David Garrick’s reaction against French Chinoiserie in *The Orphan of China*

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**Abstract**

This paper sets the success of Garrick’s Drury Lane production of Arthur Murphy’s *The Orphan of China* in 1759 against the failure of his staging of Noverre’s *The Chinese Festival* four years earlier. It argues that the Francophobia displayed by the audience in 1755 was an expression of patriotic possessiveness, and that, by 1759, Garrick had found a way of giving a peculiarly English flavour to the taste for Chinoiserie, a flavour that lacked the ingredient of French neoclassicism. Garrick’s Chinese staging reflected his English contemporaries’ concerns for nationalism, Orientalism and imperial competition with France.

The failure of Garrick’s production of Noverre’s *The Chinese Festival* (1755) raises a significant issue pertaining to paradoxical English attitudes towards all things foreign just before and during the Seven Years War (1756–63) between England and France – the fascination with the exotic Orient on the one hand and the xenophobia towards the French (or Francophobia) on the other. With England fighting against France abroad over colonies, in London the opposition against French Chinoiserie also related to the struggle between English and French imperialist powers. The battle extended to claims over the political, as well as the imaginary, realms of the Orient. On the London stage, China, a fantasized oriental land should be what the English envisioned from an English perspective, rather than what was prescribed by the French. Noverre’s French Chinoiserie ballet could be seen as dominated by French imperial hegemony, which the English abominated especially in a time of English national crisis.

Garrick’s production of Arthur Murphy’s *The Orphan of China* (1759) achieved success, even though *The Chinese Festival* triggered a riot three and half years earlier. At the French ballet Garrick was unable to solve the bitter conflict between the upper sort’s taste for exotic novelty and the lower order’s patriotic xenophobia, but he managed to provide solutions to the problem in his production of Murphy’s tragedy. In this paper, I will argue that Garrick’s production of Murphy’s play aims to react against the French Chinoiserie, the artistic colonization of China in Noverre’s *Les Fêtes chinoises* in France and Noverre’s *The Chinese Festival* in London. I will consider how Garrick turns the ostensible cause of the riot, English nationalism, into an attraction for Murphy’s play, while simultaneously catering to the vogue for

**Keywords**

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Chinoiserie. Due to the contention between the English and the French for imperial supremacy, Garrick endeavours to distinguish the Chinoiserie appeal in *The Orphan of China* as English Chinoiserie, and not French Chinoiserie. His production of Murphy's play allowed the English spectators to approach what they thought would be more faithful representations of Chinese costumes and scenery, which were nonetheless refashioned into a new imaginary world controlled by the English. Therefore, when Garrick altered Boquet’s designs of Chinoiserie scenery and costumes for *The Chinese Festival* to bring out *The Orphan of China* with all splendour, Chinoiserie, more than merely a stylistic novelty, conveys nationalistic implications due to its potential relationship with colonialism.

Textual evidence that supports my hypothesis concerning Garrick’s Chinoiserie innovation includes contemporary witnesses of the 1759 performance, Murphy’s own statement and the declarations in the prologue and epilogue to Murphy’s play. A contemporary critic appreciates Garrick’s staging of Timurkan’s encomium of the ‘glittering palace’. ‘It would be difficult to give a complete description, on once seeing, of so many pleasant novelties. An eastern traveller would imagine himself at Pekin and a Cockney in a new world’, the scenery being ‘magnificent, uniform and proper’, the Chinese temple ‘a new and masterly piece of architecture’ and the costumes ‘new, elegant and characteristic’ (*An Account of the New Tragedy* 1759: 11–12). The repeated emphasis on the word ‘new’ might be a puff but it might also indicate the distinction between the English staging and French Chinoiserie designs. According to Goldsmith, who was present at the first night of the production, ‘the whole house seemed pleased, highly and justly pleased...the nervous sentiment, the glowing imagery, the well-conducted scenery, seemed the sources of their pleasure’ (Goldsmith 1759: 435). James Boaden mentions that the audience was attracted by the Chinese costumes, ‘the splendid assemblages of foreign dress, presented by the original inhabitants (the Chinese), and their more warlike, perhaps more picturesque invaders (the Tartars)’ (Boaden 1827: 69). A reviewer in *Lloyd’s Evening Post* notes that the costume, scenery, the architecture of the palace and an altar are brilliant with oriental colour (4, 25–27 April 1759, p. 25). All these statements manifest that Garrick had paid special attention to the stage designs and costumes, and fascinated his audience with his Chinoiserie innovation.

