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Goldsmith's Cosmopolitanism

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Although imaginary travelers and voyages date back at least as far as the work of Lucian, the figure of the fictional oriental traveler seems to belong primarily to the eighteenth century. Following the great success of Giovanni Marana's *Letters Writ by a Turkish Spy*, first published in Paris in 1684, a wide range of European writers sought to exploit the various satiric and comic possibilities that were offered by Eastern spies and observers. While a work such as George Lyttelton's *Letters from a Persian in England* (1734) was clearly informed by a specific anti-Walpole agenda, fictional orientals in early-eighteenth-century British writing, especially, seem above all to have offered another means of addressing the experience of modernity: figures such as the Indian in Tom Brown's *Amusements Serious and Comical* (1702) or the Ambassadors of Bantam in *Spectator* 557 (1712) are presented as newcomers to London, and shown to be both fascinated and perplexed by the workings of commercial society. In many ways, then, the oriental traveler performs more or less the same function as a range of other eighteenth-century spies and observers, by offering positions—albeit provisional and ironic—from which to view the customs and manners of modern Britain. Oliver Goldsmith's Chinese philosopher, Lien Chi Altangi, stands out from the crowd of such fictional informants, however, both because he is made to play a larger role than this, and because he serves as more than just an estranging device. Although Lien Chi frequently misreads situations and gets things wrong, he describes himself as one who seeks “to know the

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men of every country,” and he advances the claims of a “cosmopolitan” orientation that Goldsmith’s other writings of the late 1750s and early 1760s take very seriously.¹ But while *The Citizen of the World* attempts to hold on to a utopian sense of global community, it offers a number of interrogative and even antagonistic perspectives on the idea of the cosmopolitan, too, often rehearsing the terms of current debates.² Although Goldsmith arguably took the fiction of the oriental traveler further than any of his contemporaries, therefore, his work might also be seen to offer a critical reflection on such figures, and to anticipate the slow demise of this genre in the later decades of the eighteenth century.

Goldsmith’s adoption of a Chinese persona was by no means original; he plundered the works of other writers, taking the name of his traveler from Horace Walpole’s 1757 jeu d’esprit “Letter from Xo Ho” (addressed to “Lien Chi at Peking”), and borrowing freely from the Marquis d’Argens’ *Chinese Letters* (translated into English in 1741), as well as from the Jesuit writings collected in Jean-Baptiste Du Halde’s *A Description of the Empire of China* (published in two volumes in 1738 and 1741).³ The letters of Lien Chi are often derivative, then, and they frequently betray the haste with which Goldsmith composed them, in order to meet the serialization agreement he had made with the daily newspaper *The Public Ledger*. When read in sequence, in their collected form, furthermore, these letters are distinctly uneven in tone as well as content, and resist attempts to find a coherent authorial agenda. Inaugurated perhaps by William Hazlitt (who stated that reading *The Citizen of the World* was “like walking in a garden full of traps and pitfalls”), a strong tradition of criticism has focused on the slipperiness of Goldsmith’s work, emphasizing that Lien Chi is both the “subject *and* object of satire.”⁴ While Lien Chi is an “ironic observer” of British customs and manners, therefore, as Charles A. Knight has argued, he is also an “ironic victim,” a comic and perhaps even absurd figure.⁵ Like earlier imaginary travelers, such as Ned Ward’s *London Spy*, Lien Chi appears in his first few letters as an innocent abroad, a naive observer of “a new world,” where “every object strikes with wonder and surprise” (21). And as is the case with a work such as *The London Spy*, part of the appeal of *The Citizen of the World* comes from the gap between what the observer knows and what the reader knows: early on, for example, Lien Chi mistakes pub-signs—“black lions” and “blue boars” (19, 20)—for house decorations. Goldsmith’s traveler is especially bewildered by the appearance and the conduct of English women, which he often reads through the lens of his

own “Chinese” prejudices, incredulously declaring, for example, that the women he encounters “have such masculine feet, as actually serve *some* for walking” (25). Shortly afterwards, Lien Chi is shown to be less dogmatic about standards of beauty, and to admire the engaging manners of “the ladies in this city” (42); nonetheless, he misinterprets what he sees, falling victim to the confidence trick of a prostitute: he gives his watch away to be repaired, never to see it again.

Goldsmith’s Chinese philosopher is initially shown to be at sea in the London of pubs and prostitutes, and the comic potential of his errors and misrecognitions is exploited throughout the work. If Lien Chi often comes across as a naive blunderer rather than a worldly traveler, however, *The Citizen of the World* does not in any straightforward way satirize the humanistic ideals or the “enthusiasm for knowledge” (37) that he so often proclaims. Read alongside Goldsmith’s other writings of the period, indeed, *The Citizen of the World* might be seen to form an important part of a larger, ongoing project of cultural comparison, the work’s title conveying, as Richard C. Taylor has argued, Goldsmith’s “idealized sense of himself as a journalist,” temporarily removed from the fray of the periodical trade, and released from the quest for social acceptance.⁶ While mobility was often literally forced upon the penurious Goldsmith, famous for having undertaken large sections of the Grand Tour on foot, his diverse writings also made a considerable virtue of mobility, deploying a range of peripatetic personae to facilitate the survey of different peoples, and to offer, as the subtitle to his 1764 poem “The Traveller” puts it, “a Prospect of Society.”⁷ Like the imaginary traveler in the first number of Goldsmith’s periodical *The Bee* (1759), for example, Lien Chi considers himself a “philosophic wanderer” (17), motivated by a scholarly curiosity, and determined to distance himself from narrow national prejudices. If the reader is invited to recognize the gulf between the grand terms of Lien Chi’s project and the actual content of his experiences, Goldsmith’s work nonetheless uses Lien Chi to redefine contemporary constructions of global fraternity. Whereas Addison and Steele’s Mr. Spectator had presented himself as “a Citizen of the World” by virtue of his contact with the international fellowship of “Ministers of Commerce” at the Royal Exchange, Goldsmith’s title character styles himself as someone who engages in the free trade of knowledge rather than commodities.⁸ While he often celebrates the life and writings of Voltaire, Lien Chi often looks beyond the “actually existing” cosmopolitanism of a Francophile aristocratic elite, and conceives of cosmopolitan fellowship in

a potentially much more inclusive sense, as the coming together of like-minded people concerned “to unite society more closely” (86).⁹

