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From "Terrestrial Paradise" to "Dreary Waste"

Race and the Chinese Garden in European Eyes

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Between the opening of the eighteenth century and the middle of the nineteenth, the status China held in Europe underwent a dramatic shift—a change evident in shifting perceptions of the Chinese garden. In the early decades of the eighteenth century, European intellectuals, relying on the accounts of Jesuit travelers, cast aside earlier "fairy tales" of Asian cultures. Demonstrating a pre-racial, quasi-universalizing theory of artistic and cultural difference, they recognized in Chinese gardens a distinct national character, to which they granted legitimacy in the texts and drawings of architectural treatises. A few decades later, frustrated British trade ambitions informed readings of Chinese difference that emphasized exoticness, and the Chinese garden became viewed in terms of sensuality and the sublime. Finally, in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, a developing philosophical construction of race as a central feature of world history coincided with a new perception of the gardens as emblems of ostensibly ahistorical decrepitude. This last attitude served to justify European imperialism, and specifically the 1860 destruction of the Chinese emperors' world-famous, eight-hundred-acre garden complex, the Yuanmingyuan, by an Anglo-French military expedition. As a British soldier put it: "When we first entered the gardens they reminded one of those

magic grounds described in fairy tales; we marched from them . . . leaving them a dreary waste of ruined nothings."[1]

That arson, European interpretations of Chinese gardens, and the larger transformation in European reckoning with the Chinese "other" have all been subjects of considerable study. In this chapter, I seek to triangulate these interrelated narratives in order to highlight the emergence of race as an organizing category.[2] While eschewing straightforward causal links between world history, philosophy, and design culture, I hope to reveal, by pinpointing important milestones in each, that architecture's chinoiserie experiments represent more than an attempt to add novelty to rococo garden pavilions through the addition of curving roofs and Qing motifs. It is not my purpose to show that architects' clients were directly inspired by close readings of continental philosophy, or that the British military took its cues directly from debates over chinoiserie. Rather, I emphasize the discursive echoes sounding between these expert fields, which indicate chinoiserie as a key site in the development of a theory of the Chinese "race"; European responses to the Chinese garden both reflect and anticipate the articulation of race as an ordering concept in philosophy, and its application (through the lens of national character) as justification for imperial policy.

Pre-Racial Commonality and China in Fischer, Leibniz, and Attiret

Scholars have long recognized that European conceptions of China in the seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries were structured by the available sources of information on the still-distant country.[3] The widely circulated reports of Jesuit missionaries, working from proto-colonial trading posts, were crucial in debunking the received medieval vision of "Cathay," a land of magic and monsters. The Jesuit sources were, however, biased by the desire to find a China ripe for Christianization; they thus emphasized, for example, the role of the Confucian ethical code, seemingly free of explicit heresy, and other moral doctrines. The Chinese, they suggested, were essentially like Europeans, missing only the Christian revelation. Beginning around the 1680s, European rationalist philosophers would fold this jesuitical view of China into Enlightenment thinking, praising Confucianism as the application of universal, natural reason to ethical and political problems.[4] This model of the world imagined Europe and China as equally removed from (Christian) divine origins, possessing equal access to universal reason.

Such a rationalist universalism informed a landmark architectural treatise, the *Entwurff einer historischen Architektur* (Outline of Historical Architecture), first presented in 1712 by the Austrian court architect Johann Bernhard Fischer von Erlach.[5] In architectural circles, the *Entwurff* has been regarded as the "the first general history of architecture," even "the first universal architectural history."[6]

Moving beyond Greco-Roman classicism, it expanded the scope of architecture to non-European and particularly Asian architecture. This inclusiveness, though pointedly not extended to the architecture of numerous other world cultures viewed by Europeans as "primitive" or "savage," predated the development of European colonialism in Asia, and the development of comprehensive theories of race or "human variety," in the words of the era's philosophers. At this stage, it was not differences in physiology but in national taste that attracted discussion, and these in turn were trumped by psychological tendencies assumed to be common to all the included cultures, as we see in the terms used to discuss seemingly disparate structures.

Fischer's East Asian plates and descriptions in the *Entwurff* rely on the accounts of missionaries, with his only named sources being the Jesuits Guy Tachard and Martino Martini. He doubtless also benefited from the intellectual pursuits of his Catholic Hapsburg patrons, who likely shared the Jesuits' enthusiasm for a Europe-like China. The buildings and pageants they commissioned from Fischer employed symbols associated with "the ideal of a world-wide Christian empire beyond Europe, by the conversion of East Asia and the Americas."[7] It is therefore unsurprising that the *Entwurff* evinces the period's conception of non-European cultures. In the book's outlined sequence, buildings from China, termed "modern" (*neuen/moderne*), appear in the third volume, after Roman architecture and alongside Arabian, Turkish, Persian, and Japanese works, while buildings from other cultures are excluded without comment, reflecting a priori assumptions that I attempt to capture with the qualified term "quasi-universal." Those included are organized chronologically (running from the ideal of Solomon's temple to Fischer's own designs) but not teleologically; Fischer does not link his own work to any particular source, and he bypasses the post-Roman European architecture typically seen as leading to his own baroque style.[8] The book nonetheless encourages the use of any of the structures it depicts as a model for contemporary architecture, commenting that these buildings serve not only to "please the eye of the Curious" but also to "embellish their Minds, and tend towards the Cultivation of Arts in general."[9]

