

WU-WEI IN EUROPE
-
A STUDY OF EURASIAN ECONOMIC THOUGHT

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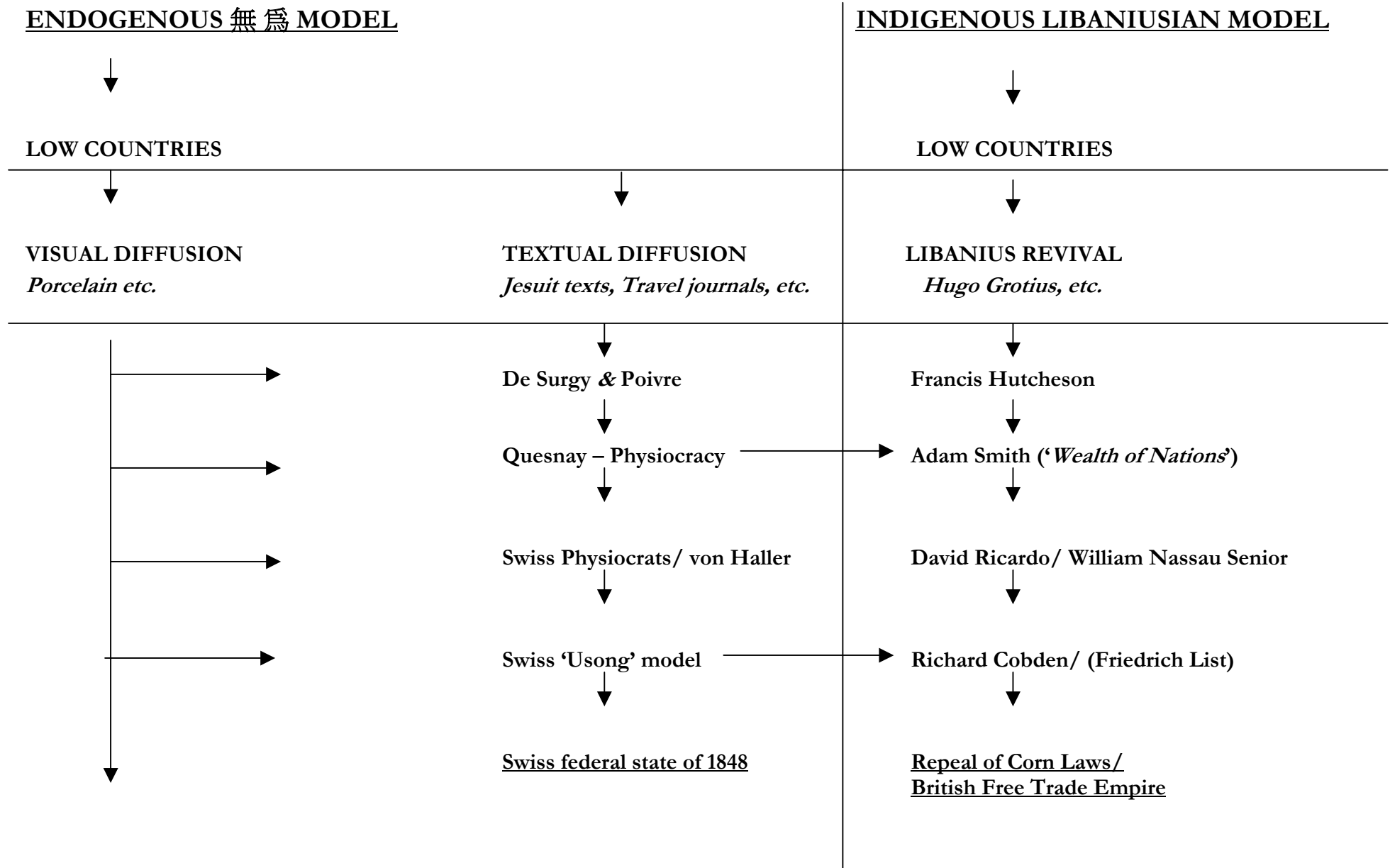
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ABSTRACT

This present paper focuses on the diffusion of *wu-wei* (an ancient Chinese concept of political economy) throughout Europe, between 1648 and 1848. It argues that at the core of this diffusion process were three major developments; firstly the importation and active transmission of *wu-wei* by the Low Countries, during the seventeenth century. It is revealed that the details of Chinese expertise entered Europe via the textual diffusion of Jesuit texts and the visual diffusion of million of so-called *minben*-images, during the ceramic boom of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. Thus, the hypothesis is advanced that the diffusion of *wu-wei*, co-evolved with the inner-European *laissez-faire* principle, the Libaniusian model.

In the second part it is shown that the intellectual foundation of Europe's first economic school, Physiocracy, is a direct replica of the imported Chinese economic, agrarian craftsmanship of *wu-wei*; subsequently it is denied that the indigenous European Libaniusian ideology can be considered the intellectual master-model of Physiocracy and his founder Quesnay.

Thirdly, it is argued that Switzerland can be identified as the first European paradigm state of *wu-wei*. The crystallization process of *wu-wei* inside Europe ultimately ended with the economic-political reorganization of the *new Eidgenossenschaft* in 1848, in which Chinese agrarian *wu-wei* was institutionally combined with the traditional Swiss "*commercial wu-wei*". In due course, this alpine paradigm enabled the endogenous Libaniusian model to verify and reflect upon its own theory of commercial society. Additionally, this third focus also demonstrates that the later development of Europe's *laissez-faire* doctrine has to be seen as a Eurasian co-production – without *wu-wei*, Europe's pro-commercial ideology would have never sufficiently matured.



INTRODUCTION

WHICH IS THE MORE BELIEVABLE OF THE TWO, MOSES OR CHINA?

*Blaise Pascal (*1623–†1662), French philosopher¹*

This essay will explore the impact of *inter-Eurasian webs of interconnections* on Europe's political economy from 1648 to 1848. I will start with the assumption that there has never been an autonomous civilization in history, which proved capable in providing continuous development inside a framework of political or economical autarchy. Furthermore, I claim that to assure an extensive, successful era of *peace and prosperity*, civilizations have to draw on 'useful knowledge' from other centers of civilization. In nature, as in history, there can be no knowledge without contact – human knowledge is continuously reborn by the forces of contact, ever changing, evolving towards ever more complexity.² I will try to spell out a vision of global history that is based on investigating the European effects of such Eurasian *exchanges of complexity*. In 1991, the historian W. H. McNeill stressed, "*the principal factor promoting historically significant social change is contact with strangers possessing new and unfamiliar skills.*"³ My focus is therefore on the diffusion of such a 'new and unfamiliar skill', to be precise, on a particular skill of Chinese state craftsmanship. This Eastern expertise in 'good government' is best described as *wu-wei*, a rough approximation of what is a complex concept of Chinese political economy, governance and religion, originating from a period before the Han Dynasty. It is best translated, as *action by non-*

¹ Pensées, No. 822, in: Blaise Pascal, *Oeuvres Complètes*, ed. and with notes by Louis Lafuma (New York 1963).

² Eric J. Chaisson, *Cosmic Evolution: The Rise of Complexity in Nature* (Cambridge, Mass. 2001).

³ William H. McNeill, *The Rise of the West* (Chicago 1963; 1991 printing), p. xvi.

action or doing nothing, yet there is nothing that is not done. What exactly does this mean?

The Chinese character 無 is literally translated as *no* or *without*, the character 爲 as *doing* or *action*. However, the axiom 無 爲 translates not into *complete absence of activity* or *doing nothing*, but what it does mean is *lesser activity*, or *doing less*. The *Huai Nan Tzu*, an influential treatise on political philosophy from the early Western Han Dynasty (206 B.C.– 9 A.D.) defined 無 爲 as follows:

“What is meant [...] by wu-wei is that no personal prejudice [private or public will,] interferes with the universal Tao [the laws of things], and that no desires and obsessions lead the true course [...] astray. Reason must guide action in order that power may be exercised according to the intrinsic properties and natural trends of things.”⁴

Thus, by relying on 無 爲 the state does less, yet everything is accomplished in accordance to the needs of the state. The philosophical core of this later political concept was formulated during the Shang Dynasty (~1500– ~1050 B.C.), as Slingerland’s recent book *Effortless Action* confirmed.⁵ Yet *wu-wei* only became a central component of classical Chinese political theory one thousands years later – as the political unit of China turned into the *wu-wei Empire*.

⁴ As quoted in: John M. Hobson, *The Eastern Origins of Western Civilisation* (Cambridge 2004), p. 190.

⁵ Edward G. Slingerland’s, *Effortless Action: Wu-wei as Conceptual Metaphor and Spiritual Ideal in Early China* (Oxford University Press 2003).

Roger Ames's comments on the *Huai Nan Tzu*⁶ illustrated how the doctrine of *doing less* developed into a political *modus operandi*, after the chaotic Warring States period (475– 221 B.C.) of the Eastern Zhou Dynasty (771– 221 B.C.).⁷ During the eclectic Han period, '*action by non-action*' was firstly adapted as a political instrument to rule over the Empire in a peaceful and harmonious way. The result was that *wu-wei* was quintessentially transformed into a policy of *wu-wei erzhi* (literally: '*order and equilibrium will be achieved without ruler's intervention*').⁸ Thus, the principle *wu-wei* became the "[...] *appropriate description of the ideal Confucian ruler: one who reigns but does not rule*".⁹

To understand in which specific political context the principle of '*doing nothing, yet there is nothing that is not done*' was adapted; we have to raise the following points. Drawing partly on Ames and Hall's work on the ancient Confucian philosopher Mencius's egalitarian ideology *minben* (meaning: the 'people/ peasantry as the foundation')¹⁰ and Broadbent's work on China's utilitarian *nongben* (meaning: Chinese agricultural fundamentalism)¹¹, Kent Deng revealed that the ideology of *minben* (i.e. the 'mandate of heaven' rooted in the people) had been an integral part of the post-'Warring States' implementation process of *wu-wei erzhi*.¹² Furthermore, as Deng demonstrated, it is possible to identify a prosperous *nongben–minben paradigm*, based on *wu-wei erzhi*

⁶ Roger T. Ames, *The art of rulership: a study in ancient Chinese political thought* (Honolulu 1983).

