

(Third Edition)

Western Civilization with Chinese Comparisons

西中文明比照 (第三版)

〔美〕 John G. Blair 〔爱尔兰〕 Jerusha Hull McCormack



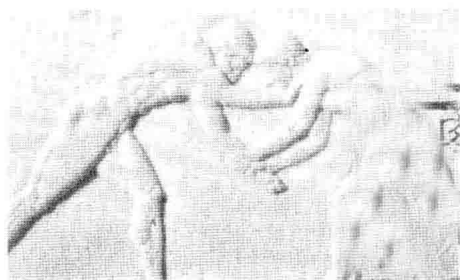
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图书在版编目(CIP)数据

西中文明比照(Western Civilization with Chinese Comparisons)/[美]布莱尔,
[爱尔兰]麦克考迈克编著. —3版. —上海:复旦大学出版社,2010. 10
ISBN 978-7-309-07543-4

I. 西… II. ①布…②麦… III. 东西文化-比较文化-研究-英文 IV. G04
中国版本图书馆 CIP 数据核字(2010)第 160599 号

西中文明比照(Western Civilization with Chinese Comparisons)

[美]布莱尔 [爱尔兰]麦克考迈克 编著
出品人/贺圣遂 责任编辑/郑梅侠 唐 敏

复旦大学出版社有限公司出版发行
上海市国权路 579 号 邮编:200433
网址:fupnet@fudanpress.com http://www.fudanpress.com
门市零售:86-21-65642857 团体订购:86-21-65118853
外埠邮购:86-21-65109143
上海崇明南海印刷厂

开本 890 × 1240 1/32 印张 20.5 字数 953 千
2010 年 10 月第 3 版第 1 次印刷

ISBN 978-7-309-07543-4/G · 916
定价: 40.00 元

如有印装质量问题, 请向复旦大学出版社有限公司发行部调换。
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Dedication to Professor Ding Wangdao

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

in the spirit of 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)



Preface

by
Professor Gu Zhengkun

独具一格的奇书：西中文明比较教材

——序 J. G. Blair 和 J. H. McCormack 合著 *Western Civilization with Chinese Comparisons* (《西中文明比照》)

——辜正坤

John G. Blair 和 Jerusha Hull McCormack 合著的《西中文明比照》(*Western Civilization with Chinese Comparisons*)是我迄今为止读到的由欧美学者编著的最有特色、最适合中国学生使用的西中文明比较教材。简而言之,该书特色有四:

第一,作者主要从西中文明两大体系的核心观念入手进行比照,这就摆脱了过分依赖堆积如山的编年史料的陷阱,使中国读者能够从理论性高度很快切入西中文明的核心领域。

第二,作者把重心放在对西方文明的阐释上,但是处处以中国文明为参照系,这就很便于对西方文明的本质了解得并不深透的中国学人能从比较的角度把握西方文明的真正价值。

第三,作者为了突出重点脉络,把最关键的概念用一个简括的框架编织起来,使教材线索集中,因而读者能够在较短的时间内很快抓住西中文明的整体外貌、基本特征和关键区别。对于使用这本教材的教员来说,因为教材的框架清晰,概念典型,例证精到,所以也很便于在课堂上操作。

第四,这可能是该著作容易被忽略其实是非常重要的特色是,作者把大量的与教材框架紧密联系的材料都放在了光盘上。McCormack 教授的这一创举,不仅有效降低了读者的购买成本,还利用CD-ROM的高效和便利保有了1 000多页的翔实资料。学者查检、使用起来非常方便。作为读者,如果需要对某个要点有更深入的了解,就可以进一步阅读光盘上的大量补充材料。作为教员,如果想让教学的资料更加丰富多采或更具说服力,也可以从光盘上挖掘更多的有用资料整合进教学过程。

