Wisdom of the East and West: A Relational Developmental Systems Perspective

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The origin of wisdom may be traced to the time when humans began to reflect on their own thoughts. Various surviving manuscripts of ancient civilizations from Egypt to Mesopotamia to China reveal a sustained analysis of this concept (Berthrong, 2008; Curnow, 2010). With its long tail of historical nuances accumulated throughout the centuries across different regions of the world, it is not surprising that wisdom is one of our most elusive concepts.

In the field of psychology, wisdom remains one of those constructs used freely in everyday conversation, but sometimes shunned by, and often used inconsistently in, academic dialogues. As a result, research on wisdom has been overlooked. Avoiding wisdom altogether often occurs because much of the scientific academic world thinks of wisdom as being too "metaphysical" for legitimate scientific inquiry. The inconsistency is due to the fact that definitions of wisdom remain highly context dependent. Despite these problems, since the publication of a seminal paper by Clayton and Birren in 1980, a number of social scientists have been investigating wisdom through a variety of scientific research approaches. One such approach explores the problem through *implicit definitions*—i.e., a common sense understanding of the meaning of the wisdom concept. This approach has been based on the assumption that any scientific construct necessarily reflects the implicit theory of the scientist himself/herself and such theories need to be relatively congruent with the definitions generated by lay people. Several studies have demonstrated that the definitions of the wisdom concept vary significantly across gender (Orwoll & Perlmutter, 1990), age (Clayton & Birren, 1980), and occupation (Sternberg, 1986). Early research was limited by the fact that studies were conducted only in the U.S. or Europe (Staudinger & Glück, 2011; Takahashi & Bordia, 2000). Subsequently, a series of cross-cultural studies were conducted that included Hispanic Americans (Valdez, 1994), Tibetan Buddhist monks (Levitt, 1999), Taiwanese Chinese (Yang, 2001), and Japanese (Takayama, 2002). In

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general, these studies reveal the unsurprising finding that implicit definitions of wisdom are largely determined by contextual factors such as gender, age, occupation, and cultural context.

Another approach that social scientists have taken in this field is the examination of historical documents in order to establish the meanings of wisdom during a given era. This line of research that Holliday and Chandler (1986) call *intellectual archeology* covers a broad historical landscape from ancient Egypt to modern Japan. The general conclusion drawn from this research is that the meaning of wisdom varies largely with the zeitgeist and with different features of a given culture such as its myth, politics, religion, and moral values.

These different approaches were designed to arrive at a definition of this elusive concept, wisdom, with the expectation that a definitive concept of wisdom would facilitate the development of explicit theories and further empirical tests of hypotheses derived from explicit theories. Paradoxically, the results have led to fragmentation rather than integration.

Mickler and Staudinger (2008) have recently proposed a novel approach to wisdom research but one that entails the same problem of fragmentation. Mickler and Staudinger argue for both distinguishing between and keeping distinct what they refer to as personal wisdom and general wisdom. Mickler and Staudinger base their argument on their own research which suggests that the two areas demonstrate different age trends and correlate differentially with several indicators of personal maturity (e.g., ego development) and subjective well-being (e.g., life satisfaction). Mickler and Staudinger's position is that personal wisdom is an intimate insight into one's own life, whereas general wisdom is a large knowledge database about life in general. For example, if one is in distress, he or she uses personal wisdom to draw strength to overcome the obstacle. On the other hand, if someone else is in trouble, a person may use the general wisdom to help that person. Unlike personal wisdom, general wisdom is a type of analytical tool used primarily to solve general problems of others. As such, a person with general wisdom is detached from the situation with minimal emotional involvement so that he or she can draw a logical and practical conclusion. In the ultimate form, general wisdom can well be a "collectively anchored product" (Baltes & Staudinger, 2000, p. 130) or extensive written materials, such as the Holy Bible or legal texts, that are "too large and complex to be stored in one individual's mind" (Staudinger & Baltes, 1996, p. 748). Baltes and Staudinger (2000) thus claim that individuals can never attain wisdom per se but should simply be regarded as "weak carriers of wisdom" (p. 130).

