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Constructing British Selfhood through Depictions of China: The Art of the Macartney Embassy

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Abstract: The Macartney Embassy, the first official British diplomatic mission to China, contributed to the visual record and understanding of China in Britain. The embassy artists were ambitious in their mission to deliver authentic visual knowledge of China to the British at the same time that they were subconsciously influenced by both the old chinoiserie tradition, and the nascent British Enlightenment thought process. In contrast to contemporary Britain's scientific and humanitarian advancements, the embassy's portrayal of China was pastoral, barbaric, and autocratic, allowing the British to revel in the humanism and progressivism of their own values and social system.

Keywords: the Macartney Embassy; British selfhood; Chinese images; visual knowledge

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The Macartney Embassy, the first British diplomatic mission to China, set out for China in the late eighteenth century. The embassy was ostensibly intended to congratulate the Qianlong Emperor, who hads run his reign from 1736 to 1796, on the occasion of his eighty-third birthday, but in reality, it utilized the occasion to negotiate improved trade and diplomatic arrangements between China and Britain. It was a huge undertaking, consisting of a core team of ninety-five members and a backup support team of six hundred. The embassy reached Beijing on 21 August 1793, with a reception held at the Chengde Mountain Resort in Rehe on September 14. Regrettably, however, the Qianlong Emperor rejected all of the British government's proposals.

The Macartney Embassy has been the subject of numerous scholarly studies. The publication in 1989 of Alain Peyrefitte's book *L'Empire immobile ou le choc des mondes* drew on Chinese historical archives and was one of the first scholarly explorations of the Macartney Embassy, but it fell short due to its Eurocentric approach (Peyrefitte 1989). The 1993 Chengde Conference on the Bicentenary of Sino–British Relations, 1793–1993, was a watershed moment in the discussion of the Macartney Embassy, indicating a shift in the perspective of scholarly work and the utilization of postcolonial theories. Both William Rowe and Zhao Shiyu criticized Peyrefitte's notion of China as an immobile empire that served to justify the Qing government's behavior during its meeting with the embassy (Rowe 1993, pp. 46–52; Zhao 1998). The publication in 1995 of James Hevia's book *Cherishing Men from Afar* reexamined the Macartney event through a postmodernist lens influenced by Paul A. Cohen's concept of "China-centered history" (Cohen 1984). Hevia pointed out that the international relations based on international law that exist today are the product of European global expansion beginning in the sixteenth century and have developed into a "naturalized hegemonic discourse"(Hevia 1995).

The late twentieth century witnessed a movement toward postmodernism and, along with it, a gradual move away from the Eurocentric in historical studies, with China's own history and ideas receiving increased attention. This is connected not only to China's improved economic status following reform and opening but also to the rapid development of postcolonial theories during this period. Key postcolonial scholars such *as* Franz Fanon, Edward Said, and Homi Bhabha demonstrate a wide variety of responses to this turn (Fanon 1952; Said 1978; Bhabha 1994).

In the twenty-first century, postmodern ideas continue to inform the study of the Macartney Embassy. Revisionist historian Henrietta Harrison, for example, vigorously questioned the conventional historical narrative of the embassy, addressing questions regarding the formation of the image of the "ignorant Qing (Harrison 2017)". Meanwhile, an increasing number of scholars have begun to expand the traditional historical narrative with interdisciplinary inquiry. Ming Wilson and Harrison, for example, focused on the embassy's preparation of gifts (Wilson 2017; Harrison 2018). Harrison and Wang Hongzhi examined the issue of the interpreters (Harrison 2021; Wang 2023), while Huang Yi-nong examined party members' editions of travel journals (Huang 2003).

From the 19th century onwards, British scholars claimed that Macartney's mission to China was intended as an invitation by Britain to the Qing court to establish modern diplomatic relations but that the Qing government's refusal to do so left Britain with no choice but to start a war. This historical narrative clearly justifies violence and imperialism and even describes it as a kind act of goodwill to enlighten the Chinese. In the 19th century, Darwin's "theory of evolution" led directly to the prevalence of the value of "natural selection". The new theory of evolution in the 19th century led directly to the prevalence of social Darwinism. This led to the collapse of Enlightenment thinking, which preached equality and provided the ideology for European hegemony in the 19th century.

In modern times, the Chinese, eager to find reasons and solutions for their country's poverty and weakness, easily accepted the historical narrative of the European hegemonic idea, believing that the main reason for China's lagging behind the West in modern times was the ignorance and arrogance of the Qing court which made China miss the opportunity to communicate and co-operate with the advanced Western civilizations in the event of the Macartney Embassy. This self-attribution was not only due to the Western judgment of China's backwardness and closedness in the 20th century, but it was also influenced by the Chinese people's judgment of themselves in the process. The May Fourth Movement and the New Culture Movement in the early 20th century opposed Confucianism, criticized feudalistic principles, and introduced Western concepts of democracy and science. In the second half of the century, the achievements of the "Reform and Open" policy prompted the Chinese to recognize the importance of openness and exchange. In discussing the Macartney mission in 1993, Dai Yi argued: "The Qing government still stubbornly refuses to take the initiative to enter the trend of world history . . .. . This shows that there is a great gulf between China's feudal political and cultural systems and conceptual formations, which were formed in a state of prolonged isolation, and the rest of the world. For China to enter the world and carry out normal exchanges with other countries, it needed to go through a long and difficult process of adaptation (Yi 1993)". Contemporary ideology would be implemented with huge inertia, and its use is often projected onto historical reality. Even some scholars, such as Luo Zhitian, began to defend the Qing court's diplomatic presentation to the embassy with the postcolonial ideology and revealed that the Chinese self-reflection on the "ignorant Qing" is not based on real historical facts (Luo 2002, p. 27). However, the view of the "ignorant Qing" is still widespread in Chinese popular culture today.

The expedition resulted in a wealth of visual documentation regarding Macartney's travel to China. Peyrefitte amassed and published a sizable collection of images from the mission (Peyrefitte 1990). Frances Wood and Stacey Sloboda have examined the mission draughtsman William Alexander's works and his process of creation (Wood 1998; Sloboda 2008), as have later scholars such as Lu Wenxue (Lu 2003) and Kara Lindsey Blakley (Blakley 2018). These studies emphasize the personal perspective of Alexander, either by situating his works in an artistic context and investigating their connection to chinoiserie or by viewing the works as evidence of a certain European observation of Chinese society. While studying Alexander's artwork is important, his works are not renowned for their artistic achievement; rather, their primary value is as visual manifestations of a significant historical event. Geographical variables and significant historical events serve as a backdrop for his series of works, emphasizing their documentary relevance. Rather than artistic creations,

then, the images should be regarded as visual documents of historical occurrences with a certain artistic quality.

Nevertheless, simply considering these images as evidence of European observations of Chinese society is incomplete, because the British interpretation of China necessarily involves the process of British self-definition. Some recent works by David Porter, Robert Markley, Eugenia Zuroski Jenkins, Chi-ming Yang, and Eun Kyung Min have demonstrated that early British textual and visual records of China make a concerted effort to write China into Britain's national representation (Porter 2010a, 2010b; Markley 2006; Jenkins 2013; Yang 2011; Min 2018). The development of early modern Britain must be seen against the backdrop of a tendency toward globalization. Incorporating a perspective of China into British self-awareness was one way the country could assert itself as a cosmopolitan nation. As Jenkins has suggested, the British observation of China was part of a cultural strategy to include things Chinese as fundamental elements of British culture (Jenkins 2013, p. 4). Macartney's journey occurred at the advent of the early modern period, a pivotal moment for both China and the West. China was experiencing the "Kangxi-Qinglong Great Ages", the flourishing of the last imperial dynasty, while Britain was under the influence of the Enlightenment and in the throes of a scientific revolution. Regardless of how China viewed itself at the time as a prosperous economy, the embassy painters portrayed the country as a pastoral, backward monarchy. Their images evoke complex, self-aware emotions, which include nostalgia for a picturesque, pastoral China as well as contempt for the country's outmoded manufacturing capabilities.