Also, in his 1759 letter to Voltaire, Murphy claims that if Voltaire had attended the performance he would have seen ‘a theatrical splendour conducted with a bienseance unknown to the scene Françoise’ (96). In his *Life of David Garrick*, Murphy acknowledges that ‘the manager prepared a magnificent set of Chinese scenes, and the most becoming dresses’ (1: 338). Moreover, in the epilogue, when Mrs. Yates shows the audience her ‘true Chinese’ costume, she might be accentuating that her costume is more faithful to the Chinese than the costume designed by Boquet for Noverre’s *The Chinese Festival* in London. All these textual testimonies indicate that
Garrick intended the staging of Murphy’s play to be distinguished from its French predecessors in theatrical Chinoiserie. Also, Garrick demonstrated his innovative concern for culturally specific reproduction of foreign fashion for historical exactness, which was to develop at the end of the eighteenth century. The eighteenth century scarcely paid any attention to correct theatrical costuming until the end of the century, when contemporary fashion commentators assert that stage dresses ‘are no longer the heterogeneous and absurd mixtures of foreign and ancient modes, which formerly debased our tragedies’ (Jefferys 1757: I. xiii).

In addition to the above textual descriptions, I will explore visual evidence that may confirm my supposition of Garrick’s innovation, by comparing illustrations of the above-mentioned English and French Chinoiserie productions. Noverre did not preserve any scenarios of The Chinese Festival in his works, but the Musée de l’Opéra in Paris holds some scenarios of Noverre’s ballets, including the décor and costume for a Chinese ballet designed by Boquet (Figure 1; Lynham 1972: 34–35), who was also commissioned to supervise the making of the scenery and costumes for Noverre’s ballet at Drury Lane in 1755 (Noverre 1930: vii). There is no evidence that these are the illustrations of the actual staging used by the London production of The Chinese Festival, but I would like to suggest that partial conclusions can be drawn from their similarities.

As an artist of the Rococo style characterized by lightness and playfulness (Rosenfeld 1981: 74), Boquet had been a costume designer at L’Opéra and was responsible for the costumes and scenery for festivals at the court. The garden scene designed by Boquet for Noverre’s Chinese ballet, as collected in the Musée de l’Opéra, observes French neoclassical aesthetics that stress the classical characteristics of order and balance. This indicates that the Chinoiserie scenery for Noverre’s Chinese ballet in France might have combined the Rococo with neoclassical symmetry, in accordance with its dancing exoticism displayed in the form of neoclassical ordered procession or pageant. A contemporary French playgoer, Jullien des Boulmiers, describes his reminiscence of the spectacle of the 1754 production of Noverre’s Chinese ballet in Paris and relates in detail the visual exhibition in the dance organized with neoclassical symmetry:

...at the back is an amphitheatre on which sixteen Chinamen are seated. By a quick change of scene, thirty-two Chinamen appear instead of sixteen, and go through a pantomimic performance on the steps. As they descend, sixteen other Chinamen, mandarins and slaves, come out of their houses and take their places on the steps. All these persons form eight ranks of dancers, who, by bending down and rising up in succession, give a fair imitation of the waves of a stormy sea... It ends by a round-dance, in which there are thirty-two persons; their movements form a prodigious quantity of new and perfectly planned figures, which are linked and unlinked with the greatest ease. At the end of this round-dance the Chinamen take up their
places anew on the amphitheatre, which changes into a porcelain shop. Thirty-two vases rise up, and hide from the audience the thirty-two Chinese.

(Jullien des Boulmiers 1769: II. 323, quoted in Lynham 1972: 21)

This is consistent with the well-ordered march that the Journal étranger describes of The Chinese Festival in London: 'The Corps de Ballet were well composed and well grouped, the individual pas agreeably varied and the

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Figure 1: Decor and costume for a Chinese ballet by Louis-René Boquet (Musée de l'Opéra, Paris).
contredanse, danced by forty-eight persons, was executed with a precision and neatness unusual in grands ballets’ (Anon 1755: 233, quoted in Lynham 1972: 35 ff.). The number of performers on stage was constantly altered among multiples of eight to present the dancing in symmetric spectacle. It is therefore plausible to infer a well-organized symmetric mise en scène from Noverre’s dance, which exhibited rich costumes and decorations in an orderly manner. The scenery of The Chinese Festival in London, also designed by Boquet, might have followed the neoclassical style of Noverre’s Chinese ballet in Paris.

