “Chinese taste,” as a disgruntled author of *The Connoisseur* commented in 1755, “which has already taken possession of our gardens, our buildings and our furniture, will also find a way into our churches; and how elegant must a monument appear, which is erected in the Chinese taste, and embellished with dragons, bells, pagodas and mandarins?”

Just as Sir Thomas Robinson associated not only the new enthusiasm about nature but also the star gardener of the moment with the Far East, so did Walpole himself implicitly see things this way back in the
1750s. "There is not a citizen who does not take more pains to torture his acre and half into irregularities," he was known to write then in *The World*, "than he formerly would have employed to make it as formal as his cravat."\(^\text{12}\)

"Kent, the friend of nature," he said, "was the Calvin of this reformation, but like the other champion of truth, after having routed tinsel and trumpery, with the true zeal of a founder of a sect, he pushed his discipline to the deformity of holiness."\(^\text{13}\) Whether or not he remembered his own words, he would later painstakingly keep Kent away from any demeaning contamination of irregularity so that he could enshrine him as a great national hero who was "painter enough to taste the charms of landscape, bold and opinionative enough to dare and to dictate, and born with a genius to strike out a great system from the twilight of imperfect essays."\(^\text{14}\)

In reality, however, the well-known aversion of Kent to "a straight line," which Walpole helped to make into a legend,\(^\text{15}\) expressed nothing more than a widely shared new perception about the identification of what was natural with what was irregular or asymmetrical. Without the prestige of what he so dismissively called "the fantastic *sharawadgi* of the Chinese,"\(^\text{16}\) the drastic transformation of English taste in landscaping probably would not have occurred at the time it did.

By discussing nothing less than the word "*sharawadgi*" in 1685, Sir William Temple started the whole chain of events. The term was introduced in a well-known essay on gardening. Even though its origin subsequently became somewhat controversial,\(^\text{17}\) it was linked unmistakably in the essay with the far away country China and defined unequivocally in terms of an opposition to the notion of regularity.

While the best forms of gardens in the English and continental European tradition are usually thought of as in some way regular, as Temple tells his readers, "there may be other forms wholly irregular that may ... have more beauty than any of the others."\(^\text{18}\) "Among us," he says, "the beauty of building and planting is placed chiefly in some certain proportions, symmetries, or uniformities; our walks and our trees ranged so as to answer one another, and at exact distances."\(^\text{19}\)

"The Chinese," he goes on to point out, "scorn this way of planting, and say, a boy that can tell an hundred may plant walks of trees in straight lines, and over-against one another, and to what length and extent he pleases."\(^\text{20}\) "But their greatest reach of imagination," he explains, "is employed in contriving figures, where the beauty shall be great, and strike the eye, but without any order or disposition of parts
that shall be commonly or easily observed: and, though we have hardly any notion of this sort of beauty, yet they have a particular word to express it, and, where they find it hit their eye at first sight, they say the sharawadgi is fine or is admirable, or any such expression of esteem.”

Because of Temple, “sharawadgi,” or the implied notion of asymmetrical beauty became in time the rallying cry of a powerful propaganda campaign against the old English and European way of laying out gardens. Thus, in 1709, Shaftesbury announced his passion “for things of a natural kind, where neither art nor the conceit or caprice of man has spoiled their genuine order by breaking in upon that primitive state.”

Going conspicuously against his own lifelong training in classicism, he professed satisfaction with “the rude rocks, the mossy caverns, the irregular unwrought grottos and broken falls of waters” rather than with the formal magnificence of princely gardens. Thus, in 1712, Joseph Addison similarly exalted natural beauty over artifice. “The Beauties of the most stately Garden or Palace lie in a narrow Compass, the Imagination immediately runs them over, and requires something else to gratifie her;” he notes, “but, in the wide Fields of Nature, the Sight wanders up and down without Confinement, and is fed with an infinite variety of Images, without any certain Stint or Number.”

