

高

等院校英语专业教材

# 中西文化比较研究

*A Comparative Study  
of Western and  
Chinese Cultures*



张从益 等编著

湖南人民出版社

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## 图书在版编目(CIP)数据

中西文化比较研究(A Comparative Study of Western and Chinese Cultures)/张从益 等编著 —长沙:湖南人民出版社,2004.5(2007.8)

ISBN 978-7-5438-3663-1

I. 中... II. 张... III. 中西文化比较 IV. G04

中国版本图书馆 CIP 数据核字(2004)第 046733 号

丛书策划:熊治祁

责任编辑:伊文思

装帧设计:卜艳冰

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湖南人民出版社出版、发行

网址:<http://www.hnppp.com>

(长沙市营盘东路3号 邮编:410005)

营销部电话:0731-2226732

湖南省新华书店经销 长沙富洲印刷厂印刷

2004年5月第1版 2007年8月第2次印刷

开本:850×1168 1/32 印张:12.5

字数:270000 印数:5001-8000

ISBN 978-7-5438-3663-1

定价:22.00 元

## Foreword

Human history and culture are created by nations. A nation's culture, at the very inception of its appearance, is a part of the world's cultural wealth. It serves as a bridge for the exchange of wisdom and experience and the promotion of friendship. Just as Prime Minister Constantine Caramanlis of Greece points out: "The civilization of China brought light to the Far East and to the whole of Asia, as Greece thought, the cornerstone of European civilization, brought light to the West. These two civilizations, which were born in different geographical areas, developed in a parallel way without inter-influence. However, the ideas of Confucius and of Socrates, though they never met in history, coincide in essence." With the support of our colleagues and partners, we have compiled and written this book. We are very glad to have the opportunity to perform our duty in erecting this bridge of friendship.

Our aim is to enable readers to gain a general idea of Western and Chinese arts and cultures in their various aspects as well as a better understanding of the history, development, present state, character, style and distinctive features of each cultural form.

Therefore this selection and treatment of Western and Chinese cultures gives attention longitudinally to its historical development and latitudinally to the variety and representativity of the cultural forms: an attempt to get a whole view of the leopard from one of its spots. Therefore, the content elucidated in the chapters as a reflection of the cultures of the Western and Chinese nations is organic, when taken as a whole, but possesses distinctive features when dealt with separately.

To fulfill the readers' desire to understand Western and Chinese cultures, each chapter of this book gives a brief but clear account of the history and present state of a certain form of culture and the development of the traditional arts. It devotes the bulk of its space to introducing the specific features of every branch of culture, so as to provide readers with a suitable means of understanding and appreciating Western and Chinese civilizations.

In introducing each form of Western and Chinese cultures and arts, our main attention should be devoted not to an academic discussion but to the exploration of the origin, character, style and particularities of that form, to ensure its value and to appreciate it. Therefore, the basic principle guiding the editing of this book is to explain the profound in simple terms, to make things easy to understand, to be brief and to the point. Thus, introducing Western and Chinese cultures and the traditional arts and tracing the history of their formation, we have tried our best to make them accessible and we have generally avoided using the names of cultural relics, engraved inscriptions, books and records and anec-

dotes, unless they cannot be dispensed with.

We have striven to make the book vivid and rich in its chapters. If this publication on Western and Chinese cultures can serve as a bridge, by means of which our readers can understand Western and Chinese arts and cultures, it is now ready for crossing. If you enjoy the leisurely stroll across this friendship bridge and thereby gain a keen interest in Western and Chinese cultures, it will be a tremendous inspiration to our work.

Here we would like to convey our thanks to the editors of *A Comparative Study of Western and Chinese Cultures* for their earnest help and energetic support in our work. We would also like to avail ourselves of this opportunity to express our thanks to all experts, professors, scholars and translators for their contributions and efforts in erecting this friendship bridge.

