



THE SELF FROM EASTERN AND WESTERN PERSPECTIVES

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ACTIVITY: TWO SIDES OF THE SAME PLANET

WRITE TOP FIVE (5) DIFFERENCES BETWEEN WESTERN AND EASTERN SOCIETY, CULTURE, AND INDIVIDUALS IN THE TABLE BELOW. WRITE THEIR SIMILARITIES IN A PARAGRAPH FORM BELOW THE TABLE. WRITE IT IN A LONG BOND PAPER (HANDWRITTEN).

Western	Eastern

INTRODUCTION

- Different cultures and varying environments 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 North America. It must be understood that this distinction and the countries included were politically colored at the time that aforementioned concepts were accepted and used in the social sciences.

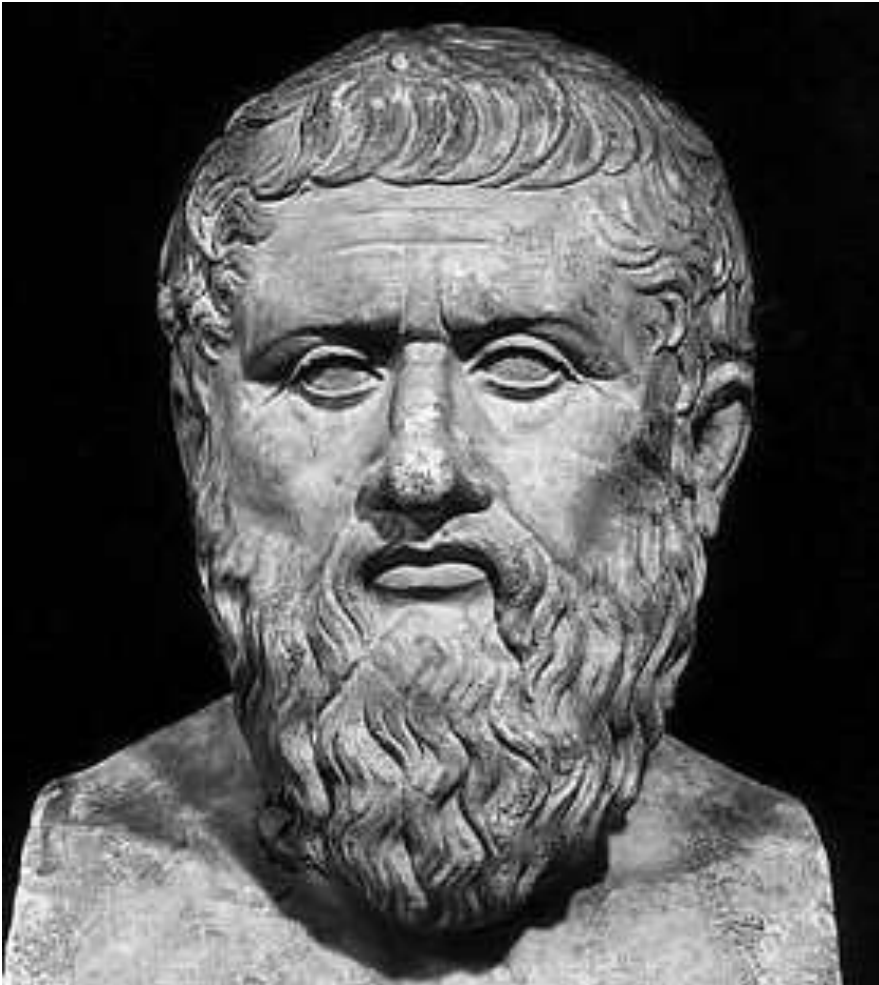


THE EASTERN AND WESTERN SELF

- Almost 2000 years before the first Western text was introduced, the Eastern civilization was already so advanced that it had accounts of the virtuous philosophies of China, the famous civil codes like the *Babylonian Code of Hammurabi*, and the earliest religious texts of India like the *Rigveda*. Noticeably, the Eastern thoughts are concerned about the collective life in the community. This is very much in contrast with the individualistic concepts of the West.



