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I. Memoir concerning the Chinese

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TRANSACTIONS
OF THE
ROYAL ASIATIC SOCIETY.

I. *Memoir concerning the Chinese.* By JOHN FRANCIS DAVIS, Esq.,
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Read May 17, 1823.

THE Empire of China furnishes a subject of investigation, highly deserving the attention of the antiquarian and the philosopher; and one which, in proportion as it has been little attempted, affords the ampler field for research. It may in some measure be considered as a reproach to this country, that, notwithstanding our having a much greater interest in the subject, we should have permitted the learned of France and of Germany to anticipate us on many points of inquiry: although the labours of the last twenty years, and more especially of the last ten, have gone far towards giving us the first place in the ranks of Chinese literature; and much more may be expected from the future.

I shall endeavour, in this paper, to take a cursory view of such facts connected with the *earlier* history of the Chinese, as may be depended upon, in order to obtain a correct idea of the antiquity of their empire, and their advancement in knowledge, points on which the most vague and unfounded notions have been prevalent; and the view may not be without its utility, in shewing what parts of the subject stand in need of further investigation. Great as is the antiquity of the Chinese, it has still been extravagantly over-rated. The best-informed and most reflecting among themselves reject, as unprofitable fables, the earliest traditions of their history: * and indeed the

* See, in Morrison's Chronology, p. 57, a quotation from *Choo-foo-tsze*, in which he says: "It is impossible to give entire credit to the traditions of these remote ages."

prodigies that are recorded, as well as the fanciful names that are given to their first emperors, carry with them the most unquestionable marks of fabrication. National vanity and a love of the marvellous have influenced in a similar manner the early history of most other countries, and furnished materials for nursery tales, as soon as the spirit of sober investigation has supplanted that appetite for wonders, which marks the infancy of nations, as well as of individuals. The person called *Fo-hi*, and some of his immediate successors, appear to have been of the number of those gifted men, who rescued the human race from primeval barbarism, and whom their gratitude has invested with superhuman attributes. All institutions and inventions, of whose real origin no history remains,* have been referred to them as to a common source; but the grave appellation of *Emperor* is only applied by the ignorant and the unthinking, to savages who first taught their cotemporaries to make fishing nets, to till the ground, and live together in a state of society.†

In order to prove how little dependence can be placed on the accounts which the Chinese give of their own antiquity and inventions, I need only produce the following quotation from the abstract of history given by Du Halde. “*Chuen-hiö* regulated the calendar, and desired to begin the year the first day of the month in which the sun should be nearest the 15th degree of Aquarius, for which he is called the author and father of the *Ephemeris*. He chose the time when the sun passes through the middle of the sign, *because in this season the earth is adorned with plants, trees renew their verdure, and all nature seems re-animated*. This of course means the spring season. Now *Chuen-hiö* is said to have lived more than two thousand years before Christ, and according to the usual mode of calculating the precession of the equinoxes, the sun must have passed through the 15th of Aquarius, in his time, somewhere about the *middle of December*.”

This strange blunder might very well have been expected from a Chinese historian, but that Du Halde should have quoted it, without any comment,

* “All they relate concerning the progress of the arts and sciences, is an incongruous mass of fictions. Every thing with them is produced as if by enchantment: and events succeed each other with inconceivable rapidity; but the greatest absurdity consists in attributing all inventions of that nature to *princes*, who we know have few opportunities of making discoveries.”—*De Pauw, Preliminary Discourse on the Egyptians and Chinese*.

† “At this time,” says a Chinese author, speaking of *Fo-hi*, “men differed but little from brutes; they knew their *mother*, but not their *father*.”—*See Du Halde*.

is certainly extraordinary. I am inclined to think that the present rule for commencing the Chinese year, near the middle of Aquarius, has a reference to the position of the *Winter Solstitial Colure* at a remote period, though it would not be so far back as the reputed age of *Chuen-hiö*, but short of it by about six hundred years. From the circumstance of the Winter Solstice being at present observed as a festival, there is a possibility that it was at first the period of their year's commencement; though I mention this merely as a conjecture.