Zhang Congyi

April 28, 2004

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## ***Part I***

### **A Probe into Theoretical Problems**

#### **General Introduction**

It has often been said that the vast difference now existing between Western civilizations and the civilizations of the East is a new thing, dating back only to the seventeenth century. Before 1600, before the rise of the new science and the Industrial Revolution, it has been pointed out, there was no real difference between the East and the West. In certain aspects, it may even be said that the East, in particular the East as represented by the civilization of China, was superior to the West. Some Western scholars often say:

China had mastered certain fundamental arts of life at a time when the West was still ignorant of them. Like her peasants, who ploughed with iron when Europe used wood, and continued to use it when Europe used steel, she carried one type of economic system and social organization to a high level of achievement, and was not conscious of the need to improve or supersede it. The phenomenon

which disturbed the balance was the rise of the great industry, first in England, and then, a generation later, on the continent of Europe and in the United States.

Professor Hu (Hushi) made practically the same remark a few years ago when he said:

The difference between the Eastern and Western civilizations is primarily a difference in the tools used. The West has during the last two hundred years moved far ahead of the East merely because certain Western nations have been able to devise new tools for the conquest of nature and for the multiplication of the power to do work. The East, whence have come a number of the epoch-making tools of ancient civilization, has failed to carry on that great tradition and is left behind in the stage of manual labor while the Western world has long entered the age of steam and electricity.

Therefore, we should not fail to note that cultural peculiarities are no less important than cultural universals in cultural exchange, and that the third culture is an important concept in cross-cultural management nowadays. Then what is the third culture ?

Third cultures can be created as a function of the in-depth interaction between partners. The creation of the third culture is

particularly important for businesses that seek to create a partnership with foreign business (Trompenaars, 1993). In cross-culture partnership building, it is not that one culture dominates over the other one. Instead, parties from both cultures need to work together to create a third culture which transcends the originals and works for both cultures. It is not a simple compromise, but a new way of thinking about and doing things which are compatible with each of the original cultures and works effectively with the technology of the organization. Thus, some scholars pointed out that meaningful and effective third cultures can be constructed only when the transculturals are in the partners stage.

## Chapter 1 Culture and Culturology

Human history and culture are created by nations. A nation's culture, at the very inception of its appearance, is a part of the world's cultural wealth. It serves as a bridge for the exchange of wisdom and experience and the promotion of friendship.

### 1. Culture

#### (1) Concepts of Culture

Culture—an ancient yet young term. Culture is something that originated with the emergence of man. One cannot trace the historical origin of man's culture without galloping his mind to the

remote past.

The origin of Western culture—according to textual criticism in philology, the English word “culture” came from the Latin word “cultura”, whose earliest basic meaning was “cultivation, planting, ~~erap~~”. That was how ancient Romans understood culture. It may be said to be a definition of culture which emphasized man’s biological attribute. The Greek words “ $\nu\delta\lambda\varsigma$ ” and “ $\nu\theta\mu\omicron\varsigma$ ” are now translated by “nature” and “customs”, referring to heaven, earth and nature on the one hand, and social customs and habits on the other. This fact shows that ancient Greeks understood culture differently from ancient Romans, that is, the former had a vague consciousness of culture as an integration of matter and mind. Later, Cicero (106 BC ~ 43 BC), who inherited this spirit of ancient Greek culture, came up with the term “culture mentis” (mental cultivation), thus developing the spiritual aspect of the Greeks’ concept of culture.

The origin of Chinese culture—according to textual criticism in philology, the character “文” was written as “ $\text{𠄎}$ ”, “ $\text{𠄎}$ ”, etc. in bone-and-tortoise-shell inscriptions and bronze inscriptions, whose basic structure was the interception of four lines. So the original meaning of “文” was “crisscross”, implying that longitude, latitude, heaven, earth and nature crossed each other. So the idea of “文” in ancient China, like that of culture in ancient Greece, encompassed the two aspects of the natural world and man’s cognition of it. The character “化” combines the meanings of “人” and “匕”, the former meaning “person”, and the latter