Thus, in 1713, Alexander Pope also censured “the modern Practice of Gardening [for receding] from Nature, not only in the various Tonsure of Greens into the most regular and formal Shapes, but even in monstrous Attempts beyond the reach of the Art it self.” Though not always acknowledged explicitly, the impetus behind all these enormously important initial calls for change was Temple and his idea of the Chinese asymmetrical garden.

Following the amateur theorists, gardening professionals such as Batty Langley gradually also jumped on the bandwagon against “that regular, stiff, and stuff up Manner” and for “Designs that are truly Grand and Noble, after Nature’s own manner.” In the slow process of moving away from the classical European conceptualization of beauty centered on geometrical shape and symmetrical order, they often alluded to or paraphrased Temple’s notion of Chinese gardening as their familiar and reassuring authority.

While promoting what he called “a kind of Extensive Gard’ning, not yet much us’d with us,” for instance, Stephen Switzer went out of his way to mention how it “was and is the manner of Gard’ning amongst the Chinese, who, as an ingenious Author of our own Country observes, ridicule the Europeans on account of that Mathematical Exactness and
crimping Stiffness that appears in our Way of Gard’ning.”

Similarly, in a crucial study about landscaping in European antiquity, Robert Castell recycled what he termed “the Accounts we have of the preset Manner of Designing in China” into a handy hermeneutic tool so that he could conveniently decipher one of Pliny’s gardening methods as “a close Imitation of Nature; where, tho’ the Parts are disposed with the greatest Art, the Irregularity is still preserved; so that their Manner may not improperly be said to be an artful Confusion, where there is no Appearance of that Skill which is made use of their Rocks, Cascades, and Trees, bearing their natural forms.”

Although admiring the notion of sharawadgi in 1685, Temple actually discouraged any attempts to imitate it. “[They] are adventures of too hard achievement for any common hands,” he says, “and though there may be more honour if they succeed well, yet there is more dishonour if they fail, and it is twenty to one they will; whereas in regular figures it is hard to make any great and remarkable faults.”

In his very first essay on Chinese landscaping, Chambers echoed Temple’s caution. Using it to disparage the direction into which Lancelot (Capability) Brown was then taking the landscaping art of England, he reminded his readers that “the art of laying out grounds, after the Chinese manner, is exceedingly difficult, and not to be attained by persons of narrow intellects.”

Even though the pedigree of the English garden already became contested before Chambers’ pronouncement, George Mason would still, in the late 1760s, assess the evolution of the English naturalistic design in terms of reactions to Temple’s warning. “Little did Sir William Temple imagine,” he says, “that in about half a century the Chinese would become the fashionable taste of his country; or that so many adventurers in it would do great justice to his observation, and prove by their works how difficult it is to succeed in the undertaking.” With this view, Walpole could hardly disagree more, but even in his half-factual-and-half-fictional chronology, he also remembered Temple’s advice and measured out the audacity of Kent’s innovation in relation to it.

Had Walpole not distorted history, the Oriental connection in the English landscaping revolution might not have been so contentious. Whether or not the national pride of England was ever at stake, the real issue always seems to be how the kind of Chinese ideas pivotal for the change of the English taste reached England and what was and still is the significance of this remarkable cross-cultural interaction. While reflecting on the unexpected visual resemblance of the Chinese and
English pleasure grounds in the early 1790s, Lord Macartney already pointed to the need of investigation into these questions. Knowing well the controversy about the appellation of the new “English” garden in France, he sounded more than a little self-defensive in his comment that if Mr. Brown or Mr. Hamilton had access to China, he “should have sworn they had drawn their happiest ideas from the rich sources which I have tasted this day.”

Brown and Hamilton had never been to China. However, Macartney was not the only one who went from England or Europe to the Far East in the eighteenth century or before. Who were those other people who had been there and seen and talked about the distinctively different garden layout? In the early modern period, few Chinese ever set foot in England or Europe, but was the kind of naturalistic landscapes which they favored available at all in some visual or artistic representation to anyone attentive in this regard in England and Europe?

