

## *Jesuit Missionaries and the Philosophers*

WHILE Mendoza was working on his great book about China, other developments were occurring in Catholic Europe which were to lead on to the first great age of European sinology. In 1540 the Society of Jesus was founded by Ignatius of Loyola (1491-1556). Part of the Catholic Reformation of the sixteenth century, the Society saw the conversion of non-Christians to Catholicism as part of its brief. Among Loyola's earliest followers was Francis Xavier (1506-52) who in 1534, even before the Jesuits' formal establishment, had pledged himself to missionary work in Loyola's service.

Xavier went to Goa in India in 1541 and to Japan in 1549. He was enthusiastic about the Japanese and their culture. Although he had heard about China as early as 1546, it was in Japan that he came to realize China's importance if he was to succeed in his aim of Christianizing Eastern Asia. He wrote of China as 'an immense empire, enjoying profound peace'. Portuguese merchants had informed him that it was 'superior to all Christian states in the practice of justice and equity'. The Chinese themselves he believed very wise. Those he had met in Japan were 'acute, and eager to learn' and 'in intellect, they are superior even to the Japanese'.<sup>1</sup> These latter held 'a very high opinion of the wisdom of the Chinese', he wrote on several occasions. 'They used to make that a principal point against us, that if things were as we preached, how was it that the Chinese knew nothing about us?'<sup>2</sup>

Xavier died in Macao while waiting for a Chinese merchant he had bribed to take him to China. He never realized his dream to go to the Chinese empire.

Xavier's policy had been that 'to win converts a missionary had to become an "integral part" of a particular civilization'.<sup>3</sup>

Such a broadminded concept was extraordinarily contentious in his day. Yet it was followed also by Alessandro Valignano, who succeeded Xavier as the head of the Jesuit missions in East Asia. Valignano was extremely impressed by the Chinese. He encouraged his followers to learn to speak Chinese. It was at his command that Matteo Ricci learned as much as possible of the language, society, politics, and culture of China from 1582 on. In 1601 Ricci reached the Chinese capital Beijing, the first European on record to do so for 80 years, and lived there until his death in 1610.

Later Jesuits built on the foundations which Ricci had laid. At the end of the Ming dynasty, the Jesuit Johann Adam Schall von Bell (1591-1666) gained the favour of the court itself through his knowledge of astronomy and the manufacture of cannon. The new Qing dynasty retained his services, appointing him head of the Department of Astronomy (*Qin tian jian*). It is true that he was disgraced at the death of the Shunzhi Emperor (reigned 1644-61), but Kangxi (reigned 1662-1722) later rehabilitated him posthumously and appointed another Jesuit, the Belgian Ferdinand Verbiest, to head the Department of Astronomy.

The Manchu emperors forbade the Jesuits to involve themselves in politics and appear to have trusted them because they came from a remote civilization and were not part of the system. One scholar has called them 'unbiased sources of information' and 'impartial witnesses from outer space'.<sup>4</sup> However, it is worth remembering that only a small number operated at court and the vast majority of missionaries never went near so exalted a place.

In the seventeenth century, missionaries of other Catholic orders, especially the Dominicans and Franciscans, began working in China. All orders became embroiled in a sharp controversy of the 'rites'. The Jesuits believed that ceremonies in honour of Confucius and one's ancestors were compatible with Christianity under certain circumstances, while the Dominicans and Franciscans adopted the alternative attitude. The matter was taken to Rome and involved several popes.

In 1715 Pope Clement XI condemned the tolerant missionary practices of the Jesuits, insisting on European forms of Christian practice in China and forbidding the use of Chinese rites. In 1742, Pope Benedict XIV not only reaffirmed the ban, but



even prohibited further debate on the matter. After Kangxi's death the decline of Jesuit influence gathered momentum. Most were expelled from China; the final blow came when, in 1774, news of the decree dissolving the Society of Jesus reached Beijing. Writing in an inscription for the Jesuit cemetery at the time, the most famous of the last generation of Jesuits in China, Joseph-Marie Amiot (1718-93), recognized that this event marked the effective end of the Society's influence at both the Chinese court and in the country as a whole. By the end of the eighteenth century there were only about thirty European missionaries left in the whole of China.