Surprisingly, illustrations of the performance of The Orphan of China suggest that Garrick did not completely adopt Boquet’s neoclassical designs for Chinese scenery. William Whitehead writes in the prologue to Murphy’s tragedy: ‘Enough of Greece and Rome. Th’exhausted store/Of either nation now can charm no more’ (1–2), confirming that Chinoiserie in eighteenth century England provided a fascinating alternative to French Classicism (Honour and Hoyt 1965: 4). Although the Rococo style spread from France to England about the middle of the eighteenth century, England received a current of direct Chinese influence through the English architect William Chambers, who had been to China in his youth in the service of the Swedish East India Company and later visited it a second time for study (Hudson 1931: 270–277). Garrick may instead have followed the more Romantic design of Chambers’s Chinese architecture and gardening rather than Boquet’s adherence to neoclassicism. A 1797 illustration of Timurkan in The Orphan of China, printed in Bell’s British Theatre, depicts the Tartar king standing before a circular window that looks out to a pagoda by a lake with a sail in it (Figure 2), resembling Chambers’s Pagoda by the lake in Kew Gardens. Originally a Buddhist temple in the form of a tower, a pagoda was used as a garden-building in this eighteenth-century English Chinoiserie landscape. It is possible that Garrick, in compliance with English nationalistic fervour, adopted Chambers’s vision of Chinese scenes to invest a sense of Englishness in the Chinoiserie designs for his production of The Orphan of China, probably in Acts I, II and V with scenes outside the royal palace, or in Act III when the heroine Mandane intercepts her son being led to execution.

Figure 2: Mr. Benson as Timurkan: ‘Traitor is false’ (Act II scene i), (Bell’s British Theatre, London, 1797, Vol. 24).
In 1756, William Chambers was the architectural tutor to the Prince of Wales, later King George III. He was a founder member and the first treasurer of the Royal Academy of Arts (1768), and Garrick was one of his close friends (McIntyre 2000: 235–236). In 1757, Chambers was commissioned to lay out the grounds of the Dowager Princess of Wales’s house at Kew Gardens, and he constructed several buildings at Kew between 1757 and 1762, including the famous Great Pagoda, an aviary and a bridge in the Chinese style, all of which led to a general interest in Britain in Chinese architecture. At a time when Chinoiserie was based on imaginative visions of China, Chambers was able to construct stylistically more accurate Chinese architectural designs. When Chambers completed the Great Pagoda at Kew in 1762, it soon became one of the popular sights of outer London and was reproduced on chintz, paintings and prints (Figure 3; Chambers 1763: engraving), in most of which the lake and its surrounding lawns are combined with the Chinese pagoda as the focal point.

Earlier in 1757, Chambers published his influential Designs of Chinese Buildings, which was regarded in England as an authoritative source for Chinese architecture. In this book, Chambers describes the spirit of Chinese architecture, which encourages asymmetry and irregularity in architecture, and its greater integration with landscape. Among the first Europeans to represent China in a truthful manner, Chambers prefigures the emerging romantic movement, which conceives a fervent admiration for alien cultures and for the new representations of nature (Jarry 1981: 54). As opposed to French neoclassical aesthetics that stress the classical

Figure 3: ‘View of the Lake and the Island from the Lawn at Kew’, 1763, painted by William Marlow (1740–1813).
characteristics of order and symmetry, the Chinese art of gardening, according to Chambers, is 'Romantic' because

NATURE is their pattern, and their aim is to imitate her in all her beautiful irregularities. . . . [The Chinese artists'] enchanted scenes answer, in a great measure, to what we call romantic, and in these they make use of several artifices to excite surprize.

