Culture and Wisdom

Franki Y. H. Kung¹

Igor Grossmann²

¹ Department of Psychological Sciences, Purdue University

² Department of Psychology, University of Waterloo

Correspondence concerning this manuscript should be addressed to Franki Kung, Department of Psychological Sciences, Purdue University, 703 Third Street, West Lafayette, IN 47907, USA;
E-mail: frankikung@purdue.edu

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Summary

The concept of wisdom is ancient and deeply embedded in the cultural history of humanity. However, only in the last few decades have psychologists begun to study it scientifically. We review emerging insights into the science of wisdom from a cultural psychological perspective, focusing on (a) cultural similarities and differences in epistemological traditions; (b) lay theories of wisdom (e.g., wisdom-related cognitions, affective processes, and prosociality), and (c) the role of socio-cultural affordances for the expression of wisdom-related characteristics in daily life. Overall, evidence suggests that wisdom is a culturally-situated and malleable construct, with culture playing a central role in shaping wisdom-related behaviors, supporting a constructionist account of wisdom and its development. Understanding of ecological and cultural-historical factors for the meaning and expression of wisdom is essential for the further advancement of psychological wisdom research.

Keywords: Wisdom, culture, cultural differences, wise reasoning, lay theories, constructionism, prosociality

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Wisdom: A Latent Multifaceted Construct

Like many individual difference constructs (e.g., conscientiousness), wisdom is multifaceted—a construct that encompasses multiple components (Bangen, Meeks, & Jeste, 2013; Brienza, Kung, Santos, Bobocel, & Grossmann, 2017; Staudinger & Glück, 2011). Wisdom is typically associated with abilities to make sound judgments (e.g., rich knowledge, self-reflection, emotional balance, prosocial orientation; Baltes, 2004; Oakes, Brienza, Elnakouri, & Grossmann, 2018; Staudinger & Glück, 2011; Staudinger, Smith, & Baltes, 1994) and is often considered as an indicator of advanced human development (Assmann, 1994; Erikson, 1982). In the past decades, psychological investigations of wisdom have surged. Scholars have proposed a range of definitions, each emphasizing somewhat different components of wisdom.

Reviewing the psychology literature, Bangen, Meeks, and Jeste (2013) have identified nine main components of wisdom. The list was later updated by Grossmann and Kung (2018). As presented in Table 1, the most widely proposed components (mentioned in at least half of the scientific papers) are benevolence/prosociality, recognizing uncertainty and change, and emotion/ self-regulation.

Benevolence/prosociality refers to tendencies to show empathy, compassion, and altruism (Bangen et al., 2013). Theoretically, the prosocial aspect of wisdom is distinct from cognitive abilities such as fluid intelligence and creativity (Sternberg, 1985). Though abstract cognitive abilities such as propositional logic (Inhelder & Piaget, 1958) are well suited to master clearly defined problems and are beneficial for a good judgment, such abilities are not sufficient for successful navigation of the ill-defined situations which typically call for wisdom (Clayton &

Overton, 1976; Grossmann, 2017c). Empirical evidence also supports this notion. Wisdom-related reasoning is only weakly related to performance on tasks measures capturing domain-general cognitive abilities (Grossmann et al., 2010; Grossmann, Na, Varnum, Kitayama, & Nisbett, 2013; Staudinger, Lopez, & Baltes, 1997) and the underlying neurophysiology (Grossmann, Sahdra, & Ciarrochi, 2016).

The recognition of uncertainty and prospection on change conceptually overlaps with the constructs of “naïve dialecticism” (Peng & Nisbett, 1999) or “holistic cognition” (Nisbett, Peng, Choi, & Norenzayan, 2001). Though each of these constructs concerns sensitivity to contextual information, they differ in the domain of analysis. Naïve dialecticism and holistic cognition focus on general cognition about change, whereas wisdom scholarship concerns reflections on concrete, ill-defined interpersonal issues (see Grossmann, 2017a, for further information regarding the concept of dialecticism and wisdom). In other words, whereas naïve dialecticism and holistic cognition are general information processing tendencies, wisdom-related characteristics are specific to navigating social issues—any issues that may involve interpersonal, intergroup, or humanity-focused considerations. Another component emotion/ self-regulation broadly refers to one’s affect regulation and self-control (Bangen et al., 2013) and the balancing between multiple (potentially conflicting) motives (Sternberg, 1998). Other important, albeit less empirically explored, components are perspective-taking and -integration (i.e., the ability to have and reconcile multiple perspectives), intellectual humility, and spirituality.

