

The London School of Economics and Political Science

**Assessing the Wealth of a Nation: British and French views of
China's political economy during the Enlightenment**

By

Ashley Eva Millar

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the London School of Economics for the degree of Doctor of
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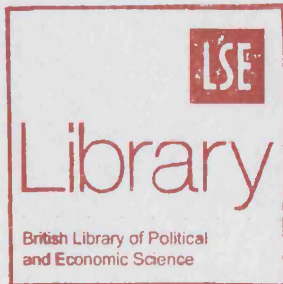


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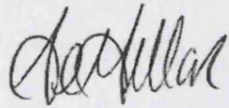
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Ashley Eva Millar

Abstract

Early modern Europeans, particularly during the Enlightenment, looked outwards to foreign lands to satisfy their curiosity, enhance theories or support nationalist or religious agendas, as well learn from other advanced civilizations. This dissertation examines British and French views of China's political economy during the Enlightenment until the publication of Adam Smith's *Wealth of Nations*. It studies the construction of knowledge on China's political economy by British and French primary travellers, geographers and philosophers, which results in several conclusions. First, while certainly evident in eighteenth century encounters with China, the sinophilia/sinophobia dichotomy is a flawed way to assess early Enlightenment perceptions of China's political economy. Rather there was a striking degree of consensus among sources that have been conventionally divided. Second, Europeans did not possess comfortable assumptions of superiority in the area of political economy and expressed a great degree of civilizational relativism. Finally, Enlightenment commentators and observers displayed a genuine interest in what could be learned from China. At times, Europeans used China as a mirror for self-evaluation and exploration, such as when considering views of economic culture. In other instances an active engagement with the Chinese model existed, as philosophers analysed how aspects of the Chinese system could be reconciled with – and even be used to improve – their own burgeoning theories of political and economic organization. China's military weakness and scientific stagnation offered insight on pitfalls to avoid. Europeans often viewed China's history, geography and population as unique and thus argued that Chinese practices could not be replicated in a European setting. On topics such as foreign trade and the form of government, China was dismissed as a useful model, not on normative grounds, but rather because its uniqueness and singularity meant it could not comfortably be worked into the universal models that characterized European Enlightenment thought.

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OUTLINE:	1.	JUDGING DIFFERENT SCHEMES OF ECONOMY
	1.1.	SCOPE AND TERMS
	1.2.	THE SINOPHILIA-SINOPHOBIA DICHOTOMY
	1.3.	CIVILIZATIONAL RELATIVISM
	1.4.	ETHNOGRAPHY AND VIEWS OF CHINA'S POLITICAL ECONOMY
	1.5	THESIS STRUCTURE

Early modern Europeans, particularly during the Enlightenment, looked outwards to foreign evidence to enhance their theories of political economy. Sir James Steuart, often referred to as the last mercantilist, began his *An inquiry into the principles of political oeconomy* (1767) by emphasizing the importance of contrasting various forms of political economy:

If one considers the variety which is found in different countries, in the distribution of property, subordination of classes, genius of people, proceeding from the variety of forms of government, laws, and manners, one may conclude, that the political oeconomy in each must necessarily be different...It is the business of a statesman to judge of the expediency of different schemes of oeconomy...The speculative person...must do his utmost to become a citizen of the world, comparing customs, examining minutely institutions which appear alike, when in different countries they are found to produce different effects: he should examine the cause of such differences with the utmost diligence and attention.¹

At the time of Steuart's publication, another member of the Scottish Enlightenment had begun a project to define and explain the divergences in the economic fortunes of different countries. Adam Smith's *The Wealth of Nations* (1776), groundbreaking as it was, also reflected the contemporary trend of drawing on modern history and descriptions of the wider world to enhance his theoretical models of political economy.

As a relatively unknown advanced civilization, the Chinese Empire held a unique and important place in early modern Europe, and particularly in Enlightenment Britain and France, as numerous thinkers tried to make sense of a widening world and their own place in it. Early modern authors—from missionaries and merchants to scholars and geographers—displayed great interest in understanding the nature and workings of the Chinese Empire. The motivations for this inquisitiveness varied, as did the ways in which knowledge of China was constructed and used. While European societies

¹ Sir James Steuart, *An inquiry into the principles of political oeconomy: being an essay on the science of domestic policy in free nations* 2 Volumes (London: printed for A. Millar and T. Cadell, 1767), vol. 1, 3. Gary M. Anderson and Robert D. Tollison, "Sir James Steuart as the Apotheosis of Mercantilism and His Relation to Adam Smith", *Southern Economic Journal* 51:2 (1984), 456-468.

remained largely religious, secular interests were rapidly expanding amongst their intellectual and commercial elites. Philosophers, polemicists, and geographers eagerly debated topics of political economy and began to incorporate information about the widening world into their conversations.

This study asks what were British and French perceptions of China's political economy during the Enlightenment? The Enlightenment, as an intellectually vibrant period *prior* to the age of European economic supremacy, represents a key moment for European assessments of China during which there was scope for an honest evaluation of different forms of social, economic and political organization. Against the backdrop of intense examination and debate by Enlightenment philosophers over the merits and changing the foundations of their own societies, there was a genuine openness towards, and desire to learn from, the Chinese system.

In a recent article, David Porter discussed the process of “writing China out of history” due to the challenge it posed to the narrative of European exceptionalism.² He claims that views of China as a viable alternative to this European model were “deliberately and usefully forgotten in England over the course of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries”.³ Porter calls for further research into the historicization of this act of forgetting which he describes as the development of “instrumental amnesia”. While this process certainly occurred over this lengthy period of time, this research will show that for an influential group of eighteenth century philosophers of political economy, and popular geographers the act of forgetting had not yet occurred. In fact, discussions of China as an alternative system of political economy were vibrant. Views of the viability of the Chinese model differed greatly depending on the particular topic at hand and this is where the examination of particular elements of China's political economy is most enlightening.

This chapter proceeds with a definition of the scope and terms of this question, including a brief introduction to the sources that will be used. Next, it addresses the historiography on three themes connected to European views of China's political economy. The first theme is the influential dichotomy between sinophilia and sinophobia in assessing Western views of China. It is argued that a focused study on

² David Porter, “Sinicizing Early Modernity: The Imperatives of Historical Cosmopolitanism”, *Eighteenth-Century Studies*, 43:3 (2010), 299-306, quote at 305.

³ *Ibid.*, 304.

assessments of China's political economy blurs such boundaries and these categories occlude more than they reveal. The second theme is the role of civilizational relativism in eighteenth century approaches to China's political economy. It is shown that Europeans did not take for granted that their own systems of political economy were innately superior to the one found in China. Finally, connected to this relativism, is the theme of openness and genuine interest with which many Europeans considered knowledge of China. A variety of Europeans sought out ethnographic information on the Middle Kingdom to assist in the creation of their schematics of the world. This introductory chapter concludes by outlining the significance of these three themes to the subsequent chapters of this study.

1.1. SCOPE AND TERMS

This study examines three main bodies of sources that are selected based on their contemporary popularity, their influence on the development of new ideas, and their relevance to the topic of China's political economy. The first group is comprised of accounts by early-modern missionaries, merchants, emissaries and travellers from several European countries—notably Italy, Portugal, Spain, the Netherlands, France and England—who relayed first-hand information about China back to interested audiences in Europe. The second group is constituted by the writings of geographers, which, as a result of a profit-driven printing culture and popular demand, reflect more accessible descriptions of the wider world that are key to understanding the broader acceptance of the intellectual evaluations of the wealth of civilizations. These geographers saw it as their task to organize and reframe the primary descriptions of the world encountered in the first group.⁴ In Britain, many of these geographers were Grub Street “hack” writers, but they were also often men of great intelligence (if not reputation) who engaged with the primary travellers and philosophers interested in China. The final group is formed by the works of a number of Enlightenment philosophers who referenced China in their studies. Given the focus on political economy, the most relevant British and French philosophers were François Quesnay, Charles de Secondat, baron de Montesquieu, Voltaire (François-Marie Arouet), Jean Jacques Rousseau, Abbé Raynal, Denis Diderot, David Hume and Adam Smith. This research, however, is not a history of philosophical views of China. Rather, it is a study of the *construction of knowledge* of China's

⁴ The term “geographers” is used as a broad category, encompassing travel compilers and authors of popular modern histories of China. A closer explication of this category can be found in chapter two.

political economy in eighteenth-century Britain and France. It examines the travelling of information and arguments about China's political economy that occurred between the primary sources, geographers, and French and British philosophers. These three categories of sources are fluid and there are individuals that traverse these constructed boundaries. Chapter two offers a detailed assessment of these sources and their relationship to one another. For now it is sufficient to note that this research is not intended as a comprehensive catalogue of all that was written about China's political economy; it is a study of the most influential, iconic and representative works that offer important or interesting discussions of the state of politics and economics in the Chinese Empire during the Enlightenment.⁵

The concept of the Enlightenment is contested and thus needs to be defined for the purposes of this enquiry. In the broadest sense, it is used as a temporal marker to delimit the period from the scientific breakthroughs of Isaac Newton and the political changes of the Glorious Revolution at the end of the seventeenth century to the start of the French Revolution at the end of the eighteenth century. However, the use of the term Enlightenment is not limited to being a synonym for this particular period. Historians debate whether there was a single Enlightenment or whether it should be understood more broadly as a period that witnessed numerous smaller intellectual movements, highly dependent on local contexts. J.G.A. Pocock argues there were multiple Enlightenments, and that national contexts mattered greatly in shaping them. However, he accepts these contexts are complicated by the "intensification of the patterns of exchange and interaction" across European countries.⁶ In a similar vein, John Robertson asserts that "the intellectual coherence of the Enlightenment may still be found...in the commitment to understanding, and hence to advancing, the causes and conditions of human betterment in this world".⁷ He rightly acknowledges that the Enlightenment had patriotic impulses, which led to the identification of solutions particular to specific national contexts, but alongside this impulse was one of cosmopolitanism that encouraged philosophers to think comparatively and about humanity as a whole. Crucially, Robertson identifies this cause of betterment as a central motive of

⁵ For a catalogue of European views of Asia in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries see Donald Lach, *Asia in the Making of Europe*, 2 Volumes (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1965-1970) and Donald Lach and Edwin J. Van Kley, *Asia in the Making of Europe*, vol. 3 (Chicago: Chicago University Press, 1993).

⁶ J.G.A. Pocock, *Barbarism and Religion* Volume 1 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999), 138.

⁷ John Robertson, *The Case for Enlightenment: Scotland and Naples, 1680-1760* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005), 28.

Enlightenment thought, articulated through the terms of political economy.⁸ For this reason, a focus on the universal language of political economy as a key commonality of the Enlightenment is of particular relevance to the aims of this study.

The importance of national contexts has not only been emphasized in relation to Enlightenment thought in general, but also specifically in regard to differing narratives on Asia emanating from England and France. One prominently identified difference was their varied religious orientations. Ros Ballaster, for instance, contends that England and France had different relationships with China, because the former was a potential trade partner while the latter viewed China primarily as an outpost for Jesuit missionary activity.⁹ Still, Ballaster qualifies this distinction by also noting that the “construction of the ‘fabulous’ Orient” often overrode national and geographic difference within Europe.¹⁰ Indeed, European views of non-Europeans occupy a central place in European Enlightenment thought as a whole. As Sankar Muthu points out, “more substantive and conventional understandings of “the Enlightenment” usually occlude more than they illuminate the writings about non-European peoples and empire by eighteenth-century political thinkers.”¹¹ Similar to Muthu’s study of anti-imperialism in the Enlightenment, this research also seeks to “broaden our understanding of Enlightenment era perspectives”. To this end, the term Enlightenment is employed here to refer to an age of philosophical thought defined by a particular project to advance knowledge (or, as the case may be, apply “reason”) in order to improve the welfare (and thus the wealth) of states. For this reason, considerations of political economy were of immense concern to the development of Enlightenment thought and especially its engagement with the non-European “other”.

Another problematic aspect of defining the Enlightenment concerns its chronology. For the purpose of examining European views of China’s political economy, this study focuses on the period between 1696 and 1776. Information produced before 1696 will, at times, be of great relevance as it continued to be referenced well into the eighteenth

⁸ *Ibid.*, 377.

⁹ Ros Ballaster, *Fabulous Orient: Fictions of the East in England 1662-1785* (London: Oxford University Press, 2005), 20.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, 20-1; Lach and Van Kley discuss the seventeenth-century printed reports stemming from northern Europe, particularly Holland, while missionary reports originated from Catholic publishing centres such as Rome. They note, however, that the original missionary and merchant reports were often reprinted, translated, republished in travel collections and used in articles published in scholarly journals on Asia. Lach and Van Kley, *Asia in the Making of Europe*, xli.

¹¹ See Sankar Muthu *Enlightenment Against Empire* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2003).

century. However, the detailed description of China by the French Jesuit Louis Le Comte provides a meaningful starting point to the period directly relevant to this study. His *Nouveaux Mémoires sur l'état present de la Chine* (1696) was as controversial as it was popular, and continued to be routinely referenced by late eighteenth-century geographers and philosophers. The period under consideration ends with Adam Smith's assessment of China's political economy in his *Inquiry into the Nature and Causes of the Wealth of Nations* (1776).¹² Spanning eighty years and two countries, the French missionary and Scottish philosopher reflect diverging conclusions about the status of China's political economy. And yet, both agreed in their assessments of several elements of the Chinese system and showed a genuine interest in understanding the workings of China's political economy.

In defining the particular subject areas used to organize perceptions of China's political economy, this study follows contemporary categories. Political economy was an evolving concept in early modern Europe. The Greek etymology of the term economy (*oikonomia*) referred to the government of the household for the common good of the family. In the seventeenth century this definition expanded to political economy, which referred to the government of the great family, the State. The first published use of the term is attributed to Antoine de Montchrestien's *Traité de l'économie politique* (1615). Montchrestien's understanding of political economy was heavily based on the writings of Jean Bodin and reflected his mercantilist and xenophobic bias.¹³ By the eighteenth century, political economy had become more of a theoretical field through which to examine the actions of a state. James Steuart defined "oeconomy" as referring to a family and "political oeconomy" as referring to a state. He argued that the economy of states "depends upon a thousand circumstances", a number of which he sought to analyse. Steuart described political economy as both an art and a science, noting that its first purpose is to adapt to the spirit, manners, habits and customs of people and then to "introduce a set of new and more useful institutions."¹⁴ He continued,

The principal object of this science is to secure a certain fund of subsistence for all the inhabitants; to obviate every circumstance which may render it precarious; to provide every thing necessary for supplying the wants of the society, and to employ the

¹² Adam Smith, *The Wealth of Nations*, ed. Edwin Cannan (New York: Bantam Dell, 2003 [first publ. London 1776]), 926.

¹³ Jacques Fontanel, Jean-Paul Herbert and Ivan Samson, "The Birth of the Political Economy or the Economy in the Heart of Politics: Mercantilism," *Defence and Peace Economics* 19:5 (2008), 331-338; Antoine de Montchrestien, *Traité de l'æconomie politique*, ed. François Billacois (Genève: Librairie Droz, 1999).

¹⁴ Steuart, *An inquiry into the principles of political oeconomy*, 2.

inhabitants (supposing them to be freemen) in such a manner as naturally to create reciprocal relations and dependencies between them, so as to make their several interests lead them to supply one another with their reciprocal wants.¹⁵

Contemporaries, such as Jean-François Féraud, agreed with Steuart's understanding of political economy, while others such as Samuel Johnson did not.¹⁶ While no definite consensus on what political economy meant was reached during the Enlightenment, it was widely understood to refer to the interlocking realms of the state and its economy. The main chapters of this study address the most important themes of political economy as related to China. These themes were defined by a thorough examination of contemporary descriptions and classifications. They are: economic culture and morality (lest we forget that Adam Smith was a moral philosopher); trade policy; the nature of government; the duties and practicalities of government; and science and technology. Approached through these categories, European perceptions of, and discourses on, China reveal their direct connection to debates about Europe's own past, present, and future, debates that came to form a cornerstone of Enlightenment thought.

Although many authors have addressed European views of China in the early modern period, it is striking that there is no single text whose primary aim is to evaluate perceptions of China's political economy in this period.¹⁷ Studies that touch on this topic suffer from their imposition of modern analytical categories on the past, when economics did not exist as a distinct field of scholarly endeavour. The problems inherent in this approach can be resolved through an alternative focus on political

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, 2-3.

¹⁶ A French dictionary that repeated this definition is Jean-François Féraud, *Dictionnaire critique de la langue française* (Marseille: Jean Mossey, 1787-88), s.v. "Économie". Other dictionaries, by contrast, retained the restricted definition of economy as the management of a family; see, for instance, Samuel Johnson, *A dictionary of the English language*, 2 Volumes (London: J. and P. Knapton, et. al., 2nd ed., 1755-56), s.v. "Economy".

¹⁷ The most notable texts include: A. Reichwein, *China and Europe: intellectual and Artistic Contacts in the Eighteenth Century*, trans. by J.C. Powell (London: Kegan, 1925); Virgile Pinot, *La Chine et la formation de l'esprit philosophique en France (1640-1740)* (Paris: Librairie orientaliste Paul Geuthner, 1932); Lewis A. Maverick, *China, a Model for Europe* (San Antonio: Paul Anderson Company, 1946); William Appleton, *A Cycle of Cathay: The Chinese Vogue in England during the Seventeenth and Eighteenth Centuries* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1951); Basil Guy *The French Image of China Before and After Voltaire* (Geneva: Institut et Musée Voltaire, 1963); Lach, *Asia in the Making of Europe*; Lach and Van Kley *Asia in the Making of Europe*; Raymond Dawson, *The Chinese Chameleon: An Analysis of European Conceptions of Chinese Civilization* (London: Oxford University Press, 1967); Colin Mackerras, *Western Images of China* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1989); René Étiemble, *L'Europe Chinoise* 2 Volumes (Paris: Gallimard, 1988); Adrian Hsia, ed., *The Vision of China in the English Literature of the Seventeenth and Eighteenth Centuries* (Hong Kong: Chinese University Press, 1998); Jonathan Spence, *The Chan's Great Continent: China in Western Minds* (New York: W.W. Norton, 1999); David Martin Jones, *The Image of China in Western Social and Political Thought* (New York: Palgrave, 2001); David E. Mungello, *The Great Encounter of China and the West, 1500-1800* (Maryland: Rowman and Littlefield, 2005).

economy as it was contemporaneously understood. Another potential objection to a focused study on political economy is the neglect of important moral and religious debates, which are deemed outside the concerns of present-day economics but were very much part of early-modern debates about political economy. Indeed, morality and religion were important components of European views of China. This study therefore addresses these topics at particular moments when they are most relevant to the subject of political economy (most expressly in the examination of views on Chinese moral philosophy in chapter three). However, anachronistic presumptions having been cast aside, there does remain good reason to analyse in detail views of political economy in its more narrow sense. First, unlike religion, an area where most Europeans were assured of the superiority of Christianity, political economy was an area of interest that was still open to great relativism and debate. Second, topics of political economy—particularly international trade, the role of government in society, and the increase of science and technology—were all growing in importance and relevance throughout this period. Finally, it enables the focused examination of an area in which primary sources suffered from less of a culturalist or Eurocentric bias than many other fields—a fact that was even acknowledged by contemporary commentators. The remaining sections of this introduction address how concentrating on the issue of political economy leads to a rethinking of three historiographical themes: the sinophilia-sinophobia dichotomy; civilizational relativism; and the use of ethnographic information in the construction of Enlightenment debates.

1.2. THE SINOPHILIA-SINOPHOBIA DICHOTOMY

A predominant paradigm in studies of European views of China has been to identify and analyse a shift from sinophilia (a strong admiration for China) to sinophobia (an aversion towards China). For instance, referring to Enlightenment discussion of China's morality and political system, David Mungello claims "there was a tension throughout the Enlightenment between sinophilia and sinophobia".¹⁸ This dichotomy is not only a construction of modern historians, but was also recognized at the time. The English translator of Jean Baptiste Grosier's updated version of Jean Baptiste Du Halde's description of China openly discussed the conflicting views of China in 1788. He observed:

¹⁸ Mungello, *The Great Encounter*, 125

the learned seem to differ widely in their ideas respecting [the Chinese]. By some they have been extolled as the wisest and most enlightened of mankind; while others, perhaps equally, if not more remote from the truth, have exhibited them in the most contemptible point of view, and represented them as a despicable people, deceitful, ignorant, and superstitious, and destitute of every principle of human justice¹⁹

Enlightenment thinkers such as Montesquieu and Voltaire have been assigned positions at the opposite ends of this spectrum, with the former labelled a sinophobe and the latter a sinophile. The primary sources of information about China have also been deemed representative of one of these two categories, with the Jesuit missionaries seen as sinophiles and other compilers of primary information, such as non-Jesuit missionaries, merchants, emissaries and travellers, labelled sinophobes.

Some historians have attempted to categorise views of China along social or class lines. Longxi Zhang argues that “average people in the market” admired China for its material products, and that afterwards the philosophers of the Enlightenment came to admire the Confucian system of Chinese civilization.²⁰ While this dissertation does not examine diaries, letters or other contemporary sources to ascertain the views of “average people in the market”, it does consider the more popular views as expressed in geographies. Their editors and compilers demonstrated interest in China’s civilization beyond its material products. While their audience was literate, thus not necessarily “average people in the market,” they were also not limited to philosophers. Moreover, even amongst the ostensibly ‘sinophile’ philosophers, we find dramatic disagreement. At times, a given scholar may have held ideological views on China that resembled more closely those of popular geographers than those of his fellow *philosophes*.

Apart from the purported differences in scholarly and popular views, there is also the question of variations in perceptions of China between nations in Europe. Reichwein argues that intellectual interest in China survived longer in France because of art.²¹ Charles Boxer likewise contends that in England the idea of a virtuous China was not as

¹⁹ Anonymous, “Translator’s Preface”, in *A general description of China...* ed. Jean-Baptist Grosier, Translator unknown. (London: Printed by G.G. and J. Robinson, 1788), iv. The French edition was published in 1777-1783. Grosier and Cornelius de Pauw engaged in a literary debate over the validity and merits of the Jesuits and over the nature of the Chinese Empire.

²⁰ Longxi Zhang, “The Myth of the Other: China in the Eyes of the West”, *Critical Inquiry* 15 :1 Autumn, 1988, 108-131, quote at 118.

²¹ Reichwein, *China and Europe*, 151. The following authors also all argue there was a difference between the French and English views of China: Qian Zhongshu “China in the English Literature of the Eighteenth Century” in *The Vision of China*, ed. Hsia, 166; Günther Lottes, “China in European Political Thought, 1750-1850”, in *China and Europe: Images and Influences in the Sixteenth to Eighteenth Centuries* ed. Thomas H.C. Lee (Hong Kong: The Chinese University Press, 1991), 71.

readily accepted as it was in France.²² Similarly, Chen Shouyi claims that “enthusiasm for China never grew very strong in England”.²³ Chen lists a selection of English sources such as the modern part of *An Universal History* and Oliver Goldsmith’s *Chinese Letters* to support his notion that English commentators on China were largely sinophobes. However, as this study will demonstrate, on the topic of political economy there is no shortage of English sources that show respect towards, or at least a genuine consideration of, Chinese institutions. Indeed, we shall see that on a number of particular topics, the modern part of *An Universal History* presented a favourable view of China. Additionally, French sources also reflected a variety of unfavourable views on China, including incisive criticism of their military and science and technology.

There is also considerable disagreement on the timing of the shift from a predominantly sinophile Europe to the rise of sinophobes during the latter part of the Enlightenment.²⁴ Arnold Rowbotham identifies the 1735 publication of Du Halde’s description of China based on primary sources as the point when sinophilia became sinomania.²⁵ In his view, this sinomania reached its apogee in 1760, the year that Voltaire published his *Essai sur les mœurs*.²⁶ Adolf Reichwein concurs with Rowbotham that 1760 represents a turning point.²⁷ Looking from the perspective of the rise of sinophobia, Chen Shouyi likewise identifies 1760 as a critical year, pointing out that it marked the first appearance of Oliver Goldsmith’s sinophobic *Chinese Letters* in *The Public Ledger*.²⁸ John Hobson, on the other hand, dates the shift to 1780, despite noting a number of inconsistencies with such a dating.²⁹ Indeed, most authors have qualified their arguments with the claim that the shift was not complete. Gregory Blue has pointed out the overlap of sinophilia and sinophobia, while still maintaining that the balance of opinion and approach to China as a deviation from the Western model shifted from the mid-eighteenth to the

²² C.R. Boxer “Some Aspects of Western Historical Writing on the Far East, 1500-1800” in *Historians of China and Japan*, ed. by W.G. Beasley and E.G. Pulleyblank (London: Oxford University Press, 1961), 313.

²³ Chen Shouyi, “Oliver Goldsmith and His *Chinese Letters*” in *The Vision of China*, ed. Hsia, 297.

²⁴ Authors such as David Mungello, *The Great Encounter*; Mackerras, *Western Images of China*; and Joanna Waley-Cohen, *The Sextants of Beijing: Global Currents in Chinese History* (New York: W.W. Norton, 1999) are examples of recent scholarship that address the evolution of the relationship between China and Europe over many centuries.

²⁵ Arnold H. Rowbotham, “The Impact of Confucianism on 17th century Europe” *The Far Eastern Quarterly* 4 (1944-45): 224-42.

²⁶ Arnold H. Rowbotham, *Missionary and Mandarin: The Jesuits at the court of China* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1942), 288.

²⁷ Reichwein, *China and Europe*, 22.

²⁸ Chen Shouyi argues that this year marked “the culmination of English interest in Chinese culture and things Chinese”. Chen Shouyi “Oliver Goldsmith and His *Chinese Letters*,” 283.

²⁹ John M. Hobson, *The Eastern Origins of Western Civilization* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004), 197.

mid-nineteenth century.³⁰ Taking a broad view of the shift, as Blue does, is most useful because the transition in European views of China was piecemeal and protracted.

Various factors that contributed to this transformation in European attitudes towards China have been proposed. Some point to art-historical explanations and the mercurial nature of fashion that led to the unpopularity of *chinoiserie*, while others look to the rise of hostile information stemming from non-Jesuit sources.³¹ The change in views on China has also been attributed to the rise of European science and technology. Michael Adas describes how the Physiocratic admiration of China's system of political economy became "anachronistic in an age when commerce and manufacturing were rapidly assuming predominant roles in the more advanced economies of Western Europe".³² Adas argues for the influence of material culture, particularly science and technology, in shaping European perceptions of non-Western people. However, his evidence on China does not support his larger hypothesis. He describes at length the period of sinophilia in Europe and points out that during this time, the one area that was consistently more likely to be criticized by the Jesuits and even Voltaire was Chinese science. Yet, as Adas himself acknowledges, Europeans from the beginning of the Jesuit mission in China in the sixteenth century were critical of Chinese science, which draws into question its explanatory capacity for the shift in European perceptions from sinophilia to sinophobia in the second half of the eighteenth-century.³³ China's supposed failures in developing its science and technology had been a standard element in critiques of China's system of political economy since the time of the earliest Jesuit reports. While the criterion of science and technology in assessing non-Western people did increase in importance over time, the descriptions of China by the mid to late eighteenth century did not give a more prominent place to discussions of these areas. Adam Smith, for one, did not refer to the weak status of China's science and technology in his attempt to explain the Middle Kingdom's economic stasis.

³⁰ Gregory Blue, "China and Western Social Thought", in *China and Historical Capitalism: Genealogies of Sinological Knowledge* eds. Timothy Brook and Gregory Blue (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1999), 70-72.

³¹ For the art-historical explanations, see Arthur F. Wright, "The Study of Chinese Civilization", *Journal of the History of Ideas*, 21:2 (1960): 233-55; and Reichwein, *China and Europe*, 16. For explanations based on changes in the available information, see Guy, *The French Image of China*, 12; Lottes, "China in European Political Thought", 66; and David Martin Jones, *The Image of China in Western Social and Political Thought*, 11. Blue, by contrast, regards both these explanations as too vague; Blue, "China and Western Social Thought", 70-72.

³² Michael Adas, *Machines as the Measure of Men: Science, Technology and Ideologies of Western Dominance* (Ithaca: Cornell University, 1989), 93.

³³ *Ibid.*, 86.

The explanations for the shift from sinophilia to sinophobia based on economic change have been subject to particular attention. Geoffrey Hudson emphasizes the role of changes in economic efficiency and military power between Europe and China, while Ho-Fung Hung describes a more general shift in the global economic balance that led to a decline in the estimation of China.³⁴ Gregory Blue and Joanna Waley-Cohen take a more nuanced approach in their respective writings, both arguing that the decline of the Jesuit mission, the forces of industrialisation, the growing disenchantment of China by European merchants, and the rise of political liberty all contributed to the devaluation of China in European perceptions.³⁵ While it is plausible that these changes in Europe affected views of China in the long-term, they are broad shifts that are difficult to connect to particular views of China's political economy during the Enlightenment.

The disagreements about the nature, timing, and causes of the shift in views of China suggest that the rigid juxtaposition of sinophilia and sinophobia may not always be useful. It is undisputable that "a change in the balance of opinion" occurred between the mid-eighteenth to the mid-nineteenth centuries.³⁶ However, when examining the particular area of political economy, categorising one work, let alone one country, as representative of sinophilia or sinophobia is counterproductive because commentary varied dramatically depending on the particular the topic. Indeed, posing such a sharp dichotomy serves to obfuscate significant instances of consensus in reports and writings on China and to neglect elements in contemporary debate that do not fit comfortably into the sinophilia-sinophobia framework. Rather than study views of China through the paradigm of admiration or disdain, it is more useful to focus on a particular topic and examine the complex relationship between the provision of primary information and the reordering of that information into theories that sought to explain the world—a distinctly Enlightenment project.

1.3. CIVILIZATIONAL RELATIVISM

³⁴ Geoffrey Hudson, "The Historical Context of Encounters between Asia and Europe: as seen by a European", in *The Glass Curtain Between Asia and Europe: A symposium on the historical encounters and the changing attitudes of the peoples of the East and the West*. ed. Raghavan Iyer (London: Oxford University Press, 1965); Ho-Fung Hung, "Orientalist Knowledge and Social Theories: China and the European Conceptions of East-West Differences from 1600 to 1900," *Sociological Theory*, 21:3 (2003): 254-280.

³⁵ See Blue, "China and Western Social Thought", 70-76; and Waley-Cohen, *The Sextants of Beijing*, 128.

³⁶ Blue, "China and Western Social Thought", 71.

In light of recent advances in global economic history that show the economic divergence between Western Europe (particularly Britain and France) and China to have occurred as late as 1800, studying contemporary views of China's political economy gains new significance. From this perspective, it is unsurprising that Europeans did not possess sweeping assumptions of superiority in their approaches to China. There was a widespread belief in Europe in the superiority of the Christian religion and cultural relativism was relatively rare; however, when it came to the assessment of China's political economy, many early-modern Europeans looked to the Middle Kingdom with open minds and a high level of *civilizational relativism*.

The current debate between the "Eurocentrists" and "revisionists" in global history captures the disagreement on the nature of China's political economy and its position relative to Europe in the eighteenth century. Fernand Braudel, Eric L. Jones, and David Landes have all been accused of Eurocentrism in their writings on the relative economic superiority of Europe, as they argue Europe had the preconditions for modern economic growth well before the eighteenth century (according to Jones, even before 1492).³⁷ Others such as Andre Gunder Frank, Samir Amin, and Kenneth Pomeranz have written revisionist histories that argue for the proper recognition of the wealth of China relative to Europe until c. 1800.³⁸ While debate continues on the merits of the revisionist argument, it has become clear that the divergence between Western Europe and China was neither as certain nor as complete in the eighteenth century as was previously assumed.

Even if a precise date of the economic divergence could be set in the eighteenth century, it is unlikely that contemporaries would have recognized the moment of change. Guy argues that the shift to sinophobia was connected to "the prodigious progress of European civilization", the start of the Industrial Revolution, and the era of steam and

³⁷ Fernand Braudel, *Civilization and Capitalism 15th-18th Century, vol. 3: The Perspective of the World*, translated by Sian Reynolds (London: Phoenix Press, 2002); Eric L. Jones, *The European Miracle: Environments, Economies and Geopolitics in the History of Europe and Asia* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1981); and David Landes, *The Wealth and Poverty of Nations: Why some are so rich and some so poor* (New York: W.W. Norton and Co., 1998). The latter two of these authors stand accused of Eurocentrism in J.M. Blaut, *Eight Eurocentric Historians* (New York: The Guilford Press, 2000).

³⁸ Andre Gunder Frank, *ReOrient: Global Economy in the Asian Age* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1998); Samir Amin, *Eurocentrism*, trans. by Russell Moore (London: Zed Books, 1989); Kenneth Pomeranz, *The Great Divergence: China, Europe, and the Making of the Modern World Economy* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2001).

superiority, natural science, commerce and invention as well as moral science.³⁹ If, as Guy claims, the shift towards sinophobia—or rather, European assumptions of their civilizational superiority—was a result of the “Rise of the West”, this shift must have occurred slowly over the course of the nineteenth century.⁴⁰ Economic historians have not settled the debate over dating the Industrial Revolution, and even if reconstructed data sets can ever determine the timing of the take-off, it remains that even by 1776, Adam Smith “was clearly quite unable to foresee the rapid industrialisation process of the next three quarters of a century”.⁴¹

Few historians who study European images of the Far East have undertaken the task of directly connecting the implications of these revisionist findings to images of China’s political economy in the eighteenth century.⁴² One notable exception is Robert Markley, a literary historian who has made the connection between global economic history and early-modern English views of China.⁴³ He appreciates the revisionist project of economic historians such as Frank, Pomeranz, K.N Chaudhuri, Paul Bairoch, Bin Wong, and Jack Goldstone and believes their work has “profound implications for ecological, economic, and social history of Sino-European relations”.⁴⁴ By looking at Peter Heylyn’s *Cosmography* (first published in 1652, with eight further editions published before 1700), Markley demonstrates that seventeenth-century English writers did not assume the superiority of Europe. On the contrary, he sees in travel narratives, diplomatic correspondence and geographies a “compensatory rhetoric” for what was feared to be Europe’s marginalisation within an Asian-dominated world economy.⁴⁵

Ultimately, the early modern period should not be viewed with an anachronistic lens of the subsequent economic ascendancy of Europe. Instead, understanding the greater level

³⁹ Guy, *The French Image of China*, 453.

⁴⁰ William H. McNeill, *The Rise of the West: A History of the Human Community* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1963).

⁴¹ Nick Crafts “The Industrial Revolution” in *The Economic History of Britain since 1700* eds. Roderick Floud and Donald McCloskey, vol. 1, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994), 50.

⁴² Louis Dermigny addressed early modern European views of China in the context of the economic history of the Canton trade. He argues the idealized image of the Jesuits was gradually supplanted by the disillusioning commercial realities described by traders. Louis Dermigny, *La Chine et l’Occident: Le commerce a Canton au XVIIIe Siecle, 1719-1833* (Paris: S.E.V.P.E., 1964).

⁴³ Ros Ballaster gives credence to the place of revisionist economic history in the analysis of fictions of the East, and also points to the insecurity of the European narrator in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries; Ballaster, *Fabulous Orient*, 6. Gregory Blue and Timothy Brook, “Introduction,” in *China and Historical Capitalism* eds. Brook and Blue, likewise anticipated the importance of revisionist global economic history in analysing views of China.

⁴⁴ Robert Markley, “Riches, power, trade and religion: the Far East and the English imagination, 1600-1720,” *Renaissance Studies*, 17:3 (2003): 433-55, quote at 494, 496.

⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, 495.

of uncertainty of the seventeenth-century observers brings the nuances and insecurity in the European voices to the fore. As Markley concludes:

If, as Frank and Pomeranz argue, there is no empirical evidence for the technological superiority and economic domination by western Europe before 1800, then seventeenth-century texts do not foreshadow an inevitable rise of modern notions of history, economics, and social theory, but register instead complex and often competing assessments of European relations with the Far East.⁴⁶

Markley, however, does not systematically address views of China's political economy (for instance he chooses not to analyse views of the military), and does not examine important authors beyond England nor into the second half of the eighteenth century.

It is therefore important to examine European perceptions of China *prior* to the age of European imperial domination, and to situate these earlier views within the context of European thinkers who embraced evidence provided by encounters with the non-European world in their efforts to construct better theories of civilization. Anthony Reid discusses the uniqueness of the cultural interaction during the Renaissance, when civilizations discovered each other without "the great burden of inequality".⁴⁷ He claims that despite the infighting amongst Europeans "there was also a pervading curiosity, puzzlement and even awe at the different ways in which Asian and European civilizations handled the great questions of ordering human society and connecting to the world beyond".⁴⁸ This leads to the question of the emergence of the idea of civilizational hierarchies. Tarikhu Farrar's study of fifteenth-century contacts with West African societies suggests that Europeans did not think in terms of the (yet to be invented) theory of cultural evolution, instead treating foreign societies individually rather than grouping them together into civilizational stereotypes.⁴⁹ Farrar also describes how a "barbarian" in medieval and early-modern Europe "was certainly to be inferior, but this inferiority had little to do with levels of political sophistication or technological complexity"; rather, his difference was rooted in his membership of a society that "in space and culture lay beyond the Christian world, regardless of its degree of political or technological complexity".⁵⁰ This curiosity continued into the Enlightenment; however, as global explorations accelerated, observers and interested

⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, 496-7.

⁴⁷ Anthony Reid, "Preface" in *Asian Travel in the Renaissance* ed. Daniel Carey (Oxford: Society for Renaissance Studies/ Blackwell, 2004), ix.

⁴⁸ *Ibid.*

⁴⁹ Tarikhu Farrar, "When African Kings Became 'Chiefs': Some Transformations in European Perceptions of West African Civilization, c.1450-1800" *Journal of Black Studies* 23:2 (1992): 158-278.

⁵⁰ *Ibid.*, 259.

Europeans began to assess the diverse cultures and societies they were confronted with on new grounds. Joan-Pau Rubiés discusses the relationship between the “two distinct languages of human classification”: Christianity and civilization. The language of Christianity created a “hierarchical classification of non-Europeans according to primarily moral traits, and to the perception of failure or success of the religious enterprise”.⁵¹ With the rise of the study of civilization throughout the eighteenth century, other factors beyond religion and morality became relevant. In particular, topics of political economy began to be used in the new hierarchical classifications of the non-European world.⁵²

As these considerations suggest, it is futile to isolate political economy from other factors that determined China’s position in European hierarchies. Fernand Braudel reminds us of the inextricable links between creating orders based on economics and other factors:

However plentiful the evidence of economic subordination, and whatever its consequences, it would be a mistake to imagine that the order of the world-economy governed the whole society, determining the shape of other orders of society. For other orders existed. An economy never exists in isolation. Its territory and expanse are also occupied by other spheres of activity – culture, society, politics – which are constantly reacting with the economy, either to help or as often to hinder its development.⁵³

It is evident that the rise of the idea of progress had a profound affect on the European worldview. This has been addressed by numerous authors, and will be considered in further detail in chapter eight.⁵⁴ As revisionist economic history as shown, progress happened slowly and the Enlightenment occupied a moment of transition where progress was not assumed. It was an era when many European authors were open to other civilizations’ answers to the questions they asked about political and economic

⁵¹ Joan-Pau Rubiés, “Introduction: Interaction and Discourse in the Expansion of Europe” in, *Shifting Cultures: Interaction and Discourse in the Expansion of Europe* eds. Henriette Bugge and Joan-Pau Rubiés (Münster: LIT, 1995), 7.

⁵² *Ibid.*, 8.

⁵³ Braudel, *Civilization and Capitalism*, 45.

⁵⁴ Pulleyblank assesses its impact in the nineteenth century; Edwin G. Pulleyblank, *Orientalism and History* (Cambridge: W. Heffer and Sons, 1954), 72. Rowbotham traces the movement in Europe from “the cult of classical Reason” to “worshipping the new goddess Progress” and how this led to a rejection of China as static; Rowbotham, *Missionary and Mandarin*, 280-282. Henri Baudet discusses the Enlightenment thinkers who shared a belief in growth and progress; Henri Baudet, *Paradise on Earth: Some Thoughts on European Images of Non-European Man*, trans. by Elizabeth Wentholt (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1965), 40. Marshall and Williams briefly consider the effect of “progress” on ordering societies; P. J. Marshall and Glyndwr Williams, *The Great Map of Mankind: Perceptions of New Worlds in the Age of Enlightenment* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1982), 134.

organization. As George Rousseau and Roy Porter claimed in their study of exoticism in the Enlightenment:

Arguably, however, there was a moment of equilibrium in the eighteenth century. Europe and Asia were still finely balanced...because of the power of Enlightenment pens, Europe itself was sufficiently self-critical and free from bigotry to be able to confront other cultures, admittedly not as equals, nor even necessarily on their own terms, but at least as alternative versions of living – for a brief moment before the logic of the white man’s mission required they be subordinated.⁵⁵

A central implication of the revised contextualisation from global economic history, then, is the absence of a general assumption of European superiority in encounters with China during the Enlightenment, which appears in sharp contrast with confrontations that followed in the nineteenth century. In fact, many Europeans, who struggled with cultural relativism (particularly as related to religion), expressed a degree of civilizational relativism in their openness to understanding the workings of the Chinese Empire. Early modern Europeans up to, and including, Adam Smith, who examined China, actively engaged with the available information to use the Middle Kingdom to help answer the pressing questions of political and economic organization of the time. This dissertation examines European engagements with China’s political economy based on an understanding of the Enlightenment as a period still open to different answers to particular questions about *Europe’s* political and economic organization, and more broadly, to alternative models of civilizations.

1.4. ETHNOGRAPHY AND VIEWS OF CHINA’S POLITICAL ECONOMY

Eighteenth-century observers regarded China as an advanced civilization that could yield information on the merits, pitfalls, hazards and lessons of its particular system of political economy. Direct accounts about China were not solely motivated by their authors’ desire to further their own individual agendas, nor did European philosophers who discussed these accounts only do so to veil their criticism of their own governments. Rather, Europeans interested in China often displayed a sincere desire to understand how aspects of China’s political economy could be reconciled with – and even used to improve – their own theories on the fundamental principles of organizing a state. China was, of course, at times used as a mirror or a model for European self-

⁵⁵ G.S. Rousseau and Roy Porter “Introduction”, in *Exoticism in the Enlightenment* eds. G.S. Rousseau and Roy Porter (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1990), 9.

evaluation (such as when considering views of economic culture). Additionally, the genuine interest in China's political economy did not always manifest itself in admiration (notably on the topics of military and science). However, in many instances – such as on taxation policies – it was seen to offer valuable lessons for the ongoing project of remodelling of European political and economic organization. At other times, like when discussing foreign trade policy or the form of government, China's political economy was considered essentially incommensurable, because its history, geography and culture were thought so unique that it was deemed impossible to derive any lessons applicable to a European setting. Thus China was dismissed as a useful model because it was regarded as a *sui generis* case that could not be worked into the universal models typical of Enlightenment thought. By examining particular topics under the theme of political economy, the different ways that China was used to shape European knowledge become clear.

In a discussion of perceptions or images – defined here as the ways in which a particular subject is represented, understood and made sense of– it is necessary to deal with the difficult question of the relationship between the reality and the idea.⁵⁶ Henri Baudet articulates the division between the real and the imagined in the context of views Europeans held of non-Europeans:

There was, on the one hand, the actual physical outside world which could be put to political, economic, and strategic use; there was also the outside world onto which all identification and interpretation, all dissatisfaction and desire, all nostalgia and idealism seeking expression could be projected.⁵⁷

It is the tension between these two realms that prompts the question of whether a resultant epistemological conflict between the actual and its images existed for thinkers of the time.⁵⁸ This question is especially relevant to images of China in Europe as China was more distant and less familiar than other parts of the non-European world such as India. Historians have answered this question in predominantly two ways: the first posits that actual China is irrelevant to any discussion of its images in Europe, while the second claims that reality is pertinent but with ambiguity as to what extent it is so.

⁵⁶ For a philosophical examination of images of China and the relationship between knowledge, belief and myth, see Jamie Morgan, "Distinguishing Truth, Knowledge and Belief: A Philosophical Contribution to the Problem of Images of China" *Modern China* 30:3 (2004), 398-427.

⁵⁷ Baudet, *Paradise on Earth*, 55.

⁵⁸ Joan-Pau Rubiés, "Introduction", 2; Rubiés asks this question in analysing the relevance of new empirical reports from travel literature to the views of European "armchair cosmographers".

There are many historians who support the view that the realities of China were largely irrelevant to early-modern authors; for the purposes of this discussion, this view may be referred to as the “model perspective”. Raymond Dawson argues that in the case of European constructions of China, there was a tension between the image and the reality that stems from the ways in which the Jesuits constructed and transmitted of information. Undertaking a self-proclaimed “history of the observer rather than of the observed”, Dawson suggests that actual China is less relevant than understanding how the information was constructed.⁵⁹ Günther Lottes takes an even more sweeping approach to claim that Europeans took very little notice of the Chinese reality.⁶⁰ Walter Davis argues that for most writers in the seventeenth and eighteenth century, particularly those of France, “praise of some distant Utopia remained merely an instrument of social criticism...without running afoul of the censors”.⁶¹ Mungello also suggests philosophers were not interested in the serious study of China:

The tendency to refer to Enlightenment thinkers as sinophiles and sinophobes reflects the philosophes’ shallow understanding of China. sinophilia and sinophobia belong to categories of enthusiasm while knowledge belongs to more neutral and objective categories of thought. The Enlightenment’s understanding of China was built on shallow foundations and, as a result, was more vulnerable to the shifting tides of intellectual fashion.⁶²

However, on the topic of political economy these labels are not appropriate and as will be seen, many thinkers actively engaged with nuanced elements of China’s political economy.

The degree to which the primary sources of information reflected actual China varied and depended largely on their level of interaction with the Middle Kingdom, but it is clear that there was some genuine engagement with the realities of the Middle Kingdom. Following this line of thought, Edwin Pulleybank reminds us that “while the sinomania of the eighteenth century both in art and in philosophy was based on very false notions of what was Chinese, the Chinese inspiration behind it cannot be

⁵⁹ Dawson, *The Chinese Chameleon*, 8.

⁶⁰ Lottes, “China in European Political Thought,” 94n.1.

⁶¹ Walter W. Davis, “China, The Confucian Ideal, and the European Age of Enlightenment”, *Journal of the History of Ideas*, 44:4 (1983): 523-548, quote at 523.

⁶² D.E. Mungello, “Confucianism in the Enlightenment: Antagonism and Collaboration between the Jesuits and the Philosophes” in *China and Europe: Images and Influences in Sixteenth to Eighteenth Centuries* ed. Thomas H.C. Lee (Hong Kong: Chinese University Press, 1991), 55; repeated almost verbatim in Mungello, *The Great Encounter of China and the West*, 122.

ignored...all these ideas had some foundation in fact.”⁶³ Arthur Wright makes a somewhat altered version of this argument, suggesting that it was the unrealistic Chinese self-image that affected European perceptions, but nevertheless it was Chinese self-perception from China. He argues that the impressions from the merchants and the Jesuits combined with the “aesthetic appeal of Chinese objects of art, [to] set the tone of the early European study of China”.⁶⁴ As we will see in the following chapter, both the sinophile and sinophobe primary sources engaged with China and reported a combination of positive and negative aspects of its political economy.

Some historians differentiate authors within the model perspective and note that there were individuals who did care about Chinese realities, others who ignored inconvenient aspects of it, and still others who used China as a model only when they discussed topics considered controversial in Europe. This approach, considering the motivations and interests of specific authors, is the most useful. Gregory Blue maintains some philosophes were less interested in actual China and uses the example of Montesquieu who partly ignored certain aspects of the Chinese reality such as the imperial civil service to make China fit his model.⁶⁵ Elizabeth Fox-Genovese distinguishes the different uses of China for the Physiocrats. When they addressed economic issues, she argues, they would address France directly but when they addressed political or social issues they would often talk of universal models or a distant land such as China.⁶⁶

Personal agendas are discussed further in the following chapter, but it is important to recognize that some authors did praise or criticize China almost entirely based on their own bias and prejudice. For instance, Chen argues that if English authors respected ancient culture, attacked revealed religion, or championed modern progress, their perspectives of China changed. In fact, he argues that Defoe’s opinion of China was “predetermined” because of his Christianity, English nationalism, and merchant, military and journalistic background.⁶⁷ All early modern authors were not driven by bias, but it is important to recognize that even if they were, bias does not eliminate the importance of Chinese reality. Urs Bitterli comments, “Perception, understanding and

⁶³ Pulleyblank, *Orientalism and History*, 72.

⁶⁴ Wright, “The Study of Chinese Civilization”, 233.

⁶⁵ Gregory Blue, “China and Western Social Thought”, 89.

⁶⁶ Elizabeth Fox-Genovese, *The Origins of Physiocracy: Economic Revolution and Social Order in Eighteenth-century France* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1976), 11.

⁶⁷ Chen Shouyi, “Daniel Defoe, China’s Severe Critic” in *The Vision of China in the English Literature of the Seventeenth and Eighteenth Centuries* ed. Adrian Hsia (Hong Kong: Chinese University Press, 1998), 242.

representation are all obliged to use stereotypes. Stereotypes are not falsehoods, but simplified models which are necessary if we are to cope with the multiplicity of experience.”⁶⁸ Similarly, David Mungello argues the “ideas of Leibniz did not originate in, so much as receive confirmation from Chinese culture”, though he continues on to note “that a corroborative influence is still an influence.”⁶⁹ Walter Demel aptly summarises the compromise in his description of Christian Wolff’s use of China to confirm his philosophy; he argues that the importance of such confirmation cannot be underestimated:

For it makes a great difference whether an ideal state can be regarded only as a utopia, or whether a political theorist is able to refer to an historical, or contemporary, state where his ideals were, or are, realized in a more or less perfect way. This was the true importance of the Chinese model.⁷⁰

In short, following Blue, the view of the “Orient” as a passive function, as a set of symbols open to manipulation of changing Western interests is too simplistic.⁷¹

While Enlightenment philosophers, geographers and the primary sources of information on China, clearly had their own agendas, many were also sincerely interested in empirical China. On this middle ground, it is useful to follow Joan-Pau Rubiés’ argument that Europeans “were often genuinely concerned with understanding the East, for practical and intellectual reasons” and the “intense interaction between direct observation and conceptual development is the key to the emergence of an early-modern discourse on non-Europeans”.⁷² It is important to consider what could have been known at the time, and to find the balance between how reality and image were combined, without assuming maliciousness or blind ignorance. It is true that China was ignored by some scholars and geographers who preferred not to address the issues it raised.⁷³ However, as we will see in throughout this study, there was also interest in China’s political economy. This interest was expressed in three primary ways. First, China was used as a mirror for self-reflection. Second, it was seen to offer lessons,

⁶⁸ Urs Bitterli, *Cultures in Conflict: Encounters between European and Non-European Cultures, 1492-1800*, translated by Ritchie Robertson (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1989), 7.

⁶⁹ David E. Mungello, “Some Recent Studies on the Confluence of Chinese and Western Intellectual History”, *Journal of the History of Ideas*, 40:4 (1979), 649-661, quote at 660.

⁷⁰ Walter Demel, “China in the Political Thought of Western and Central Europe, 1570-1750” in *China and Europe*, ed. Lee, 55.

⁷¹ Blue, “China and Western Social Thought,” 69.

⁷² Joan-Pau Rubiés, “Oriental Despotism and European Orientalism: Botero to Montesquieu”. *Journal of Early Modern History* 9:1 (2005): 109-180, quote at 113.

⁷³ Bossuet’s *Discourse on Universal History* famously did not include China as part of its universal geography (this will be discussed in chapter two). Rousseau ignored China or preferred not to address the issue of China where civilization and virtue were both reported. See, for instance, Muthu, *Enlightenment Against Empire*, 32; Lottes “China in European Political Thought,” 79.

which some argued should be applied in European countries. Finally, China was seen to be too unique in many areas to offer an imitable model of political economy.

1.5. THESIS STRUCTURE

A specific focus on views of China's political economy leads to several conclusions. First, while certainly a phenomenon that was evident in the eighteenth century, the sinophilia-sinophobia dichotomy is not always a useful way to analyse perceptions of China. With regards to political economy, we find a surprising degree of consensus among those sources conventionally cast on either side of the dichotomy. Second, in the area of political economy Europeans did not possess comfortable assumptions of superiority over China and in fact many expressed a high level of civilizational relativism. Finally, there was a genuine interest in what could be learned from China's civilization.

To demonstrate these arguments this study looks to the primary, geographical and philosophical descriptions of China. The weight of these groups of sources varies in each chapter depending on the debate at hand. This methodology is necessary in order to focus on the salient contemporary concerns. The second chapter gives an historical context to these sources, and examines their respective biases. Genuine interest in China is seen through the travelling of knowledge and arguments between these sources. This chapter also argues many European writers were able to separate religious and secular areas of interest.

Chapters three to seven examine particular areas of interest connected to China's political economy and each case reiterates aspects of the aforementioned arguments. Chapters three and four concentrate on views of Chinese commerce. Chapter three examines discussion of the commercial behaviour of the Chinese. While views of China's moral philosophy diverged greatly, descriptions of day-to-day practical morality were surprisingly similar in sources conventionally labelled as sinophile and sinophobe and displayed a high level of relativism on this topic. It is on this topic above all others in this study that Europeans used China as a mirror for self-reflection. Chapter four considers views of China's foreign trade policies. This topic represents another instance of self-reflection as Europe's own trade practices were considered highly problematic and a hindrance to the China trade. The approach to understanding China's

attitude towards foreign trade reflected a great deal of interest in the unique circumstances that allowed the Middle Kingdom to restrict international trade. Chinese policy, while not generally praised, was largely understood as rational.

The next two chapters address views of China's government. The fifth chapter examines the structure of China's government in the eyes of European observers and authors. The chapter reveals that even a famed 'sinophobe', such as Montesquieu, recognized particular exceptions to the Chinese case and repeated similar information as 'sinophile' sources. Once again, the unique characteristics of the Chinese Empire enabled a level of understanding for the moderation of the Chinese form of government. This chapter highlights an important division in views of China; that between philosophers who believed China was imitable and others who felt its system of political economy was irreproducible. Chapter six takes a more detailed look at particular areas of Chinese governance, following the duties of government laid out by Adam Smith. Here too a high level of consensus amongst those sources that are typically divided is evident, alongside instances of civilizational relativism. This chapter addresses views of China's military, justice system, public institutions and taxation policies. Discussion of China's military reveals it as a key weakness of the Chinese system of political economy. This is the first topic on which we are confronted with a fundamental flaw of the Chinese system.

Finally, the seventh chapter examines views of China's science and technology. Although this is a topic on which the primary sources are widely believed to diverge greatly, there is in fact a remarkable degree of similarity in the negative reports on the state of China's speculative sciences and mechanical arts. This is a second area of political economy in which European sources reflect an air of definite (though not assumed) superiority. Significantly, the theme of science and technology elucidates the transition to the rise of progress as the main assessor of the Chinese system. The conclusion of this thesis builds on this theme of the role of progress in examining the shift from China being seen as stable to being assigned the label of stationary.

CONCLUSION

Without anachronistic knowledge of the ultimate success and dominance of the European models of political and economic organization, Enlightenment observers and commentators were not assured of Europe's supremacy over the Chinese in this realm.

European confidence grew over the course of the eighteenth century, however, many Enlightenment thinkers still recognized and valued alternative structures of political and economic organization. This last point connects to the genuine interest in China's political economy. Europeans often displayed an active engagement with the Chinese model, analysing how aspects of it could be reconciled with – and even be used to improve – their own theories on some of the fundamental questions of their time. There were many elements of China's political economy that were deemed relatively successful and seen to offer valuable lessons for an envisioned “enlightened” remodelling of European political and economic organization. At other times, China was seen to offer information on pitfalls to avoid. We will see this exemplified with regards to China's military weakness (discussed in chapter six), and the stagnation of its science and technology (addressed in chapter seven). In the view of many contemporaries, China's history, geography and population were such unique elements, that they were seen as not being able to be translated into a European setting. Thus China was not dismissed as a useful model on normative grounds, but rather it was seen as a unique case that could not be worked into the universal models that characterized European Enlightenment thought. This is exemplified in debates over China's foreign trade policy (as discussed in chapter four), its form of government (considered in chapter five) and government revenue (addressed in chapter six). To be sure, China was at times used as a mirror for European self-evaluation and exploration. This is evident with reference to China's economic culture, a topic Europeans were struggling with in their own backyards (as will be seen in chapter three).

European, and particularly British engagement with China's political economy on several levels reveals openness to foreign answers to European questions on how to organize a society politically and economically. Appleby has argued, “The modern transformation of European society has been viewed as a process rather than a series of developments capable of leading to conclusions other than the one actually realized”.⁷⁴ However, if we return to the Enlightenment era we find much more flexibility in accepting an alternative model of civilization.

⁷⁴ Joyce Oldham Appleby, *Economic Thought and Ideology in Seventeenth-Century England* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1978), 16.

OUTLINE:	2.	TRAVELLING KNOWLEDGE IN THE “DISCERNING AGE”
	2.1.	FROM CHINA TO EUROPE
	2.2.	GEOGRAPHERS
	2.3.	PHILOSOPHERS

“Since the world is no longer to be amused with the fabulous relations of travellers and historians, any more than with the dreams of superstition and enthusiasm; an attempt to distinguish truth from fiction, and to discover the certainty of those accounts we have received of distant nations, it is presumed, will not be unacceptable in this discerning age.”

--- Thomas Salmon⁷⁵

Early modern Europeans found their curiosity of distant societies and civilizations piqued by a flood of first-hand descriptions. By the eighteenth century, discussions of foreign lands grew heated, as Enlightenment scholars and geographers fervently debated the nature, validity and implications of the empirical accounts. This chapter examines the sources that created and recycled information on China in Enlightenment Britain and France (which necessarily leads to a broader study as knowledge travelled across countries and over time). It does not add to or repeat the findings of the field of publication history, nor does it expand the cataloguing efforts of Donald Lach and Edwin Van Kley.⁷⁶ Rather, it contextualizes the sources that are examined in subsequent chapters and explains the ways in which knowledge of China travelled in eighteenth century Europe. From this contextualization, two key findings are evident: first, the boundaries between primary sources, geographers and philosophers blurred as information on China’s political economy travelled over space and time and was translated and analysed by different authors; second, many Europeans could separate religious dogma from secular interests in their descriptions and assessments of China’s political economy.⁷⁷

⁷⁵ Thomas Salmon, *Modern History*. 3 Volumes (London: Printed for M. Bettesworth et. al., 1739), vol. 1, ix. This quote is the first line in the introduction to the octavo edition, which was first published in 1724.

⁷⁶ John Feather, “The Commerce of Letters: The Study of the Eighteenth-Century Book Trade,” *Eighteenth-Century Studies*, Special Issue: The Printed Word in the Eighteenth Century. 17:4 (Summer, 1984): 405-424; Lach, *Asia in the Making of Europe* Vol. 1 and 2; Lach and Van Kley, *Asia in the Making of Europe*, Vol. 3.

⁷⁷ Franco Venturi argues that political economy was a powerful unifying force of Enlightenment philosophy precisely because it offered a secular way for philosophers to discuss human betterment. See Franco Venturi, *Utopia and reform in the Enlightenment* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1971), chapter five. See also John Robertson, “The Enlightenment above National Context: Political Economy in Eighteenth-Century Scotland and Naples”, *The Historical Journal*, 40:3 (September 1997): 667-697.

Historians have made different choices of which authors to examine when considering the broad subject of views of the other. Guy and Mungello largely restrict themselves to published works they believe best typify the general reaction in Europe.⁷⁸ Donald Lach offers the most direct assessment of the primary sources on Asia in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. He bases his research on extant printed material though he acknowledges that these “are not completely representative of what was then in circulation” because manuscript and oral reports also contributed to shaping contemporary views.⁷⁹ This dissertation selects sources based on their contemporary popularity, their influence on the development of new ideas, and their relevance to the topic of China’s political economy. This latter focus necessarily neglects detailed analysis of important authors on China, such as the Jesuit Martino Martini, who stirred controversy in his writings on Chinese chronology, and the philosopher Christian Wolff who controversially analysed Confucianism. The purpose of this research is to identify, examine and contextualise those works that were critical to the dissemination of and reflection on knowledge of China’s political economy during the Enlightenment.

An advantage of focusing on the area of political economy is that early modern Europeans widely considered it to be less of a controversial topic than religion or history. Contemporary authors perceived the Jesuit missionaries as having little incentive to be deceptive about aspects of China’s political economy. The anonymous editor of *The Chinese Traveller*, an English compendium based on Jesuit sources that presented a generally favourable view of China, argued the Jesuits could be trusted on non-religious topics: ‘We have no reason to distrust the fidelity of the [Jesuit missionaries] in their various relations, except where the religion or particular interest of the Jesuit order is concerned.’⁸⁰ The subject of political economy certainly stood in relation to knowledge of other aspects of China but at the same time was a space that enabled candid analysis.

As mentioned in chapter one, this dissertation examines the texts, the reading and production of three main bodies of sources: the early modern European travellers who relayed first-hand information about China to audiences in Europe; the British and French geographers who categorized, assessed and popularized knowledge of the Middle Kingdom; and the European philosophers who addressed China’s political

⁷⁸ Guy, *The French Image of China*, 18; D.E. Mungello, *The Great Encounter of China and the West*.

⁷⁹ Lach, *Asia in the making of Europe*, Vol. 1, xviii.

⁸⁰ Anonymous, *The Chinese Traveller*, 2 Volumes (London: Printed by E. and C. Dilly, 1772), Vol. 1, iv.

economy. A study of the circulation and construction of information of China's political economy offers a more revealing map of knowledge than other methodologies that focus on one particular group of sources. This method leads to the clear identification of the most popular themes, awareness of pieces of information that were neglected by a particular group of sources or individual author, as well as the relationship between the ethnographic descriptions of China and the ways in which this information was reworked. Focusing on the topic of political economy makes this project possible. This chapter is not designed to examine what these sources had to say about China, but rather seeks to contextualize the travelling of knowledge on China's political economy.

Although each of these three groups is treated separately in this chapter, information and ideas were transmitted between the sources and some individual authors blurred the boundaries altogether. Geographers and philosophers influenced the authors of the primary sources. As Ros Ballaster reminds us: "travellers went to eastern territories with stories in their heads and measured what they met there quite self-consciously against those stories".⁸¹ Further, primary sources were conscious of the way their accounts were being received in Europe and the effect this had on their varying agendas. Additionally, the editors of travel compilations shaped the presentation of primary sources to a European readership, and geographers actively re-arranged the information found in the numerous primary sources. Philosophers drew information from the primary and geographical sources to complement their theories, and, at times, also sought to explain information that did not fit their theoretical arguments. As discussed in the preceding chapter, Jesuit authors were usually labelled sinophiles while the non-Jesuit primary sources were predominantly considered sinophobes. In assessing the information provided, the geographers and scholars took a stance on which group was the most trustworthy and were often explicitly critical of the other group. Interestingly, even in cases where a source met with scepticism, the information it contained was often still circulated. The geographers and philosophers also related to each other's works. Books such as Guillaume Thomas François Raynal's *Histoire des Deux Indes* (discussed below) blur the boundaries between the popularizing geographies and the erudite philosophical works. Thus these three groups were closely linked and information circulating on China's political economy can only be accurately understood when we consider them together.

⁸¹ Ballaster, *Fabulous Orientals*, 5.

Alongside print runs, number of editions and translations, contemporary library catalogues are useful to identify the influential sources on China circulating in the eighteenth century. By the sixteenth century the private library became the principal resource for scholarly materials. A new class of collectors emerged including lawyers, merchants, royal officials, tradesmen and artisans. Melissa Calaresu describes how the growth of the publishing industry led to lower book prices and greater accessibility of the printed word to an increasingly literate pan-European audience.⁸² The catalogue of John Bell's travelling library gives an indication of the books circulating in England containing information of China.⁸³ Bell was a major figure in the London printing and book trade. His bookshop on the Strand in London was home to a diverse printing and publishing business, where he established himself as one of the most successful booksellers of his time, including running the British Library in 1769, and achieving the title of bookseller to the Prince of Wales in the 1780s.⁸⁴ Appendix I gives a list of important works on China available in his travelling library. This library represented a diverse group of authors, from Jesuits, to non-Jesuit missionaries, merchants, explorers, travel collections, sixteenth century to eighteenth century compendiums and philosophical sources. It also reflects the travelling of information around Europe; for instance, Spanish, Dutch, French and English authors all wrote primary sources on China found in this collection.

Another way of identifying the most important sources on China in Great Britain is to examine the works referenced by contemporary authors. One particularly useful case is that of Thomas Percy, a writer and Church of Ireland bishop, who published a list of over twenty-five sources that he relied on when creating the notes for his translation of a Chinese novel (see Appendix II). His work, *Hau Kiou Choaun, or The Pleasing History* (1761) was popular around Europe and translated into French in 1766 and Dutch in 1767. Friends with Samuel Johnson, Oliver Goldsmith and David Hume, Percy was an avid reader and was certainly one of the most informed people in eighteenth century England on the state of China.⁸⁵ His sources ranged from the Jesuits

⁸² Melissa Calaresu, "Looking for Virgil's Tomb: The End of the Grand Tour and the Cosmopolitan Ideal in Europe" in *Voyages and Visions: Towards a cultural history of travel* eds. Jas Elsner and Joan-Pau Rubiés (London: Reaktion Books, 1999), 140.

⁸³ John Bell, *A New Catalogue of Bell's Circulating Library, consisting of above fifty thousand volumes* (London: printed for John Bell, 1778).

⁸⁴ Hanna Barker, "Bell, John (1745-1831)", *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004).

⁸⁵ Chen Shouyi, "Thomas Percy and His Chinese Studies" in *The Vision of China in the English Literature of the Seventeenth and Eighteenth Centuries* in ed. Adrian Hsia (Hong Kong: Chinese University Press, 1998).

(who he criticized but nonetheless greatly relied on), non-Jesuit travellers (notably Admiral George Anson), a collection of voyages and philosophical publications. Percy relied primarily on English and French sources and at times listed the same source in two different languages indicating that he compared the editions. While identifying French primary and philosophical sources, he did not refer to any French geographical sources. Percy's book was not popular, and his methodology of commenting throughout a work of literature was unusual; however, the sources he relied upon were the standard, available, popular descriptions of China in mid-eighteenth century Britain.⁸⁶ Based on the insights provided in these two contemporary bibliographies, as well as a consideration of influential sources determined by consistent cross-referencing across all genres, this chapter proceeds by examining the three sources of information in this study. First it considers the nature of the primary sources of information, second the geographers and finally the philosophers.

2.1. FROM CHINA TO EUROPE

In the early modern world information travelled from China to Europe through individuals with careers varying from missionaries to merchants, men of war to emissaries. In this first phase of travelling the differing backgrounds of the authors in addition to their contrasting exposure to China shaped the information they produced. Reliable Medieval information on China in Europe was mixed with fantastical tales, and audiences were left unsure as to what to believe. However, they did develop a keen interest in the Middle Kingdom. By the sixteenth century, Iberian travellers began to report more detailed information on China, painting it in both a positive and negative light. From the seventeenth to the eighteenth centuries the information increased dramatically in both quality and quantity. The primary sources circulated rapidly and were quickly translated into the major European languages. Every prominent source discussed below, apart from Ricci and Triguault's description of China, was translated into both English and French.

⁸⁶ For more on the reception of Percy's work see, James Watt, "Thomas Percy, China and the Gothic", *The Eighteenth Century* 48:2 (2007): 95-109.

