In 1697, after engaging with Chinese thought for years, Gottfried Wilhelm Leibniz published *The Latest News from China* (*Novissima Sinica*), a collection of works by European Jesuits, with the intention of promoting the mutual exchange of knowledge between Europe and China. He writes in the introduction,

> I consider it a singular plan of the fates that human cultivation and refinement should today be concentrated [...] in the two extremes of our continent, in Europe and in Tschina (as they call it) [...] Perhaps Supreme Providence has ordained such an arrangement, so that as the most cultivated and distant peoples stretch out their arms to each other, those in between may gradually be brought to a better way of life. (45)

Obviously, Leibniz considers China and Europe to be on the same level of civilization while assigning other cultures to lower levels. If we see Leibniz as an ethnocentric thinker who endorses Europe’s superiority while belittling others, then his admiration for China significantly balances his Eurocentrism by conceiving the globe as at least a dual-centric constellation, if not a polycentric one. Leibniz supports those Jesuit missionaries who were inclined to integrate themselves into Chinese society and to gradually introduce Christianity, known as the method of accommodation. Furthermore, Leibniz also suggests that the Europeans «need missionaries from the Chinese who might teach us the use and practice of natural religion, just as we have sent them teachers of revealed theology» (51).1

Clearly, Leibniz interprets classical Chinese philosophy, in particular Confucianism, as a natural religion. This interpretation betrays, on the one hand, that Leibniz shifts Chinese thought into more familiar forms of knowledge, which could even be described in more radical terms as a distortion of the foreign; yet, on the other hand, Leibniz’s reading also registers his recognition of China and reveals China’s challenges to Christian European discourse.

Among the numerous European admirers of classical Chinese philosophy, Leibniz is one of the most significant representatives of Sinophilia from the sixteenth to the mid-eighteenth century. During this time, China played a central role in European intellectual discourse in religion, ethics, art, and technol-
ogy. Travel literature and other works on China were reprinted and translated into various European vernacular languages. Enlightenment rationalists such as Christian Wolff, Voltaire, and François Quesnay believed in Confucianism as the perfect political constitution and advocated European rulers emulating the Chinese model in organizing the state, economy, and agriculture. The fashionable style of chinoiserie, such as the imitation of Chinese gardens by William Chambers, the architect of the Royal Gardens at Kew, also created an exceedingly positive recognition of this remote culture, which did not seem to have equal interest in Europe at the same time. The first British embassy to China in 1792, led by Lord George Macartney to negotiate better conditions for trade and establish diplomatic relation, made clear that the Qing dynasty showed little interest in conforming to Western norms.

During the second half of the eighteenth century, the dominant course of Sinophilia shifted toward Sinophobia. Equally radical and intensive, the prevailing Sinophobic attitude portrayed China as the prototype of a stagnant and despotic society. The German philosopher Johann Gottfried Herder played the leading role in dismissing the long duration of Chinese history, praised by the Sinophiles, as an «embalmed mummy» lacking life and the capability of transformation.

Herder’s Sinophobia is intrinsically entangled with his philosophy of history, which held a powerful sway over Hegel, Marx, and their followers. Jonathan Spence observes that the Sinophile Voltaire started his philosophy of history with China instead of the Biblical Genesis and thus «gave a new twist to Western historiography» (97). Then, conversely, it is the European dispute about history that decisively engenders the attribution of historical stagnation to China, in particular in Herder’s work. In other words, the rise of historicism in the latter half of the eighteenth century, inextricably connected to Herder’s contribution, played a significant part in the long-lasting negative connotation of China (Meinecke; Tautz).

There are two main tendencies today to explain the shift from Sinophilia to Sinophobia. First, this radical turn had little to do with Chinese reality and rather reflected inner European intellectual debates (Israel 640; Waley-Cohen 127). David Mungello rightly points out that Leibniz and his contemporaries seriously studied Chinese language and culture and thus showed a more neutral and objective judgment of China, while the later generation of Enlightenment thinkers and their critics employed either a positive or a negative China to promote their own intellectual programs (Great Encounters 122). Second, this shift is ascribed to the rise of European imperialism and the growing number of negative travel accounts about China. From the perspective of postcolonial criticism of imperialism and Orientalism, intellectual
Sinophobia is thus seen as the needed justification and ideology for the rising European colonial hegemony in the second half of the eighteenth century (Said; Mackerras; Berger).