(Chambers 1757: 15)

As early as 1692, in his Upon the Gardens of Epicurus, Sir William Temple admires the Chinese practice of planting ('sharawadgi') in an apparently haphazard manner, 'without any Order of Disposition of Parts' (McKillop 1948: 248). In the 1750s, buildings in the Chinese taste and the Gothic style were regarded as relaxations from classicism, as demonstrated by William Halfpenny's New Designs for Chinese Temples (1750) and Chinese and Gothic Architecture (1752), and William and John Halfpenny's Rural Architecture in the Chinese Taste (1752–1755). This romantic style is exactly what Louis le Comte condemned Chinese architecture for in his letter to the Cardinal of Furstemberg: 'the apartments ill-contrived, the ornaments irregular,' and the general lack of the organizing principle of classical uniformity results in 'deformity in the whole, which renders it very unpleasing to foreigners, and must needs offend anyone that has the least notion of true architecture' (Le Comte and Louis Daniel 1697: 59). These qualities of disorder and deformity, namely irregularity and asymmetry, were exactly the qualities of Chinese architecture and gardens, which sharply contrasted the geometrically formal French gardens of the Louis XIV era. Throughout most of the eighteenth century in England, the rejection of the neoclassical ideals of simplicity and uniformity owed much to the influence of Chinese art, especially to the idea of 'beauty without order', the naturalness of wildness, as realized in Chinese gardens (Lovejoy 1933: 3–20). For instance, the jardin anglo-chinois, a French term popularized in mid-eighteenth-century England for Chinese gardens, describes a type of irregular landscape garden embellished with buildings in the Chinese taste, as depicted by Chambers in his Designs of Chinese Buildings.

Thus, although England’s taste for Chinoiserie responded to continental influence, it never completely followed the European styles, but developed its own English flavour, 'less reverential in its imitation and less high-flown in its application' (Jacobson 1993: 32). In 1750, Horace Walpole writes: 'I am almost as fond of the Sharavaggi, or Chinese want of symmetry, in buildings, as in grounds or gardens. I am sure, whenever you come to England, you will be pleased with the liberty of taste into which we are struck' (letter to Sir Horace Mann, 25 February 1750). When he writes in 1771 on Chinoiserie as of half-English invention, Walpole illuminates the competition for artistic originality in Chinoiserie among the English, the French and the Chinese:

David Garrick’s reaction against French Chinoiserie in The Orphan of China
The French have of late years adopted our style in gardens, but choosing to be fundamentally obliged to more remote rivals, they deny us half the merit or rather the originality of the invention, by ascribing the discovery to the Chinese, and calling our taste in gardening ‘le goût anglo-chinois.’

(Jacobson 1993: 151)

Moreover, Walpole links regular formal French gardens with the absolutism of the French despotic government, and the English landscape garden with the image of liberty in the British constitutional regime, and in ‘On Modern Gardening’ he asserts that ‘the English Taste in Gardening is thus the growth of the English Constitution’ (Bending 1994: 215–216). The English resistance to the dominance of the foreign is also manifested by Chambers’s attitude towards China: he does not completely agree with Chinese architectural concepts, even though he employs Chinese buildings as the subject of his representation. In his Designs of Chinese Buildings, Chambers endeavours to deny that he is a China-maniac:

I am far from desiring to be numbered among the exaggerators of Chinese excellence. . . . Though I am publishing a work of Chinese Architecture, let it not be suspected that my intention is to promote a taste so much inferior to the antique, and so very unfit for our climate: but . . . an architect should by no means be ignorant of so singular a style of building.

(Chambers 1757: Preface 1–2)

Murphy shares with Chambers this attitude towards China in The Orphan of China, which, though employing Chinese subject matter, criticizes Chinese political and social institutions. To distinguish itself from Boquet’s French Chinoiserie designs influenced by neoclassicism, Garrick’s production probably presented the more Romantic jardin anglo-chinois with graceful disorder. Thus, Garrick may be creating an English Chinoiserie style on the stage that can reflect changes in the contemporary English taste for Chinoiserie outside the theatre.

It also proves fruitful to compare Boquet’s costume design for Noverre’s ballet with the portrait by Tilly Kettle of Mrs. Yates as Mandane in The Orphan of China, exhibited in 1765 (Figure 4). Mrs. Yates performed the part of Mandane in Murphy’s play many times between 1759 and 1767. The actress was admired for her majestic manner and deportment, which Kettle’s ‘Grand Manner’, modelled on that of Reynolds, has captured in this portrait, to elevate the status of the actress as well as the theatrical role. This Chinese costume demonstrates significant deviation from the French Chinoiserie style that tends to have a tall feathery hairpiece or a wide pannier-skirt – all these are rarely seen on a Chinese, as indicated in the more faithful illustrations of the habits of the Chinese and Tartars in Du Halde’s General History of China (1736: II, 128–129), or the illustrations of Chinese ladies in William Chambers’s Designs of Chinese Buildings (1757: Fig. XX). This
suggests that Garrick intends the Chinese costumes in his production to be distinctively different from those in Noverre’s French production.