The only direct and positive testimony that we seem to possess, *out of China*, relating to the first origin of the Chinese nation, exists in the Institutes of Menu: and I cannot help thinking that the observations of Sir W. Jones on the passage in question are deserving of great attention. It is there written, that "many families of the military class, having gradually abandoned the ordinances of the Veda, and the company of Brahmens, lived in a state of degradation, as the *Chinas* and some other nations." The great antiquity of the laws of Menu is in favour of the authenticity of the above testimony; for at the period at which Sir W. Jones supposes them to have been written (above one thousand years B.C.), there can be no doubt whatever but the Chinese nation was yet in its infancy, and that it could lay no claim to the character of an extensive, united, and powerful empire, until many centuries after that date: as I shall attempt to shew. I content myself with noticing in this place the statement of one of their own histories,* that twelve hundred years before Christ, "the Chinese nation was small and feeble, the eastern foreigners (that is, the aborigines, perhaps Tartars, between them and the east coast) numerous and strong," and that the former "gradually obtained a residence in the middle of the country," namely, in *Honan*. It is universally admitted among themselves, that the seat of government was at first in *Shen-si*, the north-west part of the present empire, where the colonists, mentioned by the Indian Lawgiver, are supposed to have settled, and that they subsequently carried on wars against a state called *Yen*, in *Pě-chě-li*, and another named *Tsi*, in *Shan-tung*, until they succeeded in fixing themselves in *Honan*.

The opinion, hazarded by M. de Guignes, that the Chinese were a colony from Egypt, seems hardly capable of being supported by sufficient proof. Such a distant and extensive emigration could not have taken place without

* See Morrison's Chinese Chronology, p. 52.

the knowledge and notice of the nations inhabiting the vast countries that intervene; besides which, there exists no resemblance between the mysterious hieroglyphics of Egypt and the Chinese characters, which might, as Sir W. Jones observes, "have been contrived by the first *Chinas*, or outcast Hindus, who either never knew, or had forgotten, the alphabetic character of their wiser ancestors." Though M. de Pauw and other learned men have been of opinion that the Chinese were originally a tribe of Tartars, or Scythians, I cannot help thinking that there are some reasonable grounds for concluding that they were a colony from India, and that they owe their present distinctive character to their subsequent mixture with the aborigines of the country, and with the Tartars.

The *Empire of China* cannot be dated earlier than the dynasty called *Tsin*, about two hundred years before Christ; and the term *Wang*, or Prince, instead of *Hoang-ti*, or Emperor, is applied by their own historians to all the monarchs of the race of *Chow*, which immediately preceded it. From this race of *Chow* (B.C. 1100 to 240) we may date the *Authentic History* of the Chinese, which commences with the *Chun-tsew* of Confucius, the annals of his own times, in which he relates the wars of the different petty states against each other.* The northern half of modern China, from the great river Keang† to the confines of Tartary, appears then to have been divided by a number of petty independent states, which contended against each other with various success, and as one obtained a temporary ascendancy over the rest, it assumed the pretensions of a doubtful sovereignty, which was acknowledged or denied, in proportion as adversity or success might influence the dispositions of its neighbours. The province of *Pě-chě-li* was occupied by a nation or state called *Yen*, *Shan-tung* was held by the Kings of *Loo* and *Tsi*, *Keang-nan* by the sovereign of *Woo*; while a large portion of the modern half of the empire to the south of the *Keang*, together with the province of *Sze-chuen*, was occupied by Barbarians, who are seldom mentioned in the histories of that period, except as provoking, by their incursions, the chastisement of the more civilized states in the north.

* It would perhaps be going too far to condemn all that precedes the time of *Chow*, as *absolutely fabulous*; but it is so mixed up with fable, as not to deserve the name of history. They have no records older than the compilations of Confucius.

† *Yang-tsze-keang*, or *ναρῖς ἑοχην*, *Keang*, "The River."

The period of *Chow*, from about the middle of which the era of authentic history may be dated, was distinguished by the birth of *Confucius*, and of *Laou-keun*, the founders of two of the sects of China; while *Fò*, or Buddha, the author of the third, was also born in India about the commencement of the same period, although his worship was not introduced into the empire until long after, in the first century of the Christian era. The memory and the doctrines of Confucius have met with almost uninterrupted veneration down to the present time; while the absurd superstitions of the other two have been alternately embraced and despised by the different sovereigns of the country. Under the present Tartar government, they can merely be said to be *tolerated*. In the instructions of the Emperor *Yung-ching* to the people, the tenets of *Fò* and of *Laou-keun* are stigmatized among the "impure doctrines" against which the nation is warned to guard itself with especial caution.