Contemporary reviewers acknowledged that the “Chineseness” of Lien Chi is sometimes liable to be forgotten by readers; according to the *Monthly*, indeed, “This Chinese philosopher has nothing Asiatic about him.”¹⁰ Some of Lien Chi’s letters take the form of discrete moral essays on abstract questions, such as the pursuit of happiness, and a number of the letters explore Goldsmith’s own predicament as a relative newcomer from Ireland (via Scotland) to England, displaying a fascination with class distinction, or referring to the anxious and unstable condition of the modern writer. Even if Lien Chi’s mask often slips, however, his status as an oriental philosopher remains more than an incidental designation, since it serves to secure him a privileged, Olympian perspective on British customs and manners, and on European affairs more generally: “Every other nation in Europe is equally [ridiculous]; each laughs at each, and the Asiatic at all” (320). In the immediate aftermath of the so-called “year of victories” of 1759, Lien Chi offers provocative observations on Britain’s conduct of the ongoing Seven Years War, referring especially to the conflict with the French in Canada. At one point, for example, Lien Chi wonders how “an Asian politician” would understand Britain and France continually fighting wars with each other, despite their “treaties of peace and friendship” (72). This might be seen as a naive observation, or an unwitting criticism, but Lien Chi goes on to make a larger moral point about the rights of the indigenous peoples of Canada to possess the land on which they have lived “for time immemorial,” as well as to identify the resources, such as furs, that led to Canada becoming “an object of desire” to European nations in the first place (73). While Goldsmith’s work often presents empire in civic humanist terms as a drain on wealth and population, it also uses Lien Chi here to voice a more explicitly ethical anti-imperialism, echoing the terms of Johnson’s *The Idler*, 81 of November 1758 (written, incidentally, from the perspective of a native American chief): “Such is the contest” between the English and the French, Lien Chi states, “that no honest man can heartily wish success to either party” (74).¹¹

If Lien Chi is frequently said to see Britain and Europe from a generally “Asiatic” perspective, his specifically Chinese background often gives him a certain critical purchase too. He intermittently refers to the history of contact between Europe and China, complaining that European travelers to China have hitherto been people with an agenda—“the superstitious

and mercenary" (419)—rather than the truly disinterested and enlightened. And while it is true that Goldsmith does little to flesh out Lien Chi's Chineseness, beyond presenting him as "a native of Honan" and a former "mandarine" (16), Lien Chi nonetheless on occasion defends Chinese customs and manners. "The Europeans reproach us with false history and fabulous chronology," Lien Chi tells the reader, but "how should they blush to see their own books, many of which are written by the doctors of their religion, filled with the most monstrous fables, and attested with the utmost solemnity" (69); the priestly caste deceives the laity, Lien Chi states, not only in China but "in every country" (49). Lien Chi's often misogynistic commentary on both English and Chinese women makes him a secondary object of satire for the polite reader, as is the case when he describes "the Looking-glass of Lao" (195) as a monitor of the soul rather than as a mirror that reflects the mind as well as the body; "Woman," Lien Chi states on another occasion, "is a subject not easily understood, even in China" (330). It is important, nonetheless, that he also sometimes challenges commonly held European assumptions about the supposed condition and treatment of Eastern women, which were endorsed by Goldsmith's friend, Thomas Percy, in the notes to his edition of the Chinese novel *Hau Kiou Chooan, or, The Pleasing History* (1761). Lien Chi declares that "the Asiatics are much kinder to the fairer sex than you imagine" (394), in response to Beau Tibbs's fantasy of life in an Eastern seraglio, and he further complicates cultural stereotypes with his reference to the custom of foot binding. For many European writers in the nineteenth century, especially, the bound female foot was a synecdoche for the state of China, "crippled by conceited absolutism and distrust," as Charles Dickens put it in an essay on the Great Exhibition of 1851.¹² "The ladies here make no scruple to laugh at the smallness of a Chinese slipper," Lien Chi states, but he adds that "our wives at China would have a more real cause of laughter, could they but see the immoderate length of an European train!" Lien Chi again gets things wrong, since he misreads the train as "a remnant of European barbarity," which he compares unfavorably for comfort and convenience with the "sheep-skin" worn by "the female Tartar" (332). Importantly, though, Lien Chi's analogy between Chinese slippers and European trains, albeit misconceived, denies foot binding any particular "representative" significance; the analogy in effect preempts the kind of rhetorical move that Dickens and so many others were later to make, not by defend-

ing foot binding, but by presenting it as just a customary cultural practice, for which parallels might be found elsewhere. Lien Chi uses “woman” as an index of cultural comparison for his own purposes, here, presenting himself as a rational and refined observer at the primary expense of female consumers of luxury goods.

