

K'ien Long and Western Letters

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ABSTRACT

K'ien Long (Ch'ien-lung), emperor of China (1736-1796) was known in Europe by his contemporaries as emperor, a distant legendary figure, but more personally through translations of poems he composed. Father Michel Benoit's letters (1773-4) describe interesting details of conversations with the emperor while sitting for a portrait. Father Joseph Marie Amiot published in 1870 a volume containing French translations of two of K'ien Long's poems: one a long piece describing the city of the emperor's birthplace Moukden, and the other a piece in praise of tea. These pieces appealed to European sensibilities in a number of ways. The first Western writer to K'ien Long at length was Voltaire, who in letters to Frederick of Prussia and Catherine the Great of Russia, compares K'ien Long to them and includes him among ideal rulers following his Enlightenment principles. Voltaire in a number of his own pieces refers to K'ien Long and his poem on Moukden; the emperor's other poem on tea attracted British writers. Sir William Chambers wrote an oriental gardening and included lines from K'ien Long's piece on tea. In response to and disagreement with Chambers, Thomas Gray wrote a satirical piece and in a sequel actually devotes eight lines and a footnote to the emperor. Others who wrote about K'ien Long include John Wolcot, Thomas James Mathias, Andre Chenier, Stephen Weston, etc. Although K'ien Long remained by choice personally isolated from Europe and its culture, he still enjoyed a considerable, if fleeting, vogue in the West, where his poetry was translated, quoted and parodied, and where he was compared favorably both to European monarchs and to George Washington.

KEY WORDS

K'ien L'ong	Voltaire	Thomas Gray
Joseph Marie Amiot	Catherine the Great of Russia	European 18th
Michel Benoit	Sir William Chambers	century literati
Frederick of Prussia		European chinoiserie

Apart from semi-mythical figures such as the ancient emperor Yao, the only Chinese personalities who were widely known by name in eighteenth-century Europe were Confucius and K'ien Long, the reigning emperor for most of the period. The latter's poetry, moreover, was the first Chinese verse to be introduced into the West, with the exception of the *Chi-king*, usually associated in the eighteenth century with Confucius and as such treated as work of morality. There were no eighteenth-century translations into European languages of the great classics, Li Po, Tu Fu, or Wang Wei. Although some modern Chinese scholars have labelled K'ien Long's more than 43,000 poems as little better than doggerel, [Kahn 1971: 11] two of them by a quirk of history turned out to be the first poetry of the Middle Kingdom to make an impression in the West. The emperor's poetry was his only accomplishment, moreover, that made him appear as a personality rather than a legend like Confucius. Europeans avidly devoured portrayals of the private lives of Frederick of Prussia and Catherine of Russia, marveling at their exploits and gasping at their idiosyncracies, but K'ien Long remained a distant legendary figure inhabiting a mysterious and mystifying world. It was his writing and his writing alone that brought him European renown.

The only personal account of the emperor appeared in a collection of epistolary narratives by Jesuit missionaries under the title *Lettres édifiantes et curieuses, écrites des missions étrangères*. Three of these letters by Father Michel Benoit written in 1773-1774 describe in detail his conversations with the emperor in the royal palace while the latter was having his portrait painted in the Western style by another Jesuit, Father Pansi. In seven hours of conversation spread over a number of sittings, Benoit answered the emperor's questions about the West and attempted to indoctrinate him with the essentials of the Catholic faith. In these conversations, the emperor appears as an attractive human personality, and had Benoit's letters been widely read they might have created a contrary image of K'ien Long from the one that actually emerged, but these intriguing interviews were, as far as I can tell, completely ignored. In the first of his letters, Benoit indicates how he had explained the workings of two scientific instruments that the fathers had presented to the emperor, a telescope and an airpump, and describes the luxurious appointments of the interior of the palace. At Benoit's first audience with K'ien Long 26 years previously, the monarch had been lean and slender, but at the time of the sitting he had taken on considerable weight. This Benoit professed to regard as a good sign, attributable to a salutary diet and regular exercise. As other people grow old, he remarked to the emperor, their

strength and health diminish, but with the monarch they seemed to increase. K'ien Long replied that he felt healthy and robust, but realized that the aging process had brought about physical changes. He wished to be painted, however, just as he was. During the painting seances, K'ien Long was not seated on his throne but on a rug-covered platform, making no use of a cushioned back rest. He occasionally moved his head or arms, but never changed the position of the rest of the body. The room was equipped with pipes under the flooring for heating, but K'ien Long seldom made use of this amenity.

He was curious about the distinctions among Western churches, asking what had been the business of the missionaries in Europe before coming to China, whether they learned sciences and the arts before becoming missionaries, what was the usual age at which Western men joined the Church, whether all the Europeans in China belonged to it, and why almost no Europeans other than churchmen came to the East. Benoit replied as he had done many times previously, that the teaching of science was merely secondary for the missionaries, that their primary object in China was to teach their religion, correct vices, and reform manners. In answer to a query why they brought only priests, Benoit answered that experience had shown that laymen became tired of living away from home and soon left; whereas priests remained as long as they were needed. K'ien Long was also curious about the political divisions in Europe, how the various nations were governed, how they managed to live together without continual warfare, and how questions of succession were settled in the various states. He was particularly interested in the relations of Russia with the other European nations and revealed that he knew much more about Russia than Benoit did. He also asked about other Europeans in Asia, especially the Dutch in Batavia. He could not understand how the Europeans were able to draw a map of the world if they had not been everywhere themselves.

Benoit gives examples of the Emperor's humor. He once proposed with a smile the question which Chinese philosophers sometimes ask — which came first the chicken or the egg? Benoit failed to inform the monarch that the question had also been raised in the West: it was presumably already old hat in the fifth century when Macrobius brought it up in his *Saturnalia* [VII, xvi]. With great seriousness Benoit replied that the Scriptures say that God created fowls and ordered them to increase and multiply, although the chicken had not yet laid any eggs it had the faculty of laying them. K'ien Long objected that since Chinese books are silent on the creation of the world, the Western ones do not seem to be worthy of belief. Benoit answered,

again with a straight face, that the Chinese works on the subject were probably consumed in the fire of *Tsin chi-houang*. On another occasion K'ien Long slyly asked why the Jesuits have not had access to Japan, not even being allowed to approach its shores. Benoit answered that the Jesuits believe that monarchs are masters of their own countries. When the Jesuits had at first been admitted to Japan, they had offered to serve to the best of their ability, but when their services had been rejected they submitted to the monarch's will; they were, however, always ready to work for the Japanese again if readmitted. K'ien Long smiled and replied, "It is not strictly speaking that the Japanese do not want to have you around, it is that they do not want your religion." Without giving Benoit time to answer, he proceeded to navigation. He asked various questions about astronomy and seemed to understand the European system. This reminded Benoit of a discussion 12 years previously when the Emperor had said "you have in Europe your manner of explaining celestial movements, and we have ours, without needing to make the earth turn around." Benoit discovered from one of the palace eunuchs that K'ien Long sometimes attended the lessons of his many sons and questioned them on matters of science. His sons participated in these lessons at every age even up to 30 when they also had household employments. Sometimes the older ones took part in the same classes as their own sons.

