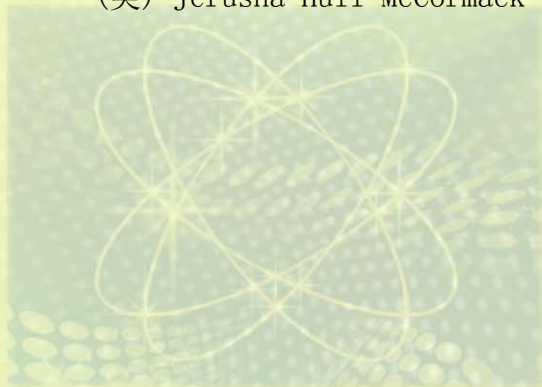


Western Civilization with Chinese Comparisons

西中文明比照

(美) John G. Blair

(美) Jerusha Hull McCormack 著



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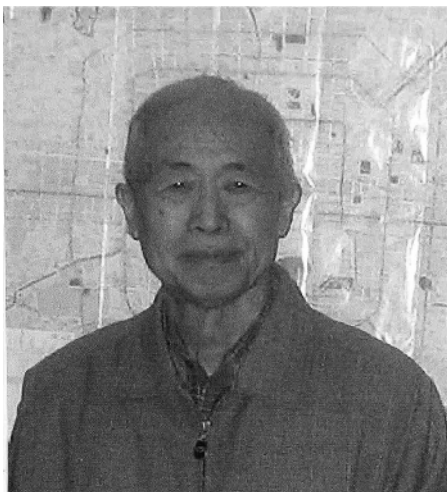
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Dedication to Prof. Ding Wangdao

distinguished teacher, scholar, translator and author
at Beijing Foreign Studies University

Zhuangzi “A path is made by people walking. ”



The origins of *Western Civilization with Chinese Comparisons* began with the revered teacher who introduced me to Chinese Civilization. In 1988, during my first experience of China, Prof. Ding permitted me to sit in on his course in English on classical Chinese texts. That extraordinary course was designed to help Chinese undergraduates of that generation to become better acquainted with their own heritage. To me as an ignorant outsider, these steps were the first on a path toward an appreciation of the deep-rooted Chinese tradition and the possibilities of mutual understanding between Western and Chinese minds.

John G. Blair

EPIGRAPHS

He who knows himself and others will also recognize that East and West cannot be separated.

Wolfgang Goethe (1749-1832)

Oh, East is East, and West is West, and never the twain shall meet,

Till Earth and Sky stand presently, at God's great Judgment Seat.

Rudyard Kipling (1865-1936)

The Greek: What is the Truth?

The Chinese: Where is the Way?

Angus Graham (1919-1991)

AUTHORS' PREFACE

There is a story behind the origins of *WCwCC*. In the autumn of 2001, when John G. Blair was serving as a Foreign Expert at Beijing Foreign Studies University, he learned that the materials being used to teach a course called *Western Civilization* were those adapted from an American textbook of some years before. He remarked to the Professor in charge that these materials did not take into account the fact that the students studying them were not Americans but Chinese. The retort was: Why don't you make us a course that will do just that? The result, several years and two trial versions later, the second now improved by Dr. Jerusha McCormack as co-author and editor, is the present *Western Civilization with Chinese Comparisons* [*WCwCC*].

Readers of *WCwCC* have often expressed a legitimate curiosity about the authors: their backgrounds and what let them to invest so much time and energy in this massive and unprecedented project. Here are some partial answers.

Both authors came to this project with similar experiences, two of which proved crucial. The first was an American-style liberal arts education in college: Wellesley College for Dr. Jerusha McCormack (1964) and Brown University (1956) for Dr. John Blair. The second, which may be even more influential, was their experience in young adulthood of leaving their home culture in the USA to move to Europe: same civilization but very different cultures; one being France; the other, Ireland.

