

# A Prospect of China in Eighteenth-Century France: The Pagoda at Chanteloup

In September 1775, shortly after his exile from the French court had been rescinded, Étienne-François de Stainville, duc de Choiseul, initiated the construction of a seven-story, forty-four-meter-tall stone pagoda on his property at Chanteloup, some one hundred and forty miles from Paris (fig. 1).<sup>1</sup> When the pagoda was completed in 1778, it became the focal point—one recent commentator has called it the “great exclamation point”—of the expansive estate to which Choiseul, once the most powerful minister in France, was banished by King Louis XV in December 1770.<sup>2</sup> Both the pagoda’s scale and its location testify to its symbolic importance. Situated on axis with the estate’s entrance gates and on the principle vista of

the grand salon of Choiseul’s chateau to its north, and at the edge of a semi-circular lake at the convergence of several avenues to its south, the pagoda was visible from almost anywhere on the property (fig. 2). As Choiseul’s wife explained in 1778, this tower was no mere garden ornament. It was rather a monument to those who defied the court and supported the couple during the period of Choiseul’s official disgrace: “Why such a superb edifice to decorate a garden? Indeed, to construct a building at a cost of 40,000 *écus* [an astronomical sum at the time] with no other purpose than to decorate a garden would be madness. I want it understood that it is a monument to friendship.”<sup>3</sup> This aim was made explicit in Choiseul’s decision to carve the names of his supporters on five large marble panels attached to the walls of the pagoda’s main floor.<sup>4</sup> Other commentators were unequivocal about the political meanings of this monument, with one, the comte de Ségur, referring to it as a “column of opposition.”<sup>5</sup> In this view, the pagoda represented, in material form, the extraordinary status of Chanteloup as a kind of court in exile and a center of political resistance.<sup>6</sup> Around two hundred aristocratic

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1. Though it is frequently mentioned in garden histories and studies of chinoiserie, the pagoda has not been the subject of sustained analysis. The most extensive treatments are Monique Mosser, “Les jardins de Chanteloup,” in *Chanteloup un moment de grâce autour du duc de Choiseul*, ed. Véronique Moreau (Tours: Musée des Beaux-Arts, 2007), 69–83; Barbara Abbs, “The Gardens of the Chateau of Chanteloup,” *Garden History* 21 (Summer 1993): 121–26. When the architects Louis Tullius Joachim Visconti and Léon Dufourny visited Chanteloup in 1800, they wrote that the pagoda was begun in 1773, but this is a mistaken paraphrase of the

marble panel, since removed or turned to the wall (see footnote 4), inscribed with the dates of construction and the architect’s name. “Voyage de Paris à Richelieu, fait par Dufourny et Visconti, en l’année 1800,” (Paris: Bibliothèque nationale de France), Ms Fr 13564, f. 26v. In an earlier transcription of the panel, Louis Dutens recorded a start date of September 1775, which was confirmed by other sources. Louis Dutens, *Oeuvres mêlées de M. L. Dutens* (Geneva: Bonnant, 1784), 357.

2. Bernd H. Dams and Andrew Zega, *Pleasure Pavilions and Follies of the Ancien Régime* (Paris and New York: Flammarion, 1995), 152. Choiseul had been exiled to his estate and forbidden to leave it by Louis XV on Christmas Eve in 1770. At the time of his disgrace, Choiseul was the secretary of state for war and for foreign affairs. With the death of the king in May 1774 came Choiseul’s return to court, though not the return to power for which he had hoped.

3. Duchesse de Choiseul to Mme du Deffand, July 22, 1778, in *Correspondance complète de Mme du Deffand avec la duchesse de Choiseul, l’abbé Barthélemy et M. Craufurt*, ed. M. le Mis. de Sainte-Aulaire (Paris: Calmann Lévy, 1877), 324.

4. Period accounts indicate that during the revolution these panels were turned toward the wall and fastened into place. Thomas Thornton, *A Sporting Tour through Various*

*Parts of France, in the Year 1802: Including a Concise Description of the Sporting Establishments, Mode of Hunting, and Other Field-Amusements, as Practised in That Country* (London: Longman, Hurst, Rees, and Orme, 1806), 25; R. Édouard André, “Documents inédits sur l’histoire du château et des jardins de Chanteloup,” *Bulletin de la société de l’histoire de l’art Français* (1935): 38. The main floor of the pagoda was its second floor.

5. Louis-Philippe de Ségur, *Mémoires ou souvenirs et anecdotes* (Paris: Alexis Eymery, 1824–26), 20–21. Choiseul’s critics interpreted the pagoda differently. Charles-Maurice de Talleyrand (writing in 1811–1816), referred to it as a pyramid to Choiseul’s vanity. Charles-Maurice de Talleyrand-Périgord, *Mémoires du prince de Talleyrand*, ed. Albert de Broglie (Paris: Calmann Lévy, 1891–92), 5: 588.

6. Julian Swann, *Exile, Imprisonment, or Death: The Politics of Disgrace in Bourbon France, 1610–1789* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2017), 163–64, 431–32; Antoine Lilti, *The World of the Salons* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2015), 200–204; T.C.W. Blanning, *The Culture of Power and the Power of Culture: Old Regime Europe 1660–1789* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002), 400.

supporters traveled to Chanteloup during Choiseul's period of disgrace. In doing so, they directly contravened the king, signaling not only their loyalty to Choiseul but also their opposition to the monarch. The comte de Ségur, no friend of the king, rejoiced to see his and his father's names inscribed on the walls of Choiseul's pagoda.

Given the monument's political significance, it is striking that Choiseul chose the form of a Chinese tower. Indeed, it may seem a surprising choice, as scholars have tended to associate orientalizing garden "follies" with fashionable superficiality. By this logic, Choiseul's monument would seem instead to demand a more classical type, such as those adopted for other late eighteenth-century garden structures dedicated to friendship.<sup>7</sup> More surprising still is the deliberate fusion of Chinese and Greco-Roman architectural forms in Choiseul's pagoda. The upper five octagonal levels, unmistakably Chinese in profile, are supported by two round classical stories: the domed peristyle of sixteen baseless Doric columns on the ground floor and the second encircled by pilasters. The pagoda thus merges both Chinese and Greco-Roman precedents, two models for building that conventional histories of eighteenth-century European architecture have posited as irreconcilable. Choiseul's pagoda invites us to rethink this neat opposition. It suggests that, in the seventeen-seventies, these two traditions were not yet established as mutually exclusive, and it gestures to the overlooked comparative dimensions of engagements with antiquity, both Greco-Roman and Chinese, in an age of an expanding global consciousness.