When Benoit repeatedly tried to bring up the subject of religion in subsequent conversations, K'ien Long each time diverted the discussion to other topics. He was curious, however, about the secular activities and arrangements of the Jesuits. Benoit observed that the Chinese who had been converted to his religion served as guides between Canton and Peking. The emperor enquired whether these converts knew any Western language, and when Benoit replied in the negative he wondered upon what basis they could profess Christianity. Benoit replied that everything essential about doctrine had been translated into Chinese. K'ien Long then inquired whether the Jesuits admitted into their establishments any people who were not of their religion. Benoit answered that they accept men of good will and that these men eventually embrace their faith. The emperor asked whether the priests drink Chinese wine, which, he felt, is good for the health when taken in moderation. Benoit answered diplomatically that they had tried several varieties, but did not use them habitually because they do not agree with European stomachs. He added that they import grape wines from Canton and make some of the same kind themselves in Peking. When K'ien Long asked whether wine from grapes is better for the health than that from grain, Benoit again

diplomatically answered that habit is the criterion. K'ien Long was amazed to learn that the priests sometimes added water to their wine, and Benoit explained that while Chinese wine is drunk warm, the European is consumed at room temperature and is, therefore, capable of being mixed with water. In connection with the religious duties of the priests, K'ien Long wondered whether they were assigned specific hours for prayers and asked how they could carry out a schedule of worship while in the palace. Benoit answered that while based in the palace they cannot perform their obligations to the letter, but must at times pray silently or omit the duty entirely. Benoit remarked in his letter that this detail, about which free-thinkers would no doubt be mirthful, was much to K'ien Long's taste.

Apparently no European unbelievers ever noticed this penetrating remark, not even Voltaire, who later called Benoit an "imbecile" in connection with a later letter.

According to Benoit, the emperor had his dinner at 8:00 A.M. and supper at 2:00 P.M. and ate nothing else. He drank tea and other hot beverages throughout the day, but never anything alcoholic except warm beer once at midday and once at night.

In connection with artistic taste, Benoit summarized conversations between two other missionaries, the painter Giuseppe Castiglione and the architect Denis Attiret, on the Chinese requirement for absolute fidelity to the object in painting; the Chinese believed that every streak on a flower must be delineated, every individual scale on a fish. K'ien Long, according to the taste of his country, wanted in his portrait the hairs of his beard and eyebrows to be distinguished one from another. Originally he had desired only a head and shoulders portrait, but changed his mind and asked for a full body in sitting position. As a compromise a Chinese painter accustomed to the national style undertook the body and ceremonial robes while the Jesuit concentrated on the face.

Benoit's anecdotes concerning K'ien Long made no impression upon Western writers, no matter how widely the good father's letters may have been read by the Catholic faithful. Indeed Benoit seems to have adopted the traditional practice in China of treating the emperorship as an institution rather than the emperors as individuals [Kahn 1971. 9]. Indeed Benoit does not refer to K'ien Long a single time by name, but merely by his title of emperor. The *Lettres edifiantes* had been equally or even more flattering concerning his predecessor, whose name also is not given. Another Jesuit, Father Entrecolles, for example, records a number of the latter's benevolent

edicts [*Letters* 1781: 19: 258-59]. The reader who did not know the dates of the two monarchs' reigns would not realize that two different emperors were being described.

K'ien Long was introduced by name to the West as an individual rather than as a figure in a French translation of his poetry published by another Jesuit, Father Joseph Marie Amiot, in a volume, published in 1770, containing two translated poems, one of which was an extensive description of the city of Moukden (the modern Shenyang), K'ien Long's birthplace, and the other a much shorter tribute to tea. The edition carried a preface by the outstanding French Sinologue of the time, Joseph De Guignes. The latter explains that Amiot had addressed a box of books, including his translations of K'ien Long, to the French royal library during the preceding year, but the Chinese customs officials had held it back because of the traditional opposition to instructing foreigners in their language and literature. A director of the French East India Company had thereupon removed Amiot's translation and sent it separately. De Guignes has little to say about the literary merits of the poems, but indicates that the one on Moukden has great practical value in describing rare agricultural products and in giving instruction about ancient Chinese culture, especially on the *Chi-king*, that De Guignes describes as one of the Chinese religious books. He observes that the emperor includes in his work many maxims from the *Chi-king* concerning government and good conduct. He does not invent fables to make his narrative more agreeable. His principal fiction consists in portraying the lives of defunct emperors as though they were alive today and a destroyed palace as though it were still in existence. In so doing, he attempts to ascribe to the Tartar race to which he belongs an antiquity as great as that of the Chinese. Anticipating material in Amiot's own preface, De Guignes affirms that the printing of the poem 64 times, each one in different characters, was not a sign of authorial vanity, but a record and illustration of these characters and, therefore, a contribution to linguistics and history. He adds that the verses on tea, composed in 1746, were also printed on tea cups. De Guignes gives further information concerning the emperor's literary and artistic activities. He had ordered the printing of the *Yu-tche-tsi*, an abridged history of China under the Mings in 24 volumes, and collected more than 100 volumes of pictures of the ancient monuments of the country. He had also sent to Paris several illustrations of victorious battles to be copper-engraved since the process was not then understood in China.

Amiot in his preface attempts to make K'ien Long's verse acceptable to

classical European taste by affirming that the emperor's purpose was to please by vivid descriptions, fine allegories, and embellishing ornaments and to instruct by including everything essential to know about his country. Amiot indicates that his translation is a literal one, line by line and page by page. Chinese editors, he affirms, have praised the poem on Moukden for its "precision, elegance, and its distribution and arrangement of parts." Amiot himself lauds K'ien Long for his marvelous wisdom. "He was able to circumscribe in their true limits, the merits of both ancients and moderns. Ignoring none of the mysteries of nature and instructed in all the content of the three active principles, sky, earth, and man, he brought his work to a conclusion, after which there seems nothing to be added, the work representing perfection in its kind." In his notes Amiot indicates that Moukden was called in contemporary Chinese, Cheng-king, that means "la Cour par excellence."