The advancement of British industrial productivity and political idealism derived much of its resonance and appeal from implicit comparisons with Qing China. In Porter's words, "The spirit of historical dynamism initially came into view as a hallmark of Western modernity, after all, through an often-explicit contrast with the complacent and self-satisfied inertia attributed to the backward-looking Chinese (Porter 2010a, pp. 300–1)". Recent publications have foregrounded the importance of images of China in early modern Britain and established their relevance to a discussion of various broad issues. However, the cultural, political, and psychological meanings of the specific stylistic features of images of China produced by artists for the Macartney Embassy remain understudied. An investigation into their roles in the cultural legitimacy for which the British strived or in the political agenda for enacting and reenacting British superiority leads us to further challenge the time-honored definition of the embassy's images of China as merely chinoiserie or historical visual documents. The purpose of this article is to provide a fresh reading of the Macartney Embassy from the perspective of its image creation and demonstrate how Britain used a narrative of China to establish a definition of itself and its supremacy during a period of historical transition. The article will also evaluate the relevance of images as historical evidence and construct mutually reinforcing and complementary relationships between historical archives and visual images.

1. The Macartney Embassy's Pictorial Chronicles and the Shaping of Sino–European Perceptions

Commencing in the seventeenth century, the Jesuits, alongside intrepid voyagers, emerged as pivotal conduits in the West's assimilation of Chinese visual epistemology. Such semi-authentic depictions of China were frequently esteemed by European scholars as indispensable repositories of Sinological insights. Yet, these Chinese portrayals, encompassing both human figures and expansive landscapes, diverged markedly from European aesthetic paradigms, eluding integration into the tapestry of the European sociocultural milieu.

However, the Macartney Embassy distinguished itself as an exception to this normative pattern. Prior to its embarkation, it had already ignited fervent scholarly debates within the British intelligentsia. Upon its repatriation from China in 1794, the embassy secured unparalleled public acclaim in Britain, not merely for its diplomatic undertakings but predominantly due to the publication of myriad journals and visual artifacts by its members. Rather than mere artistic endeavors, these visual compilations proffered an

illustrative chronicle, presenting the British populace with a nuanced perspective of the "other", thereby influencing and enriching British sociocultural narratives of the epoch.

The voyage must be understood in its complex sociocultural context. During the eighteenth century, a range of European Enlightenment ideas were centered on society. With the orientation of the spirit of "objectivity", the European perception of China became more realistic, partially as a result of the availability of more authentic documentation. The European ideological transformation also affected the creation of visual images. With their desire to make paintings for the purpose of pleasure, the earlier European Rococo artists, particularly François Boucher (1703–1770), were keen to construct China as a fantasy land. However, during the period of the Macartney Embassy, Europeans were eager for images of China that were no longer simply for entertainment but were sources of more objective knowledge. Consequently, the Macartney Embassy's visit to China was also an endeavor to further the level of knowledge about China through the lens of Enlightenment principles.

Influenced by the Enlightenment, the study of natural history from the mid-eighteenth until the end of the nineteenth century developed rapidly alongside the process of colonization, expanding from a collection of ancient specimens to embracing botany, garden designs, and social customs, all of which were seen as evidence of human social development. Drawing artistically on this, sensitive images of local customs and specimens also became an important task. That is why the Macartney Embassy purposefully engaged two professional painters, Thomas Hickey (1741–1824; the official painter of the embassy) and William Alexander (1767–1816; the embassy's official draughtsman), to produce visual knowledge about China.

Hickey made a few of his works about China during the voyage itself. In contrast, Alexander completed most of his works during the voyage and earned a great reputation for his endeavors. Drawing was an integral part of a British gentleman's education during this period, so some senior officials in the embassy were able to draw. For example, Henry William Parish (1765–1800), who was a military escort in charge of the brass cannon and the artillerymen in the embassy, was specially trained by Macartney to draw plans. Parish made a survey of the Great Wall of China and drew plans for it, thereby contributing to the embassy's official mission of military intelligence-gathering—at the expense of arousing the suspicions of his Qing hosts. In addition to the plans, Parish also made a number of sketches, some of which were used by Alexander as a basis for his drawings.

In addition to Alexander, Hickey, Parish, Macartney, George Leonard Staunton (1737–1801) as Macartney's secretary and minister plenipotentiary, and Sir John Barrow (1764–1848) as Macartney's comptroller of the household, all contributed a few visual images as amateur painters. While their works are inferior in quality and quantity compared to those of the professionals, they remain an indispensable part of the embassy's corpus of images since their existence corroborates the involvement of other embassy members in image creation.

While Alexander's oeuvre may not align strictly with the conventions of scientific illustration, his meticulous methodology is evident in the plethora of on-site sketches he produced. These sketches served as foundational templates for his final artworks, establishing the embassy's contributions as some of the most authentic visual representations of China ever presented to a European audience. Barrow extolled the virtuosity of Alexander, noting, "Mr. Alexander drew beautifully and faithfully in watercolors, and omitted nothing that was Chinese, from the human face and figure, down to the humblest plant, and so true were his delineations, that nothing before or since could be compared with them (Barrow 1847, p. 49) ".

While Alexander adeptly integrated elements of traditional European chinoiserie into his compositions, discerning audiences did not view these artistic inclusions as detracting from the inherent authenticity of his creations. The credibility of Alexander's works is anchored in both his official standing and his rigorous, academic artistic training. As one of the select British artists who had firsthand experience of China and subsequently produced an extensive portfolio, he undeniably held a unique interpretative prerogative. Comple-

menting this, Parish's meticulous maps and architectural plans of Chinese edifices further bolstered the mission's visual credibility, especially given the precision and dimensional annotations inherent in these renderings.

The proliferation of the embassy's visual narratives to diverse European nations and societal echelons was significantly augmented by advancements in printing technology. William Caxton's introduction of the mechanical movable-type printing press to Britain in 1477 catalyzed a revolutionary surge in affordable mass printing and the burgeoning of newspapers in the waning years of the eighteenth century. Concurrently, the evolution of printing techniques, notably mezzotint and fly dust etching, greatly enriched the visual materials accessible to the populace. The embassy's oeuvre resonated profoundly with this burgeoning demand, aligning seamlessly with Enlightenment ideals and satiating the public's voracious appetite for visual depictions of the enigmatic Chinese realm that they were on the cusp of diplomatically engaging.

In 1797, Staunton unveiled the seminal official chronicles of the Macartney Embassy to China, titled *An Authentic Account of an Embassy from the King of Great Britain to the Emperor of China*. Entrusted to W. Bulmer and Co. by the astute bookseller George Nicol (circa 1740–1828), this magnum opus spanned two comprehensive volumes replete with intricate engravings, supplemented by an accompanying folio of plates. Remarkably, within a mere two years post the release of the English edition, translations in diverse European tongues graced the literary market. It is estimated that from 1797 to 1832, a staggering 15 editions of this account were disseminated across seven European nations and even reached American shores (Lust 1987, p. 131). In a strategic response to audience demand and the burgeoning market for affordable literature, three economically priced editions of Staunton's account graced London's literary landscape in 1797. Concurrently, a selection of Alexander's illustrious illustrations found their esteemed place within King George III's personal assemblage, which now resides in the British Library. It becomes palpably evident that the embassy's visual oeuvre reached both the regal echelons and the broader populace, spanning not only Britain but also the wider European continent. These cost-effective renditions even addressed the requisites of socio-economically marginalized segments. As this invaluable information permeated across diverse regional and social strata, it fostered a collective consensus. Consequently, the images metamorphosed from mere personal artistic expressions of embassy members to canonical repositories of Sinological understanding in European intellectual circles.

