THE THEATRICS OF PLACE:

18TH C. FANTASY AND GEORGE III AT THE GREAT PAGODA AT KEW

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ABSTRACT

This paper examines two sites of eighteenth-century architecture, The Great Pagoda in London's Royal Botanical Gardens, Kew, commissioned for King George III, and the Qianlong Emperor's Western Palace complex at *Yuanming Yuan* 圆明园 in Beijing. By looking at architecture that transports the beholder through nonnative modeling, this paper investigates the virtual realities constructed in the foreign imagination. Methodologically based upon the architect's, Sir William Chambers, own architectural treatises (*On the Art of Laying out Gardens Among the Chinese* and *Dissertation on Oriental Gardening*), and Jonathan Hay's book *Sensuous Surfaces: the Decorative Object in Early Modern China*, this paper finds that The Great Pagoda intended to craft an entirely Sinicized experience for the King in which the sights, sounds, smells, and especially the views of Chinese gardens were replicated to engender the site as a theatrical set. Likewise, the Qianlong Emperor could personify his British equivalent through European modes of viewing, artificially ruling over a European city, particularly at *Hudong xianfahua* 湖东线法画 (Perspective Painting East of the Lake), a series of stage flats painted in trompe l'oeil to conjure a convincing street view.

The findings of this paper complicate the traditional scholarly narrative which tends to simplify the colonizer/colonized relationship, restoring agency to China's fetishistic gaze towards the West. King George III collected nonnative architecture, using structures as conduits for personal fetishization and diplomatic strategizing through a performance within the choreography of a Chinese garden space. Concurrently, the Qianlong Emperor held a mutually exotic gaze towards Europe, particularly at the site of pictorial and scopic techniques allowing him to revel in his comprehension of such nonnative visual tricks as trompe l'oeil. This mutual

understanding of elite garden spaces obviates the need to hierarchically define Great Britain and China's relationship, but instead insists upon their equivalency in navigating the 'other.'

ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

There are a few people who closely encouraged my engagement with this topic, namely Professor Christine I. Ho who permitted me to enroll in her graduate seminar during the Fall 2018 semester, the product of which was an earlier—and far less polished version of—this paper. In addition, I would like to extend my thanks to Dr. Oliver Walton who gave me permission to handle His Majesty George III's unpublished personal documents through the Georgian Papers Programme at Windsor, and to the custodians of the Smith College Special Collections. I would also like to recognize Professor Margaret Vickery who provided feedback on this text, as well as the organizers of the 2019 Massachusetts Undergraduate Research Conference who allowed me to present this paper orally. Naturally, my parents supported my research both emotionally and financially, and for that I am forever indebted.

During the majority of the late-18th century, George III, King of Great Britain, divided his time across multiple royal residencies, but none was more enticing than the Royal Botanical Gardens at Kew situated in the London borough of Richmond upon Thames. Here, buildings and flora from across the globe enveloped George III, transporting him to various locales both under his colonial rule and otherwise. One folly, an architectural ornament with purely decorative purpose, was truly an architectural feat: The Great Pagoda, likely based upon two 18th century pagodas situated in the Southern Chinese city of Guangzhou. Contemporary scholarship criticizes the designer of this building, Sir William Chambers, over his two publications on the subject of Chinese gardens where his language flattens the many complexities of Chinese gardening as a discipline, but also celebrates him for his early conceptualization of Chinese gardens in the West.[93] In said publications, Chambers essentializes the gardens into what he describes as modular displays based upon three constructions of views—the pleasing, horrid, and enchanted—established through endlessly interchangeable artifices, flora and fauna.[94] However, Chambers 'pagoda also functions through two methodologies of design: (1) the construction of a Sinicized view, as written about by Chambers himself, and (2) popular during the Ming (1368-1644) and Qing (1644-1912) dynasties, the use of sensuous qualities to delight a beholder to a decorative object, as theorized by Jonathan Hay in his book, *Sensuous Surfaces: the Decorative Object in Early Modern China*. These two design techniques, as well as the theatricality of gardens where movement through space is central to the experience, merge to establish a truly Chinese encounter for the King. The Great Pagoda serves not only as chinoiserie exotica—

[93] Rinaldi, Bianca Maria, and Chambers, William, "On the Art of Laying Out Gardens Among the Chinese," in *Ideas of Chinese Gardens*, edited by Bianca Maria Rinaldi (Philadelphia, PA: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2016), 112.
[94] Rinaldi, and Chambers, 115.

imitation Chinese ornament—but also as a theatrical set upon which the King of Great Britain could perform as his Chinese equivalent, the Qianlong Emperor, for personal exoticism or heightened diplomatic strategizing. Beyond Kew, the appropriation of architectural styles in royal and imperial garden spaces is a reciprocal effort appearing in both Europe and China, highlighting not only a mutuality in exoticism, but also the yearning for cultural contact with the exotic, most evident within courtly garden spaces.

Moving backward, a publication from 1773 entitled, *A New Display of the Beauties of England*, cites the Royal Botanical Gardens at Kew as the premier green England offers; although this is not quantified on the page, Kew and all its artifices are listed as the first beauty of England, considering Kew at the time of publication was "honoured with being the residence of His Majesty."[95] The author recapitulates the experience of Kew, taking the reader sequentially through the palace and garden spaces. *A New Display of the Beauties of England* captivates the reader, drawing them down the paths of Kew as the King of Great Britain would have walked them.

Admiration of His Majesty's parks occurred as a ritual, with the winding paths of Kew slowly and methodically displacing the King from Great Britain to snapshots of international locales. King George III would rise, daily, between seven and eight in the morning and take "walks round the gardens" before meeting his bride, Queen Charlotte of Mecklenburg-Strelitz,

[95] *A New Display of the Beauties of England: or, a description of the most elegant or magnificent public edifices, royal palaces, noblemen's and gentlemen's seats, and other curiosities, natural or artificial, in different parts of the kingdom. Adorned with a variety of copper-plate cuts, neatly engraved* (London: printed for R. Goadby; and sold by J. Towers, at No 111, in Fore street, near Cripplegate; and by R. Baldwin No. 47, in Pater-Noster-Row, 1773), 5.

