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# Entangled History and the Scholarly Concept of Enlightenment

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## ABSTRACT

This article considers the methodology of *entangled history* and its potential for nuancing or circumventing scholarly controversies over the nature and extent of the Enlightenment in eighteenth-century religious thought. After sketching the development of entangled history theory and its potential applicability to studying the Enlightenment, the rest of the article provides a case study of one way in which the insights discussed in the first parts of the article can be applied to current controversies about how historians construct the concept of Enlightenment. As will be shown, the transdiscursive entanglement of Jesuit missionary output with the debates between Voltaire and Bergier illustrates the mutability and rhetorical malleability of historical paradigms concerning the Enlightenment and religion.

## KEYWORDS

accommodationism, Baron d'Holbach, Nicholas-Sylvestre Bergier, Counter-Enlightenment, Enlightenment, entangled history, Jesuit, Pierre Louis Ko, François-Marie Arouet de Voltaire

This article considers the methodology of *entangled history* (or *histoire croisée*) and its applicability to the study of the eighteenth-century Enlightenment. In particular, scholars have not applied entangled history approaches to conceptual and historiographical debates over the nature of the Enlightenment in its relationship to eighteenth-century religion. This article seeks to address this gap in the literature. In so doing, what follows is a demonstration of the potential for considering historical entanglement as a means of nuancing or circumventing the seemingly irresolvable scholarly controversies over the nature, radicalism, and extent of the Enlightenment.

Certainly the manner in which Enlightenment discourses of constitutionalism, national or patriotic regeneration, and political economy emerged from within religious debates of the eighteenth century has long been a subject of scholarly focus.<sup>1</sup> But *entangled history* or *histoire croisée* provides eighteenth-

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1. Dale K. Van Kley, "Religion and the Age of Patriot Reform," *Journal of Modern History* 80 (2008): 252–295; James Van Horn Melton, "Pietism, Politics, and the Public Sphere in



century historians with some enticing approaches to resolving (or at least making methodologically explicit) critical dilemmas at the heart of the field of Enlightenment studies.<sup>2</sup> What follows is not a comprehensive investigation of the applicability of entangled history to the study of the eighteenth century. Instead, this article sketches the development of entangled history theory and its potential for studying the *process* of Enlightenment—the process by which eighteenth-century religious discourses adapted to more secular discourses conventionally associated with Enlightenment.<sup>3</sup> From these more general considerations, the third part of this article attempts a concrete demonstration of how the methodological insights discussed in the first parts of the article can be applied to current controversies over how historians construct the concept of Enlightenment. This more concrete demonstration will focus specifically on works by the famous Catholic Enlightenment author and antiphilosophie Nicholas-Sylvestre Bergier (1715–1790), who used writings by a Jesuit-trained Chinese expatriate in Europe, Pierre Louis Ko, in writing his *Traité dogmatique et historique de la véritable religion* (Historical and Dogmatic Treatise Concerning the True Religion) to critique the work of the philosophes using many of their own empirical and historical-critical methods. Bergier’s polemic with Voltaire in particular furnishes a locus for the practice of entangled history. Through this examination of the complex intercrossing of several major discursive fields within Bergier’s text responding to the vogue for Chinese thought and governance celebrated by many European Enlightenment writers, like Voltaire in his *Dictionnaire Philosophique* (Philosophical Dictionary) and *Essai sur les moeurs* (Essay on Morals), I argue that the marriage of entangled

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Germany,” in *Religion and Politics in Enlightenment Europe*, James E. Bradley and Dale K. Van Kley, eds. (South Bend, IN: Notre Dame University Press, 2001), 294–333; Siegfried Weichlein, “Cosmopolitanism, Patriotism, Nationalism,” in *Unity and Diversity in European Culture, c. 1800*, Tim Blanning and Hagen Schultze, eds., Proceedings of the British Academy 134 (Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, 2006), 77–99; Mark Goldie, “Priestcraft and the Birth of Whiggism,” in *Political Discourse in Early Modern Britain*, Nicholas Phillipson and Quentin Skinner, eds. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993), 209–231.

2. Though he does not directly invoke the terms *entangled history* or *histoire croisée*, Sebastian Conrad’s recent and thought-provoking foray into a more globalized conception of Enlightenment models shows how such methods may be applied (though he does not concern himself chiefly with the eighteenth century as such, nor with the intersection of religion and Enlightenment as I do here). Sebastian Conrad, “Enlightenment in Global History: A Historiographical Critique,” *American Historical Review* 117, no. 4 (October 2012): 999–1027.

3. On the interaction of secular and religious Enlightenment, and my own sense of what the Enlightenment is in the context of recent scholarship, see Jeffrey D. Burson, “Reflections on Enlightenment Pluralization and the Notion of Theological Enlightenment as Process,” *French History* 26, no. 4 (December 2012): 524–537.

history and the historiography of Enlightenment religious developments warrants greater attention.<sup>4</sup>

What, then, is *entangled history*? At the risk of overly simplifying a range of methodological complexities for the sake of heuristic elegance, the notion of historical entanglement is the manner in which an “object” of historical study (for example, a concept, discourse, or identity) is constituted at the meeting point or intercrossing among various historical contexts, as opposed to its being considered in only one isolated discursive context. Entanglement may be considered to operate on at least three levels: multicultural entanglement (the intercrossing of synchronous cultures); transdiscursive entanglement (the intercrossing of theological, scientific, or ethico-political debates, for example); and diachronic entanglement (the arguably inevitable way in which scholarly analysis interjects itself into, and alters, the past by the very process of attending to the first and second entanglements). My case study in the third part of this article examines the third form of entanglement—diachronic entanglement—by considering how multicultural entanglement and transdiscursive entanglement inflect one another. European concepts of *philosophie* and religiously driven *antiphilosophie* mutually constitute one another with a Bakhtinian sideward glance toward Chinese morality, antiquity, and religion. This multicultural entanglement becomes possible due to the transdiscursive entanglement of debates over the authenticity, historicity, and utility of European religion afforded by the translation of Chinese culture into the European imaginary by the French Jesuit mission in China.

Ultimately, the intersection of Jesuit missionary output with the debates between Voltaire and Bergier may be defined as a transdiscursive entanglement illustrating the central contention of this article—the importance of recalling the mutability and rhetorical malleability of historical paradigms such as “religious enlightenment” or “radical enlightenment” (to name only a few of the most prominent and contentious).<sup>5</sup> Entanglement illuminates the way in which the conventional categories used by many scholars of the Enlightenment (including, admittedly, this one) are best considered as analytical tools or

4. Entangled history methods have been variously employed, even if not always self-consciously, by historians of the Atlantic revolutions in global context, as well as in studies of national identity. See David Armitage and Sanjay Subramanyam, “Introduction: The Age of Revolutions, c. 1760–1840—Global Causation, Connection, and Comparison,” in *The Age of Revolutions in Global Context, c. 1760–1840*, David Armitage and Sanjay Subramanyam, eds. (Houndsmills, UK: Palgrave Macmillan, 2010), xii–xxxii; C. A. Bayly, “The Age of Revolutions in Global Context: An Afterword,” in Armitage and Subramanyam, *The Age of Revolutions in Global Context*, 209–217.

5. David Sorkin, *The Religious Enlightenment: Protestants, Jews, and Catholics from London to Vienna* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2008); Jonathan I. Israel, *Democratic Enlightenment: Philosophy, Revolution, and Human Rights, 1750–1790* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011), 1–35.

narrative tropes, as much a product of our present discursive web as they are of the past that they seek to characterize.