Leaving the religion of his countrymen as he found it, Confucius embodied in sententious maxims the first principles of morals and of government, and the purity and excellence of some of his precepts (whatever may have been said to the contrary by persons ignorant of the language) will bear a comparison with even those of the gospel. He, and he only, of the men who have at different times aspired to teach the Chinese, was truly deserving of the title of Philosopher; and he alone, during the revolutions of ages, has met with uniform veneration. Guided by the light of reason, he applied the energies of a powerful intellect to the *Study of man*, and grounded his doctrines on the fixed and immutable principles of human nature. His works are at this day the Sacred Books of the Chinese, and when compared with the evanescent relics of *Fò* and of *Laou-keun*, confirm the superiority of truth over the fictions of artful, and the ravings of fanatical teachers. Thus it is that "*opinionum delet dies, naturæ judicia confirmat.*"

After the death of Confucius, who appears to have been respected by the sovereigns of nearly all the independent states of China, a series of sanguinary contests arose among them, which gave to this period of history the name of *Chen-ko*, or the "contending nations," and proved at length the ruin of the race of *Chow*. The king of *Tsin*, who had long been growing very powerful at the expense of the neighbouring states, fought against six other nations, and after a course of successes, compelled them all to acknowledge his supremacy (B.C. 200). The chief government began now to assume the aspect of an *Empire*, which comprehended the greater portion

of the northern half of modern China ; but which, after the lapse of not much more than four centuries, was doomed again to be divided into three or four parts.

CHI-HOANG-TI, the *First Emperor*, as his name seems to import, had hardly established his authority, when the Tartars, or barbarians of the north, began to make incursions over the extensive frontiers. The Emperor succeeded in driving them back into their deserts, and then employed the united resources of his dominions in the erection of the vast Wall, which has existed during a space of two thousand years, and remains to this day a stupendous, though nearly useless, monument of the ambitious disposition of this prince.* As if determined, however, to have a counterpoise to the reputation which this great work entitled him to, or influenced by a spirit not unlike that by which Erostratus was inspired, when he burned the Ephesian temple, the same Emperor issued a general order that all the books of the learned should be cast into the flames. Though a great many, of course, escaped this sweeping sentence, his memory is execrated by the literati of China.

It is stated in the history of that period, that Japan was colonized from China during the same dynasty ; and there appears to myself some grounds for giving credit to the record. The union of the different states under his single authority, and the magnificent turn of mind that prompted *Chi-hoang-ti* to carry into execution such a work as the Great Wall, were most likely to urge him to schemes of colonization, which are sometimes very analogous to those of conquest ; and the extension of his new dominions to the shores of the Eastern Sea was still farther calculated to suggest such ideas. I am well aware that the Japanese have been asserted by some to have peopled their islands as early as the 13th century before Christ, and that those people are said to disdain the very idea of being descended from the Chinese. If, however, we remark the striking similarity that exists between the persons, the manners, the dispositions, and the policy of the two nations, we cannot but recognize them to be of *one family* ; and the fact of the Japanese making use of the Chinese written language, and reve-

* The substance of the Great Wall, which extends along a space of 1,500 miles, from the shore of the Yellow Sea to Western Tartary, has been estimated by Mr. Barrow to exceed in quantity that of all the houses in Great Britain, and to be capable of surrounding the whole earth with a wall several feet high.

rencing the books of Confucius, may fairly be considered as evidence that they carried them from China; at, or some time previous to, the period in question.* The earliest traditions of every country must be listened to with distrust, unless corroborated by circumstantial proof; and the most fastidious native of Japan need not be offended with the chronology that gives to his country an antiquity of more than two thousand years.

During the succeeding dynasties of *Han* (B.C. 200—A.D. 220), the first of which is called *Si*, or western, from holding its metropolis in *Shen-si*, while the latter bears the opposite name of *Tung*, or eastern, from its court having been removed to *Honan*, the empire suffered several revolutions. The ambition of the rulers of the different states, as well as of the ministers of the Emperor, gave rise to various wars; and, in the last days of *Han*, so little was left of an empire, that the sovereigns of that period are called *Choo*, or Lord, instead of *Hoang-ti*. The Tartars, too, by their fugitive and predatory mode of warfare, were the cause of much trouble, and forced the Chinese to propitiate them with alliances and tribute. This impolitic system, which commenced so early, was in subsequent ages carried to a still greater height, and terminated, many centuries afterwards, in the overthrow of the empire, by the Mongol Tartars.†

The dynasty of *Han*, however, is a very celebrated period in Chinese history, and learning especially is said to be under great obligations to it. At the present day, the term for a Chinese, in contradistinction to a Tartar, is *Han-jin*, “a Man of Han.” *Paper* and *ink*, instead of the awkward and cumbrous method of pricking characters on the bark of trees with a stile, are stated to have been invented during this dynasty, shortly previous to the Christian era:‡ and it is probable that the rapid progress of Buddhism, or the religion of *Fö*, which was soon after introduced from India, was in some measure owing to those inventions. The leading tenets of this sect were taught in the Chinese language, while the mere *sounds* of the characters were used,

* Allowing that this might have happened *before* the burning of the books, B.C. 200, it must necessarily have been *after* the time of Confucius, B.C. 500.