for breakfast at half past eight.[96] Kew Palace, as described in *A New Display of the Beauties of England*, is a "neat, plain building, but by no means suitable to the dignity of a King of Great Britain." However, the great hall, and the palace more broadly, was a heavily ornamented space where the King could admire furniture, decoration, and paintings, each of both domestic and international provenance, however the palace remains necessarily English. Upon leaving, George III would view what was once a barren, flat plain, that "with great expense and labour … is now a kind of Eden." The first pavilion the King encounters through his tour is the Temple of the Sun, a circular peripteros building featuring a Corinthian colonnade. Inside, His Majesty would be welcomed by a gilt interior with basso relievo featuring the Sun among festoons of flowers and the twelve zodiacs; although subtle, references to Greek and Roman mythology are the first remark on exotic philosophy. Beyond the Temple of the Sun and through the Exotic Garden and then the Flower Garden, the King would stroll on a short winding-walk that led His Majesty to The Menagerie, an ovular pavilion that housed pens of Chinese and Tartarian pheasants among many other exotic birds, beside which stood a small Chinese gazebo designed after an open *ting* (亭) (Figure 1). George III would then find himself passing four Roman buildings. One of which, the Temple of Æolus, at the head of the lake, stands near a two-story octagonal building often cited as The House of Confucius, (Figure 2).[97] Grotesque paintings featuring motifs of Confucius and the Jesuit missions to China decorate the interior walls, encouraging the King to continue His Majesty's detour to the East within his very own gardens. Looking out from The House of Confucius, the King would have a pleasant view (in the Chambers usage of the word) of the lake

[96] Acknowledgement must be given to the permission of Her Majesty Queen Elizabeth II for access to this material, and for access to the Georgian Papers Programme for research purposes. Document identifier: RA GEO/MAIN/15890 King George III's Diary, 1769.
[97] *A New Display of the Beauties of England*, 5-8.

and gardens. From there, His Majesty could go for another short walk to an octagonal seat before ensuing towards the Theater of Augusta and the Temple of Victory, Roman and French buildings respectively. Moving towards the upper part of the garden, George III would find himself at The Alhambra, a Moresque building, and The Great Pagoda, a tower based upon designs of "Eastern temples," specifically a Chinese *ta* (塔) (Figure 3).[98]

A New Display of the Beauties of England fosters an experience of Kew in which The Great Pagoda acts as a climactic point during a tour of His Majesty's gardens. Spending three extended paragraphs discussing the dazzling nature of the tower, the publication envisions this pavilion as one of the most important buildings on the King's tour, necessarily making it one of the most important follies on the plain. Following his engagement with the pagoda, the King would circle around and see the rest of his gardens before returning to the palace perhaps for an afternoon tea; and just like this *A New Display of the Beauties of England* shows little interest in the last structures George III would encounter.

Coming upon The Great Pagoda, designed by Sir William Chambers and completed in 1762, His Majesty would be enchanted with the tower (Figure 4). The pagoda consists of nine stories, each diminishing along the same mathematical proportion, totaling a staggering height of almost fifty meters. The roofs are modeled after the Chinese sweeping roof, with each tapered end ornamented by a single glass dragon, each offering a "dazzling reflexion [sic]" that emanated from the eighty beasts scattered regularly across the building.[99] The King would see his brick tower, imposing over him, with the underside of its protruding roofs decorated by varnished iron in a black-and-white striped pattern. These roofs act as lips between each floor,

[98] *A New Display of the Beauties of England*, 9.
[99] Ibid.

propelling the mathematical diminishment upwards fostering an illusion of immense height when viewing the building from the ground. The base of the tower extends outwards onto a large patio where white pillars prop up the lower awning. This lower level appears roughly two and a half times human height, achieving great scale over the inhabitant. After this story, the interior floors are rather small, feeling claustrophobic within the tower, which diminish to about human size by the ninth floor. The construction of the brick walls of the tower reflect an English sensibility for material and design, however, the polychromy maintains the reverie of Chinese timber-based architecture. Fenestration occurs on every other wall of the octagonal building, besides the upper viewing deck which has eight windows, each offering a distinct view of London and the surrounding landscape. These inset windows are long, rectangular and rounded at the top with a decorative border consisting of two bricks. Each floor of the pagoda features a non-functional balcony with a standard Chinese pen-shaft lattice fence painted white. The tower's decorative rooftop leads to a point decorated by a golden spiraling "umbrella" lightning rod, reminiscent of Chinese stupas—interestingly also referred to by the character *ta* (塔). The 18th century interior of the structure was once filled with furnishings both European and Chinese, however after recent renovations, is painted light blue and white with bare wooden floors with no interior furnishings save educational material on the first floor.

Upon entering the pagoda, His Majesty could ascend the central staircase, looking outward to view his country, from Hampstead and Highgate, to Surrey and Banstead-downs.[100] The Great Pagoda is perhaps the most wondrous building within Kew gardens, culminated by the resplendent ornament, the act of ascension by way of a spiral staircase, and the striking view His Majesty could take from, at one time, the highest point in England. However, this building also

[100] Ibid.

offers an inherently Chinese experience to its inhabitants by way of design. The stunning effect offered by the dragons, the richly painted surfaces, and the balcony fences reiterate the Ming-Qing material culture—which circulated heavily among English aristocracy during the 18th century—that Chambers references in both the design of his pagoda and his publications on the subject of Chinese gardening. The myriad buildings designed by Sir William Chambers display King George III's fondness for Middle Eastern and Chinese tastes, despite the general preference for Roman and Grecian examples among the gentry class.[101]

By taking the King of Great Britain on a long and detouring path towards The Great Pagoda, Chambers heightens the dazzling effects that the building inspires. The creation of tension throughout the Royal Botanical Gardens at Kew, giving His Majesty hints at encounters with China as he walks across the green, builds suspense as the King anticipates his approach to The Great Pagoda. In doing so, Chambers expands the temporality of the experience of The Great Pagoda, gradually inviting George III deeper into the chinoiserie atmosphere of the building; the gardens intrigue His Majesty to lose himself in the experience of the building, its dazzling surfaces, and overall luster, all of which dramatize and heighten the climactic moment within Kew's set choreography. In this way, The Great Pagoda expands the scopic techniques developed in Chinese gardens that Chambers recounts in his publications. Chambers describes Chinese gardens as winding circumambulated walks, punctuated by small pavilions, seats, or choreographed views. However, the scale of elite garden spaces is disparate; European landscape gardens are exponentially larger than their Chinese equivalents. Thus, Chambers fosters a sensual experience in which His Majesty would slowly encounter The Great Pagoda, nurturing a fetishistic view of Chinese gardens and culture. By adopting the Chinese methodology of

[101] *A New Display of the Beauties of England*, 9-12.

pleasing and enchanted garden views at Kew, Chambers layers the ways in which The Great Pagoda, and the views the beholder can take of it, are indeed enchanted and necessarily Sinicized.