### Reflection on the Scholarship of Historical Entanglement

*Entangled history theory* emerged chiefly in Europe during the 1990s in response to the end of the Cold War, the triumph of the new social history, the linguistic and cultural turns in European historiography, and the more concerted reflection on the methodological pitfalls of the global turn in historical scholarship.<sup>6</sup> In particular, sustained reflection on the analytical assumptions associated with transnational and global approaches by some of the very scholars who pioneered comparative cultural transfer studies, such as Jürgen Kocka, Michel Espagne, Michael Werner, and Bénédicte Zimmermann, revealed troubling issues about comparative methods of historiography as they had been conventionally practiced. When comparative historical analysis occurs, the chosen objects of analysis are most often united by the decisions and framework of the observer, and not necessarily by characteristics intrinsic to the object of study. Natural continuities and networks of interdependence are easily broken by the very comparative framework designed to reveal them. In the words of Jürgen Kocka, “comparison implies selection, abstraction, and de-contextualization to some degree.”<sup>7</sup> This latter realization further implies that the problems of “comparative approaches only emphasize and make particularly manifest what is implicit in any kind of historical work”—namely,

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6. Jürgen Kocka, “Comparison and Beyond,” *History and Theory* 42 (February 2003): 39–44; Ross E. Dunn, “Introduction,” in *The New World History*, Ross E. Dunn, ed. (Boston and New York: Bedford St. Martin’s, 2000), 1–11. Classic examples of such scholarly trends to which entangled history responded include (but are not limited to) the following: A. G. Hopkins, “The History of Globalization and the Globalization of History,” in *Globalization in World History*, A. G. Hopkins, ed. (New York and London: W. W. Norton, 2002), 12–44; Quentin Skinner, *The Foundations of Modern Political Thought*, 2 vols. (1978; 8th repr., Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000); Roger Chartier, *The Cultural Origins of the French Revolution*, Lydia G. Cochrane, trans. (4th repr., Durham, NC, and London: Duke University Press, 1995), 136–199. For a more recent example of this turn, see Robert Darnton, *Poetry and the Police: Communication Networks in Eighteenth-Century Paris* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard Belknap Press, 2010), 1–5, 140–145.

7. Kocka, “Comparison and Beyond,” 41; Christophe Charle, “L’histoire comparée des intellectuels en Europe: Quelques points de méthode et propositions de recherche” [Comparative history of intellectuals in Europe: Some methodological points and research propositions], in *Pour une histoire comparée des intellectuelles* [Toward a comparative history of intellectuals], Michel Trebitsch and Marie-Christine Granjon, eds. (Paris: Editions Complexe, 1998), 39–59.

that a present-rooted, “strong[,] selective and constructive component”<sup>8</sup> is inextricably bound up with historical analysis. Such conclusions inspired Michael Werner and Michel Espagne, historians of French and German literature and culture, to pioneer methods of entangled history.<sup>9</sup> Entangled history has since been haltingly adopted by a variety of scholars, including Emma Rothschild and Sanjay Subramanyam, in recognition of the fact that comparative, transnational, and global studies are best approached as a holistic web of entanglements or so-called *métissages* (crossbreeds), as much dependent in their reconstruction upon the selectivity of the historical researcher as upon the web of past interconnections themselves.<sup>10</sup>

In an effort to apply the concept to real-world examples, Werner and Zimmermann have presented the entangled history approach as responsive to an essential problem endemic to conventional transnational and comparative approaches—that the frame of reference for many comparative studies “presupposes a beginning and an end through which the process under study becomes intelligible and interpretable.”<sup>11</sup> Therefore,

if on the level of relationships between national units [the example Werner and Zimmermann invoke], the initial purpose of a transfer study was to show that borders were more permeable in order to undermine the myth of the homogeneity of national units, the result is that the categories of analysis reintroduce ... the national references that were to be put in question.<sup>12</sup>

Put differently, *entangled history* can be more neatly summarized with reference to the Heisenberg uncertainty principle in physics. Just as an observer can know neither the position nor velocity of a charged particle simultaneously because of the fact that the very process of measuring a particle with an

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8. Kocka, *Ibid.*, 43.

9. The seminal importance of Michael Werner and Michel Espagne are summarized in Kocka, “Comparison and Beyond,” 43.

10. Michael Werner and Bénédicte Zimmermann, “Beyond Comparison: *Histoire croisée* and the Challenge of Reflexivity,” *History and Theory* 45 (February 2006): 30–31, 39, 45; Michel Espagne and Michael Werner, eds., *Transferts: Les relations interculturelles dans l’espace franco-allemand (XVIIIe et XIXe siècle)* [Transfers: Intercultural relations in Franco-German Space (18th and 19th centuries)] (Paris: Editions Recherche sur les civilisations, 1988); Sanjay Subramanyam, “Connected Histories: Notes Towards a Reconfiguration of Early Modern Eurasia,” *Modern Asian Studies* 31 (1997): 735–762; Bénédicte Zimmermann, ed., *Le travail et la nation: Histoire croisée de la France et de l’Allemagne* [Work and nation: The historical entanglement of France and Germany] (Paris: Maison des sciences de l’homme, 1999); Emma Rothschild, “Globalization and the Return of History,” *Foreign Policy* (Summer 1999): 106–116.

11. Werner and Zimmermann, “Beyond Comparison,” 36–37.

12. *Ibid.*

electron microscope alters the position or velocity of the object of study, so also in history the historian transforms his or her chosen objects of study in the past by the very nature of historical analysis itself. Paradigms and methods of analysis are self-reinforcing, as the present gaze upon the past is constantly and intrinsically reflected back upon itself. For example, transfers of literature, philosophy, or art among Franco-German national cultures presuppose a stable, presentist frame of reference—the essentially separate existence of “France” and “Germany” as analytical categories. Inadvertently, then, the national framework is thereby reinforced by the very study designed to undermine it.<sup>13</sup>

In all cases, moreover, the choice of a past object presupposes some commonality of present subject with past object—a diachronic communion fundamentally rooted in the self-conscious questioning of the historical researcher. The implications of this far transcend what Clifford Geertz discovered about his own discipline of anthropology, and are of import for the whole of cultural history. Social structures can be viewed as a kind of language that cultural anthropologists must do their best to decipher on their own terms, even while fully aware that translation involves “semantic displacement” (as Geertz suggested). However, past phenomena are difficult to study, as they are in many ways inaccessible languages; the grammar of the past (its own discontinuities and continuities) is destroyed by the grammar of present analytical choices. Yet such analytical choices and narrative constructions are unavoidable preconditions for the translation of that past into the here and now.<sup>14</sup> In short, while I would still contend that all historians are professionally obliged to be attentive to context—both that afforded by the language of the past, and that which informs his or her present analytical choices—all readings of the past are what Dominick LaCapra refers to as a “redemptive reading.” Additionally, all observation of the past is, by its very nature, “a projective reprocessing of the past.” That is, all historical methods necessarily redeem the present (the analytical choices of the historical practitioner) by reprocessing the past experienced by those who lived it.<sup>15</sup>

Certainly, neither this article, nor even the method of entangled history as such, is especially original in making these observations. David Lowenthal and Robert Darnton have each in their own way underscored the fundamental otherness of the past, and Haydn White’s work reducing historical research to the status of literary genre, with its own conventions, style, and narrative

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13. Michael Espagne, *Les Transferts culturels Franco-Allemands* [Franco-German cultural transfers] (Paris: Presses Universitaires de France, 1999).

14. *Ibid.*, 2–11, 270.

15. Dominick LaCapra, “History, Language, and Reading: Waiting for Crillon,” *American Historical Review* 100, no. 3 (June 1995): 799–828.

tropes, is as well-known as it is controversial.<sup>16</sup> Indeed, aspects of entangled history were arguably presupposed by Carlo Ginzburg in *History, Rhetoric, and Proof*. Ginzburg noted ways in which Greco-Roman conventions of the historical harangue, familiarity with Montaigne's essays, and the Jesuit missionary strategy of accommodating cultural diversity as a tool for winning Christian converts all converged in the Jesuit historical works and letters of Le Gobien and De Mailla. Their texts thereby problematized Eurocentric definitions of barbarism in ways that went on to inspire Voltaire's *Essai sur les mœurs* and even Diderot's *Supplement au Voyage de Bougainville* (Supplement to Bougainville's Voyage).<sup>17</sup> Thus, while it is by no means an altogether unprecedented approach, historical entanglement presupposes a heightened degree of methodological self-consciousness; and in the judgment of this author, entangled history accepts the compatibility of scholarly responsibility to strive after the myth of objectivity but with Stoic resignation to the inevitability of redemptive readings. We can only refine and entangle our redemptive readings and thereby illuminate different facets of the past from different vantage points. Such a process, while neither the sole nor necessarily always the most ideal mode of historical narrative construction, can at times furnish a liberating methodological corrective to many historiographical controversies.