meaning "turning round to follow another person". *The Book of Change* says in the explanation of the *Diagram of Prosperity*, "One observes humanity to cultivate all under heaven by changing them." Liu Xiang, who lived in the West Han Dynasty says in the chapter *On Armed Forces in His Collection of Essays*, "Armed forces are used to suppress rebels. But only if they refuse to be changed by civil cultivation can they be put to death." After it assumed dominance in China, Confucianism upheld an outlook on culture that emphasized righteousness at the expense of profit. Righteousness is a term in law and discipline rites, which has to do with the mind, but profit is a term in economy, which is related to matter. It is the suppression of the tendency to integrate matter and mind that emerged at the beginning stage of the concept of culture and the banishment of matter from the category of culture that is at the root of a narrow understanding of culture by our countrymen up till now. There are, according to statistics in *Encyclopedia Britannica*, as many as 160 definitions of culture in regular publications the world over, which vary so much that no agreement can be reached among them. But the most authoritative of them is the one advanced in *Primitive Culture* published in 1871 by the outstanding anthropologist Edward Burnett Tylor (1832 ~ 1917): "Culture, or civilization, is the complex whole that consists of knowledge, beliefs, art, morals, law, customs and other abilities and habits that man acquires as a member of society." Tylor's definition of culture, however, seems to stress spiritual culture to the exclusion of material culture. So some

scholars from Japan , Britain and Russia put forward the view that culture is the sum total of the spiritual and material wealth of human society. Similarly, a Chinese scholar says, "Culture is a phenomenon peculiar to human society, a system that contains people's modes of action and the material and spiritual products created by man's action." The definition of culture prevalent in US universities is that by David Pope, who maintains that culture consists of three chief elements: "a. symbols, meanings and values—the means by which to interpret reality and standards by which to judge what is good and bad and what is right and wrong; b. norms and rules—interpretations of how people in a specific society should think, feel and act; c. material culture—natural and man-made objects, which reflect non-material cultural meanings. Now we are in a position to summarize the concept of culture: culture can be defined broadly or narrowly. Broad culture includes material culture (man's action upon nature), institutional and customary culture (man's action upon society) and spiritual culture (man's action upon himself). And narrow culture refers specially to spiritual culture.

## **(2) Characteristics of Culture**

It is important, before we begin our examination of the characteristics of culture, to remind you that within each culture there are numerous co-cultures and specialized cultures. Later in this chapter, we define some of these, but for now we need to clarify what our reference is when we use the term culture. When we refer to culture, we are applying the term to the dominant culture

found in each society. Although many discussions of culture use the terms umbrella culture or mainstream culture, we prefer the designate dominant, which clearly indicates that the culture we are talking about is the one in power.

The people in power are those who historically have controlled, and who will control, the major institutions within the culture: church, government, education, military, mass media, monetary systems, and the like.

In sum, regardless of how many definitions we could have examined, there would have been a great deal of agreement concerning the seven major characteristics of culture.

- a. Culture is learned.
- b. Culture is transmitted from generation to generation
- c. Culture is based on symbols.
- d. Culture is subject to change.
- e. Culture is integrated.
- f. Culture is ethnocentric.
- g. Culture is adaptive.

Examining these characteristics will help you become a better communicator for two reasons. First, as we move through these characteristics, the strong connection between culture and communication will become apparent. Second, and perhaps more important, for some of you this might be the first time you have been exposed to culture, either your own or someone else's. Remember, most of culture is in the taken-for-granted realm and below the conscious level. Learning about culture can therefore be a



stimulating awakening as you give meaning to your actions and the actions of others. Shapiro offered much the same “pep-talk” when he wrote: “The discovery of culture, the awareness that it shapes and moulds our behavior, our values and even our ideas, the recognition that it contains some element of the arbitrary, can be a startling or an illuminating experience.”

### (3) Basic Functions of Culture

We are not born knowing what clothes to wear, what games to play, what foods to eat, which gods to worship, or how to spend our money or our leisure time. It is culture that teaches us all.

Culture makes the world a less perplexing place: a. It serves the basic need of laying out a predictable world in which each of us is firmly grounded ; b. It shields people from the unknown by offering them a blueprint for all of life’s activities.

Culture has now evolved to the point where they are people’s primary means of satisfying three types of needs: a. basic needs (food, shelter, and physical protection); b. derived needs (organization of work, distribution of food, defense, social control); c. integrative needs (psychological security, social harmony, purpose in life).

We might even go so far as to agree on the idea that our primary mode of biological adaptation is culture, not anatomy.

### (4) Foundations of Culture

Culture is a complex matter, including knowledge, belief, art, morals, custom, and other capabilities acquired by people as