⁷ For a different approach on *wu-wei* of the Han Dynasty, see: Michael Loewe, *The cosmological context of sovereignty in Han times* (Bulletin of the School of Oriental and African Studies, Vol. 65, Issue 02, June 2002, pp. 342- 349).

⁸ Gang (Kent) Deng, *The premodern Chinese economy: structural equilibrium and capitalist sterility* (London 1999), p. 258.

⁹ Ames, *The Art of Rulership*, p. 29.

¹⁰ David L. Hall/ Roger T. Ames, *Thinking through Confucius* (Albany 1987).

¹¹ Kieran Broadbent, *A Chinese/English dictionary of China's rural economy* (Slough 1978), p. 104.

¹² Deng, *The premodern Chinese economy*, pp. 90, 92, 258.

throughout the Tang Dynasty (618– 906 A.D.), one of China’s most prosperous and glorious periods.¹³ Thus, *wu-wei* has to be recognized as a *laissez-faire* instrument of Chinese political economy whose rationale was to serve China’s agricultural economy, i.e. to assure the welfare of *minben*. Indeed, China’s system of *nongben* did ‘marginalise’ the interfering state and hence relied on *wu-wei erzhi* for assuring its economic prosperity.

The overall objective of this paper is thus to deal with the historical process of *wu-wei*’s diffusion inside Europe. The process lasted for approximately two hundred years (from 1648 to 1848) and has to be seen as the assimilation of an advanced concept of Eastern economical governance that ultimately transformed Europe’s economies and the political outlook of the modern political unit to a considerably extent. To trace back the European history of *wu-wei* I am going to focus on three geographical areas that proved essential in transforming pieces of Eastern knowledge into European practice: the Low Countries, France, and Switzerland.

If the amount of literature on the history of *wu-wei inside China* is to be considered sparse, serious research on *wu-wei inside Europe* can be considered even sparser. Nevertheless, let us turn now to the literature on *wu-wei*, concerning our three geographical areas of interest, and to the issue, how this essay may add to the current research; first, we will look at the Low Countries. During the 17th century, millions of Chinese art products were diffused all over Europe by the Low Countries; and as the studies by Christiaan Jorg¹⁴ and Julia Curtis¹⁵ have repeatedly stated this import-boom

¹³ Ibid., p. 92.

¹⁴ Christiaan J. A. Jorg, *Interaction in Ceramics: Oriental Porcelain & Delftware* (Hong Kong Museum of Art and Urban Council, Hong Kong, 1984); Christiaan J. A. Jorg, *Chinese Porcelain for the Dutch in the Seventeenth Century: Trading Networks and Private Enterprise*, in: *The Porcelains of Jingdezhen*.

of Chinese images and products was crucial for Europe's understanding of China. Both authors made clear, that the diffusion of Chinese artefacts and styles inside the Low Countries reached such a level of sophistication during the 17th century, that one is hardly able to compare it to the widespread intellectual hollowness of the later *Chinoiserie* craze throughout Europe. Only some authors have dealt with Chinese influence on the Low Countries beyond the world of ceramics. Lewis A. Maverick's 'A possible Chinese source of Spinoza's doctrine'¹⁶ inspired by the original research by Ch'ên Shou-yi¹⁷ was one of the first studies to stress the closeness between Confucianism and European philosophy, during the 17th century. Yet, there exists no detailed study on how *wu-wei* entered the Low Countries during the 17th century; this paper seeks to correct this.

Almost all the literature on *wu-wei* in France concentrates on François Quesnay's role, while the broader Eurasian network of the Physiocratic School is mainly neglected. During the late 1930s, Ly Siou Y and Edgar Schorer were the first to deal with possible influence of *wu-wei* on Physiocracy.¹⁸ The first text, which convincingly portrayed Quesnay's Sinophilism, is Maverick's 'China – A model for

Colloquies on Art & Archaeology in Asia, no. 16, ed. Rosemary E. Scott (Percival David Foundation of Chinese Art, London, 1993), pp. 183-205.

¹⁵ Julia B. Curtis, *Chinese Porcelains of the Seventeenth Century: Landscapes, Scholar's Motifs and Narratives* (China Institute in America, New York, 1995).

¹⁶ Lewis A. Maverick, *A possible Chinese source of Spinoza's doctrine*, in: *Revue de littérature comparée*, Vol. 19, No. 3, July-September, 1939, pp. 417- 428.

¹⁷ Ch'ên Shou-yi, *Sino-European cultural contacts since the discovery of the sea route*, in: *Nankai social and economic quarterly*, Vol. VIII, No. 1, April 1935.

¹⁸ Ly Siou Y, *Les Grands courants de la pensée économique chinoise dans l'antiquité... et leur influence sur la formation de la doctrine physiocratique* (Paris 1936); Edgar Schorer, *L'influence de la Chine sur la genèse et le développement de la doctrine physiocrate* (Paris 1938).

Europe'¹⁹ but it was only with a paper by Briger Priddat that a detailed evaluation of the *wu-wei* behind France's Physiocracy arrived, in 1984.²⁰ Priddat, relying on Schwarz's translation of *wu-wei*, "to let it grow"²¹, concluded that the system of Physiocracy indeed corresponds to the principle of 'tun/ ohne/ tun' i.e. *wu-wei*.²² Thus, Physiocracy's claim "[...] that free trade would lead to a natural distribution of [agricultural] produce [...]"²³ is directly linked to Quesnay's belief in the universal morality of agri-culture (i.e. *nongben*). The productive *branches* of industry and trade (the *Industrie,- und Handelszweige*), writes Priddat, form only minor parts of the all embracing *ordre naturel* which Quesnay imagined as a tree, which he called *économie*. For Physiocracy, 'good government' is therefore based on 'letting the branches grow' (*s'étendre en liberté*)²⁴ i.e. Practising *wu-wei erzhi*. Consequently, it is this variant of the *laissez-faire* maxim in which the basis of Physiocracy's 'moral philosophy' is to be located. Priddat's work made clear that the *wu-wei* of the complete *économie* has to be considered central to Physiocracy; Quesnay's call for *free trade* in agricultural products constitutes merely a logical sub branch of this greater structure.²⁵

New research by Clarke and Hobson on *wu-wei* in France, equally re-acknowledges the significance of the principles for Quesnay's theories.²⁶ However, both authors fail to explain what the diffusion of *wu-wei* actually means for European

¹⁹ Lewis Adams Maverick, *China, a Model for Europe*, 2 Vols., (San Antonio, 1946).

²⁰ Briger Priddat, *Ist das "laissez-faire"-Prinzip ein Prinzip des Nicht-Handelns? Über einen chinesischen Einfluss in Quesnay's "Despôtisme de la Chine" auf das physiokratische Denken* (Diskussionsschriften aus dem Institut für Finanzwissenschaft der Universität Hamburg, Nr. 16/ 1984).

²¹ Laudse, *Daudesching*, E. Schwarz (ed), (Munich 1980) p. 137.

²² Priddat, "Laissez-faire"-Prinzip, p. 31.

²³ Douglas A. Irwin, *Against the Tide – An Intellectual History of Free Trade* (New Jersey 1996), p. 65.

²⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 31.

²⁵ *Ibid.*, pp. 31- 33.

²⁶ John James Clarke, *Oriental enlightenment: the encounter between Asian and Western thought* (New York/ London 1997); John M. Hobson, *The Eastern Origins of Western Civilisation* (Cambridge 2004).

history. Simply to state, that *wu-wei* translates into French as *laissez-faire*, does not clarify the stages of *wu-wei*'s transformation process inside Europe.²⁷ Both authors fail additionally to locate Switzerland as the supreme centre of *wu-wei* in Europe, after Quesnay.

Thus, the third part of this paper tries to investigate how the *wu-wei* of the Physiocrats spread to Switzerland and ultimately produced the first *wu-wei* paradigm state inside Europe. No study so far did link the Chinese principle of *wu-wei* to Switzerland's specific type of agricultural-alpine-commercial economy. The development of European Physiocracy is generally believed to have stopped soon after Quesnay's death; I argue otherwise. This paper will try to analyse how the import of *wu-wei* did actually re-enforce the political-economical consolidation process of 19th Switzerland, and how *wu-wei* came to be at the centre of the 'new *Eidgenossenschaft*'s' political economy.

²⁷ Hobson, *Eastern Origins*, p. 196; Clarke, *Oriental*, p. 50.

I. WU-WEI IN THE LOW COUNTRIES

Keeping the lack of comprehensive sources in mind, it will nevertheless be interesting to analyze in which ways the introduction of Chinese art products (picturing idyllic scenes of a prosperous Empire) and the parallel occurrence of Sinophile texts (published in Amsterdam and partly written by Flemish Jesuits), transformed the intellectual outlook of Europe.