China, specifically, is depicted as an advanced, well-administered civilization. Of the nine Chinese scenes in the *Entwurff*, four depict bridges, captioned in terms that stress technical achievements like long spans, tall arches, and negotiation of difficult terrain. This is unsurprising, as Chinese technology, especially porcelain production, was widely perceived as advanced, and had also been a subject of Jesuit investigation. In turn, scenes of spectacular pageants, akin to those Fischer designed, posit China as a site of abundance and social order. Fischer presents Chinese monumental architecture as conforming to his own highest standards of the architectural ideal, filling the evidently large gaps in his knowledge

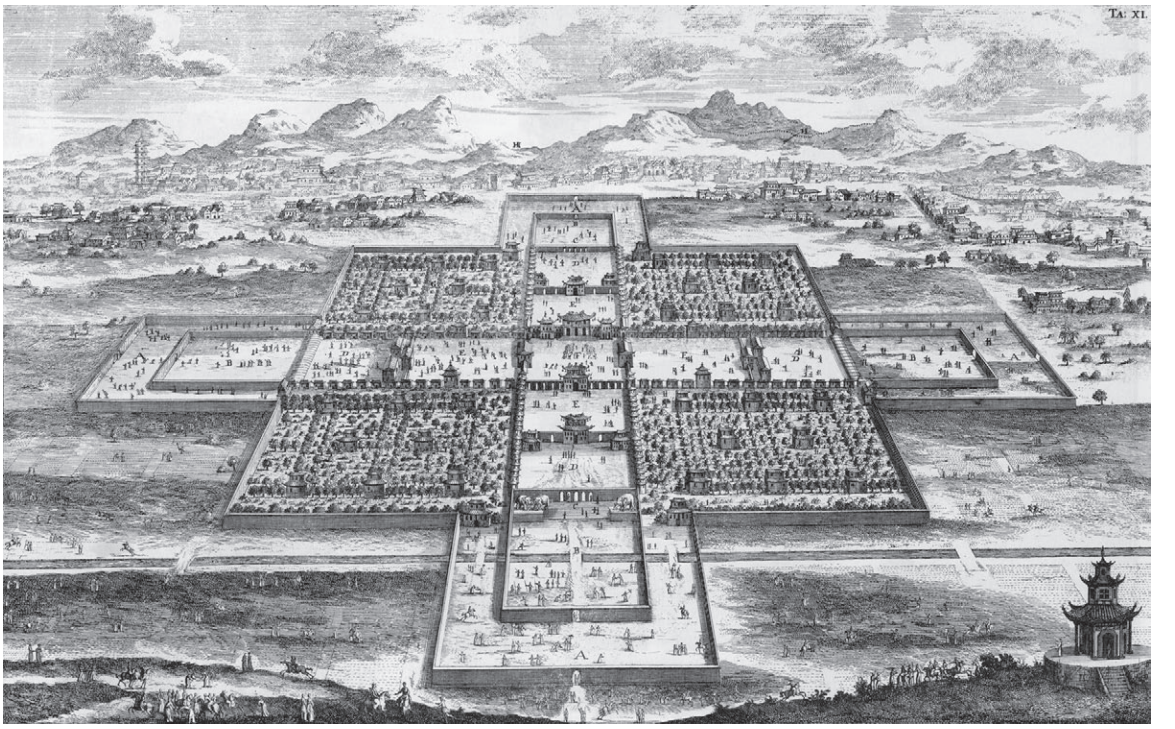

Fig. 4.1 View of the Forbidden City in Johann Bernhard Fischer von Erlach, *Entwurff einer historischen Architektur* (1712).

(and his brief texts) with description that he would surely have considered to be flattery.[10]

Fischer seems to have derived his scenes of Chinese architecture from a 1665 book by the Dutch trade attaché Johan Nieuhof, adapting the illustrations in ways that reinforce the Europeanness of forms Nieuhof had already distorted.[11] Both authors, for example, illustrate the Forbidden City as a Greek cross assembled from rectilinear courtyards, with large, vague gardens tucked into the interior corners (figure 4.1). This bizarre rendition is correct only in that the palace is indeed vast, axial, symmetrical, and several times gated. Fischer added a baroque, open-country site, like that of the Hapsburgs' Schönbrunn Palace (on which he worked), and rendered the corner gardens as approximations of internally symmetrical, four-square, Italianate models. Depicting a set of linear-edge buildings framing courtyards, the drawings are consistent with then-current European designs, such as that for the Dresden Zwinger, a palace begun around 1710 by Fischer's contemporary Matthäus Daniel Pöppelmann for the Saxon elector Augustus II. Augustus, the sponsor of a porcelain works, would later commission from Pöppelmann a country palace, Schloss Pillnitz (substantially completed by 1730), on a baroque plan with a Chinese-style roofline and decorative motifs. That design suggests a semblance between baroque and Chinese palaces; Fischer's

Fig. 4.2 Chinese garden scene in Johann Bernhard Fischer von Erlach, *Entwurff einer historischen Architektur* (1712).

drawings of these two types seemingly insist upon it. Moreover, his depictions of each also resemble his version of Solomon's temple, implying that both Chinese and central European architecture derive in equal measure from divine precedent.

