DIOGENES

Diogenes 218: 83–96
ISSN 0392-1921

Transplanting a Different Gardening Style into England: Matteo Ripa and His Visit to London in 1724

Yu Liu

In the second half of the 18th century, the naturalistically planted pleasure ground of England came to be known in France as *le jardin anglo-chinois*. Seeing this as an insult, English garden historians since Horace Walpole have experienced anger and resentment. Even though the patriotic desire to set the record straight has somewhat subsided in the last 20 years, the revisionist view of the radical garden reform as 'the Englishing of Rome' (Hunt, 1986: 197) or '[the] late geometric style . . . taken to its logical conclusion' (Williamson, 1995: 52) has not only sustained the old and irony-filled nationalistic argument about 'gardeners imitating foreign painters who were evoking classical authors' (Stoppard, 1993: 25) but also failed to differentiate the new English Elysian field from any ancient Roman or Renaissance Italian antecedent. In order to understand what was really new and revolutionary about the English landscape garden, it seems important to take seriously the hitherto generally overlooked Oriental connection of the English landscaping revolution, and it is in this context that Matteo Ripa and his visit to London in 1724 can be seen as vitally important.

Matteo Ripa was an Italian secular priest and the founder of a theological college in Naples which trained priests born in China and dedicated to missionary work in their native country. Ripa himself spent more than a decade in the middle kingdom. As part of a papal delegation to award a cardinal's hat to Charles Maillard de Tournon, he first set foot in Macao in early 1710. Tournon had been a special legate of Pope Clement XI to enforce the prohibition of such Jesuit-endorsed-or-acquiesced practices as the use of the Chinese term *Shang Di* (Lord on High) for the Christian idea of deity and the continuation of Chinese converts in their ritual veneration of Confucius and/or their ancestors. While in China, he had tactlessly sided with the Dominicans against the Jesuits in the so-called terms and rites controversies and inevitably provoked antagonism. The consequent clash of wills between the European Pope whom he served and the Chinese emperor whom the Jesuits

Copyright © UNESCO 2008
SAGE: Los Angeles, London, New Delhi and Singapore, http://dio.sagepub.com
DOI: 10.1177/0392192108090742

https://doi.org/10.1177/0392192108090742 Published online by Cambridge University Press

befriended not only cost him his personal freedom but in time also doomed the once promising accommodation policy of the Jesuits initiated in the late 16th century by Matteo Ricci.

Not long after Ripa's arrival in Macao, Tournon died. Before his death, he had remembered to recommend Ripa and other members of the papal delegation to the Chinese emperor as missionaries skilled in mathematics, music and painting. Ripa was the one identified as a painter. In his memoir, Ripa (1844: 33) claimed to be acquainted with 'only the rudiments' of the art he was called upon to cultivate. While he was still no further into the country than the coastal city of Canton, his low estimation of his own artistic ability evidently became public knowledge and even fed into a report to the local Chinese authorities, which alleged that he knew nothing of the pictorial arts, and which potentially could have derailed his welcome to China. Luckily, he was able to put to rest any doubt about his artistic proficiency by executing a lifelike portrait of a living Chinese at the command and under the supervision of a local Chinese official. Soon after this he was sent to Pekin, and from 1711 to 1723 he worked at the imperial court. Whether he was a good painter or not, he apparently had enough artistic training or natural endowment to impress the emperor Kang Xi (1662–1723) who, as Ripa recorded in his memoir, was satisfied with his pictorial output and even took a personal interest in him, often asking about his progress in the Chinese language and entrusting him with various assignments in and around the capital.

As a court painter, Ripa saw many imperial palaces and gardens. In particular, he was familiar with the imperial summer resort at Jehol, about 140 miles northeast of Pekin, which contained three distinct but interconnected scenic areas of hills, plains and lakes, because in 1713 he was ordered by the emperor Kang Xi to engrave 36 views of the then newly constructed palaces and gardens there. Because of his work, he came to know 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' (Ripa, 1844: 74). There were European missionaries who had been in the Chinese capital for much longer than Ripa, but few of them had ever seen inside the imperial palaces or pleasure grounds. On a smaller scale, outside the imperial compounds, many had encountered similar garden layouts at the residences of Chinese scholar/officials. However, not being as artistically trained or endowed as Ripa, they sensed the divergence of Chinese landscaping from European practice, but could not grasp the different valuations of nature and art or summarize those differences in a meaningful and productive context.