INDIVIDUALISTIC VS. COLLECTIVE SELF



- The concept of the psyche is a Western model of the soul. Western traditions are always preoccupied by the duality of the body and soul. **Plato** started with the idea that the soul inhabited the world of ideas, while the body descended to the world of the sensible. The ideal self is there up above the heavens, while the bodily self, or the soul imprisoned in a finite material body, by which we know today, is only thrown into the oblivion of remembering what the soul used to know while still living in the world of ideas.

INDIVIDUALISTIC VS. COLLECTIVE SELF

- Even Aristotle did not solve this problem of duality; he proposed the **hylomorphic theory**, meaning that the human person is composed of matter or the body and form or the soul. Matter is changeable while the form remains. This means that the body will grow and eventually die and decompose and will be transformed into something else. The form, however, remains unchanged. But unlike Plato, Aristotle asserted that the body is equally important as the soul, because the former will give the latter the knowledge it ought to have through the senses.

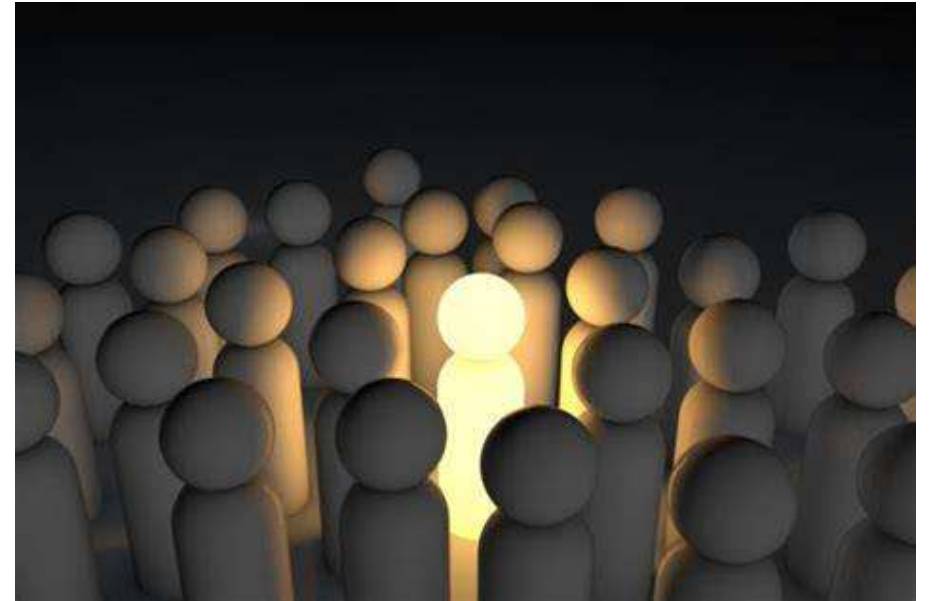


INDIVIDUALISTIC VS. COLLECTIVE SELF



- This is very much similar to the duality of body and soul of Descartes. The body is the one gathering information through the senses, although it never always trusts the information coming from the senses, the reason that processes all information and makes sense with the experiences of the body. In an attempt to solve the issue of duality, Descartes proposed that the body and the soul are fused in one very important part of the brain, the pineal gland.

- Still, the Western concept of the self is very much anchored in the **individuality** of the psyche. The individual self is always in a struggle to reconcile the connection between the ideal self or perfect soul and the limited self or sinful body. This dichotomy drives us in the understanding of the self as a lifetime toil for self-perfection. What is important in this concept of the self is the development of the self from conception to death.



TRAITS OF INDIVIDUALISTIC CULTURES

- ***Self-Sufficiency***

- People in individualistic cultures value being independent and able to take care of themselves.

- ***Uniqueness***

- Being different or standing out is seen as positive. People want to express their own personality and style.

- ***Autonomy***

- People prefer making their own decisions and living life on their own terms.

- ***Self-Expression***

- People are encouraged to speak their minds and share their ideas openly.





ARETE

- When, on the contrary, the self did not have the opportunity to be raised, and to grow, and to die a good and happy life, the self becomes a waste as it did not live the ideals of the soul. The lone purpose of the self, therefore, is to live according to the ideals of the soul. To live a perfected life called **Arete**. All of life's directions, since the Western individualistic self is concerned, are geared towards self-perfection.