Fischer also compounded Nieuhof's errors on Chinese garden rockeries. Both correctly comprehended these structures as multilevel organic forms in naturalistic settings, but severely overscaled them as seven-story extravaganzas set in open wilderness (figure 4.2). Fischer replaced Nieuhof's outward-thrusting stone grotesque with a more self-contained, spiraling composition. His "Chinese" rockeries suggest a cathedral-scale rendering of baroque sculptural details: the plastic, pitted forms of Solomonic columns (a baroque favorite) or the "Plague Column" Fischer executed in Vienna. Viewing humankind through assumptions of fundamental similarity, Fischer assumed that what he did not know about China would be essentially similar to what he did know about Europe.

This idea of similitude between European and Chinese architectural forms sustains the *Entwurff*'s universalist claims. All architecture, to Fischer, shares certain "general Principles" like symmetry and the visual support of weak elements by strong ones. While "Nations dissent no less in their Taste for Architecture, than in Food and Raiment," he claims such stylistic differences are merely "Whims" authorized by "Custom."[12] Thus, Fischer's apparent presumption in fabricating

Chinese design elements was not an imperial imposition before its time, but a reflection of his belief in universal access to reason. Of course, the Enlightenment universal is always already bound up in the problem of confining Europe's others to a state of affectable externality,[13] but Fischer sincerely imagines Europeans as benefitting from the study of Chinese examples, and invites artists reading the *Entwurff* to compare its examples and make a "judicious choice" as to stylistic devices.

This Jesuit-informed belief in commonality may also explain why Fischer made no use of Nieuhof's numerous drawings of Chinese *people*, images that emphasize difference from northern Europeans in costume, custom, and physiognomy. Fischer's panoramic views, populated by minuscule stick figures, may suggest a domineering European eye, but they also give only hints of foreign costume, and are absent details that would later constitute racial cues. Ultimately, the *Entwurff*'s short treatment of China posits it as fundamentally similar to Europe, if perhaps more advanced. Its Chinese people possess great skill and artistry, but they are neither the magicians of Cathay nor the racialized bodies of later imperialism. Fischer's contemporary, the Saxon philosopher Gottfried Wilhelm Leibniz, offers a point of comparison. While passing references to human variety in Leibniz's writings were taken up much later by the originators of racial science, and one early text calls for the European conquest of "semibeast" peoples (not including the Chinese), ultimately, inherited races were incompatible with Leibniz's universalist, monadic theory. The mature Leibniz brought up physiognomy only to dismiss its usefulness as an area of study; varied appearance "does not prevent all the human beings who inhabit the globe from being all of the same race, which has been altered by the different climates." Linguistic study would reveal the shared Hebraic origins of all languages, emphasizing the world's unity. This theme, akin to the contemporary belief that Chinese script might be the pre-Babel "language of Noah," is reminiscent of the parallels Fischer's illustrations imply.[14]

A report specifically concerning Chinese garden practices, written by the Jesuit missionary Jean Denis Attiret in 1743, completes our picture of this early eighteenth-century quasi-universalist attitude. Attiret had been working as a painter at the Qianlong Emperor's recently completed garden palace, the eight-hundred-acre Yuanmingyuan outside of Beijing. Attiret's account of this garden was important in establishing its European reputation, and his correspondence retains Fischer's admiration while avoiding his descriptive errors. In the garden, Attiret wrote, "Every thing is grand and truly fine": the place's size, its unfamiliar design, its variety, and its objects of "exquisite taste." But while the garden is termed "a terrestrial paradise," and its pavilions said to resemble "those fabulous palaces of the fairies," Attiret's description of its details is realistic and well-observed.

Attiret's report also expresses a pluralistic, if ambivalent, evaluation of Chinese and European cultural achievements. Chinese architecture is posited as inferior to its French and Italian equivalents, but Chinese technology in fireworks and lighting "infinitely surpasses" that of the same two countries.[15] Attiret's evenhanded, Fischer-esque conclusion is that "for our parts, we think differently and with reason." Differences of taste stem from experience rather than innate traits; Attiret's tenure has led his "eyes and taste [to] become in some degree Chinese," so that "without pretending to decide which ought to have the preference . . . the manner of building in his country pleases me much." A description of a Chinese garden might strike a European as "ridiculous" and of "a disagreeable appearance." But upon firsthand experience, Attiret argued, one would find the apparent irregularity artistically composed, and a beauty not perceived at first sight. Attiret's view of culture is, again like Fischer's, absent a theory of race. Attiret refers to physiognomy only once in this letter, to explain why European missionaries could never operate in secret ("our figure is too different"); such differences are secondary to a commonality that permits a French Jesuit to "become in some degree Chinese."[16] Attiret's dispatch appeared, however, as the Jesuit-derived image of China was waning. As European mercantile advances grew more persistent and aggressive, and incipient theories of race grew more developed, respect for Chinese achievements faded.

