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# The British View of Chinese Civilization and the Emergence of Class Consciousness

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This essay seeks to explain why the British view of Chinese civilization changed from one of admiration to contempt in the last decade of eighteenth century. I propose to show that the British view of Asian societies articulated in the nineteenth century relied extensively on the language and epistemes of class consciousness. Significantly, the language of class, more than any other factor, sparked a reevaluation of Chinese civilization among British intellectuals. Furthermore, this essay argues that the new perception and reevaluation of Chinese society were well received by critics in Britain who wished to reinforce class politics, particularly those of reform in early-nineteenth-century Britain. For the purposes of this present paper, the term *class consciousness* will embrace not only the most rigidly defined social categories, but also the more loosely conceived social divisions sometimes referred to as rank, order, and so forth. Not until the French Revolution did class struggle become a part of the political lexicon. Before that overwrought drama, terms such as *class* and *rank* commonly suggested a social hierarchy providentially erected.<sup>1</sup>

It has long been a commonplace that British attitudes toward Asian societies underwent a great change in the second half of the eighteenth century. While a great deal of evidence for this change has been presented, no one has yet offered a satisfactory explanation for it.<sup>2</sup> Probably the most systematic account of this change is found in Jürgen Osterhammel's recent publication, in which he argues that the development of political economy contributed to the shift in European opinions toward China. This essay follows Osterhammel in arguing that knowledge systems played an important role in British world-views. But it will argue that epistemes of social stratification, together with the ramification of a new identification of lower classes with civilization, are more essential than political economy in this change.<sup>3</sup> For instance, early writers—among them Adam Smith—saw in Asia a set of backward societies whose failure to rival European greatness had to be due to stagnation. Before the eigh-

teenth century, it was held, such states as India and China had made brilliant advances, feeding their large populations and enjoying remarkable prosperity and political power. Then, quite suddenly, the advances ground to a halt, and the achievements of northwestern Europe permitted that region to shoot past a faltering East.<sup>4</sup> The idea of progress suffused the comparative histories of this period, which served to reinforce the heady Western sense of superiority. Recent studies of eighteenth-century Asia, however, challenge—if not contradict—these early assessments, showing that even by Western standards of material progress, the region was not stagnant before 1750. Relying on Paul Bairoch's studies, Kenneth Pomeranz argues that even in 1800 per capita income in "China remains ahead of even western Europe."<sup>5</sup> To revisionists such as Baioch, Pomeranz, and Andre Gunder Frank, it is fair to describe the perspective of the eighteenth-century Europeans as determined by their perception of their relative position: those who spoke of Asian stagnation were like passengers seated in a high-speed train staring out their windows at a rickshaw going full tilt.

Here I want to argue that the British discussions of Asian societies that commenced in the second half of the eighteenth century broke with the earlier fascination with stagnation to focus on social stratification in China and the Far East, and the dark side of the societies in question. Moving beyond a focus on the elite classes, British observers turned their gaze to the lower classes and their way of life. By the turn of the nineteenth century, a full-blown discourse of class consciousness had crept into the British discourse on Asian societies. This change necessarily reflected the observers' social status, educational backgrounds, and worldviews; in addition, as I will demonstrate, this discussion shifts from identifying standards of civilization with elite culture to concentrating on the common practices in ordinary life as a measure of social, cultural, and economic standing. Such a shift contributed, perhaps more than any other factor, to the fading of Chinese high civilization in the British mindset.

To test my hypothesis, I shall consider the texts surrounding the British embassy sent to China in 1792. The loss of its American colonies, along with the outbreak of the Napoleonic wars, the French expedition to Egypt, and French ambitions in India, drove British imperialist interests to turn toward China. The embassy of 1792, led by George Macartney, was chronicled by his secretary and by a group of artists who translated the voyage into a series of etchings. Linda Colley has described this group, along with the ship's crew of sailors, financial experts, and medical personnel, as a microcosm of British occupational categories; this crew and their accounts contributed to a new sense of identity of Britons at work.<sup>6</sup> Without disputing Colley's point, I will show that the diplomatic, seafaring, and other specialized personnel constituted a microcosm of the British class system, each of whom read China according to his specific perspective. This paper, however, does not claim that the class position of an author determines his reading of Chinese culture. For instance, George Macartney himself kept a journal in China, which was not