In 1723, the emperor Kang Xi died. Taking advantage of the customary mourning the new emperor observed for his father, Ripa invoked the same filial piety for himself and obtained rare permission to return to Europe. Just as he had arrived in the Far East on a ship of the English East India Company, he did the same on his trip back. On his way out to Asia, he had been in London in early 1708 for about two months. But all of that time he remained hidden, and fearful, on board the ship on which he and his papal companions had bought their passage, because James Stuart, the son of James II, was then threatening an invasion of Scotland from France and his

https://doi.org/10.1177/0392192108090742 Published online by Cambridge University Press

sister Queen Anne had ordered the confinement of all Catholics found in the English capital. Ripa's experience of London in late 1724 could not have been more different. In spite of his lingering apprehension as a Catholic in a Protestant country, he received an unexpectedly warm welcome from English high society during his stay of about a month. Not only had his arrival been well publicized, but he was also twice an honored guest of King George I, who sought him out for lengthy conversations on diverse subjects. In addition to open meetings with the directors of the English East India Company, he was invited to dine with what he called 'a party of English gentlemen who wished to hear some account of my long residence in China' (Ripa, 1844: 34). Among the topics covered was the population of Canton and Pekin. He did not say whether the very different Chinese gardening style ever came up in the conversation, but in hindsight it seems clear that he must have been asked about it by some of his English hosts because he is now generally believed to have sold or given a set of his engravings of the Chinese imperial palaces and gardens at Jehol to Richard Boyle, third Earl of Burlington (1695–1753; for the discovery of these engravings, see Gray, 1960: 40–3).

Burlington is nowadays known mainly for his enthusiastic promotion of neo-Palladian architecture. Back in his day, however, he was also regarded as a leader in horticultural naturalism. Around him, he gathered almost everyone important, including Alexander Pope, Robert Castell and William Kent (1685–1748), the beloved star of Walpole. Because of Ripa's intimate knowledge of the Chinese imperial gardens and his ability to talk about them clearly and technically, and because of his 36 engravings to illustrate or support what he could say, the meeting or meetings with Burlington and others could not but be a pivotal event in the transplantation into England of a very different garden layout. This accidental encounter of the right people at the right time and place is the kind of event that throws light on the whole remarkable process by which the Far East became unwittingly entangled in the English landscaping revolution. Ripa is particularly important because, not being a Jesuit like Sir William Chambers's known informant Jean Denis Attiret, his description of Chinese gardens cannot be so easily dismissed as one of those 'extremely favorable, indeed, eulogistic, accounts . . . by Jesuits . . . [who] set out to show that everything in the Celestial Empire was lovely, including the gardens' (Honour, 1990: vii).

Ever since Horace Walpole, English garden historians have blamed the French for linking England's horticultural innovations of the 18th century with China. Long before the French ruffled English pride, in fact, the Chinese identification of landscaping art with nature had been talked about in England. While writing about garden design in 1685, Sir William Temple first discussed the visual and organizational peculiarity of the Chinese pleasure ground. 'Among us,' he said, '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' (Temple, 1968: 237). 'The Chinese,' he went 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' (p. 237). 'But their greatest reach of imagination,' he explained, 'is employed in contriving figures, where the beauty shall be great, and strike the eye,

https://doi.org/10.1177/0392192108090742 Published online by Cambridge University Press

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.' (pp. 237–8). *Sharawadgi* is not an actual Chinese word. The Sinologist Michael Sullivan (1990: 285) thinks it is 'a corruption of a Persian word,' and an English expatriate in Japan claims 'it stands for the Japanese *sorowaji*' (Murray, 1999: 34). Whatever its origin, it aptly encapsulates the Chinese love of horticultural naturalism, and Temple's readers soon echoed it to preach what Arthur Lovejoy (1933: 3) calls 'the gospel of irregularity'.

In 1709, for instance, Anthony Ashley Cooper, third Earl of 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' (Shaftesbury, 1964: 125). 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 (p. 125). Then, in 1712, Joseph Addison also 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 wrote in *The Spectator*, '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' (Addison, 1965: 549). Similarly, in 1713, Alexander Pope 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'(Pope, 1977: 148). In the process of moving away from the classical European tradition of landscaping art conceptualized in terms of externally imposed geometry and symmetry, gardening professionals like Batty Langley and Stephen Switzer often turned to Temple's notion of Chinese *sharawadgi*, drawing inspiration from what Y. Z. Chang (1930: 223) calls 'the quality of being impressive or surprising through careless or unorderly grace' or what Ch'ien Chung-shu (1940: 376) terms 'this peculiar lack of art which conceals real art in the Chinese gardens'.

Neither Shaftesbury nor Addison or Pope acknowledged the source of their horticultural inspiration explicitly. However, they all left enough hints. Since Addison described how he was enlightened by writers 'who have given us an Account of *China*,' and how 'the Inhabitants of that Country laughed at the Plantations of our *Europeans*, which are laid out by the Rule and Line' (Addison, 1965: 552), for instance, could anyone fail from this description to recognize Temple, who was widely read and admired at the time? The problem is to work out where Temple got his ideas. As one of the most prominent English admirers of the middle kingdom in the 17th century, Temple may have obtained much of his information from Jesuit missionaries. As a long-time diplomatic representative of Charles II in the Netherlands, he may also have mingled with ocean-going employees of the Dutch East India Company. However, no Jesuit descriptions of Chinese gardening which could have potentially shattered old fashions and spearheaded a new style of landscaping ever came out in the 17th century. Neither did nor could any of the

https://doi.org/10.1177/0392192108090742 Published online by Cambridge University Press

Dutch traders who had been to the Chinese coastal city of Canton see the kind of imperial pleasure grounds which were large enough to immediately impress and captivate them. Temple must have heard about the asymmetrical gardens of the Far East from someone who had actually been there, but that someone must have experienced much more than the highly restricted special trade zone in Canton and he must have been sufficiently artistically gifted to discuss the specific differences between China and Europe in landscaping. It may never be possible to know precisely who was Temple's informant, but Ripa gives us a good analogical idea of who that person must have been.

