



2. Oliver Goldsmith, *The Citizen of the World* (volume one), 1762. Title-page.
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THE
Citizen of the World;
OR
LETTERS
FROM A
CHINESE PHILOSOPHER,
Residing in LONDON,
TO HIS
FRIENDS in the EAST.

VOLUME the FIRST.

LONDON:
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in *St. Paul's Church-yard*.
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THE EDITOR'S PREFACE.

THE schoolmen¹ had formerly a very exact way of computing the abilities of their Saints or authors. Escobar,² for instance, was said to have learning as five, genius as four, and gravity as seven. Caramuel³ was greater than he. His learning was as eight, his genius as six, and his gravity as thirteen. Were I to estimate the merits of our Chinese Philosopher by the same scale,⁴ I would not hesitate to state his genius still higher; but as to his learning and gravity, these I think might safely be marked as nine hundred and ninety nine, within one degree of absolute frigidity.⁵

Yet upon his first appearance here, many were angry not to find him as ignorant as a Tripoline ambassador,⁶ or an Envoy from

1 *schoolmen*: another term for scholastics, theologians trained in the method of dialectical reasoning with reference to authorities that was taught in medieval universities.
2 *Escobar*: Antonio Escobar y Mendoza (1589–1669), Spanish Jesuit and prolific writer on moral theology, satirized by the French mathematician and Catholic theologian Blaise Pascal (1623–62) as a casuist whose works seek to excuse moral laxity.
3 *Caramuel*: Juan Caramuel y Lobkowitz (1606–82), Spanish scholastic philosopher and writer on theology, mathematics, and other topics.
4 *the same scale*: under the title ‘The Poetical Scale’, the *Literary Magazine* for January 1758 includes a table which rates twenty-nine English poets against the criteria of ‘Genius’, ‘Judgement’, ‘Learning’, and ‘Versification’ (Pope has the highest combined score). R.W. Seitz questions earlier attribution of this piece to Goldsmith, ‘Goldsmith and the *Literary Magazine*’, *Review of English Studies*, 5/20 (1929), 410–30 (at 424–7).
5 *frigidity*: coldness or formality: an index of Altangi’s ‘gravity’ which accentuates the idea of his philosophical detachment. In his essay ‘Of National Characters’, David Hume (1711–76) asserts that the Chinese are ‘noted for gravity and a serious deportment’, *Essays, Moral, Political, and Literary*, ed. Tom L. Beauchamp and Mark A. Box, 2 vols. Clarendon Edition of the Works of David Hume (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 2021), 1:168.
6 *Tripoline ambassador*: on 10 October ‘Hessiam Bey, lately arrived ambassador from Tripoly, had his first audience of his majesty, to deliver his credentials’, presenting George II with a gift of ‘six fine Barbary horses’, *Gentleman’s Magazine*, 29 (October 1759), 493. The North African coastal region of Tripoli, part of modern-day Libya, was a province of the Ottoman Empire.

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Mujac.⁷ They were surprized to find a man born so far from London, that school of prudence and wisdom, endued⁸ even with a moderate capacity. They expressed the same surprize at his knowledge that the Chinese do at ours.*⁹ *How comes it, said they, that the Europeans, so remote from China, think with so much justice and precision? They have never read our books, they scarcely know even our letters,*¹⁰ *and yet they talk and reason just as we do.* The truth is, the Chinese and we are pretty much alike. Different degrees of refinement,¹¹ and not of distance, mark the distinctions among mankind. Savages of the most opposite climates, have all but one character of improvidence and rapacity; and tutored nations, however separate, make use of the very same methods to procure refined enjoyment.

The distinctions of polite nations are few; but such as are peculiar to the Chinese, appear in every page of the following correspondence. The metaphors and allusions are all drawn from the East. Their

* Le Comte, Vol. 1. p. 210.

7 *Mujac*: according to Bowen, 'Mujac' is a region in West Africa to the east of Benin (*Geography*, 2:475). The idea of an envoy from Mujac is Goldsmith's invention.

8 *endued*: endowed.

9 *Le Comte*: Louis Le Comte (1655–1728), a member of the French Jesuit mission sent to China in 1685, and author of *Nouveaux mémoires sur l'état présent de la Chine* (1696), translated as *Memoirs and Observations ... Made in a Late Journey through the Empire of China* (1697). Le Comte was among those who argued that certain Chinese customs and rituals, such as the veneration of ancestors, were civil rather than religious practices that were compatible with Christianity, an 'accommodationist' stance that was condemned in a decree by Pope Clement XI in 1704. The italicized passage that follows paraphrases Le Comte.

