

Beautiful China

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By

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CHAPTER I

FUNDAMENTAL ELEMENTS FOR AN UNDERSTANDING OF THE HISTORICAL AND CULTURAL HERITAGE OF CHINA

1.1 The East India Company and the Chart of Charles II

The volume entitled *Star of India*,¹ widely deals with the foundation of the East India Company on the last night of 1599 when, on behalf of a few gentlemen, Queen Elizabeth signed a Charter that allowed them to trade with India. From then on, the history of the East India Company evolved in complex ways. In 1661, a new Royal Charter was signed by Charles II, which expanded the commercial boundaries previously granted to the East India Company. This new agreement was opened to a more extended trade, in particular, towards China. In her introduction to the volume entitled *Asian Empire and British Knowledge: China and the Networks of British Imperial Expansion*, the author, Ulrike Hillemann, mentions the groups that were interested in that commercial expansion towards Asia and, in particular, the officials of the East India Company, Protestant missionaries, and free merchants. These groups “formed networks that linked the different places of British expansion”² favouring the encounter between the English and the Chinese people.

The most important trade settlement in mainland China was that of Canton, the center of the so-called country trade and opium trade.

The present volume aims at highlighting this shift from India to China, to underline how, within the British mentality, China could be seen as a distant appendix of India - as part of a single effort of expansion eastward - accompanied by the different methods of cultural penetration.

With Charles II, the Company underwent a twofold change: On the one hand, by the attribution to it of broader functions intended to transform it from a trading company into a body with full civil and military jurisdiction in India, and on the other, by the imposition of a gradual subordination to the British government.

We should remember that, after the marriage of Charles II with the Portuguese Princess Catherine of Braganza (1638), Mumbai (Bombay) (being part of her dowry, together with Tangiers) constituted the first British possession in India. The rest of the activity on Indian soil in that century was limited to an always more widespread commercial penetration.

Additionally: The East India Company was initially formed to trade with all the territories of Asia, but ended up by trading with only two, India and China.

Registering a liquidity problem in its purchases of tea from China, the Company tried to solve it by exporting - in exchange - opium produced in British factories in India.

1.2 Thomas Chippendale (1718–1779)

In order to obtain a clear, complete vision of the progressive approach of England to China, we have to consider heterogeneous fields of cultural expression such as the art of one of the most famous furniture makers of all time, Thomas Chippendale, furniture designer and implementer during the period 1718–1779.

Chippendale, the son of a carpenter, was born in 1718 in Yorkshire. Nothing is known of his life before his marriage with Catherine Redshaw in London in 1748, which produced a conjugal relationship partly reminiscent of William Blake's with *his* wife Catherine, who became his active partner in artistic as well as publishing achievements. In 1753, Chippendale held his exhibitions in St Martin's Lane in London. He was associated with James Rannie, an upholsterer who died in 1766; with Thomas Haig, who died in 1771; and with his own son, also named Thomas, born about 1749, who succeeded him in the trade. The book written in 1754 by Thomas Chippendale, entitled *The Gentleman and Cabinet-Maker's Director* (subtitled *The Guide of the Gentleman and the Ebony Maker*), presented an amalgam of drawings - designed mostly for the use of mahogany - in a combination of styles, such as that defined as Chinese, the Louis XVI rococo, the Gothic, and the neo-classical. As an example of this work, the design of a Chinese sofa is reported in the *Gentleman and Cabinet-Maker's Director*.³ However, there is also a tray, and more besides, included in the directory.

Among the few other pieces of furniture made by Chippendale, personally, one can admire those preserved in the Chinese room in the Victoria and Albert Museum in London.

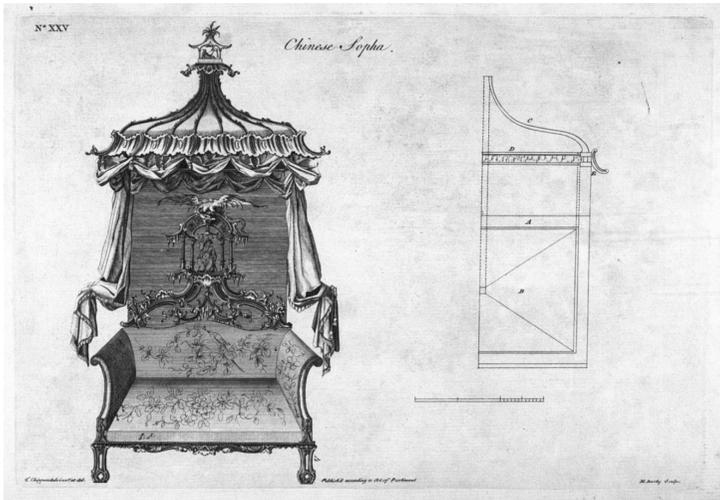


Fig. 1–1 Prototype of a sofa in the *Gentleman and Cabinet-Maker's Director* (free from copyright)

1.3 Yuan Ming Yuan, the Garden of Gardens

The author of *A Narrative of the British Embassy to China in the years 1792, 1793, and 1794* writes about what was called *Yuan Ming Yuan*:

Having passed through the eastern suburbs of the city, we entered into a rich and beautiful country where a short stage of about four miles brought us to one of the Emperor's palaces named Yeumen-man-yeumen, where we arrived about five o'clock in the afternoon, oppressed with fatigue for the extreme heat of the day, and the various impediments which obstructed our passage, arising from the immense crowd of people that may be said to have filled the whole way from Tong-tchew to this place, a journey of thirty miles.⁴

1.4 William Chambers (1706–1796)

Over the years, the way of approaching China in a conventional, practical way - with mainly economic goals - went side by side with a much deeper consideration of the country and of its culture on the part of travelers-traders with a more speculative attitude towards knowledge, towards places and peoples. Some of them developed an interest in the ancient philosophic and religious tradition of the country. One comes to

realize that, from a certain moment onwards, the fundamental aspects of Chinese culture and art became understood in their complexity by exceptional foreigners - such as William Chambers who marvellously came to grasp the principles of Chinese art - especially those underlying the construction of gardens.

