

From Confucius to the Great Wall: Chinese Cultural Influence on Colonial North America

"Americans know the richness of China's history because it helped to shape the world and it helped to shape America. We know the talent of the Chinese people because they have helped to create this great country."

-Barrack Obama in his remarks at U.S.-China Strategic and Economic Dialogue on July 27, 2009

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The transmission of Chinese culture to colonial North America provides one of the most significant examples of the spread of Chinese civilization from its center to overseas, where no significant direct contact existed. The founding fathers' efforts to draw nourishments from the culture demonstrate that how they developed the American culture by their incorporating the positive elements from Chinese culture.

The impact of Chinese culture on cultural, economical and political development of colonial North America was evident. For instance, Confucius, who has been regarded as the very emblem of Chinese civilization, was incredibly influential in North America during its colonial period. Some eminent colonists, including Benjamin Franklin (1706-1790), Thomas Jefferson (1743-1826), Thomas Paine (1737-1809), John Bartram (1699-1777), and Jedidiah Morse (1761-1826) expressed their respecting for Confucius and his moral philosophy. Franklin followed Confucius' procedure for moral cultivation and

started to cultivate his virtue as early as 1727.¹ In order to promote Confucius's moral philosophy in the colonies, Franklin published some excerpts adopted from *Morals of Confucius*² in his widely circulated *Pennsylvania Gazette* in 1737. In addition, Franklin made it clear that he regarded Confucius as his role model in 1749.³ Thomas Jefferson, who had been compared to Confucius,⁴ regarded his example as the Chinese prince, whom Confucius considered to be one of the ideal rulers.⁵ In his *Age of Reason, 1791-1792*, Thomas Paine listed Confucius with Jesus and the Greek philosophers as the world's great moral teachers.⁶ In his *American Universal Geography*⁷ Jedidiah Morse

¹ Dave Wang, Benjamin Franklin, George Washington, Thomas Jefferson and Chinese Civilization, *Virginia Review of Asian Studies* 2009. <http://virginiareviewofasianstudies.com/current3.html> ;Exploring Benjamin Franklin's Moral Life, *Franklin Gazette*, Volume. 17, No. 1, Spring 2007 .

² http://hua.umf.maine.edu/Reading_Revolutions/Confucius.html

³ Franklin told Whitefield, "I am glad to hear that you have frequent opportunities of preaching among the great. If you can gain them to a good and exemplary life, wonderful changes will follow in the manners of the lower ranks; for, *Ad Exemplum Regis*, &c. On this principle Confucius, the famous eastern reformer, proceeded. When he saw his country sunk in vice, and wickedness of all kinds triumphant, he applied himself first to the grandees; and having by his doctrine won them to the cause of virtue, the commons followed in multitudes. The mode has a wonderful influence on mankind; and there are numbers that perhaps fear less the being in Hell, than out of the fashion. Our more western reformations began with the ignorant mob; and when numbers of them were gained, interest and party-views drew in the wise and great. Where both methods can be used, reformations are like to be more speedy. O that some method could be found to make them lasting! He that shall discover that, will, in my opinion, deserve more, ten thousand times, than the inventor of the longitude." To George Whitefield, Philadelphia July 6, 1649. Reprinted from *The Evangelical Magazine*, XI (1803), 27-8; also AL (fragment): American Philosophical Society. It is available on line at <http://www.franklinpapers.org/franklin/framedVolumes.jsp>

⁴ Professor Creel, a well-known scholar of Confucius said, "it is interesting to compare the thought of Thomas Jefferson with that of Confucius. They were alike in their impatience with metaphysics, in their concern for the poor as against the rich, in their insistence on basic human equality, in their belief in the essential decency of all men (including savages), and in their appeal not to authority but to 'the head and hart of every honest man.' Jefferson's statement that 'the whole art of government consists in the art of being honest' is amazingly similar to *Analects* 12.7, and other such examples could be cited." H.G. Creel, *Confucius: The Man and the Myth*, New York, The John Day Company, p.275.

