

Cultural Diversities: Complementarity in Opposites

1. Cultural Diversities and Complementarity

History provides ample examples of cultural diversities in humankind's assimilation of knowledge and in humankind's creativity in the humanities. Such diversities produced a rich global variation among early civilisations. The cultural diversities between China and the West, for example, were well manifested by the contrast in their approaches to knowledge and creativity. We see the contrast in their languages, as exemplified by the Western alphabetic principle and the Chinese logographic principle. We see the contrast in their logic, as exemplified by the formal Aristotelian syllogism and the pragmatic Mohist model thinking. We see the contrast in their mathematical proofs, as exemplified by the Greek axiomatic deductive proof and the Chinese derivative proof. We see the contrast in their views of time and space, as exemplified by the Greek finite-crystalline universe and the Chinese infinite empty-space universe. We see the contrast in their views of building elements of the world, as exemplified by the Greek view that the world is made of *atomos* [atoms] and the Chinese view that the world is made of *qi* 氣 [energy]. Such contrast in approaches and views arising from cultural diversities were often found to be complementary.

In a paper, entitled "Equal Temperament: An Ethnomusicological Study", submitted for discussion at our Third Variantology Workshop (December, 2006), I provided a comparative study on the development of equal temperament in China and in Europe as an explicit example of complementary in contrast. It is shown there that the two approaches differ not only in thought process but also in methodology. Due to their contrast in approaches, we have an enriched understanding of tonal structures and a diversified view of tuning and harmony, in addition to the equal temperament.

In fact, complementarities among cultural diversities have facilitated human understanding of nature and promoted human creativity. They played an important role in the progress of world knowledge. Only with a better appreciation of cultural diversities can one avoid the imposition of value judgement and the traditions of one civilisation upon others and provide a better evaluation of the multicultural roots of science and humanity.