published in full until the twentieth century. Though a professional diplomat from a well-off family, Macartney was to observe that the lower ranks of people in China resented the oppression and arbitrary powers exercised by mandarins.<sup>7</sup> On the other hand, the first publication describing the mission was Anderson's *A Narrative of the British Embassy to China*.<sup>8</sup> Apart from a passing counter-argument regarding Chinese women's "reasonable liberty" in response to the Jesuits' observations of female confinement, Anderson's work touched little on social aspects of life in China.<sup>9</sup> Anderson's hasty effort receives slight respect from modern critics, and it did not attract serious attention from the public when it was first published. There were, perhaps, several reasons that Anderson's work was soon forgotten. But, as we shall see, the seminal reason is that its narratives and perspective fell outside of the sociological thinking and comparative discourses that started to take root in British views of non-European societies.

One of the several chroniclers of the mission of 1792 was George Staunton (1737–1801), Macartney's secretary, whose diaries, published in 1797 as *An Authentic Account of an Embassy to China*, have long served as the basic English-language source for this event. A child of privilege, Staunton was educated at Toulouse, a Jesuit college in France. Upon receiving a medical degree he returned to England where he befriended a number of London's great men, including Edmund Burke, Samuel Johnson, and George Macartney, his lifelong friend and patron. Staunton eventually gave up his medical practice and entered the diplomatic corps, serving under Macartney during his time as governor of Bombay.

Was Staunton's comparatively favorable impression of things Chinese related to his Jesuit education, as was the case with Voltaire? It is difficult to be certain, but surely his vocational and social experience as a member of learned society did shape his perspective of Chinese civilization. In general, *Embassy to China* is a combination of diplomatic reports and observations. It not only records the events of the mission but supplies a copious amount of information on the international politics of China, India, France, and Tibet, extensively discusses the highly codified rituals that China insisted on imposing upon the British embassy, and records many niceties and details of Chinese diplomatic ceremony. Like other gentleman scholars in Asia such as the great Orientalist William Jones (1746–94), who was also a fellow-member with Burke, Johnson, and Macartney of the Literary Club, Staunton collected Chinese animal and plant specimens, and described buildings, housings, and streets in detail.<sup>10</sup>

But beyond these subjects, Staunton had little to say about the lives of Chinese men and women—with the exception of some comments on foot-binding and infanticide, issues already discussed by Jesuit missionaries in China. It seems likely that Staunton landed in China with a good repository of knowledge about the country acquired during his Jesuit education. Prohibited from living among the Chinese people by Chinese emperors, Jesuit missionaries could live only in the capital, among Manchus, high officials, and

nobles from the imperial clan. In such an environment, they spent their time studying China's orthodox histories, philosophical works, and religious texts. Yet even as the image of a utopian land—created by Marco Polo—started to fade away with the growth of European personal experiences in the country in the seventeenth and early-eighteenth centuries, the picture transmitted to Europe in their writings was overwhelmingly favorable; the Chinese learning that the Jesuits emphasized was the great tradition of elite Chinese society.<sup>11</sup> The Chinese were said to devote all of their resources, labor, and piety to the earth and agriculture, an image that lent credence to the theories of the European physiocrats. Chinese civic morality was described as rational and tolerant, despite a lamentable absence of Christian faith. Gottfried Wilhelm Leibniz, Voltaire, David Hume, and many others promptly accepted the image of a tolerant China, using it to criticize European intolerance and religious rigidity. Chinese society was said to be tranquil, thanks to a benign and all-powerful patriarchy. Many Europeans, including Edward Gibbon, were impressed by the Chinese fascination with genealogy, which often yielded long and detailed family trees. By the mid-eighteenth century, the only aspect of culture in which Europeans claimed superiority to China was the realm of science, though that excluded significantly many specific forms of technology.<sup>12</sup> Staunton arrived in China with just such a favorable impression and left with his view unchanged: "Great order is preserved among such multitudes; and the commission of crimes is rare."<sup>13</sup> The reader of *Embassy to China* may occasionally feel that Staunton was visiting China only to confirm the Jesuits' testimonies.

