



A History of Western Civilization

西方文明史

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Preface

This book is intended as a reader for Chinese students of English as a foreign language, but also for all those literate in English with a keen interest in the history and culture of the West. China's opening up and the accelerating process of globalization have prompted the demand for English literacy among Chinese. The literacy not only means the mastery of English grammar and vocabulary but the comprehensive understanding of English culture. As the most important cultural deposit, history can provide the key insight to the culture. Of course, Chinese readers can read the history in Chinese, but English version has undisputable benefits of learning and improving English while they are tracing the development of Western civilization, without possible distortion and misreading caused by translation.

When I was a student of history, I firmly believed that history is the basis of all social sciences and the best way to understand something is to read its history. The same belief underlies this book. History, or more exactly, reading history, expands our perspectives and experience prior to our life time. Histories of other nations or cultures do the same across national boundaries. Though commercialism and utilitarianism permeates today's world and anything but practical knowledge often only gets negligence, historical understanding is still the basis of other kinds of social and cultural knowledge, including that of language. What's more, if we could read the history of certain culture in its own language, we could add another advantage: understanding the language with its cultural contents. For this purpose special attention has been paid to language used in this book so that the reader would also have a good lingual treat throughout the unfolding historical gala. The natural way is often the best way to learn a language, that is, to acquire it unconsciously through its using. I hope the book will serve this purpose.

Western civilization is a vaguely defined concept and is here mainly used as a subject for Chinese students to get a general view of the history of the West that now sets the trend of the global development. Almost every major culture or civilization, including Chinese, contributed to the emergence of what we called *Western civilization*.

Therefore, relative ignorance of these contributions in this book is only meant for a more concentrated attendance to the basic facts and ideas that are crucial for the reader to catch the cultural gist of Western countries. Due to the limited space of this book, it is very difficult to discriminate among myriads of historical facts and data to be included in this volume. Those that may most possibly assist Chinese learners' comprehension of Western culture have the priority for their presence. Some others have to be omitted. Though controversies as to the choices of data are unavoidable, I, as the chief editor, have made great effort to suppress problematic issues as many as possible. Problems may be still there and therefore readers' criticism and comments are sincerely appreciated on any part of the book, in any respect.

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邓红风，男，1953年9月出生，1982年获历史学硕士学位。1982年至1994年任山东大学历史系助教、讲师、副教授，1995年至今任中国海洋大学外国语学院副教授、教授。1986年至1987年在美国哈佛大学历史系做富布莱特访问学者，从事美国文化史研究。2000年至2001年在加拿大皇后大学哲学系做访问学者，从事多元文化理论研究。主要研究领域为文化史、汉英语言文化对比、翻译。主要论文有《美国殖民地时代的社会组织结构》、《英属北美殖民地的契约奴役制度》、《法国革命中的大众传播》、《历史科学与自然科学》、《大众文化的崛起与20世纪西方文学》、《试论翻译的本质问题》、《翻译单位的两种涵义》等；主要参编著作有《西方文化词典》、《世界史》、《美国十大总统》、《语言多学科研究与应用》等；主要译著有《杰斐逊集》、《老庄名言》、《少数的权利》等。

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CHAPTER 1

THE FIRST CIVILIZATIONS

- *What Is Civilization*
 - *Prehistory of Civilization*
 - *Oriental Origins*
 - *Egypt: The Gift of the Nile*
 - *The Fertile Crescent*
 - *Nineveh and Babylon*
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What Is Civilization

In vernacular English, as in daily Chinese, civilized often means highly cultured, and therefore civilization often is identified with *culture*. However, the layman's explanations of these terms do not clarify but often hamper our understanding of the subject we are going to discuss in this book. Most scholars accept the view that a civilization is "a culture which has attained a degree of complexity usually characterized by urban life". The word civilization comes from Latin *civis*, meaning a citizen or resident of city. *Webster's Third New International Dictionary* gives us a definition of civilization: "an ideal state of human culture characterized by complete absence of barbarism and nonrational behavior, optimum utilization of physical, cultural, spiritual, and human resources, and perfect adjustment of the individual within the social framework."

