

Cultural additivity: Some thinking from the mindsponge perspective

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“– Wherever there is food, there is freedom! This cage room is my dream. It is here my happiest moment has arrived.”

In “Dream”; [The Kingfisher Story Collection](#) [1]

Today, when sitting at the café discussing the effects of culture on the environment, we wondered whether the environmental resources influence a country's cultural additivity level within their border. The environmental resources include all the types of capital, ranging from fuels, metals, food, to weather, etc. This essay will present the logic behind my assumption using the Mindsponge mechanism [2,3].

To begin with, we use two premises. First, any existing countries on Earth are bounded by the Earth's ecosystem services, so their resources are scarce [4]. Second, for being existing, a country's people must place their survival and maintenance of wellbeing as the ultimate objectives, regardless of what happens. Based on these premises, we then explain how we interpret cultural additivity and how environmental resources determine the level of cultural additivity through two scenarios:

- 1) the country with abundant resources, and
- 2) the country with limited resources.

Culture is an umbrella term that encompasses society's multifaceted aspects, such as social behaviors, norms, knowledge, beliefs, etc. Beyond those forms, we perceive culture as a set of core values driving the social behaviors, norms, knowledge, beliefs, etc. Cultural additivity is the concept advocated by Vuong et al. [5] in the study regarding Vietnamese folktales. They find that the interaction of Confucianism, Taoism, and Buddhism, or "Three Religions with the same root" ("tam giáo đồng nguyên" 三教同源), in folktales can be classified into three models:

- a) no additivity,
- b) simple additivity, and
- c) complex additivity.

In this essay, using the Mindsponge mechanism, we interpret the cultural additivity as a society's state of being (or degree) to which people in the given society advocate or reject the co-existence of different core values. Thus, Vuong et al.'s [2] models correspond with three people's alternatives when various values are appearing in society: 1) to reject the new values, 2) to compromise with the appearance of new values but still not consider it one of the core values, 3) to accept the co-existence of multiple different core values, respectively.

Scenario 1: Abundant resources

In a country with abundant environmental resources, the cost of surviving is low, for example, Vietnam. In Vietnam, the basic needs for surviving are relatively easy to achieve. One can even collect wild plants along the road or catch fishes from a random pond for making a "sufficient" meal. Thus, the remaining ultimate goal of people living in areas with plentiful resources is to maintain and improve well-being. As such, the opportunity cost of severe conflicts to happen is considerably high. People are unwilling to exchange their stability for more benefits but full of chaos, so rejecting the new values is usually not a favorable decision. Instead, people tend to compromise with the appearance of new values or accept the co-existence of multiple

different core values. The “three Religions with the same root” (“tam giáo đồng nguyên” 三教同源) in Vietnamese folktales are a great example [6,7].

Scenario 2: Limited resources

In contrast with scenario 1, people’s ultimate goal is to survive but not maintain wellbeing because the environmental resources in the area are only sufficient to support a finite number of people. In this sense, people will form into groups with similar beliefs, values, and interests to compete for controlling and deciding rights over the limited resources. Group members are asked to acquire strong beliefs or faiths towards the group’s culture to reinforce their capacity and power. Eventually, the reinforcement of the group’s core values might lead to the low acceptance of emerging values. The popularity of tribalism in Africa can serve as an exemplary case [8]. Due to the limited resources and barren vegetation, African people with similar beliefs and interests tend to form a tribe where the size is conditional on the tribe’s survival capabilities. Within a resource-constrained area with myriad tribes acquiring various beliefs and interests, the risk of being obliterated is apparent, urging the tribe to eliminate any new values contracting with the existing core values.

Final remarks

To conclude, we propose that the abundance of environmental resources can determine the cultural additivity level of humans’ collective structures (organization, society, country, etc.). The idea is expected to provide a way of interpretation and explanation for contemporary problems [9-16]. We completely acknowledge that the viewpoint is still underdeveloped, so we welcome all colleagues’ comments and questions to make the idea more transparent and concrete.

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