Contemporary authors, who emphasize the indigenous development of economic *laissez-faire* in Europe, do repeatedly emphasize the significance of the Dutch natural law thinker *Hugo de Grotius* (*1583- †1645).²⁸ It is commonly understood that Grotius matters greatly for the development of 18th century Liberalism because he greatly influenced *Francis Hutcheson*, one of Adam Smith's most important teachers.²⁹ This chapter seeks to juxtapose the beginning infiltration of *wu-wei* into Europe with Grotius's impact on the European mind, after the period of religious wars of the 17th century. *In what way did the Low Countries diffuse wu-wei throughout Europe, while Grotius's legacy continued to mature?*

1.1 THE TEXTUAL DIFFUSION

Translations of Grotius's magnus opus *De jure belli et pacis* (1625), a book which had passed almost unnoticed in the year of its first publication, kept constantly reappearing throughout the century. Grotius work on the unwritten but imperative Law of God that governs also in times of war, the Natural Law, resurfaced widely in the minds of a generation which stood in awe before the terror and bloodshed of the Thirty-Years-

²⁸ Irwin, *Against the Tide*, p. 69.

²⁹ Roger E. Backhouse, *The Penguin History of Economics* (London 2002), pp. 108- 114.

War.³⁰ However, the re-emerging of Grotius texts during the second half of the 17th century also meant the continuation of the so-called *northern European revival of Libanius*.³¹ Libanius, a Roman pagan teacher, had eulogized the great virtues of free commerce and peaceful cooperation between men during the fourth-century BC. Grotius and others tried to find ways to resurrect Libanius's ancient 'universal economy', after 1648.³² The liberal, urban environment of 17th century Amsterdam was ideal for harbouring this *neo-Libaniusian movement*. Yet, it was exactly in this European city that the pieces of information, which would later be used to decode the 'universal economy' doctrine of the East, were first to be welcomed.

The Low Countries or more precisely the *Chinezen van Amsterdam* (to paraphrase van Winter)³³ proved essential for *wu-wei* in Europe in two ways. First, they acted as the main diffusion base for the important Jesuit texts on China's political economy. Resulting from an influx of missionary-reports from China, a mass of publications emerged, dealing with the economy, politics and history of the Chinese Empire. Secondly, parallel to this growing textual supply, thousands of images on porcelain, picturing mainly well-fed Chinese living happily inside a '*wu-wei* Empire', started to flood the Low Countries, as well. Jesuit books constitute a strong variant of this *Eastern current* inside the Low Countries: Martino Martini (*1614-†1661) published his "*Histoire de la guerre des Tatares contre la Chine*" in the Catholic Flemish stronghold of Douai, 1654; Gonzalez de Mendosa's "*Rerum morumque in regno Chinensi maxime notabilium historia*" appeared in Antwerp one year later. Especially two publications proved very influential (both, like Grotius first published in

³⁰ e.g. in the writings of Jean Le Clerc, Samuel von Pufendorf or Giambattista Vico.

³¹ Irwin, *Against the Tide*, p. 16.

³² Paul Hazard, *The European Mind – The Critical Years 1680–1715* (New York 1990 [Paris 1935]), p. 87.

³³ P. J. van Winter, *De Chinezen van Europa* (Groningen 1965).

Amsterdam): the first scientific atlas of China, compiled by Martino Martini in 1655 (see image 1), and Athanasius Kircher's *China monumentis: qua sacris qua profanis (...) illustrata* published in 1667.³⁴ These two publications from Amsterdam showed in detail the territorial magnificence and economic wealth of the Empire, influencing Leibniz, Quesnay and others, in the years to come.³⁵



IMAGE 1 CHINESE RICE PEASANTS "LETTING THE PLANTS GROW". DETAIL OF A MAP FROM MARTINI'S "NOVUS ATLAS SINENSIS" (1655)³⁶

³⁴ Arnold H. Rowbotham, *Missionary and Mandarin – The Jesuits at the Court of China* (Berkeley 1942), pp. 246- 247.

³⁵ Wolfgang Franke, *China and the West* (Oxford 1967), pp. 60-61.

³⁶ Erich Zettl, *China und Europa – Brückenschlag der Kulturen. Eine Ausstellung in der Bibliothek der Fachhochschule Konstanz im Jahr 2000*; <http://www.bib.fh-konstanz.de/inhalte/virtuell/china/start.htm> (accessed 3.08.2004)

Apart from printing works by German (like Kircher) or Austrian (like Martini) Jesuits that revealed China's high level of prosperity, the Low Countries were also the origin of many China missionaries, like Nicolas Trigault (*1577-†1628) or Ferdinand Verbiest (*1623- †1688).³⁷ Just as the Jesuit Matteo Ricci (*1552- †1610) introduced Euclid to Ming China, so Trigault introduced Europe to Confucius via his *Histoire de l'expédition christienne au royaume de la Chine*.³⁸ Early in 1615, he wrote:³⁹

“We [the Jesuit missionaries] have seen [China's] most noble provinces; we enter every day into conversation with the principle citizens, the magistrates and the men of letters; we speak the native language of the Chinese; we have learned by careful enquiry, their habits, customs, laws and ceremonial and, finally (what is of the greatest importance), day and night we have their books in our hands.”⁴⁰

The economic Sinophilism of the important Physiocrat Quesnay, with all its consequences, seems unlikely to have blossomed without another prominent work on China by Père du Halde, the *Description de l'empire de la Chine et de la Tartarie chinoise* (1735), but *du Halde's* work appears equally implausible without the groundbreaking Amsterdam texts or Trigault's translation of Ricci.⁴¹ Thus, Amsterdam, Antwerp and Douai, through commercial power, respectively Jesuit passion, proved

³⁷ John E. Wills, *Some Dutch Sources on the Jesuit China Mission, 1662-1687*, in: *Archivum Historicum Societatis Iesu*, Vol. 54 (1985), pp. 267- 293.

³⁸ John E. Wills, *1688 – A Global History* (London 2001), pp. 128- 144.

³⁹ Matteo Ricci/ Nicolas Trigault, *Histoire de l'expédition christienne au royaume de la Chine* (Latin version, Augsburg/ French version, Lyon 1615).

⁴⁰ As quoted in: Rowbotham, *Missionary and Mandarin*, p. 245.

⁴¹ Raymond Dawson, *The Chinese Chameleon – An analysis of European conceptions of Chinese civilization* (New York/ Toronto 1967), p. 54.

essential for the European version of economic government by *wu-wei* that was soon to emerge. China, and therefore *wu-wei*, entered Europe not through Portugal or France but via the Low Countries. John M. Headley describes the outcome:

*“The most notable single appropriation of Confucianism by the Enlightenment comes with the Amsterdam 1758 edition of Diogenes Laertius’ Lives of the Philosophers. There amidst the traditional thinkers of classical antiquity could now be found a ninety-page exposition of Confucius and Confucianism”*⁴²

1.2. THE VISUAL DIFFUSION

Yet, there is an additional Chinese influence on Europe via the Low Countries, and this was not by textual but by visual means. Two factors had been curial for facilitating the diffusion of *wu-wei* in Europe, the extensive ‘global reach’ of Dutch international sea-power and the emerging of a powerful, domestic ceramic industry – the interplay of these two dynamics powered the diffusion process.⁴³ While Amsterdam was at the commercial and logistic heart of Europe’s largest merchant fleet with some 10,000 vessels, one of Europe’s earliest centres of ceramic industry was slowly encircling her city walls.

Dutch East India ships had swamped first the Low Countries and then the rest of Europe, with “*more than three million pieces of Chinese porcelain [...] between 1602 and 1657 [...]*”.⁴⁴ The origin of the celebrated blue and white painted faïence of Delft

⁴² John M. Headley, *The Universalizing Principle and Process: On the West’s Intrinsic Commitment to a Global Context*, p. 312., in: *Journal of World History*, Vol. 13, No. 2, pp. 291-321.

⁴³ Claudia Schnurmann, *‘Wherever profit leads us, to every sea and shore . . .’: the VOC, the WIC, and Dutch methods of globalization in the seventeenth century*, p. 490, in: *Renaissance Studies*, Vol. 17, No. 3, pp. 474- 493.

⁴⁴ C.R. Boxer, *The Dutch seaborne Empire, 1600-1800* (London 1965), p. 174.

can be traced back to this massive influx of Chinese porcelain. By 1650, ten pottery workshops had opened at Grotius's birthplace alone – there would be thirty in 1670.⁴⁵ The makers of Delft's faïence copied various Chinese images displaying picturesque and joyful scenes of *minben* (see image 2). By 1700, millions of pieces of faïence, depicting the comfort and welfare of the *wu-wei* Empire, had diffused throughout Europe.⁴⁶



IMAGE 2 SCENES OF MINBEN ON ART FROM DELFT (1678- 1686).⁴⁷

FAÏENCE PAINTED BY 'MANUFACTURE DE GRIECKSCHE'.

To demonstrate the importance of this non-textual diffusion, we can refer to the later case of Jean Theodore Royer (*1737- †1807). Royer was a successful lawyer from The Hague and the most important Sinologist in the Low Countries of the 18th century. He thought that the best way of develop a true understanding about the prosperous life in China was actually to collect ceramics and other objects depicting information from

⁴⁵ Richard Robinson (ed.), *Business History of the World – A Chronology* (Westport 1993), p. 143.

⁴⁶ Adolf Reichwein, *China and Europe – Intellectual and Artistic Contacts in the Eighteenth Century* (London 1925 [original: Berlin 1923]), pp. 28.

⁴⁷ Danièle Fischer, *Faïence*; <http://mah.ville-ge.ch/musee/ariana/ariacoll.html> (accessed 15.3.2004).