Choiseul's "column of opposition" also invites consideration of the political resonances

of references to China in eighteenth-century France. In English gardens at the time, such as Stowe, an important and well-known precedent for the Anglo-Chinese garden in France, an oppositional patriot politics was embedded in the poetics of the garden and its buildings.<sup>8</sup> A similar politics may well have motivated Choiseul, who was understood by his contemporaries to have embraced aristocratic constitutionalism, a system in which the nobility would have a permanent constitutional role and would serve as a check on absolutism. Choiseul's choice of a pagoda form and its interpretation by his contemporaries as a monument of opposition is suggestive of how images of China were mobilized in this reimagining of the French political order. This reimagining, as materialized in the garden, came not only by way of China but also of England. In the writings of English politicians, such as Lord Bolingbroke, who notably resided at Chanteloup in 1735–36, and his French colleagues, China was understood to be the best governed of nations, and they admired it for its moral exemplarity, its stability, and its meritocratic systems. These ideas found their way into English garden design, and, it would seem, into the garden at Chanteloup.

Designed by Louis-Denis Le Camus, Choiseul's personal architect, the pagoda's tower form conjured one of China's most impressive structures, the Porcelain Pagoda in Nanjing.<sup>9</sup> Known as the Porcelain Pagoda because of the colorful ceramic tiles that ornamented its exterior, the nine-story tower was not only one of the best-documented, and thus most familiar, Chinese buildings in eighteenth-century Europe, it was also a particularly fitting model for a monument of requital. As European readers at the time

7. The temples of friendship at Laeken and Pavlovsk, designed by Charles de Wailly and Charles Cameron respectively, for example, took the form of classical rotundas. Both were built in the seventeen-eighties. On the complex allusions of gardens and their structures, which were called "fabriques" rather than follies in eighteenth-century France, see Monique Mosser, "Les architectures paradoxales ou petit traité des fabriques," in *Histoire des jardins de la Renaissance à nos jours*, ed. Monique

Mosser and Georges Teyssot (Paris: Flammarion, 1991), 259–76; Mosser, "L'art de la citation: le jardin de l'époque des Lumières, entre hétérotopie et hypertopie," in *Le jardin planétaire*, ed. Claude Eveno and Gilles Clément (La Tour d'Aigues: Aube, 1999), 15–33; and Jurgis Baltrušaitis, "Gardens and Lands of Illusion," in *Aberrations: An Essay on the Legend of Forms*, trans. Richard Miller (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1989), 137–81.  
8. See Robert Batchelor's analysis, "Concealing the Bounds: Imagining the

British Nation through China," in *The Global Eighteenth Century*, ed. Felicity A. Nussbaum (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2003), 79–92.  
9. Le Camus styled himself Le Camus de Choiseul to distinguish himself from his more well-known fellow architect Nicolas Le Camus de Mézières. See Michel Gallet, *Les architectes parisiens du XVIIIe siècle: dictionnaire biographique et critique* (Paris: Mengès, 1995), 289.

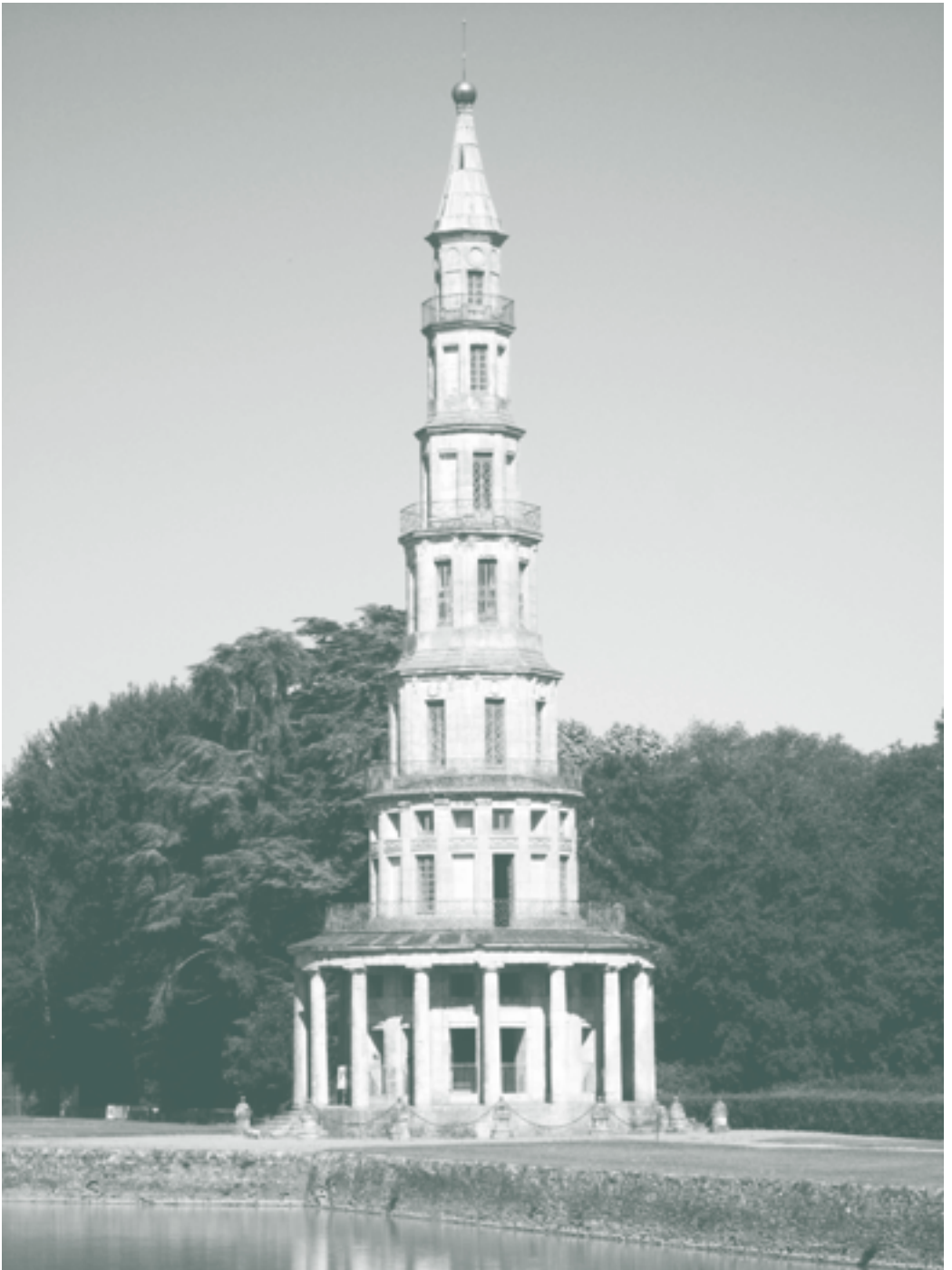


fig. 1 The pagoda at Chanteloup.  
Photograph by author.