ATMAN

- Although the self in the Eastern perspective also wants to attain perfection in meditation and enlightenment, there has never been an issue of dualism. Easterners do not have the notion of the separation of the body and soul. It is always oneself.
- The **Atman**, for example, in Indian Philosophy is considered to be the seat of consciousness. The atman may have different levels of consciousness, but the atman continues to exist because it is not dependent on the body. This, in fact, is also the concept of the non-self in Buddhism. In this concept, the self is considered as nothing but an evolution and transformation of inner consciousness.



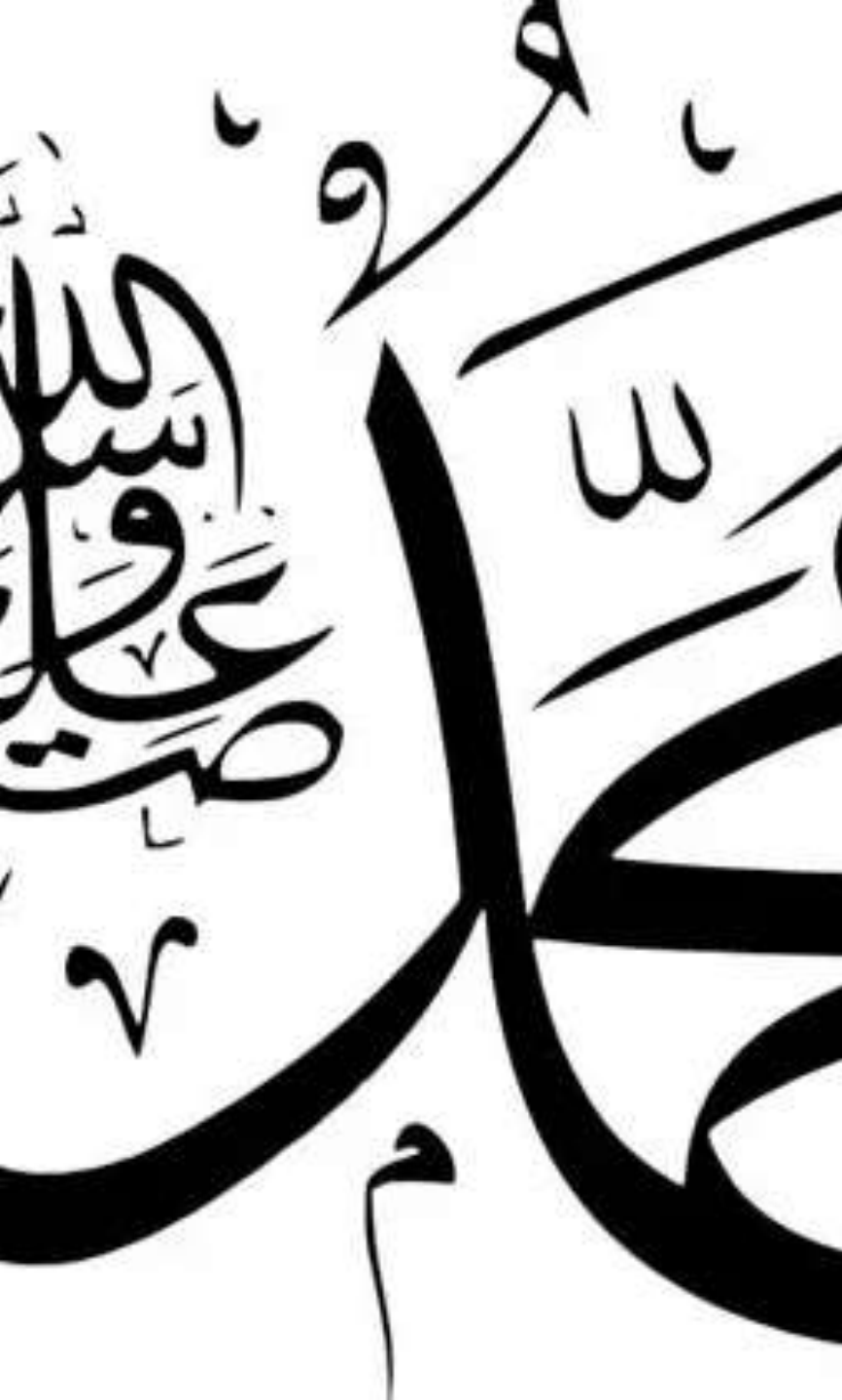
CONFUCIAN PHILOSOPHY

- Further, the **Confucian Philosophy** from China emphasized the relational self and the social understanding of the self. Scholars read Confucius' philosophy in two ways. One interpretation says that the **ideal- thus moral- self is always able to forego individual interest in view is of prioritizing the social interest.**