China. Royer believed in this hypothesis all his life, deeply mistrusting European publication on China.⁴⁸

Minben-porcelain and *neo-Libaniusian texts* did attain their closest proximity in Amsterdam.⁴⁹ For a short period, this urban entrepôt nurtured Grotius, Chinese porcelain and the bookish merchandise of Jesuit missionary zeal.⁵⁰ But in contrast to later France, where the Physiocrats would transform the *dispersed pieces* of Eurasian economic thought into one *grande* Eurasian theory of *good government* (without having the pleasure to see it transformed into real governmental practice), the Low Countries proved unable to articulate the first European transformation of the *wu-wei* principle. The Low Countries functioned only as a gateway for *wu-wei*, diffusing it unconsciously throughout Europe. The most likely reason for this ‘failure’ was that the intellectual heritage of the Habsburg-Netherlands (modern Belgium) within the Northern United Provinces did substantially diminish as the century progressed. Catholics became virtually second-class citizens in Amsterdam and although a rest of Jesuit-Chinese knowledge did survive within the Protestant Republic, this bit was ignored for decades.⁵¹

⁴⁸ Jan van Campen, *De Haagse jurist Jean Theodore Royer (1737-1807) en zijn verzameling Chinese voorwerpen / door Jan van Campen* (Hilversum 2000).

⁴⁹ It was in this European entrepôt where the first small tea shipments to Europe arrived, in 1609. Dutch VOC servants in Batavia (modern Jakarta) may have been the first Europeans who drank Chinese tea for purely personal pleasure and therefore started Europe’s relationship with tea by stimulating the shipments to Amsterdam. (Ross William Jamieson, *The Essence of Commodification: Caffeine Dependencies in the Early Modern World*, p. 283 in: *Journal of Social History* – Vol. 35, No. 2, Winter 2001, pp. 269-294.)

⁵⁰ J. I. Israel, *European Jewry in the Age of Mercantilism, 1550-1750* (London 1985); V. Barbour, *Capitalism in Amsterdam in the Seventeenth Century* (Baltimore 1963).

⁵¹ In 1773, Pope Clement XIV started to suppress systematically the Society of Jesus. Nevertheless, some former Dutch members of the Society managed to stay at *de Krijtberg* and other Northern Dutch towns, until the restoration of the Society in 1814. The property of the Southern Dutch Jesuits was confiscated instead. Overall, the effect of Pope Clement’s policies was a transfer of Southern Jesuit knowledge to the United Provinces, during the 1770s. [J. Créteineau-Joly, *Clément XIV et les jésuites* (Paris 1847).]

In sum, it is critical to understand that the spread of new *useful knowledge* from China and the artistic images of its prosperous economic effects occurred in chorus with the formation and deepening of Europe's own *Libaniusian model*. Amsterdam kept on publicizing Grotius's call for the freedom of commerce, while the Jesuit reports on the economic glory of some 120 million Chinese became more and more popular.⁵² The enormous scale of imported Chinese artefacts facilitated the diffusion process of the endogenous Chinese model, via confirming, through its visual demonstration effect, the prosperous outcomes of *wu-wei*. Consequently, the two strings of laissez faire-thought, the indigenous *Libaniusian model* and the endogenous *Chinese model*, share a common geographical and cultural foundation (best symbolized by image 3). Both evolved simultaneously, yet separately, from the Low Countries, after 1648.⁵³ Thus, this small part of northern Europe was responsible for setting the diffusion process of the incoming Chinese resource portfolio into motion. Over time, this process became partly intermingled with the indigenous *Libaniusian model*, but before this could happen, France had to discover *wu-wei* first.⁵⁴

⁵² Jonathan D. Spence, *The Search for Modern China* (New York/ London 2nd ed. 1999), p. 7.

⁵³ Reichwein, *China and Europe*, pp. 19- 72.

⁵⁴ Rowbotham, *Missionary and Mandarin*, pp. 350, 352, 360.

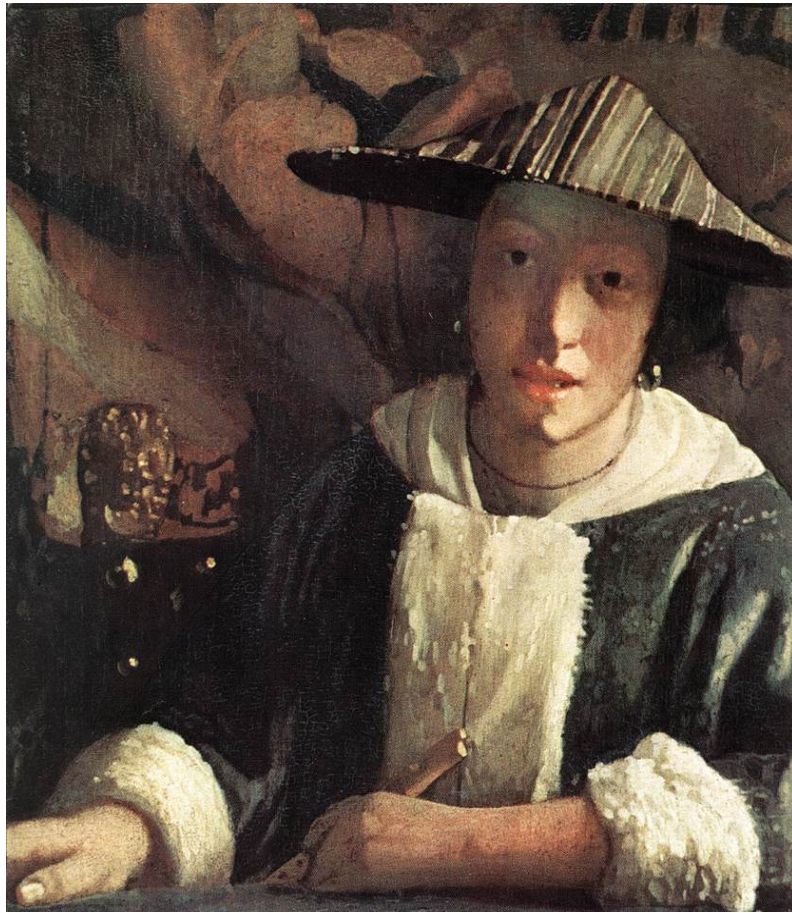


IMAGE 3 THE COMMON FOUNDATION OF <CHINA IN DELFT>.⁵⁵

'YOUNG GIRL WITH A FLUTE', 1665-67 (?) BY JAN VERMEER VAN DELFT (*1632 - † 1675)

⁵⁵ Copied from Euroweb-Gallery: <http://gallery.euroweb.hu/html/v/vermeer/03c/> (accessed 5.4.2004)

II. WU-WEI IN FRANCE 1750- 1850

The physician and economist François Quesnay (*1694-†1774) is generally seen as the founder of 18th century Europe's "new science of Political Economy"⁵⁶ but his contemporaries knew him as the *Confucius of Europe*. As Fox-Genovese writes:

“ [Quesnay’s] manuscript for ‘Le despotisme de la Chine’ contains a few pages on the life of Confucius which were deleted from the published version [...] Indeed, the title given him by his disciples – ‘The Confucius of Europe’ – originated [...] in his own self-image.”⁵⁷

Both characterizations are essential to appreciate Quesnay’s role in the history of *wu-wei* in Europe but unfortunately, “what is often omitted in accounts of Quesnay’s place in modern thought is his debt to China”⁵⁸ in general and to *wu-wei* in particular.

2.1 A EURASIAN QUESNAY

Indeed, stressing the impact of Quesnay’s Sinophilism on his economic theories has encountered strong scepticism by various scholars who like to limit Quesnay’s intellectual origins exclusively to Europe. One part of the critics does almost categorically ignore or neglect Chinese influence on Quesnay.⁵⁹ One of the most

⁵⁶ Philippe Steiner, *La "science nouvelle" de l'économie politique* (Paris 1998).

⁵⁷ E. Fox-Genovese, *The Origins of Physiocracy* (Ithaca 1976), p.74.

⁵⁸ Clarke, *Oriental enlightenment*, p.49.

⁵⁹ Recent examples include: H. Spencer Banzhaf, *Productive Nature and the Net Product: Quesnay's Economies Animal and Political*, in: *History of Political Economy*, Vol. 32, No. 3, Fall 2000, pp. 517-551; Irwin, *Against the Tide*, pp. 64- 74; Eric Roll, *A History of Economic Thought* (London 1992⁵) pp. 111-120; Walter Eltis, *How Quesnay's Tableau Économique Offered a Deeper Analysis of the*

distinguished historians on the history of *laissez-faire*, Jacob Viner, restricted the antecedents of Europe's *laissez-faire* doctrine to four indigenous traditions: *Greco-Roman, Scholastic, English common law, and mercantilist thought*.⁶⁰ Another group of critics admits the existence of Quesnay's Sinophilism but continues to overweight indigenous European explanations for the evolvement of a philosophy of *free trade* after 1776.⁶¹ The key writings that do underline Quesnay's considerable debt to Chinese thought were mainly (and strangely) all published before 1950.⁶² Nevertheless, Davis⁶³ and Clarke⁶⁴ have recently tried to revive the reinterpretation of Quesnay's work as an example of the historical process of intellectual Eurasian synthesis – without understating the traces of indigenous Western philosophy in it.⁶⁵ Especially, John M. Hobson (like Maverick and other 'Eurasians' before him) newly reinforced the historical argument for a truly Eurasian perspective on Quesnay's economic philosophy.⁶⁶

Predicament of France, Journal of the History of Economic Thought, March 2002, Vol. 24 Issue 1, pp. 39-53.