† During the learned and polite, but unwarlike dynasty of *Sung* (A.D. 950—1281), who were crushed by the Mongols, enormous supplies of money and silk were repeatedly demanded and obtained by the Barbarians. This unwise submission had the natural effect of increasing their insolence, and hastening the ruin of the empire.

‡ The art of *printing* is not recorded to have arisen until about A.D. 925, a little before the time of *Sung*.

as a system of syllabic spelling, to express the principal epithets or attributes of the Indian god, as well as the more mysterious, or unintelligible portions of his sacred books. These are now chaunted by the priests, or bonzes, without being understood, even by themselves; and may perhaps serve to excite the greater veneration for the object of their worship, on the principle of “*omne ignotum pro magnifico*.” The appellation *o-mee-to*, which, during my travels with Lord Amherst in the interior, I once saw inscribed around every division of a seven-storied pagoda, is supposed by Sir W. Jones to express *amita*, “immeasurable,” the Sanscrit epithet of Buddha: and it is probable that a person acquainted with both the languages would recognize abundance of Sanscrit words in the books of the Chinese bonzes.*

The *San-kwō*, or three nations into which the empire was divided, towards the close of *Han* A.D. 200, were *Wei* in the north, *Woo*, whose capital was at *Nan-king*, and *Shō* in the modern *Sze-chuen*. The period of the three nations is a very favourite subject of the historical plays of the Chinese, as well as of a well written and much prized historical romance, which bears the same name, and of which Sir George Staunton possesses a curious Latin translation.† The dress of that period, as represented on the stage, and in pictures, forms a singular contrast with the modern garb which has been forced upon the Chinese by their Tartar conquerors. Instead of the long queue or tail, proceeding from a single tuft at the back of the head, and which forms the usual handle for seizing offenders, the ancient Chinese are depicted with fine heads of hair, folded beneath their caps, and with dresses of a fashion differing altogether from the national costume of the present day.

Few circumstances could more strongly prove the complete subjection of the Chinese by the Manchew Tartars, than this one of the total change in their national dress. Modes of government and political institutions may be altered, in despotic countries, without the notice or even knowledge of

* The literary world is under great obligations to Professor Bopp of Germany, for proving beyond a doubt that the Sanscrit and the Greek are little more than dialects of the same language. The similarity of a few scattered words might have been regarded as accidental coincidence; but it requires considerable hardihood of disbelief to set aside the resemblance that runs through the whole conjugations of verbs, &c. &c. Even in the above-mentioned word *amita*, it is impossible not to allow a great resemblance to *το αμετηρον*, the (*a*) in both cases having the negative force.

† The translation has since been presented by Sir George to the Royal Asiatic Society, and is now in their Library.

a large mass of the community : but a change in the national costume, in consequence of a peremptory command, affects every individual equally, from the highest to the lowest, and is, perhaps, of all others, the most open and degrading mark of conquest. It can never be submitted to, except by a people who are thoroughly subdued ; nor ever imposed, except by a government that feels itself well able to *enforce* a measure, which is perhaps resorted to for no other purpose than to try, or to break, the spirit of the vanquished. The second conquest of China, in the seventeenth century, by the Eastern, or Manchew Tartars, who had not entire possession of the southern provinces until the reign of *Kang-hi*, was not so violent, or so bloody, as its first conquest by the Western or Mongols, under Coblai Khan, in the thirteenth ; but it was not less complete, and has already continued much longer.

After the time of *Han*, and at the commencement of the period called *Woo-tae*, or the Five short Dynasties, A.D. 416-620, China is recorded to have been divided into two Empires, the Northern and Southern. The Emperor of the North, however, having promoted a person, named *Yang-këen*, to the situation of his first minister, and formed an alliance between his own daughter and the minister's son, soon after made *Yang-këen* sovereign of the state *Suy*. During the following reign, this ambitious person took the title of Emperor, and having crossed the *Keang*, dethroned the sovereign of the south, and united the two empires into one, A.D. 585. The seat of government was soon after removed from *Shen-si* to *Honan*, as to a more central situation.