Much more directly than on the issue of Temple's elusive informant, Ripa helps us understand how Burlington's improvements to the gardens at Chiswick opened 'a new chapter in the history of English landscape gardening' (Charlton, 1958: 27) and how they did so by simply diverging from the austere classicism or neoclassicism all too visible in the architectural style of the new villa built on the same site and around the same time. Burlington's grandfather, the first Earl, bought the Chiswick property in 1682 as a convenient country place close to London. The third Earl succeeded to the family title as a minor in 1704, and sometime before 1719 began to change or improve the gardens. Before then, he had already made a Grand Tour in 1714–15 through France and Northern Italy to Rome. Under the influence of the architect Colin Campbell who improved and embellished the Burlington family mansion in London (Burlington House), he had already fallen in love with classical architecture. In addition to Leoni's 1715 translation of Palladio's *Quattro Libri* (*The Four Books of Architecture*), he must have read the series of volumes entitled *Vitruvius Britannicus* which Campbell began to publish in 1715. In the third volume of *Vitruvius Britannicus*, Campbell (1725: 11) loudly praised the geometrical plan of the gardens and plantations at the Cheshire residence of the Earl of Cholmondley, saying that they 'are very large and beautiful'. Even though the same organizational principle of geometry would become a byword in England for France and autocracy during the 18th century, both the original layout and the first modifications of the Chiswick gardens were unabashedly shaped and characterized by it.

As a typical 17th-century English country house modeled after continental European, especially Italian, rural villas, the estate Burlington inherited from his grandfather combined pleasure with profit or production. The area landscaped for pleasure consisted of three parts: first, right in front of the north side of the house, there was a knot garden; then, immediately west of the house, a grass lawn was subdivided into eight squares; finally, beyond both the knot garden and the grass lawn to the north, there was a large walled-up enclosure divided in the middle by a tree-lined walk. The area landscaped for pleasure was surrounded on three sides by gardens cultivated for practical or productive purposes. To the west was a vegetable garden bordered on its west side by a tidal creek of the Thames known as the Bollo Brook. To the east was an orchard, and to the north was a horse paddock. Even though the area landscaped for pleasure was small, the entire Chiswick estate had the clear geometric imprint of a formal garden because of the easily perceived iconographical connection of the knot garden and the square-shaped grass lawns with the linear characteristics of the kitchen gardens.

Begun after 1707 and completed sometime around 1719, the first phase of

https://doi.org/10.1177/0392192108090742 Published online by Cambridge University Press

Burlington's ground improvement was distinguished by the extension of the area landscaped for pleasure into the sections previously cultivated for production. At the northern end of the tree-lined walk which divided the walled-up enclosure, he created three radiating avenues or a *patte d'oie* which cut through the entire area originally kept as a horse paddock. Straight and edged with carefully shaped and pruned shrubs and trees, each of these three avenues terminated with a small building. In the space used earlier as a kitchen garden, he created a canal or rectangular sheet of water, with formal mounds at its narrow northern and southern ends built from soil dug up from the canal. For conformity with the geometrical organization of the entire estate, the Bollo Brook was also straightened into a rectangular shape. In the area originally cultivated as an orchard, Burlington put in a deer paddock and constructed a ha-ha to replace the wall which originally separated the orchard from the walled-up enclosure. Since he needed space for his new villa (actually built between 1727 and 1729), he removed the original eight-squared grass lawn to the west of the old family house, but built another rectangular grass lawn in the area to the west of the space earmarked for the new villa which had previously been part of the vegetable garden. To the east of the space for the new villa, replacing the old knot garden, he built a summer parlour, and in the original walled enclosure he planted trees in rows and lines but kept the central broad walk that divided the area in two.