⁵ Dave Wang, All Posterity Will Remember My Legacy: Thomas Jefferson and a Legendary Chinese Prince, *Huaren E-Magazine (Australia)* September, 2008, It is available on line at

⁶ Charlotte Allen, *Confucius and Scholar*, It is available on line at

<http://www.theatlantic.com/issues/99apr/9904confucius.htm> In *The Prospect*, 31 March 1804, Thomas Paine remarked, "As a book of morals there are several parts of the New Testament that are good, but they are no other than what had been preached in the Eastern world hundred years before Christ was born. http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Doctrine_of_the_Mean Confucius, the Chinese philosopher, who lived five hundred years before the time of Christ, says, acknowledge thy benefits by the return of benefits, but never revenge injuries." Philip S. Foner, ed., *Complete Writings of Thomas Paine*, 2. vol. New York: Garden City, 1945, p.805.

⁷ <http://www.archive.org/stream/americanuniversa02morsiala#page/n5/mode/2up>

(1761-1826) cited *The Great Learning* and *the Doctrine of Mean*, the two of the four classics of Confucianism.⁸ Morse extolled the two classics as “the most excellent precepts of wisdom and virtue, expressed with the greatest eloquence, elegance and precision.”⁹ John Bartram, an outstanding scientist in the colonies, wrote a paper, “*Life and Character of the Chinese Philosopher Confucius*,”¹⁰ in which he introduced Confucius’ life to his readers. One author loved Confucius’ philosophy so much that he named his pen name as *Confucius Discipulus*. In his paper carried in the *New Hampshire Magazine* in September 1793, this author told his readers that Confucius was “a character so truly virtuous.”¹¹

One of the most obvious direct economical and political influences of the Chinese culture upon social development in North America was the tea from China. The

⁸ The four classics include, *The Great Learning*, *The Doctrine of Mean*, *Analects* and *Mencious*.

⁹ Jedidiah Morse, *The American Universal Geography; or a View of the Present Situation of the United States and of all the Empire, Kingdoms, States, and Republics in the Known World*, 2 vols. Part II. Second edition of this volume. Boston: Isaiah Thomas and Ebenezer Andrews.

¹⁰ According to John Bartram, Confucius “was born in the reign of the Emperor Ling Wang 551 years before the birth of Christ. He was justly esteemed the Prince of Chinese philosophers and was the reformer of a sect of literati and the best and wisest man that this or any other nation was ever blessed with. He applied himself to the study of moral philosophy at fifteen years of age and soon became the most learned man of the empire; he had 3,000 disciples, 500 of whom bore public officers in the state and were eminent for their learning.” Confucius “seems to have been the greatest moral as well as practical philosopher that ever lived, and he excelled Pythagoras (570-495 BC--writer) in pursuit of religion and morals. He was of the most exemplary sobriety and chastity of life, was endured with every virtue and free from every vice, and showed the greatest equableness and magnanimity of temper even under the most unworthy treatment. His whole doctrine tended to restore human nature to its original dignity and that first purity and luster which it had received from heaven and which had been sullied and corrupted. He taught as means to obtain this end to honor and fear the Lord of Heaven, to love our neighbor as ourselves, to subdue irregular passions and inclinations, to listen to reason in all things, and to do or say nothing contrary to it. He taught kings and princes to be fathers to their subjects, to love them as their children, and he taught subjects to reverence and obey their kings and governors with the honor and affection due to their parents....In short, he was the original ultimate end of all things and the one supreme holy, intelligent, and invisible being”

See A. Owen Aldridge, *The Dragon and the Eagle: The Presence of China in the American Enlightenment*, Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 1993, p. 32. The manuscript of the paper now is in The Morgan Library in New York.