The ideas behind liberal-arts education are spelled out in one of their classic formulations by John Henry Cardinal Newman in the mid-19th century [Module 2.2]. Newman conceived of college-level study as giving its students an education as opposed to training. Hence the most important goals of a university are not vocational. Education in this sense aspires to broaden the mind: for example, by presuming that all forms of knowledge are related to each other, and hence by striving to relate all academic disciplines, at least on some level. Although students studying under such a conception do choose a *major* (or principal subject) on which to concentrate, they are free to range widely among courses classified as electives. In fact, during the first year or two of American colleges, there are requirements that typically require the student to spread attention over a variety of disciplines in the humanities or arts, as well as the social sciences and “hard” sciences.

To satisfy these *distribution requirements* (their most common designation) John Blair studied at an introductory level: Chemistry, Mathematics, and Biology; Economics, Psychology, and Sociology; Philosophy, History, and English Literature. His foreign language was French. When he was obliged to select a major, he chose Literature, English and American, as the least limiting field he had yet encountered. He later regretted that he had not sampled Anthropology and Political Science and Art History and Musicology as well, because he was then obliged to work up those fields on his own. That process was not unduly daunting, however, because the liberal-arts emphasis had taught him the essential skill of how to learn whatever he in later life came to feel was important.

Similarly, *distribution requirements* ensured that Jerusha Hull McCormack left Wellesley College with knowledge of the latest developments in Biology and Botany, as well as a working knowledge of Sociology, European history, English and Latin Literature, before she concentrated on her joint major of Fine Arts and Philosophy.

It is precisely this educational background, then, that has made it possible for both authors to access the breadth of disciplines represented in *WCwCC*. But perhaps an even stronger contribution came from these authors having chosen to subject themselves to a change of cultures within the Western world.

Leaving one's home culture means leaving a world that in which one has a place, a family, a status, and a sense of belonging. In the immigrant's new world, even if one has a job, one cannot feel at home. There are a multitude of invisible rules that one is prone to violate unknowingly. Thus one learns to become attentive to cultural practices as a matter of urgent necessity. Detecting the culture's values and procedures even if natives are not conscious of them is not an academic matter but a survival skill. In this situation, one instinctively compares cultures because the first things one notices are the ways that differ from ones left behind as an immigrant.

Such acute cultural awareness offers a fresh perspective on every experience, even the most painful. Whatever happens can be assessed as an instance of a culture at work. Prof. Isabel Crook, who taught English at BFSU and its predecessor organizations from 1949 till her retirement in the 1980s, put it well when she said of her experiences under arrest during the late 1960s "It helps to have been trained as an anthropologist." That is, like other forms of cultural awareness, anthropology gives an individual a disengaged perspective on personal experience quite apart from those aspects of a culture that one might study formally.

With this crucial experience behind them, Blair and McCormack were then relatively well prepared in coming to China to grapple with its radically different way of life and worldview. Both their liberal-arts education and the subsequent immigrant experience of Europe gave them many advantages. They could examine current events and encounters less as personal adventures than as instances of culture. They would then

want to try to understand where underlying attitudes and presumptions came from. Hence, to account for their new experience, it seemed important to study, even without adequate mastery of the language, the entire Chinese tradition in as much depth as their limitations would allow.

Both these background factors proved to be shaping influences on *WCwCC* and may help to explain why this book is unlike others written by outsiders who have sought to understand China.

When John Blair first came to teach at BFSU, in the first semester of 1988-89, it transformed his European career. In 1970, he had been named to the chair of American Literature and Civilization at the University of Geneva (in French-speaking Switzerland) . His research and teaching had gradually broadened from American Literature as such to focus on those literary texts in their broad cultural context. His publications privileged trans-Atlantic comparisons, culminating in the book entitled *Modular America: Cross-cultural Perspectives on the Emergence of an American Way*, 1988, winner of the Ralph Henry Gabriel Prize of the American Studies Association for interdisciplinary contributions to the field. But that very same year he experienced China for the first time. Looking at the Western world from what he could grasp of a Chinese perspective was startlingly different and challenging.

