


[Justin Erik Halldor Smith](#) has won this year's [3 Quarks Daily](#) 2010 top philosophy prize with a post on [his blog](#) entitled "More on Non-Western Philosophy (the Very Idea)". This provocative essay is  of clear cognition-and-culture relevance. It begins:

Roughly speaking, we might conceptualize the attainments of a given culture as falling into two broad categories. On the one hand, there are things like wagons, gunpowder, and telephony: cultural attainments that, once they have caught on in one society, they cannot but spread to all societies that have the means of acquiring them. There is nothing, for example, intrinsically Chinese about printing. These are things that do not have any special relationship to the context of their origin. On the other hand, there are things like the Pythagorean chromatic scale as opposed to the Indian sargam, or the unicorn motif in Indo-European art: innovations of culture that do not automatically result in global diffusion, since they are only variations on a fixed range of possibilities for the expression of elements of culture -in this instance, music and figurative art- that are in some form always already there in every culture. In general, inventions diffuse, motifs do not (unless the motifs are from a higher-status conquering elite, which explains in part the abundance of copyright-infringing knock-offs of Disney characters in the developing world...). What sort of innovation is philosophy?

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