The policy of 'integration' which Xavier had originated was thus a permanent one for the Jesuits in China. It meant that, in order to convert the Chinese to Catholicism, the Jesuits must learn as much as they could about the land and its people. Certainly they must speak the language. Ricci had aimed at the top, in other words he began by trying to convert the mandarin and made a practice of adopting their dress. This approach was in sharp contrast with the Dominicans, whose policy was to try and convert the ordinary people first, the ruling groups later. Adam Schall, Verbiest, and other Jesuits worked at the court itself. Otto van der Sprenkel sums up the results of Jesuit policy thus:

The fact that so many of the missionaries, from Ricci at the beginning to Amiot at the end, were as indefatigable in scholarship as they were devoted in religion, ensured that while they failed in their mission to interpret Christianity to the Chinese, they were brilliantly successful in interpreting China to the West. In letters, pamphlets, and folios, in travel notes, translations, and learned monographs, they sent back a flood of information to Europe on every aspect of China's past history and present condition.<sup>5</sup>

These voluminous writings include two particularly famous series. The first and more important is the *Lettres édifiantes et curieuses*,<sup>6</sup> which began publication in 1703 and continued until 1776, about one-third dealing with China. The other is the *Mémoires concernant... des chinois*,<sup>7</sup> which ran for seventeen volumes from 1776 to 1814.

The Dominicans took a very different, and much more negative, view of China and its society than did the Jesuits. The net political result of the Rites Controversy was defeat

for the Jesuits. But in terms of images of China conveyed to Europe, the Jesuits were incomparably more influential during the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries than any of the rival religious orders.

### Matteo Ricci

The first of the major Jesuit works on China was, of course, that of Ricci. His diaries were taken to Rome by Father Nicholas Trigault, a fellow Jesuit, who translated them from Italian into Latin and had them published in Augsburg in 1615.<sup>8</sup> In the next decade or so the work was reprinted four times in Latin and translated into German, Spanish, French, and Italian, and excerpts were translated into English. Like Mendoza's work, Ricci's was widely read and popular. One contemporary scholar considers the diary 'is not reliable as evidence for Ricci's own view' of the Jesuit interpretation of Confucianism,<sup>9</sup> but there is no reason to doubt that it was an extremely influential source of images of China in its day.

Ricci appears to have been the first European to become fully aware of the Chinese intellectual tradition and transmit that knowledge to the West. His book describes Chinese achievements in mathematics, astronomy, and medicine, as well as the crucial role of the Confucian classics in Chinese society. He also discusses the official examinations in great detail, including their various levels, the conditions under which they were taken, and their Confucian contents. Ricci was probably the source for the knowledge, still new in Europe, that the Chinese examinations were written.<sup>10</sup>

Ricci recognized the place of rationalistic and this-worldly moral philosophy in Chinese society. He also tried to come to grips with Neo-Confucianism and he shows some understanding, albeit rudimentary, of the complicated philosophy which it entailed. The reason was not so much broadmindedness as his attempt to convert the *literati* to Christianity. He could see that it was necessary for him to gain some idea of how they thought if his efforts were to bring any success, and it was his conscious policy to interpret any ambiguities in Confucius' writings to suit Catholic Christianity.<sup>11</sup> Ricci was not impressed with China's various other religions such as the 'sect of idols'; astrologers, fortune-tellers, and such people



he regarded as 'the blind leading the blind'.<sup>12</sup> As one scholar has aptly commented: 'For tactical purposes Ricci wished an alliance with the Confucians against the Buddhists.'<sup>13</sup>

The earliest reference to Confucianism in Trigault's version of Ricci's diaries is the following passage:

