西方文明史概述

A Survey of Western Civilization

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中国电力出版社
www.centuryoriental.com.cn

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序 言

思辨能力差恐怕是外语学习者的通病。这种问题的根源在于，在外语学习的初级阶段，人们把语言仅仅看作是由语言、语法、词汇所组成的一种符号系统。因此，初学者往往比较注重语言的形式，却不太重视语言的内容。解决这一问题的关键在于，外语学习者在掌握基本的语言技能之后，应涉猎各领域的知识，开拓视野，拓展思维空间，尤其应该学习一些与语言息息相关的文化知识，因为语言既是文化的载体，又是文化的一部分。外国文化的学习应该是外语学习中的一个重要环节。不涉及外国文化的外语学习是不完全、不深入的学习。

《西方文明史概述》一书旨在介绍隐藏在英语语言背后的西方文化背景知识，广泛涉及西方文明的各个层面，如历史事件、哲学思想、文学艺术等等。此书集语言知识与文化知识于一体，可以帮助广大英语爱好者在提高阅读能力的同时，加深对西方文化的了解，提高思辨能力、文化修养和审美能力。对于专业英语学习者来说，这本书将为进一步学习英美文学，进行中西文学及文化对比打下坚实的基础。

西方文明史内容庞杂，一本书不可能面面俱到，因此在材料的安排上，以"突出重点、简明扼要"为原则。全部内容围绕以下 11 个课题展开：

1. 希腊文化
2. 罗马文化
3. 古希腊、罗马神话
4. 基督教
5. 拜占庭帝国与伊斯兰帝国
6. 中世纪
7. 文艺复兴与宗教改革
8. 巴洛克时期
9. 启蒙运动与革命
10. 浪漫主义与现实主义
11. 现代主义

学习西方文化，并非意味着要放弃本民族的文化。相反，在学习过程中我们应该去主动地进行思考和对比，从而加深对本民族文化的理解，使自己成为沟通中西文化的使者。

在本书的创意、编辑、出版的过程中，得到了许多领导和老师的鼓励和支持，在此深表谢意。更要感谢来自美国 Florida A&M University 的专家张丽萍博士，为本书的编写所提供的宝贵意见及参考资料。由于本书作者的水平有限，可能书中有一些偏颇谬误之处，敬请读者指正。

编 者
于大连外国语学院

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Unit One Greece

古希腊的地理范围，除了现在的希腊半岛外，还包括整个爱琴海区域和北面的马其顿和色雷斯、意大利半岛和小亚细亚等地。公元前5、6世纪，特别是希波战争以后，经济生活高度繁荣，产生了光辉灿烂的希腊文化，对后世有深远的影响。古希腊人在文学、戏剧、雕塑、哲学等诸多方面有很深的造诣。

在世界文明史上，古希腊文明以其特异的风采与卓越的成就享誉后世，以至有"言必称希腊"之说。的确，它的文化创造达到了人类文明的第一个高峰。古希腊人是一个在继承基础上有着卓越创造的民族，他们的创造性源于他们的好学精神、天生的好奇心、刨根究底的追问与开放的民族性格，促使他们百般寻求知识。他们喜好思想自由，笃信人本主义，重视人和人的自身价值。正是这些优秀的品质使得古希腊人创造了光灿夺目的文明。

General Introduction

Greece is located at the southeast of Europe and it has borders with Turkey at the east, Bulgaria, Fyrom and Albania at the north, and with Italy at the west. Athens, a city with more than 3.5 million residents, is the capital of Greece. It is a country with great natural beauty as well as a long and glorious history.

With the first signs of human activity over its territory dating back to the prehistory, Greece became the center for many civilizations, firstly the Cycladic during the prehistoric times, then the Minoan, the Mycenean and lastly the Ancient Greek great civilization whose monuments are spread all over Greece and millions of foreign visitors come every year to see them. The Ancient Greeks put the foundations for almost all sciences like medicine, physics, mathematics and philosophy. The Ancient Greek civilization was at its peak in the 5th century BC and continued later until the 1st century BC when Greece was conquered by the Romans.

After the Roman conquest, Greece lost its power and glory, but the Greek spirit and civilization influenced the Romans who imitated it and this was the start to the Greek-Roman civilization which became the base for the whole European culture and civilization.

The Trojan War

The Trojan War is the main issue of the *Iliad* by Homer, and its later sequence is described in the *Aeneid* by Virgil.

The war took place between Achaeans and Trojans, and raged for ten years.

As a consequence of the Judgement of Paris, Helen (wife of the Spartan king Menelaus) was abducted by Paris (son of king Priam of Troy).

