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**CHINESE CIVILIZATION AND CHINESE WOMEN IN THE
IMAGINARY OF THE SCOTTISH ENLIGHTENMENT**

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requirements of the Master of Arts degree in Comparative History

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Abstract

In the late eighteenth century, for Scottish Enlightenment thinkers, images of women from around the world reflected the actual condition of local women in their writings on the history of women. In their works, the images of women varied across different stages of society as civilization progressed. Since China was viewed as a static commercial society by Scottish Enlightenment thinkers, Chinese women there were expected to be free and to serve as friends and companions to their partners. However, Chinese women appeared as an image of lacking freedom, despite being chaste and modest, in Scottish Enlightenment narratives. In reconstructing the image of Chinese women from the sources they read, Scottish Enlightenment thinkers drew upon prevailing depictions of Chinese women and records of China by French Jesuits to present an image that aligned with their understanding of Chinese civilization and the expectations of women and men within Scottish society. This attempt only succeeded after they revised the standards by which they evaluated civilization. With the emergence of new standards—one of which was the condition or image of women as a measure of civilization—the image of Chinese women served as a means for Scottish Enlightenment thinkers to review China within their framework of the Progress of civilization. Based on this image of a Chinese woman, Willan Alexander placed China in a position that was inferior to Europe, yet superior to other civilizations.

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Introduction

Chinese women, as a group of Asian women, are often exoticized or othered as submissive in the contemporary context, and become carriers of certain cultural imagination and gendered narratives. This not only reflects sexism towards women, but also power inequality in cross-cultural communication in the context of globalization.

This is a phenomenon existing in modern society, but it is also a continuation of a historical legacy. From the sixteenth century, with the arrival of European missionaries and travelers to China, records and narratives about Chinese women, alongside the introduction of China, gradually entered the European world. In these works, Chinese women were portrayed as both mysterious and submissive “subjects.” In the eighteenth century, Enlightenment thinkers further reinforced this gendered stereotype by incorporating Chinese women into their history of civilization. Later, these stereotypes became stabilized as a legacy.

It is against this background that my study unfolds. By tracing the construction of the image of Chinese women in Early Modern Europe, this study aims to reveal the profound connection between history and the contemporary world and to provide a perspective for understanding gender bias in cross-cultural communication.

This research examines how Scottish Enlightenment thinkers presented Chinese women in their works and how these representations intersected with evolving ideas of civilization, gender, and China. Specifically, the study will analyze the relevant writings of John Millar, Henry Home Lord Kames, and William Alexander. It focuses on their description of Chinese women in their texts and analyzes how this presentation was constructed. By situating these descriptions within the intellectual history of eighteenth-century Scotland, this research highlights the ways in which Scottish Enlightenment thought both reinforced and challenged prevailing gender norms through its engagement with cross-cultural perspectives.

Background

China in the European Enlightenment

In the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, China became a popular topic in Europe. Europeans admired China and were fascinated by its “great antiquity, the stability of its institutions and customs, and the urbane wisdom and tolerance of its ruling elites”¹. This Enlightenment Sinophilia emerged from a unique perception of China, where information from China was reorganized and transmitted by the Jesuits. China and its culture served as a model for Europeans at the time, widely engaging in conversations in Europe during the Age of Enlightenment.

The Mediator

This description of China as a “utopia” in the Enlightenment was first recorded and transmitted to Europe by the Jesuits. Jesuits, as apostles of Christianity, travelled around the world for missionary work in the sixteenth to eighteenth centuries. For the Jesuits in China, there were three missionary stages.² The first stage started in the late sixteenth century when a small group of Jesuits arrived in China and served as intellectual advisors to the late Ming Dynasty. The second stage came after the Manchu invasion of the Ming dynasty. Since then, some Jesuits participated in the courts of the Qing dynasty after the Manchu established their own regime in China. In the late seventeenth century, the influence of Jesuits in the Qing court grew. In 1710, Catholicism became a legal religion in the Qing Dynasty. The third stage came suddenly when Jesuits lost the support of Emperor Kangxi following the famous “Chinese Rites Controversy ” in Rome and the policy change within the Qing court. After 1722, the Jesuits lost

¹ David Allen Harvey, “The Wisdom of the East: Enlightenment Perspectives on China,” in *The French Enlightenment and Its Others: The Mandarin, the Savage, and the Invention of the Human Sciences*, ed. David Allen Harvey (New York: Palgrave Macmillan US, 2012), 41.

² S. A. M. Adshead, “World Within a World: China in the Enlightenment, 1650 to 1833,” in *China in World History*, ed. S. A. M. Adshead (London: Palgrave Macmillan UK, 2000), 282–83.

all political significance in the Qing court. Since then, most of the Jesuits who stayed in the Qing court were only given the position of virtuosi. In the 1730s, all Jesuits were expelled from China by Emperor Yong Zheng.

The primary purpose of Jesuits coming to China was to spread the Gospel of God. As a group of well-educated people, they knew how to convince the people there to believe in their preaching. In the Ming and Qing dynasties, the official ideology was Confucianism, while Buddhism and Taoism also coexisted as popular religious beliefs in Chinese society. To have their work supported by intellectuals in the Qing court, the Jesuits chose to focus on understanding and interpreting Confucianism, employing a special strategy for their missionary work: using Chinese classics, especially those from Confucianism, to explain Christian teachings.³ This strategy made their mission in the Qing Dynasty a remarkable success, where they gained not only the trust of the Qing court but also new converts.

The Jesuits recorded the information they gained in China and transferred their records, as well as translated Chinese classical works, to Europe. We do not know to what extent this information was transferred for the purpose of importing pure knowledge of China. Nevertheless, it shows a great deal of selective expression and self-processing of the texts. One example would be shown in the introduction of Neo-Confucianism in *Proemialis Declaratio in Confucius Sinarum Philosophus*, where the Jesuits attempted to explain the conception of Taiji(太极) of Neo-Confucianism by using language with stronger religious overtones, such as “by itself, the most high, the most beautiful.”⁴ The reason for the selective expression in the work of Jesuits lay in a broader context of the Enlightenment, where the Jesuits tended to find a compromise between the rational and mystical approaches to religious problems by

³ Wu Bin (武斌), “The Image of China in Modern Europe and Its Utopian Values”(“近代欧洲的‘中国形象’及其乌托邦价值”), *Social Science Journal*(社会科学辑刊), no. 2 (2004): 118. (in Chinese)

⁴ Knud Lundbaek, “The Image of Neo-Confucianism in Confucius Sinarum Philosophus,” *Journal of the History of Ideas* 44, no. 1 (1983): 23–24.

reexamining evidence to create a new conception of the church as eternal and universal.⁵ China, as an old civilization, was part of the evidence to support this purpose.

The Works

In the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, the Jesuits published tremendous works to introduce China to Europe, and these works gained popularity among Europeans. Among these works, three comprehensive works compiled by French missionaries in the eighteenth century introduced China in a systematic manner.⁶ *Lettres édifiantes et curieuses, écrites des missions étrangères, Mémoires de la Chine*, compiled by Charles Le Gobien, Jean Baptiste du Halde, and Louis Patouillet, was published from 1702 to 1776. It contained letters from missionaries who arrived in China and reported the missionaries' observations of Chinese institutions, customs, history, geography, and commercial situation, etc. Thus, it became the main source of information for many European scholars to study China in the eighteenth century. *Description géographique, historique, chronologique, politique, et physique de l'empire de la Chine et de la Tartarie chinoise, enrichie des cartes générales et particulières de ces pays, de la carte générale et des cartes particulières du Thibet, & de la Corée; & ornée d'un grand nombre de figures & de vignettes gravées en taille-douce* was a translated work by Jean-Baptiste du Halde and published in 1735 in Paris. Jean-Baptiste du Halde never went to China. He collected the letters, writings, and translations from Jesuits in China and then organized them in his own way. *Mémoires concernant l'Histoire, les Sciences, les Arts, les Mœurs, les Usages, etc. des Chinois: Par les Missionnaires de Pékin* was edited by Gabriel Bretier, Joseph de Guignes and Antoine Isaac Sylvestre de Sacy. This work introduced comprehensive research on China in the eighteenth century. It was constantly published in the late eighteenth century (1776-1814).

The Image of China in Europe

⁵ Arnold H. Rowbotham, "The Jesuit Figurists and Eighteenth-Century Religious Thought," *Journal of the History of Ideas* 17, no. 4 (1956): 472–73.

⁶ Wu Bin, "The Image of China in Modern Europe and Its Utopian Values", 117-121.

In the reports of missionaries who traveled to China and in the narratives of scholars in seventeenth- and eighteenth-century Europe, China was often depicted as a country of prosperity, affluence, stability, and peace. People there lived and worked in peace and contentment, and behaved in a moral and courteous manner. It was a place full of wisdom, civilization, and harmony. They especially gave compliments to China's political system and praised it as a guarantee of stability and durability. China, in the eyes of these missionaries and scholars, was a republic of learning, where education is the basis of order and stability, and the means of maintaining them. In the writings of missionaries and Enlightenment thinkers, China's supreme ruler, the emperor, was also highly praised, especially the Kangxi Emperor, who was described as a wise, generous, and enlightened great monarch. In short, in the European literature about China at that time, China was perceived as a "paradisiacal place", in sharp contrast to Europe, which was in a state of decay and crisis. For Europeans at that time, China was an ideal place they aspired to, a utopia.⁷ However, this image gradually changed to be negative in the very late eighteenth century to the nineteenth century, when travelers(a different group of people who mostly took the sea route to arrive in Guangzhou) returning from China began to criticize the Chinese political system and the human condition.⁸

The Participation of the Image of China in the Enlightenment Era

When Jesuit scholars wrote about China, they focused on how Chinese culture could be used to interpret Christian teachings. In the compilations of history that existed in China at the time, Chinese history could be dated back more than 5,000 years or even earlier, which was beyond the history recorded in the Bible. To conform to the Christian chronology of history, the legends of Pangu's parting of heaven and earth and Nuwa's creation of humankind in the Chinese history

⁷ Harvey, "The Wisdom of the East," 42.

⁸ Zhang Xiping(张西平), "The Global Significance of Chinese Culture: From the Perspective of Relations between the Enlightenment and Chinese Culture"(“中国文化的世界性意义——以启蒙思想与中国文化关系为视角”), *International Comparative Literature*(国际比较文学), 2, no. 3 (2019):420.

records were omitted from the Jesuits' account, and they directly backdated the history of China to the period of Fuxi.⁹ In the Jesuits' adaptation of Chinese history, there was one issue that seemed to have been rarely explored by historians. It was their neglect of the female figure in Chinese creation myths. If they were familiar with Fuxi, it is unlikely that they were unaware of Nuwa, the female. In the well-known mythological images of China at the time, Nuwa and Fuxi were depicted as brother and sister with human heads and snake bodies, often portrayed as Siamese twins. In Chinese mythology, both Nuwa and Fuxi are considered gods of creation; however, three different versions of the creation of humankind have circulated. One was that Nuwa created humankind with mud, which was the most popular one at the time; the other was that Nuwa and Fuxi created humans together, and the third was that Fuxi was the creator. Nuwa, as a female figure, occupied a key place in Chinese creation myths, but this figure has not been included in Jesuit interpretations of Christianity. Jesuit believed that Fuxi was the descendant of Noah and escaped to the East after the Great Flood and became the creator of the Chinese people. They believed that God gave the true natural law to Fuxi, and Fuxi put it into the Chinese characters, the classics of the sages, and the eight trigrams. To the Jesuits, China was an existing civilization with a true natural law, and the further one went into the classical period, the purer the embodiment of that law became. The Jesuits' interpretation of Chinese culture was criticized by various schools within Christianity, most notably the Dominicans. The Jesuits' interpretation of Chinese culture eventually led to the "Chinese Rites Controversy," which resulted in a confrontation between the Church of Rome and the Qing court. In 1721, the Qing court expelled all the Jesuits who had been preaching in China, bringing the Jesuits' mission in China to an end in the eighteenth century.

When the Jesuits introduced Chinese culture to Europe, they initially intended to demonstrate that they had found a place where the Gospel of Christ was readily accepted, with

⁹ Rowbotham, "The Jesuit Figurists and Eighteenth-Century Religious Thought," 476.

the aim of encouraging more missionaries to come to China. However, as their works were read in vast numbers by European thinkers, the information about China revealed its function in a manner contrary to the intention of these Jesuits. It became a weapon for some thinkers to attack religious fanaticism and the monarchs in Europe. Leibniz argued for the rationality of Confucius' teachings from a philosophical and religious perspective. He saw the impersonal divine aspect of Confucius and attempted to reconcile the contradiction between Christianity and Confucian doctrine with natural law.¹⁰ Voltaire argued for the justification of Confucius' teachings from a historical and political perspective. And for the first time, Voltaire included the history of Chinese civilization in the history of world culture, thus breaking the view of 'Eurocentric' history, which substituted European history for world history. He also used Chinese historical chronology to criticize and even deny the history preached by Christianity. Quesnay, as a representative of the school of physiocrats, put his full support behind the teaching of Confucius. He found the idea of his own theory - natural law - in Confucius' school.