SOURCES UP TO THE SEVENTEENTH CENTURY

Before the Age of Discovery, authors and readers approached the Middle Kingdom without assumptions of superiority on secular matters. Descriptions of China (or ‘Seres’ or ‘Cathay’ as it was then known), although limited, generally portrayed an advanced civilization. The most influential medieval European book that revealed the world of Cathay was Marco Polo’s *The Description of the World* (written with Rustichello of Pisa as *Livre des diversité* in 1298-99).⁸⁷ Polo was clearly impressed by China, providing an “account of Cathay as the largest, wealthiest, and most populous land of the thirteenth century.”⁸⁸ The pre-Age of Discovery approach to the East blended descriptions of fantastical tales, religious and moral exoticism, self-promotion and criticism of Western meanness in contrast to Eastern wealth.⁸⁹ Interestingly, Polo was still influential by the eighteenth century, despite some of his information having been discredited. He was defended in the modern part of the *Universal History*, which argued that while readers presumed much of Polo’s description was exaggerated, “...the more they have become acquainted with China, the better they have been satisfied of the faithfulness of that Venetian traveller.”⁹⁰

By the end of the Middle Ages many educated Europeans increasingly expressed interest in overseas civilizations; however, it was only with the expansion of the Portuguese sea route to the coast of Southern China in 1514 (when the Portuguese first touched the southern coast of China near Hong Kong), and the rise of the printing press (following the production of the Gutenberg bible in 1456) that this demand for information on the Far East could be met. In the sixteenth century Iberian travellers provided the most current information on the Chinese Empire. Galeote Pereira, a Portuguese trader and soldier, wrote an account of his observations on the customs and government of the Chinese Empire in 1565, which enjoyed a fairly wide circulation at

⁸⁷ AC Moule and P Pelliot. *Marco Polo: The Description of the World* (London: George Routledge and Sons Ltd, 1938), 32. John Horace Parry also notes the fourteenth century popularity of the travels of Odoric of Pordenone and even more famous Travels of Sir John Mandeville. However, it is the account of Marco Polo that had the most influence into the early modern period. John Horace Parry, *The Age of Reconnaissance* (Cleveland: World Publishing Company, 1963), 7.

⁸⁸ Lach, *Asia in the Making of Europe*, Vol. 1, 36.

⁸⁹ Spence, *The Chan's Great Continent*, 17.

⁹⁰ The modern part of *An universal history...*, 44 Volumes (London: Printed for S. Richardson, et. al., 1759), vol. 8, 9. Travel compilers made similar arguments about Polo’s description of Cathay. Samuel Derrick. *A collection of travels, thro’ various parts of the world; but more particularly, thro’ Tartary, China, Turkey, Persia, and the East-Indies* 2 Volumes (London: Printed for John Wilkie, 1762), Vol. 1, 56-7; John Harris, (updated by John Campbell), *Navigantium atque itinerantium bibliotheca. Or, a complete collection of voyages and travels...* 2 Volumes (London: Publisher Unknown, 1744-48) Vol. 1, 545

the time.⁹¹ Another Portuguese author, the Dominican Friar Gaspar da Cruz also published an influential account specifically on China.⁹² Lastly, the Spanish Augustinian Martín de Rada wrote an important first-hand account of China in the sixteenth century. De Rada's description was much more critical of the Middle Kingdom than those of Pereira or da Cruz.⁹³ These authors represent an important step in the expansion of European knowledge of China. Their accounts were not widely read in the rest of Europe but they greatly impacted European views of China through the synthesis offered by the Spanish Augustinian Juan González de Mendoza's popular *Historia de las cosas más notables, ritos y costumbres del gran reyno de la China* (1585).⁹⁴ Written at the command of Pope Gregory XIII, Mendoza's description of China was very popular; it was reprinted forty-six times by the end of the sixteenth century, translated into seven European languages and read by most educated Europeans.⁹⁵ His *Historia* was a systematic assessment of the Chinese Empire, covering topics as diverse as geography, customs, religion, moral philosophy and politics. The Augustinian did not let his religious agenda affect his discussion of secular aspects of China.

Mendoza never went to China (not for lack of trying) and he relied heavily on a mix of published and unpublished information from Pereira, the missionaries da Cruz, de Rada, Jesuit letters, João de Barros, and Chinese books⁹⁶; however, his work offered new information to the European public about China and thus is considered a primary

⁹¹ Pereira's account was translated into English from the abridged Italian version in 1577 by Richard Willis and published in Richard Eden, *History of Travayle in the West and East Indies* (London, printed by Richarde Iugge, 1577); Charles R. Boxer, ed. *South China in the Sixteenth Century: Being the Narratives of Galeote Pereira, Fr. Gaspar da Cruz, O.P., Fr. Martin de Rada, O.E.S.A.* (Bangkok: Orchid Press, 2004), lvi.

⁹² This was the first book on China printed in Europe, however it was not widely distributed because it was published in a plague year and was written in the Portuguese vernacular. A copy of da Cruz's account was found in Richard Hakluyt's papers and subsequently translated and published by Samuel Purchas (who reduced the original text by approximately one-third). Boxer, *South China*, lxvi.

⁹³ De Rada's report was not published in its entirety at the time, nor was it translated into English. Boxer, *South China*, lxxviii.

⁹⁴ The less popular Spanish Augustinian Jerónimo Román's *Repúblicas del Mundo* (1575) also relied on Da Rada. See Joan-Pau Rubiés, "The concept of gentile civilization in missionary discourse and its European reception: Mexico, Perú and China in the *Repúblicas del Mundo* by Jerónimo Román (1575-1595)", in *Circulation des savoirs et missions d'évangélisation (XVIe-XVIIIe siècle)* (Madrid: Casa de Velázquez, 2010).

⁹⁵ Lach, *Asia in the Making of Europe*, Vol. 1, 744. It ran through 30 editions in the principal European languages by the end of the sixteenth century. Boxer, *South China*, 310. The French translation was made by Luc de la Porte and was published in Paris (1588, 1589 and 1600), Geneva (1606), Lyon (1606) and Rouen (1604). The English translation is discussed below. Juan Gonzales de Mendoza, *The history of the great and mighty kingdom of China, and the situation thereof*. Translated by R. Parke. (London: Printed by I Wolfe for Edward White, 1588). Reprinted George Staunton ed. (London: Reprinted for the Hakluyt Society, 1853(. Facsimile reprint of the 1853 edition by (Elibron Classics, 2005).lxxxii.

⁹⁶ Lach, *Asia in the Making of Europe*, Vol. 1, 747

source. Although he did rely on da Rada as a source, as Boxer argues, Mendoza presented a view of China as an “enviable country” and he initiated “what may be termed the ‘China Legend.’”⁹⁷ In other words, Boxer contends that Mendoza instigated the era of sinophilia by starting to idealise the government of China; a project the Jesuits would take up in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. Similarly, Lach points out that Mendoza rejected de Rada’s critical attitude and followed Barros, Bernardino de Escalante (another Spanish cosmographer who described China based on Barros and da Cruz) and da Cruz’s acclaim of China.⁹⁸ However, once we begin to scrutinize exactly what was written on particular subjects such as international trade and economic culture, we find that Mendoza’s account was not as one-sided as it may have been on other subjects.

Religious interests motivated the transmission of much of the information on China, but did not account for all of the attention paid to the Middle Kingdom, particularly in an era of expansionist European ambitions. Robert Parke’s 1588 English translation of Mendoza’s work, for example, demonstrates the demand for information on China to encourage overseas trade.⁹⁹ Richard Hakluyt, who as we will see below was an English nationalist and believed in the importance of exploration and trade, commissioned this translation. Published in a year of war between England and Spain, there is a marked economic nationalism present in Parke’s introduction. His translation is dedicated to the English explorer Thomas Cavendish who, he hoped, would find a new trade route to Asia. Parke also praised the teenage King Edward VI for his encouragement of trade with the East 35 years earlier:

[he] went about the discoverie of *Cathai* and *China*, partly of desire that the good young king had to enlarge the Christian faith, and partlie to finde out some where in those regions ample vent of the cloth of England...¹⁰⁰

Although Parke lists both religion and trade as motivations for expanding information on China, the rest of his dedication concentrates solely on trade. Parke attributed his decision to translate Mendoza’s work into English to the need for a better understanding of “the intelligence of the government of the countrie and of the commodities of the territories and provinces”.¹⁰¹ Therefore, it is evident, that from the travels of the

⁹⁷ Boxer, *South China*, xci.

⁹⁸ Lach, *Asia in the Making of Europe*, Vol. 1, 748. Rubiés, “The concept of gentile civilization...”

⁹⁹ Parke’s translation was based on the Madrid edition of 1586 that contained additional materials. See Rubiés, “The concept of gentile civilization...”

¹⁰⁰ Mendoza, *The history of the great and mighty kingdom of China*, 2.

¹⁰¹ *Ibid.*, 4.

merchant Marco Polo to the English translation of Mendoza, political economy encouraged the transmission of information about China.

JESUIT SOURCES FROM THE SEVENTEENTH CENTURY TO THE EIGHTEENTH CENTURY

Beginning in the seventeenth century, the Jesuit missionaries provided the most detailed accounts of the Chinese Empire. Ignatius of Loyola founded The Society of Jesus in 1534 and Pope Paul III officially confirmed it six years later. The society prioritized missionary work and religious and secular education and thus the polymath, adventurous Jesuits were well equipped to provide information on China.¹⁰² Giovanni Petri Maffei's *Historiarum Indicarum libri XVI* (Florence, 1588) was the first systematic Jesuit work on the Eastern Missions, including China.¹⁰³ However, it was in the seventeenth century that a more detailed picture of the Middle Kingdom began to emerge. Matteo Ricci established the first Jesuit mission in China in 1583 and reached Peking in 1601. The Jesuits used their wide-ranging diplomatic and linguistic skills, religious openness and scientific knowledge to gain a greater understanding of the Chinese by forming close relationships with the imperial court and literati. The arrival of the early Jesuits coincided with the peak of the Ming Dynasty's (1368-1644) strength, allowing for cultural syncretism between self-assured missionaries and confident Chinese literati. The Jesuits were a diverse a group of individuals with varying nationalities, motivations, interests and opinions. For instance, botany interested Michael Boym, while Adam Schall von Bell focused on astronomy. In fact, Marshall and Williams make an oft-neglected point that the Jesuits did not speak with one voice.¹⁰⁴ Adding to this, depending on the topic being addressed, many perspectives were evident within a single Jesuit source.

The most influential seventeenth century Jesuit source on China was Nicolas Trigault's publication of Matteo Ricci's journals as *De Christaina expeditione apud Sinas* (1615).¹⁰⁵ Trigault arrived in Macao in 1610, the year that Ricci died in Peking and the

¹⁰² Liam Brockey, *Journey to the East* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2007), 7.

¹⁰³ Also translated into Latin, Italian and French but not into German and English. It was based on the manuscripts of Alessandro Valignano, private interviews and Jesuit archives and letters. Lach and Van Kley, *Asia in the Making of Europe*, 354.

¹⁰⁴ Marshall and Williams, *The Great Map of Mankind*, 85.

¹⁰⁵ This work appeared in 5 Latin editions (1615, 1616, 1617, 1623 and 1648), 3 French editions (1616, 1617 and 1618), and a German, Spanish and Italian edition as well as having English excerpts reproduced in Samuel Purchas *Purchas, His Pilgrimes* (London: Henrie Fetherstone, 1625). D.E. Mungello, *Curious Land: Jesuit accommodation and the origins of Sinology* (Hawaii: University of Hawaii Press, 1989), 48.

two never met; and yet, together they produced one of the most influential primary descriptions of China in early modern Europe. Trigault's contributions to Ricci's diaries were to translate them into Latin, organize them into five books, add brief sections, and write chapters in the last two books.¹⁰⁶ The focus of this research on political economy means the first book of *De Christaina expeditione* is of the most relevance. This book derived entirely from Ricci's diaries, and thus in the text I cite Ricci as the author of this work, though Trigault's editing and translating efforts are noted.¹⁰⁷

Although running fewer editions than other sources, and being the only key primary source not to have a full contemporary English translation (it was available in Latin, French, German, Spanish and Italian), it was an extremely influential work as “[i]t was almost universally cited by scholars who mentioned China, and it was regularly pilfered by later authors and publishers”.¹⁰⁸ Ricci argued that he offered a unique perspective for readers because he lived in China for over thirty years, travelled around the empire, spoke the Chinese language, read their literature and discoursed with the people.¹⁰⁹ This claim to authority became prominent in the debate over the accuracy of information provided by the Jesuits relative to that provided by emissaries, merchants and men of war who did not have the same level of access to the Chinese court. As we shall see throughout this study, a reading of Ricci that focuses on topics of political economy contradicts the notion (both contemporary and modern) that Jesuit writings too highly extolled the Chinese and that non-Jesuit reports were more nuanced in their assessments. For instance, Ricci disparaged China's military and scientific capacities.

Maintaining a focus on identifying important sources for eighteenth century Europeans interested in China, three seventeenth century Jesuits are emblematic of the popular (and at times controversial) reception of Jesuit descriptions. First, the work of Martino Martini, an Italian (and part German) Jesuit who lived in China from 1642 to 1651, and from 1658 until his death in 1661, highlight the controversial aspects of Jesuit publications. One of his books recounted Chinese ancient history, leading to a greatly

¹⁰⁶ Mungello, *Curious Land*, 47.

¹⁰⁷ Matteo Ricci and Nicolas Trigault. *China in the Sixteenth Century: the journals of Matthew Ricci: 1583-1610 [The compilation by N. Trigault]* Translated by Louis J. Gallagher (New York: Random House, 1953), xviii.

¹⁰⁸ Lach and Van Kley, *Asia in the Making of Europe*, 513. Mungello argues in terms of readership it was “probably the most influential book on China published in seventeenth century Europe”. Mungello, *Curious Land*, 48.

¹⁰⁹ *Ibid.*, 5.

contested questioning of biblical chronology.¹¹⁰ This work stirred great controversy and was widely read, with at least 21 editions being produced in 20 years. The publications of two other important Jesuits, Alvaro Semedo and Gabriel de Magalhães, reveal the role of editing, reorganizing, and popularizing Jesuit descriptions of China. These Portuguese Jesuits were not “seminal thinkers” but had deep knowledge of China’s culture, language and society leading to the popularity of their works.¹¹¹ Semedo’s manuscript on China (written in Portuguese) was translated into Spanish and reorganized by Manuel de Faria I Sousa under the title *Imperio de la China* (Madrid, 1642).¹¹² The structure of Semedo’s publication reveals its design to appeal to popular audiences. The first half of the work addressed major themes (under clear headings) to understanding the nature of the Chinese Empire, while the second half focused on the history of Christianity in China (carrying on from Ricci’s publication). The goal of this work was to simplify information on China, and as explained in the preface to abbreviate information to what was useful or of interest. Magalhães’ description of China was also composed in Portuguese. It was transported from China via Philippe Couplet and posthumously translated into French and restructured by Abbé Claude Bernou as *Nouvelle relation de la China* (Paris, 1688).¹¹³ As Mungello points out this work was “light and popular in tone”.¹¹⁴ It covered a wide range of subject matters including discussion of China’s justice system (based on first-hand experience). Magalhães’ description was a practical work designed to identify aspects of China that he felt were not addressed in sufficient detail by previous sources, such as the Chinese language. Both Semedo and Magalhães offer a mixed view of praise and criticism of China’s political economy.

Another important seventeenth century Jesuit text, *Confucius Sinarum Philosophus* (1687), also focused on a contentious topic. Largely driven by the Flemish Jesuit Philippe Couplet, it was a collaborative Jesuit effort that was translated into French by Louis Cousin (1688) and from this edition to English as *The Morals of Confucius, a Chinese Philosopher* (1691). While it was an influential Jesuit source, it did not offer information on China’s political economy. Written to defend the Jesuit position in the Rites Controversy, the original Latin text was a translation and commentary of three of

¹¹⁰ Martino Martini, *Sinicae historiae Decas Prima* (Munich 1658)

¹¹¹ Mungello, *Curious Land*, 74.

¹¹² From Sousa’s version it was then translated into Italian (1643), French (1645) and English (1655). *Ibid.*, 75.

¹¹³ Public demand led to reprinting the French edition in 1689 and 1690, and an English translation by John Ogilby in 1688. Mungello, *Curious Land*, 95.

¹¹⁴ *Ibid.*, 96.

the four Confucian books. This work aimed to teach European audiences about the ancient moral philosophy of the Chinese and was extremely popular in Europe, influencing thinkers such as Gottfried Leibniz. While later Jesuits focused a greater amount of attention on the Emperor, especially the Kangxi Emperor, Confucianism continued to play an important role in all Jesuit works on China. *Confucius Sinarum Philosophus* was (and is) viewed as ‘sinophile’ propaganda based in large part due to its publication during a particularly difficult period of the Rites Controversy.

The reputation of the Jesuits as sinophiles arose, in large part, from their position in the Chinese Rites Controversy. The Controversy began in the 1630s, reached a peak in 1700 and continued into the eighteenth century. It involved the Jansenists, the Société des Missions Étrangères, the Dominicans (who disagreed with the Jesuit practice of cultural accommodation) as well as European intellectuals such as Leibniz, and institutions including the Sorbonne. The substance of the controversy was over the Jesuit practice of cultural accommodation. In particular, it related to the terminology the Jesuits allowed for the Chinese to refer to God and Heaven, as well as the Chinese practices of Confucian rites and ancestor worship. The Jesuits, following their policy of cultural accommodation wanted to allow the converted Chinese to maintain certain cultural rites that the missionaries did not believe interfered with their newfound Christian beliefs. By 1700 the Chinese Rites Controversy had largely shifted from Rome to Paris where Jesuit books were burned at the Sorbonne.¹¹⁵ The Chinese rites were eventually condemned by Rome in 1704 (confirmed in a papal bull in 1715), however the controversy attached to their publications continued. The presentation of information on China, therefore, became particularly sensitive to this European context and Jesuit sources were increasingly questioned and attacked in Europe. This controversy helped to create the perceived dichotomy between sources seen as praising China and ones viewed as criticizing it, particularly on the subject of religious customs and historical chronologies. One important Jesuit work by Louis Le Comte was particularly engaged with the Rites Controversy and also served as a key eighteenth century reference for information on China’s political economy.

Father Le Comte was one of six Jesuits sent to China by the Académie des Sciences and

¹¹⁵ For more on the Chinese Rites Controversy see D.E.Mungello (ed). *The Chinese Rites Controversy: Its History and Meaning* (Nettetal, Germany: Steyler, 1994); Joan-Pau Rubiés, “The concept of cultural dialogue and the Jesuit method of accommodation: between idolatry and civilization”, *Archivum historicum societatis iesu*, 74:147 (2005): 237-280.

Louis XIV in 1685 with the purpose of promoting science and French nationalism. Based on information gained during his stay in China from 1687 until 1692, Le Comte's widely read *Nouveaux mémoires sur l'état present de la Chine* (1696) was one of the main sources for Europeans who wrote on China in the eighteenth century. Le Comte's account was faithfully translated into English by an unknown, likely Grub Street, writer as *Memoirs and Observations made in a late journey through the Empire of China* and published by Benjamin Tooke and Samuel Buckley in 1697.¹¹⁶ The Sorbonne condemned Le Comte's work for his proposition that China had true knowledge of God to such an extent that it could serve as a model for Europeans.¹¹⁷ The Sorbonne's condemnation did not affect the popularity or influence of the work, as by 1700 it had gone through 10 editions, and was translated into English, German and Italian.¹¹⁸ Mungello argues that the Sorbonne did not have a problem with admiring the "secular achievements" of the Chinese, but could not accept the idea of emulating the pagans in the spiritual realm.¹¹⁹ Beyond the Catholic faculty at the Sorbonne, other readers could also separate religious matters from secular interests. Le Comte separated secular and religious topics in *Nouveaux memoires*, which consisted of separate letters on different aspects of China. This structure differed from most primary books of China, though numerous philosophical and literary Enlightenment sources followed this structure. This work revealed a great deal about non-Rites Controversy issues, on topics such as China's geography, its economy and government policies, some aspects of which were criticized, others which were praised thus underlining the folly of labelling an entire book as sinophile or sinophobe.

Another important Jesuit source of information on China for eighteenth century geographers, and philosophers was Jean-Baptiste Du Halde's *Description de la Chine* (1735). Despite the fact that like Mendoza he had never travelled to China, Du Halde may be labelled a source of primary information because he had access to unpublished Jesuit reports and he was contemporaneously viewed as the source of new, credible information about China for much of the eighteenth century. Du Halde edited the influential and popular *Lettres édifiantes et curieuses écrites des missions étrangères* (34 vols. 1702-1776), a collection of Jesuit letters from all their global missions to Rome. Approximately one quarter of the thirty-two published volumes contained

¹¹⁶ Chen Shouyi "Daniel Defoe, China's Severe Critic," 233.

¹¹⁷ Another work that was condemned was the Jesuit Charles Le Gobien's *Histoire de l'edit l'empereur de la Chine* (1698).

¹¹⁸ Mungello, *Curious Land*, 331.

¹¹⁹ *Ibid.*, 338.

information on China.¹²⁰ These letters included discussion of China's religion, infanticide, chronology, paternal government, examination system, porcelain productions, medicine and gardens, as well as accounts of Jesuit activity in China, scientific experiments and philosophical dialogues with the Emperor.¹²¹ Du Halde began to edit the collection in 1709 and stopped in 1743 (volumes IX to XXVI). The information on China he took from these letters was incorporated into his popular description of China. Du Halde claimed authority by pointing out that Father Contancin, who lived in China for 32 years including 10 years in Peking, examined this description several times before its publication.¹²² Du Halde's book was of great importance to Enlightenment philosophers as well as geographers and compilers who relied heavily on his information about China.¹²³ However, not all reviews of his book were positive. For instance, Du Halde was criticized in the *Monthly Review* (November 1749) and an anonymous publication entitled *An Irregular Dissertation, occasioned by the reading of Father Du Halde's description of China* appeared in 1740, attacking him for being partial and never having been to China. Nonetheless, even authors such as Montesquieu who explicitly criticized the veracity of Jesuit sources still relied on Du Halde for information on China. Du Halde was criticized (even by his fellow Jesuits) for his extensive editing of the *Lettres édifiantes*.¹²⁴ However his manipulation of the information revealed his skill as a popularizer. Du Halde knew how to write to appeal to the eighteenth century European reading public and as a result his work achieved great popularity. As we will see in the following chapters, Du Halde provided his audience with a detailed and ambivalent description of China's political economy.

¹²⁰ Isabelle Landry-Deron, "Early Translations of Chinese Texts in French Jesuit Publications in Historiography", in *Encounters and Dialogues: Changing Perspectives on Chinese-Western Exchanges from the Sixteenth to Eighteenth Centuries* (Sankt Augustin: Monumenta Serica Institute and The Ricci Institute of Chinese Western cultural history at the University of San Francisco, 2005), 271.

¹²¹ Isabelle et Jean-Louis Vissière, *Lettres édifiantes et curieuses de Chine par des missionnaires jésuites (1702-1776)* (Paris: Garnier-Flammarion, 1979). These topics were addressed by several Jesuits notably P. Parenin, P. de Mailla and P. de Prémare. Because these letters addressed particular issues and were not part of a systematic descriptions of China's political economy, they are largely addressed through their effect on other primary sources, notably Du Halde's description of China.

¹²² Fan Cunzhong, "Dr. Johnson and Chinese Culture" in Adrian Hsia (ed.) *The Vision of China in the English Literature of the Seventeenth and Eighteenth Centuries* (Hong Kong: Chinese University Press, 1998), 265.

¹²³ Most historians agree that sources on China from the middle to late eighteenth century from popular authors to scholars consulted Du Halde. Otto Berkelbach and Van der Sprenkel, "Western Sources" in Donald D. Leslie, Colin Mackerras and Wang Gungwu (eds.), *Essays on the Sources for Chinese History* (Canberra: Australian National University, Press, 1973), 158; Paul A. Rule, *K'ung-tzu or Confucius? The Jesuit interpretation of Confucianism* (Sydney: Allen and Unwim, 1986), 185; Davis, "China, The Confucian Ideal, and the European Age of Enlightenment," 538. Isabelle Landry-Deron's *La preuve par la Chine. La "Description" de J.-B. Du Halde, jésuite, 1735* (Paris: éditions de l'École des hautes études en sciences sociales, 2002) offers a detailed analysis of Du Halde's description, particularly focusing on Du Halde's mission to reconcile Catholicism and Chinese culture.

¹²⁴ Mungello, *Curious Land*, 343.

The translation of Du Halde's description of China into English highlights the uniqueness of political economy as a less contentious aspect of China. Du Halde's *Description* had two separate English translations. Richard Brookes, along with the printer John Watts, undertook the first translation, which was published as *The General History of China* in four quarto volumes in 1736.¹²⁵ The Watts edition was (and still is) criticized for its unsatisfactory translation, though it was immediately popular and passed to a third and corrected edition in 1741.¹²⁶ Edward Cave (the proprietor of *Gentleman's Magazine*) produced a more faithful translation of Du Halde, entitled *A Description of the Empire of China* (1738-1741) and published it in two folio volumes in 1742. It is established that the Irishman John Green (*alias* Bradock Mead) edited the Cave edition, and it is suggested that another needy Grub Street geographer, William Guthrie (a Scotsman) also contributed to the effort.¹²⁷ As we will see below these editors also wrote about China in popular geographies, demonstrating the fluidity between primary descriptions and their reception in Europe. While the Cave edition was arranged much more closely to the original French version, for the subject areas relevant to this research, the original French, the Cave and the Watts editions all have corresponding citations (apart from a few linguistic differences on the contentious topic of despotism discussed in chapter five) illustrating that not all areas were controversial.¹²⁸

Historians debate the extent to which the Jesuits could address China without their religious mission dominating the portrayal. Basil Guy challenges Michele Duchet's assessment that the "Jesuits were ethnographers in the modern sense" since, Guy argues, their ultimate objective was the propagation of the Christian faith.¹²⁹ Similarly, Arnold Rowbotham describes the Jesuit information as "Sinophile propaganda" based

¹²⁵ Very little information is known about Richard Brookes (fl. 1721-1763) apart from knowledge that he compiled and translated books on medicine, surgery, natural history and geography and at some point in his life he travelled in both Africa and America. See G. T. Bettany, "Brookes, Richard (fl. 1721-1763)", rev. Claire L. Nutt, *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004).

¹²⁶ Fan Cunzhong, "Dr. Johnson and Chinese Culture," 265.

¹²⁷ *Ibid.*, 268; also see G.R. Crone "John Green. Notes on a Neglected Eighteenth Century Geographer and Cartographer" *Imago Mundi*, 6 (1949), 85-91; For more information on the background of John Green and his position as a hack writer see G.R. Crone, "Further notes on Bradock Mead, alias John Green, an eighteenth century cartographer", *Imago Mundi* 8:1 (1951), 69-70. Green made several interjecting notes into the text though it is clearly identified when the translator is speaking.

¹²⁸ T.C. Fan points out that English writers such as Thomas Percy (who was one of the most informed people on China in Britain in the eighteenth century) relied on the French and both English translations of Du Halde. T.C. Fan, "Percy and Du Halde", *The Review of English Studies*, 21:84, 326-329.

¹²⁹ Basil Guy, "*Ad majorem Societatis gloriam: Jesuit perspectives on Chinese mores in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries*" in G.S. Rousseau and Roy Porter (eds.) *Exoticism in the Enlightenment* (Manchester; Manchester University Press, 1990), 69.

on "...the simplification, to suit their own needs, of an ancient, complex and effective system of religion, ethics, and social philosophy".¹³⁰ One speculates as to why the Jesuits, if driven entirely by their need to engender support for their mission, would defend Chinese chronology, knowing it would stir controversy in Europe for the challenge it posed to the biblical chronology. I will argue in this research that the Jesuits, like all authors, necessarily had biases (which varied amongst them individually); however, as Lach stresses, an "interpretive bias need not necessarily produce inaccurate history".¹³¹ Jesuit publications, especially after the Rites Controversy increased in intensity and certainly were partial towards the self-preserving motivations of the mission; however, this need not discredit the idea that the Jesuits were also genuinely concerned with presenting an nuanced image of China, especially when it came to the less controversial subject of political economy. The Jesuit depictions of China were largely positive, however, as George Dunne points out, "they were not blind to the faults from which it suffered" and a "critical balance" can be found in most of the Jesuit sources.¹³² In spite of the controversy surrounding them, European commentators still relied on the Jesuits as sources of information, especially on the topic of China's political economy.

NON-JESUIT PRIMARY SOURCES FROM THE SEVENTEENTH CENTURY TO THE EIGHTEENTH CENTURY

During the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, non-Jesuit missionaries, emissaries, merchants, and men of war also produced primary accounts of China. Contemporary philosophers and geographers, as well as modern historians, argue these sources depicted a more negative view of China. The Spanish Dominican friar Domingo Fernández Navarrete's *Tratados históricos, políticos, ethicos y religiosos de la Monarchia de China* (Madrid, 1676) was one particularly influential non-Jesuit description.¹³³ Philosophers and geographers referred to his description of China as a reliable source well into the eighteenth century because Navarrete studied the Chinese language and lived there from 1657 until 1673 when he returned to Rome to discuss the question of Chinese Rites in Rome. He attacked the Jesuit position in the Rites

¹³⁰ Rowbotham, 'The Impact of Confucianism...', 224.

¹³¹ Lach and van Kley, *Asia in the Making of Europe*, 1730.

¹³² George Dunne, *Generation of Giants: The Story of the Jesuits in China in the Last Decades of the Ming Dynasty* (Notre Dame, Ind.: University of Notre Dame, 1962), 26.

¹³³ J. S. Cummins. *A Question of Rites: Friar Domingo Navarrete and the Jesuits in China* (Cambridge: Scolar Press, 1993). A complete translation into English was produced for Churchill's *Collection of Voyages* (1704). It was also translated into French, German and Italian. See Mungello, *Curious Land*, 170.

Controversy and disagreed with their assessment of Chinese religion; however, furthering the point that authors speak with different perspectives depending on the topic, Navarrete portrayed China's political economy in a relatively positive light. Indeed, he could separate religious dogma from secular interests.¹³⁴ Cited by Voltaire and Quesnay, both archetypal "sinophiles", Navarrete reflects the multi-faceted nature of the production of information on China.

Merchants, emissaries and men of war also provided primary information on the Chinese Empire. Attempts to expand the China trade provided ambassadors from states such as Russia, the Netherlands, France, and England as well as representatives from their respective East India Companies, with the opportunity to claim their own authority in describing China. The merchants dramatically outnumbered the Jesuits. Between 1552 and 1800 there were 926 Jesuits in China. As early as 1563 there were already 700 Portuguese on the island of Macao.¹³⁵ However, in spite of their larger numbers, these merchants and emissaries, unlike many Jesuits, had not mastered the Chinese language, and had limited access to the Chinese literati who were responsible for educating the Jesuits on Chinese moral philosophy, literature and science. In the seventeenth century, the non-Jesuit accounts of China were primarily Dutch, as the Netherlands took over from the Portuguese in dominating the China trade.¹³⁶ One of the most widely cited and translated works was Johan Nieuhof's description of a Dutch East India Company (VOC) delegation to China, which he took part in from 1655-57. This work was translated into French in 1665 and John Ogilby translated it into English as *An Embassy from the East India Company* (1669).¹³⁷ As a member of a VOC embassy to Peking Nieuhof was tasked with reporting on the economic activity he witnessed on the journey of over two thousand kilometres from Canton. Apart from the numerous anecdotes of his trip, a large amount of his description of China came from the published works of the Jesuits Ricci, Martini and Samedo.¹³⁸ This is a clear example of how the parenthood of information could be confused or lost, once again revealing the inapplicability of categorizing an entire source as sinophobia or sinophilia.

¹³⁴ J.S. Cummins, "Fray Domingo Navarrete: A Source for Quesnay", *Bulletin of Hispanic Studies* 36:1 (January 1959), 37-50.

¹³⁵ Rowbotham, "The Impact of Confucianism on Seventeenth Century Europe", 50.

¹³⁶ The Dutch fort in southern Taiwan was established in 1624, and though they were anxious to trade with China, the embassies they sent to Peking in 1656, 1667 and 1685 all failed.

¹³⁷ It was also translated into German (1666), Latin (1668).

¹³⁸ The work was likely made ready for press by his brother Hendrik, who actually referenced the Jesuit sources. John Wills Jr., "Author, Publisher, Patron, World: A Case Study of Old Books and Global Consciousness", *Journal of Early Modern History* 13 (2009), 375-433, quote on 395.

Two notable eighteenth century emissaries travelled to China and reported on the commerce they found. The Scotsman John Bell travelled to China as part of the Russian Izmailov embassy in 1720 but the account of his journey (*Travels from St. Petersburg in Russia to Diverse Parts of Asia*) was not published until 1763. While popular, this account was not as influential or provocative as Anson's and it was rarely referenced by the geographical or philosophical sources. The more prominent traveller was Lorenz (Laurent or Laurence) Lange, a Swedish explorer, who joined a Russian envoy sent by Peter the Great to China from 1715 to 1717. The mission was tasked to promote Russian commerce. Lange's account of his travels were first published in German in Friedrich Christian Weber German's description of Russia. This work was translated into English in 1723 as *The present state of Russia*. The second volume contained Lange's description of his journey to China. The account was full of the personal anecdotes of the trip and engagement between the envoys and the Chinese mandarins, who Lange painted as very accommodating. Lange admired the Kangxi Emperor. His description of China, like other non-Jesuit sources was (and is) viewed as contradicting the Jesuit images.¹³⁹ When addressed by geographical and philosophical sources, Lange was often considered in conjunction with the description of China found in Admiral George Anson's *Voyage Round the World* (1748).

Anson's description of China was short, unsystematic, and became the most influential eighteenth century non-missionary account of China. Anson was commander of the first official British naval expedition into the Pacific and reached China in 1743. Jonathan Spence describes Anson as personifying "the newly assertive side of expansionist Great Britain" and indeed his attempt to enter China was an audacious undertaking.¹⁴⁰ The limited contact these men had with the Chinese is apparent in the account of his voyage: 'we could have no communication with [the Chinese] but by signs', and yet, his account was highly influential.¹⁴¹ Anson's chaplain, Richard Walter, initiated the publishing of the account as *Voyage Round the World* in 1748. Benjamin Robins also contributed to the work but their respective contributions cannot be disentangled. Anson took a close interest in the publication and was often contemporaneously referred to when describing

¹³⁹ Dermigny, *La Chine et l'Occident*, 29.

¹⁴⁰ Spence, *The Chan's Great Continent*, 52.

¹⁴¹ George Anson, *A Voyage round the world...Compiled from the papers...[of] Anson, and published under his direction by Richard Walter...* (London: printed for the author by John and Paul Knapton in Ludgate-Street, 1748), 348.

the source. His name will be used as the author of the source in this thesis, with Robins and Walter's contributions duly noted.¹⁴² The popularity of this work is striking as the first edition had over 1800 advanced subscribers, by 1776 there had been fifteen editions in Britain alone and it had been translated into French, Dutch, German and Italian with extracts also printed in *Gentleman's Magazine*.¹⁴³ Walter Demel contends that Anson's account must "have come as a great relief for the English" as they finally had a compatriot who they could rely on. He argues that Anson was "proof" to them that the Jesuits were lying, reflecting the Protestant distrust of Catholic information.¹⁴⁴ This, however, does not explain why so many British sources from philosophers to geographers continued to rely on the Jesuit descriptions of China. Colin Mackerras argues Anson's work was the 'first full-scale attack on the rosy images of China which the French Jesuits were pushing'.¹⁴⁵ This claim is based, in part, on Anson's criticism of Chinese manufacturing, military and fine arts, as well as his frustration in dealing with immoral Chinese merchants.¹⁴⁶ However, as we shall see in chapters three, five and seven, Jesuit sources made similar points much earlier. Thus, while he certainly was critical of the Jesuit descriptions, his account, held to be one of the strongest critiques of China during its time, did not offer any radical new evidence.

One final non-Jesuit traveller who was influential in constructing views of China's political economy in the eighteenth century was the Frenchman Pierre Poivre. The almost missionary, administrator, philosopher, trader and traveller used his time in the East to gather information on China's agricultural system. Although he was too young to take missionary orders, the Society of Foreign Missions in Paris sent him to China in 1740 at the age of 20. He eventually fell out with the missionaries in the East and undertook a career as a trader, horticulturalist and author travelling throughout Asia spending time in Cochinchina, Batavia, Pondicherry in the South of India and Mauritius.¹⁴⁷ While in China he travelled to Macao, Canton and Tongking. His time as a member of the French East India Company gave him first-hand insight into the monopolistic trade system in the East. Throughout his time in the East he was a corresponding member of the *Académie des Sciences* and a follower of Physiocratic

¹⁴² See. G. Williams *Documents Relating to Anson's Voyage* (London: Navy Records Society, 1967)

¹⁴³ Mackerras, *Western Images of China*, 47.

¹⁴⁴ Demel "China in the Political Thought of Western and Central Europe...", 47.

¹⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, 43.

¹⁴⁶ Adas, *Machines as the Measure of Men*, 92; see also Spence, *The Chan's Great Continent*, 52-54.

¹⁴⁷ Maverick, *China, a model for Europe*, 40.

doctrine.¹⁴⁸ Returning back to France in 1757 he began his philosophical writings and public addresses on commerce and agriculture. Two of his addresses in 1763 and 1764 were circulated in manuscript copies that reached the Physiocrats and published as *Voyage d'un philosophe* (1768), which was later translated into English.¹⁴⁹ He supplied the Physiocrats, and later Adam Smith with a great deal of inspiration and information on the East from several points of view including that of an agriculturalist who praised the rule of nature.¹⁵⁰

The primary authors had different experiences of China. The emissaries and merchants, whose aim was to increase trade, did not provide a great deal of unique information because they had less ability to understand the operation of the Chinese system. As we will see in chapter three, their anecdotal evidence was also not extraordinary though it was relevant. The Jesuits, whose purpose was to convert the Chinese to Christianity, used their predominant position as the providers of detailed information to engender support for their mission. European observers picked up on these differences and overestimated the influence these biases had in the transmission of information on particular topics. While the primary sources may have disagreed on the implication of the particulars they provided, the content on China's political economy did not differ as dramatically as some historians have presumed, especially when the topic of political economy is in focus. Next we turn to the receivers of the primary information on China.

2.2. COMPILERS AND GEOGRAPHERS

While Enlightenment thought is a staple of historical enquiry, contemporary popular geographies remain greatly understudied. Authors and editors of these works in Europe drew information from the primary sources, and repackaged the material in order to present it to a wider audience. Popular sources played an important role in discussions of China's political economy. Travel compilations offered access to primary sources that were not readily available while geographies were designed to be accurate

¹⁴⁸ Rainer Klump, "The kingdom of Ponthiamas- a Physiocratic model state in Indochina: a note on the international exchange of economic thought and of concepts for economic reforms in the 18th century" in Ingo Barenz, Volker Caspari and Bertram Schefold (eds.) *Political Events and Economic Ideas* (Cornwall: MPG Books Ltd., 2004).

¹⁴⁹ Maverick, *China, a model for Europe*, 42 and 55. Turgot referred to the manuscript (in a reference about the Chinese tax of one-tenth of the crops forming the principal revenue of the Empire) in 1765, one year before the publication of Quesnay's *Despotisme de la Chine*.

¹⁵⁰ Lewis A. Maverick, "Pierre Poivre: Eighteenth Century Explorer of Southeast Asia" *Pacific Historical Review* 10:2 (1941), 165-177.

summaries of the reliable information available on various places in the world. The change in ways information circulated in Europe from the Renaissance through the Enlightenment impacted the growth of this genre.¹⁵¹ In *A Social History of Knowledge*, Peter Burke discusses the idea of a ‘knowledge explosion’, with the blossoming of print culture in sixteenth century England.¹⁵² Alongside the changes in the publishing industry, an increasing amount of information about the world was travelling back to Europe where it met a rising demand for the presentation of this knowledge in a quickly digestible format.

Reader scepticism was also increasing, and the public was suspect of the primary accounts of China. *The Chinese Traveller* pointed to the absurdity of John Albert de Mandelslo’s report on China from his 1640 trip, which included descriptions of unicorns and twenty-four stone oysters.¹⁵³ An even more famous case was that of George Psalmanazar, who claimed to be an inhabitant of the East Asian island of Formosa travelling in Europe. He published an account of ‘his birth land’ entitled *An Historical and Geographical Description of Formosa, an Island subject to the Emperor of Japan* (1704), and managed to convince many people (despite the protests of the Jesuit missionaries who worked in Asia) of the veracity of his account. Upon his confession in 1706 that, in fact, he had never been to Asia, the public became acutely aware of the ease with which they could be deceived.¹⁵⁴ Cases such as these made readers question primary reports, and new information on foreign lands. The popular compilations and geographies were designed to embody the “discerning age” and guard against these false reports.

Travel compendiums reflect the blurred boundaries between primary sources and editors based in Europe. These collections involved translating, editing, arranging and often publishing for the first time, primary accounts of foreign lands. With the Age of Exploration well underway, seventeenth century Europeans witnessed a rise in the popularity of travel compendiums. The two main English sources of information on

¹⁵¹ One important change in England was the lifting of the Stationers’ monopoly on printing in 1695.

¹⁵² Peter Burke, *A Social History of Knowledge: From Gutenberg to Diderot* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2002), 149.

¹⁵³ Anonymous, *Chinese traveller*, v.

¹⁵⁴ As his confession did not receive much attention, his reputation as a Formosan was still being defended decades later in Patrick Barclay, *The universal traveller* (London: n.p., 1735), 604. Psalmanazar managed to maintain a good reputation, and became one of the main contributing editors to *An Universal History* (1736-1768). Tamara Griggs, “Universal History from Counter-Reformation to Enlightenment.” *Modern Intellectual History*, 4:2 (2007), 219-247, quote on 229.

China in the late sixteenth century and early seventeenth century England were those compiled by Richard Hakluyt and Samuel Purchas.¹⁵⁵ One of Hakluyt's many professional labels was geographer; however, the nature of his work differed from the editors and authors of special geographies (discussed below).¹⁵⁶ He was a skilled editor, translator, and collector, known for his compilation of travel descriptions in *Principal Navigations, Voiages, and Discoveries of the English Nation* (1589). He advised the English East India Company and invested in the Virginia Company revealing his patriotic pride and economic focus.¹⁵⁷ Hakluyt provided the needed information on products, climates, customs and geography to accompany the bravery of the merchants and develop a successful English foreign trade.¹⁵⁸ Much like the Jesuit desire to publish information to support their mission, Hakluyt believed his works encouraged the much needed societal support to encourage exploration.¹⁵⁹ He applied this belief to China by commissioning Robert Parke to translate Mendoza's history of China in 1589. Samuel Purchas continued the work of Hakluyt and like his predecessor, Purchas' *Hakluytus Posthumus or Purchas His Pilgrimes Contayning a History of the World...* (1625) was immediately popular in England.¹⁶⁰ He provided his English readers with a great deal of information on China including Da Cruz's *Tractado*, an abridged English version of Ricci and Trigault, and sections of the accounts of Polo, Peirera, de Rada, Pantoja, and Mendoza. He also reproduced Thomas Mun's *A Discourse of Trade from England to the East Indies*, which systematically addressed objections to the East Indies trade and reflects the agenda and diversity of sources found in his collection. Eighteenth century compilers accused both Hakluyt and Purchas of a haphazard arrangement of the material.¹⁶¹ These criticisms came in light of the changes in popular collections of the later seventeenth and especially eighteenth centuries.

¹⁵⁵ Fan Cunzhong, "The Beginnings of the Influence of Chinese Culture in England" in Adrian Hsia (ed.) *The Vision of China the English Literature of the Seventeenth and Eighteenth Centuries* (Hong Kong: Chinese University Press, 1998), 81.

¹⁵⁶ The first word after his title in the ODNB is "geographer". Anthony Payne, "Hakluyt, Richard (1552?-1616)", *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography* (Online Edition: October 2006).

¹⁵⁷ J.A. Williamson, "Richard Hakluyt" in *Richard Hakluyt and His Successors*, Edward Lynam (ed.) Second Series No. XCIII (London: Hakluyt Society, 1946); E.G.R. Taylor (ed.), *The Original Writings and Correspondence of the Two Richard Hakluyts* 2 Volumes. (London: The Hakluyt Society, 1935), Vol. 1, 48.

¹⁵⁸ George Bruner Parks, *Richard Hakluyt and the English Voyages* (New York: American Geographical Society, 1928), 2.

¹⁵⁹ *Ibid.*, 21.

¹⁶⁰ Sir William Foster, "Samuel Purchas" in Edward Lynam (ed.) *Richard Hakluyt and His Successors*. Second Series No. XCIII (Hakluyt Society: 1946), 49.

¹⁶¹ In the introductory pages of Churchill's 1732 travel collection there is an account of travel books categorized according to their language of publication, and a characterization of their reputation. Hakluyt is portrayed as having a "method of heaping together all things good and bad". Without dismissing Hakluyt's value, the editor wished he was more selective of what was "really authentick and useful"; and

Melchisédec Thévenot's *Relations de Divers Voyages Curieux* (1663) was a seventeenth century French travel collection that had a lasting impact and was held in the libraries of Locke, Voltaire, and Turgot.¹⁶² His compilation began as a translation of Hakluyt and Purchas, reflecting the circulation of knowledge between France and England in this genre. Thévenot's *Relations* was the first major travel collection to emerge from France. It included information on China including French translations of Nieuhof's embassy, the Jesuit Michael Boym's description of Chinese flora, Martino Martini's account of China's dynastic history as well as a small Chinese grammar. The French editor gathered primary accounts from Dutch, Polish, Italian and Russian sources. His later compilation, *Recueil de voyages* (1681), included the relation of the Baikov embassy sent from Russia to China in 1653.¹⁶³ By the end of the seventeenth century travel compilations provided access to an array of primary sources on China to the English and French public.

The style of editing and nature of reading of travel collections evolved in the eighteenth century but information continued to circulate between France and Britain. Awnsham and John Churchill's *A Collection of Voyages and Travels* (1704, 1732 and 1744) was widely read.¹⁶⁴ By 1702, only one year after the issuance of the proposal, subscriptions lists had already amounted 200 names.¹⁶⁵ This collection included translations of Navarrete's and Nieuhof's accounts of China. A contemporary competitor to the Churchill collection was John Harris' *Navigantium atque itinerantium* (1707). In the same year, Abbé Morvan de Bellegarde and Du Périer de Montfraisier published a comparable work to Harris' in France entitled *Histoire universelle des voyages*. In 1744, John Campbell published an updated version of the Harris collection, much of which was taken from Thévenot. One year later, Thomas Osborne published two volumes, which were meant to be supplements to the famous Churchill collection. Interestingly, eighteenth century travel compilations still reproduced sixteenth and seventeenth

the same was argued for Purchas' volumes. J. and A. Churchill, *A Collection of Voyages and Travels* 6 Volumes (London: printed by assignment for Churchill, 1732), lxxxviii.

¹⁶² Nicholas Dew, "Reading Travels in the Culture of Curiosity: Thévenot's Collection of Voyages" *Journal of Early Modern History* 10: 1-2 (2006), 39-59, quote on 41.

¹⁶³ Lach and Van Kley, *Asia in the Making of Europe*, 410-411.

¹⁶⁴ The Churchill brothers were strong Whigs who believed in religious toleration. Awnsham was a friend of John Locke (whom he printed for and who advised Churchill on his collection). This collection may have been compiled by the astronomer Edmund Halley. Mark Nights, "Churchill, Awnsham (1658-1728)", *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004).

¹⁶⁵ G.R. Crone and R.A. Skelton, "English Collections of Voyages and Travels: 1625-1846" in *Richard Hakluyt and His Successors* ed. Edward Lynam. Second Series No. XCIII (London: Hakluyt Society, 1946) 81.

century sources, in particular the non-Jesuit descriptions of China. This was likely a result of the popularity of Jesuit publications in the market. As the 1732 Churchill edition claimed in reference to Le Comte's description of China, "they have abundance of very remarkable passages and singular curiosities, and have been too much talked of to require much to be said of them".¹⁶⁶ Information on China evidently travelled from the sixteenth century to the eighteenth century, and between British and French popular sources.

Joan-Pau Rubiés describes the eighteenth century shift from Renaissance travel collections that aimed to reproduce narratives in an authentic way, to the rising popular genre that sought to impose an order on the increasing amount of information.¹⁶⁷ Special geographies fall into the latter category, where editors often eliminated what they deemed boring or unnecessary. This study focuses on these sources precisely because of their imposition of order on the primary sources of information. The history of special geographies is examined in the discipline of geography and has recently been the subject of a revisionist project to appreciate their contemporary relevance, rather than label them as "bibliographic dinosaurs".¹⁶⁸ Robert Mayhew defines geography in the early modern British context as "a coherent body of knowledge about a clearly-defined object, namely the situation of places on the earth and the content of those places in natural and human terms..."¹⁶⁹ Geographies were a unique type of publication that compiled and combined materials taken from other sources. The eighteenth century geographies are heirs of the work of Sebastian Münster in Germany, Giovanni Botero in Italy, Peter Heylin in England, and Pierre Davity in France. The legacies of these early geographical thinkers include the focus on matters of state, as well as the arrangement of material under particular headings.

The intended and actual audience of the eighteenth century geographies included dignitaries, scholars as well as those with a utilitarian interest such as statesmen,

¹⁶⁶ Churchill, *A Collection of Voyages and Travels*, lxxxii.

¹⁶⁷ Joan-Pau Rubiés, "From the history of *travayle* to the history of travel collections: the rise of an early modern genre" in Daniel Carey and Clare Howitt (eds.) *Richard Hakluyt: His times, life, legacy* (Ashgate and the Hakluyt Society: forthcoming).

¹⁶⁸ Alan Downes, "The Bibliographic Dinosaurs of Georgian Geography (1714-1830)" *The Geographical Journal*, 137:3 (September 1971), 379-387. For the revisionist historiography of the genre of early modern geography see Robert J. Mayhew, *Enlightenment Geography: The Political Languages of British Geography, 1650-1850* (London: Macmillan Press Ltd., 2000), chapter one. Charles W.J. Withers, "Eighteenth-century geography: texts, practices, sites," *Progress in Human Geography*, 30:6 (2006), 711-729.

¹⁶⁹ Mayhew, *Enlightenment Geography*, 30.

merchants, mariners, and soldiers.¹⁷⁰ A select number of geographies also had a more educated audience, as grammar schools taught geography as a foundation of history in a humanist education.¹⁷¹ Subscription lists changed over the course of the eighteenth century with fewer clergy and more merchants requesting these books.¹⁷² The prefaces of these works offer an indication of the intended audience. For instance, Herman Moll, a German born English geographer known mostly for his cartographic efforts, described the importance of the genre in his first geographical work:

'tis needless to speak of the Usefulness of Geography, since every body that Read's, even a Gazette, finds himself perpetually at a Loss without some Knowledge in this Science. And therefore there needs no Apology for publishing a Work on that Subject; at this time especially, when the Actions abroad that are so much the Subject of Conversation, make every Man desire a Knowledge of the Countreys where those great Affairs are Transacted.¹⁷³

Although I consider both French and British geographers, the latter carry more weight for the topic at hand for two reasons. First, the nature of this research necessitates culling and popular British sources incorporated French knowledge and vice-versa. Second, the special geographies from Britain represent the largest volume of popular sources that addressed China's political economy. This genre's place in Britain is discussed below, but first it is necessary to briefly address its status in French literature.

An influential seventeenth century French geography was Pierre Davity's (d'Avity) *Les estats, empires, et principautez du monde* (St. Omer, 1614). This work was extremely popular and ran through twenty French editions before 1666 and was also very successful in Germany.¹⁷⁴ In 1615 Edward Grimstone translated this work into English. However, as Allan Gilbert points out, "the fame of the work hardly outlived the century."¹⁷⁵ Davity focused on contemporary political systems and as a result examined wealth, government, military forces and manners in relation to the state. Unlike his contemporaries Hakluyt and Purchas, Davity did not solely rely on primary sources. In

¹⁷⁰ Robert Mayhew, "The character of English geography c. 1660-1800: a textual approach," *Journal of Historical Geography*, 24:4 (1998), 385-412, quote on 394-395.

¹⁷¹ Mayhew uses the example of geography used by Locke and Johnson as examples of two diverse scholars who found geography books indispensable. Mayhew, "The character of English geography", 402; Mayhew, *Enlightenment Geography*, 33.

¹⁷² Marshall and Williams, *The Great Map of Mankind*, 51.

¹⁷³ Dennis Reinhartz, "Moll, Herman (1654?-1732)", *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography* (Online Edition: January 2008). Herman Moll, *A system of geography...* (London: printed for Timothy Childe, 1701), Preface.

¹⁷⁴ Allan H. Gilbert, "Pierre Davity: His 'Geography' and Its Use by Milton", *Geographical Review* 7:5 (1919), 322-338, quote on 323.

¹⁷⁵ *Ibid.*, 324.

fact, a great deal of his information was taken directly from the Italian geographer/philosopher Giovanni Botero, whose own work sought to find the causes of the greatness of states.¹⁷⁶ Botero is discussed below (in the section addressing philosophers) but his influence on Davity's depiction of China is noteworthy.¹⁷⁷ Davity also relied on the dated information provided by Marco Polo for his assessment of China.¹⁷⁸ Davity's description of China's quality, manners, riches, forces, government, religion and the genealogies of the kings showed no independent assessment or critical analysis. He was generally positive towards Middle Kingdom, claiming China was the richest country in the world; however he was critical of Chinese sciences.¹⁷⁹ While Davity's geography was influential in the seventeenth century, it was not of direct importance by the eighteenth century.

By the eighteenth century, France had a few notable geographies that addressed China, although the genre differed from the English context. The cartographer Didier Robert de Vaugondy wrote the entry "géographie" in the *Encyclopédie*. He gave a history of geography from ancient times and an assessment of the state of geography throughout Europe. Vaugondy identified six subjects of geography: natural, historical, civil or political, sacred, ecclesiastical and physical. Historical geography addressed revolutions, succession issues, trade, battles, treaties, or "everything that relates to the history of a country."¹⁸⁰ Thus, eighteenth century France had the notion of special geography and yet it was not as prominent a genre as in England. Anne Godlewska's study of French geography during the Enlightenment is focused on geography as a science.¹⁸¹ The well-known geographers found in her research were primarily cartographers such as Jean-Baptiste Bourguignon D'Anville, who made maps of China for Du Halde. However there are some French sources that Godlewska does not consider as part of French geography that are directly comparable to the British genre. In particular, Antoine François Prévost's *Histoire générale des voyages* (15 vols., Paris,

¹⁷⁶ *Ibid.*, 331.

¹⁷⁷ Pierre Davity, *The estates, empires, & principalities of the world...* Translated by Edward Grimstone (London: printed by Adam Slip for Mathew Lowne and John Bill, 1615), 729. Davity followed Botero closely in his discussion of China's revenue and forces.

¹⁷⁸ Gilbert, "Pierre Davity...", 334.

¹⁷⁹ Davity, *The estates, empires...*, 727. Though he differed from Botero on the exact figure.

¹⁸⁰ Didier Robert de Vaugondy, "Géographie," *Encyclopédie, ou dictionnaire raisonné des sciences, des arts et des métiers*, Denis Diderot and Jean le Rond D'Alembert. (eds.) (University of Chicago : ARTFL Encyclopédie Projet, Winter 2008 Edition), Robert Morrissey (ed) <http://encyclopedia.uchicago.edu/>.

7:613

¹⁸¹ Anne Godlewska, *Geography Unbound: French Geographic Science from Cassini to Humboldt* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1999)

1746-1759), which began as a translation project of an English collection published by Thomas Astley (discussed below).

A key eighteenth century French geography that reveals the close interaction between primary sources, geographies and philosophers is Jacques Philibert Rousselot de Surgy's description of the world, *Mélanges intéressans et curieux, ou abrégé d'histoire naturelle, morale, civile, et politique de l'Asie, de l'Afrique, de l'Amérique, et des terres polaires* (10 vols., Paris, 1763-1765). This work drew heavily on Du Halde and was the principal source of information for François Quesnay's description of China.¹⁸² Described as "impartial and scholarly", de Surgy was committed to giving a full impression of China from both the favourable and unfavourable reports.¹⁸³ Rousselot de Surgy described his sources in the first five pages of the fourth Paris volume. He noted the Jesuits did not address every subject and one has to keep in mind their religious bias. Nonetheless, he claimed Du Halde was the basis for his description. He also asserted to have examined Du Halde's original sources and those which the Jesuit did not reference including the accounts of Marco Polo, Emanuel Pinto, Navarette, Dutch travellers, Gemelli Carerra, Laurent Lange, Ysbrandt-Ides and Admiral Anson.¹⁸⁴

A final important continental geography that addressed China was that by the Dutch editor and doctor, Olfert Dapper. Jacob van Meurs published Dapper's compendium in 1670.¹⁸⁵ At the time of its publication, Amsterdam was an important (if not the most important) publishing centre in Europe; in fact, "In the seventeenth century more books were printed in Amsterdam than in any other European city, many of them in French, English and Latin."¹⁸⁶ The publisher Jacob van Meurs was also responsible for the publication of Nieuhof's description of the Dutch embassy to Beijing, and Athanasius Kircher's compilation on China.¹⁸⁷ Dapper's work was based on numerous primary sources, notably unpublished VOC reports, the Jesuits Trigault, Semedo, Martini and

¹⁸² Later republished in Iverdun (1764-1766, 12 vols.) It was this Swiss edition that Quesnay relied on. Maverick, *China, a Model for Europe*, 126. As Maverick points out, the first seven chapters of Quesnay's *Despotisme de la Chine* were almost entirely lifted from Jacques Philibert Rousselot de Surgy.

¹⁸³ Maverick, *China, a Model for Europe*, 127; J.A.G. Roberts confirms that Quesnay's Physiocratic ideas were formed before he read Rousselot de Surgy's description of China. J.A.G. Roberts, "L'image de la Chine dans l'Encyclopédie" in *Recherches sur Diderot et sur l'Encyclopédie*, 22 (1997), 87-108, quoted at 99.

¹⁸⁴ Jacques Philibert Rousselot de Surgy, *Mélanges intéressans et curieux...* 10 volumes (Paris, 1763), vol. 4, 1-5.

¹⁸⁵ Olfert Dapper, *Gedenkwaerdig bedryf der Nederlandsche Oost-Indische Maetschappye op de Kuste en in het Keizerryk van Taising of Sina* (Amsterdam, 1670). For more on detail on Dapper's life and work see Wills Jr., "Author, Publisher, Patron, World...".

¹⁸⁶ Wills Jr., "Author, Publisher, Patron, World...", 386.

¹⁸⁷ *Ibid.*, 394.

Kircher as well as Mendoza, Nieuhof and the Dutch embassies to China by Balthasar Bort (1663-1664) and Pieter van Hoorn (1666-68). As Lach and Van Kley note, “Dapper expended little effort at integrating the material he had collected.”¹⁸⁸ His piecemeal approach to his work on China led to inconsistent views on the Middle Kingdom.

The authors of the eighteenth century British geographies fall into two groups: Grub Street journalists or wealthier scholarly historians.¹⁸⁹ On average in Britain six special geographies were published per decade.¹⁹⁰ Mayhew argues that unlike France, these types of cheaper Grub Street publications were typically uncontroversial, as the editors rarely had distinguished intellectual reputations, and the aim of the publishers was to “compile marketable products and paid by the page, not according to the quality of the work.”¹⁹¹ While their accounts did not have the penetrating analysis of philosophers, the ideologies or personal convictions of several prominent editors of popular geographies led to comments on controversial debates such as Chinese chronology and assessment of primary sources.

The evolution of Thomas Salmon’s work is demonstrative of how the personal experiences or viewpoints of geographers impacted these geographies. Salmon was a “typical hack writer” of Grub Street whose career progressed as he published three distinct global geographies.¹⁹² Salmon claimed to have spent two periods as a soldier in the English East India Company, and lived in the West Indies. Although he was an editor and condenser, he had strong philosophical views that evolved when composing *The Review of the History of England* (1722), in which he argued for the royal prerogative. This interpretation, along with his agenda that criticized the Whig government for not expanding overseas shaped his *Modern History, or, The Present State of All Nations*, which appeared between 1724 and 1738 (and was later translated into Dutch, German and Italian). He claimed to have consulted over two hundred travel books but relied mostly on Le Comte for his description of China, which notably was the first section in the work.¹⁹³ His description of the eunuchs of China as villains who

¹⁸⁸ See Lach and Van Kley, *Asia in the Making of Europe*, 490.

¹⁸⁹ *Ibid.*, 38.

¹⁹⁰ O.F.G. Sitwell, *Four Centuries of Special Geography* (Vancouver: University of British Columbia Press, 1993), 16-17.

¹⁹¹ Mayhew, “The character of English geography,” 404 and 402.

¹⁹² *Ibid.*, 403.

¹⁹³ Thomas Cooper, “Thomas Salmon (bap. 1679-d.1767),” *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography* (Online Edition: Oxford University Press, May 2006)

disrupted the emperor reflected his political view of defending the royal prerogative.¹⁹⁴ Salmon's time accompanying Anson on his voyage around the world from 1739-1740, led him to write a new geography entitled *A New Geographical and Historical Grammar* (1749).¹⁹⁵ This work represented a harsher criticism of the Chinese people and their greed. This was an unsurprising result of his respect for the account of Anson's voyage (though Salmon himself was not a part of Anson's time in China). His final grand work was *The Universal Traveller* (1752-3), which had a longer description of China, was primarily based on Jesuit sources. In spite of his allegiance to Anson, he still had (and chose) to rely on the Jesuits for information on China. As with his first work, the beginning section of *The Universal Traveller* was on the Chinese Empire, indicating the interest and importance of the Middle Kingdom in eighteenth century geographies.

Of even greater importance to shaping views of China in the eighteenth century in both France and Britain was the popular and influential *Universal History*. It was compiled by a group of editors, notably John Campbell, John Swinton, George Sale, George Psalmanzar and Archibald Bower.¹⁹⁶ The *Universal History* was divided into two sections known as the ancient part and the modern part. The ancient part of this work was published in seven volumes from 1736 to 1744. The modern part was edited primarily by Tobias Smollett, John Campbell and William Shirley and was published between 1759-1765. Volume 8 of the 44 octavo volumes covered contemporary China. Qian Zhongshu argues the discussion of China in the ancient and modern parts is unsympathetic and reflects a belief in the inferiority of the Chinese, however, he also notes that when criticizing the antiquity of China the compilers claimed they were reporting received opinion, not their own views.¹⁹⁷ Their description of China in the modern part was also ambivalent. As Guido Abbatista argues, the subject matter of the modern part reflects an emphasis on the superiority of Europe: 50 % of the work is devoted to the history of European nations and their conquests overseas; 23 % was focused on the history of the East, with the rest being composed of the history of Africa, America and the southern hemisphere.¹⁹⁸ The editors cite mostly Jesuit sources, claiming that their accounts have been verified:

¹⁹⁴ Salmon, *Modern History*, 2.

¹⁹⁵ It ran another 13 editions by 1785.

¹⁹⁶ Guido Abbatista, "The Business of Paternoster Row: Towards a Publishing History of the *Universal History* (1736-65)," *Publishing History*, 17 (1985), 5-50, quoted at 5.

¹⁹⁷ Zhongshu "China in the English Literature of the Eighteenth Century," 150.

¹⁹⁸ Abbatista, "The Business of Paternoster Row," 19.

Nor were the relations of [the Jesuits] so universally credited (especially as many of them appeared not only exaggerated, but even in a great measure romantic, at least in whatever related to religion, or their numerous conversions), till we had them, or at least a great part of them, further confirmed by persons of other nations and religions, and less liable to be suspected.¹⁹⁹

Again, these influential geographies believed secular subjects were less contentious spaces. As we will see below, Voltaire referenced this work, demonstrating the flow of information across genres and between European countries.

Many geographers not only relied on Jesuit sources, but also greatly respected them. *A New general collection of Voyages and Travels* (1745-1747) was published by Thomas Astley and most likely edited by John Green.²⁰⁰ As mentioned earlier, John Green was probably the editor and translator of Du Halde's *Description of China*, upon which he largely drew to compose volume 4 of *A New General Collection*. Though Green is said to have had violently Protestant prejudices, he was a professional editor and respected the Catholic Jesuit sources.²⁰¹ Green noted his sources carefully and gathered information from authors including Ricci, Semedo, Martini, Magalhaes, Nieuhof, Navarette, Le Comte, and Du Halde. Unsurprisingly, he relied primarily on Du Halde who, he argued, had already extracted the most reliable information from other Jesuit sources. *The Chinese Traveller* (1772), a compilation by an anonymous editor entirely focused on China, was even kinder to Jesuit sources. The editor argued the Jesuits were the most qualified to provide information because of their

education and great erudition, their knowledge of various arts and sciences, and of the Chinese tongue; their winning address, their admittance into the court of the Emperor's palace, their familiar intercourse with the inhabitants.²⁰²

¹⁹⁹ *The modern part of an universal history*, vol. 8, 9.

²⁰⁰ Volume 3 of this collection included the account of the embassy of to Peking written by Nieuhof and taken from the John Ogilby translation. However, it is Volume 4 of the collection that reveals this work is a geography rather than travel compilation as the Middle Kingdom is examined systematically. A translation of this collection was used as the starting point for Antoine François Prévost's *Histoire Générale des Voyages* (1746-59).

²⁰¹ G.R.Crone, "John Green...", 85.

²⁰² Anonymous, *Chinese Traveller*, iv. The only information on the sources of this compilation is given on its title page that claimed it was collected from Le Comte, Du Halde and "other modern travellers". Charles and Edward Dilly, whose publications reflected their Whig and patriot political sympathies, published *The Chinese Traveller*. These publishers had close relationships with their authors and interacted with figures such as Benjamin Franklin and Samuel Johnson. See J.J. Claude, "Dilly, Charles (1739-1807)" and "Dilly, Edward (1732-1779), *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004). *The Chinese Traveller* was found in John Bell's travelling library categorized under "Romances, Novels, and Other books of entertainment" not under "Voyages and Travels". It was also found in many personal library catalogues including one in America at the end of the century indicating its lasting popularity. Hugh Gaine, *Hugh Gaine's catalogue of books* (New York: Printed by Hugh Gaine, 1792). This catalogue classified *The Chinese Traveller* under "History".

The Jesuits were seen to be particularly reliable when compared to the merchants who, the editor reasoned, “just touch upon the coast of a country, or who dwell in it for some time merely to trade there”.²⁰³

Not all geographers were convinced of the veracity of the Jesuit sources. William Guthrie (the speculated second translator of Du Halde’s description) wrote a popular Grub Street geography entitled *A New Geographical, Historical and Commercial Grammar* (1770).²⁰⁴ Intended to be an extension of Thomas Salmon’s *A New Geographical and Historical Grammar* (1749), Guthrie was keen to ensure his volume was not dry or boring and thus it required significant editing. A relatively short work, considering he covered the known world, the section on China is a mere eleven pages. Guthrie questioned the bias of the Jesuit sources.

Some of those fathers were men of penetration and judgment, and had great opportunities of being informed about a century ago; but even their accounts of this empire are justly to be suspected. They had powerful enemies at the court of Rome, where they maintained their footing, only by magnifying their own labours and success, as well as the importance of the Chinese empire.²⁰⁵

In spite of these speculations, Du Halde was the main source for the section on China, which also relied on the *Universal History*. It is clear that explicitly questioning the veracity of the sources did not prevent their use.

Apart from the assessment of sources, some British geographies were also often driven by a particular ideology. Guthrie moved from Scotland to London in 1730 where he was a reporter for *Gentleman’s Magazine* and an ally of the Whig administration. Although Mayhew describes Guthrie as a “typical hack writer”, he argues that his geography was the “most popular, and perhaps the most intellectually ambitious, of the late eighteenth-century compendia of geography.”²⁰⁶ *A New Geographical, Historical and Commercial Grammar* simplified the Scottish Enlightenment’s focus on history and politics and it presented world geography through the lens of civilizational progress.²⁰⁷ Guthrie’s agenda is clear in the preface where he argued for the importance of books of geography

²⁰³ *Ibid.*

²⁰⁴ It was printed by a fellow Scotsman, John Knox, who is also said to be a significant contributor to the work. It ran twenty-one editions by 1801. Alastair J. Durie, “Knox, John (1720-1790)” *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography* (Online edition: Oxford University Press, 2008)

²⁰⁵ William Guthrie. *A new geographical, historical, and commercial grammar; and present state of the several kingdoms of the world...* (London: Printed for J. Knox, 1770), 464.