The only one of the higher philosophical sciences with which the Chinese have become acquainted is that of moral philosophy, and in this they seem to have obscured matters by the introduction of error rather than enlightened them. They have no conception of the rules of logic, and consequently treat the precepts of the sciences of ethics without any regard to the intrinsic co-ordination of the various divisions of this subject. The science of ethics with them is a series of confused maxims and deductions at which they have arrived under guidance of the light of reason. The most renowned of all Chinese philosophers was named Confucius. This great and learned man was born five hundred and fifty-one years before the beginning of the Christian era, lived more than seventy years, and spurred on his people to the pursuit of virtue not less by his own example than by his writings and conferences. His self-mastery and abstemious ways of life have led his countrymen to assert that he surpassed in holiness all those who in times past, in the various parts of the world, were considered to have excelled in virtue. Indeed, if we critically examine his actions and sayings as they are recorded in history, we shall be forced to admit that he was the equal of the pagan philosophers and superior to most of them. He is held in such high esteem by the learned Chinese that they do not dare to call into question any pronouncement of his and are ready to give full recognition to an oath sworn in his name, as in that of a common master.<sup>14</sup>

The condemnatory first sentences of this passage are not from Ricci's hand at all. They are Trigault's embellishment of Ricci's observations that dialogue, not logic, is the form Chinese philosophers use to present their views.<sup>15</sup> Just as Ricci's views on Confucianism had taken on a political twist in China to favour his missionary work, they immediately began to become enmeshed in theological debate in Europe itself after his death.

Like many of his European predecessors, Ricci took a very favourable view of China's size and variety of produce. He was also struck by its prosperity: 'everything which the people need for their well-being and sustenance, whether it be for food or clothing or even delicacies and superfluities, is

abundantly produced within the border of the kingdom'.<sup>16</sup> The reasons for this prosperous life he believed to have been the fertile soil, the mild climate, and the industry of the people. As far as the first two are concerned it is necessary to note that he was referring to south China, not the north; this is clear from his reference to two or even three harvests a year.

Another point that struck Ricci very favourably was how peace-loving China appeared. He regarded it as remarkable that, though China possessed a well equipped army and navy, 'neither the King nor his people ever think of waging a war of aggression'. They are content with what they have and lack any ambition for conquest. 'In this respect they are much different from the people of Europe', Ricci observes.<sup>17</sup>

However, Ricci also dwelled on several of the most abhorrent aspects of Ming China. These include slavery, female infanticide, and the castration of 'a great number of male children' in northern China so that they can serve the emperor. Above all, he was horrified by the power of the magistrates. Although he found the penal laws of the country 'not too severe', he describes in some detail the frightful beatings which certain people suffered. He notes specifically that 'as many are illegally put to death by the magistrates as are legally executed'. Because of the magistrates' 'lust for domination', Ricci believed that 'everyone lives in continual fear of being deprived of what he has, by a false accusation'.<sup>18</sup>

Ricci's picture is thus only partly a favourable one and he pulls no punches in criticizing. It is to be noted that he lived in China when the Ming dynasty was in decline. Hardly more than a decade after Ricci's death China was in the grip of the notoriously tyrannical eunuch Wei Zhongxian (1568-1627). Not long afterwards the dynasty itself collapsed. Perhaps what is striking under these circumstances is how positive Ricci's impression was. It is by no means to cast doubt on his honesty or withhold credit for his achievement to suggest that his aim to Christianize China influenced his view of that country.

### The Jesuits after Ricci

The Jesuits were tremendously impressed by the early Manchu emperors. In the second half of the seventeenth and all the



eighteenth centuries they presented Europe with an extremely, indeed unduly, flattering picture of China.

It is worth remembering that Loyola had specifically ordered full reporting of their activities by Jesuit missionaries in the field, but had distinguished those that might be published from those which should be 'reserved for the eyes of the superiors of the Society'.<sup>19</sup> The editors omitted sections which might undercut the value of Jesuit missionary work, or show differences of opinion about China which rival orders could exploit. Since the Jesuits had chosen to work from the top down it was in their interests to show the ruling classes as effective and to get on well with them. Hence there was a tendency to downplay criticism of China in public statements.