Both explanations, however, should not be taken in absolute terms. Even if the shift from Sinophilia to Sinophobia merely reflected European thinkers’ own obsessions, we still have to admit that Leibniz’s Sinophilia was supported by his correspondence with Jesuits in China. Moreover, even if the missionaries did not see China in its entirety, they at least transmitted part of the so-called reality. Furthermore, European imperial encroachment on China did not start until the 1840s with the first Opium War. In particular, Germany, in which Leibniz and Herder lived, did not even exist as a unified political entity in their day, let alone have imperial ambitions. In the eighteenth century, European trade with China was almost exclusively conducted on China’s terms (Waley-Cohen 96–102; Gregory 29–72). Negative descriptions and perceptions of China had existed well before Leibniz’s time, but it had never had such a dominant position until the mid-eighteenth century. In other words, the cases of Sinophilia and Sinophobia in eighteenth-century Europe, as seen through the works of Leibniz and Herder, still deserve more comprehensive observation and explanation.

The concept of recognition, originating from Hegel’s dialectic model of master and slave, is helpful for my understanding and analysis because changing representations of China in European discourse can be synthesized and explained through a discussion of the Hegelian notion of recognition and its critique by Frantz Fanon. Hegel employs the interaction between master and slave to illustrate the independence and dependence of self-consciousness in his influential *Phänomenologie des Geistes*. While Hegel states that «the lord achieves his recognition through another consciousness» – the bondsman – and this recognition «is one-sided and unequal,» he, at the same time, stresses that the lordship is not «an independent consciousness, but a dependent one» (*Phenomenology* 116–17). Hegel contends, «the truth of the independent consciousness is accordingly the servile consciousness of the bondsman» (*Phenomenology* 117). In other words, the master only exists through recognition by the slave. Dialectically, the Hegelian tale of master and slave emphasizes a fundamental reciprocity.

Hegel’s notion of recognition meets censure from the Martinican anticolonial thinker Frantz Fanon in the 1950s. Fanon argues in *Black Skin, White Masks* that, in social and colonial reality, the white master does not need the recognition from the black slave while the slave strives to adopt the values of the master. In other words, master remains master and slave remains slave. He contends, «The Negro wants to be like the master. Therefore he is less
independent than the Hegelian slave. In Hegel the slave turns away from the master and turns toward the object. Here the slave turns toward the master and abandons the object» (221). Fanon thus claims that, in order to gain an equal recognition, the colonized blacks need to maintain their difference or alterity from the white European colonizers and fight for recognition from the master on this ground.

In the case of Sinophilia and Sinophobia, the encounter between Europe and China prior to 1800 is marked less by China’s effort to gain Europe’s recognition than by Europe’s reaction to the challenge posed by Chinese thought. Sinophilia, according to Hegel, betrays a one-sided recognition. Sinophobia, following Fanon, is both a refusal to imitate China and a cry for European alterity. The Chinese disinterest, however, compels us to see that the European representations of China in the eighteenth century are less the results of struggle and collision than phenomena produced both by Europe’s encounter with the towering figure of the Chinese Empire and inner European intellectual dynamics.

In the following pages, a more detailed perusal of Leibniz’s and Herder’s writings and an account of the historical background of European Chinese trade around 1800 will help us reimagine the transition from Sinophilia to Sinophobia through the notion of recognition.