Although such "collectively anchored products" may have been viewed as wisdom proper in the past within a small tribe or clan, and while applying its literal translation to a disputed situation may have quite effectively solved the issue in those circumstances, the effort to compartmentalize wisdom into smaller subtypes is controversial. Particularly when virtually anyone can have access to an infinite amount of information and knowledge, literally at his/her fingertips, a person with a huge information database does not seem particularly wise. To put it differently, one still has to know *what* to google before one actually googles.

A further problem with splitting personal wisdom from general wisdom is raised by Ardelt (2004) who argues that wisdom, by definition, must be personal; otherwise, the concept would lose its core meaning and merge into related but distinct concepts such as knowledge and intelligence. As Ardelt states, "wisdom-related knowledge has to be realized by an individual through a reflection on personal experiences to be called wisdom and that the wisdom-related knowledge that is written down in texts remains theoretical or intellectual knowledge until a person re-transforms it into wisdom" (p. 305). Whether a crisis is falling upon us or someone else, it is still a person who uses, abuses, or even ignores the available information.

From a culturally inclusive developmental system perspective—based on both ancient and contemporary interpretations of wisdom in the Western and Eastern traditions—wisdom should be viewed relationally (Overton, 2010) as two poles of an inclusive psychological process. Historically, however, much of the past wisdom literature split the concept into separate elements similar to personal wisdom and general wisdom. In this chapter, I will describe a culturally inclusive developmental concept of wisdom followed by a brief summary of the historical roots of the concept. After this summary, I will present a review of the etymology and transformation of wisdom in the East with a particular focus on the Buddhist tradition. Although the original conceptualization of wisdom in this tradition was based on a non-split or relational epistemology (Overton, 2006), the meaning of the concept moved to a split and exclusive epistemology as the Buddhist texts were repeatedly rewritten over the years and eventually yielded dichotomies such as the personal wisdom-general wisdom split.

Further, within any given culture, the explicit or implicit acceptance of this epistemological transformation has had a significant impact on the culture's current everyday understanding of wisdom (i.e., implicit theories). That is, those who retain the ancient relational epistemology maintain an inclusive understanding, whereas those who have adopted the split epistemology maintain an exclusive understanding. As a consequence, exclusivists are more likely than the inclusivists to view wisdom as a "product," or perhaps as expert knowledge, that can be "collectively anchored." Finally, in the context of this epistemological discussion, I will explore the historical influence on contemporary implicit theories and provide a cross-cultural research example of this influence.

Culturally Inclusive Wisdom

We had proposed a culturally inclusive developmental system framework of wisdom integrating both the Western and Eastern interpretations (Takahashi & Overton, 2005). From this perspective, wisdom is understood as two moments of the same psychological process: a synthetic mode and analytic mode. The synthetic mode—partially derived from the early traditional Eastern view of wisdom—is an experience-based, expansive mental process that constitutes the "expression" of an

underlying psychological organization that undergoes through a series of dialectic transformations over a life course. In this process, the human mind is understood to be a dynamic self-organizing and self-regulating system that develops toward higher states of differentiation and integration through its action-in-the-world.

Two features of the synthetic mode require highlighting. First, the synthetic/transformational aspect of wisdom is the result of a developmental process that generates/produces a highly reflective and adaptive level of ego or consciousness, and action-in-the-world is the mechanism of this process. Wisdom reflects a highly differentiated and highly integrated level of awareness about self and others; individuals who attain this level of subject-object awareness have traditionally been referred to in the personality literature as "interindividual" (Kegan, 1982), "self-actualized" (Maslow, 1971), and "fully functioning" (Rogers, 1959).

Second, the synthetic/integrative feature of wisdom points specifically to the end state of the transformational developmental process (i.e., to the mature form of a well-coordinated human mind). As Erikson points out, wisdom is "an increased sense of inner unity" (1959, p. 51) that involves various psychological domains including cognition, emotion, intuition, and interpersonal interaction. For example, a wise person is consistently able to regulate his/her own emotions in an interpersonal relationship while having a keen insight and understanding of the emotions of the self and others. As a result, the person is often sought after by others for sound advice and discreet judgment.