¹¹ According the author, Confucius “recommended the contempt of riches and outward pomp; he endeavored to inspire magnanimity and greatness of soul” and to reclaim his countrymen from voluptuousness to reason and sobriety. “Kings were governed by his counsels, and people revered his as saint.” See A. Owen Aldridge, *The Dragon and the Eagle: The Presence of China in the American Enlightenment*, Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 1993, p. 36.

importance of tea had developed into such a degree that it impacted the historical course of North America. Tea had become a basic element in North American colonial society so that in the 18th century, drinking tea in the morning at home and socially in the afternoon or early evening became an "established custom". A contemporary estimated that one third of the population drank tea twice a day. A Swedish traveler found that there was "hardly a farmer's wife or a poor woman, who does not drink tea in the morning."

The tea triggered the American Revolution. On December 17, 1773, a week away from Christmas Eve, some colonial patriots, disguised as Indians, secretly entered Boston Harbor under the cover of night. They boarded three British ships in the harbor and dumped some 350 chests of Chinese tea into the water. Their action was a protestation of taxation without representation and the monopoly granted the East India Company.

Outraged colonists, including merchants, shippers and general masses, started demonstrations, shortly after the Boston Tea Party. Just a year and a half after the colonial patriots dumped the tea in Boston Harbor, the first shots fired at Lexington. The conflict caused by the justified right to drink tea without extra economic burden led to political hostilities and led to the American war for independence.

Chinese Porcelain, like tea, had been imported into the British colonies long time before the founding of the United States. Settlers in Albany used China porcelain as early as 1662.¹² Benjamin Franklin told a personal story in his well read autobiography that reveals to us the chinaware's popularity in the colonial society:

Being call'd one Morning to Breakfast, I [Benjamin Franklin—writer] found it in a *China Bowl* with a Spoon of Silver. They had been bought for me without my Knowledge by my Wife, and had cost her the enormous Sum of three and twenty Shillings, for which

¹² David Sanctuary Howard, *New York and the China Trade*, New York: New York Historical Society, 1984, pp. 61.

she had no other Excuse or Apology to make, but that she thought her Husband deserv'd a Silver Spoon and *China* Bowl as well as any of his Neighbours. This was the first Appearance of Plate and *China* in our House, which afterwards in a Course of Years as our Wealth increas'd augmented gradually to several Hundred Pounds in Value.¹³

The demand for Chinese porcelain and the efforts to shake off Great Britain's control over it helped to create the national conscience of the patriots.

Benjamin Rush (1745-1813) was among the first group of colonists who wanted to build a porcelain factory in North America.¹⁴ For Dr. Rush, colonies' production of porcelain ware was one of the means to overcome the colonies' dependence on Great Britain for goods and trade. The endeavor of building such a factory was far beyond the porcelain only. It demonstrated the colonists' determination to be independent from their motherland.

Go on in encouraging American manufactures. I have many schemes in view with regard to these things. I have made those mechanical arts which are connected with chemistry the particular objects of my study and not without hopes of seeing a china manufactory established in Philadelphia in the course of a few years. Yes, we will be revenged by the mother country. For my part, I am resolved to devote my head, my heart, and my pen entirely to the service of America, and promise myself much assistance from you in everything of this kind that I shall attempt through life.¹⁵

The Americans wanted to diminish their reliance on taxed imports and ultimately their need for other goods controlled by England. Their pursuing self supply of Chinese porcelain ware became a powerful call for the patriotic support of American economical independence. Some colonists started attempts to establish a porcelain manufactory company in Philadelphia in 1769. They established the factory on Prime Street "near the

¹³ Benjamin Franklin, *The Autobiography of Benjamin Franklin*, Part Eight, in the Papers of Benjamin Franklin. It is available on line at <http://franklinpapers.org/franklin/framedVolumes.jsp> ,

¹⁴ Michael K. Brown, Piecing Together the Past: Recent research on the American China Manufactory, 1769-1772, in *Proceedings of the American Philosophical Society*, vol. 133, no. 4, 1989, p.557.