Table 1. Summary of Definitions of Wisdom: Common Components

Author(s)	Recognizing	Perspective		Benevolence/ Prosociality	Emotion/Self		Other
	Uncertainty and Change	Taking and Integration	Intellectual humility		Regulation	Spirituality	
1. Kekes (1983)	×						
2. Taranto (1989)	×			×			
3. Baltes & Staudinger (2000)	×	×	×				
4. Achenbaum & Orwoll (1991)	×	×	×	×	×	×	integrity
5. Denney, Dew, & Kroupa (1995)				×			specific skills related to business, politics, etc.
6. Ardel (1997)	×			×	×		
7. Hershey & Farrell (1997)		×		×	×	×	enlightened
8. Wink & Helson (1997)	×	×		×		×	
9. Sternberg (1998)	×			×			
10. Levitt (1999)			×	×			honesty, efficiency
11. McKee & Barber (1999)	×			×			
12. Olejnik (1999)	×						biographical perspective
13. Jason et al. (2001)	×	×	×	×	×	×	reverence for nature
14. Yang (2001)			×	×	×		modesty/ unobtrusiveness
15. Montgomery, Barber, & McKee (2002)				×			moral principles
16. Perry et al. (2002)	×			×	×	×	reverence for nature
17. Takahashi & Overton (2002)				×	×		
18. Webster (2003)		×	×		×		

19. Glück, Bluck, Baron, & Mcadams, (2005)	×	×		×	×	
20. Brown et al. (2006)	×			×	×	
21. Jeste & Vahia (2008)				×	×	
22. Meeks et al. (2009)	×	×		×	×	
23. Grossmann et al. (2010; 2012)	×	×	×			
24. Jeste et al. (2010)	×	×	×	×	×	maturity
25. Grossmann (2017c)	×	×	×	×		big-picture/broad context
26. Brienza et al. (2017)	×	×	×	×		big-picture/vintage point of an outsider
<i>N</i> definitions with component	18	12	10	21	13	5

Note. Modified from Grossmann & Kung (2018).

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The notion of wisdom goes back to some of the oldest writings describing the ideal conduct of life. Historians refer to them as the “wisdom literature.” Wisdom, as a cultural idea, distills knowledge of what is considered good within the cultural context. Therefore, the study of wisdom is fundamental for understanding human culture writ large. The way wisdom is conceptualized in people and culture may differ from the way scientists understand wisdom (i.e., “explicit theories”). Rather, the cultural knowledge of wisdom offer insights into how cultures have developed as well as conditions promoting various forms of cultural evolution, including its diversification or globalization. It sheds light on the similar and varying rules and virtues across cultures, helping psychologists to unpack the specific meaning systems in a given world, as well as the way they have changed over time.

While much evidence would suggest that wisdom tends to be valued universally and there seems to be a large overlap of what is considered wise across culture, there are also differences in the way the concept of wisdom is applied and manifested across cultures (S. Kim & Knight, 2015; Yang, 2001). These cultural similarities and differences are summarized below, based on the different perspectives in comparing the definitions of wisdom across cultures.

Dictionary definitions. Languages evolve to describe modern cultural meanings of ideas. Hence, one way to understand the concept of wisdom across cultures is to compare its dictionary definitions in different languages. For example, in English, wisdom is the “knowledge that is gained by having many experiences in life; knowledge of what is proper or reasonable; good sense or judgment” (Merriam-Webster, 2016a). In Chinese, wisdom (“智慧”) concerns the integration of knowledge and intelligence, wit and brightness (Schroeter & Uecker, 2016b). In Russian, wisdom (“мудрость”) concerns the application of knowledge and experience for

reasonable decisions and actions (Dmitriev, 2003). In many languages, knowledge seems to be a critical component of wisdom.

Table 2. Examples of Dictionary Definition of Wisdom in Different Languages

Language	Word	Dictionary Meaning	Source
Arabic	حكمة	Wisdom, maxim, prudence, epigram, sense, insight, saying, proverb, piece of wisdom	Schroeter & Uecker, 2016a
Chinese	智慧	Wisdom, wit, brain, intelligence, brightness; intellectual property	Schroeter & Uecker, 2016b
English	wisdom	Knowledge that is gained by having many experiences in life; the natural ability to understand things that most other people cannot understand; knowledge of what is proper or reasonable : good sense or judgment	Merriam-Webster, 2016a
German	Weisheit	Understanding, prudence, knowledge	Collins English-German Dictionary, 2016
Greek	σοφία	Sophia, which is the root of the English terms, "sophistication" (the art of using wisdom) and philosophy"(affection for wisdom). Cleverness, learning, wisdom, broad and full intelligence; sapience, wiseness, judiciousness, sagacity, sagaciousness	BibleHub, 2016

Hebrew	חוכמה	Wisdom, understanding, judgment, smart remarks, wisecracks	Morfix Hebrew English Dictionary, 2016
Hindi	बुद्धिमत्ता	Wisdom, being wise, dexterity, gray matter, intelligence, sagacity, sapience, sobering, sobriety	Shabdkosh: English Hindi Dictionary and, 2016
Japanese	知恵	Wisdom, wit, sagacity, sense, intelligence	Tangorin Japanese Dictionary, 2016
Russian	мудрость	Wisdom, common sense, good sense, savvy, sapience	Schroeter & Uecker, 2016c
Spanish	sabiduría	Wisdom, learning, knowledge	Merriam-Webster, 2016b

Philosophical influences.