²⁰⁶ Mayhew, “The character of English geography,” 403.

²⁰⁷ David Allan “Guthrie, William (1708?-1770)”, *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography* (Online Edition: Oxford University Press, 2004).

to reveal the world and human action “under various stages of barbarity or refinement,” what he called, “Political Geography”.²⁰⁸

While many of these authors or editors had personal agendas that will be considered throughout this study (for instance, promoting free trade), the explicit primary functions of this genre were to assess and organize the information and present it in a digestible and understandable form. Even in geographies that criticized the Jesuits, the missionaries were still used as the sources of information on China. These special geographies had a particular focus on issues of political economy as their audience was a wider group of literate Europeans who had an increasing desire for knowledge of the world, and in particular, a civilization as advanced as China’s.

2. 3. PHILOSOPHERS

As discussed in chapter one, reports on distant lands had an impact on debates over political economy in Europe; however, individual agendas still played a leading role in philosophical discussions of China. Philosophers certainly had their own perspectives, and different approaches to the use of primary information on China. Generally the philosophers tried to fit the accounts of the rest of the world into their predetermined frameworks, models or theories, which in turn influenced the selection of primary sources they drew on. However, there were also many instances of these thinkers actively engaging with the Chinese model in order to extrapolate lessons and any interested philosopher had to rely (directly or indirectly) on Jesuit sources.

Philosophical analysis of China’s political economy dates back to the late Renaissance, particularly in Giovanni Botero’s popular *Delle cause della grandezza delle città* (1588), *Delle ragion di stato* (Rome, 1589) and *Relationi Universali* (Rome, 1591-1596).²⁰⁹ Botero defies classification, as he was a political philosopher, a cosmographer and compiler of geographical descriptions of the world. *Relationi Universali* was his most geographical work in the sense that it systematically assessed the known states in the world to test his theories on the causes of wealth expounded in *The Greatness of Cities* and *The Reason of State*, especially as these causes related to climate and geography. For information on China, Botero relied on Jesuit letters, Barros and

²⁰⁸ Guthrie, *A new geographical, historical, and commercial grammar*, iv.

²⁰⁹ By 1700 it went through eighty editions and had been translated into Latin (1596) and German (1596), English (1601), Spanish (1603), and Polish (1609) – and it was used for the better part of a century as the reference on geopolitics.

Mendoza in the first two of his greatest works.²¹⁰ In these earlier books he praised the industry, character, self-sufficiency and mechanical arts of the Chinese.²¹¹ However, as Lach points out, by the publication of *Relationi*, Botero had read the Jesuit descriptions of Giampietro Maffei and Michele Ruggiero, which were more denunciatory of China. Even though he still described China's immense wealth, Botero was much more critical of their military technology and liberal arts (two areas that remained the most condemned aspects of China in the eighteenth century).²¹² Botero offers a good example of how the Jesuits offered a nuanced view of China when it came to the subject of political economy. His work influenced later philosophers but his popularity largely subsided by the beginning of the eighteenth century and thus he is only considered in key moments of this study, such as his role in the debates over Oriental despotism.

Intellectual interest in China in the seventeenth century largely centred on religion and history. Isaac Vossius, a Dutch scholar, in a direct response to the work of Martini's history, was one of the first to attempt to reconcile Chinese history with the European biblical chronology in *Dissertatio de vera aetate mundi* (Hague, 1659). Similarly, though with a more epistemological tone, Blaise Pascal, the French philosopher and critic of the Jesuits, discussed the challenge China posed to biblical history in *Pensées* (1660).²¹³ Many scholars and religious opponents of the Society of Jesus also found common ground in rejecting the Jesuit version of Chinese religion. By the late seventeenth and early eighteenth century, religion and history were still the subjects that aroused the most passionate condemnations of primary sources. For instance Pierre Bayle, a French Protestant philosopher in exile, argued the Chinese were atheists.²¹⁴ Taking another view, the German Philosopher Gottfried Leibniz was one of the few intellectuals who supported the Jesuits in Rites Controversy. He advocated for recognizing the commonalities in the history between the East and West, and argued that the *I Ching* held the key to unlocking the Chinese language as the root of all global languages. In *Novissima Sinica* (1697), he called on Protestants to send missions to China, as the Catholics did, in order to learn from the Chinese. In his long correspondence with the Catholics Jesuits, he encouraged them to transmit more

²¹⁰ Lach, *Asia in the Making of Europe*, Vol. 2, 236.

²¹¹ *Ibid.*, 239.

²¹² *Ibid.*, 246.

²¹³ Blaise Pascal, *Pensées*, Translated by W. F. Trotter (Digireads.com Publishing, 2005), Section IX, Perpetuity.

²¹⁴ Dena Goodman, *The Republic of Letters: A Cultural History of the French Enlightenment* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1994), 14.

practical information about China.²¹⁵ Similarly, John Webb, one of the few seventeenth century English scholars to address China, also expressed interest in the language and politics of China. In *The antiquity of China: or An historical essay...*(1669), he speculated about the nature of the Chinese language, and used China as a political model to support his domestic royalist agenda.²¹⁶ From Leibniz and Webb it is evident that several seventeenth century scholars who were primarily interested in Chinese religion, antiquity as well as secular topics.

Contemporaneous to the religious and chronological debates, scholarly discussion of China's system of political economy began to rise, particularly on the topics of international trade and tax policy. For instance, John Locke, like Pierre Boisguilbert in France, addressed the issue of luxury goods coming from China.²¹⁷ Further, many French philosophers and administrators on the subject of political economy analysed the Chinese tax system.²¹⁸ By the eighteenth century, interest in political economy as a subject and China's place as a source of evidence increased. In Enlightenment France, the Physiocrats were the most famous and influential group of authors writing on political economy. Physiocracy was the first science of wealth and thus is an important school of thought not only for its intellectual influence on Adam Smith, but also on its own merit. Literally meaning "rule of nature", the Physiocrats, particularly expressed in François Quesnay's *Tableau économique* (1759), believed in the primacy of agriculture over trade and industry. In his *Despotisme de la Chine* (1767) Quesnay argued that China operated on natural law.²¹⁹ The Physiocratic interest in China was not solely to use it as an abstract model as Elizabeth Fox Genovese has suggested but also as an empirical example of their system.²²⁰ Quesnay's use of a variety of primary sources including Du Halde, Gemelli Carreri, George Anson, Mendes Pinto, the Dutch travellers and Navarette, largely through the work of Rousselot de Surgy's *Mélanges*

²¹⁵ Donald Lach, *The Preface to Leibniz' Novissima Sinica: Commentary, Translation, Text* (Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 1957), 27.

²¹⁶ Rachel Ramsey, "China and the Ideal of Order in John Webb's *An History Essay...*" *Journal of the History of Ideas*, 62:3 (2001), 483-503.

²¹⁷ John Locke, *The Works of John Locke in Nine Volumes*, 9 Volumes (London: Rivington, 1824 12th ed.). Vol. 4, Chapter: Some Considerations of the Consequences of the lowering of interest, and raising the value of money. In a letter sent to a member of parliament. This was first published in 1691.

²¹⁸ For instance, Sébastien le Prestre, Seigneur de Vauban (1633-1707), a precursor to the Physiocrats and later economists, wrote *Dîme Royale* (1707), praising China's tax system.

²¹⁹ Quesnay's *Despotisme de la Chine* was published in four consecutive instalments of the Physiocratic journal, *Ephémérides du citoyen*, in the spring of 1767. Quesnay's publication was provocative and sparked a public debate. Abbé de Mably criticized Quesnay's view of China. In 1768 he published *Doutes proposés aux Philosophes économistes sur l'Ordre naturel et essentiel des Sociétés politiques* in the form of ten letters addressed "to the author of the *Éphémérides du Citoyen*."

²²⁰ Fox-Genovese, *The Origins of Physiocracy*, 11.

intéressans et curieux (1763-65) indicates his desire to be accurate in his description and assessment of China. Nevertheless, Quesnay did try to minimize the importance of elements of the Chinese system, such as their military weakness, that proved to be flawed.

Some Enlightenment philosophers, however, did use China only as a tool to further their domestic agenda. This was particularly the case in the literary works of the Enlightenment. Those sources are not addressed in this study because most of them were not interested in understanding the nature of China's political economy. From Jean Baptiste Boyer D'Argens' *Lettres Chinoises*, Horace Walpole's *Letters from Xo Ho*, and Oliver Goldsmith's *The Citizen of the World* (1762), Enlightenment philosophers did, in these instances, use China to reflect and comment on domestic affairs without attracting too much trouble for themselves. Some authors, such as Goldsmith, relied on primary sources such as Le Comte and Du Halde, as well as other sources such as Voltaire's *Essai sur les mœurs*;²²¹ but, as Chen Shouyi argues, Goldsmith's "chief purpose is to enlighten or satirize England...and not to exalt or interpret China".²²²

Philosophers interested in constructing universal models or developing theories of civilizations based on empirical reports were drawn to (and often confounded by) the case of China. Charles de Secondat, Baron de Montesquieu's *De l'esprit des lois* (1748) is especially important for understanding the rising criticism of China's system of political economy. His use of evidence when discussing China is surprising. In a published letter to Abbé Count de Guasco, written in 1755, Montesquieu describes the dispute he had with Jean-Jacques d'Ortous de Mairan over the different presentations of China. The editor of the English edition of Montesquieu's works, published in 1777 describes the disagreement:

These two learned gentlemen did not agree in some points relating to the Chinese, in the favour of whom Mr. de Mairan declared, on the authority of Father Pararin, a Jesuit's letter, of whose veracity M. de Montesquieu doubted not a little. As soon as the voyage of Admiral Anson appeared, Montesquieu triumphantly exclaimed 'I had always said that the Chinese were not such very honest men, as the missionary Jesuits would fain make us to believe them through the channel of their edifying letters'.²²³

²²¹ Chen Shouyi "Oliver Goldsmith and His *Chinese Letters*," 285.

²²² *Ibid.*, 292.

²²³ Charles Louis de Secondat, Baron de Montesquieu, *The Complete Works of M. De Montesquieu*, Translated by T. Evans. 4 Volumes (Printed for T. Evans and W. Davis: London, 1777) 4 vols., *Familiar*

Despite Montesquieu's argument about the bias of the Jesuit sources, in the following paragraph he referred to a Jesuit source to support his argument on the despotic nature of the Chinese government. In fact, he cited Du Halde several times on topics ranging from the Chinese gain in trade from sugar, the origins of the Chinese work ethic, their views on luxury, and the corruption of former dynasties. Recognizing the contradiction, Montesquieu seeks to explain it. First he suggested that the missionaries might have been too obtuse to clearly understand the nature of China: 'Might our missionaries have been deceived by an appearance of order?'²²⁴ He then posited a maxim in defence of his use of the Jesuit sources that he adamantly criticized: 'In fine, there is frequently some kind of truth even in errors themselves'.²²⁵ Even vehement critics of the Jesuits still relied on them for information. Montesquieu's view of China often revealed his deep interest in the Middle Kingdom, particularly in identifying the unique circumstances that shaped it.

In opposition to Montesquieu was François Marie Arouet de Voltaire. Through his works, *Dictionnaire Philosophique* (1764), *Orphelin de la chine* (1755), *Essai sur les Moeurs* (1756), *La philosophie de l'Histoire* (1765), and *Lettres Chinoises* (1774) he praised the Chinese government, infrastructure, inventions, manufactures, history, and morality – nearly everything apart from their science. Voltaire's *Essai sur les moeurs* (1756), which blends with the genre of geography, was in part a reaction to Jacques Bénigne Bossuet's universal history because it did not discuss China.²²⁶ Voltaire's *Essai* was immensely popular and influential running through 27 editions between 1753 and 1778.²²⁷ The English translation derived from the Geneva edition and was done under the author's inspection.²²⁸ Voltaire relied on the most popular Jesuit sources including works by Ricci, Semedo, Kircher, Le Comte, Du Halde, *Confucius Sinarum*

Letters..., Letter lvii (written Paris, 1755), Editor's Footnote. The letter describes the dispute between Mairan and Montesquieu. The editor is the only source for this story that I have found.

²²⁴ *Ibid.*

²²⁵ *Ibid.*

²²⁶ Peter Burke argues, Bossuet's "omissions were deliberate...He was not continuing automatically in a medieval tradition" but was a "conscious reactionary" to the new movement of relativism and scepticism from the libertines. Burke, *A Social History of Knowledge*, 244.

²²⁷ Voltaire began writing in the 1740s and constantly edited this work. The first authorised text was published in 1754 and the basic form can be found in the 1756 Geneva edition with successive revisions in 1761, 1769, 1775 (the last approved edition) and a posthumous edition in 1785. Karen O'Brien, *Narratives of Enlightenment: Cosmopolitan History from Voltaire to Gibbon* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005), 47.

²²⁸ François-Marie Arouet Voltaire, *An essay on universal history...written in French, by M. De Voltaire...* Translated by Mr. Nugent, 4 Volumes (Edinburgh: Printed for J. Balfour and Co. W. Gordon, J. Bell, A. Donaldson, J. Dickson, W. Creech, et. Al., 1777).

Philosophus, and Le Gobien as well as the non-Jesuit Navarrete.²²⁹ In his *Philosophical Dictionary*, he expressed his frustration with how the debate on authority of the Jesuits connected to the way in which their information was used. He mocks the logic of the ancient part of the *Universal History*, that discredited Chinese chronology simply because it originated in Jesuit sources:

The compilers of a universal history, printed in England, have also shown a disposition to divest the Chinese of their antiquity, because the Jesuits were the first who made the world acquainted with China. This is unquestionably a very satisfactory reason for saying to a whole nation – ‘You are liars’.²³⁰

Voltaire’s view of China evolved over time and he was influenced by the criticism directed at the Middle Kingdom, especially that by his correspondent, Cornelius (Corneille) de Pauw. De Pauw was a Dutch philosopher, naturalist, geographer and diplomat at court of Frederick of Prussia. While most known for his expertise on America his description of China in *Recherches philosophiques sur les Égyptiens et les Chinois* (London, Laussane and Geneva, 1774) was read not only by Voltaire but also by Raynal and Smith.²³¹ As Basil Guy argues, de Pauw “undertook [the work] to controvert the Jesuits and their machine de guerre, China, not from a factual, but from a rational, logical argument”.²³² Voltaire, in *Lettres chinoises* (1774) (dedicated to de Pauw), concluded that de Pauw excessively criticized China while Voltaire had shown it too much admiration.²³³ Pauw’s criticisms were indeed voracious and he is one of the few philosophers to maintain a steadily dismissive attitude towards China’s political economy, though his analysis was not penetrating. For instance, as we will see in chapter three, unlike other philosophers who addressed China, de Pauw criticized but did not offer an explanation for Chinese avariciousness.

A final important French work that crossed genres is Raynal’s *Histoire des deux Indes*. Rubiés describes this work as a “philosophical compilation,” reflecting its place between the previous category of geographies and that of the philosophers.²³⁴ When it first appeared nobody believed that Raynal had authored it, and attributed it to Denis

²²⁹ D.E. Mungello “Confucianism in the Enlightenment”, 103.

²³⁰ François-Marie Arouet Voltaire. “‘Cannibals to Falsity of Human Virtue’ *Philosophical Dictionary* 4 vols” in *The Works of Voltaire: A Contemporary Version*. 22 Volumes. (New York: E.R. DuMont, 1901), vol. 4, 81.

²³¹ John D. Browning, “Cornelius de Pauw and Exiled Jesuits: The Development of Nationalism in Spanish America” *Eighteenth-Century Studies*, 11:3 (Spring, 1978), 289-307, quote at 293.

²³² Guy, “*Ad majorem societatis gloriam...*”, 77.

²³³ Voltaire, *Lettres Chinoises, Indiennes et Tartares. A Monsieur Paw* (Geneve: n.p., 1776), 53.

²³⁴ Rubiés, “From the history of *travayle*”.

Diderot.²³⁵ The first edition was published in Amsterdam in 1770, and it was substantially edited in 1774 and further modified in 1780. In spite of the official controversy surrounding it, this work was extremely successful and international bestseller running through at least fifty editions in less than twenty years, excluding the numerous extracts reproduced in books and pamphlets. It was translated into several languages and made its way across the globe to North and South America.²³⁶ The English edition, translated by J.A. Justamond, appeared as early as 1776 and was re-edited up to 1821. The sources for Book I (which included the chapters on China) were primarily the *Universal History* (largely the French edition) and Abbé Prévost's *Histoire générale*. Peter Jimack notes that for the Chinese section, Raynal also likely relied on Poivre and Du Halde's descriptions of China as well as the analyses of Voltaire and Montesquieu.²³⁷ While this work had several collaborators the most important was Denis Diderot, who is estimated to have written about one-third of the finished work in the 1781 edition.²³⁸

There was one chapter on China in the 1770 and 1774 editions. Jimack argues that Raynal likely wrote the first "almostly eulogistic account" of China (Chapter 20), which he believes was informed by Voltaire's *Essai sur les mœurs* (1756). The third edition contained a new chapter (Chapter 21) on "The Present State of China according to its Detractors", which Jimack believes was composed by Diderot, who took up the view of Montesquieu presented in *De L'esprit des lois* (1748).²³⁹ Sankar Muthu agrees that Diderot authored the second chapter on China but believes he wrote it in order to "present a broader range of views that readers could peruse in order to make a better informed set of judgments about the nature of Chinese society".²⁴⁰ Even if Diderot did view Chinese civilization negatively, it certainly is remarkable that Diderot and Raynal presented the two views on China in such a straightforward way. This presentation places the Diderot chapter in the tradition of a popular geography that sought to

²³⁵ John Viscount Morley, *Diderot and the Encyclopaedists* 2 Volumes (London: Macmillan and Co., 1923), vol. 2, 196.

²³⁶ Guillaume-Thomas Raynal, *Histoire philosophique et politique des établissements et du commerce des Européens dans les deux Indes*, Anthony Strugnell et al. (eds.) Tome I. Livres I-V (Paris: Centre International d'étude du XVIIIe Siècle and Ferney-Voltaire, 2010), xlix.

²³⁷ Peter Jimack (ed.), *A History of the Two Indies: A Translated Selection of Writings from Raynal's Histoire philosophique et politique des établissements des Européens dans les Deux Indes* (Hampshire: Ashgate Publishing Co., 2006), x- xi.; Raynal, *Histoire philosophique et politique...*, 15

²³⁸ Sunil Agnan, "Diderot and the Two Indies of the French Enlightenment" in Larry Wolff and Marco Cipolloni (Eds.) *The Anthropology of the Enlightenment* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2007), 66.

²³⁹ Peter Jimack (ed.), *A History of the Two Indies: A Translated Selection of Writings from Raynal's Histoire philosophique et politique des établissements des Européens dans les Deux Indes* (Hampshire: Ashgate Publishing Co., 2006), 9. Jimack argues the same view in *Histoire philosophique et politique*, 14.

²⁴⁰ Muthu, *Enlightenment Against Empire*, 82.

explicitly assess available evidence. Jimack argues that Diderot's added chapter on China is an example of him adding "philosophy" to *Histoire*.²⁴¹ And yet Raynal's chapter, inspired by Voltaire, had a philosophic air to it, and the chapter written by Diderot had elements of geography. Thus Raynal and Diderot both reflected the genres of philosophy and geography. This research focuses only on the first two editions of *Histoire des deux Indes* published before the *Wealth of Nations*. Raynal's early editions were a reference for Adam Smith as we will see below.

It was Britain's political economists, particularly the members of the Scottish Enlightenment who initiated the nineteenth century tradition of viewing China's political economy as stationary in their stadial view of history and the world. David Hume sought to explain why China became 'stationary' and Europe was 'dynamic'. In his *Rise and Progress of the Arts and Sciences* he discussed China without referring to any sources but described the "peculiarity in the situation of that country."²⁴² Noting the exceptionality of the Chinese case (based on geography, population and culture), he indicated his engagement was based on sources that held detailed knowledge of China.²⁴³

Adam Smith often referred to his sources directly and as his library is catalogued, thus his engagement with ethnography is clearer. Christian Marouby's study of Adam Smith's use of ethnographic sources in developing his theories of economic progress finds his use of information to be highly questionable and selective.²⁴⁴ Similarly, Roy Campbell and Andrew Skinner, describe Adam Smith's (1723-1790) 'use of history':

No one of his intellectual eminence would distort the facts, even if only because refutation would thus have been infinitely easier, but, even when facts were not distorted, they may still have been used in such a subordinate and supporting role to the dominating systematic model that their use for any other purpose needs qualification.²⁴⁵

There is no doubt that Smith's knowledge of China was subordinated to his theory, but that need not imply that it had no effect. Adam Smith's library and his use of sources

²⁴¹ Jimack, *A History of the Two Indies...*, 14.

²⁴² David Hume, *Essays Moral, Political, Literary*, Eugene F. Miller (ed.) (Indianapolis: Liberty Fund 1987). Essay XIV: Of the Rise and Progress of the Arts and Sciences.

²⁴³ Alan Macfarlane, "David Hume and the political economy of agrarian civilization," *History of European Ideas* 27 (2001), 79-91.

²⁴⁴ See Christian Marouby, "Adam Smith and the Anthropology of the Enlightenment: The 'Ethnographic' Sources of Economic Progress" in *The Anthropology of the Enlightenment* (eds.) Larry Wolff and Marco Cipolloni (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2007), 85-102.

²⁴⁵ Roy Harold Campbell and Andrew S. Skinner. "Preface to Adam Smith's *An Inquiry Into the Nature and Causes of the Wealth of Nations*" in R. H. Campbell and A. S. Skinner (eds.) *The Glasgow Edition of the Works and Correspondence of Adam Smith* (Indianapolis: Liberty Fund, 1981).

reveal the importance of reconstructing the circulation of information on China by examining the primary, geographical and philosophical sources. Smith relied on several explicit and implicit primary sources when he referred to the “accounts of travellers” in China.²⁴⁶ He cited Marco Polo and Pierre Poivre (though not directly when discussing China). From his library catalogue it is clear he also had access to the descriptions of China from Hakluyt’s *Principal Navigations*, the Churchill brother’s *Collection of Voyages*, and de Pauw’s description of China.²⁴⁷ Smith also referenced philosophers who wrote about China including Raynal, and engaged with his fellow philosophers, particularly Hume, Quesnay and Montesquieu. His travels from 1764 to 1767 introduced him to the Physiocrats, and his library contained the volumes of *Ephémérides du Citoyen* that contained Quesnay’s *Despotisme de la Chine* (1767). From these sources and his discussions of China, his approach towards describing the Middle Kingdom was certainly empirical. Although he did question the primary evidence on China, he still chose to engage and explain important elements of the Chinese system of political economy such as the provision of commercial institutions, their reluctance to expand their international commerce and the need to reduce the corruption of government officials. He did not address important aspects of China such as science, because this topic was not of primary importance to his system, reflecting the centrality of his theory above analysis of China. His conclusions about the Middle Kingdom were based on the knowledge available combined with his theoretical beliefs. While he ultimately labeled China as a stationary state, he offered several recommendations on how it could begin to improve based on the ethnographic descriptions and analyses he had read. Smith represents a natural conclusion to this study because his account of China was entirely focused on political economy, he accounted for the views and arguments (both positive and negative) that came before him and he worked the Chinese Empire into a schema of civilization that was to last throughout the nineteenth century.

²⁴⁶ Adam Smith, *The Wealth of Nations* (ed.) Edwin Cannan (New York: Bantam Dell, 2003), 101.

²⁴⁷ Hiroshi Mizuta, *Adam Smith’s Library* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1967). Also see Adam Smith, *An Inquiry Into the Nature and Causes of the Wealth of Nations*, R. H. Campbell and A. S. Skinner (eds.) *Glasgow Edition of the Works and Correspondence of Adam Smith* 2 volumes (Indianapolis: Liberty Fund, 1981). Vol. 1, Table of Corresponding Passages.

CONCLUSION

As this chapter has demonstrated, the reconstruction of knowledge on China's political economy in the eighteenth century necessarily includes the examination of the three genres of primary, geographical and philosophical sources across Britain and France. The three groups of sources capture the common themes and perspectives in debates on China's political economy, and help ascertain the impact that the Chinese system had in shaping Enlightenment theories and views of political economy. From Serica to Cathay to China, Europeans have been interested in many facets of Chinese civilization. It is important to differentiate between European descriptions of China's morality, religion, history and political economy, instead of categorizing one period, or author, as a sinophile or sinophobe.

The respective primary sources of information, namely the missionaries, merchants, men of war and emissaries, all had varying motivations and loyalties in mind when constructing and transmitting facts about China's political economy. On the receiving end, the expanding role of geographers led to the arrangement and consolidation of the primary sources of information. These sources were largely driven by political economy and thus showed particular interest in this subject. More broadly, European philosophers who included China in their writings showed a genuine interest in the Middle Kingdom, though they manipulated the available information to fit their arguments and frameworks of analysis. It is from and between these three broad contexts that the content of China's political economy was formed. As we will see in chapter three's study of views of Chinese economic culture, sources often agreed in their descriptions of China.

OUTLINE:	3.	“LE PEUPLE LE PLUS FOURBE DE LA TERRE” ²⁴⁸
	3.1.	EUROPEAN CONCEPTIONS OF MORALITY
	3.2.	CHINESE IMMORALITY IN PRIMARY SOURCES
	3.3.	EXPLAINING THE CHINESE CASE

In an era when Europeans – from philosophers to politicians and merchants to peasants – were confronting a rapidly expanding commercial world, questions of morality in economic action were of the utmost interest. Long before the field of economic anthropology became a ground for disagreement between culturalists, substantivists, and formalists, the moral philosophers of the Enlightenment were debating the place of culture and the role of human nature in commercial relations. As a branch of moral philosophy, political economy was imbued with questions of morality from its inception. Indeed, Adam Smith’s *Wealth of Nations* (1776) was only logical after he laid the important theoretical and ethical foundations of social interaction in his book on moral philosophy, *The Theory of Moral Sentiments* (1759).

China occupied a unique position in eighteenth-century debates over morality, acting as a mirror for Europeans – especially the British and French – as they struggled to reconcile traditional moral paradigms with a rapidly expanding commercial society. As a comparatively highly developed civilization with expansive domestic commerce (discussed in chapter four), China was a study in the prioritization of self-interest and the role of moral philosophy and natural theology in controlling avarice. A friction existed in China (as also in Europe) between the purported ideal system of moral philosophy and descriptions of immorality and avarice in day-to-day life. Montesquieu dedicated an entire chapter to describing the unique tension in China. The *philosophe* was distinct for his direct approach to addressing this well-known issue, which most observers and commentators of China acknowledged in some way. Montesquieu’s chapter on this topic was entitled “Explanation of a paradox relating to the Chinese”, and it sought to answer why “the Chinese, whose life is entirely directed by rites, are nevertheless the most unscrupulous people on earth. This appears chiefly in commerce,

²⁴⁸ Charles Louis de Secondat, Baron de Montesquieu, *The Spirit of the Laws* Eds Anne M. Cohler, Basia C Miller and Harold S. Stone (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989), 321. “the most unscrupulous people on earth”. It has also been translated as “the greatest cheats on earth”. Montesquieu, *De l’esprit des lois*. Edition électronique par Jean-Marie Tremblay 6 parts (Genève: Barillot et fils, 1748), Part 3, 108. “*le peuple le plus fourbe de la terre*”. Throughout this chapter I will cite the English edition and also reference the original French but only discuss the language if it differs from the English translation.

which has never been able to inspire in them the good faith natural to it.”²⁴⁹ Here Montesquieu recognized a struggle between the ideal (rites) and the reality (unscrupulous people). In spite of the praise that some writers lavished on Confucianism and China’s perfection of the moral sciences, the system appeared to fall short of actually controlling the immoral inclinations of the Chinese people. This inconsistency featured prominently in descriptions of Chinese practical morality. While these discussions of the divide between moral codes and commercial greed occurred in context of addressing the Chinese case, concurrent discussions about the tension between ethical codes and commercial behaviour on a universal level also existed in Europe.

This chapter examines views of China’s economic culture in three sections. First, it describes the context within which Europeans received primary reports on China’s economic culture. It examines the European struggle with the issue of morality in commercial interactions on both theoretical and practical levels. This section focuses on themes of avarice as they related to China thus a full discussion of Adam Smith’s moral philosophy, or a comprehensive analysis of moral theories of the Enlightenment is not intended. There are two useful threads to focus on given the centrality of China. First, on the practical level, popular merchant manuals sought to define a contemporary code of conduct for commercial behaviour. The rules laid out by writers such as Daniel Defoe reflected the shifting norms of behaviour in the eighteenth century and thus the lack of conviction with which European commentators judged Chinese commercial behaviour. Second, on a theoretical level, Europeans struggled to reconcile ideal morality with an increasingly secular and rapidly expanding commercial world. The image of commercial self-interest evolved throughout the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries culminating in the *Wealth of Nations*, in which Adam Smith deemed self-interest to be an innocuous force that, through the invisible hand, actually benefited the general interests of society.

The second section of this chapter examines what the primary sources of information reported about Chinese morality. The primary authors – largely the Jesuits – expatiated on the Confucian system of moral philosophy. Praise for this philosophical system led to the perception that the Jesuits adulated Chinese morality. However, the negative view of the day-to-day avarice and fraud in China also originated in the primary reports by

²⁴⁹ *Ibid.* This also reflects Montesquieu’s view of the *douceur* of commerce.

both the Jesuits and non-Jesuits, reflecting the inapplicability of a crude sinophilia-sinophobia dichotomy. Further, not all the primary descriptions (whether Jesuit or non-Jesuit) of practical morality were entirely negative and the authors recognized the diversity within China. The primary reports revealed the similarities between China and European countries in the struggle to harness self-interest to benefit their societies.

The final part of this chapter examines the rationalizations and explanations for Chinese immorality given by the primary observers and philosophers. The views of geographers are not discussed in detail in this chapter because on this topic they do not offer a distinct perspective and largely repeated the descriptions of the primary sources. Changing European views of self-interest, and the ethnographic reports on Chinese morality contributed to shaping an understanding of Chinese economic culture and morality. These explanations reveal as much about the evolution of Enlightenment thought on economic behaviour as they did about perceptions of China. Four predominant, yet intertwined, explanations were proffered. The first pointed to China's heathen status as a possible reason for their immoral behaviour; however, this view was rarely a sufficient explanation. The second reason was based on the unique history and geography of the Chinese Empire. Anson and Montesquieu in particular pointed to specific circumstances in China that led to excessive greed. A third explanation contextualized the reports and focused on the diversity of behaviour found in China. Proponents of this view held that the coastal Chinese were more avaricious than those of the interior. The final explanation pointed to the larger universal problem of avarice and the weaknesses of humankind, reflecting a view of all societies as equally corruptible. These four explanations indicate the European desire to understand, rationalize and contextualize the reports of Chinese avarice.

The behavioural and moral foundations of what was to become the modern capitalist system were being conceived, debated, and analysed at this moment in history. As a society with a comparable level of commercial activity to advanced European states, and with a supposedly insatiably greedy population, China was viewed as a useful example of the anticipated consequences of the rise of self-interest. However, China was not merely a convenient foreign model, there was also genuine interest in understanding the role and causes of avarice in the Middle Kingdom. The primary, geographical and philosophical sources that contemplated the subject of morality in commerce explained and learned from discussions of China's economic culture. While

they criticized Chinese practical morality, they also moderated their disapproval by noting not only the diversity within China, but also the similarities to Europe. The Chinese were criticized for the immorality present in their commercial actions, but this disapproval was not sufficient to dismiss their system of political economy.

3.1. EUROPEAN CONCEPTIONS OF MORALITY

The idea that religion was inadequate to restrain the destructive passions of men emerged during the Renaissance, but was solidified in the seventeenth century.²⁵⁰ Since religion could no longer harness the negative impulses of Europeans, philosophers debated alternative constraints and, as Albert Hirschman as explained, ultimately turned to the passion of avarice to countervail the other negative passions such as pride and envy.²⁵¹ Early modern Europeans debated the role of avarice in a commercial society, and sought philosophically and practically to make it as helpful, or at least as innocuous, as possible. One way to harness avarice was to define a code of acceptable and unacceptable merchant behaviour. An important text in this field of moral merchant manuals was Daniel Defoe's *The Complete English Tradesman* (1725), a paradigmatic work in a growing genre that articulated the code of conduct for merchants within a framework of national economic advancement.²⁵² Defoe was an intriguing character who in many ways bridged the popularizing and philosophical genres. He was a businessman who went bankrupt several times and had a keen understanding of the emerging credit economy; a political activist who was involved in the government and arrested for libel; a journalist who edited *The Review* and was criticized as a hack writer; and, most famously, the literary author of *Robinson Crusoe*, which touched on the genre of popular travel literature.²⁵³ In *The Complete English Tradesman* – described as one of his “most passionate and personal books” – Defoe laid out the

²⁵⁰ See Albert Hirschman, *The Passions and the Interests* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1997), 14-15.

²⁵¹ *Ibid.*, 21.

²⁵² This was a pan-European genre with common sensibilities across Western Europe. See Daniel A. Rabuzzi, “Eighteenth-Century Commercial Mentalities as Reflected and Projected in Business Handbooks,” *Eighteenth Century Studies*, 29:2 (1995-1996), 169-189. Another important early English merchant manual was Anonymous, *Character and Qualifications of an Honest, Loyal Merchant* (London: Printed by Robert Roberts, 1686). For more on early modern English merchant morality see Richard Grassby, *The Business Community of Seventeenth-Century England* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995). An even more popular book in this genre was published by Samuel Richardson, *Apprentice's Vade Mecum* (London: Printed for T. Cooper, 1734).

²⁵³ Paula R. Backscheider, ‘Defoe, Daniel (1660?–1731)’, *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004). See also Maximillian Novak, *Defoe and the Nature of Man* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1963) which addresses the relationship between Defoe's morality and theology

“difference between an honest man, and an honest tradesman” and defined the boundaries beyond which a tradesman cannot wander if he wants to retain his the epithet “honest”.²⁵⁴ While the tradesman could not cheat or defraud, Defoe did allow him some latitude “which by the custom and usage of trade he may give himself a liberty in, which cannot be allow’d in other cases to any man, nor to the tradesman himself out of his business...”²⁵⁵ These liberties, such as “the liberty of asking more than he will take” so as to allow a “reasonable profit,” if taken “within bounds”, should allow the tradesman to be regarded in society as an honest man.²⁵⁶ Defoe distinguished between unacceptable, immoral lying and “trading lies” that were connected to self-interest, but were increasingly acceptable in society, because they were necessary for economic improvement. Although “trading lies” were to be avoided, Defoe argued, this could not always be done. One should be honest in their foundations but within reasonable expectations.

Custom indeed has driven us beyond the limits of our morals in many things, which trade makes necessary, and which we cannot now avoid; so that if we must pretend to go back to the literal sense of the command...why then it is impossible for tradesmen to be Christians, and we must unhinge all business...”²⁵⁷

Here, Defoe separated custom from morals, or practical norms from ethical ideals. Defoe argued that if Europeans followed these unrealistic ideals, they would also have to stop conversing with each other because there are many lies in the ordinary communication of life, and there is “no such thing as every man speaking truth with his neighbour”.²⁵⁸ However, not every immoral act committed by a merchant or tradesman was considered acceptable in Defoe’s scheme. There were customary frauds that were not justifiable, such as falsifying money, which Defoe noted was widely prevalent during the reign of King William of Orange, when “people were daily upon the catch to cheat and surprise one another, if they could”.²⁵⁹ This debate between utility and honesty was present much earlier in relation to the role of the statesman.²⁶⁰ This distinction was the subject of great debate in early modern Europe because European

²⁵⁴ *Ibid*; Daniel Defoe, *The Complete English Tradesman* (London: printed for Charles Rivington, 1726), 274.

²⁵⁵ Defoe, *The Complete English Tradesman*, 275.

²⁵⁶ *Ibid.*, 276.

²⁵⁷ *Ibid.*, 284-5.

²⁵⁸ *Ibid.*

²⁵⁹ *Ibid.*, 293.

²⁶⁰ See Dirk van Miert, *Humanism in an Age of Science* (Leiden: Brill, 2009), 281-2. Van Miert describes the conflict and Caspar Barlaeus (a humanist relying on Aristotle and Plato) who defended honesty against Machiavelli who propounded pragmatic utility. Barlaeus also discussed this in relation to the “wise merchant”, who he stressed needed honesty.

countries were grappling with the same questions as the Chinese, with the marked difference that in the former case Christianity replaced Confucianism as the ideal moral compass. Still the relationship between utility and honesty transcended the Christian ethical ideal and was present in the Renaissance humanist as well as and pagan classical debates.

There were clearly problems with fraud in England during, before and after Defoe's time, which were widely known and reflected in the genre of the merchant manual. However there were no clear rules on where the line of utility and honesty was to be drawn. The boundaries between avarice, fraud, immorality and self-interest were fluid, as Defoe's "trading lies" indicates. In this context, the descriptions of China do not stand out as exceptionally immoral, and yet it was still written about by scholars such as Montesquieu as the land containing "the most unscrupulous people on earth". Perhaps China was held to a higher standard as a result of the panegyrics of the Jesuits on Confucian morality; however, the assessment of the Chinese as immoral in commerce also reflects the complexity in drawing the new boundaries of acceptable commercial behaviour.

Philosophers, especially those interested in matters of political economy, recognized the tension between morality and its practical application, particularly with regards to commercial activity.²⁶¹ They dealt with the subject of avarice as a human problem. The question of how to tame the passions of human nature (such as avarice, sloth, ferocity and ambition) rose in importance as the role of religion as a controlling force in society declined. Within the Enlightenment one part of the debate over taming the passions occurred between those philosophers such as Francis Hutcheson, who defended an optimistic anthropology and still believed in some sort of natural morality (or innate "moral sense"), and thinkers in the Hobbesian tradition such as Mandeville and Hume, who believed that morality was entirely a human creation used to control natural self-interest. In his *Fable of the Bees* (1724) Mandeville pointed out the role of the vice of avarice in British society, as well as the hypocrisy of those who tried to downplay it. He described the frauds, criminals and knaves present in English society:

These were called Knaves; but, bar the Name,
The grave Industrious were the Same.

²⁶¹ See Istvan Hont and Michael Ignatieff, "Needs and justice in the *Wealth of Nations*: an introductory essay" in Michael Ignatieff and Istvan Hont (eds.), *Wealth and Virtue: The Shaping of Political Economy in the Scottish Enlightenment* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1983), 11-12. They situate Smith as seeking to define a "realistic account of moral sentiments"

All trade and Places knew some Cheat,
No Calling was without Deceit.²⁶²

The members of the beehive (or England) that were accused of deceit included lawyers, physicians, priests, soldiers, Kings and merchants. Mandeville quipped,

For there was not a Bee, but would
Get more, I won't say, than he should;
But than he dared to let them know,
That pay'd for't...²⁶³

This observation is particularly interesting when compared to discussions of Chinese commercial tenet that allowed the buyer to sell his product or service for as much as possible, without considering what was fair. Mandeville argued “The root of evil avarice” actually was the “wheel, that turn'd the trade” and he criticized the bees for their hypocrisy.²⁶⁴ Mandeville’s picture of British wealth (something he extrapolated to any “populous, rich and extended kingdom”) requiring avarice was so controversial at the time that he was nicknamed “Man-devil.” However, he greatly influenced contemporary debate and reflects the slowly changing views on commercial self-interest in eighteenth century philosophical circles.²⁶⁵

These questions on commercial morality were central to Enlightenment debates. As Nicholas Phillipson points out, “Hume studiously avoided the more troubling ethical questions Mandeville had raised. If commerce and the psychological motors that drove it transformed the human personality, were there not still qualitative questions to be asked about the effects of the civilizing process on human personality?”²⁶⁶ Rousseau answered this question in *Discourse on Inequality* (1754) by arguing civilization was corrupting force. According to Rousseau, the introduction of property led to inequality and injustice. In other words, “what Rousseau’s critique had exposed were the ethical questions about sociability which would have to be addressed if commerce was to be defended from its critics.”²⁶⁷ Smith criticized Rousseau’s denunciation of civilization and yet he was deeply challenged and inspired by it. He entered the debate mid-century with his *Theory of Moral sentiments* (1759) arguing that both natural and constructed moral traits were present in society. Underpinning Smith’s thought on human relationships was the idea of sympathy, a concept that dated back to the Stoics and was

²⁶² Bernard Mandeville, *The Fable of the Bees* Phillip Harth (ed.) (London: Penguin Books, 1989), 64.

²⁶³ *Ibid.*, 67

²⁶⁴ *Ibid.*, 68 and 69.

²⁶⁵ For more on Mandeville see E.J. Hundert, *The Enlightenment's Fable: Bernard Mandeville and the Discovery of Society* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994)

²⁶⁶ Nicholas Phillipson, *Adam Smith: An Enlightened Life* (London: Penguin Books, 2010), 144.

²⁶⁷ Phillipson, *Adam Smith: An Enlightened Life*, 148.

a popular concept in theories of human relationships during the Enlightenment. Smith believed in the controversial notion of a largely artificial morality, but he sought to distinguish himself from the contentious writings of Hobbes and Mandeville, who argued that morality was merely a form of self-love. As Hirschman points out, Smith “blunted the edge of Mandeville’s shocking paradox by substituting for ‘passion’ and ‘vice’ such bland terms as ‘advantage’ or ‘interest’”.²⁶⁸ Smith argued two forces develop morality in individuals: one is the social mirror, which appeals to an individual’s self-love, as they desire to be approved; and the other is a more ambiguous force – the impartial spectator.²⁶⁹ The conception of the impartial spectator allowed Smith to bridge Mandeville and Hutcheson by arguing that a more natural force was partially responsible for morality. With the repositioning of avarice as a form of self-interest, the view that commercial behaviour could be natural and innocuous began to anchor itself in European thought.

While thinkers like Defoe worked out the fine lines between immorality and trading lies, other philosophers such as Adam Smith subtly argued for acceptance of the positive effects of self-interest in commercial societies in universal and abstract terms. These advances in thought were to change the public acceptability of self-interest and thus redefined established morality, and hence they were necessarily slow to evolve. It was this dynamic eighteenth century environment that confronted the growing ethnographic information on morality in Chinese commerce.

3.2. CHINESE IMMORALITY IN PRIMARY SOURCES

As discussed in previous chapters, many eighteenth century observers as well as modern scholars have argued the Jesuit and non-Jesuit reports on China differed sharply, especially on the topic of morality. It is reasonable to assume that secular authors were more sympathetic towards self-interest in commercial interactions than the missionaries. However, if the personal motivations of observers are kept in mind, it is also logical to assume that merchants and men of war were frustrated by their dealings with Chinese traders; and the Jesuit missionaries praised Chinese morality to engender support for their mission by presenting the Middle Kingdom as a civilization only waiting to learn the word of God. If either of these assumptions holds, the primary

²⁶⁸ Hirschman, *The Passions and the Interests*, 19.

²⁶⁹ See D.D. Raphael, *The Impartial Spectator: Adam Smith’s moral philosophy* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007) for more on Smith’s moral philosophy.

sources would be expected to present a one-dimensional view of Chinese morality. However, the observers gave a nuanced view of Chinese morality and economic behaviour that was remarkably similar across authors.

The sixteenth century Iberian reports on China did not address Confucian ideology but did comment on practical Chinese morality. The early description of China by the Friar Gaspar da Cruz was not positive towards the Middle Kingdom. He characterized the merchants as “commonly false and liars” who deceive buyers because “they have no conscience which reproaches them...”²⁷⁰ By the seventeenth century Jesuit accounts of China, a more complex portrayal of Chinese morality emerged. On the one hand, the Jesuits expounded the Confucian teachings on morality and virtue, while on the other hand they recounted anecdotes of immoral behaviour and fraud. The Jesuits were the first Europeans to gain sufficient access to China that they were able to understand Chinese moral philosophy and Confucianism. Ricci described the ancient Confucian philosophy of China, arguing that the “only one of the higher philosophical sciences with which the Chinese have become acquainted is that of moral philosophy”.²⁷¹ He qualified this by pointing out the deficiencies of Chinese moral philosophy (such as mistaking the divisions of the subject resulting in a confusing set of maxims). Ricci mentioned the Chinese emphasis on politeness as a cardinal virtue, even when it came to commerce: “with [the Chinese], respect and deference and consideration in business transactions constitute the foundation of urbanity”.²⁷²

Aside from these reports on Chinese moral philosophy and Confucianism, the Jesuits gave contemporaneous accounts of the immoral behaviour of the Chinese in practical affairs. Ricci’s descriptions of his experiences in China are the most surprising given his supposed “sinophile” perspective. Two chapters after discussing China’s cardinal virtues, he described the common fraud of fortune-tellers in China.²⁷³ When addressing the history of the Jesuit mission, Ricci relayed numerous accounts painting the Chinese as immoral frauds, who often tried to cheat the Jesuits in business transactions and falsified credit when the opportunity arose.²⁷⁴ However, it was not only common people who were deemed avaricious, as this label was also assigned to members of the Chinese

²⁷⁰ Boxer, *South China in the Sixteenth Century*, 130.

²⁷¹ Ricci and Trigault, *China in the Sixteenth Century*, 30.

²⁷² *Ibid.* 59.

²⁷³ *Ibid.*, 83-4

²⁷⁴ *Ibid.*, 351

government, and in particular, the eunuchs.²⁷⁵ The discussion of corruption and greed in government will be addressed further in chapter five, but for now it suffices to acknowledge that Chinese officials (mandarins) also attracted much moral criticism from the Jesuits.

By the end of the seventeenth century the Jesuit reports had grown more censorious on the topic of immorality in daily interactions as they continued to praise Confucian ideal morality. Father Le Comte's 1696 account of China noted how Confucius "[r]esolved to preach up a severe morality, to prevail upon men to condemn riches and worldly pleasures and esteem temperance, justice, and other virtues..."²⁷⁶ Le Comte, however, also reported that the Chinese people ignored this Confucian precept:

there is no nation under the sun, that is more fit for commerce and traffick, and understand them better: One can hardly believe how far their tricks and craftiness proceed when they are to insinuate into mens affections to manage a fair opportunity to improve the overtures that are offered: the desire of getting torments them continually, and makes them discover a thousand ways of gaining, that would not naturally come into their head.²⁷⁷ [emphasis added]

He concluded that the "trade and commerce, that is carried on every where, is the soul of the people, and the primum mobile of all their actions".²⁷⁸ This obsession with gain, according to Le Comte, led "[the Chinese to] falsifie almost every thing they vend".²⁷⁹ Pointing out that a "stranger will always be cheated, if he buys alone," he cautioned that foreigners should use a Chinese to assist in their dealings, and hope the trusty ally did not collude in the fraud.²⁸⁰ Therefore, along with descriptions of Chinese fraud came an image of a highly commercial country.

The extension of credit was another commercial area that Le Comte, like Ricci before him, believed was affected by deceit and he pointed out, one must have "sureties" when lending to the Chinese because they do not keep their promises. The borrowers build up

²⁷⁵ *Ibid.*, 83-4, 343, and 359.

²⁷⁶ Le Comte, *Memoirs and Observations Typographical, Physical, Mathematical, Mechanical, Natural, Civil, and Ecclesiastical, Made in a Late Journey through the Empire of China*, Translated from the Paris edition (London: Printed for B. Tooke and Sam Buckley, 1697), 201. Accurately translated from the original French see Louis Le Comte, *Nouveaux mémoires sur l'état présent de la Chine*. Seconde édition, 2 Volumes (Paris: Chez Jean Anisson, 1697), Vol. 1, 330.

²⁷⁷ Le Comte, *Memoirs and Observations*, 237. Le Comte, *Nouveaux mémoires*, Vol. 1, 401.

²⁷⁸ Le Comte, *Memoirs and Observations*, 237. Le Comte, *Nouveaux mémoires*, Vol. 1, 402. "...et le principe de toutes leurs actions".

²⁷⁹ *Ibid.*

²⁸⁰ *Ibid.*

their credit with small amounts, he argued, and then steal a larger amount later.²⁸¹ Le Comte wished that the Chinese would add more honesty to their “labour and natural industry”, as they would then be able, rounded merchants; but, “their essential quality is to deceive and cozen when it lies in their power”.²⁸² Indeed, he reported that some Chinese even boasted of their immoral lying. These characteristics were not confined only to merchants: “Avarice, ambition, and love, bear a great stroke in all transactions. They cozen and cheat in traffick; injustice reigns in sovereign courts...In the mean time, persons of quality take so many measures to conceal vice...”²⁸³ Thus Le Comte, the Jesuit condemned by the Sorbonne and used as paradigmatic example of sinophilia, was surprisingly scathing in his description of Chinese commercial immorality and corruption.

By the mid-eighteenth century, Du Halde was more tempered in his account than Le Comte, arguing that the Chinese “are not so deceitful and knavish as P. Le Comte represents them”, although he certainly did not ignore the evidence on Chinese avarice.²⁸⁴ Du Halde, like the earlier Jesuits, described a world where the Chinese were led by trade and commerce, and controlled by their self-interest. However, he was less critical of self-interest than his seventeenth century fellow Jesuits. Indeed, he argued that

[i]nterest is the grand foible of the Chinese; with whom you must act all sorts of parts, even that of being disinterested. When they have any gain in view, they employ all their cunning, artfully to insinuate themselves into the favour of the persons, who may forward their business...assuming all sorts of characters with suprizing address, and turning to their advantage the most trifling occasions to obtain their ends. Interest is the spring of all their actions; for when the least profit offers, they despise all difficulties, and undertake the most painful journeys to procure it. In a word, this puts them in continual motion, fills the streets, the rivers, and the high roads with infinite numbers of people, who pass and repass, and are always in action.²⁸⁵

²⁸¹ Le Comte, *Memoirs and Observations*, 237. Le Comte, *Nouveaux mémoires*, Vol. 1, 403.

²⁸² Le Comte, *Memoirs and Observations*, 237. Le Comte, *Nouveaux mémoires*, Vol. 1, 402.

²⁸³ Le Comte, *Memoirs and Observations*, 126. Le Comte, *Nouveaux mémoires*, Vol. 1, 213.

²⁸⁴ Jean Baptiste Du Halde, *A description of the empire of China...* 2 Volumes (London: printed by T. Gardner for Edward Cave, 1738) (referred to as the Cave edition), Vol. 1, 279. Jean Baptiste Du Halde, *The General History of China: Containing a Geographical, Historical, Chronological, Political and Physical Description of the Empire of China*. Translated by Richard Brookes from the Paris edition. 4 Volumes (London: Printed by and for John Watts, 1736) (referred to as the Watts edition), Vol. 2, 132. Jean Baptiste Du Halde, *Description géographique, historique, chronologique, politique, et physique de l'empire de la Chine*. 4 Volumes (Paris: Chez P.G. Le Mercier, 1735) (referred to as the French edition), Vol. 2, 77

²⁸⁵ *Ibid.*

He recognized the abundant commercial activity of the Chinese was a direct result of their self-interest. Like the earlier Jesuits, Du Halde also argued that the Chinese system of moral philosophy tried to temper self-interest. He described the instructions given by the mandarins to the people on the first and fifteenth of every month. The fifth instruction was “That they accustom themselves to a prudent oeconomy by frugality, temperance, and modesty”.²⁸⁶ The orders reminded the people of all classes that they should never use their credit to make them formidable “that you are never to be allow’d to make use of craft or to lay snares for your neighbours... to seek to enrich your self at the expence of others, are things that you ought absolutely to avoid”.²⁸⁷ Du Halde also realized ideals did not determine reality, and with reference to government behaviour, he argued:

But among so great a number there are always some, who, placing their happiness in the pleasures and enjoyments of this life, do not often scruple to sacrifice the most sacred laws of reason and justice to their private interest.²⁸⁸

The Jesuits, therefore, presented a detailed and often critical view of Chinese morality and depicted the tension between theory and practice.

Equally surprising as the Jesuit’s negative picture of Chinese avarice, was the varied picture of Chinese morality the non-Jesuit sources painted. The Dominican Domingo Navarrete, notable for his anti-Jesuit stance in the Rites Controversy, recounted of the Chinese merchants: “if they can get any thing, tho never so little, they don’t slip the opportunity”; however, he also described them as “all very obliging and civil.”²⁸⁹ Navarrete recognized the tension between the Confucian denigration of immoral merchant behaviour and the impetus to self-interest. Repeating the teachings of Confucius, Navarrete described the moral teachings in China: “In all business and affairs...be virtuous, and endeavour to advance, and attain to perfection in virtue, is the prime and principal part of man.”²⁹⁰ He alluded to the disconnect between moral teachings and practice as a common human problem: “All the world grows more deprav’d every day. The learned men of China look’d upon merchandizing as a shame and dishonour; yet of late years even the great mandarins are fallen to it.”²⁹¹ This was of

²⁸⁶ Du Halde, Cave edition, vol. 1, 255, Watt’s edition, vol. 2, 54, French edition, vol. 2, 34.

²⁸⁷ Du Halde, Cave edition, vol. 1, 255, Watt’s edition, vol.2, 56, French edition, vol. 2, 34.

²⁸⁸ Du Halde, Cave edition, vol.1, 257; Watt’s edition, vol2, 61, French edition, vol. 2, 37.

²⁸⁹ Navarrete’s account was translated into English and published in Churchill, *A Collection of Voyages and Travels*, Vol.1, 60.

²⁹⁰ *Ibid.*, 127

²⁹¹ *Ibid.*, 130.

particular significance because the mandarins passed examinations focused on the teachings of Confucius. Attached to his discussion of Chinese morality and commerce, the Dominican mentioned the rise of commerce in Europe: “The merchants in France told me, trade was much exalted in that kingdom, for even the king himself was concern’d in it”²⁹² By addressing the increase of commerce in France, and its growing acceptability, Navarrete pointed to a commonality with China, thus the immorality of the Middle Kingdom was even more germane to a European readership.

While Navarrete’s view of the tension between moral philosophy and commercial practices was remarkably similar to that of the Jesuits, it is those travellers who went to China with secular interests in mind who are thought to have “added the shadows” to the adulatory accounts of the Jesuits.²⁹³ In fact, they offered little more criticism on this topic than their religious counterparts in China. They rarely addressed Confucian moral philosophy in any detail, in large part because they could not do so, having little knowledge of Chinese culture and less access to the Chinese literati. The omissions of praise for the ideal system of morality contributed to the view that these secular authors were especially critical of China. Johannes Nieuhof did briefly discuss Confucius. He noted that the Chinese esteemed him and

believ'd him to have far exceeded in Vertue, Learning, and Integrity, all other Mortals that ever liv'd upon the face of the Earth: And certainly, if his Works, which are extant in Chinese Books, were minded with a due regard, Men must acknowledge him to have been a Person of great Learning and Vertue.²⁹⁴

Confucius was therefore dismissed as irrelevant because his philosophy was not practiced. Nieuhof did have first-hand knowledge of immoral commercial behaviour in China from his journey to Peking, but his description was no more severe than those given by the Jesuits. Nieuhof warned his European readers that if they planned on trading in China, they “must always have a pair of scales about [them]” because the Chinese “are so nimble and deceitful in their balancing, that you had need of Argus’s Eyes [one hundred eyes] when you buy any thing of them”.²⁹⁵ He added to this that the “abundance of trades in China” have a “great defect and abuse...that they only appear

²⁹² *Ibid.*

²⁹³ Lach and Van Kley, *Asia in the making of Europe*, 1568.

²⁹⁴ Johannes Nieuhof, *An embassy from the East-India Company of the United Provinces* Translated by John Ogilby, second Edition (London: Printed by the author at his house in White Friars, 1673), 154. Nieuhof’s other mentions of Confucius were direct excerpts from earlier Jesuit works by Ricci and Athanasius Kircher.

²⁹⁵ Nieuhof, *An embassy from the East-India Company*, 76.

and seem fair to the eye, but are really for the most part very sleight...”²⁹⁶ One such fraud of the Chinese was stuffing pigs with valueless materials to increase their weight. Thus, Nieuhof offered no greater criticism than the Jesuits of the behaviour of Chinese merchants.

As discussed in chapter one and two, commentators from Montesquieu to modern historians identify a turning point in views of China with the mid-eighteenth century description by Admiral George Anson. His assault on the Chinese character in *Voyage Round the World* (1748) became infamous. Michael Adas describes how “Anson accused the Chinese of greed, deceit, dishonesty, and outright thievery.”²⁹⁷ Indeed, Anson claimed self-interest had a boundless influence in China and the people had a “strong attachment to lucre”.²⁹⁸ Anson also argued “[i]t [would be] endless to recount all the artifices, extortions and frauds which were practiced on the commodore and his people, by this interested race”.²⁹⁹ His anecdotes of Chinese fraud were strikingly similar to the earlier Jesuit and merchant reports, such as the Chinese attempt to falsify weights.³⁰⁰ The commodore tried to find a Chinese captain to guide his ships to Macao by offering dollars, which he believed was “a most alluring bait for Chinese of all ranks and professions”.³⁰¹ Thus Anson had a preconceived notion of Chinese greed, perhaps gathered from encounters with Chinese merchants in foreign ports, and likely from earlier sources reflecting that his account did not uniquely describe Chinese greed.

Surprisingly, given the similarities in the Jesuit and commodore’s descriptions of Chinese greed, Anson directly attacked the Jesuit portrayal of Chinese morality:

...we are told by many of the missionaries, that tho’ the skill of the Chinese in science is confessedly much inferior to that of the Europeans; yet the morality and justice taught and practiced by them are most exemplary: So that from the description given by some of these good fathers, one should be induced to believe, that the whole Empire was a well-governed affectionate family, where the only contests were, who should exert the most humanity and social virtue. But our preceding relation of the behaviour of the magistrates, merchants and tradesmen at Canton sufficiently refutes these Jesuitical fictions.³⁰²

²⁹⁶ *Ibid.*, 163.

²⁹⁷ Adas, *Machines as the Measure of Men*, 91.

²⁹⁸ Anson, *A Voyage round the world*, 364 and 397.

²⁹⁹ *Ibid.*, 397.

³⁰⁰ *Ibid.*

³⁰¹ *Ibid.*, 348.

³⁰² *Ibid.*, 413.

Anson set his own view of China against those of the Jesuits without accepting that the Jesuits also pointed out the discord between ideal Confucian morality and day-to-day immorality. Although Anson did not discuss Confucianism directly, he did comment on the relevance of China's system of moral philosophy. He believed that the Confucian principles described by the Jesuits (his only access to Confucian philosophy) were "immaterial" and neglected "discussing the proper criterion of human actions, and regulating the general conduct of mankind to one another".³⁰³ Thus, he maintained that China's ideal morality (the philosophy of Confucius) was divorced from the practical morality of every day life. Although Anson did not recognize it, the Jesuits also saw the gap between ideals and practice.

These primary reports were not one-dimensional assessments of Chinese character. In fact, they were surprisingly balanced in their assessment of Chinese morality. These nuanced reports travelled back to Europe, where geographies largely emphasized the prevalence of self-interest in China and the many frauds that were committed against foreigners. A few sources recognized that the missionary and secular accounts did not differ greatly in their description of the immorality of Chinese merchants. For example, Daniel Fenning and J. Collyer's *A New System of Geography* (1764-5) gave examples of fraudulent and immoral behaviour by the Chinese and commented on the primary sources of this information: "[t]hese accounts of the dishonesty of the Chinese in general, are selected from the writings of the missionaries who had long lived in the country, and perfectly agree with the treatment commodore Anson received in the river of Canton..."³⁰⁴ This is an example of a geography undertaking the task of assessing and comparing primary descriptions of China.

3.3. EXPLAINING THE CHINESE CASE

The Chinese case proved to be an opportunity to assess the negative and positive role of self-interest as well as theorize as to its causes and place in a commercial society. Four dominant and interconnected explanations for Chinese immorality were offered by the primary and philosophical sources.

³⁰³ *Ibid.* This in turn was reflected in popular geographies. Salmon's *The Universal Traveller*, written after he had taken part in a section of Anson's voyage around the world, cited Anson and Walter when describing Chinese greed. Judging from missionary accounts, he concluded the Chinese moral system contains ridiculous attachments to frivolous points, rather than proper criterion of human actions. Thomas Salmon, *The Universal Traveller* 3 Volumes (London: printed for Richard Baldwin, 1752), Vol. 1, 22.

³⁰⁴ D. Fenning, J. Collyer, et. al. *A New System of Geography* 2 Volumes (London: printed for S. Crowder, 1764-5), Vol. 1, 33.

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One of the most predictable explanations for Chinese immorality was that they were not Christians. This argument was widely used before the Enlightenment and regained prevalence in the nineteenth century. Descriptions of this kind also furthered the Jesuit cause of supporting a mission in China to reform the Chinese and save them from these barbarous practices. For instance, Ricci described practices in China such as selling their children into slavery and infanticide, which, he reported, the Chinese considered “quite morally correct.” He argued that “[t]his people is really to be pitied rather than censured, and the deeper one finds them involved in the darkness of ignorance, the more earnest one should be in praying for their salvation”.³⁰⁵

Le Comte was more explicit in his connection between Christianity and morality. He described how amongst the Christian Chinese, “religion hath reformed the evil inclinations of nature”.³⁰⁶ Le Comte, however, also argued that earlier in its history China was “wiser, more sincere, and honest, less corrupted than they are at present. Virtue, which they cultivated with so much care, which contributed infinitely to model their reason, made them at that time the wisest people of the universe...”³⁰⁷ He thus implied that virtue was attainable without Christianity. Because Le Comte tried to actively engage with Chinese history and culture, he did not convincingly attribute Chinese immoral behaviour (particularly as it related to avarice) to their non-Christianity. The Jesuits were unconvinced that conversion to Christianity alone would resolve the problem of greed in Chinese society.

A notable eighteenth century writer who addressed Chinese greed directly in relationship to their pagan status was Thomas Percy, a church of Ireland bishop. In 1761 Percy, who relied on numerous primary sources including Le Comte, Du Halde and Anson for his assessment of China, described the Chinese “love of gain” as a predominant characteristic of the Chinese people. Citing Montesquieu, he speculated on the causes for such avariciousness: “The populousness of their country, and the frequency of famines, renders their very lives precarious without great industry and

³⁰⁵ Ricci and Trigault, *China in the Sixteenth Century*, 85-6.

³⁰⁶ Le Comte, *Memoirs and Observations*, 238. Le Comte, *Nouveaux mémoires*, Vol. 1, 405.

³⁰⁷ Le Comte, *Memoirs and Observations*, 239. Le Comte, *Nouveaux mémoires*, Vol. 1, 409.

great attention to private gain.”³⁰⁸ However, this theorizing on the origins of avarice did not reveal his argument as to why the Chinese could not control such greed. To explain this, Percy argued that where there is “no check from conscience, we must not wonder that general dishonesty and corruption prevail too.” Because people try to escape detection from human laws, “the great deficiency of the Chinese laws, [is] that they are not supported by higher sanctions, than what affect temporal hopes and fears”.³⁰⁹ In this comment Percy was referring to China’s lack of belief in the afterlife. However, he did not manage to explain fraud, greed, or immorality present in England and his argument, pointing to religion, was increasingly out of touch with the avant-garde philosophers of the Enlightenment. Religion was not a sufficient explanation for Chinese avariciousness.

PECULIARITIES OF CHINA

A second predominant way to address and explain Chinese immorality was to point out its relationship to the unique geographic and political situation of China. Anson looked to China’s political policies to find an explanation that connected with the Enlightenment debate discussed earlier about the role of passions and interests in society. China’s only claim to a better morality, he argued was “founded, not on their integrity or beneficence, but solely on the affected evenness of their demeanour, and their constant attention to suppress all symptoms of passion and violence.” However, he believed that this suppression encouraged “hypocrisy and fraud”, which could be just as bad to “the general interests of mankind” as “impetuosity and vehemence of temper”, since the latter qualities still allowed for “sincerity, benevolence [and] resolution”. Anson noted

it has been often observed by those who have attended to the nature of mankind, that it is difficult to curb the more robust and violent passions, without augmenting at the same time, the force of the selfish ones: So that the timidity, dissimulation, and dishonesty of the Chinese, may, in some sort, be owing to the composure, and external decency, so universally prevailing in that Empire.³¹⁰

Thus, he believed that curbing the passion of violence in Chinese society (China was notable for avoiding foreign expansion and warfare), led to an increase in the passion of avarice. Anson’s explanation for Chinese avarice was akin to philosophical discussions

³⁰⁸ Thomas Percy *Hau Kiou Choan or the pleasing history...* 4 Volumes (London: Printed for R. and J. Dodsley, 1761) Vol. 2, 166.

³⁰⁹ *Ibid.*, 168.

³¹⁰ Anson, *A Voyage round the world*, 413-414. Repeated in Salmon, *The Universal Traveller*, 22.

on countervailing passions.³¹¹ Similarly, Adam Smith related commercial behaviour to warfare. He talked about the disadvantages of the “commercial spirit,” which included that the “heroic spirit is almost utterly extinguished.”³¹² Thus the speculation in *Voyage Round the World* related to the philosophical debates of the time. Although we cannot be sure whether it was Benjamin Robbins or Richard Walter, or perhaps the conjecture of the commodore himself, which is responsible for these comments, they reveal an important connection between the European context and the empirical evidence gathered by the primary observers of China.

Anson also reflected on the difficulty of understanding the customs of another culture. Describing an anecdote of a Chinese merchant taking advantage of Anson and his crew, he noted that “it might be expected that some satisfactory account should be given of the motives of the Chinese for this faithless procedure” and observed “it may perhaps be impossible for a European, ignorant of the customs and manners of that nation to be fully apprized of the real incitements to this behaviour”.³¹³ Anson believed that “it may be safely concluded, that the Chinese had some interest in thus amusing the commodore, yet it may not be easy to assign the individual views by which they were influenced”.³¹⁴ Beyond recognizing similarities between Europe and China, Anson understood that he could not understand some behaviour, especially as he had a relatively cursory interaction with the Chinese. The presence of cultural relativism in this source is surprising.

Montesquieu, who directly referred to Anson’s descriptions of China to support his belief in Chinese immorality, also maintained the Chinese case was unique. He used the subject to further his theory of climatic determinism, which itself was built upon thinkers such as Giovanni Botero. The reason for the inconsistency between the Chinese people being guided by rites and their immoral behaviour, he argued, stemmed from the insecure nature of Chinese subsistence.³¹⁵ Discussing the natural mixture of virtue and vices in the Chinese character, Montesquieu cited Du Halde and noted “the

³¹¹ Hirschman, *Passions and the Interests*, 28.

³¹² Adam Smith, *Lectures On Jurisprudence*, R.. L. Meek, D. D. Raphael and P. G. Stein (eds.) *Glasgow Edition of the Works and Correspondence of Adam Smith* 7 vols. (Indianapolis: Liberty Fund, 1982). Vol. 5, Chapter: Of Police

³¹³ Anson, *A Voyage round the world*, 332.

³¹⁴ *Ibid.*, 393.

³¹⁵ For a more detailed discussion of Montesquieu’s argument about how the Chinese legislators uniquely combined religion, laws, morals and manners see Jacques Pereira, *Montesquieu et la Chine* (Paris: L’Hartmattan, 2008), second partie.

precariousness of their lives [Montesquieu's Footnote: Because of the nature of the climate and the terrain] makes them so prodigiously active and so excessively desirous of gain that no commercial nation can trust them".³¹⁶ As a result of the climate, Montesquieu argued, intense labour and industry were needed to maintain the population:

Necessity and perhaps the nature of the climate have given all the Chinese an unthinkable avidity for gain, and the laws have not dreamed of checking it. Everything has been prohibited if it is a question of acquisition by violence; everything has been permitted if it is a matter of obtaining by artifice or by industry.³¹⁷

Montesquieu distinguished between something acquired by violence and something obtained by artifice or by industry. This differentiation is particularly interesting if we recall Anson's argument that suppressing violence might be worse to the general interests of mankind as it encouraged hypocrisy and fraud. Montesquieu, however, did not argue that the Chinese were worse off for their practices of artifice or industry. In fact, he concluded his section with a remarkable expression of cultural relativism:

Therefore, let us not compare the morality of China with that of Europe. Everyone in China has had to be attentive to what was useful to him; if the rascal has watched over his interests, he who is duped has had to think of his own. In Lacedaemonia, stealing was permitted; in China, deceit is permitted.