Whereas Noverre’s *The Chinese Festival* created an exotic China through a fanciful combination of neoclassical, Rococo and Chinese styles, Garrick desired to present more faithful Chinese setting and costumes to please the English audience by defying French Chinoiserie. It seems plausible to suggest that Garrick had bold intentions here to create an English Chinoiserie that would stand out against the previously dominant French Chinoiserie in Europe.

The Chinese costumes and settings used by Garrick, however, may look historically accurate for Garrick’s audience simply because they complied with audience expectation, influenced by contemporary English exoticism. In mid-eighteenth-century England, Chinoiserie decorations increasingly aspired to be ‘more Chinese’ than the Chinese arts, as Hugh Honour observes in *An Exhibition of Chinoiserie*:

> The best examples of Chinoiserie were made to answer European demands for something more bizarre than the Chinese could hope to supply, and they must therefore be judged not against Chinese objects in China or made for export to Europe, but as expressions of the Western idea of China.

(Honour 1965: 1)

The passion for Chinoiserie in artistic tastes extended from products of craftsmanship to architecture, gardening and the theatre, but most Chinoiserie scenes in these fields, derived from China as well as other parts of Asia such as India and Japan, were employed in a fanciful European exotic manner. A stage direction in Act V of the Elkanah Settle/Henry Purcell *The Fairy Queen* (1692) indicates the mentality of Chinoiserie artists in England:

> ...the Scene is sudainly Illuminated, and discovers a transparent Prospect of a Chinese Garden, the Architecture, the Trees, the Plants, the Fruit, the Birds, the Beasts, quite different from what we have in this part of the World.

(Settle 1692: 48–49)
The word ‘different’ is significant, indicating that the English theatre workers inferred the Chinese setting as ‘different’ from European ones. Until the early eighteenth century, China still gave the impression of being the ‘unknown.’ In the preface to his harlequinade The Fatal Vision (Lincoln’s Inn Fields, 1716), Aaron Hill declares: ‘our distance from, and dark ideas of, the Chinese Nation, and her borders, tempted me to fix my scene in so remote a location.’ Due to the emerging historical consciousness of period and local costumes of the Orient in the mid-eighteenth century, Garrick’s production of The Orphan of China is less fanciful than earlier works of Chinoiserie as it incorporated more of the accessible information about China, but the staging is still endowed with English imagination.

In addition to the earliest painting of Mrs. Yates in the role of the heroine Mandane by Tilly Kettle, later illustrations made of scenarios in The Orphan of China indicate Garrick’s attempt at more historically and culturally authentic costumes than French Chinoiserie designs. An engraving in the 1797 Bell’s edition of The Orphan of China shows a scene from Act V Scene i and quotes Mandane’s speech asking her husband to kill her: ‘Do thou but lodge it in this faithful breast,/My heart shall spring to meet thee’ (Figure 5). In this print, the roof is covered with Chinese armour (a helmet between two shields) and flags illustrated with dragons to represent the imperial palace, since in China the dragon is the emblem of Heaven and of emperors. Before a wall with a large circular window leading to a garden, Mandane is depicted giving Zamti a dagger. The roof above them looks like that of a pagoda, which is marked by upturned eaves, fretwork brackets and ornaments resembling bells (campanulae) suspended from the eaves. The roof also bears a resemblance to that of a ‘House of Confucius’, an octagonal structure of two storeys enriched with latticework and rooftop bells, illustrated in the catalogue of Kew prepared by Chambers in 1763. Mandane’s narrow sleeves do not conform to conventional Chinese costume of the period, for in ancient China women used wide and long sleeves to hide their hands and cover their faces to indicate modesty and chastity. Zamti wears the official uniform for the Qing mandarins, but Mandane’s plain and modest dress is a sharp contrast to Zamti’s rich.
official dress. This is probably to stress the audience expectation of a distressed mother in prison, as contrary to Zamti’s patriarchal status as a husband, father and loyal subject. Also, the colour white in China represents death and mourning for the dead, a Chinese cultural norm probably unknown to most of the eighteenth-century English playgoers. The costumes are of the typical style of the Qing Dynasty (1644–1911).