Western traditions. Ancient Greek philosophers viewed wisdom as the virtue of being able to reason logically and possess knowledge, facilitating a greater understanding of the true nature of the world (Robinson, 1990). Among others, Socrates (470-399 B.C.), and later Plato (428-348 B. C.) and Aristotle (384-322 B.C.), collectively gave the most influential Western school of thoughts on wisdom.

Socrates famously posited that cognitive limitation inhibits people from understanding the nature of things, however, when one acknowledges the limitation, one would be humble and keep trying to understand. This form of humility is typically referred to as epistemic or

intellectual humility, which is why Socrates' philosophy of wisdom is often described as the "humility theory of wisdom" (Ryan, 2013). Following the Socratic tradition, Plato later conceptualized wisdom as the ultimate meaning of truth, and Aristotle further differentiated wisdom into two components: Sophia (σοφία)—the ultimate or divine knowledge about the true nature of things, and phronesis (φρόνησις)—the practical knowledge and rational thinking that promotes good character.

The emphasis on intellectual humility in wisdom is also evidence in Abrahamic religious traditions (Assmann, 1994). Christianity, in particular, exerted a crucial influence on social systems in the West, placing a particular emphasis on the humility aspect of wisdom. According to the Christian worldview, humans are sinners and limited in comprehending the ultimate truth, whereas God is perfect and can hold the ultimate truth. Therefore, the path to wisdom is seeking and being humble before God. Because of the divine nature of wisdom, it is common to observe people speaking of wisdom as in part supernatural and related to moral perfections and ideals beyond the self and self-interests (Birren & Svensson, 2005).

Non-Western traditions. The concept of wisdom in Non-western traditions (e.g., East and South Asia) tend to include a wide range of components (Ferrari et al., 2016; Jeste & Vahia, 2008; Khan, 2013; Takahashi & Overton, 2002). Notably, two of the oldest traditions in the wisdom literature arguably came from India and China.

India. Vedas, believed to be one of the most ancient Hindu scriptures (Durant, 2011), is an anonymous collection of sages' revelations from meditation related to wisdom (Scharfe, 2002). The word Vedas came from the root "vid" which means to know and understand, and it resonates with the Western traditions of wisdom as unbiased knowing (of the truth). Yet different from the Socratic traditions that highlights reasoning and reflection, the Vedic traditions

emphasized a “more intuitive, personal experience,” which does not necessarily involve a rational reflection (Takahashi & Overton, 2002). Buddhism later emerged in India shaping the socio-religious belief system in the nation and its neighboring countries. Buddhist traditions highlight the search of higher truth through enlightening (Dyer, 2009) and conduct (Birren & Svensson, 2005). A wise person would act wisely, observe the context, listen to advice, and possess the knowledge necessary to decide what is reasonable. The initial teachings of Buddhism mostly come from conversations, lectures, and stories taught by Buddha (Birren & Svensson, 2005).

China. Chinese cultures nurtured many humanistic and non-theological philosophies of wisdom. Take Taoism for example. From Tao-Te Ching, or The Book of the Way, Lao-Taz taught that non-interference to natural courses of things is the basis of wisdom (Durant, 1961): “To be wise is to realize one’s harmony with nature and to live in conjunction with nature’s rhythm” (Bierly III, Kessler, & Christensen, 2013). Similar to Western philosophical traditions of wisdom, Taoism placed high values on knowing via self-reflection. In addition, Lao-Taz emphasized the value of inaction and unobtrusiveness. For example, such inaction may be valuable in interpersonal conflict scenarios, where the optimal solution often relies on non-engaging and letting the matters naturally unfold. Interestingly, in Taoist beliefs, not to engage in conflict resolution is not necessarily an act of indifference, but an act of understanding and compassion.

Another school of thoughts in China, Confucianism, emphasized the component of benevolence/prosociality in wisdom, or called *ren* (仁). In Analects, Confucius described *ren* as a human nature, but *ren* can be repressed by situational factors. Hence, Confucianism promotes moral cultivation and the practice of benevolence to sustain and grow people’s *ren* (Li, 2003).

Through practicing, wise people can extend their love from close relationships (e.g., in parent-child relationships) to broader social relationships (e.g., between leaders and their nations).

Overall, non-Western concepts of wisdom overlap with Western ideas on cognitive components (e.g., perspective taking, intellectual humility; Oakes, Brienza, Elnakouri, & Grossmann, 2018), but seem to diverge on emphasizing more about social and emotional components of wisdom (Takahashi & Overton, 2002).

Lay Theories of Wisdom

Wisdom scholars have also examined what lay people consider wise—the lay/implicit theories of wisdom. This lay theory approach has not only been critical in informing ideas about scientific theories of wisdom, but also addressed the extent to which traditional concepts of wisdom are maintained and evolved in current societies using empirical methods.