¹⁵ Benjamin Rush to Thomas Bradford, 15 April 1768, in L. H. Butterfield ed., *Letters of Benjamin Rush*, Princeton University Press, vol. 1, p. 54.

present day navy yard, intended to make china at a savings of 15,000 £. “¹⁶ Benjamin Franklin, who was in London at the time, showed his happiness seeing the achievement made by his countrymen. He said, “I am pleased to find so good progress made in the China Manufactory. I wish it Success most heartily.”¹⁷

The American China Manufactory became noted for the porcelain ware it produced. More importantly, it succeeded in cultivating patriotic support. It set in motion “an intense competition between the young American factory and its English contemporaries.”¹⁸ Although the porcelain factory lasted to 1772, it challenged Britain’s monopoly of the Chinese products and ultimately contributed to the winning of American independence. Benjamin Rush stated clearly, “There is but one expedient left whereby we can save our sinking country, and that is by encouraging American manufactures. Unless we do this, we shall be undone forever.”¹⁹

In the wake of America’s victory in the revolution, some veterans of the Revolutionary War wanted to establish a hereditary aristocracy in order to “distinguish themselves and their posterity from their fellow citizens.” They wanted to form an order of hereditary knights and organized the Society of Cincinnatus²⁰, hoping to let their

¹⁶ John Fanning Watson ed. *Annals of Philadelphia*. See also Michael K. Brown, Piecing Together the Past: Recent research on the American China Manufactory, 1769-1772, in *Proceedings of the American Philosophical Society*, vol. 133, no. 4, 1989, p.555.

¹⁷ Benjamin Franklin to Deborah Franklin, 28 January 1772, in Franklin Papers. It is available on line at <http://www.franklinpapers.org/franklin/framedVolumes.jsp>

¹⁸ Michael K. Brown, Piecing Together the Past: Recent research on the American China Manufactory, 1769-1772, in *Proceedings of the American Philosophical Society*, vol. 133, no. 4, 1989, p.573.

¹⁹ Benjamin Rush to probably Jacob Rush, 26 January 1769, in L. H. Butterfield ed., *Letters of Benjamin Rush*, Princeton University Press, vol. 1, p.74. Also in *Pennsylvania Journal*, no. 1374, 6 April 1769.

²⁰ In the years soon after the revolution, membership continued to expand. Members have served in all the major offices of the United States and many state governments. Some, including Thomas Jefferson, were alarmed at the apparent creation of a hereditary elite; membership eligibility is inherited through primogeniture, and excludes enlisted men and in most cases militia officers, unless they were placed under "State Line" or "Continental Line" forces for a substantial time period. Benjamin Franklin was among the Society's earliest critics, though he would later accept its role in the Republic and join the Society under honorary membership after the country stabilized. He voiced concerns not only about the apparent creation of a noble order, but also the Society's use of the eagle in its emblem as evoking the traditions of heraldry.

posterity to inherit the honor. Franklin opposed the idea immediately. He used the example from China to fight against the idea:

Thus among the Chinese, the most ancient, and, from long Experience, the wisest of Nations, Honour does not *descend* but *ascends*. If a Man from his Learning, his Wisdom or his Valour, is promoted by the Emperor to the Rank of Mandarin, his Parents are immediately intitled to all the same Ceremonies of Respect from the People, that are establish'd as due to the Mandarin himself; on this Supposition, that it must have been owing to the Education, Instruction, and good Example afforded him by his Parents that he was rendered capable of Serving the Publick. This *ascending Honour* is therefore useful to the State as it encourages Parents to give their Children a good and virtuous Education. But the *descending Honour*, to Posterity who could have had no Share in obtaining it, is not only groundless and absurd, but often hurtful to that Posterity, since it is apt to make them proud, disdain to be employed in useful Arts, and thence falling into Poverty and all the Meannesses, Servility and Wretchedness attending it; which is the present case with much of what is called the *Noblesse* in Europe. Or if, to keep up the Dignity of the Family, Estates are entailed entire on the Eldest Male Heir, another Pest to Industry and Improvement of the Country is introduced, which will be follow'd by all the odious Mixture of Pride and Beggary, and Idleness that have half depopulated Spain, occasioning continual Extinction of Families by the Discouragements of Marriage and improvement of Estates. I wish therefore that the Cincinnati, if they must go on with their Project, would direct the Badges of their Order to be worn by their Parents instead of handing them down to their Children. It would be a good Precedent, and might have good Effects.²¹

