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Alexander Statman, *A Global Enlightenment: Western Progress and Chinese Science*. Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2023. 356 pp. Notes, bibliography, and index. \$45.00 U.S. (cl). ISBN 9780226825762; \$44.99 U.S. (eb). ISBN 9780226825748.

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The idea of progress has long been associated with the Enlightenment, and luminaries such as Voltaire, Diderot, and Condorcet recognized the importance of progress and used that concept to explain the remarkable discoveries and scientific innovations that had marked the previous two centuries, construct a present-centered, teleological narrative of history, and demonstrate the uniqueness of the West. In this book, however, Statman links the idea of progress not to these luminaries but to what he calls the “orphans of the Enlightenment,” a group of Europeans who tried to recover the wisdom given by God in remote antiquity, an effort rejected by their better-known contemporaries. These orphans of the Enlightenment, including missionaries, academicians, and politicians, were fascinated by China, and particularly Chinese science and used that science to shape their idea of progress. By narrating a compelling story of these orphans and their intense engagement with Chinese science, Statman brings to light a previously overlooked intellectual current in the Enlightenment: esotericism, mysticism, and the occult. These themes were a significant part of the scientific discussion, intertwined with Europe's exploration of China and the East as a whole. Tracing how esotericism, mysticism, and the occult on the one hand and the study of Chinese science on the other appeared and reappeared in France from the end of the eighteenth century to the beginning of the nineteenth, Statman shows that what Europeans understood as science underwent a major shift, and this shift was partially triggered by their encounter with Chinese knowledge. Influenced by global networks of knowledge, the Enlightenment, Statman argues, was global at its very root.

Chapter one, “The Death of Voltaire's Confucius,” looks at how people in France engaged with China toward the end of the eighteenth century. While many Philosophes turned away from the Sinophilia that characterized the early days of the Enlightenment, the orphans of the Enlightenment not only maintained a sustained interest in China but became more prolific and, to a certain extent, successful in disseminating their ideas among academicians, physiocrats, and the reading public. Statman first reviews major claims about China and Chinese science during the height of the Enlightenment. Voltaire, for example, found the Chinese mediocre in the sciences, yet he insisted that Chinese society excelled in morality and government. As the Philosophes increasingly saw the development of science as the sole driving force behind the improvement of society, China with its mediocre science ceased to be a good model to imitate. The year 1773 marked the end of Sinophilia, not only because of the Philosophes' waning interest,

but also because of the worldwide suppression of the Society of Jesus. The Jesuits, particularly the missionaries stationed in China since the early seventeenth century, had played a key role in transmitting knowledge from China to Europe and, in doing so, influencing how Europeans conceived of China. They painted China as an ancient nation with superb moral philosophy and doubtful natural philosophy. This image provided the foundation upon which the academicians, scholars associated with the various academies established in France in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, argued over the historical origins of China. It also invigorated the efforts of the physiocrats to promote the ideals of agrarian economy in service to the ancien régime. The last section of the chapter zooms in on one particular figure: Henri-Léonard Bertin, a minister of state under Louis XV. After the suppression of the Jesuits, Bertin took those in China under his wing, providing financial and scholarly support that led to the publication of a massive fifteen-volume compendium on China, initiating a new era of Chinese studies in France.

Chapter two, “The Ex-Jesuit Mission in China,” investigates the life of the Jesuit missionaries in Beijing in the post-suppression era. Focusing on Jean-Joseph-Marie Amiot, a French Jesuit missionary who lived in Beijing for over four decades, Statman explores how Amiot managed the crisis of the suppression, cultivated friendship with Chinese imperial princes, and conducted up-to-date scientific experiments in the private quarters of the imperial city. After the news of the suppression reached Beijing in 1775, the French Jesuit missionaries residing in the North Church were greatly disturbed. They had a dispute over subsequent leadership and sought help both in China and in their home country to sustain their life as ex-Jesuits in Beijing. At the Chinese imperial court, the Qianlong emperor continued to employ the missionaries as astronomers, watchmakers, artists, and engineers, though he never considered them a priority and launched persecutions against all Westerners trying to delude the Chinese people with heterodox ideas. Meanwhile, the missionaries were able to secure support from Bertin, who generously provided nearly everything they requested. In particular, he sent the latest scientific books and periodicals that filled the North Church as well as equipment that allowed the missionaries to engage with outdoor scientific activities. They used these materials not only to enrich their own learning but also to form friendships with dignitaries in Beijing. One prominent example was the Manchu prince Hongwu, a cousin of the Qianlong emperor. Amiot informed Hongwu about current scientific experiments in Europe, which enticed him to carry out his own. In 1784, Hongwu had an air pump set up in his mansion and the next year observed the function of an electrical machine in the North Church. Although these scientific activities remained private for fear of raising the suspicion of the Qianlong emperor, they testified to the overlooked scientific exchanges between China and France during the last years of the eighteenth century.

