

STYLE AND THE PROBLEM OF UNITY AND PLURALITY*

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Abstract. The study approaches the concept of style, from the perspective of the problem the One and the Many, shaping up as the problem of Unity and Plurality, to emphasize the topic of the universal truths, embedded in every particular culture.

Keywords: Unity, Plurality, style.

Turning to the topic of your Meeting on Cultural Styles, I find the language and way of stating a most fundamental problem, very interesting, partly because of its difference. I emphasize the word “style,” which has not been a word that I have used, even when dealing with the same problem for so long and so intricately.

This is the ancient and perennial problem of the One and the Many. It shapes up as the problem of Unity and Plurality. It occurs most obviously, and to most thinkers most annoyingly, as the problem of the whole and its parts. (It is ravaging university campuses in the U.S. today as the problem of cultural diversity provoked partly by legislation favoring minorities that has been carried too far.) The problem has shaped up in Western history as the spiritual (wholeness, holiness) and material (parts, particulars), and a dualism resulting from the conviction that a whole (spirit) is not its parts (body, matter), and to identify the two in any way constitutes a contradiction. It is kind of seeming contradiction that prevents us from solving the problem and putting it to some kind of rest.

For me, in addition to a whole which is not its parts and the parts which are not the whole, both exist together in a larger whole, which I call an “organic whole.” My studies in Chinese philosophy have led me to interpret this larger whole (TAO) as a whole and parts embodying mutual immanence.

Turning from the problem of the one and the many as a metaphysical and logical problem to Cultural Styles, this problem occurs most violently in the clash of claims in religious and political belief especially those firmly established in traditional customs.

You state the problem in terms of “categorical and exclusive assertion of identity and autonomy” versus “fertile interaction between cultures” or “absolute universality of cultural traits” versus “emphasis on style diversity”. Your dichotomies are not clear to me, and you may have something in mind that is much more subtle

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