The founding fathers regarded China as a place where they could find important resources to promoting agricultural and industrial development in North America. They made their exertion to transplant valuable plants from China to North America. Benjamin Franklin obtained rhubarb seeds and sent them to John Bartram in 1772.²² George Washington made his own experiments to plant Chinese flowers in his garden on Mountain Vernon.²³ Thomas Jefferson made long time commitment to transplant the dry

It was in his writings on the Cincinnati Eagle that he also safely attacked its brother symbol, the Great Seal of the United States, without having to do so directly. More about the city is available from:

http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Society_of_the_Cincinnati

²¹ Benjamin Franklin, To Sarah Bache (unpublished) Passy, Jany. 26th. 1784, in *The Papers of Benjamin Franklin*, ed. by Yale University. It is also available on line at

<http://www.franklinpapers.org/franklin/framedVolumes.jsp>; See also, Mark Skousen, ed., *The Completed Autobiography by Benjamin Franklin*, Washington DC: Regnery Publishing Inc. 2006, pp.311-312.

²² C. R. Woodward, *Meet Dr. Franklin*, Lancaster, PA, Lancaster Press, 1943, p.194.

²³ Dave Wang, George Washington and Chinese Flowers *Huanren E-Magazine(Australia)*, May 2009, <http://www.huaren.org/uploadedFiles/1245107218802-7790.pdf>

rice to southern United States.²⁴ Samuel Bowen introduced soybeans from China into Savannah, Georgia in 1765.²⁵ Franklin also sent soybean seeds from London to John Bartram in Philadelphia in 1770.²⁶

Benjamin Franklin expressed his great interest in borrowing from Chinese industrial technologies, such as heating house in the winter, ship building, paper making, candle and mill and other technologies.²⁷ Gouverneur Morris (1752-1816)²⁸ was impressed by the literature on the Grand Canal of China. Jefferson incorporated some elements from Chinese architecture to create a new style of architecture.²⁹ Some eminent colonists including Benjamin Franklin and Benjamin Rush also promoted Chinese sericulture in North America.³⁰

²⁴ Dave Wang, Asian Dry Rice and Slaves' Living Environment: Thomas Jefferson's Efforts to Transplant the Rice to the United States, *Huanren E-Magazine (Australia)* September 2009.

²⁵ Soybeans were introduced to the United States by Samuel Bowen, a seaman who brought the seeds from China. At Bowen's request, Henry Yonge planted the first soybean crop on his farm in Thunderbolt, a few miles east of Savannah, in 1765. See The New Encyclopedia of Georgia. It is available on line, <http://www.georgiaencyclopedia.org/nge/Multimedia.jsp?id=m-3096>; T. Hymowitz and J. R. Harlan, Introduction of Soybean to North America by Samuel Bowen in 1765, *Economy Botany*, Vol. 37, no. 4 (Oct.-Dec. 1983), p.371.

²⁶ Dave Wang, Benjamin Franklin and China: A Survey of Benjamin Franklin's Efforts at Drawing Positive Elements from Chinese Civilization during the Formative Age of the United States, *The Historical Review: A Biannual Journal of History and Archaeology*, Vol. XIII, no. 1 & 2, 2005, published by Indian Institute of Oriental Studies and research, pp.13-14. See also Theodore Hymowitz, Introduction of the Soybean to Illinois, *Economy Botany*, Vol. 41, No. 1 (Jan-Mar. 1987), p.28.