The analytic mode complements the synthetic mode. It explicitly concerns not the "expression" of some underlying psychological system but the "instrumental" or "adaptive" part of observed behavior. For example, the analytic mode focuses on various information-processing functions (including a specific knowledge database and the capability to utilize it) in order to attain practical goals in life (e.g., problem solving).

While several previous research had defined wisdom exclusively from a Western perspective focusing on the analytic mode (e.g., Arlin, 1990; Baltes, Lindenberger, & Staudinger, 1998; Sternberg, 1998), the culturally inclusive framework was conceptualized partially based on the interpretations of the Western and Eastern historical literature (Takahashi, 2000). The dominant Western tradition understood wisdom from a "split" epistemological perspective and defined exclusively as a high level of analytical skills. For example, in ancient Greece, wisdom was believed to be a type of knowledge—whether it is philosophical (*sophia*), practical (*phronesis*), or scientific (*episteme*)—possessed by a small group of elite citizens such as philosophers and statesmen (Robinson, 2000). Similarly, later teaching in Judeo-Christian tradition during the Medieval and the early Renaissance period recognized the importance of human knowledge as a part of wisdom. However, unlike the Greek definition, it was the divine knowledge gained through a strict adherence to the God that gave humans the ultimate wisdom (Assmann, 1994). The fact that the Western intellectual tradition has emphasized literacy and logic and has produced numerous writings that continue to be influential today (e.g., Biblical Hermeneutics, Greek literature, etc.) may also have contributed to the idea that wisdom is not necessarily a personal quality but a general property or a type of knowledge.

In contrast, the Eastern philosophies such as Hinduism, Buddhism, and Taoism emphasize the "non-split" relational epistemology and value both the analytical and synthetic components as two sides of the same coin. While having knowledge is important, it is also necessary that a wise person has cognitive, emotional, interpersonal, and intuitive understanding. This inclusive ideology comes from one of the most ancient Hindu texts, the *Vedas*. Although different versions and interpretations exist, the original Vedic texts were written sometime around 1500–1000 B.C. Vedic cosmology stresses the origin of the universe not as a split (e.g., light and darkness, heaven and hell) but as a unity (Paranjpe, 1984). Unlike a clear demarcation of the Creator and the creation in the conventional Judeo-Christian teaching, the Eastern tradition based on *Vedas* often espouses the idea of unity even between god and people. For example, in Hinduism an ordinary person who becomes enlightened, or who has achieved "true selfness" (i.e., Ātman), is regarded as indistinguishable from the god or the supreme spirit, Brahman (Bhaskarananda, 1994). Similarly, Buddhism also adopts this non-split epistemology and claims that Buddha and the universe are not discernable from each other. This is not to say that an enlightened one is a demigod or the son of God, but the content of the universe such as people, objects, and phenomena is God itself (Tachikawa, 1995).

Historically as scholars explored the *Vedas* and other related Eastern texts, their interpretations of the teachings became increasingly compartmentalized. In the following section, I will focus specifically on the Buddhist conceptualization of wisdom in Japan, which was originally thought of as an experience-based, non-split religious teaching valuing both analytical and synthetic aspects, but due to abused and misinterpreted meanings during the early to mid-twentieth century, the concept became dogmatic and fragmented. These abuses were first perpetrated by the imperial military government until the end of WWII, and then by a propaganda campaign executed by extreme right-wing factions (Rohlen, 1979). Over the last several decades, as the people became disillusioned with concepts associated with religion but continued seeking existential meanings of life, constructs like wisdom that had their etymological roots in religion were revived in an experience-based and secularized form. That is, the current interpretation of wisdom in Japan embraces the remnant of the ancient inclusive epistemology, taking both the synthetic and analytic modes into account, without its religious implications (Takahashi & Bordia, 2000; Takahashi & Overton, 2002).