Methods. There are different approaches to study lay theories of wisdom. Some scholars have used a descriptor-rating approach, in which researchers ask a group of people to generate descriptors related to wisdom and have them rate the degree to which each descriptor reflects the qualities of wisdom (e.g., Bluck & Glück, 2005). Multidimensional scaling or factor analysis techniques would subsequently identify common dimensions/factors underlying people’s ratings (Clayton & Birren, 1980; Glück & Bluck, 2011; Holliday & Chandler, 1986; Sternberg, 1985). Other scholars used an exemplar/prototype approach. Researchers asked people to identify exemplars or “prototypes” of wisdom (e.g., Orwoll & Perlmutter, 1990; Weststrate, Ferrari, & Ardelet, 2016) or identify actions from their or others’ lives that they would describe as wise (Glück et al., 2005; Oser, Schenker, & Spychiger, 1999). Evidence for cultural influences on the concept of wisdom is reviewed below.

Evidence in Western cultures. Much research on lay theories of wisdom was conducted in North America with English-speaking populations. In Southern California, Clayton and Birren (1980) collected wisdom-related words (e.g., experienced, pragmatic, empathy) and asked lay people to rate how similar each unique pair of the words are to each other. Using multidimensional scaling, they discovered that people characterize wisdom as a multidimensional construct with three central aspects: cognitive (e.g., knowledgeable), affective (e.g., empathy), and reflective (e.g., introspective). Sternberg (1985) used a similar descriptor-rating approach with samples from the Eastern United States, again revealing three aspects: reasoning ability/sagacity, learning from ideas and environment/judgment, expeditious use of information/perspicacity. This work was preliminary, as the sample was underpowered ($N = 40$) for multidimensional scaling analyses. Additional research revealed that people view wisdom as a distinct construct from intelligence and creativity (Paulhus, Wehr, Harms, & Strasser, 2002). These lay theories of wisdom are also consistent with current scientific theories and empirical evidence about the relationship between wise judgment and intelligence (Grossmann, 2017c; Sternberg, 1998). In Canada, Holliday and Chandler (1986) used similar methods and revealed five components of wisdom, including judgment and communication skills, exceptional understanding, general competencies, interpersonal skills, and social unobtrusiveness. More recently, with a broad U.S. sample, Weststrate and colleagues (2016) employed an exemplar/prototype approach, which yielded roughly three clusters of wisdom exemplars, which researchers labeled as (i) those who have practical wisdom (i.e. who are pragmatic and strategic; e.g., Churchill), (ii) benevolent wisdom (i.e. who are prosocial and loving; e.g., Mother Teresa), and (iii) philosophical wisdom (i.e. who are intelligent and rational; e.g., Socrates).

Outside of North America, Oser and colleagues (1999) studied how Germans view wise acts, revealing that such acts are characterized as paradoxical, unexpected (i.e., acts that are unique from or contrary to most people's choice of act), morally integral, selfless, agentic (i.e., acts that overcome internal and external dictates), acts that balance different interests and trade-offs, acts that involve uncertainties and risks, and acts that strive towards improving the human condition. These underlying features seem to suggest that wisdom involves specific cognitions, emotion regulation, as well as a benevolent/prosocial orientation. More directly supporting this notion are results from a large-scale study of well-educated Germans (Glück & Bluck, 2011), who defined wisdom through cognitions (e.g., knowledge, life experience), as well as social (e.g., benevolence) and emotional components (e.g., empathy).

Evidence in Non-Western cultures. Comparing Western and non-Western traditions of wisdom scholarship, some scholars have suggested that there may be a great deal of similarity in the lay theories of wisdom across cultures. For instance, Jeste and Vahia (2008) compared contemporary Western conceptualizations of wisdom with those in the classic Hindu texts of Bhagavad Gita, pointing out such components of Gita-wisdom as knowledge of life, self-detachment/contentedness, emotion regulation/equanimity, compassion and sacrifice, and integration of these practices for the benefits of one's social environment. Arguably, similar ideas appear in various Abrahamic traditions of the West and the Middle East, as well as Confucian and Buddhist scholarship. In the Himalayan region of India, Levitt (1999) interviewed 13 Tibetan Buddhist monks to describe what wisdom is to them. Quite similar to the framework of wisdom ideas in the West, the monks described wisdom as involving a cognitive component such as recognizing the truth (i.e. "emptiness"), a reflective component like transcending the self (i.e., "nonself"), and a social-emotional component that is about understanding suffering and

feeling compassion. In Taiwan, Yang (2001) surveyed a large group of Chinese ($N = 616$), observing that Chinese also viewed wisdom as involving cognitive/analytic (i.e., “competencies and knowledge”), reflective (i.e. “openness and profundity”), and socio-emotional components (i.e., “benevolence and compassion”). In addition, Yang suggested that “modesty and unobtrusiveness” may potentially be a unique factor in cultures where people emphasize collectivism and social harmony—a hypothesis still in need of robust empirical cross-cultural examination.