Another later illustration is found in an edition of Murphy’s tragedy printed as number 279 of Dicks’ Standard Plays (Figure 6). The drawing shows Mandane dead on a couch surrounded by many Chinese mandarins, officers all dressed in the Qing dynastic style. Under the picture is printed: ‘Zamti – And there, there lies Mandane,’ &c. – Act V, Scene i. As this illustration was made much later, in the late nineteenth century, it could only be said to suggest an audience’s or reader’s reaction to the play text rather than a tableau, a frozen moment of the performance in Garrick’s production. Yet, like the previous illustration printed in Bell’s British Theatre, this illustration also suggests that the costumes used in Garrick’s production were modelled in the style of the Qing Dynasty.

Although Garrick modelled the costumes in the style of the Qing Dynasty, Murphy’s Tartar king Timurkan is obviously an emperor of the Yüan Dynasty (1279–1368), and there is a gap of three hundred years
between these two dynasties during which costume styles changed significantly. Garrick may have made a mistake because of his ignorance of the different costumes in different Chinese dynasties. Yet historical accuracy was not as important as spectacle for the audience. Even if Garrick was aware of the difference, he still needed to comply with audience expectations at Drury Lane. The Qing costume must have imparted an impression of authentic Chineseness for the eighteenth-century English audience, for most of the Chinese costumes they had seen from contemporary travel literature or missionary accounts were those worn by contemporary Chinamen of the Qing Dynasty. Le Comte’s Nouveaux mémoires (1646) prints illustrations of ‘Mandarin chinois en habit de cérémonie’ and a Qing Emperor, and Du Halde’s Description of China (1736) prints portraits of Jesuit Father Schall von Bell and Father Adam Schall dressed in Qing mandarin scholar attires (Vol. 3, frontispiece). When a contemporary reviewer of Murphy’s play states that the scenery would have an Eastern traveler imagining himself in Peking (Anon 1759: 12), he is probably referring to Garrick’s staging that resembles illustrations in contemporary travel literature to cater for audience expectation of Chinese authenticity.

Between the staged Chinese subject and the English audience, therefore, there exists a gap attributable to the distinction between the relative objectivity of ‘historical and cultural accuracy’ and subjectivity of ‘audience expectation’. By ‘historical and cultural accuracy’, I refer to faithfulness to characteristics of the staged subject in its specific historical moment and cultural locale. By ‘audience expectation’, I point to the audience’s sense of actuality evoked by the stage or social stereotypes that are formed by existing theatrical conventions and prevalent cultural heritage. The degree of ‘authenticity’ on the stage may vary according to audience expectation. Since ‘authenticity’ is always a relative term, and since the theatre may not be seeking to be authentic and the audience may not wish it to be, I focus my argument more on the sign systems of ‘audience expectation’ of the Chinese than on the ‘authenticity’ of the representation of the Chinese. Although, as a Chinese researcher studying an adaptation of a play about China, I am surprised that the eighteenth-century London stage refused to adopt Chinese ‘historical authenticity’ when they had accurate information in the travel literature, and I realize that the rejection of Chinese ‘authenticity’ in Garrick’s Chinoiserie production of Murphy’s The Orphan of China illuminates crucial features of English nationalism, colonialism and Orientalism. Due to the colonial rivalry between England and France, Garrick’s English production represents China through an English frame of reference, and, with both fascination and fear, distances itself from Chineseness to preserve its own Englishness. This scenario is similar to that in the early twentieth century, when, ‘in spite of the age’s obsession with authenticity and verification of the oriental subject in situ, the denial of knowledge in theatrical representation came about because the Orient of popular culture was, in fact, England in fancy dress’ (Singleton 2004: 2).
In the case of Garrick’s production, therefore, the gap between Chinese and English stage symbolism is less a result of cross-cultural (crossing the staged Chinese subjects and English audiences) misunderstanding than a required ‘misrepresentation’, conditioned by English theatrical necessity to comply with the cultural background of the audience that dominates the signification of stage symbols. By ‘signification’ I refer to the contextualizing process through which theatre-makers constitute plots, actions and staging in coherent ways so that the audience may derive meaningful messages from the performance infrastructure to which they are exposed. The theatre-makers develop the performance by following, and sometimes inventing, social customs or theatrical conventions, and both theatre workers and the audience must share this contextualizing process so that they can communicate through the bilateral interaction between the play and the audience. Yet problems arise when encountering a cross-cultural performance. In order to communicate with his audience, Garrick chose to follow the existing conventions to comply with ‘audience expectation’, rather than to change the conventions to establish the ‘historical and cultural authenticity’ of the staged subject.