The term civilization is similar to and often interchangeable with culture, but the former refers mostly to cultures that have complex economic, governmental, and social systems. That is, a civilization is technologically more advanced than other cultures of its time, whereas a culture, as a body of learned behaviors common to a given human society, acts rather like a template (i.e. it has predictable form and content), shaping behavior and consciousness within a human society from generation to generation. So culture resides in all learned behavior and in some shaping template or consciousness prior to behavior as well (that is, a "cultural template" can be in place prior to the birth of an individual person). So culture is any way of life, be it simple or complex, advanced or not advanced. A culture can endure only if the knowledge necessary for its survival is passed on from generation to generation. Early peoples relied on information transmitted by word of mouth. But as cultures became increasingly complex, methods for keeping records were needed and systems of writing were created. The development of writing is a prerequisite for civilization. Therefore, the first civilizations were those highly organized societies in which the only efficient way of communication between individuals and groups across larger space and time was writing. In this sense, the four earliest civilizations were

Mesopotamian, Egyptian, Indian and Chinese.

As defined in the last paragraph, civilization is only relative. Except for Chinese civilization, the earliest civilizations were all discontinued or interrupted at some point. Philosophers, historians, and archaeologists have suggested many reasons for the rise and fall of civilizations. The British historian Arnold Toynbee proposed his theory of challenge and response in *A Study of History* (1934-1961). Toynbee believed that civilizations arise only where the environment challenges the people, and only when the people are ready to respond to the challenge. For example, a hot, dry climate makes land unsuitable for farming and represents a challenge to people who live there. The people may respond to this challenge by building irrigation systems to improve the land. This hypothesis could find support in the first civilizations, such as Mesopotamia, Egypt, and China, where the natural environments are not as conducive as many other places such as Western Europe to agriculture and the way of life it engendered. But when human ability to adapt to the environment increases, other challenges may take the place of those natural ones to create new civilizations.

It is important for those in Chinese civilization to know the history of other civilizations because when the developments of various civilizations are compared with one another, it is found that the problems that arise in the course of one civilization, and the solutions devised to solve those problems, tend to be similar to those that appear at paralleled points in the course of other civilizations. A civilization can keep its sustained development only if it can absorb fresh inputs from other civilizations or cultures.

By Western civilization we mean the civilization that has consummated in the most industrially advanced regions in the world today, mostly in Europe and North America. Nevertheless, it is not a geographically defined concept. Western civilization belongs to no particular place, and the origin of Western civilization was oriental rather than occidental. The civilization that later spread to and left its legacy for the West appeared first outside the "West," in Mesopotamia at the Tigris and Euphrates river basins in present-day Iraq and Iran, a region that westerners today call the Middle East. At every stage of its growth, Western civilization drew heavily on heritages of oriental civilizations in Egypt, Asia Minor, the Middle East, Indus, and China.

Western technology, economic and political organization, and art exert dominant influences on nearly all aspects of our life in our own country in the East and in most parts of the world. Many of today's most pressing problems are also part of the legacy of the Western tradition. The remnants of European colonialism have left deep hostilities throughout the world. The integration of developing nations into the world economy keeps much of humanity in a seemingly hopeless cycle of poverty as the wealth of poor countries goes to pay interest on loans from Europe and America. Western material goods lure millions of people from their traditional world into increasingly westernized cities. The West itself faces a crisis. Impoverished citizens of former colonies flock to Europe and North America seeking a better life but often find poverty, hostility, and racism instead. Finally, the advances of Western civilization

endanger our very existence. Technology pollutes the world's air, water, and soil, and nuclear weapons threaten the destruction of all civilizations. Yet these are the same advances that allow us to lengthen life expectancy, harness the forces of nature, and conquer disease.

The history of Western civilization is not simply the triumphal story of progress and the creation of a better world. Even in areas in which we can see development, such as technology, communications, and social complexity, change is not always for the better. However, it would be equally inaccurate to view Western civilization as a progressive decline from a mythical golden age of the human race. The 300 or so generations since the origins of civilization have bequeathed a rich and contradictory legacy to the present. Inherited political and social institutions, cultural forms, and religious and philosophical traditions form the framework within which the future must be created. The past does not determine the future, but it is the raw material from which the future will be made. To use this legacy properly, we must first understand it.

Prehistory of Civilization

The human species was well established by the time civilization first appeared around 3,500 years before the Common Era. The first humanlike creatures whose remains have been discovered date from five million years ago. One of the best-known finds, nicknamed "Lucy" by the scientist who discovered her skeleton in 1974, stood only about four feet tall and lived on the edge of a lake in what is now Ethiopia. Lucy and her band did not have brains as well developed as those of modern humans. They did, however, use simple tools such as sticks, bone clubs, and chipped rocks. Although small and relatively weak compared with other animals, Lucy's species of creatures—neither apes nor fully human—survived for over four million years. Other important human characteristics, such as a large and complex brain, the ability to make and use more complex tools, and the capacity for language, developed more recently.