However, later, the praise of China in the early part of the Enlightenment was replaced by critical voices in the late eighteenth century. From Montesquieu to Rousseau, Enlightenment thought evolved and changed, and this evolution was finally expressed in Condorcet's *Sketch for a Historical Picture of the Progress of the Human Mind* in 1793, by which time the concept of Enlightenment centered on progress had been established.¹¹ At the time, China, a civilization that had been regarded as a "stagnant country" for a long time, eventually became an opposite example to "progress". Thus, it lost its prestige in the progress of civilization and ultimately fell to a position inferior to that of Europe, which I will discuss in the second Chapter of this thesis.

Just as philosophers were using Chinese culture as their weapon against religion and

¹⁰ Daniel J. Cook, "Leibniz, China, and the Problem of Pagan Wisdom," *Philosophy East and West* 65, no. 3 (2015): 936-47.

¹¹ Zhang Xiping, "The Global Significance of Chinese Culture: From the Perspective of Relations between the Enlightenment and Chinese Culture", 411-427.

monarchies, Chinese drama, brought back from China by the Jesuits, became popular in Europe. Drama writers used Chinese drama as a model for their theatrical creations:¹² There were three different forms of drama creation: self-creation, adaptation, and piecing different elements together. These dramas were based on three types of stories from or related to China: the Tatar conquest of China, Chinese orphans, and Chinese princesses. These topics were adapted by various dramatists in different parts of Europe during the Enlightenment, and some of the images remain popular in drama even today.

Literature Review

The most relevant pieces of scholarship on this topic address Sinophilia in the Enlightenment. It has been subjected to different research methods since the 1920s.¹³ Before 1978, the study of Sinophilia focused on the influence of Chinese culture on Europe. Then it turned to the images of “the other” between 1978 and 1998 due to the impact of Orientalism. Later, the trend emerged to reflect on the method of “othering,” which has led to recent scholarship. Unfortunately, there have been very few discussions on images (whether in text or visual representation) of Chinese women before the newly developed scholarship.

In the new development of scholarship on Sinophilia, the gender aspect has been proposed for the research agenda. In the chapter “What do women want,” David Porter provided a gender perspective on the influence of Chinese aesthetics in England.¹⁴ In her article, Dawn Odell discussed how the images of beautiful Chinese women were presented in Athanasius Kircher’s *China Illustrata*. She argued that Kircher mirrored the content of Chinese printed books in terms of depicting the beautiful Chinese women by nesting sexual narrative between “handwritten”

¹² Shi Ye(施晔), “Discovering China: New Horizons for European Drama in the Age of Enlightenment”(“发现中国：启蒙时期欧洲戏剧的新视野”), *Comparative Literature in China(中国比较文学)*, no. 4 (2022):73-88

¹³ Stefan Gaarsmand Jacobsen, “Chinese Influences or Images? Fluctuating Histories of How Enlightenment Europe Read China,” *Journal of World History* 24, no. 3 (2013): 623–60.

¹⁴ David Porter, “what do women want?”, *The Chinese Taste in Eighteenth-Century England* (Cambridge University Press, 2010).

poetic couplets and through printed works, and it was repositioned within a European viewing space.¹⁵ A recent article by Yushu Chen and Bing Huang focused on the images of Chinese women in seventeenth-century European exotic knowledge books and Chinoiserie decoration. They argued that the Chinese women depicted in European exotic knowledge books were often portrayed as well-dressed, of good figure, serene, and entertaining, elegant, and with dignity, which were purposefully chosen by European male authors to express the ideal model of women in their minds.¹⁶

These new researches have provided inspiring and exciting angles on how images of Chinese women were depicted in artists' work and how they were perceived by European men in published books. However, these previous studies have primarily focused on art history and cultural exchange, while the examination of Chinese women's textual and visual descriptions within the context of intellectual history remains largely unexplored.

Considering the intellectual history of Europe, the Scottish thinkers in the eighteenth century contributed a unique perspective to the European Enlightenment. They attempted to establish a universal theoretical framework applicable to all human beings. This framework not only shaped the understanding of the progress of civilization in European societies but also incorporated and profoundly influenced European conceptions of non-European civilizations. In this context, the observations, and commentaries of these thinkers on non-European societies serve as an important entry point for exploring their systems of thought regarding non-European societies. Moreover, these thinkers were passionate about writing women's history worldwide. Their writings often contain separate chapters that systematically discuss the condition and images of women in the progress of civilizations. The writing focused on women's history not only to demonstrate their concern for gender issues, but also provided rich textual resources for

¹⁵ "Chinese 'Paintings of Beautiful Women' and Images of Asia in a Jesuit Text," *Ut Pictura Amor*, 2017, 106.

¹⁶ Yushu Chen and Bing and Huang, "Images of Chinese Women in Seventeenth- and Eighteenth-Century European Exotic Knowledge Books," *Women's History Review* 32, no. 5 (July 29, 2023): 651.

studying the construction of women's image (especially non-European Women)in Enlightenment thought.

However, the study of “China in the Scottish Enlightenment” follows the tradition of discussing China's political, economic, and cultural image in intellectual texts, and there has been little discussion of the image of Chinese women in these texts. Phil Dodds explored the understandings of China by David Hume and Adam Smith, particularly how they viewed China as representative of a ‘state of stagnation’.¹⁷ Chen Zhengguo's “China in Scottish Enlightenment Thought” examines how Scottish Enlightenment thinkers evaluated China's history and civilization, particularly within the context of a materialistic perspective on civilization.¹⁸ Together, these two essays demonstrate how China was portrayed during the Scottish Enlightenment, highlighting concerns about political and economic stagnation or progress in China. Yet, they both neglect to discuss Chinese women in these discussions, especially within the framework of the Scottish Enlightenment's broader discussion of women's history.

This gap provided an important entry point for my study. Images of women in cross-cultural contexts appeared in abundance in the texts of travelers in seventeenth and eighteenth century, and these accounts of women from different societies of world were direct sources for Scottish Enlightenment thinkers to engage in conversation on the condition of “the other women” when writing history of women in the framework of the progress of civilizations. The image of Chinese women as part of “the other women” was indeed involved in this conversation. Thus, these images of Chinese women as a window can not only serve to reveal how these thinkers viewed China in 18th-century Scotland but also to reflect the Enlightenment's broader idea of

¹⁷ Phil Dodds, “‘One Vast Empire’: China, Progress, and the Scottish Enlightenment,” *Global Intellectual History* 3, no. 1 (January 2, 2018): 47–70.

¹⁸Cheng Zhengguo, “China in the Thought of the Scottish Enlightenment” (蘇格蘭啟蒙思想中的中國), *Bulletin of the Institute of History and Philology, Academia Sinica* (中央研究院歷史語言研究所集刊) 94, no. 3 (September 2023): 653–669.

humanity- how non-European women were viewed within the discussion.

Sources

The main sources of this thesis are textual descriptions from John Millar's *The Origin of the Distinction of Ranks*, Henry Home, Lord Kames' *Sketches of the History of Man*, and William Alexander's *The History of Women, from the Earliest Antiquity, to the Present Time*. I will formulate my argument in the first chapter- the intellectual context and the image of Chinese women based on the history of women in their works.

I will also refer to the discussion of China in their works -some of them were scattered in the different sections of the history of women in their works. In addition to that, I will also refer to David Hume's *Essays and Treatises on Several Subjects* and Adam Smith's *Wealth of Nations*. Together, these sources would support my argument on the view of China in the Second Chapter.

To reveal the process of formation by tracing sources and expectations of women in Scotland, both textual and visual sources will be examined. I draw my main attention towards two widely read works by French Jesuits. One is *Memoirs of China*, which Millar referenced in his book, and another one is *Description of the Empire of China...*, cited by Alexander. I will also refer to one conduct book: *A Father's Legacy to His Daughters*, which reveals the popular expectation of women at the time. In addition, I shall rely on one visual art source on Chinese women from the German Jesuit book *China Illustrata*, which was a widely read and circulated book and reprinted multiple times until the end of the eighteenth century.

Theoretical framework

"Image" will be used to refer to the visual and textual representation of China and Chinese women in the Scottish Enlightenment in this thesis. This thesis presents two layers of meaning regarding the image of Chinese women. Firstly, it refers to these representations of Chinese

women in textual and visual works that do not fully represent reality. During the Enlightenment, like most images of women outside of Europe, the image of the Chinese woman was presented in text and visual art in the works of thinkers and artists. For those who had not traveled to China, the most direct sources of these images were the artworks brought back from China by the Jesuits, the writings on China by the missionaries themselves, and the images on the porcelain that were brought back via ships of merchants. After all, in the eighteenth century, there were few records that Chinese women had ever come to Europe, let alone whether these scholars had ever seen a Chinese woman with their own eyes and were able to describe her in an objective way. The image of the Chinese woman in Europe is not so much an objective image, but rather one that was reworked and created repeatedly by European recorders in response to multiple layers of contexts. Secondly, it refers to the men's imagination of femininity. This is because most of the images of these women in a cross-cultural context were presented by male scholars during the Enlightenment, and the primary sources used in this thesis are all from male writers. Thus, the interpretations of the women's condition and images were based on the expectations of these male scholars.

So, how should these images be interpreted? To answer this question, I would like to introduce the changes in research methods related to "Sino-European cultural exchange" first. Belgian Sinologist, Nicolas Standaert, based on the study of Sino-European cultural exchange, identified three methods in cross-cultural exchange research over time.¹⁹ The first method is an analytical framework popular before 1960, primarily focused on analyzing the mediator and its impact. Between 1960 and 1970, a new "receiver framework" emerged, focusing on how China responded to the arrival of missionaries or others. Both methods are based on the premise that the information (texts and images) conveyed by the mediators can communicate historical

¹⁹ Nicolas Standaert, "Methodology in View of Contact Between Cultures: The China Case in the 17th Century", *CSRCS Occasional Paper no. 11*, (Hong Kong: Centre for the Study of Religion and Chinese Society, Chung Chi College, The Chinese University of Hong Kong, 2002), 64

reality at the time. This premise was later challenged by historians influenced by Foucault's theory. The most influential work in this regard is Edward Said's *Orientalism*. Said suggested that the language in the texts did not represent what happened in reality; it was a discourse created by the writers. It is also a cultural symbol embodied in the self-representation of the writers. Influenced by this theory, researchers began to shift their focus to the texts and images themselves, using comparative methods to highlight similarities and differences, and to demonstrate that the views of the recipients and producers of these images reflected their own cultural perspectives and Eurocentrism.

Jürgen Osterhammel proposes an alternative reading of these foreign textual images. He argued that before the nineteenth century, the preconditions for Eurocentrism, in the context of communication between Europe and China(or Asian), had not yet been established. European travelers were actively exploring China, engaging in local interactions, recording what they saw and heard, and bringing their observations back to Europe. The writers of China in Europe shared the same passion for introducing the Chinese culture to the Europeans. The texts themselves not only reflect the mentality of Europeans at that time, but also reveal the social environment in which they lived and the strategies they used to get their message across. The images presented in these texts can be seen as representations of various layers of society during that time. And it can reveal the hidden story of the time in a deeper way.²⁰

The interpretation of the image of Chinese women will follow Jürgen Osterhammel's reflection on orientalism. This research will not examine these images of Chinese women through the lens of Orientalism; rather, it will carefully put them in multiple layers of their context to examine the formation of these descriptions. What kind of image of Chinese women did they construct? What were the sources of these images of women? How was it connected

²⁰ Jürgen Osterhammel and Robert Savage, *Unfabling the East: The Enlightenment's Encounter with Asia* (Princeton University Press, 2018).

to the recognition of Chinese women and China at the time? How did it connect to the Scottish expectation of Scottish Women? What issues did they essentially want to emphasize? How do these issues engage in the construction of a theory of the progress of civilization?

Building on further reflections, the interactive communication framework proposed by Nicolas Standaert inspires this study. This framework is based on the concept of human perception of their relationships with others. It suggests that the writers of these texts had the capacity for self-reflection, especially after encountering others from different cultures. When faced with differences, they would engage in reflection and even challenge traditional or mainstream views, generating new thoughts or writings through their interaction with others. This reflection provides me with inspiration for a research examination.

I will also examine whether Scottish thinkers, in constructing the image of Chinese women, demonstrated the reflection and challenge of traditional thoughts in their interaction with foreign images. This ability to reflect and challenge mainstream thought, particularly in interaction with Chinese culture, is one of the many examinations of this study. Through analyzing these images of Chinese women through these lenses, I aim to explore the possibility that Scottish Enlightenment thinkers found a negotiable space within their cultural constructions when encountering other cultures. It was a space full of tension where they needed to negotiate their pre-existing knowledge with the new pieces of information they gained, thus a space where they were inevitably influenced by traditional ideas while attempting to break free from these influences, creating new cultural understandings.