In effect, the epilogue to The Orphan of China points out the limitation of the English presentation of the Chinese subject. It refers to Chinese women’s physical characteristics of ‘broad foreheads and pigs eyes’ to demonstrate that Chinese women are born with a less beautiful appearance than that of English women. The reference to women’s bound feet and domestic confinement indicates that Chinese women are not as well treated by their men as English women are. The essential differences between women of these two nations, as Yang Chi-ming rightly observes, conveys the limit of any English performance of Chineseness, though not necessarily of the ‘abject Eastern body’ (Yang 2002: 331). The fundamental physical distinctions between the staged Chinese characters and the English performers visibly impede a faithful theatrical presentation. However ‘authentically’ Chinese the representation of Chinese costumes and settings on the London stage may appear to be, the audience is aware that the actors are not Chinese. Without theatrical imagination, or ‘suspension of disbelief’ on the part of the theatre-going public, the European performance of the exotic is inevitably limited in its attempt at ‘authenticity’.

Though eighteenth-century scholars had more accurate understanding of Chinese costumes, architecture and decorations than before, the theatre more often than not declined to adopt them. For instance, Johan Nieuhof, Louis Le Comte and Du Halde had already printed illustrations of accurate costumes of a Tartar emperor, but in 1790 Mr. Benson as Timurkan in Murphy’s The Orphan of China was still wearing a Turkish costume. There are four possible explanations. First, the audience expected to see stereotypes of earlier European images of China, as the fanciful stereotypes were still influential on the eighteenth-century stage. Second, for economic reasons, the theatre saved costs by using costumes already made for other oriental characters. Third, the performers refused
to wear more authentic Chinese costumes and preferred mildly exotic costumes.

A fourth reason is the most plausible and significant one: some of Murphy’s contemporaries’ concern for the social and sexual degradations instigated by the Chinese craze. In his review of *The Orphan of China*, Goldsmith condemns Chinoiserie as ‘whimsies’ (Goldsmith 1759: 434). As oriental luxuries were often associated with the colonial new riches, they were despised by the Britons who based class distinctions on taste in classical arts. The third Earl of Shaftesbury attributes the decline of the manly style of classicism to the licentious effeminate influence of the extravagant sexuality in Chinoiserie (Cooper 1710). These warnings are hinted at in the epilogue to *The Orphan of China*. When Mrs. Yates refers to Chinese ‘taste and fashions,’ she is pretending to have a conversation with a Lady Fidget, who is more likely to be a dramatic persona than a real person in the female audience.

O Lord! That’s charming—cries my Lady Fidget,
I long to know it—Do the creatures visit?
Dear Mrs. Yates, do, tell us—Well, how is it?

(Cooper 1710: 13–17)

In Wycherley’s *The Country Wife* (1675), in which ‘Enter Lady Fidget with a piece of china in her hand, and Horner following’ (Act IV), the piece of china functions as an erotic metaphor for sexual transgression, pointing to the financial repercussions of female indulgence and the unmannning effect of the Chinoiserie craze.2 The spread of the luxurious taste represented by Chinoiserie not only weakened the patriarchal hierarchy among man and woman, but also flattened the artistic distinction between high arts and popular taste, subverted the social distinctions between aristocratic and merchant wealth, and therefore threatened to undermine existing aesthetic, social and political hierarchy (Porter 2001: 167–191). These concerns partially explain why Murphy and Garrick gave up Chinese ‘authenticity’ and resorted to anglicizing *The Orphan of China* at several points, such as Zamti’s objection to Mandane’s suicide.

Similarly, a contemporary critic warns about the Chinese vogue and sarcastically remarks:

The Chinese taste, which has already taken possession of our gardens, our buildings and our furniture, will also soon find its way into our churches: and how elegant must a monument appear, which is erected in the Chinese Taste, and embellished with dragons, bells, pagods and Mandarins!