Amiot begins his translation with an edict of the emperor on the occasion of the publication of his poems, in which he explains that the project grew out of his collection of different characters in the Manchurian language. His grammarians had begged him to authorize publication of his poems in 32 different sets of Manchurian characters as well as in the same number of Chinese characters. K'ien Long's own preface has considerable material that should have appealed to the European intellectual climate. He states that in composing, he had always followed the maxim that one should conform one's spirit to that of his father and mother, of his ancestors, and of the heaven and earth. He indicates that he has recognized resemblances to his natal village in accounts of legendary cities in ancient literature and suggests that Moukden is a poetic utopia. His father and grandfather had visited the city and performed funeral rites for their ancestors, and on his own pilgrimage he had envisioned the city as "truly a realm favored by heaven."

It has frequently been said that Chinese verse lacks an epic tradition, but "Moukden" contains many structural elements resembling those in Western poems in the epic style: a review of ancient poets who had celebrated other cities, an apostrophe to the mountains, and descriptions of the interactions of men, animals and the landscape. Much of "Moukden" could be viewed as an epic catalogue expanded in the framework of a topographical poem. K'ien Long describes in almost scientific detail the most common animals, the tiger, leopard, bear, horse, mule, deer, wolf, fox, boar, squirrel, hare and mongoose, the domesticated fowls and animals, plants, trees, and fish. Nearly all of his subsequent sections would not have seemed out of place in a European Georgic or topographical poem of the same period: they describe ancient

dynasties and their accomplishments, the various orders of society, the founding of Moukden, the erection of a palace and adjoining buildings, the historical traditions of the Manchus, and the imperial army engaged in hunting. The emperor's philosophy prefigures that of the French Physiocrats, that the true riches of the country lie in its agricultural products. Because of these resemblances to European models one might expect "Moukden" to have acquired a degree of vogue in Europe as a literary composition, but this did not occur. Instead it was the accompanying ode on tea that later attracted the West. "Moukden" was quoted extensively, however, as a text-book of the flora and fauna of the area throughout one of the most widely-circulated books on the Middle Kingdom early in the nineteenth century, the abbé Jean-Baptiste Grosier's *De la Chine, ou Description générale de cet empire*. Because of its resemblances to European poetic conventions one might expect "Moukden" to have acquired a degree of vogue in Europe as a literary composition, but this did not occur. One of the few critics to treat seriously the esthetic aspects of the poem was Diderot, who in general was no great admirer of the Chinese. In his *Correspondance littéraire*, an enterprise in which he and others provided news of the latest literary activities in the French capital to the German nobility, Diderot summarized at length the entire contents of Amiot's volume, including prefaces, notes, and poetic texts. He informs his readers in May 1770 that they will not find in "Moukden" what they know as allegories or fantasies, but they will find what is called all over the world and will be called in centuries to come, "true poetry." He is equally complimentary to the ode on tea, affirming that Western writers of Anacreontics, both ancient and modern, have produced nothing with more "verve, grace, sentiment, wisdom and taste." Admitting that he does not hold a highly favorable opinion of Chinese manners, he, nevertheless, maintains that careful reading will bring out in the poetic language of the ode "something common to all nations of the world."

In his preface Amiot states that the emperor had a porcelain factory that produced exclusively for him; the verses on tea were printed on cups, and the subject represented pictorially by a design of three trees at the bottom of the cup. The poem itself was written while K'ien Long was hunting beyond the Great Wall, during one of the fortnightly periods devoted to this custom during the spring and fall. Amiot affirms that an accomplished scholar had assured him that the emperor's verses were very good, possessing a delicacy far above that found in ordinary poetry. He, nevertheless, calls upon his readers to judge the verses, not by their esthetic value, but by their content.

In his words, "I give them only as the copy of a painting by a great master because the emperor is one of the foremost scholars of his empire." The verses on tea could be compared to European poems in the Georgic tradition that explain or glorify a process in agriculture or commerce, but Western writers made no effort to associate the poem with similar works in their own culture.

The first Western writer to treat K'ien Long at length was Voltaire, who used him in both his private and public works. In his private letters to Frederick the Great of Prussia, he compared the two monarchs and in public he presented K'ien Long as an ideal ruler, who purportedly embodied some of his own Enlightenment principles.

Voltaire first drew the parallel between K'ien Long and Frederick of Prussia in a letter to the latter of 27 July 1770 in which he remarked that the two monarchs were the only two who were both philosophers and poets [Besterman 1953-65: 15531]. In November of the same year, he suggested to a French critic Marmontel that K'ien Long should be accorded a place of honor at the prestigious Academy of Inscriptions that he would thereupon enrich by donating to it sixty kinds of Chinese characters [Best 15760]. In the next month, Frederick the Great sent Voltaire verses in French he had written in imitation of K'ien Long, and in an accompanying letter amused himself by remarks on the difficulty of translating these verses from the Chinese and the help he had received from a scholar in residence, who had insisted that the translation be in poetry rather than in prose [Best 15778]. In his poem, entitled "Vers de l'Empereur de la Chine," K'ien Long writes with self-assurance rather than modesty [Frederick 1849: 13: 36-6]. "My glory is assured," he affirms, and my eulogy of the city of Moukden as good as anything about Paris or Rome. He refers in a condescending tone to Frederick, whose writing is cold and who is known in Peking only through an epistle of Voltaire. Although happy to be the most famous poet in his realm, the emperor admits that all is not rosy in Chinese intellectual circles, infected like France with bigots and writers of doggerel. In Western Enlightenment fashion, he declares, "Man is everywhere the same, and his various traits do not affect his mind, his heart, and his feelings." Still China is more rational in religion than the West, concerning itself with this world, not with heaven or hell. Voltaire in reply praised his style that had greatly improved since his eulogy of Moukden [Best 15821]. Carrying out the fiction that the verses were actually by K'ien Long, Voltaire records his assumption that the emperor has no mandarins who understand his verse, but like Orpheus he

recites to lions, leopards, wolves and falcons. Voltaire then looks back upon his previous visit to the royal court, where he had marvelled at the army, but a hundred times more at the king's person, and swears to his correspondent that he had never enjoyed more agreeable evening meals than those to which he had been admitted by K'ien Long the Great. In reality there must have been a great difference in the suppers of the hedonistic Frederick and the abstemious K'ien Long. Voltaire adds that he considers Frederick in his adopted identity to be the greatest man in the two hemispheres.