Empirical evidence comparing lay theories of wisdom *across cultures* is scarce. Most of the work was conducted in Western societies or within a single non-Western culture. Additionally, although there are advantages of using descriptors generated by lay people, these descriptors may be idiosyncratic—meanings may differ across cultures. Therefore, these descriptors may not be suitable for direct comparisons across cultures. One notable exception is the set of studies by Takahashi and Bordia (2000). The researchers recruited 53 U.S. Americans, 50 Australians, 59 Indians, and 55 Japanese to evaluate which personality descriptors most closely match the descriptor “wise.” Indians and Japanese tended to associate “wise” with “discreet,” whereas Americans and Australians tended to associate “wise” with “knowledgeable” and “experienced.” Takahashi (2013) proposed that these differences are rooted in distinct epistemological traditions of the ancient East vs. West: Whereas the analytical tradition of the West emphasizes the analytical skills, differentiating them from socio-emotional skills, this split may be absent in the East. In other words, Japanese and (to some extent) Indians are more likely to view wisdom through the lens of socio-emotional processes than Westerners because of certain distal cultural beliefs. However, such interpretation should be considered with caution. First, empirical evidence for cross-cultural variability in lay theories of wisdom is preliminary, as

it comes from a single, underpowered study. Second, without an actual measure of epistemological belief systems, it is possible that any difference observed across samples will be due to sample-specific idiosyncrasy rather than macro-level historical differences in belief systems (Grossmann & Na, 2014). Third, other studies indicate that Western conceptions of wisdom include both cognitive and social/emotional processes (e.g., Glück & Bluck, 2011). Therefore, it is possible that the singular observation of cultural differences in emphasis on social (e.g., “discreetness”) vs. cognitive aspects (e.g., “knowledge”) represents a sample-specific anomaly.

It appears premature to claim major cultural differences in the general meaning of wisdom, with many cultures emphasizing both cognitive as well as socio-emotional processes. Nevertheless, there appears to be some initial evidence that the *degree* to which one of these components is salient may differ across cultures. In a series of studies, Buchtel and colleagues (2015) demonstrated that, in comparison to U.S. Americans, Australians, and Canadians, Chinese were more likely to label behaviors that they perceived as harmless, yet highly uncivilized (e.g., to litter, to swear and curse loudly in public) to be immoral. Connecting the idea of virtues to wisdom, more recently Buchtel and colleagues have observed that Beijing Chinese are more likely to see wisdom to reflect a virtuous character, a pattern that was not observed among Canadians (Buchtel, Guan, & Wang, 2017). This cross-cultural observation suggests that Chinese place a greater emphasis on civility and proper social conduct as central to wisdom. One possible reason for this emphasis is the greater value of civil conduct as a form of wisdom in Confucian teachings—a claim that requires further multi-cultural empirical testing with direct measures of salience of Confucian beliefs and practices in a given cultural group.

Developing wisdom

Development of wisdom is frequently associated with the notion of human maturity (Assmann, 1994). While there is scarce longitudinal research that directly tests how wisdom is developed (Grossmann, Gerlach, & Denissen, 2016), existing scientific framework and lay theories research offer insights into what scientists and lay people think would contribute to the development of wisdom (Glück & Bluck, 2011).

The MORE Life Experience model. Some scholars argue that wisdom can be actively developed through specific ways people interact with their life challenges (Glück et al., 2015; Grossmann, 2017b). Glück and Bluck (2013) proposed five factors that can promote wisdom. These factors are mastery, openness, reflectivity, emotion regulation, and empathy, and hence collectively they are called the “MORE Life Experience Model.” The five factors were proposed to help individuals to extract information from life experience in a deeper and more meaningful way that promotes wisdom. A recent study examined one of the factors, reflectivity, and found that those who used “exploratory processing” (i.e., meaning-making, personal growth) when reasoning about difficult life experience tended to have a higher level of wisdom (Weststrate & Glück, 2017). However, no research that we know of has systematically compared cultural similarities or differences in the development of wisdom across the lifespan.

Lay theories of wisdom development across cultures. Recent cross-cultural findings revealed how cultures might differ in what people believe to be contributing to the development of wisdom. Grossmann, Kung et al. (2016) asked Chinese, Russian, participants to pick three strategies that in their opinion people in their country would think are the most likely paths to wisdom. These strategies include 12 strategies capturing experiential (personal and vicarious) factors, the role of contemplation about the world and the self, as well as relational, structural, didactic and naturalistic factors.