During the Dynasty *Tang*,* which immediately succeeded, and which lasted from A.D. 620-900, a circumstance highly deserving of attention is the extraordinary power which the Eunuchs of the palace seem to have assumed. For a considerable time, their influence and authority were such, as to enable them to make and unmake emperors at pleasure, like the

	A. D.	A. D.
* After <i>Tang</i> , we have the five latter dynasties.....	900	950
<i>Sung</i>	950	1281
<i>Yuen</i> , or Mongols	1281	1365
<i>Ming</i> , or Chinese restored	1365	1644
<i>Ta-tsing</i> , the present Manchows	1644 down to the	present time.

Pretonian guards at Rome. As they could not, like the latter, have possessed any real or substantial power, we must necessarily refer so curious a circumstance to the operations of intrigue. The uncontrolled access which their neutralized condition gave them to all parts of the palace, and to the company of both sexes, was greatly calculated to facilitate their projects: and projects of mischief and disorder were likely enough to be formed by persons in their miserable condition, who looked with an eye of envy and hatred on all the rest of the human race. The awe of state was not long felt by those who were the immediate attendants, and perhaps the companions of the sovereign, in his private haunts: and that barrier being once passed, the approaches of insolence and usurpation advanced with less interruption. At the close of the dynasty, however, their power was finally crushed in a general massacre: and though eunuchs are at this day employed at Pekin in great numbers, the more modern history of China has not recorded their interference in the revolutions of the Empire.*

In the above brief view of the principal facts connected with the *earlier* history of China, I have contented myself with noticing such points, as seemed best calculated to convey a general notion of the real antiquity of the Empire, or were most deserving of attention in themselves; and I am of opinion, that a careful examination of its authentic annals, undertaken with a proper degree of scepticism towards the misrepresentations of national vanity, will establish the following facts: that the antiquity of China as an *Empire*, has been greatly exaggerated, and that it cannot be dated earlier than the reign of *Chi-hoang-ti*, about B.C. 200; that it was then confined

* It was about the end of the same dynasty of *Tang*, or very soon after, that the strange custom of cramping the feet of the higher classes of women is recorded to have commenced. As it has always appeared to myself impossible to refer the origin of such shocking mutilation to any notions of physical beauty, however arbitrary, I am inclined to ascribe it to a principle which unquestionably dictates the *long nails* of the literati and higher classes of Chinese men. The idea conveyed by these is *exemption from labour*, and as the small feet make perfect cripples of the ladies, it is fair to conclude that the idea of gentility which they convey, arises from a similar association. That appearance of helplessness, which the mutilation induces, is much admired by the Chinese, notwithstanding its usual concomitant of extreme unhealthiness; and in their poetry, I have frequently observed the tottering gait of the poor women compared to "the waving of a willow in the breeze." A Mandarin once told me, with great gravity, that the compression of the ladies' feet in early youth was highly desirable,—*quod carnem ex pedibus in crura misit, et pinguiora ea ob hanc causam fecit.*

almost entirely to that half of modern China, which lies between the great river Keang, and the confines of Tartary; that it was subsequently split into several independent nations, which, after various contests and revolutions, were formed into *two* Empires, the Northern and Southern, and became finally united under *one* head, about A.D. 585; that China has been the theatre of as bloody and continued wars as have ravaged most of the other countries of the globe; that it has twice, and at no very distant periods of time, been completely conquered by foreign barbarians; and that its last conquerors exercise over it, at this day, an imperious, and by no means impartial sway, but one in which the precedence and the trust are, in most cases, conferred on the Tartar.

Among other points of inquiry relating to the Chinese, their attainments in the various branches of human knowledge have naturally been the objects of much curiosity in Europe. With respect to those arts of life which administer to the wants and enjoyments of mankind, they must be allowed to have made a very early and considerable proficiency, and are even at this day, in many respects, the most skilful and best workmen in the world. Of science, however, they are, and appear always to have been, entirely destitute. It is a curious circumstance that they and the Hindus, (whether they had, or had not, any connexion in remote antiquity,) should have existed so long in the immediate vicinity of each other, and at the same time possessed so little in common. With the exception of the sect of *Fö*, or Buddha, an Indian heresy, which found refuge in the Empire from the persecutions of a bigotted priesthood, the Chinese appear to me to have received nothing from their western neighbours. The ancient skill of the Hindus, in astronomical and algebraic science, has been clearly and ably demonstrated: but no proofs have yet occurred that they imparted any portion of that skill to the Chinese. I feel persuaded that, until the introduction of astronomy into the Empire by the Arabians, in the first instance, and subsequently by the European Missionaries, the whole science of the Chinese consisted in a careful observation and scrupulous notation of the eclipses, and other heavenly phenomena. Their ignorance led them to attach the most important political influences to the different aspects and conjunctions of the celestial orbs, and hence arose the exactness with which they marked and chronicled them.