Voltaire also brought Catherine the Great of Russia into his circle of enlightened monarchs, observing in a letter to her of the same year, 1770, that she has two versifying neighbors, Frederick and K'ien Long [Best 15751]. He has already seen poetry by Frederick about her and is waiting for similar verses from the Chinese emperor. In January of the next year, Voltaire wrote that in his estimation Catherine is above the Chinese ruler as the preeminent power of the universe [Best 15954]. He mentions an epistle of his own to K'ien Long that he correctly predicts will never be read by the person to whom it is addressed. Voltaire included the Chinese emperor, moreover, in correspondence with two of his fellow warriors in the struggle for tolerance and intellectual freedom, Dalember and Condorcet. In a letter to the former, he classes K'ien Long with the enlightened Western rulers of Prussia, Russia, Denmark and Sweden, who do not engage in religious persecution [Best 15755]. In a letter to Condorcet, he wrathfully described the Jesuit who had recorded conversations with K'ien Long as the "imbecile named Benoit" because of a subsequent complaint by the latter about the alleged persecution of a Chinese convert to Christianity [Best 17967]. Benoit's complaint in my edition of the *Lettres edifiantes* covers seventeen large-size, two-column pages. The convert in question, a mandarin, had been demoted for allegedly allowing his religious beliefs to interfere with his loyalty to the state. Voltaire in his letter to Condorcet both greatly simplified the situation and drastically condensed the narrative. In his version, K'ien Long asks the minister who had prosecuted the mandarin, is his province dissatisfied with him? Does he render justice with impartiality? Has he failed in any duty of the state? Is he a good family man? Receiving satisfactory answers to all these questions, K'ien Long retorts, "Why then do you concern yourself about such a minor matter?"

In January 1776, Voltaire sent Frederick a copy of his *Chinese Letters* [Best 18756]. He assures the monarch that in them he has made absolutely no comparison between him and K'ien Long even though the latter

is the great-grandson of the celestial virgin, sister of god, a genealogy about which he has taken the liberty of diverting himself a little. Voltaire likewise protests that he places a greater value on Frederick's 72,000 prairie acres and his 7,000 cows than on the theological fantasies of the Chinese and the Indians. He adds, however, that K'ien Long also reclaims the land and that some people say his plough is mightier than his lyre, a reference to the widespread circulation in Europe of the legend of the emperor's ceremonial spring planting, a legend that referred to the emperor as the ruler of the country, however, rather than to K'ien Long specifically. Voltaire concluded that Frederick was assuredly the only king in the world to be superior in all aspects.

Frederick conveyed to Voltaire in March of the same year the news that K'ien Long was dead, that his son had taken over the government, and that the defunct emperor had visited great cruelties upon the Jesuits [Best 18842]. He had learned these details from the abbe Cornelius de Pauw, one of the anticlerical luminaries of his court, who had written a book arguing that Egypt, not China, was the cradle of civilization. Voltaire replied in the same month that if the news was true, he was sorry to hear it. The news was not true, however, for the emperor lived on for two more decades.

Voltaire owned his own copy of Amiot's translation of K'ien Long's poetry, which is now housed in the National National Public Library at Leningrad. In this volume he has marked seven passages and added in connection with three of them a marginal word or descriptive phrase. These descriptive key words suggest that his original intention was to use the material for satirical purposes, as he had previously handled other Jesuits besides Amiot. In one of these, K'ien Long records, almost in passing, that among his ancestors, "a celestial virgin, elder sister of the Heavens," tasted a fruit of remarkable color and after swallowing it conceived and became mother of a son, celestial like herself. In the margin, Voltaire wrote "virgin mother" [Voltaire 1988. 644]. In another passage, K'ien Long describes a ceremonial blood sacrifice accompanied by rich decorations, music and incense. Voltaire wrote in the margin, "sweet perfume [odeur de suavité]." In the third passage, K'ien Long describes at length how his Manchu ancestors had been favored by God and his great-grandfather placed on the throne by divine guidance after the displacement of the Ming dynasty. In the margin, Voltaire wrote "god" [645].

Voltaire's first public notice of K'ien Long took place in a satirical poem directed against his literary enemies, published in 1770, shortly after Amiot's

translation. Although China and the emperor occupy somewhat less than half of the entire work, the title refers exclusively to K'ien Long, *To the King of China, on the volume of his verses that he has ordered published* [*Au Roi de la Chine, sur son recueil de vers qu'il a fait imprimer*]. In the opening couplet, Voltaire compliments the "charming" king and affirms that his throne is supported by twin hills, presumably those of politics and poetry. Then in a long footnote, he gives the emperor's name and other details about him. He is the reigning monarch, he has written many other works, and the present ones have been translated from Chinese into Tartar and more recently into French. Voltaire then discusses the Chinese language, adding some information that does not appear in Amiot. The Chinese have no alphabet, but instead depend on 3,300 basic characters, each one expressing a fundamental idea. When a small mark is added to these characters, they take on various nuances such as tense and number. This method has produced more than 80,000 figures. As new information is discovered in the arts and sciences, it is necessary to invent new characters. "The entire life of a Chinese man of letters consists in the painful task of learning to read and to write." In addition, these characters change with the times, but do not have the wide variety in characters of the Chinese. The emperor himself aided by his relatives and court officials, therefore, invented new Manchurian characters in order to give their race the same prestige as the Chinese. "They put themselves to incredible pains to print in 64 different manners his poem on *Moukden*, that could easily have been printed in two days, if the Chinese had been willing to adapt themselves to the alphabet of other nations." This linguistic explanation is not only inaccurate, but it does not conform to Amiot's preface, which does not state that the emperor invented the Manchurian words, but that he had collected them. Interpreting this labor as one of many evidences of the Chinese respect for antiquity, Voltaire affirms that one can see why the Chinese "who are perhaps preeminent in morality among civilized nations are the last in the sciences and their ignorance equal to their pride."

In treating K'ien Long's poem, Voltaire is far more complimentary. It has several merits, "whether in subject matter, which is the praise of his ancestors and in which filial piety seems natural; whether in the descriptions, instructive for us, of the city of *Moukden* and of the plants and animals of this vast province; whether in the clarity of style, which is a perfection so rare among us. One may assume that the author speaks in a pure style, [purement] which is an advantage lacking among more than one of our own

poets." Voltaire finds remarkable the great respect for the Supreme Being which the emperor reveals and quotes as evidence one of the sentences in the passage that he had marked with the word *Dieu* in his copy of Amiot. He cites this passage in his notes to confound the opinion of some ecclesiastics that the Chinese were atheists. He next regrets that K'ien Long, "otherwise so modest, says that he has descended from a virgin who became pregnant by divine favor after eating red fruit. This detracts somewhat from the wisdom of the emperor and from that of his work. It is true that this is an ancient tradition of his family and that the same thing has been said about the mother of Gengis." Voltaire then praises the emperor for the extreme consideration he shows for agriculture and his love for frugality, virtues that are nowhere noticed in Amiot, but greatly praised by the Physiocrats. In the final paragraph of his note, Voltaire affirms that the emperor's great reverence for antiquity is itself an argument against the theory of some European scholars that the Chinese were originally a colony of the Egyptians.

