

The West has a highly unusual and unusually developed “sense of personal *agency*”.

This sense of individualism coincided with an equally developed curiosity. This, in turn, led the West to cultivate learning as an important social and leisure activity.

This contrasts sharply with the Eastern sense of “*collective agency*”, through which individuals nourished their sense of self through social relations, contributing to group goals, and “carrying out prescribed roles.”

This emphasis on belonging and contribution diminished confrontation, debate, and curiosity.

Socioeconomic and cultural factors “affect cognitive habits.”

Specifically, the western mind developed tendencies toward “personal freedom, individuality, and objective thought” because of an ecology that gave rise to economic and social structures such as shipping, trading, and hunting that enhanced individualism.

In contrast, the East ecology led to an agricultural society that emphasized interdependent networks of social relations.

This led to attentional tendencies that focused on interconnectedness and relationships among objects, which naturally gave rise to a holistic philosophy that emphasized change and flux.

The Eastern concept of “self” is quite different from the corresponding Western concept.

The Easterners’ sense of feeling good often comes from participation in a group, as can be seen by the fact that “In Chinese there is no word for ‘individualism.’ The closest one can come is the word ‘selfishness.’”

Not only are Easterners less aware of the individual, they also see themselves as being more malleable, describing “themselves” in different ways according to the occasion.

Indeed, individuals in Eastern culture take pleasure in being involved in a harmonious “network of supportive social relationships” and in playing “one’s part in achieving collective goals.”

The Western and Eastern languages differ on these matters as well.

Westerners have a highly developed “rhetoric of argumentation”, while Easterners rarely engage in this kind of dialogue. This is true of business, science, education, and law.

Consequently, Easterners often try to negotiate agreeable solutions in business or law where Westerners might see conflict resolved only in victory.

This is equally true in science and education, where Easterners might find technological solutions, but will not argue for the correctness of their theories in the same way that Western scientists or education commonly do.

This difference starts out in childhood, where studies show that Western children learn nouns faster than verbs, and Eastern children learn verbs faster than Western children.

This may in turn be partly attributable to the languages themselves, given that “East languages are highly contextual,” with meaning necessarily being extracted from context, where as English words are intentionally decontextualized. For example, English sentences focus largely on objects, with the subject often taking primary place, whereas East sentences mostly begin with “context and topic.”

This could mean that “the differences in linguistic structure between languages are reflected in people’s habitual thinking processes.”

Eastern and Western views of logic have diverged greatly, with the Eastern tradition making only slight inroads in logical theory, and never separating logic from context.

Consequently, Easterners use experience more and logical principles less in judging propositions. This leads to the observation that Easterners often seek conflict resolution through some middle ground, while Westerners commonly choose one side of an argument.

One could ask which of these two forms of thought is “correct”. The answer is that each has benefits and drawbacks.