An English architect, born in Sweden, Chambers brought the Chinese styles to England where he built several outstanding monuments, such as the pavilion at Kew Gardens. What is most relevant about his beginnings is his rare apprenticeship in China, the fact that he started painting in China at the age of fourteen or fifteen, and there he spent his formative years. It is known that he travelled to China on a cargo ship and, not long after landing, began to develop a deep acquaintance with the country that characterized his entire career. Chambers is the author of a charming book, entitled *A Dissertation on Oriental Gardening*,⁵ dedicated to the King. His positive evaluation of what he saw about him, and his enthusiasm for the Chinese art of building gardens, calls to mind the way in which Sir William Jones (1746–1794) discovered - in the same years, at the end of the 1700s - ancient Indian literature, up to then unknown to his countrymen and to the world; the enthusiasm with which he studied Sanskrit, devoting himself even to the composition of poems in that ancient language, thereby attributing to himself a place in the caste of warriors; and opening his cultural and linguistic horizon to the learning of the written Chinese language, always more difficult for a European.

Chambers' and Jones' unconventional approaches to India and China established a profound relationship between East and West. It was the dawn of an intercontinental relationship that would, with the passing of years, slowly alter its positivity in an often disastrous way.

Chambers' *Dissertation* attempts to make a comparison between the art of building gardens in Europe and in China, and introduces the idea that the way in which such a project takes place in China is much more complex and refined. He says:

Their Gardeners are not only Botanists, but also Painters and Philosophers, having a thorough knowledge of the human mind, and of the arts by which its strongest feelings are excited. It is not in China, as in Italy and France, where every petty Architect is a Gardener.⁶

He explains this definition with the following statement:

In China, Gardening is a distinct profession requiring an extensive study; to the perfection of which, few arrive. The Gardeners there, far from being either ignorant or illiterate, are men of high abilities. [...] The Chinese

Gardeners take nature for their pattern; and their aim is to imitate all her beautiful irregularities. Their first consideration is the nature of the ground they are to work upon.⁷

These are phrases that well exemplify the process of rapprochement of Europe to the main features of the intellectual and artistic heritage of China!

In the work of Chambers, we find a presentation of the Garden of Gardens, which is also interesting evidence of a cultural heritage now irretrievably lost, but observed two centuries ago by a foreigner with enthusiastic admiration. Thus, he writes:

No nation ever equalled the Chinese in the splendor and number of their Garden structures. We are told, by Father Attiret, that, in one of the Imperial Gardens near Peking, called *Yven Ming Yven*, there are, besides the palace - which is of itself a city - four hundred pavilions; all so different in their architecture, that each seems the production of a different country.⁸

The book presents a general exaltation of China and its arts:

Upon their lakes, the Chinese frequently exhibit sea-fights, processions, and ship-races; also fire-works and illuminations: in the two last of which they are more splendid, and more expert than the Europeans. On some occasions too, not only the lakes and rivers, but also all the pavilions, and every part of their Gardens, are illuminated by an incredible number of beautiful lanterns, of a thousand different shapes, intermixed with lampions, torches, fire-pots, and sky-rockets; than which a more magnificent sight cannot be seen. Even the Girandola, and illumination of St. Peter's of the Vatican, though by far the most splendid exhibitions of that sort in Europe are trifles when compared to these of China.⁹

Despite Chambers having detailed knowledge of garden building and a good understanding that it was based on philosophical principles and not on simple construction techniques, in the volume that we are examining we find no explicit reference to the two complementary forces ruling the Universe known as *Yin-Yang* - with the possible exception of phrases, such as those concerning the concept of contrast, *opposition* and implicitly *change* as determinant both in nature and in human action. He writes that:

Their artists knowing how powerfully contrast agitates the human mind, lose no opportunity of practicing sudden transitions, or of displaying strong oppositions, as well in the nature of the objects, which enter into their compositions, as in their modifications. Thus they conduct you from limited prospects to extensive views; from places of horror to scenes of

delight; from lakes and rivers to woods and lawns; and from the simplest arrangements of nature, to the most complicated productions of art.¹⁰

Chambers seems to understand perfectly the first principle of Taoism, as applied to the art of gardens: “dào kě dào, fēi cháng dào,” “The true Tao is not a permanent Tao.” Impermanence is indeed its essential character.