After the first couplet of his poem, Voltaire goes on to say that he has always had an affection for Western monarchs who write verses, citing King David of the Old Testament and Frederick of Prussia of modern times. The latter, he says, has read and imitated Horace and recommends his Chinese majesty to do the same. He then appeals to K'ien Long, whose throne is wrapped in celestial fire, to inform him whether the great art of versifying is as difficult in Peking as in Paris and whether his poets conform rigidly to the rules of composition. He then sets forth the major French commonplaces of style that obviously have nothing to do with China. He asks whether Chinese poets are inhibited by various civil and religious attempts at censorship, all those which he mentions being characteristic of France. The rest of the poem treats Voltaire's personal concerns exclusively with merely an occasional reference to China or the emperor. He refers to a dispute between the Sorbonne and a French liberal over whether the virtuous men of antiquity were granted salvation or destined to eternal punishment and affirms that K'ien Long rejected the opinion of the Sorbonne and continued writing poetry. Referring to Rousseau's contempt for the profession of men of letters, he remarks that both the emperor of China and the king of Prussia honor that title. He refutes certain French writers who had been affirming for 30 years that the government of China is atheistic by citing in a footnote the respect shown for the deity in K'ien Long's *Moukden*. And toward the end of Voltaire's poem, he calls on the emperor to "reign in peace, write verses, and enjoy happy days," while the rest of Asia exists in turmoil.

When one of his feminine acquaintances complimented him on this epistle by dignifying it as a "work," Voltaire replied that his modest effort did not merit that title. "It is the verses of the King of China that represent a considerable work. They contain his generalogy; he descends in a direct line from a virgin. That is not at all extraordinary in Asia" [Best 15782]. Here as elsewhere, Voltaire regards K'ien Long with both admiration and condescension. Two weeks earlier he had observed to another correspondent that the Chinese people must be happy since their emperor writes poetry [Best 15769].

Five years later in a collection of prose essays, *Chinese, Indian, and Tartar Letters*, [*Lettres Chinoises, Indiennes et Tartares*] 1776, Voltaire devotes the first of these pieces to "The Poem of the Emperor K'ien Long." He imagines a Benedictine monk in conversation with a provincial French book-seller, who complains that he has had Amiot's translation on hand for four years without selling it. The Benedictine, charmed with the tender morality and beneficent virtue of the work, cannot understand how a nation as sensitive and feeling as the French could treat with indifference this prodigy, a more powerful more revered and more caring emperor than Augustus of Rome, who writes only for the instruction and welfare of the human race. Quoting the Jesuit missionary Father Parennin, he affirms that K'ien Long was the first to write verse in the Tartar tongue and that the Tartars before his time had been forced to translate Chinese into prose. Voltaire's Benedictine commends the emperor for his humility in affirming that application and effort would compensate for the talents he lacked, his humility being highlighted by the fact that he had the power to order his subjects to praise his efforts under pain of death. He had written, "The empire having been transmitted to my humble person, I must not omit anything in trying to restore the virtue of my ancestors, but I fear, with reason, that I shall not be able to equal them." The bookseller then casts some doubt on the emperor's modesty by referring to the passage in which K'ien Long refers to his descent in a direct line from a celestial virgin. The Benedictine replies that this passage might turn us away, but not disgust us, cites Gengis and Romulus as other rulers whose birth had been miraculous, and argues that if history were limited to absolute truth, it would lose its power. Finally, he remarks that the *Poem of Moukden* was not written for us, but for the Chinese. And the bookseller retorts, then let them read it in China.

Voltaire gives as title of his second letter "Reflections of Dom Ruinart on the virgin from whom the Emperor K'ien Long descends." His entire

purpose is to discredit miraculous prodigies in religion in general and the virgin birth of Christ in particular. Dom Thierry Ruinart, was an actual Benedictine, author of several histories of Christian martyrs. Ruinart advises Voltaire's fictional member of his order not to deny the fable of K'ien Long's virgin ancestor, whom he identifies as the emperor's grandmother, for if the Benedictines ever replace the Jesuits in China, they would be at risk for having doubted the story. Since the story is incontestably true in China, it must be true everywhere. Who better than K'ien Long himself could know the origins of his grandmother? Everything that he says about the city of Moukden is absolute verity and devoid of imagination; everything that he says about his family must also be true. This mode of argument strongly resembles that of K'ien Long himself, who had objected to Benoit that since Chinese tradition has nothing to say about the creation of the world, no faith can be placed in Western accounts of it. Voltaire then satirizes Dom Ruinart's proofs of the prodigies he has demonstrated in his own writings, particularly, that since all of the sixteenth-century manuscripts he had discovered in Benedictine monasteries agreed with each other, they must be accepted as verity. In Ruinart's opinion, it makes no difference in daily life whether something is actually true or merely passes for being true.

Voltaire then compares a passage in K'ien Long with one in Marco Polo's travels. The latter affirms that when Genghis Khan learned of the latter's arrival, having come to his dominions in order to sell a cure-all drug, the Khan ordered an escort of 40,000 men and later sent Marco back to Italy to beg the Pope to dispatch missionaries to baptize him and his family, all of them "having an extreme passion for baptism." Voltaire considers this story parallel to K'ien Long's account of his ancestor, the son of the virgin sister of god, sailing in a boat that he had built himself toward a throng of people on the shore of a lake in Moukden gathered to choose a ruler. The son of the virgin harangued the assembly with so much eloquence that he was elected unanimously. Voltaire adds that Julius Ceasar engraved the star of Venus on his medals, signifying his pleasure in descending from the goddess of love and that this was parallel to K'ien Long's believing himself an issue from the heavenly virgin.

In his third letter, which refutes the accusation that the Chinese are atheists, Voltaire remarks that he is bored to tears by both the poetry of K'ien Long and the theology of Confucius, but he, nevertheless, admires them at the same time. His reason for becoming weary of the verse of "the greatest monarch in the world" is that any poem translated in prose would have the

same effect. As for Confucius, he is a good preacher, but too prolix. Voltaire looks up to them, however, because the one, being king, concerns himself with the welfare of his subjects, and the other, being a theologian, says nothing injurious to anyone. On the point at issue, Voltaire says he believes neither that the Chinese admit the existence of a god nor that they are atheists. What he does believe is that they are extremely intelligent and that their metaphysics are as mixed up as those of the West. In connection with K'ien Long's religious opinions, Voltaire quotes a long passage from his preface — not marked in Voltaire's edition of the poem — in which the emperor remarks that he has always heard that universal peace would come about if everyone adapted his spirit to that of his parents, ancestors, and heaven and earth. Voltaire considers this passage to be worthy of the Roman emperor-philosopher Marcus Aurelius, "sitting on the throne of the world." But in the intellectual climate of eighteenth-century Europe, it would be interpreted as atheism. Voltaire next prints an almost identical passage from Confucius that K'ien Long had quoted in his preface. Here the Chinese sage affirms that a realm may easily be governed by a person who faithfully performs the ceremonies required to honor the heavens and earth and who understands the significance of these rites. These sentiments, Voltaire maintains, would be regarded by European priests as atheistic. To support his own contrary opinion, he quotes one more passage from K'ien Long — one that is marked in his personal copy — affirming that virtuous behavior would bring upon men "the notice of the sovereign master who rules in the highest reaches of the heavens." Despite this convincing proof of the emperor's religious faith, Voltaire ironically suggests in his eighth letter that K'ien Long would run the risk of prosecution for his poem on Moukden if he ever came to Paris. And at the close of the letter he makes a passing reference to the poem on tea, which he labels a drinking song, but one quite different from French songs because of its sobriety and morality. He also remarks that there is no lady from Peking to Canton who fails to warble the emperor's song at breakfast time.