Confucius has recorded six and thirty eclipses of the sun, the greater number of which have been verified by the calculations of European astro-

nomers : but the recording an eclipse may prove the authenticity of historical annals, while, at the same time, it proves nothing as to the existence of astronomical science. Some persons have been led to suspect that the Chinese must at one time have possessed the astronomy of the Hindus, by their having twenty-eight lunar mansions, and a cycle of sixty years : but a careful observation of the essential differences that exist on either side, must remove all shadow of identity. The Hindu cycle is a cycle of Jupiter, while that of the Chinese is a solar cycle ; and the twenty-eight constellations of the Hindus are nearly all of them equal divisions of the circle, consisting of about 13° each, while the Chinese constellations are extremely unequal, varying from 30° to less than 1° .

That the Chinese possessed no real science of their own, and that they obtained none from the Hindus, is, I think, proved by the readiness with which they adopted that of Europeans. On this one subject that singular nation has deviated from its established prejudices and maxims against introducing what is foreign : and that a people so self-sufficient and vain, should at once, in open violation of their general practice, have adopted the science of foreigners, and raised its professors to high dignities, is perhaps the strongest proof in the world that they possessed none of their own. It appears that they have in former times adopted the very *errors* of our astronomy, most probably from the Arabians. I discovered in an old Chinese book the most exact delineation of the Ptolemaic system, with its crystalline orbs, primum mobile, &c. &c. and the Earth occupying a conspicuous place in the centre of all. Indeed it is impossible not to smile at the idea of attributing *any* science to a people, whose learned books are filled with such trumpery as the diagrams of *Fò-hi*, and a hundred other puerilities of the same kind.

In a consideration of this vast and extraordinary Empire, there is no point of inquiry more curious, or more interesting, than the amount of its *population* ; and though it deserves to be ascertained with some degree of accuracy, it has perhaps been the subject of as many vague guesses and conjectures as any other. The enormous amount of 333 millions, stated to Lord Macartney, was supported by no better authority than the mere assertions of Mandarins, at all times ready enough to make the most of their country in the eyes of foreigners, and generally possessed of very little correct information on such points, even if they were willing to give it. The document to which Dr. Morrison refers for the sum of 143 millions, would be deserving of great attention, did it not destroy its own credit by

the tremendous absurdity of its statements. According to this statistical work (the *Yě-tung-chy*), the total population about A.D. 1644, was twenty-seven millions and a half, and in 1790 it was increased to 143 millions. "Oh, monstrous! eleven buckram men grown out of two!" The population of an old country like China more than quintupled in 146 years! This is quite incredible, and throws great discredit either on the *Yě-tung-chy*, or on the accuracy of the Chinese in taking their census. Twenty-seven millions and a half seem much too little for China in the year 1644, and there must either be some mistake in the dates, or the later census was the correct one, and the earlier altogether erroneous. Grosier states, on the authority of the *Yě-tung-chy*, (though he makes the date of it 1743,) that the population of China proper was somewhat more than 142 millions, and by a calculation of his own, to include those whom he assumes to have been left out in the census, increases the number to 157 millions. To this account he subjoins the copy of an estimate of the population, called *Chung-min-soo*,* which, he says, was made in the 27th year of Kien-Lung, or 1761, and received in France from the missionaries in 1779. This, which states the population at 198 millions, is not to be depended on, as the Chinese generally profess to be ignorant of the existence of such a document. It is likely to be spurious, or at least *unofficial*, and certainly does not deserve as much credit as even the *Yě-tung-chy*, which is a national work. Thus it would appear, that the only thing *certain* is our total ignorance of the real population of China ;

" And all our knowledge is, we nothing know."

Some persons have been disposed to draw sweeping inferences from the numbers that were observed by the two British embassies of 1794 and 1816 : but surely these were not the proper data for such calculations. The provinces and districts, through which both missions passed, are confessedly the richest of the whole Empire ; and beyond comparison excel, both in fertility and population, those to the westward. The grand canal, and the *Yang-tsze-Keang*, render them the great commercial route between the northern and southern provinces ; as well as the channel of almost all political communication. A British embassy was calculated to draw, and did actually draw together, the whole population of the cities and neighbour-

* " An account of the whole people."

hoods through which they passed ; and the officers of government observed frequently to us, during the progress of Lord Amherst's embassy, that the "*jě-naou*," "the crowd and bustle," exceeded any thing they had before witnessed. What sound inferences then can be drawn from the observations of either mission, respecting the real population of China? A statistical work like the *Yě-tung-chy*, whose professed object was to treat of the resources of the Empire, was very unlikely (however incorrect it might be), to *underrate* the amount of population. We may, therefore, assume with tolerable certainty, that about 150 millions is the *full extent* of the Chinese population ; that is, less than one half of the 333 millions stated to Lord Macartney.