(The Connoisseur, 73, 19 June 1755)

This is perhaps why, in Act III of *The Orphan of China*, Murphy makes an English churchyard find its way into the Chinese scene of tombs in a temple. At the end of Act I, Zamti mentions that he will plot with his
conspirators in the cloisters of a temple, where the royal tombs are. He tells the Prince:

In the dim holy cloisters of yon temple
Thou’lt find them musing – near Osmingti’s tomb
I charge they all convene . . .

(Zamti: I, 356–358)

This scenery does not appear on the stage until Act III of the play, in which the scene is set according to the stage direction in the text, in ‘a temple’ with ‘several tombs up and down the stage’. Zamti’s friend Morat gives a vivid description of the scenery:

This is the place – these the long winding aisles,
The solemn arches, whose religious awe
Attunes the mind to melancholy musing,
Such as befits free men reduc’d to slaves.

(Morat: III, 1–4)

This scenic direction indicates that the setting combines oriental remoteness and Gothic terror. Unlike the English churchyard graves, ancient Chinese tombs were usually located in the wilderness, more likely on a mountain or near a river, but rarely inside a temple. Even when royal tombs were located in a mausoleum they were in the basement of a palace-like building, rather than in a temple. Murphy follows the English convention by depicting the Chinese Emperors’ tombs as being within the cloisters of a temple (probably to accentuate the religious significance of the rebellious conspiracy to preserve the line of the royal ancestry). It is unlikely that this pseudo-Chinese stage setting results from Murphy’s lack of knowledge about Chinese customs, for Murphy indicates in his 1759 letter to Voltaire that he had read Du Halde’s Description de la Chine, which gives detailed descriptions of Chinese social customs and architecture. Thus, Murphy does not present a convincing Chinese set because he intends to differentiate the play from theatrical products totally influenced by foreign fashions.

My argument may have given the impression that I regard Garrick as an artist, a politician or a historian in his representation of the Orient. Yet, I am well aware that whatever Garrick’s artistic or political motivations were in seizing on the popularity of Chinoiserie, he was after all a businessman, an actor-manager who made a living for himself and for all the theatre workers under his management by pleasing his patrons, the audience. Although in general Garrick tried to rescue drama from ‘the degradation of merely commercial entertainment’, to establish ‘theatre for the sake of sense against theatre for the sake of pence’ (Shepherd and Womack 1996: 193), nevertheless when he reused the Chinoiserie scenery to save production costs, or when he altered the French Chinoiserie costumes and
staging details, he would have been less motivated by his own political or aesthetic ethics than by economic necessities and audience taste. Though eighteenth-century theatrical taste and dramatic criticism were diverse, the theatre-makers were concerned with the artistic power of plays as a gainful occupation, and therefore the power of the plays must register on the audience. One of Garrick’s manuscripts reveals the thoughts of a sensitive manager for the artistic perfection of his profession: ‘When the taste of the public is right the Managers and Actors must follow it or starve’ (Stone 1960: xxiv). Garrick’s obligation was inevitably to appeal to the audience inclination in political and artistic trends, and this is why in this paper I am exploring the reasons for Garrick’s use of the Chinoiserie vogue from an audience-orientated perspective.

Eighteenth-century theatre demanded the provision of spectacular display to attract audience attention, especially to a new play like The Orphan of China. Garrick’s audience was attentive to the competition for extravagant productions between the two patent theatres, Drury Lane and Covent Garden, on whose playbills the words ‘New Scenes’ appeared with increasing frequency. Shortly before The Orphan of China was staged, Garrick’s revival of Antony and Cleopatra, though unsuccessful, was given ‘New Habits, Scenes, and Decorations’. The Orphan of China had ‘Scenes, Habits, and Decorations entirely New’, and Murphy’s next two plays, The Desert Island and The Way to Keep Him (both first performed on the night of 24 January 1760) were adorned with ‘new Scenes, Cloaths, and other Decorations’. Yet, among all these emphases on theatrical spectacle, what makes the ‘New Scenes’ in The Orphan of China stand out against other productions is, as I have argued, the fact that Garrick’s Chinoiserie production was intended to compete, not only with the rival patent theatre in London for commercial profits, but also with its French counterparts in Paris for a nationalistic triumph that may also lead to commercial profit due to the patriotic mood of the London audience in quest of English national identity and social stability.

Works cited
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