Chambers can be the useful starting point of an investigation. Born in 1723 to a Scottish couple in Sweden, he entered the service of the Swedish East India Company at sixteen. Between 1743 and 1749, he twice visited Canton (Guangzhou), the only Chinese coastal city open to foreign traders until the mid-nineteenth century. His family wanted him to choose a mercantile career, but sensitive and precocious, he very early set his mind on architecture, a profession in which he would later distinguish himself. In Canton, he was exposed to Chinese arts, one of which was gardening which impressed him indelibly. Embodying the Oriental affiliation of beauty and art with nature, it had little in common with what he would learn in the 1750s during his formal architectural training in France and Italy, but he liked it and retained his enthusiasm.

When writing about it in the late 1750s and the early 1770s to criticize rather than commend English gardening, he used his knowledge, backed up by his experiences. Resenting his thinly disguised denigration of Brown in 1772, his cynical critics often attributed his criticism to his loss of a commission in 1770 for Lord Clive’s large estate, Claremont Park. In doing so, they often overlooked the fact that in 1757 he already portrayed English gardeners as eager but inept imitators of the Chinese. He knew the subject much better than his critics ever credited to him. However, as he readily admitted in 1757, the kind of gardens he saw in Canton (Guangzhou) was very small and was not the kind which made the most important impact in England.

For his information, Chambers relied on a letter which Jean Denis Attiret, a French Jesuit, wrote in 1743 from Pekin (Beijing) and which
was published first in French in 1749 and then in English in 1752. In his letter, he glowed over the infinitely varied valleys, rivers, and ornamental buildings of the Chinese emperor’s pleasure ground, Yuan Ming Yuan, near Pekin, praising profusely what he called “a beautiful Disorder and a wandering as far as possible from all the Rules of Art” and what, via the words of unidentified Chinese artists, he termed “a natural and wild View of the Country; a rural Retirement, and not a Palace form’d according to all the Rules of Art.”

Identifying Attiret as a guest of the Chinese emperor, Macartney later largely authenticated his account. As the first European person to provide a detailed written record of the famed garden which the British and the French would loot, burn, and destroy in 1860, Attiret is very important. However, what is much more important is how he had access to not only what Chambers could not see in Canton but also what even other European missionaries could not experience even in Pekin. As he explained in his letter, he was allowed into the imperial pleasure ground because he was a painter. As an artist in the service of the Chinese emperor, he noted both the general difference of Chinese gardening from European practices and such specific contrasts as the walks leading from one valley to another, which turned and wound rather than going straight as in Europe.

Since the late sixteenth century, Catholic missionaries had been in China. In reports about their activities, gardens were sometimes mentioned. In the first composite book about the Middle Kingdom published in 1585, Juan Gonzalez de Mendoza described the residences of the provincial governors as having “within them great gardens, water ponds and woods compassed about.” In particular, he noted the inside of the houses decorated with burnished paper, floors paved with broad and smooth square stones, ceilings painted with something like damask, and the fish pool furnished though small. While traveling in the provinces as the only outsiders allowed into the interior of the country, the missionaries often checked out depictions left by travelers of an earlier era.

Tracing Marco Polo’s footsteps in the southeast, for instance, Matteo Ricci, the founder of the Jesuit mission in China, verified the identity of Hamceu (Hangzhou) with what the famous Venetian traveler called “the splendid city of Kinsai, whose name means ‘City of Heaven’.” In the abridged English version of the account, Purchas had Ricci describe how “[there] is also a Lake close to the Citie, which the eye can scarcely measure, which sliding into a Valley encompassing,
embossed with divers Hillocks, hath given occasion to Art to shew her utmost in the adorning the same, beautifying all those spacious banks with Houses, Gardens, Groves; a very Labyrinth to the bewitched eyes, not knowing whereat most in this Maze to bee most amazed, wherein most to delight."

Throughout the seventeenth century, the accounts of Gonzalez and Ricci were widely read. They very likely contributed to such an image as given in 1700 by the operatic performance of *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, which set it in "a transparent prospect of a Chinese garden, the Architecture, the Trees, the Plants, the Fruit, the Birds, the Beasts, quite different from what we have in this part of the World." However, they did not start any horticultural revolution.

