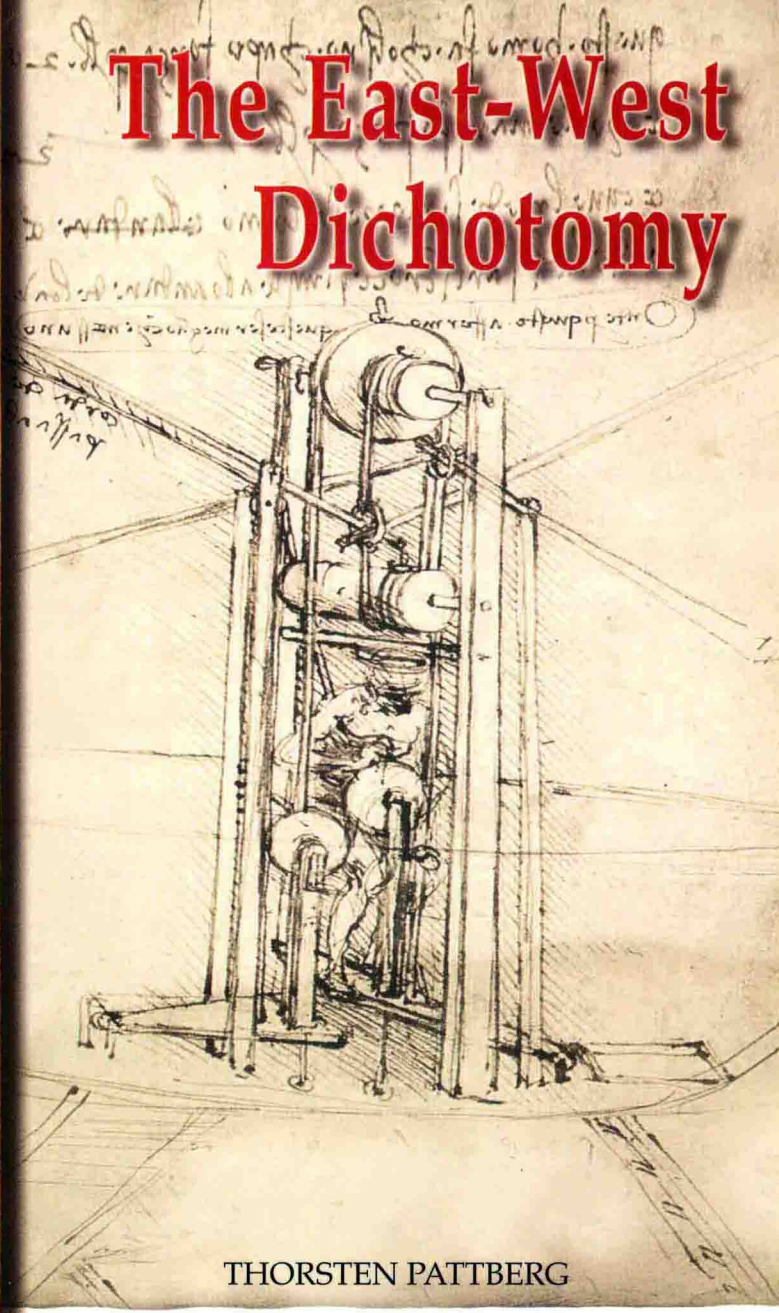


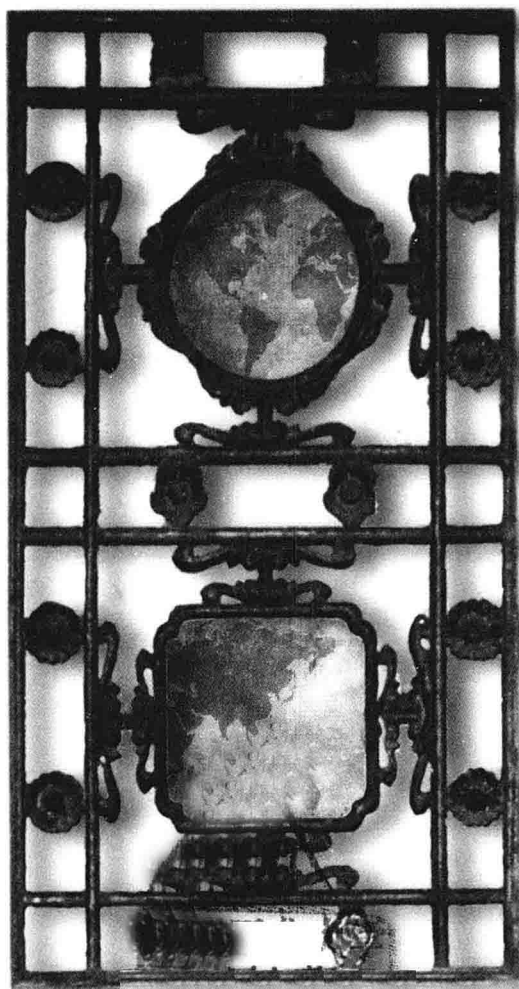


# The East-West Dichotomy



THORSTEN PATTBERG

THE CONCEPTUAL CONTRAST  
BETWEEN  
EASTERN AND WESTERN CULTURES



# **The East-West Dichotomy**



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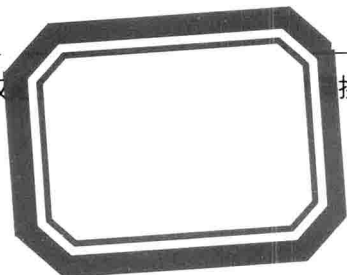
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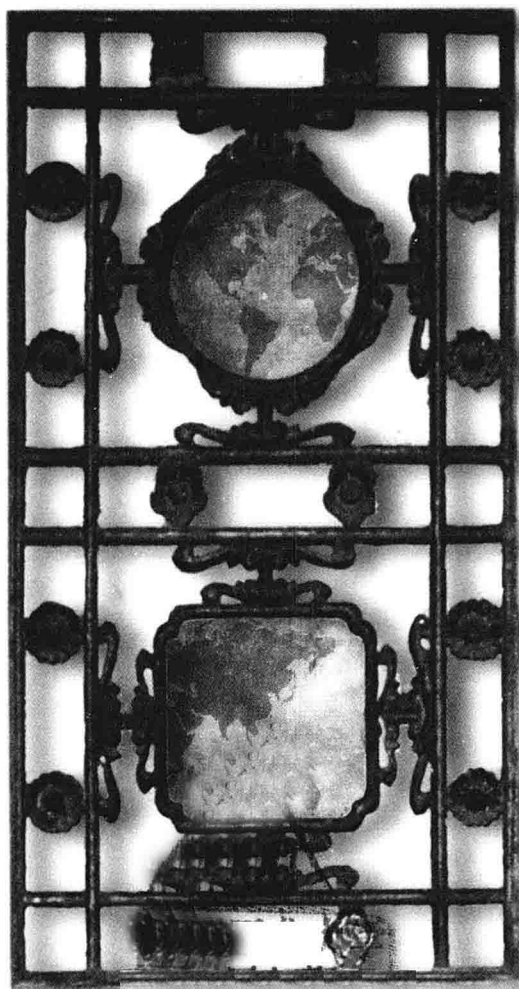
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The 'East-West dichotomy' is a philosophical concept of ancient origin which claims that the two cultural hemispheres, East and West, developed diametrically opposed, one from the particular to the universal and the other from the universal to the particular; the East is more inductive while the West is more deductive. Together they form an equilibrium...



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East is East, and West is West,  
and never the two shall meet.

—— Rudyard Kipling (1895)

A dichotomy – is any splitting of a whole  
into exactly two non-overlapping parts.  
Nothing can belong simultaneously to both parts.

—— Wikipedia (2008)



*CHAPTER //*

**HISTORY**

**H**erodotus (484-425 BC), the 'father of history' (*The Cambridge Dictionary*, 1999), was possibly the first recorded historian who deliberately portrayed the 'East' (Persians) and the 'West' (Greeks) as mutual antagonists, thereby proposing the nucleus of all ancient history. Others, Thucydides (460-400 BC), and Xenophone (430-354 BC), similarly, found it natural to employ strong polarities and concentrate on the 'otherness' of the East, while accepting the necessity of resistance to external force by defining a Western 'self.' Thus came into being the first system of the so-called East-West dichotomy.

