



CHINA IN EARLY ENLIGHTENMENT POLITICAL THOUGHT

Simon Kow

China in Early Enlightenment Political Thought

Simon Kow

First published 2017
by Routledge
2 Park Square, Milton Park, Abingdon, Oxon OX14 4RN

and by Routledge
711 Third Avenue, New York, NY 10017

Routledge is an imprint of the Taylor & Francis Group, an informa business

© 2017 Simon Kow

The right of Simon Kow to be identified as author of this work has been asserted by him in accordance with sections 77 and 78 of the Copyright, Designs and Patents Act 1988.

All rights reserved. No part of this book may be reprinted or reproduced or utilised in any form or by any electronic, mechanical, or other means, now known or hereafter invented, including photocopying and recording, or in any information storage or retrieval system, without permission in writing from the publishers.

Trademark notice: Product or corporate names may be trademarks or registered trademarks, and are used only for identification and explanation without intent to infringe.

British Library Cataloguing in Publication Data

A catalogue record for this book is available from the British Library

Library of Congress Cataloging in Publication Data

Names: Kow, Simon, 1974- author.

Title: China in early enlightenment political thought / Simon Kow.

Description: Abingdon, Oxon ; New York, NY : Routledge, 2017. | Series: Routledge studies in social and political thought ; 116 | Includes bibliographical references and index.

Identifiers: LCCN 2016008784 | ISBN 9781138809277 (hardback) |

ISBN 9781315750125 (ebook)

Subjects: LCSH: China--Politics and government--18th century. | Political science--History--18th century. | Enlightenment. | Bayle, Pierre, 1647-1706--Knowledge--China. | Leibniz, Gottfried Wilhelm, Freiherr von, 1646-1716--Knowledge--China. | Montesquieu, Charles de Secondat, baron de, 1689-1755--Knowledge--China.

Classification: LCC JQ1510 .K68 2017 | DDC 320.95109/033--dc23

LC record available at <https://lccn.loc.gov/2016008784>

ISBN: 978-1-138-80927-7 (hbk)

ISBN: 978-1-315-75012-5 (ebk)

Typeset in Times New Roman
by Taylor & Francis Books



Printed and bound by CPI Group (UK) Ltd, Croydon, CR0 4YY

China in Early Enlightenment Political Thought

China in Early Enlightenment Political Thought examines the ideas of China in the works of three major thinkers in the early European Enlightenment of the late seventeenth to early eighteenth centuries: Pierre Bayle, Gottfried Wilhelm Leibniz, and the Baron de Montesquieu. Unlike surveys which provide only cursory overviews of Enlightenment views of China, or individual studies of each thinker which tend to address their conceptions of China in individual chapters, this is the first book to provide in-depth comparative analyses of these seminal Enlightenment thinkers that specifically link their views on China to their political concerns. Against the backdrop especially of the Jesuit accounts of China which these philosophers read, Bayle, Leibniz, and Montesquieu interpreted imperial China in three radically divergent ways: as a tolerant, atheistic monarchy; as an exemplar of human and divine justice; and as an exceptional but nonetheless corrupt despotic state. The book thus shows how the development of political thought in the early Enlightenment was closely linked to the question of China as a positive or negative model for Europe, and argues that revisiting Bayle's approach to China is a salutary corrective to the errors and presumptions in the thought of Leibniz and Montesquieu. The book also discusses how Chinese reformers of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries drew on Enlightenment writers' different views of China as they sought to envisage how China should be remodelled.

Simon Kow is an Associate Professor of Humanities at the University of King's College, Halifax, Nova Scotia, Canada.

