

碰撞下的跨文化交流

# 中西文化对比研究

A COMPARATIVE STUDY OF  
CHINESE AND WESTERN CULTURES

祝吉芳 / 编著

Gladys Evertsen / 审校



河海大学出版社  
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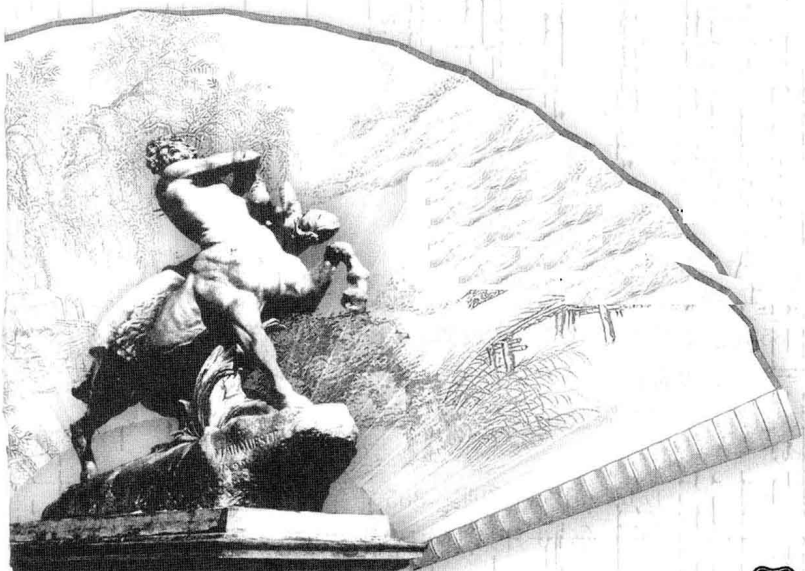
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# Foreword

The reality of our relative backwardness compels us to import a lot from the Western countries. Today we learn English, read books about Warren Edward Buffett, wear Nike shoes, drink Coca-Cola, listen to rap songs, drive Mercedes-Benz, and watch Hollywood movies. Our higher education tends to be Westernized, too— emphasizing analysis, criticism, logic, and formal approaches to problem-solving. What is tragic is that in spite of the seemingly prevalent westernization in China Westerners report they feel uncertain and uncomfortable in interacting with Chinese and there has been much coverage of communication breakdowns. I am convinced that much of this problem stems from lack of mutual understanding of cultural background knowledge, for in reality the current westernization within China is superficial. It is due to this lack that many of our good intentions have been misinterpreted in the intercultural communication.

In writing these pages, I have an ambitious goal. I hope I can display to the reader that most often the cultural differences are just differences of degree, and that acknowledging the cultural differences will lead one to re-examine his or her own culture. For this reason, this book is to focus on cultural comparison and contrast and tries to identify cultural differences as well as reasons behind these explicit or hidden discrepancies.

Of course, we have in the past thirty years of reform and opening up learnt a lot from the outside world. Likewise, the Western culture has changed a lot over the years through interactions with other cultures. Therefore, we should have a new look at different cultures and their recent changes, and get hold of the latest information about them. But given the limited space of this book and the great difficulty of comparing the ever-changing and dynamic cultural elements, I am to confine my attention to what are traditional and hence stable about Chinese and Western cultures.

The chapters of this book are arranged under five headings— East and West, Cultural Differences in Silent Languages, Cultural Differences in Thinking, Different Cultural Orientations, and Different Cultural Standards.

While this book was informed and enhanced by my international colleagues in

Nanjing who have helped to make this a better book than it would otherwise have been, friends in SHSU and WCPC who have given me much food for thought, and academics who have studied and published their research, there are two persons in particular to whom I owe a great deal of thanks; Dr. Tracy L. Steele and Mr. Fernando Mercier, who have offered invaluable help. I am also greatly indebted to my friend Gladys Evertsen and her husband Harry. This book has benefited enormously from their comments, suggestions, and corrections.

**Nanjing**  
**September 2010**  
**Zhu Jifang, Ph. D**

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# Part I

*“Oh, East is East, and West is West, and never the twain shall meet.” This opening line of “The Ballad of East and West” by the famous English poet Rudyard Kipling (1865—1936) is often quoted to underline that two things are so different that they can never come together or agree. But, the fact is the “twain(two)” do meet.*

*In this part, the question about why we should compare Chinese and Western Cultures is answered in Unit 1 after a brief introduction to the two civilizations and a review of cultural comparative studies in China. Traditional characteristics which may help to identify Chinese and Western cultures are then discussed in Unit 2. Unit 3 offers a reappraisal of the affinities or similarities that unite cultural traditions in the East and West.*

# Unit 1 Why Comparing Chinese and Western Cultures?

***Our most basic common link is that we all inhabit this planet. We all breathe the same air. We all cherish our children's future. And we are all mortal.***

**—J. F. Kennedy**

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*Do you agree with former U. S. President J. F. Kennedy? If yes, why?*

***I do not want my house to be walled on all sides and my windows to be stuffed. I want the cultures of all lands to be blown about my house as freely as possible. But I refuse to be blown off my feet by any.***

**—Mahatma Gandhi**

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*If you were having a face-to-face talk with the famous Indian politician, what would you say to him? Do you love meeting people from other cultures?*

## I. Ancient Civilizations and Cultures

To explain why we should compare Chinese and Western cultures, it might be better to start with the two major civilizations on earth—the Chinese inland civilization and the Western sea civilization.