Whatever the actual population of the Empire may be, it probably is as thickly peopled in some of its provinces, as any of the richest countries of Europe : but there is every reason to believe that this is not uniform, and that, by the application of additional stimuli to its resources, the whole country might be rendered vastly more wealthy and populous than at present. These stimuli have been stated generally, by political economists, to consist in the distribution and demand arising first, from the division of the lands of a country ; secondly, from foreign and internal commerce ; thirdly, from the maintenance of unproductive consumers.* With respect to the first of these, it may safely be affirmed that the subdivision of land in China could not be carried much further with advantage. A great landed proprietor is a character unknown in the country, and all the institutions of the Empire, as well as the habits of the people, are generally inimical to a great accumulation of any kind of property by an individual.† As to its commerce, although the *internal* trade of China has long since arrived at a very high pitch, and may from the beginning be regarded as the chief cause of the wealth and populousness of the Empire, its *foreign* commerce must be considered as very trifling indeed, in comparison with the productive powers of the whole country. If the habits of the people, and the policy of the government,

* Malthus. Political Economy, ch. 7, sect. 7, page 427.

† Extraordinary wealth never fails, in a country where *justice* is administered as it is in China, to attract the grasp of rapacity ; "*feriuntque summos fulmina montes.*" A certain affectation of patriarchal simplicity and *purity*, on the part of the Mandarins, operates as a sumptuary law, and gives a corresponding tone to the habits of the people, as far as relates to external equipage and show. Superfluous wealth finds itself a vent in the shades of domestic privacy, in contributing to the gratification of every species of sensuality.

should ever change so far as to admit of an unrestrained intercourse with the rest of the world, it is really impossible to conceive to what an extent the wealth and power of that country might increase, favoured as it is in point of fertility, climate, and facility of internal intercourse, as well as in the industrious character of its inhabitants. As far as regards the third point, although the number of unproductive consumers might be greatly extended by the increased number and efficiency of its military establishments, by the formation of a naval force proportioned to the extent of its coasts, and by an increase in the use of various other kinds of unproductive labour, this consideration is quite trifling in comparison with the results of an *extended foreign trade*.

With a view to guard against a very common danger, that of *false inferences*, I must apologize for the super-addition of a few observations, which may appear somewhat out of place in this paper. Such a trade, as the above mentioned, can never take place without a complete change in the habits of the people, and the maxims of the government. Let no inference be drawn from the foregoing remarks, in favour of an *open trade* between this country and China. Until the other party change their restrictive policy, it is not expedient for us to change ours. I am firmly of opinion, and this opinion is founded on some degree of local experience, some knowledge of the language, and considerable intercourse with the natives, that if, at the expiration of the Charter, the present system be altered, it will be an experiment attended with the *greatest hazard*. There is no maxim more generally true, than that monopoly is not so good as unfettered intercourse; but there is, at the same time, no greater source of error, than the application of general principles, without a due regard to the peculiarities of individual cases: and if the government shall ever be induced by popular clamour,—by the “*civium ardor prava jubentium*,”—to throw the trade with China open, there is every reason for predicting, that it will be a sacrifice of the true interests of the *whole* to the outcries of a *part*, though that may be the most numerous part of the community. We shall soon find that we buy *worse* tea, and pay *dearer* for it; not to mention the difference that it will make, in the collection of nearly four millions of revenue, and the facilities that will be afforded to smuggling, with the temptation to evade a duty of one hundred per cent.: and for the reasons of all this, I need only refer to the evidence before Parliament in 1813, as well as to Sir George Staunton's notices of China, published in 1822. The systematic, and un-