"A Distinct and Very Singular Race of Men" in Chambers and Blumenbach

The intellectual vogue for Chinese ideas in eighteenth-century Europe took different forms. In Great Britain, ideas about China were shaped less by missionary reportage than by mercantile contact—the accounts of traders, and the representative goods they brought back. Trade in porcelain, silks, wallpaper, and furniture grew considerably in the early eighteenth century, responding to the growing popularity of "fashionable novelties" and especially tea. By the 1740s, English factories made Chinese-style goods, and British merchants fruitlessly pressed Chinese officials for trade concessions. Frustrated British observers increasingly characterized the Chinese as greedy and cunning, though sometimes still praising their "arts and manner off governmentt" in the same breath. Even successful trade ventures reduced China's reputation by making the faraway country seem more responsive to British desires. By the century's last quarter, many British people had come to view China in terms of its contemptible *difference* from Europe, and even those who continued to borrow from Chinese culture emphasized its difference in terms that underscored a proximity between the Chinese mind and the natural landscape.[17]

In the aesthetic realm, British chinoiserie—a free-form adaptation of "Chinese" devices that emphasized exoticness—reached its apex just as the tide of opinion

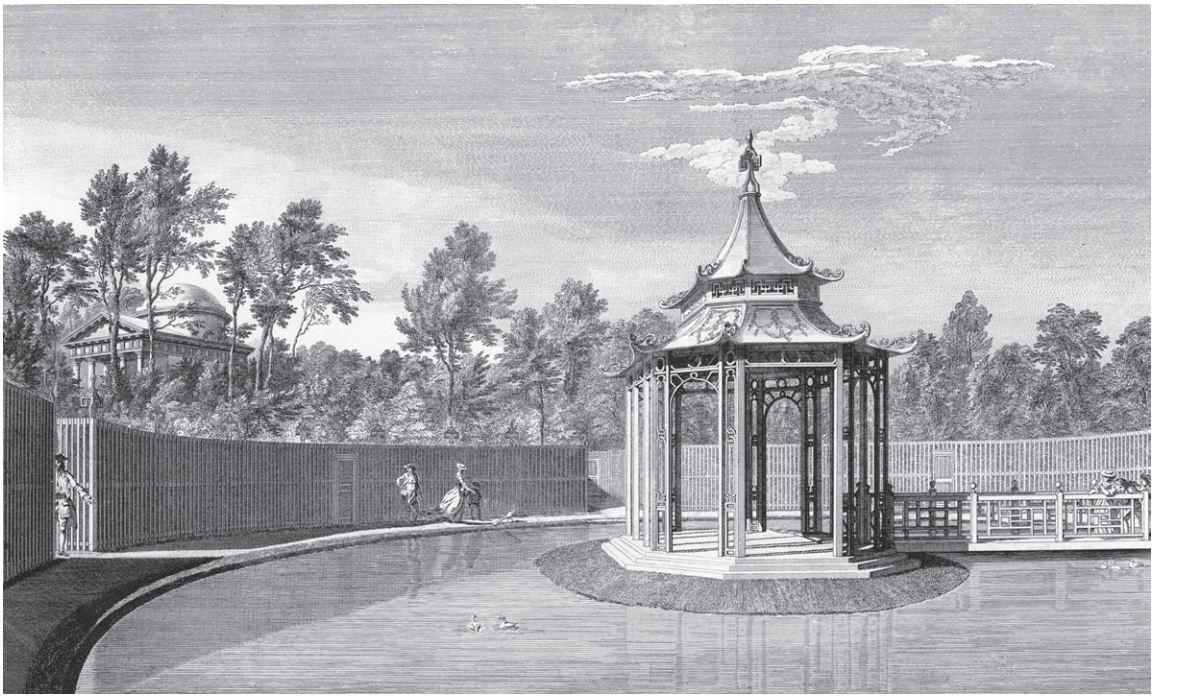

Fig. 4.3 Chinoiserie menagerie pavilion at Kew Gardens, designed by William Chambers in the 1750s. Engraving by Charles Grignon, published in William Chambers, *Plans, Elevations, Sections, and Perspective Views of the Gardens and Buildings at Kew, in Surry* (London: J. Haberkorn, 1763).

