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Cultural additivity – means of human survival and evolution

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This week, the Royal Swedish Academy of Sciences announced the names of Nobel laureates in different fields. This year, the Nobel Prize in Biomedical Sciences was awarded to Swedish geneticist Svante Paabo for his discoveries concerning the DNA sequence of apes and human evolution.

His work is especially meaningful as the question of human origin has long been a major concern to mankind. Modern-day wise humans belong to the genus *Homo sapiens*, along with seven ancient human races that existed millions of years ago. Over time, many species became extinct and Professor Paabo discovered the gene transfer of these extinct species to *Homo sapiens*. With this discovery, he laid the foundation for other scientists to continue to search for the origin of modern humans.

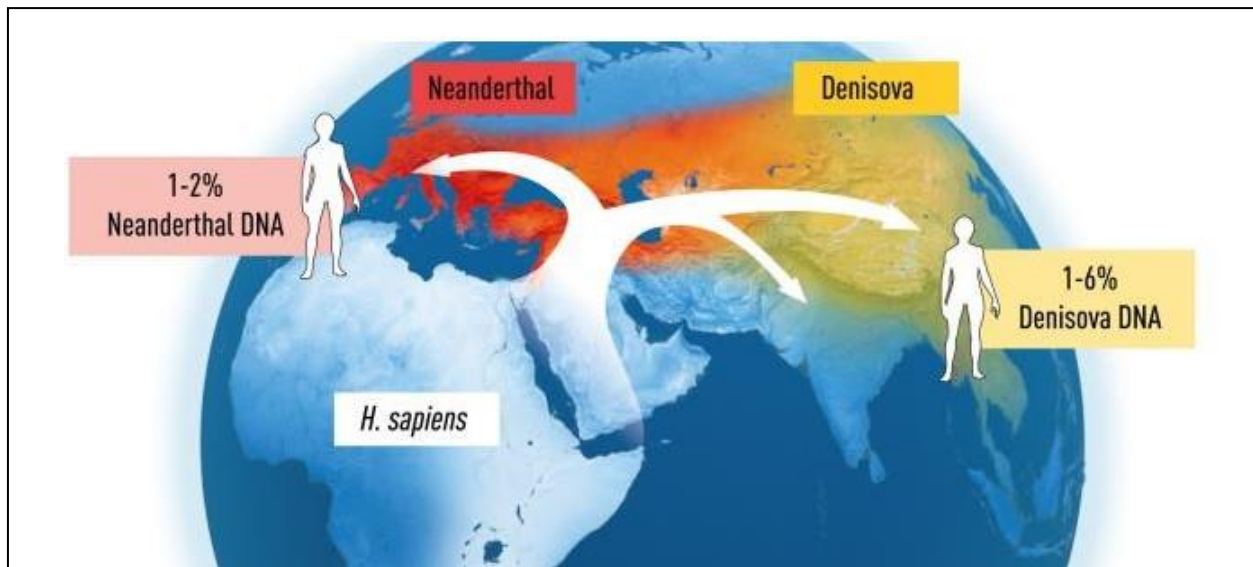


Figure 1. How the world was populated at the time *Homo sapiens* migrated out of Africa and spread to the rest of the world. Neanderthals lived to the west and Denisovans to the east in Eurasia. Interspecies mating occurred as *Homo sapiens* spread across the continent, leaving traces that remain in our DNA. Source: <https://www.nobelprize.org/>

Four years ago, Dr. Vuong Quan Hoang and his colleagues first published a groundbreaking study on culture (QH et al. Vuong, 2018). In this work, the authors introduced the concept of “Cultural Additivity – CA”, which in Vietnamese means “cultural additive”. CA is “a mechanism whereby people of a given culture are willing to incorporate into their culture the values and norms from other systems of beliefs that might or might not logically contradict with principles of their existing system of beliefs” (Ho Manh Tung & Pham Hiep, 2018). A special feature is that the authors used Bayes math tools to demonstrate the harmonious forms of 3 religions (Buddhism, Taoism, Confucianism) that make up the typical culture of Vietnam.