In another part of the world, meanwhile, the ideas of Confucian China (551-479 BC) and unification prevailed in the feudal states of the Eastern Zhou period (starting in 770 BC), spurred by the constant menace of invasion by exterior barbarians.

Meanwhile, the Aryan masters of the Indus Valley who had long merged with the Dravidian inhabitants started to unite their tribes and founded kingdoms (1500-400 BC), and as a matter of survival against aggressors from the West created their own classical Indian culture and identity in opposition to the categorical otherness of the West.

As I see it, there have been only two configurations of the East-West dichotomy throughout history. The first one was Western-centered (Eurocentric, c. 500 BC-AD 1950), the second one is Eastern-centered (Asiacentric, c. 1950-present). The former can be divided into Hellenic-Greek (c. 500 BC-AD 0), Judeo-Christian (c. from the birth of Jesus Christ to AD 1500) and North-Atlantic (c. 1500-1950); the latter one exclusively relies on the growing influence of China and its periphery (c. 1950-present) alone. To my knowledge, no

other 'centrism' has ever prevailed in world affairs. It is said in some academic circles that there has been a time when China was believed to be the supreme civilization, with all her great inventions like paper (220 BC), gunpowder (900), printing (1040), and the compass (1100) (Needham, 1964). Yet, to my understanding and despite those obvious accomplishments, China's contributions to the external world, her encounter with and influence on the Western hemisphere have been scarce and almost insignificant. Some have argued that the "invention of the sciences" was the single decisive advantage that put the West ahead of all the other civilizations. We should have serious doubts about this. Thousands of Greeks marched into Persia to aid Cyrus (c. 400 BC); the conquest of Alexander the Great (356-323 BC), the Romans and their emperors (27 BC-AD 395), the crusades (eleventh-fifteenth centuries), the explorations and conquests by the Mediterranean world (fifteenth-sixteenth centuries), the missionaries (sixteenth-seventeenth centuries), the colonial powers (sixteenth-nineteenth centuries), the subjugation of the New World (fifteenth-sixteenth centuries), the invention of the sciences (seventeenth century), and now globalization – all are products of the West. In a distinct succession, the West had always descended upon the 'others' before they did the same: The envy of the world was the Greeks, the tormentor of the world was Christianity, and the leader of the world was Europe/America, more or less indisputably so until the second half of the twentieth century.

I would like to argue then, that with the shattering of Europe during the two world wars (1914-1918 and 1938-1945), the collapse of the colonial empires, the rise and (later) fall of the Soviets, and with China's first experiments with Western 'narratives' (e. g. Marxism/communism), Asian dominance had silently set in the second half of the twentieth century. History speaks for itself: In the following

50 years, according to the United Nations (UN), there were 118 wars (compared to just 55 in the first half of the century), not surprisingly most of them driven or fueled by anti-Western sentiments, most notably the Cold War (1950-1989). The USA, at least involved in 60 of these wars, was defeated in Korea (1950-1953, officially a UN operation), Vietnam (1965-1972), during the Suez-Crisis (1956, together with Britain and France), and, most recently, failed in Afghanistan (2002-2006) and Iraq (2004-2013, both with the UK and other nations). In the meantime, we have seen the rapid economic development of no less than nine Eastern 'tiger-states' or regions: Taiwan, Hong Kong, Singapore, South Korea, Indonesia, Malaysia, Thailand, Dubai and the Philippines.

Some people say that the two poles of the East-West dichotomy had shifted twice to the outmost peripheries of the world, in the East to Japan (c. 1868-1945) and in the West to the USA (c. 1950-2006). I have strong objections against this. Japan, despite her relative military and economic power, like Great Britain, is an island state with the historical function of manipulating power structures between the divided forces dwelling on the massive neighboring continent. However, being descendants of the great landmasses themselves (Germanic and Chinese/Korean), with relatively small populations, neither of them fits the East-West equation by itself. The USA, on the other hand, is not a civilization but a (Western) culture, living on the outer crescent of the world's pivot: Eurasia.

Halford Mackinder had suggested as early as 1904 that the natural seat of power of all existing civilizations (except Latin American civilization) – Western, Confucian, Japanese, Islamic, Hindu, Slavic-Orthodox, African, with a combined population of 5.6 billion (or 85 percent of the Earth's population) – is the continuous landmass of