was turning. Chinoiserie, while sometimes still alluding to China's perceived philosophical and moral wisdom, generally deployed Chinese forms as a novel means of rebelling against the neoclassical order, not unlike the Gothic Revival and picturesque landscape styles (to which chinoiserie is closely related). Most historical and contemporary discussions of British chinoiserie concern small objects, interiors, and garden pavilions, easily fitted into an aesthete's consumption and lifestyle, and offering, as the historian David Porter argues, a "tincture of sublimity" that provoked contemplation of an "unfathomable" other. It is this context that produced the work of Sir William Chambers, known as much for his neoclassical facades as for the chinoiserie pavilions he designed for London's Kew Gardens (figure 4.3). In the 1740s, he briefly visited Guangzhou (then known as Canton) as a supercargo with the Swedish East India Company. This experience supported his claim in 1757's *Designs of Chinese Buildings, Furniture, Dresses, Machines, and Utensils* to offer a corrective to the excesses of uninformed chinoiserie.[18] The book includes an essay on garden design principles, the first of two texts by Chambers that together reveal a rapidly transforming interpretive framework for cultivated Chinese landscapes.

Likely lacking the firsthand experience that supported his handling of temples and other topics, Chambers's discussion of gardens in *Designs* borrows its outline

of principles from earlier English sources. However, he departs from these texts by establishing a hierarchical framework of difference, insisting that he does not wish to "promote a taste so much inferiour to the antique, and so very unfit for our climate." For Chambers, study of Chinese designs satisfies "curiosity," as in Fischer, but no longer serves to cultivate taste. Rather, the Chinese structures and details he refers to as "toys in architecture" may simply be "useful" to an architect seeking ideas for gardens or rooms; "inferiour" spaces can be rendered as chinoiserie, since "variety is always delightful; and novelty . . . sometimes takes the place of beauty."[19] This dismissive tone may indicate a bid by Chambers to shield himself from opponents of chinoiserie, or to position himself in a wider debate concerning the appropriate uses of varied styles and architectural "characters." Simultaneously, his comments reflect an ascendant theory of differential national development absent in Fischer and Attiret—one in which "nation" and "race" become interchangeable, though incompletely articulated. While Chambers refuses to place the Chinese in "competition" with Europeans, according to his text, Chinese people still comprise a "distinct and very singular race of men[,] inhabitants of a region divided by its situation from all civilized countries; who have formed their own manners, and invented their own arts, without the assistance of example." Nonetheless, he goes on to say, they are "great, or wise, only in comparison with the nations that surround them." The 1750s saw an emerging intellectual speculation among Europeans on the origins and relative "place" of Chinese civilization, but "race" was not yet a coherent or scientific concept, and Chambers does not elaborate on it. Chambers does reprint illustrations of Chinese dress (akin to in Nieuhof's treatise), possibly indicating an attention to physiognomy (figure 4.4). More significant is the link between "race," "nation," and an implied narrative of development and influence. Common historical roots and inherent human abilities fade, so that Chambers finds it remarkable that China could possess quasi-European qualities without the European "example." Chambers also affirms as widely held the idea that China's culture has "continued without change for thousands of years," an emerging trope that would become embodied in formalized Eurocentric theories of history, to be discussed shortly.[20]

In *Designs*, Chinese gardens are discussed chiefly in terms of their semblance to "nature," and the careful techniques by which "irregularity" is produced. Whether China was seen to possess a corresponding regularity is unclear, as Chambers leaves undiscussed the orthogonality, axiality, and symmetry evident in his drawings of Chinese temples. Geography becomes a determining factor, as the nature of mountainous terrain is said to inspire Chinese gardeners to "avoid all regularity." This labeling of a physio-geographical origin point for culture is consistent with the thinking of the period's materialist natural philosophy, and resembles "climatic" theories of human variety. Although this essentialism seems to diminish

Fig. 4.4 Illustrations of Chinese dress, engraved by Charles Grignon, and printed in William Chambers, *Designs of Chinese Buildings, Furniture, Dresses, Machines, and Utensils* (London: published for the author, 1757).

the individual subjectivity of Chinese garden designers, Chambers elsewhere characterizes them as possessing not merely "judgment and experience," but also "genius."[21]

Chambers's second major text on Chinese landscape, the 1772 *Dissertation on Oriental Gardening*, is quite different. At first, it appears to retain traces of universalism, and in some ways is less dismissive of Chinese art than *Designs.* Chambers suggests that Chinese gardens would be viable models for Western gardens because gardening's "effects upon the human mind [are] certain and invariable," describes "Oriental grandeur" as a goal to which Europeans should aspire, and echoes Attiret's ambivalence concerning whether Chinese gardens are "better or worse" than European ones. The role of the Chinese garden is to offer a "judicious mixture," avoiding two European tendencies: the too-formal classical garden, and the too-naturalistic picturesque garden of Lancelot "Capability" Brown.[22] This reduction of Chinese forms to a just-right porridge for an authorial Goldilocks was a popular rhetorical device at the time, but Chambers extends the approach into wild exaggerations (or "amusements," as he later claimed in defending them from critics).[23] The *Dissertation* as a result demonstrates a shift away from viewing China and its art forms as objects for serious study and reportage, as compromised as the Jesuit accounts may have been, and toward a casual and cavalier use of Chinese design (as well as goods).