²⁷ Dave Wang, Benjamin Franklin and Chinese Civilization, *Reset Dialogue on Civilizations*, Well-known European Website (Italy). <http://www.resetdoc.org/EN/Franklin-Wang.php>; Benjamin Franklin and China: A Survey of Benjamin Franklin's Efforts at Drawing Positive Elements from Chinese Civilization during the Formative Age of the United States, which is published since 2005 by the Official Website of the Tercentenary Commission headed by Honorary Chairman, President George W. Bush. http://www.benfranklin300.org/etc_essays.htm

²⁸ http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Gouverneur_Morris

²⁹ Dave Wang, Thomas Jefferson and Chinese Architecture: Chinese Culture in North America before the Founding of the United States, *Huanren E-Magazine (Australia)*, January 2009, Chinese New Year Edition <http://www.huaren.org/uploadedFiles/1235090967870-5421.pdf>

³⁰ Dave Wang, Benjamin Franklin's Efforts to Promote Sericulture in North America, in *Benjamin Franklin Gazette*, Vol. 18, no. 2, Summer 2008. Benjamin Rush told his fellow colonists "Mulberry trees are so plenty among us that we might raise silkworms in a few years to supply us with all the silk we want, as oak leaves (when those of the mulberry are not to be had) have been found in China to afford a food to the worms." (Benjamin Rush to probably Jacob Rush, 26 January 1769, in L. H. Butterfield ed., *Letters of Benjamin Rush*, Princeton University Press, vol. 1, p.74. Also in *Pennsylvania Journal*, no. 1374, 6 April 1769.)

The eighteenth century saw the rapid expansion of the British colonies in North America. However, this period was full of various hardships and conflicts. In 1754, the French and Indian War started in the Ohio River Valley. The feeling of insecurity dominated the colonists' lives in North America from the mid-eighteenth century to the founding of the United States. The conflicts between the Indians and colonists and the fear of becoming a pawn of British or French designs for international power contributed to this feeling. Some leading colonialists, among them Benjamin Franklin, worked hard to keep the colonies safe. In this critical time, Franklin introduced the notion of the Great Wall of China into the public debate in 1760. He recommended the strategy of building an American Great Wall as the most efficient way to protect the thirteen colonies.

The second kind of security—A security of our planters from the inroads of savages, and the murders committed by them—will not be obtained by such forts, unless they were connected by a *wall* like that of *China*, from one end of our settlements to the other.³¹

Twenty years later, Franklin raised the notion of the Great Wall again, this time in the Revolutionary War.

The examination of the above historical facts leads to some significant discoveries. Before the significant direct connection between China and the United States was established, information and knowledge on China reached North America through Europe. Books on China and the personal contact between Europe and North America were main channels that Chinese culture reached North America. During this period the main books introducing China and its civilization published in Europe were also available in North America. Americans could learn all manner of subjects from agriculture, science, philosophy, art and technology from these books.

³¹Benjamin Franklin, *The Writings of Benjamin Franklin*, London, The McMillan Company, 1909, Pp.25-26

The prominent colonists, including the founding fathers, who made their efforts to draw nourishments from Chinese civilization, were those who stayed in Europe for a period of time and maintained close contact with the Europeans who studied Chinese culture and had information on China. They were the most important agents by whom Chinese culture were transmitted to North America. Benjamin Franklin stayed and worked in Europe for a good part of his life. In addition to a brief stay in England as a young man, he stayed in London, a center of China studies in the world, from 1757 to 1775 and later went to Paris, another center of China studies, to be ambassador from 1776 to 1785. Thomas Jefferson lived in Europe 1785-1789. In Europe, both men contacted some main elements of Chinese culture. It was by no coincidence that they became main promoters of Chinese culture.

I have found two characters of the indirect transmitting Chinese culture to North America: voluntary and selective. Their adoption of the elements from Chinese culture was voluntary and carefully controlled. No one forced Benjamin Franklin and Thomas Jefferson to learn from Chinese culture; they were self starters. Instead of taking everything from the culture, they made their own selections and took the elements which they thought would be useful in helping develop North America into a strong and flourishing society. The enthusiasm and wisdom the founding fathers possessed to adopt from Chinese culture distinguished them from those who expelled other cultures than the European culture they inherited.