ceasingly operating spirit of encroachment, imposition, and extortion, on the part of the Chinese, requires the constant pressure of a counteracting check, the firm and concentrated, though mild and judicious, opposition of all the resources in one power. These resources consist in a long experience and thorough knowledge of the people, an intimate acquaintance with their language, and an adequate (though not overweening) confidence in, as well as a temperate use of, the influence arising to the Company, *as a body*, from the value and importance of the trade. The present system, namely, the establishment of a resident Factory, acting with knowledge, judgment, and unanimity, and possessing the most thorough controul over a numerous fleet of ships, whose commodore, captains, and officers depend for character and employment on the discipline which they preserve in the river among 2500 seamen, as well as on the obedience which they themselves pay to the orders of the Committee, can alone ensure the continuance of a trade, whose *existence* depends on the entire suppression of disorder on the one hand, as much as its *value* does on the successful opposition to extortion on the other. This excellently organized system may with truth be affirmed, (like most others,) gradually to have arisen out of the *necessity for it*. Any person at all acquainted with the early history of our intercourse with China, when every separate ship of the Company transacted its own business, and when that intercourse in many points resembled *what a free trade would make it*, must have been struck by the endless and intolerable grievances to which we were subjected by the Chinese, and which frequently reduced us to the brink of giving up the commerce altogether. (See Asiatic Journal for 1822.) It is quite idle to insist that the Americans are a proof of the success with which an open trade can be carried on. It is too evident that they participate in a very large portion of the advantages which our own system affords; that they absolutely trade under our wing; and that while we are constantly and successfully opposing, with the united weight of our influence and address, the infliction of destructive impositions on the *British* trade, the beneficial effects extend to foreign trade *in general*.

But to return from this digression. In a comparative estimate of the advancement and civilization of different countries, *at the present day*, it would not perhaps be a very difficult matter to assign to China her proper place, were the comparison confined to the nations of *Asia*. *There* she may be allowed to stand pre-eminent. Some persons, however, (and those well

acquainted with the country,) have been bold enough to assert, that she can challenge competition with the most refined states of Europe. But in what instances? Has natural science, or have even the arts, made the same progress there as here? Have the principles of moral or of political philosophy been as thoroughly investigated, or as clearly established? Is the state of one-half of the people, namely the female sex, so elevated or so happy as in Europe? Is the person or the property of the Chinese so secure, as the persons and properties of the subjects of most European states? Or, lastly, are the daily and domestic habits of the people so generally free from sensual and degrading vices? Until these questions can be answered in the affirmative, it is impossible to give to that country the lofty station which her advocates require. At the same time, it must be allowed, that she appears to have attained, at a very early period, to a considerable point of refinement in many respects, and that, with the exception of occasional and tremendous revolutions, she has been, for at least two thousand years, a wealthy, flourishing, and tolerably civilized portion of the globe. I am disposed to attribute this in a great measure to her particular geographical situation; * to the peculiarly favourable climate, or rather climates; the *moderate* average fertility of soil, and the great facility of internal intercourse, with which she has been gifted by nature. An attentive survey of most of the tropical regions of the globe, where the great heat of the climate, and the almost *morbid* fertility of the earth, tend to produce food in the greatest abundance, † will seem to justify the conclusion, that extreme fertility, or power of production, has been rather unfavourable to the progress of the human race; or at least, that the industry and advancement of nations has appeared in some measure to depend on a certain proportion between their *necessities* and their *natural resources*. Man is by nature an indolent animal, and without the stimulant of necessity, will in the first instance be inclined to get on, as well as he can, with the provision that nature has made for him. In the

* Between the 40th and 23d degrees of North latitude, that is, in the finest part of the temperate Zone.

† I was led to make the above observations during a voyage among the islands of the Eastern Archipelago, and I have since been gratified in finding them confirmed by the great authority of Mr. Malthus, in his late work upon Political Economy, in which he draws some important conclusions from the remarks of M. de Humboldt upon New Spain, ch. vii., sect. iv., p. 381.

warm and fertile regions of the Tropics, or rather of the Equinoctial, where lodging and clothing, the two most necessary things after food, are rendered almost superfluous by the climate, and where food itself is produced with very little exertion, we find how small an advancement has in most cases been made; while, on the other hand, the whole of Europe, and by far the greater part of China, is situated beyond the northern Tropic. If, again, we go *farther* north, to those Arctic Regions where men are still in a very miserable state, we shall find that *there* they have really no materials to work upon. Nature is such a niggard in the returns which she makes to labour, that industry is discouraged and *frozen*, as it were, in the outset. In other words, the *proportion* is destroyed. The equinoctial regions are too spontaneously fertile, and the arctic too unkindly barren: and industry, wealth, and civilization seem on this account to have been principally confined to the temperate zone, where there is at once *necessity* to excite labour, and *production*, to recompense it. I am well aware that there are other important circumstances, besides geographical situation, which influence the progress of nations: all I mean to say is, that the last cause does not seem generally to have met with the attention it deserves. It will be obvious too, that the foregoing observations apply solely to those countries whose inhabitants may be considered as *indigenous*, in the common acceptation of the word, and not to such as have been peopled by extensive emigrations from old states, whence all their industry and knowledge—“*tanta memoria præteritorum futurorumque prudentia, tot artes, tantæ scientiæ, tot inventa*”—have been transferred.