Leibniz’s admiring interpretation of classical Chinese philosophy, in particular Confucianism, is best articulated in his argument with the party of Jesuits such as Farther Longobardi and Father Sainte-Marie, who consider Confucian doctrines erroneous and thus claim that the Chinese need to abandon their own philosophy and become completely Christianized. Leibniz disagrees in his Discourse on the Natural Theology of the Chinese (1716):

China is a great Empire, no less in area than cultivated Europe, and indeed surpasses it in population and orderly government. Moreover, there is in China a public morality admirable in certain regards, conjoined to a philosophical doctrine, or rather a natural theology, venerable by its antiquity, established and authorized for about 3,000 years, long before the Greeks whose works nevertheless are the earliest which the rest of the world possess, except of course for our Sacred Writings. It would be highly foolish and presumptuous on our part, having newly arrived compared with them, and scarcely out of barbarism, to want to condemn such an ancient doctrine simply because it does not appear to agree at first glance with our ordinary scholastic notions. (78)

Leibniz advocates that more Chinese classics should be accurately translated with greater quantity, «Indeed, it would even be desirable that all the classics be translated together» (78). Obviously, Leibniz’s recognition of China stresses the antiquity of Chinese thought and its practical effects in society.
Leibniz even believes that the ancient Chinese learned part of their thought from the tradition of the Christian Patriarchs such as Abraham and Jacob.

This endeavor to identify the shared root of both Chinese and Christian philosophy is reflected throughout Leibniz’s reading of Confucian classics. In fact, Leibniz does not strive to find out the differences but to identify the similarities between Chinese and Christian thought. He contends that «Chinese philosophy more closely approaches Christian theology than the philosophy of the ancient Greeks» (97). By bringing Christianity into accordance with Confucianism or vice versa, Leibniz aims to establish universal truths.

For example, Leibniz understands the Confucian notion of *Li* (理) as «reason, or the foundation of all nature, the most universal reason and substance.» *Li* is for Leibniz the «pure, motionless, rarified» universal cause, «without body and shape, and can be comprehended only through the understanding» (79). Leibniz rejects Father Longobardi’s interpretation of *Li* as the Christian prime matter and contends that this Chinese notion should be equated with the notion of prime form «as the Soul of the World, of which the individual souls would only be modifications» (96). Leibniz’s central thesis about Chinese philosophy is that it is a natural theology, which contains profound and accurate understanding of moral truths comprehended through human reason or *Li* and exists before the divine revelation by Jesus Christ. For Leibniz, «Jesus adds nothing new to what reason shows, but only converts this knowledge to a surer footing, overcoming the inconstancy of human reason» (Perkins 174).

Leibniz’s interpretation of *Li* as the prime form reminds us of his monadology, according to which each monad is a variation of the same universe and an expression of the same whole (see Perkins 60–65). Each monad contains and reflects the whole universe and the temporality of past, present, and future in a different way. The British historian of science Joseph Needham argues in his influential *Science and Civilization in China* (1956) that Leibniz’s theory of monads, one of his life achievements, is essentially influenced by Confucian philosophy. In other words, through Leibniz, Chinese thought enters European intellectual history. Although it is debatable if Chinese philosophy is germinal to Leibniz’s monadology, as David Mungello doubts, at least we can be sure today that Confucianism is germane to and supportive of Leibniz’s own theory (Mungello, «How Central to Leibniz’s Philosophy Was China?»).

Leibniz, with the Jesuit Bouvet, also made one of the most remarkable discoveries in Europe’s encounter with China: they realized that the binary system of arithmetic, which Leibniz developed, astoundingly corresponds with the central diagram of the *Book of Changes* (易经), one of the ancient Chinese
classics. Leibniz thus comments, «Now this shows also that the ancient Chinese have surpassed the modern ones in the extreme, not only in piety (which is the basis of the most perfect morality) but in science as well» (134).

Furthermore, Leibniz is interested in the Chinese language and believes that it contains structures of the universal Primitive Language given by God to Adam prior to the confusion of languages in Babel. This attempt at introducing a nonphonetic language into the phonocentric and logocentric system in Europe, as Jacques Derrida comments, «had opened a breach within the logocentric security» of the West (98).

Now if we go back to our question of recognition, then there does not seem to be a master and a slave in Leibniz’s narrative. Rather Leibniz places Chinese culture on a higher or at least an equal level to Europe and shows his willingness to adopt the assumed Chinese perspective to connect or integrate his world with the other. Yet it is also inappropriate to completely ignore the aspect of subsuming and encompassing Chinese philosophy or language into the European knowledge system in Leibniz’s approach. The Leibnizian search for a universal language, as Derrida points out, is immediately connected with the search for a universal logic, which may in turn confirm European logocentrism. Especially when China becomes the prototypical example of Herder’s historical stagnation, the aspect of logocentrism becomes more consolidated and the master-slave model emerges in the European representation of China.