Through most of the war, because of Achilles' withdrawal, Agamemnon (king of the Achaeans and brother of Menelaus) was unable to penetrate the fortified city of Troy. On the tenth year, Achilles joined the Achaian's army and killed Hector, the Trojan prince.

After the death of Achilles, the Achaeans built a wooden horse, filled it with warriors and brought it into the city. Once the city was captured, it was destroyed by the Achaeans.

The Trojan king Priam and most of his family were killed, Cassandra, his daughter, was raped and taken as slave to Greece, and Helen, whose abduction had started the war, returned to Menelaus.

The Persian War

In 499 BC the Greek cities of Ionia rebelled against Persian rule. The Persian king, Darius, crushed the revolt and sacked Miletus. Darius invaded Greece to punish Athens for the support of the failed revolt in Ionia. A first Persian invasion failed when the Persian fleet was destroyed in a storm off Mount Athos. A second expedition was decisively beaten by the Athenians and their allies on land at the Battle of Marathon in 490 BC.

Xerxes, Darius' son and successor, launched a third expedition on a massive scale on land and sea. To avoid the risk of losing the fleet in a storm, Xerxes ordered a canal to be dug through the Athos peninsula, a notoriously stormy area. As the army advanced along the Thracian coast, Persian diplomats attempted to persuade the Greeks to submit. Many cities and the Greek oracle at Delphi decided to accept Persian terms, but some twenty cities, under the leadership of Sparta, refused to yield.

On August, 480 BC, 300 Spartans and 5600 other warriors died at Thermoplylae in a vain attempt to stop the Persian advance. Then, as Xerxes' army marched south, the Athenians were compelled to evacuate the city, which was burned by the Persians.

Yet the Persians had difficulty in supplying their army and Xerxes decided to attack the Greek fleet, which had taken refuge in the Strait of Salamis near Athens. In the narrow Strait, the superior Persian fleet became disorganised and the Greeks, by skillful maneuvering, were able to win a decisive victory. Xerxes ordered an immediate retreat to prevent his army from being trapped.

A token army was left in Greece but this force was destroyed the following year at the Battle of Plataea. After this defeat the Persians abandoned their expansionist aims and the independence of Greek civilization was secured.

The Romans Conquered Greece

The first contact of Rome with the Greeks took place in the area of southern Italy. The Greek cities underestimated the Roman power and their first attempt to stop them from expanding to the south ended in the glorious fiasco of Pyrrus. By 270 BC the Romans had occupied — without any real difficulty — all of the southern Italian peninsula. This unfortunate — for the Greeks — turn of events did not make the rest of them realize the Roman danger, as the west was organized into a unified political system under the Romans. The Romans' first move to the west was invited by those Greek cities that were suffering under the Illyrian occupation. In 225 BC, the Romans declared war against the Illyrians and they became the new occupying force of the region. Egypt, Syria and the Greeks "south of Olympus", saw this event as the only chance for the destruction of the Macedonian kingdom.

Plato's Cave Theory

Plato realizes that the general run of humankind can think, and speak, etc., without (so far as they acknowledge) any awareness of his realm of Forms.

The allegory of the cave is supposed to explain this. In the allegory, Plato likens people untutored in the Theory of Forms to prisoners chained in a cave, unable to turn their heads. All they can see is the wall of the cave. Behind them burns a fire. Between the fire and the prisoners there is a parapet, along which puppeteers can walk. The puppeteers, who are behind the prisoners, hold up puppets that cast shadows on the wall of the cave. The prisoners are unable to see these puppets, the real objects that pass behind them. What the prisoners see and hear are shadows and echoes cast by objects that they do not see. Here is an illustration of Plato's Cave:

Such prisoners would mistake appearance for reality. They would think the things they see on the wall (the shadows) were real; they would know nothing of the real causes of the shadows. So when the prisoners talk, what are they talking about? If an object (a book, let us say) is carried past behind them, and it casts a shadow on the wall, and a prisoner says, "I see a book," what is he talking about?

He thinks he is talking about a book, but he is really talking about a shadow. But he uses the word "book".

Plato's Cave

the Fire
Roadway where puppet showmen perform
Shadows cast on this wall
Prisoners
ascent to Sunlight
diffused Sunlight
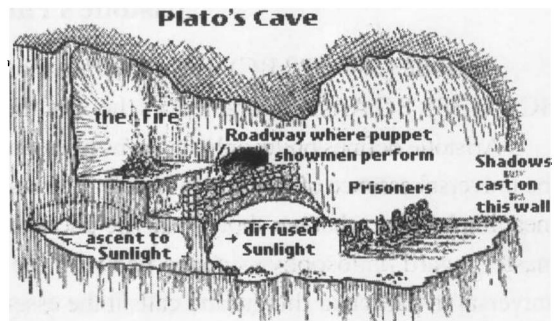
What does that refer to?