Transformation of Wisdom in the East

When Buddha became enlightened and began teaching around 600 BC, he spoke a language similar to Pali (Mizuno, 1982), a language of commoners in the current region of India, Pakistan, and Nepal. His teaching was primarily concerned with *paññā*. It is a female noun later translated into Chinese by Zhi Lou Jia Chen in 179 AD as the wisdom of Buddhism or the knowledge required for enlightenment

(般若) (Hirai, 2009). However, *paññā* is not simply a type of knowledge or cognitive function, but rather, it should be interpreted as an essential property of the experience of enlightenment itself because in Buddhism—as in the contemporary relational developmental systems perspective of psychology—knowledge and action are inseparable. So it was then believed that *paññā* must be complemented by compassionate action (*maitra-cittatā* or慈悲), a male noun. Compassion is the procedural part of the enlightenment (方便) referring to the most profound form of friendship or unconditional embracing of all beings. In other words, Buddha was regarded as a wise or enlightened one, not only because of his expanded consciousness regarding knowledge of wisdom, but also because of his subsequent deeds to save others with his teaching. Both the knowledge and action of Buddha are *sine qua non* for *paññā*, and both must be realized by a person (Takasaki, 2000).

As Buddha's teaching spread beyond common people to elites and scholars, numerous manuscripts were produced in Sanskrit, a language that is more formal than Pali and, along with Latin and Greek, one of the most widely used since antiquity. In this scholastic language tradition, the concept of ancient wisdom (i.e., pre-Buddhism) was originally expressed as *vid*,[1] a verb implying a type of religious or transcendental knowing. It may be translated as "knowing directly with emotion" (Takasaki, 2000). It also means "revealing" or "waking up" (覚) as Buddha himself literally woke up from an ordinary consciousness to a higher level of superconscious state. In other words, *vid* is not a logical or scientific knowledge but an inclusive knowing that one must experience bodily, much like the concept of "embodiment" found in the contemporary relational developmental systems perspective.

Furthermore, it is this type of experiential knowing that the Buddhist teaching emphasizes the most. The short text of Prajñā-pāramitā-hrdaya (般若心経), which literally translates as "Heart of the Perfection of Transcendent Wisdom (commonly known as the Heart Sutra)," one of the most important and widely read Mahayana Buddhist wisdom texts translated in Chinese by Xuanzang in 649AD, is illustrative of this point (Nakamura & Kino, 1960). While this text describes the core teaching of Buddhism (e.g., karma, suffering, noble paths, impermanence, and moderation) within a context of a colloquial conversation between Buddha and Śāriputra, his main disciple, the entirety of the text consists of 269 Chinese characters, approximately 1/6 page long. More importantly, in the last section of the text where Buddha tries to explain what wisdom really is, he uses a phrase with no apparent meanings (e.g., 羯諦羯諦波羅羯諦 or "gate, gate, pāragate"). From the context, several interpretations of its meaning have been inferred including a congratulatory yell to those who achieved *nirvana* or the sound (or lack of sound) of the universe. In other words, this text emphasizes that wisdom in the Buddhist tradition values not words themselves but the experience that followers have *with* the text through regular recitation and meditation. *Zen* Buddhism is even more extreme. It avoids analyzing and dissecting its respective texts because doing so was believed to dilute

[1] Whereas *veda* is a noun for *vid*, the *Vedas* refer to a body of ancient Hindu texts.

the very teaching *Zen* practitioners were trying to disseminate. For example, one of the main *Zen* tenets is to simply avoid the written texts—the analytical representation of its teaching—as a pedagogical means (不立文字 or "*furyumonji*") (Nitobe, 1993). Instead, people who seek wisdom are expected to *personally* experience life in a specific way by following certain behavioral codes transferred orally across generations.