Thus, the neutral tone of the book's initial sections gives way to a parade of bizarre inventions, more appropriate to the nascent genre of Gothic fiction; the text may even have inspired aspects of William Beckford's *Vathek* (1786). Chambers takes the idea of a garden that artfully stages a series of differentiated scenes as the basis for a division between three kinds of Chinese gardens—"the pleasing, the terrible, and the surprising," a widely noted variation on Edmund Burke's 1757 essay on the sublime and the beautiful. It is in the discussion of the "terrible" gardens, and their "sublimity," that Chambers is most inventive. These gardens, experienced in part as boat rides through "dark caverns," are reminiscent of twentieth-century haunted mansion rides and feature fearsome bats, vultures, wolves, jackals, implements of torture, volcanoes, earthquakes, pyrotechnics, and electric shocks.[24] This vision, obviously without Chinese precedent, extends Chambers's theme of Chinese control over nature to a broader realm of sensory stimulation. Moreover, while Chinese designers remain "men of genius, experience and judgement," the depiction of the garden's *owner* is an Orientalist fantasy. Served by eunuchs, he reclines in specially designed furniture, admiring "amorous paintings" while concubines perform songs, pantomimes, and "lascivious posture-dancing."[25] Chambers inverts the real purpose of many Chinese gardens—the secluded cultivation of scholarly, artistic subjectivity—to posit a sensual, materialist playground, a projection of his era's playboy fantasies.

Sensation and variety are prominent themes in mid-eighteenth-century aesthetics, not limited to discourse on China. The later passages in Chambers's *Dissertation* might be compared to the text of Jean-Francois de Bastide's 1758 novella *La Petite Maison* (*The Little House*), which stages a seduction through a rococo garden pavilion's variously atmospheric rooms, or the 1760s debate on "monotony" between Giovanni Battista Piranesi and Pierre-Jean Mariette.[26] In Chambers, these preoccupations dovetail with a developing Orientalism that prevents us from reading sensuality and variety as neutral aesthetic concerns. As Porter suggests, chinoiserie's decline may have stemmed from these very qualities, as much as from shifts in elite tastes, as China became associated with the sublime, and not the beautiful: it was a site of bodily thrills and earthly delights, not universal reason, even as it was placed hierarchically beneath Europe in its development.[27] Chambers still equivocates on Chinese subjectivity and intelligence, but the stage is set for China to fully occupy the materialized, racialized exteriority that scholar Denise Ferreira da Silva has recently posited as co-constitutive of European transcendental subjectivity.[28]

In this light, Chambers's evolving treatment of Chinese subjectivity may be juxtaposed with the long eighteenth-century prehistory of racial science, in which one key figure is the German naturalist Johann Friedrich Blumenbach. His *On the Natural Variety of Mankind* was published in 1775, three years after the *Dissertation*, inviting us to consider the underlying assumptions shared by European intellectuals of the late eighteenth century—notwithstanding the obvious differences in backgrounds, interests, and audiences—in comparison to those shared by the English gardener.

On the one hand, Blumenbach rejects the idea of separate human species, insisting that one variety "does so sensibly pass into the other, that you cannot mark out the limits between them," as seen specifically in the case of skin color. Nonetheless, Blumenbach identifies several "varieties of mankind," which in his final scheme numbered five, derived from climate and "mode of life." The first "variety" comprises Europeans, and an initial Asian grouping was later subdivided to distinguish northern peoples (e.g., Siberians) from those of China, Korea, and Southeast Asia. Despite his onetime claim that mental capacity and physical appearance had not "the slightest relation," this southern Asian group is "distinguished [by] depravity and perfidiousness of spirit and of manners." The Chinese in particular, he writes, are "less content than any other of the inhabitants of the world, with the natural conformation of their body," and use so many "artificial means to distort it, and squeeze it, that they differ from almost all other men in most parts of their bodies."[29] While Blumenbach introduces this claim to demonstrate that variety in human skull measurements stems from "the mode of life and art," rather than

Fig. 4.5 Chinese figures by Daniel Chodowiecki, illustrating one of Johann Friedrich Blumenbach's five "human varieties" (Menschenvarietäten) for the 1806 edition of the *Beiträge zur Naturgeschichte* (Contributions to Natural History).

biology, it is interesting that he imagines the Chinese as master manipulators of nature, treating their bodies as Chambers imagines them treating their gardens.