There were evident cultural similarities. Participants from all countries emphasized active seeking of new experiences (9.8-15.6%), openness to life events (8.5-21.4%), as well as reflections on the self (6.8-16.7%) and the situation (10.9-15.9%). Nevertheless, there were also cultural differences. North Americans were more likely to endorse focus on first-hand experiences (6.7-15%) compared to Chinese (2.3%) and Russians (0.5%), consistent with the greater prevalence of entity beliefs about wisdom in the former countries. North Americans were also more likely to endorse seeking vicarious experiences through advice from others (12.8-16.7%) than Chinese (6.2%) and Russians (4.2%). Russian sample has shown a unique pattern in that they were more likely to focus on strategies concerning openness and reflection than other countries (53.9% vs. 29.2-34.6%). The latter observation is consistent with the cultural stereotype of Russian as a culture endorsing self-reflection and brooding, including reflection on negative experiences (Grossmann & Kross, 2010). Finally, Chinese were more likely than people from other three countries to endorse cultivation of habits (14.1% vs. 1.9-4.6%) and studying the life of sages (16% vs. 2.3-6.4%). This observation is consistent with the imitation approach in contemporary Chinese learning and education policies (e.g., using rote memorization of famous writings of sages).

Cultural Expressions of Wisdom

A literature review suggests that the expression of wisdom-related qualities likely hinge on situational affordances in the cultural environment (Grossmann, 2017c). In this section, we review cross-cultural research on wisdom-related cognitions, emotion regulation, and benevolence/prosociality.

Cognitions. Collectivistic cultures, like Chinese, Japanese, or Russian tend to be more oriented to the social context when thinking about interpersonal experiences than other cultural

groups, such as European Americans, who tend to focus on the individual when reflecting on similar experiences (Cohen, Hoshino-Browne, Leung, Hoshino-Browne, & Leung, 2007; Grossmann & Kross, 2010). A greater focus on the social context may help the individuals in non-Western countries to achieve the overarching goals of relatedness and social connection, which are of higher value among these cultural groups (Hofstede, 1980; Triandis, 1989). In one study, Americans from the Midwest and Japanese from the Tokyo Metropolitan area (age range: 25-75 years; Grossmann et al., 2012) were asked to describe a series of intergroup and interpersonal conflicts (Grossmann et al., 2010). Results indicated that younger and middle-aged Japanese showed greater ability to reason wisely about societal and interpersonal conflicts than their American counterparts. These results hold when controlling for domain-general cognitive abilities, occupational prestige, and response length.

Moreover, there are differences between Chinese and Western European/Anglo-American approaches to cognitive integrative reasoning. According to Peng and Nisbett (2000), Chinese deny the reality of contradiction between seemingly opposing viewpoints and instead accept the permanent unity of opposites. In contrast, integration of viewpoints as present in Western European/Anglo-American traditions requires a synthesis rather than acceptance as a way of resolving intolerable contradictions. The form of cognitive integration preferred by Chinese vs. Western Europeans/Anglo-Americans vary. Chinese appear to favor less direct forms of social conflict resolution (e.g., avoidance strategies), whereas Anglo-Americans favor strategies in which one explicitly works through resolving disagreements (Leung, 1988; Morris et al., 1998).

Other work has also shown that the cultural differences in expression of wisdom-related cognitions extend beyond comparisons of national groups to differences between working class

and middle-class cultural groups within the same nation. Specifically, Brienza and Grossmann (2017) have tested how people living in different socio-economic conditions reason about interpersonal conflicts. Across a range of studies, researchers observed that U.S. Americans from poorer regions were more likely to utilize wise reasoning strategies (i.e., show intellectual humility, take others' perspectives, consider multiple ways the conflict may unfold as well as consider ways to compromise) than U.S. Americans from more affluent regions. Further, greater education and income were inversely related to participants' propensity to reason wisely about unresolved conflicts in their lives, as well as standardized scenarios presented to participants in the lab. The researchers argued that the chief reason for these cultural differences in wise reasoning about interpersonal conflicts concerns differences in ecological affordances of the more affluent and self-reliant middle-class culture in the U.S., as compared to more resource-scarce culture of the U.S. working class. The scarcity of resources and uncertainty of their availability requires coordination-oriented adaptations, with wise reasoning representing an adaptation serving the purpose of coordination and management of socio-economic uncertainty (Kraus, Piff, Mendoza-Denton, Rheinschmidt, & Keltner, 2012; Pepper & Nettle, 2017).

Emotion regulation. Cross-cultural differences in emotion regulation emerge in “emotional dialecticism” (Larsen, McGraw, Mellers, & Cacioppo, 2004; Miyamoto & Ryff, 2011; Miyamoto, Uchida, & Ellsworth, 2010), the experience of both positive and negative emotions or greater balance in experience of positive and negative emotions concurrently or over time. A number of studies have demonstrated greater emotional dialecticism among East Asian and Asian-American samples than among from European-American samples (Bagozzi, Wong, & Yi, 1999; Schimmack, Oishi, & Diener, 2002; Spencer-Rodgers, Williams, & Peng, 2010; Williams & Aaker, 2002). Similarly, researchers found that bicultural Canadians are more likely

to view positive and negative states as opposites (i.e., no balance) in situations where they speak English than in situations where they speak Mandarin (Perunovic, Heller, & Rafaeli, 2007). Recent work extended this evidence to other levels of analysis, showing that English-language internet blogs from non-Western countries such as Singapore, Malaysia, or South Africa were more likely to include both positive and negative utterances in the same sentence as compared to those in Western countries such as Canada, UK, or Australia (Grossmann, Huynh, & Ellsworth, 2016).