The Chinese identity of Lien Chi is especially significant in the light of Goldsmith's engagement with the ongoing debate about the effects of luxury. As is well known, one of the key types of luxury commodity in the consumer culture of the mid-eighteenth century was “chinoiserie,” a catch-all term that referred both to goods brought from China—lacquerware furniture, porcelain, silks, and so on—and to domestic imitations of these exotic imports. The representation of luxury in *The Citizen of the World* has confounded some critics, since Goldsmith initially seems to treat luxurious consumption in a very different manner in his later poem, and probably his best-known work, “The Deserted Village” (1770). In Letter XI, for example, Lien Chi attributes to Confucius the Humean injunction that “we should enjoy as many of the luxuries of life as are consistent with our own safety and the prosperity of others” (53). Elsewhere, however, Lien Chi puts a positive gloss on the British demand for silk primarily because “it is so very beneficial to the country in which I was born.” Rehearsing the argument of Jonas Hanway's *Essay on Tea* (1756), Goldsmith has Lien Chi draw attention to how the fashion for things Chinese drains Britain of its capital without meaningful return: “This unnecessary consumption may introduce poverty here, but then we shall be richer for it in China” (331).¹³ Goldsmith had denounced chinoiserie as “a perversion of taste” in a review of the 1759 play *The Orphan of China*, and his use of a term like “perversion” seems to position Goldsmith among those critics who saw the Chinese taste as a vulgar affront both to the integrity of the nation and to the dignity and truth of neoclassical aesthetics.¹⁴ But one of the significant features of *The Citizen of the World* is that its critique of this popular taste also addresses the way in which chinoiserie travesties China. Goldsmith often poses the sober rationality of his Chinese philosopher against the frivolous excess and superficiality of the contemporary “Chinese” aesthetic, a distinction that he announces with the editor's prefatory declaration: “If the Chinese have contributed to vitiate our taste, I'll try how far they can help to improve our understanding” (15). The editor describes how he had dreamt of a “Fashion Fair” on the frozen river Thames, where, see-

ing the marketability of the “furniture, frippery, and fireworks of China,” he resolved to try his luck with “a small cargoe of Chinese morality.” That the ice cracks under the weight of this cargo in the editor’s dream might be read as an ironic recognition of the limits of the work’s moral authority, and perhaps further serves to acknowledge the compromise inherent in using an imaginary Chinese philosopher to satirize the taste for, among other things, chinoiserie; though only “a small cargoe,” “Chinese morality” itself clearly takes on the status of a commodity here. This opposition between fashionable commodities and unfashionable morality, albeit precarious, nonetheless structures many of Lien Chi’s letters, and he frequently alludes to a deeper, if barely articulated, history of Chinese cultural authority, in the process distinguishing this pedigree from the surface triviality of Chinese-style artifacts.¹⁵

Throughout *The Citizen of the World* Goldsmith presents the taste for apparently Chinese commodities as frivolous and ignorant, having little or nothing to do with China itself. Lien Chi encounters a range of people of indeterminate social position, such as the female collector of chinoiserie in Letter XIV, who want to see something other than what is in front of them, and who will not bear contradiction. Whereas Pope’s Belinda, in “The Rape of the Lock,” is adorned by the accumulated spoils of English mercantilism, if in an ambivalent fashion, the woman described by Lien Chi as a “lady of distinction” has in effect been consumed by her habit, to the extent that she is represented as a wasted and withered grotesque: “a little shrivelled figure indolently reclined on a sofa” (63).¹⁶ As David Porter has recently argued, chinoiserie had a widespread and potentially liberatory appeal as an “aesthetic of illegitimacy,” a form of artistic revolt against the authority of the classical taste and its patrician arbiters (133). Rather than engage with the terms of contemporary investments in chinoiserie, however, Goldsmith seems quite straightforwardly to frame the Chinese taste as deluded and depraved, representing the lady of distinction as an aggressive and hectoring figure who is unable to explain the attraction of “Chinese” artifacts beyond reiterating that they are “of no use in the world” (64). The lady of distinction assails her guest for not conforming to her expectations—for not wearing what she imagines to be his proper national costume, for example, and for not appreciating the true character of her furnishings. Lien Chi in turn protests at his host’s fanciful construction of Chineseness, stating that the pagodas in her garden look as much like “an Egyptian pyramid as a Chinese temple.” Perhaps alluding to Sir William

Chambers's pagoda at Kew Gardens, being built as Lien Chi's letters were being published, Goldsmith has Lien Chi declare that "*Pagods of all kinds are my aversion*" (64).¹⁷

In a later letter, Lien Chi complains about "the presumption of those islanders, when they pretend to instruct me in the ceremonies of China!," his use of the term "islanders" here serving to provincialize Britons and put them in their place: "They lay it down that every person who comes from [China] must express himself in metaphor; swear by Alla, rail against wine, and behave, and talk and write like a Turk or Persian" (142). In this instance, Lien Chi complains about how the fantastical "China" that he involuntarily represents has come under the sign of "the East," an undifferentiated space that his interlocutors seem to know primarily via *Arabian Nights*-style romance. In the same letter, Lien Chi tells of a visit he made to another "lady of distinction," said to have "collected all her knowledge of eastern manners from fictions every day propagated here under the titles of eastern tales and oriental histories." Lien Chi tells of how the lady first wondered why he had brought no opium with him, then, in accordance with her skewed understanding of formal "decorums" rather than "ordinary civilities," offered him a cushion on the floor rather than a chair; "It was in vain that I protested," Lien Chi states, that "the Chinese used chairs as in Europe" (143). Lien Chi encounters writers as well as readers of oriental tales, including not only Mr. Tibbs, a member of a society of authors who "throws off an Eastern tale to perfection" (126), but also a "grave gentleman" who assembles his works from a vocabulary of "genii, magicians, rocks, bags of bullets, giants, and enchanters, where all is great, obscure, magnificent, and unintelligible!" (144). In common with the first "lady of distinction," the grave gentleman is interested only in what is "sonorous, lofty, musical, and unmeaning" (145), privileging sound over sense, and surface over depth. Goldsmith's own attempt at an oriental tale, "The Proceedings of Providence Vindicated" (1759), is notable for its neoclassical indifference to the detail of costume, and for the way in which, like Johnson's *Rasselas*, published in the same year, it resorts to a foreign setting primarily as a backdrop for the consideration of abstract moral questions. Lien Chi's letters incorporate a number of similar Eastern apologues, and he actively distances himself from the language of orientalist fantasy, appealing to his own experience "as one who is professedly a Chinese" in order to disabuse the grave gentleman of his errors. If the editor's preface initially proclaims Lien Chi's "Eastern sublimity," Lien Chi himself goes

on to repudiate any association between the Orient and imaginative vitality, emphasizing that “in the east, similes are seldom used, and metaphors are almost wholly unknown” (145); in China, especially, writers are “more assiduous to instruct than to please,” and they “address rather the judgment than the fancy” (146).