Method

To approach this research, I will adopt an interdisciplinary research method, drawing on textual analysis, contextualization, and gender studies within the field of intellectual history. Specifically, I will examine the construction of images within the texts and their interaction

with the surrounding socio-cultural contexts. This involves investigating how these images were formed —what sources they used —and how the social expectations of eighteenth-century Scotland shaped the formation. I will also examine how these images reflect and challenge existing traditions, particularly in the view of China.

In terms of image formation, I will incorporate gender studies to analyze how women's images are portrayed, from their appearance and character to the underlying assumptions about women's roles. I will examine how these portrayals fit within broader theoretical discussions of women's history, considering how these representations relate to the prevailing gender norms and ideologies of the time.

Moreover, I will not limit my analysis to the textual representation of women but will extend it to include the textual and iconographic sources that influenced these images. This approach draws on the concept of cultural transfer, exploring how ideas and images of women were constructed and disseminated across cultural boundaries. By situating these constructions within a broader context of intellectual exchange, I will explore how these portrayals of Chinese women contribute to the conversation on the roles of women in both European and non-European societies.

Structure

In this first chapter, I will provide an intellectual context for how late eighteenth-century Scottish intellectuals depicted women worldwide in their writings on the history of women. I argue that the images of women varied from being enslaved and unaware of chastity in the savage society, unfree yet starting to be aware of proper dress and value chastity in the pastoral society, still lacking the freedom to cultivating their nature but putting greater emphasis on chastity and modesty in the agricultural society, and eventually to be friends and companions, even elegantly engaged in the public conversations in the commercial society.

In the second chapter, I will examine the Scottish Enlightenment thinkers' discussion of China and explore how they view China and its place within their theory of civilization. I argue that even though the Scottish Enlightenment thinkers at the time considered China to be a commercial society in the progress of civilization, there was a shift in the place of China from superior to Europe to inferior to Europe.

In the last chapter, I will present the image of Chinese women in the works of John Millar, Henry Home Kames, and William Alexander. While they viewed China as a commercial society, the Chinese women depicted in the image of chaste and modest, yet not free, which could be seen as falling outside the coordinates of the civilization theory. I will also try to present the intensive progress made by Millar, Lord Kames, and Alexander when dealing with these images of Chinese women, and see how they struggled when faced with this image that went against their previous views towards China and expectations of women in Scotland. I shall demonstrate that, in the process of reconstructing the image of Chinese women from the sources they consulted, Scottish Enlightenment thinkers drew upon prevailing depictions of Chinese women, as well as records of China by French Jesuits, to present an image that aligned with their understanding of Chinese civilization within their own framework of civilization. This attempt only succeeded after they revised the standards by which they evaluated civilization. With the emergence of new standards—one of which was the condition or image of women as a measure of civilization—the image of Chinese women came to serve as a means for Scottish Enlightenment thinkers to position China within their framework of the Progress of civilization.

Chapter 1. The Intellectual Context: Civilizations and Their Images of Women

Introduction

In the latter half of the eighteenth century, Scottish Enlightenment thinkers contributed the influential idea of the progress of civilization. These ideas were inspired by the growing body of knowledge emerging from the exploration and study of diverse cultures, societies, and races worldwide. The Enlightenment, with its emphasis on reason and science, encouraged European intellectuals to search for universal patterns and explanations for human society. The Scottish thinkers were deeply engaged in these debates. They attempted to provide a universal framework for understanding the trajectory of human civilization. As they sought to explain the progress of human civilization, the history of women was placed in an important position within this broader narrative of progress. Therefore, Scottish thinkers were actively involved in writing the history of women. Among them, John Millar, Henry Home Lord Kames, and William Alexander contributed full discussions on the history of women in their works, exploring the progress of human civilization.

John Millar published his work *Observations Concerning the Distinction of Ranks* in 1771, where he devoted the entire first chapter, “Of the Rank and Condition of Women in Different Ages,” to the history of women. Millar traced the history of women from the primitive age to the commercial world and noted that the condition of women throughout history had undergone constant progression, and it would reach its peak in the commercial society.²¹ This book was later republished under the well-known title *The Origin of the Distinction of Ranks*,²² which is referenced mainly by this thesis. Lord Kames’ *The Sketches of the History of Man* was published

²¹ John Millar, *Observations concerning the distinction of ranks in society. By John Millar, ... 1771, 1771*, http://archive.org/details/bim_eighteenth-century_observations-concerning-_millar-john-professor_1771.

²² John Craig John Millar, *The Origin of the Distinction of Ranks; Or, An Inquiry Into the Circumstances Which Give Rise To ...* (W. Blackwood; etc., etc, 1806), <http://archive.org/details/origindistincti00craigoo>.

in 1774. In the chapter “Progress of Female Sex,” he presented a similar view to Millar on the improvement of the condition of women throughout the progress towards commercial society and focused its discussion on developing the argument for marriage within this progress.²³ In 1779, William Alexander published a two-volume work titled *History of Women*. This work was a systematic review of earlier narratives about women, where the author examined the changes in the status of women throughout history and across multiple cultures.²⁴

In this chapter, I aim to outline the intellectual framework of the history of women written during the Scottish Enlightenment, as mentioned above. I shall present this assumption by following several questions: What was the progress of civilization? What were the conditions of women at different stages of the progressive civilization? How did the images of women change following the changes in women’s condition in different stages? And how the standards of civilization changed from commercial development to cultural practice.

To answer these questions, I shall mainly examine the text of these thinkers. I will first present a general picture of their argument on the progress of civilization. Next, I will examine their texts on the condition of women at different stages of progressive civilization to see how these thinkers described the conditions of women and the reasons behind the improvement of their conditions. And then I will try to dig into the reimagining of femininity that goes along with these changes in the conditions for women. Eventually, I will have a short discussion on the changes in the standards of civilization. By presenting this intellectual framework, I shall provide an intellectual context for my discussion of how they portrayed China and Chinese women in the following chapters.

In this chapter, I will present the argument as follows. The history of women as portrayed

²³ Henry Home Kames, “progress of the female sex”, *Sketches of the History of Man* (Edinburgh : Printed for W. Creech, and for W. Strahan, and T. Cadell, 1774), <http://archive.org/details/sketcheshistory00kamegoog>.

²⁴ William Alexander, *The History of Women, from the Earliest Antiquity, to the Present Time : Giving Some Account of Almost Every Interesting Particular Concerning That Sex, among All Nations, Ancient and Modern* (London : printed for W. Strahan and T. Cadell, 1779), <http://archive.org/details/historyofwomen02alex>.

by these thinkers at the time was regarded as a history of women worldwide. And the improving condition of women was taken as an important part of the whole picture of the progress of mankind. The improvement of the condition of women was claimed to be a result of the improvement of sensitivity and refinements of men, which was led by the development of commercial activities throughout human history. Alongside the change in the condition of women in different stages, femininity was imagined to be different. Thus, the images of women changed through different stages of progressive civilization, and they reached their ideal state in commercial society. These images of women were eventually used as a benchmark to measure the progress of civilizations.²⁵

The Progress of Civilizations

In the late eighteenth century, the intellectuals in Scotland contributed their idea of ‘progress’ to the European Enlightenment. This idea came from the comparison of diverse societies that were discovered before. It defined the stages of progress in terms of subsistence and held that progress emerged when society changed from a savage society to a pastoral society, then to an agricultural society, and eventually to a commercial society.

The earliest form of human society was the so-called savage society. At this stage, people were primarily concerned about their survival. The people relied on simple activities like hunting, fishing, and gathering fruits and plants for their living. Commercial activity was limited to what was necessary for survival. And there was little opportunity for individuals to accumulate wealth. As a result, there was no significant social hierarchy, and people lived in relatively equal conditions.²⁶

²⁵ Silvia Sebastiani, “Measures of Civilization: Women, Races, and Progress,” in *The Scottish Enlightenment: Race, Gender, and the Limits of Progress*, ed. Silvia Sebastiani (New York: Palgrave Macmillan US, 2013), 133–34.

²⁶ John Millar, “Of the Rank and Condition of Women in Different Ages”, *The Origin of the Distinction of Ranks; Or, An Inquiry Into the Circumstances Which Give Rise To ...*(W. Blackwood; etc., etc, 1806), <http://archive.org/details/origindistincti00craigooq.14-15>

The invention of taming and pasturing cattle marked an entry into pastoral society. In the pastoral age, people were “more regularly supplied with food and [were] commonly subjected to fewer hardships and calamities than those who [lived] by hunting and fishing.”²⁷ Thus, it led people to have more time for entertainment.²⁸ What is more, livestock, particularly cattle and sheep, became valuable resources, and individuals who owned large herds gained greater wealth and influence. Commercial activities became centered around the management and trade of livestock, and the accumulation of wealth led to the creation of social classes. The ownership of animals became a source of power, and those who controlled large herds held a dominant position in society. This marked the beginning of social hierarchies and the division of labor.

The next major transformation in human society came with the rise of agriculture. The development of farming allowed people to cultivate crops and produce surplus food, which enabled them to settle in permanent locations. This shift to a sedentary lifestyle further increased social stratification. Land ownership became the key determinant of wealth and power, and societies became increasingly divided into distinct social classes. Those who owned land accumulated significant wealth, while tenant farmers and laborers worked the land. The division of labor became more complex, and society became more hierarchical as wealth and power became concentrated in the hands of a landowning elite.²⁹

Finally, the commercial society represented the most advanced stage of human civilization. There are two stages of commercial society presented by Millar. For the first stage of commercial society, the rise of the improvement of manufactures led to the improvement of commercial activities. In this commercial society, trade, commerce, and industry drove economic life. The focus shifted away from agriculture as the primary means of wealth generation, and instead, societies increasingly relied on manufacturing, commerce, and

²⁷ John Millar, “Of the Rank and Condition of Women in Different Ages”, 58.

²⁸ John Millar, “Of the Rank and Condition of Women in Different Ages”, 57–58.

²⁹ John Millar, “Of the Rank and Condition of Women in Different Ages”, 67–68.

intellectual pursuits. In the second stage of commercial society, a larger amount of wealth was accumulated. And people there lived a luxurious life, “exempted from labor, and placed in great affluence, they endeavor to improve their enjoyments, and become addicted to those amusements and diversions which gave an exercise to their minds and relieve them from languor and weariness, effects of idleness and dissipation.”³⁰ Part of Europe in the eighteenth century was claimed to exist at this stage, where commerce and industry were flourishing. And this commercial stage was seen as representing the highest level of economic, social, and cultural sophistication.³¹

Henry Home Lord Kames did not put the focus on describing the situation of different stages of civilization in his chapter "Progress of the female sex". However, it seems he shared the same idea with Millar on the progress and the stages of civilization. This is manifested in two specific ways. Firstly, he stated at the beginning of the chapter that he would “trace the gradual progress of women, from their low state in savage tribes, to their elevated state in civilized nations.”³² And second, he used the same terms as Millar (like savage, shepherd) to describe the stages and peoples there, when he tried to argue the role of women in marriage.³³ William Alexander also shared the same idea of the progress of civilization and its stages. Compared with Millar and Lord Kames, he became more pronounced in his text when addressing the history of women. He examined the changes in different aspects of women throughout history, following the historical progress of savage, pastoral, agricultural, and commercial societies.³⁴

Scottish intellectuals like John Millar, Lord Kames, William Alexander, and others believed that they were writing a universal history of human civilization, and their theories were framed

³⁰ John Millar, “Of the Rank and Condition of Women in Different Ages”, 99.

³¹ John Millar, “Of the Rank and Condition of Women in Different Ages”, 87–88.

³² Kames, “progress of the female sex”, *Sketches of the History of Man*, (Edinburgh : Printed for W. Creech, and for W. Strahan, and T. Cadell, 1774), <http://archive.org/details/sketcheshistory00kamegoog>.168.

³³ Kames, “progress of the female sex”, 170–71.

³⁴ Alexander, *The History of Women, from the Earliest Antiquity, to the Present Time*, 1779.

as universally applicable, explaining the progress of all human societies, regardless of geographic location or cultural background. This was reflected in their confidence in using examples from various societies in the world to support their theories, often drawing from the customs and practices of different peoples to bolster their claims about the universality of civilization's progress. As John Millar wrote about marriages in savage society, he claimed, "These were in all probability the first inducements to marriage among the rude and barbarous inhabitants of the earth."³⁵

As a result, they confidently believed what they provided was a convincing model of progress of civilizations: from savage societies to pastoral societies, then to agricultural societies, and finally reaching commercial societies. In *The Origin of the Distinction of Ranks*, John Millar articulated this "four stages theory" as a way of explaining how societies evolved over time. He claimed that the development of society could be understood as a process that unfolded in these distinct stages, each of which was characterized by different economic activities, social structures, and power relations. Lord Kames and William Alexander also shared the idea of the progress of civilization with Millar when they wrote the history of women, which could be seen as evidence of its commonality in the Scottish Enlightenment.