In 1791, almost a century after the publication of Leibniz’s *The Latest News from China*, Herder, then one of the most prominent intellectuals in the German-speaking world, published the fourth part of his *Ideen zur Philosophie der Geschichte der Menschheit* (1784–1791) and turns the image of China into a hopeless stagnation of history. As the title of Herder’s *magnum opus* indicates, he endeavors to unearth a philosophical logic of time, space, and human culture in this work. In the preface to his *Ideen*, Herder claims,


Herder arrives at the conclusion that history is not a series of coincidences; rather it is an organic ongoing process, or a development comprising constant
dynamic changes and improvements from lower to higher stages. Herder’s philosophy of history encompasses a universal development from cosmology to the civilization in northern Europe. The chronology and the rhetoric of Herder’s narrative make clear that northern European nations represent the most developed stage of history while other cultures are seen as less developed:

Wie kam also Europa zu seiner Kultur, und zu dem Range, der ihm damit vor anderen Völkern gebühret? Ort, Zeit, Bedürfnis, die Lage der Umstände, der Strom der Begebenheiten drängte es dahin; vor allem aber verschaffte ihm diesen Rang ein Resultat vieler gemeinschaftlichen Bemühungen, sein eigener Kunstfleiß. (897)

Obviously, Herder identifies Europe as a cultural entity in comparison to other peoples. Furthermore, the self-fashioning of Herder’s philosophy of history undeniably bears a logic which justifies the self-ascribed superiority of Europe as a natural and historical process.

Herder’s philosophy of history, along with his Sinophobia, emerged through his dispute with Voltaire’s extremely influential treatise *Philosophie de l’histoire* (1765), in which Voltaire expresses his high esteem toward China.9 Voltaire stresses the longevity of Chinese historiography and, similar to Leibniz, the imperfection and underdevelopment of European culture in comparison to China. Furthermore, following in Leibniz’s wake, Voltaire also considers that the ancient Chinese have developed social morality to perfection:

Let us constantly remember, that five hundred years ago, scarce any one knew how to write, either in the North, in Germany or France. […] There are no people in Europe, who have not latterly made more progress within half a century in all the arts, than they had made from the time of the invasions of the Barbarians, till the fourteenth century. I shall not here examine why the Chinese, who were arrived at the knowledge and practice of everything that was useful in society, did not go as far as we do at present in the sciences; they are, I allow, as bad physicians as we were two hundred years ago, and as the Greeks and Romans; but they brought morality to perfection, which is the first of the sciences. (*Philosophy of History* 89)

Herder strongly disagrees with Voltaire’s approach to history and, in particular, the idea of an absolute perfection in the past because, for him, history is not an imitation of certain ancient models but should rather be conceived as an ongoing process of unique transformations toward the future.

Therefore, motionless, the word Leibniz used to describe the unchangeable law of the notion of *Li*, is now used by Herder to characterize a condition which is forgotten by the flow of history. The universal law for Herder now is not motionless perpetuity, but rather constant regeneration and progression. Therefore the ancient high culture of China, along with Egypt, does not
deserve awe and respect any longer. It merely resembles museum-like dead objects and curiosities. Herder portrays China as the biggest failure in the course of the history of humanity. He claims, «Wer erstaunt nicht, wenn er in der Sinesischen Geschichte auf den Gang und die Behandlung der Geschäfte merkt, mit wie Vielen ein Nichts getan werde» (437)!

We can summarize Herder’s depiction of China with a metaphor he uses: an embalmed mummy (eine balsamierte Mumie). First, China is embalmed because it has achieved a high degree of refinement in many aspects of its culture such as porcelain, silk, gun powder, the compass, printing, and bridge, and ship-building long before the Europeans could. Second, it is a mummy because the Chinese are not seen to have the organic drive and ability to innovate and improve these arts.