When Burlington altered the grounds again between 1727 and 1733, he kept the main anchoring and orienting device of the broad walk leading to the three straight radiating avenues lined with meticulously cut and pruned trees and shrubs, and he emphasized the related development of the avenues designed to direct the attention of visitors towards the anticipated formal vistas. When he acquired the land on the west bank of the Bollo Brook in 1727, he even put in more of his favorite radiating avenues, or *patte d'oies*. Before the improvements were complete, however, he also made small but significant changes in a different direction, so that English landscaping could be seen retrospectively as diverging from not only the French but also the entire continental European practice. Since English garden historians are fond of explaining the rise of English horticultural naturalism by reference to the Roman Campagna as seen by English tourists on the Grand Tour, and idealized in the canvases of 17th-century Italian landscape painters, it is important to note that the alterations made by Burlington and Kent had little to do with what Elizabeth Wheeler Manwaring (1925: 13) calls 'a particular sort of landscape – elaborate, widespread, greatly diversified, and having classical association' or what William Mason (1778: 65–6) terms 'those glowing scenes, that taught a Claude / To grace his canvas with Hesperean hues'. Since English garden historians are likewise eager to account for the fundamental change of English landscaping by reference to the almost mythical athletic prowess of Kent who, as Walpole said memorably, 'leaped the fence, and saw that all nature was a garden' (1987: 38), it is also instructive to remember that Burlington modeled his new architectural showpiece after Palladio's famous Villa Capra near Vicenza but completely disregarded the 16th-century Italian architect's attempt to integrate the linear patterns of the surrounding agricultural fields into the formal garden design.

The layout of the Chiswick pleasure ground noticeably changed during the period in which Burlington not only made his second visit to Italy and brought Kent

https://doi.org/10.1177/0392192108090742 Published online by Cambridge University Press

back with him but also met Ripa and acquired the set of 36 engravings of the Chinese imperial palaces and gardens at Jehol. Since what was new and revolutionary about Burlington's garden improvement was not the *patte d'oies* or any other identifiable features or ornamental structures of Italian or French formal gardens and could not therefore be linked easily and persuasively with what Burlington and Kent may have seen in Italy, it seems only too pertinent for the modest innovations to be referenced against what they must have heard from Ripa. In his memoir, Ripa clearly differentiated the Chinese preference for irregularity in garden design from the classical European penchant for regularity which he, as an Italian, must have known well. As specific examples of the Chinese use of art to imitate rather than dominate nature, he mentioned vividly how, in the imperial palaces and gardens at Jehol, there were, among other things, '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' (Ripa, 1844: 62). Burlington and Kent did not reproduce any of these literally at Chiswick, but in their modestly altered garden design, all the significant changes pointed unmistakably to the Chinese irregularity and away from the regularity of Ancient Rome and Renaissance Italy.

The main broad walk leading to the three straight and radiating avenues was retained, for instance, but it subtly disrupted rather than supported the overall geometric design because, rather than being moved to the front of the newly constructed villa, which was the new architectural focus of the whole estate, it was positioned, or left, on the east side. Similarly, the Bollo Brook, which had already been painstakingly straightened into a rectangular sheet of water, kept its formal canal appearance, but was made to zigzag ever so slightly, so that it became the precursor of all the deliberately serpentine rivers or lakes soon to be regarded as indispensable on many an English country estate. Finally, the areas between the radiating avenues were kept landscaped as (misleadingly named) wildernesses, but the paths running through them twisted and turned rather than simply crisscrossing in straight lines as they did in comparable situations. With the emergence of the new irregularity, what one was used to seeing or experiencing in gardens was no longer so fully controlled, regulated or foreseeable.

Whatever reminders of Italy English garden historians may nowadays see in such details as radiating avenues or the many ornamental structures supposedly in or after the classical manner, the pleasure ground of Burlington was recognized in the 18th century as new and revolutionary only to the extent of its experimentation with oriental irregularity rather than occidental regularity. Admiring the horticultural changes at Chiswick in the early 1740s, for instance, Daniel Defoe noted how one aspect of the gardens was 'plainer, but . . . very bold and grand, having a pleasing Simplicity, as hath also the Side-Front, toward the Serpentine River' (Defoe, 1991: 288). In the early 1750s, even Walpole saw Kent's innovation in terms of what H. F. Clark (1944: 125) calls 'the vogue for "Irregularity"'. 'There is not a citizen who does not take more pains to torture his acre and half into irregularities', Walpole wrote in *The World* (8 Feb 1753), 'than he formerly would have employed to make it as formal as his cravat'. 'Kent, the friend of nature,' he went on to say, 'was the Calvin of this reformation, but like the other champion of truth, after having routed tinsel and

https://doi.org/10.1177/0392192108090742 Published online by Cambridge University Press

trumpery, with the true zeal of a founder of a sect, he pushed his discipline to the deformity of holiness' (1753). Writing about the new spirit of landscaping inaugurated by Kent while the gardens at Chiswick were still being altered, Sir Thomas Robinson also singled out the disregard for linearity. 'There is a new taste in gardening just arisen,' he said in a letter to his father-in-law in 1734, 'which has been practised 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' (Robinson, 1897: 143–4). By this method, he was quick to add, 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' (p. 144).

As Kent's horticultural link with the Far East, Ripa apparently provided information not generally available before 1724. Sometime after Temple's 1685 discussion of the very different landscaping style in China, not only amateur theorists like Shaftesbury, Addison and Pope but also professional gardeners like Batty Langley turned against 'that regular, stiff, and stuft up Manner' and argued for 'Designs that are truly Grand and Noble, after Nature's own manner' (1728: vii).