Women's Condition in Different Stages

Following the progress of different stages, the condition of women progressed. According to Scottish intellectuals, women were naturally inferior to men in terms of strength and courage. Due to this disadvantage, women were in a passive position in their relationships with their partners, where the improvement of their conditions was largely determined by how they were treated by men. This idea was first indicated by Millar when he attempted to make the argument for the progressive condition of women through four stages.³⁶ It was then in "progress of the

³⁵ John Millar, "Of the Rank and Condition of Women in Different Ages" 19.

³⁶ John Millar, "Of the Rank and Condition of Women in Different Ages", 14-108

female sex” as an unquestioned context for arguing the role of women in marriage and family³⁷.

For William Alexander, the same idea was presented in his writing of women’s history. I shall specifically present how the condition of women improved following the improvement of sensitivity and refinement of men.

In the savage society, women were in their worst condition, where they were enslaved. Since the primary task of people at the time was survival, men spent a significant amount of time obtaining food to meet their basic survival needs and had no time to cultivate interactions with the opposite sex, nor were they familiar with the social manners found in civilized societies. In such circumstances, the interaction between men and women was driven by natural instincts rather than passion. This was true, for example, for the case in marriage,

“The marriages, however, of rude people, according to all accounts, are usually contracted without any previous attachment between the parties, and with little regard to the gratification of their mutual passions.”³⁸

Therefore, the situation of women in primitive society, as well as those currently going through this primitive stage, was far from optimistic: “The influence of such manners must be extremely unfavorable to the rank and dignity of the women.”³⁹ However, this argument seemed more like a product of his imagination rather than one supported by actual evidence, as Millar openly expressed in his argument, “The inferiority of the women, in this respect, may be easily imagined.”⁴⁰

This unfavorable situation, combined with women's natural disadvantages in courage and strength, inevitably placed them in a humble state. Here, Millar assumed a state of conflict, where stronger groups would always attempt to conquer weaker ones and enslave them. As a result, in his argument, women became enslaved by men. “Accordingly, we find that, in those

³⁷ Kames, "Progress of the Female Sex," *Sketches of the History of Man*, 168.

³⁸ John Millar, "Of the Rank and Condition of Women in Different Ages", 21.

³⁹ John Millar, "Of the Rank and Condition of Women in Different Ages", 32.

⁴⁰ John Millar, "Of the Rank and Condition of Women in Different Ages", 33.

periods, the women of a family are usually treated as the servants or slaves of the men.”⁴¹

In places where women were treated as slaves, the buying and selling of women was a common practice. “Thus, in all savage nations, whether in Asia, Africa, or America, the wife is commonly bought by the husband from the father or those other relations who have an authority over her. That in some parts of the world it is usual for the husband to give a dowery to the wife or her relations, instead of the wife bringing along with her a dowery to the husband.”⁴² Alexander also presented a similar argument on women’s condition in so-called barbarian society, while he puts more focus on diverse evidence over time and space on the conditions of women as slaves and servants in that time.⁴³

As society developed to the pastoral stage, women were more sympathized with due to the development of the sentiment of men. With the emergence of domestication and herding, people could obtain relatively sufficient food, “Being thus provided with necessities, he is led to the pursuit of those objects which may render his situation easier and more comfortable; and among these the enjoyments derived from the intercourse of the sexes claim a principal share, and become an object of attention.”⁴⁴

Due to the improvement of refinement, men made more detailed distinctions towards the objects of desire. Pure sensual pleasures were more frequently accompanied by a correspondence of inclination and sentiment. This mutual affinity often hindered them from meeting the objects of their affection, thus leading them to have more passions out of imagination. When love transforms into a passion, rather than merely a sensual appetite, it is naturally thought that those feelings would be the purest and strongest.

On the other hand, with the accumulation of personal wealth, social hierarchies began to

⁴¹ John Millar, “Of the Rank and Condition of Women in Different Ages”, 34

⁴² John Millar, “Of the Rank and Condition of Women in Different Ages”, 39

⁴³ Alexander, “Of Matrimony”, *The History of Women, from the Earliest Antiquity, to the Present Time*, 1779, 112–13.

⁴⁴ John Millar, “Of the Rank and Condition of Women in Different Ages”, 58.

emerge. Certain individuals became wealthy, and they gradually formed notions of dignity commensurate with their status; at the same time, they pursued a higher level of elegance and refined pleasures, and they disdainfully rejected forming marital alliances with their dependents or those of inferior status.

Among the wealthy, to protect their property and dignity, there would also be an indifference maintained between each other, making interpersonal relationships during this period even more difficult than in the savage times. However, this would lead to a greater intensity of emotions, ultimately reaching a higher level of sensitivity as they overcame these difficulties.

“In the compositions of Ossian, which describe the manners of a people acquainted with pasturage, there is often a degree of tenderness and delicacy of sentiment which can hardly be equaled in the most refined productions of a civilized age.”⁴⁵ (in discussions of the Golden Age). In this context, men developed a “sentiment” like that of women, beginning to sympathize with and respect the situation of women more.

“In consequence of these improvements, the virtue of chastity (of women)begins to be recognized.”⁴⁶ Millar gave the example of the women who live near the East Coast of Tartary, where their men were found jealous regarding the chastity of the women.⁴⁷

During the agricultural stage of society, women were more respected as the chivalric spirit developed(the condition of showing more of their chastity and modesty). During this time, the sentiment of men reached a higher level. This was mainly due to the emergence of the chivalric system, which originated from a culture of combat. As Millar pointed out, men in the agriculture stage not only developed their habits of calmness and fearlessness in danger, but also gained extraordinary tolerance through continuous mutual hostility. Nobles and knights were expected

⁴⁵ John Millar, “Of the Rank and Condition of Women in Different Ages”, 62.

⁴⁶ John Millar, “Of the Rank and Condition of Women in Different Ages”, 59.

⁴⁷ John Millar, “Of the Rank and Condition of Women in Different Ages”, 61.

to display courage and honor in battle. Young men were trained to become knights through the study of martial arts and military skills. They were taught to uphold justice, protect the weak, show humanitarian attitudes towards enemies, and treat others with humility and politeness.

Under the influence of this chivalric spirit, knights roamed around seeking adventure, in which they endeavored to advance their reputation in arms, and to recommend themselves to member of the fair sex with who they were enamored, by fighting with every person who was so inconsiderate as to dispute her unrivalled beauty, virtue, or personal accomplishments.⁴⁸ When the knight focused on gaining attention from the woman, he paid more attention and developed more passion towards her. And it resulted in more sentimental feelings towards women.

As a result, women's chastity was more of a concern to their partners in agricultural society. "A woman who violated the law of chastity was indeed deserted by everybody....But those who adhered to the strict rule of virtue.... were treated like being of a superior order."⁴⁹

In the commercial society, the condition of women improved greatly, and they were viewed as friends and companions. With the development of arts and manufactures, alongside the more frequent commercial interactions, different members of society became more closely united and had more opportunities for broader communication. Consequently, men became more and more sentimental and refined. Similarly to the interaction between men and women: "Being no longer withheld by mutual fear and jealousy, they are led by degrees to contract an acquaintance, and to carry on a more intimate correspondence."⁵⁰

When men made a certain progress in the arts and reached a corresponding level of refinement, they inevitably began to value the talents and virtues of women, which had a significant impact on various advancements. These talents and virtues added comfort and

⁴⁸ John Millar, "Of the Rank and Condition of Women in Different Ages", 76–77.

⁴⁹ John Millar, "Of the Rank and Condition of Women in Different Ages", 79–80.

⁵⁰ John Millar, "Of the Rank and Condition of Women in Different Ages", 88.

pleasure to life in many ways. As a result, women were no longer frequently seen as objects of romantic and exaggerated emotions; instead, they were respected for their more practical and enjoyable talents. In this situation, the women become neither the slaves nor the idols of the other sex, but friends and companions.

In conclusion, the theory of progress of civilization suggests that in the progressive stages of civilization, due to the improvement of sensitivity and behavior of men, the condition of women improved. What needs to be noted is that this freedom did not come from women's own resistance to oppression; rather, it was tied to the self-improvement of men over different stages of civilization. Consequently, the core reason behind the improvement in women's conditions was seen as the advancement in men's behavior. As men evolved by learning from women, refining themselves from being savage and crude to becoming cultivated and courteous, women's condition improved.

The Images of Women Alongside the Improvement of Their Conditions

The condition of women was thus claimed to have improved throughout their history. Along with this progress, the imagination of their femininity changed as well. The following passages will focus on how these images of women, and by definition, the imagination of femininity, changed in the progress of civilization.

In the savage society, as described by Scottish thinkers, women were dominated through force and enslaved by men, and were often treated as slaves and servants. They were considered, under such circumstances, as beings without freedom and treated as sexual objects by their partners. Millar gave the example of the Romans, whose marriages were regarded as forming for the purpose of use.⁵¹ In this case, people at the time were "entering very gross ideas

⁵¹ John Millar, "Of the Rank and Condition of Women in Different Ages", 20.

concerning those female virtues.”⁵²

Under this treatment by men, on the other hand, the women were often imagined as they did not wear clothes, often walked around naked, and had no idea of chastity. Millar mentioned the Indian women in America and described them as having “violated the law of chastity before marriage.”⁵³ And young Lydian women, “were not accustomed to marry until they had earned their doweries by prostitution.”⁵⁴

In a pastoral society, men began to develop finer emotions and started to respect women. In this case, women were still treated as objects, but with more distinct feelings towards their partners. Therefore, they were still under certain unfree conditions, yet were described as becoming more aware of being properly dressed and began to value chastity.

At the end of the discussion on the relationships between the sexes during the pastoral era, Millar employed content from Ossian's poetry to depict the idealized female image of that time:⁵⁵ “Lorma sat in Aldo’s Hall, at the light of a flaming oak: the night came, but he did not return, and the soul of Lorma is sad...” She waited for her hero Aldo, the hunter of Cona. However, he did not return for a long time, and she gradually realized that her hero had passed away. She was overwhelmed with grief, “he sank into the tomb.” Here, Mill describes an image of a woman who is alone, waiting for her hunting husband to return. When she learns of her husband’s death, she follows him in death or dies herself. This is a woman of sacred virtue, loyal and devoted to her husband.

In agrarian societies, chivalry emerged, and men held romanticized visions of women, realizing they needed to make efforts to win women’s favor. Women, as a result, were still treated as objects. And thus, they were regarded as lacking such freedom to cultivate their nature, yet placed even greater emphasis on chastity and modesty,

⁵² John Millar, “Of the Rank and Condition of Women in Different Ages”, 23.

⁵³ John Millar, “Of the Rank and Condition of Women in Different Ages”, 23.

⁵⁴ John Millar, “Of the Rank and Condition of Women in Different Ages”, 23.

⁵⁵ John Millar, “Of the Rank and Condition of Women in Different Ages”, 62–63.

“A woman who deviated so far from the established maxims of the age as to violate the laws of chastity was indeed deserted by everybody, and was universally contemned and insulted. But those who adhered to the strict rules of virtue and maintained an unblemished reputation were treated like beings of a superior order.”⁵⁶

As women received the respect brought by the delicate feelings of men, they began to cherish their chastity even more. Therefore, women were taught to be more chaste and modest,

“The lady herself was taught to assume the pride of her family, and to think that no person was worthy of her affection who did not possess an exalted rank and character. To have given way to a sudden inclination would have disgraced her forever in the opinion of all her kindred; and it was only by a long course of attention, and of the most respectful service, that the lover could hope for any favor from his mistress.”⁵⁷

And because of this chastity and virtue, women were increasingly favored and respected by knights. Knights needed to show respect to gain the affection of their loved ones. Those who did not demonstrate chastity, as it was pointed out above, would be blamed and punished by the public.

In commercial society, alongside the development of manufactures and commerce, “the advancement of people in manufactures and commerce has a natural tendency to remove those circumstances which prevented the free intercourse of the sexes.”⁵⁸ Women were thought to be regarded as free and equal friends and turned to an image of freedom, and could cultivate their natural roles as good mothers and companions.

The women acquire a position and rank that most closely align with their character and talents. Being naturally charged with the primary responsibility of nurturing and caring for children, they were considered to have the qualities suitable for fulfilling this important duty, while also

⁵⁶ John Millar, “Of the Rank and Condition of Women in Different Ages”, 97–98.

⁵⁷ John Millar, “Of the Rank and Condition of Women in Different Ages”, 77.

⁵⁸ John Millar, “Of the Rank and Condition of Women in Different Ages”, 88.

being particularly apt for tasks that require skill and dexterity rather than strength, which are essential for the management of the household.

Women were also expected to have a natural uniqueness in delicacy and sensitivity, whether stemming from their innate traits or lifestyle, enabling them to win their husbands' respect and affection by sharing their worries, celebrating their joys, and comforting their husbands' misfortunes. They are taught to diligently engage in work within their responsibilities of influence their husband to be more refined.