2. The Role of a Pastoral China in British Self-Awareness

At the time of the Macartney Embassy's visit to China, Britain was undergoing a technological revolution, which was the prelude to the Industrial Revolution. The nation's population was increasingly moving to the large cities that were centers of industrial manufacture. This rapid industrialization and urbanization reawakened a yearning for the pastoral and evoked nostalgia for a simple, preindustrial lifestyle, which is a sentiment that was represented in both the content and the aesthetics of the embassy's pictures. In the eighteenth century, China was appreciated as an advanced agricultural country by some influential European scholars, especially François Quesnay (1694–1774), whose idea of "physiocracy" promoted the belief that agricultural work contributes the most value to society's products and a nation's riches (Quesnay 1946, pp. 139–305). The embassy's pictures, while based on real experience, verified and enhanced this stereotype. Under the influence of nostalgia for a pastoral life, China depicted in the embassy's pictures was a "poetic pastoral geography". The idea of describing China as a "pastoral state", on the one hand, was formed by the Western observation of Chinese emphasis on agricultural production. On the other hand, the French physiocratic scholars' advocation of the Chinese agricultural economic model also reinforced the link between China and the "pastoral state" in European notion. For instance, Anne-Robert-Jacques Turgot (1727–1781), the physiocratic economist, the Intendant of the généralité of Limoges from 1761 to 1774 and later the Controller-General of Finances, has sought authentic knowledge and information onthe

foundations and workings of Chinese economy. He posed a series of queries regarding the Chinese government's identification of agriculture as the primary source of wealth to two Chinese young people in Europe (J. Finlay 2020, pp. 15–16). in accordance with Britain's aesthetic expectations. Embassy members exhibited a pronounced interest in Chinese irrigation technologies tailored for agricultural landscapes. Alexander, with his astute artistic eye, crafted a compelling series centered on water-wheel mechanisms, and the British Library collected five of them: "Water-wheel" (WD959 f.23120; there are relevant descriptions on the back of the paper), "Chain pump used in China" (WD 959 f.23 121), "Description of a pump" (WD 959 f.23 122), "Chinese working the Chain Pump" (WD 959 f.23 123; this was later used as the 44th illustration in *An Authentic Account of an Embassy from the King of Great Britain to the Emperor of China*, Figure 1) and "A Wheel for raising water" (1865,0520.268). Alexander also represented the visual image of the plow (Maps 8 TAB.c.8.37, Figure 2) and rake (WD 961 f.68v 207, Figure 3). Notably, while these illustrations celebrated the agrarian facets of Chinese life, the manuscripts of embassy members offer scant insights into China's industrial endeavors, signaling a contrast in their observational focus.

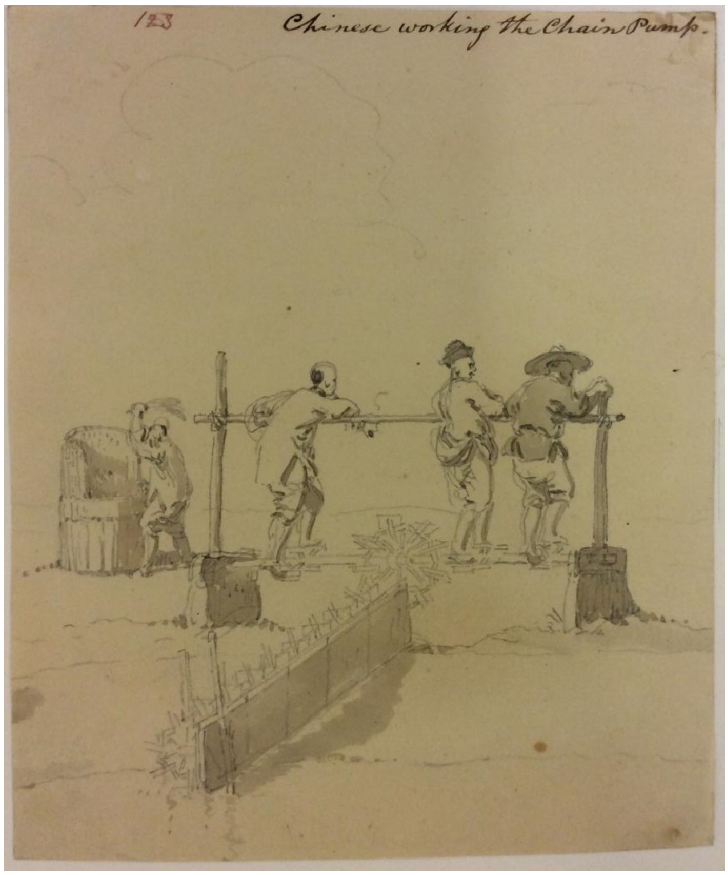

Figure 1. William Alexander, "*Chinese working the Chain Pump*", 1792–1794, pencil and ink on paper, The British Library (WD 959 f.23 123).

The emphasis on China as an agricultural society was also confirmed by the embassy members' written records. Macartney repeatedly expressed his admiration for Chinese agriculture in his private journal. For example, on 21 November 1793, he wrote: "I did not see a spot in the whole way that was not cultivated with infinite industry and compelled to produce every grain and vegetable of which it was capable. The soil is naturally indifferent, which renders the farmer wonderfully active in his endeavors to fertilize it" (Cranmer-Byng 1962, p. 186). Only four days later, he wrote again: "The Chinese are certainly the best husbandmen in the world" (Cranmer-Byng 1962, p. 188).

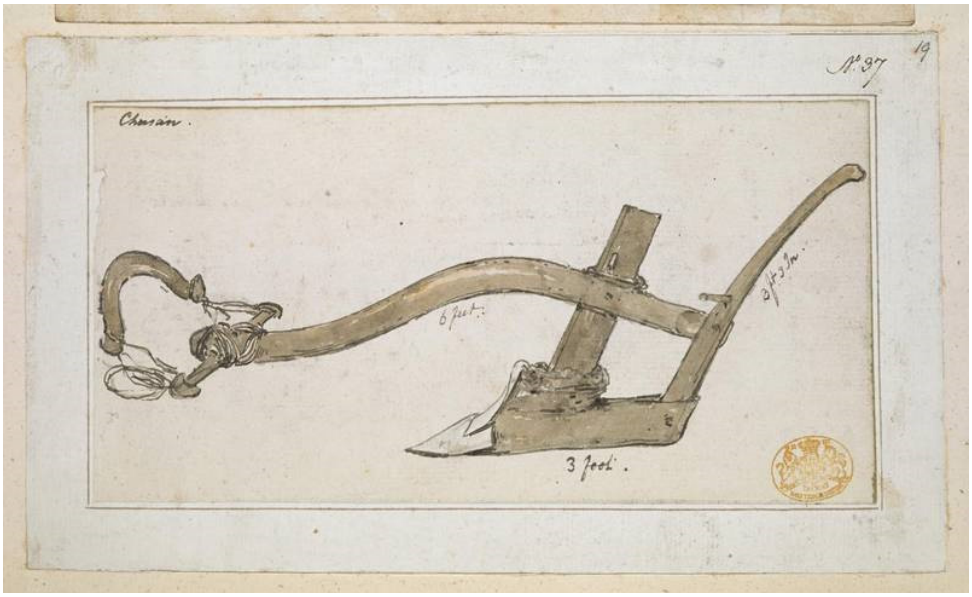

Figure 2. William Alexander, "*Plough*", 1792–1794, pencil and ink on paper, The British Library (Maps 8 TAB.c.8.37).