第五,这本著作处处透露出作者敏锐的学术洞察力与渊博的西中文明知识。对于当今的中国读书界,可说是一本不可多得的奇书。之所以如此,我想这不仅由于本书作者在西中文明比较方面有过深湛的研究,还因为作者曾在中国的大学(主要是北京外国语大学)里从事过多年的西中文明比较教学。不用说,两位作者自己的研究成果和他们与中国的教授、专家、研究生和本科大学生之间的长期互动与交流的心得体会已经水乳交融地凝结在这部著作中。所以,两位教授的许多观点与



看法在一定的程度上也与若干中国学者的思考有某种奇妙的呼应,成为一种非常有趣的中西文化互动现象。

两位教授之所以邀请我为他们的大作作序,可能因为我也是这个领域的同行。我自己是从 1995 年开始在北京大学开设《中西文化比较》这门课程的。算起来,已经讲了十二年了。北大选修这门课程的同学比较多,通常在 300—500 人之间。巧的是 John G. Blair 教授数年前在北京外国语大学也开设了类似的课程《西中文明比照》。据 John G. Blair 教授说,选课人数也有好几百人。这个现象折射出当代中国大学素质教育的整体趋势。比较文化,尤其是中西文化(文明)比较,已经由于时代和社会的需要,势所必然地被推向教育和学术研究的前台。可是,需要顺便指出的是,我和两位欧美教授的课程虽然名称很相近,但是在具体倾向和框架处理上,其实是有颇大区别的。我的《中西文化比较》是用西方文化做参照系统,侧重的是中国传统文化;两位欧美教授的《西中文明比照》则是用中国文明做参照系统,侧重的是西方文明。我的《中西文化比较》主要以学科分类的方式进行;两位欧美教授的《西中文明比照》则主要是以核心文明概念的比照进行。在一定的意义上,他们两位教授的课程和我的课程恰好是互补的。而从一定的文化逻辑看,照我看来,这两类课程的互补特点恰好是两类课程主讲者本身的文化积淀及思维模式的必然产物。

在中国学术界,同行相嫉的说法很流行,但是我更情愿同行相慕的说法也同样流行。至少,我和两位教授、尤其是 John G. Blair 教授之间,从未有过相嫉。记得 2005 年的一天,我接到 John G. Blair 教授的邀请,希望进行中西文化比较教学方面的交流。于是我们相识了,并进行了坦诚的交谈。Blair 教授是乐观、豁达、知识渊博、见解犀利的学者。他的夫人 Jerusha 教授也非常健谈、睿智、思维敏捷。Blair 教授曾邀请美国夏威夷大学安乐哲(Prof. Roger T. Ames)教授、香港城市大学的张隆溪教授和我一起聆听了他在北外的一次实际教学。他的教学给我们留下了深刻的印象。在短短的两个课时内,他居然把那么多的西中文明的核心概念讲述得如此井井有条,生动风趣。这使我非常景仰。他授课用的英语是我听到过的最清晰、流畅、准确而又动听的英语。也难怪北外会连续多年聘请他做客座教授了。

这样的教授,正是中国的大学所需要的教授;这样的教授编著的教材,也正是中国的读书界、尤其是中国的大学生们所急需的教材。这部教材曾使用过多次,学生反映热烈,应该说是经过了实践检验的。复旦大学出版社慧眼识荆,毅然出版了这部作品,并在次年就重版,可谓适得其时、适得其宜。所以当 John G. Blair 和 Jerusha Hull McCormack 教授邀请我为本书作序时,我感到十分荣幸,因为这正是我非常乐意向我国读书界、尤其是中国英语界推荐的真正优秀的教材。

是为序。

2010 年 7 月于北京大学

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 BFSU, he saw that the materials being used to teach *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 three revisions later, 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 led 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 college education: Brown University (1956) for Dr. John Blair and Wellesley College for Dr. Jerusha McCormack (1964).