Montesquieu resolved the paradox he described between Chinese ideal and practical morality. In the process, he surprisingly came to the defence of the Chinese morality.³¹⁸ In fact, he went further and argued Chinese self-interest assisted their commercial success. When discussing the unique mixture of virtues and vices in the character of the Spanish and the Chinese, he argued that unlike the Spaniards whose faithfulness and laziness made them poor in commercial affairs, the Chinese desire for gain (and resulting untrustworthiness) led them to keep their successful Japan trade away from the Europeans. He concluded from these observations that "not all political vices are moral vices and that not all moral vices are political vices, and those who make laws that run counter to the general spirit should not be ignorant of this."³¹⁹ By distinguishing between politics and morality, Montesquieu again points to a gulf between practical issues of political economy and what Anson referred to as "immaterial points". China

³¹⁶ Montesquieu, *The Spirit of the Laws*, 313. Montesquieu, *De l'esprit des lois*, 100-101.

³¹⁷ Montesquieu, *The Spirit of the Laws*, 321. Montesquieu, *De l'esprit des lois*, 108.

³¹⁸ See also Pereira, *Montesquieu et la Chine*, 227.

³¹⁹ Montesquieu, *The Spirit of the Laws*, 314. Montesquieu, *De l'esprit des lois*, 101.

could be attacked for immorality but the effect it had on its system of political economy was actually positive.

LOCAL CONTEXT

A third explanation for Chinese commercial culture involved contextualizing the immorality to a particular area and aspect of Chinese commerce. Apart from the friction between ideal and practical morality, primary sources also addressed the variation amongst a population as large as that of China. Ricci claimed some magistrates were moral and showed “no signs of avarice”.³²⁰ Similarly, Le Comte described the honest mandarins he encountered when he first arrived in China. He also noted that when the Jesuits offered a gift to the commissioner of the customhouse, the official protested that he would not accept any gifts from the Europeans as it could be considered immoral bribing.³²¹ Du Halde argued the fraud and self-interest was particular to a select group of low-level traders: “This knavish wit is found chiefly among the vulgar, who have recourse to a thousand tricks to adulterate every thing they sell”.³²² Further “they seldom practice these tricks on any but strangers; and in other places [distant from the sea-coast] the Chinese themselves will hardly believe them”.³²³ These descriptions implied the issue was one of class and location rather than endemic to Chinese culture or society. Nieuhof also differentiated between groups who were ethical and immoral. He presented the Chinese as of “an affable and peaceable disposition, addicted to husbandry”, whereas the Tartar “delights in nothing so much as hunting, being very cunning and deceitful...”³²⁴ The Chinese appeared as good-natured agriculturalists, and the coastal merchants appeared more like the invading Tartars.

Even the notoriously critical Anson described an honourable, honest mandarin (the Regency of Canton), with whom he met. Recognizing a potential flaw in generalizations about the morality of the Chinese – namely, that he was isolated to the coast of the great empire – Anson attempted to explain his assumptions. He acknowledged that

observations made at Canton only, a place situated in the corner of the Empire, are very imperfect materials on which to found any general conclusions, yet as those who have opportunities of examining the inner parts of the country, have been evidently

³²⁰ Ricci and Trigault, *China in the Sixteenth Century*, 394.

³²¹ Le Comte, *Memoirs and Observations*, 238. Le Comte, *Nouveaux mémoires*, Vol. 1, 405-6.

³²² Du Halde, Cave edition, Vol. 1, 280; Watts edition, Vol. 2, 133; French edition, Vol. 1, 78.

³²³ *Ibid.*

³²⁴ Nieuhof, *An embassy from the East-India Company*, 250.

influenced by very ridiculous prepossessions, and as the transactions of Mr. Anson with the Regency of Canton were of an uncommon nature...³²⁵

Anson hoped that his narrative would be acceptable to readers despite the acknowledged generalizations that he made.

These views travelled to European philosophical descriptions of Chinese commercial behaviour. In a section entitled “Commerce Viewed as Serving Agriculture”, the French Physiocrat, François Quesnay (repeating almost verbatim a section of Rousselot de Surgy’s *Mélanges intéressans et curieux* (1763-1765)³²⁶) connected the size and efficiency of China’s domestic trade with Chinese self-interest, which he noted, “is the dominating passion of the Chinese people.”³²⁷ He acknowledged the “one blemish in their commerce,” namely, “the lack of good faith” and described their desire to sell as dearly as possible, and the practice of falsifying merchandise. Quesnay also repeated a particular Chinese maxim that circulated in numerous primary and geographical sources. The maxim was that buyers should give as little as possible for their purchase, whereas the seller should ask the greatest price and if the buyer is ignorant enough to pay this, it is not the merchant who deceives, but rather the buyer who deceives themselves.³²⁸ This maxim of wanting the greatest price and the market determining what the buyer pays is similar to Mandeville’s description of the avaricious merchants in England.

Quesnay then stopped following Rousselot de Surgy and inserted his own speculations on the reasons behind the self-interested and immoral behaviour in Chinese commerce. He criticized the travellers for giving the impression that Chinese falsifications were committed with impunity, which would be ironic in a country known for its strictness and rites. The Physiocrat believed that travellers “have certainly confounded the business carried on with Europeans in the port of Canton” – where “both sides cheat one another” – with the commerce that occurs between subjects of the empire. Quesnay argued that the Chinese government had to tolerate fraudulent practices in particular

³²⁵ Anson, *A Voyage round the world*, 411.

³²⁶ Jacques Philibert Rousselot de Surgy spent many years in the French treasury department and afterwards became a royal censor of new publications. The section on China in this work relied heavily on Du Halde.

³²⁷ Maverick, *China, a model for Europe*, 209. François Quesnay, “Despotisme de la Chine,” *Oeuvres Économiques et Philosophiques*, Published with an introduction and notes by Auguste Oncken (ed.) (Paris: Jules Peelman and Co., 1888), 604. “

³²⁸ Anonymous, *The Chinese Traveller*, 191.

areas “because it is difficult to discipline foreigners three thousand leagues from home, who disappear as soon as they have sold their merchandise.”³²⁹ Because he expounded the prioritization of agriculture over foreign trade, Quesnay believed there were many examples of “nations that have been corrupted by the contamination of foreign commerce,” of which China happens to be the most corrupted because it is the most skilled in its fraud. These immoral practices however could not be present in the domestic Chinese trade, he argued, because nothing would be gained and it would make daily commerce “almost impossible.” He believed “this is even more inconceivable in a nation so civilized as China, where at all times good faith and rectitude in commerce have been noteworthy; this is one of the principal subjects of the ethics of Confucius, the ethics which amount to law in this empire.”³³⁰ Quesnay thus emphasized the practical role of reputation as a check on immoral behaviour.³³¹ While Quesnay hinted at the common human nature of immorality and the role of Confucianism in checking behaviour, the core of his argument focused on noting the variation within China and arguing about the corrupting effects of foreign commerce on the Chinese coast.

Numerous sources commented on the variation within the China trade domestically and with foreigners (or in the interior compared to the coastal). For instance, the modern part of the *Universal History* argued the Chinese are “arrant cheats” with foreigners as with each other, but later noted there are many instances among them “of honest and fair dealing, and open and generous usage...even of fidelity, incapable of being corrupted.”³³² In *Essai sur les moeurs* (1756) Voltaire repeated this discussion of variation in China. Questioning Anson’s contempt towards Chinese immorality, he repeated the commodore’s self-assessment of his observations: “But are we to judge of the government of a great nation from the behaviour of the populace in a sea-port town?”³³³ However, he added a perspective of cultural relativism by asking, “what would the Chinese say of us, if they had been cast away upon our coasts, at the time when the laws of European nations confiscated shipwrecked effects, and custom

³²⁹ Maverick, *China, a model for Europe*, 210.

³³⁰ *Ibid.*, 211.

³³¹ For Smith’s discussion of reputation as a check on commercial behaviour see Hont and Ignatieff, *Wealth and Virtue*, 13.

³³² *The modern part of an universal history...*, vol. 8, 238 and 250. Salmon repeats this latter phrase almost verbatim. Salmon, *Modern History*, vol.1, 120. Fenning and Collyer make a similar point about the honest men scattered throughout the empire, Fenning and Collyer, *A New System of Geography or a General Description of the World*, 2 Volumes (London: printed for S. Crowder, 1764-5), Vol. 1, 33.

³³³ Voltaire, *An essay on universal history*, Vol. 1, 17-18. Accurately translated from the original French, see Voltaire, “Essai sur les moeurs” in *Oeuvres Complètes de Voltaire* Tome III (Paris: Perrotin, 1846), 79.

permitted the murder of the proprietors?”³³⁴ Voltaire was likely referring to *jus naufragii* (right of shipwreck), a medieval custom that allowed people to seize the property (as well as persons) of shipwrecks if they discovered them. This practice continued into early modern Europe, being fully abolished by the French in 1681. Thus Voltaire demonstrated the relativity (over geography and time) of defining morality in commercial actions.

In both of the 1770 and 1774 editions of *Histoire des deux Indes*, Raynal praised the honour and virtue of the people in China. In the 1774 edition he added an explanation:

If this picture of the manners of the Chinese should be different from that drawn by other writers, it is not, perhaps, impossible to reconcile opinions so seemingly contradictory. China may be considered in two distinct points of view. If we study the inhabitants as they appear in the sea-ports, and great towns, we shall be disgusted at their cowardice, knavery and avarice: but in the other parts of the empire, particularly in the country, we shall find their manners domestic, social and patriotic.³³⁵

There was a clear recognition that Chinese morality varied based on class and geographical location.

Even Cornelius de Pauw, who was especially critical of the Chinese, noted the variation in the Empire. He argued that unlike the Chinese peasants in the rural areas, the merchants “steer against the stream, instead of being discouraged by obstacles. They resemble the Jews, who inhabit the different states of Asia: their continual grievances goad them on...”³³⁶ This comparison indicates a view of the Chinese as one of a few remarkably avaricious groups in the world. While de Pauw repeated Laurent de Lange’s description of the wealthy merchants colluding with the elite members of Chinese society in Peking, he did not look to explain the root causes that made the Chinese merchants similar to the Jewish population in Asia, indicating his shallow description of China’s political economy.

³³⁴ *Ibid.*

³³⁵ Guillaume-Thomas-François Raynal. *A philosophical and political history of the settlements and trade of the Europeans in the East and West Indies*. Translated by J. Justamond 4 volumes (London: Printed for T. Cadell, 1776) (referred to as the Justamond edition), Vol. 1, 103; Guillaume-Thomas Raynal, *Histoire philosophique et politique* (referred to as the French edition), 113.

³³⁶ Cornelius de Pauw, *Philosophical dissertations on the Egyptians and Chinese* Capt. J. Thomson (translator) 2 volumes (London: printed for T. Chapman, 1795), vol. 2, 306. Accurately translated from the original French. Cornelius de Pauw, *Recherches Philosophiques sur les Égyptiens et les Chinois* (Paris: Chez François Bastien) in *Oeuvres philosophiques de Pauw* 7 Volumes (Paris: J.F. Bastien, 1794) Vol. 2, 445.

HUMAN NATURE

The final explanation for Chinese immorality was that it was a result of human nature. The Jesuits posited that human nature was responsible for the examples of immorality they found in China. The missionaries believed avarice, as one of the seven deadly sins, afflicted all people. When Ricci discussed thieves and robbers in China, he commented “the lure of gold to human avarice had been so great.”³³⁷ Thus avarice was human, not just Chinese. Corruption was a problem the Jesuits found in Europe as well as in China. Le Comte made this point more explicitly when he claimed that with regards to immorality in commerce, the Chinese resemble the Europeans. He demonstrated the immorality of Europeans by describing an anecdote of a French woman who tried to commit fraud by pretending to be from China.³³⁸ In the eighteenth century, Du Halde made this connection even more direct when after he described an example of a Chinese fraudster, he commented, “...in reality it is said, that some Europeans have taught them their trade.”³³⁹ Within early modern Christianity, two views of human nature and morality can be distinguished. First, the Augustinian view that pointed to mankind’s corruptibility and fallibility. The Jansenists largely followed this philosophy. The second was the Stoic position that argued humankind had a natural moral sense (similar to the one that Hutcheson articulated) which depended upon reason. The Jesuits largely followed the Stoic view, reflecting their belief in the ability of humans to use universal reason to improve their behaviour. In this view, the immoral Chinese traders, as well as self-interested Europeans, all needed to use reason to improve themselves.

Surprisingly, in sections of *Voyage Round the World*, Anson takes a similar view as the Jesuits on human nature. While discussing the corruption and greed in the Chinese government, Anson described how the mandarins were “composed of the same fragile materials with the rest of mankind”.³⁴⁰ For all of his criticism of Chinese immoral behaviour, he did not believe it was endemic to China. Even more surprising were indications of self-awareness that pointed to the “fragile materials” of the commodore himself. For instance, there were examples of Anson’s own untrustworthiness as he broke his word when dealing with the Chinese. The Chinese “revered the Commodore’s power...yet suspected his morals, and had considered him rather as a lawless

³³⁷ Ricci and Trigault, *China in the Sixteenth Century*, 343

³³⁸ Le Comte, *Memoirs and Observations*, 129. Le Comte, *Nouveaux mémoires*, Vol. 1, 213 and 220-226.

³³⁹ Du Halde, Cave edition, Vol. 1, 279, Watts edition, Vol. 2, 132., French edition, Vol. 2, 77.

³⁴⁰ Anson, *A Voyage round the world*, 363.

freebooter...”³⁴¹ Indeed, through all the criticisms of Chinese morality and behaviour, Anson was aware of the same problems in his own society.

In the Preface to *Novissima Sinica* (1699), Gottfried Leibniz expounded the belief that avarice was a part of human nature. He claimed, “man is a wolf to man”; this line was used by Thomas Hobbes in *De cive* (1651) to refer to the inherent selfishness of men.³⁴² The Chinese, according to the German philosopher, also possessed this quality of human nature: “To be sure, they are not lacking in avarice, lust or ambition.” In this respect, the Chinese were the same as the Europeans and Leibniz remarked, “everything is done just as it is here. Hence the Chinese do not attain to full and complete virtue.” He supported the Jesuit cause in the Rites Controversy, and argued that Confucianism was a state cult rather than a religion (though he maintained the Chinese were deists not atheists).³⁴³ Leibniz believed the Chinese could not attain full virtue without Christian teachings, but this did not mean that the Christians lacked vices. While he believed the Chinese needed European missionaries to show them revealed religion, he was impressed with China’s natural theology, which he thought had a lot to offer European societies: “they surpass us (though it is almost shameful to confess this) in practical philosophy, that is, in the precepts of ethics and politics adapted to the present life and use of morals.”³⁴⁴ He continued on to argue that the Chinese “temper the bitter fruits of vice, and though they cannot tear out the roots of sin in human nature, they are apparently able to control many of the burgeoning growths of evil.”³⁴⁵ Leibniz’ argument is similar to the Jesuits who praised the Confucian system of morality for encouraging restraint, but understood it could not temper all avarice and immorality.

Leibniz’s view travelled to seventeenth and early eighteenth century England to the Deists, who had liberal interpretations of scriptures. In 1730, Mathew Tindal referred to China as support for the idea that Christians are not morally perfect in relation to the rest of world.³⁴⁶ He described Leibniz’s comparison of Christians with “Infidels of China”, where he gave the latter preference in relation to “all moral virtues.”³⁴⁷ Tindal

³⁴¹ *Ibid.*, 389.

³⁴² Lach, *The Preface to Leibniz’ Novissima Sinica*, 70.

³⁴³ Julia Ching and Willard G. Oxtoby, *Moral Enlightenment: Leibniz and Wolff on China* (Steyler Verlag: Institut Monumenta Serica, 1992); Franklin Perkins, *Leibniz and China: a commerce of light* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004).

³⁴⁴ Lach, *The Preface to Leibniz*, 69-70.

³⁴⁵ *Ibid.*

³⁴⁶ Mathew Tindal (published anonymously), *Christianity as Old as Creation: or, the Gospel, A Republication of the Religion of Nature*. Second edition (London [Amsterdam?]: n.p., 1731), 372.

³⁴⁷ *Ibid.*, 371.

cited Navarette as saying “It is God’s special Providence, that the Chinese did not know what is done in Christendom, for if they did, there woul’d be never a man among them, but woul’d spit in our faces.”³⁴⁸ In not recognizing the numerous descriptions of immoralities present in China, Tindal’s use of China is superficial. He used China to attack Eurocentrism in debates over moral philosophy, but in the process reduced China to a one-dimensional antithesis to European immorality. While this thesis supports the argument that ethnographic information was important to the formation of views of China’s – and as a consequence Europe’s – system of political economy, there certainly were individuals, like Tindal, who were not as interested in the first hand descriptions of China.

In *Philosophical Dictionary* (1764), Voltaire articulated his view that avarice was a flaw of human nature and there was nothing unique about such behaviour in China. Just as in Europe, the Chinese succumbed to the pull of their self-interest. Voltaire praised the antiquity and erudition of the Chinese civilization and admired China’s system of government and meritocracy, he added “[y]et, we must confess, that the common people, guided by the bonzes, are equally knavish with our own; that everything is sold enormously dear to foreigners, as among ourselves...”.³⁴⁹ Thus, from the early Jesuit accounts through to Voltaire, commentators pointed to human nature as part of an explanation for Chinese avarice.

There were several explanations proffered as to why the Chinese suffered from immoral commercial behaviour. The religious argument was the least popular and tenable in the eighteenth century as Europeans recognized that their own Christian countries experienced similar problems. Several observers and commentators attempted to identify the singular reasons why the Chinese were exceptionally avaricious. Montesquieu in the process placed responsibility for Chinese avarice away from its culture and with its geographical situation. Others pointed to the variation within China or expressed cultural relativism, arguing particular norms for commercial conduct

³⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, 372.

³⁴⁹ François-Marie Arouet Voltaire, “China,” *Philosophical Dictionary* in *The Works of Voltaire: A Contemporary Version*. Translated by William Flemming, 21 volumes (New York: E.R. DuMont, 1901), Vol. 4, 94. In the original French Voltaire writes “mais on doit avouer que le petit peuple gouverné par des bonzes, est aussi fripon que le notre, qu'on y vend tout sort cher aux étrangers, ainsi que chez nous.” “Fripon” was translated into knavish in the eighteenth century context, and at the time the adjective form was used to describe someone who was dishonest with money. See Voltaire, “De La Chine” *Dictionnaire philosophique, Tome II* in *Oeuvres de Voltaire* (ed.) Adrien-Jean-Quentin Beuchot Tome XXVIII (Paris: Garnier Frère, 1878), 158.

changed over place and time. Finally, numerous observers and commentators recognized the similarities between the European and Chinese cases, and argued that avarice was a part of human nature and certainly attached to a commercial society. Nearly every source discussed above offered more than one explanation for Chinese immorality in commerce indicating their irresolution in theorizing commercial morality.

CONCLUSION

This examination of European views of Chinese commercial culture throws light on the question once asked by Albert Hirschman (following Max Weber), “How did commercial banking, and similar money-making pursuits become honorable at some point in the modern age after having stood condemned or despised as greed, love of lucre, and avarice for centuries past?”³⁵⁰ This transformation was a European intellectual and social phenomenon; however, the present study of European views of Chinese practical morality (or immorality) demonstrates the role that discussions of a non-European civilization had in debates on self-interest. While Mandeville, Hutcheson, Hume, Rousseau and Smith did not reference Chinese morality directly in their theorizing on the role of sympathy or self-interest in civilization, discussions of Chinese morality were certainly connected to such issues.

This chapter has revealed the malleable and evolving view of morality in commercial activity in eighteenth century Europe. More than any other topic related to political economy, on this subject China was a mirror to which Europeans could project and develop changing views on the role of avarice in a commercial society. The information on Chinese morality reached a European environment that was struggling to identify its own practical commercial morality, seen through merchant manuals and a changing social hierarchy where commerce began to dominate agriculture (or the interests of the landed nobility). On a more theoretical level, moral philosophers of the Enlightenment speculated on the nature of avarice in their societies. Adam Smith transformed this vice into a more innocuous form of self-interest, which over time became an acceptable theoretical position to ease the tension with practical morality.

The primary sources on China reflected a tension between ideal morality (represented by Confucian moral philosophy) and practical morality (seen in the anecdotes of

³⁵⁰ Hirschman, *Passions and the Interests*, 9.

immoral behaviour by Chinese merchants and mandarins). However, the Jesuit recognition of the friction between practical and ideal morality was rarely noted in the philosophical, geographical and even secular primary sources. This led the Jesuits to be viewed as presenting a favourable view of Chinese morality. Some geographers did comment on the similarities between the primary sources on this subject, or tried to explain the difference in their perspectives.

The combination of the changing European attitude towards self-interest and commerce as well as the ethnographic information on China, led to the emergence of several explanations and rationalizations of Chinese morality. Some argued the pagan status of the Chinese contributed to their immorality, while others such as Montesquieu turned to its unique climate and geography. Local contexts were also seen to be an important qualifying factor for Chinese avarice. However, explanations that drew comparisons between Europe and China in the struggle of reconciling commerce with morality were more prominent. These comparisons reflected an approach to China as an Empire struggling with the same problems of advanced civilization as France and Britain. The insecurity in the European voice was also present in the relativist position that attempted to understand the Chinese moral norms or at least pointed out that the Chinese might disagree with European commercial practices. Nature, education, culture, and geography were all given as explanations of the greedy behaviour of the Chinese traders. These discussions reflected the European struggle to understand the relationship between social mores and the new economic order.

As an advanced commercial civilization, China played an important part in the Enlightenment's struggle to deal with the theme of moral philosophy in an expanding commercial world. As we will see in the following chapter, as a result of the great force of self-interest and in spite of the fraud and immorality, China's domestic commerce was portrayed as flourishing. While immorality was certainly believed to be an important topic worth contemplating, it did not lead to a dismissal of the Chinese system of political economy precisely because, on this subject, the Chinese problem reflected a concurrent European problem.

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- OUTLINE:**
4. “YOUR BEGGARLY COMMERCE!”
 - 4.1. FROM EL DORADO TO IMPERVIOUS
 - 4.2. UNDERSTANDING CHINESE TRADE POLICY
 - 4.3. A EUROPEAN PROBLEM? NATIONAL RIVALRIES AND MONOPOLIES
 - 4.4. AWARENESS OF CHINA’S FOREIGN TRADE
 - 4.5. BALANCE OF TRADE
-

International trade was of central importance to Enlightenment conceptions of wealth. As Daniel Defoe - the famed champion of the merchant class - wrote, “the rising greatness of the British nation is not owing to war and conquests, to enlarging its dominion by the sword, or subjecting the people of other countries to our power; but it is all owing to trade, to the encrease of our commerce at home, and extending it abroad”.³⁵¹ European philosophers and a broader group that included popular geographers and merchants hotly debated international trade. These debates portrayed China as having a more cautious, restricted view of foreign trade. No lesser authority than Adam Smith succinctly expressed this view:

The Chinese have little respect for foreign trade. Your beggarly commerce! was the language in which the Mandarins of Peking used to talk to Mr. de Lange, the Russian envoy, concerning it. Except with Japan, the Chinese carry on, themselves, and in their own bottoms, little or no foreign trade; and it is only into one or two ports of their kingdom that they even admit the ships of foreign nations. Foreign trade therefore is, in China, every way confined within a much narrower circle than that to which it would naturally extend itself, if more freedom was allowed to it, either in their own ships, or in those of foreign nations.³⁵²

Modern historians have addressed the idea of Chinese isolations. John Hobson labelled the traditional narrative that China turned inward during the Ming Dynasty as “China’s great leap backward”.³⁵³ Proponents of this view maintain that China’s decline relative to Europe began in 1434 when the Emperor Xuande, following the “Confucian traditions” of his father, the Emperor Hongxi, imposed restrictions on foreign trade and navigation.³⁵⁴ According to this view, by the end of the eighteenth century Europeans recognized the limitations of the Chinese system of political economy, particularly with regards to international trade. Adam Smith’s promotion of the free market in 1776 and

³⁵¹ Defoe, *The Complete English Tradesman*, 382-3.

³⁵² Smith, *Wealth of Nations*, 864-5.

³⁵³ Hobson, *The Eastern Origins of Western Civilization*, 62.

³⁵⁴ While the narrative of China’s “great leap backwards” includes resistance to foreign trade and foreign navigation and exploration, this chapter only concentrates on the former.

the 1793 failed British Embassy to China under Lord Macartney led to a dominant image of an arrogant China, resistant to the progress of the modernising world.³⁵⁵

Frustration with Chinese policies of isolation, however, dated as far back as Ancient Rome, thus was not a reaction to the rising European faith in the mutual benefits of free trade, expressed most famously by Smith. Further, the narrative of Chinese isolation was only part of a wider eighteenth century discussion of the China trade. In fact, early modern European observers and commentators were not assured of their superiority and reflected a wide range of views on the China trade beyond simple frustration. This is reflected in recent scholarship that examines the interaction between the Qing Dynasty and European states as the encounter of imperial forces, indicating a comparable balance of power, and a dynamic of international trade more complicated than the mere idea of a European rejection of Chinese policies.³⁵⁶

This chapter begins with a brief discussion of how the travellers, geographers and philosophers related to the topic of international trade. It also addresses the tension between the European desire for trade with China and the Chinese policies of restricting international relations. European ambitions of achieving a bountiful trading relationship with China certainly met with the reality of Chinese restrictions. The interplay between optimism and rejection led to a consistent narrative of frustration in many European sources. It is important to recognize that the narrative of Chinese isolationism was not a construction of the late eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, nor was it a concept created in twentieth century. The remainder of this chapter analyses the other prominent narratives attached to the China trade. In addition to a view of Chinese restrictions on foreign trade, which certainly existed, four additional themes were conspicuous. First, Europeans attempted to understand China's unique ability to restrict international trade.

³⁵⁵ David Porter describes the eighteenth-century encounter between the Europeans and the Chinese, where the former believed in the importance of international trade, and the latter strictly limited international commerce, leading to "a widespread perception among British observers that an unnatural tendency toward blockage and obstructionism was an integral, defining feature of Chinese society as a whole". D. Porter, "A Peculiar but Uninteresting Nation: China and the Discourse of Commerce in Eighteenth Century England", *Eighteenth-Century Studies*, 33:2 (1999-00): 181-199; James Hevia describes the historiographical tradition (from Euro-America as well as China) of viewing the early modern trade relationship between China and Europe as a clash between tradition and modernity. James L. Hevia, *Cherishing Men from Afar: Qing Guest Ritual and the Macartney Embassy of 1793* (Durham: Duke University Press, 1995), 242; Joanna Wayley Cohen argues that the wave of Sinophilia ended, in part, because of the shift in views in the China trade, particularly that "the restrictive Canton system of trade went directly against the free world market advocated by Adam Smith in 1776" Waley-Cohen, *The Sextants of Beijing*, 92- 99 and 128.

³⁵⁶ James L. Hevia's *Cherishing Men from Afar* explores the interaction between the Qing Dynasty and European states in the eighteenth century as the encounter between two imperial powers.

As we will see throughout this thesis, Europeans often recognized China's uniqueness. Second, observers and commentators identified obstacles to trade that originated in Europe. Again, like in the previous chapter, China heightened European self-awareness and self-criticism. Third, these sources discussed the nature of the trade that did exist, and recognized the Chinese encouragement of said trade. Finally, Europeans debated the implications of the balance of trade with China, and demonstrated awareness of China's place in a global trading system.

This chapter concludes that the overarching image of China's foreign trade was that as a uniquely large and independent country that had the ability to restrict international trade, and when they did partake in it, they maintained a formidable position exporting luxury items. Concurrent to this image was the view held by many (but not all) that China would benefit from expanding its international trade, a view supported by the idea that their history of fluctuating trade policies indicated that increasing foreign trade was indeed possible. The awareness of China opening up to foreign trade with the transition to the Qing Dynasty encouraged a view of their system of political economy as mutable. Criticisms of European trade policies reveals that they did not assume the superiority of their own practices above China. As with the subject of morality discussed in the previous chapter, while China's restrictive policies were criticized, they were not sufficient to dismiss their system of political economy.

4.1. FROM EL DORADO TO IMPERVIOUS

The primary authors, both missionary and secular, had an interest in understanding China's foreign trade policy. As we saw in chapter two, trade, religion, and information on China were intertwined in this period. This connection was reflected in the early Portuguese engagement in the East Indies. Portugal received the *padroado* (patronage) with the *Jus patronatus* granted by a papal bull in 1514, vesting exclusive control of European missionary, political and economic activity in the East with the Portuguese monarchy. Missionaries travelled to China on merchant ships and resided alongside European traders on the island of Macao.³⁵⁷ The Portuguese control of European engagement with the East did not last long, and at the turn of the seventeenth century the Dutch and English quickly expanded their commercial interests in the area. Under these different dominating European powers, Catholic missionaries from European

³⁵⁷ For more on the Jesuit travels to China see Brockey, *Journey to the East*.

states such as Portugal, Italy, Spain, France and Germany continued to travel and transmit information on China. In their roles as translators and influencers of Chinese opinions, these European missionaries acted in the interest of their own missionary orders, and at times in their national interests. For instance, in 1697-98 a group of French Jesuits urged the French government to develop a chartered company for the China trade to search for alternative trade routes to those controlled by the English and Dutch.³⁵⁸ Although the Jesuits were primarily concerned with their religious mission, they did provide information highly relevant to the China trade. The secular authors who travelled to China, such as Nieuhof and Anson, were more interested in commerce than the Christianizing agenda of the missionaries. These authors were first-hand witnesses to China's restrictive trade policies and thus, on this topic in particular, their point of view is germane.

The growth of popular works in Britain over the seventeenth and eighteenth century was driven, in large part, by the desire for information on international trade, and many of these sources had commercial biases embedded in their texts.³⁵⁹ For instance, as we saw in chapter two, Robert Parke's 1588 English translation of the Augustian Juan González de Mendoza's *The Historie of the great and mightie kingdome of China...* (Rome, 1585; London, 1588), was highly influenced by interest in foreign trade and its publication expressed a form of economic nationalism. Another (later) example of the connection between trade and information on China is found in the first English translation of Du Halde's description of China. While this was the less reliable of the two early translations, of interest here is a main motivation for the quick publication of the work. Richard Brookes, the English translator of the edition, dedicated the fourth volume "to the Directors of the United Company of Merchants of England trading to the East Indies."³⁶⁰ In this dedication, Brookes argued, "it is a fond mistaken notion of some" that Britain is self-sustainable and does not need anything from the rest of the world, when in reality "the most common repast must be supply'd with ingredients from the remotest parts of the globe."

Philosophers, especially those interested in the emerging field of economics, showed a great deal of interest in the topic of international trade. Douglas Irwin's intellectual history of free trade is divided into two parts: the first addresses the dominance of the

³⁵⁸ Lach and van Kley, *Asia in the making of Europe*, 432.

³⁵⁹ Markley, *The Far East and the English Imagination*, 270.

³⁶⁰ Du Halde (Watts edition), Volume 4, Dedication

pre-Smithian protectionist view culminating in the mercantilist literature of the seventeenth century, and the other examines the post-Smithian period of the pre-eminence of free trade ideology.³⁶¹ Of particular interest then is the transitional period of the eighteenth century, which is situated between the apogee of mercantilism and the publication of Adam Smith's *Wealth of Nations* (1776). As Irwin acknowledges, during the eighteenth century, "The general presumption in favor of trade restrictions was gradually tempered by criticisms from within the mercantilist camp, as well as by a quite different form of reasoning from moral philosophers and others in favor of economic freedom".³⁶² Smith's system was responsible for undermining the protectionist view with a more "theoretical analysis". Prior to the establishment of a consensus view in favour of free-market trade, philosophers had dramatically debated varied policies of international trade. This is not the place for a detailed description of early modern European debates about foreign trade but a brief account of the main schools of thought will be useful to contextualize views of the China trade.

In the seventeenth century, the diverse group referred to as the "mercantilists" debated theories of international trade. Historians dispute the common traits that bind them. Some nineteenth century commentators, following Adam Smith, maintain the mercantilists were united by a belief in the balance of trade theory and bullionism (the view that wealth is defined by the quantity precious metals), whereas later thinkers, such as the historian Eli Heckscher argue it was a system of state intervention in the economy.³⁶³ Still others, such as Joyce Oldham Appleby, assert this group changed over time. By the end of the seventeenth century there were dozens of publications that argued concern about a negative balance of trade was outmoded, did not believe that gold and silver had intrinsic value and argued that free trade was the way to prosperity. The expression of mercantilism also varied from England to France. In England, merchants published works supporting mercantilist beliefs whereas in France it was statesmen such as John-Baptiste Colbert who were the main proponents of the system. Colbert's institution of mercantilist protectionist policies to limit imports and increase French exports was so prominent that French mercantilism is often referred to as

³⁶¹ Douglas Irwin, *Against the Tide: An Intellectual History of Free Trade* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1996), 3.

³⁶² *Ibid.*

³⁶³ For instance, see Adam Smith, Book IV, Chapter 1 "Of the principle of the commercial or mercantile system", which describes that gold and silver were viewed as wealth and a favourable balance of trade was thought; Eli F. Heckscher, *Mercantilism*, 2nd edition, Ernst F. Söderlund (ed.) 2 volumes (London: George Allen and Unwin, 1955).

Colbertism. In the English case, these debates heavily focused on interest and exchange rates and were not extended to the China trade directly thus they are not addressed in detail in the present study. By the eighteenth century, more information about the nature of the China trade began to be reported and thus intellectuals theorizing on the motivations and implications of international trade explicitly discussed it.

Theories on foreign trade evolved over the course of the eighteenth century towards a view of the mutual benefits of trade as well as the benefits of freer international trade. In Hume's essays *Of the Balance of Trade* (1752) and *Jealousy of Trade* (1758), he expounded an analysis of foreign trade that naturally balanced prices, and he attacked the zero-sum game view of international trade where benefits accrued in one country meant losses in another.³⁶⁴ In France, the Physiocrats, focused on demonstrating the supremacy of agriculture, were not greatly interested in foreign trade and "viewed it disdainfully as a necessary evil" for the export of domestic agricultural products.³⁶⁵ Adam Smith thought the Physiocrats gave too much precedence to agriculture above commerce. Following Hume, Smith articulated a system where free international trade without the dominance of monopolies was integral to domestic development.

It was from this evolving context of theorizing international trade that Europeans looked to the China trade in both its direct connection to Europe and in relation to its own system of political economy. European sources oscillated between optimism and disappointment in their discussion of the China trade. On the one hand, there was an air of hope for the potential wealth that the China trade could generate. The desire to increase state-sponsored commercial profit in the context of rising domestic demand for foreign goods and new global opportunities for trade led to popular literature of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries expressing the hope of finding foreign lands that offered bountiful trade relationships. Voltaire commented on the dreams of easy profits in his popular novel *Candide* (1759). Upon leaving El Dorado, Candide exclaims: "if we return to our own world with only a dozen of El Dorado sheep, loaded with the pebbles of this country, we shall be richer than all the kings in Europe".³⁶⁶ The reports of the grand scale of the Chinese Empire and its significant wealth came to represent

³⁶⁴ John F. Berdell, "Innovation and Trade: David Hume and the Case for Freer Trade." *History of Political Economy* 28:1 (Spring: 1996): 107-126. Istvan Hont, *Jealousy of trade: international competition and the nation-state in historical perspective* (Cambridge, MA: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2005)

³⁶⁵ Arthur I. Bloomfield, "The Foreign Trade Doctrines of the Physiocrats", *The American Economic Review*, 28 (4) (December 1938): 716-734, quote at 716.

³⁶⁶ François-Marie Arouet Voltaire, *Candide*, Translated by Norman Cameron (London: Penguin, 2001), 52.

another El Dorado, and a tangible object for the European desire for profits. As the English merchant Joshua Gee declared, “the greatest empires, and the vastest numbers of people are found in the part of the world called Asia.”³⁶⁷ Nieuhof’s description of the numerous Dutch attempts to develop a free trade with China reflects the determination of the Europeans: “From the time that the Netherlanders had commerce with their ships into several parts of India, they continually sought unto the people of China to trade with them...”³⁶⁸

China, however, was not the easiest trading partner and Europeans expressed a concurrent frustration with the practicalities involved in the China trade. The earliest descriptions of China by European authors reveal a long history of the theme of Chinese isolation. Ancient Romans wrote about a place known as Serica (believed to refer to the north-eastern part of modern day China). Pliny the Elder, for example, claimed “The Seres are of inoffensive manners, but, bearing a strong resemblance therein to all savage nations, they shun all intercourse with the rest of mankind, and await the approach of those who wish to traffic with them”.³⁶⁹ This history was not lost on eighteenth century commentators, as a popular compendium about China, *The Chinese Traveller* (1772), addressed the antiquity of the view of Chinese isolation: “It is remarkable that the manners of the modern differ not much from those of the antient Chinese... [Pliny] says that the Chinese...like wild animals industriously shun any communication with strangers...They are at this day courteous and gentle, but will not suffer merchants of other nations to penetrate into their country.”³⁷⁰

Indeed, China’s restrictive policies continued into the early modern world. In 1517, Tomé Pires led the first official embassy from a European state (Portugal) to China. The reality of China’s foreign policy quickly moderated the Portuguese enthusiasm when after their long journey the emissaries were not granted an audience with the emperor. The Portuguese conquering of Malacca (a tributary state of the Chinese), as well as their thieving and disruptive behaviour around Canton led to the Chinese constraints.³⁷¹ China sentenced Pires to death because of the actions of his compatriots, and he took his

³⁶⁷ Joshua Gee, *The Trade and navigation of Great Britain considered...By a merchant* (London: printed for J. Almon, 1767), 58

³⁶⁸ Nieuhof, *An embassy from the East-India Company*, 20.

³⁶⁹ Pliny the Elder, *The Natural History*. Eds. John Bostock and H.T. Riley (1885), Book VI, Chapter XX, “The Seres”, Gregory Crane (ed.) (The Perseus Digital Library, Tufts University), 2036-2037.

³⁷⁰ Anonymous, *The Chinese Traveller*, v.

³⁷¹ John E. Wills Jr., *Embassies and Illusions: Dutch and Portuguese Envoys to K'ang-hsi* (Cambridge: Harvard University Asia Center, 1984), 19.

own life in prison. The repetition of this archetypal embassy by the English, French, Dutch and Russians, despite continuing failures to gain significant trade concessions, demonstrated the European determination to expand the China trade.³⁷²

The failure of early modern European trade missions reflected China's ability to resist the foreign overtures. Unlike other parts of the world, threats of violence were insufficient to achieve the European desire for open trade with China. Rather, Chinese trade concessions were erratic and highly dependent on the emperor. The Chinese, according to John Wills Jr., never had anything resembling "a coherent or effective foreign policy."³⁷³ Wills lists three primary reasons for this discord between the Europeans and Chinese in trade negotiations: first, Chinese culturalism degraded the study of foreigners; second, limited contact meant there was little opportunity to build real knowledge of foreign areas; finally, the tributary system's focus on ceremony kept relations superficial, where appearance mattered more than reality.³⁷⁴ He argues the Chinese government pushed trade away from the central administrative area to the coast in order to maintain the "illusion" that their tributary system was intact. Meanwhile, the Europeans were holding on to the "illusion" that the Chinese would increase their foreign trade.³⁷⁵ These inconsistencies were increasingly difficult for Europeans to understand as they rationalized international trade as ordained or natural.³⁷⁶ By the eighteenth century, thinkers such as Defoe and Smith began to expand the legitimization of international trade beyond the dictates of divine Providence to the original principles of human nature. From these perspectives, emissaries in China were frustrated and confused by the Chinese refusal to adapt to European customs and trade practices.³⁷⁷ Although acknowledging that foreign relations took place on several levels (apart from the tributary system), John Wills points out how the European experience of

³⁷² Between 1655 and 1795 there were approximately seventeen Western missions that reached the emperor (six from Russia, four from Portugal, three or four from Holland, three from the Papacy, and one from Britain). J. K. Fairbank, 'Tributary Trade and China's Relations with the West', *The Far Eastern Quarterly*, 1:2 (February, 1942), 148-9. For more information on failed trade negotiations see Markley, *The Far East and the English Imagination*, Chapter 3 and Wills, *Embassies and Illusions*.

³⁷³ Wills, *Embassies and Illusions*, 20.

³⁷⁴ *Ibid.*, 21-2.

³⁷⁵ *Ibid.*, 38.

³⁷⁶ For instance, Nieuhof repeated a letter from the general of Batavia to the Emperor of China describing the European explanation for trade based on God's division of things necessary and convenient for life across the globe. Nieuhof, *An embassy from the East-India Company*, 310.

³⁷⁷ David Porter, *Ideographia: The Chinese Cipher in Early Modern Europe* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2001), 197 and 199.

China's tribute system reflects "the clash between the basic values and world-views of the tribute system and those of Western formal diplomacy."³⁷⁸

Seventeenth and eighteenth century primary accounts composed by secular authors revealed the practical encounter between European and Chinese customs in international relations. For instance, Nieuhof described the confrontation between European and Chinese expectations. In an excerpt of the decree of the Chinese Emperor on the Holland trade, he noted the Chinese comments on how the Hollanders and Muscovites "will not submit themselves to those ceremonies of reverence accustom'd in this palaces. They are novices, and ignorant in affairs, and obstinate in refusing to accommodate themselves to the customs of the country".³⁷⁹ Anson's experience in Canton also reflected significant differences in expectations and customs. Although he was not a merchant, but a man of war, to the Chinese the distinction was negligible and they were evidently concerned by his presence. As a man of war, Anson refused to pay duties for his engagement at Canton (as was customary amongst European states).³⁸⁰ However, Chinese custom dictated all ships that enter Chinese ports must pay duties. Ultimately, the Chinese desire for the commodore to leave their port made them acquiesce to his refusal to pay a duty. Despite these idiosyncrasies of Chinese policy, Europeans attempted to understand the principles behind their reluctance to engage in international trade.

4.2. UNDERSTANDING CHINESE TRADE POLICY

Early descriptions of the Chinese, including those by the Jesuits, depicted an arrogant nation who believed they were at the centre of the world. Ricci concluded that "[Chinese] pride, it would seem, arises from an ignorance of the existence of higher things and from the fact that they find themselves far superior to the barbarous nations by which they are surrounded".³⁸¹ Or, as the geographer Thomas Salmon argued in his popular compendium, they looked upon "the rest of mankind as little better than brutes".³⁸² This assertion was supported by the knowledge that the Chinese had access to the compass before the Europeans, and yet explored little in comparison.

³⁷⁸ Wills, *Embassies and Illusions*, 172.

³⁷⁹ Nieuhof, *An embassy from the East-India Company*, 316

³⁸⁰ Anson, *A Voyage round the world*, 354.

³⁸¹ Ricci and Trigault, *China in the Sixteenth Century*, 23.

³⁸² Salmon, *Modern History*, 18.

Nonetheless, Europeans sought to understand China's motivations for restricting trade beyond simple arrogance.

In the seventeenth century, numerous European observers respected China's policy of limiting international trade. The expansion of European interests overseas, concurrent with internal wars, revolutions and the spread of disease, reminded early modern observers of lessons from Ancient Rome, and concerns about overexpansion led some to admire China's restraint.³⁸³ One of the early Iberian accounts of China by Gaspar da Cruz described how the Chinese had a large empire earlier in their history, ruling over Malacca, Siam and Champa in Southeast Asia. He explained their motivations for reducing this empire and turning inwards: "the King of China, seeing that his kingdom went to decay, and was in danger by their seeking to conquer many other foreign countries, he withdrew himself with his men to his own kingdom..."³⁸⁴ Navarrete was an early seventeenth source that explicitly commended the limitations on international relations as "a good piece of policy," adding "[t]he same might be done in other kingdoms"³⁸⁵ Later when discussing the Chinese treatment of strangers, he noted "[t]hey have reason enough not to admit of strangers, as having no need of them for any worldly affairs".³⁸⁶ These early primary descriptions travelled back to a European audience, many of whom agreed the Chinese policy was wise.

In Europe, particularly in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, geographers and philosophers repeated the praise of China's wise policy. Giovanni Botero explained China's motivations for restricting foreign interactions: "Strangers are not admitted to enter into the kingdome, lest their customes and conversation should breed alteration in manners, or innovation in the state. They are onely permitted to traffick upon the sea coasts, to buy and sell victual, and to vent their wares".³⁸⁷ The Chinese, he argued, were "more ready and fit to defend, then offend, to preserve rather than increase", an indirect criticism of European states' expansionary policies.³⁸⁸ Thus Botero presented the Chinese view of foreign relations as protective and cautious. By the eighteenth century,

³⁸³ Edward Gibbon chronicled this notion of internal decay from overexpansion in his influential *Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire* (1776).

³⁸⁴ Boxer, *South China in the Sixteenth Century*, 67.

³⁸⁵ Navarrete in Churchill, *A Collection of Voyages and Travels*, Vol. 1, 60-61.

³⁸⁶ *Ibid.*, 64.

³⁸⁷ Giovanni Botero, *Relations, of the most famous kingdoms and common-weales through the world...* fourth edition (London: Printed by John Haveland, 1630), 596 and 598. This excerpt was accurately translated from the original Italian see Giovanni Botero *Delle Relationi Universali* (Venetia: Nicolò Polo, 1602), Parte Seconda, 66.

³⁸⁸ *Ibid.*

a few European philosophers and geographers rationalized China's cautious approach towards entering into relationships with foreign states. For instance, Raynal reminded his readers of the problems of the Sino-Portuguese relationship during the time of Tomé Pires; under those circumstances, what incentive did the Chinese have to expand their foreign relations?³⁸⁹ Similarly, the geographer, Thomas Salmon, in his *Modern History* explained the Chinese restrictions at the harbour of Nanking were a result of the besiegement of a pirate, which showed the Chinese "how much the place was expos'd to insults from abroad" leading them to "Remove the trade to other towns which were more secure".³⁹⁰ In a later work he argued the Chinese restricted the Europeans to the port of Canton because they witnessed the Dutch deposing Indian princes and usurping dominions, and "they know that their forces are not equal to European Armies."³⁹¹

Another explanation for China's restrictive policies gained prominence in the eighteenth century, though it originated in earlier sources. It was based on the belief that China's domestic trade made their Empire self-sufficient thus they had no need for international commerce. Sixteenth century European reports of China's trade revered China's massive domestic trade. Gaspar da Cruz claimed "[t]he great plenty and riches of the country doth this, that it can sustain itself alone."³⁹² Mendoza, who relied on da Cruz a great deal, popularized this view in Europe. He described how China's isolation from international trade was possible because as "one of the greatest and best kingdoms of the world...many strange nations do profite themselves from them, and they have need of none other nation for that they have sufficient of all things necessarie to the mainteining of human life".³⁹³ Mendoza took the argument further by directly comparing the scale of trade in China with the size of European trade. The reports about the activity on China's rivers and canals astonished him: "In my opinion it might be said with greater truth and without fear of exaggeration, that there are as many boats in this kingdom as can be counted up in all the rest of the world".³⁹⁴ Mendoza, who had never been to China himself, admitted the comparison was speculatively based on reports he read. Nonetheless, these early modern sources demonstrated how China's

³⁸⁹ Though in the final edition these paragraphs were found in chapter twenty-one (to which Diderot is credited), the paragraphs in question were also in earlier editions and are attributed to Raynal. Raynal, Justamond edition, 105-6, French edition, 123-4.

³⁹⁰ Salmon, *Modern History*, 10.

³⁹¹ Salmon, *Universal Traveller*, 18.

³⁹² Boxer, *South China in the Sixteenth Century*, 112.

³⁹³ Mendoza, *The historie of... China*, 69-70.

³⁹⁴ *Ibid.*, 12-13.

particular circumstances explained its deviation from European expectations, which in this case was being active in foreign trade.

Seventeenth century sources confirmed the significant scale of Chinese domestic trade. Ricci agreed there were as many boats in China as in all the rest of the world; however, he qualified this statement by arguing that it is only true if counting boats travelling on fresh water, as the Chinese have far fewer sea faring ships than Europe.³⁹⁵ Unlike most other subjects, where the missionaries were the most informed Europeans, on the topic of international trade secular observers offered many original and insightful observations. Johann Nieuhof, purser of the VOC embassy to China, was tasked with observing the economy of the towns and villages he passed through on the journey from Canton to Peking. He described the great trade he saw in detail, concluding, “No less doth this kingdom abound in shipping above all the rest; for the number of all manner of vessels is so great, that it seems as if all the shipping in the world were harbor’d there: but ‘tis no wonder, considering the situation of the rivers that run through this country....”³⁹⁶ China’s geography was often used to explain the success of its unique system of political economy.

Du Halde popularized this argument in the eighteenth century. China’s reluctance to engage in foreign commerce was connected to an understanding of its internal strength and history:

As the Inhabitants find within themselves every thing that is necessary for the conveniences and pleasures of life; so judging their native soil sufficient to supply all their wants, they have ever affected to carry on no commerce with the rest of mankind...³⁹⁷

He argued that this led the Chinese to believe they were “masters of the whole world” and that everyone outside of China was barbarous. Chinese arrogance was thus explained by their self-sufficiency. In fact, Du Halde took the view further, and controversially stated the vastness of China’s domestic trade compared to the whole of Europe’s: “The inland trade of China is so great, that the commerce of all Europe is not to be compar’d therewith; the princes being like so many kingdoms, which communicate to each other their respective productions”.³⁹⁸ By pointing out that each

³⁹⁵ Ricci and Trigault, *China in the Sixteenth Century*, 13.

³⁹⁶ Nieuhof, *An embassy from the East-India Company*, 69.

³⁹⁷ Du Halde, Cave edition, 237, Watts edition, 1-2, French edition, 1.

³⁹⁸ Du Halde, Cave edition, 334, Watts edition, 296, French edition, 204.

province specialized in particular productions, the Jesuit portrayed China's self-sufficiency as a policy that still allowed for diversified products.

Made during a period of rapid expansion of European trade, this bold assertion was repeated numerous times in popular compendiums.³⁹⁹ Other mainstream sources restated the idea of Chinese self-sufficiency but did not make the controversial comparison to the European trade. The modern part of the *Universal History* described how the Chinese "chiefly [relied] on" their domestic trade, where each province was like a state or kingdom that had speciality goods and easy transportation to traffic them, but it did not claim this domestic trade was larger than elsewhere.⁴⁰⁰ It is remarkable that this influential source, which heavily relied on primary accounts, did not address the well-known speculation of Chinese internal trade being larger than European trade. This omission may indicate that the editors believed the assertion was either baseless or irrelevant.

Philosophical sources differed in their assessment of the claim that China's domestic trade was larger than Europe's. Montesquieu, for instance, believed the comparison was irrelevant. In *De l'esprit des lois* (1748), Montesquieu described the implications of European global expansion. He argued, "Europe has reached such a high degree of power that nothing in history is comparable to it." Immediately after asserting European power and dominance, he felt the need to challenge Du Halde's contention about the relative size of China's domestic trade, indicating his view that this claim undermined European supremacy. He argued that China's internal commerce might be larger than Europe's, but European foreign trade was, in fact, much greater: "Europe carries on the commerce and navigation of the other three parts of the world, just as France, England, and Holland, carry on nearly all the navigation and commerce of Europe".⁴⁰¹ Montesquieu's argument about the relevance of China's internal trade did not travel far in other philosophical sources, however some popular geographies, notably Daniel Fenning and J. Collyer's *A New System of Geography* (1764-5), recounted the dispute between Du Halde and Montesquieu.⁴⁰²

³⁹⁹ For instance a direct quotation can be found in Anonymous, *The Chinese Traveller*, 189; Claude François Lambert, *A collection of curious observations on the manners, customs, usages, different languages, government, ...* translated by John Dunn 2 Volumes (London: Printed for John Dunn, 1750) Vol. 2, 386.

⁴⁰⁰ *The modern part of an universal history...*, Vol.8, 239.

⁴⁰¹ Montesquieu, *The Spirit of the Laws*, 393. Montesquieu, *De l'esprit des lois*, 71.

⁴⁰² Fenning and Collyer, *A New System of Geography*, Vol. 1, 61.

A fellow Frenchman, François Quesnay, vehemently contested Montesquieu's view of China. In a section entitled "Commerce Viewed as Serving Agriculture" in *Despotisme de la Chine* (1767) Quesnay used China as model to attack the belief that "nations must trade with foreigners in order to grow rich in money."⁴⁰³ Commerce was necessary, he argued, but it was dependant on agriculture. Quesnay repeated Du Halde's assertion that China's internal trade was greater than Europe's and that each province specialized in particular products, making commerce between them necessary so they did not lapse into poverty. The Physiocrat believed "the greatest opulence possible consists in the greatest consumption possible," which "has its source *within* the territory of every nation" [emphasis added].⁴⁰⁴ Opposed to the mercantilist view, Quesnay differentiated between China's domestic commerce (which was driven by consumption) and the commerce of merchants (which was often extended afar). He believed "foreign commerce is perhaps more injurious than favourable to the prosperity of the nations that devote themselves to it" and it only serves to profit the merchant class and encourage "frivolities which support an injurious luxury".⁴⁰⁵ Quesnay could not find an example of a nation attached to foreign commerce that, apart from their traders, "provides examples of prosperity."⁴⁰⁶ The Chinese system, according to the Physiocrat, represented the Natural Order and thus he praised their elevation of domestic trade above foreign commerce.

Adam Smith, who had a great deal of respect for the French *économiste* Quesnay, also believed China was uniquely situated for domestic trade and disagreed with the mercantilist view of wealth, however he did believe in the added benefits of foreign trade. He argued China's geography deterred it from foreign trade for several reasons:

A nation that would enrich itself by foreign trade is certainly most likely to do so when its neighbours are all rich, industrious, and commercial nations. A great nation surrounded on all sides by wandering savages and poor barbarians might, no doubt, acquire great riches by the cultivation of its own lands, and by its own interior commerce, but not by foreign trade. It seems to have been in this manner that the antient Egyptians and the modern Chinese acquired their great wealth...the modern Chinese, it is known, hold [foreign

⁴⁰³ Maverick, *China a Model for Europe*, 208. Accurately translated from the original French, see Quesnay, "Despotisme de la Chine", 603.

⁴⁰⁴ Maverick, *China a Model for Europe*, 208.

⁴⁰⁵ *Ibid.*, 211

⁴⁰⁶ *Ibid.*

trade] in the utmost contempt, and scarce deign to afford it the decent protection of the laws.⁴⁰⁷

Later he added,

the great extent of the empire of China, the vast multitude of its inhabitants, the variety of climate, and consequently of productions in its different provinces, and the easy communication by means of water carriage between the greater part of them render the home market of that country of so great extent, as to be alone sufficient to support very great manufactures, and to admit of very considerable subdivisions of labour.⁴⁰⁸

Following Du Halde's and Quesnay's (from Du Halde through Rousselot de Surgy) assertion that Chinese products were diversified, Smith argued that China had significant subdivisions of labour. From the Scottish philosopher this was a great compliment indeed, as he asserted in *The Wealth of Nations* (1776) that the division of labour was key to economic growth. However, Smith moderated his assessment of the size of China's domestic trade, claiming it was "perhaps, in extent, not much more inferior to the market of all the different countries of Europe put together".⁴⁰⁹ By the end of the eighteenth century with European commerce rapidly expanding, even the tempered claim that China's domestic market was near the size of all of Europe's, and the view that China had significant subdivisions of labour from its internal commerce, were both complimentary of the Chinese system.

Recognizing China's self-sufficiency did not mean abandoning hope for its engagement in an active international trade. Smith argued that "a more extensive foreign trade...could scarce fail to increase very much the manufactures of China, and to improve very much the productive powers of its manufacturing industry" as well as offering externalities such as extensive navigation, technology transfer and "other improvements of art and industry".⁴¹⁰ It was possible to understand China's reasons and respect its ability to limit foreign trade, and still believe that a profitable foreign trade was in its interest and was indeed possible.

Primary authors, geographers and philosophers ruminated on China's unique reasons for restricting international trade, as well as its unusual ability to garner significant wealth from domestic commerce. As theories of freer international trade continued to rise in prominence in the eighteenth century, China's ability to garner a relatively high

⁴⁰⁷ Smith, *Wealth of Nations*, 623.

⁴⁰⁸ *Ibid.*, 865-6.

⁴⁰⁹ *Ibid.*, 866.

⁴¹⁰ *Ibid.*

level of wealth while heavily restricting foreign trade required an explanation. European views of China's political economy often discussed the exceptionality of the Middle Kingdom as an explanatory factor as to why it did not fit European theories and assumptions. China represented a system that had the capacity to greatly diversify products in its domestic economy. In the case of foreign trade, the Middle Kingdom offered a different model for growth that depended almost entirely on domestic consumption and production. A minority of commentators such as Quesnay believed that China's system was based in a natural order and thus was replicable meaning all countries should prioritize domestic agriculture over foreign trade; others such as Smith recognized China's unique capacity for domestic growth but still believed it would benefit from increased foreign trade.

3.3. A EUROPEAN PROBLEM? NATIONAL RIVALRIES AND MONOPOLIES

While Europeans attempted to understand and even, at times, appreciate China's restrictions on international trade, the policies of the Middle Kingdom also offered an opportunity to analyse European trade practices. Indeed, many observers maintained that the European system itself was at fault for limiting the China trade. From national rivalries to the nature of the monopolistic system controlling trade, there was a great deal of self-criticism in the European approach to the China trade. Aside from thinkers such as Quesnay who did not believe in the merits of international trade, many European commentators demanded reform of their own systems.

National rivalries, particularly between the Spanish, Portuguese, Dutch and English, led to competing European interests hindering advancements in East Asian trade. As Istvan Hont argues, jealousy of trade emerged "when success in international trade became a matter of the military and political survival of nations".⁴¹¹ During the first half of the seventeenth century, the Dutch began to make their presence in East Asia felt. Unlike the Spanish and Portuguese, the Protestant Dutch (and later the English) were not as concerned with spreading Christianity, but focused their empires largely on commerce. The Dutch East India Company (VOC), formed in 1602, was chartered with the control of the Dutch trade east of the Cape of Good Hope and west of the Straits of Magellan, putting it in direct conflict with the Portuguese declared monopoly of Asian trade. As such, the VOC was given authority to "wage defensive war, negotiate treaties of peace

⁴¹¹ Hont, *Jealousy of trade*, 5.

and alliance in the name of the States General, and build fortresses.”⁴¹² This led to several VOC attacks on the Portuguese establishment at Macao. Ultimately, the Dutch gained a monopoly in the Japan trade and increased their presence in East Asia throughout the seventeenth century. By 1685, with the opening of Canton to foreign commerce, the English also began to assert their standing in the China trade. The divided London and English East India companies formally united in 1708 giving the British a strong position in the East Indian trade.

The descriptions of European observers reveal the nationalism involved in international trade with China in particular, and the East Indies in general. In the seventeenth century, Nieuhof publicised the tension between the Dutch and the Portuguese in the Far East in his *Het gezantschap der Neêrlandtsche Oost-Indische Compagnie* (1665).⁴¹³ He was part of a mission from 1655-1657 led by a Dutch merchant, Frederick Schedel, who was sent by the Chief Council of New Batavia to China to verify recent changes in China’s foreign policy. In his account Nieuhof argued that the mission to negotiate a freer trade with the Chinese government was doomed from the start because the Portuguese at Macao and the Jesuits in Peking had portrayed the Dutch as pirates without a country who “got their livings by stealth and piracy” and who sought to plunder the Chinese Empire.⁴¹⁴ According to Nieuhof, these Portuguese told the Tartar leaders that previous Chinese emperors would not engage with the Dutch since they were seen “as the ruine and plague of that Empire.”⁴¹⁵ He also accused the Portuguese of bribing the Jesuits and the Chinese to ensure the Dutch trade demands were not met.⁴¹⁶ Descriptions of how the Portuguese stifled Dutch efforts are prevalent in Nieuhof’s account and constitute a unique contribution of the secular author to primary knowledge of European relations with China. This information travelled into the eighteenth century as Raynal repeated these descriptions, reminding his readers how in 1607 the Dutch tried to open up the China trade but “The Portuguese found means, by bribery, and the intrigues of their missionaries, to get the Hollanders excluded.”⁴¹⁷ It became evident to European commentators, through these sources, that conflicts between European countries greatly affected trading relationships with China.

⁴¹² Lach and Van Kley, *Asia in the Making of Europe*, 45.

⁴¹³ Before the end of the seventeenth century there were six Dutch editions, three German, two English (London, 1669 and 1673), one Latin and one French (Leyden, 1665). See Lach and Van Kley, *Asia in the Making of Europe*, 484.

⁴¹⁴ Nieuhof, *An embassy from the East-India Company*, 22 and 112.

⁴¹⁵ *Ibid.*, 23.

⁴¹⁶ *Ibid.*, 24 and 112.

⁴¹⁷ Raynal, Justamond edition, 246, French edition, 160.

Englishmen expressed similar frustrations over conflicts with the Portuguese and Dutch. Direct conflicts such as the 1623 Amboyna massacre of twenty men, ten of who were members of the British East India Company, by agents of the VOC undoubtedly contributed to the tone of tracts on the East India trade. Geographers, polemicists and philosophers complained about the problems that arose from these national rivalries. The national competitiveness led to a mistrust of information circulating on the trade: “The difficulty of trading with the Chineses in their own Country, is not so difficult as the Portingals and Hollanders would perswade the World for their own advantage”.⁴¹⁸ The anonymous author of this tract on the East India Company argued that, despite the hindrances by the Portuguese, the English have traded in Canton with great success.

Over the course of the eighteenth century, national rivalries were less prominent explanations for the inability to establish a flourishing China trade. European commentators began to argue the largest problem on the European side of the China trade was not the high degree of competition between countries, but rather the lack of competition between companies. This was a result of the rising power of the European East India companies. The debate over the impact of chartered companies and monopolies in the China trade featured prominently in eighteenth century popular sources, in which many authors argued against the monopolies and for the rights of individual merchants. For instance, a letter addressed to the Aldermen of the City of London in 1754 attacked the claim that free merchants did not have the ability to carry on the East India trade in the same manner as the East India Company. The anonymous author argued “every one knows, that the trade to China may be carried on from Britain directly, as it is from Sweden, and that, without a Company the same may be done from all other parts.”⁴¹⁹ The high level of country trade (local trade that took place in the East Indies) conducted by free merchants indicated their ability to be successful, and “they do not ruin themselves, nor do they lose the trade, or give away all the profits to the natives.”⁴²⁰

⁴¹⁸ Anonymous, *The East-India trade* (n. p., 1641?), 8.

⁴¹⁹ *Letters relating to the East India Company...* (London: Printed for W. Owen, 1754), 24. This work has been dubiously attributed to John Campbell (one of the editors of the *Universal History*)

⁴²⁰ Lord Somers, *A third collection of scarce and valuable tracts, on the most interesting and entertaining subjects...* 4 Volumes (London: printed for F. Cogan, 1751), Vol.3, 212. Most tracts in this collection were collected from the library of Lord John Somers.

In contrast to the idea that China was solely responsible for limiting the number of ports where international trade could be conducted, some believed the large monopolistic European East India companies made this decision. Joshua Gee, an English merchant who wrote *The Trade and navigation of Great Britain considered* (1729) – a work that made him famous and went through many editions including a French translation in 1750 – argued that the English East India Company was at fault for limiting the China trade, and in particular, the number of ports at which international trade was conducted.⁴²¹ He believed that the sales of British woollen goods would be higher in the colder, northern Chinese provinces, but the English captains chose to stay at Canton. According to Gee private traders knew better: “when private traders had liberty to go to China, they were of another opinion; they went to those places where they could get most money.”⁴²²

In reality, the East India companies did hinder the China trade. The English abandoned their factories at the port of Amoy and Chusan in 1707 and 1710 respectively because of the favourable possibilities of trade at Canton. This was well before the 1757 official Chinese restriction of foreign trade to Canton.⁴²³ A popular dictionary of trade in the eighteenth century written by Richard Rolt described the “inducement which the European merchants have to frequent Canton” in comparison to Amoy, namely that “whole fleets may be freighted in a short time there, and are not in danger of being delayed til the monsoon sets in...”⁴²⁴ By 1740, the British met with a solid monopoly on in Canton, the Hong Merchants (a small group of elite merchants who dominated the Canton trade). By 1762, to combat the strength of the Hong monopoly, the English East

⁴²¹ Peter Groenewegen, “Gee, Joshua (1667–1730)”, *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004).

⁴²² Gee, *The Trade and navigation of Great Britain considered*, 29; Dalrymple, *A plan for extending the commerce of this kingdom...* also described the high demand for wool in China being limited by the trade at Canton, which was further from the colder areas of the empire. Dalrymple was a career East India Company writer and traveller who was based at Canton for a time. Andrew S. Cook, “Dalrymple, Alexander (1737–1808)”, *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004).

⁴²³ See E.H. Pritchard, *The Crucial Years of Early Anglo-Chinese Relations, 1750-1800* (1936) reprinted in Patrick Tuck (ed.) *Britain and the China Trade, 1635-1842*, 10 Volumes (London: Routledge, 1999), Vol.5, 114. Also Paul A. Van Dyke, *The Canton Trade: life and enterprise on the China coast, 1700-1845* (Hong Kong: Hong Kong University Press, 2005), 163. Pritchard and Van Dyke describe how foreigners chose this port themselves before the official Chinese restriction.

⁴²⁴ Richard Rolt, *A new dictionary of trade and commerce, compiled from the information of the most eminent merchants, and from the works of the best writers...* (London: printed for T. Osborne and J. Shipton, et. al., 1756), 130. Rolt was a historian and travel writer. Some of his works were praised by Voltaire indicating the circulation of information between popular and philosophical sources, as well as between France and Britain. The preface of the first edition was written by Samuel Johnson, who never actually read the work. Betty Rizzo, “Rolt, Richard (bap. 1724, d. 1770),” *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004)

India Company created one unified council to regulate all of its ships. Thus the trade was a dual monopoly where the interests of both China and Britain were represented, and vehemently defended.

Enlightenment philosophers, especially those of the Scottish Enlightenment, devoted a great deal of time to analysing the distorting nature of these chartered companies on the China trade. David Hume was one of the first prominent scholars to point out those European actions that hindered the China trade (particularly as expressed by the varying prices in gold and silver): “Thus the immense distance of China, together with the monopolies of our India companies, obstructing the communication, preserve in Europe the gold and silver, especially the latter, in much greater plenty than they are found in that kingdom.”⁴²⁵ Later, Adam Smith also pointed to the negative impact of the monopolistic system. If, as he argued, “rich and civilized nations can always exchange to a much greater value with one another than with savages and barbarians”, he had to explain how Europe has “derived much less advantage from its commerce with the East Indies from that with America”.⁴²⁶ To answer this puzzle, he did not turn to descriptions of isolationism, but rather blamed the fact that the “Portuguese monopolized the East India trade to themselves for about a century” and when the Dutch began in the seventeenth century to expand in that area, “they vested their whole East India commerce in an exclusive company”. He continued on:

The English, French, Swedes, and Danes have all followed their example, so that no great nation in Europe has ever yet had the benefit of a free commerce to the East Indies. No other reason need be assigned why it has never been so advantageous as the trade to America, which, between almost every nation of Europe and its own colonies, is free to all its subjects.⁴²⁷

While Smith recognized the Chinese reasons for restricting foreign trade, he also attributed some of the blame to the European system of national monopolies.

European observers and commentators recognized the European policies that hindered the China trade, particularly the influence of national rivalries and the existence of competing monopolies. As with European discussions of Chinese morality, the example of China helped Europeans reflect on the flaws in their own theories and policies.