JUDEO-CHRISTIAN PHILOSOPHIES

- The Middle Eastern traditions are also very much associated with communal self. One example is the **Judeo-Christian philosophies**, which emphasized the unity of a nation- the chosen people of God (Exodus 19:5). The biblical prophets would always find themselves reminding the people, as a community of believers, to be faithful to the loving compassion of God.



PROPHET MOHAMMAD OF ISLAMIC TRADITIONS

- Even Prophet Mohammad of Islamic traditions highlights the oneness of Allah and the inclusiveness of Islam as a religion. Islamic ethics, in the words of Mohammad, asserts that “[m]y community will never agree to an error” (Esposito, 2005). Both traditions stress the importance of the community over the self. The eastern philosophy, therefore, is more attuned to the collective dimension of the self as opposed to the Western individualistic ideals of the self.

FEATURES OF INDIVIDUALISM

- “I” identity
- Promotes individual goals, initiative and achievement - Individual rights are seen as being the most important. Rules attempt to ensure self-importance and individualism.
- Relying or being dependent on others is frequently seen as shameful
- People are encouraged to do things on their own; to rely on themselves
- People strive for their own success

FEATURES OF COLLECTIVISM

- Each person is encouraged to be an active player in society, to do what is best for society as a whole rather than themselves.
- The rights of families, communities, and the collective supersede those of the individual.
- Rules promote unity, brotherhood, and selflessness.
- Working with others and cooperating is the norm; everyone supports each other as a community, family, or nation more than as an individual.



THE SOCIAL CONSTRUCTION OF THE SELF IN WESTERN THOUGHT

SOCIAL CONSTRUCTION

- **Social construction** is a shared assumption or perception of the people in society. The Western social construct of the self can be characterized in three ways. First is the **individualistic self**, at a very young age, the measure of a successful life is when the self can fulfill the life-goals set for and by the self. The individualistic self is always conceived as the autonomous, bounded entity. For one to be autonomous, one must be able to show independence.