Chambers 'two publications on Chinese gardening, his *Dissertation on Oriental Gardening*, and *On the Art of Laying out Gardens Among the Chinese*, were not only hugely influential among the British and French aristocracy—being translated into French—but also largely formulated Chamber's own architectural practice at Kew, specifically informing the design of The Great Pagoda and the few other Chinese examples.[102] Chambers 'publications came after his two trips to China with the Swedish East India company where he spent time in the gardens of Guangzhou. In Guangzhou, Chambers built a repertoire of knowledge upon which he could draw for his publications and Royal architectural commissions at Kew by visiting multiple scholar gardens. Beyond Chambers 'lists of what artifices, flora and fauna are and are not appropriate in Chinese garden spaces, Chambers develops his notion of the view within said gardens. Here, he references the pleasing, horrid, and enchanted as the three principal views one can take within scholar gardens, and goes on to say that Chinese gardens are meticulously designed to inspire these types of views.[103] These archetypical Chinese views reflect contemporary ideas about views in European landscape gardens, demonstrating Chambers 'effort to highlight the familiar within the exotic.[104] Chambers does not necessarily delineate the pleasing, for it is rather self-explanatory, but the enchanted is cited as 'romantic 'in the Western conception, and the horrid is diagnosed through features that are rather frightening such as

[102] Rinaldi, and Chambers, 112.
[103] Rinaldi, and Chambers, 115.
[104] Rinaldi, and Chambers, 112.

jagged rocks and caverns.[105] Chambers describes the gardens of Guangzhou—the only city in China he ever visited—as short winding walks where the modular displays of pavilions, birds, vegetation and waterways would construct these various types of views for the beholder. Chambers directly implements the 'enchanted 'and 'pleasing 'views within and around The Great Pagoda in order for the experience of the pavilion to offer an authentically 'Chinese ' experience.[106] Through the layering of natural and artificial ornamentation, Chambers employs the same strategies he observed in Guangzhou in order to present the King with a Chinese garden space His Majesty could enjoy. According to scholar John Harris, visitors audibly gasped at the sight of The Great Pagoda. Harris goes on to state that the pagoda is, and continues to be, the most ambitious chinoiserie structure in Europe.[107] The construction of Chinese viewing methods is a covert form of chinoiserie—less obvious than deliberate motifs—but it is just one strategy Chambers drew upon from the discipline of Chinese gardening that contributes to the chinoiserie atmosphere of The Great Pagoda in order to create an idyllic Chinese experience for the King of Great Britain.

The atmosphere of Kew's Great Pagoda acts as a 'chinoiserie objectscape, 'a notion conceptualized by Jonathan Hay in his book, *Sensuous Surfaces*. The Ming-Qing 'surfacescape ' can be described as a decorative object's surface qualities with its imbued agency, where the surface begs to be touched through sensuous qualities like texture and form. The link between

[105] Rinaldi, and Chambers, 114-115.
[106] Further scholarship on The Great Pagoda could perhaps consider the imposing nature of the building as necessarily horrid, considering China's dominance over the world economy within recent history, particularly during the mid-Ming dynasty. This analysis could examine the building as a visual reminder of China's threat to His Majesty's empire.
[107] Harris, John, "Sir William Chambers and Kew Gardens," in *Sir William Chambers: Architect to George III*, edited by John Harris and Michael Snodin, (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1996), 65.

Chambers 'and Hay's writing is evident here. Chambers writes that Chinese gardens "inspire an emotional response within the viewer" and "arouse curiosity," which are indeed sensuous qualities.[108] Hay's concept of the 'objectscape 'forwards that decorations—and their sensuousness—when situated among other decor, ornament, or material, culminate in an overall sensuous environment. The concept of the objectscape, and its role at Kew, is further developed through the visual strategies employed by Chambers within his design of The Great Pagoda. Ming-Qing surfacescapes, according to Hay, have the ability to reflexively "take on the character of vehicles for non-artistic processes—the exercise of taste, [and] self-fashioning."[109] Hay goes on to assert that beholders 'interactions with decorative objects are inspired through an appeal "to the hand and eye in distinctive ways."[110] In investigating decoration and ornament in Ming-Qing material culture, Hay finds that the conjoining of the man-made and natural constitutes an ephemeral hybridity that is delightfully enchanting for beholders of decorative objects, which Hay mentions could include architectural structures, however this idea is never fully developed beyond interiors.[111] Hybrid objects—that hybridity being constituted by the marriage of the man-made and natural—is exemplified by potted flowers, but on a larger scale could describe The Great Pagoda and its greater environment. Hybridity within the objectscape expands the sensory possibilities with which to experience the ornament itself. For instance, the scent of cut flowers housed in a vase waning over time, or the various diffuses of light and those reflections produced on the vessel for said flowers. These characteristics inspire the viewer to take interest with the

[108] Rinaldi, and Chambers, 113.
[109] Hay, Jonathan, "The Object Think With Us," In *Sensuous Surfaces: The Decorative Object in Early Modern China*, (Honolulu, HI: University of Hawai'i Press, 2010), 61.
[110] Hay, 62.
[111] Hay, Jonathan, "The Atmospherics of Surface," in *Sensuous Surfaces: The Decorative Object in Early Modern China*, (Honolulu, HI: University of Hawai'i Press, 2010), 344.

object throughout its lifetime, to behold the ornament in all its permutations, forever a mutating experience.

The Great Pagoda's objectscape provides such an ephemeral experience. The fleetingness of time, light, and temperature affect the beholder of the tower in myriad ways, offering different emotional appeals to the inhabitant through various sensory inputs.[112] His Majesty enjoying The Great Pagoda on a hot summer day would see the highly reflective glass surfaces of his tamed dragons perched, shorebird wings cocked back, tongues twisting forward, and the aroma of China broad leaved pine filling the air with the bewitching perfume of terpenes. Perhaps at night, the twinkling stars overhead would imbue those dragons with a liveliness, awaiting His Majesty with an eerie domesticity. As the King would enter The Great Pagoda, the gilt interior would glisten and reflect light, inviting him to ascend the staircase. On arriving at the top, he could view his country, itself an ever-changing, or ephemeral, landscape during the industrious 18th century. Although the view of London that The Great Pagoda afforded him was fundamentally English, the rich surroundings of the tower maintained the chinoiserie reverie. Thus, the King's engagement with the pagoda would enact a quasi-theatrical sequence tied to the atmospherics of chinoiserie that The Great Pagoda facilitates. The Great Pagoda acts as a stage for His Majesty to embody rulership within China, personifying the Qianlong Emperor, not only through the enchanting visual strategy of Chinese garden pavilions, but also through the Ming-Qing environs of The Great Pagoda's objectscape and general regality of the structure. The King could feel as though he was the ruler of another nation in a fantasy aided by the built environment.

Through Hay's understanding of the decorative object, The Great Pagoda offers itself to various avenues of exploration that have previously gone understudied. Not only does the Great

[112] Hay, 353.