The spread of Chinese cultures into North America started with the efforts of the eminent colonists, such as Benjamin Franklin and Thomas Jefferson, who were mainly responsible for broadening of Chinese civilization in North America. They used positive

elements from the civilization to answer the economical, social and political issues in North America. Their efforts actually created a special pattern for integration of elements from other cultures into the main culture. By incorporating elements from Chinese culture into the European culture they carried over the Atlantic Ocean, the colonists took significant steps toward the creation of a civilization of their own. Thomas Jefferson's incorporation of the design of Chinese railing into his own design of Italian style of architectures, gave rise to a unique style of American architecture that persists to the present day and has had a considerable impact on architecture in contemporary world.³²

Why did the founding fathers put so much energy to learn from Chinese culture? One simple answer is that China, as the most developed country in the time, could provide what they need in their endeavor to build a strong nation in North America. Franklin told his fellow Americans, "The Chinese are an enlightened people, the most antiently [anciently] civilized of any existing, and their arts are antient [ancient], a presumption in their favour [favor]."³³ Thomas Paine also told Americans the Chinese "are also a people of mild manners and of good morals."³⁴ Franklin regarded China as a role model for North America. He stated, "Could we be so fortunate as to introduce the industry of the Chinese, their arts of living and improvements in husbandry, as well as their native plants, America might be in time become as populous as China, which is

³² Dave Wang, Thomas Jefferson and Chinese Architecture: Chinese Culture in North America before the Founding of the United States, *Huanren E-Magazine (Australia)*, January 2009, Chinese New Year Edition <http://www.huaren.org/uploadedFiles/1235090967870-5421.pdf>

³³ Benjamin Franklin, 1785: Benjamin Franklin's 'Sundry Maritime Observations'. It is available on line at <http://oceanexplorer.noaa.gov/library/readings/gulf/gulf.html>

³⁴ Paine remarked, "The Chinese are a people who have all the appearance of far greater antiquity than the Jews, and in point of permanency there is no comparison. They are also a people of mild manners and of good moral, except where they have been corrupted by European commerce. Yet we take the word of a restless bloody-minded people, as the Jews of Palestine were, when we would reject the same authority from a better people." Philip S. Foner ed., *Completed Writings of Thomas Paine*, vol 2, New York: Garden City, 1945, p.737.

allowed to contain more inhabitants than any other country, of the same extent, in the world.”³⁵ To help the northern colonists keep their houses warm in the winter, Franklin borrowed from heating technology of warming house practiced in northern China and invented a furnace based on the Chinese design.³⁶ Franklin also applied his knowledge in Chinese ship building to a proposal to institute passenger service between France and the United States.³⁷ In 1771 Thomas Jefferson recommended to Robert Skipwith, his brother-in-law, to read Chinese books, which he regarded as among the best books on general subject available in America.³⁸ Like Franklin, Jefferson had an open mind concerning Chinese technologies and told his subordinates that Chinese products offered “a better idea of the state of science in China than the relations of travelers have effected.”³⁹ Ezra Stiles (1727-1795), president of Yale University, maintained that China, “the greatest, the richest & most populous kingdom now known in the world.”⁴⁰

These distinguished colonists maintained their interest in China for a long time from the colonial era to the aftermath of the founding of the United States. In the eyes of an

³⁵ Ellis Paxson Oberholzer, Franklin’s Philosophical Society, in *The Popular Science Monthly*, March 1902, p.432.

³⁶ Dave Wang, Benjamin Franklin and China: A Survey of Benjamin Franklin’s Efforts at Drawing Positive Elements from Chinese Civilization during the Formative Age of the United States, *The Historical Review: A Biannual Journal of History and Archaeology*, Vol. XIII, no. 1 & 2, 2005, p.12

³⁷ Dave Wang, Benjamin Franklin and China: A Survey of Benjamin Franklin’s Efforts at Drawing Positive Elements from Chinese Civilization during the Formative Age of the United States, *The Historical Review: A Biannual Journal of History and Archaeology*, Vol. XIII, no. 1 & 2, 2005, p.13.