Against Leibniz’s high regard for the Chinese language, Herder holds it as the epitome of the Chinese artificial way of thinking and their lack of scientific spirit:

ein Europäisches Ohr und Europäische Sprach-Organe [gewöhnen] sich äußerst schwer oder niemals an diese hervorgezwungene Sylbenmusik […]. Welch ein Mangel von Erfindungskraft im Großen und welche unselige Feinheit in Kleinigkeiten gehörte dazu, dieser Sprache aus einigen rohen Hieroglyphen die unendliche Menge von achtzigtausend zusammengesetzten Charakteren zu erfinden […]. (434–35)

For Herder, Chinese people are not talented to develop sciences in their culture according to European standards: «Kann man sich wundern, daß eine Nation dieser Art nach europäischem Maßstabe in Wissenschaften wenig erfunden?» (438).

Confucian moral philosophy is seen by Herder as the hindrance preventing China from growing into the next historical stage and keeping Chinese civilization in the childhood phase (Knabenalter) of the history of humanity. Herder compares Confucianism to a mechanical engine (mechanisches Triebwerk) which does not have the ability to produce any new ideas. He comments that there is little taste of true nature and feeling of inner peace, beauty, and dignity in Chinese cultural customs. Echoing the popular climate theory that some climatic environments are better than others for enabling humans to develop their potential, Herder ascribes the negative features of Chinese culture to China’s national character and its geographical location. Therefore, he argues, the Chinese are doomed to be a degenerated slave culture because, like the Jews, they avoid contacts and exchange with other nations.

It is not only clear so far that Herder is using European standards to judge China but also that he is doing so intentionally. Well informed and erudite as Herder is, he knows the high reputation of the Chinese Empire among Enlightenment thinkers. Herder writes, «Jedermann kennt die vorteilhaftest
Although he claims to find a middle course to deliver a realistic picture of China, his completely negative portrayal betrays that he is not primarily interested in drawing up a balance sheet of Chinese mores and customs, but rather bears other intentions: first, as a critic of the Enlightenment, as Isaiah Berlin calls him, he shows his discontent with the Enlightenment philosophy of history represented by Voltaire by destroying the positive image of China; second, something that is more far-reaching and influential, Herder constructs an image of China in order to establish and promote an image of European dynamism of trade and sciences, which is set against the backdrop of the so-called Chinese stagnation. In other words, Herder’s endeavor to find out the logic of universal history bears the task of constituting a new identity and historical mission for Europe, and thus he uses China here to produce the binary between the modern and the ancient, east and west, historical stagnation and development.

Herder’s account of the historical stagnation of China is later reflected in Hegel and Marx’s image of China. For Hegel, China does not have real history or historicity. The spirit of world history, which finds its home in northern Europe, has never been to the other part of the world (Vorlesung 11–174). Karl Marx also takes on the concept of Chinese changelessness and considers Asian economic form a nonprogressive one. Colin Mackerras comments, «It followed for Marx that outside intervention was necessary to force change upon a resistant and miserable Asia» (112).

If Hegel’s and, in particular, Marx’s image of China accompanies and also is accompanied by China’s subjugation by Western powers in the second half of the nineteenth century, in Leibniz and Herder’s time there was little diplomatic relationship between the Chinese Empire and European nations. In 1793, two years after the publication of Herder’s Ideen, Lord George Macartney, Great Britain’s first envoy to China, was commissioned to negotiate better conditions for trade and to establish diplomatic relationships with the Qing dynasty.

At the end of his mission, Macartney was deeply disappointed because his requests to the Huang Di (emperor) Qianlong were rejected and he was courteously dispatched back to his ships in the South. Qianlong’s edict to George III, which appears to have been drafted well before Macartney’s arrival, treats Great Britain as one of China’s tribute countries:
We, by the Grace of Heaven, Emperor, instruct the King of England to take note of our charge. Although your country, O King, lies in the far oceans, yet inclining your heart towards civilization you have specially sent an envoy respectfully to present a state message, and sailing the seas he has come to our Court to kotow and to present congratulations for the Imperial birthday, and also to present local products, thereby showing your sincerity. [...] As to what you have requested in your message, O King, namely to be allowed to send one of your subjects to reside in the Celestial Empire to look after your country’s trade, this does not conform to the Celestial Empire’s ceremonial system, and definitely cannot be done. (Macartney 337–38)