Routledge Studies in Social and Political Thought

For a full list of titles in this series, please visit www.routledge.com/series/RSSPT

106 Re-Grounding Cosmopolitanism

Towards a Post-Foundational
Cosmopolitanism

*Edited by Tamara Caraus and
Elena Paris*

107 Panarchy: Political Theories of Non-Territorial States

*Edited by Aviezer Tucker and
Gian Piero de Bellis*

108 Gramsci's Critique of Civil Society

Towards a New Concept of
Hegemony

Marco Fonseca

109 Deconstructing Happiness

Critical Sociology and the
Good Life

Jordan McKenzie

110 Novels and the Sociology of the Contemporary

Arpad Szakolczai

111 Liberty, Toleration and Equality

John Locke, Jonas Proast and the
Letters Concerning Toleration

John William Tate

112 Jürgen Habermas and the European Economic Crisis

Cosmopolitanism Reconsidered

*Edited by Gaspare M. Genna,
Thomas O. Haakenson, and
Ian W. Wilson*

113 Genealogies of Emotions, Intimacies, and Desire

Theories of Changes in Emotional
Regimes from Medieval Society to
Late Modernity

Ann Brooks

114 Modernity and Crisis in the Thought of Michel Foucault

The Totality of Reason

Matan Oram

115 Crisis and Critique

On the Fragile Foundations of
Social Life

Rodrigo Cordero

116 China in Early Enlightenment Political Thought

Simon Kow

117 Elementary Forms of Social Relations

Status, Power and Reference Groups

Theodore D. Kemper

118 Groundwork for the Practice of the Good Life

Politics and Ethics at the
Intersection of North Atlantic and
African Philosophy

Omedi Ochieng

119 Theories of the Stranger

Debates on Cosmopolitanism,
Identity and Cross-Cultural
Encounters

Vince Marotta

Acknowledgements

This book was largely written during a full-year sabbatical leave. Thus, it could not have been written without the support of the University of King's College, which granted me the most precious component of scholarship – time – as well as travel and research funding during the decade or so of research leading to this work and other publications. I am grateful to Patricia Chalmers and other staff at the University of King's College Library for their diligence and efficiency in meeting my many requests for inter-library materials. Thanks go to all of my colleagues and students at King's and at Dalhousie University for cultivating an environment which recognises and respects the humanities, an increasingly rare phenomenon in this commercialised and utilitarian era. A summer workshop on East Asian studies at the East-West Center, University of Hawaii, was particularly helpful to me in assessing Enlightenment interpretations of China. I owe special thanks to two Enlightened Canadian Scots, Gordon McOuat and Neil Robertson, for reading and commenting on several of the chapters in draft form, despite the latter's distaste for my often scathing remarks on Montesquieu (a sign of his good nature and tolerance). I am especially indebted to Douglas Berger – not only for his incisive comments on the entire draft from his perspective as a major scholar of Asian philosophy, but also for his friendship and moral support throughout the writing of this book.

Versions of sections from this book were presented to the early modern reading group in Halifax, organised by Krista Kesselring and hosted by Cynthia Neville; to the Dalhousie Philosophy Colloquium, organised by Letitia Meynell; and the 2015 Atlantic Medieval and Early Modern Group annual conference at Saint Francis Xavier University, Antigonish, Nova Scotia. I am grateful to these and other colleagues who attended my presentations and posed many thoughtful questions. My thanks also to Franklin Perkins, Robert Sparling, and the staff at Routledge Press – including Lucy McClune and especially Peter Sowden, my editor, for his encouragement and guidance – as well as to Moira Donovan for her invaluable assistance on preparing the index.

Finally, the quasi-monastic solitude and discipline required to produce this work nevertheless depended on the society of others, including David Heckerl

and family members both immediate and extended. Above all, Sue-San King kept me grounded and well-cared for throughout this book project and when I needed most encouragement. This book is dedicated to her with love and to the memory of my late father, both outstanding examples of cultural intersectionality.

Contents

<i>Acknowledgements</i>	vi
1 Introduction	1
2 The Jesuits: A swinging door	15
3 Pierre Bayle: A tolerant, atheistic monarchy	41
4 Gottfried Wilhelm Leibniz: Natural theology and universal justice	79
5 Montesquieu and Chinese despotism	134
Conclusion: The early European Enlightenment in Chinese political thought	200
<i>Index</i>	211

1 Introduction

The setting is the imperial court of China in the late seventeenth century. A group of missionaries has travelled from Europe and managed to obtain an audience with the emperor himself, no mean accomplishment given that this will be the first encounter between representatives of the Catholic Church and the legendary Son of Heaven. They have orders from the Papal See to present the Christian religion and the church in the best possible light, with the aim of securing the emperor's toleration or, they dare hope, his endorsement of and perhaps even conversion to Christianity. To succeed they will have to engage his interest and impress upon him the virtues of Christianity, while omitting mention of the conflict and bloodshed wracking the Christian world far to the west.