In their agitation for change, they often alluded to Temple as Stephen Switzer did in 1718 when he characterized his brave new proposal of 'a kind of Extensive Gard'ning, not yet much us'd with us' as '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' (Switzer, 1718: xi, xxxviii). Open-minded but never capricious or whimsical, Temple must have heard about the asymmetrical Chinese garden from someone who actually saw it and knew how to talk about it professionally, but none of those who echoed him before 1724 seemed to have had access to the same firsthand knowledge. Fascinated with the reputed beauty of the Chinese arcadia, Temple is nowadays known to have attempted, before his death in 1699, randomly winding pathways and seemingly disorderly vistas in one corner of his garden (Hussey, 1967: 21). Their rhetoric notwithstanding, Langley and Switzer, in contrast, never went beyond variations of formality. Having little literary pretension, Kent may never have read Temple, but even if he had, could he have moved English landscaping so expertly in the direction of Chinese irregularity if he had known only as much or as little as Langley and Switzer did? Robinson did not identify Ripa directly in his 1734 letter, but without some knowledge of Ripa's visit, could he have been so confident that what Kent attempted was what the Chinese did?

In retrospect, what made it so easy for Kent and others to embrace the irregular gardening style is how Chinese horticultural naturalism had by then been assimilated into a subtly iconoclastic rereading of the classical European past. Robert Castell is the one who did it more than others. In 1728, he published *The Villas of the Ancients Illustrated* containing his annotated translation of two letters by Pliny the Younger about his villas, Laurentinum and Tuscum. Of particular importance is Pliny's Tuscan villa. In a letter to Domitius Apollinaris, Pliny described two of his

https://doi.org/10.1177/0392192108090742 Published online by Cambridge University Press

gardens. First, there was a landscaped area to the south of the house, beginning with a terrace which sloped down to a level ground and finishing beyond this with a plot of land laid out in the form of a circus. All the different pieces of land were subdivided into a multitude of geometrical figures and adorned with rows of trees or evergreens trimmed into various shapes. Then, on the opposite side of the house, there was what Pliny called 'a very spacious hippodrome, entirely open in the middle, by which means the eye, upon your first entrance, takes in its whole extent at one view' (Pliny, 1931: 389). Encompassed on every side by ivy-covered plane-trees alternating with differently shaded or colored box and bay trees, the hippodrome or horse-racing track was depicted as ending in a semi-circle with the area beyond it divided into several tracks by manifold winding alleys. 'In one place you have a little meadow;' Pliny wrote, 'in another the box is interposed in groups, and cut into a thousand different forms; sometimes into letters, expressing the name of the master, or again that of the artificer: whilst here and there little obelisks rise intermixed alternately with fruit-trees: when on a sudden, in the midst of this elegant regularity, you are surprised with an imitation of the negligent beauties of rural nature; in the centre of which lies a spot surrounded with a knot of dwarf plane-trees' (1931: 391).

In Pliny's text, it is not clear what the *ruris imitatio* refers to. Since Pliny was not informative, in 1780 Walpole felt justified in dismissing that reference and characterizing his entire garden layout as what was rejected by the English landscaping revolution. Intrigued by the same mysterious reference, however, Castell creatively recycled Pliny's text in 1728 into a different speculation. According to him, the early builders 'aimed at nothing further than the Disposition of their Plantations' or 'select, well-water'd Spots of Ground, irregularly producing all sorts of Plants and Trees, grateful either to the Sight, Smell, or Taste, and refreshed by Shade and Water' (Castell, 1728: 116). Then, they invented 'a Manner of laying out the Ground and Plantations of Gardens by the Rule and Line' (p.116). Finally, '[by] the Accounts we have of the preset Manner of Designing in *China*, it seems as if from the two former Manners a Third had been formed, whose Beauty consisted in 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 in their *Rocks, Cascades*, and *Trees*, bearing their natural forms' (114–17).

Guided by his information about China, Castell was then able to decipher the ordering principles of Pliny's garden. 'In the Disposition of *Pliny*'s Garden,' he said (Castell, 1728: 117), 'the Designer of it shews that he was not unacquainted with these several Manners, and the Whole seems to have been a Mixture of them all Three'. First of all, the meadow was where 'Nature appears in her plainest and most simple Dress; such as the first Builders were contented with about their *Villas*, when the Face of the Ground it self happened to be naturally beautiful' (p. 117). Then, the geometrically and symmetrically formed walkways and the variously cut and shaped plants indicated 'the Manner of the more regular Gardens' (p. 117). Finally, the imitation of rural nature evinced 'the third Manner, where, under the Form of a beautiful Country, *Hills*, *Rocks*, *Cascades*, *Rivulets*, *Woods*, *Buildings*, etc. were possibly thrown into such an agreeable Disorder, as to have pleased the Eye from several

https://doi.org/10.1177/0392192108090742 Published online by Cambridge University Press

Views, like so many beautiful Landskips; and at the same time have afforded at least all the Pleasures that could be enjoy'd in the most regular Gardens' (p. 117). Doing much more than translate or paraphrase Pliny, Castell not only made the originally ambiguous and therefore seemingly insignificant text sound clear and significant but also brought it in line with the kind of landscaping reform just then being contemplated and tried out by Burlington and Kent at Chiswick.