Pagoda fascinate the hand and eye through its resplendent features and architectural motifs, but the atmosphere of the space is also inherently Chinese, that is to say, functions through the same decorative arts strategies as Ming-Qing material culture. As King George III would walk toward The Great Pagoda he was not only met with other Chinese pavilions, but also Chinese pheasants, *Platanus orientalis*, and most importantly the enchanting view that Chambers conceptualized from his writings on the subject of Chinese scholar gardens (Figure 5).[113] Through exaggerated Chinese motifs and atmospherics, The Great Pagoda acts as an exceedingly 'Chinese 'building where His Majesty could personify the Qianlong Emperor through experiencing the sights, sounds and smells that are as authentically Chinese as Chambers could possibly conjure in England through his limited sense of what Chinese gardens were like, and the methodologies that Chinese gardens were operating under.

The Great Pagoda and its theatricality, constituted by the choreographed movement through a heightened chinoiserie atmosphere, serves the King of Great Britain as a fantastical experience, conceived to typify the experience of the Chinese garden methodology to the fullest extent within the established hierarchy of 18th century English landscape garden design. Through fantasy, His Majesty could reenact the leisure culture of Chinese scholar gardens—a mirrored environment not dissimilar to the spaces the Qianlong Emperor would walk through. In this way, George III and the richness of Kew's Chinese ornamentation would merge to produce an imaginative sequence where His Majesty could reproduce the experiences, sights, sounds and

[113] Repton, Humphry, "Fragments on the Theory and Practice of Landscape Gardening: including some remarks on Grecian and Gothic architecture, collected from various manuscripts, in the possession of the different noblemen and gentlemen for whose use they were originally written; the whole tending to establish fixed principles in the respective arts," in *The Landscape Gardening and landscape architecture of the late Humphrey Repton, Esq.: being his entire works on these subjects*, (London: Whitehead and Co., printers, 76, Fleet Street, 1840), 479.

smells within Chinese gardens, albeit in Great Britain. By employing not only Chinese decorative arts design techniques, but also scopic enterprises devised in Chinese garden spaces, Chambers envisions a complete chinoiserie fantasy for the King. Furthermore, the act of looking out from the top of The Great Pagoda served as a seat for His Majesty to hold, overlooking his country from a quasi-Chinese 'throne, 'the most spectacular imagining of this building. In doing so, George III could imagine himself ruling over China despite looking across Great Britain, thus engaging in a form of theater.

Readers of this paper may take pause at the application of a methodology developed around strictly Chinese material culture and decorative arts—Hay's *Sensuous Surfaces*—towards a non-Chinese building. Nevertheless, it must be noted that intellectual leaps such as this are made throughout landscape garden history. For example, Michael Symes writes about the term 'fabrique 'in regards to English gardens in his article "The Concept of the "Fabrique"." Symes charts the history of the fabrique in French and English landscape garden design. Translated from Larousse, he cites this definition of the term: "a small picturesque building intended for the ornament of a park, particularly an English garden."[114] Although not small, The Great Pagoda can be considered one of many fabriques throughout Kew. Adapted from a painting idiom, 18th century scholars deployed this expression—fabrique— in order to conceptualize objects within physical garden spaces. In the 18th century, there was a widely held belief that the landscape garden was undoubtedly related to landscape painting, and thus the artist's rendition of natural beauty was turned outwards toward the environment. Furthermore, Chambers himself argued

[114] Symes, Michael, "The Concept of the "Fabrique"," *Garden History* 42, no. 1 (2014), 120.

that Chinese gardeners were "not only botanists but painters and philosophers as well."[115] Based upon this, it is understandable that the history of garden design, and the way it has been written about, is inextricably linked to other modes of art-making. Larousse's definition of fabrique, once extended to The Great Pagoda, fits into the established language Chambers already uses to describe not only his pagoda, but also Chinese "ornamental gardening" as a subdiscipline in the field. The Great Pagoda, despite drawing inspiration from Chinese religious architecture, functions as a fabrique within Kew in order to fulfill an external non-artistic process, as Hay suggests in *Sensuous Surfaces*. Argued here, this non-artistic process is the fanciful course through which King George III could self-fashion as the Qianlong Emperor through the construction of a chinoiserie atmosphere upon the Kew grounds. Through the stripping of religious association within The Great Pagoda, Chambers reduces the intended function of the Chinese Buddhist *ta* (塔) to simply ornament.

In order to understand Kew's Great Pagoda, it is necessary to have an understanding of the globality of exotica in the 18th century. Greg Thomas touches on internationality and identifies a mutuality in appropriation between European and Chinese palace cultures during the 18th century in an article titled "Yuanming Yuan/Versailles: Intercultural Interactions Between Chinese and European Palace Cultures."[116] While Thomas 'example focuses specifically on *Yuanming Yuan* (圆明园) and Versailles, his argument can be extrapolated in order to think about the similar relationship occurring between Great Britain and China at the same time. Due

[115] Von Erdberg, Eleanor, "The Anglo-Chinese Garden," In *Chinese Influence on European Garden Designs*, edited by Bremer Whidden Pond, (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1936), 43.
[116] Thomas, Greg, "Yuanming Yuan/Versailles: Intercultural Interactions Between Chinese and European Palace Cultures," in *Art History*, (Malden, MA: Blackwell Publishing, February, 2009), 115.

to the nature of the appropriations taking place between the Qianlong Emperor and European rulers, readers of history can interpret a global exoticism that took place during the 18th century. Both the Qianlong Emperor and King George III intended to reproduce the exotic's royal leisure culture through the constructed fantasies at *Yuanming Yuan*, or the Garden of Perfect Brightness, and at Kew respectively. While *Yuanming Yuan* expands upon Kew's appropriations in that there is an expansive European palace plantation in Beijing, it is evident that both rulers had a taste for exotica. Both Qianlong and George III had exotic pavilions designed and built on their palace grounds in order to domesticate the exotic through familiarizing nonnative motifs. Once this familiarization occurred, each ruler could enact a mutual theatricality within the garden spaces, self-fashioning as they chose.

The European palaces at *Yuanming Yuan* in Beijing function through a reverse mutuality where the Qianlong Emperor could personify the King of Great Britain, or perhaps other European rulers by viewing imported technologies, living in Baroque palaces and even governing over an illusionistic avenue constructed through an inherently European trompe l'oeil fantasy. This European atmosphere at *Yuanming Yuan* enacts an inversed but shared exotic gaze between China and Europe, reinforcing the draw for rulers on the world stage to construct spaces for fantasy outside of serious diplomatic strategy. The Qianlong Emperor entrusted Giuseppe Castiglione with designing a series of European palaces across a large swath of land at the Old Summer Palace, perhaps the most well-known of which is *Haiyantang* (海晏堂) (Figure 6).[117] Qianlong requested hybrid Baroque-Neoclassical buildings and pavilions to be constructed across a large park at *Yuanming Yuan* featuring topiaries, aquariums and large water fountains

[117] Finlay, John,"The Qianlong Emperor's Western Vistas: Linear Perspectives and Trompe l'Oeil Illusion in the European Palaces of the Yuanming yuan," in *Bulletin de l'École française d'Extrême-Orient*, Vol. 94 (2007), 160.

where he could relish in the exoticism of Européennerie—exotic European forms deployed as ornament. At the European palaces of *Yuanming Yuan*, the Emperor could admire his vast collection of European technologies such as mechanical clocks introduced by the Jesuit missionaries, thus producing an atmosphere of Europe in which the Emperor could envelope himself in Western aristocratic culture, enacting a reversed, but mutual, theatrical sequence. Therefore, Qianlong mirrored George III through not only a reciprocal appropriation of exotic structures and royal leisure, but also through the act of exotic looking in a theatrical setting in order to fulfill a fantasy of rulership over the foreign, most notably at Perspective Hill, translated from the Chinese *Xianfashan* (线法山).