They are ushered into his august presence, in the very heart of the Forbidden City at the centre of the middle kingdom. The emperor is surrounded by members of his inner council, and asks the missionaries what has prompted them to depart their homes and journey to such a remote kingdom. We have come, they reply, to teach the true religion based on the Gospels of Jesus Christ, the son of God who commanded all men to love one another. They describe the life and mission of Jesus Christ, and especially his promise of everlasting life to those who follow him.

The imperial council takes especial note of their account of the unhappiness and dishonour to the church arising from pagan religion. The council poses a difficult question to the missionaries: What do you do with those who do not believe in your religion? Boldly, the Europeans reply that they are commanded by holy scripture and church doctrine to compel unbelievers into the house of God. The council is horrified. They advise the emperor to expel these foreigners, who clearly if they held sway in his dominions would commit violence against the Chinese people who refuse to accept their faith. Indeed, and most horrifically, once they gained a foothold in China with their own followers, they would undoubtedly force the emperor to submit to their religion or otherwise face a crusade of European powers seeking to absorb his kingdom into Christendom. If the latter, the emperor would surely face the prospect of war with Europe, to be slaughtered in battle or captured and imprisoned for the rest of his life. After only two hours, the emperor – motivated by considerations of public

2 Introduction

safety and justice – decides to banish the missionaries from China. The audience with the emperor has been a disaster for the church.

This remarkable incident was the creation of exiled French philosopher Pierre Bayle, who used this imaginary encounter between Europeans and Chinese to illustrate the ‘horrible consequence’ of promoting a religion which must appear to the emperor as ‘ridiculous and diabolical’ (Bayle 2005, pp. 97–98). Why did China, and in particular the court of the emperor, strike Bayle as an appropriate imaginary setting to illustrate his argument against religious intolerance? More generally, what explains the presence of the idea of China in the works of Enlightenment thinkers such as Bayle? And what does the fascination with China indicate about the character and development of Enlightenment political thought?

Bayle’s imaginary scenario reflects a number of aspects of European Enlightenment views of China. First, Enlightenment thinkers drew predominantly upon the accounts of Jesuit missionaries, for it was the Jesuits who initiated the early modern encounter (roughly 1500–1800) with China and even gained access, albeit briefly, to the imperial court itself. Second, the early modern encounter was initially driven by religious motives with the goal of eventual conversion. Thus Enlightenment views of China were intertwined with questions of religion and its effect on society – a preoccupation of much Enlightenment thought. Third, the significance of China for Enlightenment thought was political as much as religious or philosophical. In other words, China presented to Enlightenment thinkers a vast remote land with a distinct civilisation and cultural and political traditions, and approaches to comprehending the middle kingdom could not but be shaped (in many ways distorted) by political ideas and concerns internal to Europe. Finally, and most strikingly, no Enlightenment thinker actually visited China; none were able to observe its society, government, customs, and beliefs first-hand. In this sense, ‘the East’ was ‘read’ rather than witnessed by the Enlightenment. And yet China preoccupied the minds of key Enlightenment thinkers and, as this book will show, was an integral aspect of Enlightenment political thought. The question of China was inseparable from questions of European politics concerning how the states of Europe should be assessed and criticised, and how they should be affirmed, reformed, or even rejected.