Modesty was another ideal quality for women in commercial society. Accustomed to a secluded life and companionship with close relatives and friends, they naturally embody that shyness and humility, which is innate for those unfamiliar with casual conversation; their emotions neither dissipate due to happiness nor decay due to worldly vices.

What was described above were images of women at the first stages of commercial society. For Millar, when society went into higher stages, where wealth was accumulated mainly, women were seen to be more admired and respected by their partners. They are encouraged to get rid of the life that fits the natural character of modesty and appear in mixed company in public places and entertainment to cultivate them. Especially those women in the upper class showed an image of "appearing in mixed company and in public meetings of pleasure"⁵⁹

However, this high accumulation of wealth in commercial society would also bring another image of women in commercial society. It would show a disturbing image when people are possessed by freedom in such an amount of wealth gathering, where women were seen negatively engaging in free sex and even prostitution. In wealthy and luxurious countries, the principle of free intercourse between the sexes may lead to immoral and dissolute manners, inconsistent with good order and the general interests of society. The excessive pursuit of pleasure often weakens and destroys those feelings that should be gratified and distorts the

⁵⁹ John Millar, "Of the Rank and Condition of Women in Different Ages", 100.

desires that nature has bestowed upon humanity for the most beneficial purposes. The excessive luxury and dissipation may lower the status and dignity of women by preventing refinement in their connections with the other sex, rendering them merely subordinate to the purposes of animal enjoyment. Millar cited the practice of polygamy in Eastern countries and the phenomenon of many women in Rome engaging in prostitution as examples where excessive freedom hinders social progress.⁶⁰ Here, he seems to emphasize that both men and women, through excessive indulgence and pursuit of pleasure, could be detrimental to family harmony. In modern Europe, the main effects of luxury would encourage people to shift their focus from the pursuit of business or ambition to the entertainment of love, or more precisely, transforming the latter into a serious occupation.

By assuming that women naturally possessed qualities of gentleness, delicacy, and care, and arguing that the history of women is a history of gaining their freedom, the intellectuals present the images of women from being enslaved, to pursuing chastity and modesty, to becoming good wives and partners, and eventually to elegantly involved in public place or free sex and prostitution respectively in the savage society, pastoral society, agricultural society, first stage of commercial society and peak of the commercial society in their theory of progress of civilization.

Conclusion

For Millar, as we have shown above, it is economic development that drove the progress of civilization, and it was alongside the transition to different stages that the condition and image of women progressed. He represented the Early Scottish thinkers' view towards the progress of civilization, in which they believed that the progress of civilization was based on the development of the economy and that other aspects of society, such as institutions and cultures,

⁶⁰ John Millar, "Of the Rank and Condition of Women in Different Ages", 102.

would unfold alongside this progress.⁶¹

The images of women suggested the stage these civilizations around the world were at that time. Clearly, after reading numerous travelogues and records from travelers, he categorized the descriptions of women from different parts of the world into his framework.

This categorization naturally placed the ideal female image of Western society at the highest standard. The female image in other parts of the world, if it did not conform to this standard, would be categorized into the earlier stages of civilization. In some civilizations, a woman's lack of chastity before marriage does not affect her character, so the civilization she belongs to was considered savage. And the most typical example of this type of civilization is the Native America one: "The Indians of America think it no stain upon a woman's character that she has violated the laws of chastity before marriage; nay, if we can give credit to travelers who have visited that country, a trespass of this kind is a circumstance by which a woman is recommended to a husband."⁶²

Of course, this situation also occurred in Europe's ancient past, during the times of Ancient Greece and Rome, when the phenomenon of husbands sharing their wives with guests existed. This comparison gives one the impression that people from America, who lived around the same time as Millar, seemed to be in a barbaric and ancient European era, while Europe had developed into a much more advanced civilization.

At that time, it was not just America that was in this barbaric stage: "In Louisiana, upon the coast of Guinea, in several parts of the East Indies, in Pegu, Siam, Cochinchina, and Cambodia, the inhabitants are, in like manner, accustomed, for a small present, to make an offer of their women to all strangers who have occasion to visit the country."⁶³

Compared to the Indians, the women of the Tartars are placed in the second stage of

⁶¹Cheng Zhengguo, "China in the Thought of the Scottish Enlightenment", 654.

⁶² John Millar, "Of the Rank and Condition of Women in Different Ages", 23.

⁶³ John Millar, "Of the Rank and Condition of Women in Different Ages", 40.

civilization: the pastoral stage. Their women, like the Celtic women of Scotland in the third to the Sixteenth centuries, began to value chastity.

In some parts of Europe, women retained some virtues from the knightly era; they needed to demonstrate chastity and virtue to gain the favor of knights. And those women who did not show chastity, as they said, would be blamed and punished by society, with their image being placed in the agricultural stage of civilization.

The cultural phenomenon across the world would not always follow the development of economics. For some countries, it showed the imbalance between those two. This led to some reflections on standards for civilizations in the later Scottish Enlightenment, where they tended to believe that uniform habit, the custom connected tightly with the development of the economy and the progress of civilization.⁶⁴

⁶⁴ Cheng Zhengguo, "China in the Thought of the Scottish Enlightenment", 69.

Chapter 2. The Image of China as a Static Commercial Society.

Introduction

In the previous chapter, I presented a theoretical framework of women's history in the works of Scottish Enlightenment thinkers, specifically focused on John Millar, Lord Kames, and William Alexander as an intellectual context for this thesis. As it was stressed in the first chapter, the images of women changed as civilization progressed, and it would present certain images of women at a particular stage in the progress of civilization in the ideal theoretical framework.

In this chapter, I shall explore how China was viewed in the Scottish Enlightenment. To do so, I shall examine the description of China in works of David Hume, Adam Smith, John Millar, Lord Kames, and William Alexander. By examining the works of these thinkers and comparing their judgment on China, I aim to provide a general picture of where China was placed in the progress of civilization.

I argue that even though China had been constantly regarded as a commercial society, its assessment shifted from being regarded as superior to inferior in comparison with Europe over time.

China in the Work of David Hume and Adam Smith: A Civilization at the Peak of the Progress of Civilization

The description of China had already been very rich and detailed early in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. These images of China had been introduced to Scotland through the works of Jesuits, including intellectual works, literature, drama, and other forms of writing. China appeared in these works in a generally positive light, which might lead to a similar

appreciation of China in the works of Scottish Enlightenment thinkers.

Before Millar, both David Hume and Adam Smith had discussed China. For Hume, China was classified as a commercial society in the progress of civilization. He described China not only as sufficient in wealth but also as having “pretty considerable stock of politeness and science”⁶⁵. Politeness and science had existed in Chinese history for several centuries, and for Hume, it was expected to mature into something more perfect than the Chinese had achieved so far.

For Hume, the reason it failed to do so was that it was a vast Empire with uniform language, law, and custom, while the people were deficient in the spirit of challenging the authority. Even though Hume considered China to be somewhat in a static state in its development, and thought that the steadfast admiration toward tradition would be an obstacle to its progress to a higher level of civilization, he neither denied China’s position as an advanced civilization nor voiced criticism towards it. He interpreted this phenomenon of China staying as a static state as a natural result of the Chinese “pure monarchy.”⁶⁶

This classification was, on the one hand, derived from the sources he read, where China was described as a civilization with abundant wealth, and the Chinese people there were refined and modest in the *Description of China*.⁶⁷ On the other hand, it was because of his observation of commercial trade between China and England. For Hume and some other Scottish intellectuals, the key to the process of civilization lay in the degree of commercial development.⁶⁸ In the 18th century, trade between China and Britain was unbalanced, with Britain consistently running a trade deficit in its dealings with China. In his account, Hume

⁶⁵ David Hume, "Of the Rise and Progress of the Arts and Science", *Essays and Treatises on Several Subjects* (London: Printed for A. Millar; Edinburgh: A. Kincaid and A. Donaldson, 1758), 76. <http://archive.org/details/essaysandtreati03humegoog>.

⁶⁶ Hume, "Of the Rise and Progress of the Arts and Science", 76.

⁶⁷ Dodds, ““One Vast Empire,”” 50.

⁶⁸ Cheng Zhengguo, “China in the Thought of the Scottish Enlightenment”, 658.

introduced this situation in a tone of exaggeration and apprehension: “And where it not for the continual recruits which were received from America, money would very soon sink in Europe, and rise in China, till it came nearly to a level in both places.”⁶⁹ This led Hume to believe that China was a self-sufficient civilization that did not require supplies from other countries. And China was a society that had entered the stage of commercial civilization ahead of others, and thus served as a reference for Europe.⁷⁰

Hume’s understanding of the static state of China as a natural process was led by his view on the results of the progress of civilization. Thinkers of the Scottish Enlightenment posited that the advancement of commerce was a fundamental determinant in the progress of civilization. And it was assumed that the development of commerce could drive transformative changes in social customs, political institutions, legal systems, and other aspects of society. Yet, different thinkers had different ways to deal with the civilizations that failed to achieve such change—a society that was highly developed in commerce, while at the same time, its customs and political institutions appeared to be out of balance with the level of its commercial development. There were mainly two kinds of attitudes towards it: Materialist philosophers, represented by David Hume, regarded this imbalance as a manifestation of the diversity of human civilization, whereas philosophers of mind viewed it as an awkward discrepancy—one that ultimately prompted them to seek alternative standards for measuring the progress of civilization.⁷¹

Adam Smith also regarded China as a commercial society, and at the same time, he seemed to have shared Hume’s idea that China stood still. In his *Wealth of Nations*, he described China in such an image:

⁶⁹ Hume, "Of Simplicity and Refinement in Writing", *Essays and Treatises on Several Subjects*, 181.

⁷⁰ Cheng Zhengguo, “China in the Thought of the Scottish Enlightenment”, 668

⁷¹ Cheng Zhengguo, “China in the Thought of the Scottish Enlightenment”, 661

“China has been long one of the richest, that is, one of the most fertile, best cultivated, most industrious, and most populous, countries in the world. It seems, however, to have been long stationary.”⁷²

However, Smith seemed to be less favorable to China than Hume. Phil Dodds argued that it is because Adam Smith reached different sources from those of Hume, and at the same time, that the “Enlightenment standard of ‘progress’ became more powerfully and universally normative.”⁷³ He became aware of China’s policy of self-isolation through the sources brought back by merchants, where Chinese trade with foreign countries was restricted to only one port, -- Guangzhou, being the sole city, where foreigners were allowed to exchange goods. Smith was dissatisfied with the Chinese government's policy of isolation because it was against his idea of free trade. And he believed that these policies were hindering the further development of Chinese civilization.

The commercial development of China had been static, yet, for Smith, it was still one of the most advanced commercial civilizations around the world. According to Smith, within the commercial society itself, there were four stages of progress: declining India, static China, slowly progressing Europe, and rapidly progressing North America.⁷⁴ Although China was considered stationary, it nevertheless exceeded Europe in terms of commercial development and the accumulation of wealth: “China is a much richer country than any part of Europe, and the difference between the price of subsistence in China and in Europe is very great.”⁷⁵

⁷² Adam Smith, "Of the Wages of Labour", *Wealth Of Nations* Adam Smith, 1776, 64, <http://archive.org/details/WealthOfNationsAdamSmith>.

⁷³ Dodds, ““One Vast Empire,”” 58.

⁷⁴ Cheng Zhengguo, “China in the Thought of the Scottish Enlightenment”, 669

⁷⁵ Adam Smith, "Of Wages and Profit in the Different Employments of Labour and Stock", *Wealth Of Nations*, 161.

China in the Works of Millar, Lord Kames, and William Alexander: A Civilization on Its Way to Being Inferior to Europe.

Millar was a student of Adam Smith. He followed the idea of progress of civilization of his teacher. And his view towards China was not much of an innovation compared with Adam Smith and David Hume in terms of the general impression towards China as a static civilization. In his *The Origin of the Distinction of Ranks*, he described China as a vast Empire where people were mild and modest.⁷⁶ While the Chinese people admired their traditional culture and were discouraged from innovation,

“In the empire of China, the same circumstance, together with that aversion which the people discover to every sort of innovation, have also enabled the father to maintain a great part of his original jurisdiction.”⁷⁷

For Millar, this static state furthermore brought an explanation for anachronistic phenomena in Chinese society. For example, he seemed to believe that the reverence for ancient culture and the reluctance to challenge authority led the Chinese to retain an excessively high level of paternal authority, which is incompatible with a commercial society.⁷⁸ However, it was not clear where Millar placed China in the progress of commercial society - was China still, as a civilization, superior or at least equal to Europe? Millar seemed to have avoided discussing this question in his work.

The Lord Kames also viewed China as a commercial society, “where manners [were] carried to a high degree of refinement.”⁷⁹ His attitude towards China's position in commercial society was not entirely clear. However, his statement on the art and science in China subtly

⁷⁶ John Millar, “Of the Rank and Condition of Women in Different Ages”, 11.