In 1687 there appeared in Paris a book entitled *Confucius Sinarum Philosophus* (*Confucius Philosopher of the Chinese*). This was the first complete translation into a European language of any of the Confucian classics to be published in Europe, and included the *Lunyu* (*Analects*), the *Zhong yong* (*Doctrine of the Mean*), and the *Da xue* (*Great Learning*). The Jesuit translator claimed his work to be a literal rendering of the original, but in fact there is also a considerable infusion of European moral philosophy. In places 'Confucius speaks not only in the language, but also with the thoughts of the mediaeval-scholastic philosophers and theologians'.<sup>20</sup> The reason was partly due to the conviction of the Jesuits of Christian veracity. But much more noteworthy is that the translator was actually imputing to the Chinese a knowledge of truth irrespective of Christian revelations. Indeed the introduction to the translations asserts specifically that the ancient Chinese must have had knowledge of the true God and must have worshipped him.

Among the earliest Jesuit missionaries in China to publish an account of the country in his own lifetime was Louis Daniel Le Comte (1656-1729), whose *Nouveaux mémoires sur la Chine* appeared in Paris in 1696. It was immediately translated into several languages and widely read, in the context of its time certainly an image-formulating work. In fact it was somewhat too influential for the Catholic authorities of the day. Le Comte formed a very positive view of Chinese government and law. 'As if God himself had been the legislator, the form of government is hardly less perfect in its origin than it is at present after the more than 4,000 years that it has lasted.'<sup>21</sup> More dangerous

still from the point of view of certain Catholic superiors was his view of Chinese religion and morality. The Chinese may be heathens, but 'I have everywhere noticed a chosen people who adore in spirit and in truth the Lord of heaven and of earth',<sup>22</sup> by implication a direct challenge to the exclusiveness of the Judaeo-Christian divine revelation. He even thought that the Chinese worship of the true God could serve as an example for Christians. Issues of this sort had been under debate in Catholic circles for some time. In 1700, the theological faculty of the Sorbonne investigated several books including that of Le Comte and ordered them to be burned.

By far the most important of works on China in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries is Jean-Baptiste Du Halde's *The General History of China*, which, according to part of its immensely long subtitle, contains 'a geographical, historical, chronological, political, and physical description' of China, Chinese Central Asia, Korea, and Tibet. Du Halde edited Volumes IX to XXVI of the *Lettres édifiantes et curieuses* (1709-43) and they are his main source; his work is in a sense a digest of what they say. Du Halde himself was among the great sinologists never to have visited China. Du Halde's work, in four volumes, is the largest and most comprehensive single product of Jesuit scholarship on China. It is a truly spectacular accomplishment and in all senses a major landmark in the history of sinology. Among the many in Europe who referred to China and relied on Du Halde as a principal source of information were Montesquieu, Joseph de Guignes, the Encyclopedistes, Rousseau, Voltaire, Hume, and Goldsmith. It is clearly crucial as a source of Western images of China in its day.

Du Halde was immensely positive about China. He praises virtually every aspect of its people and society, and where he offers criticism it is in a defensive tone as if he regarded himself as an advocate for China. He frequently makes comparisons with Europe, mostly to show better conditions in China. Du Halde and other editors of the *Lettres* apparently made a conscious policy of selecting and publishing material favourable to China in order to refute their opponents' image of an atheistic culture.

The work is so comprehensive that it is not easy to select points needing mention. The following are illustrative only.

Du Halde believed China very well governed. He could



see the power of the mandarins, but believed it generally benign. 'They would not be able to maintain themselves in their offices', he wrote, 'if they did not gain the reputation of being the fathers of the people, and seem to have no other desire than to procure their happiness'.<sup>23</sup>

China is extremely prosperous, says Du Halde. It is 'one of the most fruitful countries in the world, as well as the largest and most beautiful'. He ascribes this 'plenty' to the industry of the people and to the large number of lakes, rivers, and canals.<sup>24</sup>

Du Halde's view of the Chinese people was favourable. They 'are mild and peaceable in the commerce of life', although they can be 'violent and vindictive to excess when they are offended'.<sup>25</sup> He found their modesty 'surprising' in that 'the learned are very sedate, and do not make use of the least gesture but what is conformable to the rules of decency'. As for the women, decency 'seems to be born' with them, as shown by the fact that 'they live in a constant retirement' and 'are decently covered even to their very hands'.<sup>26</sup> Du Halde seems to have been impressed by the demeanour and social position of women. He is not shocked even by foot-binding. 'Among the charms of the sex the smallness of their feet is not the least', he writes.