While Voltaire concentrated on the poem of Moukden, it was the simpler poem on tea that drew the attention of British writers to the Chinese emperor. He was introduced to the British public in a dissertation on oriental gardening by the architect and Sinophile Sir William Chambers, whose esthetic concepts have been made familiar to modern scholars by a famous essay by A. O. Lovejoy on "The Chinese Origin of a Romanticism." K'ien Long does not figure in Chambers's first edition in 1772, but in the second in the fol-

lowing year, which bears the title *A Dissertation on Oriental Gardening . . . To which is annexed An Explanatory Discourse, by Tan Chet-qua, of Quang-chew-fu, Gent.* The actual author of this "Explanatory Discourse" is Chambers himself. He had invented the Chinese gentleman to serve as his spokesman to explain some parts of his first edition that had not been properly understood. According to Chambers "All the world knew Chetqua, and how he was born at Quang-chew-fu, in the fourth moon of the year twenty-eight; also how he was bred a law-maker, and had three wives, two of whom he caressed very much." The third was a virago with big feet. In London, he lodged in the Strand and enjoyed smoking his pipe and talking, his favorite subjects being painting, music, architecture and gardening.

Chambers nowhere explains the relevance of the emperor's poem to the notions of gardening set forth in his dissertation — essentially that Chinese landscaping was not symmetrical, but based upon natural effects designed to "move the passions" or "excite powerful sensations." These natural effects were assisted by artificially placed waterworks, buildings, and sculptures. Chambers argues that many dreary, barren tracts of land in England "may easily be framed into scenes of terror, converted into noble pictures of the sublimest cast. and, by an artful contrast, serve to enforce the effect of gayer and more luxuriant prospects." [130] Chambers opened himself to ridicule for this and similar passages in which he describes islands in Chinese lakes in which are seen "stalking along, the elephant, the rhinoceros, the dromedary, ostrich, and the giant baboon" and the Garden of Yven-Ming-Yven containing in miniature "a fortified town, with its ports, streets, public squares, temples, markets, shops, and tribunals of justice; in short, with every thing that is at Peking, only on a smaller scale."

The epigraph on Chambers's title page consists of four lines from K'ien Long's poem on tea, and the notes at the end of the book give an English translation of Amiot's version of the entire poem together with a list, also from Amiot, of the various mandarins who had applauded the merits of the poem and approved of its publication. It may be that Chambers included the poem on tea because of the theory in his explanatory discourse that "without a little assistance from art, nature is seldom tolerable; she may be compared to certain viands, either tasteless or unpleasant in themselves; which, nevertheless, with some seasoning become palatable; or, when properly prepared, compose a most delicious dish." [145-6] He had also remarked that "nature produces nothing either boiled, roasted or stewed, and yet we do not eat raw meat." [20] The poem explains that tea, to be enjoyed to the maximum,

needs to be carefully brewed in water of the exact consistency, brought to exactly the right degree of heat, and served in vessels of the highest quality porcelain. The four lines in the epigraph give examples of three products from nature that arouse agreeable sensations of sight, odor, and taste, objects to stimulate the sensations, if not to excite the passions. A separate "verbal translation" of the ode, comprising only ten lines, was published in John Barrow's account in 1803 of the Macartney mission [1805: 280-81].

William Mason, the friend and biographer of Thomas Gray and a poet in his own right published in 1773 an *Heroic Epistle to Sir William Chambers*, ridiculing the latter's notions of landscape gardening. Presumably he was motivated in his satire because he had brought out in the same year as Chambers's dissertation a long exposition in heroic couplets on *The English Garden*, in which he maintains that "divine simplicity" is the essence of successful gardening, a principle completely opposite to the notions displayed by Chambers. Mason called his satire an "heroic epistle" because of Chambers's statement that "the scenery of a garden should differ as much from common nature, as an heroic poem doth from a prose relation." [21] In his original epistle Mason does not allude to K'ien Long by name, but in his preface ironically refers to the art "displayed in the emperor's garden. . .; where fine lizards and fine women, human giants, and giant baboons make but a small part of the superb scenery."

In a sequel to this poem, however, *An Heroic Postscript to the Public occasioned by their favorable reception of a late Heroic Epistle to Sir William Chambers*, Mason devotes eight lines and a footnote to the emperor.

Did China's Monarch here in Britain doze,
 And was, like western Kings, a King of Prose,
 Thy Song [the heroic epistle] could cure his Asiatic spleen,
 And make him wish to see and to be seen.
 That solemn vein of irony so fine,
 Which e'en reviewers own, adorns thy line,
 Would make him soon against his greatness sin,
 Desert his Sofa, mount his Palanquin,
 And post where'er the Goddess led the way.

In his footnote, Mason supplies the emperor's name, remarks that he is a poet, and maintains that his composition would have appeared to greater advantage in "heroic verse" than in prose translation.

Mason's *Heroic Epistle* created a considerable stir among contemporary

wits. It went through twelve editions, and a controversy took place over the identity of the author. [Chalmers 1810. 18: 316] Another poem on Chambers's esthetics appeared anonymously in 1775, *A Chinese Imperial Eclogue, Translated from a curious oriental manuscript, and inscribed by the translator to the author of an Heroic Epistle to Sir William Chambers, Knight*. K'ien Long is not put forth as the author of this eclogue, but rather as its subject. In the opening lines, his palace grounds are compared to the Greek Elysium.

Luxurious scene! where wealth and whim preside,
Obsequious handmaids of imperial pride:
In soft pavilion, on soft sofa laid,
Lull'd by soft murmurs of a lost cascade.