## Entangled History and Enlightenment

One such field of controversy concerns the Enlightenment. The issue of what the Enlightenment is, where it is, to what extent it is best described as plural or unitary, and to what extent it should be understood to encompass developments in European religious beliefs and practices still bedevil specialists. Even with the best of intentions, it may be said that by insisting on a unitary thread of Enlightenment thought or Enlightenment public discourse, by studying the eighteenth century as the gradual unfolding of "religious enlightenment", national enlightenments, "moderate enlightenment", "radical enlightenment", "super-enlightenment", and the like, to name only a few, we are in effect reinforcing the separateness of categories rooted largely in the present state of eighteenth-century scholarship. This reinforced separateness ensures

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16. David Lowenthal, *The Past Is a Foreign Country* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999); Robert Darnton, "Workers Revolt: The Great Cat Massacre of the Rue Saint-Séverin," in *The Great Cat Massacre and Other Episodes in French Cultural History* (London: Basic Books, 1999), 75–107; Haydn White, "The Question of Narrative in Contemporary Historical Theory," *History and Theory* 23, no. 1 (February 1984): 1–33.

17. Carlo Ginzburg, *History, Rhetoric, and Proof* (Hanover, NH, and London: University Press of New England, 1999), 71–92.



that we are not observing the phenomena under investigation.<sup>18</sup> Accordingly, it may prove insightful to understand how the phenomena associated with eighteenth-century religion and Enlightenment mutually constitute one another in the past through transcultural and transdiscursive phenomena, and in the present through the diachronic interaction of historians with their past objects of analysis. As Werner and Zimmerman have suggested in a somewhat different context, writing cultural history in a “process-oriented” way is fundamental to discovering how the “trajectory, form, and content” as well as “new combinations” of culture “develop themselves in the process of crossing” themselves.<sup>19</sup> Consequently, though much can still be gained from focusing specifically on global, national, dynastic, philosophical, or religious milieus of Enlightenment, the dynamism of the eighteenth century is perhaps best examined with exactly this “process-oriented ... mutually-constitutive approach” that would consider religious enlightenment and enlightenment radicalization as “mutually contingent processes of historical change.”<sup>20</sup> The outcome of such a mutually constitutive process reveals how new combinations—new definitions of Enlightenment—can evolve across time, space, and the choice of authors under consideration. The approach of entanglement studies allows historians to break free of what many historians still refer to as reified, temporally static categories of Enlightenment. Viewed in this way, contingencies are privileged in lieu of hypostatic ideological categories. As Sebastian Conrad has recently put it in reference to his own historiographical essay on the global transformation and reinvention of Enlightenment, “the trajectory of ‘Enlightenment’ and the various ways in which it is used need to be understood as part of its conceptual development.”<sup>21</sup>

But, an entangled history of the culture of Enlightenment that would take into account the changes to the religious dimensions of the eighteenth century should be just as attentive to the fact that “the entities, persons, practices, or objects that are intertwined ... do not necessarily remain intact and identical in form”; instead, “their transformations are tied to the active as well as the interactive nature of their coming into contact.”<sup>22</sup> This is true both with regard to the concepts of enlightenment that *we* are using today to frame and characterize an epoch, as it is with regard to our understanding of the relationship between the Enlightenment and religious discourses of the eighteenth century. In this sense, then, there is no radical enlightenment, no Counter-Enlightenment, and no religious enlightenment except perhaps that which is dependent

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18. John Robertson, *The Case for the Enlightenment* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005), 1–52; Israel, *Democratic Enlightenment*, 1–34.

19. Werner and Zimmermann, “Beyond Comparison,” 38.

20. *Ibid.*

21. Conrad, “Enlightenment in Global History,” 1022.

22. Werner and Zimmermann, “Beyond Comparison,” 38.

upon the subtextual teleology of any given research project. There is arguably nothing more than entangled processes of reinvention and translation, both of the contexts and of the content of something contemporaries called Enlightenment, *lumi, siècle des lumières, Aufklärung*, and so forth.<sup>23</sup>

This article, however, does not deal with the history of the concept of Enlightenment as such, but rather to use it as an example of how scholarly categories of analysis (religious enlightenment, Counter-Enlightenment, radical enlightenment, and so forth) obscure the manner in which a single source can be at once a theologically radical example of Enlightenment historicism and rationalism in one sense, and an attack on the Enlightenment in another.<sup>24</sup> The concepts of philosophe and antiphilosophe, upon which so much of the scholarship on the Enlightenment and its detractors depends, are transdiscursive in their inception; they mutually constitute one another from the meeting point between synchronous cultures (European and Chinese in this instance) as transcribed within theological and moral/political discourses. By examining the complex discursive entanglement evident within the work of Nicholas-Sylvestre Bergier, this article underscores the inevitable entanglement of present scholarly conceptions with the transdiscursive history of eighteenth-century Enlightenment and religion.

### **Transnational, Transdiscursive, and Diachronic Entanglement: The Case of Nicholas-Sylvestre Bergier**

Nicholas-Sylvestre Bergier was one of the premier vernacular apologists and theologians of pre-Revolutionary France. Although many of his later works are viewed as having contributed to the patterns of Counter-Enlightenment tendencies during the 1770s and 1780s, Bergier's theories of language and the philosophy of history and his friendships with Denis Diderot and Baron d'Holbach place him as much within the mainstream of the Enlightenment as among its enemies.<sup>25</sup> Bergier received his doctorate in theology from the Uni-

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23. *Lumi, siècle des lumières, and Aufklärung* are terms used by contemporaries to refer to the Enlightenment. See also Reinhart Koselleck, "A Response to Comments on the Geschichtliche Grundbegriffe," in *The Meaning of Historical Terms and Concepts: New Studies on Begriffsgeschichte*, Hartmut Lehmann and Melvin Richter, eds., Occasional Papers 15 (Washington, DC: The German Historical Institute, 1996), 59–70.

24. For further reflections on the history of the concept of Enlightenment itself, see James Schmidt, "Further Thoughts on 'the Enlightenment,' the OED, the History of Concepts," *Persistent Enlightenment*, 10 February 2013, <http://persistentenlightenment.wordpress.com/>.

25. Sylvianne Albertan-Coppola, *L'abbé Nicholas-Sylvestre Bergier, 1718–1790: Des Monts à Jura: De parcours d'un apologiste du XVIIIe siècle* [Abbé Nicholas-Sylvestre Bergier, 1718–1790: From the mountains to Jura: Progress of an eighteenth-century apologist]

versity of Besançon and by 1744 had served as its chair of philosophy, before assuming the curate of Flangebouche, a rural parish situated near the Swiss border. Bergier's prize-winning essays on natural history and philosophy for the Academy of Besançon helped secure his reputation among eighteenth-century men of letters and in the eyes of the archbishop of Paris. In fact, in 1769, he was appointed canon of Notre-Dame Cathedral by Archbishop Christophe de Beaumont. Bergier's *Examen du matérialisme* (Examination of Materialism), a work specially commissioned by the 1770 General Assembly of the Gallican Clergy in response to Baron d'Holbach's *Système de Nature* (System of Nature), established him as one of the Gallican Church's premier defenders.<sup>26</sup> In addition to nearly two thousand *livres* from the General Assembly and a royal pension in excess of the same amount, Bergier eventually became confessor to the queen at Versailles, where he remained until the October Days of 1789. He then returned to Paris with the royal entourage of Louis XVI in the early days of the French Revolution.<sup>27</sup>

While at Versailles, Bergier composed the twelve-volume *Traité historique et dogmatique de la vraie religion*, published in 1780. In many ways, the treatise represents an attempt to create a summa of historical theology as it had evolved in dialogue with philosophical innovations through time. Nearly twenty-five hundred copies of the *Traité* were sold before 1783, and a revised edition was already in print by 1786. The work was republished in French and translated multiple times into Spanish and Italian, with a final French edition published as late as 1890 during the Third Republic.<sup>28</sup> The scope of the *Traité* is encyclopedic insofar as it grapples with Catholic theology in light of ancient moral philosophy, and works by Baron d'Holbach, Claude Adrien Helvétius, Epicurean atomism, Humean skepticism, and Spinozist materialism. Yet, in

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(Paris: Champion, 2010); Alan C. Kors, *The Coterie d'Holbach* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1975), 114–117; William Everdell, *Christian Apologetics in France, 1730–1790: The Roots of Romantic Religion* (Lewiston, NY: Edwin Mellen Press, 1987), 128–132; Didier Masseur, *Les ennemis des philosophes: L'antiphilosophie au temps de Lumières* [The enemies of the philosophes: *Antiphilosophie* in the time of the Enlightenment] (Paris: Albin Michel, 2000), 237–273; Ambroise Jobert, "Avant-Propos" [Foreword], in *Un théologien au siècle des lumières: Bergier correspondance avec l'abbé Trouillet 1770–1790* [A theologian in the century of lights: Correspondence between Bergier and the Abbé Trouillet 1770–1790], Ambroise Jobert, ed. (Lyon: Centre Andre Latreille, 1987), 15–44.