But there were limits to Staunton's admiration of Chinese society. Though they were mild and sometimes mentioned only in passing, Staunton's criticisms were consistently aimed at China's social hierarchy. Intimately familiar with Indian society, Staunton observed that in China there were "but three classes of men" in comparison with the more complex caste system. While the Chinese themselves customarily divided the populace into *shi* (literati or men of letters), *nong* (farmers), *gong* (artisans), and *shang* (merchants), Staunton was under the impression that artisans and merchants formed a single class.<sup>14</sup> He observed that the "civilized and lettered classes of society" were not only the leading elements of Chinese society but that they led that society in a direction utterly different from that of Europe. While the leaders of European society excelled in uniting eloquence with "valour and military talents," to them "literature was little more than an amusement." The officials whom Staunton met during the Macartney embassy, on the other hand, made it clear that "the study of the written morals, history, and policy, of China, was the only road, not merely to power and honour, but to every individual employment in the state."<sup>15</sup> The highly elevated position to which literary culture was assigned corresponded to the imperial aspiration for universal tranquility and peace: just as the state identified which works were to be studied by those who hoped to rise to officialdom, so did it proscribe works that might induce men of let-

ters to contemplate revolt. Staunton noted that the approved works of politics, morality, and history “contain no abstract ideas of liberty.”<sup>16</sup>

Staunton believed that class was a major influence on creativity and innovation, namely the forging-house of civilization. With such cultural self-awareness, Staunton was able to differentiate Chinese civilization from that of Europe. Comparing the class structures of China and Europe, Staunton suggested that the absence of a Chinese leisure class had deprived Chinese science and literature of a potentially powerful engine. An abundance of time, combined with “the principal net revenues of the country,” could have enabled China to keep up with the pace of European developments:

Many of the improvements, and some of the greatest inventions in European sciences, have been the fruits of their [i.e. the gentry’s] leisure. Among them are chiefly to be found those pure and elevated sentiments, and those refined manners which distinguish the character of a gentleman. But except in instruction they are of little benefit to the other orders of mankind, upon whose industry they subsist. This class, including the rich and idle among the nobility and gentry, is, in every part of Europe, numerous.<sup>17</sup>

Staunton’s thinking about class yielded a peculiar notion which went beyond the conventional division of society into the three estates. Staunton’s leisure class cannot be confused with Veblen’s leisure class, which was defined in terms of capitalism and the culture of consumption.<sup>18</sup> When Staunton used the phrase, he had in mind that peculiar virtue of the gentry, the identity of liberty, and property.<sup>19</sup> Whig or not, Staunton may have chosen the term “leisure class” to avoid alternatives that had become terrifically charged in the world of popular politics that emerged after the French revolution.<sup>20</sup>

Just after the turn of the nineteenth century, two richly illustrated compendiums of Chinese clothing and manners appeared in England. The first, published in 1804, was the work of George Henry Mason; the second, published a year later, was produced by William Alexander (1767–1816), junior draughtsmen in Macartney’s embassy.<sup>21</sup> The two publications amount to a great exhibition of the social categories of eighteenth-century China. From beggars to mandarins, from grand dames to prostitutes, and from peasants to criminals, these pictures portrayed all walks of life with an eye to social stratification. They gave the British reader an Oriental land that was much more vivid, differentiated, and realistic than that of the Jesuits’ accounts, or of the increasing number of translations of Chinese literary works into European languages.<sup>22</sup> Like Staunton, Mason and Alexander divided Chinese society into three classes—lower, middle, and upper—and the captions they appended to their books’ illustrations explicitly assign the men and women depicted to specific social categories.<sup>23</sup> These books on clothing provided the most extensive information available to English readers up to that time about the middle and, especially, the lower classes.

Alexander and Mason's pictures dwell on the ordinary life and common customs of Chinese people, carefully distinguishing between members of the middle and lower classes. A drawing by Alexander shows "a group of peasantry, watermen, &c playing with dice." The author commented that the people of China "are so much addicted to gambling, that they are seldom without a pack of cards, or a set of dice."<sup>24</sup> Another picture in the same book represents a group who made their living by hauling vessels laden with goods along canals and up rivers; Alexander commented, "The chief food of these poor labourers, is rice."<sup>25</sup>

Women received a great deal of attention in the books. Probably basing their illustrations on Chinese paintings, Alexander and Mason systematically represented different classes of women. Commenting on an elegant woman whose elevated social status was clear from her ornaments and bound feet, Mason wrote, "The diminutiveness of the latter compels her to move with such a cautious and unsteady step as causes a painful sensation to an European."<sup>26</sup> Regarding another plate, Mason wrote that if the deformity of women's feet derived from men's jealousy, "from a distrust of their fidelity . . . it is remarkable that no such custom prevails amongst the Turks, or other Asiatics, who are equally jealous of their women."<sup>27</sup> This remark equates the woman with bound feet to the inhabitants of an Indian or Muslim harem. The custom of foot-binding was thought by the British to carry a distinct meaning of class differentiation. Alexander wrote:

