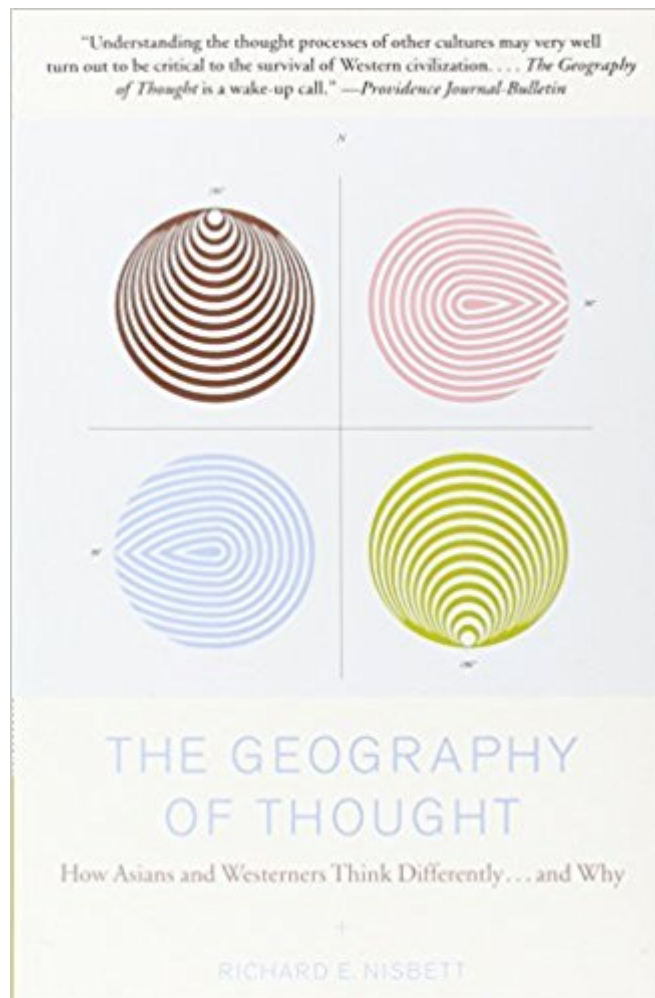




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The Geography Of Thought: How Asians And Westerners Think Differently...and Why



Synopsis

A “landmark book” (Robert J. Sternberg, president of the American Psychological Association) by one of the world’s preeminent psychologists that proves human behavior is not “hard-wired” but a function of culture. Everyone knows that while different cultures think about the world differently, they use the same equipment for doing their thinking. But what if everyone is wrong? The Geography of Thought documents Richard Nisbett’s groundbreaking international research in cultural psychology and shows that people actually think about—and even see—the world differently because of differing ecologies, social structures, philosophies, and educational systems that date back to ancient Greece and China. As a result, East Asian thought is “holistic”—drawn to the perceptual field as a whole and to relations among objects and events within that field. By contrast, Westerners focus on salient objects or people, use attributes to assign them to categories, and apply rules of formal logic to understand their behavior. From feng shui to metaphysics, from comparative linguistics to economic history, a gulf separates the children of Aristotle from the descendants of Confucius. At a moment in history when the need for cross-cultural understanding and collaboration have never been more important, The Geography of Thought offers both a map to that gulf and a blueprint for a bridge that will span it.