Goldsmith stated in a review of *Letters from an Armenian* that the writer who assumes the persona of an Eastern traveler “should be careful to let nothing escape him which might betray the imposture,” and he would surely have been conscious of the irony of using a fictional Chinese philosopher to satirize the inauthenticity of other “oriental” narratives; the character of Beau Tibbs might be read as an autobiographical creation, indeed, alluding to Goldsmith’s own restless activity in the sphere of contemporary publishing.¹⁸ Although Goldsmith implicated his own writings in this critique of misrepresentation, however, *The Citizen of the World* remains concerned with the objectification of its Chinese philosopher, to the extent that Christopher Brooks has claimed that Lien Chi might be seen as the “original victim” of orientalist discourse, forced to reckon with its distorting and even dehumanizing effects.¹⁹ Rather than attempt to provide an authentic description of Lien Chi’s particularity, Goldsmith’s work, notwithstanding its occasional reference to certain “Chinese” eccentricities, seems much more concerned to “de-exoticize” and familiarize its title character. Lien Chi complains that “some fancy me no Chinese, because I am formed more like a man than a monster” (142), for example, and he tries in turn to frustrate others’ curiosity by aiming at “appearing rather a reasonable creature, than an outlandish idiot” (147). Many of Lien Chi’s letters refer to his companionship with the “man in black,” an English gentleman, sometimes interpreted as another authorial persona, who introduces himself to Lien Chi at Westminster Abbey. Although numerous eighteenth-century narratives depict newcomers to London being accompanied around the metropolis by apparently well-meaning guides, Goldsmith’s work offers one of the relatively few instances where the intentions of the self-appointed instructor seem to be entirely honorable. *The Citizen of the World* certainly exploits the comic potential of the man in black’s misanthropic “humor,” but at the same time it develops a bond between Lien Chi and his guide, a bond founded on the fact that, as the editor’s preface puts it, “The Chinese and we are pretty much alike” (13–14). Goldsmith’s work has little to say about any markers of physical difference between Lien Chi and the people he encounters, and it is significant that the only interest in

the Chinese philosopher's physiognomy comes from those figures, such as the "lady of distinction" or the "grave gentleman," who are determined to see him as exotically other: "The same earnestness which excites them to see a Chinese," Lien Chi states at one point, "would have made them equally proud of a visit from [a] rhinoceros" (190). The ties between Lien Chi and the man in black are further strengthened at the close of the work, when Lien Chi persuades his friend to accompany him on his future travels (thereby keeping the way open for more "Chinese Letters," and a possible sequel to *The Citizen of the World*). Goldsmith strengthens the bond all the more in his brief reference to the marriage between the son of Lien Chi and the niece of the man in black. Although minimally described during the comic episode of the man in black's own brief engagement (broken off after a dispute about how to carve a turkey), this marriage seems to give substantial content to the unifying rhetoric that informs Lien Chi's letters, both entertaining the theoretical prospect of Sino-British intermixture, and offering a quasi-novelistic resolution that is absent from the majority of other works in the same genre.

In Letter 108, which Goldsmith titled "The utility and entertainment which might result from a journey into the East," Lien Chi states that the export of genuinely curious and open-minded European travelers would help to atone for the past conduct of men who had been motivated only by "commerce or piety": "To send out a traveller properly qualified for these purposes might be an object of national concern: it would, in some measure, repair the breaches made by ambition; and might shew that there were still some who boasted a greater name than that of patriots, who professed themselves lovers of men" (421).²⁰ That Goldsmith recycled these sentences in a later essay suggests that, for all the layers of irony in *The Citizen of the World*, his investment in this version of cultural exchange was sustained and serious.²¹ If *The Citizen of the World* attempts to grasp the utopian potential of cross-cultural contact, however, it also appears to concede that the time is not ripe for the realization of this potential. One index of this is that while Goldsmith's writing insistently emphasizes the need to overcome the false consciousness of an unreflecting patriotism, *The Citizen of the World* also acknowledges the enduring force of popular patriotic attachment. When he encounters the figure of a disabled soldier who had been wounded in the service of the East India Company, for example, Lien Chi notes the "truly British" nature of the man's intrepid resilience, stating that "it is indeed inconceivable what difficulties the meanest English

sailor or soldier endures without murmuring or regret”; significantly, the soldier claims to have “no enemy in the world . . . but the French” (459). Goldsmith’s use of the definite article in the title of his work emphasizes the exceptional status of his cosmopolitan hero, and he clearly presents the relationship between Lien Chi and the man in black as an atypical one. In a fashion similar to sentimental fictions of the period such as Henry Mackenzie’s *The Man of Feeling* (1771), *The Citizen of the World* presents cross-cultural dialogue as something that happens at a distance from “the world.”²² Shortly after proclaiming to an audience that “the unaffected of every country nearly resemble each other,” Lien Chi realizes that his listeners were in “no way attentive to what I attempted . . . to enforce” (147), and that one of them had in fact fallen asleep.