Whether or not Pliny ever advocated horticultural irregularity, Castell's use of Ripa enabled him to make the concept sound like part of a long-existing native tradition. Since the horticultural innovations at Chiswick could then be linked with what Pliny did at his Tuscan villa, it is possible for John D. Hunt to argue that 'Kent's garden work grew out of . . . classically derived garden tradition, mediated and authorized by modern Italian examples' (1987: 26). Since the antiquarians of the Far East and the West were then thought of as likeminded on the subject of landscaping, it is also easy and reasonable for Rudolf Wittkower to contend that the often noticed 'contradiction between Burlington's obsession with sober classical values as far as architecture was concerned and the freedom he, his associates and friends, among them above all William Kent, advocated for the lay-out of gardens' (Wittkower, 1969: 25) is more apparent than real. Such an equation of China with Europe may be hard to understand nowadays, but back in the early 18th century, the middle kingdom was not only widely admired in England and Europe as 'the best-governed land on earth' (Lach and van Kley, 1993: 1905) but also often envisioned in terms of classical European political theories as the realization of Plato's utopian republic or as 'an excellent practical example of the virtues thought to be inherent in natural philosophy and lay morality' (Lach, 1942: 216). The calculated propaganda of the Jesuits throughout the 17th century contributed a great deal to this fascinating but largely misleading identification of the Far East with the West. What Burlington, Kent and Castell did very much resembled what the Jesuits did. At the same time, however, there was a subtle and significant difference.

Missionaries from the Society of Jesus first penetrated into China in the late 16th century. Even before they got there, they realized they would not be able to impose their faith by force on the local residents as European missionaries had done in Africa, America and parts of Asia and as the powerful warships of the West eventually enabled the footsoldiers of Christianity to spread the faith in the middle kingdom in the 19th and early 20th centuries. Admiring China but committed nevertheless to the goal of religious conquest, Matteo Ricci consciously chose to adapt the evangelical message to the Chinese context, hoping to gain acceptance and legitimacy through a subtle and highly selective alliance with the Chinese classics. Because of his policy of accommodation rather than confrontation, the Jesuit mission to China indeed represented what Wolfgang Reinhard (1977: 241) calls 'one of the few serious alternatives to the otherwise brutal ethno-centrism of the European expansion over the earth'. Because of his diligent studies of the Chinese language and classics, Ricci indeed also acted as what the late Pope John Paul II (in his address of 1982) terms 'a true "bridge" between the European and Chinese civilizations'. In spite of his truly extraordinary open-mindedness, however, Ricci was never enamored of the cosmic and metaphysical underpinnings of Confucianism or Neo-Confucianism. The key idea which he grappled with and which as much defined

https://doi.org/10.1177/0392192108090742 Published online by Cambridge University Press

Chinese landscaping as Chinese philosophy was '*tian-ren-he-yi*' or the union of man with heaven or nature.

What Ricci attacked is what Wing-Tsit Chan describes as the uniquely Chinese brand of humanism, 'not the humanism that denies or slights a Supreme Power, but one that professes the unity of man and Heaven' (1963: 3). From at least the Zhou dynasty around the 12th century BCE, references to 'Heaven'[1] and 'the Mandate of the Lord on High'[2] already abounded in Chinese historical and poetical works. Rather than any anthropomorphic force or being which is separated from the world but which has the power and the desire to affect everything in it, the notion of divinity in Chinese classics is never more than what Chan (1963: 3) calls 'a self-existent moral law' with which humanity is inexorably linked as its actual or potential embodiment. Enriching their reinterpretation of the Confucian tradition by absorbing ideas from both Daoism and Buddhism, such 12th-century Chinese philosophers as Zhu Xi further enhanced the ambiguity potential of identity and distinction between divinity and humanity, making the universe out to be one 'which, though neither created nor governed by any personal deity,' as Joseph Needham notes, 'was entirely real, and possessed the property of manifesting the highest human values . . . when beings of an integrative level sufficiently high to allow of their appearance, had come into existence' (1954: 412). The Neo-Confucianists may use such new terms as '*tai ji*' (the great ultimate), '*li*' (principle) and '*chi*' (material force), but the substance of their ideas is the same as the old correspondence of man and god.