⁴²⁵ D. Hume, “Of the Balance of Trade”, in E. F. Miller (ed.) *Essays Moral, Political, Literary*, (Indianapolis: Liberty Fund, 1987).

⁴²⁶ Other factors Smith mentioned included the disadvantages to slave labour over free labour, which would act against the success of North America, and the role of the English constitution governing the North American colonies as benefiting their development.

⁴²⁷ Smith, *Wealth of Nations*, 564.

Europeans did not assume their foreign trade practices were superlative. Smith believed China would improve if it expanded its foreign trade. However, he also argued European countries would grow if they revised their own monopolistic practices.

3.4. AWARENESS OF CHINA'S FOREIGN TRADE

Although the primary sources, geographers and philosophers attempted to understand the limitations of the China trade (both from the Chinese and European perspectives), they were also aware that some international trade did exist. From knowledge of active Chinese encouragement of foreign trade, to the numerous ways in which Europeans and Chinese merchants could exchange goods without formal permission, eighteenth century Europeans realized that while the China trade was restricted, the country was never completely isolated. During the Ming Dynasty, European sources had described how Chinese foreign trade occurred under the guise of tribute, a context that gave the Chinese a dominant position in the exchange. For instance, at the very start of his description of China, Olfert Dapper explained that the Chinese followed “too strictly” an Ancient Law prohibiting strangers from entering in their country, and noted “excepting such onely as bringing Tributes from adjacent Borders, paid Homage to their Emperor, as Supreme Lord of the World; or else Foreign Embassadors, under which pretence many drove there a subtile trade...”⁴²⁸ Dapper reported that some Turks, Tartars and Moguls feigned being ambassadors while actually behaving as merchants. When they presented cheap gifts to the emperor as a gesture, they tended to get at least twice the value in return.⁴²⁹ However, the Europeans sent few missions to the court of China, and the missions that were sent did not submit to tributary status (see Nieuhof's discussion above).⁴³⁰ European sources also recognized that policies did not always dictate reality and subterfuge trade did exist. For instance, Richard Rolt in a dictionary on trade and commerce described the advantages of trading silver in China in exchange for gold. He noted “the exportation of gold is prohibited in China; but the magistrates, notwithstanding, will privately sell it to the Europeans.”⁴³¹

⁴²⁸ Olfert Dapper, *Atlas Chinensis: Being a second part of a relation of remarkable passages in two embassies from the East-India Company of the United Provinces to the Viceory of Singlamong and General Taising Lipovi and to Konchi, Emperor of China and East-Tartary...* Translated by John Ogilby (London: printed by Tho. Johnson, 1671), 1. Note that the title page misattributes the original Dutch work to Arnoldus Montanus.

⁴²⁹ *Ibid.*, 2.

⁴³⁰ Between 1655 and 1795 there were approximately seventeen Western missions that reached the emperor (six from Russia, four from Portugal, three or four from Holland, three from the Papacy, and one from Britain) J. K. Fairbank, “Tributary Trade and China's Relations with the West”, 148-9.

⁴³¹ Rolt, *A new dictionary of trade and commerce*, 130.

With the transition from the Ming to Qing Dynasty in 1644, primary sources of information on China reported the government's active encouragement of international trade. Louis Le Comte's *Nouveaux Mémoires* (1696) was one of the first sources to explain the effect that dynastic change had on the China trade. He described the tenth "principle maxim" of Qing policy "to encourage trade as much as possible thro' the whole empire...[And] To increase commerce, foreigners have been permitted to come into the ports of China, a thing till lately never known."⁴³² Around the same time, Nieuhof discussed how "the Great Cham of Tartary had conquer'd the empire of China, and all the kingdoms belonging thereunto, with the slaughter of some hundred thousands of people, and had proclaim'd a free trade in the city of Canton to all foreign people."⁴³³ He also described how the Canton viceroys "jug'd, that the Holland merchants would bring great advantage and profit to the inhabitants of China, in regard that through the mutual commerce of these people, the defects of the country would be supply'd, and what was superfluous would be exported, which must necessarily very much advance the trade thereof, and increase the revenues of the country."⁴³⁴ These viceroys then published this consent to a free trade, allowed the Dutch merchant Frederick Schedel to erect a factory and gave some of his companions leave to continue at Canton. However, soon after a commissioner from Peking arrived and dissuaded them from these overtures, claiming "it was one thing to grant a port to a foreign people and another to allow a constant habitation".⁴³⁵ While an open relationship with established European factories was cautiously undertaken, the Chinese reportedly believed foreign trade with the Europeans was profitable. Nieuhof was still impressed that in Canton ships arrive from "all quarters of the world with a all manners of goods, wherewith they make a considerable gain."⁴³⁶

In the eighteenth century, Du Halde reiterated these changes in Chinese policy and pointed out that trade had been opened to all nations, though adding the qualifications that it was only the port of Canton that is open to Europeans, and then only at certain times of the year, and even then they must anchor outside the port.⁴³⁷ In spite of these

⁴³² Le Comte, *Memoirs and observations*, 290. Le Comte, *Nouveaux mémoires*, Vol. 2, 73.

⁴³³ Nieuhof, *An embassy from the East-India Company*, 20.

⁴³⁴ *Ibid.*, 23.

⁴³⁵ *Ibid.*

⁴³⁶ *Ibid.*, 36.

⁴³⁷ Du Halde, Cave edition, Vol. 1, 335, Watt's edition, Vol. 2, 302, French edition, Vol. 2, 208.

limitations, a belief remained that China offered new opportunities for trade. The secular primary authors also described the existence of foreign trade with China.

Laurence Lange gave a complex portrayal of the chaotic diplomacy between the Russian trade embassy at the Chinese court at Peking.⁴³⁸ He revealed the difficulties, confusions and contradictions in engaging with the Chinese officials. Lange recounted a Chinese official statement that “commerce is looked upon by [them] with contempt...These [European] merchants come here to enrich themselves, not our people...”⁴³⁹ This is the aspect of Lange’s embassy that Smith referred to when he noted the Chinese disdained commerce. However later in his journal, Lange commented that he was “very glad to learn that the court had also begun to enter into a trade, which they had before looked upon as so contemptible a thing with them...that, since his majesty had given such authentic marks of the esteem he had for commerce....”⁴⁴⁰ Lange certainly noted the difficulties of the China trade such as the story of a French commissary trying to dispatch a ship from Canton but being meeting with corruption and excessive duties. However, he also commented on the substantial European trade at Canton, where he argued “they carry to China from Europe, and bring back from China, a very great variety of toys, and different sorts of curiosities, upon which they make a very considerable profit”.⁴⁴¹ Anson also alluded to European trade with China. He described Canton as “frequented by European ships,” and identified an established European presence such as the English super cargoes and the resident Portuguese at Macao who he consulted with.⁴⁴²

Geographies repeated the advances in Chinese policy. In the *Universal Traveller* (1735), Patrick Barclay noted “in former times [the Chinese] exported in their own bottoms, not allowing any foreigner to enter their ports. But now they are grown wiser, and allow a free trade, as other nations do”.⁴⁴³ B. Le Sturgeon in *A compleat universal history* (1732-1738), pointed out the importance of foreign trade to the Qing: “The Chinese carry on a very great Trade with the Europeans, it being one of their State

⁴³⁸ Laurence Lange, “Journal of Mr. De Lange” in *Travels from St. Petersburg in Russia to various parts of Asia* ed. John Bell (Edinburgh: printed for William Creech, 1806).

⁴³⁹ Lange, “Journal of Mr. De Lange”, 481-2.

⁴⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, 487.

⁴⁴¹ *Ibid.*, 459.

⁴⁴² Anson, *A Voyage round the world*, 353.

⁴⁴³ Patrick Barclay, *The universal traveller: or, a complete account of the most remarkable voyages and travels of eminent men...* (London: Printed for J. Purser, T. Read and S. Hester, 1735), 614. Similarly, in *Modern History*, Thomas Salmon wrote that the Chinese “admit everyone into their ports, and carry merchandise out of China themselves”. Salmon, *Modern History*, 21.

Maxims to encourage trading as much as possible, both at home and abroad; and as all their political maxims are calculated for the peace and plenty of their country, they would be soon reduc'd to great extremities, if their trade should once fail.”⁴⁴⁴ He described how China changed from a highly restricted foreign trade to a policy where Qing mandarins were required to facilitate trade, and “frequently furnish merchants with sums of money to improve to the best advantage.”⁴⁴⁵ Thus, the changes in China’s policy were widely discussed in European sources.

European observers and commentators recognized that China was not as absolutely chained to their ancient maxims as previously supposed. The changes in the China trade under the Qing Dynasty indicated the government did have some flexibility in their policies.

3.5. BALANCE OF TRADE

In this trade China maintained a strong position, and Europeans debated whether this commerce hindered or helped expand the wealth of their own countries. From 1699 to 1751 silver made up an estimated ninety percent British exports to China.⁴⁴⁶ In exchange for the silver the English primarily received luxury goods such as porcelain, silk and tea. The China trade was large enough that it allowed for the development of a *chinoiserie* trend in Europe for Chinese manufactured goods. Further, although antithetical to the idea that China was isolating itself from significant European trade, the commerce with China occasioned debate over the implications of the massive influx of Chinese luxury goods in exchange for European precious metals.

Before the sea route to East Asia was sufficiently opened to expand the China trade in the seventeenth century, there was little discussion about the balance of trade. For instance, in the sixteenth century, Mendoza did not express concern about the influx of goods from China, but this is not surprising as a significant flow of goods from China was yet to begin, and there was still hope that China would begin to accept European manufactured goods (not just silver). However, as the trade increased, the debate over balance of trade intensified and by the seventeenth century, foreign trade was an

⁴⁴⁴ B. Le Sturgeon, *A compleat universal history, of the severall empires, kingdoms, states &c. throughout the known world...* (London: Printed by Benjamin Baddam, 1732-38), 29.

⁴⁴⁵ *Ibid.*

⁴⁴⁶ H.B. Morse, *Chronicles of the East India Company Trading to China, 1635-1834*, 4 Volumes (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1926-29), Vol. 1, 307-13.

extremely divisive topic.⁴⁴⁷ A sub-category of mercantilists, labelled “bullionists,” viewed the outward flow of silver in terms of the export of wealth (an idea that originated in earlier Spanish debates). In the view of the bullionists, the China trade was negative because luxury items were bought in exchange for precious metals, which they believed should be held as reserves.⁴⁴⁸

The varying views of the intrinsic value of money fundamentally shaped the balance of trade debate. Revisionist economic historians, in the wake of Adam Smith, argue that silver should be viewed as a commodity rather than “money”. David Porter contends that the Chinese disinterest in British wool and tin meant the English East India Company was “forced, at considerable political peril, to finance its purchases of tea, silks, and porcelain with silver bullion...”⁴⁴⁹ However, the East India Company was not “forced” to trade silver, often traders made significant profits in this trade, and the China trade was not just a bilateral exchange as the goods were often re-exported in exchange for specie or other goods.⁴⁵⁰ Many Europeans recognized the significant arbitrage profits from the silver trade to China because silver was often exchanged for gold. The editors of the modern part of the *Universal History* noted that the China trade “was once very advantageous to the Europeans.”⁴⁵¹ The same view was presented in *A new general collection of voyages and travels* and both sources described the large profits derived from exchanging precious metals. The increasing trade England had with China, it was argued, led to goods such as “cloths, crystals, swords, clocks, striking-watches, repeating-clocks, telescopes, looking-glasses, etc” becoming “as cheap as in Europe...so that at present there is no trading to Advantage with any-thing but Silver in China; where considerable profit may be made by purchasing gold, which is a commodity there”.⁴⁵² These sources did not reflect alarm at the European drainage of specie for Chinese manufactures.⁴⁵³

⁴⁴⁷ See D.C. Coleman, “Mercantilism Revisited”, *The Historical Journal*, 23:4 (1980), 773-791 for a review of the historiographical problems surrounding the study of mercantilism.

⁴⁴⁸ Irwin, *Against the Tide*, 35 and 38.

⁴⁴⁹ David L. Porter, “Monstrous Beauty: Eighteenth-Century Fashion and the Aesthetics of the Chinese Taste” *Eighteenth-Century Studies* 35:3 (2002), 400.

⁴⁵⁰ There were two cycles of significant divergence in bimetallic ratios between Europe in China. In the first cycle, the gold/silver ratio in China was 1:6, while in Europe it was 1:12. In the second cycle the gold/silver ratio was 1:10-11 in China and 1:15 in Europe, with prices converging by 1750. Dennis O. Flynn and Arturo Giráldez, “Cycles of Silver: Global Economic Unity through the Mid-Eighteenth Century”, *Journal of World History*, 13:2 (2002), 393.

⁴⁵¹ *The modern part of an universal history...*, Vol.8, 238.

⁴⁵² Green, *A new general collection of voyages and travels*, Vol. 4, 125.

⁴⁵³ The drainage of specie to China did not concern Adam Smith either, because the staunch anti-mercantilist viewed silver as a commodity. He argued that there were two consequences of the annual exportation of silver to the East Indies: the first was that plate was somewhat more expensive in Europe,

Not everyone agreed. In 1732 Richard Cantillon, an Irish author, argued for the maintenance of a favourable balance of trade, which to him meant exporting manufactured products.⁴⁵⁴ He believed that the East India trade was profitable to the Dutch Republic, at the expense of the rest of Europe, because the Dutch traded the Eastern goods to Germany, Italy, Spain and the New World in return for money, which they sent to the Indies to buy more goods. While his view of the balance of trade increasingly lost currency in the eighteenth century, Cantillon was an early observer of the global dimensions of trade networks and the important place of the East Indies held within them.

Indeed, the global nature of international trade was increasingly discussed as it grew throughout the early modern period and this understanding affected views of the China trade. Joshua Gee argued that although a great amount of bullion is sent to Asia, they “sell to foreigners as many of the said commodities as repay for all the bullion shipped out, and leave with us beside a very considerable ballance upon that trade.”⁴⁵⁵

Montesquieu recognized the multiple centres involved in the global exchange of silver:

The consequence of the discovery of America was to link Asia and Africa to Europe. America furnished Europe with the material for its commerce in that vast part of Asia called the East Indies. Silver, that metal so useful to commerce as a sign, was also the basis for the greatest commerce of the universe as a commodity. Finally, voyages to Africa became necessary; they furnished men to work the mines and land of America.⁴⁵⁶

While Montesquieu believed Europe was the master orchestrating this cycle, the place of the East Indies, and especially China as the prime absorber of silver, reflected its recognized place in global trade.

Geographies also identified the importance of China in global trade. For instance, a 1743 geography by Joseph Randall, a schoolteacher and agriculturalist, demonstrated awareness that trade was not bilateral and deficits should not be considered in isolation of the global system. Describing the East Indies trade, he argued British exports to China, India and Persia, which included bullion, clothes and several other items were

and the second that coined silver rose in value. However, Smith maintained that these consequences were “too insignificant to deserve any part of the public attention.” Smith, *Wealth of Nations*, 565.

⁴⁵⁴ Richard Cantillon, *Essai sur la Nature du Commerce en General*, Translated by Henry Higgs (London: Frank Cass and Co., 1959). Part III, Chapter I: Of Foreign Trade.

⁴⁵⁵ Gee, *The Trade and navigation of Great Britain considered*, 26.

⁴⁵⁶ Montesquieu, *The Spirit of the Laws*, 392, Montesquieu, *De l'esprit des lois*, Quatrième partie, 71.

exchanged for china-ware, tea, cabinets, and other luxury items, “of which, ‘tis supposed, as much is re-exported to foreign nations, as repays all the bullion carried to these places, and a considerable balance besides”.⁴⁵⁷ Discussion of global trading linkages reveals the integral part that China had in the international trade system. In this sense Eurocentricism and Sinocentrism both misrepresent the diversity of European worldviews in the eighteenth century, where many contemplated the multiple poles involved in global trade.

While Europeans still desired the China trade to increase, they also hoped it would diversify. The actual trade that existed with China, where China exported luxury goods in exchange for largely silver, reflected an image of China as holding a powerful position. Over the course of the eighteenth century, as the support for mercantilism waned, there was less concern over the negative balance of trade with China. Although China sold Europeans luxury goods in exchange for precious metals, the trade was understood as part of a larger system of global commerce.

CONCLUSION

By the end of the eighteenth century Europeans still looked for solutions to expand the China trade. Alexander Dalrymple – a Scottish born East India Company traveller and researcher who spent time in Canton tirelessly trying to develop a more open international commerce - argued in 1769 that the China trade should be moved from Canton to Balambangan Island, near Borneo, where the duties would be less and trade would be freer.⁴⁵⁸ He pointed out this was also in the interest of the Chinese merchants who could be freed from the Hong merchant monopoly under which they had to pay to preserve their privileges.⁴⁵⁹ In a neutral land, *both* the British and Chinese merchants would benefit from independence from their respective governments. This perspective allies the interests of the British and Chinese governments against British and Chinese merchants. Dalrymple’s suggestion reflects how the linear narrative of Europeans entering the modern world with Smith’s promotion of the free market, while the

⁴⁵⁷ Joseph Randall, *A system of geography; or, a dissertation on the creation and various phenomena of the terraqueous globe...* (London: Printed for Joseph Lord, 1744), 344.

⁴⁵⁸ Andrew S. Cook, “Dalrymple, Alexander (1737–1808)”, *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004)

⁴⁵⁹ Dalrymple, *A plan for extending the commerce of this kingdom*, 13-16, and 96.

Chinese stagnated due to their isolationism, fails to capture the various agendas and nuanced views of eighteenth century observers.

The comments in geographical, philosophical and primary works available in Europe indicate a well-rounded and complex understanding of China's policy towards foreign trade. First, there was an appreciation of China's motivations and unique capacity to focus inward and rely on internal markets through the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. Second, the problems contributing to the difficult trade relationship were not always seen as stemming from the Chinese. National rivalries, and the monopolistic system of the European trading companies were deemed hindering forces on the European side. Third, there was awareness of active Chinese encouragement of foreign trade indicating Chinese policy was more flexible than previously thought. Finally, the existence of a debate over the balance of trade with China reveals an understanding of the multiple poles involved in global commerce and China's importance therein. The narrative of Chinese isolation was not a post-Enlightenment construction; however, it reflects only part of a wider context of the early modern discussion on the China trade that points to European commentators and observers who understood China's unique ability to gain wealth from domestic trade; who did not assume the superiority of their trading policies; and who recognized China's integral place in the early modern world. China's international trade policies, though criticized by most observers and commentators, were not sufficient to lead to the dismissal of its system of political economy, nor its potential to amass significant wealth. Chapters three and four have demonstrated that while China's domestic and foreign commerce policies and practices could be improved, they were not considered fundamental flaws of the Chinese system. The next category of analysis that was of critical importance was China's form and practice of government.

OUTLINE:	5.	“LA SCIENCE DES PRINCES”
	5.1.	ORIENTAL DESPOTISM
	5.2.	CHINESE DESPOTISM IN ENLIGHTENMENT DEBATES
	5.3.	THE MODERATE CHARACTER OF THE CHINESE CONSTITUTION

The subtitle to François Bernier’s French translation of *Confucius Sinarum Philosophus*, “La Science des Princes,” not only reflects the high esteem in which Confucius was held, but also the attempts by interested Europeans at connecting Chinese philosophy to the rising intellectual pursuit in Europe of a science of man and society, and in particular, a science of government.⁴⁶⁰ As Virgile Pinot described in his discussion of Bernier’s translation, Confucianism was not a speculative philosophy but rather, when merged with politics, a concrete science that could be used to educate young princes throughout the world.⁴⁶¹ Bernier believed the Confucian system should be judged by what the Chinese empire had achieved, in which case the moral system was successful, given the country’s wealth and large population. To Bernier, this proved that the principle of centralized authority had merits, even if its application was defective in France.⁴⁶² This underlines one of the most significant tensions in the political debates of early modern Europe, namely the relationship between theory and application. If the application of centralized authority tended to corruption in France, could it have had positive or different outcomes in the Chinese case?

The discussions of China’s government revealed two images of China: one despotic and one moderate. China was often admired for its antiquity, the wisdom of its maxims, the uniformity of its laws, the virtue of its administrators, and for the regularity and order it maintained, in spite of the problems of state such as civil or foreign wars, the injustice of princes, and the avarice of mandarins. Reacting against this image of moderate China, philosophers such as Montesquieu famously decried it as a bastion of fear and oppression; it was an infamous example of that pejorative concept, oriental despotism. However, the tension between moderate and despotic China cannot be neatly divided along the lines of sources. In fact, Jesuits such as Le Comte addressed tyrannical powers in the Chinese government and Montesquieu considered China’s more moderate checks and balances. In other words, the same source could recognize China had both moderate

⁴⁶⁰ The translation project was completed but only partially published by the time of Bernier’s death. The introduction was published in the *Journal des Sçavans* in 1688. Virgile Pinot, *La Chine et la Formation de l’Esprit Philosophique en France (1640-1740)* (Paris: Paul Geuthner, 1932), 377-384.

⁴⁶¹ *Ibid.*, 379.

⁴⁶² *Ibid.*, 383.

and despotic qualities. The dominating question was whether China fit into the theoretical models of European philosophers, or whether it was a genuinely unique system. If it was the latter, what were the lessons and potential for replication of such a unique system?

This chapter examines views of China's form of government and asks in which ways European observers and commentators approached, accepted and criticized its model of government. Chapter six will also address China's government, but specifically as it related to the realities of day-to-day operations (governance) and China's economic success. These two themes certainly interacted with each other (particularly with regards to the topic of property rights) but due to the complexity of the subject, I will consider constitutional issues in detail before addressing the practices of government as they related to political economy. This chapter begins by discussing the evolution of the concept of oriental despotism and its pre-Enlightenment relationship to China. The extent to which China posed a challenge to Enlightenment theories of ideal systems of government is addressed in the second section, which will prioritize the debate between Montesquieu and Quesnay to reveal the dual imaging of China as both despotic and moderate. It will be shown that most Enlightenment philosophers concluded that the Chinese system struck a unique balance between centralized authority and moderation. While some, notably Montesquieu, believed this balance could not be reproduced elsewhere, Quesnay viewed the system as the expression of natural law that should and could be replicated in all states, including Europe. The third and final section addresses the unique structural, moral and internal checks and balances in the Chinese constitution that reflected the moderate elements of the Middle Kingdom. Information about these checks was discussed in numerous primary sources and well known amongst the geographers and philosophers interested in the Chinese system.

5.1. ORIENTAL DESPOTISM

When considering views of China's government in the eighteenth century, the concept of oriental despotism inevitably arises. This concept evolved in relation to the states of the Near East. It is evident from the early modern European primary, geographical and philosophical sources that China never fit neatly into this category. As a result, debates about Chinese despotism were closely linked to the empirical evidence available about their system of government.

European discussions of eastern despotism during the early modern period were fundamentally shaped by early modern European politics, and in particular by the contrasting trajectories of France and England. The absolute monarchy of Louis XIV in late seventeenth century France, centralized the government, eliminated feudalism, reformed the army and finances, and created a uniform law that limited the role of the *parlements*, all of which curbed the power of the aristocracy. It was a militaristic government fighting several wars that were exacerbated by famines leading to the deaths of millions. Louis XIV's power over the church and aristocracy increased, and the revocation of the Edict of Nantes, which threatened Protestants with exile, led to the fear of his tyrannical tendencies. By contrast with the 'gloire' but also the 'tyranny' of Louis XIV, the reign of Louis XV from 1715 to 1774 (including the régence by Philippe d'Orléans) was less dramatic but more scandalous. Over the years the king became extremely unpopular for his private luxuries and for losing French colonies, maintaining the central power of the monarchy; meanwhile, popular demand for reform rose.

During the same period, England's political history witnessed dramatic fluctuations. The turbulent seventeenth century witnessed the Exclusion Crisis, the Restoration and the Glorious Revolution and ultimately led to a mixed constitutional monarchy restrained by the House of Commons. The factional politics between the Tories (who endorsed a strong monarchy to counterbalance the power of parliament) and the Whigs (who supported constitutional monarchism and the role of aristocratic families and eventually wealthy merchants in government) heavily influenced many writers of early modern England. France, therefore, represented an absolute monarchy where, as David Hume put it, "law, custom and religion concur;"⁴⁶³ and England was an example of a mixed monarchy (as Hume described it, not wholly monarchical, nor wholly republican), where debates ensued over whether, and in which way, the delicate balance between powers could be maintained.

⁴⁶³ David Hume, "Of the Liberty of the Press" in *The Philosophical Works of David Hume 4 Volumes* (Edinburgh: Printed for Adam Black and William Tait, 1826), vol. 3, 9. This essay was first published in 1741. This is particularly interesting because of the similarity to Montesquieu's description of how the Chinese "confused religion, laws, mores and manners". Montesquieu, *The Spirit of the Laws*, 318. Montesquieu, *De l'Esprit des Lois*, 105. In fact, Hume and Montesquieu agreed on numerous points. For more on Montesquieu's relationship to the Scottish Enlightenment see James Moore, "Montesquieu and the Scottish Enlightenment" in Rebecca E. Kingston (ed.), *Montesquieu and His Legacy* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2000), 178-195.

Within this context, the concept of oriental despotism first expounded by Aristotle in reference to Persia re-emerged with new life. The definition of despotism was consistent from Aristotle through to the Enlightenment in terms of its status as a legal and hereditary regime (thus distinguishable from tyranny), and its location in an oriental context.⁴⁶⁴ Joan-Pau Rubiés' examination of oriental despotism from Botero to Montesquieu points to the relationship between the concept and empirical evidence in early modern Europe.⁴⁶⁵ Over the course of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, the primary descriptions of the Near East were used to enhance and modify the original concept of despotism. Not enough was known about China's government (especially compared to Mughal India, the Ottoman Empire and the Persian state) in this period for it to drive the model of oriental despotism.

The notion over Chinese exceptionalism was present in the formative stages of the early modern European theory of despotism. Juan González de Mendoza gave a complex portrayal of the Chinese form of government. In some ways, according to the Augustinian, the Chinese were more like slaves than free men, particularly in relation to the importance of personal service, the insecurity of property rights and the corruption of governors.⁴⁶⁶ However, Mendoza also depicted Chinese emperors throughout history as a mixture of tyrants and benevolent leaders. His characterization of the Chinese government focused on the operation of the system, rather than the theoretical intricacies of the system. This is not surprising as the sources Mendoza relied on for his description did not have as much access to Chinese intellectuals to garner information on their governing principles, as later Jesuits would. The image of the people as slaves supported the notion of Chinese despotism, but the discussion of corruption and behaviour of individual emperors indicated a tyranny, which was not systematic.

Descriptions of oriental states, such as Mendoza's account of China, influenced evolving theories classifying systems of government. Rubiés looks to the important role of Giovanni Botero's *Relationi Universali* (Rome, 1591-96) in the evolution of the

⁴⁶⁴ Joan-Pau Rubiés, "Oriental Despotism and European Orientalism", *Journal of Early Modern History* 9:1-2 (Leiden: Brill, 2005), 115. Franco Venturi, "Oriental Despotism", *Journal of the History of Ideas*, 24:1 (1963), 133-142.

⁴⁶⁵ Others have noted moments of important confluence between ethnographic descriptions of Asia with the development (or criticism) of the concept of Oriental Despotism. However these focus on particular figures, notably, Abraham-Hyacinthe Anquetil-Duperron, who travelled to Asia and criticized Montesquieu's use of primary reports and theory of despotism by referring to India, Persia and Turkey. Venturi, "Oriental Despotism", 136-138.

⁴⁶⁶ Mendoza, *The historie of... China*, 73 and 82

concept of despotism, through his use of empirical evidence to refine the Aristotelean definition.⁴⁶⁷ Botero concentrated on the importance of geography (in terms of size and climate) as leading to despotism in Asia. This focus remained important throughout the Enlightenment, particularly with regards to China's unique system of government. Botero argued that large empires were in fact weaker than those of Europe and pointed to the "excessive, counter-productive concentration of authority and revenues" without structural limitations.⁴⁶⁸ According to Botero, despotic governments did not care for their subjects. However, China was a notable exception in his scheme. Although it was despotic, lacked a nobility and the emperor controlled the movements of the people; justice, good policy and industry flourished and China was ultimately very well governed with peace as its aim.⁴⁶⁹ The two sides of China thus appeared in the development of oriental despotism. Botero's momentous sixteenth century study of despotism recognized the uniqueness of the Chinese system that did not comfortably meet all the criteria of a despotic model.

As the concept of oriental despotism solidified, China's classification remained questionable.⁴⁷⁰ It was increasingly labelled despotic rather than monarchical but the extent to which it resembled the ideal type of despotism, or other oriental models such as Mughal India was fiercely debated. Because oriental despotism was not defined in direct relation to China, evidence about the Middle Kingdom either had to be selected to fit the concept or the label had to be adapted to fit the reality of China. These concerns would continue to burden philosophers of the Enlightenment who grappled with understanding and placing the Chinese government.

⁴⁶⁷ Botero's use of Mendoza is evinced by his repetition of the information and names of Chinese cities discussed in *Della cause della grandezza e magnificenza della città* (Rome, 1588). He also relied on Barros, Maffei and Michele Ruggiero, and the Jesuit letters. Lach, *Asia in the Making of Europe*, Vol. 2, 238 and 245.

⁴⁶⁸ Rubiés, "Oriental Despotism...", 126.

⁴⁶⁹ Note however the English and French translations decided to avoid the Italian *despotico* for the terms "absolute" and "tyrannical." Rubiés, "Oriental Despotism...", 124. Botero, *Relations, of the most famous kingdoms*, 596-597. Apart from the term *despotico*, this discussion was accurately translated from the original Italian. See Botero, *Delle Relationi Universali*, Parte Seconda, 65.

⁴⁷⁰ An example of the disagreements in classification is seen in the variation between the original French and two English translations of Du Halde's section on the authority of the Chinese emperor. The original French stated "Il n'y a jamais eu d'état plus monarchique que celui de la Chine: l'empereur a une autorité absolue & à en juger par les apparences, c'est une espèce de Divinité." French edition, Vol. 2, 156. The Cave edition, held to be the more accurate, added the term despotic: "There is no government whose monarchy is more despotic than that of China. The emperor is vested with absolute authority, and to appearance is a kind of Divinity". Cave edition, Vol. 1, 241. Finally the Watts edition used the term absolute: "There is no monarchy more absolute than that of China. The Emperor has an absolute authority, and the respect which is paid to him is a kind of adoration". Watts edition, Vol. 2, 12.

5.2. CHINESE DESPOTISM IN ENLIGHTENMENT DEBATES

By the eighteenth century, empirical information on China increased and the relationship between scholarly theory and the primary sources of information became even more pivotal to discussion of the Chinese government. Though numerous authors, notably Montesquieu, labelled China despotic, nearly all commentators struggled to reconcile the many unique elements of the Chinese system. Quesnay defended the Chinese system of government against Montesquieu's criticisms, and believed that China, operating on the basis of natural law, was replicable. However, even the Physiocrat addressed empirical evidence that questioned the merits of the Chinese system. The debates over China's government reflect – but extend beyond – the boundaries of sinophiles and sinophobes because both despotic and moderate images of China were present in the same texts. Enlightenment commentators demonstrated a genuine engagement with the empirical descriptions of China, even if at times this interest was a necessity in order to penetrate debates rather than a personal desire to understand the Middle Kingdom.

Montesquieu opposed the centralizing force of Louis XIV, defended the French nobility, and wanted constitutional limits on the monarch.⁴⁷¹ Because he believed the conditions and principles for a monarchy, despotism or republic could change over time, the concern over the potential for a monarchy to degenerate into despotism, and in particular France's threat of becoming despotic, led to Montesquieu's vehement attack on despotism.⁴⁷² Thus, he needed the concept of oriental despotism to revive the idea of mixed monarchy and discuss the threats of centralized monarchical power.⁴⁷³ It is worth focusing on his famous assessment of the Chinese government at length because it brings two relevant themes to light. First, his relationship with the empirical evidence on China provided by the primary sources was paradigmatic of the oscillation between selectivity and genuine engagement with the available information. There is great debate as to the extent and nature with which Montesquieu united empirical evidence

⁴⁷¹ Rubiés, "Oriental Despotism...", 118. Franco Venturi addresses the close relationship between the concept of despotism in seventeenth century France and the absolutism of King Louis XIV. Venturi, "Oriental Despotism", 133. Melvin Richter also describes the concept of Oriental despotism being driven by images of Louis XIV as a "Grand Seigneur or Oriental despot" in the eighteenth century. However, Richter argues that Montesquieu "transcended the mere interests of his class" and his "theory of despotism served nobler purposes than the rationalization of prejudices of a privileged caste". Richter, "Despotism", 8. For more on Montesquieu's background see Robert Shackleton, *Montesquieu: a Critical Biography* (London: Oxford University Press, 1961).

⁴⁷² Rubiés, "Oriental Despotism...", 163

⁴⁷³ *Ibid.*, 111.

with theoretical models.⁴⁷⁴ Regardless of Montesquieu's personal feelings towards the validity of his ideal types, it is evident that he felt it was necessary to cite prominent primary sources and engage with the information they provided. He knew that detractors from his theory would be inclined to use the same material to rebut his arguments. With Montesquieu's desire (or need) to connect the empirical evidence to his theories on government, the case of China proved to be a thorn in his side.⁴⁷⁵ In *De l'Esprit des Lois*, Montesquieu made several varied efforts to explain how China fit into his schema, recognizing the major objections it posed to his arguments. Second, Montesquieu's endeavour to fit China into his ideal type of despotism revealed the uniqueness of China's government. Although he struggled, Montesquieu ultimately labelled China as a variant form of his ideal definition of despotism.⁴⁷⁶

Montesquieu's conception of despotism has been widely studied. David Young argues that the *philosophe* formed his ideas on despotism based on Turkey and Persia and relied on a selective reading of the travel literature on these countries to support his theory.⁴⁷⁷ Earlier, E. Carcassone maintained Montesquieu relied on knowledge of the Near East to formulate his theory of despotism, and then as an afterthought tried to label China despotic, but had to modify his original position because of the information provided by the Jesuits.⁴⁷⁸ The most recent study of Montesquieu's use of China by Jacques Pereira highlights three specific difficulties that China posed to Montesquieu's theories: the first was China's challenge to his typology of government, the second was China's position as an alternative monarchical model to the French system (whereas Montesquieu wanted to improve and imitate England's constitutional model), and finally the Chinese system undermined Montesquieu's appreciation of noble privileges

⁴⁷⁴ *Ibid.*, 162. Melvin Richter has argued that Montesquieu's use of evidence was "highly selective", demonstrating "how Eurocentric he remained in his view of the world". He argues that Montesquieu ignored Jesuit evidence when it did not support his theories, and instead turned to the testimony of traders. Melvin Richter, *The Political Theory of Montesquieu* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1977), 72 and 84. Richter argues elsewhere that Montesquieu's concept of despotism was always meant as an "ideal type" and was not expected to be "empirically embodied in all its aspects". Richter, "Despotism", 9.

⁴⁷⁵ Walter Demel claims "It is well known how difficult it was for Montesquieu to force China into his system of three forms of government." Walter Demel, "China in the Political Thought of Western and Central Europe, 1570-1750" in Thomas H.C. Lee (ed.) *China and Europe: Images and Influences in Sixteenth to Eighteenth Centuries* (Hong Kong: The Chinese University Press, 1991), 53.

⁴⁷⁶ Rubiés, "Oriental Despotism...", 162 and 165.

⁴⁷⁷ David Young, "Montesquieu's View of Despotism and His Use of Travel Literature," *The Review of Politics*, 40:3 (Jul., 1978), 392-405.

⁴⁷⁸ E. Carcassone, "La Chine dans *l'Esprit des Lois*," *Revue d'histoire littéraire de la France*, XXXI (1924), 193-205.

and *parlements* in France.⁴⁷⁹ Pereira argues Montesquieu used Du Halde to discredit the presence of honour in China, relied on Anson to attack the presence of virtue (discussed in chapter three of this thesis), and finally looked to the letters of the Jesuit Dominique Parennin to argue the government existed through fear.⁴⁸⁰ As Pereira points out modern historians such as Muriel Dodds and René Étiemble along with Montesquieu's contemporaries like Voltaire and Quesnay have highlighted the contradictions, manipulation of evidence and errors in Montesquieu's assessment of the government of China.⁴⁸¹ What follows here is not a catalogue of the unsatisfactory elements in Montesquieu's writings, but rather an alternative explanation for his understanding of the Chinese Empire. Pereira questions Montesquieu's motive when he addressed China. Did he want to demonstrate China was not as idyllic as the missionaries claimed, or did he want to save his system by proving it was despotic? There was an alternative way for Montesquieu to protect the integrity of his system.⁴⁸² While he labelled China despotic, the more important assessment he gave the Middle Kingdom was that it was unique.

It is clear that Montesquieu struggled to deal with the challenge of the Chinese government. This led him to question the missionary evidence and note that the merchant sources did not reveal any evidence of virtue (citing Lange and Anson). Though he did not accuse the Jesuits of malicious lies, he speculated that the missionaries deceived themselves. However, he ultimately concluded, "there is often something true even in errors" and "particular and perhaps unique circumstances may make it so that the Chinese government is not as corrupt as it should be."⁴⁸³ The jump from questioning the Jesuits evidence, to admitting that their descriptions of China's good governance might have some validity, reveals the tenuous way in which Montesquieu dealt with the China case. It also evinces the balance between prioritizing his theoretical model of governments and addressing the empirical evidence that contradicted it.

In book eight, chapter twenty-one of *De l'Esprit des Lois*, Montesquieu's battle with China took centre stage as he attempted to "answer an objection that may be raised

⁴⁷⁹ Jacques Pereira, *Montesquieu et la Chine* (Paris: L'Harmattan, 2008), 3ème partie, esp. 256 -257 and 272.

⁴⁸⁰ *Ibid.*, 264-6.

⁴⁸¹ *Ibid.*, 267. Muriel Dodds, *Les Récits de voyages, sources de l'Esprit des lois de Montesquieu* (Paris: Honoré Champion, 1929). Étiemble, *L'Europe Chinoise*.

⁴⁸² *Ibid.*, 266.

⁴⁸³ Montesquieu, *The Spirit of the Laws*, 127. Montesquieu, *De l'esprit des lois*, Première Partie, 143.

about all [he] has said to this point”.⁴⁸⁴ Because the missionaries claimed that a mix of fear, honour and virtue governed China, the Chinese Empire posed a significant threat to his schematic distinction between republics based on virtue, monarchies based on honour, and despotisms based on fear. His response to this challenge oscillated between using evidence to attack the Jesuit position and questioning the evidence itself. In the first instance he asked, “how one can speak of honour among peoples who can be made to do nothing without beatings”.⁴⁸⁵ Here, he cited the Jesuit Jean Baptiste Du Halde, and claimed, “the stick governs China”. This piece of information can be traced back to Alvaro Semedo’s *The History of that great and renowned monarchy of China...* (1655).⁴⁸⁶ In a chapter entitled “Of the prisons, sentences and punishments of the Chinesses”, Semedo described how the Japanese claimed that “they cannot governe without *Catana* [the Sword]...so it may be said of the Chinesses, that without *Bambu*, that is, the cudgel or *Baston*, with which they use to beat men, it is not possible they should be ruled”.⁴⁸⁷ Semedo also remarked that the bastinado was administered to people of diverse social status and magistrates even ordered the beating of mandarins, a point that would be particularly offensive to Montesquieu, himself a nobleman. However, Semedo’s discussion of the bastinado occurred in a section on justice not governance. Du Halde repeated Semedo’s description of the importance of the bastinado in a section on the prisons and punishments for criminals. However, his phrasing was a bit more forceful about the importance of the bastonado in government: “commonly in China all punishments, except pecuniary ones, begin and end with the bastonado, in so much that it may be said that the Chinese governments subsists by the

⁴⁸⁴ Montesquieu, *The Spirit of the Laws*, 126. Montesquieu, *De l’esprit des lois*, Première Partie, 143.

⁴⁸⁵ Montesquieu, *The Spirit of the Laws*, 127. Montesquieu, *De l’esprit des lois*, Première Partie, 143. There has been significant discussion about Montesquieu’s use of this information by Carcassone, “La Chine dans *l’Esprit des Lois*”; Pereira, *Montesquieu et la Chine*, 263; Dodds, *Les Récits de voyages*, 150. Dodds argues Montesquieu relied on the sinophile Jesuits and sinophobe Anson and Lange, and that drawing on these diverging sources led to contradictions in *Esprit*. However, as we have seen the Jesuit sources also reflected a tension between moderation and despotism. Catherine Volphillac-Auger, “On the Proper Use of the Stick: *The Spirit of the Laws* and the Chinese Empire” in Rebecca E. Kingston (ed.), *Montesquieu and His Legacy* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2000), 81-92. Volphillac-Auger dedicates her chapter to attacking Dodd’s view of Montesquieu. In particular, criticizing Dodd’s reading of Montesquieu’s “idea of despotism” and his alleged deliberate misreading of the primary sources. Volphillac-Auger, while criticizing Dodds for not finding Du Halde’s reference to the cudgel, does not herself identify the origins of this idea in the work of Alvaro Semedo. While she accurately defends Montesquieu’s honest approach to the sources, her view of Montesquieu’s engagement with the Chinese model does not satisfactorily account for his struggle to engage the Chinese system.

⁴⁸⁶ Timothy Brook, Jérôme Bourgon, Gregory Blue, *Death by a Thousand Cuts* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2008), 158.

⁴⁸⁷ Alvaro Semedo, *The history of that great and renowned monarchy of China* (London: Printed for E. Tyler and John Cook, 1655), 142.

exercise of the battoon”.⁴⁸⁸ Du Halde drew the connection between the system of government and the bastinado in passing, but notably not in his lengthy section describing the government. Thus Montesquieu clearly stretched this point, and an eighteenth century reader would only have to turn to Du Halde to recognize this.⁴⁸⁹ Even Thomas Salmon’s popular geography *Modern History* only referred to the bastinado as a common punishment for crimes, indicating that the context presented in the primary sources could be easily understood.⁴⁹⁰ This claim was insufficient to simply dismiss the Chinese government as despotic. Montesquieu’s use of evidence here is questionable.

Another problem in his discussion of China centred on the Jesuit descriptions of honour in China. Montesquieu argued honour could not be present in a despotism because when the people were all equally “slaves, one can prefer oneself to nothing”.⁴⁹¹ And yet, in other sections of his work, Montesquieu implied there might be aspects of the Chinese system that involved honour. In a chapter entitled, “A good custom in China”, Montesquieu described the practice where the emperor performed a ritual ploughing ceremony to open cultivation of the fields. He argued this was an admirable tradition because it involved the emperor rewarding the “plowman who has most distinguished himself in his profession; [the emperor] makes him a mandarin of the eighth order”.⁴⁹² In the following chapter Montesquieu described how this custom should be followed in southern Europe where people are “so impressed by the point of honour, it would be well to give prizes to the plowmen who had best cultivated their lands”.⁴⁹³ He therefore connected the Chinese practice of rewarding the ploughmen to the existence of honour. And yet, he still concluded that China was ruled by fear.

The absence of an intermediate power was another criterion of despotism Montesquieu turned to in order to categorize China. In fact, Walter Demel speculates it was the absence of an intermediate power with a name of its own in China that led Montesquieu

⁴⁸⁸ Du Halde, Cave edition, 312, Watts edition, Vol. 2, 229, French edition, Vol. 2, 134. In the original French: “qu’on peut dire que le Gouvernement Chinois ne subsiste guères que par ‘exercice du bâton”

⁴⁸⁹ Arnold Rowbotham argues this information was not actually found in Du Halde and speculates that Montesquieu received this information in conversation with the excommunicated Jesuit Figurist, Jean François Fouquet in Rome in 1729. Rowbotham also argues that Montesquieu’s confusion about the Chinese was a result of a conflict of evidence he received from Fouquet and read from Du Halde. See Arnold H. Rowbotham, “China in the *Esprit des Lois*: Montesquieu and Mgr. Fouquet,” *Comparative Literature*, 2 (1950), 357-8.

⁴⁹⁰ Salmon, *Modern history*, 33.

⁴⁹¹ Montesquieu, *The Spirit of the Laws*, 27. Montesquieu, *De l’esprit des lois*, Première Partie, 49.

⁴⁹² Montesquieu, *The Spirit of the Laws*, 238. Montesquieu, *De l’esprit des lois*, Troisième Partie, 28.

⁴⁹³ *Ibid.*

to describe China as despotic.⁴⁹⁴ In monarchies, Montesquieu argued, this power was composed of the nobility, which operated based on honour. He argued a “monarchical government assumes...preeminences, ranks, and even a hereditary nobility”.⁴⁹⁵ The primary travellers reported the Chinese ensured nobility was never hereditary.⁴⁹⁶ They related the Chinese argument that non-hereditary nobility was beneficial to the system of political economy. This type of intermediate power offered several benefits: it was said to increase trade; revenues were increased because no estates were tax free and no person was exempt from poll-money; powerful families could not usurp the authority of the prince; and the people were subjects not “many little kings” thus the emperor was obeyed. However, there were some indications of a type of hereditary nobility that existed. For instance, Gabriel Magalhães described the nobility acquired by arms, which did not last in a family for more than three hundred years. Du Halde claimed the noble order was composed of “princes of blood, the dukes, earls, mandarins of learning and arms, those that have been mandarins formerly, but are not so at present, and the literati, who by their studies...are aspiring to the magistracy and dignities of the empire”.⁴⁹⁷ But the noble class that had influence in the state was not hereditary. Magalhães described mandarins who were part of the supreme court, tasked with watching the conduct of mandarins in the provinces, and reporting on their behaviour so “that some may be raised to the highest offices, as the reward of their virtue and merit; and others degraded for behaving unworthy of the station they were raised to. These are, properly speaking the Inquisitors of the state”.⁴⁹⁸ This class of individuals clearly acted as a check on government.

Some observers reacted positively to the non-hereditary nature of nobility in China. Pierre Poivre, notably the son of a wealthy silk merchant, described how China’s ancient laws and government have made it “sensible that all mankind are born equal, all brothers, all noble. Their language has not even hitherto invented a term for expressing this pretended distinction of birth”.⁴⁹⁹ They are all “equally the children of the emperor” and “have never so much as suspected an inequality of origin amongst them”.⁵⁰⁰

⁴⁹⁴ Demel, “China in the Political Thought...”, 56.

⁴⁹⁵ Montesquieu, *The Spirit of the Laws*, 27. Montesquieu, *De l’esprit des lois*, Première Partie, 48.

⁴⁹⁶ Magalhães, *A new history of China*, 146.

⁴⁹⁷ Du Halde, Cave edition, Vol. 1, 241, Watts edition, Vol. 2, 12; French edition Vol. 2, 10.

⁴⁹⁸ Du Halde, Cave edition, Vol. 1, 249. Watts edition, Vol. 2, 35. French edition, Vol. 2, 28.

⁴⁹⁹ Poivre, Pierre, *The travels of a philosopher. Being observations on the customs, manners, arts, ... of several nations in Asia and Africa. Translated from the French...* (London: printed for T. Becket and Co., 1769), 153. Translated accurately from the original French. Pierre Poivre, *Voyages d’un philosophe* (Yverdon: n.p., 1768), 123.

⁵⁰⁰ *Ibid.*

However, others, such as Montesquieu, foresaw problems in this system. Because the status of mandarin was dependent on the state and without an independent institutional or legal outlet, this class could not represent society against the state. The central issue for Montesquieu was the protection of liberty. However, elsewhere, Montesquieu indicated that China had another useful check to control the emperor, namely the Chinese people.

Montesquieu's most useful way to address the Chinese government was by arguing that in many respects China was unique and thus inimitable. For example, he explained China's relative lack of corruption as a distinct characteristic of the Middle Kingdom. While he used geography to argue that large states should be despotic because they require quick, decisive action, Montesquieu argued that China's climate, which resulted in a large population, made it distinct: "In this country causes drawn mostly from the physical aspect, climate, have been able to force the moral causes and, in a way, to perform prodigies."⁵⁰¹ Ultimately Montesquieu argued that in China the people "will triumph over tyranny" because bad governments were immediately checked by the people.⁵⁰² Unlike European princes, who feared the afterlife, a Chinese emperor "[knew] that, if his government is not good, he will lose his empire and life".⁵⁰³ The idea that popular rebellion could act as a check on tyranny in China extended beyond Montesquieu and will be discussed further below. Apart from rebellion, Montesquieu believed China's large population acted as a check on bad government through the priorities it necessitated. The people and the government had to concentrate on subsistence, so that it was in everyone's interest to be able to work "without fear of being frustrated for his pains."⁵⁰⁴

According to Montesquieu, another exceptionality of the Chinese case related to the severity of penalties. Chinese authors, he noted, observed that in their empire the harsher the punishments were, the closer the people came to revolution. Montesquieu remarked, "that China, in this respect, is a case of a republic or a monarchy."⁵⁰⁵ These vagaries were present more often than not when he mentioned China. For instance, he described how censors were not needed in despotic governments; but he noted, "the example of China seems to be an exception to this rule, but in the course of this work

⁵⁰¹ Montesquieu, *The Spirit of the Laws*, 127. Montesquieu, *De l'esprit des lois*, Première Partie, 144.

⁵⁰² Montesquieu, *The Spirit of the Laws*, 128. Montesquieu, *De l'esprit des lois*, Première Partie, 144.

⁵⁰³ *Ibid.*

⁵⁰⁴ *Ibid.*

⁵⁰⁵ Montesquieu, *The Spirit of the Laws*, 82. Montesquieu, *De l'esprit des lois*, Première Partie, 99.

we shall see the singular reasons for its establishment there”.⁵⁰⁶ China was evidently a fluid and ‘singular’ case that while labelled despotic, continuously diverged from the ideal type of despotism that Montesquieu described. A final example of Chinese variance related to his description of the pattern of Chinese dynasties. He argued that the dynasties all started off well but this did not last: “virtue, care and vigilance are necessary for China; they were present at the beginning of the dynasties and missing at the end.”⁵⁰⁷ Initially emperors remembered the previous revolution caused by the corrupting force of luxury and thus they preserved the virtue that led them to the throne. However, “after these first three or four princes, corruption, laziness, and delights master their successors” and ultimately there was a revolution and a new dynasty began and China thus moved from monarchy to despotism in cycles.⁵⁰⁸ Montesquieu did not simply ignore the evidence on China. In fact, he sufficiently engaged with it to the extent that he implicitly admitted China did not fit neatly into his category of despotism.

Montesquieu concluded his section on China with a general attack on the concept of legal despotism: “Some have wanted to have laws to reign along with despotism, but whatever is joined to despotism no longer has force.” Therefore, China is a despotic state whose principle is fear”.⁵⁰⁹ Acknowledging the rules in China that moderated power (discussed below), he still felt the Chinese system was more despotic than monarchical. However, given the aforementioned exceptions that Montesquieu described about the Chinese case, it is questionable why he categorized it as despotic. As we saw from the discussion of the bastinado, Montesquieu ultimately relied on an abuse of empirical descriptions to connect the Chinese state to fear, and even then his argument was not consistent.

Montesquieu’s discussion of China has been widely studied with opposing conclusions.⁵¹⁰ Reichwein believes Montesquieu was most interested with making

⁵⁰⁶ Montesquieu, *The Spirit of the Laws*, 71. Montesquieu, *De l’esprit des lois*, Première Partie, 89.

⁵⁰⁷ Montesquieu, *The Spirit of the Laws*, 103. Montesquieu, *De l’esprit des lois*, Première Partie, 119.

⁵⁰⁸ He explicitly uses the dynasties of the Jin and Sui as examples of when a monarchy was ruined, Montesquieu, *The Spirit of the Laws*, 116-7. Montesquieu, *De l’esprit des lois*, Première Partie, 132.

⁵⁰⁹ *Ibid.* Montesquieu added that Chinese despotism “arms itself with its chains and becomes still more terrible”. The chains refer to the laws that moderate the government. Quesnay quipped about Montesquieu’s conclusion: “The author attempted to terminate his case with vigor, but the vigor is found only in the style; for we do not understand, and he could hardly have understood himself, what he meant by these words”. Maverick, *China, a model for Europe*, 247.

⁵¹⁰ See Rubiés, “Oriental Despotism...”. In his work on Sino-Western relations René Étienne interpreted Montesquieu as a cryptosinophile but as Brook, Bourgon, and Blue argue, this is not an especially convincing interpretation because Montesquieu’s contemporaries read him differently. However, they do

China fit his own dogmas and so relied “only on the reports of traders.”⁵¹¹ While he did explicitly refer to Anson and Lange in contrast to Jesuit sources, he clearly relied on the Jesuits for most of his arguments on China and even admitted that there must be some truth in their descriptions of China’s admirable government. Another explanation of Montesquieu’s decision to label China despotic was his criticism of how the Chinese treated aristocrats in the judicial system.⁵¹² As a defender of the nobility, China’s intermediate class defined through a meritocracy, along with the subsequent equality of punishment for this class offended his sensibilities. However, Montesquieu could have argued that there was an intermediate class whose power was protected by the bureaucratic system and imposed critical check on the absolute power of the emperor. One of the most convincing arguments is provided by Günther Lottes who contends that China was the case that threatened Montesquieu’s system the most because it merged absolutism and rationalism. The Chinese government was a unique paternal despotism, because of its population, had to focus on tranquillity and agriculture so there was no room for liberty.⁵¹³ This perspective reflects the importance of Chinese singularity, which was a critical aspect in the dismissal of the Chinese system of political economy because it could not be a universal model. Montesquieu did not label China despotic because China was part of the Orient, but because it was clearly not a republic (which many primary sources noted the Chinese had never heard of, and when they were told about it⁵¹⁴) nor, more important, was it a constitutional monarchy like England. Thus according to his schema, it had to be despotic. Montesquieu, while admitting exceptionalities, did not want to idealize a system whose delicate balance was simply not replicable in a European context. China’s large population differed from France (and any other state in the world) and thus while China was a uniquely functional system it was not reproducible and thus could never be an alternative model of government.

Montesquieu’s contemporaries did not passively accept his labelling of the Chinese government. François Quesnay launched a vehement attack on the notion of Chinese

note that Montesquieu considered Chinese despotism to be moderated. Brook, Bourgon, Blue, *Death by a Thousand Cuts*, 279.

⁵¹¹ Reichwein, *China and Europe*, 94.

⁵¹² Brook, Bourgon, Blue, *Death by a Thousand Cuts*, 163.

⁵¹³ Günther Lottes, “China in European Political Thought, 1750-1850” in Lee (ed.) *China and Europe*, 78.

⁵¹⁴ The modern part of *An Universal History* cited Nieuhof and Le Comte in a discussion of the Chinese view of the Dutch state as a republic, “which appeared to them rather as a monster with many heads, the spurious offspring of lawless ambition and stubbornness, begotten and bred, as they supposed, in times of anarchy and confusion, could possibly subsist without some sovereign power to curb and suppress the one and steer and govern the other.” The modern part *An Universal History*, Vol. 8, 140.

despotism.⁵¹⁵ Quesnay devoted a relatively lengthy section of his *Despotisme de la Chine* to attacking the “Assertions of M. de Montesquieu”.⁵¹⁶ Quesnay’s well-documented interest in China led the Marquis de Mirabeau, the co-founder of the school of Physiocracy, to describe him as the “venerable Confucius of Europe.”⁵¹⁷ Like Montesquieu, Quesnay concerned himself with uniting empirical evidence of the world with his theoretical models. Elizabeth Fox-Genovese points out that while half of Quesnay’s library consisted of his medical collection, the remainder largely comprised of dictionaries, geographies and histories, demonstrating his interest in the empirical evidence of the wider world.⁵¹⁸ However, the Physiocrats had a clear intellectual agenda of praising the natural benefits of an agricultural economic system. The differentiation between tyrannical despotism and legal despotism (where the monarch or emperor ruled according to natural laws) was in the Physiocrats’ view essential to understanding the nature of Chinese government. Legal despotism was an ideal, imitable model of government that encouraged a healthy political economy.

Quesnay was not as disapproving as Montesquieu on the subject of the bastinado (as the Physiocrat was a critic of hereditary aristocracy and appreciated the Chinese egalitarian system of punishments). He claimed that contrary to Montesquieu’s argument that the Chinese lived in fear, these beatings were only lightly administered.⁵¹⁹ He also relegated the bastinado to its proper realm, that of the justice system, by asking, “Is there any government without penal laws?”⁵²⁰ Quesnay’s reference to the fact that the original description of the bastinado did not occur in a general account of the Chinese government indicated he paid close attention to the primary sources.

Quesnay also questioned Montesquieu’s claim that unlike princes in Europe, who are afraid of the ramifications of their bad behaviour in their afterlife, the Emperor of China’s concerns were more temporal and he “knows that if his government is not

⁵¹⁵ A source that also directly attacked Montesquieu, and who Quesnay relied on heavily, was Jacques Philibert Rousselot de Surgy’s *Mélanges intéressans et curieux...* 10 volumes (Paris, 1763-1765). Specifically Volume 5 (Paris: Chez Lacombe, 1766), 180, which argued China did not fit into Montesquieu’s system of despotism. For instance pages 168-169 refer to the battoon being about penal system. Rousselot de Surgy concluded for numerous reasons the “nous portent à regarder l’Empereur de la Chine, moins comme un despote absolu que comme un monarque en qui reside une autorité très-étendue, mais tempérée par les loix”, 177.

⁵¹⁶ Maverick, *China, a model for Europe*, 247 and 239. Maverick notes that a large part of this work and particularly this section was taken from Rousselot de Surgy’s *Mélanges intéressans et curieux...*

⁵¹⁷ Ronald L. Meek, *The Economics of Physiocracy: Essays and Translations* (London: Ruskin House, George Allen and Unwin Ltd., 1962), 19.

⁵¹⁸ Elizabeth Fox Genovese, *The Origins of Physiocracy*, 96.

⁵¹⁹ Brook, Bourgon, Blue, *Death by a Thousand Cuts*, 165.

⁵²⁰ Maverick, *China, a model for Europe*, 239. Quesnay, “Despotisme de la Chine,” 622.

good, he will lose his kingdom and his life”.⁵²¹ First, Quesnay pondered why Montesquieu was suddenly concerned with the role of the afterlife in controlling human behaviour, as his work was on the topic of human laws. The second and more pointed comment by Quesnay questioned why Montesquieu would not believe that the fear of losing kingdom and life would be the most effective check on tyrannical despotism. He asked, “Would the counter-weights, which [Montesquieu] would like to establish, be so much more powerful and more compatible with the permanent solidity of good government?”⁵²² Quesnay was unnecessarily critical on this point because Montesquieu (and others, as we will see below) did recognize the importance of China’s large population as a check on government.

The Physiocrat claimed Montesquieu’s biggest failure was in seeing all despotisms as tyrannical and absolute.⁵²³ In other words, Montesquieu was too closely aligned with his theoretical structure, which led him to inaccurate characterizations of real world examples. However, Quesnay also had his own theoretical precepts that he prioritized. For instance, when discussing China he claimed, “[a] large population can accumulate only under a good government, for bad governments destroy wealth and men.”⁵²⁴ Like Montesquieu, Quesnay also had great difficulty balancing his theory with contradictory empirical information about China. One of his less convincing resolutions of this tension between theory and evidence rested on the distinction between the Chinese constitution and the practical administration of its government. In response to Montesquieu’s criticism of infanticide, Quesnay argued that it was not the result of the constitution of the government, but instead it was a problem of action. He argued that in a well-governed kingdom, the only way to prevent overpopulation was to have colonies, and on this issue “one may find in the administration of the government and in the inhabitants of China a clearly reprehensible fault”.⁵²⁵ In effect, Quesnay admitted to

⁵²¹ Maverick, *China, a model for Europe*, 245. Quesnay, “Despotisme de la Chine,” 625.

⁵²² *Ibid.*

⁵²³ Maverick, *China, a model for Europe*, 247. Quesnay, “Despotisme de la Chine,” 627.

⁵²⁴ Maverick, *China, a model for Europe*, 244. Quesnay, “Despotisme de la Chine,” 625.

⁵²⁵ Maverick, *China, a model for Europe*, 262. Quesnay, “Despotisme de la Chine,” 635. Quesnay drew the idea that colonies prevent overpopulation from Jean François Melon’s *Essai politique sur le commerce* (1734), which also encouraged agricultural economies. Melon’s essay also claimed that the Chinese did not follow their ideal theories of government in practice and he was much more critical of the Chinese government than Quesnay. Maverick, *China, a model for Europe*, 34 and 130. The 1761 edition of Melon’s *Essai* included an extra seven chapters added to the original 1734 edition in 1736. Mélon asked, “Quelle nation n'a pas un législateur religieux ou philosophe, d'une morale aussi salutaire que celle de confucius et aussi mal observée?” Jean François Melon, *Essai Politique sur le commerce Nouvelle édition* (n.p., 1761), 389.

admiring the Chinese system in theory but understood the problems it endured in practice.

Both Quesnay and Montesquieu prioritized their theoretical ideals, but both also concerned themselves with the empirical case of China, and its notable exceptions. Quesnay, believed the Chinese system was replicable (though it is unclear as to what extent), while Montesquieu's label of China as despotic was full of exceptional elements that meant it was in effect inimitable. The notion of a moderate Chinese government was alluded to by Montesquieu, explicitly argued by Quesnay and based on the information provided by the primary sources of information on China.

The debate on Chinese despotism persisted into the end of the eighteenth century. Cornelius de Pauw's *Recherches philosophiques sur les Egyptiens et les Chinois* (1774) referred to China's government as viciously despotic, like other Asian governments, keeping the notion of oriental despotism firmly alive.⁵²⁶ And yet Chinese despotism did not affect views of its economic potential or wealth. This can be explained because alongside the broad idea of Chinese despotism were primary descriptions, geographical summaries and philosophical acknowledgements of a number of distinct provisions and precautions embedded into the system that ensured that it functioned moderately.

5.3. THE MODERATE CHARACTER OF THE CHINESE CONSTITUTION

From Montesquieu and Quesnay's principal conclusions about the Chinese government two distinct images of Chinas appear, one despotic and one moderate. Rather than being seen as contradictory, these two labels fit the descriptions given by the primary sources. Le Comte explicitly referred to these two Chinas. He described how the "unbounded authority which the laws give the Emperor, and a necessity which the same laws lay upon him to use that authority with moderation and discretion, are the two props which have for so many ages supported this great brick of the Chinese monarchy".⁵²⁷ The emperor was treated as the Son of Heaven, whose sacred commands were respected and obeyed. Le Comte discussed six examples that signified the supreme authority of the

⁵²⁶ De Pauw also discussed the bastinado as reflecting fear in Chinese society. He often compared China to other eastern states such as Persia and Turkey. Cornelius de Pauw, *Philosophical dissertations on the Egyptians and Chinese* Capt. J. Thomson (translator) 2 Volumes (London: printed for T. Chapman, 1795), vol. 1, 292. Accurately translated from the original French. Cornelius de Pauw, *Recherches Philosophiques sur les Égyptiens et les Chinois* (Paris: Chez François Bastien) in *Oeuvres philosophiques de Pauw* 7 Volumes (Paris: J.F. Bastien, 1794) Vol.2, 425.

⁵²⁷ Le Comte, *Memoirs and Observations*, 243. Le Comte, *Nouveaux mémoires*, Vol. 2, 4.

emperor ranging from his power in assigning bureaucratic and administrative posts, the extent of his revenue, his right of making peace and war, his liberty in choosing his successor, his dominion over dead subjects, and his power with regards to changing the Chinese language (as opposed to the power of custom in shaping it).⁵²⁸ However, in spite of all these powers, “so many are the provisions, and so wise the precautions which the laws have prescribed to prevent them, that a prince must be wholly insensible of his own reputation, and even interest, as well as of the publick good, who continues long in the abuse of his authority”.⁵²⁹ Here we have an image of a moderate China. Early modern observers and commentators disagreed about the language to express this form of government (from tyranny to despotism from enlightened to absolute) but even Montesquieu and Le Comte agreed that while the Chinese emperor enjoyed absolute authority, there were moral, structural and legal provisions in place that enabled Chinese civilization to achieve a delicate balance in government.

A STRUCTURAL CHECK

Whether opposing, supporting or qualifying the idea of Chinese despotism, numerous sources described a unique check on the Chinese government, namely the role of insurrection. In Hume’s essay *Of the Rise and Progress of the Arts and Sciences* (1742), he described the “extensive despotism of a barbarous monarchy.” His opposition between barbarous monarchy and a civilized monarchy gave rise to the question on how to situate China in this schema. Hume argued that although the Chinese government was a pure monarchy, “it is not, properly speaking, absolute”.⁵³⁰ This was a result of the nature of its geographic isolation and therefore lack of military discipline (discussed further in chapter six) in combination with their large population. So that,

the sword, therefore, may properly be said to be always in the hands of the people, which is a sufficient restraint upon the monarch, and obliges him to lay his mandarins or governors of provinces under the restraint of general laws, in order to prevent those rebellions, which we learn from history to have been so frequent and dangerous in that government.⁵³¹

This led Hume to speculate, in a footnote, that “perhaps, a pure monarchy of this kind, were it fitted for defence against foreign enemies, would be the best of all governments,

⁵²⁸ Le Comte, *Memoirs and Observations*, 244-252. Le Comte, *Nouveaux mémoires*, Vol. 2, 6-17.

⁵²⁹ Le Comte, *Memoirs and Observations*, 252. Le Comte, *Nouveaux mémoires*, Vol. 2, 17.

⁵³⁰ David Hume, “Of the Rise and Progress of the Arts and Sciences” in *The Philosophical Works of David Hume* 4 Volumes (Edinburgh: Printed for Adam Black and Wiliam Tait, 1826), vol. 3, 122 f. 13.

⁵³¹ *Ibid.*

as having both the tranquillity attending kingly power, and the moderation and liberty of popular assemblies.”⁵³² Hume’s relegation of this observation to a footnote is revealing. If this were the recipe for the “best of all governments” then why would he not give it a more prominent place in his essay? Hume argued that China’s geographic isolation and large population led to this unique circumstance, which did not exist anywhere else in the world, thus the system was inimitable. As we saw above, both Montesquieu and Quesnay discussed the idea of China’s population as a check on government. This idea was also present in other primary, philosophical and geographical sources that revealed the uniqueness of the Chinese system.⁵³³

MORAL CHECKS

Beyond the check of the people, a result of Chinese geography, Le Comte argued three things “are exceedingly conducive to the publick peace, and are as it were the very soul of the government. The first is the moral principles that are instilled into the people. The second is the political rules that are set up in every thing. The third is the maxims of good policy which are, or ought to be every where observed”.⁵³⁴ The most notable anchoring force for the Chinese system of government that underpinned the three elements conducive to the public peace was Confucianism.⁵³⁵

Ever since the publication of *Confucius Sinarum Philosophus* in 1687, Europeans were aware of the role and impact of the philosophy of Confucius in China. Many of the fundamental Confucian principles made their way into analysis and discussion of the Chinese government. The view of Confucianism as providing the basic principles of morality and governance led to an image of a stable Chinese system. From Adam

⁵³² *Ibid.*

⁵³³ Étienne de Silhouette, who eventually became controller-general of France, made a similar argument as Hume in *Idée generale du gouvernement det de la morale des Chinois* (1731). However Silhouette argued that the authority of the Chinese emperor was ‘despotique’ but it was controlled by concern for his reputation and interests because he could not abuse his power for long due to the laws and the threat of revolution. Étienne de Silhouette, *Idée generale du gouvernement det de la morale des Chinois* (n.p., 1731). Silhouette’s work on China was notably influential on his successor as controller-general, Henri Bertin (who would also support French Jesuit work in China as well as encourage East India Trade). See Gwynne Lewis, “Henri-Léonard Bertin and the Fate of the Bourbon Monarchy: the ‘Chinese Connection’” in Malcolm Crook, William Doyle, and Alan Forrest, *Enlightenment and Revolution: Essays in Honour of Norman Hampson* (Aldershot: Ashgate Publishing Ltd., 2004), 71. The hazard of rebellion in China was also repeated in the modern part *An Universal History*, which cited Juan de Palafox y Mendoza, Martini, Le Comte, and Du Halde. The modern part *An Universal History*, vol. 8, 142.