1.5 The *Chinese Encyclopedia*

Despite the fact that they were mostly ill seen by court and government officials, the missionaries were employed in more than one activity within the Chinese Empire. They were engaged in theological and missionary matters, but also took part in the implementation of other projects, such as for example, the printing of the most colossal work that China has ever produced, known as the *Chinese Encyclopedia* which, at least ideally, collected everything that had been written from 1100 BC until about 1700. In order to understand what the *Chinese Encyclopedia* really was, and find comprehensive information about it, we may quote from an article in the *London Globe*,¹¹ which speaks of the acquisition of an immense encyclopedic work on the part of the British Museum, which took place in 1878, that is, almost thirty years after the date of its foundation. The same article provides information on how this encyclopedia is formed:

It is a work due to the wisdom and energy of Kang-he, whom all historians of China extol as the greatest and wisest of the Chinese Emperors. He conceived the plan of a great Chinese dictionary, and also set about the really remarkable undertaking now represented by 5,020 volumes at the British Museum. He was, it appears, a great admirer of ancient Chinese literature, and was deeply grieved to perceive that extensive corruptions were everywhere creeping into the texts of ancient works that were reproduced. To put a stop to this, he determined to gather together in one authoritative work the entire mass of Chinese literature from the earliest times until his own day. It was a vast design, and was carried out with the ability for which Kang-he was conspicuous. A learned commission was appointed to collate and verify all Chinese works.

In the article, we read the part played by the missionaries in the typesetting of the famous work: “the Jesuit missionaries were simultaneously employed in casting a vast fount of copper type.”

London Globe's article goes on to explain the crisis, which the composition of the work met after the death of the Emperor, and the influence it had on the work of the missionaries:

The collection and the examination occupied the Commission for 40 years, and before it was fully completed the wise old monarch died, leaving the completion of his great design to Yung-Ching, his successor, who signaled his accession by dismissing the missionaries as a dangerous and traitorous set — all but a few, who were retained at court as indispensable to the carrying on of Kang-he's Encyclopedia, the printing of the almanac and so on.

1.6 *Pidgin English* and Sir William Jones Invites to a Study of the Chinese Language

A relationship between Asia and the West developed at all levels, including, of course, on the linguistic. Pidgin was a commercial language that the English and Chinese began to use in the nineteenth century. Pidgin English, having originated in Chinese ports, was formed by the insertion of correct English words within the syntactical structure of the Chinese. This was the situation with regard to the oral production of phrases and sentences.

However, this was not the full platform on which Pidgin stood. The great discoverer of the Asian languages and cultures, the scholar Sir William Jones, made an important approach to the Chinese language and from time to time communicated its results to the members of the Asiatic Society of Bengal, which he founded. He can be considered to all effects, as the first sanskritologist, but also the first European sinologist. If we consider the list of speeches he delivered to the Asiatic Society of Bengal, we find that a rather significant part of them is devoted to China and her neighbouring lands. They are entitled "On the Orthography of Asiatic Words" (1784); "On the Tartars" (1788); "On the Chinese" (1790); "On the Borderers, Mountaineers, and Islanders of Asia" (1791); "On Asiatic History, Civil and Natural" (1793); and "On the Philosophy of the Asiatics" (1794).¹² It should be acknowledged that only now that our attention is completely oriented towards an understanding of the relationship between Europe and China, Jones' interest in enlarging cultural horizons toward China - beyond India - becomes evident. In his article, entitled "Sir William Jones's Chinese Studies," Han Cunzhong (TC Fan) writes: "It was not until the late eighteenth century when Sir William Jones taught himself to decipher the Chinese characters that there were signs of a discrete cultural contact."¹³ He adds: "[...] with the efforts of Sir William Jones, as an orientalist, random and not very successful as they were, we can say that the Sinology as such has begun in English."¹⁴ The author of the same essay also points out that Lord Teignmouth, Jones's biographer, mentions in his 1767 *Memoirs*,¹⁵ that Jones

“copied” the keys to the Chinese that he desired to learn. With “keys” Teignmouth probably meant the Tablets of Radicals and Derivatives of the Chinese language, a number of which had appeared in works on China as early as the seventeenth century.¹⁶

Han Cunzhong also writes, that by the year 1770, Sir William Jones should have read Confucius and remembers that in the seventh speech in the assembly of Asiatic Society of Bengal, dedicated to the Chinese and delivered on February 25, 1790, Jones considered the extremely difficult question of origin of the people who had long ruled China before being ruled by the Tartars.¹⁷

Han Cunzhong writes:

He was in favor of the Brahmanic theory that the Chinese were originally Hindu Kshatriya caste who as a result of the omission of the sacred rites in ancient times had been driven to wander outside India.¹⁸

To this, he added that the authority of Jones was based on a passage of the *Institutes of Manu*, which he had begun to translate.

It may be useful to report a few paragraphs of the very interesting speech delivered by Sir William Jones on February 28, 1793, entitled “On Asiatic History, Civil, and Natural.” In it the accessibility of languages, such as Persian, Turkish, and Sanskrit, is compared with the intricacy of the Chinese characters, which create a large labyrinth:

but, though Persian, Arabic, Turkish and Sanskrit are languages now so accessible, that [228] in order to obtain a sufficient knowledge of them, little more seems required than a strong inclination to learn them, yet the supposed number and intricacy of the Chinese characters have deterred our most diligent students from attempting to find their way through so vast a labyrinth.¹⁹

However, opposing *this* vision of the language, he also observes that those who have approached the Chinese language have magnified its difficulties:

it is certain, however, that the difficulty has been magnified beyond the truth; for the perspicuous grammar by M. Fourmont, together with a copious dictionary, which I possess, in Chinese and Latin, would enable any man, who pleased, to compare the original works of Confucius, which are easily procured, with the literal translation of them by Couplet; and, having made that first step with attention, he would probably find, that he

had traversed at least half of his career.²⁰

Sir William Jones had realized that what helped diminish to the student the difficulty of the Chinese written language, and helped the understanding of it, was the brevity of the compositions that characterized the Chinese literary tradition. With the help of a dictionary and good grammar, it was relatively easy (as it is now) to scroll through those short texts and interpret them correctly.