⁶⁰ Jacob Viner, *Essays on the Intellectual History of Economics*, [compiled and edited by Douglas A. Irwin], (Princeton/ Oxford 1991), pp. 24- 25.

⁶¹ Ken McCormick, *Sima Qian and Adam Smith*, in: Pacific Economic Review, 4: 1, 1999, pp. 85-87.

⁶² Reichwein, *China and Europe*, pp. 101-109; G.F. Hudson, *Europe and China: A Survey of Their Relations from the Earliest Times to 1800* (London 1931) pp. 322- 25; Virgile Pinot, *La Chine et la formation de l'esprit philosophique en France, 1640-1740* (Paris 1932); Maverick, *China*; Rowbotham, *Missionary and Mandarin*, pp. 285-286.

⁶³ Walter W. Davis, *China, the Confucian Ideal, and the European Age of Enlightenment*, pp. 539-540 in: Journal of the History of Ideas, Vol. 44, No. 4 (Oct.-Dec., 1983) pp. 523-548; Walter W. Davis, *Eastern and Western History, Thought, and Culture, 1600-1815* (Lanham 1993).

⁶⁴ John James Clarke, *Oriental enlightenment: the encounter between Asian and Western thought* (New York/ London 1997).

⁶⁵ Although one can see influences in the work of the Australian historian Robertson: Robbie Robertson, *The Tree Waves of globalisation. A history of a Developing global Consciousness* (London/ New York 2003), p. 96.

⁶⁶ Hobson, *Eastern Origins*, pp.196-198.

Not only did Quesnay approve of China but also, writes Maverick, was directly inspired by her, copying important sections from her *classics*.⁶⁷ The foundational theoretical assertion of Physiocracy, namely that a society which is organized on nature's own way of functioning (i.e. *Agri-culture*) is the most prosperous, strongest and happiest, matches Confucianism's claim that it can only be the achievement of agricultural prosperity by which the state and people can obtain "peace and harmony".⁶⁸ Quesnay's preference for Chinese classics over European ones shows most clearly, when he compares the most influential text in East Asian intellectual history, Confucius's *Lun Yü* (Analects) with the quality of Greek knowledge:⁶⁹

*"[The articles of Lun Yü] all deal with good government, virtue and good works; this collection is full of principles and moral sentences, which surpass those of the Seven Sages of Greece."*⁷⁰

It is therefore accurate to describe Quesnay a faithful disciple of Confucius and an understatement to classify his work simply as "*quite favourable towards China*"⁷¹, as McCormick did.⁷² Quesnay's vision of a political rule, which is based on the prosperity achieved via primary production i.e., *nongben*, is deeply embedded in a 'Confucian vision of good government'.⁷³ However, this *nongben*-model of Quesnay is adapted using China's *wu-wei* framework. As Hudson explains:

⁶⁷ Maverick, *China*, p. 22

⁶⁸ Huan-chang Ch'ên, *The Economic Principles of Confucius and his School* (New York 1911), p. 381

⁶⁹ Consequently Quesnay follows Leibniz's footsteps.

⁷⁰ As quoted in: Reichwein, *China and Europe*, p. 105.

⁷¹ Ken McCormick, *Sima Qian and Adam Smith*, in: *Pacific Economic Review*, Vol. 4, No. 1, 1999, p. 85.

⁷² See also his paper on the *non-existing* link between Adam Smith and *wu-wei*: Ken McCormick, *The Tao of Laissez-Faire*, in: *Eastern Economic Journal*, Vol. 25, No. 3, Summer 1999, pp. 331- 341.

⁷³ Quesnay, *Despotism in China*, pp. 207-211, in: Maverick, *China*.

“For [Quesnay], enlightenment in a ruler consisted in recognizing the principles of the ‘natural order’ and making legislation conform thereto. When the king has reformed legislation he should then ‘do nothing, but let the laws rule’; this is the *wu-wei* of the Chinese ideal monarch. [For Quesnay], efforts of government to control trade [...] do not create wealth [...]; they are violations of the ‘natural order’.”⁷⁴

Consequently, Quesnay’s model of Physiocracy is primarily based on his implementation of *wu-wei* *erzhi*. Quesnay’s Eurasian make-up is crucial for the history of *wu-wei* in Europe because, as McCormick accentuated, “Quesnay had a direct influence on [Adam] Smith”⁷⁵. However, what were Quesnay’s sources on the *wu-wei* Empire? Which part did he play inside Europe’s network of Asian relations?

2.2 INSIDE THE EURASIAN WEB

As an 18th century man who lived in the *China of Europe*⁷⁶, Quesnay was not only influenced by the old strings of inherited Stoicism and Descartes, like his fellow citizen, the radical anti-Colbertiste *Pierre Le Pesant, Sieur de Boisguilbert* (*1646-†1714) had been.⁷⁷ The founder of Physiocracy tried to show that the pieces of economic philosophy he received from the East were in fact more advanced compared to the ones

⁷⁴ Hudson, *Europe and China*, p. 322

⁷⁵ McCormick, *Sima Qian and Adam Smith*, p. 85.

⁷⁶ After 1750, people started to call France frequently the *China of Europe*. (Charles A. Fisher, *Containing China? I. The Antecedents of Containment*, p. 549 in: *The Geographical Journal*, Vol. 136, No. 4., Dec., 1970, pp. 534-556)

⁷⁷ Paul P. Christensen, *Epicurean and Stoic Sources for Boisguilbert's Physiological and Hippocratic Vision of Nature and Economics*, in: *History of Political Economy*, Vol. 35, Annual Supplement, 2003, pp. 101-128; Douglas A. Irwin, *Against the Tide* (Princeton 1996) p. 65.

of western Eurasia – the end result was a fusion of the two worlds of thought, the first step towards one *grand design* of Eurasian political economy. *But how did the altering form of Chinese thought reach the mind of Quesnay?*

There were of course several ‘European reasons’ why Quesnay ended up with his specific type of economic system based on ‘Natural Order i.e. Law’ (Deism and the aftershock of the religious War of the 17th century were two important factors). Nevertheless, Quesnay’s new and challenging physiocratic mosaic is best to be seen as the zenith of the century old European movement of deep admiration for China.⁷⁸ The French physician’s economic undertaking was at its heart truly Chinese. As his disciple, Marquis Victor de Mirabeau (*1717-†1789) described his teacher after his death:

*“[He was dedicated to] the whole teaching of Confucius [...] aimed at restoring to human nature that first radiance, that first beauty, which it had received from Heaven, and which had become obscured by ignorance and passion. [Quesnay], therefore, exhorted his countrymen to obey the Lord of Heaven, to honour and fear him [...]”*⁷⁹

Thus, the Lord of Heaven, for Quesnay, was most apparent in the harmonious order of the Chinese Empire, the *wu-wei* Empire.

Quesnay’s writings were part of an anti-mercantilist movement inside 18th century France. The French Jesuits’s publications on China provided this widespread protest movement with a completely new intellectual outlook. The texts by the Jesuits demonstrated to Quesnay the contemporary relevance of *wu-wei* – a significance, he thought, that the European *classics* were unable to offer. The Chinese example produced

⁷⁸ Maverick, *China*, p.111.

⁷⁹ As quoted in: Reichwein, *China and Europe*, p. 104.

eventually an altered forward motion of the French mind⁸⁰ – away from the interventionist mercantilism of Europe and towards a Chinese *ordre naturel*.

There were two publications, which did much to deepen Quesnay's physiocratic Sinophilism in his later life, Jacques Philibert Rousselot de Surgy's "*Mélanges intéressans et curieux...*"⁸¹ (1764- 66)⁸² and a work by Pierre Poivre. Quesnay directly copied large parts of the "*Mélanges intéressans...*" into his "*Le despotisme...*" (1767), composing the most lucid work of the Physiocratic school (which was at the same time its most Sinophile).⁸³ Like the 17th-century faïence-workshops of Delft (see above) adapted the prosperous images of Chinese *minben* as their own, 18th-century Quesnay adapted China's *nongben*. However, how did de Surgy's text change Quesnay's intellectual outlook?

The background to why Quesnay and de Surgy proved so receptive to the information coming from the Eurasian maritime web was the urgent need of economic and political reform in France. To attack the Republican views of *Montesquieuian* Liberals (*who praised parliamentarianism and despised the French Monarchy*), neo-monarchist like de Surgy (*who praised the reformist potential of enlightened despotism*) relied heavily on China as a model.⁸⁴ De Surgy tried to show objectively that commercial success was achievable and even enhanced, by modelling one's government on the contemporary achievements of China's "enlightened monarchy". At the heart of this enlightened approach, was the abolishment of all mercantilism's restrictions on

⁸⁰ Maverick, *China*, pp.130-131.

⁸¹ Jacques Philibert Rousselot de Surgy, *Mélanges intéressans et curieux ou, abrégé d'histoire naturelle, morale, civile et politique de l'Asie, l'Afrique, l'Amérique et des terres polaires* (Paris 1744- 66) 10 vols.

⁸² The twelve volumes by Rousselot de Surgy's were already partly replicas of a very influential text on China, the "*Description de l'empire de la Chine et de la Tartarie chinoise*" (1735) by the Jesuit Jean Baptiste duHalde.

⁸³ Maverick, *China*, p. 315.

⁸⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 34.

commerce, and further the implementation of *wu-wei* i.e. The institutionalization of the ‘Natural Order’. Describing the “*richesses immenses*”⁸⁵ of Asia, de Surgy linked economic success to this form of *natural* government i.e. *Wu-wei*.