⁵³⁴ Le Comte, *Memoirs and Observations*, 265. Le Comte, *Nouveaux mémoires*, Vol. 2, 35.

⁵³⁵ For a discussion of the influential and important role of the relationship of Confucianism and the West see Mungello, *Curious Land*.

Smith's arguments about the importance of civic education to Quesnay's emphasis on the importance of educating "the thinking part of the people" about government, philosophers agreed that morality should be viewed as part of the science of government. Quesnay believed that "the natural laws include the rule, and the evidence of the excellence of the rule [whereas the] positive laws show only the rule".⁵³⁶ While having the proper structural checks and balances in place was necessary, an embedded morality must also govern.

Attention was drawn to three particular moral constraints: the respect children pay their parents, the veneration which all pay the emperor and his officers, and the "mutual humility and courtesy of all people".⁵³⁷ These tenets reflected a wider approach to morality regulating society. Melvin Richter points out the Greek etymology of the term despot being *despótēs*, which referred either to the head of a family, or the master of slaves.⁵³⁸ The origin of this term had particular resonance for China. The ancient Chinese lawgivers asserted the maxim that kings were the fathers of the people, not masters to slaves. Navarrete described the emperor as the father of the empire and then compared this principle to the late fifth and early sixth century King Theodorick's adage, "The prince is the publick and common father."⁵³⁹ The paternal care resulted in constant inquiring into the state of the empire so that when a calamity occurred the emperor was aware and deprived himself of pleasures so he suffered along with his subjects. The Jesuit Gabriel de Magalhães reported the nine qualities of a virtuous prince according to Confucius' *The Golden Mediocrity*.⁵⁴⁰ He noted that if the Emperor behaved in a virtuous way, this would be imitated by the mandarins and down the bureaucratic ladder until everyone in China behaved morally in the image of the Prince. Du Halde also described the ready obedience of the people who venerated the mandarins like parents, in part because they were taught to, and in part because the

⁵³⁶ Maverick, *China, a model for Europe*, 275.

⁵³⁷ Le Comte, *Memoirs and Observations*, 279. Le Comte, *Nouveaux mémoires*, Vol. 2, 56. This was repeated in Anonymous, *The Chinese Traveller*, Vol.1, 92 and 106.

⁵³⁸ Melvin Richter, "Despotism" in *Dictionary of the History of Ideas* 7 Volumes (New York: Charles Scribner's sons, 1973), vol. 2, 2.

⁵³⁹ Theodorick was also known as "the people's king". He was King of the Ostrogoths, ruler of Italy, regent of the Visigoths and Viceroy of the Eastern Roman Empire. Churchill, *A Collection of Voyages and Travels*, Vol. 1, 22.

⁵⁴⁰ Gabriel de Magalhães, *A new history of China containing a description of the most considerable particulars of that vast empire...done out of French* (London: Printed for Thomas Newborough, 1668), 193.

mandarins treated them well. This allowed the mandarins to govern easily as their orders were obeyed.⁵⁴¹

The reputation of the emperor and government administrators was based on their behaviour as fathers and wise, moral leaders. The use of reputation as a check on passions is reminiscent of Adam Smith's "impartial spectator" in the *Theory of Moral Sentiments*. This type of check on behaviour was not just seen as existing for the Emperor, but also applied to all other levels of government. The role of the daily Peking Gazette enabled this constraint to operate on a practical level because it reported the names of mandarins who lost their offices and the reasons for their dismissal (for instance negligence in gathering the emperor's tribute, or squandering it), as well as those who were promoted and the reasons for their promotion.⁵⁴² In addition, the paper reported all capital convictions, natural disasters (and the responses by mandarins to them), the expenses for the subsistence of soldiers, the necessities of the people, and the present state of public works. Connected to the role of reputation in controlling the negative passions of the emperor, there was also a practice of having a select group of men write the history of an emperor's reign and daily actions. These men kept their writings sealed until the entire dynastic line died and then the information was published.⁵⁴³ This type of constraint by such a highly regarded spectator in China – history – took Smith's impartial spectator a step further. China's lengthy history enabled a consistent morality based on Confucianism to emerge. This morality acted as a check on government and thus was a unique feature of the Chinese system.

INTERNAL CHECKS

Constitutional checks also existed to control the negative passions of the imperial administration. These checks were built into the system and led to the praise for China's admirable model of government. China had ten principal maxims of good policy, which were expounded by Le Comte and repeated in most popular geographies that described the Middle Kingdom.⁵⁴⁴ These maxims were (1) to never give someone office in his own province; (2) to retain at court the children of the mandarins to ensure their fathers perform their duties; (3) to prevent money from affecting the outcome of the justice

⁵⁴¹ Du Halde, Cave edition, Vol. 1, 252. Watts edition, Vol. 2, 46. French edition, Vol. 2, 34-35.

⁵⁴² Du Halde, Cave edition, Vol. 1, 260. Watts edition, Vol. 2, 70. French edition, Vol. 2, 50.

⁵⁴³ Le Comte, *Memoirs and Observations*, 255. Le Comte, *Nouveaux mémoires*, Vol. 2, 20.

⁵⁴⁴ Le Comte, *Memoirs and Observations*, 279-291. Le Comte, *Nouveaux mémoires*, Vol. 2, 56-74.

system by allowing the emperor to appoint a new judge to a case if he believes the sentence was not appropriate; (4) to bestow offices based on merit; (5) to not allow strangers to share in administration; (6) to never allow the nobility to become hereditary; (7) to keep up in peace and war great armies, maintain credit and respect from neighbours (which will be addressed in the following chapter); (8) to be liberal in rewards and severe in punishments; (9) to forbid women from all trade and commerce; and finally, (10) to encourage trade throughout the whole empire.

Although not explicitly discussed in the list of ten maxims, the ability of mandarins and the people to lodge formal complaints was also often reported as an essential and remarkable check on executive power. Le Comte listed several examples supporting the principle of mandarins telling the Emperor of his faults. One such example was the case of an officer of the court telling the emperor that he left the palace too often, and stayed too long abroad in Tartary. At times these complaints were heeded, other times ignored or punished.⁵⁴⁵ Le Comte added that if the mandarin was correct in his criticism and the emperor punished him for it, the mandarin became a public martyr. Similarly, the people had the power to protest their situation through the channels of government. Any citizen could petition the Emperor for the removal of a mandarin if they could prove they were mistreated.⁵⁴⁶ Further, mandarins were to be accessible to hear complaints from the people under their care. But as Le Comte noted this could be difficult in practice, thus the Emperor also dispatched trusted spies to monitor behaviour of the provincial mandarins, who were often removed by great distances from the centre of the empire. The risks of the decentralized power were mitigated by morals and monitoring. According to the editors of the modern part of *An universal history*, the emperor's engagement and care for the people distinguished him from "other Eastern monarchs" because although some claimed he indulged in pleasure and lived with concubines, he was in fact constantly occupied with the welfare of his state.⁵⁴⁷

The Jesuits also reported that checks on government officials should not often be required as they are promoted on a meritocratic rather than hereditary basis. As mentioned, the fourth maxim of the Chinese government was to never to sell any offices, but bestow them based on merit and judged by the examination system. Many

⁵⁴⁵ Le Comte, *Memoirs and Observations*, 254. Le Comte, *Nouveaux mémoires*, Vol. 2, 19-20.

⁵⁴⁶ Le Comte, *Memoirs and Observations*, 261. Le Comte, *Nouveaux mémoires*, Vol. 2, 28.

⁵⁴⁷ The modern part of *An Universal History*, Vol. 8, 144. Salmon, *Modern History*, 25 made the same point.

sources, beginning with Barros' *Décadas* (1552), described the formation of the Chinese civil service and the practice of examining those who held office.⁵⁴⁸ Mandarins enjoyed significant power. Ricci commented that China was, to a certain extent, an aristocracy because of the emperor's lack of power to increase a monetary grant or to confer a magistracy upon someone "except on request of one of the magistrates".⁵⁴⁹ Le Comte noted, "Merit, that is honesty, learning, long experience, and especially a grave and sober behaviour" are the only determinant qualities in appointing members to his bureaucracy.⁵⁵⁰ The highest post in the land, that of Emperor, was also in theory able to be assigned based on merit. As another example of the Emperor's supreme authority, Le Comte pointed out that he had the ancient right to choose his successor not only from the royal family, but also from other subjects. He claimed this was put into practice with "impartiality and wisdom" so that successors were chosen based on their virtue and understanding.⁵⁵¹ Poivre described an account of ancient emperors who chose as their successors "two simple labourers", who subsequently "advanced the happiness of mankind."⁵⁵² Le Comte qualified such claims earlier by pointing out that these examples are "seldom known" and Emperors in recent history chose their successor from within their own families, though they did not always choose the oldest son.

Numerous anecdotes were provided in the Jesuit publications, and repeated in the popular geographies to support the claim that these maxims were in fact practiced in China. For instance, Le Comte recounted a story about the journey of the emperor who crossed the path of a peasant. The peasant told the emperor that a Tartar mandarin took away his only son and left him without any help. In response, the emperor gave the mandarin's office to the peasant and executed the mandarin involved.⁵⁵³ This story not only revealed the swiftness of justice, but also the meritocratic system practiced in China. Another example about the consequences of corruption stemmed from Le Comte's own time in China. When he was in Peking it was discovered that three *colaos*, who he noted were equivalent to Ministers of State, had taken bribes. Upon learning this, the Emperor took their salaries, ordered them to retire, and one of them was

⁵⁴⁸ Lach, *Asia in the Making of Europe*, Vol. 1, 740.

⁵⁴⁹ Ricci and Trigault, *China in the Sixteenth Century*, 46.

⁵⁵⁰ Le Comte, *Memoirs and Observations*, 244. Le Comte, *Nouveaux mémoires*, Vol. 2, 6.

⁵⁵¹ Le Comte, *Memoirs and Observations*, 250. Le Comte, *Nouveaux mémoires*, Vol. 2, 14. Du Halde also discussed the remarkable tendency of princes of "preferring the welfare of their subjects to the glory and splendor of their own family" but noted that more recently the emperor chose his successors from his family based on merit and capacity to govern. Du Halde, Cave edition, Vol. 1, 242. Watts edition, Vol. 2, 16. French edition, Vol. 2, 13.

⁵⁵² Poivre *Travels of a philosopher*, 152. Poivre, *Voyages d'un Philosophe*, 122.

⁵⁵³ Le Comte, *Memoirs and Observations*, 262. Le Comte, *Nouveaux mémoires*, Vol. 2, 30-31.

condemned to guard the palace gates with other common soldiers.⁵⁵⁴ This story reflected the equality with which the intermediate class was punished. These individual anecdotes were significant for seemingly uniting China's precepts of government with its practice.

The notion that the Chinese government was perfect in theory but not in practice is reminiscent of the praise of Chinese moral theory and criticism of its practical morality. Le Comte argued that tyranny and oppression in China stemmed from the "princes own wildness, which neither the voice of nature, nor the laws of God can ever countenance."⁵⁵⁵ When the Emperor was "full of violence and passion", his mandarins followed suit, the system disintegrated, people formed together into armies and the public peace was disturbed.⁵⁵⁶ Le Comte's discussion of the Chinese dynastic cycles of corruption demonstrates the criticism of the Chinese system and honest recognition of its instability. Again, the sinophilia-sinophobia dichotomy does not hold.

Thomas Percy (the English proto-sinologist and author of *Hao Kiou Choaun* (1761)) similarly discussed the gap between the Chinese government in theory and in practice: "If we examine the Chinese government in theory, nothing seems better calculated for the good and happiness of the people; if in practice we shall no where find them more pillaged by the great."⁵⁵⁷ The magistrates were greedy and laws could not successfully check these tendencies because "after all, as the Chinese laws are merely political institutions, and are backed by no sanctions of future rewards and punishments, though they may influence the exterior, they will not affect the heart, and therefore will rather create an appearance of virtue, than the reality."⁵⁵⁸ Percy claimed Anson was mistaken for only seeing the visible corruption of the Chinese and thus conceived a poor opinion of their laws. He also argued the editors of the modern part of *An Universal History* were incorrect for believing in the excellence of the Chinese laws and thinking their corruption was only partial and recent. Indeed, Percy claimed, "that grand source of corruption, a strong desire of gain, must always have prevailed in a country so circumstanced as China: nor was it in the power of any laws merely human to prevent its effects"⁵⁵⁹

⁵⁵⁴ Le Comte, *Memoirs and Observations*, 245. Le Comte, *Nouveaux mémoires*, Vol. 2, 6.

⁵⁵⁵ Le Comte, *Memoirs and Observations*, 243. Le Comte, *Nouveaux mémoires*, Vol. 2, 4.

⁵⁵⁶ Le Comte, *Memoirs and Observations*, 257. Le Comte, *Nouveaux mémoires*, Vol. 2, 17.

⁵⁵⁷ Percy, *Hao Kiou Choaun*, Vol. 2, 166.

⁵⁵⁸ *Ibid.*, 167.

⁵⁵⁹ *Ibid.*, 168-9.

Thomas Salmon, the English geographer who travelled on part of Anson's voyage, described the government of China as a monarchy whose corruption was comparable to "a certain European nation," (referring to Britain), where there laws were good but hardly put into execution.⁵⁶⁰ He blamed the emperor's ministers for hiding corruption from the emperor, as he argued was done in Europe, because when the emperor was made aware of corruption he punished it severely. "Upon the whole, the Chinese seem to be a nation of exquisite hypocrites; and, like some other pretenders, while they carry a fair outside are guilty of all manner of fraud, vice and extortion."⁵⁶¹ Salmon was most critical of the eunuchs that surrounded the monarch, who he blamed for the fall of the Ming Dynasty (citing Adam Schall von Bell), as he believed they had "then the principal share in the administration" just as the princes of Europe must rely on advisors.⁵⁶² Salmon's Tory political position was quite evident, in particular his belief in the royal prerogative and importance of a balanced constitution, which he maintained was threatened by the excess power of any element of government. Indeed, he saw the English constitution "as an impossible balancing act which is always being pushed towards the extremes of tyranny by self-interested parties who wish to monopolize power".⁵⁶³ In his argument about the difficulty of ensuring the successful functioning of the balanced mixed monarchy, Salmon drew a close connection between the issues of the English mixed monarchy and Chinese government, in contrast to the issues of the French absolutist state.

In the view of many Enlightenment thinkers, all existing political systems were flawed and these commentators sought to identify their weakest links and best elements. The Chinese system was presented as a balance between absolutist impulses and structural, moral and internal checks designed to control negative aspects of such centralized, potentially despotic power. As the editors of *The modern part of the Universal History* argued, some of China's

excellent monarchs had the peace and welfare of their subjects at heart, but also how tender they were of wounding the antient constitution of the empire by too despotic a use of their power and authority; for one may plainly see, that it was chiefly owing to this strict observance of

⁵⁶⁰ Salmon, *Modern History*, 26.

⁵⁶¹ *Ibid.*, 27.

⁵⁶² The modern part of *An Universal History* followed Salmon's comparison of China to England by pointing out difference between theory and practice The modern part of *An Universal History*, Vol. 8, 149.

⁵⁶³ Mayhew, *Enlightenment Geography*, 136.

the fundamentals of their government, that the Chinese have been able to preserve it in such wealth and splendour during so long a series of ages; and still continue to do, even under a foreign yoke.⁵⁶⁴

CONCLUSION

In his essay *Of Civil Liberty*, David Hume wrote: “I am apt, however, to entertain a suspicion, that the world is still too young to fix many general truths in politics, which will remain true to the latest posterity”.⁵⁶⁵ He followed with several examples, including how the principle that “commerce can never flourish but in a free government” was proven wrong by France’s commercial prowess. Philosophers such as Montesquieu and Quesnay, who were vehemently attached to their analytical systems, did not support Hume’s point; and yet these same philosophers made notable exceptions for the Chinese case. A more fundamental difference beyond their diverging labels of the Chinese government was Montesquieu’s view that China’s unique system was inimitable and Quesnay’s belief in the universal applicability of the natural law followed in China. The two philosophers used the empirical descriptions in such a way to support their distinct views, but both also engaged, to varying levels of success and honesty, with the evidence that contradicted their theories.

The Chinese government endured many labels, but the greatest apparent contradiction was between the concepts of Chinese despotism and Chinese moderation. Even the most manifest critics found it difficult to dismiss China on the basis of its system of government. Turning back to the guiding question that began this thesis, namely, what did Europeans see as China’s future prospects with regards to political economy, especially compared to other extant systems, it is evident that the nature of China’s government and its unique brand of “despotism” were not considered sufficient threats to the wealth and success of the Chinese state. While elements of the internal maxims of the Chinese system may be replicated elsewhere, the structural and moral checks were unique to the Middle Kingdom.

This chapter has shown how eighteenth century European observers and commentators approached the Chinese principles and model of government. While there was much to admire and criticize in the Chinese political system, it is evident that for many the

⁵⁶⁴ The modern part of *An Universal History*, Vol. 8, 166-8.

⁵⁶⁵ David Hume, “Of Civil Liberty” in *The Philosophical Works of David Hume* 4 Volumes (Edinburgh: Printed for Adam Black and Wiliam Tait, 1826), vol. 3, 87.

model was deemed to work because of the peculiar nature of the Chinese Empire. In particular, geography had gifted China with a large population, and its longevity had ingrained it with a unique system of morality based on Confucian ethics that dictated its particular political maxims. The longevity of the Chinese system was viewed as a testament to its success. As Le Comte commented: “the plan of their government was not a whit less perfect in its cradle, than it is now after the experience and tryal of four thousand years”.⁵⁶⁶

Because European analysis of China’s constitutional structure was conflicted by these co-existing images of despotism and moderation, which led to a formulation of Chinese government as a *sui generis* case, a closer analysis of the practice (rather than the form) of China’s government is required to determine assessments of the role of government in China’s political economy.

⁵⁶⁶ Le Comte, *Memoirs and Observations*, 242. Le Comte, *Nouveaux mémoires*, Vol. 2, 4.

OUTLINE:	6.	DUTIES OF GOVERNMENT
	6.1.	EXPENSE OF DEFENCE
	6.2.	EXPENSE OF JUSTICE
	6.3.	COMMERCIAL INSTITUTIONS
	6.4.	TAXES

Discussion of the administrative practicalities of the Chinese government featured prominently alongside those of despotism and constitutional structure in Enlightenment assessments of the nature and prospects of the Middle Kingdom. To reflect on contemporary concerns and classifications, this chapter defines the categories of government administration according to Adam Smith's description of the duties of government in Chapter I, Book V of *Wealth of Nations*. Smith identified four expenses of government: defence, the administration of justice, the provision of public works and institutions, and maintaining the dignity of the sovereign (though he devoted very little attention to this final expense). Chapter II of Smith's fifth book examined how these duties were to be funded, specifically examining the taxation policies of the government. It was not only Adam Smith who found these categories useful and important. In fact, earlier François Quesnay enumerated the constitutive laws of nations based on the natural rights of men: the laws of distributive justice, armies to assure the protection of the nation, and the establishment of public revenue to provide the funds for security, good order, and prosperity; therefore, he only neglected to prioritize public works and institutions, and maintaining the dignity of the sovereign.⁵⁶⁷ Smith's respect for the system developed by the *économistes* is well documented and they shared a common *laissez-faire* approach to the government's role in society.⁵⁶⁸ Thus, in the two most prominent theoretical economic systems of the eighteenth century, these were the essential categories of assessing the role of government. There is also a noteworthy Chinese comparison to these duties of government. The primary reports described six bureaus of the Chinese government, which included a bureau that looked after military affairs, one in charge of the justice system, another that monitored the public buildings and works, and one in control of the treasury and taxes. While the other two tribunals (one supervising the meritocratic system and the other overseeing ancient customs and religion) were unique to the Chinese system, the other four corresponded directly to Smith's duties of government discussed in this chapter.

⁵⁶⁷ Maverick, *China, a Model for Europe*, 265. Quesnay, "Despotisme de la Chine", 637.

⁵⁶⁸ Phillipson, *Adam Smith*, 192-197.

This chapter addresses Enlightenment views of the first three of Smith's duties. The final section examines views of China's public revenue and taxation policies. Each of the four sections in this chapter is divided into three parts. The first provides the background and context to the topic in the British and French systems. The second presents and discusses the information provided by the primary sources. The final section considers how receivers of information in Europe (the geographers and philosophers) assessed the information they received.

The preceding chapters addressed China's economic culture, its policy of international trade, and its structure of government. While the Enlightenment discussion of these subjects certainly contained a fair degree of criticism of China, these objections did not constitute a definitive dismissal of China's potential to be a wealthy and prosperous civilization. However, in the discussion of the duties of government the dismissal of the Chinese model becomes more evident. In particular, nearly every observer and commentator (save a notable few discussed below) deemed China's military weakness to be a critical failure of government. The justice system (especially the enforcement of property rights), commercial institutions (particularly national infrastructure) and the policies of taxation all had room for improvement but were not believed to leave the Chinese Empire in the hopeless state that a weak military structure could.

6.1. EXPENSE OF DEFENCE

The first and most important duty of government, according to Smith and other eighteenth century philosophers, was "protecting the society from the violence and invasion of other independent societies."⁵⁶⁹ China's military was almost universally seen as the Achilles' heel of their system. From the primary authors to the geographers and philosophers, there was a broad consensus that in spite of its immense population, China was unable to defend its borders. Although China's geographic features were believed to provide a unique degree of security from outside invasion, many European observers saw the devastating mid-seventeenth century Manchu Conquest and subsequent dynastic change as a warning against a complacent civilization.

⁵⁶⁹ Smith, *Wealth of Nations*, 879.

EUROPEAN CONTEXT

A strong military was critically important to the survival and success of early modern European states. As Richard Bean argues, “War, preparation for war, and the payments to debts from previous wars were more important than the sum of all other types of expenditure combined”.⁵⁷⁰ Military strength was connected to the success of state’s system of political economy because it protected the state’s wealth. Clifford Rogers argues “if the ‘carrot’ of the production and allocation of wealth is one of the basic motive forces of history, the ‘stick’ of the creation and application of coercive force is the other.”⁵⁷¹

The weight given to military prowess is understandable given the history of early modern Europeans who suffered through numerous wars including the immensely destructive Thirty Years War (1618-1648) and several wars of the eighteenth century, notably the War of Spanish Succession (1701-1714), War of Austrian Succession (1740-1748), the Seven Years War (1754-1763) and numerous domestic conflicts. The size and nature of the early modern European armies changed from the sixteenth to the eighteenth centuries and while alliances within Europe shifted, states (and the commentators who lived within them) were cognizant of the significance of military strength.⁵⁷² The expansion of overseas empires during these centuries made European military strength compared to the rest of the world evident. During the Enlightenment, military power was a key criterion of assessing a state. As we saw in chapter four some individuals, especially in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, made the case for restricting international relations; however, even those who praised Chinese isolation agreed that the government must be able to defend itself if attacked.

⁵⁷⁰ Richard Bean, “War and the Birth of the Nation State”, *The Journal of Economic History*, 33:1 (March, 1973), 216.

⁵⁷¹ Clifford J. Rogers, “The Military Revolution in History and Historiography” in Clifford J. Rogers (ed.) *The Military Revolution Debate: Readings on the Military Transformation of Early Modern Europe* (Boulder: Westview Press, 1995), 1.

⁵⁷² The extent to which European states underwent a military revolution in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries is still contested amongst historians. See Rogers ed., *The Military Revolution Debate*. See John Brewer, *The sinews of power: war, money, and the English state, 1688-1783* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1988). See also Jeremy Black, *European Warfare, 1660-1815* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1994). Specific figures are discussed below.

PRIMARY DESCRIPTIONS

The immense size of China's military was one of the most prominent characteristics reported. Primary descriptions of China from the sixteenth-century accounts by the Augustinians Juan González de Mendoza and Martín de Rada to the reports given by the Jesuits Louis Le Comte and Jean Baptiste Du Halde in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries ranged in estimating China's infantry from 700 000 to nearly six million.⁵⁷³ The discrepancies with regards to the numbers in these sources were in part due to the varying aspects of China's military they addressed (for instance, a standing army in comparison to the potential size of a conscripted army). These numbers also reflected dramatic shifts in China's actual military structure over the early modern period, and in particular the changes affected by the Manchu Conquest.⁵⁷⁴ By the eighteenth century, popular geographies reported figures for Chinese infantry of one million strong.⁵⁷⁵ Notwithstanding the variations in these figures, it was apparent that they dwarfed those of the European states. Precise figures for early modern militaries are very difficult to compute and though numbers fluctuated greatly across countries and between periods of wartime and peace, armies of 20 000 to 120 000 were the norm in European conflicts of the eighteenth century.⁵⁷⁶

⁵⁷³ Mendoza claimed the infantry was 5, 846, 500 strong. Mendoza, *The historie of China*, 91; Martín de Rada listed 4, 178, 000 for the infantry. Boxer, *South China in the Sixteenth Century*, 272; Louis Le Comte noted there were one million men stationed on the Great Wall of China. Le Comte, *Memoirs and observations*, 285. Le Comte, *Nouveaux mémoires*, Vol. 2, 65; Jean Baptiste Du Halde claimed there were 700 000 soldiers dispersed in the provinces. Du Halde, Cave edition, Vol. 1, 261. Watts edition, Vol. 2, 75. French edition, Vol. 2, 45.

⁵⁷⁴ For instance, the system changed with the end of hereditary military system by the 1570s, and the rise of a paid army. Peter Lorge, *War, Politics and Society in Early Modern China 900-1795* (Routledge: London, 2005), 128.

⁵⁷⁵ Fenning and Collyer, reported 770 000 soldiers held in constant pay and near 565,000 horses to remount the cavalry.

Fenning and Collyer, *A New System of Geography*, 51. The editors of the English *Universal History* cited Magaillan, Le Comte, Navarrete, Gemel and Martini and reported 902 054 soldiers guarded the frontier. The modern part of *An universal history*, Vol. 8, 12.

⁵⁷⁶ David Eltis, *The Military Revolution in Sixteenth-century Europe* (London: I. B. Tauris, 1998), 27. At the time of the Seven Years War (1756-1763), the average annual personal of the British navy and army was 167 476 (though this number certainly overestimates the actual number of people on the ground). The peacetime standing army shortly after the Seven Years War averaged about 45 000 men. Brewer, *The sinews of power*, 29-30. By the end of the seventeenth century, France had the largest European army totally 420 000 soldiers on paper. By the War of Austrian Succession (1740-1748), France's military was reportedly 390 000 and during peace times it fell to 160 000. John A. Lynn, *Giant of the grand siècle: the French Army, 1610-1715* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997), 32 and 55. Military historians have extensively debated the issues around these "paper" numbers but here they serve as an indication of the relative size of the European military systems. Notably, from the time of Ricci to that of Smith near the end of the eighteenth century, the size of both the British and French militaries grew dramatically. For instance, from 1680 to 1780 the British army and navy trebled in size. See Brewer, *Sinews of Power*, 29-30.

Although China clearly outnumbered the European military forces, nearly all observers commented on the low quality of its military. Primary descriptions of China by members of different missionary orders, merchants, emissaries, and military men all observed that the Middle Kingdom lagged far behind Europe in military capacity, especially given its status as a relatively advanced civilization. The Augustinians, such as de Rada, advanced the view of an uncourageous population in the early descriptions of China. These reports were intensely discussed because they connected to the Spanish plan to conquer China from the Philippines in the 1570s and 1580s.⁵⁷⁷

The Manchu Conquest⁵⁷⁸ that created the Qing Dynasty in 1644 was one of the most significant events in the formation of early modern European views of China. Nearly every European observer viewed the triumph of “barbarians” over a civilized empire as an embarrassing failure and evidence of a fundamental flaw in the Chinese Empire. Both the Ming and Qing governments used the Jesuits Adam Schall von Bell and Ferdinand Verbiest to help them build European cannons. The Chinese use of Jesuits, Portuguese and Dutchmen to help construct and man artillery demonstrated the comparable advancements of European military skill.⁵⁷⁹ By the mid-eighteenth century, it was widely recognized that the Chinese had mastered the use of artillery long before Europe – an observation made earlier by Mendoza – but most observers agreed that despite this advantage, China failed to develop this technology and thus had fallen far behind Europe.⁵⁸⁰ Chapter seven deals with the subjects of science and technology in greater detail, but it is evident that the Chinese did not prioritize the development of military technology.

The Jesuits offered a nuanced analysis of the conquest, painting a picture that included the internal decay of the Ming Dynasty alongside military struggles. From 1613 to 1636, Álvaro Semedo was stationed in the south of China.⁵⁸¹ During this time, the Ming Dynasty was suffering from significant incursions by the Manchus as well as internal

⁵⁷⁷ In 1576 Francisco de Sande (the governor of the Philippines) formally proposed to attack China. He assumed, as the Portuguese prisoners did, that two to three thousand men could accomplish this, as the Chinese people would revolt as soon as operations began. While these ideas of an early invasion of China never took hold in Europe they do reflect the low level at which China’s military capacities were held. Lach, Vol.1, 746.

⁵⁷⁸ The Manchus and the Mongols were both referred to as Tartars by early modern Europeans.

⁵⁷⁹ This was reported by Martini. Martino Martini’s, *Bellum Tartaricum* was included in the translation by Thomas Henshaw FRS of Álvaro Semedo’s *The History of the Great and Renowned Monarchy of China*, 261.

⁵⁸⁰ Mendoza, *The History of the Great and Mighty Kingdom of China*, Vol. 1, 129.

⁵⁸¹ His manuscript on the Middle Kingdom was translated, re-arranged and published in Spanish as *Imperio de la China* in 1642.

rebellions. Semedo offered an ambivalent image of China's military capacities. While the Chinese had ancient knowledge of war, and had "formerly been a valiant and warlike nation"; Semedo noted that their only advantage at the time of his observation was the size of their military.⁵⁸² Some of the Chinese soldiers fought with valour, but others were cowardly, perhaps resulting from their lack of experience. Semedo noted that they were not full-time soldiers, but had other professions such as shoemakers and tailors.⁵⁸³ In addition to criticizing China's military technology, Semedo offered various explanations as to why the Chinese had a feeble military: first, they lived in ease and idleness, a result of the peacefulness of the Empire; second, they prioritized learning above all else; third, they chose captains by examination; fourth, the soldiers in China were not courageous by their nature or by the example set from a nobility or by the discipline that they experienced in their training; fifth, the generals were too remote to give proper orders; and finally, their councils of war had no soldiers on them.⁵⁸⁴ Semedo's incisive criticisms attacked core values of the Ming Dynasty such as introversion (with regards to imperialism, not commerce), Confucianism and meritocracy. While a number of his criticisms could be remedied, others, such as prioritizing peace, would require a fundamental reworking of the Chinese system of political economy.

Jesuit descriptions also pointed to the corruption of core principles as an explanation for the conquest, taking some of the blame away from the weakness of the military. Martino Martini produced the first detailed description of the Manchu Conquest in 1654. *De bello tartarico* told the story of the internal decay of the Ming and the Sinicization of the Tartars.⁵⁸⁵ Echoing the Chinese explanation, he argued that the mismanagement of Manchu and Mongol relations by the court of the Wanli Emperor, the broader alienation of officials, the famine, and the avarice of the emperor "who exhausted the people by imposts and taxes", all explained the fall of the Ming Dynasty. Pointing to the internal problems of the Ming Dynasty did not dissipate criticism of the military. The domestic problems of the Ming combined with a weak military to enable

⁵⁸² He cited Ricci as claiming China had more than one million soldiers, whereas the Jesuit John Rodriguez (a Jesuit who spent 22 years in China from 1611 until his death 1632) reported the Chinese had 594 000 soldiers (excluding those at the coast) and 682 888 stationed at the Great Wall. Semedo, *The history of that great and renowned monarchy of China*, 97.

⁵⁸³ *Ibid.*, 98.

⁵⁸⁴ *Ibid.* 99-100.

⁵⁸⁵ This view was repeated in the eighteenth century by Du Halde. Du Halde, Cave edition, Vol. 1, 238; Watts edition, Vol. 2, 3; French edition, Vol. 2, 3.

an internal rebellion to grow, which in turn opened the gates of Peking to the Manchu invaders.⁵⁸⁶

China's tranquil history and the character of its people were used to explain the low quality of its military. China's geography discouraged international interactions and warfare. In addition to the Great Wall, China was protected by the sea and mountains, which also contributed to the isolation of the Empire. Although China's geography assisted its security efforts, Europeans proposed a major lesson could be learnt from its history: peace and tranquillity can render governments vulnerable. However, the achievement of public tranquillity was not solely an accident of geography, but also recognized as part of Chinese culture.

By the mid-seventeenth century information about the Chinese priorities of government increased and the weakness of the Chinese character in battle was attributed to the empire's prioritization of learning and peace. In 1665 Nieuhof described the difference between the customs and manners of Tartars and Chinese. The Dutchman was well situated to comment on this topic as he travelled to Peking from 1655 to 1658, a decade after the Manchu invaders had taken Peking. On his route to China, he passed through areas loyal to the Ming Dynasty such as Guangdong province and Nanjing, which meant he had access to Ming loyalists, Manchu conquerors, and average Chinese people caught in between the conflict.⁵⁸⁷ His diverse exposure to both the Tartars and the Chinese led to a complex portrayal of their respective behaviour. He described the Chinese as being "of an affable and peaceable disposition, addicted to husbandry, and loving all good arts and sciences: But the Tartar, on the other hand, delights in nothing so much as hunting, being very cunning and deceitful, lusting after war, and of a very loose and uncivil comportment."⁵⁸⁸ They both shun idleness but for very different ends, "the one to live temperately and honestly; but the other only to range abroad in a wild and bestial barbarism".⁵⁸⁹ On a personal level, however, Nieuhof described Chinese individuals as ranging from brave and heroic leaders to traitorous cowards.⁵⁹⁰ He explained these attributes largely by turning to geography. The Manchus were "bred up to arms from their cradles, which makes them such excellent soldiers" and in this way

⁵⁸⁶ See *Ibid.* for Martini's discussion of the mismanagement of the Manchu relations (257), his speculation that the war was punishment for the Chinese persecution of Christians (260), and his discussion of the internal problems of the Ming Dynasty (269).

⁵⁸⁷ For Nieuhof's route in China see Lach and Van Kley, *Asia in the Making of Europe*, 1689.

⁵⁸⁸ Nieuhof, *An embassy from the East-India Company*, 250.

⁵⁸⁹ *Ibid.*

⁵⁹⁰ "There was no courage wanting on either side". *Ibid.*, 264.

he believed they were similar to the ethnically Chinese people of province of Liaodong, which was very close to the northern border with the Manchus.⁵⁹¹ However, culture was mutable, particularly when confronted with the dominating numbers in China. Referring to the Mongol conquering of China, he noted that once the invaders were comfortable in Peking, they became effeminate like the Chinese.⁵⁹² Even though the Manchus were a militaristic people, the Chinese could take this away, as they had done throughout their history by sinifying their enemies.

The view of the Chinese as naturally weak was carried through by Le Comte who argued that because of its size China's military "should awe all Asia"; however, its idleness and "natural effeminacy" rendered it weak.⁵⁹³ The principle of bravery present in Europe did not exist in the Chinese Empire, something he directly attributed to their high level of civilization: "The Chinese are always talking to their children of gravity, policy, law, and government; they always set books and letters in their view, but never a sword into their hands."⁵⁹⁴ Only a few decades after the dynastic change, Le Comte argued, the priorities of the Chinese government had not changed.

By the eighteenth century, the primary observers of China believed the Tartars assimilated to the weak and uncourageous Chinese culture. Anson criticized the "defenceless state of the Chinese Empire" where "by the cowardice of the inhabitants, it continues exposed not only to the attempts of any potent state, but to the ravages of every petty invader".⁵⁹⁵ Once again, this famous 'sinophobe' source on closer scrutiny appears to be remarkably similar to the Jesuit accounts it sought to question. Du Halde similarly concluded that the Chinese troops were "not comparable to our troops in Europe either for courage or discipline..."⁵⁹⁶ He invoked the often-repeated view that the Chinese had an effeminate character, which he argued also infected the 'Tartar disposition' in the aftermath of the Manchu Conquest. Du Halde, like Le Comte, attributed this character flaw directly to China's high level of learning: "the esteem that they have for learning preferable to every thing else, the dependence that the soldiers have upon men of letters, the education that is given to youth...is not capable of giving

⁵⁹¹ *Ibid.*, 255 and 260.

⁵⁹² *Ibid.*, 250.

⁵⁹³ Though contemporary English translations of French works used the term "effeminate", the original French used by Le Comte and Voltaire was "mollesse" meaning softness. Le Comte, *Memoirs and observations*, 309. Le Comte, *Nouveaux mémoires*, Vol. 2, 102.

⁵⁹⁴ Le Comte, *Memoirs and observations*, 309. Le Comte, *Nouveaux mémoires*, Vol. 2, 103.

⁵⁹⁵ Anson, *Voyage Round the World*, 546.

⁵⁹⁶ Du Halde, Cave edition, Vol. 1, 261; Watts edition, Vol. 2, 75; French edition, Vol. 2, 45

men a warlike genius”.⁵⁹⁷ Thus several Jesuits attacked the weakness of the Chinese character by arguing there was a relationship between education and military weakness. Again, this reflected in part the Jesuit agenda of allaying European concerns and securing their position in the Middle Kingdom, but it was also a genuine criticism of the vulnerability of the Chinese Empire.

The primary descriptions of China’s military, from the Jesuit and non-Jesuit sources were very disparaging. Every observer commented on the vulnerability of the Chinese and offered several interconnected explanations as to why China had such a weak defence. Whether it was argued to be a result of geography, culture, the priorities of the state or a combination of all three, the Chinese were deemed to have an effeminate character. Further, the government did not compensate for this by developing significant artillery (as we will also see in more detail in chapter seven).

RECEPTION

The descriptions and explanations offered in the primary sources were repeated and modified by eighteenth century geographers and philosophers. A consistent narrative was formed that the Chinese did not prioritize their military and thus their civilized empire was vulnerable to attack.⁵⁹⁸ Thomas Salmon’s *Modern History* (1727) relied heavily on Le Comte’s account of China and repeated the explanations he gave for the dynastic change, including the trade grievances with the Tartars and the corruption and famine within China that led to rebellion. Salmon also described the sinicization of the Tartars as well as the efforts of the Tartar leaders to win over their new Chinese subjects by “[remitting] to the people one third of their taxes, [governing] them by their own laws, and like our Henry VII [delivering] the commons from that tyranny the great men used to exercise over them.”⁵⁹⁹ Thus the geographer added his view of the Tartars liberating the Chinese from their corrupt government. He also commented on the varying cultures of the Chinese and Tartars. Those Tartars who did not live at the court “are neither so effeminate or luxurious as their more southern neighbours, nor do they apply themselves to traffick near so much; hunting, horsemanship, and other manly

⁵⁹⁷ *Ibid.*

⁵⁹⁸ Leibniz argued the Chinese were inferior to the Europeans in the military sciences “not so much out of ignorance as by deliberation”. However, he argued “even the good must cultivate the arts of war”. Lach, *The Preface to Leibniz’ Novissima Sinica*, 69.

⁵⁹⁹ Salmon, *Modern History*, Vol.1, 3.

exercises take up great part of their time.”⁶⁰⁰ Salmon implied that the effeminate nature of the Chinese connected to their commercial activity, something Smith would argue decades later.

After accompanying Anson on part of his voyage around the world, Salmon cited the commodore in his condemnation of the Chinese for their immorality and corruption, but above all argued “that government which does not, in the first place, provide for the security of the publick against the attacks of foreign powers, must be a most defective institution; and yet this populous, this rich, and extensive country was conquered by a handful of tartars, and even now, through the cowardice of the inhabitants, and the want of proper military regulations continues exposed to the ravages of every petty invader; the Centurion Man of War alone, was an overmatch for all the naval power of China.”⁶⁰¹

The idea of the Tartars as warlike barbarians meeting the civilized and effeminate Chinese persisted throughout the eighteenth century. William Guthrie, a Scottish geographer, identified potential advantages to the Chinese military as a result of the dynastic change. He argued China was “a far more powerful empire, than it was before its conquest by the eastern Tartars in 1644.”⁶⁰² Guthrie believed that because the first Tartarian emperor blended the Tartars and the Chinese together, the Chinese became stronger. However, he also warned of the threat to the Tartars that they would lose their skills by the “disuse of arms”. He claimed the Chinese land army included five million men, but noted most of these were employed in collecting revenue, preserving canals and roads and the public peace.⁶⁰³ Guthrie, like the Scottish Enlightenment philosophers he popularized, was concerned with progress. He concluded, “Though this [ancient] system preserved the public tranquillity, for an incredible number of years, yet it had a fundamental effect that often convulsed and at last proved fatal to the state, because the same attention was not paid to the military as the civil duties.”⁶⁰⁴ All efforts of good government could be laid to waste if the government lacked the capacity to protect its people.

⁶⁰⁰ Salmon, *Modern History*, Vol.1, 44.

⁶⁰¹ Salmon, *Universal Traveller*, 25.

⁶⁰² Guthrie, *A new geographical, historical, and commercial grammar*, 469.

⁶⁰³ *Ibid.*

⁶⁰⁴ *Ibid.*, 468.

Several commentators drew a connection between military prowess and purpose of state. The modern part of *An Universal History* repeated Du Halde's view that the Chinese army was unequal to European armies in courage and discipline and soldiers were "easily put into disorder, and routed."⁶⁰⁵ They added that the Chinese overestimated the degree of protection provided by Great Wall, as it did not stop the Tartars,

which sufficiently shews the shortness of human forecast; since it was their too great confidence in these, and some other advantages we are going to mention, that lulled them into that state of luxury and indolence which made them fall so easy a prey into the hands of their warlike neighbours, when they least thought of it, or were least able to make head against them.⁶⁰⁶

The Chinese army had little practice fighting and soon grew complacent. The forward-looking orientation of European states contrasted with the present or backwards minded Chinese.

To Rousseau, the revolution provided fodder for his argument about the ill consequences of civilization. In his 1750 essay on the question "Has the restoration of the arts and sciences had a purifying effect upon morals?" Rousseau turned to China to support his argument. He described the China as an "immense land where Letters are honored and lead to the foremost dignities of State" and concluded "If the sciences purified morals, if they taught men to shed their blood for the fatherland, if they animated courage; the peoples of China should be wise, free, and invincible."⁶⁰⁷ And yet, he found the Chinese to be avaricious, corrupt and above all argued "neither the enlightenment of the ministers, nor the presumed wisdom of the laws, nor the large number of inhabitants of this vast empire have been able to protect it from the yoke of the ignorant and coarse Tartar". Of the Chinese, he asked, "what use have all its scholars been?" China's pursuits and aims were deemed useless in the face of the purest test of a nation – whether it can defend itself. Here, China became the Athens to Rousseau's idealised Sparta. On this point Rousseau was not representative of Enlightenment values, but he did reflect criticisms of China's military.

⁶⁰⁵ Directly from Du Halde, Cave edition, Vol. 1, 261; Watts edition, Vol. 2, 75; French edition, Vol. 2, 45. This was repeated in The modern part of *An universal history*, vol. 8, 151.

⁶⁰⁶ The modern part of *An universal history*, vol. 8, 11.

⁶⁰⁷ Jean-Jacques Rousseau, *The Discourses and other early political writings*. Victor Gourevitch (ed.) (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press), 135. Rousseau, *Discours sur les sciences et les arts* Edition électronique par Jean-Marie Tremblay (1750), 11.

Voltaire in *Essai sur les mœurs* (1756) also claimed the Tartars had characteristics which distinguished them from the Chinese. He raised the often-asked question of how barbarians could conquer a civilized state: “It is very extraordinary, that the Tartars, only with bows and arrows, should prevail against those who had artillery to defend them: This was the reverse of what happened in America, and shews the superior genius of northern over southern nations.”⁶⁰⁸ The last comment praised the Tartar barbarians above the American savages, and used it as evidence supporting geographic explanations for military strength. He described the war between the Manchu and the Ming Dynasty as more primitive than those in Europe and as such argued “Strength of body was what determined the victory: And the Tartars, accustomed to lie in the open fields, must naturally have the advantage over a people used to a more delicate life.”⁶⁰⁹ The delicate life of the Chinese led to their defeat, and lack of caution regarding the savages to the north. Voltaire extrapolated from the Chinese case: “The same effeminacy which ruined Persia and India, produced a revolution in China in the last century, more complete than that of Jenghiz-cha and his grandson”.⁶¹⁰ Voltaire built on this notion of effeminate behaviour and connected it to a broader concept of Asiatic pride when he discussed how the emperor killed his two eunuchs for carrying a letter from the rebel mandarin: “Here we see the nature of Asiatic pride, and how consistent it is with effeminacy”.⁶¹¹ The noted ‘sinophile’ criticized the impracticality of Chinese priorities. Their brilliant laws were set back by “a most terrible catastrophe” because they could not defend their empire.⁶¹²

Others philosophers disregarded the established implications of China’s military weakness. Quesnay minimized the relevance of China’s lack of military strength by arguing that war should be rare “since a good government excludes all senseless pretexts for war”.⁶¹³ However, he differentiated between making war and defending one’s land. Quesnay, like his contemporaries, believed “defense assured by force...must always be a principal object of a competent government.”⁶¹⁴ Natural laws “assure the success of agriculture, and it is agriculture that is the source of wealth that satisfies the

⁶⁰⁸ Voltaire, *An essay on universal history*, Vol. 3, 329. *Essai sur les mœurs*, 602.

⁶⁰⁹ Voltaire, *An essay on universal history*, Vol. 3, 326. *Essai sur les mœurs*, 601.

⁶¹⁰ Voltaire, *An essay on universal history*, Vol. 3, 324. *Essai sur les mœurs*, 600.

⁶¹¹ Voltaire, *An essay on universal history*, Vol. 3, 327. *Essai sur les mœurs*, 601. Voltaire’s concept of “Asiatic pride” is worth further study.

⁶¹² Voltaire, *An essay on universal history*, Vol. 3, 325. *Essai sur les mœurs*, 600.

⁶¹³ Maverick, *China, a Model for Europe*, 301. Quesnay, *Despotisme de la Chine*, 658.

⁶¹⁴ Maverick, *China, a Model for Europe*, 285. Quesnay, *Despotisme de la Chine*, 648.

needs of men and supports the armies necessary for their security.”⁶¹⁵ The Physiocrat thus placed agriculture at the root of defence. However, China had successful agriculture and a weak military. Once again Quesnay faced evidence in China that contradicted his theory of political economy. When he described China’s military forces, he did not refer to the Manchu Conquest and instead focused on the bureaucratic structure, the number of forces (from Du Halde) as 760 000, and claimed all the soldiers were “quite adequately maintained” and “discipline is very well observed.”⁶¹⁶ Nearly every word of Quesnay’s section on China’s military came from Rousselot de Surgy’s *Mélanges intéressans* section on the state of the military.⁶¹⁷ However, China’s military weakness was well known and Quesnay was very likely aware of these criticisms. On the topic of military, even Quesnay could not muster a defence of his idealized model.

Raynal, on the other hand, managed to formulate a way to dismiss China’s deficient military. He followed the dichotomy created between learning and defence. He agreed that because the Chinese valued “reason and reflection”, he argued, they left “no room for that enthusiasm, which constitutes the hero and the warrior”.⁶¹⁸ Raynal differed from the majority of his contemporaries by not regarding this as problematic. He extended Quesnay’s view by highlighting the importance of the sinicization of the tartars: “When a nation has found the art of subduing its conquerors by its manners, it has no occasion to overcome its enemies by force of arms”.⁶¹⁹ This was possible because of the formidable numbers of the ethnically Han Chinese relative to conquerors. Montesquieu admitted this point as a “property peculiar to the government of China”; and argued that because religion, laws, mores and manners were united in China, anyone who conquered China would adapt to Chinese practices.⁶²⁰ However, Raynal’s argument, while supported by primary sources and earlier philosophers such as Montesquieu, was not sufficient to justify China’s deficient military, for what country would choose to endure violence and dynastic change rather than building up their defences?

⁶¹⁵ *Ibid.*

⁶¹⁶ Maverick, *China, a Model for Europe*, 176-177. Quesnay, *Despotisme de la Chine*, 584.

⁶¹⁷ Jacques Philibert Rousselot de Surgy, *Mélanges intéressans et curieux* 9 Volumes (Paris: Chez Lacombe, 1766), Vol. 5, 203-207.

⁶¹⁸ Raynal, *A philosophical and political history*, 104; Raynal, *Histoire philosophique et politique*, 113. This line was absent from the 1770 edition but present from 1774 onwards. In the 1770 edition Raynal argued the Chinese had countless militia but lacked tactics and skill, Raynal, *Histoire philosophique et politique*, 634. Raynal made several changes to his description of China in the 1774 edition due to his reading of new works on China such as that by Cornelius de Pauw.

⁶¹⁹ Raynal, *A philosophical and political history*, 105; Raynal, *Histoire philosophique et politique*, 114. This line was absent from the 1770 edition but present from 1774 onwards.

⁶²⁰ From this he concluded that Christianity could never be established in China. Montesquieu, *The Spirit of the Laws*, 318-319. Montesquieu, *De l’esprit des lois*, 105-106.

Adam Smith also viewed the Manchu Conquest as a result of the prominence of commerce, though not of “arts and sciences”. In his Lectures on Jurisprudence, he made a general argument about the “universal experience” of minds being enervated by “cultivating arts and commerce”.⁶²¹ He posed this as an explanation for global events as diverse as the Scots taking possession of parts of England in 1745, the European penetration of India, and the Manchu’s defeat of China. These instances demonstrated the “disadvantages of a commercial spirit.” In the *Wealth of Nations*, Smith described how a rich state is more likely to be attacked, and “unless the state takes some new measures for the public defence, the natural habits of the people render them altogether incapable of defending themselves”.⁶²² The government must either mandate regular military drills for its populace or establish a standing army in order to effectively defend itself. China’s failures on this front and the lessons they offered were nearly unanimously recognized. Enlightenment thinkers, therefore, established a connection between wealth, civilization, and learning with weakness, unless the state focused on their military, something that was evidently not a priority to the Chinese government.

By the end of the eighteenth century, the French Jesuit Jean-Joseph Marie Amiot had translated Sun Tzu’s *The Art of War*, as well as added a great deal to the European understanding of China’s military.⁶²³ However, these developments were not sufficient to overturn the predominant view of China’s military weakness, which became even more pronounced in the early nineteenth century. The focus on quality over quantity became key to dismissing the potential of the Chinese Empire and the accomplishments of its government. Although explanations (geographic, cultural and socio-economic) varied, both European observers and commentators were in agreement about the failure of the Chinese government to defend its people and wealth. To Enlightenment philosophers, it became an example through which to analyse the implications of state priorities and the potential trade-offs between various government agendas. In spite of the positive assessments in other categories of administration, it was only a few utopian admirers of peace (notably Raynal) who saw the potential for the Chinese government to progress without military strength. The place of military should not be underestimated in answering the central question of this thesis: it is evident that military

⁶²¹ Smith, *Wealth of Nations*, 541.

⁶²² *Ibid.*, 698.

⁶²³ For more on this topic see Waley-Cohen, *The Sextants of Beijing*.

weakness and consequent defensive vulnerability was a critically important area through which Enlightenment thinkers dismissed China's model of political economy.

6.2. EXPENSE OF JUSTICE

According to Smith, the second duty of the sovereign was the protection of members of society by establishing "an exact administration of justice".⁶²⁴ Interest in this theme can be divided into two areas, namely protecting the integrity of the justice system (reducing corruption) and securing property rights. The discussion of the structural checks and balances in chapter five reflect views of the precautions in the Chinese system designed to fight against corruption thus this section will focus on the second topic raised by Smith, the nature of property rights. Enlightenment sources contain relatively little information and discussion of Chinese property rights, most probably due to the incommensurability of European and Chinese conceptions of property rights.

EUROPEAN CONTEXT

Property rights in early modern Europe varied dramatically, but both France and England prioritized their reform. In England, the fiscal crises of the seventeenth century and subsequent insecurity of property due to the threat of expropriation by the monarch led to a rejection of absolutism and focus on securing property rights.⁶²⁵ The Inclosure Acts of the mid-eighteenth century accelerated the privatization of property by enclosing open fields and commons, but by this time, individual property was already secured from seizure by the monarch. In France, the complex legal system led to mass confusion about property rights. Most French villages had communal property over which individual landowners, the community and the seigneur had conflicting rights. Judicial reform under Louis XIV revised the criminal code, appeal system and limited

⁶²⁴ Smith, *Wealth of Nations*, 708.

⁶²⁵ There is a debate between economic historians about the timing of secure property rights. Douglas North and Barry Weingast attribute property rights to the Glorious Revolution, whereas Gregory Clark argues property rights existed at least in 1600 and perhaps before that even under autocratic and dictatorial regimes. See Douglas C. North and Barry R. Weingast, "Constitutions and Commitment: The Evolution of Institutional Governing Public Choice in seventeenth-century England", *The Journal of Economic History*, 49: 4 (December 1989), 803-832. Gregory Clark, "The Political Foundations of Modern Economic Growth: England, 1540-1800", *Journal of interdisciplinary History*, 26:4 (Spring 1996), 563-588.

judicial abuses but could not resolve the complex issue of property. The inherent contradiction of law, customary rights and feudal privileges led to endless lawsuits.⁶²⁶

Early modern European philosophers addressed the topics of justice, property rights, and natural law in relation to each other. Thomas Horne has pointed out that two developments in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries made the philosophical analysis of property an imperative: the voyages of discovery (leading to questions about ownership of newly discovered lands and rights over oceans) and the struggle between absolutist rulers and representative institutions.⁶²⁷ As we saw in chapter five, security of property was a key component identifying an absolute or despotic government. Property rights were also essential in discussions of economic growth. At the root of discussions of property rights was the question of their origin. There was disagreement over whether they originated in nature or whether they were a result of a social contract. For instance, Thomas Hobbes argued that rights of property stemmed from the consent of societies that relied on a powerful central figure for protection. In his view this led to a defence of absolutism. Since property rights were a creation of the state, only a sovereign could grant them. Thus for Hobbes, property rights were secured by civil law. Others, such as Samuel Pufendorf, argued that individual property was established in natural law (though he made room for the importance of property in civil law).⁶²⁸ By the eighteenth century, theories of property rights continued to be closely related to political and economic circumstances, especially relative to the distribution of property, or inequality. The idea of property rights stemming from nature was never very popular in England throughout the eighteenth century as the majority of land was held by the government and great landlords who themselves did not work on the land.⁶²⁹ In France, Montesquieu and Rousseau also did not believe property was a natural right. However, the Physiocrats, consumed as they were by natural law, argued property was a natural right. Thus views of Chinese property rights were highly dependant on these conflicting theories.

⁶²⁶ See James B. Collins *The State in early modern France* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009) 114.

⁶²⁷ Thomas A. Horne, *Property Rights and Poverty: Political Argument in Britain, 1605-1834* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 1990), 9. Horne describes the relationship between the intellectual history of property rights and changing agendas of political economy (such as mercantilism, representative institutions and economic growth) in Britain from the seventeenth to early nineteenth century.

⁶²⁸ Horne, *Property Rights*, 33.

⁶²⁹ Richard Schlatter, *Private Property: The History of an Idea* (London: George Allen and Unwin Ltd., 1951), 162

PRIMARY DESCRIPTIONS

The primary sources on China reported little on the subject of security of property rights, reflecting fundamental conceptual differences between China and Europe. The modest amount of information received about the status of property in China often occurred in passing remarks. For instance, when discussing the power of the Chinese emperor, Le Comte noted that “every one be perfect master of his estate, and enjoys his lands free from disturbance and molestation.” However, he added that the Emperor could lay any amount of taxes he chose depending on the necessities of the state.⁶³⁰ Du Halde described how civil cases “which merely regard private property, are determin’d by the great officers of the provinces,” indicating court cases about property rights were fairly common. An interesting addition on this subject is found in the second English translation of Du Halde, published by Edward Cave in 1738. While the original French and Watts edition of 1736 both described how everyone in China had the right to be judged by a court tribunal, the Cave edition added a footnote about the implications of this piece of information.⁶³¹ As discussed in chapter two, a likely editor of this edition was John Green. He added the comment “Such is the monarchy of China: where, the people are more free, from being in the most profound subjection; and where, the most despotic power in the prince is reconciled, with the most perfect liberty and property of the subject. A paradox not to be solved on this side of the globe.” Green used the discussion of court tribunals as an opportunity to proclaim China as moderate monarchy with secured property. Du Halde himself does not comment on the security of property. In fact, few seventeenth and eighteenth century primary descriptions concerned themselves with this subject. One possible reason for this paucity of information was China’s unique history and particularly its lack of feudal roots. Furthermore, the Jesuits had access to Confucian insights on governmental practices, but there was not the same style of discourse on property rights in the Confucian works as was present in European philosophical circles.

China endured similar struggles to Britain and France in reforming their property rights, but did not articulate them in a comparable way to the Europeans. It is beyond the scope of this chapter to discuss the recent scholarship on property rights and contract law in early modern China, but it is important to point out that there was information that the

⁶³⁰ Le Comte, *Memoirs and observations*, 248. Le Comte, *Nouveaux mémoires*, Vol. 2, 11.

⁶³¹ Du Halde, Cave edition, Vol. 1, 313; Watts edition, Vol. 2, 234; French edition, Vol. 2, 161.

missionaries might have drawn on in their reports back to Europe about China. Anne Osborne argues the changes occurring from the mid-seventeenth century through the eighteenth century “made the determination of rights to property an urgent matter” in China.⁶³² Indeed, the Manchu Conquest was responsible for leaving vast stretches of productive land uncultivated, and the eighteenth century push to settle new frontier lands increased the need for understanding property rights. As Thomas Buoye points out, China’s population more than doubled in the eighteenth century creating new pressures on land that often resulted in either legal disputes or violence.⁶³³ The policy of the Chinese emperors changed over time. Jonathan Ocko describes the different approaches of various emperors: “they broke up large landholdings, required partible inheritance, ordered regular redistribution of land, and implanted cadastral surveys to ensure that all land under cultivation was also susceptible to taxation”.⁶³⁴ In spite of this evident concern on behalf of the Chinese government, “no land law of the sort that we find in Europe ever developed”, nor did any argument similar to Locke’s articulation of private property and liberty arise. Further, “though contracts were an integral part of daily life, a law of contract did not arise”.⁶³⁵ These historians argue that although a rights-based discourse did not exist in China, this did not reflect the absence of rights.

Fortunately for curious philosophers, Pierre Poivre travelled to China. Poivre dedicated nearly the entire section on China in his *Voyage d’un Philosophe* (1768) to its agriculture and fiscal policies. Property rights along with simplified taxation structure were key pillars of a successful agricultural system, thus Poivre made considerable observations on these topics. There is no doubt of the high esteem with which Poivre held agriculture, its relationship to security of person and property, and its impact on the general wealth of the empire. For instance, when describing the success of Protestants who fled to the Cape of Good Hope, Poivre commented that they found “security, property and liberty with it, which are the sole real encouragers of agriculture, the sole principles of plenty”.⁶³⁶ The Chinese government was praised because it did not neglect

⁶³² Anne Osborne, “Property, Taxes and State Protection of Rights” in Madeleine Zelin, Jonathan K. Ocko and Robert Gardella (eds.) *Contract and Property in Early Modern China* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2004), 120.

⁶³³ Thomas Buoye “Litigation, Legitimacy and Lethal Violence: Why country courts failed to prevent violent disputes over property in eighteenth-century China” in Zelin et. al. (eds.) *Contract and Property in Early Modern China*, 95.

⁶³⁴ Jonathan Ocko, “The Missing Metaphor: Applying Western Legal Scholarship to the Study of Contract and Property in Early Modern China” in Zelin et. al. (eds.) *Contract and Property in Early Modern China*, 179.

⁶³⁵ *Ibid.*

⁶³⁶ Poivre, *The travels of a philosopher*, 10. Poivre, *Voyages d’un philosophe*, 12.

“to secure to the labourers that liberty, property, and indulgence which are the great springs for the improvement of agriculture.”⁶³⁷ He described how the Chinese “quietly enjoy their private possessions” as well as those that are indivisible by their nature (such as canals). According to Poivre those who bought a field or received it by inheritance become the “lord and master” of that land.

The lands are as free as the people; no feudal services, and no fines of alienation; none of those men interested in the misfortunes of the public; none of those farmers who never amass more exorbitant fortunes...none of that destructive possession, brought forth in the delirium of the feudal system, under whose auspices thousands of processes arise, which drag the labourer from his plough into the dark and perilous mazes of chicane, and thereby rob him, while protecting his rights, of that time which would have been usefully employed in the general service of the human race.⁶³⁸

In a later section, Poivre compared the agriculture of Africa and the rest of Asia to that of China. He pointed to Malabar “without property subjected to the tyrannical government of the Moguls”, Siam “under the cruel sceptre of the despot”, and the Malais “fettered by their feudal laws”, where the land may be fertile but the laws crushing to the pursuit of agriculture.⁶³⁹ Poivre clearly believed that liberty and the right of property were tied to successful cultivation, and lauded the absence of feudalism in China. He concluded his book by imploring kings to follow the example of China, who cultivated every part of their land, and who because of their “liberty, [and] their unmolested right of property” established a flourishing agricultural empire.⁶⁴⁰ In line with the tone and style of his book, Poivre did not cite direct evidence or examples supporting his claim of the security of property in China. He did, however, relate what he saw to be the most convincing evidence for China’s agricultural success: there was no other way that China could support such a large population without a flourishing agriculture; indeed, a flourishing agriculture could only exist under the right conditions of governance and law, which for Poivre included private property. Though he did spend time in China, he ultimately relied on his theoretical beliefs in order to support the notion that China had secure property rights, thus earning his title as a philosopher.

⁶³⁷ Poivre, *The travels of a philosopher*, 161. Poivre, *Voyages d’un philosophe*, 129.

⁶³⁸ Poivre, *The travels of a philosopher*, 162. Poivre, *Voyages d’un philosophe*, 129-130.

⁶³⁹ Poivre, *The travels of a philosopher*, 166. Poivre, *Voyages d’un philosophe*, 133.

⁶⁴⁰ Poivre, *The travels of a philosopher*, 173. Poivre, *Voyages d’un philosophe*, 137.

RECEPTION

Just as revealing as discussions of Chinese property rights was the absence of mention of Chinese property rights. Montesquieu avoided the subject of Chinese property rights altogether likely because the information available did not fit his model. When he referred to the connection between despotism and weak property rights directly, he used the examples of Turkey and Bantam.⁶⁴¹ His views on property rights in Europe were complicated, as his noble background led him to support certain feudal privileges. He argued that laws were more complicated in a monarchy, and referred to differences in rules of property established by hereditary rights.⁶⁴² China was not an ideal model of despotism in Montesquieu's system.

The reports of the primary observers were sufficient to reflect an image of a non-feudal property regime in China. For instance, in 1727 Thomas Salmon reported that in China "Every subject has an estate of inheritance in his lands, and does not hold them of any superior Lord; yet the Emperor may levy what taxes he sees fit".⁶⁴³ In his 1756, several years before Poivre's public lecture, Voltaire argued that under a despotic government the prince could, "consistently with law, strip a private citizen of his property, or life, without form of justice, or any other reason than his will. Now, if ever there was a government, where the life, honour, and estate of the subject are secured, it is that of China".⁶⁴⁴ Voltaire tied the security of property directly to the debate about despotism.

Most philosophical discussions on China's property rights focused on the desirability of the Chinese agricultural system. The Physiocrats believed that China's prioritization of agriculture, and the consequent security of property rights, could and should be replicated in Europe. In contrast to many philosophers, notably Montesquieu and Rousseau, the Physiocrats argued that property was the basis of freedom and stemmed from natural law. Relying extensively on Poivre, Quesnay's *Despotisme de la Chine* extolled the security of property in the Chinese Empire.⁶⁴⁵ Explaining why a Chinese peasant was content with his rice and tea in the evening after toiling in the fields all day, Quesnay pointed to the fact that the peasant "has his liberty and property assured; there is no chance of his being despoiled by arbitrary impositions...Men are very

⁶⁴¹ Montesquieu, *The Spirit of the Laws*, 61-62. Montesquieu, *De l'esprit des lois*, Première partie, 80-81.

⁶⁴² Montesquieu, *The Spirit of the Laws*, 72-73. Montesquieu, *De l'esprit des lois*, Première partie, 90-92.

⁶⁴³ Salmon, *Modern History*, Vol.1, 34.

⁶⁴⁴ Voltaire, *An essay on universal history*, Vol. 3, 324. *Essai sur les moeurs*, 600.

⁶⁴⁵ Maverick, *China, A Model for Europe*, 44.

hardworking, wherever they are assured the benefits of their labor”.⁶⁴⁶ In a section entitled “Ownership of Property,⁶⁴⁷” he added, “The ownership of wealth is quite secure in China” and the right of property “is extended even to slaves or bonded domestics”.⁶⁴⁸ To Quesnay, these observations exemplified “the extent of the right of inheritance and the security of the right of property in this empire”.⁶⁴⁹ Quesnay’s agenda called the prioritization of a land-based economy over commerce or manufacturing. Once again, China served Quesnay’s agenda of promoting his agricultural model of political economy.

Raynal also relied on Poivre’s assessment of Chinese agriculture and property rights. In discussing Chinese agriculture, he referred to “A philosopher, whom the spirit of observation has led into their empire, has found out and explained the causes of the rural oeconomy of the Chinese”.⁶⁵⁰ He argued the sea, rivers and canals were all common property but “a subject who is in possession of an estate, whether acquired by himself or left by his relations, is in no danger of having his right called in question by the tyrannical authority of the feudal laws.”⁶⁵¹

In the *Wealth of Nations*, Smith distinguished between natural rights (such as personal liberty and protection of one’s body) and acquired rights, which included property. In this respect, he moved away from the argument supported by the Physiocrats that placed property amongst natural rights. In describing the evolution of civilization from hunters and gathers in his lectures on jurisprudence, Smith noted “Till there be property there can be no government, the very end of which is to secure wealth, and to defend the rich from the poor.”⁶⁵² The intimate relationship between property and government was evidently important in Smith’s model. Like Quesnay, Smith relied on Poivre for his discussion of Chinese property rights, which he again directly connected to its

⁶⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, 170. Quesnay, *Despotisme de la Chine*, 580. It is highly likely Quesnay received this impression of Chinese property from Poivre as neither *Mélanges intéressans*, or the French edition of Du Halde made this claim.

⁶⁴⁷ The original French title was “La propriété des biens” but Maverick translated this as the “ownership of wealth”. Maverick, *China, a Model for Europe*, 203. Quesnay, *Despotisme de la Chine*, 599.

⁶⁴⁸ *Ibid.*

⁶⁴⁹ Maverick, *China, A Model for Europe*, 204. Quesnay, *Despotisme de la Chine*, 600.

⁶⁵⁰ Raynal, Justamond edition, vol. 1, 89. French edition, 105. The line directly referencing the “philosopher” was present only in 1774 edition. The 1770 edition made the same argument that China had the best agriculture in the world. See Raynal, *Histoire des deux Indes*, 632.

⁶⁵¹ This line was also found in the 1774 edition. Raynal removed the line arguing there was no servitude in China because of the criticism of Cornelius de Pauw, *Recherches philosophiques*, Vol. 1, vii. Raynal, *Histoire des deux Indes*, 106.

⁶⁵² Smith, *Lectures On Jurisprudence*, 404.

agricultural system. He followed Poivre in arguing that “[i]n China, the great ambition of every man is to get possession of some little bit of land, either in property or in lease; and leases are there said to be granted upon very moderate terms, and to be sufficiently secured to the lessees.”⁶⁵³ However, elsewhere Smith alludes to the lack of security of the property of the poorer classes because of corruption. Without acknowledging a direct source, he could have relied on numerous Jesuit and non-Jesuit primary descriptions of Chinese corruption. Smith argued the insecurity of the lower class hindered Chinese growth:

In a country too, where, though the rich or the owners of large capitals enjoy a good deal of security, the poor or the owners of small capitals enjoy scarce any, but are liable, under the pretence of justice, to be pillaged and plundered at any time by the inferior mandarines, the quantity of stock employed in all the different branches of business transacted within it, can never be equal to what the nature and extent of that business might admit. In every different branch, the oppression of the poor must establish the monopoly of the rich, who, by engrossing the whole trade to themselves, will be able to make very large profits.