It should also be noted that Sir William Jones had what we might nowadays consider an old-fashioned approach to the study of languages, but nonetheless one that has not completely disappeared. It was substantially equivalent to having the ability to understand the classics, analyze grammatical rules, and then being able to decipher and translate them.

1.7 Romanization of the Chinese Language: Th.F. Wade (1818–1895) and H.A. Giles (1845–1935)

One of the most interesting works that came from the intercultural relationship between Britain and China was the creation of a dictionary of Chinese words transliterated into Roman characters, in use since [at least up to 1958] the days in which it was originally produced by Thomas Francis Wade, that is, from about the middle of the year 1800. Wade was British ambassador to China and a profound expert of the Chinese language, as well as the first professor of Chinese at the University of Cambridge. Wade also published in 1867, in English, the first manual of Chinese. In 1912, Wade's originally composed system was taken to perfection by Herbert Allen Giles, another scholar and British diplomat in China, who worked together with his son Lionel Giles, curator of the British Museum.

Then in 1958, the Republic of China formulated the so-called 'pinyin', a transliteration that was different from that of Wade-Giles and considered more phonetically satisfactory, more likely to correctly reproduce the sounds of the Chinese language. To take an example of the difference between the systems known as Wade-Giles and pinyin, the two spellings of the surname of one of the most famous Chinese writers can be easily compared. According to the Wade-Giles system, the name is written 'Lu Hsun' and is written 'Lu Xun' in pinyin. For the student of Chinese, the most frustrating thing is that very often the two different ways of writing the same name will be presented to the reader, in the same situation and even on the same page.

1.8 End of the eighteenth century, Philadelphia, and China

After the Americans were able to prevail because of their maritime power over the English, the Continental Congress voted in 1790 to move the seat of government to Philadelphia while looking for a permanent capital on the banks of the Potomac River; the Bank of North America was then located in Philadelphia and the economy recovered from the war - the shipyards were producing vessels of exceptional quality. An American arsenal was founded. Merchants, free from the limitations of English mercantile rules, found new ports in Europe and China. The total value of exports was higher than the commerce of the city of New York and New England.

1.9 The Manchu Qing Dynasty

The last ruling dynasty in China, from 1644 until the deposition of the last emperor in 1912, was of Manchurian origin, but had absorbed the traditional culture of China and made it her own. The last emperor was the infant P'u-i. Originally, a nomadic people from Manchuria - the Manchus - seized power through a series of invasions from the north. Under the Qing Dynasty - such is the title with which the Manchus decided to reign - the power of the Chinese Empire reached a peak and then declined, partly because of internal misconduct and corruption, and partly because of external pressures from the West.

Towards the end of the eighteenth century, the dynasty reluctantly agreed on international trade relations with western countries. Foreign trade was limited to the port of Guangzhou, where the merchants were required to conduct their business through a limited number of mediators, collectively known as the *cohong*. England, France, and the United States were the most committed, and British trade was commercially, by far, the most developed. Initially, the trade balance pended in China's favour since England bought tea and paid with silver, however - in order to reverse the balance - in 1780, the British traders started to pay for their tea out of the proceeds from the opium produced in their factories in India.

1.10 Triangularity and Quadrangularity in the International Relationships

From time to time, in the history of intercontinental relationships, such as those being introduced here, there are special plants that acquire a greater importance than others. The spice trade, and the importation of

spices to England, had been the initial drive towards the foundation of the East India Company. At the end of the eighteenth century, the plants that became protagonists were the opium poppy, and the tea plant. It was because of the increased demand for tea in Europe, especially in England, that the English devised a way to pay for it with opium - mainly produced in the North of India, and refined in Patna. However, this triangular relationship, where the main actors were England, India, and China, was cemented, as aforementioned, with the further involvement of America and its new fast ships - always the winners in international competition. Then the stimulant and aphrodisiac herb, called *ginseng*, also became a protagonist; a permanently valuable root, the importance of which never waned.

1.11 Cinnabar

One of the most interesting adventures for anyone who wishes to further their knowledge of the issues we are now dealing with is the study of scholars and scientists, connected to the East India Company, who were soon to develop a multitude of topics relating to India and China, such as the weather, the geological characteristics of certain areas under observation, the kind of vegetation, agriculture and animal breeding, and the presence of metals and precious stones, etc.

That curiosity - which was one of the distinguishing traits of the Royal Academy founded in 1662, and applied to the lands of the New American Continent - was directed towards Asia and China. In 1832, a new edition of the *Journal of the Asiatic Society* was wholly dedicated to the detailed exploration of territories so vast as to extend from the Indian Subcontinent to China. Let us highlight in particular an article on the almost mythical metal named cinnabar, connected with the ancient science of the body in Chinese medicine, and precisely to that part named *dan tien*, meaning literally the field of cinnabar, located a little below the navel. The above-mentioned article is a study, one might even say - 'a contemplation', of the purity of this element as found in nature, as opposed to the better known, but less valuable, mercury. What the article says is based on a mention of the metal in Chinese writings of 1637:

Cinnabar, liquid silver, the red of silver, are in reality one and the same thing. What causes them to bear different names is that the substance is either pure or coarse, or old or recently extracted.

Cinnabar, of the first quality, comes from *Chinpé* (now *Mayang*), and from *Sichouan*. It is found in a state of purity in the bosom of the earth,

and does not require purification by fire. This cinnabar, which is used to polish the tips of arrows, metallic mirrors, etc., is thrice as valuable as mercury: whence it is carefully picked and sold under its native form, that is, in the state of sand or red powder. If melted, it loses a great part of its value.²¹

The presentation of cinnabar given by the author of the East India Company is different from that entertained by scientists nowadays. The British Encyclopaedia describes cinnabar as sulphuret of mercury. The definition is more precise, but certainly less poetic and unrelated to TCM (Traditional Chinese Medicine).