⁷⁷ John Millar, “Of the Rank and Condition of Women in Different Ages” 136.

⁷⁸ John Millar, “Of the Rank and Condition of Women in Different Ages”, 167.

⁷⁹ Kames, “Progress of Men in Society“, *Sketches of the History of Man*, 337.

presented his ambition of placing Europe in a superior position to China. He claimed that,

“The way of writing in China makes it naturally the second step in the progress of the art, that our good fortune in stumbling upon a way much more perfect cannot be sufficiently admired, when to it we are indebted for our superiority in literature above the Chinese.”⁸⁰

“Their way of writing is a fatal obstruction to science, for it is so riveted by inveterate practice. That the difficulty would not be greater to make them change their language than their letters.”⁸¹

His judgment on science in China, compared with Hume, showed a noticeable change in his text. While Hume regarded China as a place with a considerable stock of science, Lord Kames described China as a place, “the sciences are still in infancy” and “will forever continue so.”⁸²

For Scottish thinkers, art and science were two key factors in advancing a commercial society. They believe that through the cultivation of art and science, the people there would be more refined, thus the society would be in a more advanced stage. If the science and art of China were inferior to Europe, would it mean that China was also at an inferior stage to Europe in the progress of commercial society?

In his *History of Women*, without hesitation, William Alexander viewed China as inferior to Europe. This was when he described the Chinese women in a condition that was inferior to that of European women in the progress of civilization. This shift in the way Alexander presented the condition of Chinese women was related to a change in the standards for evaluating civilization in Scottish society at the time. His writing of women's history aligns with the theory of the progress of civilization, but his standards for evaluating civilization were

⁸⁰ Kames, "Progress of Men as Individuals", *Sketches of the History of Man*, 93.

⁸¹ Kames, "Progress of Men as Individuals", 93.

⁸² Kames, "Progress of Men as Individuals", 93.

no longer based solely on economic development. During the late Scottish Enlightenment, philosophers such as James Mill believed that the progress of civilization was driven by cultural practices.⁸³ The condition of women served as such a standard. Under this premise, the situation of Chinese women helped Scottish Enlightenment thinkers re-evaluate and reposition the civilization of China. In *his History of Women*, William Alexander still regarded China as a commercial society. However, He uncritically characterized China as a civilization that was inferior to Europe;

“ In China, which, for politeness of manners, is little inferior to any part of Europe, women seem to enjoy the same rank, and to share in the honours and dignities of their husbands...”⁸⁴

Conclusion

In the works of Scottish Enlightenment thinkers, China was described as a commercial civilization where an abundance of wealth was accumulated, and people there were gentle and polite. This civilization, however, had already ceased to develop because of its admiration for tradition and a lack of a spirit of challenge. For Hume, even though there was some obstacle for China to ripen to a more perfect civilization, in considering its wealth and the manners of people there, it was still a civilization that was more developed than Europe. Adam Smith put more critique on the Chinese policy of trade and had less favor for China, yet he still considered that China had suppressed Europe in terms of Wealth.

Millar, Lord Kames and Alexander also considered China in a commercial society. Since it had been in a static state, and meanwhile Europe was on its way to progress, whether it was

⁸³ Cheng Zhengguo, “China in the Thought of the Scottish Enlightenment”, 677

⁸⁴ William Alexander, *The History of Women, from the Earliest Antiquity, to the Present Time : Giving an Account of Almost Every Interesting Particular Concerning That Sex, among All Nations, Ancient and Modern* (Philadelphia : Published by J.H. Dobelbower, 1796), 203, <http://archive.org/details/historyofwomenfr01alex>.

still in a position superior to Europe over time? For Millar, the stand was not clear. Lord Kames ambitiously challenged the position of China compared to Europe in the aspects of art and science, and he believed that China had already fallen behind Europe in both art and the development of science, even further behind. Later on, as the idea of “progress” became the center of the entire progress of civilization, the static China, serving as a counterexample, was relegated to a position behind Europe. In the works of William Alexander, he placed China in an inferior place to Europe without hesitation when he wrote his *The History of Women*

Chapter 3. The Image of Chinese Women in the Scottish Enlightenment

Introduction

In the previous chapters, I presented a theoretical framework for women's history in the works of Scottish Enlightenment thinkers, specifically focusing on John Millar, Lord Kames, and William Alexander, as an intellectual context for this thesis. I then outlined the image of China in the works of Scottish thinkers and its place in the progress of civilization.

As emphasized in the first chapter, the images of women evolved as civilization progressed, presenting distinct images of women at various stages within the ideal theoretical framework of the progress of civilization. As China was described as a commercial society, women there were expected to be portrayed as free and seen as companions and friends. However, in the following section, we will see how the image of Chinese women fell out of this coordinate and how the Scottish thinkers deal with this apparent contradiction.

To present the intensity during this progress of formulating the image of Chinese women in their works of history of women, I shall first generate the image of Chinese women in John Millar's *The Origin of the Distinction of Ranks*, Lord Kames' *The Sketches of the History of Man*, and William Alexander's *History of Women*. Then I shall trace back to the sources to present the intensity when they had to deal with the image that was out of their expectation of China's position in the progress of civilization. Lastly, I put my focus on engaging this image of Chinese women in the conversation of their expectations of Women in Scotland.

The Image of Chinese Women in the Texts

In the text of Scottish Enlightenment thinkers, Chinese women were, on one hand,

revered for their chastity and modesty, while on the other hand, they lacked independence and freedom.

Chinese women were first depicted as delicate. Such delicacy was evident in their clothes, behavior, and character. “But in China, one of the politest countries in Asia, and perhaps not even in this respect behind France or Italy, the case is quite otherwise: no being can be so delicate as a woman, in her dress, in her behavior and conversation.”⁸⁵ In dress, “the (Chinese) women still more closely wrapped up, never discovered a naked hand even to their nearest relations, if they can possibly avoid it.”⁸⁶ The body, wrapped up closely by clothes and not exposed to others, indicated the cautious attitude towards sexual activities, which was considered a virtue of chastity for Scottish Enlightenment thinkers. In addition to their clothes, their behavior also gained a compliment. They behaved so properly that “Every part of their behavior is calculated to preserve decency.”⁸⁷ The proper dress and behavior certainly inspired respect from these Scottish thinkers; however, what amazed them more was the character of modesty hidden behind the appearance of these Chinese women: “What adds the greatest luster to their charms is uncommon modesty which appears in every look and in every action.”⁸⁸

The Chinese women were delicate in appearance, chaste and modest in character, yet highly dependent on their men. As Alexander stated, it seems that even though noble women in China were highly respected by their husbands, they were rarely entrusted with property and had little to no fortune. Thus, people could see they devoted their love to their husband and had

⁸⁵ Alexander, "Of Delicacy and Chastity", *The History of Women, from the Earliest Antiquity, to the Present Time*, 1779, 5.

⁸⁶ Alexander, "Of the Treatment and Condition of Women, and the various Advantages and Disadvantages of their Sex, in savage and civil Life", *The History of Women, from the Earliest Antiquity, to the Present Time* (1796), 288.

⁸⁷ Alexander, "Of the Treatment and Condition of Women, and the various Advantages and Disadvantages of their Sex, in savage and civil Life", 288.

⁸⁸ Alexander, "Of the Treatment and Condition of Women, and the various Advantages and Disadvantages of their Sex, in savage and civil Life" 288.

no separate interests from them, “nor any independence to render her undutiful and impertinent.”⁸⁹

Chinese women, in the eyes of Scottish thinkers, also lacked freedom. A prominent example would be that they were treated as property by their families. The phenomenon of buying wives was mentioned multiple times in the works of Scottish thinkers. This state of Chinese women was revealed as a long-existing custom in the work of John Millar: “This ancient custom, that the husband should buy his wife from her relations, remains at present among the Chinese.”⁹⁰ The fact that a husband could buy his wife implied that the wife was essentially considered property. Once bought, they would remain as possessions of the husband for a while and then could be discarded by their husbands.

For Millar, the phenomenon of buying wives was common in early human societies. Nearly every civilization, including Europe itself, had gone through such a stage. However, such a practice was far from appropriate in a commercial society. He seemed to be shocked that Chinese society still retained such customs: “(Chinese) who, notwithstanding their opulence, and their improvement in arts, are still so wonderfully tenacious of the usages introduced in a barbarous period.”⁹¹ The fact that the phenomenon of buying wives remained only as a custom indicated that Millar thought it was not a common phenomenon in China.

Henry Home Kames, in contrast, described the phenomenon in a way that suggests the practice of buying wives was not uncommon in China. In his statement of the reasons for the emergence of polygamy in the mild zones, he argued that men in the tropics were so energetic that they were not satisfied with one wife, so it was common to buy and sell their wives to

⁸⁹ Alexander, "Of the Treatment and Condition of Women, and the various Advantages and Disadvantages of their Sex, in savage and civil Life", 202.

⁹⁰ John Millar, "Of the Rank and Condition of Women in Different Ages", 41.

⁹¹ John Millar, "Of the Rank and Condition of Women in Different Ages", 41.

multiple partners. In China, many men also buy women to obtain a partner or bride. He describes the process in detail: “The same obtains in China: after the price is adjusted and paid, the bride is conducted to the bride. groom's house locked in a sedan, and the key delivered to him: if he be not satisfied with his bargain, he sends her back at the expense of losing the sum he paid for her: if satisfied, he feasts his male friends in one room, and she her female friends in another.”⁹² William Alexander also mentioned the phenomenon of buying wives in China as the remnants of customs from primitive society, and it was quite common in all the nations.⁹³ For him, buying wives could be compared to the trade of slaves.⁹⁴ In this case, the wife was only an object to satisfy the husband.

The Intense Process of Dealing with Sources

In the eighteenth century, the depiction of Chinese women was scattered in texts and visual art in works that intended to introduce knowledge of China at the time. Millar, Lord Kames, and Alexander had never been to China and saw the Chinese women that they depicted in their works. Most of their information on Chinese women came from popular images in books and translated works introducing China by French Jesuits.

The Chaste and modest image of Chinese women, as depicted by Scottish Enlightenment thinkers, is not different from that of Chinese women portrayed in the widely read books in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. In these books, which intend to introduce knowledge of China, it was popular to portray the ideal image of a modest and elegant

⁹² Kames, "Progress of Female sex", *Sketches of the History of Man*, 196.

⁹³ Alexander, "Of Courtship", *The History of Women, from the Earliest Antiquity, to the Present Time*, 1779, 209.

⁹⁴ Alexander, "Of the Character and Conduct of Women", 236

Chinese woman and to idealize them as a model for European women to follow.⁹⁵ The most representative work among these books was *China Illustrata*, a book published in 1667 by the German Jesuit Scholar Athanasius Kircher (1601-1680). In *China Illustrata*, Kircher gathered records of the cultural, political, and social conditions of China and other parts of the Far East. The book was first published in Latin in Amsterdam, with a Dutch translation in 1668, a French translation in 1670, and later partial translations into English in 1669 and 1673. The original and other translations were widely received on the European continent and became one of the founding works of later European Sinology.⁹⁶

A visual image of two Chinese women appears in *China Illustrata*. As can be seen from the image, they were dressed in long robes, and their bodies were tightly wrapped in clothes, with no other parts of their bodies naked except for their faces and hands. They were elegant and calmly playing with a bird. The two Chinese characters on the picture above the two ladies were a direct expression of their overall characters -窈窕 (Yao Tiao) , which came from a sentence of a poem “窈窕淑女，君子好逑”. This poem came from the ancient *Book of Songs* in China and means that a woman's elegance in appearance and virtue of character make her desirable to men. These visual images of Chinese women corresponded to Alexander's descriptions of Chinese women as: “no being can be so delicate as a woman, in her dress, in her behavior and conversation.”⁹⁷ what could be seen as further evidence for this corresponding with the images of Chinese women in Scottish Enlightenment was the textual descriptions of these ladies before these two images of Chinese women is the author's textual description: “The

⁹⁵ Chen and Huang, “Images of Chinese Women in Seventeenth- and Eighteenth-Century European Exotic Knowledge Books,” 651.

⁹⁶ Balesław Szczesniak, “Athanasius Kircher's: *China Illustrata*,” *Osiris* 10 (1952): 385–411.

⁹⁷ Alexander, “Of Delicacy and Chastity”, *The History of Women, from the Earliest Antiquity, to the Present Time*, 1779, 5

dress of the women is modest and grave and covers every part of the body except the face.”⁹⁸ If we compared these images of Chinese women with what Alexandra writes on the appearance of Chinese women: “the (Chinese) women still more closely wrapped up, never discovered a naked hand even to their nearest relations, if they can possibly avoid it,”⁹⁹ we could easily find the similarities.



Figure 1 Left and Right, Illustrations of Two Chinese Women from *China Illustrata* (1667)

Although the description of Chinese women being restricted by their men was also presented in *China Illustrata*, it was not the main source for Scottish intellectuals to write about this aspect of Chinese women. The descriptions of Chinese women being highly dependent on their men and unfree were mostly drawn from works by French Jesuits.