The Jesuits constructed and introduced a trompe l'oeil illusion for the Qianlong Emperor on Perspective Hill, the easternmost example of Européennerie within the European palace complex at *Yuanming Yuan* (Figure 7). Perspective Hill was a large Baroque viewing gazebo in which the Emperor could gaze upon Perspective Painting East of the Lake, or *Hudong xianfahua* (湖东线法画), a backdrop that employs a series of stage flats painted in trompe l'oeil in order to trick the eye into viewing a fully three-dimensional European city street (Figure 8, 9). Here, the Emperor could envision himself as a European ruler, gazing down upon his European city through an inherently European mode of visualization. For a Chinese audience in the 18th century, trompe l'oeil and one-point perspective were entirely foreign scopic enterprises introduced again by Jesuit missionaries. Perspective Hill directly challenges Kew's Great Pagoda as a fantastical viewing experience, however, does so through similar means. The Qianlong Emperor not only viewed his land from a European pavilion within his gardens, but also employed a trompe l'oeil, or exotic scopic experience, in order to establish a convincing

European city street constructed through theatrical design. In doing so, the Qianlong Emperor is mutually co-opting a foreign experience in order to foster an aspirational fantasy of European rule.

Kristina Kleutghen writes extensively about the Qianlong's experience within the Western Palace complex, and argues that the European palaces indeed are more complicated than simply a fantastical excursion. Instead, Kleutghen argues that the Emperor's self-fashioning in the gardens in fact fostered a refined experience for the Son of Heaven through an intricate understanding of European modes of viewing. In *Imperial Illusions: Crossing Pictorial Boundaries in the Qing Palaces*, she forwards that through the trick of trompe l'oeil at Perspective Painting East of the Lake, the Qianlong could revel in his access to comprehending European pictorial methods.[118] Indeed, the Emperor's understanding of trompe l'oeil brought him great pleasure, and this access was circulated to only his closest coterie in the imperial court; guests in this space were limited and the printed album depicting the Western villas were distributed to only but a few selected members of the court.[119] While he was generally uninterested in diplomatic engagements with Europe—typically avoiding any mention of specific countries altogether—it is clear through Qianlong's guarding of this optical trick that European scopic enterprises held cultural capital in 18th century China.[120]

Defining the theatricality of chinoiserie and gardens is of critical importance. Chinoiserie possesses theatrical qualities in that it presents a heightened display through multivalent lenses of exotica, performing an abstraction or virtual reality. Seen in particular through blue-and-white

[118] Kleutghen, Kristina, "Staging Europe." In *Imperial Illusions: Crossing Pictorial Boundaries in the Qing Palaces*, Seattle, WA: University of Washington Press, 2015, 216.
[119] Kleutghen, 201.
[120] Kleutghen, 211.

porcelain production in the 17th and 18th centuries, chinoiserie is authentic in tandem with its inauthenticity through agency in Chinese export production, most evident in Occidental iconography appearing in Chinese wares. Like this, theatricality provides an experience that is parallel to daily life through multivalent lenses of authenticity, where Kew's nonnative architectural motifs act as conduits for grafting personal fantasies. The Royal Botanical Gardens at Kew are a perfect setting for theater, mimicking the sights, sounds, and movement of places throughout the world. Chambers 'creation of a marvelous experience through theater fosters limitless possibilities within the defined stage; at Kew, the stage begins as King George III exits his mansion and enters the green. At The Great Pagoda today stands a contemporary imagining of His Majesty's experience in the garden, appearing in an interactive replica of The Great Pagoda on the first floor of the tower. This replica displays the King, accompanied by Queen Charlotte and the rest of his entourage, choreographed along a track processing through the gardens among zebras peacocks and kangaroos. By spinning little wheels with handles, visitors can operate the scene, making it come to life. As the visitor controls these wheels, the King trumps around the garden passing the mosque, pagoda and alhambra. Here, and in reality, a walk through Kew is especially dramatic, or theatrical, due to the scope of its chinoiserie and other exotic structures, and the multiple methodologies through which Chambers channeled The Great Pagoda's design. In providing such an elaborate stage featuring The Great Pagoda as part of a sensuous chinoiserie objectscape, Chambers convinces the King that he may indeed have transported beyond the borders of Great Britain. This imbued theatricality is crucial to understanding His Majesty's experience within said stage.

Despite a mutuality in appropriations, the inquisitiveness King George III directed towards the Qianlong Emperor was not entirely shared. In fact, King George III sent an embassy

led by George Leonard Staunton to China in the late-18th century, however, it was not a diplomatic success.[121] Nonetheless, His Majesty was eager to gather as much information about China as possible in order to make an informed appeal to the Emperor to increase trade access for Great Britain.[122] It is safe to infer that George III desired to understand China and the Qianlong Emperor better personally—in addition to his political motivations—due to His Majesty's taste for Chinese motifs. King George III can be seen as attempting to understand how the Emperor thinks, perhaps in order to gain a deeper conceptualization of how the Son of Heaven operated politically by entering Kew's chinoiserie atmosphere. However, Britain's attitude towards China was ambivalent, where China was largely seen as a "rival on the world stage."[123] Through The Great Pagoda, His Majesty could embody the Qianlong Emperor, thus allowing him to, at least hypothetically, personify the Qianlong Emperor and think as he would. Without the optics or sensuousness of The Great Pagoda's atmosphere, George III would have had a more difficult time attempting to embody the Emperor as the experience would feel inauthentic. Thus, it was necessary that Sir William Chambers create as authentically Chinese an experience as possible for His Majesty; at least as authentic as an English aristocrat could conceive. Anecdotally, it must be mentioned that George Leonard Staunton, during his trip to China leading the British embassy, found the Emperor's pastiche of a European picturesque park quite disturbing and unbecoming of a European landscape garden.[124] It is not a leap to say that Mandarins would likely hold a similar distaste for the Chinese pavilions at Kew.

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[121] Rinaldi, Bianca Maria, and Staunton, George Leonard, "Embassy from the King of Great Britain to the Emperor of China," in *Ideas of Chinese Gardens*, edited by Bianca Maria Rinaldi, (Philadelphia, PA: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2016), 186.
[122] Ibid.
[123] Porter, 41.
[124] Rinaldi, and Staunton, 187.