If Goldsmith draws attention to the idealized nature of the dialogue between Lien Chi and the man in black, it is also important to contextualize his appeal to the honorific term “cosmopolitan,” and to look more closely at the foundation of the critical authority that is sometimes accorded to his Chinese traveler. The way in which *The Citizen of the World* often confronts received ideas about China and the Chinese seems to underscore its commitment to improving cross-cultural conversation, which is based on the assumption that “the Chinese and we are pretty much alike” (13–14). It is significant that Lien Chi makes a particular claim for Chinese civility and politeness, though, defining these virtues against the “voluptuous barbarities of our eastern neighbours” (142): when he defends Chinese rationality against the orientalist assumptions made by readers of Eastern tales, Lien Chi states that “you must not expect from an inhabitant of China the same ignorance, the same unlettered simplicity, that you find in a *Turk*, *Persian*, or native of *Peru*” (146). There are obvious limits to the model of cultural exchange offered by Lien Chi, then, especially since he claims that only certain peoples are qualified to engage in such a process.²³ Although Lien Chi frequently complains about the indiscriminating way in which English men and women construct “the East,” Goldsmith’s work also takes for granted the mythology of a generalized oriental despotism. Lien Chi tells of how his son Hingpo was captured by “wandering Tartars” (95) while on his way to join his father in Europe, and, following the example of Montesquieu’s *Persian Letters*, Goldsmith has Hingpo offer anecdotes of his life as a slave in Persia—“a land of tyrants, and a den of slaves” (153)—that resort to the familiar lexicon of harems, eunuchs, and so on.²⁴

Even though Lien Chi intermittently asserts the cultural prestige of

Chinese civilization, Goldsmith's construction of China is itself ambivalent and divided. Despite Lien Chi's efforts to distinguish between China and its "eastern neighbours," Goldsmith sometimes presents China as a generic oriental despotism: early on, for example, Lien Chi receives news of the Emperor's "displeasure" that he has left China, and he hears of how all of his family except his son have been seized by the Emperor and "appropriated to his use," becoming "the peculiar property of him who possesses all" (38). While contemporaries such as the French Physiocrat Francois Quesnay sought to rehabilitate Chinese despotism as a legal and legitimate affair, circumscribed by natural law, Lien Chi at times frames imperial despotism in absurd terms, describing the way the Emperor is served by courtiers including an ear-tickler, a tooth-picker, a bearer of the royal tobacco-box, and a "Karamat man" (428) employed solely to flatter and applaud. And though Lien Chi protests at being associated with the wrong part of Asia by some of the people he encounters, the Chinese Emperor is said to be attended by nobles who are referred to as "Rajas" (428). The idea of a static and nonprogressive China was always implicit in the language of eighteenth-century sinophilia, since even the most enthusiastic accounts of Chinese cultural prestige emphasized the unchanging observation of certain ancient practices; according to Lien Chi, "The people of Asia are directed by precedent, which never alters" (469).²⁵ Lien Chi's travels in Europe sometimes prompt him to question Chinese preeminence, and he furthermore describes the gradual degeneration of China "from her ancient greatness," stating that the Empire is "declining into barbarity." His claim about the Empire being "shut up from every foreign improvement" (262) is consistent with the work's overall emphasis on the importance of intellectual exchange and stimulation, but at the same time it anticipates the rhetoric that many later writers employed in suggesting that China had stopped developing and had ground to a halt.

A brief consideration of Goldsmith's other work from the 1760s and early 1770s further helps to contextualize the cosmopolitan rhetoric of *The Citizen of the World*. In a series of essays published in the *Royal Magazine* in 1760, grouped together by R. S. Crane under the title "A Comparative View of Races and Nations," Goldsmith outlines his enlightened mission of making patriots into cosmopolitans, just as he was later to do in *The Citizen of the World* and in his poem "The Traveller." The first of these essays refers to the need to "level those distinctions which separate mankind," and to "improve our native customs by whatever appears praiseworthy among for-

eigners”; the only distinction that really matters here, it seems, is between abstract ideas of wisdom and folly. Although others have sought “to compare the individuals of one nation with each other,” Goldsmith states, no one has hitherto tried “to consider nations in the same light as individuals” (69).²⁶ Such an endeavor might be seen as an attempt somehow to imagine at a national level the fellow feeling that he depicts between Lien Chi and the man in black. But if Goldsmith represents the effort to bring other peoples within his purview as a familiarizing or even equalizing enterprise, this project of describing nations as if they were individuals leads him to classify “national characters” in essentialist terms, using a small number of apparently typical qualities or traits. While Goldsmith rejects the artificial distinctions imposed by national boundaries in favor of a larger humanism, he creates new and seemingly more permanent distinctions in the process, glossing the character of other peoples—“the indolent Spaniard” or “the voluptuous Persian” (70)—in a unitary and often casually denigratory way.

At once large in its ambition and cursory in its execution, Goldsmith’s comparative survey also draws a general distinction between “the inhabitants of Europe” and “those of the other parts of the globe.” If the Chinese are “polite,” in Goldsmith’s terms, a range of other oriental peoples, including Turks, Persians, and Indians, are said to be “not much superior to the fabled satyrs of antiquity, and possessed of little more humanity than the appearance” (83); furthermore, “the natives of the east themselves” are said to acknowledge the “mental superiority” of Europeans (84). Although Goldsmith does not develop these throwaway claims about the inferiority of non-Europeans, he makes them in a series of essays ostensibly dedicated to collaboration, reciprocity, and the future friendship of humankind. His survey seems to be pulling in opposite directions, therefore, on the one hand assuming the essential similarity between peoples, which would underpin the ideal of mutually beneficial exchange, while on the other displaying a fascination not only with the substance but also with the larger or deeper meanings of human variety.