Figure 3. William Alexander, "*Rake*", 1792–1794, pencil and ink on paper, The British Library (WD 961 f.68v 207).

For centuries, the image of a pastoral China has spread throughout Europe and was gradually assimilated into the material and spiritual lives of British citizens. At first, Chinese visual imagery flowed into Europe via the exportation of porcelain. From the beginning of the seventeenth century to the end of the eighteenth century, the VOC imported at least 43 million pieces of porcelain to Europe (R. Finlay 2010, p. 258). Besides huge amounts of porcelain, Europe also imported from China watercolor paintings, furniture, lacquer, folding fans, and other products, which usually shared the same decorative patterns. A frequent visual theme in these works was the Chinese enjoyment of exquisite gardens or peaceful natural landscapes, which corresponded to the European longing for Arcadia, a fantasy of pastoralism and harmony with nature, and which gradually shaped the vision of a pastoral China. Visual features such as rockery, pagodas, pavilions, willow

trees, and junk later became classic icons of chinoiserie. Some scholars hold that exported paintings were greatly influenced by porcelain, and were even independent from exported porcelain patterns (Hu 1998, p. 82). These Chinese images of exported manufactured goods served as primary sources for European artists to mimic and from which to develop new images of China in paintings, furniture design, room decoration, and gardening, all linked to the idea of pastoral pleasure.

Another important artistic genre that implicated the pastoral image of China was garden design, which also deeply influenced the Macartney Embassy's artistic creations. Chinese gardens are based on the idea of obeying natural law and on asymmetrical composition. The introduction of these design ideals into Europe challenged the conventional French "formal garden", which was based on the principles of symmetry, balance, and artificial order and forced an implementation of the "picturesque garden". In 1692, Sir William Temple (1628–1699) had already compared symmetrical European garden design with the spontaneous irregularity of the Chinese example in his "Essay upon the Garden of Epicurus" (Temple et al. 1908, pp. 3–68). Later, the Scottish–Swedish architect William Chambers (1723–1796) visited China and discussed Chinese garden design in his *Dissertation on Oriental Gardening* (Chambers 1772) and his "Of the Art of Laying Out Gardens Among the Chinese" (Chambers 1757, pp. 14–19). He observed that "nature is their [Chinese gardens] pattern, and their aim is to imitate her in all her beautiful irregularities" (Chambers 1757, p. 15). Chamber's opinion not only promulgated the knowledge of Chinese gardening but also advocated the naturalized spirit of Chinese aesthetics. In the early eighteenth century, gardens that imitated those found in China appeared in Britain, the most famous of which is Kew Gardens in southwest London, where Chambers designed the Great Pagoda and the House of Confucius along with Chinese-style rockery, waterfalls, and a bridge. Kew Gardens, one of the most classical visual expressions of pastoral China in Europe, provided a model for other European countries to imitate. It is worth emphasizing that these gardens are not copies of Chinese gardens; rather, they were inspired by them. David Porter observed that "Western readers would have been fully aware of the peculiarities of the Chinese language and writing system. . .. and of course, the famously naturalistic style in landscape gardening hailed by William Temple, Joseph Addison, and William Chambers, and adapted into what the French came to call *le jardin anglo-chinois*" (Porter 2002, p. 398). The dissemination of the naturalistic Chinese garden not only enhanced the European idea of the Chinese naturalistic taste but also deemed the picturesque Anglo–Chinese garden as a typical British aesthetic contribution.

The embassy artists also depicted some Chinese gardens in their works. Alexander did not accompany those who presented gifts from the embassy to Qianlong at Jehol, yet he still made works picturing the imperial garden there based on Parish's unembellished, true-to-life sketch, which is now in the British Library (Figure 4). Alexander modified Parish's picture in his watercolor with the title *A View of the Eastern Side of the Imperial Park at Jehol*, which was published in 1804 (Figure 5)[1]. Alexander further enhanced the bucolic and halcyon theme of his image by adding and accentuating a succession of traditional Chinese visual elements: Chinese sailing boats and pagodas. All of the objects Alexander added or accentuated, such as the pagoda, the willow, and the rockery, were prominent components of chinoiserie in Europe, contributing to the aesthetic impression of a sense of harmony between humans and nature. He was recording a typical Anglo–Chinese garden more than a real Chinese imperial garden. In other words, Alexander used Parish's image as a starting point and added certain distinctive Chinese aspects to reinforce viewers' perceptions of a halcyon China inspired by the European popularization of Anglo–Chinese gardens.

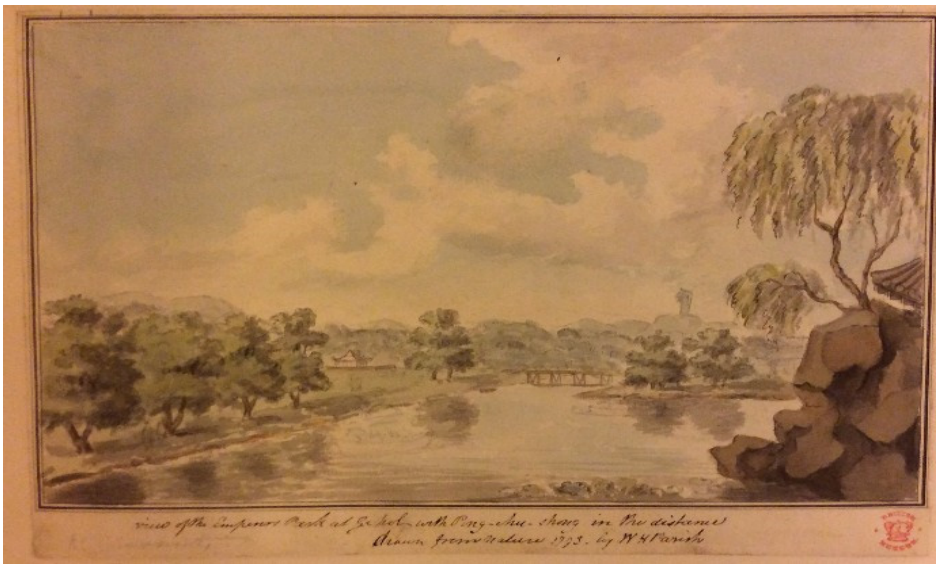

Figure 4. Henry William Parish, *View of the Emperor's Park at Jehol*, pencil and watercolor, 1793–1794, Add. 33931, fol. 9, British Library, London.

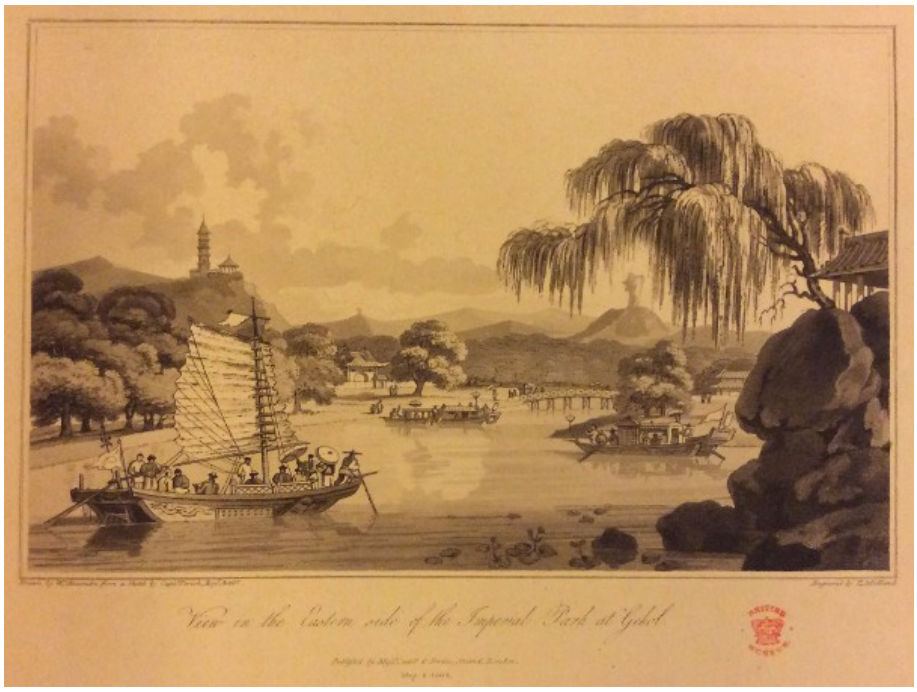

Figure 5. William Alexander, *View of the Eastern Side of the Imperial Park at Jehol*, black-and-white engraving, 1793–1794, Add. 33931, fol. 10, British Library, London.