With an increasing popularity of Buddhism after his death, relevant manuscripts were reinterpreted and rewritten numerous times in various scholastic traditions. As a consequence, the meaning of wisdom as divine knowledge was transformed from a religious and mystical knowing of *vid* to a more practical and logical knowledge of *jñā*. Unlike *vid*, *jñā*, a verb stem, denotes "to recognize" and is regarded as a type of cognitive knowledge in the "head" and might be used to describe "information processing" in cognitive science and in other more applied fields. Further, *jñā* is a derivative of *jñāna* and *prajñā*. The former may be translated as "knowing" or the "function of knowing," while the latter denotes "knowing ahead (pra = pre)" or "predicting." In short, the words *jñāna* and *prajñā* are synonyms denoting cognitive knowing or what one might call the general wisdom of Buddhism. On the other hand, *vid* implies a private, experiential knowledge of enlightenment or the personal wisdom of Buddhism

Around 200 BC, Ashoka, a Buddhist and the first unifier of ancient India, propagated Buddhism beyond India (Seneviratna, 1994). The teaching eventually reached China during Emperor Ming's reign around 1 AD (Hill, 2009). By this time, these two types of knowing, *jñāna* and *prajñā,* replaced the original conceptualization of wisdom as *vid* and had been translated into Chinese (as 智 and 慧, respectively), and a combined word, 智慧, became known as the wisdom of Buddhism. For this reason, the concept of wisdom came to be associated with less of an emphasis on inclusivity and personal experience involving cognition, emotion, intuition, and other psychological processes, and more of an emphasis on knowledge per se, with accentuated with analytical and practical properties (Takasaki, 2000).

In summary, as a consequence of the multiple historical rewritings of the Buddhist texts, the concept of wisdom was transformed from one originally based on non-split epistemology to one more highly compartmentalized and exclusive. As a result, some of the Buddhist interpretations may now be seen as quite similar to those of personal wisdom and general wisdom.

Further, the extent to which this transformation of meanings over time has been explicitly or implicitly accepted within a given culture, seems to have influenced how lay people of the culture understand the concept today (i.e., their implicit theories). That is, people who adhere to the older, non-split epistemology understand the meaning of wisdom as inclusive, whereas those who have the historical transformations as their epistemological context understand wisdom as a more highly compartmentalized and exclusive concept. Consequently, the latter group is more likely than the former group to conceptualize wisdom as a "product," or perhaps as knowledge, that can be "collectively anchored."

Historical Influence on Contemporary Implicit Theories

Among the many regions in the East that have been influenced by Buddhism, present-day India and Japan demonstrate two unique cases in their own rights. Although Buddhism originated in the northern region of India, it is almost extinct there today, accounting for less than 1 % of the population. However, more than 99.9 % of the population practice specific religions such as Hinduism (80.5 %) that share the ancient *Vedic* non-split ideology (Government of India, 2010). Still today, religions in India constitute the critical subsoil on which principles of politics, ethics, and other fields are nourished. As religions penetrate into many practical spheres, however, the religious doctrines are constantly and increasingly narrowly reanalyzed and reinterpreted to conform to the dominant secular narratives (Clothey, 2006; Crossette, 1993). The political turmoil seen around the nation is illustrative of the discord caused by the secular (e.g., regional and political) and religious narratives shaping each other to fit into their respective agenda (Sathyamurthy, 1996).

In contrast to India, although a large majority of Japanese report themselves to be Buddhists and/or Shintoists, only a small minority actually identify themselves as adherents of a specific religious faith (29.1 %) or the member of a particular religious organization (8.8 %; Ishii, 2005). This inconsistency is due to a discrepancy between religious practice and religious faith. That is, many in Japan engage in rituals that were once regarded as religious but no longer require a specific faith or commitment to be practiced. For example, it is quite common across generations to celebrate one's birth at a Shinto shrine, marry in a Christian church, and be buried at a Buddhist temple. In Japan, wisdom is also no longer expressed as the original Chinese characters, 智慧, with exclusive religious semantics, but as a set of new, secularized, and simplified characters, 知恵 (in fact, 慧 is no longer recognized as a part of Japanese lexicon). This "new wisdom" maintains the ancient and inclusive connotation of the "non-split" epistemology that emphasizes personal properties and experiences, and is clearly distinguished from related analytical concepts such as intelligence and knowledge that resemble general wisdom (Takahashi & Bordia, 2000).