This book focuses on three early European Enlightenment thinkers who drew from Jesuit accounts to discuss China in light of their respective philosophical and political concerns: Pierre Bayle, Gottfried Wilhelm Leibniz, and the Baron de Montesquieu. Although their perspectives form but a small sample of the responses to China in the early Enlightenment, the works of Bayle, Leibniz, and Montesquieu reflect the diversity of European attitudes to China. Not all western observers of China assumed European superiority: while Montesquieu characterised the middle kingdom as embodying a mitigated form of Asian despotism in contrast to moderate European constitutions, Bayle and Leibniz were admirers of Chinese society and government. All three thinkers did tend to concur with the Jesuits on favouring Confucian doctrines

and institutions over Daoism and Buddhism, reflecting a common western inability throughout the early modern period to appreciate the latter and the extent to which Daoist and Buddhist ideas and influences were pervasive in the Chinese tradition and within Confucian thought at the time. But their approvals of Confucianism were on divergent and opposing bases. Against the Jesuits, Bayle largely presented Confucian thought and practice as constituting the bases for a rational, tolerant, and atheistic monarchy in China. Leibniz, an enthusiastic supporter of the Jesuit mission, saw in Confucian philosophy an ancient Chinese natural theology which was not only compatible with Christianity and Leibnizian metaphysics, but also the foundation for an ethically and politically superior state which embodied his conception of justice. Finally, against Jesuit and early Enlightenment idealisations of China, Montesquieu regarded Confucianism as a despotic civil religion of manners which, despite its inferiority to the moderate civil religions found in Europe, was suited to and mitigated despotism in China.

European Enlightenment views of China were not, moreover, simply instances of caricature, chauvinism, and misunderstanding. It is true that each theorist presented to varying degrees a distorted picture of China for purposes largely internal to European political life, particularly in relation to France in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries: Bayle's defence of toleration and of the viability of a decent society of atheists against the intolerance and religious bigotry of the *ancien régime* in France as well as other Catholic and Protestant states in Europe; Leibniz's championing of China's embodiment of justice against the 'Hobbesian imperialism' of Louis XIV's France; and Montesquieu's warning to France that absolutist government could slide towards despotism, which as even China showed could not be described as enlightened or virtuous. Yet as I will argue throughout chapters 3 to 5, for all of his shortcomings and instrumental uses of China for internal purposes, Bayle set a high standard for cross-cultural evaluation in Enlightenment thought, of which Leibniz's engagement with China and especially Montesquieu's critique of Chinese despotism fell short. Bayle was sceptical of the veracity of European accounts of China and the non-western world, which explains his sometimes fragmentary and inconsistent remarks on Chinese thought, society, and politics. He urged careful study of the languages and cultures before coming to firm conclusions about countries outside Europe, but also suggested that China constituted a counter-example to European intolerance, bigotry, fanaticism, factionalism, misgovernment, and imperialism: his perspective on China thus countered European assumptions of superiority to the non-western world and justifications for imperial domination and missionary conversion.

Leibniz and Montesquieu, by contrast, tended to affirm European chauvinism. While Bayle's contemporary and friend Leibniz admirably pursued a project of intellectual exchange between Europe and China, Leibniz nevertheless supported Jesuit goals of converting the Chinese and interpreted Chinese thought through the lens of his own metaphysical system. Hence while Europe might learn and benefit from China's ethical and political teachings

4 Introduction

and example, he was convinced that the metaphysical truths underlying Chinese natural theology were in fact congruent with his own philosophy. Therefore, Leibniz saw himself as best placed to reveal to the Chinese what was true in their beliefs and doctrines, while China and Europe thus brought together through this ‘commerce of light’ could then civilise the rest of the world.

Montesquieu, in contrast, lacked the sophisticated (if ultimately one-sided) engagement with Chinese thought and culture present in Leibniz’s works. Although equally critical with Bayle of the Jesuit missions overseas and of religious intolerance within Europe, Montesquieu departed from Bayle and Leibniz in depicting Chinese absolutism as nothing more than a form of despotism. In support of his often acute and penetrating insights into constitutional government in Europe, Montesquieu interpreted China and other Asian states as irredeemably backwards and culturally stagnant: countries saddled with tyrannical rulers and despotic cultures which pervaded every level of society. Nevertheless, Montesquieu’s account of the non-western world lacked the imperialist rhetoric present in some of Leibniz’s writings, even if his view of China and Asia as despotic would influence later justifications of imperial subjugation and domination. In general, then, not all Enlightenment perspectives on China can be characterised as either denigrating or justifying European imperialism, or as insufficiently cognisant of cultural difference, based just on these three early Enlightenment thinkers. But in the wake of the Jesuit accounts and from the late seventeenth to mid-eighteenth centuries, there is a general shift from sinophilia to sinophobia in Enlightenment thought. This complex picture of early Enlightenment political thought on China suggests a number of ways in which the thought of the Enlightenment ought to be revised or reinterpreted – a process which has already been underway for several decades in contemporary scholarship, to which we will now turn.