Quesnay copied the first seven chapters of “*Le despotisme...*” nearly entirely from de Surgy’s text.⁸⁶ Moreover, in accordance with de Surgy, Quesnay identified his crucial economic concept of *ordre naturel* as underlying every civilized state. It is then here where Quesnay’s position shifts towards the original economic notion of Han China and drifts away from old European conceptions of ‘Natural Order’ as a force undermining the foundations of civilisation.⁸⁷ Surgy’s text enables Quesnay to go beyond the Stoic and parts of medieval thinking, arriving at a very Chinese arrangement of ‘good government’, embracing the lessons of the *Lun Yü*.⁸⁸

The other major influence on Quesnay’s work was the retired French ambassador to China and president of the Royal Society of Agriculture at Lyons, *Pierre Poivre*. In 1763 and 1764, Poivre gave two lectures on agriculture to the French Academy of Lyons; they were later to be repeated in Paris and published in Switzerland in 1768.⁸⁹ In Lyon, Poivre lectured on what the world might become, namely an image of flourishing China, if only the laws of China would become the laws of the world. Poivre called upon all Frenchmen to go to Beijing, to gaze at the perfect image of

⁸⁵ Jacques Philibert Rousselot de Surgy, *Mélanges intéressans et curieux, ou abrégé d’histoire naturelle, morale, civile et politique de l’Asie, l’Afrique, l’Amérique et des terres polaires* (Yverdon 1764- 66), 6. Vol. of 12, p. 236.

⁸⁶ Maverick, *China*, p. 127.

⁸⁷ Maverick, *China*, p. 131.

⁸⁸ Davis, *China, the Confucian Ideal*, p. 540.

⁸⁹ Pierre Poivre, *Voyages d’un philosophe ou, observations sur les mœurs & les arts des peuples de l’Afrique, de l’Asie et de l’Amérique* (Yverdon 1768).

Heaven.⁹⁰ Quesnay became aware of these axioms through copies of the lectures and his acquaintance to another Sinophile, Anne Robert-Jacques Turgot (*1727- †1781).⁹¹ Poivre's reflections on agriculture were in essence a tribute to the Chinese superior form of virtuous economic management and government:

*“This great nation unites under the shade of agriculture, founded on liberty and reason, all the advantages possessed by whatever nation, civilized or savage.”*⁹²

Poivre's interpretation convinced Quesnay once more of China's supreme model of 'natural government' – once again the *wu-wei erzhi* of 'enlightened despotism' offered itself to be the magic but subversive (i.e. Anti-mercantilist) key to open France's door to economic, agricultural progress. Therefore, it comes as no surprise that Quesnay decided to publish his *Physiocratie* (1767) in made up 'Peking', to avoid French censorship.⁹³ In 1767, Quesnay's mind was already more at home in the capital of the *wu-wei* Empire than in Louis XV's Paris.

In 1774, the year of Quesnay's death, the governmental concept of *wu-wei* had reached a new level of prominence throughout the informed circles of Europe – in form of the physiocratic doctrine. *Wu-wei* had finally left the small scholarly chambers of the Jesuit- *philosophes* circles and started to infiltrate Europe ever more, while the images of prosperous *minben* continued to spread all over Europe.

⁹⁰ Raymond Dawson, *The Chinese Chameleon – An analysis of European conceptions of Chinese civilization* (New York/ Toronto 1967), p. 55.

⁹¹ Lewis A. Maverick, *Chinese Influences upon Quesnay and Turgot – Read before the Society for Oriental Studies, at Claremont, in April 1942* (Claremont 1942).

⁹² As quoted in: Rowbotham, *Missionary and Mandarin*, p. 285.

⁹³ Emma Rothschild, *Economic Sentiments. Adam Smith, Condorcet, and the Enlightenment* (Cambridge, Massachusetts/ London 2002), p. 67

III. WU-WEI IN SWITZERLAND

The Low Countries and France do not represent the complete European axis of *wu-wei* infiltration. Before the tolerant period of Eurasian synthesis inside Europe would cease to exist, terminated by the rise of national neo-mercantilist *Revolutionism*, a European mutation of the *wu-wei-state* was erected inside a small Alpine transit-land, Switzerland. During the 17th century, the Low Countries had provided Europe with a mass of new information on China but the “*Chinezen van Europa*”⁹⁴ did prove unable to decipher the *wu-weian* message. Quesnay had based his model of reform on *wu-wei* – yet, Physiocracy’s influence on the political economy of post-revolutionary France was almost nonexistent. Ultimately, it was in the Swiss Confederation where the actual fusion of European, traditional practice and imported Chinese expertise, materialized. In this section we will consider two aspects of this fusion process, first, the effects of Quesnay’s theories on Switzerland, and secondly, Switzerland’s development into a European paradigm of *wu-wei*. The Swiss succeeded where France and the Low Countries failed; through their example, the European political unit transformed itself under the banner of China’s *wu-wei*. *But how did Switzerland do this?*

3.1 THE FUSION

After the revocation of the *Edict of Nantes* (1685) by Louis XIV, 25,000 Huguenots exiles had settled and revived large parts of Switzerland, economically and culturally.⁹⁵

From the seven Swiss contributors to the French *Encyclopédie*, only two were not

⁹⁴ P. J. van Winter, *De Chinezen van Europa* (Groningen 1965).

⁹⁵ Ian Inkster, *Science and Technology in History* (London 1991), p. 48.

second generation Huguenots.⁹⁶ Additionally, the traditional inter-European intellectual endeavours of the Huguenots (the ‘livre de Hollande’)⁹⁷ pulled Switzerland closer to the inner-circles of the so-called ‘Republic of Letters’, whose centre was Amsterdam.⁹⁸ Thus, a matured *enlightened* nexus had arisen in western Switzerland and the independent republic of Geneva, by the 1720s.⁹⁹

During the 1760s, a distinct Sinophile block of the so-called ‘*école romande du droit naturel*’ (Alfred Dufour)¹⁰⁰ and Swiss Economic Patriots, started to reprint Quesnay’s sources on China, re-creating his personal resource pool on *wu-wei* in western Switzerland. In 1764, *de Surgy*’s vital texts were published at the ‘*imprimerie de Fortunato Bartolomeo de Felice*’¹⁰¹ in Yverdon.¹⁰² In the same year, the process continued through the posthumous publication of the *Considérations* by Marquis d’Argenson (*1694-†1757)¹⁰³, a former classmate of the Sinophile Voltaire. The favourite maxim of the Marquis, Europe’s first ‘*true free trader*’¹⁰⁴, had been ‘*to govern*

⁹⁶ Frank A. Kafker/ Serenal L. Kafker, *The Encyclopaedists as individuals: Biographical Dictionary of the Authors of the "Encyclopédie"*; *Studies on Voltaire* (Oxford 1988), pp. XX- XXIII.

⁹⁷ Jonathan Israel, *The publishing of forbidden philosophical works in the Dutch republic (1666-1710) and their European distribution*, p. 233, in: *The Bookshop of the World – The role of the Low Countries in the book-trade 1473-1941*, (ed) Lotte Hellinga et al. (Goy-Houten 2001), pp. 233- 243.

⁹⁸ Elisabeth L. Eisenstein, *The Printing Press as an agent of Change: communications and cultural transformations in early-modern Europe*, 2 vols. (Cambridge 1979), vol. I, p. 138.

⁹⁹ Ulrich im Hof, *Geschichte der Schweiz* (Stuttgart, 6th ed.1997), pp. 87- 91.

¹⁰⁰ Simone Zurbuchen, *Patriotismus und Kosmopolitismus – Die Schweizer Aufklärung zwischen Tradition und Moderne* (Zürich 2003), p. 50.

¹⁰¹ Jean-Pierre Perret, *Les imprimeries d’Yverdon au XVII^e et XVIII^e siècles* (Lausanne 1945).

¹⁰² De Surgy, *Mélanges intéressans*, (Yverdon 1764-1767).

¹⁰³ René Louis de Voyer de Paulmy d’Argenson, *Considérations sur le gouvernement ancien et présent de la France / par Mr. le Marquis d’Argenson* (Yverdon/ Amsterdam 1764)

¹⁰⁴ Julius Becker, *Das deutsche Manchestertum – Eine Studie zur Geschichte des wirtschaftspolitischen Individualismus* (Karlsruhe 1907), p. 7.

*better, one must govern less*¹⁰⁵; which is of course analogous to the *wu-wei* principle of the ideal Confucian ruler, *who reigns but does not rule*.¹⁰⁶ At the end of his life, d'Argenson had developed a deep sense of admiration for Chinese state craftsmanship. As he wrote in *Considérations*:

*“The Chinese government embodies the ‘juste milieu’, [here] the Law of Confucius still exists [...], although it is as old as that of Solon, [which is] destroyed, and even caused the destruction of [...] Empires. I believe in exact the description which I have just made of the Chinese government [...] I propose to the nations of Europe this model [of superior government], for their own benefits.”*¹⁰⁷

Interestingly, the first edition of the famous Lyon-lecture by Poivre was published in Yverdon as well, only four years after de Surgy and d'Argenson.¹⁰⁸

Besides replicating Quesnay's sources on *wu-wei*, Yverdon was very active in diffusing various original physiocratic texts. Parallel to Poivre, a collection of Quesnay's writings by the French Physiocrat *Pierre du Pont de Nemours*, the *“Physiocratie, ou constitution naturelle du gouvernement”*, was published.¹⁰⁹ Once again, the strong influence of French Sinophilism on the Swiss *enlightened* nexus becomes apparent by quoting *Nemours* on the Chinese expertise in government:

¹⁰⁵ Oncken, August, *Die Maxime laissez faire et laissez passer, ihr Ursprung, ihr Werden* (Bern 1886), p. 61.