³⁸ Thomas Jefferson, *Thomas Jefferson Papers*, vol. 1, Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1950, p.76-81. The letter is available on line at <http://etext.virginia.edu/etcbin/toccer-new2?id=JefLett.sgm&images=images/modeng&data=/texts/english/modeng/parsed&tag=public&part=5&division=div1>

³⁹ Thomas Jefferson, Letter to Charles Jared Ingersoll, July 20, 1818, in *Writings of Thomas Jefferson*, ed. by A. A. Lipscomb & A. E. Bergh, vol. 19, Washington D.C. Thomas Jefferson Memorial Association, p.262.

⁴⁰ Ezra Stiles, *Letters and Papers of Ezra Stiles* (microform), Isabel M. Calder, ed., New Haven: Yale University Press, 1933, Item 130.

author in New England, the newly established United States should “look beyond Europe and to take China as model in agriculture, in government, and in personal liberty.”⁴¹

Unlike Europe where the societies had been established already, the Americans worked to build a brand new society in North America. They started their endeavor from scratch, so their need for the elements from Chinese culture was different from that of Europe. That is why we see that some Chinese books were largely ignored in Europe but the same books were treated as treasures in America. The three books on China written by the Swedish---*A Voyage to China and the East Indies*, by Peter Osbeck, a chaplain on a voyage of the Swedish East India Company; *A Voyage to Surat*, by Olaf Toreen, another chaplain in the same service as Osbeck; and an *Account of the Chinese Husbandry*, by Charles Gustavus Eckeberg, the captain of one of the company’s ships---were published as a unit in Swedish in 1757. They were translated into German in 1765 and into English in 1771. However, the original Swedish and their German and English translations “have been neglected by all the major histories of China in the European Enlightenment.”⁴² Conversely, they were treated as treasures in North America. The *Pennsylvania Magazine* edited by Thomas Paine introduced and recommended to Americans the three books in August 1775.

However, indirect borrowing from Chinese culture was influenced by the attitudes of places where they borrowed the civilization. Starting from the 19th century, the Europeans started to focus on the negative side of Chinese civilization. With the development of modern science and technology in Europe, the European looked down on the Chinese culture. This change of attitudes had an impact on the Americans. That explains the receding of the trend that drew nourishments from Chinese civilization started by the founding fathers in the modern United States.

I want also to point out that the positive attitudes of the founding fathers and other eminent colonists never darkened the existence of the negative opinions on China in North America. The negative opinions existed in the same time of the positive opinions

⁴¹ A. Owen Aldridge, *The Dragon and the Eagle: The Presence of China in the American Enlightenment*, Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 1993, p.156.

⁴² A. Owen Aldridge, p.34.

represented by the founding fathers with great wisdom. However, in the formative period of American culture, the influence of negative attitudes never became a significant factor.

Nevertheless, the remarkable story of the efforts to draw nourishments from Chinese culture has served as an excellent case study of the creation of a new civilization by adopting selected positive elements from other cultures and assimilating the elements into the main culture. The colonists' efforts have provided us with an ideal way of dealing with other civilizations.

This essay was inspired by a graduate student from the University of London. In April 2009, I was invited by the Benjamin Franklin House at London to deliver my speech, "Benjamin Franklin and the Great Wall of China." After my presentation, a graduate student raised the question, "Chinese civilization was transmitted from Europe to North America. Then, why Chinese civilization had such a big impact there?" It wasn't the first time that I was asked such a question. Back to 2005 in Rome, an Italian graduate student from University of Rome asked me the same question in the wake of my presentation, "Benjamin Franklin and Confucius Moral Philosophy." I am sure that similar questions will be asked over and over again with my future presentations in other places of the world. With this essay, I attempt to answer them and probably future audience of my presentations on the influence of traditional Chinese culture on the early development of the United States. This is the question I must answer before I examine Chinese cultural influence on North America.