Political thought and the non-western world

As with other academic fields, political thought is a wide and contested area of study, particularly amidst current calls for a more global approach to political thought. Anthony Black (2009) characterises political thought as ‘any form of reflection about the nature of human society and organisation, about leadership and the state; about how society and the state should be managed and run, and what possible alternative forms there are’. Such a broad characterisation captures the breadth of Enlightenment political theory, as political thought thus conceived includes ‘both philosophy and culture’ and is linked to ‘moral thought, of which it comprises a significant part’ (p. 26).

Scholars disagree, among other things, over what ‘forms of reflection’ should be studied and how they should be studied. Traditionally, the study of the history of political thought had in many universities consisted of the study of canonical books by western philosophers, from Plato’s *Republic* and Aristotle’s *Politics* to early modern texts such as Hobbes’s *Leviathan* and Rousseau’s *Social Contract* to later classics including works by Mill and Marx (see

Strauss & Cropsey 1987 as representative of this approach). As Siep Stuurman (2000) argues, the canonical approach to political thought has come under severe criticism since the late twentieth century, though the study of the ‘great books’ in the history of political thought has proven remarkably resilient in university undergraduate curricula. He characterises two forms of criticism: the ‘democratic critique’ and the ‘methodological critique’. The first denounces the focus on selected texts written by dead white European males, which are then presented fallaciously as universal truths (without attention to questions of class, gender, and race in the history of the west). The second targets the anachronistic and unhistorical consequences of interpreting canonical texts as if they addressed timeless questions, without proper regard to the contexts in which they were written. Thus both critiques see the canonical approach as a form of ‘Whig history’ tracing the development of the ‘concept of the autonomous individual’ (p. 155). The so-called ‘Cambridge School’ of political thought sought to rectify the deficiencies in the study of the history of ideas through close attention particularly to the political and linguistic contexts in which texts were written (see Skinner 1969). In turn, the approaches of Quentin Skinner and other Cambridge scholars have been subject to criticism, for example, in defence of Leo Strauss as a historically sensitive scholar (Major 2005), or in terms of the interpretative pitfalls of focusing on historical context without attending to the text in its own terms (Steinberger 2009). It is likely that the debate over the merits of textualist and contextualist approaches is far from over. This book will seek to balance text and context, particularly the ways in which theoretical arguments relate to the Enlightenment’s engagement with China.

A different response to the perceived bias of the traditional study of political thought in the west has been the development of comparative political thought. Apologists for this approach seek to rectify the Eurocentrism of the western canon by comparing western and non-western works of political philosophy from ancient times to the present. As Fred Dallmayr (2004) – a founding father of and leading figure in this field – argues, the events of September 11, 2001 and the continued growth of global markets underscore the urgency of the west to engage in cross-cultural exchange with non-western civilisations, particularly those in Asia. Underpinning comparative political theory is the familiar postmodernist critique of ‘modern Western egocentrism (stylised in Descartes’s *ego cogito*) and its corollary, Eurocentrism’ (p. 250), with reference to Husserl, Heidegger, Gadamer, Taylor, and others. Dallmayr asserts that ‘comparative theorising in many ways re-opens the old battle between the ancients and the moderns, a battle which curiously intersects with the difference between East and West’ (p. 254). Thus his manifesto not only aligns comparative political theory with contemporary continental philosophical concerns, but also indicates the impetus arising from Edward Said’s *Orientalism* and the postcolonial theory in the wake of Said’s work (Said 2003; Thomas 2010). In other words, such calls for comparative political thought are simultaneously critiques of western modernity and western imperialism.