Liberal-Arts Education

The ideas behind liberal-arts education are spelled out by John Henry Cardinal Newman in the mid-19th century [link: John Henry Newman]. Newman conceived of college-level study as giving its students an *education* as opposed to *training*. To him, the most important goals of a university were not vocational. Education in this sense aspires to broaden the mind. For example, it presumes that all forms of knowledge are related to each other. Hence, it strives to relate all academic disciplines to each other, at least on some level. Although students studying under such a conception do choose a *major* (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 most American colleges, students are typically required to spread attention over a variety of disciplines in the humanities or arts, as well as the social sciences and physical sciences. These are commonly designated as *distribution requirements*.

To satisfy such requirements, 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. The liberal-arts emphasis taught him *how to learn* so later he could access Anthropology, Political Science, and Art History at need.

Similarly, *distribution requirements* ensured that Jerusha Hull McCormack

left Wellesley College with a good grounding in Biology and Botany, as well as a working knowledge of Sociology, European History, English and Latin Literature. She studied these before she concentrated on her joint major of Fine Arts and Philosophy.

This breadth of educational background has made it possible for both authors to access the diversity of disciplines represented in *WCwCC*. From there both went on to graduate study in English and American Literature. That led each to a Ph. D. (respectively at Brown University in 1962 and Brandeis University in 1973). This stage of their studies constituted, in Western terms, *professional training* as opposed to their earlier *liberal education* [link: *education vs. training*]. Their liberal arts *education* contributed more to *WCwCC* than the research skills they learned as part of their professional *training*.

Immigrant Experience in Europe

The second major factor in both their backgrounds involves immigrant experience. As young professionals in the academic world, these two left their home culture in the USA to move to Western Europe, thereby subjecting themselves to unprecedented experiences. The civilization was basically the same but the cultures quite different from that of the USA. John Blair went to French-speaking Switzerland, Jerusha McCormack to Ireland. Adapting to another culture as immigrants transformed their views of their home culture and, indeed, their perspective on human experience itself.

Leaving one's home culture means leaving a world 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 desirable job, one cannot feel fully at home. One encounters a multitude of invisible rules that are easy to violate unknowingly. One learns to become attentive to cultural practices as a matter of urgent necessity. Detecting a culture's values and procedures even if natives are not conscious of them is a survival skill. In this situation, one instinctively compares cultures because the first things one notices as an immigrant are the practices that differ from the ones left behind.

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 enhanced cultural awareness, anthropology gives an individual a disengaged perspective on personal experience that does not depend on formal study.

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. They could examine current events and encounters less as personal experiences than as instances of culture. They then wanted to understand where underlying presumptions and attitudes came from. Hence, to

account for their new experience, it seemed important to study, even without adequate mastery of the language, the Chinese tradition in as much depth as their limitations would allow. These background factors may help to explain why this book is unlike others written by outsiders who have sought to understand China.

More about *WCwCC* and its co-authors is to be found on their website: <http://comparativeculturestudies.org>.

Engagement with China

When John Blair first came to teach at BFSU, in the first semester of 1988–1989, 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 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.

In the fall of 1988 Professor Ding Wangdao initiated John Blair's Chinese education by him allowing 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 partly because BFSU had such a distinguished translator and author available on the staff. But also the leadership was aware of how little the Chinese students of that generation knew of their own cultural heritage. *WCwCC* follows in that spirit, dedicating the present volume to Ding Wangdao, now retired with full honors. In addition Prof. Ding had a decisive influence on *WCwCC* by insisting that Chinese students should not be put in the position of reading texts from Chinese origins in a foreign language. *WCwCC* is happy to respect that principle, even knowing that giving the original classical Chinese may pose another kind of problem for those who are unfamiliar with the classical language.

After John Blair's initial exposure to China, his European courses in American Studies evolved away from literature in cultural context to interdisciplinary culture studies as such. These worked to highlight the thought patterns that were important backgrounds to cultural understanding. These courses were also comparative, involving European, Asian and American perspectives. The intellectual techniques necessary for *WCwCC* were in the process of development. His knowledge of China was helped along by teaching assignments as Foreign Expert at BFSU in 2001, 2003–2004, 2005–2006 and autumn 2007.