The delightful maze which amazed Ricci in Hangzhou may sound like the graceful disorder which Temple later heard about, but not being an artist such as Attiret or Chambers, the otherwise multi-talented father could only make the involved pleasure ground of China alien or exotic.

In the second half of the seventeenth century, some missionaries did notice the peculiarity of Chinese gardening, but being likewise not sufficiently artistically trained or inclined, they did not appreciate its significance. In the 1670s, for instance, two members of the Jesuit mission observed how the gardens of their Chinese acquaintances "are very green and delightful, because of the conveniency of watering them with fresh Rivers, but they have but small skill to dress and order them."

Similarly, in the 1690s, Father Louis le Comte talked about how "[the] Chinese, who so little apply themselves to order their Gardens,... make Grotto's in them, raise little pretty Artificial Eminences, transport thither by pieces whole Rocks, which they heap one upon another, without any further design, than to imitate Nature."

In the context of what Gonzalez, Ricci, and others said about the Chinese garden, the significance of Chambers and Attiret becomes evident. Between them, they help sketch out the person who might have provided Sir William Temple with the notion of *sharawadgi*. As one of the most prominent English admirers of the Middle Kingdom in the seventeenth century, Temple may have obtained much of his information from Jesuit missionaries who prolifically published on various aspects of their host country. As a long-time diplomatic representative of the English crown in the Netherlands, he may also have mingled with ocean-going employees of the Dutch East India Company which dominated the Far Eastern trade through much of the seventeenth century.

However, no Jesuit descriptions of Chinese gardening which could
potentially shatter old fashions and ring in a new style of landscaping ever came out in the seventeenth century. Neither did or could any of the Dutch traders who had been to Canton see the kind of Chinese pleasure grounds that were large and could immediately impress and captivate them. Temple must have heard about the irregular garden of the Far East from someone who had actually been there, but that someone must have experienced much more than the highly restricted special zone in Canton to which the Chinese confined foreign merchants and he must have been enough artistically initiated to be much more than vaguely aware of the general differences between China and Europe in landscaping.

In retrospect, Temple’s informant may very likely have been connected with one of the three embassies which the Dutch government sent to the newly triumphant Qing Court between 1655 and 1664. In 1665, an account of the first official visit was published by John Nieuhoff who served on that trip as steward to the envoys Jakob de Keyzer and Pieter de Goijer. Translated into English in 1669, it was especially important as one of the very few reliable non-missionary publications about China in the seventeenth century. In it, he provided information about diverse manners and arts of the Middle Kingdom, including gardening. He was fascinated, for instance, with the artificial rock hills which are a distinctive feature of a Chinese pleasure ground both then and now. He was also dazzled by “pleasant Gardens, Palaces, Woods, Pools, Rivers, and delicate Summer Houses, which the Emperour caused to be made for his pleasure.”

These may be part of what Attiret and Macartney saw in the next century. However, Nieuhoff coyly declined to give details. “If I should relate all the other Artificial Ornaments, as of Gardens, Wilderness, Pools, and other particulars which adorn this Court,” he says, “I should far exceed the bounds of what I intend, and perhaps to some of belief; this shall only suffice to set forth the wonders of this most Magnificent Palace.” Though less informative than he could be on this occasion, was he or any of the artists who went to Pekin with him and who drew the many illustrations of his book more communicative elsewhere?

Whether attached to the first, or the second, or the third of the three Dutch embassies, the person who told Temple about sharawadgi must have seen the large-scaled imperial gardens near Pekin and been artistically savvy and sophisticated enough to talk about them intelligently in terms of a productive contrast with the practice of Europe. Coming from such a person, the account of Chinese gardening Temple heard must
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have been much more than what Hugh Honour calls "the very haziest notions." Though dismissively associated nowadays with such inauthentic and ephemeral *chinoiserie* constructions as a pagoda or a fretwork bridge over a brook flanked by the boughs of a weeping willow which occasionally conjured up "the vision of Cathay," the influence of the Far East in reality manifested itself from the very first in a newly awakened appreciation of nature and in the identification of it with irregularity.