Theater and exotica are at play in both The Great Pagoda and *Yuanming Yuan*. While *Yuanming Yuan* employed theatrical set design in order to create a fantasy for the Qianlong Emperor, The Great Pagoda implements Ming-Qing ornamental strategies in order to enhance the viewing experience for King George III. Both garden spaces deploy foreign scopic techniques and exotic decorative architectural fabrique in order to produce a marvelous experience of the exotic's royal leisure culture. By designing stages for the Emperor and King to act upon, the Jesuits and Sir William Chambers respectively establish theatrical encounters based around exotica that allow for a child-like make-believe encounter with the visual language and atmospherics of faraway cultures. Both of these sets propel their actors into ulterior realms, where reality subsides for personal fantasy and potential empire building. Thus, the creation of a fantastical viewing experience at The Great Pagoda serves to please King George III by allowing him to not only ascertain a concrete impression of the exotic 'other 'that China was to a British audience in the mid-18th century, but also as a pleasing grounds where the King could enact a parallel aspirational fantasy from those of Qianlong at the European palaces at *Yuanming Yuan*.

The Great Pagoda and *Yuanming Yuan* both act as conduits for their respective rulers. Through an understanding of the pictorial illusions devised in the series of copper engravings narrativizing the Western Palace complex at *Yuanming Yuan*, the Qianlong could self-fashion as a refined viewer who grasps foreign representational methods.[125] In the Qianlong's case, trompe l'oeil was a conduit through which his self-importance and sophistication could be channeled, despite an overall disinterest in Europe. Conversely, The Great Pagoda was a conduit through which George III could channel his civic interest in China, despite his uninsightful understanding of the country and its customs and culture. In this way, garden spaces can be understood through

[125] Kleutghen, 216.

their function outside of manicuring landscape. The choreography of Chambers 'pagoda, its methodologies of design, and its function, all provide layers of meaning which enhance contemporary engagement with 18th century exotica, situating it within a global conversation.

Coda

> "…with the oddest thrill of excitement in her voice, looking vaguely round and letting herself be drawn on down the grass path, trailing her parasol, turning her head this way and that way, forgetting her tea, wishing to go down there and then down there, remembering orchids and cranes among wild flowers, a Chinese pagoda and a crimson-chested bird…"[126]

This 20th century example, from Virginia Woolf's short story, *Kew Gardens*, brilliantly captures the sensuousness of The Great Pagoda at Kew (Figure 10). The enchanting paths of Kew's expansive plantation draws our protagonist, a young woman, down towards the exotic Great Pagoda. Woolf's language arouses a sense of wonder about The Great Pagoda and presents it as an enchanted chinoiserie objectscape. Woolf's 1927 *Kew Gardens* confirms The Great Pagoda's continued ability to bewitch beholders through its Ming-Qing objectscape into the early-20th century. Woolf's prose highlights the beholder's continued fascination with the enchanted view and sensuous objectscape that Chambers translated from a Chinese origin for a British audience at Kew, thus illuminating the space and The Great Pagoda's persistence as an inherently 'Chinese 'environment.

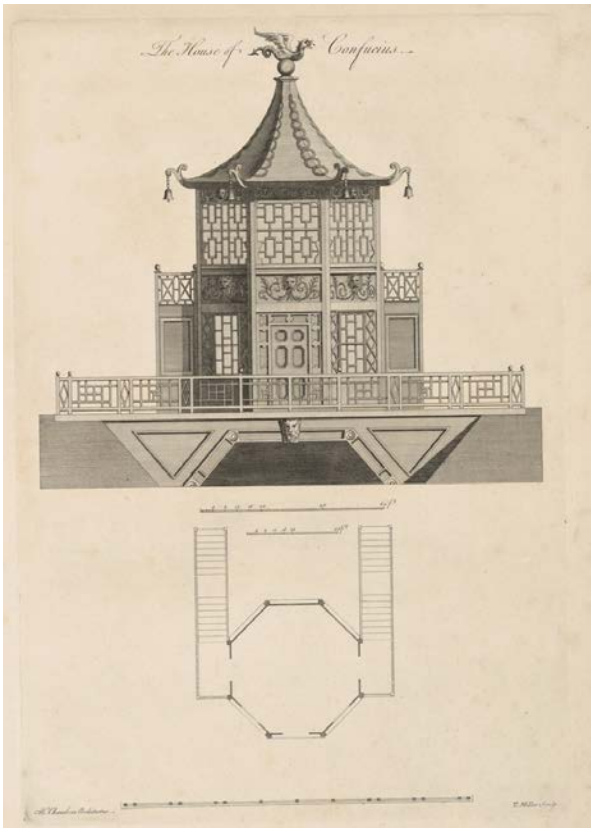
It is clear through Britain's continued fascination with Kew's pagoda as a sensuous and enchanting object that Chambers was indeed successful in producing a 'Chinese 'garden space, at least that an 18th century British audience would participate in as 'Chinese. 'In *Kew Gardens*, Virginia Woolf herself employs The Great Pagoda as a stage for her actors to engage with each

[126] Woolf, Virginia, *Kew Gardens* ([Place of publication not identified] : Richard West, 1927), 20.

other upon. Although the experience has mutated, appearing now in a literary setting, Kew evidently continues to function as a theatrical set. Beyond this, Chambers triumphs in producing a chinoiserie objectscape for the King of Great Britain, and in implementing tactile strategies drawn from Chinese material culture. Consequently, the fantasy of Kew's Great Pagoda still operates today as it would have in 1762, offering a novel detour amidst a chinoiserie atmosphere, transporting the beholder from Britain to China.

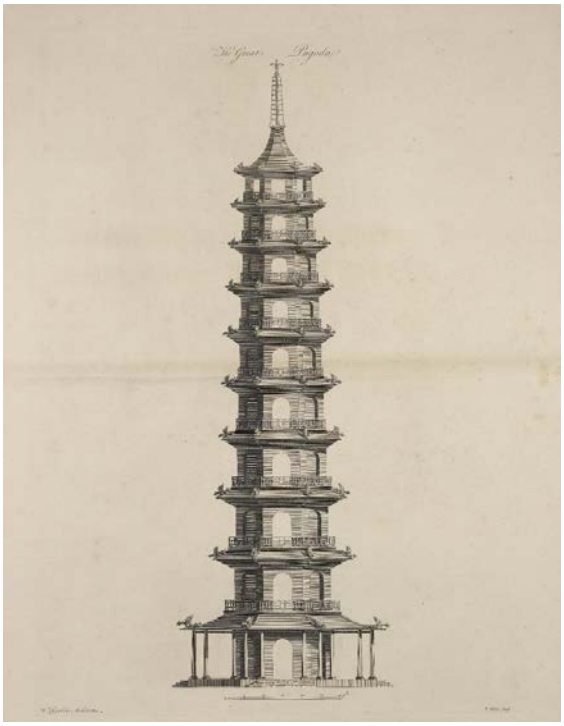
Figures (All Images belong to the Public Domain)