Here is Plato's answer:

"And if they could talk to one another, don't you think they'd suppose that the names they used applied to the things they see passing before them?"

Plato's point is that the prisoners would be mistaken. For they would be taking the terms in their language to refer to the shadows that pass before their eyes, rather than (as is correct, in Plato's view) to the real things that cast the shadows.

If a prisoner says, "That's a book", he thinks that the word "book" refers to the very thing he is looking at. But he would be wrong. He's only looking at a shadow. The real referent of the word "book" he cannot see. To see it, he would have to turn his head around.

Plato's point: the general terms of our language are not "names" of the physical objects that we can see. They are actually names of things that we cannot see, things that we can only grasp with the mind.

When the prisoners are released, they can turn their heads and see the real objects. Then they realize their error. What can we do that is analogous to turning our heads and seeing the causes of the shadows? We can come to grasp the Forms with our minds.

Plato's aim in *the Republic* is to describe what is necessary for us to achieve this reflective understanding. But even without it, it remains true that our very ability to think and to speak depends on the Forms. For the terms of the language we use get their meaning by "naming" the Forms that the objects we perceive participate in.

The prisoners may learn what a book is by their experience with shadows of books. But they would be mistaken if they thought that the word "book" refers to something that any of them has ever seen.

Likewise, we may acquire concepts by our perceptual experience of physical objects. But we would be mistaken if we thought that the concepts that we grasp were on the same level as the things we perceive.

Aristotle's Philosophy

Aristotle (384~322 BC) was a Greek philosopher who studied under Plato (367~347 BC). In 335 BC Aristotle opened a school in the Athens called The Lyceum.

Aristotle defines philosophy in terms of essence, saying that philosophy is "the science of the universal essence of that which is actual". Plato had defined it as the "science of the idea", meaning by idea what we should call the unconditional basis of phenomena. Both pupil and master regard philosophy as concerned with the universal; the former, however, finds the universal in particular things, and calls it the essence of things, while the latter finds that the

universal exists apart from particular things, and is related to them as their prototype or exemplar. For Aristotle, therefore, philosophic method implies the ascent from the study of particular phenomena to the knowledge of essences, while for Plato philosophic method means the descent from a knowledge of universal ideas to a contemplation of particular imitations of those ideas. In a certain sense, Aristotle's method is both inductive and deductive, while Plato's is essentially deductive. In other words, for Plato's tendency to idealize the world of reality in the light of intuition of a higher world, Aristotle substituted the scientific tendency to examine first the phenomena of the real world around us and thence to reason to a knowledge of the essences and laws which no intuition can reveal, but which science can prove to exist. In fact, Aristotle's notion of philosophy corresponds, generally speaking, to what was later understood to be science, as distinct from philosophy. In the larger sense of the word, he makes philosophy coextensive with science, or reasoning: "All science (*dianoia*) is either practical, poetical or theoretical." By *practical science* he understands ethics and politics; by *poetical*, he means the study of poetry and the other fine arts; while by *theoretical philosophy* he means physics, mathematics and metaphysics. The last, philosophy in the stricter sense, he defines as "the knowledge of immaterial being", and calls it "first philosophy", "the theologic science" or of "being in the highest degree of abstraction". If logic, or, as Aristotle calls it, Analytic, be regarded as a study preliminary to philosophy, we have as divisions of Aristotelian philosophy (1) Logic; (2) Theoretical Philosophy, including Metaphysics, Physics, Mathematics; (3) Practical Philosophy; and (4) Poetical Philosophy.

Epicureanism

This term has two distinct, though cognate, meanings. In its popular sense, the word stands for a refined and calculating selfishness, seeking not power or fame, but the pleasures of sense, particularly of the palate, and those in company rather than solitude. An epicure is one who is extremely choice and delicate in his viands. In the other sense, Epicureanism signifies a philosophical system, which includes a theory of conduct, of nature, and of mind.

Epicurus, from whom this system takes its name, was a Greek, born at Samos 341 BC, who, in 307 BC, founded a school at Athens, and died 270 BC.

Philosophy was described by Epicurus as "the art of making life happy", and he says that "prudence is the noblest part of philosophy". His natural philosophy and epistemology seem to have been adopted for the sake of his theory of life. It is, therefore, proper that his ethics should first be explained. The purpose of life, according to Epicurus, is personal happiness; and by happiness he means not that state of well-being and perfection of which the consciousness is accompanied by pleasure, but pleasure itself. Moreover, this pleasure

is sensuous, for it is such only as is attainable in this life. This pleasure is the immediate purpose of every action. "Habituate yourself", he says.