While Goldsmith’s *Royal Magazine* essays refer to the physical appearance of different peoples, drawing freely from the Comte de Buffon’s *Natural History* (1749–88), his later, multivolume work, *A History of the Earth and Animated Nature* (1774), displays a much more sustained interest in physiology and physiognomy, and pays closer attention to the significance of skin color as a marker of distinction. Despite sometimes being dismissed as a piece of derivative hackwork, Goldsmith’s *History of the Earth* has an

important place among writings about human difference in the period, its importance reflected not least because it was one of the few eighteenth-century natural histories to carry illustrations of the “varieties of men.”²⁷ Goldsmith’s work helped to popularize the classificatory schema of natural history and comparative anatomy, but it also went further than his main source, the Comte de Buffon, by attempting to connect the condition of the body to the condition of the mind, the exterior to the interior man. Writing of “the Negroes of Africa,” for example, Goldsmith claims that “as their persons are thus naturally deformed, at least to our imaginations, their minds are equally incapable of strong exertion. The climate seems to relax their mental powers still more than those of the body. They are, therefore, in general, found to be stupid, indolent, and mischievous.”²⁸ The concessionary reference to “our imaginations” qualifies the force of Goldsmith’s claim about the natural deformity of Africans, and makes his linking of physical appearance to mental capacity speculative rather than absolute. Goldsmith’s work does not in fact disguise its uncertainty about how to weigh the relative importance of the diverse factors that are said to determine “variations in the human figure”—“the rigour of the climate,” “the bad quality, or the scantiness of the provisions,” “the savage customs of the country,” and so on. But these physical differences are nonetheless regarded as “actual marks of degeneracy in the human form,” and as deviations from the “standards to which to refer all other varieties,” namely “the European figure and colour” (239). Although Lien Chi in *The Citizen of the World* often states that standards of beauty are dependent solely on fashion or caprice, rehearsing the terms of a contemporary work such as Adam Smith’s *The Theory of Moral Sentiments* (1759), Goldsmith’s *History of the Earth* unequivocally states that “of all the colours by which mankind is diversified, it is easy to perceive that ours is not only the most beautiful to the eye, but the most advantageous” (232).

Goldsmith’s writing invests in a potentially unifying rhetoric of cosmopolitan fellowship and often relativizes differences of customs and manners, but it also puts this idea of human universality under considerable pressure, addressing the variety of peoples as well as cultures in a number of competing ways. In *The Citizen of the World*, Lien Chi appears to privilege sentimental exchange at an individual level when he states that he is a philosopher “desirous of understanding the human heart,” but in the same sentence he goes on to describe himself as one “who seeks to know the men of every country, who desires to discover those differences which

result from climate, religion, education, prejudice, and partiality" (40). The parataxis here draws attention both to Goldsmith's interest in alternative criteria of difference ("climate, religion, education," and so on) and to the difficulty in discriminating between them, or prioritizing the explanatory power of one over another. When it comes to accounting for the singular national genius of the English, especially "the vulgar English," for example, Lien Chi resorts to the environmental determinants of "climate and soil," which together are said to give "courage to their dogs and cocks," and "fierceness to their men" (369). Elsewhere, by contrast, Lien Chi's account of the customs and manners of Siberia is informed by the stadial theory of the Scottish Enlightenment, and privileges culture as a marker of difference. In the context of the debate about "whether arts and sciences are more serviceable or prejudicial to mankind" (333), most famously associated with Rousseau's *Discourses*, Lien Chi invokes the "solitary Siberian" (335) as a figure who is neither irredeemably backward nor a fossilized embodiment of "natural man," but a rational agent, "poor indeed, but equally fond of happiness with the most refined philosopher of China" (334). Although the Siberian is a "barbarian" in Lien Chi's terms, his barbarism is a function of his nomadic, hunter-gathering life rather than the product of any essential "character." Goldsmith's work similarly appears to set up a stadial explanation of the conditions of life in central Asia when Lien Chi describes his overland journey from China to Europe, referring to countries "from whence the rigorous climate, the sweeping inundation, the drifted desert, the howling forest, and mountains of immeasurable height banish the husbandman" (47). If Lien Chi claims here that the climate and terrain of this extensive region provide obstacles to societal progress, however, he goes on to suggest that the capacities of its inhabitants constitute a barrier to improvement that is just as permanent. Lien Chi states that "the brown Tartar wanders for a precarious subsistence, with a heart that never felt pity, himself more hideous than the wilderness he makes." The brown Tartar's "heart that never felt pity" disqualifies him from sympathetic relations with others, and he is instead deemed somehow responsible for the wilderness that surrounds him, the hostility of his environment a reflection of his own natural ugliness.

Although Goldsmith's Lien Chi often presents cross-cultural dialogue as a means of both uniting and elevating the human race, his classification of the Tartar here offers a form of racial taxonomy that appears to uphold a permanent, biologically grounded distinction between civilization and

barbarism. This is not to suggest that Goldsmith's appeal to the rhetoric of the cosmopolitan is necessarily devalued, but instead to draw attention to the coexistence of seemingly contradictory languages of analysis in his work: Goldsmith's diverse writings often resort to the idea of a universal humanity as a political move, so as to invoke a sense of global community and underwrite an ethical anti-imperialism, yet he is also drawn to the apparent authority inherent in new and inflexible means of distinguishing between the peoples of the world. Rather than focus on the philosophical contradiction here, however, it is perhaps more fruitful to consider how a text such as *The Citizen of the World* overlaps and interweaves rival ways of apprehending human difference that were jostling together in the period. While Goldsmith's intermittent resort to the language of fixed and immutable identity clearly runs counter to his assertion of human universality, it also pays tribute to the free trade of ideas celebrated by Lien Chi, since, like so much of Goldsmith's work, *The Citizen of the World* engages with Buffon's pioneering natural history, adapting and extending the terms of his classificatory project. In the context of this interface between competing constructions of likeness and difference, my account of Goldsmith's cosmopolitanism will conclude by saying a little more about the foundations of Lien Chi's critical authority, and the generic lifespan of the imaginary oriental traveler.