The female sex in China, live retired in proportion to their situation in life. The lower orders are not more domesticated than in Europe; but the middle class are not often seen from home, and ladies of rank scarcely ever.<sup>28</sup>

Mason also equated foot-binding with social prestige. Thus, a merchant's daughter would feel awful mortification if she had "full-formed feet," while the girls who "earned their slender livelihood by hard labour and unpleasing employments" could hardly afford to walk on anything less than "full-formed."<sup>29</sup>

Among those who wrote about the British mission of 1792, John Barrow (1764–1848) probably contributed most significantly to the shift in how Britain viewed China. The son of a Lancashire farmer, Barrow left school at the age of thirteen and went to sea, working on a whaling boat in the North Sea until George Staunton hired him to tutor his son Thomas in mathematics.<sup>30</sup> In time Barrow became Staunton's protégé and accompanied him on the Macartney mission, during which he served as a comptroller and guarded the presents to be presented to the Chinese emperor. Thanks to his relatively low profile of duty on the mission, Barrow was not as frequently attended by Chinese mandarins as Macartney and Staunton. He was, therefore, relatively free to observe the country beyond the compound within which his British superiors were confined. Staunton wrote that Barrow "had frequently the opportunity of

observing . . . the ingenuity and dexterity of the Chinese workmen." Barrow held traditional opinions about socio-economic stagnation in China. "From the middle to the end of the sixteenth century, compared with Europe in general," China, said Barrow, "had greatly the superiority, if not in science, at least in arts and manufactures, in the conveniences and the luxuries of life. The Chinese were, at that period, pretty much in the same state in which they still are; and in which they are likely to continue."<sup>31</sup> Like Staunton, Barrow described in his book the ceremonies of the Chinese imperial court, but he made a point of insisting that his book would focus on "the different ranks in China."<sup>32</sup> In fact, Barrow set out to repudiate the Jesuits' idealized accounts by emphasizing China's highly stratified society.<sup>33</sup> Unlike Staunton, whose preconceptions about China appear to have been drawn from his Jesuit education, Barrow came to China via Montesquieu.<sup>34</sup> Much of the sociological merit of *L'esprit des loix* (1748) lies in its perceptive analysis of social institutions according to gender, class, and power. Perhaps because his origins were quite humble, Barrow paid far more attention than Staunton to China's lower classes.

Shortly after the publication of Barrow's account, titled *Travels in China* (1804), two insightful reviews appeared in the *Edinburgh Review*, written by Francis Jeffrey and James Mill. These three texts changed how the people of Britain thought about China. While *Travels in China* lingers on the music, language, flora, crafts, medicine, science, and architecture of China, emulating the fascination with the gentlemen's culture evident in Staunton's book, Barrow's novel perspective emerges clearly when he turns his attention to class differences. At various points he distinguished different ranks to argue against Montesquieu's theory of physical determinism and polygamy. Barrow maintained that the servility of Chinese women was a result not of temperament, as Montesquieu asserted, but "of [the Chinese] studiously pampering the appetite, nurturing vicious notions, considering women as entirely subservient to the pleasure of men." Furthermore, "among the upper ranks only a few wealthy merchants" could maintain "a plurality of wives," whereas "a poor man finds one wife quite sufficient for all his wants."<sup>35</sup> Class difference also reflected on human features. Barrow rightly argued that an individual's features and skin color were strongly affected by working conditions: "The women of the lower class, who labour in the fields or who dwell in vessels, are almost invariably coarse, ill-featured, and of a deep brown complexion, like that of Hottentot. . . . The sprightliness and expression of the features, as well as the colour of the skin, which distinguish the higher ranks from the vulgar, are the effects of ease and education."<sup>36</sup> Although the reference to "Hottentot" might kindle British readers' racial prejudices, Barrow was not interested in racial theory. Quite to the contrary, it is social conditions as the measure of civil society, not racial determinism of civilization, that Barrow emphasized.