When a female infant comes into the world, the nurses are very careful to bind their feet very close for fear they should grow too large. The Chinese ladies are subject all their lives to this constraint, which they were accustomed to in their infancy, and their gait is slow, unsteady and disagreeable to foreigners. Yet such is the force of custom, that they not only undergo this inconvenience readily, but they increase it, and endeavour to make their feet as little as possible, thinking it an extraordinary charm, and always affecting to show them as they walk.<sup>27</sup>

Clearly Du Halde was aware of some shortcomings in Chinese society. Despite the 'plenty' to which he draws attention, he knew there was also great poverty. He was perceptive enough to attribute this partly to overpopulation. 'Yet it must be owned that, however temperate and industrious these people are, the great number of inhabitants occasions a great deal of misery', he writes. Some people expose their children to die because they cannot afford an upbringing.<sup>28</sup>

Finally we may note Du Halde's rather positive view even

of the Chinese law system of his day. The 'prisons are neither so dreadful nor so loathsome as the prisons of Europe, but are much more convenient and spacious, and are built in the same manner almost throughout the empire'.<sup>29</sup> The generally favourable judgement, even in comparison with Europe, is quite characteristic of Du Halde's work. Although he was aware of the use of torture he goes some way towards excusing it by stating that 'the Chinese have remedies to diminish, and even to destroy the sense of pain, and after the torture they have others to make use of to heal the criminal'.<sup>30</sup> He appears to have believed that punishments meted out were usually well deserved.

The Jesuit writings on China, at the pinnacle of which Du Halde's work stands, were much read and produced a big impact on Europe. The Society's scholars were, in a real sense, the fathers of Western sinology, and the earliest secular writers on Chinese history, to be discussed in a separate chapter, owe their learning to the Jesuit efforts. The net result was that eighteenth-century Europe knew quite a lot about China.

### The Philosophers

Many philosophers of the day admired the Confucian rationalism which contrasted very strongly, they believed, with the religious conflict so prevalent in Europe. In Germany, the Lutheran logician and mathematician Gottfried Wilhelm Leibniz (1646-1716) was appalled at the immorality of his own time and country and argued that China ought 'to send missionaries to us to teach us the purpose and use of natural theology, in the same way as we send missionaries to them to instruct them in revealed theology'. He believed China and Europe, at the opposite ends of the vast Eurasian continent, to be the greatest of the world's civilizations.<sup>31</sup> Leibniz worked much of his life for cultural interchange between China and Europe, and his efforts bore some fruit.

Among the thinkers of the French Enlightenment, the most influential of those positive about China was Voltaire (1694-1778). Highly laudatory about Chinese government, he departed from a view widely held in his time that China was an 'enlightened despotism' and denied that it was a despotism at all. Such a view he believed to be false and based on the



purely external factor that people often had to prostrate themselves before superiors. Voltaire's contrary opinion was that China's governance was based on morals and law, and the respect of children for their fathers. The educated mandarins were the fathers of the cities and provinces, and the king that of the empire.<sup>32</sup>

One of the points which struck Voltaire most positively about China was the secular nature of Confucianism. The religion of the emperors and the tribunals he claims 'has never been troubled by priestly quarrels'. He praised Confucius for claiming to be not a prophet but simply a wise magistrate who taught old laws. This was a doctrine of virtue, which preached no mysteries and taught that mankind was naturally good. At the same time, Voltaire rejected utterly the charge that the Chinese were atheists, although he did see their religion as primarily concerned with the present world, not that which follows death, and appears to have regarded their approach as a point in their favour.<sup>33</sup>

Voltaire was much impressed by China's large population, which he estimated at some 150 million and much more than all of Europe, where he believed there were some 100 million people. He comments on the large cities and the considerable prosperity of the country as well as the range of foods and fruits available there. He was aware that the Chinese had known about printing long before Europe.<sup>34</sup>

Almost exactly contemporary with Voltaire was François Quesnay (1694–1774), the leader of the first systematic school of political economy, known as the Physiocrats. Quesnay's *Le despotisme de la Chine (Despotism in China)* was published in Paris in 1767. It is enthusiastic about China, even though, as its title shows, its author sees that country's government as despotic. Quesnay regarded China's despotism as benign, in contrast to that of his own country.