¹⁰⁶ Ames, *Rulership*, p. 29.

¹⁰⁷ Translated from the French: d'Argenson, *Considérations* (Amsterdam 1784), pp. 109- 110.

¹⁰⁸ Poivre, *Voyages* (Yverdon 1768).

¹⁰⁹ Francois Quesnay, *Physiocratie, ou constitution naturelle du gouvernement le plus avantageux au genre humain / recueil publié par Du Pont*, 6 vols. (Yverdon 1768- 69).

“[China’s way of government], by taking human nature into account, includes all the *needed* [...] laws for men, and is suitable for all types of climate and countries; since four thousands years [the ordre naturel] has remained the [official doctrine] of the Chinese government.”¹¹⁰

Unsurprisingly, the French Physiocrats had been attracted to parts of this very sinophile part of Switzerland – especially after the foundation of the partly physiocratic *Economic Society of Bern*, in 1759 (see image 4).¹¹¹

From very early on, one of Quesnay’s students, the Sinophile *Marquis Victor de Mirabeau* became ecstatic about the French Physiocrats’s Swiss connection.¹¹² In 1760, he travelled to Bern and addressed the society:

“Finally the day of days has dawned which will open the eyes of mankind to the best of her truest advantages, this is because the ‘*Ökonomische Gesellschaft*’ is to be established in the capital of the most powerful canton of Switzerland [...] Admirable citizens, soon all the dispersed pieces of knowledge will, under your favour, crystallize in your country and form a protected and secured treasure of

¹¹⁰ Pierre Samuel du Pont de Nemours, *De l’origine et des progrès d’une science nouvelle 1768/ Dupont de Nemours ; publié avec notice et table analytique par A. Dubois* (Paris 1910), p. 35.

¹¹¹ Georg C. L. Schmidt, *Der Bauer im Zeitalter des Frühkapitalismus – Die Wandlung der Schweizer Bauernwirtschaft im achtzehnten Jahrhundert und die Politik der Ökonomischen Patrioten* (Bern 1932), pp. 112- 118.

¹¹² August Oncken, *Der ältere Mirabeau und die Ökonomische Gesellschaft in Bern* (Bern 1886) p. 38.



IMAGE 4 AGRICULTURAL EMBLEM OF THE SWISS ECONOMIC SOCIETY, BERN (1766)¹¹³

knowledge. I cannot reveal to you what I am expecting, what I am hoping for in this deepest of moments. But do not despise the discoveries of the people who preceded you in this noble cause."¹¹⁴

Indeed, one member of the society *would not despise* the findings of the French around the 'Confucius of Europe'; this person was *Albrecht von Haller* (*1708-†1777), an influential physiologist and writer. As one of the outstanding Swiss intellectual figures of the 18th century, he chaired the *Economic Society* for nine years (1766, 1768, 1770-1777) and was fascinated by the works of the Sinophiles, Mirabeau and Christian Wolff.¹¹⁵ Haller frequently used his knowledge of the Chinese Empire to criticise anti-physiocratic writings. He condemned Galiani's writings on the poor export power of

¹¹³ Copied from: Ökonomische und gemeinnützige Gesellschaft des Kantons Bern, *Emblem of the society*, <http://www.ogg.ch/content.php?si=17> (accessed 5.2.2004)

¹¹⁴ Translated from the German version, in: Oncken, *Mirabeau*, p.21.

¹¹⁵ Ulrich im Hof, *Albrecht von Haller. Staat und Gesellschaft*, p. 48 in: *Albrecht Haller (1708-1777), 10 Vorträge gehalten am Berner Haller-Symposium 6.-8. Oktober 1977* (Bern 1977), pp. 43- 66.

agriculture, by drawing attention to the “entrepreneurialization of the Chinese peasantry”¹¹⁶:

“Galiani, the defender [of industry, is] mistaken: the tailor from Canton, he says, can work for Paris but not the [Cantonese] peasant. [Galiani forgets that] the Chinese peasant produces [the] silk for London [as well].”¹¹⁷

In 1771, Haller published *Usong*, a Swiss *Staatsroman* i.e. description of the ideal state in all its aspects, whose political philosophy was deeply influenced by the principle of *wu-wei*.¹¹⁸ Although Haller’s story plays in Persia, the lessons of his *Staatsroman* were the lessons he had personally drawn from examining the government of *virtuous China*.¹¹⁹ Haller’s ideal state is based on China’s universally applicable laws and a bureaucracy that is governed by the principle of accountability, but most importantly on the principle of ‘*action by non-action*’.¹²⁰ Haller’s Emperor simply rests in a state of *wu-wei* as the human embodiment of the authority in which laws and bureaucracy are grounded, like the ideal Confucian ruler *who reigns but does not rule*.¹²¹ Furthermore, the tax system is copied from the Chinese practice.¹²² Like in China, the system is mainly based on land-poll, and indirect taxes play only a secondary role.¹²³ One indirect tax is known, a very low import duty. However, this duty is fixed at the lowest rate

¹¹⁶ Kent G. Deng, *Development and Its Deadlock in Imperial China 221 B.C.–1840 A.D.*, p.495 in: *Economic development and cultural change*, Vol. 51, No. 2, January 2003, pp. 479- 523.

¹¹⁷ Translated from German: im Hof, *von Haller*, p. 61.

¹¹⁸ Albrecht von Haller, *Usong. Eine Morgenländische Geschichte* (Bern 1771).

¹¹⁹ Max Widmann, *Albrecht von Hallers Staatsromane* (Biel 1894), pp. 59-60.

¹²⁰ Haller, *Usong*, pp. 385- 418.

¹²¹ Ames, *Rulership*, p. 55.

¹²² Haller, *Usong*, pp. 117- 121.

¹²³ Deng, *Imperial China*, p. 490.

possible because it is “*not the Emperor’s wish to extort riches from the merchants*”¹²⁴ but to increase commerce and agriculture.¹²⁵ Thus, the Emperor Usong is most concerned with *agriculture as the base of the state* i.e. the *nongben-minben* ideology, but also considers evenly commerce and industry as sources of national wealth.¹²⁶ Usong’s physiocratic government does not despise cities (as the Physiocrats did) but aims to protect the welfare of the urban centers to assure additional welfare for the people of the Empire.¹²⁷

Therefore, by choosing China as his preferred model of government, Haller ends up praising *wu-wei* as a virtuous and successful instrument of government. However, most importantly, the commercial power of the city is added to Haller’s vision of the ideal state. Unlike Quesnay, who was very much focused on copying the *nongben* qualities of China, the economic model by Haller endorses the modern commercialism of the urban centers as a vital element for a *wu-wei* state in Europe. Haller states clearly that this de-linking of *wu-wei erzhi* from its agricultural core is done for the benefit of the whole population, including the peasants (hence *minben*).¹²⁸

Thus, Haller urged Switzerland to transform the French-Chinese physiocratic message of *wu-wei* for the solely benefit of ‘the people’. He attached the component of urban freedom to the original principle, which had solely been based on the Chinese virtue of *agrocraacy* (agriculture and peasantry-friendly)¹²⁹. This inclusion of *commercial wu-wei* was facilitated by Switzerland’s high proto-industrialization and *free trade* tradition. Quesnay’s one-to-one copy of the Chinese principle had been

¹²⁴ Widmann, *Staatsromane*, p. 48.

¹²⁵ *Ibid.*, pp. 47, 49.

¹²⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 52.

¹²⁷ Haller, *Usong*, pp. 406- 407.

¹²⁸ Haller, *Usong*, p. 406.

¹²⁹ Deng, *Imperial China*, p. 497.



IMAGE 5 A CHINESE SCENE FROM ALBRECHT VON HALLER'S USONG (1771)¹³⁰

¹³⁰ Florian Gelzer, Daniela Lüthi und Wolfgang Proß, *Die Staatsromane Albrecht von Haller* (Eine Internetpublikation von Universität Bern, 2003);

http://www.germanistik.unibe.ch/gelzer/1_usong/5_usong_abbildungen.pdf (accessed 5.08.2004).

ideally suited to reform the autocratic, agrarian, anti-commercial ‘*China in Europe*’¹³¹ but for agrarian *and* commercial Switzerland, this *so-perfect* model would work no more. The Swiss, not the French, nor the British, altered the authentic Chinese ‘*agrarian wu-wei*’ to suit their own needs, transforming themselves into the new European paradigm of *wu-wei*. This additional economic freedom was embraced via Switzerland’s traditional *free trade* economy.

3.2 THE PARADIGM

There are two aspects to the Swiss paradigm; first, forces inside the Swiss domestic policy arena caused its formation. Secondly, the paradigm functioned as Europe’s prime example of successful economic management, during the 19th century. Both aspects undermine the Hobson’s Anglo-centric viewpoints on *laissez-faire*.¹³² Let us deal first with the paradigm as an instrument of Swiss state building.

