

西方文化研究

A Study of Western Culture

白靖宇 等编著



西安交通大学出版社
XI'AN JIAOTONG UNIVERSITY PRESS

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图书在版编目(CIP)数据

西方文化研究:英文/白靖宇,白鸽编著. —西安:西安交通大学出版社,2016.11
ISBN 978-7-5605-9106-3

I. ①西… II. ①白… ②白… III. ①西方文化-研究-英文
IV. ①G11

中国版本图书馆 CIP 数据核字(2016)第 254495 号

书 名 西方文化研究
编 著 白靖宇 白 鸽
责任编辑 蔡乐芊

出版发行 西安交通大学出版社
(西安市兴庆南路 10 号 邮政编码 710049)

网 址 <http://www.xjupress.com>
电 话 (029)82668357 82667874(发行中心)
(029)82668315(总编办)

传 真 (029)82668280
印 刷 虎彩印艺股份有限公司

开 本 727mm×960mm 1/16 印张 19.625 字数 365 千字
版次印次 2016 年 11 月第 1 版 2016 年 11 月第 1 次印刷
书 号 ISBN 978-7-5605-9106-3/G·1512
定 价 39.00 元

读者购书、书店添货、如发现印装质量问题,请与本社发行中心联系、调换。
订购热线:(029)82665248 (029)82665249
投稿热线:(029)82665371
读者信箱:xjtu_rw@163.com

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Western Culture is one of the origins and components of human civilization. In the course of over 3,000 years, Western Culture has made brilliant achievements in the cultural fields of philosophy, ideology, religion, arts, science and technology, all of which have promoted the progress of human culture and society. It is with the intention of enabling English majors in China to know and study Western Culture that we have written this academic book called *A Study of Western Culture*.

The book systematically discusses Western Culture from Ancient Greece through to the middle of the 20th century. It covers five key stages: Ancient Greece and Rome, the Middle Ages, the Renaissance, the Enlightenment, and modern capitalism, focusing on the achievements of ideology and culture, and highlighting the two principal spirits of rationality and science in Western Culture. In particular, the book has a fresh understanding of the cultural achievements of the Middle Age, thus overcoming one-sided views about medieval culture. This is helpful for readers in understanding that the Christian spirit is one dominant section of Western Culture, and for readers to learn the essence of Western Culture.

This book has its own features. Ideologically, it focuses on the ideological and cultural achievements of the major stages of Western Culture. Academically, the book discusses the academic issues relating to the study of Western Culture, and it is provided for courses in Western Culture studies, English language and culture, cross-cultural studies, and so on. Furthermore, this book deals with many great



social events, cultural trends and well-known figures in the Western World, all of which have rich historical value.

The writing of this book has been a corporate effort. Prof. Bai Jingyu of Shaanxi Normal University is the leading author, and Dr. Bai Ge from School of Liberal Arts in Northwestern University accounts for a total of 120 thousand words. In the process of writing this book, we have referred to other books, journals and websites at home and abroad. It must be noted that this book is supported by the research program of graduate education reform of Shaanxi Normal University. Some graduate students helped with the collection and collation of data used, and foreign expert Rob Paix thoroughly edited the English version of the book. Many thanks to them all!

Authors

Spring, 2016

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Chapter 1

Introduction



1.1 The Implication of “Culture”

1.1.1 Definition of “culture”

1) Etymology of “culture”

The modern word “culture” that we are familiar with has classical origins in both ancient English and Chinese.

► “Culture” in English

The English word “culture” originates from the Latin word “cultura,” evolving from “cultus,” which had two preliminary acceptations in ancient times. The first one means farming for showing great reverence for God, which leads “culture” to grow into a kind of “religion culture.” The other refers to farming for living, which guides culture to become a “scientific one.” These are the primary meanings of culture in the Western World.

The Latin word “cultura” was first mentioned in classical antiquity by the Roman orator Cicero (Marcus Tullius, ca. 106 – 48 BC) in his *Tusculan Disputations* (45 BC), in which he wrote of “cultura animi” (cultivation of the soul). The Latin word “cultura” became the English word “culture” at the beginning of the 15th century, and the main semantic meaning farming to take care of animals and plants.