The process of human evolution was undoubtedly very slow, but by 100,000 years ago scattered hunting packs of biologically modern man roamed the savannas of Africa and perhaps also inhabited mild climes in the Eurasian landmass as well. The earliest *Homo sapiens* in Europe, the Neanderthal, differed little from humans today. They were roughly the same size and had the same cranial capacity, and spread throughout much of Africa, Europe, and Asia during the last great ice age. To survive in the harsh tundra landscape, Neanderthals developed a cultural system that enabled them to modify their environment. Customs such as the burial of their dead with food offerings indicate that Neanderthals may have developed a belief in an afterlife.

Some scientists suggest that the Neanderthals who lived in areas ranging from Western Europe through central Asia were replaced by our subspecies, *Homo sapiens sapiens* ("thinking thinking human") because our ancestors had a more flexible language ability. Whatever the reason and whatever the process of extinction, evolution, or extermination—this last arrival on the human scene was hugely successful. All humans today, whether blond, blue-eyed Scandinavians, Australian aborigines,

Africans, Chinese, or Amerindians—belong to this same species. Differences in skin colour, hair type, and build are minor variations on the same theme. The identification of races, while selectively based on some of these physical variations, is, like civilization itself, a fact not of biology but of culture, the sum total of knowledge and skills inherited from their proto-human ancestors. The use of wood and stone tools, for example, seems to have started before fully human populations had come into existence. Elementary language, and habits of cooperation in the hunt, were also proto-human in their origin. So, perhaps, was the use of fire. A longer infancy and childhood was the main distinction between fully human populations and the man-like creatures who flourished before them. This longer childhood meant a longer time during which the young depended on parents, and a correspondingly longer time for the elders to teach their offspring. From the child's side, slower maturation meant prolonged plasticity and a much increased capacity to learn. Enlarged learning capacities, in turn, increased the frequency of intentional preservation of inventions and discoveries.

When this occurred cultural evolution began to outstrip the slow pace of biological evolution. Human behavior came to be governed far more by what man learned in society than by anything individuals inherited biologically. When cultural evolution took over primacy, history in the strict sense began.

Before the first civilizations emerged, humans lived in a period characterized by the use of stone as the principal raw material for tools. The period is called the Stone Age. Archaeologists have divided the Stone Age into different stages, each characterized by different types of tools or tool-manufacturing techniques. The most widely used designations for the successive stages are Paleolithic (Old Stone Age), Mesolithic (Middle Stone Age), and Neolithic (New Stone Age).

■ First Arts

During the upper or late Paleolithic era about 11,000 to 32,000 years ago, culture was increasingly determinant in human life. Paleolithic people were able to develop speech, religion, and artistic expression. The artistic expression included two main categories: portable pieces, such as small figurines and decorated objects carved out of bone, antler, or stone, and cave art. Wall paintings, small clay and stone figurines of female figures emphasizing their reproductive role (which may reflect concerns about fertility), and finely decorated stone and bone tools indicate not just artistic ability but also abstract and symbolic thought.

The end of the Glacial Era marked the beginning of the Mesolithic, or Middle Stone Age (ca. 10000-8000 B.C.E.). This period occurred at different times in different places as the climate grew milder, vast expanses of glaciers melted, and sea levels rose. Mesolithic peoples began the gradual domestication of plants and animals and sometimes formed settled communities. They developed the bow and arrow and pottery, and they made use of small flints and fishhooks.

An amazing continuous record of the civilizing of the West is found in the arid wastes of Africa's Sahara Desert. At the end of the last Ice Age, much of North Africa

enjoyed a mild, damp climate and supported a diverse population of animals and humans. At Tassili-n-Ajjer in modern Algeria, succeeding generations of inhabitants left over 4,000 paintings on cliff and cave walls that date from about 6000 B.C.E. Like a pictorial time line, these paintings show the gradual transformations of human culture.

The earliest cave paintings were produced by people who, like the inhabitants of Europe and the Near East, lived by hunting game and gathering edible plants, nuts, and fruit. Through this long period, humans perfected the making of stone tools; learned to work bone, antler, and ivory into weapons and utensils; and organized an increasingly complex society.