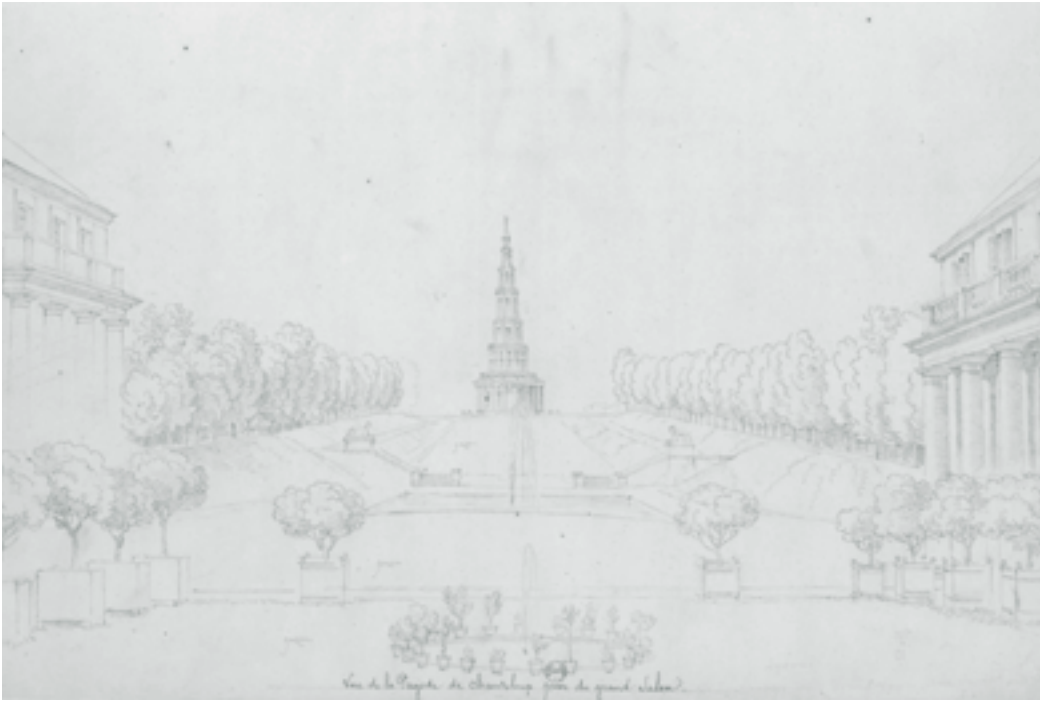


fig. 2 View of the pagoda at Chanteloup from the grand salon of the chateau, ca. 1810. Sketch by an anonymous artist. Réserve Ve 26(K) fol, p. 157, Prints and Photographs Department, Bibliothèque nationale de France.

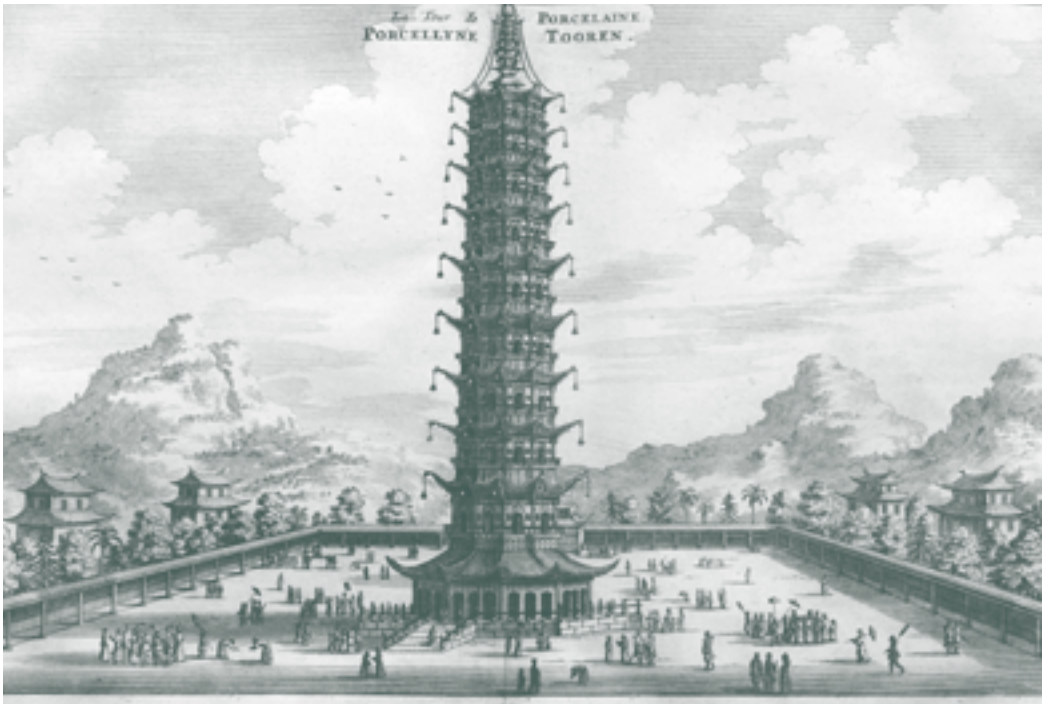


fig. 3 Sketch of the Porcelain Pagoda in Johan Nieuhof, *Het Gezantschap der Neerlandische Oost-Indische Compagnie aan den grooten Tartarischen Cham* (Amsterdam: Jacob van Meurs, 1665).