Figure 2. Cultural Additivity in Vietnamese architecture. Source: (Q. H. Vuong et al., 2018)

From the scientific work of Professor Paaboo, I have more convincing evidence proving that CA is (probably) a means of survival for humanity in social terms. The gene transfer of these extinct species to Homo sapiens suggests that the ancient human races had a certain harmony in the early civilization for survival and population growth (although there may be certain contradictions). In this process, only the modern human race has evolved continuously to these days because of its ability to get along and cooperate better, to have more beneficial customs, and to have more improvements in life and production.

If mindsponge theory (Q.-H. Vuong, 2022b) is a general process of nature, then CA is a mechanism that creates a kind of comfort zone for mindsponge to operate or a reflection of mindsponge in a context that society increases social connectedness, promoting cooperation (out of discipline). However, it is not necessarily just a social problem, since CA is endogenous in the system between people, and in itself contributes to the setting of social norms. In other words, CA is not only considered a social means for survival but also a strategic advantage or a mechanism to promote solutions for people (Q.-H. Vuong, 2022a; Q. H. et al. Vuong, 2022), which is expressed in many forms, with wide universality, and is reflected from the individual level to the corporate, national, and human level.

First, it is a matter of individual survival. Not long ago, the suicide of a student in Hanoi caused a public shock (Bao Anh & Danh Trong, 2022). Under the pressure from his family to study, this student chose to commit suicide to escape. According to the theory of suicide mechanism, suicide is an information-processing process in which “people in a deadlock situation cannot find effective help when facing mental difficulties and pain (psychological stress on study result). When the necessary supportive resources are not available, man tends to find an alternative solution, including committing suicide” (Nguyen et al., 2021; Nguyễn Thanh Nhân, 2021). In this case, the ability (a

mechanism) to actively connect socially to seek help in difficult times is a manifestation of CA. Nevertheless, the victim was unable or unsuccessful in using this social media to solve his survival problem.

For enterprises, business activities can be explained by cultural additivity. In a highly competitive environment, businesses always have to approach many partners and customers. They often come from many different religions, even different countries, with different cultures. The element of “tolerance” becomes fundamental. Entrepreneurs with “the more tolerant and open-minded” mindset have higher opportunities for cooperation, from which the opportunities for survival and development in business are also more open. In essence, the element of “forgiveness” that I am talking about is a condition of social connectedness, and it is a form of expression of “CA”.

Cultural additivity is expressed in the way a nation survives and develops. For example, during the period of resistance in Vietnam, defending and liberating the country was vital. CA is clearly shown by a very high social connectedness: leaders and people are connected, united, and together they stand side by side with a belief in victory despite tough living standards.

At the global scale, cultural additivity is expressed through many forms, typically cooperation and cohesion between countries. However, the disagreement and division between countries are increasing, especially in the powerful countries (Chakraborty, 2017) illustrating that humanity's chances of survival are extremely small. In terms of environmental pollution and climate change, CA is (probably) the key (solution). CA is the way to help countries get closer together, and help them work together in tackling common issues. Nevertheless, as environmental contamination and climate change are global problems, in order to solve them effectively, besides social connection, natural connectedness also needs strengthening in the future.

Natural connectedness allows people to learn more from nature, and have more motivation and solutions to conserve the environment/nature (Frantz & Mayer, 2014). Thus, enhancing social connectedness and nature connectedness can be the core principle in human's fight for survival and sustainable development in this century.

In short, cultural additivity is (probably) a special means of human survival and evolution, manifested in many forms associated with different contexts. Above all, the least basic logical connections seem to appear. They let 3 theories (CA, mindsponge, and serendipity) which at first look isolated and separated, to be interconnected through the basic conditions of life and social existence as a whole. Therefore, I am not surprised if continued research leads to the possibility that CA plays a role in a better explanation of social evolution, as well as the movement of people. Obviously, this connotation has gone beyond the original research, and so CA continues to push for logical and explanatory assumptions, once the data emerges to clarify a point argument that precedes it.

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