The edict further shows that the Qing do not want to privilege the British over other European countries and consider the purpose of a long-term ambassador unpractical and illogical:

If it is said that your object, O King, is to take care of trade, men from your country have been trading at Macao for some time, and have always been treated favourably. [...] Why, then, do foreign countries need to send someone to remain at the capital? This is a request for which there is no precedent and it definitely cannot be granted. Moreover, the distance between Macao [...] and the capital is nearly ten thousand li [a Chinese li is equal to 500 meters], and if he were to remain at the capital how could he look after it? If it is said that because you look up with admiration to the Celestial Empire you desire him to study our culture, yet the Celestial Empire has its own codes of ritual which are different from your country’s in each case. Even if the person from your country who remained here was able to learn them it would be of no use since your country has its own customs and regulations, and you would certainly not copy Chinese ones. (Macartney 339–40)

It is not only clear that the Qing are ignorant of the British and European practice of diplomacy, but this document also tells us that they are not at all interested in expanding trade and maintaining a sustained relationship with Britain – from their perspective a tribute country of no danger and significance. For the British, however, the Macartney embassy is meant to save the British East India Company from bankruptcy, due to the highly restricted trade conducted solely on China’s terms, and to further open up the potentially greatest market in the world for British products.

In fact, before and also long after Macartney’s embassy, European trade with China was restricted to the small area around Macau and Canton in the south. Foreign trade was not seen as a natural right, but rather a gracious concession by the Qing Empire. China exported a great amount of tea to Europe each year, but refused to allow European goods to circulate extensively on their domestic market. «The East India Company had been unable to sell sufficient goods to finance its large purchases of tea, and as a result had been forced to send great quantities of silver dollars to China to pay for its yearly
purchases» (Macartney 14). Foreigners were not allowed to buy books on Chinese histories and ordinary Chinese people were not allowed to teach them Chinese. Only merchants with special licenses could do business with people from the so-called Western Oceans. Recent research has shown that the Gross Domestic Product of China in 1820 was $199 billion, whereas six advanced Western countries (UK, USA, France, Germany, Italy, and Austria) altogether only had $128 billion (See Sugihara 79).

Therefore China plays, culturally and economically, a far more important role for Britain and other European countries than vice versa. The Macartney embassy has been seen as the defining moment in Sino-European history because China was first seen from inside out through the eyes of a shrewd diplomat. The travel writings by Macartney and his companion John Barrow are the first accounts of China from a British colonial and capitalist point of view (see Barrow). This embassy also poses clear challenges to China and demystifies the dominant European perception of China as a country of grand power.

When Herder published his *Ideen*, however, China still remained an enigmatic country in respect of political and economic powers for the European nations. The letter by George III that Macartney presented to the Chinese Emperor still reflects a strong Sinophile tendency.

Against this background, it is difficult to see Herder’s Sinophobia merely as the rhetoric of the powerful or the justification of subjugation and exploitation because Europe was still observing and exploring the real strength of the Chinese Empire. Therefore, in addition to criticizing the arbitrary debasement of China in Herder’s work, we can also see that Herder’s philosophy of history actually produces the need of recognition that an assumed inferior China should have toward a self-ascribed superior Europe. If Leibniz’s willingness to adopt Confucianism shows his one-sided recognition toward China, then Herder’s exaggerated negative depiction of China discloses a negative recognition of China and a call for European distinction.

The existence of the Chinese Empire with its economic, cultural, and territorial achievements and the euphoric accounts of the Jesuits throughout the eighteenth century all compel European and German intellectuals to react in such a radical manner. This invention of the need of recognition for China, in fact, betrays a desire for Europe’s self-assertion and self-acknowledgement. It is to some extent true, if we follow Edward Said’s argument in *Orientalism*, that the West imposes images of the Orient onto it, which has less to do with the reality than the rhetoric of control and subjugation. Yet in the case of the representations of China in the eighteenth century, reality and projection are
both at work to produce the Leibnizian Chinese utopia and the Herderian Chinese dystopia. Furthermore, we also perceive the anxiety of defining oneself against an imagined giant. Surely we have to keep in mind that the representations of China as historical stagnation has had disastrous consequences until our time. The need of recognition Herder produces for China becomes reality in the end.