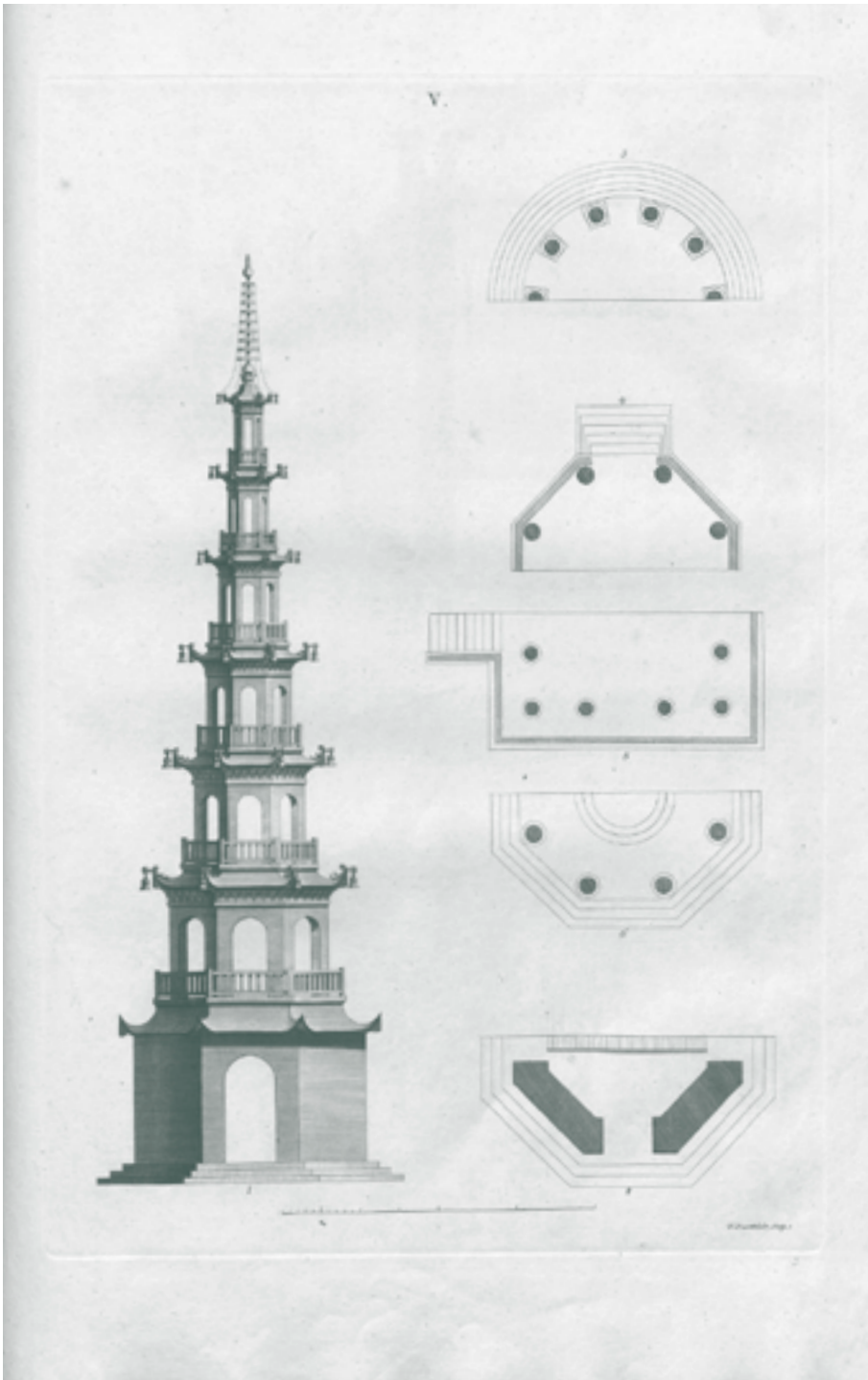


fig. 4 Sketch of a *taa* (tower) in Canton in William Chambers, *Designs of Chinese Buildings, Furniture, Dresses, Machines and Utensils* (London, 1757), plate 5.

were aware, the tower in Nanjing was the centerpiece of a temple complex, “which the Chinese call the temple of gratitude,” whose construction was begun by the Yongle Emperor (ruled 1403–24) outside the then imperial capital. The source of this identification for European readers was the Jesuit Louis-Daniel Le Comte’s *Nouveaux mémoires sur l’état présent de la Chine* (Recent memoirs on the present state of China, 1696), whose detailed description of the tower became the authoritative written source.<sup>10</sup> As one of a number of French Jesuits permitted to live at the imperial court in Beijing, Le Comte had traveled to various regions in China, and his eyewitness account of the Nanjing tower was excerpted in books such as Jean-Baptiste du Halde’s widely consulted, four-volume *Description géographique, historique [...] de l’empire de la Chine* (A geographical, historical ... description of the empire of China, 1735), and in Denis Diderot and Jean d’Alembert’s *Encyclopédie*, where the porcelain pagoda merited its own entry. Both of the latter texts repeated Le Comte’s praise for the tower as “without doubt, the most accomplished, the most solid, and the most magnificent structure there is in the East.”<sup>11</sup> A much shorter but equally glowing *éloge* was published earlier by Johan Nieuhof, a steward to the Dutch Embassy to Beijing in 1655–57. The illustrated account of his travels was published in his native language in 1665 and translated into French later that same year. German, Latin, and English editions soon followed. For Nieuhof, the tower in Nanjing “surpassed all

the works so lauded by our ancients.” He accompanied his text with a double-page engraving of the tower that became the definitive image of the Porcelain Pagoda in Europe (fig. 3).<sup>12</sup> Reprinted in such lavish publications as Fischer von Erlach’s *Entwurf einer historischen Architektur* (A Plan of Civil and Historical Architecture, 1721), in the elaborate frontispiece to *Céramonies et coutumes religieuses de tous les peuples du monde* (The ceremonies and religious customs of all the peoples of the world, 1723–27), Bernard Picart’s monumental work of comparative religion, as well as on printed European textiles and in perspective views for peep-show boxes, the image of the tower became one of the most widely circulated signifiers of China in the eighteenth century.

If the Nanjing tower was one inspiration for the pagoda at Chanteloup, the tapering form of the French structure suggests another Chinese precedent: a *taa* (tower) in Canton depicted by the English architect William Chambers in his *Designs of Chinese Buildings, Furniture, Dresses, Machines and Utensils [...]* from the originals drawn in China by Mr. Chambers, Architect (1757) (fig. 4).<sup>13</sup> Though poorly received in England, continental Europeans embraced Chambers’s book, as well as his subsequent publication *A Dissertation on Oriental Gardening* (1772), a reception he facilitated by simultaneously publishing French editions of both.<sup>14</sup> Chambers also famously authored his own repeat of a Chinese tower in the ten-story brick pagoda he designed and built in Kew Gardens outside London in 1762

10. Louis-Daniel Le Comte, *Nouveaux mémoires sur l’état présent de la Chine*, 3rd edition (Paris 1697–98), 135. The name of the temple complex, the Da Bao’ensi, is variously translated as Great Temple of Requit or Repaid Gratitude. Destroyed during the Taiping Rebellion in 1854, the Porcelain Pagoda was recently reconstructed in Nanjing and opened to the public in December 2015.