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. In addition, during five years she ran an Irish Studies program for American students in Dublin. The intercultural skills learned in these contexts 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. Equally important, Jerusha McCormack has also now become the chief source of leading ideas. Her own teaching at BFSU as a Foreign Expert in 2004, 2005 – 2006, and then again in 2007 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.

The Connection between the Co-Authors

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 an intellectual life together that has resulted in this, their first significant collaborative work.

In the spirit of this on-going enterprise, the authors themselves see this current version as the best they can do for now. But they expect to improve it as time goes on. They invite readers to contribute to the process. Please email them at jgblair1226@gmail.com in order to:

1. signal errors that need correction;
2. recommend ways this text could be made more usable;
3. suggest other authors or texts that merit inclusion (suggesting compensating cuts);
4. contest interpretations that seem wrong-headed (based on supporting evidence).

Like all truly educational processes, this one works best on a collaborative basis.

John G. Blair & Jerusha Hull McCormack
Summer, 2010



OVERALL INTRODUCTION

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Introduction

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 may find their circumstances changed. Their work, their leisure, even their food, may change on the basis of decisions made far away, sometimes for reasons that may seem incomprehensible to them. There is something one can do to help cope with this radically changed and changing world. One can study the differences so as to understand 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 a distant 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 mind. We need to grasp that other person's worldview, especially the unthinking patterns of thought which are central to *culture*.

Intercultural understanding and communication tends to be fragile, when it exists at all. What is the best course to take under the circumstances? Its proper name is *education*, a process requiring time and hard work. *Education* promises to help us appreciate where others are *coming from*, in the fullest sense of that expression. When people from 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 yet, *cohabitation* on the planet earth, a matter of real urgency in the 21st century [link: ecology, today's

common overriding concern].

Today's students face an unprecedentedly complex and changing world. To cope with this 21st-century world requires knowing something about more than one's own 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 seems to be 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 several thousands of years of recorded history.

WCwCC is not a history course but an exercise in comparative culture studies [link; 12 premises for *CCS*]. The primary goal is to understand the central characteristics of two major civilizations, identified here as *Western* and *Chinese*.



To Study One Civilization or Two?

One premise of this work is that civilizations reveal themselves more readily by comparison and contrast than by being taken one at a time. Traditionally in the West, Western civilization is studied on its own, as if it were a unique and isolated phenomenon. Similarly single-minded studies of national history can take place in China. Placing the West beside the civilization of China allows both West and East to be seen under another light — in the perspective of comparisons that both exemplify and extend 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.

First of all, we humans all bring our own cultural assumptions to bear when we encounter another civilization. They are always at work, even when we think we are studying only another, single civilization. This course seeks to make these silent comparisons explicit. What this course shows is how studying an *other* actually helps to understand home better.

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, present and future. Putting two civilizations side by side brings into focus those elements which are most enduring, thus highlighting them for genuine comparison.

Thirdly, by focusing on specific issues or cultural domains, this process allows one to radically simplify the study of these two civilizations. In this way one proceeds one step at a time. In fact, one can never pretend to an all-

inclusive study of any civilization. Comparing Western civilization with Indian or Islamic or African civilizations would highlight somewhat different aspects of the Western tradition. In this process no inclusive or definitive conclusion is possible [link: 12 Premises for CCS]. Inevitably, the choice of which particular cultural features to pursue is situated in a larger context dictated or chosen on the basis of factors which themselves lie outside the particular comparison itself. Such factors will inevitably seem arbitrary and merely pragmatic. But when this mode of proceeding is openly acknowledged, it undermines claims to an authoritative “truth.” This awareness of its own limitations is itself one of the more useful implications of WCwCC.