26. Nicholas-Sylvestre Bergier, *Examen du matérialisme ou Réfutation du Système de la Nature* [Examination of materialism or the refutation of the system of nature], 2 vols. (Paris: Humblot, 1771); Caroline Chopelin-Blanc, *De l'apologétique à l'Eglise constitutionnelle (1742–1794)* [From apologetic to the constitutional church] (Paris: Honoré Champion, 2009), 122–123.

27. Jobert, "Avant-Propos," 22–23.

28. *Ibid.*, 24–28.

a way often neglected by scholars, the work was also theologically radical in places.<sup>29</sup>

The work of Clorinda Donato has emphasized Bergier's avid reading of European travel literature, works by philosophes about the New World, and the outpouring of publications deriving from Jesuit missionary endeavors throughout the world, especially those concerning China.<sup>30</sup> Hardly surprising, therefore, is the fact that the first volume of Bergier's *Traité* shows the intercrossing of eighteenth-century debates concerning China. In dialogue principally with the sinophilia of passages in Voltaire's *Essai sur les moeurs* and *Dictionnaire philosophique*, Bergier problematizes the antiquity, presumed theism, and superior moral philosophy claimed by philosophic partisans of China.<sup>31</sup> "If the elegies that several of our philosophes have made about the history, religion, and political morality of the Chinese were true," he argues, the Chinese people "would be the most ancient, the wisest, the happiest, the most estimable in the universe." According to Voltaire, "those who do not believe all of these miracles are senseless ignoramuses."<sup>32</sup> Bergier's response to Voltaire intercrosses at least three transdiscursive historical contexts. The first is the Jesuits' adaptation to the Qing dynasty's imperial system and the fruits of their strategy of accommodating Chinese rites in order to secure the success of their endeavor. The second concerns Jesuit strategies of gaining lasting support from the French monarchy at a time of great hardship wrought by the papal condemnation of the Jesuit position on Chinese rites. After the suppression of the Jesuits in France between 1762 and 1764, an attempt was made to gain support from Louis XV for the scientific and missionary endeavors of the ex-Jesuits, and it was from this context that one of Bergier's main sources emerged—the memoir of Chinese expatriate priest Pierre Louis Ko (b. Kao Lei-ssu, 1732–1790<sup>33</sup>). Bergier used Ko's memoir to undermine what he per-

29. As Sylviane Albertan-Coppola has recently argued, Bergier's *Traité* even implies that the salvific grace of God must be universal. See Albertan-Coppola, *L'abbé Nicholas-Sylvestre Bergier*, 199–242; Nicholas-Sylvestre Bergier, *Traité historique et dogmatique de la vraie religion: La refutation des erreurs qui lui ont été opposé dans les différens siècles* [Historical and dogmatic treatise of true religion: Refutation of the errors which have confronted it throughout different centuries], 12 vols. (Tournay, France: Ch. Casterman-Dieu, 1827), 2:96–105, 2:342–362, 3:53–79, 3:283–291.

30. Clorinda Donato, "Le Nouveau Monde et l'apologie du catholicisme dans le *Dictionnaire de théologie (1789–1790)* de l'abbé Bergier" [The new world and the defense of Catholicism in the *Theological Dictionary (1789–1790)*], *Tangence* 72 (2003): 57–73.

31. Bergier, *Traité*, 1:305–333. All translations of Bergier are my own unless otherwise noted.

32. *Ibid.*, 1:305.

33. Danielle Eliseeff-Poisle, "Chinese Influence in France, Sixteenth to Eighteenth Centuries," in *China and Europe: Images and Influences in Sixteenth to Eighteenth Centuries*, T. H. C. Lee, ed. (Hong Kong: Chinese University Press, 1991), 158.

ceived as the skepticism and unbelief at the heart of Voltaire's popular love of China, and this polemic, in turn, is entangled with still a third history: the history of debates concerning the nature of Chinese antiquity and its supposedly superior moral and philosophical worldview. By choosing to stress how these three entangled discourses intersect and were redefined by Bergier's plume, the remainder of this article will demonstrate one of the ways in which the objects of present scholarly conceptions of radical, secular, and religious enlightenment discourses permanently forged one another by their interaction.

The first of the intercrossed historical contexts in Bergier's *Traité* is that of Jesuit accommodationism, a rhetorical and strategic position that allowed the mission to thrive within the Ming and the Qing states and Chinese society of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. The explosive growth of world trade in both China and Europe, and translations of Chinese texts into the European Enlightenment mediated by the Jesuits, are merely two facets of this time of intercultural vitality. Indeed, populations of religious minorities in China (Lamaist Buddhists, Chinese and Turkish Muslims, Jewish traders, multinational cadres of missionary priests from Catholic Europe) were common in the sprawling multinational empires of the Ming and Qing dynasties. Qing emperors generally encouraged assimilation of minority populations by protecting and patronizing their religious leaders to keep them loyal and quiescent. As a result, many religious leaders, including the early Jesuits like Matteo Ricci, used imperial politics to their advantage by attempting to gain recognition and status in Beijing. As such, many Jesuits focused on gaining the support of scholar-gentry at court so that their missionary endeavors in the provinces would be granted greater flexibility to maneuver without interference from provincial officials. The result, however, was the need for Jesuits to adopt the style of Chinese literati (dressing like them, learning Chinese fluently, and studying the Confucian classics). Ricci and his successors among the French Jesuits became convinced that, in China, Christianity must be seen by the mandarins to be nothing more than a purified Confucianism. Ricci and many Jesuits also began to tolerate the persistence of Chinese state and household rites sanctioned by Confucian gentry and the emperor himself because, the missionaries reasoned, these rites had originated as social and civil reflections of filial piety. The basis, however, of this entire strategy was the assumption that the original revelation/natural religion from the Christian God had once been well-known in China, and, indeed, had been passed down from the greatest antiquity until its corruption by idolatry brought on by foreign influences like Buddhism and the credulity and superstition of the common people.<sup>34</sup>

34. Liam Matthew Brockey, *Journey to the East: The Jesuit Mission in China, 1579–1724* (Cambridge, MA, and London: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2007), 11–12; Jean-Pierre Chabonnier, *Christians in China, A.D. 600–2000*, M. N. L. Couve de Murville, trans. (San Francisco: Ignatius, 2007); Arnold Horrex Rowbotham, *Missionary and Man-*

Beginning with the accession of the Jesuit Father Verbeist to a position of great influence at the Qing dynasty court of Emperor Kangxi, the Jesuits had actively promoted the training of native Chinese scholar-priests, both to minister to new converts in China and to garner support, it was hoped, from the papacy and major monarchs in Europe. Indeed, the first so-called propaganda tour for the Jesuit mission in China had occurred between 1683 and 1692, and it was spearheaded by Father Philippe Couplet and his colleague, the Chinese Christian priest Shen Fuzong.<sup>35</sup> Results were mixed. In the short term, the voyages of 1683–1692 culminated in the apogee of French support for the Jesuit China mission under Louis XIV, and the active recruitment of French Jesuit priests to be sent to mission fields in China. While French royal support for the Jesuit endeavor was growing, however, the attempt to smooth ruffled feathers among factions of Catholics critical of the Jesuits back in Europe backfired.