For European Americans, emotion regulation seems to be served to increase hedonia—that is, European Americans prefer to maximize their positive emotions and moods, while decreasing their negative ones (Miyamoto, Ma, & Petermann, 2014). In contrast, people from other cultures such as China or Japan are more likely to view emotion regulation as a tool to restore a balance between various affective states in service of maintaining interpersonal harmony. Such balance may be achieved through a dialectical focus on positive in the negative situations and vice versa (Grossmann, Karasawa, Kan, & Kitayama, 2014). Related to cultural differences in the goals of emotion regulation, research indicates that Anglo-Americans are likely to encourage feeling and expression of (desired) emotions as a sign of unique inner features of the self (H. Kim & Markus, 1999), even if such seeking of hedonia may diminish their actual affective well-being (Ford et al., 2015). In contrast, East Asians are likely to encourage emotional moderation and inhibition of overt expression of emotions (Rothbaum, Pott, Azuma, Miyake, & Weisz, 2000). For East Asians, such inhibition of overt affective expression may serve as an effective tool to maintain group harmony rather than self-expression (Markus & Kitayama, 1991; Matsumoto, Yoo, & Nakagawa, 2008). Indeed, European Americans are more likely to engage in emotional reappraisal often than Japanese, while

Japanese are more likely to use suppression than Americans (Matsumoto, 2006). There appears to be little evidence that the utility of a given emotion regulatory strategy for an individual's mental health would generalize across cultures. Strategies known to be mostly maladaptive in the West, such as emotion suppression or rumination, appear to produce fewer detriments and in fact may promote social benefits in other cultures.

Prosociality. Expressions of prosociality may vary depending on both broad social structures and specific cultural ideas about what prosociality means. From a broad evolutionary perspective, prosociality has survival advantages and has prevailed over the course of human evolution. Even in nowadays society, we see prosociality often referred to as a desirable, noble characteristic. Not surprisingly, many people see others who can exhibit an exceptional level of prosociality to be wise (e.g., Mother Theresa, Gandhi) and characterize wisdom to include certain prosocial values (Weststrate et al., 2016).

There are both cultural similarities and differences in people's level of prosociality. Some studies examining human prosociality utilize economic games to simulate real-world cooperative/competitive situations. For instance, in the so-called Dictator Game, a participant is paired with another person, who is usually a stranger, and they receive a certain amount of money (or other resources). The participant, being the dictator, has complete power over deciding how to split the money. The assumption here is that if the participant is entirely selfish, he or she will keep all the money. On the contrary, the more the money the participant is willing to give the other person, the more prosocial the participant would be. Using these game paradigms, early research done in the U.S. has shown a very consistent pattern that most participants tended to split the money 50-50 (Camerer & Thaler, 1995; Hoffman, McCabe, & Smith, 1996), and this holds even when the decision was anonymous (e.g., Bolton & Zwick,

1995). Researchers suggest that the results reflect people's non-selfishness, and the fact that anonymity did not affect their decision much is probably due to an internalized idea of being fair and treating others equally in North America (Henrich et al., 2010; Nowak, Page, & Sigmund, 2000).

Similar game paradigms were conducted across many cultures outside of North America, showing that, like North Americans, people in these cultures shared close to 50-50 by default. For instance, people chose to split their resource quite evenly in some European countries such as Slovenia (Roth, Prasnikar, Okuno-fujiwara, & Zamir, 1991), and other countries such as Japan (Roth et al., 1991), Indonesia (Cameron, 1999; Chuah, Hoffmann, Jones, & Williams, 2009), India (Nishi et al., 2017), Israel (Roth et al., 1991). Some nuanced differences did appear in some of the comparisons—for example, U.S. American participants tended to share less compared to Indonesians (Chuah et al., 2009), and Israeli and Indian participants tended to share less in relation to Americans (Nishi et al., 2017; Roth et al., 1991)—but the overall pattern that people make allocation close to 50-50 was very similar across these cultures.