10 *scarcely know even our letters*: in the *Public Ledger* version of Letter 8, Altangi honours 'that great emperor who first instituted marks to represent our ideas'. It was sometimes claimed (for example by Le Comte) that the nature of Chinese written characters was uncondusive to thinking and retarded social progress, but Goldsmith here reverses this perspective, albeit primarily for comic rather than critical effect, ventriloquizing 'Chinese' amazement at Europeans' ability to 'talk and reason' even though they use a different alphabet.

11 *degrees of refinement*: this initial framing of human difference assumes the uniformity of human nature and posits a single trajectory of development common to all societies.

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formality our author carefully preserves. Many of their favourite tenets in morals¹² are illustrated. The Chinese are always concise, so is he. Simple, so is he. The Chinese are grave and sententious, so is he. But in one particular, the resemblance is peculiarly striking: the Chinese are often dull; and so is he. Nor has my assistance been wanting. We are told in an old romance¹³ of a certain knight errant and his horse who contracted an intimate friendship. The horse most usually bore the knight, but, in cases of extraordinary dispatch,¹⁴ the knight returned the favour, and carried his horse. Thus in the intimacy between my author and me, he has usually given me a lift of his Eastern sublimity,¹⁵ and I have sometimes given him a return of my colloquial ease.

Yet it appears strange in this season of panegyric,¹⁶ when scarce an author passes unpraised either by his friends or himself, that such

- 12 *tenets in morals*: Altangi's letters frequently invoke the figure of Confucius (see Letter 7, note 3), a selection of whose maxims is included in Le Comte. Qian Zhongshu notes that the success of *The Oeconomy of Human Life* (first published in 1750), purportedly translated from the Chinese version of an 'Indian manuscript', helped to generate the ideas of 'Chinese' and more broadly 'Eastern' morality on which the Editor draws here, 'China in the English literature of the eighteenth century', in Adrian Hsia (ed.), *The Vision of China in the English Literature of the Seventeenth and Eighteenth Centuries* (Hong Kong: Chinese University Press, 1998), 117–213 (at 177–9).
- 13 *an old romance*: probably a reference to *Don Quixote* (1605, 1615) by Miguel de Cervantes (1547–1616) which presents the horse Rocinante as a kind of double for his owner, the titular knight-errant.
- 14 *in cases of extraordinary dispatch*: when greater speed was necessary.
- 15 *his Eastern sublimity*: like the idea of 'metaphors and allusions ... drawn from the East', this reference to the 'sublimity' of Altangi (seemingly at odds with ideas of his gravity and the 'concise' style of the Chinese) presents him as an 'Oriental' figure, associating him with the figurative language widely regarded as typical of Eastern poetry.
- 16 *panegyric*: 'a public speech or published text in praise of someone or something' (OED). The idea of a 'season of panegyric' could potentially refer to popular celebration of recent events: the *Annus Mirabilis* or 'year of victories' of 1759 during the Seven Years' War, the accession of George III in October 1760, and/or his marriage to Princess Charlotte of Mecklenburg-Strelitz in September 1761. Here, however, it relates to what the Editor presents as the fashion for authors to praise themselves and each other.

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merit as our Philosopher's should be forgotten. While the epithets of ingenious, copious,¹⁷ elaborate, and refined, are lavished among the mob, like medals at a coronation,¹⁸ the lucky prizes fall on every side, but not one on him. I could on this occasion make myself melancholly, by considering the capriciousness of public taste, or the mutability of fortune; but during this fit of morality, lest my reader should sleep, I'll take a nap myself, and when I awake tell him my dream.

I imagined the Thames was frozen over, and I stood by its side. Several booths were erected upon the ice, and I was told by one of the spectators, that FASHION FAIR was going to begin.¹⁹ He added, that every author who would carry his works there, might probably find a very good reception. I was resolved however to observe the humours of the place in safety from the shore, sensible that ice was at best precarious, and having been always a little cowardly in my sleep.

Several of my acquaintance seemed much more hardy than I, and went over the ice with intrepidity. Some carried their works to the fair on sledges, some on carts, and those which were more voluminous, were conveyed in waggons. Their temerity astonished me. I knew their cargoes were heavy, and expected every moment they would have gone to the bottom. They all entered the fair, however, in safety, and each soon after returned to my great surprize, highly satisfied with his entertainment, and the bargains he had brought away.