Barrow's descriptions of the subordinate classes deserve close attention. On landing at Ta-koo (Dagu), at the time the port that served Beijing, Barrow

remarked that the buildings and river were more wretched than “those parts about Rotherhithe and Wapping,” the slums adjacent to London: “Everything, in fact, that we had hitherto seen wore an air of poverty and meanness.”<sup>37</sup> Poor or not, though, the Chinese people made a fine first impression on Barrow. Soon enough, however, his enthusiasm waned. He explained that “had we returned to Europe, without proceeding farther in the country than Tien-sing [Tianjin], a most lively impression would always have remained on my mind in favour of the Chinese. But a variety of incidents that afterwards occurred, and a more intimate acquaintance with their manners and habits, produced a woeful change of sentiment in this respect.”<sup>38</sup>

The first aspect of Chinese society that fell under Barrow’s censure was the treatment of women. His views had been shaped by the lively European discussion of the place of women in world civilizations that had taken place over the course of the eighteenth century. John Millar (1735–1801), a bright pupil of Adam Smith and the professor of Law at Glasgow University, argued in his highly celebrated *Observations Concerning the Distinction of Ranks in Society* (1773) that the position of women in society improved in step with broader social progress. If women tended to be oppressed early in the stages of human experience, in civil society they rose to become the true companions of men. A less proclaimed Scots writer, William Alexander, had elaborated this part of Millar’s theory in *The History of Women* (1782).<sup>39</sup> The locus classicus of the connection between the place of women in society and the achievements of civilization was Montesquieu’s *L’Esprit des loix*, a work Barrow knew well, as we have seen. Barrow observed that “the condition of the female part of society in any nation will furnish a tolerable just criterion of the degree of civilization to which that nation has arrived.”<sup>40</sup> From such a viewpoint, he believed, China had not advanced far along the path of civilization. He cited both foot-binding and a grievously unjust sexual division of labor:

The wives and daughters . . . of the lower class are neither confined to the house, nor exempt from hard and slavish labour, while the husband, in all probability, is gaming, or otherwise idling away his time. I have frequently seen women assisting to drag a sort of light plough, and the harrow.<sup>41</sup>

In contrast to Millar, who argued that women’s participation in society attested to progress, Barrow discovered that in China, the entry of poor women into society amounted to new forms of oppression.

Barrow systematically exposed the social and economic conditions of China’s lower classes. According to Barrow, a vessel tracker in China was paid the equivalent of sixpence a day:

In order to procure others [i.e. trackers], the officers dispatched their soldiers to the nearest village, taking the inhabitants by surprise and forcing them out

of their beds to join the yachts. Scarcely a night occurred in which some poor wretches did not suffer the lashes of the soldiers for attempting to escape, or for pleading the excuse of old age, or infirmity.<sup>42</sup>

Barrow believed that the conditions under which the poor were obliged to live had corrupted Chinese morality, leading to infanticide. This accounted for the pedestrian horror he witnessed one day in south China: "I have seen the dead body of an infant, but without any guard, floating down the river of Canton among the boats, and the people seemed to take no more notice of it than if it had been the carcase of a dog." The practice of deserting infants was so common that the Chinese "have no positive law against infanticide."<sup>43</sup>

In the natural law tradition with which British observers of China were familiar, parental authority went hand in hand with governmental authority. Just as Chinese parents were said to command complete obedience from their children, so did the government of China wield despotic power over its subjects. Where surveillance was universal, there could be no true public life. Like Staunton, Barrow believed that China lacked what his mentor called a leisure class and he named more forthrightly as a middle class:

There is no middle class of men in China: men whose property and ideas of independence give them weight in the part of country where they reside; and whose influence and interest are considered as not below the notice of the government. In fact, there are no other than governors and the governed. If a man, by trade, or industry in his possession, has accumulated riches, he can enjoy them only in private. He dare not, by having a grander house, or finer clothes, to let his neighbour perceive that he is richer than himself. . . .<sup>44</sup>

This image sharply diverges from the one that germinated in the European mercantilist mentality, in which China, notwithstanding its political despotism, was considered a highly sophisticated and wealthy commercial society.