This association is reinforced by a set of illustrations of the "five varieties of humanity," created by Daniel Chodowiecki for a later Blumenbach text and recently analyzed by the art historian David Bindman. Here, the typical male Chinese figure, removed from Fischer's urbane crowds, is set in a chinoiserie garden pavilion, in close contact with landscape and with a female figure (who may represent a concubine à la Chambers) (figure 4.5). Chodowiecki's renderings imply a close fit between culture, skin color, physiognomy, landscape, and architecture. Bindman, probing Blumenbach's universalist tendencies, asserts that despite the descriptive text's physiognomic detail, the images avoid "flat faces and slanting eyes," and emphasize "the possibilities of differentiated, but harmonious, ways of life among the world's peoples, and of improvement by the cultivation of nature."[30] Framing these images in the history of Chinese garden accounts, I suggest, paints a more troubling picture. If Chinese design was exploited for its associations with the sensual—in Ferreira da Silva's terms, the external, material, and affectable—

then the titillating or sublime experience it provoked may be a microcosm of Europe's encounters with the Chinese other. Chinoiserie offered a moment of safe, thrilling contact with the overwhelming, unfathomable "Orient," sublimating Europe's inability to impose itself on a vast portion of the planet. As a racial and imperial theory avant la lettre, it helped pave the way for the conceptualization of the Chinese as not only fundamentally different, but also as inferior and without claim to world-historical subjectivity.

Herder, Hegel, the Yuanmingyuan, and a Racialized China

By the time of the Opium Wars—imperial conquests in 1839–1842 and 1856–1860 that arose from the eagerness of British traders to gain privileged access to Chinese products and markets—this shift in European perceptions of Chinese character was complete. Experts now described a stagnant culture bereft of new inventions, while greater availability rendered Chinese products banal.[31] These changes in attitude coincided with an increasing racialization of European aesthetic discourse and accounts of Chinese physiognomy; this can be seen in changing attitudes toward gardens, and in the looting and burning of the once-fabled Yuanmingyuan by British and French troops over the course of two days in 1860. The premeditated destruction was intended not to provoke Chinese surrender, which was already at hand, but to convince the Chinese of their inferiority to British military and cultural authority.[32] With the defeat of what had once been understood as a great civilization, European hegemony apparently faced no rival claimants to mastery of the world.[33] While the arsonists' own memoirs barely mention conventional racial signifiers like physiognomy, they reflect the development of "Chinese" as a coherent racial category linked to a world-historical teleology that posited China and its people as fundamentally ahistorical.

Biological divisions among "races," attached to claims about "spirit and manners," became increasingly prevalent in late-eighteenth-century thought. Explicit racial categories are entangled with universal reason in the historical philosophy of Johann Gottfried Herder, who outlined in various essays and the *Ideas on the Philosophy of the History of Mankind* (1784–1791) the possible unification of world history as the continuous unfolding of a variegated "humanity's" God-given gifts of reason and justice. To Herder, each culture deployed these gifts by the means available to it, and in so doing made some contribution to humanity. In Herder's theory, these available means are the locus of racial difference: within the one human species, physiognomic variations emerge in response to climatic factors, and are cemented by custom. Custom and physiognomy in turn delimit the possibilities for the use of universal reason. The Chinese are defined by their racial status as an "unmixed . . . Mongol tribe," for which the evidence is physical ("their features"), cultural ("their gross or odd taste, yes even [their] clever artfulness"),

and geographical (the "earliest seat of their culture"). The description incorporates stereotyped physiognomic detail ("small eyes, snub noses, flat foreheads," and so on); these features directly inform cultural accomplishments, with the "auditory organs of a Mongol" yielding a language "of three hundred and thirty syllables." A "basic Mongol makeup," possibly related to the way nature has "bountifully endowed their little eyes," gives rise to "dragons and monsters" in folklore, a "careful minuteness of irregular figures" in drawing, and "formless jumble" in gardening. Thus, race leads directly to cultural forms, but Herder also outlines an indirect path: nomadic Mongol origins give rise to deep-seated cultural traditions that promulgate "childlike obedience," preventing the development of artistic autonomy. By either path, Chinese art comes to embody a "deranged sensibility" lacking "a feeling for inner calm, beauty and dignity." Thus, universal human qualities are channeled through racially determined biology, resulting in cultural forms ranked in a Eurocentric hierarchy. According to Herder, all cultures' art displays "the plan and design of a reflecting understanding," but in different degrees—from "the shapeless artificial rocks, with which the Chinese ornaments his garden, to the Egyptian pyramid, or the ideal beauty of Greece."[34] The Chinese garden, far from proof of a gardener's "genius" as in Chambers, is, in such a formulation, the product of qualities intrinsic to a Chinese racial heritage.

In Georg W. F. Hegel's lectures of the 1820s, Asia and China were drawn into a less consistently racialized but even more explicitly teleological and Eurocentric narrative of world history. Hegel's "world-historical nations"—sites for his "world spirit" to enter consciousness—can only exist in the geographical circumstances of Europe and the Middle East, where the natural world is forgiving enough for man to "assert his spiritual freedom." The Chinese, though not subjected to the parade of physiognomic and cultural details by which Hegel dismisses Native Americans and Africans, serve his historical structure by failing to live up to it. Asian geography, he writes, directly affects "the character of [its] peoples and history"; its mountains and plains yield only nomadism and agriculture, and without a linking Mediterranean, East Asia's societies remain enclosed within themselves rather than having to grapple with other nations. Thus, the region does not enter into world history, but rather "lies suspended, as it were, outside the historical process." Its only possible relation to history is through exploration by other nations.[35] Asian societies, then, exist to provide a moment of contact with the ahistorical, furthering Europe's self-revelation of historical purpose and "world spirit."[36] As in Herder, the natural, material world has preempted individual Chinese action; the result is a nation destined for European imperial incursions.