Even though research thus far seems to suggest that people in industrialized societies act in similar prosocial ways, the reason why people show prosociality may not be the same across cultures. In fact, some cross-cultural research suggests nuanced cultural differences in the meaning behind when and why people act in prosocial ways. For example, U.S. Americans see prosocial acts partly an expression of the self, and they do it out of respect. In economic games with a stranger partner, U.S. American participants were highly cooperative at the risk of being exploited. They reported that they chose to be cooperative not because they believe their partner was trustworthy, but because they meant to show respect to the partner (e.g., Dunning, Anderson, Schlösser, Ehlebracht, & Fetchenhauer, 2014). East Asians, on the other hand, seem to see

prosociality as wise only when there is an assurance of reciprocity. Compared to people in Western societies, East Asians sometimes showed more trust toward their ingroup than a stranger (Huff & Kelley, 2003; Yamagishi, 1988; Yamagishi, Jin, & Miller, 1998; c.f. Buchan & Croson, 2004; Yuki, Maddux, Brewer, & Takemura, 2005). This preference was not easily explained by ingroup favoritism, but their expectation that prosociality is more likely reciprocated by an ingroup than a stranger (Yamagishi et al., 1998). Increased expectation of reciprocity also explains why knowing an indirect contact (e.g., a common friend) increased East Asians' level of trust toward a stranger, a pattern that was not observed among Americans (Chua, Morris, & Ingram, 2009; Yuki et al., 2005). This is because indirect contact can potentially keep the stranger's behavior in check, thus allowing East Asians to have more confidence that the stranger reciprocates the favor in the future.

On the receiving end of prosociality, some research has shown that an expectation of reciprocity also affects when and why people accept others' prosocial gestures. In Chinese, an expectation of reciprocity is called "renqin." It refers to a benevolence debt: Upon accepting a favor, Chinese expect that they will need to return it in the future (King, 1989). Therefore, studies have found that Chinese people, compared to Westerners, are less likely to accept even a small gift (e.g., a coffee) from acquaintances and would have felt more uncomfortable if they did (Shen, Wan, & Wyer, 2011). Relatedly, East Asians also seem less comfortable to seek help, even from close others (H. S. Kim, Sherman, & Taylor, 2008). In one study, researchers manipulated whether the participant's partner was busy or not working on a difficult task, when the participant needed help. Results revealed that whether or not the partner was busy did not affect European-American participants' level of help-seeking, but it did for Asian-Americans. Asian Americans sought help less when the partner was busy because they were more concerned

about potential negative relational consequences (Sherman et al., 2008). These findings are in line with earlier discussion on implicit theories of wisdom. Specifically, among Chinese in Taiwan, the component of “modesty and unobtrusiveness,” the idea that a wise person does not bother others and not create social discomfort, emerged as part of their concept of wisdom (Yang, 2001). Taken together, the literature suggests that there are cultural specificities in what prosociality means and what prosocial actions are seen as wise in a culture.

An Emerging Constructionist Account of Wisdom

Both scholarly and lay theories vary in their assumptions about the centrality of certain psychological characteristics to the notion of wisdom, as well as *the extent* to which wisdom can be developed. For instance, exemplars of wisdom tend to vary with time and the specifics of the cultural-historical context. Further, the ways how wisdom-related characteristics may be expressed depending on the features of a given situation (e.g., Grossmann & Kross, 2014; Kross & Grossmann, 2012). Moreover, cultures may vary in the extent to which people would consider wisdom to be malleable (vs. immutable; Grossmann & Kung, 2018). Historically, essentialist views that wisdom is rare, innate, unchangeable, and indicative of a person’s true essence are not uncommon (Grossmann, Kung, & Santos, 2018). For example, one interpretation of Aristotle’s work is that wisdom-related behaviors stem from “firm and unchangeable character.” In other words, a person is either wise or unwise, and that is a stable disposition across situations (Doris, 2002; Kekes, 1983). Together, these insights suggest that wisdom can be best represented as a socially and culturally-situated construction.

The *constructionist account of wisdom* emphasizes the culturally, experientially, and situationally-determined ways in which wisdom can be understood, expressed, and developed (Grossmann, 2017b; also see Glück et al., 2015; Grossmann et al., 2018). Support for the

constructionist account of wisdom comes from a range of empirical studies. For instance, Staudinger, Lopez, and Baltes (1997) examined people's levels of wisdom across hypothetical situations and discovered a large portion of variance (26-56%) unexplained by individual differences. Further, Glück and colleagues (2015) interviewed people who were nominated to be wise in multiple days and found only a modest association between their responses across the days. Moreover, in a 9-day diary study conducted in Germany, researchers assessed wisdom-related cognitions in diverse situations and discovered only small to modest associations in the expression of wisdom-related cognitions across the days (Grossmann, Gerlach, et al., 2016), suggesting that wisdom-related cognitions are highly variable across time and situations.

Conclusion

Culture influences wisdom in various ways, from the beliefs about the core components of the construct and how it can be developed to specific ways in which wisdom-related cognitions, emotion regulation, and prosocial tendencies may be expressed. Overall, evidence appears to converge on the universality of beliefs about the cognitive aspects of wisdom. Relatively greater cross-cultural variability can be expected for attribution of wisdom to specific emotional/ self-regulatory or prosociality-related psychological processes. Cross-cultural research on lay theories and expressions of wisdom-related characteristics begins to examine the universality of ethical and epistemological principles people use in daily lives, as well as the role of cultural narratives and social ecology for shaping wisdom-related behaviors.

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