Temple may have warned against adopting the asymmetrical plantation method, but twentieth-century scholarship has shown that he tried nothing less than that before 1700 in one corner of his garden where he laid out randomly winding pathways and seemingly disorderly vistas. Similarly, in one of the earliest instances of the new landscaping practice at Wray Wood, he is thought to have exerted decisive influence on Lord Carlisle in preserving the mature beech trees and preventing the professional gardener George London from cutting a geometrically shaped network of straight walks through it.

Whoever may have told Temple about the *sharawadgi* of China, he was not the only one who was well placed and well qualified to talk about it and who, by doing so at a propitious moment, determined the direction of the English landscaping development. Better documented but similarly not enough appreciated so far, Matteo Ripa is one other instance of such a person. He was an Italian Jesuit and was in the Middle Kingdom from 1711 to 1723. Like Attiret, he was an artist and therefore spent much of his time serving the pleasure of the emperor at the Qing court. In such a capacity, he knew firsthand how Chinese landscaping "is in a taste quite different from the European; for whereas we seek to exclude nature by art, leveling hills, drying up lakes, felling trees, bringing paths into a straight line, constructing fountains at a great expense, and raising flowers in rows, the Chinese, on the contrary, by means of art endeavor to imitate nature."

He was particularly familiar with the imperial pleasure grounds at Jehol, which Lord Macartney saw in the early 1790s, because he was ordered in 1713 by the emperor Kangxi to engrave thirty-six views of the then newly constructed palaces and gardens there. On his way back to Europe in late 1724, he made a stopover of almost a month in London where he was made much of by not only the English East India Company but also King George I. As a memento and a present, he gave the king an impression of the map of China and Tartary which he had himself engraved for the emperor Kangxi between 1713 and 1719.
In his memoir, Ripa did not record any conversation in London about Chinese gardening, but he must have been asked about it, because he is now generally believed to have sold or given the Earl of Burlington a set of his engravings about the Chinese imperial palaces and gardens at Jehol.\(^48\) In addition to being the high priest of the neo-Palladian style in architecture, Burlington was also a leader of the new naturalistic fashion in landscaping. Around him, he had almost everyone important in the emerging horticultural naturalism, including Alexander Pope, Robert Castell, and William Kent, the beloved star of Walpole who studied classical painting in Italy from 1709 to 1719 but failed as a historical painter. Burlington himself had twice visited Italy by 1724. Being able to speak Italian, he and Kent could have heard Ripa talk directly about the “labyrinths of artificial hills, intersected with numerous paths and roads, some straight and others undulating; some in the plain and the valley, others carried over bridges and to the summit of the hills by means of rustic work of stones and shells.”\(^49\)

Given what Ripa was able to say technically about Chinese landscaping, is it surprising that the garden for Burlington’s Chiswick villa which Kent had just then begun to design should have worked out in a partially natural form? When he went on to plan, for instance, the gardens at Holkham, Norfolk, is it surprising that the seemingly free and haphazard placement of trees and ornamental structures should have resembled Ripa’s engraving?\(^50\)

As a crucial link in the transmission of Chinese gardening ideas to England, Ripa is uniquely significant because of the engraved images of the Chinese emperor’s pleasure ground at Jehol. However, they were not the only visual representations of the naturalistic landscapes which the Chinese favored and which were seen in the West. Since the second half of the sixteenth century, Europe had been increasingly inundated with decorative art objects from China. Between 1602 and 1682, for instance, the Dutch East India Company shipped over 3.2 million pieces of Chinese and Japanese porcelain to Holland.\(^51\) Many of these were embellished with painted natural landscapes or garden scenes. “[Whoever] observes the work upon the best India gowns, or the painting upon their best screens or parcellans,” as Temple says, “will find their beauty is all of this kind (that is) without order.”\(^52\)

As the raging fashion of the late seventeenth century, large numbers of Chinese porcelain pieces were amassed inside the grand staterooms of the rich and powerful and displayed proudly and prominently on specially built shelves or ledgers, while formal gardens were planted out-
side. Daniel Marot, the French-born garden designer of William and Mary at Hampton Court, may not have paid much attention to the landscape and garden images on the much prized porcelain pieces, but did others see them and get inspiration from them after the championship of Temple, Shaftesbury, Addison, and Pope made the asymmetrical layout of the Chinese garden popular?