Why This Comparison Now

In the present case, the choice to compare Chinese and Western civilizations is dictated by global developments of the late 20th and early 21st centuries. *Globalization* is a vast but elusive process which promises sooner or later to involve everyone in the world. To some, globalization seems to offer opportunities; to others it implies intrusions in the form of foreign ways of doing things. In either case, it leads to vastly increased contact between people and ideas which formerly had no obvious need to take each other into account. This relentless and inescapable process can be ignored only at one's own peril. The least constructive response to the resulting changes, which are often perceived as dislocations, is panic or a defensive backlash. The most constructive response is *education*, learning how to understand these changes and how they can be made use of rather than simply endured.

The people who will be well placed in tomorrow's world are those who have learned how to size up and live with imported ideas and practices without losing their sense of their own cultural values. To accomplish that goal requires a solid knowledge of what “home” means, including how it developed into what it is today. WCwCC tries to explain and exemplify the enduring aspects of Western civilization in parallel with the quite different development of Chinese civilization throughout its long evolution.

From a Chinese Point of View

Chinese intellectuals and academics have been aware for a long time now that Western civilization has been and will continue to be a major source of importations into the evolving Chinese way of life. Thus anyone who seeks to be educated in China today is under some kind of obligation to form ideas and/or judgments about things Western. It makes sense for such ideas and practices to be tested in order to understand what it means for something to be characteristically Western — one major emphasis in WCwCC. How else can one recognize which cultural features are central?

Many Chinese may feel tempted to equate Western civilization with the



widely available artifacts of its popular culture. Some others identify the concept of a *market economy* as quintessentially *Western*. Both instances give an impoverished view of the West. After all, Adam Smith wrote the master plan for the *market economy* idea only a little more than two centuries ago. Other Western orientations, particularly the mode of critical and analytical thinking originated by the Greek philosophers, may be taken as more representative of Western habits of mind and as more promising as tools to help cope with today's world.

Young people in China today respond intensely to questions like “Is China Westernizing Too Fast?” To have a considered opinion on such questions, one first has to define what it has meant (and should mean) to be *Chinese*. And what does *Western* means in some serious sense [link: “Easternizing”?]? *WCwCC* aims to provide the materials for such a study without prejudging the outcome, which can ultimately only be decided by Chinese people themselves.

From a Western Point of View

Although the present course is oriented to Chinese interested in understanding the West, it is also open to Westerners who now begin to realize the growing importance of China in today's — and tomorrow's — world. Slowly, sometimes reluctantly, Westerners have begun to realize that China has become a significant factor in everyone's world and will become ever more so in the foreseeable future. The impulse to dismiss things Chinese as distant or irrelevant thus proves self-defeating.

Some Westerners still continue to think of China in a thoroughly outmoded Cold-War framework. Others might ask when will China become more like “us.” Both views are seriously out of touch with both today's world and that of tomorrow. China has always developed in ways that are distinctive to itself and in strong contrast to Western ways. There is no reason to think that deeply anchored habits of mind and heart would or could or should change, despite the relatively superficial transformations that are currently taking place in both civilizations. Within this context, *WCwCC* aims to provide the materials that will enable Westerners to make sense of the otherness of Chinese civilization, hence to grasp the fundamental factors behind its increasing importance in *their* own world.



Cultural Pluralism

To some extent, a cultural *live and let live* is indispensable to any project in comparative culture studies; that is, an attitude of mutual tolerance. Many individuals, perhaps most individuals, all over the world, never leave their home culture, never ask for a passport, never are exposed in any serious way to the fact that people in different cultures look at the world in different ways. Yet in the course of the 21st century, even these stay-at-homes are likely to encounter

powerful and inescapable changes happening around them.

But stay-at-homes may well choose to ignore the comparative civilization studies proposed here. This kind of study is not addressed to them but to those who aspire to an educated understanding of the world. These are the people who are willing to take on the responsibility for learning about other culture-worlds. They will already have chosen to learn English, the primary language for international discourse today. That implies a willingness to work toward improving the chances for intercultural communication. To learn another language is already, implicitly, to be inducted into another and foreign culture. More, it will also involve an implicit search for what is most worthy in one's own culture. This is more urgent in the world of today, where every home culture is now open to the multiple pressures linked to *modernity* [link: *modernity*].