11. “Assurément l’ouvrage le mieux entendu, le plus solide & le plus magnifique qui soit dans l’Orient.” Lecomte, *Nouveaux mémoires*, 139; Jean-Baptiste du Halde, *Description géographique, historique, chronologique, politique et physique de l’Empire de la Chine et de la Tartarie chinoise* (Paris: Le Mercier, 1735), 95; *Encyclopédie ou dictionnaire raisonné des sciences, des arts et des métiers* (Paris, 1751–72), 461, s.v. “Tour de porcelaine.”

12. “La tour de porcelaine qui surpasse en netteté, en gentillesse, en diaprure, en émailleure, & en richesses tous les ouvrages tant vantés par nos anciens.” Johan Nieuhof, *L’Ambassade de la Compagnie orientale des Provinces unies vers l’empereur de la Chine ou grand cam de Tartarie*, trans. Jean Le Carpentier (Leiden: J. de Meurs, 1665), 138.

13. *Designs of Chinese Buildings, Furniture, Dresses, Machines and Utensils, Engraved by the Best Hands, from the Originals Drawn in China by Mr. Chambers, Architect ... To Which is Annexed a Description of their Temples, Houses, Gardens &c.* (London: Published for the author, 1757). Choiseul’s tower has frequently been compared to Chambers’s pagoda at Kew, but the resemblance to the Canton tower, though much closer in form, has been less frequently discussed. An exception is

Eleanor von Erdberg, *Chinese Influence on European Garden Structures* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1936), 118.

14. On the continental reception of Chambers’s book, see the introduction by Janine Barrier, Monique Mosser, and Che Bing Chiu to William Chambers, *Aux jardins de Cathay: l’imaginaire anglo-chinois en Occident* (Besançon: Editions de l’imprimeur, 2004), 9–129; and the essays in *Sir William Chambers and der englische-chinesische Garten in Europa*, ed. Thomas Weiss (Stuttgart: G. Hatje, 1996).

15. William Chambers, *Plans, Elevations, Sections, and Perspective Views of the Gardens and Buildings at Kew, including the Palace, the Great Pagoda, the Mosque, the Gothic Cathedral, the Temples and the Water Engine, the Designs mostly by the Architect, and Author of the Volume* (London: J. Haberkorn, 1763).

and published in 1763.<sup>15</sup> He twice traveled to Canton (present-day Guangzhou), first in 1743–44 and then in 1748–49, during his service in the Swedish East India Company. While there, Chambers studied the port city’s architecture, and his drawings became the source material for his *Designs of Chinese Buildings*. His stated goal in publishing them was to furnish Europeans with an accurate description of Chinese architecture, and the presumed authenticity of his account was a primary source of the book’s attraction.<sup>16</sup> Chambers’s text was untainted by the confessional biases of Jesuit writers, and the architect’s claims were substantiated by the visual evidence of precise drawings, which were presumably done on site.

In his design for Chanteloup, Le Camus merged textual and visual descriptions of the Nanjing and Canton prototypes, following these precedents closely in some respects, while altering them in others. Adopting the seven floors of the Canton tower rather than the nine in Nanjing, Choiseul’s pagoda afforded a commanding view of the duc’s property to those visitors who climbed the narrowing interior staircase to the top of the structure. Period drawings of the pagoda show that Le Camus emulated both the Nanjing and Canton towers by crowning the ground level rotunda with an overhanging roof of upturned curves and by hanging bells from the eaves of the upper six levels (fig. 5). Both features were removed in the nineteenth century, giving the pagoda its current stark appearance. On the upper levels of the pagoda, Le Camus replaced the prominent projecting bracketed rooflines of the Chinese examples with four iron fretwork railings, which echoed Chambers’s plate of the Canton tower and his description of a “narrow gallery [on each story] enclosed by a rail or balustrade” (fig. 4).<sup>17</sup> Perhaps the

most significant divergence from the Chinese models was the decision to use cut stone. This choice of material for a narrow, tapering building demanded significant technical expertise and helps to account for the enormous expense of the Chanteloup pagoda. It also conferred a solidity and austerity on Choiseul’s tower that closely resembled Chambers’s illustration of the *taa*. Chambers is vague on the material from which the Canton tower was constructed, but his accompanying image strongly suggests stone. Le Camus additionally displaced the staircase from the center of the structure as described in his sources on Chinese architecture. Instead, the staircase was supported solely by the exterior walls, and it daringly pierced the successive European domed ceilings as it ascended. Le Camus’s other modifications included his substitution of square openings for the arched ones of the Chinese examples. He also topped the pagoda with a golden ball, as was described by Nieuhof and Le Comte, but he replaced the openwork structure of mast and disks at the summit of the Nanjing and Canon towers, opting instead for a thin pyramidal form. This pyramidal apex, along with the regularly diminishing proportions of the upper levels, led to comparisons of the tower with ancient obelisks, stone monuments whose commemorative functions were analogous to those of the pagoda at Chanteloup. Jean-Jacques Barthélemy, a prominent antiquarian and intimate of the Choiseuls, referred to the pagoda as an “obelisk in form,” and Jean-Nicolas Dufort de Cheverny, another of Choiseul’s supporters, described it as “a kind of Chinese obelisk.”<sup>18</sup>

In a sense, the pagoda condensed three separate garden structures—a pagoda, an obelisk, and a classical rotunda—into one. This implicit comparison between Chinese,

16. Though his contemporaries appreciated *Designs of Chinese Buildings* as an eyewitness account, the degree to which his book was based on his first hand experience may have been overstated. See Stacey Sloboda, *Chinoiserie: Commerce and Critical Ornament in Eighteenth-Century Britain* (Manchester, UK: Manchester University Press, 2014), 192–93.

17. Chambers, *Designs of Chinese Buildings*, 6.

18. Jean-Jacques Barthélemy to Mme du Deffand, Chanteloup, July 30, 1778, *Correspondance complète*, 328; Jean-Nicolas Dufort de Cheverny, *Mémoires sur les règnes de Louis XV et Louis XVI et sur la Révolution*, ed. Robert de Crèvecoeur (Paris: E. Plon, Nourrit et Cie, 1886), 417.

19. Anthony Pagden, “The Immobility of China: Orientalism and Occidentalism in the Enlightenment,” in *Anthropology and*

*the Enlightenment*, ed. Larry Wolff and Marco Cipolloni (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2007), 50–64.