Although very well studied, the fiery debates over Jesuit accommodationism, which came to a head in the Chinese Rites Controversy, impacted both Europe and China. The fabric of these debates is woven into the *métissage* characterized by Bergier's dialogue with Voltaire. Accommodationism was highly successful for some time until the early 1700s, when it became highly controversial on both poles of the Eurasian landmass. Once Louis le Comte's *Nouveaux mémoires sur la Chine* (New Memoirs Concerning China), based on Jesuit accounts of China, was published between 1696 and 1700, Mendicants, some rival Jesuits, and Jansenists immediately attacked accommodationism as being soft on idolatry—a position taken both by the Sorbonne (1700) and the pontiff (1704 and 1715), and reiterated in 1742 by Pope Benedict XIV.<sup>36</sup> At-

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*darin: The Jesuits at the Court of China* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1942); Louis J. Gallagher, S. J., trans., *China in the Sixteenth Century: The Journals of Matteo Ricci, 1583–1610* (New York: Random House, 1953), 154; Jonathan Spence, *The Chan's Great Continent: China in Western Minds* (New York and London: W. W. Norton, 1998), 31–35; J. J. Clarke, *Oriental Enlightenment: The Encounter between Asian and Western Thought* (London and New York: Routledge, 1997), 42–53; D. E. Mungello, *The Great Encounter of China and the West, 1500–1800* (Lanham, MD, New York, Boulder, CO, and Oxford: Rowman & Littlefield, 1999), 59–60, 72–74; see also D. E. Mungello, “The Seventeenth-Century Jesuit Translation Project of the Confucian *Four Books*,” in *East Meets West: The Jesuits in China, 1582–1773*, Charles Ronan and Bonnie B. C. Oh, eds. (New York: Loyola Press, 1988), 252–272.

35. J. D. Spence, *The Question of Hu* (New York: Knopf, 1988), 1–26, 122–134.

36. David Porter, *Ideographia: The Chinese Cipher in Early Modern Europe* (Palo Alto, CA: Stanford University Press, 2001), 81–82; on the later condemnation by Pope Benedict XIV, see Mario Rosa, *Settecento religioso: Politica della ragione e religione del cuore* [Age of religion: Politics of reason and religion of the heart] (Venice: Marsilio, 1999); see also David E. Mungello, “European Philosophical Responses to Non-European Culture: China,” in *The Cambridge History of Seventeenth-Century Philosophy*, David Garber and Michael Ayers, eds. (Cambridge and New York: Cambridge University Press, 1998; 2003 repr.), 87–103.

tacks on accommodationism actually escalated between 1692 and 1740, with greater awareness of Jesuit activities and Chinese philosophy. Official condemnations of Jesuit practices, in turn, only augmented Jesuit political difficulties in China itself. Factions of Chinese literati seemed increasingly concerned that the Jesuits were two-faced and represented a potential political threat in the provinces. While some of the Jesuits sounded like Confucians at the Forbidden City, they were reported by provincial mandarins to be preaching what many believed was a radical sect of Buddhism among Chinese provincials. In obedience to the pope, Jesuit accommodationism waned in China, and, predictably enough, so did Qing support during the reign of emperors Yongzheng and Qianlong.<sup>37</sup>

The Jesuit mission was fighting for its life, and the struggle worsened after the suppression of the Jesuit order in France, the mission's largest bastion of support, in 1764.<sup>38</sup> In 1751, when the new superior general of the Jesuit mission, Father Joseph Amiot, arrived in Beijing, he found Jesuit converts scattered, the missionaries often persecuted, and the number of Jesuits so painfully diminished that Amiot orchestrated a plan to send Chinese converts to France for training at the Jesuit colleges of Louis-le-Grand and College La Flèche. After 1764, with the confiscation of Jesuit properties in France, the situation in China became desperate. Amiot appealed to Henri-Léonard-Jean-Baptiste Bertin, minister and secretary of state for Louis XV, to garner royal support for the training of more Chinese priests in France by financing their scholarly labors and publicizing the fruits of them.<sup>39</sup>

37. Jerome Heyndrickx, ed., *Philippe Couplet, S. J. (1623–1693): The Man Who Brought China to Europe* (Nettetal, Germany: Steyler Verlag, 1990), 18–19; Mungello, *Curious Land*, 17–19; George Minamiki, *The Chinese Rites Controversy from its Beginning to Modern Time* (Chicago: Loyola University Press, 1985); J. S. Cummins, *A Question of Rites: Friar Domingo Navarette and Jesuits in China* (Aldershot, UK: Scholar, 1993); Mungello, *Great Encounter of China and the West*, 60–62; Ma Zhao, “Christianity Viewed from the Perspective of the Eighteenth-Century Chinese Imperial Archives: Examining the Causes of the 1746–1748 Persecutions,” in *Les Lumières Européens dans leurs relations avec les autres grandes cultures et religions* [The European enlightenments in relationship to other great cultures and religions], Florence Lotterie and Darrin M. McMahon, eds. (Paris: Honoré Champion, 2002), 25–70.

38. Dale K. Van Kley, “Jansenism and the International Expulsion of the Jesuits,” in *Enlightenment, Reawakening and Revolution, 1660–1815*, Stewart J. Brown and Timothy Tackett, eds., *Cambridge History of Christianity 7* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006), 302–328.

39. Camille de Rochemontieux, *Joseph Amiot et les derniers survivants de la Mission française à Pékin (1750–1795) avec nombreux documents inédits* [Joseph Amiot and the last survivors of the French Mission to Beijing (1750–1795) with numerous unedited documents] (Paris: Librairie Alphonse Picard et Fils, 1915), 37–38, 58–67, 72–78; Mungello, *Curious Land: Jesuit Accommodation and the Origins of Sinology*, 354; [Joseph Amiot], “Préface,” in *Mémoires concernant l’histoire des sciences, les arts, les moeurs, les usages, &c. des Chinois* [Memoirs concerning the sciences, arts, ethics, and customs, etc. of the Chinese] (Paris:

Before dealing with Bergier's dialogue with Voltaire, we should focus on another constellation of discourses intercrossed in Bergier's *Traité*—the history of debates on Chinese antiquity, theism, and ethics. Despite the travails of the Jesuits, their activities facilitated a veritable avalanche of descriptions, artifacts, translations, and travel accounts related to Chinese culture.<sup>40</sup> From every corner of Enlightenment Europe, debates raged about the religion of the Chinese and the well-ordered nature of its politics, which seemed to mimic the ideal of enlightened absolutism that scholars such as Voltaire admired. The superior morality and civility was noted by Jesuits and philosophes alike. The Jesuits had argued that the reason for the salutary exceptionalism of Chinese morality and benevolent absolutism was rooted in the exceptionally long duration in which the Chinese scholar-elites had maintained the purity of the patriarchal religion before its degeneration into idolatry.<sup>41</sup> Foundational to this argument was Ricci's assertion that the Chinese had worshiped the Christian God under the name *Shangdi*, and that it was only the relatively recent corruption of Confucianism by materialists in the Tang and Song dynasties (618–1279) under the influence of Buddhist metaphysics that led to the more degenerate state of Chinese religion in the eighteenth century. Ricci's successor, Father Longobardi, the Jesuits' inveterate opponents among the Mendicants such as Friar Navreete, and the Jansenists thought otherwise, noting (accurately, as it happens) that even the most ancient of Chinese classics possesses no clear idea of incorporeal deity, because Chinese philosophy and religion is materialist. The debate over Chinese religion was soon joined by Enlightenment writers like Leibniz and Voltaire, who maintained (at least nominally in accord with the Jesuits) that the Chinese were theists.<sup>42</sup> In contrast, scholars like the

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Nyon Librairie, rue S. Jean-de-Beauvais vis-à-vis le college, 1776), 1:ii–iv; Cordier, *La Chine en France au XVIIIe siècle* [*China in France in the Eighteenth Century*] (Paris: Henri Laurens, 1910), 132–134; see also Rochemontieux, *Joseph Amiot*, 104–111.

40. Mungello, *Great Encounter of China and the West*, 84–85; Henri Pinot, *La Chine et la formation de l'esprit philosophique en France, 1640–1740* [*China and the formation of the philosophical spirit in France, 1640–1740*] (Genève: Slatkine Reprints, 1971), 367–376; Donald F. Lach and Edwin J. Van Kley, *Asia in the Making of Europe*, 3 vols. (Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press, 1993), 3:1752–1753; see also David Porter, "China and the Critique of Religious Fanaticism in Eighteenth-Century France," in Lotterie and McMahon *Les Lumières européennes*, 61–80; Porter, *Ideographia*, 8.

41. In essence, Europeans of the late seventeenth and eighteenth centuries were ideologically caught between two competing theories. One posited an original, natural, monotheistic religion that degenerated into idolatry, thus necessitating revealed religion, and the other suggested idolatry of nature was the essence of primitive natural religion. See Guy G. Stroumsa, *A New Science: The Discovery of Religion in the Age of Reason* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2010), 77–100, 145–149.