Soon, after Napoléonic rule, the Swiss cantons ultimately transformed themselves into a *federal, republican* version of Haller’s ideal *patriarchal and monarchic* Usong state. The emerging ‘*new Eidgenossenschaft*’ of the 19th century, would prove to be strongly supportive of *free trade*, merchants and industry. Nevertheless, *agrocacy* (the *nongben* foundation of Haller’s model) had to be first identified as the most virtuous foundation of the ‘*old Eidgenossenschaft*’, to be additionally embraced by the ‘*founding elite of 1848*’.¹³³ In other words, the post-1800 affirmation of the *agrarian variant of wu-wei* was politically generated to legitimise the new domination of *commercial wu-wei*. After the Civil War of the 1840s, an constitutional reform based on this ‘double

¹³¹ Fisher, *Containing China?*, p. 549.

¹³² Hobson, *Eastern Origins*, chapter 11.

¹³³ Manfred Hettling, *Geschichtlichkeit – Zwerge auf den Schultern von Riesen*, pp. 91- 92 in: Jakob Tanner et al, *Eine kleine Geschichte der Schweiz. Der Bundesstaat und seine Traditionen* (Frankfurt 1998), pp. 94- 95, 100- 105.

embrace’ promised to be the best way to assure national unity and economic welfare, while easing the strong national strife between Catholics and Protestants, commercial Liberals and agricultural Conservatives.¹³⁴ To preserve the historical myth of the free, democratic alpine peasant (i.e. Wilhelm Tell) as the founder of the Swiss nation, inside the ‘*new Eidgenossenschaft*’, it was absolutely necessary to eulogize Haller’s ideal of alpine *agrarian wu-wei* and therefore to legitimize the new government of the Swiss commercial elite.¹³⁵

Secondly, this successful economic *compromise* of Switzerland produced widespread admiration throughout 19th century-Europe – while images of prosperous China were still being diffused (see image 6). The *commercial wu-wei* had resulted from the fact that Switzerland’s prosperity (i.e. *the welfare of Swiss minben*) had depended on the free flow of European commerce, for centuries.¹³⁶ Haller’s general *wu-wei* framework of the ideal state included a re-affirmation of this Swiss *laissez-faire* commercial tradition. As one of Europe’s key economic gateways, a majority of the cantons’ economies had conditioned themselves to function in a continuous environment of *free trade* (like Bale), although pockets of protectionism continued to exist (like Bern), right up to the 19th century.¹³⁷ The influential English *free trader* Richard Cobden was one of the first admirers of Switzerland’s strange blend of *agricultural* and *industrial* prosperity, of *agrarian* and *commercial wu-wei*. On the 6th June 1834, he wrote to his brother, from Geneva:

¹³⁴ Walther Rupli, *Zollreform und Bundesreform in der Schweiz 1815- 1848* (Zürich 1949), p. 188.

¹³⁵ Matthias Weishaupt, *Bauern, Hirten und «frume edle puren». Bauern und Bauernstaatsideologie in der spätmittelalterlichen Eidgenossenschaft und der nationalen Geschichtsschreibung der Schweiz* (Basel/ Frankfurt 1992), pp. 86-95.

¹³⁶ Eduard Fueter, *Die Schweiz seit 1848* (Zürich/ Leipzig 1928), p. 150.

¹³⁷ Rupli, *Zollreform*, p. 196.



IMAGE 6 EFFECTS OF CHINA'S CRAFTSMANSHIP. PROSPEROUS CHINA AS SEEN BY 19TH CENTURY EUROPEANS.¹³⁸

FIRST ENTRANCE, GATE TO THE TEMPLE OF CONFUCIUS, CHING-HAI, BY J. TINGLE, DRAWN BY T. ALLOM, 1843

“The people of this country [Switzerland], are I believe the best governed and therefore the most prosperous and happy in the world. It is the only Government [,] which has not, one douanière in its pay, and yet, thanks to free trade, there is scarcely any branch of manufacturing industry which does not in one part or other of the country find a healthy occupation. The farmers are substantial. Here is a far more elevated character of husbandry life than I expected to see. Enormous farm-houses and barns; plenty of out-houses of every kind; and the horses and cows are superior to those of the English farmers.”¹³⁹

¹³⁸ Engraving from the author's personal collection.

¹³⁹ As quoted in: John Morley, *The Life of Richard Cobden*, 2 vols. (London 1881) Vol. 1, p. 28.

Like the prominent German political economist Friedrich List, Cobden was amazed that the free-trading Swiss economy, unlike his native England, included *substantial farming*.¹⁴⁰ Nonetheless, he was just as impressed by the Swiss partly urban *manufacturing industry* i.e. Haller's *commercial wu-wei*. This type of admiration of the Swiss economy was typical for the 19th century-disciples of the *Libaniusian model*. In consequence, the paradigm of the Swiss *wu-wei* state helped to transform Europe into an altered image of the *wu-wei* Empire. At last, Confucius and Libanius would fuse into one great modern Eurasian theory of political economy and the European diffusion of *wu-wei* had been completed.

¹⁴⁰ Friedrich List, *Gesammelte Werke, 10 vols.* (Berlin 1935), Vol. 5, p. 348.

CONCLUSION

To conclude, we will draw attention to the three major findings of this paper. Firstly, the analysis demonstrated that the Chinese principle of *wu-wei* was actually imported and primarily diffused by the commercial and Jesuit nexus of the Low Countries. Consequently, the details of China's expertise entered Europe via the textual diffusion of the Jesuit texts and were visually supported by million of *minben*-images during the ceramic boom. Secondly, it has been shown that the intellectual foundation of the School of Physiocracy is a direct replica of the imported Chinese economic craftsmanship of *agrarian wu-wei*; consequently the European *Libaniusian ideology* cannot to be considered the intellectual master-model of Physiocracy. Thirdly, it has been made clear that Switzerland was the first European paradigm state of *wu-wei*. The European crystallization process of *wu-wei* ultimately ended with the Swiss state of 1848, in which Chinese *agrarian wu-wei* was institutionally fused with traditional Swiss *commercial wu-wei*. In due course, this alpine paradigm enabled the *Libaniusian model* to verify and reflect upon its own theory of a *commercial society*. In the following, we will touch on the broader implications of these three findings.

The fact that the Chinese principle of *wu-wei* was imported into Europe via the Low Countries proves clearly that research, which stresses the purely indigenous development of Europe's *laissez-faire* doctrine, is mistaken. McCormick and others do focus too much on the non-Eurasian development of the European revival of the *Libaniusian model* and leave out the parallel emergence of the *Chinese model*. Only by re-focusing on the historical forces, which allowed both models to exist and mature simultaneously, historians can win a deeper understanding of the origins of *laissez-faire* in Europe. The Low Countries are a supreme example of the historical proximity of

both models, and a great deal may be learned from a direct and more detailed juxtaposition of Grotius and the early characteristics of *wu-wei*'s importation; on this matter, I have only touched the historical surface. Furthermore, the Low Countries offered essentially two entry points for *wu-wei*'s diffusion into Europe: firstly, their printing presses and secondly, the ceramic (import) industry.

The groundbreaking textual base was truly enhanced by the visual wave of images that confirmed a China at the peak of her economic development. The sinophile triangle of Amsterdam, Antwerp and Douai, was perfectly suited to push the message of *wu-wei* into the wider European arena of diffusion. Yet it was also an environment that was perfectly conditioned to receive *wu-wei* in the first place. In sum, *wu-wei* in the Low Countries was the outcome of a Catholic-Protestant, Flemish-Dutch co-production. Without the Jesuit from Douai the printing presses of Amsterdam would have remained quiet – so much for Max Weber.

The second part's re-affirmation of Physiocracy as a direct copy of Chinese expertise is not as novel to current research, as it may sound – Hudson and Clarke are only the two recent examples of this approach. Yet, the assertion of Quesnay as the 'Confucius of Europe' remains controversial, until this very day. Repeatedly, textbooks on the history of economic thought have continued to re-instate Physiocracy's debt to Europe's indigenous *Libaniusian model*. In this Eurocentric model, the direct links between the ancient Stoics, Newton and Quesnay remain untouched by the incoming Eurasian influences. Part two of this paper has tried to demonstrate that this linear model of European thought is erroneous. The relative qualities of Europe can only be located in her capacity to embrace, fuse and transform non-European information; it is incorrect to construct her history of economic thought around a nexus of mental autarchy and the example of the history of *wu-wei* in France verifies this claim.

Quesnay has to be understood as a mind inside the Eurasian web of economic thought, his *ordre naturel* as a product of *wu-wei*an influence and his so-called Physiocracy as a copy of China's *nongben-minben* paradigm. It is only through this Eurasian assertion that one can appreciate the implications of Physiocracy's Swiss connections.

Finally, Switzerland's economic model of 1848 is not completely a one-to-one model of the *wu-wei* Empire, and of course, her *commercial wu-wei* is as much a product of the *Libaniusian model* as much it is reinforced by the European diffusion of *wu-wei*. Nevertheless, the first state inside Europe, which is actually deeply shaped by *wu-wei*, remains Switzerland – neither the British Empire of Adam Smith, nor François Quesnay's France. Albrecht von Haller's Swiss vision of *Usona* can be considered the first work of a European mind, which dis-connected the original agrarian *wu-wei* doctrine of China from its *agrocractic* i.e. *nongben* base, and added something truly European, namely *commercial wu-wei*. This process of fusion led to the European paradigm of *wu-wei*, namely 19th century Switzerland – admired and renowned by the disciples of the *Libaniusian model*, Cobden and List. The 'new Eidgenossenschaft' of 1848, based on *free trade*, commerce and a peasant state ideology can therefore be seen as the ultimate apex of *wu-wei* in Europe. Thus, two hundred years after the end of the terror of the Thirty-Years-War, a mountainous part of western Eurasia had created a new vision of harmonious government for the welfare of its people – we now know that without the diffusion of *wu-wei*, this would have never happened.

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