The Emperor of China is a despot, but in what sense is that term applied? It seems to me that, generally, we in Europe have an unfavourable opinion of the government of that empire; but I have concluded from the reports about China that the Chinese constitution is founded upon wise and irrevocable laws which the emperor enforces and which he carefully observes himself.<sup>35</sup>

Quesnay considered agriculture as by far the most economically productive activity and China was his model. Here

was a rich and prosperous nation with fertile soil and a multiplicity of rivers, lakes, and well maintained canals, where peasants were free and ran no risk of 'being despoiled by arbitrary impositions, nor by exactions of tax collectors'.<sup>36</sup> Yet Quesnay did recognize much poverty in China. Like Du Halde he attributed this largely to overpopulation: 'in spite of . . . the abundance that reigns, there are few countries that have so much poverty among the humble classes. However great that empire may be, it is too crowded for the multitude that inhabit it.'<sup>37</sup>

Though China was much less focal for the great Scottish political economist and philosopher Adam Smith (1723–90) than for Voltaire or Quesnay, he does merit mention here because of the enormous influence of his work *The Wealth of Nations* in the history of political economy.

For Smith, China had for a long time been 'one of the richest, that is, one of the most fertile, best cultivated, most industrious, and most populous countries in the world'.<sup>38</sup> Smith to some extent shared Quesnay's enthusiasm for Chinese agriculture but in contrast saw the large population as a positive factor. He praises China for not going backwards and its 'lowest class of labourers' for making shift 'to continue their race so far as to keep up their usual numbers'. Still, Smith was keenly aware of the 'poverty of the lower ranks of people in China' which, he claims, 'far surpasses that of the most beggarly nations in Europe'. So bad is this poverty that in the great towns several children 'are every night exposed in the street, or drowned like puppies in the water'.<sup>39</sup>

The other point to strike Adam Smith most strongly is the extent of domestic, but lack of foreign, trade. Because of its agricultural wealth, its enormous extent, its large population, the variety of its climate, 'and consequently of productions in its different provinces, and the easy communications by means of water-carriage between the greater part of them', the domestic market is perhaps 'not much inferior to the market of all the different countries of Europe put together'. But Smith regarded the resultant lack of foreign trade as a serious drawback for the Chinese political economy. Foreign trade would open the possibility of learning about the machines and industry of other parts of the world, and 'could scarce fail to increase very much the manufactures of China, and to improve very



## Conclusion

Montesquieu leads on to a very much bleaker picture of China in the imperialist nineteenth century. Yet despite the existence of men such as he, it is almost certainly fair to see European images of China from about the middle of the seventeenth to the middle of the eighteenth century as more positive than at any other time before or since.

This was the period of the passion for *chinoiserie* in artistic tastes, which extended from products of craftsmanship and architecture to literature and the theatre. The most famous example of the last was Voltaire's *Orphélin de la Chine*. First produced in 1755, it was based on a translation by the Jesuit J. Prémare of the Chinese drama *Zhaoshi guer* (*Orphan of the Zhao Family*), which was included in Volume III of Du Halde's great work. There were some strange political consequences of the sinomania. In 1764 Mirabeau's *Philosophie rurale* bore as its frontispiece a picture of the Chinese emperor ploughing a small plot of ground to set a good example to his subjects. In 1768 the French dauphin and in 1769 the Emperor Joseph of Austria copied him.

It is of course true that the first half of the Qing was a relatively stable and prosperous period of China's history. Yet the images which the West came to accept were somewhat more flattering to China than the realities could warrant. The transmission of these images to Europe was primarily the work of the Jesuits. It is ironical that they should have been so successful in such a task, when what they were really trying to do was convert the Chinese educated classes to Christianity.