Chapter three, “The Origins of Esotericism,” returns to France and examines how two French scholars studied esoteric subjects in light of Chinese sources made available through the Jesuit missionaries. Esotericism in late eighteenth-century France was inseparable from orientalism. The search for the origins of the arts and sciences lay at the core of esotericism, and this search was in direct dialogue with the study of the East because a number of scholars believed that the East with its long history was closely connected to Noah and his descendants, who preserved the ancient wisdom given by God before the Flood. This belief in the existence of ancient wisdom in the East was embraced by European scholars of esotericism and China missionaries alike, though they disagreed on when the Chinese nation was founded and where the Chinese people came from. Antoine Court de Gébelin was one of the two scholars of esotericism Statman analyzes in detail. One subject Court de Gébelin addressed in his monumental opus *Monde primitif* was tarot cards, which he claimed to be a reservoir of ancient wisdom, misinterpreted by ancient Egyptians

and misused by modern Europeans. After receiving a copy of *Monde primitif* in Beijing, Amiot sent back to Court de Gébelin an ink rubbing of a Chinese stele that was allegedly inscribed in the twenty-first century BCE. Gébelin studied the rubbing and concluded that the tarot cards and the Chinese stele were founded on the same theory, though few readers were convinced. Jean-Sylvain Bailly was the other scholar trying to search for ancient wisdom. He believed that a single ancestor people, whom he identified as the Atlantans, gave birth to the Chinese, Egyptians, Indians, and Chaldeans who preserved ancient wisdom as part of their memories before the Flood. He praised China for having carefully recorded its ancient history. Later in his life, however, Bailly changed his view and came to regard modern science as far superior to ancient wisdom. In the last section of the chapter, Statman draws parallels between the orphans of the Enlightenment and the evidential-studies scholars in eighteenth-century China, as both believed in the existence of ancient wisdom and its subsequent degeneration.

Chapter four, “The *Yin-Yang* Theory of Animal Magnetism,” explores how the orphans of the Enlightenment used knowledge of Chinese natural philosophy to explain modern European science by tracing the intellectual journey of Louis-Raphaël-Lucrèce de Fayolle, comte de Mellet. As Bertin's nephew, the Mellet was well positioned to connect with European scientists on the one hand and China missionaries on the other. In fact, his theory on the medical properties of electromagnetism was built on the work of the German physician Franz Anton Mesmer and of Amiot. Mesmer enchanted people in Paris with his supposed discovery and spectacular demonstrations of “animal magnetism,” a universal agent in the form of a subtle fluid that runs through all living things, producing cures for humans and maintaining harmony in the cosmos. Mellet believed deeply in animal magnetism even after this theory was discredited by French royal committees in 1784. Meanwhile, he also developed an interest in Kung-fu practiced by Daoists in China. For the Daoists, the human body was akin to a machine activated by bodily fluids. Certain gestures and breathing patterns could change the flow of the bodily fluids, thus curing diseases and even opening the door to immortality. Seeing the similarities between Mesmer and the Daoists, Mellet wrote to Amiot asking for his opinion. Amiot responded, claiming that animal magnetism was indeed a rediscovery of Chinese *yin-yang* theory, one of the main principles underlying Daoist Kung-fu practice. Statman points out that Amiot at times distorted Chinese sources in order to prove his claim. Yet this distortion did not prevent Mellet and other like-minded European scholars from interpreting animal magnetism through Chinese *yin-yang* theory and vice versa. Although Mellet failed to publish his treatise on Chinese magnetism, no less than three of his contemporary French scholars wrote on this very topic, cementing the connection between Chinese natural philosophy and European esotericism.