The critical purchase Lien Chi offers derives from the enduring, if increasingly contested, status of the "tutored" civilization that he represents, and from the fact that, beyond repeated appeals to the wisdom of Confucius, his Chineseness is only minimally substantiated, and almost beyond definition. While Lien Chi confidently typifies the physical and psychological characteristics of "the brown Tartar," the people who try to objectify him, such as "the lady of distinction" referred to earlier, are consistently shown to be ignorant and deluded. Although fictional oriental observers or travelers were much less prominent after Goldsmith's work was published than they had been in the first half of the eighteenth century, the figure of the Chinese observer continued to be used well into the 1780s, at least; even if the prestige of Chinese civilization was increasingly contested in the second half of the century, therefore, it was still possible to introduce the correspondence of a Chinese spy or traveler with the claim that the Chinese "made the best moralists in the world."²⁹ The fact that less was known about the customs and manners of China than, say, India or the Ottoman Empire, also helped to prolong the usefulness of

such Chinese travelers, since it was in large part their connection with a remote and—to most people—alien land that privileged them as commentators. In the anonymous 1786 work *A Chinese Fragment*, to give just one example, a Chinese visitor is used to survey “the present state of religion in England.” “Our Chinese,” as he is introduced, is unnamed and only briefly described, but his outsider status enables the writer to offer a familiar-sounding account of the gulf between the noble precepts of Christianity and the corrupt actuality of daily life: “I find myself in the midst of a nation, not without noble instances of learning and abilities of every kind, but immoral in a high degree, and uninspired with devotion.”³⁰

In the two or three decades after *The Citizen of the World* was published, a range of writers continued to employ the figure of the Eastern, and especially Chinese, observer. It is fair to say, though, that the authority of the imaginary oriental traveler became increasingly precarious in the final decades of the century. Later works of fictional travel still presupposed the innate interest of British readers in what outsiders said about their customs and manners, but by the end of the century much more had to be done to legitimize the specifically *oriental* observer: in Eliza Hamilton’s *Letters of a Hindoo Rajah* (1796), therefore, the title character’s account of British upper-class dissipation is made possible by the fact that at an early stage he endorses the presence of the British in India, and claims that Britain has to learn from the example of its civilizing mission overseas. The language of cosmopolitan fellowship had taken on potentially revolutionary implications by the end of the eighteenth century, and the rapid expansion of the British territorial presence in Asia, along with the growing demand for authentic narratives from actual Eastern travelers in Britain, no doubt further contributed towards reducing the purchase of fictional oriental observers. Even as it presents the potential benefits of cross-cultural dialogue in a more celebratory way than other eighteenth-century narratives, *The Citizen of the World* also looks ahead to the later demise of the genre, by registering challenges to the critical authority of Lien Chi’s “Chinese” perspective. Lien Chi’s status as a philosophic traveler is loosely guaranteed by the enduring cultural cachet of “Chinese morality” and Confucian wisdom, but the more detail that *The Citizen of the World* supplies about China, the more unstable its account of Chinese civilization becomes. Despite Lien Chi’s frequent distinctions between Chinese civility and Turkish or Tartar ignorance, the enabling claim that Goldsmith makes about the excellence of Chinese morality collides on a number of occasions with a more hostile

account, increasingly prevalent from the 1760s onwards, of Chinese imperial despotism and cultural stagnation.³¹ And while Lien Chi still insists that the world is “but one city” (476) to him, at the end of the work, his newly married son is “fixed for life” in Britain, in effect repudiating China and rejecting the ambitious project of his wandering father. *The Citizen of the World* gestures boldly in the direction of a transnational universalism, its account of the need to renounce local prejudice all the more remarkable for having first appeared when many if not most Britons would have been celebrating the spoils of imperial conflict. But if Goldsmith's work defines the encounter of Lien Chi and the man in black against “elite” or global economic accounts of international community, it struggles to find an alternative language with which to grasp the actual substance of human variety and cultural diversity, and its appeal to the idea of the cosmopolitan remains shadowed by a skeptical commentary on the content and meaning of this elusive term.

Notes

1. *The Citizen of the World*, in *The Collected Works of Oliver Goldsmith*, ed. Arthur Friedman, 5 vols. (Oxford: Clarendon, 1966), 2:40. Subsequent references to this volume will appear in the text. Many thanks to Peter Denney, Alison O'Byrne, and Seng Puay Ong for commenting on an earlier draft of this essay.

2. David Parker, in “Diaspora, Dissidence, and the Dangers of Cosmopolitanism,” *Asian Studies Review* 27 (2003): 155–79, takes Goldsmith's work as the starting point for his skeptical account of cosmopolitanism's allure. Some important recent collections of essays on the idea of the cosmopolitan include: *Cosmopolitics: Thinking and Feeling beyond the Nation*, ed. Pheng Cheah and Bruce Robbins (Minneapolis: Univ. of Minnesota, 1998); *Conceiving Cosmopolitanism: Theory, Context, and Practice*, ed. Steven Vertovec and Robin Cohen (Oxford: Oxford Univ., 2002); and *Cosmopolitanism*, ed. Carol Breckenridge, Sheldon Pollock, Homi K. Bhabha, and Dipesh Chakrabarty (Durham: Duke Univ., 2002).

3. Horace Walpole, “A Letter from Xo Ho, a Chinese Philosopher at London, to his Friend Lien Chi at Peking (London, 1757).” Arthur Friedman, in *Collected Works*, claims that “whenever inspiration failed him, [Goldsmith] was able to draw a sentence, a paragraph, or even an entire letter” from D'Argens' *Lettres Chinoises* (2:x).