Whether at the hands of the sovereign or inferior mandarins, unjust expropriation was detrimental to the system.

Views of the security of Chinese property rights were limited by a lack of empirical evidence. Most of the few primary descriptions dealing with this topic only offered vague generalizations. While observers of China could assess the military from the numbers found in Chinese books, or from the outcome of the Manchu conquest, or report on the canal systems from their interior travels, they did not have the same ability to understand Chinese property rights. One explanation is the lack of discourse on property rights among the Chinese literati. Geographers and philosophers did not have much information to debate or evaluate and thus were relatively superficial in their analysis. Though knowledge of Chinese corruption led to questions about the security of property rights the area was still insufficient to dismiss the Chinese model of political economy, as not enough information was garnered on the ways in which rights were threatened, secured or enforced. However, Smith’s comment about the existence of corruption in China was a notable and significant flaw in his view of the Chinese system.

⁶⁵³ Smith, *Wealth of Nations*, 680.

6.3. COMMERCIAL INSTITUTIONS

Smith's third expense and duty of government was "that of erecting and maintaining those public institutions and those public works" that are advantageous to society but do not offer enough profit to induce private agents.⁶⁵⁴ Smith divided this duty into two main parts: the first involved facilitating and promoting commerce; and the second was education. Education will be addressed in chapter seven, as it related closely to the development (or lack thereof) of science and technology in China. The subject of facilitating and promoting domestic commerce is treated briefly in this section, because there was general agreement amongst sources that the Chinese government was extremely efficient in undertaking this responsibility. The only question to be answered was why this was so.

EUROPEAN CONTEXT

In early modern England, a national canal system emerged in the eighteenth century, highlighted by the completion of the Bridgewater canal in 1760. These canals were created at the impulse of landlords wanting to extend the market of their estates, the owners of family businesses, farmers needing supplies and a rising demand for coal. Landlords used their clout to influence parliament, which ultimately passed numerous ordinances supporting these projects. Several sources were responsible for the financing of these canals including capital derived from rents, income borrowed from friends, and increasingly joint stock enterprises, where most of the capital was raised in the locality that the project was designed to serve.⁶⁵⁵ The administration of roads in England used to be assigned to *ad hoc* local public bodies, however in the eighteenth century, the maintenance costs were transferred to the users of the roads through the formation of turnpike trusts, meaning tolls were paid to use the roads.⁶⁵⁶ This model was so successful that in a few generations, England had a national road network established. Ashton notes that the English parliament occasionally contributed to works of public utility, such as giving money to rebuild London Bridge in 1757. However, "generally its

⁶⁵⁴ Smith, *Wealth of Nations*, 916.

⁶⁵⁵ T.S. Ashton *An Economic History of England: The Eighteenth Century* (Oxon: Routledge, 2006 [1955]), 74.

⁶⁵⁶ Ashton, *An Economic History*, 80.

functions were to regulate than to initiate”.⁶⁵⁷ Thus infrastructure development in England was encouraged by private profit.

In late seventeenth century France, the internal minister Colbert centralized the responsibility for the maintenance of roads. The project was relatively successful but after Colbert died, the central control was relaxed until a reorganization of budget and training occurred in the 1740s. While these changes significantly improved passenger traffic, the movement of freight was still lethargic, something Adam Smith commented on.⁶⁵⁸ France had a large-scale canal project long before the canal era began in England. In 1681 the Canal du Midi, which connected the Atlantic to the Mediterranean was completed. It was a project requiring great funds, engineering and innovation. The work began as an initiative by an estate owner, Pierre Paul Riquet, who dreamt of an efficient way to market his produce. Riquet received support from Colbert and about half of the funds for the project were derived from the central government, the rest from the local estates and Riquet personally.⁶⁵⁹ However, the completion of this project did not initiate a canal age comparable to that which characterized the construction of the Bridgewater canal in England. While England transported its goods on the water and on roads at a ratio of 50:50, France’s ratio was 1:10.⁶⁶⁰

PRIMARY DESCRIPTIONS

Primary sources were largely in agreement about China’s infrastructure. Le Comte reported China’s centralized emphasis on infrastructure maintenance, noting that for governors ensuring the quality of the roads “concerns their fortunes but sometimes their life.”⁶⁶¹ He told a story about a village of the third rank in the province of Shanxi, where the governor had just hung himself in despair as he did not have enough time to repair a road that the Emperor was going to travel on. Du Halde and most other observers also noted the ease with which one could travel on the main roads of China as they were well kept, safe and had regular lodges along the major routes.⁶⁶² The most praise was given to Chinese canals. Primary sources from missionaries to emissaries described the

⁶⁵⁷ *Ibid.*, 83

⁶⁵⁸ Tim Blanning, *The Pursuit of Glory: Europe 1648-1815* (London: Penguin Books, 2008), 8; Chandra Mukerji, *Impossible Engineering: Technology and Territoriality on the Canal du Midi* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2009).

⁶⁵⁹ Blanning, *The Pursuit of Glory*, 25. Mukerji, *Impossible Engineering*, 85-86.

⁶⁶⁰ Blanning, *The Pursuit of Glory*, 23.

⁶⁶¹ Le Comte, *Memoirs and observations*, 307. Le Comte, *Nouveaux mémoires*, Vol. 2, 99.

⁶⁶² Du Halde, Cave edition, Vol. 1, 265; Watts edition, Vol. 2, 87; French edition, Vol. 2, 51.

beneficial canals throughout the empire.⁶⁶³ Du Halde reported “The Chinese not contented with these canals, which are of infinite conveniency for travellers and trading people, have dug many others with admirable industry and art for the reception of rain to water the fields of rice”.⁶⁶⁴ The Grand Canal epitomised the relationship between public works and the Chinese economy.

Poivre related his amazement at the extensive canals in China that allowed for the transportation of goods “with great ease, and small expence”.⁶⁶⁵ However, the philosopher-traveller was less impressed by their public roads, which he compared to European footpaths. Yet this was not deemed a problem because canals are more useful, because as Poivre argued, “there is no comparison between the weight which can be transported in a boat, and that which can be conveyed by any kind of land-carriage; no proportion between expense”.⁶⁶⁶ An even greater benefit was that the canals were public and thus not controlled for the benefit of a few.⁶⁶⁷

RECEPTION

This topic was not controversial as geographers repeatedly asserted, and philosophers agreed, that the Chinese had well-maintained public infrastructure. For instance, Salmon’s *Modern History* compared Chinese highways to Roman roads as they ran from one end of the kingdom to the other.⁶⁶⁸ He noted the public paid for the military to guard the roads for security and the emperor encouraged the maintenance of the roads by the constant prospect of his visitation to all the provinces. Salmon also described the Grand Canal in each province that served as a high road with smaller canals cut from it concluding, “Europe we are assured has nothing to boast of comparable to this.”⁶⁶⁹ The Grand Canal, he reported, ran from Canton to Peking making it 1200 miles long (with one day’s interruption from a mountain). To compare, the innovative Canal du Midi was 150 miles long. However, Salmon did claim their technology was not as advanced as that of Europe, as they did not have the use of floodgates. The canals were so widely discussed that William Guthrie’s brief description of China contained a section entitled

⁶⁶³ Nieuhof, *An embassy from the East-India Company*, 182. Anson did not describe the interior canals as he did not travel around China, and only remained in Canton.

⁶⁶⁴ Du Halde, Cave edition, Vol. 1, 325; Watts edition, Vol. 2, 272; French edition, Vol. 2, 156.

⁶⁶⁵ Poivre, *The travels of a philosopher*, 141. Poivre, *Voyages d’un philosophe*, 113-114.

⁶⁶⁶ Poivre, *The travels of a philosopher*, 142. Poivre, *Voyages d’un philosophe*, 114-115.

⁶⁶⁷ Poivre, *The travels of a philosopher*, 161. Poivre, *Voyages d’un philosophe*, 129.

⁶⁶⁸ Salmon, *Modern History*, 14.

⁶⁶⁹ *Ibid.*, 5.

'Canals'. He claimed these canals "are sufficient to entitle the antient Chinese of the character of being the wisest and most industrious people in the world."⁶⁷⁰

Montesquieu did not address the Chinese canals, which is not surprising given his focus in the *L'Esprit des Loix* and his less practically minded discussion of economic prospects. Other philosophers praised the ease of transportation in China. Most complimented China's canals over their roads. For instance, both Quesnay and Raynal offered praise for the ease of trafficking goods in China because of their navigable canals.⁶⁷¹ Raynal expressed an Enlightenment thought of man conquering nature in his praise of Chinese industry. "As the Egyptians checked the course of the Nile...To the movements of the globe, the Chinese oppose the efforts of industry."⁶⁷² In the 1770 edition of *Histoire des deux Indes*, Raynal praised "the beauty of the roads, and the amount of canals."⁶⁷³ However in the 1774 edition, he removed the line about "the beauty of the roads" and only left in the praise for the amount of canals.⁶⁷⁴ It is likely that Raynal received some criticism from the readers of his first edition for his praise of Chinese roads, and thus removed it, but maintained the information about the canals because that was widely held to be true.

Scepticism about the quality of China's public works increased in Smith's *Wealth of Nations*. After addressing the advantage to private interest controlling highways and canals, he was particularly interested in the case of China's public works. Smith noted that provincial governors are judged according to how well they have maintained such works. Though he believed this was the practice in several governments of Asia, it was particularly so in China "where the high roads, and still more that navigable canals, it is pretended, exceed very much every thing of the same kind which is known in Europe".⁶⁷⁵ Smith claimed to doubt the veracity of the information provided by "weak and wondering travelers" and "stupid and lying missionaries" and noted that Bernier's reports on Indostan reflect how such descriptions have been exaggerated before. He hypothesized that China, like France, maintained the canals and roads that were "likely to be the subject of conversation at the court and in the capital", while "all the rest

⁶⁷⁰ Guthrie, *A new geographical, historical, and commercial grammar*, 464

⁶⁷¹ Maverick, *China, a model for Europe*, 223-224. Quesnay, *Despotisme de la Chine*, 612-613; Rousselot de Surgy, *Mélanges*, Vol. 5, 227-8.

⁶⁷² Raynal, *A philosophical and political history*, 88. Raynal, *Histoire des deux Indes*, 104. He also noted the canals were public property.

⁶⁷³ Raynal, *Histoire des deux Indes*, 631.

⁶⁷⁴ *Ibid.*, 103.

⁶⁷⁵ Smith, *Wealth of Nations*, 925.

neglected.”⁶⁷⁶ Nevertheless, he felt it necessary to describe why the Chinese government would have the incentive to invest in public works. Smith connected the nature of China’s agricultural system, to taxation and subsequently to public works. It was “natural” for Chinese emperors to support agriculture as their yearly revenue depended on it. Because the revenue was collected from the land, the executive power had the incentive to maintain the high roads and the navigable canals in order to facilitate the marketing of produce. In China, Indostan and several other governments of Asia, the revenue was gathered from land taxes or rents, which

rises or falls with the rise and fall of the annual produce of the land...The great interest of the sovereign, therefore, his revenue, is in such countries necessarily and immediately connected with the cultivation of the land, with the greatness of its produce, and with the value of its produce. But in order to render that produce both as great and as valuable as possible, it is necessary to procure to it as extensive a market as possible, and consequently to establish the freest, the easiest, and the least expensive communication between all the different parts of the country; which can be done only by means of the best roads and the best navigable canals.

This was contrasted to Europe, where the revenue of the sovereign is not primarily from land tax or rent, and the dependency on the land was “neither so immediate, nor so evident.” The European sovereign had little interest in promoting and increasing the produce of the land and maintaining good roads and canals to help market produce. Smith described how it was the church in Europe that, like the Chinese government, was supported by a land tax proportioned to the produce of the land, not to the rent. However, because the tithe of the Church in Europe was divided into such small portions, it did not have the same interest as the Chinese state for maintaining good roads and canals. He concluded that while it might be true that in some parts of Asia “this department of the public police is very properly managed by the executive power, there is not the least probability that, during the present state of things, it could be tolerably managed by that power in any part of Europe.”⁶⁷⁷ Once again, the Chinese case was deemed unique. Most observers and commentators agreed that China had a well-developed public infrastructure, particularly with regard to its canal system, but again this was a result of its land-based economy from which Europe could not draw any lessons.

⁶⁷⁶ *Ibid.*, 926.

⁶⁷⁷ *Ibid.*

6.4. TAXES

Adam Smith carefully considered from where the funds for the main expenses of government should be derived. He argued that the funds for defence and for the subsistence of the sovereign should come from the general revenue, whereas those for justice should arise from fees and those for infrastructure should be based on the local beneficiaries of a project (as often occurred in the join-stock ventures in England); the funds for roads and education could be derived either from the general revenue or from local budgets or tolls. These concerns led Smith to the second chapter of his fifth book, the “sources of the general or public revenue of the society”. These funds were divided into those that belong to the sovereign (or commonwealth) - primarily revenue from land - and those that derived from taxes (on rent, profit or wages). These taxes, he argued, should be proportional, certain, convenient and efficiently collected.⁶⁷⁸ This topic was of the utmost importance, for without sufficient revenues and their proper management (or, avoiding corruption), the aforementioned duties of government could not be fulfilled. Enlightenment observers and commentators of China addressed two main subjects regarding Chinese taxation. The first regarded the scale and the second the specific policies of extraction.

EUROPEAN CONTEXT

The appeal of the Chinese system stemmed from the dramatically contrasting situation in France and England. After the Glorious Revolution in 1688, the English government’s options for raising money were limited to levying taxes and raising voluntary loans (selling state or crown lands, or offices were no longer feasible solutions). John Brewer reports the average annual tax revenue during the Nine Years’ War (1688-97) was 3.64 million pounds (double the state’s tax income before the Glorious Revolution).⁶⁷⁹ By 1775 the total net tax income was over 12 million pounds per annum, and reached just less than 20 million pounds by the end of the eighteenth century.⁶⁸⁰ However, tax collection during the end of the Restoration in England “lacked administrative coherence”.⁶⁸¹ It was divided into four different bodies (local government, employees of tax farmers, parliamentary commissioners, and royal

⁶⁷⁸ *Ibid.*, 1042-1046.

⁶⁷⁹ Brewer, *Sinews of Power*, 88.

⁶⁸⁰ *Ibid.*, 89.

⁶⁸¹ *Ibid.*, 91.

officials). This variation led to problems with tax collection. By the Glorious Revolution, there were reforms that brought this system into greater order, such as the establishment of the Treasury Board to oversee state revenues and expenditure. The chief taxes that contributed to the regular income in the late seventeenth century were: the customs (taxes on international trade); the excise (duties on domestically produced commodities such as alcohol); and the hearth tax (graduated property tax based on number of household hearths).⁶⁸² The collection was the responsibility of private business – tax farmers – who, not coincidentally, were also government creditors. By 1684, they shifted from tax farming to direct collection. After the Glorious Revolution, the unpopular hearth tax, the customs, excise and land tax provided about 90% of state's revenue.⁶⁸³

French philosophers-cum-administrators showed a great deal of interest in the Chinese tax system for reasons of their own. At the time, the French monarchy determined tax rates on a local basis all over the country, creating a fragmented taxation system.⁶⁸⁴ After the French famine in 1693, Louis XIV implemented the *capitation*, the first direct tax to all subjects. In 1710, the War of Spanish Succession led to another universal tax, the *dixième*. However tax collection was still uneven and abused. The process of tax collection was privatized and led to intense corruption. The historic influence of privilege continued and many nobles and clergymen did not pay the *taille*, a direct tax, which largely fell on the peasantry. It also varied greatly across regions. The French state inefficiently extracted more revenues from its populace as its national debt continued to rise.⁶⁸⁵

PRIMARY DESCRIPTIONS

As noted in previous chapters, China's sizeable population was widely recognized and considered to be a unique feature of the empire. Before the rise of Malthusian concerns, population size was typically associated with national wealth. Navarrete cited Proverbs 14:28 when he discussed China's population: "In the multitude of the people is the

⁶⁸² *Ibid.*, 92.

⁶⁸³ *Ibid.*, 95.

⁶⁸⁴ For more on French fiscal policy see Michael Kwass, *Privileges and the Politics of Taxation in Eighteenth Century France* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000).

⁶⁸⁵ See Phillippe Hoffman and Kathryn Norberg *Fiscal Crises, Liberty, and Representative Government, 1450–1789* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1994).

honour of the king.”⁶⁸⁶ A large population demonstrated the ability of the country to feed a large number of people, thereby attesting to a successful agricultural system, and also meant that the government could collect revenue from a substantial tax base.

Specific information on the size of China’s population was popularized in Europe in the sixteenth century through Mendoza who estimated that there were over 35 million taxpayers in the empire.⁶⁸⁷ Throughout the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries (before and after the Manchu Conquest), Jesuits and emissaries reported on the number of China’s taxpaying men (excluding soldiers, eunuchs, women, children and those who do not pay taxes) within the range of 58 and 59 million men.⁶⁸⁸

However, some did reflect concerns of overpopulation in China. For instance, in between his descriptions of Chinese spices and trees, Du Halde argued “Notwithstanding this great plenty it is however true, though a kind of a paradox, that the most rich and flourishing empire in the world is in effect poor enough; for the land, though so very extensive and fruitful, hardly suffices to support its inhabitants.”⁶⁸⁹ Chinese poverty caused infanticide and the selling of children of slaves, leading Du Halde to speculate “that to live comfortably they have need of a country as large again”.⁶⁹⁰

In spite of the disagreements about the specific number of inhabitants of the empire, there was broad acceptance that China was extremely large. The actual population of China oscillated over the Ming dynasty and historians disagree on the total population. It is estimated that China’s population 1600 was 150 million.⁶⁹¹ Due to epidemics as

⁶⁸⁶ Churchill, *A collection of voyages and Travels*, Vol.1, 21.

⁶⁸⁷ Mendoza, *The History of the Great and Mighty Kingdom*, 80-81.

⁶⁸⁸ Ricci citing a Chinese book from 1579 listed the adult population subject to taxes as 58 550 801. Ricci and Trigault, *China in the Sixteenth Century*, 9; Semedo, listed 58 550 180 taxpayers. Semedo, *The history of that great and renowned monarchy of China*, 3; Nieuhof listed the sum of families is 10 128 067 and the sum of fighting men 58 916 783. Nieuhof, *An embassy from the East-India Company*, 404; Gabriel de Magalhães claimed there were 59 788 364. Magalhães, *A new history of China containing a description of the most considerable particulars of that vast empire* (London: Printed for Thomas Newborough, 1688), 40; Du Halde claimed 58 000 000 formerly paid the tribute but by the beginning of reign of Kangxi Emperor there were 11 052 872 families and 59 788 364 men able to bear arms. This was the same as Magalhães decades earlier though Du Halde did not cite it. Du Halde, Cave edition, Vol. 1, 244; Watts edition, Vol. 2, 20; French edition, Vol. 2, 14-15.

⁶⁸⁹ Du Halde, Cave, Vol. 1, 318; Watts edition, Vol. 2, 250; French edition, Vol. 2, 145.

⁶⁹⁰ Du Halde, Cave, Vol. 1, 318; Watts edition, Vol. 2, 250; French edition, Vol. 2, 145.

⁶⁹¹ Timothy Brook points out three different figures reached by three distinct approaches to determining China’s population in 1600: 66 million, 150 million and 230 million and argues it is most useful to follow China’s population as being 150 million. Timothy Brook, *The Troubled Empire: China in the Yuan and Ming Dynasties* (Harvard: Harvard University Press, 2010), 45.

well as the Manchu invasion, the population dropped by the beginning of the Qing dynasty before increasing dramatically in the eighteenth century, surpassing 300 million by the end of the century. In comparison, the population of England and Wales in 1650 was 5.6 million and by 1750 it had reached 6.1 million (7.4 million including Scotland).⁶⁹² Even France, which in the eighteenth century was the most heavily populated country in Europe and the third largest in the world (after China and India), was dwarfed by the Chinese figures. In 1650, France had an estimated population of 21 million and on by 1750 it reached 25 million.⁶⁹³ These comparisons were understood as early as the sixteenth century. Botero acknowledged the lack of certainty about China's population before estimating it at around 70 million.⁶⁹⁴ He directly compared China to Italy (with its population of nine million), Germany (with the Swiss Confederacy and Dutch Republic totalling 15 million) and England (with its much smaller population of three million), demonstrating the remarkable size of the Chinese Empire.⁶⁹⁵

To infer fiscal wealth from population size was a common leap at the time. Here too, the primary sources from the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries reported varying figures. Ricci claimed that the revenue from tax returns, impost and other tribute exceeded 150 million pounds a year.⁶⁹⁶ Navarrate added up the taxes on ploughed lands, the duties on silk and other clothes, the customs and tolls, the poll tax and the ground rent on houses to be worth 100 millions of fine silver.⁶⁹⁷ He discussed the varying figures, noting Ricci's claim as well as Martini's that the revenue amounted to 150 millions of silver. Later, Le Comte pointed out the difficulty in calculating the revenue of the empire as it is collected partially in specie, and partially in goods. Basing his assessments on the officers and their books, he estimated the treasury received about 22 million crowns of China (which the Portuguese referred to as taels).⁶⁹⁸ In addition to this sum received in specie, the treasury was also paid in rice, corn, salt, silks, cloths, varnish and other commodities that were estimated to be worth more than 50 million Chinese crowns. Le Comte concluded the ordinary revenues to equal 120 600 000

⁶⁹² Blanning, *The Pursuit of Glory*, 42-43.

⁶⁹³ *Ibid.*

⁶⁹⁴ Giovanni Botero, *Relations, of the most famous kingdoms*, 595. Botero *Delle Relationi Universali*, Parte Seconda, 64-65.

⁶⁹⁵ *Ibid.*

⁶⁹⁶ Ricci and Trigault, *China in the Sixteenth Century*, 46.

⁶⁹⁷ Churchill, *A Collection of Voyages and Travels*, Vol. 1, 25.

⁶⁹⁸ In 1642, the largest year of their silver collection in revenue, the Ming government collected 23 Million taels of silver. Richard von Glahn, "Comment on Arbitrage, China, and World Trade in the Early Modern Period", *Journal of the Economic and Social History of the Orient* 39:3 (1996), 365-67.

pounds, “at least”, thus dropping his figure below Ricci.⁶⁹⁹ By the eighteenth century an exact figure that could be reported was still absent. Du Halde also noted that it was not easy to give account of great revenues because they were paid partly in money and partly in commodities.⁷⁰⁰ He described the personal tribute paid by those between the ages of twenty and sixty and offered an account of the payment in kind received by the emperor (in goods such as rice, wheat and salt). He concluded that the entire revenue of the emperor was equal to 200 million taels or ounces of silver.⁷⁰¹

It was not just the scale of China’s tax revenue that was discussed but also particular policies of taxation and collection, and the institutions that determined spending.⁷⁰² As information increased, explanations as to how easily the taxes were collected began to circulate. The Chinese government was deemed to have a just tax policy and this contributed to the ease with which taxes were collected. Mendoza argued that the rate of Chinese taxation was lower than in Europe: “Although this kingdom is great and very rich, yet there is none that both pay so little tribute ordinarily unto their kings as they do: neither amongst Christians, Moores, nor gentiles that we know.”⁷⁰³ The image of a reasonable tax level continued into the seventeenth century. Navarrete provided insight into the Chinese philosophy behind taxation. He cited Emperor T’ai Tsung from the Tang Dynasty, who argued:

It is but reasonable to lay a burden upon him that has strength to bear it; but it is a madness to place the weight upon him that is not able to carry himself. The Chinese oblige all persons, from two and twenty to sixty years of age, to pay taxes, supposing they are not able to bear that burden either before or after... To take a morsel of bread from him that has but two to feed four mouths, is not sheering, but devouring the sheep and what good can it do the sovereign but breed ill blood”.⁷⁰⁴

While Navarrete claimed the taxes in China were light and proportional, he did comment the mandarins abused their power and stole from the subjects.⁷⁰⁵ Corruption was indicated as a problem, which Smith eventually picked up on.

⁶⁹⁹ Le Comte, *Memoirs and observations*, 249. Le Comte, *Nouveaux mémoires*, Vol. 2, 13.

⁷⁰⁰ Du Halde, Cave edition, Vol. 1, 244; Watts edition, Vol. 2, 20; French edition, Vol. 2, 14-15.

⁷⁰¹ Du Halde, Cave edition, Vol. 1, 244; Watts edition, Vol. 2, 21; French edition, Vol. 2, 15.

⁷⁰² In reality, China’s fiscal policy was much more complicated than these primary reports indicated. Due to a systemic breakdown in the rural fiscal policy during the Ming period, the entire system was reformed. George William Skinner and Hugh D. R. Baker (eds.), *The City in late imperial China* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1977)

⁷⁰³ Mendoza, *The History of the Great and Mighty Kingdom of China*, 82.

⁷⁰⁴ Churchill, *A collection of voyages and travels*, Vol.1, 103.

⁷⁰⁵ *Ibid.*, 27 and 28.

Other primary sources, notably Le Comte, praised the Chinese methods for tax collection. Le Comte claimed “of all their wholesome institutions there is nothing which contributes so much to the keeping up peace and order, as does their method of levying the Emperor’s revenues”.⁷⁰⁶ Unlike France, “they are not troubled in China with such swarms of officers and commissioners”. All the estates were measured, families registered, and what the emperor excised on goods or taxes on persons was publicly known and everyone paid the mandarins or governors of the third rank. Those who did not pay did not lose their estates by confiscation, as that would punish an innocent family, instead the individual was imprisoned until they paid.⁷⁰⁷ Apart from imprisonment, other punishments for failure to pay taxes included being beaten or being forced to billet the poor or aged. All of these different punishments were designed to avoid seizing goods.⁷⁰⁸ After the taxes were collected, the mandarins gave an account to a general officer of the province, who then reported to the responsible court in Peking.

Descriptions from primary sources about spending government revenue contradicted the notion that an absolute despot controlled China. Ricci argued that the emperor was not solely responsible for deciding how to spend government income. He commented on the misconception that the revenue collected from the Chinese public went directly into the Imperial Exchequer so the King could use it as he pleased. Instead, he argued, the silver “is placed in the public treasure, and the returns paid in rice are placed in the warehouses belonging to the government”.⁷⁰⁹ The Emperor could only offer rewards from his private fortune, not from the public revenue but he still argued “the size of the national budget is far in excess of what Europeans might imagine” because the national treasury paid for public buildings, palaces, prisons, fortresses, and war supplies.⁷¹⁰ Primary observers from missionaries to merchants, as well as geographers and philosophers were aware of the imperial court called *Houpo* or *Hopu*, which was deemed equivalent to the Department of the Treasury and handled tax collection, public debts, negotiation of loans and other financial transactions.⁷¹¹ The revenue was disbursed in provinces to pay for pensions (especially for maintaining the poor), salaries of the mandarins and soldiers, public buildings and for structures necessary to facilitate

⁷⁰⁶ Le Comte, *Memoirs and observations*, 307-8. Le Comte, *Nouveaux mémoires*, Vol. 2, 99.

⁷⁰⁷ *Ibid.*

⁷⁰⁸ Du Halde, Cave edition, Vol. 1, 244; Watts edition, Vol. 2, 21; French edition, Vol. 2, 15.

⁷⁰⁹ Ricci and Trigault, *China in the Sixteenth Century*, 46.

⁷¹⁰ *Ibid.*, 47.

⁷¹¹ *Ibid.* Le Comte, *Memoirs and observations*, 258. Le Comte, *Nouveaux mémoires*, Vol. 2, 24.

commerce.⁷¹² Primary accounts also described the Chinese system of public treasuries and rice warehouses that ensured the revenue was spent in the best interest of the empire, and not just the emperor.⁷¹³ This accountability was seen as conducive to tax collection.

Ricci described the Emperor's ability to raise new funds. When there is an insufficient amount of money in the treasury, "new taxes are imposed to balance the budget".⁷¹⁴ However, Le Comte commented that the Emperor rarely invoked his power to levy new taxes and describes another custom of "exempting every year one or two provinces from bearing their proportion in the tax, especially if any of them have suffered thro' the sickness of the people, or if the lands thro' unreasonable weather have not yielded so good an encrease as usual".⁷¹⁵ Du Halde concurred, writing that the emperor very rarely raised new taxes and "there is scarcely a year he does not remit the whole tribute to some province, if it happens to be afflicted with any kind of calamity".⁷¹⁶ Extraordinary resource mobilization in Europe was primarily for military expenditures, whereas in China it was largely for major public works projects, particularly for water control and grain storage.

An important eighteenth century primary description on this subject was that of Pierre Poivre. As discussed, he showed particular interest in property rights and taxation. Poivre confirmed earlier descriptions noting that taxes in China were paid with the "greatest fidelity" because the payers knew where their money went.⁷¹⁷ The people of China were aware that when there was a scarcity, the stored grain was open to the public. They knew that the remainder of the impost was sold in public markets, and the profits were then given to the treasury under the custody of the "respectable tribunal of Ho-pou" where it was given to supply the general necessities of the court.⁷¹⁸ The Peking Gazette supported knowledge of the public works that revenue was spent on. Discussed in the previous chapter, this daily paper related the expenses of the Chinese government and in particular described the public works. China's taxes were confirmed as easy to

⁷¹² Du Halde, Cave edition, Vol. 1, 245; Watts edition, Vol. 2, 22; French edition, Vol. 2, 16.

⁷¹³ Ricci and Trigault, *China in the Sixteenth Century*, 47. Le Comte, *Memoirs and observations*, 258. Le Comte, *Nouveaux mémoires*, Vol. 2, 24. Poivre, *The travels of a philosopher*, 164-5. Poivre, *Voyages d'un philosophe*, 132.

⁷¹⁴ Ricci and Trigault, 47.

⁷¹⁵ Le Comte, *Memoirs and observations*, 248. Le Comte, *Nouveaux mémoires*, Vol. 2, 11.

⁷¹⁶ Du Halde, Cave edition, Vol. 1, 244; Watts edition, Vol. 2, 21; French edition, Vol. 2, 15.

⁷¹⁷ Poivre, *The travels of a philosopher*, 164-5. Poivre, *Voyages d'un philosophe*, 132.

⁷¹⁸ Poivre, *The travels of a philosopher*, 165. Poivre, *Voyages d'un philosophe*, 132.

collect because of the efficient survey of lands and census of families, as well as the efficiency of the officials in charge of tax collection.⁷¹⁹ Poivre highlighted this point when he wrote that the Chinese pay taxes “not to avaricious farmers-generals, but to honest magistrates, their proper and natural governors”.⁷²⁰ Thus he directly contradicted Navarrete’s claim of the low-level corruption in tax collection. Poivre discussed the “impost named the tenth”, which he noted was “regulated according to the nature of the lands” so that in poor soils it might only be around one thirtieth part, a topic that, as we will see below, was of great interest to Adam Smith.⁷²¹

RECEPTION

On the receiving end, the geographers and philosophers questioned the information and often relied on outdated figures. The modern part of *An universal history* referred to “some authors” but clearly relied on Du Halde, as the editors listed the number of taxpaying males as 59, 788, 364.⁷²² The author of *An Irregular Dissertation* (a text devoted to attacking Du Halde’s work) questioned the validity of the calculation of China’s population. He argued there were 64 million fighting men in China, and calculated this meant there were a total of 256 million people in the empire.⁷²³ The author then utilized Du Halde’s fact on the number of families (rounding the number to 11 million), questioned the assumption that the number of families in China had the same implications as it would in Europe.⁷²⁴ *The Chinese Traveller*, which had a favourable position towards using the Jesuit sources, also relied on Du Halde but did not cite him as a source.⁷²⁵ Another popular compendium compiled by William Guthrie demonstrated a more sceptical view of China’s population. In a short paragraph on ‘the population and inhabitants’ of China, he argued that by the best accounts, the population of China is not less than fifty million. He also commented on the other, higher, numbers available: “Most of those accounts are exaggerated, and persons, who visit China without any view of becoming authors, are greatly disappointed in their mighty expectations.”⁷²⁶ Paradoxically, in a description questioning the veracity of

⁷¹⁹ Le Comte, *Memoirs and observations*, 307-8. Le Comte, *Nouveaux mémoires*, Vol. 2, 99.

⁷²⁰ Poivre, *The travels of a philosopher*, 164. Poivre, *Voyages d’un philosophe*, 131.

⁷²¹ Poivre, *The travels of a philosopher*, 163. Poivre, *Voyages d’un philosophe*, 131.

⁷²² The modern part of *An universal history*, Vol. 8, 11.

⁷²³ Anonymous. *An irregular dissertation, occasioned by the reading of Father Du Halde’s description of China. Which may be read at any time* (London: Printed for J. Roberts, 1740), 50.

⁷²⁴ Anonymous, *An irregular dissertation*, 46.

⁷²⁵ Anonymous, *Chinese Traveller*, 20-21.

⁷²⁶ Guthrie, *A new geographical, historical, and commercial grammar*, 465.

sources, the author does not cite his own sources for the fact of China's population being less than fifty million.

The debate and desire for exactness intensified over time. Cornelius de Pauw exclaimed "the population of China, which as shall now appear, has been prodigiously exaggerated."⁷²⁷ He noted the inconsistency in the reports on China's population where authors

even vary in their calculations as far as one hundred millions...All the details we possess on this subject have been written at random. Father du Halde gives Peking three millions of inhabitants: Father le Comte admits only two millions; and Father Gaubil expresses himself in so vague a manner, that nothing can be concluded from his accounts.⁷²⁸

He accepted that there may be 82 million people in China (though noted it is 'most probably is exaggerated') nevertheless he argued, 'China has still much less people, in proportion to its size, than Germany'.⁷²⁹

By the eighteenth century a few philosophers, including Montesquieu, followed the primary sources in expressing concern about China's large population,⁷³⁰ Quesnay also identified Chinese overpopulation as a fundamental flaw in their system of political economy, arguing "However great that empire may be, it is too crowded for the multitude that inhabit it. All Europe combined would not number so many families".⁷³¹ Quesnay criticized the common European belief that a "large population is the source of wealth" and instead argued, "population exceeds wealth everywhere".⁷³² Repeating Du Halde's descriptions of infanticide and slavery, Quesnay argued where population exceeds wealth to the extent that it did in China, terrible acts of inhumanity become common.⁷³³ However, he did not attribute Chinese poverty to inequality in the distribution of property, nor the Chinese, claiming, "Population always exceeds wealth in both good and bad governments..."⁷³⁴ In Quesnay's view, to prevent overcrowding in a well-governed nation there was "no other recourse but that of colonies". According

⁷²⁷ Cornelius de Pauw, *Philosophical dissertations on the Egyptians and Chinese* Translated by Capt. J. Thomson (London: Printed by T. Chapman, 1795), 72.

⁷²⁸ *Ibid.*, 75 and 76.

⁷²⁹ *Ibid.*, 84.

⁷³⁰ Montesquieu, relying on Du Halde in his discussion of luxury in China, noted "women are so fertile and humankind multiplies so fast that the fields, even heavily cultivated, scarcely suffice to produce enough food for the inhabitants." Montesquieu, *The Spirit of the Laws*, 102. Montesquieu, *De l'Esprit des Loix*, Première part, 118.

⁷³¹ Maverick, *China, a Model for Europe*, 168.

⁷³² *Ibid.*

⁷³³ Here he followed Du Halde via Rousselot de Surgy's *Mélanges intéressans*.

⁷³⁴ Maverick, *China, a Model for Europe*, 261.

to Quesnay, this imperfection of the Chinese system was fairly easily corrected. A policy of expanding into uninhabited territory would deal with the problem of surplus population and China would then embody his ideal model of political economy.

Geographers repeated the varying figures of revenue provided by the primary sources. Giovanni Botero made this connection at the end of the sixteenth century, arguing that the Chinese revenues amount to 120 millions of gold “which value although it may seem impossible to him that shall make an estimate of the states of Europe with the kingdom of China”.⁷³⁵ Salmon, however, directly challenged the primary descriptions. He questioned the accuracy of Le Comte’s figure because England’s revenue during the War of Spanish Succession was nearly half as much as the Chinese and after the war, in full peace, their revenue was above one-fourth of the Chinese. Considering how much smaller England was than China, Salmon argued it was “not easily conceived” how the Chinese paid their civil bureaucracy and five million soldiers.⁷³⁶

Nonetheless, European commentators from the sixteenth to the eighteenth century largely admired Chinese taxation policies. Botero posed the question: “Wherefore since this Empire is so huge, and all the profits thereof are in [the emperor’s] hands, how can the former assertion of so great a yearly revenue, to men of reason seem any thing admirable at all?”⁷³⁷ Botero then answered his own question by arguing that the Chinese system should be admired for several reasons. Firstly, taxes were paid not only in coin but also in kind, which can then be redistributed to those in need. Secondly, the emperor distributed “three parts” of his total revenue: “people receive againe by those expences as much as they laid out in the beginning of the years”.⁷³⁸

Chinese tax policy was considered to be a simple land-tax model that imposed a payment of between one-tenth and one-thirtieth of the value produced by a piece of land. In 1707, frustrated by the inefficiency and complications of the French taxation system, Sébastien Le Prestre de Vauban argued for the utility of a simplified royal tithe in *Dîme Royale* (1707). Famed as a military engineer, Vauban was frustrated by the inefficiency and complications of the Colbert taxation system. He noted that a

⁷³⁵ Giovanni Botero, *Relations, of the most famous kingdoms*, 599. Botero *Delle Relationi Universali*, Parte Seconda, 67.

⁷³⁶ Salmon, *Modern History*, Vol.1, 30.

⁷³⁷ Giovanni Botero, *Relations, of the most famous kingdoms*, 600. Botero, *Delle Relationi Universali*, Parte Seconda, 68.

⁷³⁸ *Ibid.*

simplified tax was not a new idea, and was mentioned 3000 years earlier in the Scriptures, as well as in Profane history, which “tells us, that the greatest states of the world used it to very good purpose”, the Greek and Roman Emperors as well as currently the King of Spain in America, and that the Great Mogul “and the King of China do use it over all their vast Empires”.⁷³⁹ The English translator noted in the preface that Vauban’s motivations for writing this work stemmed from the love his country and his access to information, which led to a realization “about how both prince and people were cheated by those who have the management of publick money. An evil not peculiar to France, nor confined to arbitrary governments”.⁷⁴⁰ The translator pointed out how Vauban knew “that the true greatness and riches of a kingdom consists in the numbers of men, wisely govern’d, and usefully employ’d”.⁷⁴¹ The translator concluded the “reasonable remedy” to ensure the King was “rich and powerful” while the subjects were “happy” was to introduce proportional taxation to all subjects regardless of “rank, quality, or condition”.⁷⁴² The taxes should remain between one-tenth and one-twentieth depending on the needs of the government. He proposed a tax “laid upon all the fruits of the earth, on one hand; and on all that produces yearly incomes on the other”.⁷⁴³ It was a system less liable to corruption and employed fewer hands to collect it and a lower cost. He also recommended an annual census for France and suggested a way to achieve this was to “divide all the people into decuries, as the Chinese do”.⁷⁴⁴ Although dismissed by French officials at the time, Vauban’s taxation policy was very influential to the later Physiocrats. Quesnay remarked that Vauban’s argument for a principle tax of one tenth of the agricultural harvest and industrial production was remarkably similar to the practice in China. However, Quesnay argued that it should not be the total value that was taxed, but rather the net product (the rent paid by the farmer to the landlord).⁷⁴⁵

Quesnay deemed China’s tax burden fair, at least in theory. He described how in China no land was exempt from the tax, and if a tax was extracted from farmers, the cost of farming was subtracted from the charge. Quesnay believed natural law dictated taxes could only be drawn from the soil itself and not from people because “man by himself is bare of riches”, and they could not come from his wages which were needed for

⁷³⁹ Sébastien Le Prestre de Vauban, *A project for a royal tythe: or, general tax* (London: n.p., 1708), Vauban’s preface, viii.

⁷⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, Preface by the English translator.

⁷⁴¹ *Ibid.*

⁷⁴² *Ibid.*

⁷⁴³ *Ibid.* Vauban’s preface, viii.

⁷⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, 159.

⁷⁴⁵ Maverick, *China, a Model for Europe*, 120.

subsistence, which Quesnay believed could not pay for both subsistence and taxes, as the cost of labour would have to be raised without production increasing.⁷⁴⁶ He believed that the Chinese followed these fundamental principles. Quesnay argued the Chinese personal tax on labour could not contribute to the public revenue because it would reduce cultivation of the land and violate natural law.⁷⁴⁷ However, the Chinese system was not perfect. In a section entitled “Taxes other than on land”, Quesnay addressed the “irregular taxes” in China. By this he meant customs duties, tolls and the poll tax. He believed that if these “allegations [of irregular taxes in China] have foundation” then “the state is not sufficiently enlightened as to its true interests; for in an empire, the wealth of which springs from the soil, such impositions are destructive to taxation itself and to the revenues of the nation”. To Quesnay this was “indisputably demonstrated by mathematics”.⁷⁴⁸ Although Quesnay believed these irregular taxes were the “seed of a devastation”, he did not think they would destroy the empire because they were moderate and fixed. He also noted that the defect was one of administration not of government (going back to his line of argument discussed in chapter five). He argued the fault “may be corrected without involving any change in the constitution of that empire”.⁷⁴⁹ Once again, he criticized the improper application of his ideal model. Other philosophers agreed with Quesnay that minimal and simplified taxation was beneficial to agricultural production. For instance, Raynal, following Poivre again, commented about China (in every edition of *Histoire des deux Indes*), “the smallness of the taxes is still a farther encouragement to agriculture”.⁷⁵⁰

Once again, Cornelius de Pauw was distinctively critical in his description of Chinese taxation. He argued “in all despotic states, the revenues of the sovereigns are much less than we are tempted to believe”.⁷⁵¹ In China, this was a result of the disorder introduced by the eunuchs into the state finances. He also, however, described the efforts of the Tartars to reform the treasury but noted again the corrupting forces of the eunuchs who “dreamed of nothing but imposts”.⁷⁵² De Pauw evidently believed the ideal system of taxation in China meant little in the face of the greedy role of the eunuchs.

⁷⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, 291. Quesnay, *Despotisme de la Chine*, 652.

⁷⁴⁷ Maverick, *China, a Model for Europe*, 292. Quesnay, *Despotisme de la Chine*, 653.

⁷⁴⁸ Maverick, *China, a Model for Europe*, 260. Quesnay, *Despotisme de la Chine*, 634.

⁷⁴⁹ *Ibid.*

⁷⁵⁰ Raynal, *A philosophical and political history*, 93; Raynal, *Histoire philosophique et politique*, 106.

Though by 1776 edition, he also added information on duties paid in seaports, personal tribute by men, as well as the dixième au tentième.

⁷⁵¹ De Pauw, *Philosophical dissertations*, 308.

⁷⁵² *Ibid.*

Adam Smith, who was aware of de Pauw's work, listed four general maxims for taxation, they should be: equal (meaning taxes are proportionally determined), certain not arbitrary, convenient to be paid, and economically collected.⁷⁵³ While evidence on China's taxes indicated they were certain, convenient and collected economically, Smith doubted their equality. He argued taxes that were proportioned to the produce, rather than the rent, were very unequal. Different agricultural situations required different percentages to replace employed capital. In other words, the ratio of produce to expense varied.⁷⁵⁴ Chinese taxes were reportedly proportioned to produce. "In China, the principal revenue of the sovereign consists in a tenth part of the produce of all the lands of the empire. This tenth part, however, is estimated so very moderately, that, in many provinces, it is said not to exceed a thirtieth part of the ordinary produce."⁷⁵⁵ Smith compared this to tax rates elsewhere, noting that the land tax paid to the Mahometan government of Bengal (before it was dominated by English East India Company) and that paid in ancient Egypt were both approximately one fifth part of the produce. This demonstrated to him a very low tax burden on Chinese peasants. Smith cautioned however that payment in kind rather than in money was more liable to manipulation and fraud.⁷⁵⁶ This again points to the differences between China and Europe, especially in regard to Europe's overwhelmingly money-based economies. Both de Pauw and Smith cautioned about the potential for corruption in China.

Eighteenth century commentators demonstrated great interest in China's organization of revenue collection. The high level of revenue, the low rate of taxation and the consistency, efficiency and theory of the policy were generally admired, most agreed elements of the Chinese system could be reformed for greater benefit. Many philosophers, such as Quesnay, believed that even if China was not the perfect model of taxation, it was the closest approximation and thus lessons could be learned from the Middle Kingdom. Adam Smith, however, articulated a fundamental difference of the Chinese tax system, based on an agricultural economy that collected a portion of its taxes in kind, in comparison to Europe's increasingly money-based political economies leading to a threat of corruption. Moreover, he argued that China's taxes were unequal and thus not ideal. On the subject of revenue, observers and commentators admired

⁷⁵³ Smith, *Wealth of Nations*, 1043-1044.

⁷⁵⁴ *Ibid.*, 1057-1058.

⁷⁵⁵ *Ibid.*, 1059.

⁷⁵⁶ *Ibid.*, 1060.

China's wealth, although they disagreed about China's taxes, reflecting the Enlightenment debates on political economy.

CONCLUSION

Assessed on the execution of its duties of government, China's priorities and circumstances were identified as unique. One clear and unrelenting failure of the Chinese state was its ineffectual military, which was particularly acute after the Manchu Conquest. Some commentators believed the masculine force of the Tartars who assumed power could assist the development of China's military strength, yet also recognized the tendency in China for the conquerors to adopt the manners of the conquered. While Raynal attempted to rationalize and justify China's passive stance, most observers and commentators agreed that China was vulnerable because of its lack of state strength. Quesnay, needing to preserve his model of political economy, ignored the implications of this key state failure. This vulnerability was to haunt the Chinese empire in the nineteenth century, but even without foresight, eighteenth century observers were aware of this fatal flaw.

When it came to property rights, commercial institutions and revenue, China was not viewed as perfect, but none of the criticisms were sufficient to dismiss their system of political economy altogether. Its legal system was seen as functioning and fair, with property secured. The idea of corruption loomed over the topic, as it did when it came to assessing the form of China's government and revenue. The restricted information on this topic, however, ensured it never became a defining feature of China's system of political economy. It was widely held that the Chinese government provided useful commercial infrastructure. However like the topic of China's trade policy, this was seen to be a feature of its unique circumstances. China's agricultural base, according to Smith, was an incentive for the government to provide a good system of infrastructure to transport goods. Finally, China's revenue was considered large, effectively collected, and responsibly spent. While Quesnay admitted China's taxes might be imperfect and Smith argued their taxes were unequal and vulnerable to corruption, these were points that might be improved, but not considered fatal flaws in the Chinese system of political economy.

OUTLINE:	7.	“RAISONNEURS TRÈS IGNORANTS” ⁷⁵⁷
	7.1.	THE STATUS OF SCIENCE AND TECHNOLOGY
	7.2.	ASSESSING CHINA’S SCIENCE AND TECHNOLOGY
	7.3.	EXPLANATIONS FOR STAGNATION

Thus far, this research has identified China’s military as an area that Enlightenment Europeans established as fundamentally inadequate. This chapter examines views of China’s technology and sciences, which stand beside China’s weak defence as deficient in European eyes. For instance, Voltaire, a noted ‘sinophile,’ heavily criticized China’s scientific achievements:

It is sufficiently known, that they are, at the present day, what we all were three hundred years ago, very ignorant reasoners. The most learned Chinese is like one of the learned of Europe in the fifteenth century, in possession of his Aristotle.⁷⁵⁸

However, unlike the military, the connection between technology and sciences with assessments of China’s system of political economy was not all that evident. During the Enlightenment, the material advancement of society was not directly connected to what was considered at the time to be the more esoteric pursuits of natural philosophy (or the sciences). The importance of technological developments to economic gains was also not as evident as it would be a century later, at the height of the Industrial Revolution. While not necessarily connected to the assessment of the wealth of a nation during the Enlightenment era, science and technology were still important in judging the status and progress or stagnation of a civilization, particularly that of China.

Retrospectively economic historians such as Joel Mokyr have established that science and technology are key components of growth.⁷⁵⁹ Francesca Bray notes that scientific progress and technological development “play star roles in the master narrative of ‘the rise of the West’”.⁷⁶⁰ However science and technology have not been consistently viewed as a defining feature of a successful civilization, particularly during the early modern period. Michael Adas argues that over the course of the eighteenth century achievements in material culture became increasingly important to shaping European perceptions of the rest of the world, including China.⁷⁶¹ This chapter agrees with Adas

⁷⁵⁷ Voltaire, “De La Chine”, 151. Voltaire, *Philosophical Dictionary*, 83.

⁷⁵⁸ *Ibid.*

⁷⁵⁹ See Joel Mokyr, *Lever of Riches* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1992).

⁷⁶⁰ Francesca Bray, “Towards a critical history of non-Western technology” in *China and Historical Capitalism: Genealogies of Sinological Knowledge* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999), 158.

⁷⁶¹ Adas, *Machines as the Measure of Men*, 3.

that the influence of science and technology as assessors of civilization grew during the Enlightenment; however, it argues that by 1776 (the end point of this study) lack of progress in science and technology was not typically connected to assessments of China's wealth or potential for improvement.

This chapter begins with a discussion of the complex and fluid terms science and technology. While acknowledging the difficulty of distinguishing between the two terms, Adas defines science as "endeavours that are aimed at gaining a knowledge of the natural environment" while technology includes "efforts to exercise a 'working control' over that environment".⁷⁶² He argues further that prior to the Industrial Revolution, science and technology were both part of material culture, with areas such as architecture, housing and ship building being more critical to determining European attitudes than subjects like astronomy.⁷⁶³ James Ferguson, in a review of Adas' *Machines as the Measure of Men*, argues the categories of science and technology only became meaningful after the Industrial Revolution and he criticizes the "inappropriate projection backward in time of a modern category."⁷⁶⁴ To avoid anachronism, the first section of this chapter examines the contemporary definitions and concludes that adopting the terminology of science and technology is useful, as long as the evolving early modern categories of analysis are considered. For the purposes of this chapter, the speculative sciences are referred to as 'science', whereas the mechanical arts and applied sciences are labelled 'technology'.

The second section of this chapter considers the assessment of China's science and technology by early modern observers and commentators. An examination of the primary descriptions of China's science and technology reveals that they reported that European science was more advanced than that of the Chinese. Adas argues "eighteenth-century merchants and naval commanders such as [Laurence] Lange and [George] Anson were the first to broach many of the criticisms that would be directed against China in the era of industrialization".⁷⁶⁵ However, the Jesuits also heavily criticized Chinese science before the accounts of Lange and Anson. In fact, this section will show that science is one particular area where the lines between sinophiles and sinophobes were most blurred. Descriptions of technology varied to a greater extent,

⁷⁶² *Ibid.*, 5.

⁷⁶³ *Ibid.*, 6.

⁷⁶⁴ James Ferguson, "Review: *Machines as the Measure of Men* by Michael Adas" *American Anthropologist*, New Series 93:1 (1991), 220-230.

⁷⁶⁵ Adas, *Machines as the Measure of Men*, 177.

and primary reports often praised China's skill and techniques of production while criticizing their inability to invent. Both geographers and, as we saw with Voltaire above, philosophers acknowledged the criticisms of Chinese science, and identified those particular elements of Chinese technology that were laudable.

The final section of this chapter addresses the explanations offered by the primary, geographical and philosophical sources for China's relative stagnation in science and technology. Joseph Needham famously formulated a puzzle about China in the 1950s and 1960s: why, when China had once led the world in science and technology (which itself was a revisionist view in Needham's era), did it eventually fall behind the West?⁷⁶⁶ Needham's puzzle has encouraged a continuing body of research on the progression of Chinese science and technology; however, it was not the first time in history that someone from the West had wondered about the relative stagnation of Chinese scientific advancement. From the reports of the primary observers, four principal (and interconnected) explanations can be identified: China's language, geographical isolation, educational priorities and the character of its people were offered as reasons for China's lack of progress in science and technology. European geographers and philosophers who addressed China's scientific stagnation used a combination of these same four explanations to determine why an advanced civilization such as China, which had a much longer history, had fallen behind Europe in science and technology.

7.1. THE STATUS OF SCIENCE AND TECHNOLOGY

The status of science in eighteenth century Europe was rapidly changing and it was becoming increasingly institutionalized in universities and academies throughout Europe.⁷⁶⁷ However many still questioned the esoteric qualities and utility of science. Projects such as the creation of the *Encyclopédie* by Diderot and D'Alembert (whose aim was to expose guild secrets) demonstrated the practical value of science and technology. However, as we will see below with Adam Smith, for many thinkers, scientific advancement was associated with overcoming superstitions associated with

⁷⁶⁶ Many, such as Francesca Bray, argue that the Needham question is problematic for imposing modern values and categories anachronistically and for being framed as a negative (ie. what went wrong?) rather than understanding technology's individual role in Chinese history. Bray, "Towards a critical history of non-Western technology," 163.

⁷⁶⁷ Richard Yeo, "Classifying the Sciences," in Roy Porter (ed.) *The Cambridge History of Science 7 Volumes* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003), Vol. 4, 241.

religion rather than material improvement. As Dorinda Outram has succinctly explained, “The intellectual status of science was contested, its institutional organizations often weak, and certainly thin on the ground, and the nature of its relations with the economy and with government often tenuous.”⁷⁶⁸

The subjects within the categories of ‘science’ and ‘technology’ were by no means solidified. The concepts of science and technology did not exist as they do at present. For instance, in Adam Smith’s writings “the terms philosophy, physics, arts, sciences, and natural philosophy are used almost indiscriminately”.⁷⁶⁹ As Francesca Bray argues, “the linking of science and technology is again a product of our modern industrial world, rooted in the late eighteenth- and early nineteenth-century...”⁷⁷⁰ While this is true, it is nonetheless possible to address early modern views of science and technology as long as we examine the specific areas of interest to contemporary sources.

To avoid imposing concepts on the past it is necessary to turn to contemporary definitions of the terms associated with what we now consider science and technology. Samuel Johnson’s *A Dictionary of the English Language* (second edition, 1755-56) and the French Academy’s *Dictionnaire de l’Académie française* (4th edition, 1762) both reveal the fluidity and uncertainty associated with the concept of science during the Enlightenment. For instance one of Johnson’s listed definitions for art is “a science; as, the liberal arts”; while definitions for science included “any art or species of knowledge”, “one of the seven liberal arts, grammar, rhetorick, arithmetick, musick, geometry, astronomy”.⁷⁷¹ The definition of science also had several meanings in the French dictionary. Art, again, was defined as “les sept arts libéraux,” “arts mécaniques” and “méthode de bien faire un ouvrage selon certaines règles.” Science was still defined as “connoissance”, or *connaissance* meaning knowledge. Technology was not a concept that existed in the eighteenth century, however similar topics relating to that concept did exist. Categories such as the “mechanical arts” were often used to refer to the areas that would now be considered technology. For instance the French

⁷⁶⁸ Dorinda Outram, *The Enlightenment* Second Edition (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005), 94

⁷⁶⁹ W.P.D. Whightman, J.C. Bryce and I.S. Ross (Eds.), *Adam Smith: Essays on Philosophical Subjects* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003), 12. Indeed there are many examples in Smith’s work of him interchanging these terms.

⁷⁷⁰ Bray, “Towards a critical history of non-Western technology,” 161.

⁷⁷¹ Johnson, *A dictionary of the English language*, Vol. 1, Image 161 and Vol. 2, Image 603.

dictionary described *mécanique* as “des arts qui ont principalement besoin du travail de la main”. They noted that the arts are divided into the liberal arts and mechanical arts.⁷⁷²

The *Encyclopédie* attempted to clarify the divisions of knowledge. Diderot and D’Alembert’s system of human knowledge, inspired by Bacon, was divided into memory (history), reason (philosophy) and imagination (poetry). Arts, crafts and manufactures such as minerals, gold and silver, arms manufacture, glass making, practical architecture, and silk were included under memory. Logic, grammar, rhetoric, ethics, architecture, economic matters such as trade, politics (including military matters), knowledge of nature, mathematics, arithmetic, algebra, geometry, applied mechanics, hydraulics, navigation, astronomy, geography, agriculture and chemistry were included in the category of reason. These divisions reveal the difficulty of identifying a clear contemporary classification.

While the terminology was not stable, the primary sources of information on China gave an indication of where the greatest interest in particular aspects of China relating to the above subjects lied. Ricci’s chapter on China’s “mechanical arts” addressed architecture, the art of printing, painting, music, time-keeping instruments, dramatic representations, the art of making seals, making ink, and the trade in fans.⁷⁷³ The following chapter covered “the liberal arts, the sciences and the use of academic degrees”. This section considered the Chinese language and the “higher philosophical sciences” such as moral philosophy, logic, astronomy (which was tied to Chinese astrology), mathematics, arithmetic, geometry, the art of medicine and the Chinese education system.⁷⁷⁴ While agricultural techniques were not placed in this scheme, there is a division between applied, more economic mechanical arts, and the speculative sciences (which included the seven liberal arts).

Du Halde largely followed a similar division of Chinese science and technology though he further categorised the subject areas. The beginning of his second volume contained a section on “The Ingenuity of Mechanics, and Industry of the Common People”⁷⁷⁵ in which he addressed Chinese public works, trade, varnish, porcelain, silk and printing. Elsewhere he included another section entitled, “Of the Skill of the Chinese in the

⁷⁷² *Dictionnaire de l’Académie française* 4th édition (Paris : Chez B. Brunet, 1762), 109.

⁷⁷³ Ricci and Trigault, *China in the Sixteenth Century*, 19.

⁷⁷⁴ *Ibid.*, 30-32.

⁷⁷⁵ “De l’adresse des artisans et de l’industrie du menu peuple”

sciences,” in which he discussed the seven liberal arts (though notably substituting mathematics in the place of grammar). Popular geographies followed similar lines of categorization. A useful insight into contemporary classifications is offered in Rousselot de Surgy’s description of China’s science and technology in volume 5 of *Mélanges intéressans*. From pages 37 to 144 he gave the following categorization: Chinese science (subtopics: language, morals, history, and the canonical works); speculative sciences (subtopics: poetry, logic, plays, music, arithmetic, geometry); astronomy; optics, mechanics and architecture; geography; medicine; manual arts; manufactures; porcelain production; paper production; printing; education. From Rousselot de Surgy we can clearly see that topics within the modern categories of science and technology were addressed in consecutive sections.

These contemporary categorisations do not reveal a prioritization of either science or technology. Adas argues that technological achievements were “far less important than scientific advance in shaping European attitudes toward African and Asian societies” because the dramatic changes in production and communication were not evident until the Industrial Revolution.⁷⁷⁶ However, with particular attention to the Chinese case, we find that technology was a significant element in descriptions of the Middle Kingdom. One particular example epitomizes the relevance of Chinese technology as it related to assessing their civilization. Semedo’s chapter on the “nature, wit and inclination” of the Chinese described their ingenious mechanics and manufactures. He confirmed Aristotle’s claim, “Asia exceeded Europe in ingenuity; but was exceeded by Europe in valour.” Semedo argued, “There are many, which even to this day do call the Chinesses, Barbarians, as if they spoke of the Negroes of Guynea, or the Tapuyi of Brasile. I have blusht to hear some stile them so, having been taught the contrary by many years travels among them. Although the fame and manufactures of China are sufficient to teach it us; it being now many years that we have heard the one; and seen the other.”⁷⁷⁷

7.2. ASSESSING CHINA’S SCIENCE AND TECHNOLOGY

From the early Jesuit encounters, science and technology were key pillars in converting the Chinese, and gaining their acceptance. Combined with the strategies of cultural accommodation, and the top-down approach to conversion, the use of Western science

⁷⁷⁶ Adas, *Machines as the Measure of Men*, 77.

⁷⁷⁷ Semedo, *The history of that great and renowned monarchy of China*, 27-28.

and technology to gain the trust and interest of the Chinese was an explicit tool of the Christian missionaries. Jesuit education was characterized by its comprehensiveness, and many Jesuit missionaries were selected for the China mission based particularly on their training in natural philosophy. However, the Jesuit relationship to science was complicated by their connection to the Catholic Church.⁷⁷⁸

On the whole, there was a mixed impression of the Chinese as industrious, ingenious, inventors and imitators. Before the Jesuits arrival in Peking, there was little information available on Chinese science. Additionally, in the fifteenth century, the Scientific Revolution was still in its nascence. Mendoza exemplifies this earlier period when Europeans were impressed with China's invention of the printing press, gunpowder and the compass. He discussed their invention of printing 500 years before Europeans; dismissing the "vulgar opinion" that Johannes Gutenberg invented printing in 1458.⁷⁷⁹ He praised land sailing vessels and their architecture "and the necessaries that they have to build with [as] the best that is in the world."⁷⁸⁰ As the Spaniard concluded, the Chinese were "great inventors of things".⁷⁸¹

Once the Jesuits reached the Chinese court, the perceived gulf between European and Chinese science and technology grew. Matteo Ricci exemplified the utility of combining science and technology with the Christianizing mission.⁷⁸² During his pioneering trip to Peking, he was captured and imprisoned. The Wan Li Emperor released the Jesuit in exchange for a European clock and a painting. Ricci proceeded to

⁷⁷⁸ The Jesuits did not always present the most up to date scientific discoveries from Europe. As agents of the Catholic Church, an institution that was often threatened by scientific developments and was coming to terms with the place of science in what they saw as a theological world, the Jesuits were – and had to be – religious missionaries before scientists. For instance, they did not report the heliocentric theory of the universe until 1760 (it was banned by the Church until 1757). Waley-Cohen, *Sextants of Beijing*, 108. For more on the Jesuit education system, and in particular the place of science refer to Brockey, *Journey to the East*, 215-217. See also Nicholas Standaert (ed.), *Handbook of Christianity in China: Volume One (635-1800)* (Leiden: Brill, 2001)

⁷⁷⁹ Mendoza, *The History of the Great and Mighty Kingdom of China*, Vol. 1, 131.

⁷⁸⁰ *Ibid.*, 26.

⁷⁸¹ *Ibid.*, Vol. 1, 32.

⁷⁸² Regardless of their efforts to respect the church's stance on science, the Jesuit involvement in Chinese science was controversial in Europe and contributed to the Rites Controversy. There were several Jesuit activities in China that received scorn from European observers. For instance, the calendar given to the Chinese was used to predict lucky and unlucky days, contradicting the Christian religion and seen as pagan. Further, Ricci's geographic contribution to China – a 1584 map of the world produced for the Chinese court – placed China, not Europe, at the centre of the world. Finally, the missionaries assisted in the production of artillery for a foreign empire. Schall made over 500 cannons for the Ming dynasty and Verbiest produced more than half of the cannons made under the entire Kangxi reign. For more detailed information on the Jesuit experience in China, particularly with regards to science and technology see "Technology in China" special edition of *History of Technology* (ed.) Ian Inkster, Volume 29 (December 2009).

entertain the Chinese court by demonstrating that the sun is larger than the earth and the moon smaller, explaining the law of gravity, and revealing to them a map of the earth. He noted, “once this new knowledge became known to a few, it was not long before it found its way into the academies of the learned class”.⁷⁸³ With the assistance of Xu Guangqi (the highest level Christian convert and influential Imperial Grand Secretary), Ricci translated Euclid’s *Elements of Geometry*. Xu Guangqi also translated *Western Irrigation Methods*, and built three telescopes just 21 years after the European invention. Ricci noted that “the high esteem acquired by the Christian religion...” was built up in part from things such as the expert craftsmanship in the binding of books, ornamented in gold.⁷⁸⁴ He tried to impart on his European readership the importance of science to the Christian mission: “Whoever may think that ethics, physics and mathematics are not important in the work of the Church, is unacquainted with the taste of the Chinese, who are slow to take a salutary spiritual potion, unless it be seasoned with an intellectual flavoring.”⁷⁸⁵ He argued that “the reasoning demanded in the study of mathematics” helped the missionaries awaken some Chinese to the absurdity of idol worshipping.⁷⁸⁶

From the outset of the Jesuit engagement with Peking, the Chinese court oscillated between acceptance and rejection of Western science and technology. The internal decay of the Ming encouraged a restoration of orthodoxy and expelling of the missionaries in 1617. However, the Manchu incursions that began in 1618 led the Chinese to invite the missionaries back to assist in the construction of cannons. It is not surprising that the Chinese were willing to learn from these Christian interlopers. The Chinese had a tradition of allowing foreigners to contribute to their scientific inquiries. Indian astronomers were present in the Tang Dynasty (618-907); Persian and Central Asians astronomers were present in the Chinese court from the Mongol Yuan Dynasty (1271-1368) and were appointed to the Imperial Bureau of Astronomy. Ricci described the astrological instruments he found in Peking and his belief that the foreigners who designed them had some knowledge of European astronomical science.⁷⁸⁷ However, it was the newly arrived Christians who dominated a competition sponsored by the court in 1629 to predict an eclipse. When the Jesuit Johann Adam Schall von Bell, presented a new calendar to the Qing court, he was appointed the director of the Astronomical

⁷⁸³ Ricci and Trigault, *China in the Sixteenth Century*, 326.

⁷⁸⁴ *Ibid.*, 157.

⁷⁸⁵ *Ibid.*, 325.

⁷⁸⁶ *Ibid.*, 328.

⁷⁸⁷ *Ibid.*, 331.

Bureau in 1645. Although this provoked a conservative reaction from the Chinese court, Schall – along with Ferdinand Verbiest – designed new astronomical instruments and served as tutors to the young Kangxi Emperor. China’s willingness to learn science from foreigners became an important aspect of whether science led to dismissal of Chinese civilization and will be discussed further below.

Before China exiled the Jesuits, the missionaries gathered and reported on a significant amount of information on Chinese science and technology. Adas argues that this led Europeans to be especially critical of Chinese natural philosophy. Unlike India, Europeans were made aware of Chinese natural philosophy through the translation efforts of Jesuits such as Matteo Ricci.⁷⁸⁸ The Jesuits were dismissive of China’s capabilities in natural philosophy, but offered some praise for their technological abilities.

Ricci claimed that the Chinese had most of the mechanical arts because of the encouragement they receive from their great raw material and talent for trading. However, he criticized the quality of their goods, arguing because “these people are accustomed to live sparingly, the Chinese craftsman does not strive to reach a perfection of workmanship in the object he creates.”⁷⁸⁹ He denigrated Chinese architecture, painting, music and instruments for keeping time and measurements. Moderate praise was reserved for Chinese printing (which was necessarily different than European techniques because of the Chinese language) and their plays. Giving the examples of similarity between European and Chinese tables, chairs and beds he concluded: “In the practice of the arts and the crafts we have mentioned, the Chinese are certainly different from all other people, but for the most part of the other arts and sciences is quite the same as our own, despite the great distance that separates them from our civilization.”⁷⁹⁰ The following section addressed “the liberal arts, the sciences and the use of academic degrees among the Chinese.” He reported that through Confucius moral philosophy was the only one of the “higher philosophical sciences” that the Chinese knew, and even then they introduced many errors.”⁷⁹¹ Ricci argued that the Chinese had no logic, and their ethics were a confused set of maxims. He noted some progress in astronomy and the branches of mathematics, but argued that despite being

⁷⁸⁸ Adas, *Machines as the Measure of Men*, 54.

⁷⁸⁹ Ricci and Trigault, *China in the Sixteenth Century*, 19.

⁷⁹⁰ *Ibid.*, 25.

⁷⁹¹ *Ibid.*, 30.

proficient at arithmetic and geometry these fields were in a state of confusion.⁷⁹² He also noted the Chinese made some progress in the field of medicine, particularly with regards to their knowledge of the pulse.