The political and ideological dimensions of these images remain significant, despite the sincerity and pioneering work of these thinkers and sinologists. Du Halde and others had political and theological points to score through presenting Chinese society in a favourable light. For Voltaire, a splendid China was at the heart of a new and original view of civilization and its history. For several major philosophers China was a model constructed to criticize their own society. Both the Jesuits and the philosophers were like the great majority of people in all ages. What mattered most to them was not so much the foreign culture — in this case China — as home.

Meanwhile the main European centres of interest in China

much the productive powers of its manufacturing industry'.<sup>40</sup>

Despite trenchant and perceptive criticisms, Smith's view of China was basically positive. A very different and very negative image of China came from Charles Louis de Secondat Montesquieu (1689–1755). He agreed with Quesnay that China was a despotism, but saw little benign about it.

Montesquieu was noted for his division of governments into three types: republic, based on virtue; monarchy, based on honour; and despotism, on fear. He argued, further, in a theory which was to assume great importance in later periods, that the natural environment was the main social determinant. Climate takes pride of place, but terrain also ranks high. Montesquieu believed that in hot climates people were weak, lazy, and cowardly, so despotism was the norm, but in cold places people were courageous and free. Montesquieu posed a dichotomy between free Europe, where the temperate zone was large, and Asia, where it hardly existed at all. In China the cold north had conquered the hot south and inflicted despotism everywhere. China seems unable to win; even though some of it is in fact cold, none of it is free.

Despite the fear by which as despots they rule, the Chinese emperors are not without saving graces: they have and are themselves subject to very good laws. Moreover, they are forced to govern well because they know that otherwise revolutions will rise up to attempt their overthrow. This is no doubt a reference to the doctrine of the Mandate of Heaven (*tianming*).

Montesquieu knew of the strong family system in China and apparently admired it. The relationship between rulers and people was that of father and children. The legislators required the people to be submissive, peaceful, and industrious. 'When everyone obeys, and everyone is employed, the state is in a happy situation.'

Unfortunately, however, 'by the nature of the soil and climate, their subsistence is very precarious'. As a result the Chinese, Montesquieu believed, were 'the greatest cheats on earth', despite their good laws. 'Let us not then compare the morals of China with those of Europe', he wrote.<sup>41</sup> So whatever good points he may have found in China's society, he was hostile to its people, whom their environment had driven to deceit. His view verges on environmental racism.

had moved north. Marco Polo was Venetian, Rada and Mendoza Spaniards. Ricci, the founder of the Jesuit mission, was Italian, but it was France that led the way in informing Europe about China from the middle of the seventeenth to the late years of the eighteenth centuries. The reign of the great French 'sun-king' Louis XIV (reigned 1643-1715) was contemporaneous with Shunzhi and Kangxi, and made France politically dominant in Europe. In any case, the countries of southern Europe, which had led the way up to the time of Ricci, have never again become the West's main centre of the study of China.

## 4

## Nineteenth-Century Imperialism and China

JUST like earlier centuries, the nineteenth produced a variety of views in the West about China. However, the balance between positive and negative images shifted decisively away from the former and towards the latter.

There were various reasons for this. The cults of *chinoiserie* and sinophilism which characterized the Enlightenment 'had run their natural course and completely lost their impetus'.<sup>1</sup> The Chinese empire itself was declining quite rapidly from the late years of Qianlong's reign onwards, and the downhill move gathered momentum throughout the nineteenth century. But by far the main reason was the rise of European, and especially British, imperialism from the time of the Industrial Revolution. For the first time Britain became a leader as a formulator of Western images of China.

Chronologically, the beginning of the change from the dominantly positive images of the eighteenth towards the negative of the nineteenth century occurs in the middle of the eighteenth century. Baron George Anson returned from a long voyage around the world in 1744 and his account was published by his chaplain Richard Walter in 1748. It is the first full-scale attack on the rosy images of China which the French Jesuits were pushing. For a variety of domestic reasons, which had but little to do with China, opinion both in France and Britain moved strongly against China in the second half of the eighteenth century. After the rupture of relations occasioned by the withdrawal of the Jesuits from China in the 1770s the event which brought about the beginning of a new wave of interest in China was the embassy of Lord Macartney in 1793. On the whole the newly industrializing and supremely confident