42. Basil Guy, *The French Image of China Before and After Voltaire* (Geneva: Intitut et Musée Voltaire les Délices, 1963), 116–120; Voltaire, *Essai sur les moeurs et l'esprit des nations et*



young Marquis d'Argens believed that primitive Confucianism had affinities with Spinoza.<sup>43</sup> Bayle's famous and popular reflections on China in *Commentaire philosophique* (Philosophical Commentary), coupled with d'Argens's own musing about the possibility of morally upright atheism, raised the alarming possibility that Chinese society was never beholden to any concept of transcendent incorporeal deity.<sup>44</sup> But as of the middle of the eighteenth century, few writers who had read the texts and translations produced by the Jesuit missionaries disagreed with the view of the Chinese as a generally well-governed society possessing a superior morality enforced by the benevolent example of philosopher-princes. Left unresolved, however, was the debate over whether Chinese morality was animated by corrupted theism or by philosophical atheism.<sup>45</sup>

Inextricably bound up with the question of whether China was originally theist or atheist was the unresolved debate about the antiquity of Chinese culture and religion. Recorded in Confucian classics were chronologies that placed the origins of the Chinese empire well before the biblical Flood recorded in the book of Genesis. Issac Vossius, the renowned seventeenth-century polymath, had suggested in *De vera aetate mundi* (On the True State of the World) (1659) that the Genesis chronologies contained in the Greek Scriptures (Septuagint) comported well with the Chinese histories. Vossius's referral to the Septuagint minimized the discrepancies between Catholic teachings and Chinese history,

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*sur les principaux faits de l'histoire depuis Charlemagne jusqu'à Louis XII* [Essay on the morals and spirit of nations and the principal facts of their history from Charlemagne to Louis XII], in *Oeuvres complètes de Voltaire* [The complete works of Voltaire], new ed., T. Beuchot, ed. (Paris: Garnier, 1878), 11:176–179; Voltaire, *Dictionnaire philosophique* [Philosophical dictionary], Alain Pons, ed. (Paris: Gallimard, 1994), 112–136; Gottfried Wilhelm Leibniz, "Preface to *Novissima Sinica*" [The most original China], in *Writings on China*, Daniel J. Cook and Henry Rosemont, Jr., trans. (Chicago and LaSalle, IL: Open Court, 1994), 45–59; Roy Oliver, *Leibniz et la Chine* [Leibniz and China] (Paris: Librairie Philosophique J. Vrin, 1972).

43. Jean Baptiste Boyer, Marquis d'Argens, *Lettres chinoises ou correspondance philosophique, historique et critique entre un chinois voyageur & ses correspondans à la Chine, en Moscovie & au Japon* [Chinese letters, or philosophical, historical, and critical correspondance between a Chinese traveler and his correspondants in China, Russia, and Japan], 6 vols. (La Haye: Pierre Paupie, 1769), 1:138–139; see also Jonathan I. Israel, *Enlightenment Contested: Philosophy, Modernity, and the Emancipation of Man* (Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, 2006), 640–662.

44. Porter, "China and the Critique of Religious Fanaticism in Eighteenth-Century France," 61–80.

45. Paradoxically, the texts produced by the Jesuits had enabled Bayle to distill the essence of why the Chinese could very well be an example of a virtuous atheist society, thereby recursively hastening the Jesuit defeat in the Chinese Rites Controversy. In effect, accommodationism was revealed in this way to be all too tolerant of atheistic rites. Guy, *The French Image of China Before and After Voltaire*, 130–131.

and implied that Chinese culture, morality, beliefs, and practices were at least as ancient and historically authentic as those of the Bible. In building on such findings, Voltaire's *Essai sur les mœurs* affirmed that the vast discrepancy intimated in the Hebrew version of the Old Testament suggested that sacred history was no model for universal history, and that the Chinese tradition actually reflected an older and far superior tradition of ancient history.<sup>46</sup>

Bergier's dialogue with Voltaire's text grapples with the complexities of these various disputes. It is arguably a significant intercrossing among a variety of transdiscursive entanglements—the transnationally contingent history of Jesuit missionary activity, the translation of Chinese thought into a European context by a Jesuit-trained Chinese novice, and Enlightenment debates about universal history and religion. When viewed in hindsight, Bergier's debate with Voltaire is additionally an instance whereby philosophe and antiphilosophe discourses mutually constitute one another.<sup>47</sup> Moreover, because Bergier's text was written in a clearly digestible fashion and reprinted continuously throughout the rest of the period from 1780 to 1890, Bergier's *Traité*, the intercrossing of so many histories as detailed above, was widely influential.

At its inception, the Voltairean faith in Chinese antiquity, deism, and upright morality is the object of Bergier's critique in his *Traité*. Voltaire affirmed that “the antiquity of the truth and authenticity of the Chinese chronicles cannot be doubted,” and that such facts were “confirmed by so many astronomical observations, the unanimous testimony of travelers to China.” Moreover, as Bergier continues summarizing Voltaire, “the Chinese have excelled at all times in ethics and legislation; [and] their religion is simple, august, free of all superstition and barbarism.”<sup>48</sup> Yet Bergier is quick to remind his readers of other, less pervasive but increasingly important critical viewpoints on China. In this connection, he mentions Rousseau and the *Philosophical Research Concerning the Egyptians and Chinese* by Cornelius de Pauw, both of whom had spoken of the Chinese as “the most vile, ignorant, corrupt, and dissolute” people in the world.<sup>49</sup> But Bergier's attempt to enter into dialogue with Voltaire concerning

46. Voltaire, *Essai sur les mœurs*, 165–166.

47. Philippe Lefebvre, “Le regard sur l'incrédule dans les sermons de la deuxième moitié du dix-huitième siècle” [The view of unbelief in the sermons of the second half of the eighteenth century], in *Religions en transition dans la seconde moitié du dix-huitième siècle* [Religions in transition in the second half of the eighteenth century], Louis Châtellier, ed. (Oxford: Voltaire Foundation, 2000), 95–109.

48. Bergier, *Traité*, 1:305.

49. Bergier, *Traité*, 1:306; Jean Jacques Rousseau, *Nouvelle Héloïse* [New Heloise], Jean M. Gouleot, ed. (Paris: Editions Gallimard; Le Livre de Poche, 2002); Salvatore Rotta, “Egiziani e cinesi a confronto: Intorno alle *Recherches philosophiques sur les Egyptiens et les Chinois* di Cornelius de Pauw (1773)” [A comparison of Egyptians and Chinese: Concerning *Historical Research on Egypt and China* by Cornelius de Pauw, (1773)], in *La geografia dei saperi*

the antiquity, religion, and moral philosophy of the Chinese in his *Traité* relies chiefly on the memoir of Father Pierre Louis Ko. Ko was one of the Chinese trained by the Jesuits, and his “Essai sur l’antiquité des Chinois” (Essay on the Antiquity of the Chinese) was published as part of a large collection of scholarship on China edited by Joseph Amiot, entitled *Mémoires concernant l’histoire, les sciences, les arts, les mœurs, &c. des Chinois* (Memoirs Concerning the History, Sciences, Arts, Morés, etc. of the Chinese) (1776–1802). From the perspective of Father Amiot, these memoirs were part of an effort to rehabilitate the Jesuit mission in the eyes of the French court, as an essential component of the expansion of French commerce and technical knowledge.<sup>50</sup>

Little has been written about Pierre Louis Ko and his compatriot, Etienne Yang (b. Yang Te-Wang, 1733–1798). Based presumably on the speculation that because the “very few Chinese people who came to France were of poor families” recently converted to Christianity, “outside the traditional system” and therefore “ill prepared to foster real intellectual exchanges between the two civilizations,” Danielle Elisseef-Poisle has speculated that these two Chinese may have been little more than a mouthpiece for the views of their educator, the ex-Jesuit Michael Benoist. However, this assumption has never been substantiated in any of the existing works that touch on Ko and Yang, including those of David Mungello, Joseph Dehergne, and myself.<sup>51</sup> Certainly, a poverty-stricken birth and exclusion from the education afforded to the sons of Chinese scholar-gentry hardly makes such Chinese Catholic converts a cultural or intellectual tabula rasa. Bergier asserts that Pierre Louis Ko, although a “Chinese by nationality” (*Chinois de nation*), nevertheless wrote against the “histories, chronology, legislation, and current religion of his *patrie*.”<sup>52</sup> Bergier openly favors Ko’s position despite the fact that the second volume of the *Mé-*

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[The geography of knowledge], D. Ferraro and G. Gigliotti, ed. (Florence: Le Lettere, 2000), 241–267.