The emperor is described as great, valiant and wise, alternately seeking slumber and musing on the cares of the empire while his lords in waiting knock "their broad foreheads nine times on the ground." In a footnote, the author explains the origin of the kow-tow, basing his information on the English translation of a Chinese scholar-beauty romance, *Hau Kiou Chooan*, that had recently appeared [Percy 1761]. Later passages contain Chinese names derived from both this romance and from Chambers: *Che-foos*, governors of cities; *Ku-se-kee*, a poet; *Li-song*, a landscape architect; *Lay-qua*, a painter; *Pingchou*, a jeweler, and *Vrangti*, a Brahmin manufacturer of fire-arms. A mandarin affirms that the court jewelers receive paltry pensions for their works, but K'ien Long acquires immortal fame from his, but the author suggests that the praise accorded to the emperor is exaggerated because of his high station. The poem concludes with a mammoth sea-battle conducted on one of the palace lakes in which 10,000 junks ride in naval triumph.

The inspiration for the next two English poems devoted to K'ien Long derived from an expedition to the Chinese court organized by the British East India Company under the leadership of a distinguished diplomat, Lord Macartney, that took place in 1792-1794. The first of these, published just before the departure of the embassy, came from the pen of a prolific writer of light verse John Wolcot, who regularly used the pseudonym Peter Pindar. In the preface to his *Odes to Kien Long, The Present Emperor of China*, 1792. Wolcot informs the emperor that the "praise of MOUKDEN" and the "beautiful little ODE to TEA" have afforded him infinite delight. And since Lord Macartney with his splendid retinue hoped to initiate trading relations,

he ventured to propose a literary commerce between himself and the emperor as two men of rhymes. To show his good faith, he is transmitting samples of his own versifying talents. The first of Wolcot's odes is undeviating praise.

Believe me, venerable, good KIEN LONG,
Vast is my pleasure that the Muse's song
Divinely soundeth through thy Tartar groves;
Still greater, that the *first* of Eastern Kings
Should praise in rhyme the Tartar vales and springs,
And pay a tuneful tribute to the Loves.

The second ode has more compliments in a similar vein, but shifts to condemnation of the anti-royalist sentiments of French revolutionaries.

Thou art a second Atlas, great KIEN LONG;
Supporting half th'unwieldy globe, so strong.

The third and fourth odes are highly ironical, cautioning the emperor against spending on public enterprises while neglecting to engage in profitable transactions, devoting his riches to charity, and failing to extract the utmost from his subjects in taxes. The fifth ode ridicules the sordid commercialism of the Macartney expedition. The English

Have heard uncommon tales about thy wealth;
And now a vessel have they fitted out,
Making for good KIEN LONG a monstrous rout,
To trade, and beg, and ask about his health. . . .

Lord! couldst thou send the Chinese Empire o'er,
So hungry, we should gape for *more*.

In the same year, Wolcot published *A Pair of Lyric Epistles to Lord Macartney* in which he continues his satire on English cupidity. In his verse, Macartney expects lavish presents and commercial advantage, but K'ien Long gives him the bastinado instead. In dismissing him, the emperor solemnly declares,

"This thus we Kings of China *folly* pay;
"Now children, ye may all go home agen."

Probably the most widely-read of all English literary works concerning K'ien Long was a long poem purporting to be written by the emperor himself and addressed to the King of England. By Thomas James Mathias, another of the prolific verse satirists of the period, it went through many separate editions, including one in Philadelphia, and was collected in the author's *Pursuits of Literature*, which by itself had sixteen editions. Taking the hint from an account in a London newspaper of K'ien Long presenting a box of verses to Macartney, Mathias entitled his satire *The Imperial Epistle from Kien Long, Emperor of China, to George the Third, King of Great Britain* [1795?]. The work is a political satire, particularly on the ambition of the prime minister, William Pitt, who in the poem is invited to serve as K'ien Long's chief mandarin. Apparently Mathias derived from Chambers all of his information about the emperor, for he does not even mention Moukden or Amiot. He cites in his preface, however, the "Ode in Praise of Drinking Tea" and notices the approbation it received from various grandees of the realm and the circumstance of its being printed in 32 [sic] different types and characters. Mathias sets forth his personal conception of the ideal ruler by means of the characteristics of K'ien Long as he imagined them to be. "His majesty appears to me, as the father of a people should appear, a man able to distinguish, to mark, and to declare the virtues and qualities of statesmen, without the unworthy bias of a party; as a man labouring under strong impressions of the nature of all government and of the foundation upon which it is supported, without despising the mean or trembling at the powerful; as a man, whom neither the splendor of any thing that is great, nor the conceit of any thing that is good or specious in the constitution or the direction of an empire, can withdraw from the thought of human infirmity, of the instability of all public opinion, and of the causes, which, however mean and trifling in their origin, may overthrow and lay prostrate the most confirmed dominion."

K'ien Long largely disappears from the poem, however, after the first two pages, which portray him at the age of 80, composing verse in the palace grounds.

Here nightly by the moon, her quickening beams
I court reclin'd and call Sidonian dreams,
While minstrels breathe around divine airs
A poet's rapture soothes a monarch's cares:
All pomp of words my sober years decline,
Simplicity and truth illumine my line,

Soft as the tints of Meihoa's foliage spreads,
And fragrant as the perfume Fo-sai sheds.

Toward the end of the century, the French lyricist Andre Chenier, who had developed an interest in Chinese poetry, compiled a number of manuscript notes on the subject, including a passage from K'ien Long, which he aptly describes as "Horace in Chinese."

My palace is a small room three times longer than my height. Magnificence never enters it, but cleanliness never leaves. A pallet is my bed, a folded sheet of sailcloth is my bedspread: this is enough for me to sit upon during the day and to sleep upon at night. On one side there is a lamp, on the other, an incense burner. The singing of birds, the whistling of the wind, the murmuring of a fountain are the only sounds I hear. My window can be closed, and my door, opened, but this is only for the good; the ill-natured stay away. I do not shave like a bonze, and I do not fast like a Taoist. Truth resides in my heart, and innocence guides my actions. Having neither master nor disciple, I do not waste my life dreaming of nothings and playing with words, still less in composing satires or piling up eulogies. I have neither schemes nor projects; glory tempts me as little as do riches, and all the forms of voluptuousness do not kindle a single desire. To enjoy my solitude and my repose is my great affair. Leisure comes to me from all sides and disturbance flees. I look at the sky and take courage; I regard the earth and draw consolation. I take each day at a time, and the years pass one by one; the last will take me to my destination, and I shall have lived for myself.

This passage encapsulates the eighteenth-century ideal of rural retirement associated with the Latin poet Horace. I have not succeeded in discovering Chinese documentary source, which, if a translation, must be very free and interpretive, for it contains European neo-classical stylistic echoes, such as epigrammatic terseness and balance and antithesis, combined with pre-Romantic subjectivity. The passage completely makes over the Chinese emperor into a country gentleman of the Age of Reason. Much of it, moreover, goes contrary to the emperor's actual historical career. If Voltaire had published a passage such as this in place of references to K'ien Long's virgin

ancestry, religious toleration, and linguistic skills, the fame of K'ien Long might have rivalled that of Confucius.