When British visitors to China, whose life experience had opened their eyes to the significance of the poor, began to think and write about their travels in the wake of the French Revolution, class consciousness crept into their accounts. Because of this new perspective, many British readers acquired startlingly new views of life in China and India. And British popular politics began to exploit the newly constructed image of Asia to further invigorate class consciousness. Francis Jeffrey turned to Barrow's observations in a fiery polemic against despotism. In the review article mentioned above, Jeffrey consistently depreciated things Chinese, producing a picture of Chinese everyday life far bleaker than that in *Travel in China*. "The women, in the higher ranks and in the cities," wrote Jeffrey, "never appear abroad; and never eat at the same table, not sit in the same apartment, with the male part of the family at home. Their time is chiefly spent in smoking tobacco, though some of them

embroider brilliant silks into monstrous patterns." He pointed out that in peasant families women were expected to do the most strenuous labor, harrowing and ploughing, adding that "[w]ith all this domestic rigour, they are entirely destitute of decency or purity."<sup>45</sup> Unlike the learned author of the *Encyclopaedia Britannica* article of forty years earlier, Jeffrey judged Chinese society from the life experience of ordinary people. He concluded with an enumeration of the woes of the Chinese populace:

The miserable, starved, and beggarly condition of the great body of the people, evinced by what was observed of their insufficient diet, and the indiscriminating voracity with which they swallowed all the offal and trash which was thrown away by the travelers.<sup>46</sup>

Francis Jeffrey was a pupil of John Millar, so it is hardly surprising to see that he judged Chinese society from a sociological perspective. Nor it is surprising that Jeffrey's critique was picked up and elaborated by James Mill. Mill was one of the most conscientious writers about class at the beginning of the nineteenth century, perhaps because he was the son of a shoemaker. He was the author of the famed article about "Caste" for the third edition of *Encyclopaedia Britannica*. In 1817, Mill suggested to Thomas Hodgkin, the future radical and a son of his friend, when the young man contemplated visiting Germany, that the best way to gain an understanding of a society was to approach it from the bottom social layers and work toward the middle:

I would go & board myself in the house of a farmer, live in the family, see every thing, & seek explanation of every thing, & remain there till I had the information I was in quest of. Next I would try to board myself in the house of a school master, till I has learned [sic] all that I could from him. Next I would board myself in the house of some parish priest, who was poor enough to board me for such a sum as I could afford. And there I could hear all that was to be learn[e]d about the clergy & religion. As to the University, if not able to board myself with a professor, I would go to the boarding or lodging houses of the poorer students, & by conversation with them, acquire the knowledge of which I was in request.<sup>47</sup>

With such a positivist and sociological perspective of social inquiry in mind, Mill quickly seconded Jeffrey's criticism of Chinese civilization, and Barrow's discovery that there was "no middle class of men" in China.<sup>48</sup> And as late as in 1818, Mill still admitted that there were no new materials about Chinese society that he could use to test Barrow's authority on this subject.<sup>49</sup>

This sociological mode of thinking with special reference to the language of class focused British public attention on the social conditions of the lower classes in China. Chinese civilization was no longer considered to be embodied in,

let alone identical with, Confucianism or elite culture. Instead, it was the lower classes of Chinese society that revealed more about the reality of Chinese civilization, and the absence of a middle class offered a further scientific explanation for the empire's despotism. Consequently, as a general awareness of the sociological significance of classes grew, the genre of representing Chinese society shifted paradigmatically from imaginative literature, such as *Citizen of the World* by Oliver Goldsmith, to "realistic" observatory accounts as demonstrated above. It is true that the first English translation of a Chinese classic is found at the turn of the nineteenth century. Joshua Marshman (1768–1837), a missionary and an associate with William Carey, published the first volume of an English version of *Confucius* in 1809.<sup>50</sup> The task of translation was, however, executed no longer in the spirit of a Leibnizean universalism or Goldsmithian citizen of the world, but with an evangelical passion for civilizing the non-Christian world. In other words, Marshman's *Confucius* belonged to an age in which the climate of opinions—of things Chinese—was sociologically conditioned. Unlike Marco Polo's fabulous Orient or the Enlightenment Philosophers' redactions of high culture, this new mode of sociological thinking tended to pin down the "problems" of Chinese society: the "absence of ideas of liberty," the "absence of middle class," the "suppressions of the lower classes by their superiors," and others were identified as problems to be solved. Since the "dual revolution" of the French and Industrial revolutions, European society generally had been seen by theorists as problematic.<sup>51</sup> These revolutions changed not only the British perceptions of Chinese civilization in the last decades of the eighteenth century, but also affected the relative perceptions of European and Asian societies. In the nineteenth century, the comparative sociology outlined in this essay in the works of Barrow, Millar, and others accelerated its momentum in discovering and defining social problems, not only in Britain and Europe but also in China and Asia.