Indeed, lacking firsthand knowledge of the imperial garden, Alexander faced a choice between remaining faithful to Parish's original composition or embellishing the picture with elements of chinoiserie recognizable to his British audience. He opted to take the latter path, constructing an image dense with traditional indicators of China for a British audience to easily comprehend. Alexander's depiction of the imperial garden, in concert with the intricate landscape motifs on Chinese vessels and the harmonious integration of gardening elements, coalesce to form an idyllic representation of naturalistic rurality and lifestyle. These compositions resonate with pastoral ideals, catering predominantly to an urban demographic. Such audiences, distanced from the verdant tranquility of the

countryside, are increasingly reliant on these artistic renderings to vicariously immerse themselves in the pastoral serenity they yearn for.

It is worth emphasizing that Alexander's visual signs in the picture are not fictitious but are based on his on-site sketches. The signs are not only classic chinoiserie motifs but also Alexander's genuine visual records of China. He did not create a new vision of China; rather, he used his own experiences in China to "validate" Europe's long-standing fantasy of a pastoral China. To a certain extent, Alexander was also a typical British viewer. In contrast to his limited exposure to actual Chinese objects and scenery, he had been accustomed to seeing examples of chinoiserie for a significantly longer period of time. The European cultural context unconsciously influenced his aesthetic decision-making as a member of the Macartney Embassy. Before he first saw Parish's sketch, he already had a concept in mind of what should appear in a royal Chinese garden. However, his failure to address the true visual experience had the unintended consequence of causing him to focus exclusively on the typical. What was considered typical of China was often the result of preconceptions, not years of on-site observation. Alexander's picture and his Chinese experience persuaded his audience that their preconceived notions of a pastoral China were real.

Besides the theme of a conventional naturalistic China, the embassy artists' landscapes also indicate a certain pastoral composition. Most of the landscapes show more interest in the cult of the picturesque, a typical aesthetic convention developed in England in the eighteenth century that aimed to represent the pastoral. A picturesque painting strikes the balance between nature and art and can be recognized by its content and composition (Archer 1969, p. 1:18).

A picturesque composition was one that followed strict rules and possessed a similar spirit and moral appeal, which (against the backdrop of urbanization and industrialization) valued ancient, ideal beauty and sublime composition as well as details. As a system of representation, the picturesque determined not only the mode of depiction but also what to depict and how to do so. A typical picturesque composition has a strict tripartite structure: a darkened foreground, a strongly lit middle ground, and an ethereal background, all of which are accompanied by an equally strict organization of color (Mason 1786, p. 9). By the last third of the eighteenth century, a taste for the picturesque was also welcomed by Enlightenment thinkers in Britain because it showed the possibility that representations of beauty and sublimity could be developed within a rational framework. Alexander's gentle, sober composition reflected the clear influence of eighteenth-century British picturesque artists such as Richard Wilson (1714–1782), Thomas Gainsborough (1727–1788), and William Gilpin (1762–1843). The history of the picturesque and its formulation help us to recognize a similar artistic convention in the embassy artists' pictures. When Alexander produced his watercolors, the landscapes that had begun as a means of topographical and natural historical record-keeping developed into a medium for expressing desirable responses to natural scenery. Theoretically, Alexander should have paid minimal attention to aesthetic taste in his capacity as a draughtsman responsible for technically recording information, but dictated by the general spirit of the picturesque, he depicted the unfamiliar foreign landscape with the British aesthetic dream of Arcadia firmly in mind.

The ruin is an eternal picturesque motif, as Gilpin argued: "Among all the objects of art, the picturesque eye is perhaps most inquisitive after the elegant relics of ancient architecture, the ruined tower, the Gothic arch, the remains of castles and abbeys. These are the richest legacies of art" (Gilpin 1792, p. 46). The British public's eagerness for picturesque landscapes inspired Alexander to represent ruins and graves repeatedly in his pictures for the embassy. In these compositions, he used the picturesque as a means of elevating desolate, natural topography to a level capable of evoking emotion.

Alexander's *View of the Tower of the Thundering Winds on the Borders of Lake SeeHoo* (Figure 6) was published as a plate in *An Authentic Account of an Embassy*. The picture is permeated with a sense of bleakness. Alexander employed a low perspective, which is "the picturesque point" of view, according to William Mason, which helps extend the

perspective farther into the distance (Mason 1775, p. 360). The composition adheres to the required picturesque tripartite structure, which Gilpin described as follows and which Alexander's image clearly illustrates: "*Background*, containing Mountains and Lakes; *Off-skip*, comprising Valleys, Woods, Rivers; *Foreground*, comprising Rocks, Cascades, Broken Ground, and Ruins" (Hussey 1967, pp. 115–16). Alexander's *Tower of the Thundering Winds* is pictured in ruin and overgrown with weeds, and the grass-covered mound in the foreground is filled with dagobas, graves, and even coffins, all of which are typical picturesque elements. Both the engraving's subject and its picturesque character point to the artist's deep understanding of nature and his imaginative vision of an antiquated, pastoral China.

Figure 6. William Alexander, *View of the Tower of the Thundering Winds on the Borders of Lake SeeHoo*, black-and-white engraving, 1797, from *An Authentic Account of an Embassy*.

The embassy artists utilized particular aesthetic conventions to compose their scenes of a pastoral, picturesque China, the latter of which was "reinterpreted as the precious remnants of disappearing ways of life, worth hunting down and preserving…. finally transformed into subjects of aesthetic delectation in an imagery in which exotic human beings are integrated with a presumably defining and overtly limiting decor" (Nochlin 1991, pp. 50–51). These artworks reveal the expectations of Alexander's audience, who preferred ideal, rural scenes dating back to folk traditions from the Hellenistic period. A pastoral China functioned as a criticism of industrial and commercial development in modern Britain. Over the course of the eighteenth century, the pace of British life had been speeding up and leaving nature behind. As scholars argued, urbanization and industrialization were removing people from a peaceful, rural life (R. Williams 1975).

In short, pastoral China appeared unchanged from Britons' initial glimpse of it on blue-and-white porcelain. As industrialization was eroding Britain's pastoral character, the idea of an unspoiled China became a more treasured and timeless utopia. However, the embassy's representations of China are convoluted and self-contradictory. The amplification of a pastoral China reflects a highly complicated British social consciousness, implying not just British nostalgia but also Britain's proud self-awareness and its sense of superiority as a modern industrial country. With the help of the members' journals, it is easy to discover that the embassy's attitude to this pastoral China was not so positive. Macartney proudly claimed that "although so much prejudiced in favor of their own customs and fashions

they [the Chinese] could not, after some time, withstand the superiority of ours in a variety of instances" (Cranmer-Byng 1962, p. 225). His assertion was based on the comparison between British and Chinese industrial development. In a larger sense, his judgment implied that the British were proud of the so-called superiority of their modern, industrial society.