Stimulated by the much admired and surprisingly well introduced example of a different but eminently utilizable design from the Far East, the landscaping art of England underwent nothing less than a revolution in the first half of the eighteenth century. Not surprisingly, the direction of change followed the often-reverberated description of Temple about both Chinese gardening and Oriental estimation of Occidental practice. The disciplined association of beauty with geometrical shape and symmetrical order was repudiated, because the Chinese laughed at it. Simultaneously, an experimental affinity with wild nature and with an asymmetrical plantation method was encouraged, because the Chinese preferred it.

In the old English and European way of doing things, gardening was an extension of architecture. In the one as in the other, regularity was considered the litmus test of what was beautiful. As a reflection of the strength of the new contrary influence from the Middle Kingdom, this long inherited connection was unceremoniously severed. Residential buildings would continue to be erected with every attention paid to the strict requirements of geometry and mathematics. Promoted by Lord Burlington, Neo-Palladian constructions would also conspicuously dot and decorate every new pleasure ground. However, not only did the irregular layout of trees and pathways catch on, but it even came to be viewed as somehow traditional because of Robert Castell’s reading or misreading of classical landscaping in light of Chinese practice.

In the midst of all the exhilaration about nature and about sharawadgi, not only the way a garden was planted but also the way it was experienced changed. When regularity reigned supreme, a visitor was not supposed to wander freely in a pleasure ground. Instead, he or she was usually taken to such a prior chosen spot, such as the window of a second-floor stateroom, for the fully anticipated visual impact. What one saw there was not only what one got but also all one could have because all the geometry and symmetry worked inside an axial plan which would immediately reveal itself to the well positioned spectator. What was perceived all at once could be impressive, but there were no surprises either then or afterwards.
After the inherited European ideal of beauty was dethroned, the totalizing scheme of organization disappeared with the geometrical and symmetrical fixation. Visitors were allowed into the naturalistically planted garden. What one saw at any given moment was still what one got, but it was no longer whatever there was in store for a spectator. By definition, irregularity meant that not everything one saw was what could be expected beforehand. Furthermore, something was always hidden from view. What was seen at any spot might be captivating, but it did not and could not exhaust what was aesthetically pleasing about the artful cultivation of the whole and, through an ever-shifting contrast much like the chiaroscuro of painting, the visible and the invisible accentuated each other, adding to the enchantment of the place.

Since the new paragon of beauty was nature, calls were made early by professional gardeners like Stephen Switzer for connecting what was cultivated inside a pleasure ground with what was naturally grown outside. However, this was not always what was done or what could be done. The issue was not whether a naturalistically planted garden should look inward or outward, as one recent scholar suggests. Rather, it was about how to work with what was available to create unexpected drama and delight. "All the rules of gardening are reducible to three heads:" as Joseph Spence records Pope as remarking, "the contrasts, the management of surprises, and the concealment of the bounds."

Pope’s own garden at Twickenham was small and did not open directly to a natural scene, but because of his dexterous use of disguise, variation, and asymmetry, it could be as magical as any of the small-scaled and entirely man-made gardens which Chambers saw in Canton (Guangzhou). Pope never visited the Far East, but being an artist of the imagination, he was able to absorb and appropriate the Chinese idea of graceful disorder as talked about by both Temple’s informant and Matteo Ripa. "Those who understand classical Chinese gardens," as Wang Yi points out, "are aware that the soul of this art is not to be found in the specific scene wrought from hills, ponds, flowers, and trees or from the architectural creations set within the garden’s confines, but rather resides in the philosophical spirit and ideals of human character invested in these scenic objects."

Though decisive in the drastic makeover of the English pleasure ground, the landscaping ideas from the Middle Kingdom had their much more significant and much more lasting influence in precisely their philosophical implications. Borrowing authority from the Chinese, Temple’s informant may have poked fun at the design of a garden by the
rule and line, but it was not because regularity was easier than irregularity that both English and European pleasure grounds used to be laid out geometrically and symmetrically. Together with the contrast of what was grown naturally outside, the geometry-and-mathematics-buttressed axial plan of a formal garden presented not only a dualistic perspective but also the constant need of one for dominance over the other. In the ideal world of both European humanist and religious traditions, things were well ordered.