In the 17th century, the original meaning “farming” of culture evolved into the human modern understanding of culture. In 1640, English Bourgeois Revolution overthrew the feudal society and laid the foundation for the development of the “Culture of Capitalism” or “Capitalist Culture.”

► “Wenhua” in Chinese

The Chinese counterpart of the word “culture” is “wenhua,” a word which

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originated in the Western Han Dynasty (206 BC – 25 AD). Liu Xiang (77 BC – 6 AD) wrote in the book *On Military Strategies in Garden of Anecdotes*:

When a wise man governs a state, he should make use of the cultivated virtues first of all, and only then, military force. He comes to power by the force of arms, and he will not conquer the people. If he doesn't alter the culture, he will still be suppressed by others later on. Here, the word "culture" means civil administration and moralization, as opposed to nature and simplicity or barbarism.

All these implications of the word "culture" belong to the category of spiritual civilization, which is the counterpart to military force or barbarism. It contains a kind of positive idealism and reflects the ideas of "gentleness" in governing a country. It is not only a reflection of political content but also ethical significance. Moreover, in ancient China, the word "culture" is often used as a verb. It was an approach and an assertion of ruling the society. On one hand, it corresponds to military force. On the other hand, it is affiliated with force. They are supplementary to each other, just as the old Chinese saying that "courtesy comes first, only then, military force". This meaning was in use up until the Qing Dynasty (1644 – 1911). Not until modern times did its meaning change into the one used in the Western World, which was introduced into China from Japan in the late Qing Dynasty. It is necessary to point out here that "culture" was not popular at all in ancient China.

The word "culture" that we use now is a free translation from Japanese at the end of the 19th century. The meaning of "culture" used in Japan comes from Europe. Before the Japanese adopted the meaning of culture used in Europe, the Japanese had used its ancient Chinese meaning until the Meiji Restoration (1868), when a great amount of new ideas from Western Culture were transmitted into Japan. In 1898, after the failure of Hundred Days' Reform, Liang Qichao (1873 – 1929) fled to Japan and became editor of *The China Discussion*, *Xinmin Series Newspaper*. At that time, the new concept of "culture" had become very popular in Japan. Perhaps the new meaning of the word "culture," as a translated concept in China, was taken directly from Japan.

► **Comparison of culture in China and in the Western World**

Thus a comparison is made between the origins of "culture" in China and the Western World.

Table 1.1 Comparison between “culture” in China and the Western World

	English—culture	Chinese— <i>wenhua</i>
ancient meaning	Originating from the Ancient Rome (45 BC)	Originating from the West Han Dynasty (206 BC)
modern meaning	During the 17th century, it evolved into the modern human understanding of culture (in 1640, English Bourgeois Revolution overthrew the feudal society and laid the foundation for the development of the Capitalist Culture)	At the end of the 19th century the modern understanding of culture was introduced from Japan into China.

2) Definition of the term “culture”

In ancient Rome, the term “culture” was an agricultural metaphor used to describe the development of a philosophical soul, which means the one natural highest possible ideal for human development. In the 17th century, German Philosopher Pufendorf (Samuel von Pufendorf, 1632 – 1694) deployed this metaphor in a modern context, giving it a similar meaning, but no longer assuming that philosophy is man’s natural perfection. Velkley (2002), who was the first scholar to take culture as an independent concept, believed that the term “culture” refers to all the ways in which human beings overcome their original barbarism, and through artifice, become fully human.

The term “culture,” which originally meant the cultivation of the soul or mind, acquires most of its later modern meanings in the writings of the 18th century German thinkers, who were on various levels developing French scholar’s criticism of “modern liberalism and the Enlightenment.” Thus a contrast between “culture” and “civilization” is usually implied in these authors, even when not expressed as such. Two primary meanings of culture emerge from this period: culture as the folk-spirit having a unique identity and culture as cultivation of waywardness or free individuality. The first meaning is predominant in the current use of the term “culture,” although the second still plays a great role in what we think culture should achieve, namely, the full “expression” of the unique or “authentic” self.

The term “culture” is so complex that it is hard to define accurately. In any case, scholars at home and abroad have tried to provide it a definition. There are

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more than 500 definitions, and these can be divided into narrow sense and broad sense.

