

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

Ph.D. Richard Nisbett Ph.D. - pdf download free book

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Title: The Geography of Thought: How

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Description:

From Publishers Weekly 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.

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From Scientific American 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 an out of print or unavailable edition of this title.

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