### ① Chinese Civilization and Culture

Surrounded by land on three sides, China with the Central Plains Region as the source of its civilization has long been isolated. This geographical isolation, together

with its unique natural environment and ecology has endowed the nation with a unique cultural tradition and a distinctive social psychology. The self-reliant and self-supporting rural-based agrarian economy born out of this isolated land caused a greater isolation in dire need of the spirit of openness.

Encouraging people to stick to their homeland, be content with their simple life, follow the Way (Dao or Tao), happily labor at sunrise and rest at sunset, the orthodox Confucianism, a product of this civilization, has contributed much to the formation of the isolated and hence inward-bound Chinese culture. Its doctrine of "the integration of Heaven and man" pushed Chinese culture further down the road of the introversion or the inward seek (内求). The cardinal Confucian virtues of humanity and righteousness urged the ruler to "lovingly care for his people" and "regulate human relationships." Guided by the thought of "applying theory to reality (经世致用)" which emphasizes scholarship, ancient Chinese read not for knowledge or skills but for the Way by practicing "seriousness to straighten the internal life and righteousness to square the external life." They had little interest in pursuing "investigation of the things (格物致知)" into the realms of what we call natural or social sciences. The inward seek, so to speak, was what ancient Chinese pursued after.

As a consequence, in this inland civilization a culture of introversion or inward-orientation was gradually formed, and has nurtured many generations of Chinese marked by their home-orientation, non-action, tolerance, pacifism, lack of competing tradition, and absence of explicit time concept.

## ② Western Civilization and Culture

Ancient Greece as the cradle of Western civilization is of a long irregular coastline with many fine harbors. The ecology of this place, consisting as it does mostly of mountains descending to the sea, favors occupations such as hunting, herding, fishing, sea trade, sea transportation, and even piracy. With the exception of trade these economic activities do not strictly require living in the same community for a long time, which made people outward-bound.

It is the outward seek that ushered in the rise of natural sciences characterized by transcendence, conquer, and creation, which in turn inspired people to be more open and more outward-oriented. It is because of its outward-orientation that settled agriculture which requires stability came to this civilization later than to inland civilizations, but quickly became commercial.

Gradually outward-bound Western culture was formed in this blue sea civilization surrounded by water on three sides.

## II. Cultural Comparative Studies in China

Before the Sino-British Opium War (1840), Chinese and Western cultures developed like two streams running side by side on their own by following their own courses. But the Qing Dynasty's (1644—1911) defeat in the war (1838—1842) first opened the eyes and ears of Chinese to the rising Western world. And the Dynasty's subsequent defeat in the Sino-Japanese War of 1894—1895 turned their eyes and ears also to Japan which was assumed to be fast developing because people there had learned from the West.

### ① During the Reform Movement of 1898

After the Opium War and shortly after the Sino-Japanese War, the Western powers began to occupy various ports of China by force, which badly upset Chinese people who had felt disappointed and disheartened. To bring a new hope to them, the leaders of the Reform Movement of 1898 such as Kang Youwei (1858—1927), Liang Qichao (1873—1929), and Tan Sitong (1865—1898) translated Western works to spread the Bourgeois ideology of Europe, and wrote articles to compare Chinese and Western cultures so as to found the theory of Constitutional Reform and Modernization. Although the Reform Movement didn't last long and failed in the end, yet it may be said to have made preparation for more systematic studies of Chinese and Western cultures during the 1919 May Fourth Movement.

### ② During the May Fourth Movement of 1919

The aggressive invasion of Westerners and of Japanese against China had led Chinese intellectuals to assume that the humiliation and backwardness of China was due to the useless rigid obsolete Confucianism.

In May 1918 Lu Xun (1881—1936), hailed as “commander of China's cultural revolution” by the founding father of P. R. China Mao Zedong (1893—1976), used his pen name for the first time and published his first short story in vernacular *A Madman's*

Diary, a scathing criticism of outdated Chinese traditions and Confucian feudalism that were supposed to be “gnawing” at the Chinese. The impact of Lu Xun and other revolutionaries such as Cai Yuanpei and Hu Shi (1891—1962) was undeniably immense, given the fact that the whole young generation was transformed. During the tumultuous days of 1919, students in Beijing marched on the streets protesting the unequal treaty with Japan and blaming Confucianism for such an injustice. They angrily shouted “Down with Confucianism” and opened their arms and hearts for new ideas of science from the West. In short, the message sent by the Movement was clear: Up with Western scientism and down with Confucianism.