Rather than denying the fact that the idea of divinity could be found in the Chinese classics because it was not conceptualized in the way of a Christian God, Ricci went out of his way to prove that it was not only there but might even be thought about in a European way. 'Of all the pagan sects known to Europe,' as he explained the situation to his European audiences, 'I know of no people who fell into fewer errors in the early ages of their antiquity than did the Chinese' (Ricci, 1953: 93). 'From the very beginning of their history', he said, 'it is recorded in their writings that they recognized and worshipped one supreme being whom they called the King of Heaven, or designated by some other name indicating his rule over heaven and earth' (p.93). Agreeing with Ricci's reading of the monotheistic impulses of the early Chinese classics, James Legge, who is undoubtedly the greatest 19th-century British Protestant scholar of Chinese religious and philosophical thoughts, would go so far as to claim that 'the *Ti* (Lord) and *Shang-ti* (Lord on High) of the Chinese classics is God – our God – the true God' (1877: 3). However, Ricci was never as sanguine as Legge about the identity or even similarity between the Chinese deity and the Christian God. 'Accordingly, we have judged it preferable in this book', as Ricci said while delineating to his Jesuit superior the rhetorical strategy of his evangelical writing in Chinese, 'rather than attack what they say, to turn it in such a way that it is in accordance with the idea of God, so that we appear not so much to be following Chinese ideas as interpreting Chinese authors in such a way that they follow our ideas' (Ricci, 1953: 27).[3]

By interpreting or misinterpreting the Chinese idea of divinity in terms of the European concept of deity, the Jesuits were able to argue against Chinese philosophy and religion while appearing to defend them. By representing or misrepresenting the

https://doi.org/10.1177/0392192108090742 Published online by Cambridge University Press

landscaping theory of Pliny and other ancient writers in terms of what Ripa must have told them about the Chinese imperial pleasure grounds, Burlington, Kent and Castell were similarly able to sabotage the classical European garden tradition while professing the desire to enhance it. For Burlington, Kent and Castell, as for Ricci and his Jesuit confrères, it may be inevitable that what was new was presented at first as what was old, so that what was unfamiliar and therefore potentially unacceptable could come across as what was familiar and therefore perfectly acceptable, but sooner or later what was old had to be reconceptualized in terms of what was new so that real change could take place. This critically important second step was accomplished in the English landscaping revolution but not in the Jesuits' evangelical enterprise in China.

Ever since Walpole, English garden historians have denied the arguably decisive involvement of Chinese gardening ideas in the transformation of the English pleasure ground. But even before the end of the 18th century and before the death of Walpole, firsthand English testimony had already recorded that what the English did was what the Chinese did. Writing about his experience as the first English diplomatic envoy to the Chinese imperial court in 1793–4, Lord Macartney recorded his pleasant surprise at 'the rural scenery of Chinese gardening' which he saw in the gardens near Pekin and at Jehol and which he had not thought possible outside England. Remembering the highly emotional dispute over the appellation of the new English garden in France, he was 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' (Macartney, 1963: 95,126). Brown and Hamilton may not have got their ideas directly from the Far East, but how about others? For his embassy, Macartney had obtained two Chinese interpreters from none other than Ripa's foundation. Had he known what Ripa must have told Burlington, Kent, Castell and others about the imperial gardens in and around the Chinese capital, what would he have thought about the nationalistic claim of Walpole and others about the originality or uniqueness of the new English garden?

Yu Liu
Niagara County Community College

Acknowledgment

The research for this essay has been supported over the last few years by a sabbatical leave grant from Niagara County Community College, a John Simon Guggenheim Memorial Foundation Fellowship, and short-term research fellowships at the Huntington Library, the Lewis Walpole Library and the Beinecke Library of Yale University, the William Andrews Clark Library of UCLA, the Yale Center for British Art, the Harry Ransom Humanities Research Center at the University of Texas at Austin, and the Warburg Institute of London University. For the crucial support of all these institutions and of the librarians and staff members involved I would like to express my sincere gratitude.

https://doi.org/10.1177/0392192108090742 Published online by Cambridge University Press

Notes

1. *Book of Odes*, Ode 260 'The Teeming Multitude', in Chan (1963: 5).
2. *Book of History*, 'Prince Shih', in Chan (1963: 6–7).
3. See also Matteo Ricci's 1604 'Letter to the General of the Jesuits', conserved at the Casanatense Library in Rome, ms no. 2136, as cited in Gernet (1982).

References

Addison, J. (1965) 'From The Spectator, no. 414, 25 June 1712', in Donald F. Bond (ed.), *The Spectator*. Oxford: Clarendon Press.

Campbell, C. (1725) *Vitruvius Britannicus*. London.

Castell, R. (1728) *The Villas of the Ancients Illustrated*. London.

Chan, Wing-Tsit (1963) *A Source Book in Chinese Philosophy*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press.

Chang, Y. Z. (1930) 'A Note on Sharawadgi', *Modern Language Notes*, 45.

Charlton, J. (1958) *A History and Description of Chiswick House and Gardens*. London: HMSO.

Ch'ien, Chung-shu (1940) 'China in the English Literature of the Seventeenth Century', *Quarterly Bulletin of Chinese Bibliography*, New Series 1.