When different cultural-historical interpretations of wisdom are laid out on a continuum from exclusive to inclusive, contemporary implicit definitions also seem to overlay that continuum. That is, a contemporary common sense understanding of wisdom is often narrow and highly compartmentalized within the culture wherein wisdom has been historically defined as such, while the opposite is the case where wisdom is defined more inclusively. Takahashi and Bordia (2000) conducted a cross-cultural comparison of implicit theories of wisdom involving different cultural-historical traditions. In this investigation, the countries of Australia, India, Japan, and the USA were selected for study based on an assumption that the Australians/Americans and Indians/Japanese respectively represent what are generally defined as the Western and Eastern cultures. While acknowledging the danger in oversimplifying the world into an East-West

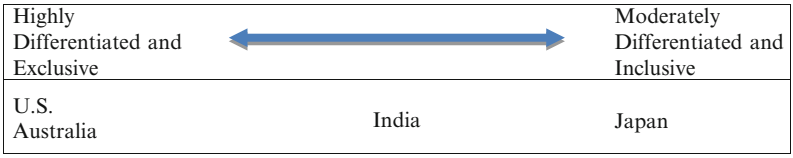

Fig. 1 Exclusive-inclusive continuum of wisdom definitions for Australia, India, Japan, and the U.S.

dichotomy, the aim of the study was to show a pattern of different conceptualizations of wisdom within these broadly defined regions/cultures. Furthermore, these four groups could also be viewed in terms of their cultural-historical emphasis on the non-split relational epistemology (Fig. 1). At the far end, the "Western" samples regard wisdom not as an integration of analytic and synthetic characteristics but as a high level of analytical skills accumulated through one's life experience. In its extreme form, they might accept wisdom as highly logical literary products that contain knowledge and expert advice.

On the other end of the continuum, contemporary Japanese represent a very secular culture, yet its fundamental epistemology derives from the non-split tradition of the ancient East. Like many other concepts historically associated with religion (e.g., spirituality), the concept of wisdom in contemporary Japan is only moderately articulated in public dialogue and often regarded as mystical, vague, and inclusive (Takahashi & Ide, 2004). The contemporary Indian culture represents a point somewhere in the middle of the non-split relational epistemology continuum. Although non-split epistemology was embraced in the past, a constant reanalysis and scrutiny of religious doctrines seem to have created more highly analytical and practical interpretations (often in English) of their respective epistemology than those of the past (Crossette, 1993).

In the study, a total of 217 young adults from these four countries were asked to rate the similarity of seven pre-generated personality descriptors: *aged, awakened, discreet, experienced, intuitive, knowledgeable,* and *wise*. They were also asked to select the preferred adjective for an ideal self. The results of multidimensional scaling, along with a cluster analysis, revealed that the Americans and Australians had an almost identical result and regarded *wise* as most closely associated with *knowledgeable* and *experienced*. Further, for the descriptors of an ideal self, both the Americans and Australians selected *wise* and *knowledgeable* as the most preferred, while *discreet* and *aged* were the least preferred. These findings indicate that the Western understanding of wisdom still emphasizes analytical features such as a broad knowledge database that can also be seen as a "collectively anchored product" (i.e., general wisdom).

In contrast, there are some uniquely Eastern patterns found in both the Indian and Japanese groups. First, although both Western and Eastern samples viewed *wise* and *experienced* to be similar in meaning, only the latter group viewed *experienced* and *aged* as closely associated as well. In other words, what is valued in the East is not any experience per se but those personal experiences that must be

accumulated through the lifelong developmental process. Second, whereas *wise* is closely associated with *knowledgeable* in the West, the Indian and Japanese view *wise* as most closely associated with *discreet*, characteristics often used in a broader situation that requires both analytical and synthetic skills such as prudence and judiciousness. These results clearly suggest then that wisdom in the East is interpreted not as a "general" product but as a personal experience that is, by definition, realized by that person.