However, an objective voice could still be heard, for instance from Liang Qichao (1873—1929), a political activist and academician. Before he went to Europe, Liang Qichao’s views were identical to those of the New Culture Movement which launched ruthless attack on Confucianism. After returning from Europe, he had acquired a new basis for critical reflection on modernity, and published *Journey to Europe* (《欧洲心影录》), in which Liang refuted his previous views completely, advocating borrowing the spirit and methods of the Western science to reassess and reorganize the national cultural heritage in order to develop a new one.

Echoing Liang Qichao’s theories in his *East and West: Their Civilizations and Philosophies*, Liang Shuming (梁漱溟) foretold that Western civilization will be doomed to eventual failure. Although he disfavored complete reform and adoption of Western institutions, Liang Shuming believed that reform in China was a necessity. Soon there appeared the debate between “Old Learning (旧学)” and “New Learning (新学)”. Although the contention lingered on in the following years, the latter had forced its way into prominence while the former gradually withdrew into obscurity.

Against this larger social background, Wang Guowei (王国维) advocated “going beyond the distinction between Chinese and Occidental Learning (学无中西)”, while Lu Xun recommended his strategy of “looking for new voices in foreign cultures (别求新声于异邦)”. Those views turned out to be so prevailing that all sorts of Western theories and ideologies flooded into China through translated versions.

### ③ After the May Fourth Movement

Faced with “the Complete Westernization (全盘西化论)” as a trend of thought and the deteriorating economic situation, some professors in Shanghai jointly published a manifestation in 1935, openly advocating the necessity of constructing native Chinese culture.

With respect to “Westernization” or “construction of native culture”, Zhang Dainian(张岱年) and other scholars came up with a proposition of “synthetic creation (综合创新论)”. This proposal emphasized that, in dealing with cultural issues, equal attention should be paid to what is the best both in Western culture and Chinese culture. Later on, Zhang Dainian introduced “cultural creationism (文化的创造主义)” and uplifted the realistic significance of “synthetic creation” to the level of actualizing the rebirth of Chinese culture and national rejuvenation.

Similar proposals like those greatly encouraged and inspired Chinese scholars who attended to the construction of Chinese culture and consciously took up the responsibility for the future of the nation and its people.

## ❶ After 1949

After 1949 when People’s Republic of China was founded, Confucianism was officially condemned. Confucius-bashing reached a peak during the “Anti-Lin Biao and Anti-Confucius Campaign” when schools banned the Confucian classics and Red Guards blamed scholars for teaching the classical books that for centuries had served as a philosophical primer for China. Meanwhile, books on Marxism and Leninism were taught at school, read at workplaces and at home. Cultural studies of this period favored the two branches of Western thought and the traditional Chinese thought and culture were put aside.

## ❷ In the 1980s

In 1988, much attention was cast on comparative studies of Chinese and Western cultures again. The television series “The Yellow River Elegy(《河殇》)” elaborated that compared to the sea civilization, the inland civilization had fallen. This epic television series initiated a whirlwind of discussion and debate when it was first broadcast nationwide. CCTV statistics claimed that over 200 million people watched it, making it one of the most popular series that year. Its scripts were published in the newspapers and in book form, which started a new wave of cultural comparative studies.

## ❸ In the New Century

The first few years of the 21st century witnessed the decrease of traditional values and the appearance of some social ills—a result of the tragic collapse of Confucianism.



More tragically, it seemed that no principle, no law, and no morality could offer help. People became confused. Then the Lecture Room of CCTV 10 initiated a sudden revival of Confucianism and other traditions in 2006. Confucian classics are no longer regarded as fossils, but as a value system that can help Chinese to find answers to many problems, since for more than 2,500 years the Confucian doctrines of humanity, righteousness, filial piety, etc. were the guiding principles of life and government in China.

With the revival of Confucianism, cultural comparative studies, particularly East-West studies, appear so important that many scholars have engaged in it and many colleges and universities have added relevant courses to their schools' curriculum.

### **III. Imperatives to Compare Chinese and Western Cultures**

This book is a contrastive study of Chinese and Western cultures. As for why, eight reasons are to be presented — perhaps you can add more.

#### **❶ The Harmonious Imperative**

Though it has tried its utmost to build a harmonious and friendly relationship with the other countries since its reform and opening up in 1979, China has to face disputes over some issues and cultural discomforts in international context. The reasons for this state of affairs are many and varied, some of them are beyond the control of anything China might do to try to correct them, but some are not. Take the very way we show our good intentions and politeness for instance. When presented a present, the polite way for us is to decline three times before accepting it and then putting it away without opening it or telling the giver how much I love the gift and how much I appreciate his kindness. This custom is incompatible with the so-called international practice, but it is something within our control and can be adjusted so that our good intentions can be better understood by foreigners.

It is not my argument that Chinese should be universally loved. Given the fact that communication breakdowns often occur in our interaction with others, we should try to learn more about differences between cultures in order to live more harmoniously with others in the global community.