1.12 France and China

In China, not far from Kunming, the remains (tracks and tunnels) of a railway linking China to Vietnam - built for the transportation of goods from China to French Indochina - are still visible, near the so-called Petrified Forest, but, as far as we know, a French trade never really flourished in the surroundings.

Perhaps, one could say that what the French did not accomplish in the field of trade with the Chinese, they managed to achieve in the field of literature. They were, in fact, among the first to devote themselves to the study of the Chinese language and literature, and what we know about the country's history from the beginnings to the last century is mainly due to their study and translation of the *Annals*,²² and of other texts through which China became known to the European intellectual and literary world. The history of China, at least until the eighteenth century, could not have been known if not for the efforts of writers and French missionaries, such as Mailla, Du Halde, Amiot, and others.

It is known that the Emperor Keen Lung (Qianlong) appreciated and felt flattered by these studies. His poems, particularly his odes on "Tea," and one entitled "Eulogy of Moukden," were translated by Amiot. They then attracted the attention of Voltaire who addressed to the Emperor an epistolary poem on the characteristics and difficulties of versification in Chinese.

The name of Voltaire can be connected to China in various ways. Not just because of his remake of the famous work *The Orphan of China* - that will be discussed later in these pages - but also because his literary and philosophical work, in general, is reminiscent of the Asian country.

To what has already been said, we may add a testimony of Sir William Jones' admiration for Voltaire, expressed prior to the former's stay in India:

In the introduction to *A Grammar of the Persian Language*, written before his leaving for India (in 1771 Samuel Johnson had already sent a copy of this book to Warren Hastings), Jones wrote that Voltaire, whom he considered superior to every contemporary writer because of his elegant style and his incredibly versatile talent, had recognized the beauty of the Persian language and had versified a piece by the poet Sadi whom he compared to Petrarca.²³

However, as already mentioned, Voltaire's interest was not limited to Persia, but extended to the literary productions of China *and* to China's history and territory. Of his literary output, we may say that it is surprising that *Candide* (1759) was written only four years after *Orphelin de Chine*. The tragic seriousness, present in the latter volume, seems to dissolve in *Candide* in crazy loves, in sea voyages whose cargo is made of two Andalusian horses, in improbable landings. In addition, in *Candide*, the stage is set in another part of the world, but in places and situations that lend themselves to be continually ridiculous, where there are ludicrous figures of guests, where one can laugh all the time, where there is nothing that can really be taken seriously. What can bring together the two works is that the characters distance themselves from a European center of interest: In *Orphelin de Chine*, after traveling the route that goes from Paris to Mongolia, from Mongolia to Beijing, and in *Candide* from Cadiz to Paraguay and to Eldorado.

1.13 Napoleon and China

In Alain Peyrefitte's volume, entitled *The Collision of Two Civilizations, The British Expedition to China in 1792–1794*, Chapter 85 - entitled "Amherst at Saint Helena" (June–August 1817) - contains the following information:

On the return trip, Amherst, as Macartney had previously done, landed at St. Helena. Between these two visits, the island was occupied by a resident of unprecedented distinction.²⁴

That involuntary resident was - from October 1815 - Napoleon (1769–1822) who was held prisoner by the British at St. Helena, and there visited by Lord Amherst and his entourage in July of 1817, during their return journey from their mission in China.

A brief parenthesis should be opened on Saint Helena - an island in the

Atlantic Ocean, not commonly associated with the East India Company. It was owned by the Company, a notion that may explain, among other things, why the famous British ambassadors to the Chinese Empire landed there before heading back to England. Similarly, their attempt to establish a relationship with the Emperor of China can be explained by the intention of extending the operations of the Company more and more eastward in a single drive of expansion and conquest.

Lord William Pitt Amherst (1773–1857) had led the delegation sent by George III in 1816 and had written a diary, which remains still unpublished, where the story of the relationship between himself and Lord Macartney on one side, and Napoleon on the other, is interestingly described.

We know that Napoleon, the prisoner of the British on the island, was informed of the approach of the strange ambassadors in 1817 and that the news rekindled in him those meditations regarding the East, in which China had a prominent part. Eight and a half years earlier, in 1808, the French Emperor had ordered the preparation of a Chinese-French-Latin dictionary that certainly, in his mind, anticipated less linguistic and literary pursuits. Among the considerations we can now make on Napoleon's encounter with the British ambassadors, there are the following:

Behind Napoleon's interest in India, which he had already revealed during his campaign in Egypt, there was probably the idea of extending his imperial ambitions to China. It can also be said that, for him, India was basically an outpost to the conquest of larger and more distant territories.

The most important British representatives of the Anglo-Chinese expansion, Lord Amherst and Lord Macartney, had felt duty bound to pay a visit to the deposed emperor, to inform him of the situation. In spite of every other consideration, in that event, one might capture a glimpse of an idea of Europe that went beyond rivalry and the ongoing open war between the two nations. One can reasonably introduce the concept of Europe, because that act of 'getting together' perhaps implied the sense of co-responsibility on the part of western nations towards their Asian ambitions.

Napoleon allowed himself to make criticisms to the British for not having followed, to the letter, the etiquette prescribed by the imperial ceremonial.