20. Chambers, *Designs of Chinese Buildings*, preface, n.p.

21. Chambers continued the passage by comparing Chinese and ancient wall construction: “as the Chinese manner of walling is upon the same principle with the *revinctum* and the *emplecton* described by



Egyptian, and Greco-Roman building types echoed the visual and textual comparisons between Chinese and Greco-Roman buildings that pervaded Chambers's *Designs*. Though the architect was in no doubt about the ultimate superiority of the ancient Greeks and Romans in architecture, he was intrigued by the similarities he detected between Chinese building practices and the traditions in which he was trained. For him, these were similarities worth investigating. Chambers began by rehearsing the familiar European understanding of China as unchanging, a state understood by its admirers as exemplifying an admirable stability, or as a fatal immobility by its detractors.<sup>19</sup> The advantage of China's continuation of tradition "without change for thousands of years" was that it allowed access to ancient Chinese architecture.<sup>20</sup> For Chambers, the latter's similarities with the architecture of classical antiquity were striking: "There is a remarkable affinity between it [Chinese architecture] and that of the antients [*sic*], which is the more surprising as there is not the least probability that the one was borrowed from the other." He then explained these affinities through comparisons of form, plan, and ornament: "In both the antique and Chinese architecture the general form of almost every composition has a tendency to the pyramidal figure: in both, columns are employed for support; and in both, these columns have diminution and bases, some of which bear a near resemblance to each other." He further pointed out the similarities between Greco-Roman and Chinese fretwork, as well as correspondences in floor plans between Greek and Chinese temples: "the Chinese *ting* [pavilion] is not much different from that in the *peripteros* of the Greeks; the atrium and the *monopteros* and *prostyle* temples are forms of building that nearly resemble some

used in China."<sup>21</sup> In his accompanying plates, Chambers performs similar kinds of analyses, applying the same sobriety in representation to them that he had to his studies of European building traditions. In plate twelve of *Designs*, he presents Chinese columns as if they were classical orders using the same format as for the illustrations in his subsequent *Treatise on Civil Architecture* (1759).<sup>22</sup> In his plate of the *taa*, Chambers showed the floor plan of a round *ting* with its ten columns that, in his view, was the "same as that of the *monopteros* temple" and very like the ground floor peristyle at Chanteloup, though without the latter's interior wall.<sup>23</sup> Echoing Chambers's descriptions of the use of similar ornaments by the Chinese and "the antients," Le Camus deployed a scroll motif, akin to both Vitruvian and Chinese scroll borders, above the openings on the ground floor and included carved fretwork on the exterior of the floor above that recalled both Greek and Chinese meanders. Le Camus also visually correlated the gold ball at the top of the pagoda with the blind oculi in the story immediately below and the classical wreaths of the third floor.

The most striking ornaments on the Chanteloup pagoda are also the most unexpected. These are the legible Chinese characters inscribed on the panels above all the openings on the ground floor and the cosmological symbols from the ancient divination text, the *Yijing* (Classic of Changes), carved into the lower exterior walls of the pagoda's sixth story (figs. 6, 7). The alternating characters on the ground floor signify friendship and gratitude. Chambers's *Designs* may have furnished an example for their placement—plate two of his book depicts tablets with Chinese characters positioned over all of the rectangular, ground floor openings of a *ting*—but Chambers's characters are illegible. It required some effort

Vitruvius." Chambers, *Designs of Chinese Buildings*, preface, n.p.; Chambers's comments on the affinities between Chinese and ancient architecture would be repeated by such French architectural theorists as Pierre Patte. See his *Mémoires sur les objets les plus importants* (*sic*) *de l'architecture* (1769), 76, n.a.

22. Richard Strassberg, "War and Peace: Four Intercultural Landscapes," in *China on*

*Paper: European and Chinese Works from the Late Sixteenth to the Early Nineteenth Century*, ed. Marcia Reed and Paola Demattè (Los Angeles: Getty Research Institute, 2007), 125. On Chambers's engagements with both Chinese and Roman architecture, see also David Porter, *The Chinese Taste in Eighteenth-Century England* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2010), 37–54.

23. What we know about the seating furniture inside the pagoda suggests it too was based on plates in Chambers's *Designs*. Thibault Wolvesperges, "Choiseul, Chanteloup et la Chine. Réflexions sur l'évolution de la chinoiserie sous Louis XVI: l'anglo-chinoiserie," in *Chanteloup: un moment de grâce*, 286–88.



fig. 5 *Above*, View of the pagoda at Chanteloup, 1787. Sketch by an anonymous artist. Thierry André Collection.

fig. 6 *Below*, Chinese characters on the pagoda at Chanteloup. Photograph by author.



fig. 7 *Above*, Trigrams on the pagoda at Chanteloup.  
Photograph by author.



fig. 8 *Below*, Louis Nicolas van Blarenberghe, *The Pagoda at Chanteloup*, ca. 1776. Gouache on paper, 20 × 35 cm. Musée du Louvre, Paris, RF 36721. Photograph by Daniel Arnaudet and Christian Jean. © RMN-Grand Palais/Art Resource, NY.

in eighteenth-century France to secure the degree of veracity achieved at Chanteloup, as there were few individuals in eighteenth-century France who could reliably interpret Chinese characters. The accuracy of the characters inscribed on the pagoda was clearly a point of pride for Choiseul; in a gouache painting of the pagoda commissioned before its completion from Louis Nicolas van Blarenbergh, the duc's preferred miniaturist, the Chinese characters are visible and legible on the pagoda itself and are doubled by their fictional placement on stone slabs in the foreground of the scene (fig. 8).<sup>24</sup>

More unusual still, and to my knowledge unprecedented in eighteenth-century European design, is the inclusion of the eight trigrams of the *Yijing*, a text understood in eighteenth-century Europe to be the most ancient of the Chinese classics.<sup>25</sup> Originally, the trigrams incised on the pagoda were painted red and would thus have been more immediately visible than they are today.<sup>26</sup> The *Yijing* described a cosmological system founded on symbols comprised of three horizontal broken and unbroken lines. These combinations of *yin*, represented by the broken lines, and *yan* by the unbroken, formed abstract patterns through which the dynamism of the universe was described and could be understood. At Chanteloup, the trigrams were further correlated, as they were in the *Yijing*, with the eight principal winds—east, northeast, north and so on (fig. 9). The French names for the winds were inscribed on eight corresponding tablets on the exterior of the fourth story. Positioned immediately above the wreaths, the tablets are still in situ but are now worn

and hard to decipher.<sup>27</sup> With this inscription of the winds on its octagonal upper story, the pagoda gestures not only to the *Yijing* but also to the ancient Greek Tower of the Winds, an octagonal structure in Athens ornamented with relief sculptures of the eight principal winds and much discussed by eighteenth-century antiquarians and architects.<sup>28</sup>