Britain in the late eighteenth century was experiencing an economic transformation and an accumulation of capital due to the Industrial Revolution, which stimulated commercial development and trade. After 1750, trade among the European nations grew to a global scale. Merchants sold Asian cotton cloth in Africa for slaves, then brought them to the West Indies to exchange for sugar, the easiest product to sell in the Americas. During this period, the capital investment rates in Britain increased from about 7 percent of the GDP in 1760 to 14 percent in 1840 (Voigtländer and Voth 2006, p. 323). Commerce became an essential core of the British economy, and Adam Smith described Britain as "a nation of shopkeepers" (Smith 1901, p. 379).

In sharp contrast, Chinese trade in the embassy's pictures was limited to images of various traveling peddlers, with no sign of permanent shops. Moreover, no images of industry could be found, either in the embassy's artworks or in its members' publications and manuscripts. The embassy constructed a pastoral China devoid of industrial or commercial development, where people lived modestly and somewhat primitively. However, Chinese paintings from the time, such as *The Qianlong Emperor's Southern Inspection Tour in 1770* by Xu Yang (Figure 7) and *Prosperous Suzhou in 1759*, are extremely vibrant depictions of bustling cities and prospering commerce. Various types of stores are frequently highlighted in these images to demonstrate the richness, convenience, and diversity of people's lives as modern consumers, displaying a well-choreographed sense of urbanization, festivity, and prosperity. Chinese painters thus celebrated instances of the nation's urban commercial prosperity, while the embassy painters constructed China as a pastoral land with primitive modes of commercial trade and the absence of industrial production (Min 2018, pp. 15–46).

Smith identified four stages in his theory of economic progress: hunting; shepherding and pastoral life; self-sufficient agriculture; and "civilized" commerce and manufacture. He considered capitalist commerce the most "ideal type" (Spengler 1959). While the British valued the pastoral life, it was considered merely a symptom of maladjustment to the nation's abrupt social and industrial transformation. The trajectory of British social growth demonstrated that the whole nation reaped the benefits of commerce and the dramatic expansion in wealth. In contrast to China's agricultural economy and constrained commercial society, the embassy helped to establish Britain's image of itself as a thriving commercial economy. Pastoral and picturesque Chinese landscapes and ruins constructed by the artists of the Macartney Embassy became a source of schadenfreude—a self-satisfactory delight that comes from witnessing the failures of the other—for the British audience. These images served both as a bucolic delight and as signs of Chinese misfortune (because they did not picture the prosperity of industrialization), ultimately encouraging the British to feel better about their national identity and self-worth.

The British idea of China described above had not always been the rule. There was a long-standing convention in Enlightenment Europe of viewing China as a more modern and progressive civilization. To win the support of the Holy See and European society in general, the Jesuit missionaries who traveled to China in the late seventeenth century began presenting the country to Europe in an idealized way, as affluent and sophisticated. Their descriptions were admired by Enlightenment philosophers, who viewed "enlightened" and "rational" China as a social model while criticizing religious extremism and authoritarianism in Europe. According to David E. Mungello, through the efforts of Voltaire (François-Marie Arouet, 1694–1778) and other Enlightenment intellectuals, an interest in Chinese morality and politics supplanted an interest in language and history on the part of Europeans and began to exert a significant influence on European society (Mungello 2009, p. 127). The appreciation of the Chinese social system and Confucianism helped prevent Europeans from thinking of the Chinese as barbaric.

Figure 7. Xu Yang, detail of *The Qianlong Emperor's Southern Inspection Tour*, Scroll Six: Entering Suzhou along the Grand Canal, 1770, full scroll dimensions: 68.8 × 1994 cm, Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York.

Nonetheless, Europeans begin to regard themselves as superior to the Chinese in the mid-eighteenth century. As a result, before the Macartney Embassy in 1793, Sinophobic scholars were already popularizing the image of China as an autocratic and backward society and even classifying the Chinese as "barbarians". Montesquieu (1689–1755), for example, dismissed China as "a despotic state, whose principle is fear" (Montesquieu 1989, p. 128). He thought it lacked a code of honor that was central to a monarchy: "I do not know how one can speak of honor among peoples [Chinese] who can be made to do nothing without beatings" (Montesquieu 1989, p. 127). Neither Montesquieu's criticism of the Chinese regime nor Voltaire's enthusiasm for it can be understood as representative of a broader European perception of China. Enlightenment luminaries harnessed their portrayals of China as instrumental vehicles to promulgate their own political ideologies. Their understanding of the Chinese realm was predominantly gleaned from the writings of Jesuit missionaries and the chronicles of intrepid voyagers. While these intellectuals acknowledged the paramountcy of veracious information, their primary preoccupation lay in ascertaining whether this "authentic" portrayal of China conformed to and buttressed their theoretical constructs. The visual narratives birthed by the artists of the Macartney Embassy not only reinforced Montesquieu's conjectures but also seamlessly integrated with prevailing European stereotypes.

Yet, amidst these generalized perceptions, Sinophilia resonated profoundly within British intellectual circles. A cohort of English literati, wielding the potency of the written word, presciently predicted the Chinese emperor's rejection of the Macartney Embassy's overtures, even prior to their formal diplomatic engagement[2]. Peter Pindar predicted the following:

> Now with a mock solemnity of face,
> I see a mighty EMP'ROR gravely place
> Fools-caps on all the poor degraded men –
> And now I hear the solemn EMP'ROR say,
> ' 'Tis thus we Kings of China folly pay;
> Now, children, ye may all go home agen (Pindar 1793, p. 10).[3]

The submissive British emissaries in Pindar's poetry serve to mock the diplomatic conduct, which shows that not every Briton was optimistic about the embassy's commercial and political negotiation plan with the Qing court. Due to the enormous distance between China and England and the lack of information about China in general, the British government in the eighteenth century knew little about the Qing court's foreign policy. Hence, the Macartney mission was fraught with uncertainty. Some East India Company executives were unenthusiastic about the expedition and even fearful it would fail and jeopardize the port's trade (Hevia 1995, pp. 57–58). British elites, as the primary buyers of Chinese luxury items such as silk and porcelain, had always had lofty hopes and illusions about the potential of Sino–British trade. However, beginning in the 1790s, the economic focus of British society shifted away from far-eastern luxuries and toward a domestic economy of mass consumption (Markley 2006, p. 3). In light of this, the Macartney mission, which was searching for trade privileges, could not possibly have reflected the needs of the majority of the British populace.

Despite the oscillating European sentiments towards China, spanning from reverence to estrangement, underlying appreciation for the nation remained relatively unaltered. Several factors contributed to this nuanced dynamic. By the close of the 18th century, Europe, buoyed by technological advancements and expansive global trade, had amassed considerable wealth, imbuing its citizenry with a renewed sense of confidence. Concurrently, the Jesuit Society, long a stalwart advocate for a favorable Chinese image, faced prohibition in 1773. Furthermore, the unearthing of Pompeii reignited Europe's fascination with the classical cultures of Greece and Rome. This renewed veneration for canonical traditions inevitably precipitated a distancing from external, or 'alien', cultures.

3. The Role of a Barbarous China in British Self-Awareness

While China appears pastoral in the embassy's pictures, the term "pastoral state" in the eighteenth century was sometimes synonymous with "barbarous state"[4]. The British concept of "barbarian" originates from the ancient Greek term *barbaros*, which was used to describe those who did not follow classical Greek customs. Later, Christians adopted the term, using it to describe pagans. As a consequence of increasing contact between Europeans and people from the rest of the world during the Age of Sail, the concept of "European society" replaced that of "Christian society" (Heraclides and Dialla 2015, p. 31). While Enlightenment intellectuals in the eighteenth century referred to humanity as a whole, they regarded European civilization to be at the forefront of progress (Pagden 2013, pp. 149–292). Therefore, Europeans began to allege that the other races and countries were "barbarians"[5].