By 10000 B.C.E., humans had spread into virtually all habitable places on earth. In the northern hemisphere, the last of the continental glaciers retreated between the years 10000 and 8000 B.C.E. Where the glaciers retreated, agriculture began to replace hunting culture. In an area called the Fertile Crescent, hunter-gatherers camped alongside fields of wild wheat or barley, and cereals. Here was also game, such as gazelles. Soon they were planting gardens to supplement their hunting. Rather than constantly traveling in search of food, people living near the Mediterranean coast stayed put and exploited the various seasonal sources of food, fish, wild grains, fruits, and game. In communities such as Jericho, people built and rebuilt their mud brick and stone huts over generations rather than moving on as their ancestors had. By 7000 B.C.E., the planting of seeds such as the wild forms of wheat and barley had become a major source of food. People began farming and raising animals, and their farms anchored them to one place.

No one really knows why settlement led to agriculture. Some scholars speculate that the push to take nature in hand came from population growth and the development of a political hierarchy that reduced the natural breaking away of groups when clans or tribes became too large for the natural resources of an area to support. In any case, in settled communities, infant mortality decreased and life expectancy rose. In part, these changes occurred because life in a fixed location was less exhausting than constant wandering for the very young and the very old.

■ Social Organization, Agriculture, and Religion

As population growth put pressure on the local food supply, gathering activities demanded more formal coordination and organization and led to the development of political leadership. This leadership and the perception of safety in numbers may have prevented people from breaking away to form other similar communities in the next valley, as had happened when population growth pressured earlier groups. In any case, people no longer simply looked for favoured species of plants and animals where they occurred naturally. Now they introduced these species into other locations and favoured them at the expense of plant and animal species that were not deemed useful. Agriculture had begun.

The ability to domesticate goats, sheep, pigs, and cattle and to cultivate barley, wheat, and vegetables changed human communities from passive harvesters of nature

to active partners with it.

The revolutionary aspect of agriculture was not that it ensured settled communities a food supply. The true innovation was that agriculture was portable. For the first time, rather than looking for a place that provided them with the necessities of life, humans could carry with them what they needed to make a site inhabitable. This portability also meant the rapid spread of agriculture throughout the region.

Oriental Origins

■ Mesopotamia

Around 6000 B.C.E., after the agricultural revolution had begun to spread from its place of origin on the northern fringes of the Fertile Crescent, the domestication of animals and people permanently settled in present-day Iraq. Although this broad plain received insufficient regular rainfall to support agriculture, the eastern section was watered by the Tigris and Euphrates Rivers. Known in the ancient days as Mesopotamia (Greek for “between the rivers”). Mesopotamia has been called the “cradle of civilization” because agriculture, animal herding and domestication developed there earlier than anywhere else, almost 8,000 years ago. The lower reaches of this plain, beginning near the point where the two rivers nearly converge, was called Babylonia. Babylonia in turn encompassed two geographical areas—Akkad in the north and Sumer, the delta of this river system, in the south.

Sumer had splendid agricultural potential if the environmental problems could be solved. The twin rivers provide life-giving water but also bring destructive floods that normally arrive at harvest time. Therefore agriculture is impossible without irrigation. But irrigation systems, if not properly maintained, deposit harsh alkaline chemicals on the soil, gradually reducing its fertility. In addition, Mesopotamia’s only natural resource is clay. It has no metals, no workable stone, and no valuable minerals of use to ancient people. These very obstacles pressed the people to cooperative, innovative, and organized measures for survival. Survival in the region required planning and the mobilization of labour power, which was possible only through centralization.

After around 3500 B.C.E., with the arrival of the first Neolithic farmers, the population began to increase rapidly. The inhabitants of the lower Tigris and Euphrates first lived in scattered villages and small towns. Then small settlements became increasingly common. By cooperative effort the environmental problems were solved and agricultural production increased rapidly. The plow was invented and in time domesticated cattle were harnessed to drag the plow in place of the farmer. Yoked, harnessed oxen pulled plows in the Mesopotamian alluvium by 3000 B.C.E. By harnessing the ox man began to control and use a motive power other than that furnished by his own muscular energy. More and more agricultural surplus mean that more and more could be specialized in non-agricultural areas. By about 3100 B.C.E., metal workers discovered that copper was improved by the addition of tin. Thus the advent of civilization is associated with the beginning of the Bronze Age in the West. Non-agricultural population now lived in large urban centers such as Eridu, Uruk and