Just before the French Revolution, the identity of the Chinese emperor was borrowed in a collection of ostensible *Greetings of the Emperor of China to the sovereigns of Europe for the year 1782. With a peace proposal by the Chinese Monarch and his Instructions to the Mandarin Chou-King . . . His Ambassador in all the Courts of Europe.* (Constantinople [Paris] 1782. [*Etrennes de l'empereur de la Chine aux souverains de l'Europe pour l'année 1782. Avec un plan de Pacification proposé par le Monarque Chinois. & ses Instructions au Mandarin Chou-King . . . son Ambassadeur dans toutes les Cours de l'Europe*]) The purported imperial documents comprise separate letters to all the monarchs of Europe, treating their politics from a French point of view.

With the exception of Benoit's letters and Amiot's translation, all of the published works I have treated so far are largely satirical in intent and have more reference to conditions in Europe than to the achievements and personality of K'ien Long. Early in the nineteenth century, however, an English Sinologist, Stephen Weston, published two authentic translations of the emperor's poetry. In the first of these, *Ly-Tang, An Imperial Poem*, published in 1809 and dedicated by the translator to Sir George Staunton, who had served as Macartney's interpreter and was considered the outstanding British sinologue of the time, Weston attempts to rescue the emperor from the satirists. In his preface he observes, "Kien Lung, the late Emperor of China, is well known in Europe on many accounts, but chiefly for the length of his reign, for his poetic talent, and his origin; he being the fourth sovereign of the Tartar dynasty in 1644, and having mounted the throne in 1736, and reigned till 1796." Weston then indicates that which he considers to be the two most remarkable and significant events in bringing about literary relations between the West and China. The first of these was the publication by the emperor's command of a dictionary and commentary in the Tartar language. The second was the publication by Voltaire of his *Epitre au roi de la Chine*, probably a justified tribute to the great influence of the French philosophy. Weston explains that he had found the emperor's poem on a cup and, curious about its meaning decided to render it into English. He presents his translation in two forms, one absolutely word for word with no added connectives, and the other in standard contemporary prose. The following passage is Weston's rendition of the theme that the contemplative life leads to greater virtue and personal satisfaction than are provided by an existence of action

and displacement.

Man, proud zealot, lord paramount to all, seeks with his divin-
ing rod what the earth conceals, and goes in quest, through
foreign climes, of animals which eye has not seen nor ear heard;
and he is called illustrious, artificer of things emblematic of good,
that neither perish nor decay; but he is in haste to leave the
beauties of his own climate to run after a change of seasons. I,
alone and unassisted, with fearful heart, give to the world these
verses, without venturing to look back to the reputation I may
have acquired, or to repose in the enjoyment of my present labors.

In the following year, Weston translated a longer poem, *The Conquest of the Miao-tse. An Imperial Poem by Kien-long entitled A Choral song of Harmony for the first part of the Spring*, following the same procedure of providing a narrative in standard prose as well as a literal transcript of the actual Chinese characters. He explains in his preface that the poem describes "the defeat and actual subjugation of the Miao-tse, an independent people in the province of Hounan, and the very heart of China; whose government, laws, and language, were peculiar to themselves, and exclusively their own." Weston emphasizes the problems of translation and the difficulties with which he is faced. One who attempts to capture the essence of Chinese poetry, he says, is "completely thrown out," because no matter how conscious he may be of the beauty of the original, "he cannot paint it; and if he could, he would hardly make his readers admire it." Since he must fall back upon "wretched prose," Weston laments that the elevated spirit of the "royal muse descends to dryness." He is consoled, however, by the thought that his text presents some practical facts, customs and habits that may be new even for an English resident of Canton.

Although Weston affirms that it is impossible to capture the spirit of the original and its musical charm, he goes to the opposite extreme in regard to conveying the sense of the original. In his words, "all that is necessary for an Englishman to make him Chinese scholar enough to translate any common work in prose . . . is a good eye for Chinese characters, and a knack of deciphering them, or finding the key by dissection, as children learn geography."

Probably Weston's translation secured the interest of a small group of linguists and Sinophiles rather than that of the reading public at large. Today its value consists in its comments on the techniques of translation and

illustrations of Weston's-art in applying them. In the first part of the nineteenth century, his volume made its way across the Atlantic to the United States, where it was cited in a manuscript on the poetry and general literature of the Middle Kingdom intended as a chapter in a monumental work entitled *China* with a subtitle of 90 words comprehending every imaginable phase of Chinese culture from its history to its women. The author Robert Waln Jr., who had been engaged in the China trade, published an initial volume comprising more than 300 pages in 1823, but the rest of his manuscript, including the chapter on literature, never saw print. Waln, unlike Weston, was not a Chinese scholar and failed to appreciate the beauties of the emperor's verse. While Weston held the process of translation responsible for these beauties not being apparent to English readers, Waln tended to deny artistic merit to the original. He made fun of the emperor's imagery from common life in the Miao-tse poem, particularly the simile declaring that "the blast of his artillery choaked up the embrasures of their fortress, as the breath of a fish is stop'd when thrown into a cauldron of boiling water." [Waln Papers, Library Company of Philadelphia]

With the exception of the letters of Benoit, nearly all the evidence I have given concerning the Western vogue of K'ien Long concerns his literary production. During the last decade of the eighteenth century when both the British and the Dutch East India companies sent embassies to the Chinese court, however, several Europeans published their impressions of K'ien Long as a person. By and large those associated with the Dutch mission give favorable impressions of the emperor, but those written by the British present him in an unfavorable light. For various reasons, I am excluding these recollections from this paper. I shall mention, however, that the author of an account of the Dutch mission, Everard Van Braam Houckgeest, a naturalized American citizen, dedicated his work to George Washington while drawing a parallel between the first president of the United States and the emperor of China. In his words, China "makes its chief the Father of the National Family," and in America "everything bespeaks the love of the First Magistrate for the People."

I shall conclude with a similar tribute to K'ien Long by another European visitor, earlier in the century, Charpentier Cossigny: "Poet, historian, philosopher, great law-giver, friend of humanity, he has won the admiration of his century and will be the source of amazement to posterity. His good works, his constant application to government during a reign of 60 years, his love for justice and for the laws of the Empire, his taste in letters and his esteem for

men of letters, and especially his filial piety carried to the highest degree, will guarantee to him a distinguished rank in the history of the Empire." [1799. 139]

Although K'ien Long remained by choice personally isolated from Europe and its culture, he still enjoyed a considerable, if fleeting, vogue in the West, where his poetry was translated, quoted and parodied, and where he was compared favorably both to European monarchs and to George Washington.

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