To think that death is nothing to us; for all good and evil is in feeling; now death is the privation of feeling. Hence, the right knowledge that death is nothing to us makes us enjoy what there is in this life, not adding to it an indefinite duration, but eradicating the desire of immortality.

The defects of this theory of life are obvious. In the first place, as to the matter of fact, experience shows that happiness is not best attained by directly seeking it. The selfish are not more happy, but less so, than the unselfish. In the next place the theory altogether destroys virtue as virtue, and eliminates the idea and sentiment expressed by the words "ought", "duty", "right" and "wrong". Virtue indeed tends to produce the truest and highest pleasure; all such pleasure, so far as it depends upon ourselves, depends upon virtue. But he who practises virtue for the sake of the pleasure alone is selfish, not virtuous, and he will never enjoy the pleasure, because he has not the virtue. A similar observation may be made upon the Epicurean theory of friendship. Friendship for the sake of advantage is not true friendship in the proper sense of the word. External actions, apart from affection, cannot constitute friendship; that affection no one can feel merely because he judges it would be advantageous and pleasurable; in fact he cannot know the pleasure until he first feels the affection. If we consider the Epicurean condemnation of patriotism and of the family life, we must pronounce a still severer censure. Such a view of life is the meanest form of selfishness leading in general to vice. Epicurus, perhaps, was better than his theory; but the theory itself, if it did not originate in coldness of heart and meanness of spirit, was extremely well suited to encourage them. If sincerely embraced and consistently carried out, it undermined all that was chivalrous and heroic, and even all that was ordinarily virtuous. Fortitude and justice, as such, ceased to be objects of admiration, and temperance sank into a mere matter of calculation. Even prudence itself, dissociated from all moral quality became a mere balancing between the pleasures of the present and of the future.

Homer and *Iliad*
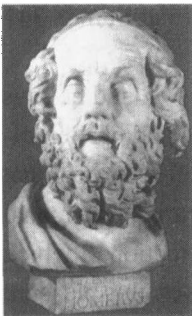
Homer

Apart from the historical writings of ancient Israel, the two major pieces of epic literature in Western civilization are the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey*, two books ascribed to the ancient Greek poet Homer.

These two works represent a brilliant retelling of myths and legends. For the Greeks of the 7th century BC, however, these books were their history.

About Homer nothing certain is known.

The later historian Herodotus (5th century BC) said that Homer was a Greek from Ionia on the west coast of Asia Minor. He was perhaps a native of the island of Chios and supposedly lived around 850 BC. Other historians place him closer to 750 BC.

Tradition depicts Homer as a blind minstrel wandering from place to place, reciting poems that had come down to him from a very old oral tradition. Many scholars believe that the books as they exist today were not written by a single person and were not put in writing until centuries after they took their present form.

It is probable that much of the epic tradition of the two books was formed in the 200 or 300 years before an alphabet reached Greece in the 9th or 8th century BC. If so, it is possible that Homer used earlier writings to help him, or he could have dictated his poems to someone else because of his blindness or because he was illiterate.

Iliad

The *Iliad* is a summary in verse of what was apparently a very long war conducted against Troy by the Greeks. As in much myth, there is a kernel of reality behind it. That there was such a war is quite likely.

The *Iliad* is an amazing tale of heroes and heroines, gods and goddesses. But most of all it is the story of Achilles, of his anger and determination, and of his slaying of the Trojan hero Hector.

The purpose of the war was to recover the most beautiful woman in the world, Helen. She was the wife of Menelaus, king of Sparta. But she had been carried off to Troy by Paris, son of King Priam of Troy. Menelaus, naturally, swore vengeance. He called upon the kings and princes of Greece to help him. Among those who responded were Achilles, Ajax, Diomedes, Odysseus and Nestor. Agamemnon, king of Mycenae and brother of Menelaus, was chosen commander in chief.

For more than nine years the Greeks besieged Troy unsuccessfully. Then Achilles quarreled with Agamemnon and refused to take further part in the conflict. It was the slaying of his friend Patroclus about two thirds of the way through the book that brought Achilles back to the action. He killed Hector in battle, but later he was himself killed — driving the Greeks to despair of ever winning.

It was then that the crafty Odysseus stepped forward with a stratagem. Aided by the goddess Athena, he planned the construction of a huge wooden horse with enough room to contain 100 warriors. Secretly the best warriors were hidden inside. Then the rest of the Greeks boarded ship as though to sail home in defeat. The Trojans thought the horse was a peace offering to Athena. One of the Trojan priests, Laocoön, warned against "Greeks, even bearing gifts". Cassandra, daughter of King Priam, also predicted disaster. She had