Even more interesting is Napoleon's reaction at a possible English invasion of China, reported by his Irish doctor in his diary, and afterwards transcribed by Peyrefitte:

Napoleon firmly opposed the idea (already widespread in London) of opening China to the British trade by force saying that "(it) would be the worst thing that you have done for several years, wage war on an immense

power such as China in possession of many resources. At the beginning no doubt you would succeed, you would take the ships they have, and will destroy their commerce, but you would teach them their strength. They would be forced to take certain steps to defend themselves against you; they would consider ‘We must try to equal this nation, we must build ships, we must arm them with guns.’ They would get the artificers, shipbuilders, from France and America and also from London they would build a fleet and with time you would be defeated.”²⁵

As one can see, Napoleon was not restrained by the idea that it might be improper for himself, or for others, to have the desire to take advantage of other people’s territories and settle in them, as by the fear of defeat, the preoccupation that the power of the opponent might become dangerous and overwhelming.

Notes

¹ Lina Unali, *Stella d’India. Temi imperiali britannici, modelli di rappresentazione dell’India* (Roma: Edizioni Mediterranee, 1993); *Star of India. Imperial Themes: The Other Face of English Literature, Modes of Representing the Subcontinent*, Kindle Edition, 2011.

² Ulrike Hillemann, *Asian Empire and British Knowledge: China and the Networks of British Imperial Expansion*, Cambridge Imperial and Post-colonial Studies Series (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2009), 2.

³ Thomas Chippendale, “Chinese sofa,” *The Gentleman and Cabinet-Maker’s Director: Being a Large Collection of the Most Elegant and Useful Designs of Household Furniture in the Gothic, Chinese and Modern taste*, 1754, plate XXV.

⁴ Aeneas Anderson, *A Narrative of the British Embassy to China in the Years 1792, 1793 and 1794; Containing the Various Circumstances of the Embassy with Accounts of Customs and Manners of the Chinese and a Description of the Country, Towns and Cities* (Dublin: William Porter, 1795), 109.

⁵ William Chambers, *A Dissertation on Oriental Gardening* (London: W. Griffin, 1772).

⁶ *Ibid.*, 13.

⁷ *Ibid.*, 13–14.

⁸ *Ibid.*, 35.

⁹ *Ibid.*, 76.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, 83.

¹¹ The article entitled “The Chinese Encyclopedia. A Single Work in 5,020 Volumes — The Codification of a Nation’s Literature” was published in the *London Globe*, August 13, 1878, and then in the *New York Times* on August 29, 1878, 2.

¹² Cf. *Dictionary of National Biography*, vol. 30 (London: Smith, Elder & Co, 1892), 175.

¹³ Han Cunzhong, “Sir William Jones’s Chinese Studies,” *The Review of English Studies*, 22 Oct. 1946, republished in *The Vision of China in the English Literature of the Seventeenth and Eighteenth Centuries*, ed. Adrian Hsia (Hong Kong: Chinese University Press, 1998), 325.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*

¹⁵ Cf. Lord Teignmouth, *Memoirs of the Life, Writings and Correspondence of Sir William Jones* (London: John Hatchard, 1806), 78–79.

¹⁶ Cunzhong, “Sir William Jones’s Chinese Studies,” 326.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, 332–33.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, 333.

¹⁹ Sir William Jones, “The Tenth Anniversary Discourse, On Asiatick History, Civil and Natural, delivered 28 February, 1793,” *The Works of Sir William Jones: With the Life of the Author by Lord Teignmouth. In Thirteen Volumes*, vol. 3, ed. John Stockdale, Piccadilly, and John Walker (London: Paternoster-Row, 1807), 227–28.

²⁰ *Ibid.*, 228.

²¹ *Journal of the Asiatic Society of Bengal*, vol. 1 (Calcutta: Baptist Mission Press, 1832), 151.

²² Cf. Joseph Anne Marie Moyriac de Mailla, *Storia generale della Cina: ovvero, Grandi annali cinesi*, 36 volumes (Siena: F. Rossi, 1777–83).

²³ Unali, *Star of India*, Kindle Edition, 2011.

²⁴ Alain Peyrefitte, *The Collision of Two Civilisations: The British Expedition to China in 1792–94*, first edition printed in France in 1989 (English edition, London: Harvill, 1993), 512.

²⁵ *Ibid.*, 518.

CHAPTER II

CRYSTAL COLOURED FLOWERS, MOTHER OF PEARLS AND DRAGONS INSIDE THE ROYAL PALACES OF EUROPE: PORCELAINS IN THE EAST AND IN THE WEST

2.1 The Intersection between the Arts of China and the Various Elements of European Culture

Outside the Victoria and Albert Museum, on large brown wooden hoardings (behind which the new rooms of the Victoria and Albert Museum, under construction, were still invisible), the representations of artifacts from China were displayed in conjunction with high quality, heterogeneous elements of European culture from 1600 to 1800. It was the preview of an important exhibition inaugurated in December 2014.

Amid the preciousness of colour and shape, photographs of vases of blue porcelain on a white background made their appearance alongside portraits of missionaries to China; masks of the Italian Comedy of Art - of Arlequin in particular; and the blue and white porcelain statue of a Chinese lady who wore a necklace round her neck from which a cross conspicuously hung.