SOCIAL CONSTRUCTION

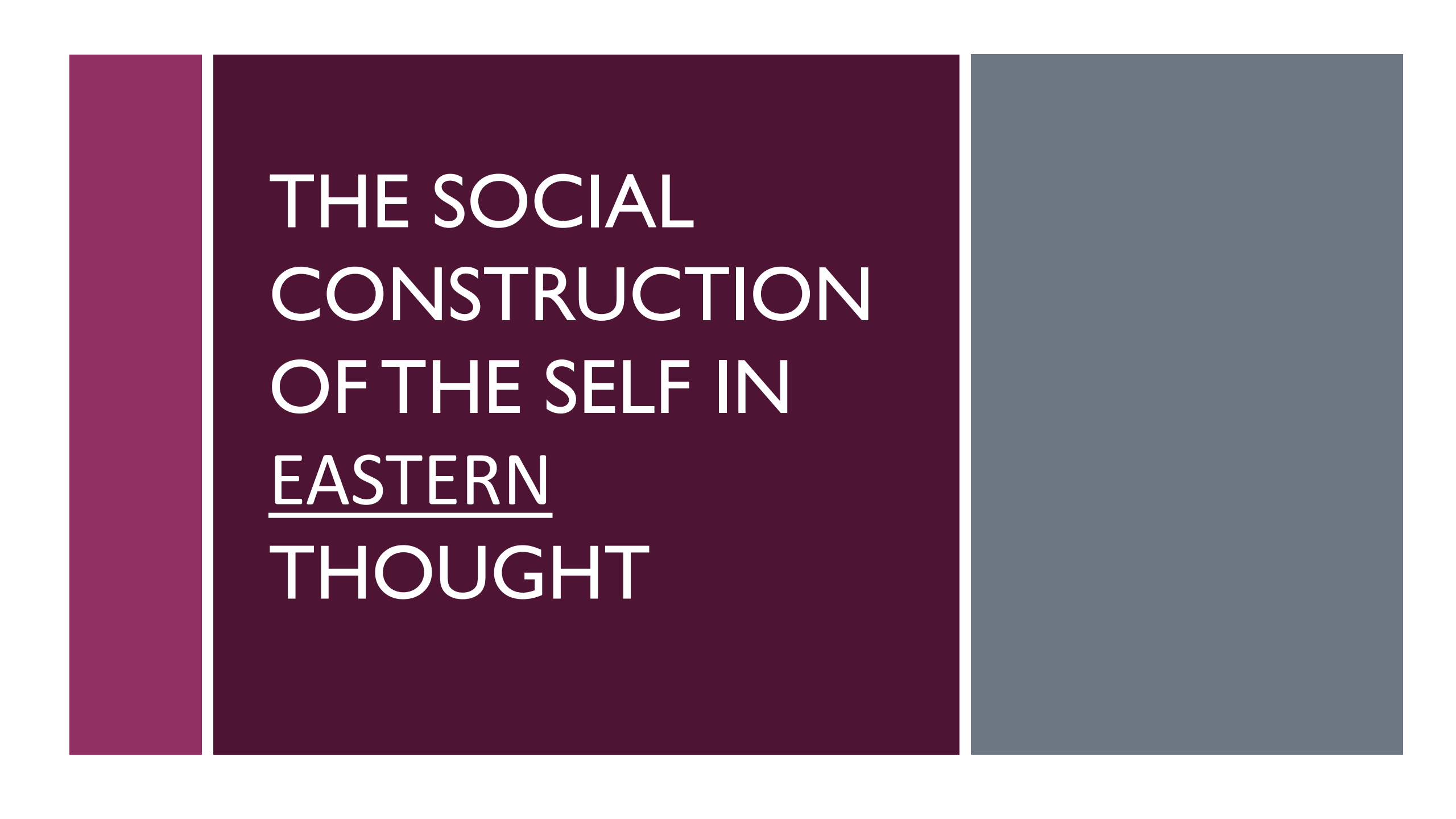
- Relevant to independence brings about the second Western social construct of the self, which is **self-sufficiency**. This construct presumes that a successful self must be able to supply one's needs without external assistance. Being self-sufficient also implies authority. Therefore, the self needs to establish one's power and accumulate the needed knowledge and resources so that one will be able to provide for one's needs.



SOCIAL CONSTRUCTION

- The third social construct is the self being **rational**. In the Western practice, there is no time for the self to be weak and emotional. The self must not waste resources on meditation and other metaphysical cognitions, but must be constantly rational and reasonable. The self masters the causal relationships of things. Everything must be explained by logic and reason.





THE SOCIAL CONSTRUCTION OF THE SELF IN EASTERN THOUGHT



- Eastern social infrastructures are mostly seen as contrary to the Western individualistic construct. The eastern construct is primarily viewed as **collectivistic** and is always grounded in nature. Many eastern traditions flourished in the history of thought that were firmly based on how the self relates to others, to the Divine Being, and to nature.

CONFUCIUS, OR *KUNG FU ZI*

- Confucius, or *Kung Fu Zi* established the ancient Chinese civilization by establishing social order. The society will be led by wise leaders who guarantee peace, prosperity, and harmony. Here in the **Confucian system, we can immediately notice the primacy of society over the person.** In fact, Confucius believed that the threat to social order is only caused by the unchecked selfish desires of individuals. The self, therefore, in the Confucian system, is a person within the society who exhibits refinement and compassion.



JUNZI

- The **refined and compassionate person** was what Confucius envisioned as *junzi*. It is the new self formed in the right education under a virtuous teacher as a role model. Central to the educational formation of junzi are humanistic learning, refined personal manners, and the capacity to govern the community wisely and with compassion. In principle, the new self of junzi- the sage king- brings to life the virtues of the ancestors to the new order of society. The self, therefore, is the transmitter of the ancient virtues to the new world.