(Figure 1) Thomas Sandby, *View of the Menagerie at Kew*, 1763, watercolor, 27.5 x 45 cm, The Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York City, NY

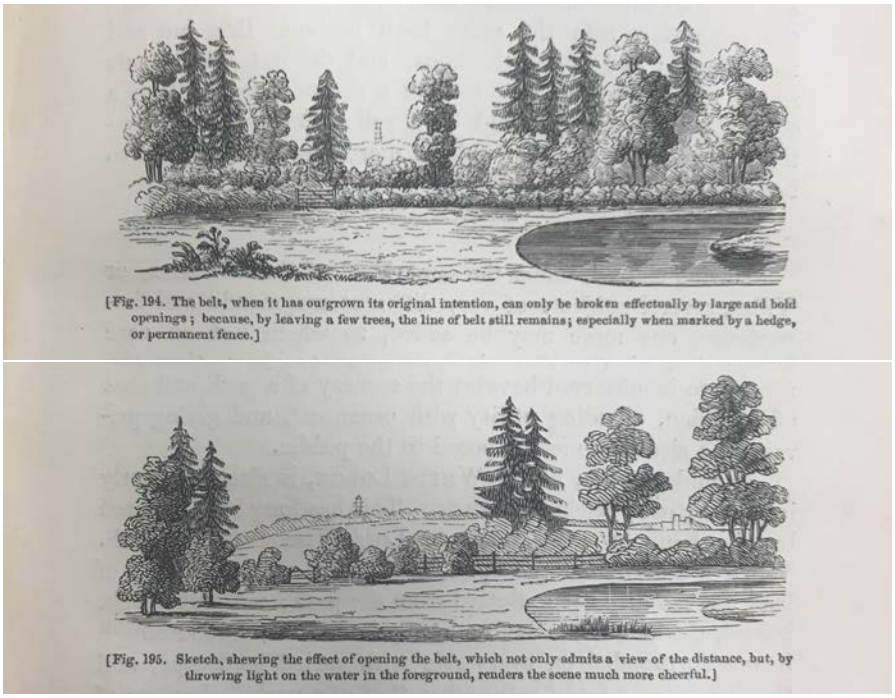


(Figure 2) Sir William Chambers, *The House of Confucius*, ca. 1720-1762, engraving, 37.5 x 54 cm, Yale University, Beinecke Rare Book and Manuscript Library, New Haven, CT

(Figure 3) Heinrich Josef Schütz, *A View in Kew Gardens of the Alhambra and the Pagoda*, 1813, aquatint with watercolor, 35.9 x 43.8 cm, The Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York City, NY



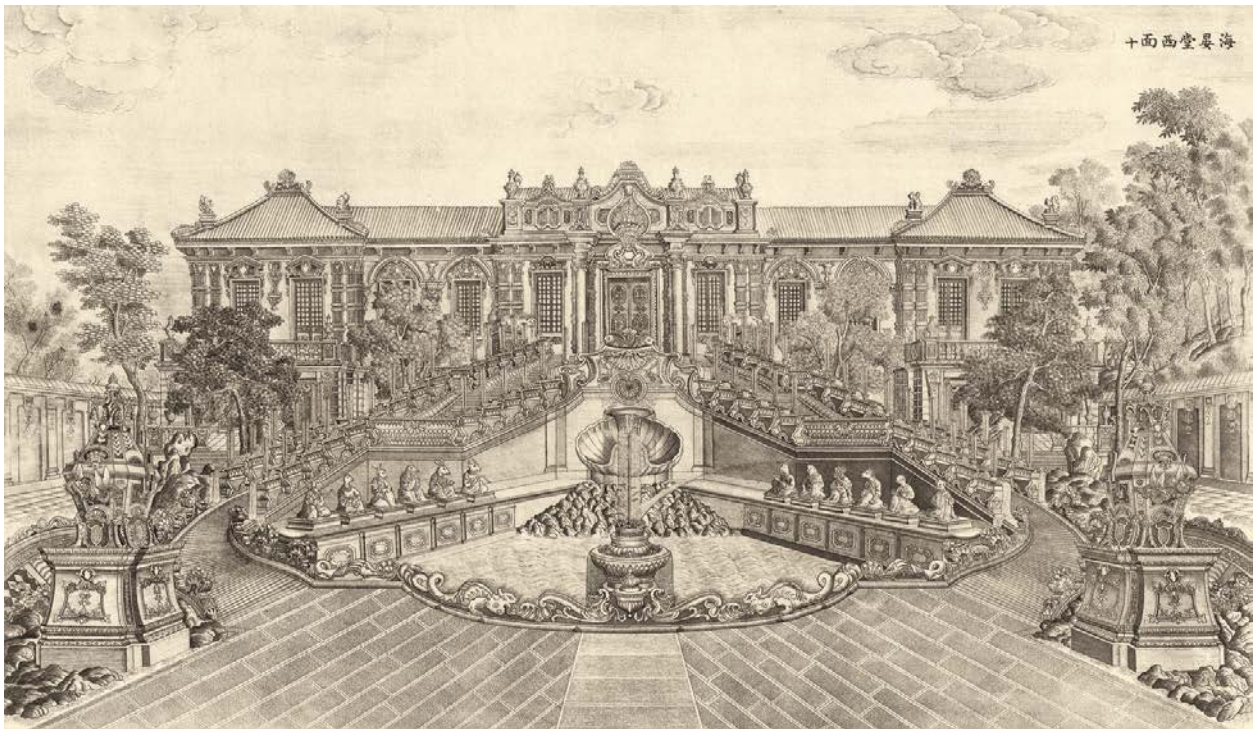
(Figure 4) James Basir, *Plans, elevations, sections, and perspective views of the gardens and buildings at Kew…*, 1763, etching, 53.6 x 37 cm, The British Museum, London