However, they were only so because of the power and beneficence of a divine artist who was not a part of that world but who created it out of disorder and made sure of its good preservation. As much in need of control as the things of the ideal world, the trees and flowers of a pleasure ground could never be trusted with being left alone. In addition to being disciplined into a particular shape or pattern, they must also be surrounded by walls and protected from the unruly and dangerous. This symbolic power struggle of art with nature had to be recognized by the spectator because there was the comparable need inside him or her for the rational or spiritual to triumph over the sensual or physical.

As in the West, gardening in the Far East was also inextricably linked with a way of seeing the world. Chinese gardeners never bothered to line things up into any laborious shape or order, but it was not because they were lazy or unskilled as Father Le Comte once thought. Rather than distrusting and fearing what was irregular, they embraced it as synonymous with what was beautiful. Though preferring irregularity to regularity, they did not just reverse the valuation of art and nature as Rousseau did in the eighteenth century, nor did they even see art and nature as necessarily opposed to one another as did their Western counterparts trained in the classical tradition. In their scheme of things, the idea of divinity was also paramount.

However, what was divine was not so much any active or activist intervention of a supernatural agent in the affairs of our world as the amazing fact of our universe as a creative and self-creative process in which every constituent was born able to participate spontaneously and constructively. Without any direction from the outside, there was always a way for things to work themselves out. Rather than imposing his or her own will, a gardener must tap into that fountain of magic so that the irregularly laid out trees, flowers, and ornamental structures could impress and enchant in their own free and unexpected ways. In its turn, the dovetailing of the natural and the artful would help a thoughtful spectator to learn about the analogical relationship of complement
rather than as conflict between the rational and the sensual.

Starting with Matteo Ricci, Jesuit missionaries to the Middle Kingdom had been diligently studying Chinese classics. To solicit support back home for their proselytizing effort in the Middle Kingdom, they had purposefully promoted Confucianism since the late sixteenth century as an already perfect political and ethical system which needed only the supplement of Christian revelation. In the late seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries, their calculated idealization of Chinese philosophical and religious thought met forceful challenges from not only their enemies from other Catholic orders but also a few prominent Jesuit dissidents.

Much publicized, the acrimonious disputes would eventually shut down the evangelical enterprise of the Jesuits in China, but in the process they also alerted major continental European thinkers to what Pierre Bayle calls "an inward power [of everything], independent by its own nature of the power of Heaven, and acting sometimes against the designs of Heaven" or what Gottfried Wilhelm Leibniz terms "a wonderful spontaneity, which in a certain sense makes the soul in its resolves independent of the physical influence of all other creatures." The same philosophical and religious controversies did not make as much impact in England, but through the transplantation of Chinese landscaping ideas, the English were similarly able to imbibe what one recent historian describes as "the uniquely Chinese sense of the moral potential of man rooted in his organic relations to the world around him."

It was as a practical gardener that Temple came to be interested in the sharawadgi of the Far East, but after learning about it, he evidently also became aware of the provocative implications of this different design. Speaking against "the forcing of nature," he mentioned in the same essay about the irregular layout of Chinese gardens how "great sums may be thrown away without effect or honour, if there want sense in proportion to money, or if nature be not followed, which I take to be the great rule in this, and perhaps in everything else, as far as the conduct not only of our lives, but our governments."

Neither an innovative gardener nor a sinophile, Shaftesbury nevertheless built everything important in his philosophical thinking on the idea of irregularity. Had he stuck to what he learned in his classical training, he might have been another indifferent Neo-classical critic. Precisely because he was willing to see the possibility of beauty being associated with what was natural and irregular, however, he was able to
start a profound revolution in aesthetics. Though a classicist in everything else he did, Pope also learned enough about Chinese gardening to become both an inventive theorist and a consummate practitioner of the new landscaping art. From the fact of things in nature being "Not Chaos-like together crush’d and bruis’d, /But as the World, harmoniously confus’d: /Where Order in Variety we see, /And where, tho’ all things differ, all agree," he was able to obtain an exhilarating epiphany about the organic essence of the universe.