6 Introduction

Comparative political theorists may acknowledge historical precedents to cross-cultural theory, but their overall tendency is to show the inadequacies of earlier attempts at comparative thought particularly in the early modern period. The editors of *Western Political Thought in Dialogue with Asia* declare that ‘cross-cultural encounter in the time of Western colonialism rarely took the form of... dialogues of mutual accommodation and respect’ (Shogimen & Nederman 2009, p. 8). Commentators criticise the tendency of Enlightenment thinkers to set down supposedly universal principles which are merely western, ethnocentric standards applied to the non-western world (Benhabib 1994; Tully 1995; Said 2003; Dallmayr 2004; Buchan 2009). At the heart of Enlightenment perspectives on the wider world was the conviction that ‘Europe (especially its western portion) represented the summit of civilisation, and the other continents represented various levels of savagery or barbarism’ (Buchan 2009, p. 70).

To what extent does this characterisation hold for Enlightenment views of China (not to mention other parts of the world)? This book seeks to revise or at least qualify such sweeping dismissals. Jonathan Spence (1992) has written that ‘[w]hatever their limitations, it is not adequate to view the majority of... divergent views [of China] as solely reflecting the biases within Western culture or a patronising and exploitative attitude towards Eastern civilization’. In regard to Said’s Orientalist critique as applied to western perspectives on China, he continues, ‘[t]here have been so many twists and turns along the way to depicting China during the last four hundred years that no such broad generalisations can hold’ (p. 90). Indeed, a number of scholars have emphasised the complex dialogical relationship between Asian and western thought: not only patronising or colonial attitudes in the west but also Asian influences on western thinking and diverse Asian responses to western thought (for example, see Dirlik 1996, Wang 1997, and Varisco 2007).

Redefining and defending the Enlightenment

One response to postmodernist critiques of the Enlightenment is to deny the idea of a single ‘Enlightenment’. Some scholars have sought to bring out how Enlightenment ideas, though sharing certain common features across Europe, took on different forms in different national contexts (see Porter & Teich 1981). While such a national approach is no doubt useful for assessing the social and political contexts of Enlightenment ideas, it is nevertheless the case that Enlightenment dialogues on the significance of China took place between authors in different countries (not least between Jesuits and Enlightenment thinkers in Holland, France, and Germany, for example). More radical is the historical scholarship which argues against any unified idea of the Enlightenment: as J.G.A. Pocock (1999) writes, the Enlightenment ‘occurred in too many forms to be comprised within a single definition and history...we do better to think of a family of Enlightenments, displaying both family resemblances and family quarrels (some of them bitter and even bloody).’ A ‘single formula’, he states, ‘is, I think, more the expression of one’s loyalties than of

one's historical insight' (p. 9). Pocock would certainly be right in denying that there was a single, unified attitude towards China in eighteenth-century Enlightenment thought, but we can still identify a general shift from idealisation to denigration of China in the course of the eighteenth century.

Recent scholars have sought to interpret 'the' Enlightenment to demonstrate its positive orientation to non-western peoples and societies. Perhaps the most controversial of the contemporary defenders of the Enlightenment as a relatively unified movement is Jonathan Israel, whose trilogy has been described by one critic as 'the most ambitious and sweeping revisionist history of the Enlightenment since Ernst Cassirer's *The Philosophy of the Enlightenment* (1932)' (La Vopa 2009, p. 717). Israel (2001; 2006a; 2012), however, identifies a general narrative between two competing strains of Enlightenment thought in the seventeenth to eighteenth centuries – the radical and moderate – and very clearly champions radical Enlightenment, in contrast to defenders of more traditionalist elements in Enlightenment thought (such as Haakonssen (1995) or Schmidt (2000)). Israel asserts the primacy of ideas in comprehending these rival strains, particularly the influence of Spinoza's monist philosophy on the revolutionary social and political agenda of the radical Enlightenment in contrast to the incoherent compromises between reason and religion and/or traditional authority characteristic of moderate Enlightenment thought. Moreover, critiques of Enlightenment tendencies toward repression, sexism, racism, and imperialism are at most applicable to moderate Enlightenment, not radical Enlightenment, thought (see Israel 2006b). Thus radical Enlightenment is for Israel the best intellectual defence against such dangers as moral relativism or religious fundamentalism.