4. William Hazlitt, *Lectures on the English Comic Writers*, Everyman's Library edn. (London: J. M. Dent, 1910), 104; Christopher Brooks, “Goldsmith's *Citizen of the World*: Knowledge and the Imposture of ‘Orientalism,’” *Texas Studies in Language and Literature* 35 (1993): 124–44, quoted at 125.

5. Charles A. Knight, “Ironic Loneliness: The Case of Goldsmith's Chinaman,” *Journal of English and Germanic Philology* 82 (1983): 347–64, quoted at 354.

6. Richard C. Taylor, *Goldsmith as Journalist* (London: Associated Univ., 1993), 99. Taylor's book offers a very useful account of the continuities between Goldsmith's different works of this period.
7. "The Traveller" (1764), *Collected Works*, 4:248.
8. *The Spectator*, ed. Donald F. Bond (Oxford: Clarendon, 1965), 1:293–4 (No. 69, 19 May 1711).
9. The phrase "actually existing cosmopolitanism" is taken from Scott Malcolmson's essay "The Varieties of Cosmopolitan Experience," in Cheah and Robbins, *Conceiving Cosmopolitanism*, 233–45, quoted at 240.
10. Cited by Arthur Friedman, in *Collected Works*, 2:xiii (*Monthly Review*, June 1762).
11. See also Goldsmith's essay "On Public Rejoicings for Victory," in *Collected Works*, 3:16–21 (*The Busy Body*, 20 October 1759). Along with leaning on *The Idler*, 81, Goldsmith also borrows here from Johnson's 1756 "Observations on the Present State of Affairs."
12. Charles Dickens (with R.H. Horne), "The Great Exhibition and the Little One" (5 July 1851), in *Uncollected Writings from Household Words, 1850–1859* (London: Allen Lane, 1969): 319–29, quoted at 328.
13. Goldsmith's own review, from the *Monthly Review* (July 1757), of Hanway's *Essay on Tea* was a quizzical one, however, that asked why there was "so violent an outcry" against this particular article of luxury. See *Collected Works*, 1:80.
14. *The Critical Review* (May 1759), in *Collected Works*, 1:171.
15. For a longer account of the tension between chinoiserie and China in *The Citizen of the World*, on which my own discussion draws, see David Porter, *Ideographia: The Chinese Cipher in Early Modern Europe* (Stanford: Stanford Univ., 2001), 136–42.
16. Laura Brown's *Alexander Pope* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1985) offers a classic account of Pope's Belinda in this context (6–28).
17. Lien Chi's distaste for pagodas is consistent with his hostility towards what he sees as an idolatrous Buddhism. Note, however, that in his later poem "Threnodia Augustalis" (1772), Goldsmith celebrated Kew's association with the recently deceased Princess Augusta, mother of George III.
18. *The Monthly Review* (August 1757), in *Collected Works*, 1:90. For Beau Tibbs as a "partly autobiographical" figure, see Taylor, *Goldsmith as Journalist*, 101.
19. Brooks, "Goldsmith's *Citizen of the World*," 127. For a contrasting view, which offers a Saidian focus on the "orientalizing" strategies of Goldsmith's work, see Tao Zhijian, "Citizen of Whose World? Goldsmith's Orientalism," *Comparative Literature Studies* 33 (1996): 15–34.
20. These letter titles first appeared in the 1762 edition's table of contents, but did not appear in the text itself. Towards the end of 1761, as Richard C. Taylor notes in *Goldsmith as Journalist*, Goldsmith unsuccessfully petitioned the Earl of Bute for funds to enable him to undertake his own tour of the East (121).
21. Letter 108 of *The Citizen of The World* reappears as number 18 of Goldsmith's 1765 *Essays*.

22. See, for example, Henry Mackenzie, *The Man of Feeling* [1771], ed. Stephen Bending and Stephen Bygrave (Oxford: Oxford Univ., 2001), where the ex-soldier Edwards engineers the escape of a prisoner, while serving in India: the prisoner praises the "Indian heart" of his preserver (70).

23. Goldsmith's work here betrays a tension that, in David Parker's terms, characterizes any expression of the cosmopolitan ideal: a tension "between an unrestricted affiliation with all others, and a judgmental demarcation between 'us' the cosmopolitans and 'them' the barbarians." See Parker, "Diaspora," 156.

24. Goldsmith later repeated this assessment of Persia in line 309 of "The Traveller," *Collected Works*, 4:262.

25. Though Voltaire, for example, was renowned as a sinophile (and is frequently praised by Lien Chi), his work in this period also shows how his veneration for Chinese antiquity could shade into a more critical account of the lack of progress in the arts and sciences. See *An Essay on Universal History, The Manners, and Spirit of Nations, from the Reign of Charlemaign to the Age of Lewis XIV*, trans. Nugent, 2nd edn. (London, 1759), 19–20.

26. Oliver Goldsmith, "A Comparative View of Races and Nations," *Collected Works*, 3:69.

27. See Roxann Wheeler, *The Complexion of Race: Categories of Difference in Eighteenth-Century British Culture* (Philadelphia: Univ. of Pennsylvania, 2000), 242–47.

28. Oliver Goldsmith, *An History of the Earth, and Animated Nature*, 8 vols. (London, 1774), 2:228.

29. *The Chinese Spy; or, Emissary from the Court of Peking, Commissioned to Examine into the Present State of Europe. Translated from the Chinese*, 6 vols., (London, 1765), 1:vii.

30. Ely Bates, *A Chinese Fragment: Containing an Enquiry into the Present State of Religion in England* (London, 1786), 365.

31. See, for example, Thomas Percy's preface and notes to his edition of *Hau Kiou Chooan, or, The Pleasing History* (London, 1761), and his *Miscellaneous Pieces Relating to the Chinese* (London, 1762).