#### NOTES

1. Asa Briggs, "Middle-Class Consciousness in English Politics, 1780–1846," *Past and Present* 9 (1956): 65–74, see esp. 65–66. The ideas and politics of classes in nineteenth-century Britain have a complex history, which is beyond the concerns of the present essay. It suffices to note that some historians, such as Briggs, maintain that class consciousness was a political ramification of the French Revolution and blossomed from 1815–1846, while some other critics, including E. P. Thompson, contest that it was not a direct product of the French upheaval, but awakened through the experience of the industrial revolution. For the historiographical debate, see R. J. Morris, *Class and Class Consciousness in the Industrial Revolution 1780–1850* (London, 1979); and R. S. Neale, ed., *History and Class: Essential Readings in Theory and Interpretation* (Oxford, 1983).

2. See for example Victor Kiernan, *The Lords of Human Kind* (Harmondsworth, 1968); Peter Marshall and Glyn Williams, *The Great Map of Mankind: Perceptions of New Worlds in the Age of Enlightenment* (Cambridge, Mass., 1982); Jonathan Spence, *The Chan's Great Continent: China in Western Minds* (New York, 1998); Colin Mackerras, *Western Image of China* (Oxford, 1999); and David Porter, *Ideographia: The Chinese Cipher in Early Modern Europe* (Stanford, 2001).

3. Jürgen Osterhammel, *Die Entzauberung Asiens: Europa und die asiatischen Reiche in 18. Jahrhundert* (München, 1998), 383–84.

4. Adam Smith, *Inquiry into the Nature and Causes of the Wealth of Nations* (Oxford, 1978), 1:89–90. See also John Logan, *Elements of the Philosophy of History* (Bristol, 1995).

5. Paul Bairoch, *Commerce extérieur et développement économique de l'Europe au XIX<sup>e</sup> siècle* (Paris, 1976); Kenneth Pomeranz, *The Great Divergence: China, Europe, and the Making of the Modern World Economy* (Princeton, 2000), 36, 44, 47, 227 and *passim*. See also R. Bin Wong, *China Transformed: Historical Change and the Limits of European Experience* (Ithaca, 1997); Janet L. Abu-Lughod, *Before European Hegemony: The World System A.D. 1250–1350* (Oxford, 1989); and Andre Gunder Frank, *ReOrient: The Silver Age in Asia and the World Economy* (Berkeley, 1998).

6. Linda Colley, "Britishness and Otherness: An Argument," *Journal of British Studies* 31, no. 4 (1992): 309–29, 309–11.

7. George Macartney, *An Embassy to China*, ed. J. L. Cranmer-Byng (London, 1962), 226. The best study on Macartney's mission to China and its cultural implication is, to my knowledge, James L. Hevia's *Cherishing Men from Afar: Qing Guest Ritual and the Macartney Embassy of 1793* (Durham, 1995).

8. Aeneas Anderson, *A Narrative of the British Embassy to China* (Basil, 1795). For Cranmer-Byng's unfavourable comment on it, see George Macartney, *An Embassy to China*, ed. J. L. Cranmer-Byng, 343–44.

9. Anderson, 328.

10. Garland Cannon, *The Life and Mind of Oriental Jones: Sir William Jones, the Father of Modern Linguistics* (Cambridge, 1990), and *Oriental Jones: A Biography of Sir William Jones* (London, 1964); Garland Cannon and Levin Brine, eds., *Objects of Enquiry: The Life, Contributions and Influences of Sir William Jones (1746–1794)* (New York, 1995); David Kopf, *British Orientalism and the Bengal Renaissance: The Dynamics of Indian Modernization 1773–1835* (Berkeley, 1969); and Alexander Murray, *Sir William Jones 1746–94: A Commemoration* (Oxford, 1998).

11. Jörg Fisch, "Der märchenhafte Orient: Die Umwertung einer Tradition von Marco Polo bis Macaulay," *Saeculum* 35 (1984): 246–66; 253.

12. See, for example, G. W. Leibniz, *Writings on China*, trans. Daniel J. Cook and Henry Rosemont, Jr. (Chicago, 1994), 48–50; and Michael Adas, *Machines as Measures of Men* (Ithaca, 1989), chap. 1.

13. George Staunton, *An Authentic Account of an Embassy from the King of Great Britain to the Emperor of China*, 3 vols. (London, 1797).