Professor Ding Wangdao, to whom *WCwCC* is dedicated, initiated his true Chinese education by allowing John Blair to sit in on a course for senior undergraduate English majors: *Classic Chinese Texts in English*. Since the course was offered in English, this was a first opportunity to encounter Kongzi and the other venerable figures so influential in the Chinese tradition. This course was offered not only because BFSU had such a distinguished translator and author available on the staff but also because the leadership was aware of how little the Chinese students of that generation knew of their own cultural heritage. *WCwCC* follows in that spirit. Not only is the present volume dedicated to Ding Wangdao,

now retired with full honors, but he had a decisive influence on other features of this text. In the earliest stages of planning in late 2001, he rightly insisted that Chinese students should not be put in the position of reading texts from Chinese origins in some other language. *WCwCC* is happy to respect that principle, even knowing that giving the original classical Chinese for traditional authors poses another kind of problem for those who have mastered only modern Chinese.

After John Blair's initial exposure to China, his European courses evolved away from literature in cultural context to interdisciplinary culture studies as such. These were still focused on the USA at different periods in its evolution, but working to highlight the thought patterns that were important in diverse cultural domains. Very often these courses were also comparative, for instance in using immigrant writing from Asian-American as well as European-American sources. The intellectual techniques necessary for *WCwCC* were in the process of development. And his knowledge of China was gradually accumulating as well helped along by shorter visits in the 1990s and stints as Foreign Expert at BFSU in 2001 and then again in 2003-2004.

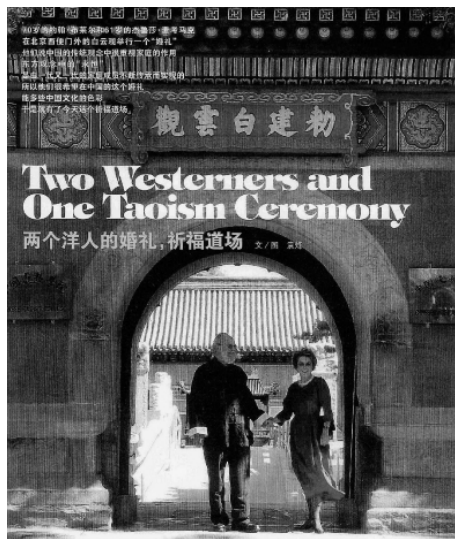
Dr. Jerusha McCormack joined this project in 2004 as its first version was in urgent need of revision. She came to this project after thirty years of teaching American and British literature in University College, Dublin — and after five years of running an Irish Studies program for American students in Dublin. The skills thus learned at these venues and in her previous four books were indispensable to her role as co-author and chief editor, responsible for critiques at all stages of the preparation process. As crucially, Jerusha McCormack has also now become the chief source of leading ideas, including the innovative publishing format that Fudan University Press has adopted for *WCwCC*. Her own teaching at BFSU as a Foreign Expert in 2004 and then again in 2005-2006 has given her a good sense of how today's Chinese students work and how best to frame Western ideas and practices to make them as

comprehensible as possible. In particular, she remains actively involved in the launching of Irish Studies at BFSU.

In earnest of their joint and on-going commitment to *WCwCC* as comparative civilization studies, they invite corrections or suggestions for improvements. For details, see MODULE 0.1.3 Intermediate Conclusion, including the email address WCwCC.2006@yahoo.com. Any recommendations for texts to be added should be accompanied by suggestions for what texts might be dropped to create the necessary space.

Readers of this short book may need to be reminded that the primary means of accessing these materials is on-screen. The set-up process requires minimal computer skills, but most on-screen readers never want to return to reading hard-copy print-outs. The reason is because of all the unique facilities that Adobe Reader 7.0 permits [see *Technical Features of This Text*]. There is no need for an index because all words can be searched independently using the SEARCH function. Hence one can learn how many times a certain name or idea is mentioned, and each mention is clickable to move directly to the page in question. Perhaps the most engaging feature of this latest software is the ability to add comments, underlines or highlighting. In this way every reader can save a cumulative record of responses to the readings. The result is an individual version of *WCwCC*, unique to the evolution of each reader's thinking. Since the subject is vast and invites reflection over a considerable period of time, this reading record of comments and highlights may prove especially valuable.

Finally, it is for you, the reader of this — the first source-book to undertake a sustained comparison between these two civilizations — to advance this important work. Nothing less than intercultural communication, the very basis of international understanding and cooperation, is at stake.