2.2 China at the Court of Cosimo II de' Medici and in Many Other European Courts

In *Voyage Round the World* by Giovanni Francesco Gemelli Careri, published in 1700, there is the mention of Chinese porcelains being inside the residence of the Grand Duke of Tuscany Cosimo II de' Medici (1590–1621): “In the first room, one can see the portraits of the most famous painters, made of their own hand: In the following one, various jars of bone china, beautifully placed.”¹

A consideration, although necessarily brief, of the Chinese artifacts - or

of their imitations produced in the European courts - between the end of the eighteenth and the beginning of the twentieth century, may allow for the understanding of a wide range of cultural phenomena, such as the exceptional consideration in which China was held for centuries in Europe and some of the reasons for it.

To become aware of the production of Chinese artifacts, and of their imitations produced in Europe, a visit to the so-called *Chinese Sitting-room* (*salottino cinese*) in Naples' Museum of Capodimonte, from which the present research began, is certainly among the most advisable. After having gone through some of the most important manifestations of interest in China to be found in the Spanish territory, the journey will continue towards Northern Europe, up to Norway, towards the East, towards the Czech Republic, and finally towards Turkey. Of course, many nations will be "omitted," not because they lack evidence of their taste for Chinese artifacts, but to limit and simplify the itinerary.

Designed and built by the Bourbons from 1738 onwards, the Royal Palace of Capodimonte became a National Museum after the unification of Italy, keeping intact some of its amazing features. One can walk through the great halls of the Palace, including the magnificent ballroom and the equally sumptuous and inviting dining room, and, following the regular course of the visit, something unexpected and extraordinary will be noticed on the right - a combination of porcelain and plaster never seen before. A crystal chandelier, with broad and thick foliage of a green porcelain palm tree on it, hangs from the ceiling; on the walls, there are large mirrors with inlaid frames, decorated with branching plants, flowers and birds, in ways unknown to the European style of art. Following are additional notes on the basis of the presentation made by the museum itself:

A masterpiece during the last years of the Carolingian working of porcelain, it has been set up for Maria Amalia of Saxony, as part of her private apartments in the Palace of Portici between 1757 and 1759. In 1866, the porcelain layer has been removed and sent to Capodimonte to a space that had been restored. The room has a coating of porcelain plates fixed to the wall with wooden supports. The idea of replacing the traditional *boiseries* (wood paneling) with a porcelain coating creates a unique spot, comparable only to the sitting room of the royal palace of Aranjuez, built by the same Charles III once he moved from Naples to Madrid.

The decorations on the mirrors and on the frames are in tune with the interpretation and the Chinese taste, popular in Europe during the eighteenth century thanks to the Neapolitan artisans and producers of porcelain. The decorative theme is interspersed with compositions of

scenes taken from Chinese everyday life. The 23 scrolls are particularly interesting. On some of them, there are Chinese characters giving a poetic tribute to the King and short poems dated 1758. The ceiling, hung on the walls in 1959, is a plaster execution, “ad uso di porcellana,” written in gold on the gilding. The work was done by Joseph Gricci, the head modeller (who worked in Naples from 1743 to 1759), who was assisted by the decorator Mattia Gasparini, the creator of the stucco ceiling in Portici. Giovan Battista Natali, a painter in Naples since 1749 and a native of Piacenza, provided the idea of the decorative project. The decorations were painted by the Saxon head painter Sigmund Fisher with ten collaborators, including Luigi Restile, who replaced him as director in 1758.

All these operations can be thus summarized and described, with a smile, as a carousel of Neapolitan workers, experts in the work of reproducing the arts of China following some of the most prized and gorgeous Neapolitan methods and styles.

There are no Chinese rooms in the Royal Palace of Caserta - another of the twenty and more royal mansions built by the Bourbons in the same area - but small Chinese-style pavilions are frequently visible in various cities of Italy, from Naples up to Turin.

Ideally, going from Naples to Madrid, the aforementioned experience is repeated inside the Royal Palace in the capital of Spain. After walking through the beautifully decorated halls of the East Wing, which, through large windows, overlook the Plaza de Oriente - and where Joseph Bonaparte arrogantly quartered in 1808 with his entourage - one can reach a large room adorned with mixed Chinese and rococo elements, especially noticeable on the ceiling: elements belonging to a later period, that is the last decades of the nineteenth century - at the time of the so-called Alfonsine restoration. It is a late *chinoiserie*, denoting the continuation of a tradition of Chinese art in the royal palaces of Europe, based on the admiration for what was perceived as the product of the efficient and well-ordered empire of China, and for the arts through which it had admirably expressed itself over the centuries.

In other royal palaces of Spain, and precisely in San Lorenzo del Escorial, walking through the halls of said palace, one can admire two beautiful silk baldaquins, and specifically the one above the bed of Philip II (1527–1598), from which it is said that the dying King looked towards the main altar. The other leans on the bed of his daughter Isabella Clara Eugenia, decorated with a cloth that is different from the previous one, apparently made of damasked silk, adorned with large floral motifs.

When considering the biographical data of Philip II and, of course, of his daughter, there is a tendency to antedate the beginning of the flowering of Chinese art in Europe, which is generally attributed to the construction

of the Trianon, in France, in 1670. San Lorenzo del Escorial was indeed built around 1563.

Spain, like the other nations of Europe, is very rich in these *Chinese memories*. One just needs to be ready to notice them. It seems that this has been done but seldom. In some town squares, we notice the presence of pavilions, which - although showing a certain number of differences compared with the original - remind us of those in China. In the center of the beautiful Zocodover Square in Segovia, there is a good example of a pavilion that, in an environment characterized as a whole by a surprising intercultural mixture, stands in the ancient market of the Arab period, overlooking the Tagus. There is a similar one in Toledo. Also worth considering in the Spanish Royal Palace of Aranjuez, is the so-called China Hall with characteristics similar to those of previously mentioned households.