Chapter five, “The Invention of Eastern Wisdom,” gives an account of how the orphans of the Enlightenment set the foundation for modern Sinology in the nineteenth century and exerted a major influence on how European philosophers such as Hegel viewed China. Although Bertin and Amiot, the most prominent among the orphans of the Enlightenment, died before the onset of the nineteenth century, their legacy endured. The creation of the first usable Chinese dictionary in Europe and the renewed interest in interpreting the inscription on the Chinese stele are two examples. Most notably, Jean-Pierre Abel-Rémusat, the founder of Sinology in France, rejected many claims made by the orphans of the Enlightenment, yet he used their sources and analyses quite extensively. His work on Daoism was inspired by the writings of the Jesuit missionaries. Like the missionaries, Abel-Rémusat believed in what he called “antique sagesse orientale” (ancient eastern wisdom) (p. 215). The former understood knowledge as a shared property of all humans. Thus, ancient Chinese natural philosophy could easily be explained

through the lens of modern European science. Abel-Rémusat, by contrast, considered knowledge of the East essentially different from knowledge of the West, and in this sense, Chinese natural philosophy was in no way comparable to European natural sciences.

Hegel drew his conclusion that China had neither philosophy nor history directly from his reading of Amiot and Abel-Rémusat. According to him, China had no philosophy because philosophy was a distinctively European discipline. Moreover, the Chinese lacked freedom, which prevented them from developing the natural sciences. Without the natural sciences, progress was impossible. With no progress, there could be no history. From Voltaire to Hegel, the European image of China changed dramatically: once a nation of reason, now a land of superstition; once a place ruled by Confucian morality, now ruled by Daoist magic; once a model to emulate, now an exotic alternative to true knowledge. The orphans of the Enlightenment, who had lived in the shadow of the Philosophes, saw their ideas reincarnated in the nineteenth century.

In the conclusion of the book, Statman summarizes how the Europeans and the Chinese engaged with the idea of progress in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. He also articulates a few lessons from the orphans of the Enlightenment for present-day historians on belief in progress and the notion of science.

Certain readers might be puzzled by the precise meaning of “global Enlightenment” in the title of the book. While Statman masterfully shows how France and China in the last decades of the eighteenth century were closely connected, this book is ultimately about the Enlightenment that took place in France. He mentions other possible sites of Enlightenment, including the Islamic world and South Asia. It would be helpful to know whether he sees the Enlightenment as a single movement that had many regional variants or multiple movements that meant different things in different places, and what might distinguish the French Enlightenment from others, if at all. In addition, readers could perhaps have hoped for a comparative view of the Chinese side of the story. At the end of chapter three, Statman reveals a fascinating parallel between the orphans of the Enlightenment and the evidential-studies scholars in China. The book would have benefited from more such passages. Another interesting question worth exploring is the extent to which the Chinese communicated with the orphans of the Enlightenment. It seems that the Chinese were only marginally present in the debates about their own history and natural philosophy. If the Europeans used Chinese sources to validate their theories, did the Chinese look for European evidence to substantiate their claims?

This erudite and engaging study with its extensive use of archival sources, many of which are studied for the first time, is a welcome addition to the literature on the history of science, the Enlightenment, and Jesuit missionaries in China. It complicates and historicizes the notions of progress and science, sheds light on a lesser-known side of the Enlightenment that focused on esotericism, and foregrounds the importance of the Jesuit missionaries in establishing a global network of knowledge. It would be interesting to read the book in conjunction with the work of such scholars as David Allen Harvey, Alexander Bevilacqua, and Florence Hsia, who have explored similar subjects and themes.^[1] Certainly, this book enriches our understanding of a fascinating aspect of the Enlightenment.

NOTE

[1] David Allen Harvey, *The French Enlightenment and its Others: The Mandarin, the Savage, and the Invention of the Human Sciences* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2012); Alexander Bevilacqua, *The Republic of Arabic Letters: Islam and the European Enlightenment* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2018); Florence Hsia, *Sojourners in a Strange Land: Jesuits and their Scientific Missions in Late Imperial China* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2009).

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