May 30, 2004, Baiyunguan

Perhaps the best way to sum up the connection between these two collaborators is to report that on May 30, 2004, their fortunes were united in a *Ceremony of Blessing* held at *Baiyunguan* (白云观), the leading Daoist temple in Beijing. This ritual symbolizes their long-term commitment to comparative civilization studies and an intellectual life together that has resulted in this, the publication of their first significant collaborative work.

John G. Blair
Jerusha Hull McCormack
Beijing Foreign Studies University
May 2006

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Chapter 1

Overall Introduction

Study One Civilization or Two?

Why This Comparison Now?

From a Chinese Point of View

From a Western Point of View

Cultural Relativism

Modernity Is Different in China and in the West

The Goal of Comparative Civilization Studies

Western Thought Patterns in *WCwCC*

The Uses of Distant Perspectives

Preparatory Skills

“Last Words”

WCwCC belongs to the 21st century. Never before this century have so many human beings found themselves in contact with ways of life that differ from what is familiar to them. More and more people move around the world, some voluntarily, others driven by necessity. Even the stay-at-homes find their circumstances changed. Their work, their leisure, even their food, changes on the basis of decisions made far away, sometimes for reasons that seem incomprehensible. There is something one can do to help cope with this changed and changing world — study the differences so that one will know better how to make use of these new conditions instead of merely suffering their consequences.

Anyone who has attended to the world news or traveled to another country understands the difficulties of communicating across cultures. These difficulties are not merely a matter of language but of understanding what is going on in the other person's head: in other words, that other's worldview, especially the patterns of thinking by which we define *culture*.

What can be done about the fragility of intercultural understanding and communication? Its proper name is *education*, a process requiring time and hard work, but one that promises to make it possible to appreciate where others are "coming from," in the fullest sense of that word. When both sides begin to understand how the world looks to the other person, there are almost always means to clarify differences in such a way that they do not constitute threats. With mutual understanding comes enhanced possibilities for cooperation, or, better, cohabitation on the planet earth.

Today's students face an unprecedentedly complex and changing world. To cope with this 21st-century world requires knowing something about more than one culture. And to study another culture in any serious way requires knowing enough about one's own heritage to be able to make comparisons. Such is the goal of *WCwCC*, which for the moment, as far as we know, is the only course of its kind. Its primary goal is to clarify two major world civilizations by putting them side by side through readings chosen from their thousands of years of recorded history.

WCwCC is not presented as a history course but as an exercise in comparative civilization studies. The primary goal is to help exemplify central characteristics of two major civilizations now identified as *Western* and *Chinese*.

Study One Civilization or Two?

The premise of this work is that civilizations reveal themselves more readily by comparison and contrast than by being taken one at a time.

Traditionally, Western Civilization is studied on its own, as if it were a unique and isolated phenomenon — this way of looking at things might even be identified as particularly Western. Placing it beside the civilization of China allows both West and East to be seen under another light, within the perspective of comparisons that both extend and exemplify their own particularities.

It might appear at first that comparing two civilizations is more complicated than studying either one separately. In fact, bringing two civilizations side by side simplifies the task by making the process more manageable. There are several reasons for this. In any case, we all bring our cultural assumptions to bear when we encounter another civilization. Making these assumptions explicit helps establish a common ground for comparisons.

Secondly, if one were to study Chinese Civilization or Western Civilization on its own terms — as is frequently undertaken in both instances — it would be difficult, perhaps impossible to escape the ideological controversies of the time in which such a study is attempted. Every period — on inspection — is a time of transition, characterized by conflicts between differing interpretations of the civilizational past and present and future. Putting two civilizations side by side brings into focus those elements — whether pedagogical or ideological — that facilitate the particular comparison at hand. Several corollaries follow.

The price of narrowing the comparative focus to the elements that facilitate a particular comparison is that one can never pretend to be an all-inclusive study of either civilization. Some elements will inevitably be left aside. Comparing Western Civilization with Indian or Islamic or African Civilizations would highlight somewhat different aspects of the Western tradition. Thus no definitive bilateral comparison is possible. The choice of which comparisons to pursue is situated in a larger context dictated or chosen on the basis of factors which themselves lie outside the particular comparison. Such factors inevitably seem arbitrary and