50. Rochemonteix, *Joseph Amiot*, 37–38, 58–67, 72–78; Mungello, *Curious Land*, 354; [Joseph Amiot], “Préface,” 1:ii–iv; Cordier, *Chine en France*, 132–134; see also Rochemonteix, *Joseph Amiot*, 104–111.

51. Elisseef-Poisle, “Chinese Influence in France,” 151–163. No reference is given for Elisseef-Poisle’s speculation regarding the originality of Ko’s and Yang’s work. See also David Mungello, “Confucianism in the Enlightenment: Antagonism and Collaboration between the Jesuits and the Philosophes,” in Lee, *China and Europe*, 99–127; J. Dehergne, *Les deux Chinois et Bertin: Lenquête industrielle de 1764 et les début de la collaboration technique franco-chinoise* [Bertin and two Chinese: The industrial inquest of 1764 and the origins of Franco-Chinese technical collaboration] (Paris: Thèse pour le 3e cycle en Sorbonne, 1965); J. de Sacy, M. Antoine, *Henri Bertin, dans le sillage de la Chine (1720–1792)* [Henri Bertin in the Shadow of China (1720–1792)] (Paris, Editions Cathasia, 1970); Jeffrey D. Burson, “Chinese Novices, Jesuit Missionaries, and the Accidental Construction of Sinophobia in Enlightenment France,” *French History* 27, no. 2 (Spring 2013): 1–24.

52. Bergier, *Traité*, 1:306.

*moires* contains a lengthy essay by Father Joseph Amiot defending the Chinese annals and the generally favorable opinion of Chinese civilization shared, in fact, by many Jesuits, as well as by their detractors among the philosophes. Ko's memoir, Bergier believes, is actually the more credible source, because one would expect him to be "more interested than a foreigner in the glory of his fatherland."<sup>53</sup>

Marshaling evidence from Pierre Louis Ko's memoir, Bergier asserts that the earliest of Chinese classics, the *Yijing* (I'Y-King), could not date back to 2940 BCE at all, but is instead a book most likely written by the founder of the Zhou dynasty in 1122 BCE and partially rewritten by Confucius himself before his death in 479 BCE. Similarly, Bergier contends, the first so-called Chinese history, the *Zhoujing/Chou-King*, is a mere chronology of events, while moral maxims attributed to Confucius are believed to have been compiled from more ancient manuscripts.<sup>54</sup> According to both Father Amiot and Pierre Louis Ko, "[o]ne knows nothing" further about them, and even "Confucius himself was ignorant" concerning the whereabouts of the original manuscripts. Bergier thereby concludes, along with Amiot and Ko, that the chronology of the *Zhoujing* was actually the invention of historians and written well after the philosophy of Confucius came into existence, and as such it could not have presented an accurate account of Chinese historical origins.<sup>55</sup> In effect, Bergier uses Ko's memoir to systematically refute Voltaire concerning the antiquity and authenticity of the Chinese classics in order to undermine Voltaire's elevation of Chinese moral, political, and religious discourses above Catholic religion and European political culture. "It is evident," Bergier writes, "that not a single one of these classic books such as they are today could be more ancient than Confucius, and none of the dates employed by these memoirs and documentary evidence can be conclusively established."<sup>56</sup> Moreover, Bergier adds, "let us not forget that ... three hundred fifty years after Confucius, Emperor Shi Huangdi ordered the burning of all books of history and morality throughout his empire, in particular the *Zhoujing*." So thorough was the literary carnage that "around fifty years after the persecution, only one example of that book remained." According to both Bergier and Ko, this copy of the *Zhoujing* was irrevocably corrupted and damaged such that the original could never be reconstructed. Even if the hypothetically original *Zhoujing* could somehow be reconstructed from the surviving copy, Bergier adds, the characters had changed so much over the course of the Chinese empire's four-thousand-year history that even the Chinese scholar-gentry could not accurately decipher

53. *Ibid.*, 1:306–307.

54. *Ibid.*, 1:308–309.

55. *Ibid.*, 1:309n1.

56. *Ibid.*, 1:309–315.

them.<sup>57</sup> “[A]ccording to the testimony of Father Ko,” Bergier claims, “there is not one literati in China who would claim more than probable and satisfactory knowledge that the chronology of the Chinese classics goes back to 841 years before Jesus Christ.”<sup>58</sup>

“Even if one were to disregard all of this evidence” on the unreliability of the Chinese sources as shown in Ko’s memoir, and persist in maintaining that Fo-Hi founded the Chinese empire in 2940 BCE, the biblical account would not be thereby contradicted, “since, according to the chronology of the Septuagint, which it is fully permissible to follow,” asserts Bergier, “the dispersion of the peoples after the Flood would still have predated Fo-Hi.” Bergier is here invoking the contentious debates over chronological discrepancies between the Septuagint, Hebrew texts, and the Chinese chronologies. The larger importance of synthesizing Vossius’s work on Chinese versus sacred chronology with Ko’s memoir was to buttress Bergier’s thesis—that the “purity of Chinese mores, the sagacity of their laws, and the prosperity of their nation, be it ever so proven one hundredfold, could still not be attributed to the salutary influences of deism,” as Voltaire suggested.<sup>59</sup>

Having undermined the ancient authenticity of Chinese history and problematized Voltaire’s tendency to see the Chinese as primitive deists, Bergier writes, “from the earliest times, [the Chinese] people had adored one God, ruler of the universe, under the name of Tian, Di, or Shangdi; they believed in divine providence, the immortality of the soul and the life to come.” This primitive world religion “subsists no longer in Chinese books any more than in China,” since “the emperors, the literati, the nobility, and the people are idolatrous.” Far from showing evidence of primitive natural piety (as Voltaire contended) or an enlightened atheism (as some early scions of radical enlightenment believed), Bergier further contends, “there is no nation more credulous, superstitious, or fearful than the Chinese,” and “their ancient chronicles are replete with [such] puerile fables.”<sup>60</sup> Bergier falls back upon a central argument he had maintained consistently throughout his works, from *Les Origines des Dieux de la paganisme* (The Origins of the Gods of Paganism) (1767), through his *Examen du materialisme* (Examination of Materialism) (1771), to the *Dictionnaire de théologie* (Dictionary of Theology)—that all ancient peoples on earth had once worshiped one and the same God.<sup>61</sup> Bergier maintained

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57. *Ibid.*, 316.

58. *Ibid.*

59. Bergier, *Traité*, 1:307–308; on Vossius and another significant and insightful study of the importance of Enlightenment sinophilia, see Jonathan I. Israel, “Admiration of China and Classical Thought in the Radical Enlightenment (1685–1740),” *Taiwan Journal of East Asian Studies* 4 (2007): 1–25.

60. Bergier, *Traité*, 1:316–317; see also Israel, *Enlightenment Contested*, 640–662.

61. Nicholas-Sylvestre Bergier, *Examen du materialisme*, 2:8–19, 2:51–59, 2:197–203;

that this “primitive religion,” revealed by God to the patriarchs descended from Noah, was passed down through family-based polities and ultimately evolved into the various civilizations of the world. Deficient understanding of the natural world and linguistic confusion in the transmission of sacred epics and rituals through time had led to the personification of natural forces as deities. Taken together, these factors led toward the decay of human religious understanding into polytheism.<sup>62</sup> In miniature, this process is the very thing that Bergier, alongside many enlightened clerics in Europe, had assumed was the *deus ex machina* behind the corruption of morals and natural revelation, and hence the very reason why divine revelation was necessary at all, even in an age of reason.<sup>63</sup> Though the Chinese obviously believed in rewards and punishments in an afterlife, in contradistinction to what Voltaire wrote (for “why,” writes Bergier, “would they consult the dead and offer them sacrifices” if it were otherwise?), the Chinese “like all pagans ... believe in the existence of natural spirits to whom they entrust their prayers,” thereby snuffing out the original religion of God, preserved in Europe thanks to the Catholic Church (as Bergier argued).<sup>64</sup> “Obedience to the law, the magistrates, the sovereign, to fathers and mothers is not,” therefore, considered “as a means of pleasing God and meriting rewards of an afterlife.” Instead, morality derives from “purely civil order.”<sup>65</sup> In practice, then, Chinese morality “is cold, monotonous, lacking foundation, [and] as vague as that of all pagans,” for their “moralists condemn neither the despotism of princes, nor slavery, nor the tyrannical powers of fathers and mothers, nor infanticide, nor polygamy, nor the captivity of women.” All such characteristics, Bergier writes, are “unequivocal signs of the corruptions of morals.”<sup>66</sup>

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Bergier, *Dictionnaire de Théologie*, new ed., 4 vols. (Lille: Lefort, 1838), 1:x–xxiii. Bergier completed the *Dictionnaire de Théologie* in 1790 just before his death. It was posthumously published in 1838.

