

A COMPLETE  
**HISTORY**  
OF THE

**Empire of CHINA:**  
Being the Observations of above Ten Years  
Travels through that Country:

CONTAINING  
**Memoirs and Remarks**

GEOGRAPHICAL,  
HISTORICAL,  
TOPOGRAPHICAL,  
PHYSICAL,  
NATURAL,  
ASTRONOMICAL,

MECHANICAL,  
MILITARY,  
MERCANTILE,  
POLITICAL,  
And  
ECCLESIASTICAL,

Particularly upon

Their Pottery and varnishing Silk and other Manufactures,  
Pearl-fishing, the History of Plants and Animals, with  
a Description of their Cities and Publick Works, Number  
of People, Manners, Language, and Customs, Coin and  
Commerce, their Habits, Oeconomy, and Government,  
the Philosophy of the Famous CONFUCIUS.

With an Account of the Conquest of *China* by the  
*Tartars*, and many other curious Particulars.

Written by the Learned

**LEWIS LE COMTE**

Confessor to the Dutchess of *Burgundy*, and one of the *French* King's  
Mathematicians, who was a Missioner in *China* near twenty Years.  
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ALBERT CONROT

1305

LUXEMBOURG.

## L E T T E R XIV.

*To Monsieur the Abbot Bignon.*

*A General Idea of the Observations we have made in the Indies, and in China.*

*Sir,*

**A**Ltho' you should not be at the head of the most ingenious and learned men in Europe, by the rank you hold in the Academy Royal; yet the passion I have always had to give you some marks of my esteem, and to improve by your knowledge, would engage me to communicate to you what we have performed in the Indies, as to the perfection of sciences.

It is, sir, for the credit of this illustrious academy (with which we have such a strict friendship and correspondence) that a person of your merit should seem to have any esteem for the persons it employs in its function; and I suppose, the protection, you are pleased to afford us in the world, will be taken kindly by them; but it is yet more our particular interest, that you would severely and strictly examine our works, and that, when you have implored the esteem of the publick on our behalf, you would, by an impartial and learned criticizing, take some pains to perfect us, and make us one day worthy of its approbation, and your own.

It is not, sir, that I have a mind, in this place, to explain to you in particular all that we have performed, to acquire a more exact knowledge for the future, of the motion of the stars, or to deliver memoirs to those who design to penetrate farther into the secret mysteries of nature. This work, which is of too large an extent, to be comprised within the compass of a single letter, will serve for the subject

peradventure be at this place contiguous to the firm land of America. We have, besides all this, made several observations concerning the variation of the needle upon tides, upon the length of a single pendulum, which may however contribute something to the perfection of arts and sciences.

Yet these general observations have not so much taken up our time but that we have spared some to examine what there is in the East most curious, in the way of natural philosophy, anatomy, and botany.

Our sojourning at Siam afforded us an opportunity to view several particular animals, which we seldom or never see in Europe; as for example, the elephant, the nature of which we have described, as also its docibleness, strength, courage, dexterity, the interior and exterior contexture of all its parts; together with divers other properties, that the very people of that country, that are accustomed to them, cannot chuse but admire.

There have we seen tigers, much different from those that are sometimes to be seen in France, and other countries; whether you look upon the colour, which is reddish fallow, interlaced with large black streaks, or whether you respect the bigness, which sometimes is equal to the bigness of horses; they call them Royal Tigers: those they call Water Tigers do exactly resemble a cat. They live upon fish, but do commonly live in woods, or upon the banks of rivers.

There are likewise to be seen your rhinoceros's, one of the oddest animals in the world, in my opinion; it hath some resemblance with a wild boar, only it is a little bigger, the feet of it somewhat thicker, and the body more clouterly shaped; its hide is covered all over with thick large scales, of a blackish colour, of an extraordinary hardness: they are divided  
into

into little squares or buttons, rising about a quarter of an inch above the skin, in a manner like those of the crocodile; its legs seem to be engaged in a kind of boot, and its head wrapped about behind with a flat capuche, or monk's hood; which made the Portuguese to call him the Indian Monk: its head is thick and gross, its mouth not wide, its muzzle thrust out and armed with a long thick horn that makes him terrible to the very tigers, buffalo's, and elephants.

But that, which seems the most admirable in this animal, is its tongue, which nature hath covered with such a rough membrane, that it differs but little from a file, so that it fleas off the skin of all that it licks. In a word, as we see some animals here that make a good ragoust of thistles, whose little pricks tickle the fibres or the extremities of the nerves of the tongue; so likewise your rhinoceros takes delight in eating branches of trees, armed on all sides with stiff thorns: I have often given it some of them, whose prickles were very hard and long, and I admired how cunningly and greedily it bended them immediately, and champed them in its mouth without doing itself any harm. 'Tis true indeed, they sometimes drew blood of him, but that very thing made them more pleasant to the taste; and these little flight wounds made probably no other impression upon its tongue, than salt and pepper does upon ours.

What is to be seen, in the isle of Borneo, is yet more remarkable, and surpasseth all that ever the history of animals hath hitherto related to be most admirable. The people of the country assure us, as a thing notoriously known to be true, that they find in the woods a sort of beast called the Savage-man, whose shape, stature, countenance, arms, legs, and other members of the body are so like ours,  
that