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Customer Reviews

This book may mark the beginning of a new front in the science wars. Nisbett, an eminent

psychologist and co-author of a seminal Psychological Review paper on how people talk about their decision making, reports on some of his latest work in cultural psychology. He contends that "[h]uman cognition is not everywhere the same"-that those brought up in Western and East Asian cultures think differently from one another in scientifically measurable ways. Such a contention pits his work squarely against evolutionary psychology (as articulated by Steven Pinker and others) and cognitive science, which assume all appreciable human characteristics are "hard wired." Initial chapters lay out the traditional differences between Aristotle and Confucius, and the social practices that produced (and have grown out of) these differing "homeostatic approaches" to the world: Westerners tend to inculcate individualism and choice (40 breakfast cereals at the supermarket), while East Asians are oriented toward group relations and obligations ("the tall poppy is cut down" remains a popular Chinese aphorism). Next, Nisbett presents his actual experiments and data, many of which measure reaction times in recalling previously shown objects. They seem to show East Asians (a term Nisbett uses as a catch-all for Chinese, Koreans, Japanese and others) measurably more holistic in their perceptions (taking in whole scenes rather than a few stand-out objects). Westerners, or those brought up in Northern European and Anglo-Saxon-descended cultures, have a "tunnel-vision perceptual style" that focuses much more on identifying what's prominent in certain scenes and remembering it. Writing dispassionately yet with engagement, Nisbett explains the differences as "an inevitable consequence of using different tools to understand the world." If his explanation turns out to be generally accepted, it means a big victory for memes in their struggle with genes. Copyright 2003 Reed Business Information, Inc. --This text refers to the Library Binding edition.

Nisbett, a psychologist and Distinguished University Professor at the University of Michigan at Ann Arbor, used to believe that "all human groups perceive and reason in the same way." A series of events and studies led him gradually to quite another view, that Asians and Westerners "have maintained very different systems of thought for thousands of years." Different how? "The collective or interdependent nature of Asian society is consistent with Asians' broad, contextual view of the world and their belief that events are highly complex and determined by many factors. The individualistic or independent nature of Western society seems consistent with the Western focus on particular objects in isolation from their context and with Westerners' belief that they can know the rules governing objects and therefore can control the objects' behavior." Nisbett explores areas that manifest these different approaches--among them medicine, law, science, human rights and international relations. Are the societal differences so great that they will lead to conflict? Nisbett

thinks not. "I believe the twain shall meet by virtue of each moving in the direction of the other."

Editors of Scientific American --This text refers to the Library Binding edition.

I found this book interesting, fascinating and profound in so many ways. One of those things that you always suspected but was waiting for the proper evidence, well now I have it. Very well done.

Excellent, very interesting history and geography, definitely recommend for all multi cultural psychologists

Used as reference book.

As a Chinese American who grew up in China and then has lived almost 30 year in the US, I agree with many observations of difference between Eastern and Western thoughts outlined in this book. Although there are details in the experiments and psychological analysis etc. in the book that will invite discussion and critiques, it is very important to at least promote the awareness of such difference in today's world of globalization where more and more people will be dealing with people of different culture and ways of thinking.

I am still reading the book. It provides a comprehensive and insightful overview of the primary differences that shape the thinking within these broad social and cultural categories. The book offers a good platform for more focused academic reading on this subject.

I really enjoyed this book, its well written and easy to read. I highly recommend it if you are interested in the subject or just trying to broaden your way of thinking about culture.

Bought this book after having lived in Asia for many, many years. The book brings practical insight into the thinking processes which separate our cultures. It helps explain how information is processed. Great stuff to know if you are trying to accomplish anything spanning multiple cultures. Knowing how people make decisions helps me change the way I communicate in order to match their communication needs.

groups perceive and reason in the same way" (xiii-xiv). "East is East and West is West" (Kipling); the quote is emphasized in Richard Nisbett's book *The Geography of Thought*. He challenges the

assumption that all people think the same. He has analyzed a large number of psychology experiments, including his own, to come to the conclusion that there have been major differences between the modes of thought of "Asian (China, Korea, Japan)" and "Western (US, British Commonwealth)" people. The Western style of thought is valuing individual distinctiveness and independence while the Eastern style embodies the value of harmonious social relations and interdependence. The book builds on this core argument to attempt to resolve contradictions pertaining to reasoning, perception, and knowledge organization between Easterners and Westerners. I would say this is a great book for closet psychologists and marketing people.

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