62. For a compelling account of the development of anthropocentric history of religion in the Enlightenment and its evolution from debates over the history of idolatry, see Stroumsa, *The New Science*, 77–101.

63. Nicolas-Sylvestre Bergier, *Les Origines des dieux du paganisme et le sens des fables découvert par une explication suivie poésies d’Hésiode* [The origins of pagan deities and the meaning of fables uncovered through an explanation of Hesiod’s verse], 2 vols. (Paris: Humblot, 1767), 1:5–12, 1:15, 1:23–24, 1:29–33, 1:38–44.

64. Bergier, *Traité*, 1:320, also 1:306–307; Jean-Baptiste du Halde, *Description géographique et historique, chronologique, politique, et physique de l’empire de la Chine et de la Tartaire chinoise* [Geographical, historical, chronological, political, and physical description of the Chinese empire and of Chinese tartary], 4 vols. (La Haye: H. Scheurleer, 1736).

65. Bergier, *Traité*, 1:321–322.

66. *Ibid.*, 1:322–323. For such indictments of the Chinese nation and its moral practices, Bergier leans heavily on the negative portrayals of China by Du Halde, the English commodore Anson, Montesquieu’s *Spirit of the Laws*, and the thirty-fourth volume of the Jesuit

What, then, does this thick description of Bergier's critique of Voltaire reveal about the merits of entangling the history of religion and Enlightenment? First, Bergier's worldview is shaped by critical engagement with the very same travel literature about non-Western "others" that inspired Voltaire. Bergier's use of Jesuit philology concerning China reflects ongoing debates throughout the age of reason involving philosophes, academicians, and clergy over the universal history of human religion. Asking questions such as what is natural reason and what, if anything, is the importance of so-called revealed faiths like confessional Catholicism, Protestantism, Judaism, and Islam, Bergier's defenses of the Catholic Church demonstrated sophisticated engagement with Enlightenment epistemology, materialism, and the works of many of the same luminaries that shaped the work of philosophes. In most respects, Bergier, like his compatriots among Catholic and Protestant teachers, critically appropriate Locke, Newton, Leibniz, and Wolff, and he was on favorable terms with Denis Diderot and Baron d'Holbach. Thus, Bergier has as much reason to be defined as part of the Enlightenment as Voltaire does.<sup>67</sup> However, when the transdiscursive intercrossing embodied in Bergier's *Traité*—the intercrossing of, on one hand, the memoir of Ko and the Jesuit missionary activities with Voltaire's rose-colored portrayal of Chinese thought on the other—is viewed in another light by historians, Bergier's work emerges as quite the opposite. When viewed as part of an explanatory process by which many Catholic writers in France migrated by the late eighteenth century away from their earlier social and intellectual engagement with the high Enlightenment, Bergier's summation of Chinese controversies in the *Traité historique et dogmatique* can be considered a part of the process by which Enlightenment was wielded against the philosophes. In other words, Bergier's text can also be studied as an example of *antiphilosophie*.<sup>68</sup> As demonstrated above, Bergier's *Traité* can be viewed at the intercrossing of multiple histories. Bridged by Bergier's text

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*Lettres édifiantes et curieuses* [Edifying and Curious Letters], in addition to the memoir of Pierre Louis Ko. See Bergier, *Traité*, 1:326; see also Charles Louis de Secondat, Baron de la Brède et de Montesquieu, *De l'Esprit des lois* [Spirit of the Laws], Jean Brethe de la Bessaye, ed., 4 vols. (Paris: Société des Belles Lettres, 1950), 1:225–228; Commodore Richard Walter Anson, *Voyage around the World in the Years 1740–1744*, Glyndwr Williams, ed. (London: Dover, 1974), 347–349, 352–356, 361–393.

67. Albertan-Coppola, *L'abbé Nicholas-Sylvestre Bergier*, 237–239; Alan Kors, *The Coterie d'Holbach*, 114–117; Jean Delumeau, "Introduction," in Jobert, *Un théologien au siècle des lumières*, 1–12; Jeffrey D. Burson, "Nicolas-Sylvestre Bergier (1715–1790): Enlightened Antiphilosophie," in *Enlightenment Catholicism: A Transnational History* (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 2014).

68. Burson, *Rise and Fall of Theological Enlightenment*, 302–304; Israel, *Democratic Enlightenment*, 152–161, 362–363; Darrin McMahon, *Enemies of Enlightenment: The French Counter-Enlightenment and the Making of Modernity* (Oxford University Press, 2001), 5–53.

and its appropriation are controversies over the atheism and theism of the Chinese, Enlightenment debates over what constitutes *la morale* and the science of public happiness, the collapse of the Jesuits in China as well as in France, and the process of eighteenth-century intercultural translation mediated by Jesuits, philosophes (and even Chinese Catholic expatriates). The literary output of a Chinese Catholic convert, Pierre Louis Ko, whose discourse was shaped by both Qing China and Enlightenment Europe, was ultimately swept up into the debate between Voltaire and Bergier in a way that contributed to a Eurocentric discourse of *antiphilosophie*. In short, at least one of the things entangled history does is to problematize the linearity of conventional narratives, if only to open the possibility of breaking free of the self-reinforcing categories of analysis (such as, for example, radical enlightenment, religious enlightenment, or Counter-Enlightenment) unintentionally imposed by historians even in their attempt to break free of them.<sup>69</sup> The dangers of “projective reprocessing of the past” notwithstanding, it remains impossible for historians to construct a conjectural one-way narrative from past influences to later or present consequences without engaging in the “structuring, voluntary intellectual action” through which “the object of study” and “the line of inquiry” is defined.<sup>70</sup>

Thus, Bergier’s anti-Voltairean arguments in the *Traité* are in one sense a product of the Enlightenment and, in another sense, an abandonment of the late Enlightenment French trajectory. The case study of Bergier’s text demonstrates that a single text is not only a building block in the mutual entanglement of historical discourses. A single text can be, as it was in Ginzburg’s study, at least by implication, the locus of diachronic entanglement between historian-in-the-present as subject and phenomena-in-the-past as object.<sup>71</sup> The linearity of narrative construction belies the more complex reality too often forgotten in the thick of historiographical controversy—that the present inevitably transposes the past.

One final cautionary note is in order by way of conclusion: I am not arguing for the illegitimacy of historical narratives which (as Sebastian Conrad has recently suggested) see Enlightenment as a transnational crisis of global modernity.<sup>72</sup> Nor am I suggesting that debating the contours of various “national enlightenments”, the “Atlantic enlightenment”, “religious enlightenment”, “radical enlightenment”, or historical processes such as “theological enlightenment” is an exercise in futility—far from it. What is history if not the analysis of sources and the construction of an engaging narrative, with all the attendant risks that entails? Nonetheless, the choices, evidence, and hypotheses of prac-

69. Werner and Zimmermann, “Beyond Comparison,” 40, 44.

70. *Ibid.*, 40.

71. See Ginzburg, *History, Rhetoric, and Proof*, 71–92.

72. Conrad, “Enlightenment in Global History,” 999–1027.



titioners are to a large extent self-referential, and the end of the story writes the beginning. Therefore, entangling our own historiographical paradigms from time to time furnishes us an insightful scholarly memento mori—that the past is endlessly complex and quintessentially mute until the long moment in which we will it to speak in our own voices. *Histoire croisée* forces us to take a long, honest look at that moment, nothing more and nothing less.