The success of such numbers at last began to operate upon me. If these, cried I, meet with favour and safety, some luck may, perhaps, for once attend the unfortunate. I am resolved to make a new

17 *copious*: rich in ideas.

18 *medals at a coronation*: commemorative coins. George III was crowned on 22 September 1761.

19 *the Thames was frozen over*: during a long period of global cooling, and at a time when the river (before it was embanked) flowed more slowly, the surface of the Thames frequently froze over. Three frost fairs took place on the frozen River Thames during the eighteenth century, in 1715–16, 1739–40, and 1789.

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adventure. The furniture,²⁰ frippery²¹ and fireworks²² of China, have long been fashionably bought up.²³ I'll try the fair²⁴ with a small cargo of Chinese morality. If the Chinese have contributed to vitiate our taste, I'll try how far they can help to improve our understanding. But as others have driven into the market in waggons, I'll cautiously begin by venturing with a wheel-barrow. Thus resolved, I baled up my goods and fairly ventured; when, upon just entering the fair, I fancied the ice that had supported an hundred waggons before, cracked under me; and wheel-barrow and all went to the bottom.

Upon awaking from my reverie, with the fright, I cannot help wishing that the pains taken in giving this correspondence an English dress, had been employed in contriving new political systems, or new plots for farces. I might then have taken my station in the world, either as a poet or a philosopher; and made one in those little societies where men club to raise each others reputation.²⁵ But at present I belong to no particular class. I resemble one of those solitary animals,²⁶ that has been forced from its forest to gratify human curiosity.

20 *furniture*: furniture-makers such as Thomas Chippendale (1718–79) had begun to incorporate Chinese, alongside Gothic and French Rococo, influences into their work: see for example his *The Gentleman and Cabinet Maker's Director* (1754).

21 *frippery*: ornament or ornamental style, with a suggestion of excess or at least profusion. The popularity of Chinese and Chinese-style decorative objects, notably porcelain, was already well established.

22 *fireworks*: fireworks were invented in China, first appearing during the Song dynasty (960–1279) in the form of bamboo sticks packed with gunpowder, which, along with the compass, paper-making, and printing, is one of the 'Four Great Inventions' celebrated in Chinese culture for their world-historical impact.

23 *long ... bought up*: compare the dedication written by William Hatchett (b.1701) to his unperformed play *The Chinese Orphan*: 'China has furnish'd us long with the Produce of her Earth; with her Manufactures; and I am willing to flatter myself, the Importation of her Poetry will serve to regale in its Turn', *The Chinese Orphan: An Historical Tragedy* (London, 1741), vi.

24 *try the fair*: there is a double meaning here, since 'the fair' may refer to female readers as well as to the Fashion Fair itself.

25 *raise each others reputation*: as already suggested by the phrase 'this season of panegyric', the idea that literary fame often resulted from authors agreeing to praise each other is a recurrent complaint throughout *The Citizen of the World*.

26 *one of those ... animals*: the reference to 'the end of my chain' suggests that the Editor is imagining himself as a bear being baited for popular entertainment.

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My earliest wish was to escape unheeded through life; but I have been set up for half-pence, to fret and scamper at the end of my chain. Tho' none are injured by my rage, I am naturally too savage to court any friends by fawning. Too obstinate to be taught new tricks; and too improvident to mind what may happen, I am appeased, though not contented. Too indolent for intrigue, and too timid to push for favour, I am—But what signifies what am I.²⁷

Ἐλπίς καὶ σὺ τύχη, μέγα χαίρετε· τὸν λιμέν' ἔυρον·
 Οὐδὲν ἔμοι χ' ὑμῖν· παίζετε τοὺς μετ' ἐμέ.²⁸

27 *what am I*: this question appears as a refrain in Goldsmith's letter to Robert Bryanton, 14 August 1758, in which he contrasts his friend's seeming good fortune with his own situation in life (*Letters*, 29).

28 Ἐλπίς καὶ σὺ τύχη: the Dublin edition of 1762 includes the following translation: 'Fortune and Hope adieu! I see my Port, / Too long your dupe; be others now your Sport.' The source of this anonymous epigram is *The Greek Anthology*, a collection of epigrams from classical Greece. There appears to be a misprint at the beginning of the sentence, and the correct Greek is as follows: Ἐλπίς καὶ σὺ τύχη, μέγα χαίρετε· τὸν λιμέν' εὖρον· / Οὐδὲν ἔμοι χ' ὑμῖν· παίζετε τοὺς μετ' ἐμέ.

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