

Module 7 The Self in Western and Eastern Thoughts

At the end of this module, you are expected to:

1. Differentiate the concept of self-according to Western thought against Eastern/Oriental perspectives;
2. Explain the concept self as found in Asian thoughts; and

The Self in Western and Eastern Thoughts

Different cultures and varying environment tend to create different perceptions of the “self” and one of the most common distinctions between cultures and people is the Eastern vs. Western dichotomy wherein Eastern represents Asia and Western represents Europe and Northern America.

In this lesson, we will look at religious beliefs and political philosophies that greatly influenced the mindset of each nation or culture. Since almost all the theories about the self, which were discussed in the previous lessons, also came from the western scientific research, we will highlight the Eastern thoughts in this lesson.

Confucianism

- can be seen as a code of ethical conduct, of how should properly act according to their relationship with other people; thus it is also focused on having a harmonious social life (Ho 1995).

Taoism

- is living in the way of the Tao or the universe. However, Taoism rejects having one definition of what the Tao is, and one can only state clues of what is they adopt a free-flowing, relative, unitary, as well as paradoxical view of almost everything.

Buddhism

- The self is seen as an illusion, born out of ignorance, of trying to hold and control things, or human centered needs; thus the self is also the source of all these sufferings.

The self or the individual is not the focus of the abovementioned Asian or Eastern philosophies or beliefs. Even with extended discussions about how the self should work, Confucianism and Taoism still situate the self within a

bigger context. In striving to become a better person, one does not create a self above other people or nature but a self that is beneficial to his community as well as its order and harmony with everything else. As for Buddhism, the self, with all its connections and selfish ideas, is taken not just out the center of the picture, but from the whole picture entirely.

The western culture is what we would call an individualistic culture since their focus is on the person. Asian culture, on the other hand, is called a collectivistic culture as the group and social relations that is given more importance than individual needs and wants.

By valuing the individual, Westerners may seem to have loose associations or even loyalty to their groups. Competition is the name of the game and they are more likely straightforward and forceful in their communication as well as decision making.

Eastern or Oriental persons look after the welfare of their groups and values cooperation. They would also be more compromising and they tend to go around the bush in explaining things, hoping that the other person would “feel” what they want to say (Qingxue 2003).

Westerns also emphasize more on the value of equality even if they see that the individual can rise above everything else. Because everyone is on their own in the competition, one can say that they also promote ideals that create “fair” competition and protect the individual. Asian’s with their collectivistic culture, put more emphasis on hierarchy as the culture wants to keep things in harmony and order (Qingxue 2003). For example, Westerns would most likely call their bosses, parents or other seniors by their first name. The boss can also be approached head-on when conflicts or problems about him arises. For Asian’s we have respectful terms for our seniors and a lot of workers would not dare go against the high-ranking officials (Qingxue 2003).

It must be emphasized, however that these are general commonalities among Western culture as compared to Asian or Oriental cultures. In the case of the Philippines, we can also consider the colonization experience for differences and similarities with our Asian neighbors. We might also find variation among provinces and regions due to geographical conditions.

References and Supplementary Materials

1. Gleitman, Henry, James Gross and Daniel Reisberg. 2011. *Psychology*. 8th Ed. Canada: W.W. Norton and Company.
2. Eden Joy Pastor Alata, Bernardo Nicolas Caslib, Jr. 2018. *Understanding the Self*. 1st Ed. Rexstore