► A narrow definition

English scholar Tylor (1871) described culture in the following way:

Culture or civilization, taken in its wide ethnographic sense, is that complex whole which includes knowledge, belief, art, morals, law, custom, and any other capabilities and habits acquired by man as a member of society.

The Modern Chinese Dictionary defines culture as:

Everything man creates during the development of society, including material and spiritual wealth, especially spiritual gains, such as literature, art, education, science, etc.

► A broad definition

Although Tylor was not aiming to propose a general theory of culture, and he explained his understanding of culture in the course of a larger argument about the nature of religion, American anthropologists have generally presented their various definitions of culture as refinements of Tylor's. American anthropologist Boas (Franz Boas, 1858 - 1942) believes:

Culture is composed of three elements: First, symbolic meanings and values—these are used to explain realities and confirm the criterions of good things. Second, maxims of specification—an explanation for how people think, feel and behave in a given society. Third, material culture—natural and man-made objects, that reflect intangible cultural meanings.

Boas's student Alfred Kroeber (1944) identified culture with the "superorganic," that is, a domain with ordering principles and laws that cannot be explained by or reduced to biology. His theory of the "superorganic" asserts that culture develop its own unique "style patterns." For our purposes, we will understand the superorganic as not unlike our definition of "culture" in this course, or, a system of organized symbols expressive of underlying values. In 1973, Gerald Weiss reviewed various definitions of culture and debates as to their parsimony and power. He proposed as the most scientifically useful definition that "culture" is defined "as the generic term for all human nongenetic, or metabiological, phenomena."

Boas's definition matches the concept of "culture" in the Chinese Thesaurus

(1989), which gives the following definition:

Broadly speaking, it refers to everything man creates during the development of human society, both material wealth and spiritual wealth included. Narrowly speaking, it refers to the ideology of a society as well as the corresponding systems and organizations.

► The idea of the term “culture”

Now we have a clear idea of the term “culture.” In short, it has a broad sense and a narrow one. In the former sense, culture is the sum of human life, which includes a wide aspect, such as the social life, material life, spiritual life, etc. In the latter sense, culture consists of all the spiritual creations, such as customs, consciousness, psychology, and so on. Generally speaking, we prefer to use the latter meaning.

3) Concepts of West and East

► Diverse concepts

The West and East are two objective concepts. That men’s recognition starts from time and space is a basic principle of epistemology. But, the earth is a sphere and any of its directions are merely just relative. Thus, there is no absolute east or west in the universe. If a man moves towards the east or west until he sails right around the world, he will arrive back at his starting point again, as has been proven by the circumnavigation of the Spanish fleets led by Magellan (Ferdinand Magellan, 1480 – 1521) from 1519 to 1522. Even though Magellan himself was killed in the Philippines in April 1521, his crew went back to their departure point—Spain. The relativity of time and space makes it possible for the east and West to have contact with each other. There has been complementary interaction between the two from ancient times.

The great Chinese historian, Sima Qian (ca. 145 – 90 BC) stated, East is the place where things start and West is the place where things mature. The “east” and “west” which Sima Qian spoke of 2,000 years ago are different from the ones we use today. His thinking about culture and space, as well as the philosophical reflection in his words are significant. All of these are referential for the conceptual

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distinction of the two in the present day.

Since the ancient Greece, Europe had already been regarded as the “West” and Asia stood for the “East.” We can’t deny that his statement is one-sided, for we all know that not only is the “East” “relative,” the “West” is the same. The reason lies in the fact that the earth is round. The German philosopher Hegel (Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel, 1770 – 1831) once said that world history moves from the east to the west because Europe is the terminal of the world and Asia is the beginning. There is only an “East” in the world and the word “east” itself is a relative category, because the earth is round and history doesn’t turn around it. On the contrary, there is a definitive “east”—the Asia of history. The concept of “West” and “East” used by Hegel is very close to the one we use today. Although Hegel’s opinion of the east and west is mixed with parochial nationalism and Eurocentrism, he could see and recognize the difference between Western and Eastern culture.