Clark, H. F. (1944) 'Lord Burlington's Bijou, or Sharawaggi at Chiswick', *The Architectural Review*, 95.

Defoe, D. (1991) *A Tour thro' the Whole Island of Great Britain* (1742). New Haven, CT: Yale University Press.

Gernet, J. (1982) *Chine et christianisme*. Paris: Gallimard.

Gray, B. (1960) 'Lord Burlington and Father Ripa's Chinese Engravings', *The British Museum Quarterly*, 22: 40–3.

John Paul II (1982) 'Address at the Georgian University Session of 25 October 1982 of the Macerata Conference Commemorating the 400th Anniversary of the Arrival in China of Matteo Ricci, S.J.'. Rome.

Honour, H. (1990) 'Introduction' to Osvald Siren, *China and Gardens of Europe of the Eighteenth Century*. Washington, DC: Dumbarton Oaks.

Hunt, J. D. (1986) *Garden and Grove: The Italian Renaissance Garden in the English Imagination, 1600–1750*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press.

Hunt, J. D. (1987) *William Kent Landscape Garden Designer: An Assessment and Catalogue of His Designs*. London: Zwemmer.

Hussey, C. (1967) *English Gardens and Landscapes 1700–1750*. New York: Funk & Wagnalls.

Lach, D. F. (1942) 'China and the Era of the Enlightenment', *The Journal of Modern History*, 14.

Lach, D. F. and van Kley, E. J. (1993) *Asia in the Making of Europe*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

Langley, B. (1728) *New Principles of Gardening*. London.

Legge, J. (1877) *Confucianism in Relation to Christianity*. Shanghai: Kelly & Walsh.

Lovejoy, A. (1933) 'The Chinese Origin of Romanticism', *The Journal of English and Germanic Philology*, 32.

Macartney, G. (1963) *An Embassy to China: Being the Journal Kept by Lord Macartney during his Embassy to the Emperor Ch'ien-lung 1793–94*, ed. J. L. Cranmer-Byng. Hamden, CT: Archon Books.

Mason, W. (1778) *The English Garden: A Poem*. London: Horsfield.

Murray, C. (1999) *Sharawadgi: The Romantic Return to Nature*. San Francisco: International Scholars Publications.

Needham, J. (1954) *Science and Civilization in China*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Pliny (1931) *Letters*, transl. William Melmoth, rev. W. M. L. Hutchinson. London: William Heinemann.

Pope, A. (1977) 'The Guardian, 173, Tuesday, 29 September 1713', in Norman Ault (ed.), *The Prose Works of Alexander Pope*. Westport, CT: Greenwood Press Publishers.

Reinhard, W. (1977) 'Gegenreformation als Modernisierung? Prolegomena zu einer Theorie des konfessionellen Zeitalters', *Archiv für Reformationgeschichte*, 68.

Ricci, M. (1953) *China in the Sixteenth Century: The Journals of Matthew Ricci, 1583–1610*, transl. L. J. Gallagher *s.j*. New York: Random House.

Ripa, M. (1844) *Memoirs of Father Ripa*, transl. Fortunato Prandi. London: Murray.

https://doi.org/10.1177/0392192108090742 Published online by Cambridge University Press

Robinson, T. (1897) 'Letter to the Earl of Carlisle, 23 December 1734', in *Historical Manuscript Commission Reports*, Castle Howard mss, VI.

Ronan, C. E. *s.j.*, Oh, B. B. C., eds (1988) *East Meets West: The Jesuits in China, 1582–1773*. Chicago: Loyola University Press.

Shaftesbury, A., Earl of (1964) 'The Moralists', in John M. Robertson (ed.), *Characteristics of Men, Manners, Opinions, Times*. Indianapolis, IN: Bobbs-Merrill.

Stoppard, T. (1993) *Arcadia*. London: Faber and Faber.

Sullivan, M. (1990) 'Chinese Art and Its Impact on the West', in Paul S. Ropp (ed.), *Heritage of China: Contemporary Perspectives on Chinese Civilization*. Berkeley: University of California Press.

Switzer, S. (1718) *Ichnographia Rustica: or, the Nobleman, Gentleman, and Gardener's Recreation*. London.

Temple, W. (1968) 'Upon the Gardens of Epicurus; or, of Gardening', in *The Works of Sir William Temple*. New York: Greenwood Press.

Walpole, H. (1987) *On Modern Gardening*, Rebecca More (ed.). Hackney: Stourton Press.

Wheeler Manwaring, E. (1925) *Italian Landscape in Eighteenth Century England*. New York: Oxford University Press.

Williamson, T. (1995) *Polite Landscape: Gardens and Society in Eighteenth-Century England*. Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins University Press.

Wittkower, R. (1969) 'English Neo-Palladianism, the Landscape Garden, China, and the Enlightenment', *L'arte*, 6.

https://doi.org/10.1177/0392192108090742 Published online by Cambridge University Press