Montesquieu, Henri Jean-Jacques Rousseau (1712–1778), and Adam Ferguson (1723–1816) discussed the connotation of the word "barbarism" and diversely defined it (Winkler 2018, pp. 45–144). They agreed, however, that a "barbarous society" was one that had not yet been fully civilized and industrialized. It is worth noting that the construction of such a "barbarous" China in the pictures from the Macartney Embassy was not unintentional. Macartney noted in his published journal that "in China there is properly no hereditary nobility" (Cranmer-Byng 1962). But in his notebooks, which were more private and not published in his lifetime, he used the words "barbarian" or "barbarous" without hesitation. He noted, "We must consider them [Chinese] as barbarians notwithstanding what we supposed them to be from the accounts we had of them, and therefore, as Louis XIV said, there is no point of honor with the Turks. They are a people not to be treated with as civilized European nations"[6]. One of the main ways in which the embassy members conceived of China was as a "barbarous society", a term referring to the embassy's judgment of some special local Chinese customs. The embassy's pictures are flooded with such "barbarous" customs, including gambling on the street (Figure 8), women's foot-binding (Figure 9), and the bastinado in a public area (Figures 10 and 11).

Figure 8. William Alexander, *A Group of Peasantry, Watermen, &c. Playing with Dice*, colored engraving, 1805, from *The Costume of China*.

The idea of China as barbarous was relative, set against a more "civilized" Britain. At the time, British Enlightenment scholars believed that the advance of reason would encourage the growth of a new, ideal age for humankind, the advantages of which would not only include scientific and rational thought but also a set of humanistic values. Locke, for example, argued that all individuals are equal in the sense that they are born with certain "inalienable", natural rights. Those rights are "life, liberty, and estate", and the government, acting humanistically, is responsible for protecting them (Locke 1988, sects. 87, 123, 209, 222). This idea was a key to Enlightenment philosophy and filtered into the European consciousness, which included the minds of the embassy members. The embassy artists judged China against the backdrop of certain humanistic ideals. Meanwhile, other embassy members shared the same sentiment through literary description. Barrow frankly pointed out the bound feet of Chinese women, such as those pictured in Alexander's drawing (see Figure 9), as "unnatural and inhuman" (Barrow 1804, p. 49) and commented that the practice of foot-binding "required a voluntary relinquishment of one of the greatest pleasures and blessings of life, the faculty of locomotion" (Barrow 1804, p. 49). It is possible to understand his words in light of Locke's humanistic philosophy, for the ability to move and the enjoyment of pleasure are natural human rights that should not be denied.

Figure 9. William Alexander, *Feet of the Woman*, pencil and watercolor, 1793–1794, WD 961 fol. 67 v. 198, British Library, London.

Fundamentally, Enlightenment thinking determined much of how the European imagination conceived of modern world order, including the duality of Eastern "barbarism" and Western "civilization". The word "barbarous" was used to describe not only certain Chinese customs but also, more importantly, the ideology behind them (Cranmer-Byng 1962, p. 214). Later, in the 19th century, French missionaries arrived in China with the idea of la mission civilisatrice, or the "civilizing mission" to "improve" Chinese cultural identity to be more civilized (Clark 2019, pp. 5, 9, 19–42). As the sinologist Timothy Brook explained, the embassy turned "China into a museum of all that Europe had left behind a Pandora's box of leftover images" that helped give "the imperialist West the justification it sought to prove that it had to act in China" (Brook et al. 2008, p. 28). The embassy's adoption of Enlightenment and humanism, therefore, implied that the people represented in the pictures by the embassy artists were more backward than, and culturally inferior to, those who produced the images.

It is important to note that while the embassy was picturing China as a barbarian country, the Chinese had their own historical, political, and translational deployments of the concept of "barbarian". The Qing emperors viewed China as the world's focal point of its position of dominance under the "tribute system", which served as the country's primary diplomatic logic until the nineteenth century. In the poem Qianlong composed to commemorate the Macartney Embassy's visit, he used the word *yuanyi* to refer to the British (Manzhouguo guowuyuan 1964, p. 11). Although *yuanyi* literally translates as "barbarians from afar", Harrison pointed out that both Li Zibiao, the embassy's interpreter, and Thomas Staunton (1781–1859), the son of George Staunton who accompanied the

embassy to China, understood *yi* to mean foreigners, but pro-war British writers in the 1830s insisted on translating it as "barbarian", a phrase that was widely adopted by British members of Parliament (Harrison 2021, p. 21).

Figure 10. William Alexander, *The Punishment of the Bastinado*, colored engraving, 1805, from The Costume of China.

The perceptional chasm, wherein both China and Britain regarded the other as uncultivated barbarians, can be attributed to divergent evaluative standards. During this era, Britain's appraisal of China was heavily influenced by Enlightenment tenets. Conversely, the Chinese assessed foreign civilizations based on their proficiency in the Chinese language, adherence to local etiquette, and familiarity with indigenous culture. This incongruity in benchmarks led each nation to perceive the other as "barbaric". This dissonance is less a contestation between the "barbaric" and the "civilized", but rather a cultural divergence stemming from two distinct national paradigms.

From an embassy member's point of view, the autocratic regime and the huge gap between social classes were two of the most visible characteristics of Qing society. The Qing court was a typical autocratic government, as Macartney noted: "As in China the interests of the emperor are always the first consideration; no property can be secured against his claims" (Cranmer-Byng 1962, pp. 241–42). Various Chinese punishments that appear in the pictures made by the embassy's artists are indicative of the Qing court's brutal reign and the stark inequality between social classes. A case in point is Alexander's *The Punishment of the Bastinado* (see Figure 10). The picture includes individuals of four classes: an official, a messenger, several ordinary people, and a culprit; their class status and their relationship to one another are expressed through their positions, their posture, and even their height. According to the official's order, the messenger, his cane raised above his

head, is about to strike the feet of the culprit on the ground while the people crowd around to watch. Alexander expanded and embellished this scene in another circumstantiated, nearly cinematic print entitled *View of a Pai-Loo, Improperly Called a Triumphal Arch, and of a Chinese Fortress* (Figure 11). Here, the punishment of the bastinado takes place in front of a memorial arch, a type of architecture that would have been familiar to members of the embassy. Alexander understood, as his extensive caption to the image makes clear, that "these monuments are erected for the purpose of transmitting the meritorious actions of good men to posterity"[7]. The memorial arch was an emblem of the Confucian moral code. The representation of both the punishment and reward-oriented architecture in Alexander's composition can be understood as a metaphor for the Qing court's "the carrot and the stick" policy: people's virtuous deeds would be inscribed on the arch and be proclaimed, while vice would be punished[8].

Figure 11. William Alexander, *View of a Pai-Loo, Improperly Called a Triumphal Arch, and of a Chinese Fortress*, black-and-white engraving, 1797, from An Authentic Account of an Embassy.

Among the various Chinese punishments, the bastinado was not the cruelest, but its manifestation implied certain degrading traits[9]. Ancient forms of European punishment and incarceration were rather severe, but the embassy's pictures of China were made in the spiritual and intellectual climate of the Enlightenment when torture and corporal punishment were seen as symbols of an inhuman and reactionary regime. A sense of the importance of sympathy in defining the nature of human beings and their social relations was growing. Smith had argued for the universality of sympathetic identification and connected it to judicial execution (Smith 2011, pp. 4–21). Visual displays of punishment had a stronger impact than verbal displays and elicited great sympathy in the collective minds of viewers. Sympathy as a fundamental human quality is closely linked to theories about the formation of global conceptions such as "Western civilization" or "political economy" (Hayot 2009, p. 91).