The earliest division of east and west from the point of culture can be dated back to a world war that took place before Christ. From 492 to 447 BC, there were several wars between Athens on the Aegean coast, and Persia. During these wars, the Athenians realized that there were great differences between themselves and the Persians not only in terms of geographical location, national customs, and religious beliefs, but also in political and military systems, even in language and culture. Because the Persian Empire was to the east of ancient Greece, the Greeks formed the earliest concept of the “east” and regarded themselves as the “western” nation relative to the “eastern” one.

The Greek historian Herodotos (430 BC) put forward his opinion about the relationship between the location of Greece and the other countries in his masterpiece *History* according to the then cognition about the world geography. He believed that Greece was located on the European mainland, and that the continent of Asia was to its east. Persia belonged to Asia, and the easternmost country was India. The European mainland was a part of the “west,” and the continent of Asia was a part of the “east.” Among all the Asian countries we know for sure, the easternmost one is India, which is in the direction of sunrise. Herodotus named the continent of Asia and the countries in it “the eastern nations” in order to distinguish them from Greece in the Mediterranean. This is an early division of “the east” and “the west.” As a prominent historian, Herodotos’ opinion exerted a great influence

on later generations. The “East” and “West” quoted by Hegel reflect the origin of this old concept in Europe.

► Ancient West and East in culture

Ancient Western Culture refers to the culture of ancient Greece and Rome. It is believed that Greece and Rome are the cradles of Western Civilization. The ancient Greek mythologies are the seeds of Western Culture. For instance, there is the Trojan War, the story of the Golden Fleece, beautiful Aphrodite, the king of the gods, Zeus, and so on and so forth. Apart from these gods, it is also known that there are many mortals who are closely bound up with the gods, such as Oedipus and Helen. As for the creation myths, the Western World has its own creation legends, the first sentence in the Bible says, “In the beginning, God created the Heavens and the earth.” Another romantic story let us hear the earliest song of the Greeks. This song was passed on to a deaf mute and later became the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey*. After the glorious Greek Empire, the great Romans subdued much of Europe under their invincible iron hooves. They made Western history with the use of their force, and built the greatest empire in history, one which has had a great influence on Western Culture.

Ancient Eastern Culture refers to the culture in the eastern area in ancient times. It is generally considered to be the culture in “Egypt in the northeast of Africa, Mesopotamia in West Asia, India in South Asia, China in East Asia and so on.” Thus, it seems that “the oriental civilization” means the culture in these areas. The origin of ancient eastern culture is in the Euphrates and the Tigris, the most important rivers in West Asia. Both of them spring from the Armenian Highlands. Water is quite plentiful in the two rivers. The areas along the bands of the rivers have convenient irrigation conditions and they became a developed agricultural region. The reputation of the two rivers is also attributed to their incubation of ancient civilization. In 4000 BC, the Sumerians there invented the cuneiform script and built the earliest country in the world. Later, Babylon and Assyria successively became very powerful nations, creating splendid civilizations, making this place another birthplace of civilization in Asia.

► “West” and “East” in the modern era

In geography, the earth can be divided into two parts by the International Date

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Line which runs down the Pacific Ocean; the Western Hemisphere and the Eastern Hemisphere. Countries in the Western Hemisphere are called Western countries, the U. S. A. , etc. Countries lying to the west of this line belong to the Eastern Hemisphere (China, Japan, North Korea and South Korea). In some senses, "east" should refer to the above four countries in East Asia.

In economic terms, some people may say that "West" means all other countries apart from these four. This is not true for people subconsciously deem that "West" means the European countries, the U. S. A. and Canada in North America and Australia and New Zealand in Oceania, which are economically developed. The Group of Seven (G-7), which was formed 1975, is a forum of the seven most industrialized economies in the world, it includes France, Germany, Italy, Japan, the U. S. A. and U. K. , with Canada invited to join the group in 1976. Thus, Japan in East Asia is considered to be the "West" gradually because of its economic achievement. So we can say that, in regard to geography, Japan is a part of the East, while in economy term, it belongs to the West.

In regard to culture, the world can't be divided according to this dualistic theory. It is not correct to say that there is only the "East" apart from the "West." The two kinds of cultures are two representative culture formed during the development of history. The present concept of "East" and "West" is greatly narrowed. To a certain degree, the "East" refers in particular to China, which is the main country in Asia and on ancient country in the east, and Chinese culture is taken as the representative of eastern culture. On the other hand, American Culture becomes representative of Western Culture because it inherited European culture and has become the most developed country in the world.