Cultural pluralism, as used here, does not imply a vacuum of values. Rather, it requires that people of good will from every origin recognize that their home values are precisely that, *home values*. These values do not depend for their credibility on being exported to others, but precisely on the fact that they are *ours*. They have evolved over time to reflect the historical and geographical circumstances of the people in question. They are central to what it means to be *Chinese* or any variety of *Westerner*. For this very reason, a studied awareness of these values and where they came from is indispensable for anyone who wants to think seriously about present issues and future directions, both within their own lives and within the larger community around them.

Thus, entering into a comparative study of civilizations does not imply that one will lose the right to make one's own value judgments. But, for a student of comparative civilizations, value judgments most appropriately take the form of *likes* and *dislikes* rather than stern judgments of *good* or *bad*. For example, one might conclude after studying a certain cultural practice that one would dislike living in a civilization where that practice was common. Such expressed preferences usually result from isolating one element of a culture from the larger context within which it makes sense. But one learns quickly that "There is no such thing as a free lunch" — a saying that means everything has a price. It is a phrase that ecologist Barry Commoner uses as part of his analysis of the earth's environmental interrelatedness [link: *Four Laws of Ecology*]. There is no "free lunch" in relation to individual cultural practices or constructs because they come into existence as parts of larger wholes. At the same time, they all serve some purpose and they all come at a certain cost. It would be very short-sighted to believe that a whole way of life could be condemned or praised for just one of its aspects.

Value judgments that go beyond an expression of likes and dislikes are dangerous to the comparative enterprise. They risk imposing on the *other* culture unthinkingly ethnocentric views of the person making the judgment. The practices in question must be acceptable to those who live with them, or else they would have brought about changes. Judgments of good or bad must be

reserved for the home folks; those who come from the outside should observe a respectful suspension of judgment.

Still, suspending judgment about another culture does not imply that one does not take up interpretive positions in relation to them — far from it. *WCwCC* relies heavily on the argumentative process that is central to intellectual work in the Western tradition and specific to academic writing in English [link: *WCwCC* as a University Course]. But argumentative positions need not be based on moral approval or disapproval. Rather, they test out the degree to which any one cultural element or practice can be taken as representative. One argues as strongly as possible in favor of one position or another for the sake of testing the strength of counter arguments [link: debate]. Then, to gain credibility, one moves on to refine or reformulate, perhaps profoundly, one's own working hypotheses.

There is no inherent end to this process of thinking/arguing, in particular because all generalizations in civilization studies are inherently provisional. The very next day may bring new readings or new experiences that require a reopening of one's mind. For this reason, one works to think as consequentially as possible every day but in the knowledge that there are never any last words or final judgments that can endure.



Modernity Is Different in China and in the West

Throughout *WCwCC*, *modernity* is a touchstone concept [link: *modernity*]. But it is not understood here as a historical movement that involves *Westernization* of the Chinese — or any other — world. *Modernity* as it is seen here begins in the West around the time of Early Modern Europe when the rigid ideas and institutions of the Middle Ages began to be called into question [link: Early Modern Europe]. What is central to this definition of *modernity* is not the actual date but the process of challenging traditional and inherited authorities, one that has continued and gained momentum up to the present day. In China, *modernity* as this kind of questioning process did not begin until late in the 19th century with challenges to the Qing Dynasty. Thus, in *WCwCC*, *modernity* is invoked as a certain cultural process, not a series of events tied to a specific historical era or to a set of dates.

Medieval Europe and imperial China, though they shared some surface characteristics, remained fundamentally different [link: text]. Hence, the Chinese *modernity* process necessarily follows a different course than the earlier, Western, one. The differences in the nature of traditional authorities and what they represented meant that the progressive challenging of those authorities would necessarily — and legitimately — also be carried out in a different way and with different results.