There are subtle differences, however, between the Indian and Japanese samples in semantically defining wisdom and in how they choose adjectives for an ideal self. First, for Indians, *knowledgeable* played a significant role in the understanding of wisdom, although not to the same extent as in the case of Americans and Australians. While *knowledgeable* and *wise* belonged to different clusters for Japanese (i.e., *wise*/*discreet* vs. *knowledgeable*/*aged*/*experienced*), for Indians *knowledgeable* and *wise* were within one large cluster (*wise*/*discreet*/*awakened*/*knowledge*). Further, *knowledgeable* was selected by Indians as the second preferred adjective to describe an ideal self, compared to the sixth for the Japanese. By the same token, *discreet* was selected as the second preferred for the Japanese and fourth for the Indians. These findings suggest that while the conceptualization of wisdom is more similar than different between Indian and Japanese when juxtaposed with the American and Australian samples combined, Indians regarded wisdom more as an analytical concept (e.g., a broad knowledge database) that can be anchored as some sort of wisdom treatise than did the Japanese sample. That is, the concept of wisdom is likely to be viewed in terms of general properties in India, while the contemporary definition of wisdom in Japan emphasizes personal properties (e.g., emotions, intuition) that are essential in sustaining one's prudence and discretion.

On the empirical level, the culturally inclusive developmental system has been explored from several approaches. For example, Takahashi and Overton (2002) carried out a cross-cultural study examining the synthetic and analytical dimensions of wisdom among middle-aged and older American and Japanese adults and found that older adults, regardless of their cultural background, generally outperformed the middle-aged counterparts on both wisdom dimensions. Similarly, Ardelt proposed a three-dimensional personality characteristic model of wisdom (1997, 2004) based on a model postulated by Clayton and Birren (1980) and revealed in a study that not only analytical but also synthetic dimension—reflective and affective characteristics—of wisdom were associated with life satisfaction of older adults. Other empirical approaches to wisdom that incorporate the inclusive developmental system model include those of post-formal operation (e.g., Sinnott, 1998), emotion/cognition integration (e.g., Scheibe & Blanchard-Fields, 2009), and the dynamic systems (e.g., Labouvie-Vief, Gruhn, & Moras, 2009). In essence, these studies demonstrate that both the analytic and the synthetic dimensions are important in understanding the functioning of wisdom.

Even after three decades of rigorous research, wisdom still remains one of the most challenging constructs for social scientists. Its definition is elusive, to say the least, because people in different cultures throughout various eras have had their

unique perspectives and understandings of wisdom. As mentioned earlier, Mickler and Staudinger (2008) have recently proposed a new distinction between personal wisdom, concerned with a personal insight into one's own life and general wisdom, concerned with general properties of wisdom which could also be a "product" such as written manuscripts. While it remains controversial to split wisdom into subcategories, it may be valid to recognize these as two poles of the same relational matrix. In this chapter, I have reviewed historical understandings of wisdom in Buddhism and showed two distinctive interpretations within that tradition that correspond to personal wisdom and general wisdom. On the one hand, *vid* denotes the original ancient wisdom that must be realized by an individual during the enlightenment process, a personal wisdom. On the other hand, *jñā* represents a type of general cognitive knowledge and information contained in the numerous wisdom texts, and as such it is a detached knowledge with an emphasis on general properties, a general wisdom.

Furthermore, when implicit theories are compared across cultures, the more a culture identifies itself with the split epistemology, with compartmentalized theories of religion and mythology (such as Western and to some extent Indian culture), the more people regard wisdom as general properties that can be defined in terms of culturally anchored products. In contrast, the more a culture identifies itself with the non-split relational epistemology (e.g., Japan), the more the concept of wisdom is likely to be understood in terms of personal properties that require multiple levels of psychological functioning that must be realized by that individual.

The relational framework I propose here sidesteps debates over the semantic dichotomies of personal wisdom and general wisdom by recognizing them as parts of an integrated whole; it thus facilitates legitimately related lines of wisdom research that can cooperate scientifically rather than compete semantically. For example, it would be interesting to examine wisdom's association with the concept of spirituality, a direction that is gaining increasing interest in the field of gerontology. Do wisdom and spirituality share the same underlying developmental system? What contextual factors mediate the expression of these constructs? With an inclusive relational approach to wisdom and related concepts such as spirituality, we may gain a better grasp of what these concepts truly means.

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