1.1.2 Classification of cultures

It is well known that there was no culture in the early period of primitive society. Clearly, culture grows from nothing and under goes a process from simple to complex. Through thousands of years of creation, there grow the numberless cultures in society. Therefore, it is necessary to classify the various cultures.

Regional culture refers to the area in which a certain culture is developed. According to geography, regional culture can be classified into Eastern Culture and Western Culture, or maritime culture and inland culture, etc. This kind of classification can help us understand the special features of culture in different

regions and environments.

Historical culture, in accordance with the process of the human evolution, can be divided into five stages: primitive culture, ancient culture, modern culture, contemporary culture and post-modern culture. This is only a general classification, within which we can have a more detailed one. For example, ancient culture can be studied according to several more detailed periods such as ancient Western culture, which has two periods: ancient Greek and ancient Rome. The significance of this classification is that we can know the level and speed of cultural development in a given period.

Racial culture is classified according to different races. Every race in the world has its own unique culture. For instance, English culture, German culture, Chinese culture, American culture, etc. There is great diversity among the cultures of different races. Knowing their similarities and differences is beneficial for harmony and solidarity between all the races.

Culture of things is based on the properties of things which culture reflects. There are various ones, such as campus culture, food culture, dress culture, etiquette culture, corporate culture, ethical and moral culture; managerial culture; philosophical culture; arts culture and sports culture, etc. Although human beings create extremely complex cultures, all of these can be summarized into different kinds of cultures. The advantage of this classification is that, after summing up all kinds of cultures, a complex thing can become simple and clear, and this can help us understand the characteristics of different cultures very well.

What is the significance of culture classification? Theoretically, the development of human culture must be balanced and harmonized. Classification of culture is the foundation of cultural research. The comparison of different cultures can tell us the status of cultural development in a certain place, and distinguish the developed ones from the underdeveloped ones. This is quite helpful for the setting of new policies and strategies for cultural development, and can help promote the balanced development of culture in different regions. The growth of culture is significant for the sound development of society, economy and politics.

We hold culture to be a comprehensive system with unique features in human life. It is composed of three hierarchies—the pattern of social production and life; the pattern of social structure and the pattern of spiritual consciousness. These are connected with each other. Thus, it is necessary for it to be whole of human behavior and spiritual life.

1.1.3 Constitution of a culture system

1) Components of a culture system

As a system, culture is systemic and holistic. That is all of its components connect and affect each other. The system is independent, self-sufficient and isolated from the other systems. This is the basic principle of research on a system. The basic components of a culture system can be analyzed as follows:

Firstly, social life includes clothing, food, housing and transportation and the other customs of people from different countries and races. Secondly, the type of social production means the major mode of production, for example, production of livestock, fishing and hunting, agriculture, industry, etc. Historically, ancient culture generally developed into industrial society from an agriculture-dominated production pattern. Because of the significance of the pattern of social production, culture can be divided into industrial culture, agricultural culture, fishery culture, and so on. Thirdly, a country's political mechanism includes the regime and state system (socialism in China, capitalism in America), legal system, government apparatus, etc. Fourthly, languages, and science and technology refers to French, Chinese, English, Japanese, etc. and the development of science and technology in human society. Fifthly, the spiritual orientation of a culture, which mainly includes religious belief, ideology, cultural logic, national spirit, moral evaluation, etc, all of which reflect the value judgments and spiritual orientation of a national culture.

These five factors can be divided into three hierarchies, namely, the level of social production and living, consisting of social life and social production; the level of social structure, consisting of national political mechanism, science and technology and language; the level of spirit and ideology, consisting of the spiritual orientation of culture.

2) Notions of culture and civilization

Culture and civilization make up a pair of concepts that are related to each other, and it is often debated whether they are equivalent in nature. There is no common root between culture and civilization. As for etymology, the words are likely to have different origins. In Latin, the former means "agriculture," whereas the latter means "urbanization." The original meaning of civil in Latin is "civil" and "urban." Thus, it is safe for us to say that they differ in etymology. However,