In the seventeenth century, the French King Louis XIV sent Jesuits to China to increase his influence and break the Portuguese monopoly of ecclesiastical patronage. He attached this missionary with the scientific purpose of studying the geography and history of China. In March 1685, five French Jesuits departed from France; among them were Bouvet, Jean-François Gerbillon (1647-1707), Louis-Daniel Le Comte (1655-1728), Guy Tachard (1648-1712), and

⁹⁸ Athanasius Kircher, *China Illustrata: With Sacred and Secular Monuments, Various Spectacles of Nature and Art and Other Memorabilia* (Bloomington, Ind.: Indiana University Research Institute for Inner Asian Studies, 1987), 102, <http://archive.org/detail>

⁹⁹ Alexander, "Of the Treatment and Condition of Women, and the various Advantages and Disadvantages of their Sex, in savage and civil Life", *The History of Women, from the Earliest Antiquity, to the Present Time* (1796), 288

Claude de Visdelou (1656-1737).¹⁰⁰ These French Jesuits arrived in China in 1688, and since then, a large number of records have been produced, sent back to France, compiled, and published by their colleagues in France. These publications caused a huge debate about China in Europe, which contributed to the formation of the Enlightenment movement.¹⁰¹

Among these published works on introducing knowledge of China, two books were the most clearly evidenced sources for Scottish Enlightenment thinkers. One was *Memories of China*, referenced by Millar when he depicted the phenomenon of buying wives in China; another was *Descriptions of China*, cited by Alexander when he tried to state the equality between emperor and empress. The original name of *Memories of China* was *Nouveaux mémoires sur l'état présent de la Chine*, which was a letter collection from the French Jesuit Louis le Comte. Louis le Comte stayed in China from 1688 to 1691. After returning to France, he arranged his reports of China and published them in 1696 as a book named *Nouveaux mémoires sur l'état présent de la Chine*.¹⁰² Soon after its publication, this book gained great popularity. Its French version was republished four times in the following four years, and it was also translated into English, Italian, and German. The English version was first published in 1697 in London¹⁰³ and was repeatedly reprinted throughout the 18th century. Even though the book had been forbidden to be published in Paris since the 1700s due to its controversial opinions towards Christianity and its role in the Rites Controversy in 1697 in Europe, The Publication of the English version seemed not to have been affected. The new version of

¹⁰⁰ Catherine Pagani, *Eastern Magnificence and European Ingenuity: Clocks of Late Imperial China*, 2001, 329, <http://archive.org/details/eastern-magnificence-european-ingenuity-clocks-of-late-imperial-china>.

¹⁰¹ Nicolas Standaert, *The Intercultural Weaving of Historical Texts: Chinese and European Stories about Emperor Ku and His Concubines* (BRILL, 2016), 95.

¹⁰² Nicolas Standaert, *The Interweaving of Rituals: Funerals in the Cultural Exchange between China and Europe* (University of Washington Press, 2008), 184, <https://www.jstor.org/stable/j.ctvcwn6zz>.

¹⁰³ Louis Le Comte, *Memoirs and Observations Topographical, Physical, Mathematical, Mechanical, Natural, Civil, and Ecclesiastical...* (London : Benj. Tooke ... and Sam Buckley ..., 1697), <http://archive.org/details/memoirsobservati00leco>.

Memories of China was still in its printing in 1738 in London.¹⁰⁴

Compared with *China Illustrata*, the description of the restricted conditions of Chinese women in the *Memories of China* was richer and more detailed. The description here firstly followed the popular positive view towards Chinese women in Europe “women with good nature, modesty, and innocence, that they might look after their families, and take care of their children's education, but that men are born with strength of body and mind, with wit and generosity to govern and rule the world.”¹⁰⁵ Then, it put more focus on the negative treatment towards women: the phenomenon of foot binding,¹⁰⁶ the prohibition of trading and commercial activities.¹⁰⁷ Louis le Comte mentioned the phenomenon of buying wives when he introduced what the “civil constitution has ordained concerning marriages:”¹⁰⁸

“Because the Chinese buy their wives, and, as in other merchandizes, they give more or less according to the good or bad properties of them.”¹⁰⁹

Millar probably referenced this description when he discussed the phenomenon of buying wives in his *The Origin of the Distinction of Ranks*. However, he did not simply replicate the depictions found in *Memories of China*. It seems that he deliberately portrayed the practice of wife-buying as a remnant of an ancient custom rather than as a widespread phenomenon in contemporary Chinese society, an impression the readers might get from Louis le Comte's statement. This is likely because wife-buying would be considered incompatible with a civilized

¹⁰⁴ Louis Le Comte et al., *Memoirs and Remarks Geographical, Historical, Topographical, Physical, Natural, Astronomical Mechanical...* (London : Printed by John Hughes near Lincoln's-Inn-Fields, for Olive Payne at Horace's-Head, in Round-Court in the Strand, opposite to York-Buildings, 1738), <http://archive.org/details/memoirsremarksge00leco>.

¹⁰⁵ Le Comte et al., 61.

¹⁰⁶ Le Comte et al., 126.

¹⁰⁷ Le Comte et al., 294.

¹⁰⁸ Le Comte et al., 299.

¹⁰⁹ J.-B. (Jean-Baptiste) Du Halde, *A Description of the Empire of China and Chinese-Tartary, Together with the Kingdoms of Korea, and Tibet: Containing the Geography and History* (London, T. Gardner for E. Cave, 1738), 300, http://archive.org/details/descriptionofemp01duha_0.

society, which China was often perceived as being in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries.

Millar saw China as a static commercial civilization, and thus the women there were supposed to be “neither the slaves, nor the idols of the other sex, but the friends and companions.”¹¹⁰ Therefore, Chinese women were supposed to be in the state of what the Scottish thinkers called a free condition, where they became equal partners and friends of their men. However, the image of Chinese women they gained from sources was far from that—a chaste and modest image, yet in a restricted condition.

To some extent, the image of Chinese women fell out of the coordinates of Scottish civilization theory. Millar referred to the condition of Chinese women in the primitive stage of women's history--- Chinese buying their wives. He understood and explained it as a remnant of ancient custom, which was consistent with his view and understanding of China —a static civilization where the Chinese people worshiped their traditional culture. However, in other stages of women's history, the situation of Chinese women was not included as evidence in his framework of progress in women's history.

One possible interpretation of this is that Millar himself did not attach much importance to the situation of Chinese women that he read about. This is inconsistent with his frequent citation of Chinese sources when discussing other aspects of human civilization. Another possible interpretation is that Millar might have been confused and hesitant when he was dealing with this image of Chinese women: the image of women was difficult to categorize into any stage of commercial civilization within the Scottish Enlightenment framework. We are not sure if Millar had ever considered changing the standards to measure the progress of civilization, or further doubted their theory of civilization when he saw this difference brought by another commercial society, which was considered to be in a more advanced, or at least equal stages as Europe in

¹¹⁰ John Millar, “Of the Rank and Condition of Women in Different Ages”, 89.

the progress of civilization. Nevertheless, the former solution would be present in the work of Alexander. And for Millar, the solution was to exclude this case from his discussion of the history of women. Millar's sentence on the image of Chinese women, thus, looks more like an interpretation based on a civilized image of China--an image that had been circulated in previous European society, rather than a slander: "This ancient custom, that the husband should buy his wife from her relations, remains at present among the Chinese."¹¹¹

The intention of interpreting the image of Chinese women based on the civilized image of China when they read about the conditions of Chinese women was also evident in Lord Kames's account. Lord Kames also considered China as a commercial society. As mentioned above, he had shown his ambitions of challenging the superior position of China over Europe by discussing the development of art and science. This challenge could also be triggered by the condition/image of Chinese women. However, in his chapter "Progress of the Female Sex", Lord Kames did not exhibit the same ambition. When describing the details of the wife-buying phenomenon, Lord Kames also referenced Louis Le Comte's description of marriage,¹¹² though he only offered a brief summary of it. In response to the phenomenon of buying wives in Chinese society, which could be understood as another inferior aspect of China, and out of the theory of the progress of civilization at the same time, he attributed these phenomena to climatic reasons and claimed it as a universal phenomenon in areas that shared the "hot climate."¹¹³

Another important reference for the Scottish Enlightenment was a comprehensive work compiled by Jean Baptiste du Halde - *Description géographique, historique, chronologique, politique, et physique de l'empire de la Chine et de la Tartarie chinoise, enrichie des cartes générales et particulières de ces pays, de la carte générale et des cartes particulières du Thibet,*

¹¹¹ John Millar, "Of the Rank and Condition of Women in Different Ages", 41.

¹¹² Le Comte et al., *Memoirs and Remarks Geographical, Historical, Topographical, Physical, Natural, Astronomical, Mechanical, Military, Mercantile, Political and Ecclesiastical, Made in above Ten Years Travels through the Empire of China*, 300–301.

¹¹³ Kames, "Progress of the Female Sex", *Sketches of the History of Man*, 196.

& de la Corée; & ornée d'un grand nombre de figures & de vignettes gravées en taille-douce(*description de la Chine*). Jean Baptiste du Halde was also a French Jesuit specialized in China in the eighteenth century. Unlike Louis le Comte, he never went to China. From 1711-1743, he oversaw the publication of *Lettres édifiantes et curieuses, écrites des missions étrangères. Mémoires de la Chine*(*Lettres Édifiantes et Curieuses*), a work contained letters from missionaries who arrived in China and reported the missionaries' observations of Chinese institution, customs, history and geography, and commercial situation. It was compiled by Charles Le Gobien, Jean Baptiste du Halde and Louis Patouillet, and published from 1702-1776, becoming the main source of information for many European scholars to study China in the 18th century. *Description de la Chine* was a combination of *Lettres Édifiantes et Curieuses* and some unpublished reports containing translations of Chinese texts of various origins¹¹⁴. It was published in French in 1735 and was soon translated into English and named *The General History of China*.¹¹⁵ Later, another English version was published in London, following its original French name as *A description of the empire of China and Chinese-Tartary, together with the kingdoms of Korea, and Tibet: containing the geography and history*.¹¹⁶

The *Descriptions of China* could be one of Alexander's sources on writing about Chinese women. He cited Jean Baptiste du Halde's description of the Empress receiving compliments from women in different ranks in China after she got married to the Emperor¹¹⁷ to present that women enjoy the same rank and share in honors and dignities with their husbands in China.¹¹⁸ In his statement, he was doubtful of the equality presented by Jean Baptiste du Halde, and

¹¹⁴ Wu Bin, "The Image of China in modern Europe and its utopian values", 117-121

¹¹⁵ J.-B. (Jean-Baptiste) Du Halde, *The general history of China. Containing a geographical, historical, chronological, political and physical description of the empire of China, Chinese-Tartary ...* 1736: Vol 1, 1736, http://archive.org/details/bim_eighteenth-century_the-general-history-of-c_du-halde-j-b-jean-ba_1736_1.

¹¹⁶ J.-B. (Jean-Baptiste) Du Halde et al., *A Description of the Empire of China and Chinese-Tartary....* (London: Printed by T. Gardner in Bartholomew Close for Edward Cave, 1738), <http://archive.org/details/descriptionofemp00duha>.

¹¹⁷ Du Halde et al., 293.

¹¹⁸ Alexander, "Of Matrimony", *The History of Women, from the Earliest Antiquity, to the Present Time*, 1779, 201.

claimed that what was behind this seeming equality was the fact that the Chinese women did not have their own property, which indicated that they were not independent in the aspect of wealth.

“In China, which, for politeness of manners, is little inferior to any part of Europe. Women seem to enjoy the same rank, and to share in the honors of husbands...Though honors of such a nature are paid to the Chinese empress, and to every woman according to her rank, yet the fair sex are hardly entrusted with any property, and have no fortunes.”¹¹⁹

It is likely he also read the *memories of China*, considering this statement on women's lack of property, to form this argument about the condition of women in China. Compared with the reconstruction of images of Chinese women by Millar and Lord Kames, the attitude of defense and understanding the negative side of China--the condition of Chinese women-- seemed to go away, he was more cautious and doubtful about the sources and compliments on China, especially when he read negative condition of women in China.

In conclusion, Sources were crucial for the Scottish Enlightenment thinkers to reconstruct the images of Chinese women. The sources they gained from text and visual art contributed to a general image of Chinese women as women with chastity and modesty, but lacking independence and freedom. The process of reintegrating the sources they gained on Chinese women was full of intensity, where they needed to choose between defending the traditional images of a civilized China or challenging these pre-existing images in society.