In their appreciation of Chinese art, the European monarchs, identified - and perhaps ideally blended - their idea of power with that of the emperor of China who ruled over a well-governed country, and the beauty of the artifacts produced in their countries with those produced far away. They connected each of them to the other; they did not set them apart, nor separated them.

After having been able to count many Chinese objects in the royal palaces throughout Italy and Europe, we should now consider the certainly most eccentric construction - one would also be tempted to say the most *outrageous* that Europe has produced - an architectural complex in which the imitation of Asian art is not confined to the internal spaces, as in the cases previously considered, but also helps to unequivocally configure the external ones: The Royal Pavilion in Brighton, which appears as the result of a unique development in English reflections on China for the whole eighteenth century; at least since George III had sent the first famous embassy, headed by Lord Macartney, to the Chinese Emperor Qianlong, and the encounter had taken place with some diplomatic incidents during the party for the eightieth birthday of the monarch.

One of the reasons why George, Prince of Wales - who had become Regent in 1811 because of his father's inability to reign - decided to build Brighton's Royal Pavilion was to escape the heavy gossip of the London circles, which had been always hostile toward him. In volume XXI of the *Dictionary of National Biography* (1890 edition), we read the expression of blame, shared by many, towards the prince's predilections:

To add to these follies, he began in 1784 to build his costly absurdity, the Brighton Pavilion, decorated in the oriental, especially the Chinese, style. He had taken a fancy to Brighton since his first visit in 1782, and soon

made it equally fashionable and dissolute. It was from Brighton that he was summoned post haste to Windsor in November 1788 by the news of the king's insanity."²

The same text informs us that, as soon as he saw his son, George III slammed him against a wall.

The outside of the Royal Pavilion was built in a style that has been defined Indo Saracen as prevalent in India during the time of the Muslim emperors of Delhi, from Akbar the Great, roughly a contemporary of Elizabeth I, to Shah Jahan, who was deposed and imprisoned by the British in the Red Fort of Delhi in the second half of the nineteenth century.

The architect, John Nash, designed it as we see it now. It is characterized by a succession of domes and minarets that resemble those seen in the royal palaces of Northern India, including the famous Taj Mahal from which, however, it differs for the absence of that specific light marble whiteness that is replaced by gray ash colour slabs.

On the site of the Royal Pavilion in Brighton³ we read:

The lavish interiors of the Royal Pavilion combine decorations done according to Chinese styles with magnificent furniture and furnishings. Adorned with golden dragons, carved palm trees and imitation bamboo staircases, the unique style of the building mixes Asian exoticism and English eccentricity.

The so-called Hall of Music, the second extension made on the basis of the Nash draft in which the Regent himself seems to have performed *and* in which were also executed, for the first time, works by Handel and Rossini, is lighted by nine candelabra in the shape of lotus flowers. The series, on both sides of green pagodas, which are present in the original design, are no more there.

One of the most extraordinary active interweaving of more than one art, and more than one artistic culture, is shown in the paintings hanging on the walls of the music room where one is able to identify pictorial views taken from *The Costumes of China*⁴ (1805) - the diary illustrated by one of the most famous painters of the journey to the East, William Alexander, English watercolourist⁵ (1767–1816), who was also known for having accompanied Lord Macartney in his embassy.

A pictorial image, taken from the work of William Alexander, may help to explain better the taste of the period, and the Regent's predilections. We may quote one in which it is possible to highlight specific characteristics of the Chinese style of landscape painting (*shan*

shui), such as the insistence of the brush on particular points of the vegetation there represented, in which the artist exerts greater energy, and easing in other points. The same features can be seen in the painting of the boats moored in the harbour.

A special mention should be made of the Banquet Hall, also drawn by Nash in 1826, and still set for 32 virtual guests. The ceiling is decorated with a palm tree painted on a light blue background stretching across the breadth of the vault. The table is topped by a giant luminaria supported by the jaws of a bronze dragon. Another four crystal chandeliers hang from the ceiling. The imperial colours of the distant country - red, green, and gold - predominate. On the right, we see figures of Chinese people, presumably personifying courtiers.

Although this description of the Pavilion is quite limited - compared to the number of elements that it is possible to identify and analyze in it - one wishes to add the observation that in the rooms that open to one of the exits from the Banquet Hall, there is a lamp representing the Battle of Trafalgar (1805) that contributes to determine the historical period in which the strange Regent's "villa" was built, and exalt a victory that would have glorified the British for ever.

Aside from the lack of sympathy, which always accompanied the person of the Regent, the future George IV - after a long time since the events that we have presented thus far - one would be led to highly value his admiration for the architecture and decoration of buildings that rose in distant places overseas, in countries that neither he nor his architect had ever visited. The transposition to England was a sign of consideration for what was different from the surroundings he was familiar with, the sign of a mind open towards other cultures, other ways of conceiving the human being and the arts. The admiration for Asian products, and artifacts, will diminish if it will not become null with the passing of time.

Another instance of the memory of China during the Regency was a bridge in St James's Park, later reproduced in a painting, which was afterwards destroyed by fire.

Valeria Vallucci wrote about that bridge in her doctoral dissertation, entitled *Byron, Russia and Italy*, referring to a piece of Byron's correspondence: "To Byron this ephemeral monument was a symbol of the emptiness of the Restoration and of the celebrations that followed the defeat of Napoleon."⁶

Speaking about Brighton's Pavilion from a literary point of view, we should remember that all the outstanding English poets and writers were alive during the Regency period, and that validations of the negative