

## 240th Anniversary of world's first Freedom of Information legislation

### Let us remember Chydenius



**240 years ago**, Sweden passed the first freedom of information law in the world, principally sponsored by a Finnish clergyman Anders Chydenius. This year is the 240th Anniversary of world's first Freedom of Information legislation, adopted in Sweden-Finland. Enlightenment thinker and politician **Anders Chydenius** (1729-1803) played a crucial role in creating this Act that abolished political censorship and provided public with an access to government documents (2 December 1766).



Confucius (illustration from *Myths & Legends of China*, [1922](#), by E.T.C. Werner)

Anders Chydenius ,had been inspired by the humanist Confucian philosophy (Confucius was born in 551 BC)...and the fact that the Chinese emperors were expected to:

“Admit their own imperfection as a proof for their love of the truth and in fear of ignorance and darkness.”...

"When a prince's personal conduct is correct, his government is effective without the issuing of orders. If his personal conduct is not correct, he may issue orders, but they will not be followed." ...

"Let his words be sincere and truthful and his actions honorable and careful."

*The origins of openness are not in the West, but in the East.*

The Finn Anders Chydenius was one of the most notable politicians of eighteenth century Sweden-Finland. He is most of all remembered as an outspoken defender of freedom of trade and industry, the "Adam Smith of the North". Chydenius' views on freedom of trade were a consequence of his general ideology of freedom. According to him, democracy, equality and a respect for human rights were the only way towards progress and happiness for the whole of society.

According to Chydenius, economics exists for the benefit of "the little people" - and not the other way round.

Chydenius' first writings concerned practical matters, such as the overgrowing of meadows by moss, and improvements in the design of horse-carriages. Soon he moved on to social questions.

Chydenius participated very actively in the Diet, and published several articles criticising the dominant political economics of mercantilism, based upon regulation, limits and monopolies. The most famous of these articles, which caused a great stir, was 'The National Gain'. Concrete results of Chydenius' activities at the Diet were for example a stricter control of the national economy and an extension of the freedom of the press, which he considered himself to be one of his greatest achievements.

Chydenius strongly championed the rights of the servant class, and called for the creation of an open employment market. He introduced a bill, at the suggestion of King Gustavus III, by which foreigners were also granted limited rights to the practice of their own religion. Chydenius died in 1803.



Sources:

<http://www.chydenius.net>

<http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Confucius>

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-Srinivas Madhav  
Consultant