The Reception of Chinese Gardens in 18th Century England and Germany

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LECTURE

My talk argues that Chinese structures in German and English gardens, including the prominent Chinese pagoda in Munich’s English Garden or the one in the Royal Gardens at Kew near London, are symbols of European monarchism in the Age of Enlightenment. Drawing the visual materials the Jesuits brought back from the Qing court in Beijing to Europe, William Chambers, the royal architect to George III, integrates the Chinese and the Gothic styles of architecture to evoke a sense of awe and sublimity. The German garden theorist Christian Cay Lorenz Hirschfeld and the writer and philosopher Friedrich Schiller, however, are highly critical of this “Chinese” style and its rising popularity in German princes’ gardens. I interpret their critique as their disdain for monarchism and their support for political liberalism.

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