These details suggest a quest for authenticity that paralleled contemporary investigations of Greco-Roman architecture. They also suggest the rhetorical importance of authenticity.<sup>29</sup> In Choiseul's pagoda, they summoned the authority of imperial China, possessed of a great antiquity and a consistent morality based on Confucian principles. The original authorship of the trigrams was attributed to Fu Xi, the legendary first emperor of China, and it was the classic's significant age that attracted the attention of a select group of European thinkers with a variety of agendas. These included Gottfried Wilhelm von Leibniz, who understood the book's hexagrams (combinations of the trigrams) to be a binary arithmetic akin to his own, and for whom it helped to confirm his understandings of China as governed by the law of nature.<sup>30</sup> The *Yijing* and its appended commentaries, especially those attributed to Confucius, were also understood by Jesuits working in China in the late seventeenth and eighteenth centuries to embody a profound moral philosophy. This was a view they transmitted in a number of texts published in Europe.<sup>31</sup> Other authors, such as linguist Joseph de Guignes, Choiseul's likely advisor on both the characters and the *Yijing*, drew a suggestive connection between Fu Xi's system and his maxims on good government,

24. On the date of Blarenbergh's gouache see Jean-François Méjanes, "Les Van Blarenbergh et le duc de Choiseul," in *Les Van Blarenbergh: des reporters du XVIIIe siècle*, ed. Jean-François Méjanes (Paris: Musée du Louvre; Ghent: Éditions Snoeck, 2006), 92.

25. See, for example, the lengthy description of the *Yijing* in Du Halde, *Description géographique*, 288–295.

26. Mosser, "Les jardins," 80; Thornton, *A Sporting Tour*, 25. Writing in 1802, Thornton described the pagoda as red and white.

27. They are clearly represented in an anonymous drawing of the pagoda from

c. 1820 now in the Musée du Louvre, Paris, RF36721.

28. My warmest thanks to Drew Armstrong for pointing out this connection. For eighteenth-century images and discussions of the Tower of the Winds, see Julien-David Le Roy, *Les ruines des plus beaux monuments de la Grèce* (Paris: Guérin et Delatour, 1758), pt. 1, 26–27, pt. 2, 23; and James Stuart and Nicholas Revett, *The Antiquities of Athens* (London: J. Haberkorn, 1762), 13–25.

29. Sloboda, *Chinoiserie*, 187–94; Nebahat Avcioglu, *Turquerie and the Politics of Representation, 1728–1876* (Farnham, UK: Ashgate, 2011), 139–186.

30. Franklin Perkins, *Leibniz and China: A Commerce of Light* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2004), 116–118.

31. D. E. Mungello, *Curious Land: Jesuit Accommodation and the Origins of Sinology* (Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 1989); Lionel M. Jensen, *Manufacturing Confucianism: Chinese Traditions and Universal Civilization* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1997). For the late eighteenth-century French reception of Confucianism, see Paola Demattè, "A Confucian Education for Europeans," *Art Bulletin* 98 (2016): 43–71.



*Les deux premiers principes.*



*Quatre images qui naissent de ces deux principes.*



*Huit figures résultent de ces quatre images.*



Ces huit figures, dont quatre appartiennent au parfait, & quatre à l'imparfait, se disposent ainsi en forme de cercle; enforte qu'elles se regardent entre elles, & qu'elles regardent aussi les quatre points cardinaux du Monde.

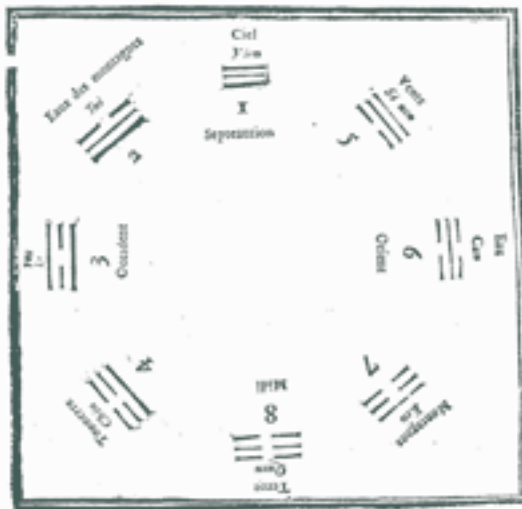


fig. 9 Trigrams of the Yijing in Jean-Baptiste Du Halde, *Description géographique, historique [...] de l'empire de la Chine* (Paris: Le Mercier, 1735), 2:289.

including the duties of a sovereign toward his subjects.<sup>32</sup> Though not developed further by De Guignes, other eighteenth-century French commentators elaborated on their understanding of a distinctive conjunction in China of the law of nature, Confucianism, and stable, meritocratic government in which, notably, the emperor was guided, not threatened, by his ministers.<sup>33</sup>

The tapering Chinese tower form, its Chinese characters, and its trigrams gesture toward all of these meanings: a just and stable government in an undeniably civilized empire that was equal, if not morally superior to, the kingdoms of Europe. For those who were familiar with Du Halde or Guignes's texts, the trigrams were an explicit reference to China's long antiquity.<sup>34</sup> Drawn from the most ancient of texts, they allude to the fact that China could legitimately claim an antiquity far greater than that of Europe and its Greco-Roman past. Jesuit studies of Chinese historical documents had introduced European audiences to unsettling evidence that Chinese civilization had existed before the biblical flood from which Christians believed all of humanity had descended.<sup>35</sup> Writing in 1658, the Jesuit Martino Martini determined that Fu Xi had founded the first dynasty in 2952 BCE, nearly 600 years before the biblical flood as commonly calculated by European scholars. China's ancient history thus posed a direct challenge to the biblical view of Noah as the father of all humanity, just as China's priority in the invention of paper, printing, gunpowder, the compass, and porcelain called European exceptionalism into question.