Notes

1 For an excellent description of the method of accommodation and the Jesuits’ «Rites Controversy» see Perkins 23–32, 184–94. Leibniz’s later Discourse (1716) indicates his sustained interest in Chinese philosophy as a natural religion which supposedly shares common ground with Christianity.


3 See Mungello, Great Encounter 116–20. Voltaire claims, «It is true that the constitution of their empire is the best in the world, the only one entirely based on paternal authority» (Philosophical Dictionary 114).

4 For Chinese interest in European culture see Mungello, Great Encounter 15–76. Chambers’s main contribution to eighteenth-century chinoiserie is his Dissertation on Oriental Gardening (1772).

5 Israel argues, «Western philosophers strove valiantly to grasp the fundamentals of classical Chinese philosophy but ended up, in the main, merely mirroring their own prior obsessions» (640).

6 In the seventeenth century, the anti-accommodationists in the «Rites Controversy» within the Catholic Church clearly state the inferiority of Chinese thought and ritual practices and their need to be Christianized. Montesquieu attributes despotism to China in his famous The Spirit of Laws. For more details see Perkins.

7 Mungello argues that, to a certain extent, Leibniz’s reception of China deserves to be acknowledged as an expression of «an egalitarianism (but not relativism) among cultures that predate the development of ideas about Europeans’ cultural superiority» (Great Encounter 86).

8 Derrida argues, «In an original and non-relativist sense, logocentrism is an ethnocentric metaphysics. It is related to the history of the West. The Chinese model only apparently interrupts it when Leibniz refers to it to teach the Characteristic. Not only does this model remain a domestic representation, but also, it is praised only for the purpose of designating a lack and to define the necessary corrections» (79).

9 In August 1773, Herder wrote to his publisher Hartknoch about his debut work on the philosophy of history, «Endlich, mein lieber Hartknoch kann ich Ihnen antworten: denn Eins meiner Bücher ist fertig, dazu ein sehr schönes: heißt «auch eine Philosophie
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der Geschichte zur Bildung der Menschheit: Beitrag zu vielen Beiträgen des Jahrhunderts 1773.» hat aber mit Voltaire u. Harder zum Glück nichts als Titel gemein, ist wirklich meine Philosophie der Geschichte […]. Es ist Feur darinn u. glühende Kolen auf die Schädel unsres Jahrhunderts» (Briefe 35). Herder’s Ideen are in many ways an expansion and further development of the framework he developed in Auch eine Philosophie der Geschichte zur Bildung der Menschheit.

Herder claims, «Das Porzellan, die Seide, Pulver und Blei, vielleicht auch Kompaß, die Buchdruckerkunst, den Brückenbau und die Schiffskunst, nebst vielen andern feinen Handtierungen und Künsten kannten sie, ehe Europa solche kannte» (Ideen 441).

Herder contends, «nur daß es ihnen fast in allen Künsten am geistigen Fortgange und am Triebe zur Verbesserung fehlet» (Ideen 441).

Herder argues, «Durch sie [politische Moral] ist dies Volk, wie so manche andere Nation des Erdkreises mitten in seiner Erziehung, gleichsam im Knabenalter stehen geblieben, weil dies mechanische Triebwerk der Sittenlehre den freien Fortgang des Geistes auf immer hemmte und sich im despotischen Reich kein zweiter Confucius fand» (Ideen 441).


Herder claims, «denn die Sinesen in ihrer Erdecke sich, wie die Juden, von der Vermischung mit andern Völkern frei erhalten haben, zeigt schon ihr eiter Stolz, wenn es sonst nichts zeigte. […] Wie sie das Eiimpfen der Bäume nicht lieben, so stehen auch sie, trotz mancher Bekanntschaft mit andern Völkern, noch jetzt uneingimpft da, ein Mongolischer Stamm, in einer Erdecke der Welt, zur Sinesischen Sklavenkultur verartet» (Ideen 436).

Works Cited