Hegel's conceptualization of Chinese institutions as not merely long-lived, but unchanging, was increasingly common by his time. To Nicolas de Condorcet, China's state was one of "shameful stagnation"; to John Stuart Mill, "stationari-

ness"; to Leopold von Ranke, "eternal standstill."[37] Herder saw the country as "a "dormouse in its winter sleep," an "embalmed mummy," whose arts stood "as they were centuries ago" and whose laws "continually pace round the same circle."[38] Following the first Opium War, travelers described a "stationary nation," "half-civilized," whose people were "sleepy or dreaming."[39] The preponderance of biological metaphors links these concepts to Chinese bodies and to their racialization.

Others have linked the perception of China as declining or frozen to the destruction of the Yuanmingyuan;[40] I would like to specifically emphasize the importance of the emerging racial imaginary, and treat memoirs of the 1860 assault as this period's notable garden texts. Encircling the Chinese in racial and world-historical schemas, European military officers recognized a garden—now a space of earthly indulgence and bodily torpor—as a critical site in the forcible redefinition of European-Chinese relations. Officially, the sacking of the Yuanmingyuan's hundreds of pavilions, following the conclusion of major operations in the second Opium War, was an act of retaliation for the murder of members of a European diplomatic delegation, but the gratuity of the destruction suggests other forces at work. The narrative of British army chaplain R. J. L. McGhee, who witnessed the destruction, is revealing even in its vague chronology. Attiret could date the garden's construction to two decades in the early eighteenth century, but McGhee saw its pavilions as having been built "many, many hundred years ago"—"the admiration of ages, records of by-gone skill and taste." Despite the nineteenth century's pretensions to historical insight, the suspension of China outside of history leaves McGhee to shroud the palace in timelessness. Conveniently, this confirms the "stern but just necessity" of British domination and the destruction of the garden's "most enchanting beauty."[41]

To others, the Chinese existed in coherent, linear time, but in a narrative of decline. They spoke of cities in ruin and crumbling pagodas, evidence that following some earlier, distant period of perfection, the empire had "been retrograding rather than advancing."[42] Another Yuanmingyuan arsonist, Garnet Wolseley, found advanced decay in the garden he was sacking, notwithstanding its "magic grounds described in fairy tales," mentioned earlier. To him, the Yuanmingyuan's ponds, once evidently fed by "very pretty little cascades," were now full of "stagnant water." Such signs of physical ruin demonstrated not the destructive effects of European interference on China's economy and society, but rather the internal decline of Chinese administration—a decline that, he commented, "has allowed [the gardens] to become what they are." The garden's remaining beauties were even cast as the source of racialized decadence; its "very gorgeousness . . . has been one great promoting cause of the luxury and effeminacy which have served to debase the late rulers of China, causing the descendants of fierce warriors to degenerate

into mere enervated debauchees." Growing up in the gardens, and apparently more susceptible to material influence than Hegel's Europeans, the emperors came to "an indolent, dreamy, and unpractical manhood," cut off from historical progress as "the greatest of all copyists under heaven." Here Wolseley echoes not only Chambers's reclining potentates, but Herder, who claims that "a nation bedded on warm stove tiles, drinking warm water from morning till night" inevitably lacks "the martial as well as the reflective spirit."[43] Thus, the conversation around the Yuanmingyuan discursively knits together Chinese bodies, products of Chinese design, and Eurocentric theories of history in a way that must be understood as racial. Just as Hegel viewed Asian geography and Herder viewed "Mongol" lineage, the British viewed the Yuanmingyuan as a generator of inferior bodies and an inferior worldview. In turn, they thought, these produced military defeat and the destruction of the garden. Burning the garden was a material means of forcing the timeless "copyists" into their appointed role in a racialized, European history of the world.

Although McGhee and others expressed some regrets concerning the Yuanmingyuan's destruction, such sentiments were fading legacies of an earlier period.[44] The arson, like the war to which it served as postscript, made clear that the new order of European-Chinese relations presumed the annihilation of Chinese independence. Without the development of race as a category defining and delimiting Chinese art and society, could educated Europeans have destroyed a garden celebrated as a masterpiece a century before? Would a Europe that still revered the Chinese garden have constructed an image of a Chinese race whose inferiority and ahistorical condition demanded conquest? In this light, Chambers's garden fantasies mark a step away from the quasi-universalist gestures of Fischer, and toward the radical inscription of difference increasingly articulated by Blumenbach, Herder, and Hegel, and insisted upon by the Yuanmingyuan arsonists of 1860. More than a quirky subspecies of rococo, or a piece of the picturesque garden mode, chinoiserie in architecture and landscape design served as a site for the theorization of Chinese difference, and part of the grand rethinking of European-Chinese relations over the course of the long eighteenth century.