14. Staunton, 2:329.

15. Staunton, 3:108.

16. Staunton, 3:112–13.

17. Staunton, 2:326–27.

18. Thorstein Veblen, *The Theory of the Leisure Class* (New York, 1934).

19. H. T. Dickinson, *Liberty and Property: Political Ideology in Eighteenth-Century Britain* (London, 1977); J. G. A. Pocock, *The Ancient Constitution and the Feudal Law* (Cambridge, 1987); and Pocock, *The Machiavellian Moment: Florentine Political Thought and the Atlantic Republican Tradition* (Princeton, 1975).

20. Dror Wahrman, *Imagining the Middle Class: The Political Representation of Class in Britain, circa. 1780–1840* (Cambridge, 1995), 46–47. John Barrow stated publicly that Macartney held Whiggish principles.

21. George Henry Mason's *Costume in China* and William Alexander's work of the same name have been reprinted in a modern one-volume edition on which I have relied: *View of Eighteenth Century China: Costumes, History, Customs* (New York, 1988). Mason claimed he did the drawings from which the illustrations for his book were made, but the plates bear the name "Pu-Qua." I have been unable to identify this name. Alexander later became the first keeper of prints and drawings in the British Museum in 1808.

22. The entry for China that appeared in the first edition of the *Encyclopaedia*

*Britannica*—the first volume of the dictionary was published in 1765—conveys a great deal about the country's early image in England: nearly the entire entry is devoted to a description of the classical works of Chinese philosophy.

23. *View of Eighteenth Century China*, 56.

24. *View of Eighteenth Century China*, 72, plate 33.

25. *View of Eighteenth Century China*, 24, plate 9.

26. *View of Eighteenth Century China*, 50, plate 22.

27. *View of Eighteenth Century China*, 18.

28. *View of Eighteenth Century China*, 56, plate 25. The comment Mason appended to his drawing of a conspicuously well dressed woman applied exclusively to females from wealthy families: "After the manner of other Asiatics, modesty and taciturnity are the peculiar ornaments of Chinese ladies, who are brought up in seclusion and retirement; and who, like many curious flowers, born equally to blush unseen, are reared by their proprietors, come to maturity, fade, and die in their possession." (*Ibid.*, 222, plate 108.)

29. *View of Eighteenth Century China*, 56, plate 50.

30. Charles C. Lloyd, *Mr. Barrow of the Admiralty: A Life of Sir John Barrow 1764–1848* (London, 1970).

31. Sir John Barrow, *Travels in China*, 2nd ed. (London, 1806), 29. I suppose that Barrow's belief in Chinese stagnation derived its origin from Macartney's journal kept in China, which was entrusted to his hands by Macartney's family and was only partly published in Barrow's edition in 1806.

32. Barrow, 191 ff.

33. Barrow, 143.

34. Barrow, 147.

35. Barrow, 148.

36. Barrow, 184–85.

37. Barrow, 71.

38. Barrow, 82.

39. John Millar, *Observations Concerning the Distinction of Ranks in Society* (London, 1773). A revised version of Millar's book was published in 1806 under the title *The Origin of the Distinction of Ranks*. See also William Alexander, *The History of Women: From the Earlier Antiquity to the Present Time*, 2 vols. (Bristol, 1995). For a detailed discussion of Millar's and Alexander's theories and their views on Asian societies, see Jeng-Guo Chen, "James Mill's *History of British India* in Its Intellectual Context," (Ph.D. diss., Edinburgh University, 2000), 62–92.

40. Barrow, 138.

41. Barrow, 141.

42. Barrow, 162. When canals were major traffic routes in China, trackers were frequently employed to pull a ship to move forward when the canal water was too shallow or in any other disadvantageous condition.

43. Barrow, 170–71.

44. Barrow, 389.

45. *Edinburgh Review* 10 (Jan. 1805): 271.

46. *Edinburgh Review* 10 (Jan. 1805): 287.

47. James Mill to Francis Place, 17 May 1817, BL ADD. MSS 35153, ff. 2–5.

48. *Edinburgh Review*, (Jan. 1809): 415.

49. *The British Review*, XI (1818): 163.

50. Joshua Marshman, *Confucius* (Serarempore, 1809). It seems that the intended second volume was never published. Letter from Marshman to John Taylor, March 21st 1812, National Library of Scotland MSS, 36.1.6, f. 52b.

51. Eric Hobsbawm, Preface to *The Age of Revolution* (London, 1962).