

BOOK REVIEW

## Alexander Statman, *A Global Enlightenment: Western Progress and Chinese Science*

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How global was Europe's Enlightenment? It is on this question that Alexander Statman makes an important intervention: he reveals *how* ideas in France were shaped by interaction with China. He acknowledges that scholars have questioned the singular nature of the Enlightenment (as a process and through its manifestations in other cultures and geographies), then brings our focus back to late eighteenth-century France and the significance of China for intellectual changes in this era. Statman traces how European ideas of China and of scientific knowledge from China changed over time and contributed to new notions of the European self.

Like his actors, Statman navigates multiple geographical, cultural and intellectual worlds. At the heart of this story is a group whom Statman calls 'orphans of Enlightenment': they were European missionaries, scholars, politicians and others who were at the margins of the Enlightenment in different ways. Statman demonstrates how their concerns were central to ideas of the Enlightenment: visions of progress and of European uniqueness.

The 'orphans of Enlightenment' lived through and navigated different historical contexts and junctures in the decades before the French Revolution. It was the height (and also the beginning of decline) of the newly expanded Qing Dynasty – an aspect that Statman could have emphasized more. Europeans in China were forced to adapt. We see, for example, Joseph-Marie Amiot, a Jesuit at the Qing court, forging a new identity: no longer a Jesuit after the suppression of the Society of Jesus in 1773, he began to affirm his Frenchness. In doing so, Amiot cultivated new relationships with those in Paris, and these interactions, according to Statman, advanced his work in natural history.

Ideas that the 'orphans of Enlightenment' were working with – such as esotericism and mysticism – were informed by Chinese concepts and changed how Europeans thought about science. One instructive feature of this monograph is Statman's detailed discussion of the generation of a distinct combination of these ideas, 'the *yin-yang* theory of animal magnetism', in Chapter 4.

Statman's work is impressive in terms of the ease with which he engages with a range of audiences (European historians, Chinese historians and historians of science, to mention a few). He evidences his work with a wealth of primary sources in French and Chinese. One of Statman's strengths is that he not only indicates 'what French thinkers *said about* Chinese natural philosophy, but also what they *did with it*' (p. 18, emphasis added).

In situating the ‘orphans of Enlightenment’ within a broader context, where notions of China in Europe were changing (from Voltaire to Hegel), Statman tells a number of different stories. On one level, this is an intellectual history that engages with cutting-edge ideas in the history of science that emphasize knowledge produced outside the typical scientific contexts, the significance of material culture and the idea of go-betweens. On another level, this monograph is relevant for discussions about the origins of European Sinology – highlighting its early development in France – and ideas we might associate with orientalist thought. Statman’s discussion of Jean-Sylvain Bailly invites writing a history of the history of science in Europe and the anglophone world ranging from Bailly’s eighteenth-century contributions to George Sarton’s in the twentieth century. This monograph also provides a textured context for Joseph Needham’s twentieth-century writings on the history of science in China. For these reasons, it is useful for researchers and academics who work on French or Chinese history, European intellectual history, the history of science and global history.

The monograph is titled *A Global Enlightenment*. Some may wonder about the extent to which it is global. Does discussing Jesuits make the topic global? Or is it bringing China into European history that makes it global? This is very much a history of Europe, but a globally connected one. It recasts an important moment in European history by showing how ideas in France were informed by and in part created in relation to those in China. Statman does acknowledge that ideas from other cultures and geographies contributed to those in Europe, and there is certainly room to explore his story alongside those. Statman emphasizes the importance of recognizing China’s distinct role in defining modern notions of progress in France. He also discusses Asia as a site of ‘origins’ that appeared in people’s imagination at that time. Statman’s monograph raises further questions. The mid-eighteenth century was also a time when the Qing reached the height of its expansion. Existing research generally underestimates the intellectual and diplomatic work for terrestrial empires in this process.

Statman’s examples do not just present an intellectual history that engages with classical Chinese texts and concepts like *yin-yang* and *qi*. The evidence he draws our attention to also reveals a rich social history with a range of actors. Although there is ample material on the Manchu prince Hongwu in Chapter 2, it would have been interesting to read more on actors such as the Khorchin Mongol chief who discussed science and medicine with Amiot. Statman also mentions a Tibetan lama who gifted a ‘cosmographical map’ – depicted on the cover of Statman’s book – to Amiot in China, who in turn passed it on to Henri Bertin’s nephew, the comte de Mellet, in France. Further examples of such individuals would certainly be welcome. The Qing state’s connections between people of these wider worlds – due to the multifaceted processes of expansion and rulership over terrestrial Asia – made the world at the Beijing court more global. The extent to which these strands translated to Europe is another story that could be explored further.

This book delivers even more than it promises and opens up new research perspectives. Hopefully more historians of Europe and China, including those working on the history of science and other fields, will incorporate this study into their reading, research methods and teaching (especially at postgraduate level). In time, we will see how far the use of this monograph will itself tell a global story, as go-betweens in different knowledge-making contexts around the world utilize it for further research.