Britain experienced the Glorious Revolution in 1688 and established a constitutional monarchy to limit the king's rights. The theory of human rights, on which Montesquieu based his assertion of China as "a despotic state", was developed by Enlightenment scholars in the eighteenth century. In this context, Barrow was an exponent of the idea that a repressive government had crushed the individuality of the Chinese. He claimed they had been cowed due to "the habits in which they have been trained, and to the heavy hand of power, perpetually hanging over them" (Barrow 1804, p. 176).

4. Conclusions

The early missionaries' idealistic portrayals of China profoundly shaped European perceptions, precipitating considerable disillusionment when the observations of the Macartney Embassy diverged starkly from these accounts. The embassy's narratives underscored the perceived despotism of the Qing court, rendering a somewhat primitive and outdated tableau of Chinese society. This less-than-flattering depiction can be interpreted as a psychological recourse for the mission's inability to realize its diplomatic aspirations, an affirmation of British imperialistic fantasies, and a recalibration of the rosier representations offered by preceding missionaries.

Eric Hobsbawm's conceptualization of the "long 19th century" (Hobsbawm 1989, 1995, 1996) drew inspiration from Fernand Braudel's delineation of the "long 16th century" (Braudel 1972). Within the 16th-century framework, where societal structures revolved around natural order, the rudiments of the modern world's system took shape. The paramount challenge of this era was the preservation of social equilibrium, with commerce acting as the primary catalyst for mollifying conflict, as exemplified by the economic theories of the physiocrats and Adam Smith. However, traditional ethical mores were supplanted during the "long 19th century". The European dominance of the 19th century, alongside the waning influence of Enlightenment rationality, bore the imprints of the nascent "survival of the fittest" ideology. Although the embassy's narratives were anchored in Enlightenment rationality, their disdain for Chinese traditions and their implicit confidence in British superiority, as evidenced in their artistic endeavors, hinted at the gradual erosion of age-old moral standards, gravitating towards a burgeoning European hegemony.

The most resonant sentiment the Embassy disseminated amongst British echelons was a pronounced skepticism towards China. While the embassy's outputs were not the genesis of Europe's waning admiration for China, they signaled a pivotal shift. As Professor René Etiemble posits, Gallic veneration for China saw a downturn in the late 18th century (Pu 2008, pp. 250–60, 282–90). Broadly, the allure of chinoiserie began to wane post-1760, notwithstanding the enduring enthusiasm of the physiocrats. By 1715, Daniel Defoe had already offered a dismissive portrayal of the Chinese in his seminal work, *The Life and Strange Surprising Adventures of Robinson Crusoe of York*. George Anson's 1748 publication, *A Voyage Round the World*, also laid bare the perceived military vulnerabilities of China, engendering a pivot from admiration to derision. Yet, these accounts, steeped in adventurous narratives, lacked empirical validation. The Macartney mission, armed with official credentials, sought firsthand verification of these assertions. Through their visual and textual chronicles, they sculpted an image of China as both regressive and uncivilized, intensifying pre-existing European prejudices.

In phenomenology, "other" is identified as a cumulative factor in the construction of the self-image. At its most basic, the "other" is an indispensable reference and response in the construction of self-awareness. The concept of "otherness" in the structure of postcolonialism sees the world "as divided into mutually excluding opposites: if the Self is ordered, rational, masculine, good, then the Other is chaotic, irrational, feminine, and evil" (Nijhar 2015, p. 157). This construction of the "other" is a process of demonization, which in itself expresses the "ambivalence at the very heart of authority" (Ashcroft et al. 2002, p. 102). More than previous narratives about China's connection with Europe, which are based on the Orientalist paradigm of "self" and "other", this article demonstrates how modern British self-awareness first developed through methods of identification with, rather than opposition to, pastoral and picturesque China. By the early nineteenth century, British self-awareness could not be conceived without the concomitant concepts of the Chinese, among other countries (such as India). In other words, otherization and self-awareness were, and are, two parts of a monolithic construction.

The initial stage of globalization began in the eighteenth century when British minds were actively compiling new information about distant civilizations and reconsidering their knowledge of the world. Britain had to reposition itself in a new global context rather than remain inside the confines of the established European system. With the growth of

colonization and overseas trades in the eighteenth century, Britain was improving itself by importing foreign goods and expertise and constructing its own cosmopolitan system for assessing them. Information about the Chinese was privileged in this system, as China represented a remote yet affluent nation.

In this British cosmopolitan system, China served as an existing antipode, a site of supposed difference, shining a light on the achievements and problems of British development and finally helping the British to establish a sense of national identity. Due to the long-standing relationship between Britain and India, India was capable of shouldering this role as well; nevertheless, China was a far more qualified candidate. Contact between Britain and India began as early as 1600. By and large, India showed minimal antagonism toward outsiders, eventually becoming the most important British colony in 1858. By contrast, China maintained a far more withdrawn attitude towards Europe. The Qing court's rejection of the Macartney Embassy's requests, in particular, is an indication of China's less-welcoming attitude to commercial and political cooperation with Western countries. As a consequence, India was influenced by British culture gradually, while China showed more pronounced cultural discrepancy and independence. In Jenkins's words, "the more different China was from England, the better Chinese things signified a unique English ability to sustain universal order" (Jenkins 2013, p. 64).

The artists of the Macartney Embassy, who utilized an enlightened, scientific mindset to acquire knowledge from previously inaccessible regions of the globe, played an important role in this historical encounter: their artworks could be regarded as a type of global encyclopedia. The embassy artists' aspiration of delivering accurate visual knowledge about China to Europe was sincere. However, truthful representations were readily superseded by a fundamental and subconscious urge to construct an image of China that was beneficial for Europeans, allowing them to more easily criticize and affirm themselves. The embassy's visit to China was motivated by a variety of political and commercial objectives, which influenced the perspectives from which its members observed China. The British evaluation and otherization of China enabled Britain in its effort to construct a positive self-definition and build a sense of national self-confidence. The embassy's images of China were produced through an elaborate process that vacillated between the old chinoiserie tradition and a new, authentic visual knowledge of the country, resulting in a seemingly complicated paradox: on the one hand, the embassy admitted China as a pastoral Arcadia, while on the other, it delivered the notion of China as backward and barbarian. In fact, this seemingly paradoxical representation was a form of self-affirmation through schadenfreude—the British taking delight in China's backwardness while remaining complacent about their own growth. It is but one example of the way in which European intellectuals in the eighteenth century widely employed China as a tool to arrive at a self-conscious appraisal of their own culture (Min 2018, p. 12).

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Notes

1 Stacey Sloboda also mentioned Alexander's adaption of Parish's original work (Sloboda 2008).

2 There are many satirical works on this mission. For a detailed list, see (L. Williams 2013, p. 107).

3 (Pindar 1793, p. 10). Although mean-spirited, Pindar's statements accurately foreshadowed the mission's situation in Beijing.

4 Adam Smith, in particular, made significant contributions to the consolidation of the concept of the "barbarian" with the pastoral, and deepened the semantic definition of "barbarism". (Winkler 2018, pp. 94–103).

[5] For the concept of "barbarism" in eighteenth-century theories of culture and sociogenesis, see (Winkler 2018, pp. 45–144).

[6] Macartney, George. *George Macartney Papers,* MS Eng. misc., fol. 533: 7, Bodleian Library.

[7] Quoted from the caption accompanying William Alexander's painting *View of a Pai-Loo*.

[8] For details about the composition and the ideas behind it, see (Chen 2019, p. 430).

[9] For the idea of bastinado as a degrading punishment, see (Knight 1859, p. 985).

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