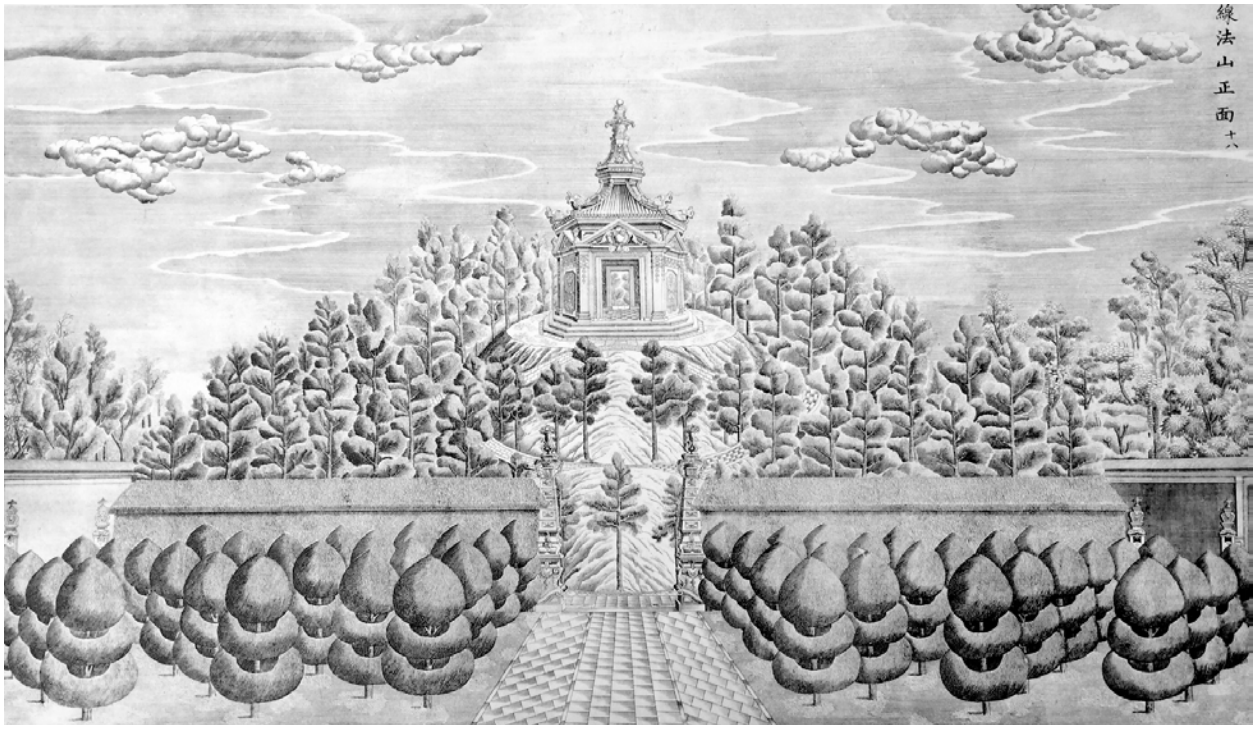
[Fig. 194. The belt, when it has outgrown its original intention, can only be broken effectually by large and bold openings; because, by leaving a few trees, the line of belt still remains; especially when marked by a hedge, or permanent fence.]

[Fig. 195. Sketch, shewing the effect of opening the belt, which not only admits a view of the distance, but, by throwing light on the water in the foreground, renders the scene much more cheerful.]

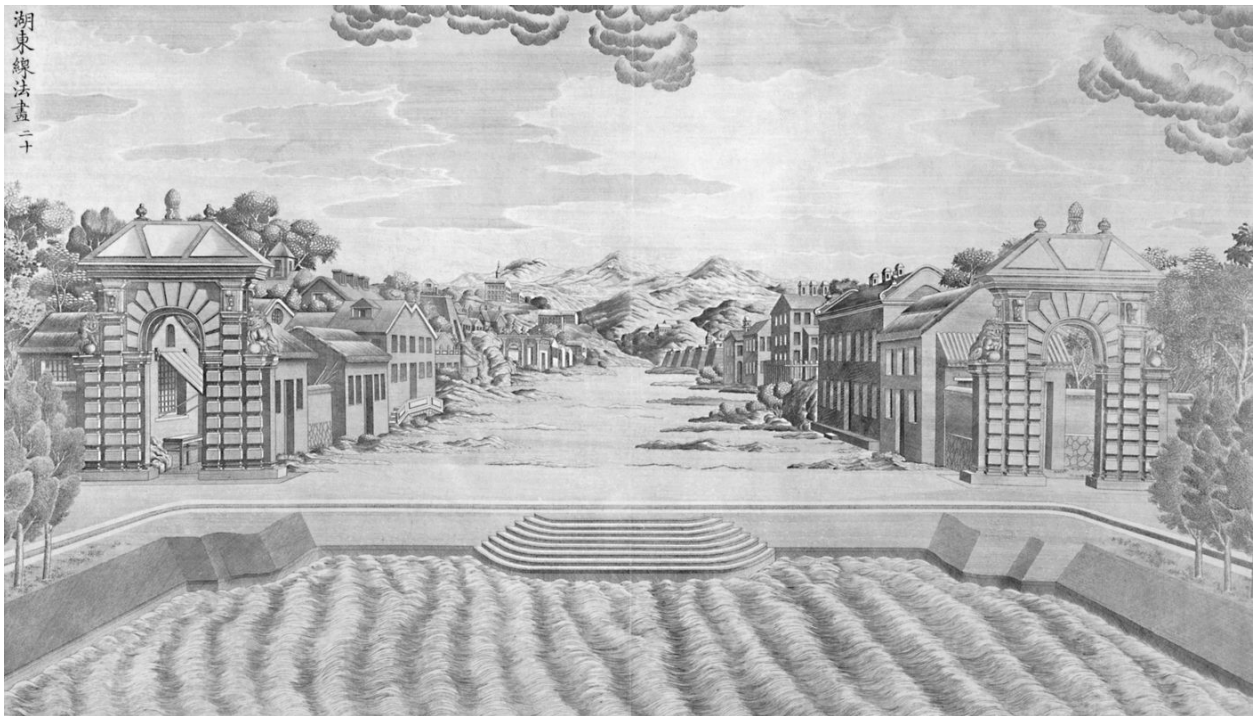
(Figure 5) Humphry Repton, *Figures 194, 195 showing Great Pagoda perspectives*, ca. 1840, engraving, unknown dimensions, included in "Fragments on the Theory and Practice of Landscape Gardening," London, 1840



(Figure 6) Ilantai, *Fountains from the Yuanming yuan European Palaces*, engraved ca. 1781-1786, copper engraving, 55 x 80 cm, unknown collection



(Figure 7) Ilantai, *Hill of Perspective*, engraved ca. 1783-1786, copper engraving, 76.2 x 111.76 cm, Museo Italo Americano, San Francisco, CA



(Figure 8) Ilantai, *Painting of Perspective, East of the Lake*, engraved ca. 1783-1786, copper engraving, 76.2 x 111.76 cm, Museo Italo Americano, San Francisco, CA

(Figure 9) Carroll Brown Malone, *Ruins of the Perspective Painting*, ca. 1920, photograph, unknown dimensions, included in his PhD thesis, "History of the Peking Summer Palaces," University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign, 1928

(Figure 10) Unknown, *The Great Pagoda at Kew*, 2018, digital photograph, unknown dimensions, The Royal Botanical Gardens, Kew, London

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