

**A GENERAL VIEW OF
CHINESE CIVILIZATION
AND OF THE RELATIONS
OF THE WEST WITH CHINA**

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M. PIERRE LAFFITTE & JOHN CAREY HALL

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A GENERAL VIEW
OF
CHINESE CIVILIZATION
AND OF
THE RELATIONS OF THE WEST WITH CHINA.

FROM THE FRENCH OF

M. PIERRE LAFFITTE,

(DIRECTOR OF POSITIVISM).

TRANSLATED BY

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Progress is the development of Order.

—Auguste Comte.

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INTRODUCTION.

In 1859 and 1860 I delivered a course of free public lectures on the General History of Humanity.¹ Three of the lectures in that course were devoted to Confucius and Chinese Civilization; and these I now publish.

My main object in singling out this particular portion of a vast body of doctrine for separate publication is to bring to the notice of the higher minds and hearts amongst us the need there is for setting on foot a reasonable and moral policy for regulating the relations of the West with the rest of the World. Those relations are coming more and more under the direction of a commercialism of the baser sort, or of a narrow proselytism, which is often, after all, very little better than a pretext for furthering some political or mercantile object. I am in hopes, also, that this sample of a political conception, based on a thorough philosophic study of the situation which it is desired to modify, will suffice to convince reflecting minds of the necessity of bringing to the study of social phenomena at least the same degree of attention and perseverance as is required for the study of the simpler phenomena of life and of the world. Moreover, the institution of a policy which embraces in its scope the whole extent of our planet, is not only an object of high importance, in itself, but is also connected, both directly and indirectly, with the more pressing needs of the reorganization of the West:

¹The program of the course is published at the end of this volume, by way of giving a general idea of its scope. For fuller details, see the opening lecture, published by Dunod, quasi des Augustins 49, Paris, in 1 vol. 8vo, entitled *Philosophic Course on the General History of Humanity*, by M. Pierre Lafitte.

for the true doctrine, fit to usher in the normal state of Humanity, should show itself able at the outset to construct a policy that really embraces the whole sum of terrestrial affairs. This is what Positivism actually does, as will be seen before very long by those whose minds are capable of appreciating the value of such a doctrine, destined, as it is, to form the bond of union of the noble hearts of every land.

But before the group formed by the advanced populations can adopt a proper policy towards the rest of the world, a change must be brought about in its way of looking at itself. When that change does take place, it will have the further effect of producing a wholesome reaction on the internal politics of the West.

This change consists in dropping the notion of *Christendom*, and adopting in place of it, the notion of *Westerndom* or *The West*. Such a substitution, being nothing more than the systematic expression of a fact, will be welcomed by all serious and reflecting minds. Only a few fanatics will object to the change.

By the term *Westerndom*, or the *Western Commonwealth*, I mean to indicate the group of the five leading peoples, the French in the centre, the Italian and Spanish to the South, the British and the German to the North, who, as pointed out by Auguste Comte, have been united by the same interests and responsibilities since the time of Charlemagne.

The West, is a more rational term than *Christendom*. To begin with, it is more precise, for it eliminates from such a group both Russia and the Christian peoples of the East, who cannot be seriously imagined to belong to it. Another advantage it has is that it represents fully the whole set of antecedents that have helped to mould this memorable group. The word *Christian* points only to one of those antecedents, a noteworthy and important one no doubt, but, in reality, the least decisive of them all. *Westerndom* owes its formation to

its conquest by the Romans more than to anything else; and the formative process was completed by the policy of Charlemagne, by the sway of the Catholic Church, by the incomparable influence of Feudalism, and the revolutionary developments of the last five centuries. This term has thus the advantage of allowing their due to all our ancestors; whereas the other ignores the more important of them in favour of one alone.

But apart from its being the more sensible term, the substitution of *Westendom* for *Christendom*, must bring about a great change in the views of statesmen, and, in the end, in the views of peoples also, by placing them at a really civic point of view. The civic standpoint, obscured since the days of Cæsar and Trajan beneath the stratum of Christianity, cropped out, as it were, in the grand types of Henry the Fourth and Richelieu; but it was only in Frederic the Second, the greatest statesman the West can boast of since the time of Charlemagne, that it came forth into full display. Not that the genius of a Frederic is needed nowadays; the situation is so clear that any real statesman must take it in at a glance. If Frederic was able to govern by placing himself at the purely civic standpoint of a great dictator, what for such a man was then a possibility, is now a necessity. That is to say, a statesman's duty in these days is to govern without any theological bias whatsoever. Theological considerations must henceforth be relegated exclusively to the sphere of private life. Indeed, in France, that is the actual state of the law, resulting from the proclamation of freedom of worship. If, according to the correct saying of a contemporary legist, Law is atheous, we may say with still greater truth that in France the State has no religion. It is for statesmen, therefore, and for peoples, to place their ideas and their sentiments on a level with the situation.

This substitution of *Westendom* for *Christendom*, so vital for the internal state of the West as marking out the only common ground on which all can agree, will have a no less

efficacious influence on its external policy. Henceforward it will be impossible for the West to aim at foisting upon the East a synthesis that is in utter decay at home. The conception capable of becoming the universal religion must be sought for outside of all the provisional syntheses. This Christian point of view, which so profoundly vitiates our appreciation of the other peoples of the world, will then no longer form a barrier to our understanding them aright. It will thenceforth be possible to judge of them rationally, unbiassed by retrograde or revolutionary prejudices.

These general views are such as can now be accepted in the West by all superior minds; by all those, in a word, who are fit to deal with social questions. It is not too much to say that, on this head, current opinions are beneath the requirements of the situation, to a degree perhaps unparalleled in history.

I have endeavoured to bring out clearly the superiority of the religious spirit, by contrasting the admirable mission organized by the Jesuits with the oppression, sometimes hypocritical, sometimes violent, set on foot by an ignoble mercantilism.¹

I venture to hope, indeed, that truly religious natures, especially Catholics, will give their support to a rational and moral policy which reprobates the employment of public force in the service of private greed, and which comes forward, in the name of Humanity, to claim a suitable respect for the civilizations that have arisen on the planet outside of the boundaries of the West. Every religion worthy of the name, be its dogmatic basis what it may, is bound to protest aloud against the employment of force either as a prelude or as a support to preaching. In this respect the noble mission of the Jesuits in China should be taken as a pattern.

Finally, we may hope that some day the healthy public

¹The allusion is, of course, to the opium trade.—Tr.

opinion of the West will bring about, under the name of the *Navy of the West*, the establishment of a public force which, besides safeguarding a useful commerce, shall be specially employed in protecting the backward populations against attempts at oppression which are all the more certain to ensue as the cupidity in which they originate will be less and less under control.

In the work I now publish I have been inspired not only by the leading principles of the Positive Philosophy but also by the special view, as profound as it is luminous, put forward by Auguste Comte on the subject of Chinese civilization :—

“ A special set of influences, mostly social, caused Chinese civilization to develop Fetishism to a far higher degree than was possible elsewhere. Better systematized than in any other case, it there prevailed over Theologism, and preserved a third of our species from the system of castes, in spite of the fact that callings were hereditary,” etc.—(*Auguste Comte: Synthèse Subjective, Vol. I, Introduction.*)

Such is the inspiration under which, in my course of public lectures on *The General History of Humanity*, I have considered the civilization of China and its most eminent representative, Confucius.

I venture to hope that such a work will help to disseminate the conviction that the Demonstrated Religion alone can encompass the sum of terrestrial affairs in a policy at once rational and moral.

P. LAFFITTE,
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PARIS, 27th Saint Paul, 73 (15th June, 1861).