Most striking for our purposes is Israel's interpretation of the radical Enlightenment as setting out a true moral universalism which is applicable beyond the borders of the European continent. 'For if', Israel (2001) asserts, 'the Enlightenment marks the most dramatic step towards secularisation and rationalisation in Europe's history, it does so no less in the wider history not just of western civilisation but, arguably, of the entire world' (p. vi). In response to the critique that such a perspective would reflect the imposition of European norms and values on the non-European world, and hence constitute a justification of western imperialism, he argues that radical Enlightenment principles are the best and most effective bulwark against imperialism, colonialism, and other forms of oppression. 'The social values of the Radical Enlightenment', Israel (2006a) writes, 'have an absolute quality in terms of reason which places them above any possible alternative', with the caveat that 'there is no reason why one should search only in western philosophical traditions to find the intellectual roots of, or a cultural basis for, personal liberty, comprehensive toleration, equality sexual and racial, and a secular morality of equity – any less, indeed, than for grounding anti-slavery or anti-colonialism' (p. 869). Israel cites Chinese reformers in the late nineteenth century, especially Kang Youwei, as proponents of the position that 'moral universalism based on equality, democracy, and personal liberty is ultimately both superior to, and

compatible with, cultural difference where ancient cultural traditions are suitably adjusted, reformed, adapted, and “modernised” in light of these universal values’ (p. 870). One might note, however, that such arguments for modernising these traditions arose in large part as a response to western economic imperialism in China (Spence 1982; De Bary & Bloom 2000; and see chapter 6). Western imperialism appears in this example to have spurred the non-western embrace of European Enlightenment ideas, which surely complicates an unambiguous championing of Enlightenment ideals as universal.

Moreover, Israel seeks to demonstrate the superiority of the radical Enlightenment’s orientation to China and other non-European countries despite, however, the often negative judgements of radical Enlightenment thought of the non-western world. As a whole, Israel (2006a) writes, the Enlightenment’s ‘general assessments of Islamic, Indian, and Chinese thought’ may have come up short, but ‘as so often in cases of attempts at cross-cultural evaluation the result was curiously self-centred and limited. Western philosophers strove valiantly to grasp the fundamentals of classical Chinese philosophy but ended up, in the main, merely mirroring their own prior obsessions’ (p. 640). Nevertheless, Israel (2012) ultimately vindicates radical Enlightenment views of China despite the fact that they were in many ways more dismissive than moderate Enlightenment accounts. China, as we shall discuss in depth, was embraced by early Enlightenment philosophers of both ‘radical’ and ‘moderate’ persuasions such as Bayle and Leibniz respectively; but later thinkers identified by Israel as radical – especially Diderot – followed the later Enlightenment’s sinophobic tendencies, though the ‘moderate Enlightenment’ *philosophe* Voltaire notably departed from these dismissals of Chinese civilisation. Against Voltaire, Diderot and Raynal may have ‘rejected the Chinese model’ but in their acknowledgement of the sharp division of opinions on China and Japan indicated the need for ‘extensive further research and more direct experience of the Chinese reality’. Thus, Israel concludes, ‘the Enlightenment’ – and here the radical Enlightenment is meant – ‘proved a sharper stimulus to thorough, systematic, and intensive study of other parts of the world than any other cultural flowering in human history’ (pp. 563–64). In this way, despite its serious shortcomings, (radical) Enlightenment thought on the non-European world is championed as the firmest foundation of cross-cultural philosophy. This claim, however, indirectly concedes the general inadequacy of Enlightenment accounts of China. But the question remains what such accounts reveal about and how they even shape Enlightenment political thought.

Like Israel, Sankar Muthu (2003) identifies a strong anti-imperialist strand in Enlightenment thought. Instead of associating it with the categories of radical or moderate Enlightenment, Muthu focuses on the late Enlightenment thinkers Diderot, Kant, and Herder as proponents of anti-imperialist political philosophy. More than simply a form of moral universalism which recognises the dignity of non-European peoples, Muthu’s trio also conceived of human beings as cultural agents and of cultures as fundamentally diverse and incommensurable to an extent. In this form, the ‘universal and particular