LI

- To carry out the transmission, one must have the correct procedures and protocol. In Chinese philosophy, religious rituals are of great importance. The word **li** originally means **sacrifice**. In time, the principle of li is better understood as a refined manner of spiritual rituals and sacrifice, and protocols in honoring the ancestors. Li is both the restraining and the refinement of the self. The virtuous self must be able to practice the correct customary procedures and protocols governing all of life.



REN

- Another concept in Confucian philosophy is the principle of **ren**. Ren is the **character of the self that sincerely shows compassion for others**. The self must embody human-heartedness by prioritizing the self-interest of others. The sage king-jenzi- is characterized by his practice of ren in putting others first before the self.



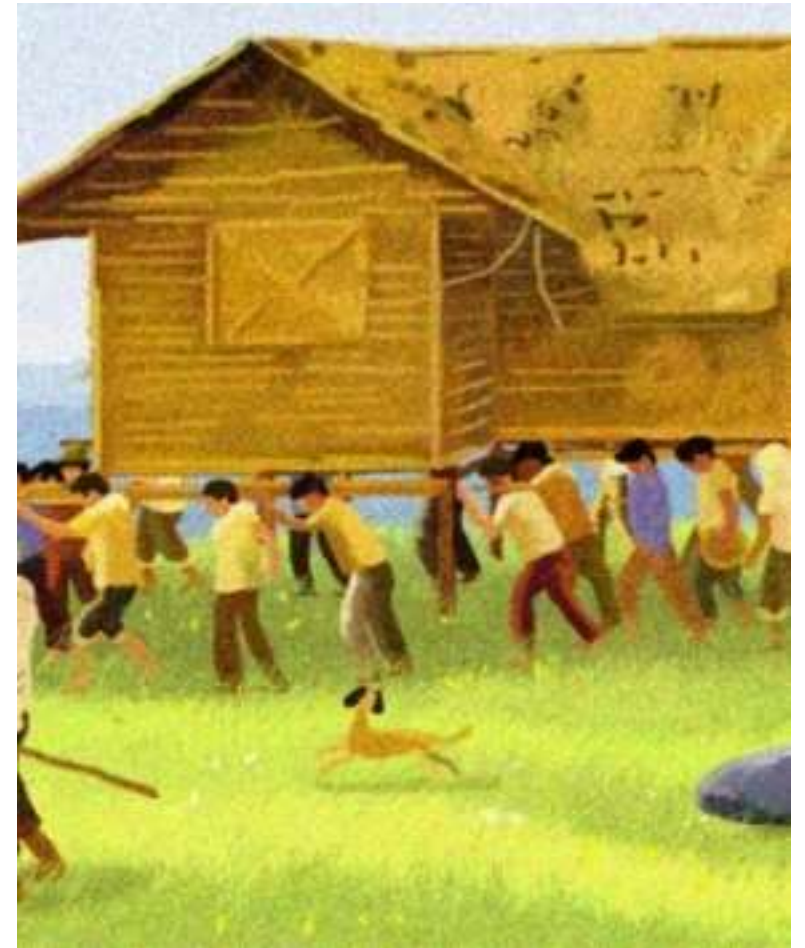


THE FILIPINO SELF AS A BLEND OF EAST AND WEST

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- The Filipino self is unique because it reflects both Eastern collectivism and Western individualism. This is due to the Philippines' long history of colonization, trade, and cultural exchange. Our values and ways of living are not purely Eastern nor purely Western, but rather a combination of both.

FILIPINOS IN EASTERN PERSPECTIVE

- From the Eastern perspective, Filipinos are deeply rooted in **close family ties, respect for elders, spirituality, and the value of bayanihan or community cooperation.** These traits highlight the collective self, where the welfare of the group is often placed above personal interest.



FILIPINOS IN WESTERN PERSPECTIVE

- From the Western perspective, Filipinos also value education, independence, self-expression, and personal achievement. This is why many Filipinos aspire to work abroad, pursue careers that highlight individuality, and embrace modern technologies and lifestyles.



- The blending of these perspectives is evident in everyday life. For example, a Filipino student may strive for academic excellence and career success (Western ideal), but at the same time, feels responsible to support their family and community (Eastern ideal). Similarly, many Overseas Filipino Workers (OFWs) sacrifice their own comfort abroad to provide for their loved ones at home—a clear mix of personal ambition and collective responsibility.





THANK YOU!