However closely connected with the Chinese gardening ideal in the first half of the eighteenth century, English landscaping practice did eventually move away. As the drive to link up what used to be protected by garden walls with what used to be kept out, a partiality for panorama gradually crystallized into the quasi-linguistic composition of Lancelot (Capability) Brown. “Now there, I make a comma, and there, where a more decided turn is proper, I make a colon;” he was known to have said, “at another part, where an interruption is desirable to break the view, a parenthesis; now a full stop, and then I begin another subject.”

Infatuated with “prospect and fortunate points of view” as “[that] chief beauty of all gardens,” Walpole considered Brown as the culmination of a development which began with Charles Bridgman’s use of the fosse or haha and with William Kent’s real or fictional jump over the fence. Though the fosse had long been used in France as a mechanism of military defense and though the division of open space into the foreground, the middle and back grounds, and the far away horizon was the trademark of such seventeenth-century Italian landscape painters as Claude Lorrain, Walpole felt no qualm about chalking both up to the credit of English horticultural naturalism. Always set in a rural scene, the perspective continued to make the English garden similar to the large-scaled imperial pleasure grounds of the Chinese emperor which Macartney saw in the early 1790s, but it also made them fundamentally different.

Being an artist and having actual experiences with the Chinese garden, Chambers was able to sense the subtle departure of English landscaping from the Oriental model which had been followed till then. The problem with the new emphasis on panoramic view in which Walpole took so much delight and pride, however, was not just a certain literal naturalism with which Chambers found fault. In his effort to create the drama of open space, Brown did not just cut down thousands of venerable plants and “laid waste the growth of several ages … to make room
for a little grass, and a few American weeds," as Chambers accused him. In addition, he drove the spectator from the shade-less interior of a garden to the periphery. As the visitor was again led to a prior chosen vantage point so as to feel the fully anticipated visual impact of the pleasure ground all at once, the ghost of the old totalizing scheme of organization was willy-nilly resurrected.

The spirit of sharawadgi with which the radically reformed English garden was once so intimately in tune was lost. However, via Shaftesbury, Addison, and Pope, the inspiration of a different Eden would come up again toward the end of the eighteenth century in the aesthetic theories of Herder and Kant and in the poetic innovations of English Romanticism, thereafter entering into the mainstream of English and European thought. To understand how that came about in a much larger global context, it is imperative to acknowledge the surprising involvement of China in the English landscaping revolution.

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ENDNOTES
1. Widely read in continental Europe, Chambers’s ideas are contained mainly in “The Art of Laying out Gardens among the Chinese” which is a part of Designs of Chinese Buildings, Furniture, Dresses, Machines, and Utensils (1757), A Dissertation on Oriental Gardening (1772), and An Explanatory Discourse by Tan Chet-Qua of Quang-Chew-Fu, Gent (1773).

2. Written in the 1750s and 1760s and revised in the 1770s, Walpole’s essay On Modern Gardening was first published in 1780 as part of his four-volume Anecdotes of Painting in England.


6. John Dixon Hunt, for instance, includes Chinese landscaping in what he terms "the biggest casualty in Walpole's essay" (*Greater Perfection* 209).


10. Ibid.


13. Ibid.


15. Ibid, 44.


20. Ibid.


23. Ibid.


29. Temple, "Gardening" III. 238.


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42. Nieuhoff, *An Embassy to China* 129.


49. Ibid.

50. For a detailed study of the impact of Ripa and his Chinese engravings on William Kent, see Rudolf Wittkower, “English Neo-Palladianism, the Landscape Garden, China, and the Enlightenment,” L’arte; rivista di storia dell’arte, 6 (1969): 18-35.


52. Temple, “Upon the Gardens of Epicurus; or, of Gardening” III. 238.


59. Temple, "Upon the Gardens of Epicurus; or, of Gardening" III. 235.