The Expectation of Women and Men in Scotland

Scottish thinkers praised the chaste and modest image of Chinese women while hesitating to comment on the other image of unfree women. This aligns neatly with their pre-established

¹¹⁹ Alexander, " Of the Treatment and Condition of Women, and the various Advantages and Disadvantages of their Sex, in savage and civil Life" , 201.

framework for evaluating the condition of women and men in Scotland

The Enlightenment thinkers did not hesitate to express praise for this chaste and modest image of Chinese women. This character of virtue was said to “add the greatest luster to their charms.” The virtues of chastity and modesty not only increased their allure but also earned them the respect of men. Compared with Chinese women, women from other regions, such as Africa and the Americas, were seen as clearly lacking in their display of chastity and modesty. For example, women in Brazil “are far from paying any regard to chastity.”¹²⁰ As a result, the civilizations to which they belonged appeared deficient in certain elements that characterized ‘civilized’ nations.

Chastity and modesty, as standards used by Scottish Enlightenment thinkers to evaluate women in non-European civilizations, were not derived from empirical observation or genuine understanding of women’s conditions in those cultures. Instead, these standards were borrowed from the prevailing norms within Scottish society at the time regarding the ideal qualities of women. Women in the Scottish Enlightenment were defined as having a greater capacity for sympathy, a willingness to show emotion, and a natural aversion to conflict.¹²¹ In a civilized society like Europe, women were allowed and encouraged to cultivate their nature and play their role as a good wife and mother in the domestic space. Women were expected to be chaste and modest in their domestic activities. On the one hand, it would be better for them to follow their nature and make the best of it to contribute to their families. On the other hand, their behavior could also influence their partner to become more refined. If women overused their passion and were unchaste, it could lead them to neglect their duties towards domestic activities, which could hinder the progress of civilizations.¹²²

¹²⁰ John Millar, “Of the Rank and Condition of Women in Different Ages”, 14-47

¹²¹ Carr, Rosalind, *Gender and Enlightenment Culture in Eighteenth-Century Scotland*, Edinburgh University Press, 2014, 13.

¹²² Carr, Rosalind, 17

This idea towards women could be seen in a popular female conduct book-- *A Father's Legacy to His Daughters*¹²³. This book was published by John Gregory in 1774 in Edinburgh, and it was intended as a guide to proper conduct for his daughters. It subsequently became one of the best sellers in Britain and America during the late 18th and early 19th centuries. In this book, chastity and modesty are repeatedly emphasized as feminine virtues, used to admonish and guide the author's daughters. The book clearly catered to popular ideals of female virtue, which contributed to its repeated reprinting and wide circulation in both Britain and the United States. In this context, the graceful image of Chinese women aligned perfectly with the Scottish imagination of ideal womanhood. As a result, they were praised more highly than women from other regions during the same period and were seen as embodying the qualities of a truly civilized people.

Even though these Chinese women were modest and chaste, they were considered not to be in their free state and thus could not be considered as sharing equal position with Scottish women in the progress of Civilization. Women to be liberal, for Scottish thinkers, would not only have been presented by the behavior of women. How men should behave in treating their partners was crucial to the liberty of women. What does liberal women mean to Scottish thinkers? As mentioned before, women were born with femininity. For a woman to be liberal, they needed to be in a condition where they are free to cultivate the virtue based on their nature. The condition was that their partners respect this nature and support her to do so. It was in this condition that women were considered in a free state. The situation of not respecting women's nature and putting them in a situation where their life was restricted and used to please people, thus the nature of women cannot be fully developed, and it was considered that they were not free.

¹²³ John Gregory, *A Father's Legacy to His Daughters* (London : Printed for T. Cadell and W. Davies., 1808), <http://archive.org/details/fatherslegacyto00greg>.

This respect towards women could only come from a refined man, a man in a commercial society. According to Adam Smith, in the progress of civilization, men gradually became more sensitive and compassionate through interaction in commercial activities, thus they tended to become more refined and polite. Those men in a commercial society, through cultivation by art and knowledge of science, were expected to be sympathetic when interacting with others; a manner was also considered a principle for a liberal man.¹²⁴

The action of restricting wives, taking them as goods/ slaves, could have happened in the very first stages of civilization, when they lacked the sensitivity and sympathy for their partners. The phenomenon of buying wives was mentioned in other places around the world in the books of Scottish Enlightenment thinkers, but this society was basically considered in its early stages. The Chinese men's treatment of their wives as goods brought confusion to these thinkers. This can be seen in the way they interpret these sources that describe Chinese women.

The confusion stems from the knowledge they gain from their sources, namely the former descriptions of China as a highly civilized country. Both David Hume and Adam Smith believed that China was a commercial society, where men were expected to have a high respect for the nature of their partners and treat them in an equal manner. Then, how to explain the phenomenon that they restricted their wives and view them as objects? Can men in a commercial society still be in a state of savagery? How to explain the situation when men were polite, yet they still treated their wives without sympathy? In terms of addressing this confusion, it is essential to understand the alternative view of passion and sensitivity held by Scottish Enlightenment thinkers.

Having a high degree of sensitivity was not always positive for Scottish thinkers. Too much sympathy indicated a loss of control over passion, which was not what most of the Scottish

¹²⁴ Carr, Rosalind, 19.

thinkers promoted.¹²⁵ At least some of them held a very cautious attitude towards it, because it was also dangerous for the progress of civilization when men overused their passion, even though it was not as dangerous when it happened to women. For some intellectuals, it was a matter of equality when men were required to keep their loyalty to their wives/control their desire towards other women. On the extreme side, for Scottish Enlightenment thinkers, loss of control of passion could lead to a man becoming more feminine through excessive politeness, a tendency exemplified by France. It was a threat to their masculinity. Thus, an ideal man, as expected by Scottish thinkers, was refined and polite on the one hand and rational enough to control their passion.

Restricting and buying wives may be interpreted as an act driven by passions that were out of rational control due to the men's excessive desire. Even though Chinese men were in a commercial society like Europe, and they gradually behaved in a refined and polite way through commercial activities, they seemed to lack the rationality to control their sexual desire, as an ideal man was expected to in the commercial stages of society. As shown in their treatment of their women, to deal with this desire towards women, the Chinese men tended to buy wives to fulfill the desire rather than attempt to use reason to control it. The solution of Chinese men to the excessive desire indicated that they lacked the reason required by a highly developed commercial society. That was why some of the Scottish thinkers considered China a civilization that lacked logic and Science. In this case, the Chinese women that Scottish Enlightenment thinkers imagined here played an important role in helping them to realize it.

Conclusion

The image of Chinese women in the Scottish Enlightenment can be traced back to different layers of background. Chinese women were portrayed as humble and loyal, yet unfree. This

¹²⁵ Carr, Rosalind, 27

image first originated from books about China that were popular in Scottish society in the early 18th century. Scottish Enlightenment thinkers selected and interpreted these materials based on existing standards for evaluating the condition of women in the Scottish Enlightenment.

In the process of interpretation, these images seemed not to align with their prior positioning of Chinese civilization within the progress of civilization. How to deal with this issue appeared to prompt further reflection on the criteria of civilization. In fact, the condition of Chinese women once led China to be seen as a country that had fallen out of the coordinates of Scottish civilization. This intellectual dilemma was not resolved until thinkers came to realize that economic development could also lead to negative elements. It was at the same time that the standards for evaluating civilization had also changed accordingly: the condition of women would become a measurement of civilization. Perhaps the condition of Chinese women would help them reposition Chinese civilization.

Conclusion

In the eighteenth century, the Scottish thinkers attempted to write a history of women worldwide. The history of women was presented as part of the broader picture of the progress of human history. Thus, the history of women was claimed to be in a state of progress, presented by their gradually improving conditions. The Scottish thinkers read sources that came from different areas of the world, and the representation of women in these sources served as foundational evidence for their examination of women's condition around the world. And by gathering and examining these representations in sources, they categorized women from different societies into different stages of civilization.

As a result, the Scottish Enlightenment thinkers provided a universal framework of women's history. They claimed that the condition of women improved as society progressed through different stages: women were enslaved and treated as slaves by their partners in a savage society; gained more sympathy, but still were treated as objects by their partners in pastoral society; were more respected as the chivalric spirit developed in agricultural society; and finally were treated as friends and companions in commercial society. Alongside the claim on the improvement of women's condition, the imaging of how women in different stages were supposed to be was also presented in the texts. The images of women changed from being unaware of chastity in the savage society, starting to be aware of proper dress and value chastity in the pastoral society, putting greater emphasis on chastity and modesty in the agricultural society, and eventually to be friends and companions, even elegantly engaged in the public conversations in the commercial society.

China, in the eighteenth century, was regarded as a static commercial society in the works of Scottish Enlightenment thinkers. This impression was first stressed by David Hume. He claimed China to be a civilization with abundant wealth, a stock of science and art, and

people there were refined. However, the Chinese had uniform customs, habits, and cultures, and they lacked the courage to challenge the traditional regime dominated by Confucianism, which became an obstacle to their development in the progress of civilization. Adam Smith shared a similar idea with David Hume on the state of China, where he also viewed it as a static commercial society. Compared with Hume, Adam Smith accessed extra sources brought back from Canton, which contained more negative descriptions of the situation of China, especially on trade. He, therefore, was less favorable to China compared with Hume. Nevertheless, both David Hume and Adam Smith viewed China as a civilization that was superior to Europe in the progress of civilization.

For David Hume and Adam Smith, the standard for measuring the progress of civilization was the development of the economy. For them, China's superior position was decided by its abundance of wealth. As the idea of "progress" gradually centered in the Scottish Enlightenment, the standard to measure the progress of civilization changed. In the later Scottish Enlightenment, the standards changed to cultural practice (like customs, women's conditions) within societies. The "static" China not only served as an opposite example to "progress", but was also considered inferior in some aspects of cultural practice, and therefore became inferior to Europe. This progress of Change could be seen from the varied descriptions of China in the works of John Millar, Lord Kames, and William Alexander. Millar did not discuss whether China was inferior or superior to Europe. He basically avoided any comparison between China and Europe in his book. Lord Kames challenged the position of China that was described in Hume's work, in the aspect of art and science. He claimed that China had already fallen behind Europe in art and science. Later on, William Alexander viewed China as inferior to Europe in his *The History of Women*.

As China was viewed as a commercial society, according to the stadial theory of Scottish thinkers, the image of Chinese women was supposed to be free and as friends and companions.

In a higher level of commercial society, they were even expected to be elegantly involved in public social activity. However, the sources they read presented a different picture of Chinese women from the Jesuit descriptions, which were generalized by Scottish thinkers as chaste and modest, yet not free. This image of Chinese women did not align with the civilization theory of women's history and its view of China. In his "Of the Rank and Condition of Women in Different Ages", John Millar only mentioned the condition of Chinese women once when he tried to introduce the women's condition in savage societies, where Chinese women were sold by their fathers and bought by their husbands. Millar gained this image of buying and selling wives from *The Memories of China*. And in his descriptions of this phenomenon, he explained it as a remnant of custom, which fit his expectation of China as a civilization where people admire traditions. While the general picture of Chinese women had not been referred to in the discussion of women in the commercial society. Lord Kames also only mentioned the phenomenon of buying wives, and unlike Millar, he understood it as a result of a hot climate.

For both Millar and Lord Kames, there seemed to be an intention to explain the phenomenon of buying wives/negative treatment of Chinese women within their view of China as a developed commercial society. In other words, for them, China might still be the civilization that was superior to Europe, despite the unexpected condition of Chinese women compared with the ideal condition of women in commercial society. The intention to search for an explanation for other civilizations they encounter indicates a space where there was a struggle over how to interpret other cultures, which led to the possibility of a counter-direction to Eurocentrism.

However, in William Alexander's work, the explanation for the negative condition of Chinese women disappeared. Alexander placed China as inferior to Europe without hesitation in his *The History of Women*. This change followed multiple layers of changes within Scotland and the communication between China and Europe, which this thesis has not discussed in depth.

One of the reasons was, as mentioned above, the change in the standard of civilization to cultural practices (such as women's conditions, and so on).

The image of Chinese women presented in the works of Scottish Enlightenment thinkers not only aligned with their view of China, but also neatly with their pre-established framework for evaluating the condition of women and men in Scotland. The Enlightenment thinkers did not hesitate to express praise for this chaste and modest image of Chinese women. Modesty and chastity as a standard to evaluate women from outside Europe were drawn from the prevailing norms of women in Scottish society. The Chinese women were also considered not free because they were restricted by their men and thus lacked the chance to cultivate their nature. China, as a commercial society, where men were supposed to be more sympathetic to their partners, yet treated their wives in a barbarian way by selling and buying their wives, restricted them to a limited space. This might have led Scottish thinkers to view the Chinese men as a group of people who lacked enough rationality to control their passions. And thus, later considered China as a civilization that lacked logic and science. In this case, the recognition of the condition of Chinese women helped them form such an idea.

In the late stage of the Scottish Enlightenment, the earlier admiration for China transformed into a more negative image as a "stagnating" civilization. This is attributed to the increasing preoccupation of Enlightenment theorists of society with the idea of progress. And some (perceived) features of the condition of women that were associated in stadial theory with the pre-commercial stages seemed to them to harmonize with this general judgment, as remnants of those earlier stages regarded as no longer existing in truly progressive nations.

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