Some eighteenth-century commentators resolved the conundrum of China's great antiquity and its technological innovation by

dismissing Chinese claims to both. De Guignes, for instance, sought to reconcile discrepancies between Chinese and biblical histories by positing that China was originally a colony of Egypt, a move which also deprived the Chinese of any indigenous claim to their technological achievements.<sup>36</sup> The integration of Greco-Roman and Chinese motifs at Chanteloup, however, suggests a more nuanced negotiation of China's challenge to European world history. In this sense Le Camus's choice of baseless Doric columns for the pagoda's peristyle seems particularly appropriate. The Doric was the order most closely associated with the origins of Greco-Roman architecture, an association strengthened by eighteenth-century investigations of the baseless Doric temples at Paestum.<sup>37</sup> As Chambers's described it, this most "antient" of Greco-Roman orders imitated "the trees used in the first buildings without any plinths to raise them above the ground."<sup>38</sup> Viewed in light of the associations made by Guignes and others between China's long antiquity and that of ancient Egypt, it seems possible that period comparisons of the pagoda at Chanteloup with obelisks were not only formally motivated but also conceptual. In this case, incised Chinese characters and trigrams substituted for the hieroglyphs to which Chinese characters were frequently compared.

Choseul's pagoda at once fantasizes China, investigates it, and mobilizes it for political ends. It was the setting for elaborate entertainments in which participants imagined themselves in China, an act of projection facilitated by the lakeside tower's Chinese-themed furniture and by kitchen boys ringing the pagoda's bells on command.<sup>39</sup> At the same time, it was a highly visible declaration

32. *Le Chou-King, un des livres sacrés des Chinois, qui renferme les fondements de leur ancienne histoire, les principes de leur gouvernement & de leur morale, ouvrage recueilli par Confucius, traduit et enrichi de notes par feu le P. Gaubil, [...] revu [...] par M. de Guignes [...]. On y a joint un discours préliminaire [...] sur les tems antérieurs à ceux dont parle le Chou-King et une notice de l'Y-King* (Paris: N.N. Tilliard, 1770), xx–xxi.

33. See Ashley Eva Millar, *A Singular Case: Debating China's Political Economy in the European Enlightenment* (Montreal: McGill-Queen's University Press, 2017),

126–151, with further bibliography. See also Étienne de Silhouette, *Idée générale du gouvernement et de la morale des Chinois, tirée particulièrement des Ouvrages de Confucius* (Paris: G.F. Quillau, 1729), which is not discussed by Millar.

34. Not everyone was familiar with them. One period commentator understood the trigrams to be Arabic characters. Mosser, "Les jardins," 81, (fig. 7).

35. Edwin J. Van Kley, "Europe's 'Discovery' of China and the Writing of World History," *The American Historical Review* 76, no. 2 (1971): 358–85.

36. Joseph de Guignes, *Mémoire dans lequel on prouve que les Chinois sont une colonie égyptienne* (Paris: Desaint et Saillant, 1759); S.A.M. Adshead, "China a Colony of Egypt: An Eighteenth-Century Controversy," *Asian Profile* 12, no. 2 (1984): 113–27.

37. Sigrid de Jong, *Rediscovering Architecture: Paestum in Eighteenth-Century Architectural Experience and Theory* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2014), with further bibliography.

of Choiseul's authority and his continuing political ambition. The declaration was not hidden, waiting to be discovered, in Choiseul's nearby Anglo-Chinese garden. Instead, it was placed in the very center of his formal gardens, visible upon the approach to his estate and from all points on the grounds. It was directed at and against Versailles, simultaneously feigning indifference toward court politics and signaling a deep and continuing investment in them. Adapting yet another eighteenth-century association of China—that of an empire thoroughly uninterested in European goods or in European diplomacy—Choiseul's sister, Mme de Gramont, wrote of the family's exile at Chanteloup, "we are very content here; we think no more of the court [at Versailles] than do the Chinese."<sup>40</sup>

What the pagoda most intriguingly suggests, however, is the political resonances of "China" in eighteenth-century France. Choiseul's Chinese tower may offer material evidence of his sympathies for aristocratic constitutionalism, sympathies which historians have debated but which his contemporaries understood him to share. His ally, the comte de Ségur, referred to the pagoda as a monument to a "new Fronde," a reference to an aristocratic rebellion against the French crown in the seventeenth century.<sup>41</sup> One of Choiseul's detractors, Jacob-Nicolas de Moreau, a staunch defender of absolutist monarchy, denounced him as "the most zealous defender of the nobility, the most audacious enemy of the monarch," and went on to outline the ways in which, in his view, Choiseul sought to position himself as the leader of a new aristocratic conspiracy.<sup>42</sup> For its European admirers, China was upheld as a model of a well-governed polity. As interpreted by opposition patriots like Lord Bolingbroke,

who spent his periods of exile in France and lived at Chanteloup from 1735–36, and by those in his French circle, including his translator and friend, Étienne de Silhouette, who was also briefly controller-general of finances under King Louis XV, China was a model of exemplary stability, not least because of its adherence to Confucian principles and its system of rewarding merit with nobility rather than linking nobility to inheritance, as in Europe.<sup>43</sup> Viewed in this light, Choiseul's choice of an unmistakable Chinese architectural type for a monument to his aristocratic supporters and its references to the *Yijing* take on more political resonances. China had achieved what the ancient Greeks and Romans had not: an unbroken history that stretched from before the biblical flood to the present day.<sup>44</sup> Wise government had made this stability possible. Choiseul's stone pagoda, with its evocations of an empire of great antiquity, guided by rulers understood to have a deep morality and appreciation of talent, materialized a vision of China as a model of what the French monarchy, which exiled rather than appreciated its ministers, was not.

38. William Chambers, *A Treatise on Civil Architecture, in which the Principles of That Art are Laid Down, and Illustrated by Great Number of Plates Accurately Designed, and Elegantly Engraved by the Best Hands* (London: J. Haberkorn, 1759), 8.

39. Jean-Jacques Barthélemy to Mme du Deffand, Chanteloup, August 16, 1777; Chanteloup, July 30, 1778, *Correspondance complète*, 286, 328.

40. Argenson, "Les exilés de Chanteloup: La disgrâce du duc de Choiseul (1770–1780)," in *Revue de France* (August 1, 1931), 452.

41. Ségur, *Mémoires*, 20–21. Ségur further identified the pagoda as a "présage d'autres résistances qui prirent dans la suite une si grave importance," no doubt a reference to the French Revolution to which Ségur had been sympathetic.

42. Jacob-Nicolas Moreau, *Mes souvenirs*, ed. Camille Hermelin (Paris: Plon, 1901), 2: 570; cited and discussed in Munro Price, *Preserving the Monarchy: The Comte de Vergennes, 1774–1787* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 1995), 26–27.

43. Batchelor, "Concealing the Bounds"; Vanessa Alayrac-Fielding, *La Chine dans*

*l'imaginaire anglais des Lumières (1685–1798)* (Paris: PUPS, 2016), 160, 162–68; Silhouette, *Idée Générale*.

44. Alayrac-Fielding, *La Chine*, 164.