Other seventeenth century primary sources followed Ricci's ambivalent assessment of China's science and technology.⁷⁹³ In 1642 Smedo described the Chinese method of categorizing sciences, noting that they consider three things in the universe: the heavens (beginning of natural things, starts, planets), earth (seasons, production, fields, agriculture) and man (morality and politics, the liberal and other arts) and divide their learning in the science of each.⁷⁹⁴ He agreed with Ricci's assessment of China's deficiency in the liberal arts and also reserved moderate praise for Chinese medicine. Smedo contributed to discussion of how quickly the Chinese took up knowledge from the Jesuits, indicating their inferiority but also their willingness to learn.⁷⁹⁵ His description of Chinese manufactures was even kinder than that of Ricci, though he argued that European manufactures and its mechanical arts were superior (apart from lacquer).⁷⁹⁶

By the end of the seventeenth century Le Comte repeated the original assessments of China's science and technology, but added more detailed commentary. In a letter on the "character of the wit and temper of the Chineses", Le Comte argued that one would assume from their libraries, universities, doctors and observatories that they would be ingenious and "perfectly well versed in all sorts of sciences, that they have a vast reach, invention, and a genius for every thing." However, even though they have rewarded the learned for four thousand years, "they have not had one single man, of great achievements in the speculative science: they have discovered all these precious mines, without troubling themselves to dig for them..."⁷⁹⁷ Again he recognized the Chinese were better at manufactures and the mechanical arts than science: "The Chineses that are mean proficient in sciences, succeed much better in arts; and tho' they have not brought them to that degree of perfection we see them in Europe."⁷⁹⁸ Le Comte also

⁷⁹² *Ibid.*, 32.

⁷⁹³ For instance, Nieuhof cited Ricci on this subject and largely repeated his descriptions. Nieuhof, *An embassy from the East-India Company*, 154.

⁷⁹⁴ Smedo, *The history of that great and renowned monarchy of China*, 49-50.

⁷⁹⁵ *Ibid.*, 242.

⁷⁹⁶ *Ibid.*, 27.

⁷⁹⁷ Le Comte, *Memoirs and observations*, 221. Le Comte, *Nouveaux memoires* (1697) Vol. 1, 356.

⁷⁹⁸ Le Comte, *Memoirs and observations*, 231. Le Comte, *Nouveaux memoires*, (1697) Vol. 1, 382-383

emphasized the view that the Chinese were better imitators than inventors.⁷⁹⁹ He described their imitations of European glass, watches, pistols and bombs, though noting the Chinese might have given Europe gunpowder, printing and the use of the compass. While he did acknowledge China's three major inventions, these were not sufficient to continue to label them admirable inventors because they had not been improved upon for many years. Le Comte underscored that although the Chinese were beneath Europe in the sciences and arts, they were Europe's equals in politeness "and that perhaps they may surpass [the Europeans] in politicks and in government."⁸⁰⁰

Du Halde description of China in the eighteenth century confirmed that Chinese inventions were "not so good as that of [European] Mechanicks" but argued "they can imitate exactly enough any pattern that is brought them out of Europe".⁸⁰¹ He largely repeated Le Comte's description of the Chinese sciences though giving greater detail about Chinese astronomy and interaction with Jesuit science.⁸⁰²

Anson's critique of China's science and technology does not represent a watershed moment. The Commodore knew nothing of their sciences and his criticism of China's manufacturing abilities was not unique. In fact, at one point he even praised the Chinese as "a very ingenious and industrious people", which he claimed was demonstrated by the "great number of curious manufactures which are established amongst them, and which are eagerly sought for by the most distant nations."⁸⁰³ To be sure, he was also very critical. He claimed their skill in handicraft arts is "of a second rate kind; for they are much outdone by the Japanese in those manufactures, which are common to both countries; and they are in numerous instances incapable of rivaling the mechanic dexterity of the Europeans." Anson concluded that China's "principal excellency seems to be imitation and they accordingly labour under that poverty of genius, which constantly attends all servile imitators." Later he attacked their ability to imitate European clocks, watches and firearms because they could not understand the whole product. He also criticized artists for the poor quality of paintings.⁸⁰⁴ While Anson was

⁷⁹⁹ Le Comte, *Memoirs and observations*, 231. Le Comte, *Nouveaux mémoires*, (1697) Vol. 1, 383. Navarrate also argued the Chinese were better at imitation. Churchill, *A collection of voyages and Travels*, Vol.1, 58.

⁸⁰⁰ Le Comte, *Memoirs and observations*, 239-240. Le Comte, *Nouveaux mémoires*, Vol. 2, 409-410.

⁸⁰¹ Du Halde, Cave edition, Vol. 1, 277; Watts edition, Vol. 2, 124; French edition, Vol. 2, 72.

⁸⁰² Du Halde, Cave edition, Vol. 2, 124-139; Watts edition, Vol. 3, 63-109; French edition, Vol. 3, 264-289.

⁸⁰³ Anson, *Voyage Round the World*, 411.

⁸⁰⁴ *Ibid.*, 412.

arguably more critical of the quality of Chinese imitations, there was nothing in his description of Chinese manufactures that could not be found in earlier Jesuit sources. However, Anson presented his views in opposition to what he deemed was a Jesuit tendency to idealize China. Therefore, while the observations were not new, the tone had changed.

The sixteenth century observer Mendoza praised Chinese inventions, but the Jesuit descriptions of the seventeenth century reported European superiority over the Chinese in terms of both science and technology. There was also an increasing sense that Chinese science and technology had either stagnated or declined since the transformative inventions of gunpowder, printing and the compass.

RECEPTION

Unlike the topic of China's form of government, there was little confusion or controversy in Europe about the status of China's science and technology. Geographers and philosophers agreed, as early as Leibniz, that the Chinese were inferior to Europe in the speculative sciences and equal or slightly inferior in the mechanical arts.

In the preface to *Novissima sinica* (1699) Leibniz argued, "In the useful arts and in practical experience with natural objects we are, all things considered, about equal to them, and each people has knowledge which it could with profit communicate to the other." However, when "In profundity of knowledge and in the theoretical disciplines we are their superiors. For besides logic and metaphysics, and the knowledge of things incorporeal, which we justly claim as peculiarly our province, we excel by far in the understanding of concepts which are abstracted by the mind from the material..."⁸⁰⁵ Leibniz concluded the Europeans and Chinese were equal in "the industrial arts" while the former were superior in the "contemplative sciences" and the latter better in "practical philosophy," which referred to ethics and politics.⁸⁰⁶ The argument was a succinct, if somewhat simplified, version of the image painted by the Jesuits who Leibniz largely relied on for information.

⁸⁰⁵ Donald Lach, *The Preface to Leibniz' Novissima Sinica*, 68-69.

⁸⁰⁶ *Ibid.*

By the eighteenth century, geographers synthesized the Jesuit assessment of China's science and technology.⁸⁰⁷ Salmon followed the Jesuits arguing the Chinese "ignorance is so notorious in the speculative science, and even in some mechanick arts, such as clockwork, architecture, &c."⁸⁰⁸ He noted China's ability to imitate reasonably well as well as their historical inventiveness: "The Chinese imitate the inventions of the Europeans very well, and now make glass, watches, pistols, grenades, or shells for bombs. They had it seems gunpowder, printing and the use of the compass long before us".⁸⁰⁹ Salmon acknowledged the Chinese had the loadstone and compass before the Europeans, but mistakenly asserted they never travelled on long voyages.⁸¹⁰ In another chapter he gave an "account of their learning, arts and sciences, languages, characters, history and chronology". Here, Salmon assessed the state of the liberal arts in China exactly as the Jesuits did before him. For instance, he criticized their lack of logic, superficial geometry and the poor quality of music. By the time he published *Universal Traveller* in 1752, after his travels with Anson, his assessment had not changed but his negative rhetoric intensified. He repeated Anson's description of their inferiority in mechanics to Japan and Europeans and described China's inclination towards imitation as reflecting a "poverty of genius."⁸¹¹ Notably, Salmon did not mention the willingness of the Chinese to learn and improve from the Jesuits European science and technology thus offered little hope for their improvement in this sphere.

The editors of the modern part of *An universal history* (1759) repeated European superiority in the "liberal sciences," but reserved more praise than Salmon for their manufactures. When describing China's "learning, arts, sciences, languages, &c."⁸¹², they argued for finding a middle ground in reports, concluding the missionaries praised them too much whereas other writers "unjustly undervalued" the Chinese. Referencing Gaubil and Du Halde, they repeated views of China's liberal arts and noted that in the subject of moral philosophy, the Chinese are not as advanced as they believe (noting they made no distinction between morality and politics).⁸¹³ According to these editors, "in point of richness, opulence, sundry manufactures, handicrafts, and, to say nothing of their excellent agriculture lately mentioned, and the many excellent ways they have of

⁸⁰⁷ For instance, Rousselot de Surgy followed Le Comte's assessment of China's speculative sciences.

Mélanges intéressay, Vol. 5, 63.

⁸⁰⁸ Salmon, *Modern History*, Vol. 1, 10.

⁸⁰⁹ *Ibid* 22.

⁸¹⁰ Salmon, *Modern History*, 18.

⁸¹¹ Salmon, *The Universal Traveller*, Vol. 1, 21.

⁸¹² *The modern part of an universal history*, vol. 8, 179.

⁸¹³ *Ibid.*, 193-200.

fertilizing and improving even their most barren lands, it will hardly be denied that they exceed any country in Europe...”⁸¹⁴ They followed Anson, commenting that Chinese lacquer was not as good as that of Japan, and Chinese porcelain was of a lower quality than that produced in Saxony.⁸¹⁵ In another section on “the agriculture, silk manufacture, China-ware, Japan, varnish, and other inferior arts of the Chinese” they praised their irrigation techniques and improvement of the lands, but commented in a footnote “that if those who wrote on the subject of agriculture among them, had been more versed in physics and natural philosophy, they might have still made much greater improvements in that so useful and necessary art.”⁸¹⁶ These editors believed in the applicability of physics and natural philosophy (or science) to the useful arts (or technology).

The editors of *An Universal History* discussed the rate of scientific advancement. They also recognized China’s early inventions such as gunpowder, but similar to Salmon’s qualification that the Chinese never made the best use of the compass, they noted the Chinese used gunpowder mostly for fireworks.⁸¹⁷ They compared this to the Europeans who only recently received scientific knowledge from the Greeks and Romans and “have so far outstripped not only them, but the Chinese, within the compass of two or three centuries.”⁸¹⁸ Thus, they too pointed out that while China may have developed earlier, it became stagnant while Europe rapidly progressed.

Rousselot de Surgy made a similar point in *Mélanges intéressans*.⁸¹⁹ After a lengthy assessment of China’s capacity in the sciences he created a section entitled “Arts manuels”. In it he argued that the Chinese were better in the arts than in the sciences, but still not as good as Europe. He believed they had what was necessary for life and what contributed to the “commodité, à la propreté & à une magnificence bien entendue.”⁸²⁰ While their industry and imitation was sufficient they did not have the capacity for invention as the Europeans did. Later he argued even their imitations were not flawless.⁸²¹ Quesnay closely followed Rousselot de Surgy’s assessment.⁸²²

⁸¹⁴ *Ibid.*, 9-10.

⁸¹⁵ *Ibid.*, 243-244.

⁸¹⁶ *Ibid.*, 217.

⁸¹⁷ *Ibid.*, 152.

⁸¹⁸ *Ibid.*, 179.

⁸¹⁹ Rousselot de Surgy, *Mélanges intéressans*, Vol. 5, 62.

⁸²⁰ *Ibid.*, 104.

⁸²¹ *Ibid.*

⁸²² Maverick, *China, a model for Europe*, 190.

Enlightenment philosophers who addressed China's science and technology usually did so within the context of explaining rather than assessing their state. The *Encyclopédie* focused heavily on the mechanical arts, which as Robert Darnton argues, "constituted the most extensive and original part of the *Encyclopédie* itself."⁸²³ Louis de Jacourt, who compiled nearly one-fourth of the entire *Encyclopédie*, wrote several specific articles describing Chinese bridges (which he praised as better than those in Europe), boats, varnish and paper.⁸²⁴ He gathered his information on China largely from Du Halde.⁸²⁵ On the other hand, Denis Diderot's article on the philosophy of the Chinese pointed out the relative deficiency of Chinese science, though he predominantly focused on Confucianism, metaphysics and religion.⁸²⁶ He did complement their manufactures (especially in fabrics and porcelain) but attributed this to their materials, not their skill or taste.⁸²⁷ Diderot described how the Kangxi emperor learnt from the Jesuits science, philosophy, mathematics, anatomy, astronomy and mechanics, however his son, the Yongzheng Emperor did not follow him in this regard. To Diderot, the Chinese willingness to learn from the Jesuits was evidence of their deficiency. He argued that the high estimation in which the Chinese held the Jesuits (who were not experts in these fields) is evidence of China's lack of knowledge of mechanics, astronomy and mathematics.⁸²⁸

Much like Diderot, Voltaire's assessment of China's science and technology was not as systematic as the primary and geographical sources. He praised China's silk, paper and porcelain production but disparaged their skill in producing glass. Similar to the commentators before him, Voltaire discussed Chinese inventions; however, unlike earlier sources he directly connected their lack of developing technology to their needs. For instance, he suggested that even though they had the compass much earlier than Europe, they did not have a similar need to circumnavigate because their lands

⁸²³ R. Darnton, *The great cat massacre and other episodes in French cultural history* (New York: Vintage, 1984), 198.

⁸²⁴ Richard Schwab, "The Extent of the Chevalier de Jaucourt's Contribution to Diderot's *Encyclopédie*", *Modern Language Notes*, 72:7 (1957), 507-508; Denis Diderot and Jean le Rond D'Alembert (eds.) *Encyclopédie, ou dictionnaire raisonné des sciences, des arts et des métiers* Robert Morrissey (ed) (University of Chicago: ARTFL *Encyclopédie* Projet, Spring 2010 Edition) vol. 13, 72; vol. 16, 807; vol. 17, 76; vol. 11, 851; See also, Roberts, "L'image de la Chine dans l'*Encyclopédie*".

⁸²⁵ James Doolittle, "Jaucourt's Use of Source Material in the *Encyclopédie*", *Modern Language Notes* 65:6 (1950), 387-392, 388.

⁸²⁶ Diderot, "Chinois, Philosophie des", *Encyclopédie*, vol. 3, 346.

⁸²⁷ *Ibid.*, 347.

⁸²⁸ *Ibid*

contained everything they needed.⁸²⁹ But, the philosophe did not try to explain away all of China's deficiency in science and technology. When addressing their lack of military technology, he argued it was not attributable to their virtue because they "have nevertheless been used to war."⁸³⁰ In other words, they had the need for military technology but still did not improve it. China's astronomy was positively assessed, which Voltaire attributed it to being a field of observation that required "the fruit of patience," something the Chinese had in abundance.⁸³¹ As Diderot and Voltaire demonstrate, philosophers certainly relied on the primary sources of information on China to arrive at their estimation of China's science and technology, but their descriptions were not as detailed. These Europeans were more concerned with the explanations for and implications of the information provided by the primary sources.

From the primary sources a consistent assessment of China's science and technology emerged, which translated into the accounts of the geographers. On the whole, China's manufactures and mechanical arts received moderate praise, while their advancements in the speculative sciences were almost entirely dismissed (with some exception in the case of astronomy). It should be remembered that these assessments were most frequently given in direct comparison to Europe. When China was compared to other states their science and technology were discussed more positively. When Voltaire described Chinese instruments, he argued they were not as good as European ones, but they were much better than those from the rest of Asia.⁸³² While moral philosophy was not categorized as one of the liberal arts, it was often included in sections that addressed Chinese science and learning. When the Jesuits were criticized for extolling Chinese science it was largely with regards to the specific area of moral philosophy because there was little doubt of their negative assessments of the speculative sciences. Europeans acknowledged China's invention of the compass, printing and gunpowder, but commented on their lack of improvement, indicating Chinese stagnation. It is evident that China's science was heavily criticized and its technology was deemed inferior to Europe's and in need of improvement. The important question then became how easily could these issues be remedied: could China improve its science and technology?

⁸²⁹ Voltaire, *An Essay on Universal History*, Vol. 1, 16. Voltaire, "Essai sur les moeurs", 78.

⁸³⁰ Voltaire, *An Essay on Universal History*, Vol. 1 of 4, 15. Voltaire, "Essai sur les moeurs", 78.

⁸³¹ *Ibid.*

⁸³² *Ibid.*

7.3. EXPLANATIONS FOR STAGNATION

While European writers largely agreed upon the assessment of China's science and technology, there were varied explanations as to why China was not more advanced in these fields. There were four predominant and interconnected explanations found in the primary sources, which were then recycled in various forms by the geographers and philosophers. The primary sources argued China's language, geographic isolation, educational priorities and innate character were responsible for hindering their progress in sciences and technology.

*LANGUAGE*⁸³³

Matteo Ricci first speculated that the hindrance of China's scientific development stemmed from their language. The Jesuit argued that spoken Chinese was the most equivocal language and there were frequently misunderstandings in conversations.⁸³⁴ In a section on the sciences and academics, Ricci argued that the learning of language consumes a great deal of time "that might have been spent in the acquisition of more profitable knowledge."⁸³⁵ Nonetheless, he argued that China's written language had the advantage of allowing different nations in the region to communicate with each other.⁸³⁶

At the end of the seventeenth century, two important China Jesuits publically disagreed about the Chinese language. Gabriel Magalhães' argued that because language was learnt by memory and Chinese had relatively small vocabulary, it took only one year to grasp, thus making it easier to learn than Greek or Latin. He therefore believed that it was not responsible for the stagnation of the Chinese sciences.⁸³⁷ He cited the numerous books authored by the Jesuits in Chinese as evidence of the ease of learning the language. Eight years later Le Comte's description of China explicitly refuted Magalhães' claim: "I cannot tell whether some missionaries had not better have labour'd in the mines than to have apply'd themselves for several years to this labour, one of the hardest and most discouraging that one can experience in matter of study."⁸³⁸

⁸³³ Early modern European debates about the Chinese language were extensive. They related to issues of chronology, history and religion. However, this section is focused on the issue of language as it related to the development of science and technology.

⁸³⁴ Ricci and Trigault, *China in the Sixteenth Century*, 28.

⁸³⁵ *Ibid.*, 29.

⁸³⁶ *Ibid.*, 28 and 29.

⁸³⁷ Magalhães, *A new history of China*, 77-78.

⁸³⁸ Le Comte, *Memoirs and observations*, 182. Le Comte, *Nouveaux mémoires*, Vol. 2, 300.

He questioned Magalhães' claim that Chinese was easier to learn than all the languages in Europe. Following Ricci, Le Comte saw a direct connection between China's lack of science and their language: "This abundance of letters is in my opinion the source of the Chinese ignorance, because they employ all their days in this study, and have not leisure so much as to think of other sciences, phansying themselves learned enough if they can but read."⁸³⁹ Learning Chinese characters, he added, was a horrible way to spend time because it was a mindless activity unlike "the sciences of Europe, which, in fatiguing, do not cease to captivate the spirit with delight."⁸⁴⁰

By the time of Anson's account in 1748, two widely read Jesuits reports by Ricci and Le Comte had already put forth the argument that China's language hindered its science. Anson followed them, proclaiming the Chinese language was "too great for human memory." However, he added his own detail to the argument, claiming that the Chinese language inhibited the transmission of information over generations: "Hence it easy to conclude, that the history and inventions of past ages, recorded by these perplexed symbols, must frequently prove unintelligible; and consequently the learning and boasted antiquity of the nation must, in numerous instances, be extremely problematical."⁸⁴¹

If, as these primary sources argued, a major explanation for the lack of scientific and technological advance was linguistic, they saw little hope for improvement. Unless the Chinese completely reconstructed their language and created an alphabet, a great amount of time would always be spent in the study of language. This explanation, however, did not account for the early inventions and advances of the Chinese that Europeans were aware of, and therefore could not be the only factor explaining scientific progress.

GEOGRAPHIC ISOLATION

Several primary sources pointed to China's lack of competition and exchange with other civilizations as an explanation for their scientific stagnation. Whereas European scientific and technological innovation progressed in part due to competition between countries, China could maintain their (ignorant) arrogance because they were not

⁸³⁹ Le Comte, *Memoirs and observations*, 187. Le Comte, *Nouveaux mémoires*, Vol. 2, 308.

⁸⁴⁰ Le Comte, *Memoirs and observations*, 188. Le Comte, *Nouveaux mémoires*, Vol. 2, 309.

⁸⁴¹ Anson, *Voyage Round the World*, 413.

exposed to competitors on a regional level.⁸⁴² Chinese arrogance was widely addressed. For instance, Le Comte described how the Chinese believed themselves to be “the most intelligent nation in the world.”⁸⁴³

In a section addressing China’s mechanical arts (such as architecture, music, painting and printing) Ricci, who observed China in a moment when it was only beginning to learn about European science and technology, argued,

the Chinese, who in other respects are so ingenious, and by nature in no way inferior to any other people on earth, are very primitive in the use of these latter arts, because they have never come into intimate contact with the nations beyond their borders...Such intercourse would undoubtedly have been most helpful to them in making progress in this respect.⁸⁴⁴

However, he also believed that the Chinese “possess the ingenuous trait of preferring that which comes from without to that which they possess themselves, once they realize the superior quality of the foreign product.” In fact, he concluded, “their pride, it would seem, arises from an ignorance of the existence of higher things and from the fact that they find themselves far superior to the barbarous nations by which they are surrounded.”⁸⁴⁵ This idea was supported by knowledge of the role that Muslim astronomers had played in Chinese history. Marco Polo had a chapter on “the Astrologers of the City of Kanabalu [Beijing]” where he described the astrologers as “Christians, Saracens, and Cathaians”, who used astronomical instruments “likely introduced by the Muslims”.⁸⁴⁶ Ricci argued that when the Chinese were proven wrong, they could admit it and learn from their mistakes. The view of Chinese openness to foreign ideas fluctuated (as did the fate of the missionaries stationed in China over the early modern period).

As mentioned above, Magalhães also blamed China’s isolation for the hindrance of their science and technology. He argued the Chinese “are ignorant of many sciences, for want of communication with other people.”⁸⁴⁷ Le Comte attributed China’s lack of letters to the “little converse they have had with other neighbour nations, or thro’ the small account they made of foreign inventions.”⁸⁴⁸ By the eighteenth century, Du Halde

⁸⁴² Philipp Pattberg, “Conquest, Domination and Control: Europe’s Mastery of Nature in Historic Perspective”, *Journal of Political Ecology*, 14 (2007): 1-9.

⁸⁴³ Le Comte, *Memoirs and observations*, 220. Le Comte, *Nouveaux mémoires*, Vol. 2, 356.

⁸⁴⁴ Ricci and Trigault, *China in the Sixteenth Century*, 22.

⁸⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, 22-23.

⁸⁴⁶ Marco Polo, *The Travels of Marco Polo*, 133.

⁸⁴⁷ Magalhães, *A new history of China*, 88.

⁸⁴⁸ Le Comte, *Memoirs and observations*, 186. Le Comte, *Nouveaux mémoires*, Vol. 2, 307.

argued one reason for the low level of China's speculative sciences was that "there is nothing within or without the Empire to stir up their emulation."⁸⁴⁹ Du Halde believed states could encourage each other through competition or inspiration to improve their sciences.

If China's stagnation in the sciences was attributed to their geographic isolation this could be remedied by greater interaction with the civilized Europeans. This argument, a useful one for the Jesuits who participated in Chinese science in Peking, offered hope for China's ability to rapidly improve their science and technology.

EDUCATIONAL PRIORITIES

A third explanation for the stagnation of China's science and technology was their bureaucratic structure of rewarding members of society based on an examination system that prioritized Confucian learning. China's civil service system was a culturally and historically embedded part of Chinese society. As Rachel Ramsey points out, the Chinese education system was radically different from the patronage system and limited bureaucracy that existed in England.⁸⁵⁰ To be sure, primary sources described benefits of the Chinese system. For instance, it fought the potential regionalism that existed in the massive empire, and it allowed for a dream of social mobility to exist in Chinese society. However, the Chinese education system was largely believed to act *against* scientific advancement rather than promote it.

Mendoza again represented the pre-Jesuit period where Chinese science was admired to a greater extent. He maintained the Chinese education system included areas other than moral philosophy: "For one to be of [the king's royal counsel], it is not sufficient that they be expert and learned in the lawes of the countrie, and in morall and naturall philosophie, and commenced in the same, but they must also be expert in astrologie and judgements".⁸⁵¹ He also described how the "king" pays for colleges in every city where students are taught literacy, arithmetic and "studie naturall or morall philosophie,

⁸⁴⁹ Du Halde, Cave edition, Vol. 2, 124; Watts edition, Vol. 3, 64; French edition, Vol. 3, 264.

⁸⁵⁰ Ramsey, "China and the Ideal of Order in John Webb", 499. Ramsey also points out the recent research by Benjamin Elman that demonstrates that China was not a true meritocratic system. For more see Benjamin Elman, *A Cultural History of Civil Examinations in Late Imperial China* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2000), 248.

⁸⁵¹ Mendoza, *The History of the Great and Mighty Kingdom*, 97.

astrologie, lawes of the countrie, or any other curious science”.⁸⁵² The reports he relied on had a small geographical sample and the extent to which education was provided to the Chinese people was debated in primary sources through to the eighteenth century.

The critique of China’s meritocratic system on the development of the sciences began in earnest with Ricci. In a section “Concerning the Liberal Arts, the Sciences, and the Use of Academic Degrees Among the Chinese”, Ricci pointed out discrepancies between various reports about Chinese education, particularly with regards to its universality. Similar to Mendoza, he acknowledged other fields of interest but left no doubt that moral philosophy dominated. Ricci noted that there were specialist exams for different fields such as the military, mathematics and medicine. The practice of having mandarins who specialised in philosophy assessing all other fields of exams, he reflected, “might seem to be a rather strange and perhaps a somewhat inefficient method” to European observers.⁸⁵³ Ricci described how medicine is taught through an apprentice system rather than in a university setting. Though you can take an examination in medicine, he claimed it was a formality of little consequence.⁸⁵⁴ As more detailed information about China spread, it began to be established that the education system elevated moral philosophy above medicine or mathematics. He argued that it was evident that “no one will labor to attain proficiency in mathematics or in medicine who has any hope of becoming prominent in the field of philosophy.” The only reason someone would devote themselves to the study of areas such as mathematics or medicine would be if their family affairs or “mediocrity of talent” forced them to these studies. Ricci believed that students were attracted to philosophy “by the hope of the glory and rewards attached to it.”⁸⁵⁵ The argument that there were no incentives to study science increased in prominence in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries.

Semedo confirmed Ricci’s assessment of the lack of rewards for sciences, but focused specifically to the study of medicine. He argued there are no medical schools in China and obtaining a degree of doctor of physick “doth advance neither the honor or respect of the person. And for this reason it is probably, that few or none study physick but the meaner sort of people, because the very profession thereof (which is so honorable in

⁸⁵² *Ibid.*, 122.

⁸⁵³ Ricci and Trigault, *China in the Sixteenth Century*, 41.

⁸⁵⁴ *Ibid.*, 32.

⁸⁵⁵ *Ibid.*, 32.

other places) is there is no esteem, nor adds the least reputation to him that gains it.”⁸⁵⁶ Similarly, Le Comte argued the Chinese were much better in arts than sciences and concluded that “They would have got a great deal farther, had not the form of government, that hath prescribed bounds to the expences of private persons, put a stop to them”.⁸⁵⁷ There was varying speculation as to why the Chinese government followed these restricted priorities, most of which were connected to some notion of Chinese focus on tradition.

Du Halde concurred that a lack of incentives was a major problem stopping the progress of the sciences in China. In China, he believed, there were neither great men of speculative science to admire nor any encouragement to move forward. He claimed, “Those who are able to distinguish themselves therein have no reward to expect for their labour”.⁸⁵⁸ As such, he saw no benefit to applying oneself to the speculative sciences: “and as the study of them is not the road to affluence and honours, it is no wonder that these sort of abstracted sciences should be neglected by the Chinese.”⁸⁵⁹

Unlike specific taxation policies, Confucian moral philosophy was recognized as a fundamental pillar of the Chinese system of political economy, implying that significant shifts would be required to suddenly prioritize the development of scientific fields of inquiry.

CHARACTER

The final predominant explanation for the Chinese lack of scientific advancement given by the primary sources related to their character, which was purportedly influenced by their veneration for tradition.

Le Comte argued “without offering them any injury, that amongst the qualities wherewith heaven hath respectively enriched the people of the world, they have not shewed that spirit of penetration and nicety, so necessary to those who addict themselves to the research of nature”⁸⁶⁰ This vague notion that the Chinese lacked the spirit of penetration might be attributed to the Chinese tendency to look backwards to

⁸⁵⁶ Semedo, *The history of that great and renowned monarchy of China*, 155.

⁸⁵⁷ Le Comte, *Memoirs and observations*, 232. Le Comte, *Nouveaux mémoires*, Vol. 2, 383.

⁸⁵⁸ Du Halde, Cave edition, Vol. 2, 124; Watts edition, Vol. 3, 64; French edition, Vol. 3, 264.

⁸⁵⁹ *Ibid.*

⁸⁶⁰ Le Comte, *Memoirs and observations*, 221. Le Comte, *Nouveaux mémoires*, Vol. 2, 357.

tradition rather than forwards to progress. Du Halde was “not willing to find fault with their capacity, since it is very plain that they succeed in other things which require as great a genius and as deep penetration as the speculative sciences.”⁸⁶¹ However he did offer an example of China’s stubbornness to change when he described the response of the Chinese mandarins when Verbiest demonstrated the inaccuracies of their calendar: “The Mandarins...could not bear with patience that the Chinese astronomy should be abolish’d, and that of Europe introduced...” The mandarins argued that the Emperor would suffer if he changed this science “since hitherto all nations had deriv’d their laws, politicks, and skill in government from there”. The Chinese, according to Du Halde, concluded it was better to follow a somewhat defective calendar than to reform it.⁸⁶² Du Halde, however, noted the Manchu mandarins disagreed with the Chinese unwillingness to learn from the foreigners and wanted to work with the missionaries, perhaps a result of their lack of connection to Chinese history. This indicated that there might be some hope for a change in attitudes towards science.

In addition to the difficulty of their language, Anson also attributed China’s stagnation in the arts to their character: “And it may perhaps be truly asserted that these defects in their arts are entirely owing to the peculiar turn of the people, amongst whom nothing great or spirited is to be met with.”⁸⁶³ Salmon directly repeated Anson’s line in his *Universal Traveller*.⁸⁶⁴

These ill-defined attributions of China’s stagnant sciences to their disposition that led them to look backwards were contrasted with an image of Europeans motivated by a penetrating spirit. Unless, as Du Halde alluded to, the Manchu disposition altered the Chinese norm (which was unlikely as we saw in chapter six the conquerors end up assimilating to the conquered), the Chinese sciences were likely to continue to be hindered by their character.

RECEPTION

European geographers and philosophers recycled the explanations found in the primary sources. Salmon’s repetition of Anson’s critique of the Chinese character (mentioned

⁸⁶¹ Du Halde, Cave edition, Vol. 2, 124; Watts edition, Vol. 3, 64; French edition, Vol. 3, 264.

⁸⁶² Du Halde, Cave edition, Vol. 2, 137; Watts edition, Vol. 3, 105; French edition, Vol. 2, 287.

⁸⁶³ Anson, *Voyage Round the World*, 412.

⁸⁶⁴ Salmon, *The Universal Traveller*, Vol. 1, 21.

above) diverged from his earlier geography first published in 1727. In *Modern History*, Salmon argued the Chinese were ingenious and explained “the reason they fall short of the Europeans in the speculative sciences does not proceed from any defect in their capacities or intellects, but from their situation; being separated so far from the rest of the learned world, and conversing with none but people so much inferior to themselves.”⁸⁶⁵ The blame he attributed to China’s geographic isolation was likely drawn from Ricci. Salmon also added his own arguments about the implications of being geographically removed from other advanced civilizations: “There cannot be a greater misfortune happen to any man or nation, than the being instructed only in one set of notions, and never meeting with opposition or contradiction.” In fact, he believed that considering China was clearly the superior civilization in Asia, it was quite remarkable and showing “a wonderful tractable disposition that they should submit to be taught and instructed by the Europeans.”⁸⁶⁶ To Salmon, the willingness of the Chinese to learn from the Jesuits indicated their ingenuity and offered hope that they could improve their science and technology. Salmon disagreed with the view that China’s meritocracy was to blame, because they had rewarded and encouraged learning for four thousand years and “yet has not any one man amongst them made any great advances in the speculative sciences.”⁸⁶⁷ Salmon also expounded the disagreement between Le Comte and Magalhães about the difficulty of learning the Chinese language, noting that language was Le Comte’s explanation for the lack of improvements in Chinese science.⁸⁶⁸ In fact, the Chinese language provoked a considerable amount of debate and analysis in Europe. John Webb’s *An Historical Essay Endeavoring a Probability that the Language of the Empire of China is the Primitive Language* (1669) argued that China preserved the first language of Adam and Eve through Noah after the Great Flood.⁸⁶⁹ The idea of China possessing the “primitive tongue” was attached to a vision of Chinese socio-political stability stemming from a dominion over nature.⁸⁷⁰ However the connection between language and Chinese progress in science and technology did not travel far during the Enlightenment. The Jesuit Dominique Parrenin rejected the suggestion by Jean Baptiste Dortours de Mairan,

⁸⁶⁵ Salmon, *Modern History*, 21.

⁸⁶⁶ *Ibid.*

⁸⁶⁷ *Ibid.*

⁸⁶⁸ Salmon, *Modern History*, 23.

⁸⁶⁹ Ramsey, “China and the Ideal of Order...”, 483.

⁸⁷⁰ *Ibid.*, 488.

the director of the Académie des Sciences, that language explained China's lack of scientific progress.⁸⁷¹

The editors of the modern part of *An Universal History* made similar arguments to those of Salmon in his *Modern History*. They cited the Jesuits in their argument that China's scientific deficiency could not be explained by a "want of genius and capacity." Instead, they supported the geographical argument, noting that the Chinese were "debarred the benefit of travelling and corresponding with other learned nations of the world; so that, all things considered, it ought to be rather a wonder that they had made so great a progress..."⁸⁷² Like Salmon, they offered hope for improvement, commending the Chinese "understanding and capacity, that they so readily submitted to be taught by a people of whom they had scarcely heard before". Finally, they repeated the debate on China's language between Magalhães and Le Comte and commented "most writers impute the small progress and improvements which the Chinese nation hath made in the sciences, there being so great a part of their time spent in learning to read and write their own language."⁸⁷³ While geographers such as Salmon and the editors of *An Universal History* found it necessary to address China's science and technology, they did not offer any new views explaining their relative stagnation.⁸⁷⁴

Philosophers were equally intrigued by the puzzle of China's lack of scientific advancement. In the *Encyclopédie* Diderot referred to members of Académie des Inscriptions et Belles-Lettres, Académie des sciences, Société des Missions Étrangères de Paris as well as Leibniz and Le Comte in his scathing explanation for China's lack of progress in the sciences.⁸⁷⁵ Clearly recognizing the view of some that China's isolation was, at least in part, to blame, Diderot argued that if they had been better men, their philosophers would have broken any barriers to learning because of their inability to stay still.⁸⁷⁶ He believed that the general spirit of the East was quiet and lazy, more

⁸⁷¹ Adas, *Machines as the Measure of Men*, 85. O'Brien has pointed out that the most historians now agree that the Chinese language was not an impediment to the advancement of abstract science and technology. Patrick K. O'Brien, "The Needham Question Updated: a Historiographical Survey and Elaboration", Special Edition: Chinese Technological History: The Great Divergence, Kent Deng and Jerry Liu (eds.) *History of Technology* 29 (December 2009).

⁸⁷² *The modern part of an universal history*, vol. 8, 180.

⁸⁷³ *Ibid.*, 208.

⁸⁷⁴ Similarly, Rousselot de Surgy in France followed the explanation that China's sciences were flawed because there were no incentives in government or in society. Since the Chinese are actuated by gain, they would only study what was practical. Rousselot de Surgy, *Mélanges intéressans*, Vol. 5, 37-8.

⁸⁷⁵ Diderot, "Chinois, Philosophie des", *Encyclopédie*, vol. 3, 347-348.

⁸⁷⁶ "que s'ils avoient eu des hommes supérieurs, leurs lumieres auroient forcé les obstacles par la seule impossibilité de rester captives". *Ibid.*

interested in preserving what was already established, especially when compared to the West.⁸⁷⁷ Diderot forcefully maintained that China could have overcome their isolation if it was in their character to. China, in particular, was driven by a uniform government with durable laws but the sciences and arts require “a curiosity that never tires of searching” and because they lacked this, even though the China was an older civilization, Europeans have outstripped them.⁸⁷⁸ Attributing the stagnation of their arts and sciences to their character offered little prospects for improvement.

Cornelius de Pauw was noted for his opprobrium of China. For instance, Voltaire concluded that de Pauw had too intensely criticized China while he himself had exalted it too much.⁸⁷⁹ De Pauw argued Egyptians did not progress in the sciences because of their language, and even they had use of an alphabet making them superior to the Chinese language. However, de Pauw articulated a direct (albeit unique) path that the Chinese could follow to improve their sciences. He believed the Tartars emperors “have not ceased, during more than a century, to encourage the sciences”.⁸⁸⁰ However, their efforts had not led to significant changes. He believed “If the Chinese could divest themselves of that natural vanity...they would adopt without hesitating the writing and language of the [Manchus].” It would not be as difficult as some may think since the mandarins already knew it and all Tartars who married Chinese were obliged by law to teach it to their children. The Tartar language “is infinitely superior to the Chinese jargon, in which nothing can be written with precision on true science”.⁸⁸¹

Voltaire grew increasingly critical of China’s science over time, but even in his earlier writings he disparaged the Chinese character for hindering science. In the introductory dedication of *L’Orphelin de la Chine* (1755) to his friend the statesman, soldier and member of the Académie Française, Le duc de Richelieu, Voltaire questioned how the Chinese, whose dramatic productions surpassed Europe’s in the fourteenth century, still remained in the “infancy of this art” while Europeans had achieved the status of best in the world. He noted:

The Chinese, like the other Asiatics, have stopt at the first elements of poetry, eloquence, physicks, astronomy, painting, known by them so long before us. They begun all things so much sooner than all other people,

⁸⁷⁷ “plus tranquille, plus paresseux, plus renfermé dans les besoins essentiels, plus borné à ce qu’il trouve établi, moins avide de nouveautés que l’esprit d’occident”. *Ibid.*

⁸⁷⁸ *Ibid.*

⁸⁷⁹ Voltaire, *Lettres Chinoises*, 53.

⁸⁸⁰ De Pauw, *Philosophical dissertations*, Vol. 2, 209.

⁸⁸¹ *Ibid.*

never afterwards to make any progress in them. They have resembled the ancient Egyptians, who having first instructed the Grecians, were afterwards incapable of being their disciples.⁸⁸²

By the publication of *Essai sur les mœurs* (1756), Voltaire explained the different priorities (or abilities) of the Chinese: “It seems as if nature had given to this species of men, so different from ours, organs formed for discovering all at once whatever was necessary for them, and incapable of going any further”; Europe, however, made their scientific discoveries more recently but perfected them quickly.⁸⁸³ Voltaire gave two further specific explanations for China’s meager progress in arts and science. First, he blamed the “great respect they have for whatever has been transmitted to them by their ancestors,” thus they did not question ancient knowledge in order to move it forward. Second, he pointed to “the nature of their language, the first principle of all human knowledge,” which he described as difficult to communicate in and very time consuming to learn.⁸⁸⁴

In the *Philosophical Dictionary* (1764) Voltaire strengthened his view that China’s reverence for tradition was responsible for their lack of progress: “the respect entertained by the Chinese for their ancestors is an evidence that such ancestors have existed”. He repeated the observation, so often made, “that a reverential respect has in so small degree impeded, among this people, the progress of natural philosophy, geometry and astronomy”.⁸⁸⁵ The disposition of the Chinese was to look backwards to tradition. This contrasted to the Enlightenment priorities to push ancient knowledge forward. Voltaire, however, did not view science as the distinguishing feature of an admirable civilization as his comments on the “necessary arts of life” demonstrate:

But it is possible to be a very bad natural philosopher, and at the same time an excellent moralist. It is, in fact, in morality, in political economy, in agriculture, in the necessary arts of life, that the Chinese have made such advances towards perfection. All the rest they have been taught by us: in these we might well submit to become their disciples.⁸⁸⁶

To Voltaire, morality, political economy and agriculture were considered “necessary arts of life.” This view was very similar to Raynal’s argument several decades later.

⁸⁸² Voltaire, *The Orphan of China* translated from the French by Arthur Murphy, (Dublin: William Smith, 1756), xi-xiii; Voltaire, *L’Orphelin de la Chine* (Paris: Michel Lambert, 1755), 6.

⁸⁸³ Voltaire, *An Essay on Universal History*, Vol. 1, 16. Voltaire, “Essai sur les mœurs” 78.

⁸⁸⁴ Voltaire, *An Essay on Universal History*, Vol. 1, 17. Voltaire, “Essai sur les mœurs” 78-79.

⁸⁸⁵ Voltaire, *Philosophical Dictionary*, 83. *Dictionnaire philosophique* 151.

⁸⁸⁶ *Ibid.* For “natural philosopher” Voltaire used the term “physicien”.

Voltaire's *Lettres chinoises* (1776), written as a response to Cornelius de Pauw's attack on China, was even more dismissive of China's science. In this work, Voltaire expressed his astonishment that they cultivated the sciences for so long and yet remained where Europe was in the tenth, eleventh and twelfth centuries.⁸⁸⁷ Voltaire also undermined the advances the Chinese had made in the arts (both liberal and mechanical) noting that their ability to play music, have mechanical works and calculate eclipses, without understanding the science behind these endeavours.⁸⁸⁸ By 1776, Voltaire was convinced that their respect for their ancestors prevented them from progressing in the sciences.⁸⁸⁹ However he did offer some hope, noting that at present the Chinese had "begun to use their minds, thanks to our European mathematicians".⁸⁹⁰

Voltaire's discussion of Chinese science was influential to Raynal. Like the other philosophers discussed, Raynal acknowledged that in China "improvements" that are based on complicated theories are not as advanced as one would expect from an ancient, active and hardworking people.⁸⁹¹ However he believed "this riddle is not inexplicable" and offered several explanations for the relative stagnation of the Chinese sciences. First, he turned to the Chinese language, which "requires a long and laborious study" as well as their rites and ceremonies, which occupy a man's life and memory.⁸⁹² Next, the Chinese were "too much taken up in the pursuit of what is useful, they have no opportunity of launching out into the extensive regions of imagination."⁸⁹³ Finally, the Chinese had "an excessive, veneration for antiquity, [which made] them the slaves of whatever is established."⁸⁹⁴ He concluded that it took the Chinese centuries to bring any thing to perfection, thus descriptions of China's arts and sciences from Marco Polo's time were not dramatically different from descriptions of the eighteenth century.⁸⁹⁵ In the 1774 edition of *Histoire des deux Indes*, Raynal added another paragraph explaining, "the lous state of learning, and the fine arts in China", which he attributed to "the very

⁸⁸⁷ Voltaire, *Lettres Chinoises, Indiennes et Tartares. A Monsieur Paw* (Geneve: 1776), 51. Voltaire reduced the quality of Chinese plays further back from their equivocation to fourteenth century European plays.

⁸⁸⁸ *Ibid.*

⁸⁸⁹ *Ibid.*, 52.

⁸⁹⁰ *Ibid.*, 52-53. "commencent à oser faire usage de leur esprit, grace à nos mathématiciens d'Europe".

⁸⁹¹ Raynal, *A Philosophical and Political History*, Vol.1, 103. Raynal, *Histoire philosophique et politique*, 113. Present in all editions.

⁸⁹² *Ibid.*

⁸⁹³ *Ibid.* Same in all French editions except for a slight grammatical change.

⁸⁹⁴ *Ibid.* Same in all French editions.

⁸⁹⁵ Raynal, *A Philosophical and Political History*, Vol.1, 104. Raynal, *Histoire philosophique et politique*, 113. Same in all French editions except for a grammatical change.

perfection of its government”.⁸⁹⁶ He agreed with the view that the Chinese system prioritized the study of law above all else and hence learning concentrated on the regulation of manners and the public welfare. As mentioned above, this view was discussed by several primary sources. However, Raynal went further in explaining the focus of the Chinese education system. He believed that China’s unique political economy led to it being “exceedingly populous, and requires a constant attention in its learned members to make subsistence keep an equal pace with population.” As a result of this necessary focus in China, “the speculative and ornamental parts of science cannot be expected to arrive at that height of splendor they have attained in Europe.” Clearly Raynal did not believe the sciences had an impact on the maintaining the wealth of the country. Raynal concluded that the Chinese learnt the arts of luxury and vanity from the Europeans, but were superior to Europeans in the science of good government, or “the study how to increase, not how to diminish the number of inhabitants.”⁸⁹⁷ Raynal thus formulated a choice between good government and scientific advancement, and believed that the Chinese had selected correctly, connecting his view of China to that of Leibniz one century earlier.

Scholars such as Montesquieu and Smith did not address China’s science and technology directly. Smith mentioned China’s prioritization of the agricultural labourer over the artificer, compared to Europe where the condition of the artificer was superior to that of the labourer.⁸⁹⁸ This was a result of China’s concentration on agriculture, and indicated their lack of attention on inventing and developing products, but he never discussed this in relation to Chinese stagnation. Earlier in *Wealth of Nations*, Smith hinted at a connection between science, technology and economic development. He described one of the advantages of the division of labour as the encouragement of machinery invented by workmen, and by “those who are called philosophers or men of speculation, whose trade it is not to do any thing, but to observe every thing; and who, upon that account, are often capable of combining together the powers of the most distant and dissimilar objects.”⁸⁹⁹ Smith recognized some connection between scientific and technological innovation and economic progress. However, this notion was still in its infancy. When he discussed science in a section on education, he argued that one of the chief uses of science was as an “antidote to the poison of enthusiasm and

⁸⁹⁶ *Ibid.* In the original French he referred to “l’imperfection des lettres & des beaux-arts” and used the word “science” to refer to the time it takes an individual to “understand” the duties he owes to the public.

⁸⁹⁷ *Ibid.*

⁸⁹⁸ Smith, *Wealth of Nations*, 31.

⁸⁹⁹ *Ibid.*, 18.

superstition.”⁹⁰⁰ As we will see in the conclusion, Smith had different explanations for China’s stationary status.

The primary sources, geographers and philosophers posited several reasons for China’s stagnation in the sciences. Whether attributed to language, geographic isolation, educational priorities or the Chinese character, there evidently was an inadequacy that required an explanation. Adas is correct in arguing the status of science and technology as categories for assessing civilizations increased over the eighteenth century. However, by the publication of Smith’s *Wealth of Nations*, science and technology were not yet fundamental areas of assessing the wealth of a nation; further, there was potential for China to improve its capacity for developing these areas of knowledge.

CONCLUSION

Early modern European observers of China, including the Jesuits, assessed the various aspects of Chinese science and technology and concluded that for the most part China lagged behind Europe. While there was more room for praise of China’s manufacturing capabilities, they lambasted Chinese scientific knowledge. The perceived scientific and technological gap between Europe and China increased from Mendoza’s praise to the criticism given by Le Comte and Leibniz, but the negative descriptions remained stable over the course of the eighteenth century. The primary authors and geographers presented some optimism in their reports that China was, at times, willing to learn European sciences. Some of the explanations given for the low level of sciences were believed to be remediable. Further, by 1776 there was not a definite connection between overall wealth or improvement with the development of science and technology (notably seen through Smith’s lack of discussion of China’s technology). Nonetheless, considering their early invention of printing, gunpowder and the compass, it was evident that the Chinese had stagnated in their domestic innovation. This view is akin to the larger context in which, as we shall see in the next chapter, Adam Smith labelled China’s entire political economy as stagnant.

⁹⁰⁰ *Ibid.*, 1005. This was the same context in which Cornelius de Pauw discussed Chinese science. De Pauw, *Philosophical dissertations*, Vol. 2, 208. Similarly, Quesnay had earlier argued that in China because the speculative sciences are neglected, there is too much superstition. Maverick, *China, a model for Europe*, 190.

8. CONCLUSION

This study started by invoking Sir James Steurt's argument that the duty of the speculative person and the statesman was to "judge of the expediency of different schemes of oeconomy".⁹⁰¹ The dissertation has examined the various ways in which early modern Europeans, from primary observers to geographers and philosophers, actively engaged in the assessment of other systems of political economy. Like Steuart, geographers believed in the utility of comparing countries across space and time. As Edward Wells, author of a popular, educational eighteenth century geography argued, his text "is of excellent use, not only to be able to reckon up all the antient and present countries (&c.) by themselves, but also to know how they stand in relation one to another".⁹⁰² Several primary sources even offered their own rankings of Asian civilizations. For instance, Du Halde claimed that "China is, beyond all dispute, the largest and finest kingdom known to us". He continued, "Even the Indians themselves, tho not altogether so rude, can be accounted little better than barbarians, when compared with our civiliz'd nations."⁹⁰³ China was of particular interest in these assessments because of its status as a relatively advanced civilization – in many ways offering to Enlightenment observers a captivating mirror against which to assess and measure advances in their own countries. In evaluating China's system of political economy, Europeans also analysed and debated specific elements of their own commercial culture, geographic situation, political institutions and scientific thinking. In the process, they revealed a genuine interest in the lessons offered by China's system of political economy.

This study has identified the application of the European system of knowledge on the non-European world to the Enlightenment project of improving the welfare of states. Not only were boundaries between types of sources obscured in the travelling of knowledge or views on China's political economy, but a significant ability to transcend religious dogma and focus on secular interests also existed.

Discussion of China's commercial culture revealed the struggle of Enlightenment authors to bring moral philosophy in line with the rapidly growing commercial world. Analysis of the primary reports reveals both criticism of the insatiable greed of the

⁹⁰¹ Sir James Steuart, *An inquiry into the principles of political oeconomy*, 3.

⁹⁰² Edward Wells, *A Treatise of antient and present geography...* (Oxford: Printed at the Theater, 1701)

⁹⁰³ Du Halde, Cave edition, Vol. 1, 1; Watts edition, Vol. 1, 2; French edition, Vol. 1, 1.

Chinese and praise for their system of moral philosophy, often within the same sources, bringing into question the crude dichotomy of sinophilia and sinophobia that has prevailed amongst many modern historians. Discussion of Chinese greed led to self-reflection and to the recognition of a similar problem of avarice in European societies. On the topic of commercial culture, China was a useful model through which to examine the implications of boundless self-interest in society. While Europeans lambasted the Chinese for their excessive self-interest, this topic did not occasion a fundamental rejection of the Chinese system. China's commercial inclinations also led to a recognition of its vast internal trade. The uniqueness of China's size and geographic situation enabled its domestic trade to sustain a very wealthy economic system. Numerous observers, notably Adam Smith, argued that if China expanded its foreign commerce, its economic situation would improve. This belief was similar to contemporary claims about how European countries needed to improve their own commercial policies, and therefore was not a criticism uniquely given to the Chinese. In other words, both European states and China could improve their foreign trade practices. Europeans recognized that China's foreign trade policies were flexible and, as late as Smith's *Wealth of Nations*, there was a belief that they could change and allow increased foreign commerce. While problematic, China's approach to foreign commerce did not signify the fundamental failure of the system in the eyes of Enlightenment observers.

Assessments of China's government varied to a greater extent. When it came to constitutional structure, the same observer or commentator often described China as both despotic and moderate. Most Enlightenment commentators agreed that China's form of government was the unique result of their geography and longevity, which enabled the Confucian system to become engrained in Chinese culture. Quesnay was a notable exception because he believed that China's system of legal despotism was reproducible, and thus could serve as a universal model. The dual image of the Chinese government as moderate and despotic made it difficult for Enlightenment commentators to draw conclusions about the effect of the Chinese form of government on their system of political economy.

To gain insight into the Enlightenment's understandings of the effect of China's government on their political economy, it was necessary to examine the practicalities of governance. The primary sources did not report detailed information on Chinese

property rights, but in general, believed that they were secure. Adam Smith criticized the insecurity of property of the poorer classes, but attributed this to corruption rather than to a systemic flaw in the constitutional structure. The corruption of the Chinese mandarins was certainly seen as problematic, but, as discussed in chapter five, Europeans described the numerous checks and balances in the system that sought to deter this form of abuse. The assessment of China's public institutions was, on the whole, extremely positive. While there was some debate about the nature of Chinese roads, observers and commentators agreed that goods were easily transported throughout the Empire. Smith's explanation for China's success in this area pointed to yet another area where China was deemed a unique case, namely its agricultural system and the extent of its empire. On the topic of revenue, Europeans agreed that China was wealthy, and that its taxes were moderate and efficiently collected. Some, such as Quesnay, noted imperfections of China's policies, particularly with regard to irregular taxes, but believed that these could be modified with relative ease.

The discussion of China's military did not, however, result in a similarly hopeful conclusion. In fact, most Europeans identified China's ineffectual defence as a fundamental weakness of China's system of political economy. Raynal tried to rationalize the deficiency, while Quesnay ignored it, revealing the extent to which Europeans recognized China's military weakness as a significant vulnerability that could not be easily resolved.

The final chapter addressed the second major weakness of the Chinese system, namely the lack of development of the arts and sciences. Scientific advancement was a criterion of assessing a civilization, though it was not yet fully connected to the improvement of political economy. However, eighteenth century Europeans did recognize the importance of technological progress, which led to publications such as the *Encyclopédie*. Europeans considered China's failure to prioritize the development of the arts and sciences in their education system as well as and in their society more generally as a fundamental flaw, no less than the noted weakness of its military. China's comparatively low-level of arts and sciences were connected to core Chinese principles that could not be altered easily.

The assessments of various elements of China's system of political economy demonstrate the openness of the Europeans to learn from the experiences of another

advanced civilization. At times, China was useful to encourage self-reflection, such as when Europeans addressed China's commercial behaviour. At other times, namely in discussions of taxation policies, China offered useful policies that Europeans might be able to adopt. However, as we have seen with our discussion of China's military and science, Europeans believed the Chinese system of political economy had significant flaws. Further, China was often revealed to be a unique case because of its history, geography and culture, one that did not easily fit into the universal models created by Enlightenment philosophers.

There is no doubt that the idea of progress, which was not limited to, nor even originated in relation to economic matters, was a significant development over the course of the eighteenth century. Ultimately, it had a profound effect on the European worldview.⁹⁰⁴ Whereas Europeans once admired Chinese historical stability, the obstinacy of China's customs became the focus of some of the greatest critiques. However, European progress (both the idea and the phenomenon) emerged slowly over the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries.⁹⁰⁵ In *The Great Map of Mankind* P.J. Marshall and Gyndwr Williams centralize the role of progress in shaping European views of the non-European world. They describe the process whereby Europeans throughout the eighteenth century moved from curiosity about the non-European world, to a belief that Europeans were needed to improve it. And yet, their assessment of China, relying heavily on the work of Donald Lach for the seventeenth century, concludes that Eighteenth-century Englishmen began their inquiries on Asia "with comfortable assumptions of superiority."⁹⁰⁶ This might have been the case in their religious approach to China, but it was less certain for the economic approach. This dissertation

⁹⁰⁴ Michael Heffernan, "On geography and progress: Turgot's Plan d'un ouvrage sur la géographie politique (1751) and the origins of modern progressive thought", *Political Geography* 13(4) (1994): 328-343. David Spadafora, *The Idea of Progress in Eighteenth-Century Britain* (New Haven & London: Yale University Press, 1990). J.B. Bury, *The Idea of Progress: An Inquiry into Its Origin and Growth* (London, 1920)

⁹⁰⁵ Most historians who address the role of progress in European views of China look to the late eighteenth and nineteenth century. Arthur Wright maintains that the growth of the idea of progress from the late eighteenth century coincided with the rise of Europe's power and prosperity, which led Europeans "to categorize the histories of non-European peoples" and differentiate their own progressive history from the despotic Orient. Wright, "The Study of Chinese Civilization", 241; David Jones removes causality between the rise of progress and the rejection of China, and instead argues they rose in tandem in the nineteenth century, noting how China's transformation from an admired model to "the sick man of the east" encouraged European reflection on progress. David Martin Jones, *The Image of China...*, 76; Gregory Blue and Timothy Brook assert by the end of the eighteenth century, China was increasingly seen as stationary, and "Chinese historical stagnation became a cliché over the following century, a cliché that European social theory mobilized to develop its understanding of capitalism". Brook and Blue, *China and Historical Capitalism*, 4.

⁹⁰⁶ Marshall and Williams. *The Great Map of Mankind*, 25.

has revealed the important nuances in discussions of China's political economy that reflects insecurity in the voice of the European observers and commentators.

This research had revealed that while the rise of the idea of progress in Europe, together with China's stationary status, certainly impacted European hierarchies of civilization, this was not a predominant method of assessing China's political economy until at least the publication of Smith's *Wealth of Nations*. The Chinese, as self-interested, industrious, and self-sufficient people with a uniquely balanced and responsible government contained many elements that Europeans admired; however, their weak military and stagnation in the arts and sciences were significant failures of their system. While the government could modify their taxation and foreign trade policies, improving their ineffectual military would require changing the priorities of the state and developing their arts and sciences would likely necessitate either altering their language or the structural foundations of their bureaucracy.

The notion of progress as applied to China is most emblematically embodied in Smith's labelling of the Middle Kingdom as stationary. However, there was much more in his discussion of China than this label implies. In Smith's view China was unquestionably a wealth country: "China has been long one of the richest, that is, one of the most fertile, best cultivated, most industrious, and most populous countries in the world"⁹⁰⁷ However, at the same time, "The poverty of the lower ranks of people in China far surpasses that of the most beggarly nations in Europe."⁹⁰⁸ While the primary sources differed on some subjects, Smith argued, travellers agreed on the low wages of labour and the difficulty of raising a family in China. He explained the wages of labour and profits of stock were low in China because it had been stationary for several centuries (at least since Marco Polo's visit).⁹⁰⁹ Chinese towns were not deserted, their lands not neglected and they maintained the same annual labour, thus, unlike Bengal, China was not retrogressing.⁹¹⁰ He also argued that China was not improving like many countries in Europe.⁹¹¹ Smith surmised that China "acquired that full complement of riches which the nature of its laws and institutions permit it to acquire". By pointing to China's "laws and institutions", China's stationary status was, by no means, a historical imperative. Smith believed "this complement may be much inferior to what, with other laws and

⁹⁰⁷ Smith, *Wealth of Nations*, 101.

⁹⁰⁸ *Ibid.*, 102.

⁹⁰⁹ *Ibid.*, 101.

⁹¹⁰ *Ibid.*, 103.

⁹¹¹ *Ibid.*, 258.

institutions, the nature of its soil, climate and situation might admit of".⁹¹² He specifically pointed out that China should change its policies towards foreign commerce and enhance the security of the poorer class. Other obstacles to the success of the Chinese system included overcoming the hindrance of being surrounded by "wandering savages and poor barbarians".⁹¹³ However, their situation could improve and thus the standard of living for their labouring class would as well. While Smith's schema of declining, stationary and improving states is a prominent element of his system, his analysis of specific elements of China's political economy, based on ethnographic information as well as other philosophers, was not dependant on the idea of progress.

Enlightenment writers debated whether China had the capacity to address the weaknesses in their system. In particular, the Chinese needed to improve their military and arts and sciences. Europeans disagreed on the extent to which this was possible. For instance, Montesquieu argued that the Chinese confused religion, laws, mores and manners, which to him meant that they were immutable.⁹¹⁴ Others, such as Quesnay believed in the transformability of any state towards natural law. China could eliminate their irregular taxes and encourage settlements and in the process perfect their system. In this view, rather than seeing Montesquieu as a sinophobe and Quesnay as a sinophile, it is useful to see the former as someone who labelled China as immutable and irreproducible, while the latter believed China was changeable and imitable. These characterizations of their approach to China are more relevant to the discussion of political economy than the traditional sinophile-sinophobe dichotomy.

China also needed a motivation to change their system, which European observers and commentators noted they might lack. When describing Chinese architecture, Ricci remarked, "When they set about building, they seem to gauge things by the span of human life, building for themselves rather than for posterity. Whereas, Europeans in accordance with the urge of their civilization seem to strive for the eternal."⁹¹⁵ Ricci's view of the contrast between the Chinese as focused on the present and Europeans as looking forward, is exemplary of the portrayal of China's distinct priorities. China's elevation of agriculture combined with the prime motivation of public tranquillity

⁹¹² *Ibid.*, 132.

⁹¹³ *Ibid.*, 623.

⁹¹⁴ Montesquieu, *The Spirit of the Laws*, 318-319. Montesquieu, *De l'Esprit des Loix*, Troisième partie, 105.

⁹¹⁵ Ricci and Trigault, *China in the Sixteenth Century*, 19.

differed greatly from the increasing significance of commerce and manufacturing, as well as expansionary enterprises, in early modern Britain and France.

By the publication of Smith's *Wealth of Nations* philosophers were still piecing together varying aspects of political economy to formulate their ideal models. The rise of progress played a crucial role in constructing hierarchies of civilization. In particular, Smith's labelling of China as stationary in contrast to the improving states of Europe was an important moment in European assessments of China's political economy. However, in the eighteenth century there was more flexibility in accepting an alternative model of civilization than previously assumed. A major hindrance to adopting the Chinese system as a universal model (apart from the issues associated with their military and science) was that, while for many writers specific elements could be imitated elsewhere, only the Physiocrats, and those who followed their philosophy such as Poivre and Raynal, believed that the entire Chinese system was replicable. The most likely alternative system to the one emerging in the British context was comprehensively considered through systematic assessments of China's commercial behaviour, trade policies, constitutional structure, duties of government and arts and sciences. Europeans, whether labelled sinophiles or sinophobes, and throughout the seventeenth and eighteenth century, considered China's military and scientific weakness to be the most problematic elements of its system. This was an early recognition of two of the main elements that led to the unravelling of the Qing Dynasty in the following centuries.

As the first comprehensive study of British and French views of China's political economy during the Enlightenment, this dissertation has revealed several important conclusions. First, examining the views of China across primary, geographical and philosophical sources on one particular area - political economy - reveals the unsuitability of the sinophilia-sinophobia dichotomy. Second, in contrast to the belief that European views of China were dominated by a sense of supremacy, Europeans displayed a willingness to learn from China's system of political economy. Finally, this learning was based on a genuine engagement with the primary descriptions of the Middle Kingdom. European philosophers and geographers turned to China with an open mind to assess not only its prospects for prosperity but also to reflect on the aspects of the Middle Kingdom that made it unique and sincerely engage with the insights of an alternative system of political economy.

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Appendix I

A New Catalogue of Bell's Circulating Library, consisting of above fifty thousand volumes, (English, Italian, and French)... Which are lent to read, at twelve shillings per year; or, four shillings per quarter: By John Bell, Bookseller (London, 1778).

The catalogue lists 8486 works each associated with a number. Below is a list of the relevant works that discuss China's political economy and their number in the catalogue.

- 96. Ogilby's Description of China 2 volumes
- 215. Churchill's Collection of Voyages and Travels 6 vols.
 - Vol. I Navarrete's Account of the Empire of China
 - 216. Vol. II Nieuhoff's voyages
- 227-228. Hakluyt's Voyages and Travels 3 vols.
- 229-230. Harris's Collection of Voyages and Travels 2 vols
- 574. Parke's History of China
- 591. Astley's Collection of Voyages and Travels, 4 vols.
- 613. Isbrand Ides Travels from Muscovy to China
- 1352-1355. Du Halde's History of China, 4 vols. [1. General view, 2. Antiquity of monarch 3. Novels, 4. Siberia]
- 1407. Le Compte's History of China
- 1424. Magellan's History of China
- 1451. Pallasox Conquest of China by the Tartars;
- 1497. Salmon's Modern History; 19 volumes vol. 1
- 1572-1593. An Universal History, 21 volumes
 - 1592. Vol. 20
- 1594. Modern Part of a Universal History
 - 1601. Vol. 8
- 1643. Voltaire's General History and the State of Europe 3 Vols.
- 1655. Wonders of Nature and Art, Volume III
- 1669. Anson's Voyage round the World by R. Walter
- 1683. Brand's Travels from Muscovy to China over Land
- 1724. Curious Relations, or entertaining correspondent Vol. 1
- 1802. Lockman's Travels of the Jesuits into various Parts
- 1831. Osbeck's Voyage to China and the East Indies, translated by Forster
- 1852. Robinson Crusoe
- 1873. Travels of a philosopher
- 2531. Chinese Traveller
- 4060. Chinese Spy
- 4500. London Magazine 42 volumes
- 4570. Montesquieu's Spirit of the Laws
- 6595. Oeuvres de Voltaire. 4 Tomes
- 6655. Oeuvres de Voltaires. 9 Tomes
- 4976-5011. Voltaire's Works translated by Dr. Smollet, &c 36 volumes
- 5343. Adam Smith's Theory of Moral Sentiments⁹¹⁶

⁹¹⁶ Notably his *Wealth of Nations* was not included in this travelling library. This is likely a result of the fact that it was only published two years earlier, and that it is Smith's more famous work only respectively. Even the Scotsman himself thought he was more likely to be remembered for his *Theory of Moral Sentiments*.

Appendix II

Thomas Percy, *Hau kiou choaan or the pleasing history. A translation from the Chinese language, to which are added, I. The argument or story of a Chinese play, II. A collection of Chinese proverbs, and III. Fragments of Chinese poetry. In four volumes. With notes.* (London : Printed for R. and J. Dodsley in Pall-mall, 1761)

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A LIST of books from whence the following NOTES are extracted: and of the several editions there referred to.

A description of the empire of China and of Chinese Tartary, &c. from the French of P. DU HALDE, London 1738. 2. vol. folio.

[Although the references are chiefly made to this translation, yet recourse was occasionally had to the grand Paris edition of the original intitled,]

Description Geographique, Historique &c. de l' Empire de la China & de la Tartare Chinoise &c. par le P. J. B. DU HALDE, de la Comp. de Jesus. Paris 1735. 4. tom. folio.

The Hist. of . . . China &c. lately written in Italian by F. ALV. SEMEDO, now put into English, &c. Lond. 1655. folio.

A new history of China, &c. by Gabriel Magaillans [or MAGALHAËNS] of the society of Jes. done out of French. Lond. 1686. 8vo.

Nouveaux memoires sur l'etat present de la Chine par le R. P. Louis LE COMPTZ, de la Comp. de Jes. Amst. 1697. 2. tom. 12mo.

A short description of China, &c. by DIONYSIUS KAO, a native, &c. printed at the end of Isbrandt Ides' travels, &c. London 1705. 4to.

Novus

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NOVUS ATLAS SINENSIS a Martino MARTINIO Soc. Jes. descriptus. Amst. à Bleau 1655. folio.

Martini MARTINII Tridentini à Soc. Jes. SINICÆ HISTORIÆ, decas prima. Amst. à Bleau, 1659. 12mo.

LETTERES EDIFIANTES & CURIEUSES, ecrites des missions étrangères, par quelques missionnaires de la Comp. de Jes. Recueils XXVIII. Paris 1702. à 1758. 12mo.

TRAVELS OF THE JESUITES, &c. compiled from their letters, &c. by Mr. LOCKMAN. Lond. 1743. 2. vol. 8vo.

CONFUCIUS Sinarum Philosophus, sive SCIENTIA SINENSIS Latinè exposita, studio & opera P. Couplet, &c. Paris 1687. folio.

The MORALS of Confucius. Lond 1691. 12mo.

L'AMBASSADE de la Compagnie Orientale des Provinces Unies vers l'Empereur de la Chine, &c. par Mons. J. NIEUHOFF. Leyd. 1665. folio.

KERCHERI China illustrata, &c. Amst. 1667. folio.

Theof. Sigef. BAYERI, Museum Sinicum, In quo Sinicæ Linguae et Literaturæ ratio explicatur. Petropoli 1730. 2. 8vo.

Historia