The authors review evidence of large quantitative and qualitative differences in cognitive processes of Westerners and Easterners. East Asians are found to be holistic, attending to the entire field and assigning causality to it, making relatively little use of categories and formal logic, and relying on "dialectical" reasoning, whereas Westerners are more analytic, paying attention primarily to the object and the categories to which it belongs and using rules, including formal logic, to understand its behavior. The authors propose that:

1. Social organization directs attention to some aspects of the field at the expense of others.
2. What is attended to influences metaphysics, that is, beliefs about the nature of the world and about causality.
3. Metaphysics guides tacit epistemology, that is, beliefs about what it is important to know and how knowledge can be obtained.
4. Epistemology dictates the development and application of some cognitive processes at the expense of others.
5. Social organization and social practices can directly affect the plausibility of metaphysical assumptions, such as whether causality should be regarded as residing in the field versus the object.
6. Social organization and social practices can influence directly the development and use of cognitive processes such as dialectical versus logical ones.

- Easterners view the world as a collection of continuous and interpenetrating objects and events, focusing attention more on the relationships between objects and on the field, or situational contexts. Easterners are more accepting of opposing propositions, taking the middle ground. They are also more dependent on experience-based knowledge. The tendency to consider the complex system in which objects are embedded makes Easterners consider more perspectives and alternative explanations for events. As a result, they are less susceptible to the fundamental attribution error, and more susceptible to the hindsight bias than do Westerners.

- In contrast, Westerners view the world as a collection of discrete objects and events, focusing attention more on the universal properties of the objects. Westerners’ tendency to avoid contradiction makes them tend to reject one opposing proposition in favor of the other when presented with both. They also favor abstract logic over experience-based knowledge. Westerners’ focus on the objects (instead of the field), and tendency to avoid contradiction make them more susceptible to the fundamental attribution error, and less susceptible to the hindsight bias than do Easterners.

The differences in these cognitive processes are attributed to social organization in these cultures. The historically agricultural Eastern cultures, which tend to also have complex and hierarchical social structures require collaboration and in-group harmony for survival. As a result, Easterners learn early about relationships in the world. In contrast, the hunting and gathering history of Western cultures, which also tend to have simple social structures, promote personal agency and sense of control. As a result, Westerners learn most early about discrete objects and events.