

Opinions of Culturally Diverse Sample of Asians on Wisdom

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Opinions of Culturally Diverse Sample of Asians on Wisdom. The development of expert theories of wisdom shows a general shift from emphasizing the role of cognitive processes to broader definitions, which perceive wisdom as a way of integration of cognitive skills, emotional abilities and personality. Within the Eastern concepts of wisdom, its spiritual part is often mentioned. Research studies of public opinions about wisdom, conducted on a Western sample and confronted with pioneer findings obtained on non-Western samples show that it may result appropriate to contemplate the concept of Western wisdom as dominantly based on rationality, knowledge and reason and the Eastern approaches as the ones emphasizing emotions, intuition and transience. The sample of 646 students from culturally and religiously differentiated regions of Asia documents the variability of answers to the scale-type inventory questions and the sample introduces us to the diversity in basic parameters of Eastern understanding of wisdom.

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Introduction

Many religions and schools of philosophy perceive gaining wisdom to be the key goal in a human life. Wisdom is for social scientists related to successful mastery of the last stages of human ontogenesis. Wisdom is often described as the highest form of cognition, many experts consider wisdom to be the highest of human virtues.

Due to the firmly standing set of reasons, researchers will probably never be able to unequivocally define wisdom. Many restrictions also result from the complicated work with a uniquely complex object that is difficult to grasp and whose essence exceeds the possibilities of human cognition in interpretations of several authors. The public represents a form of help in this situation because – as indicated by the research – it is usually able to describe or define wisdom quite effortlessly. According to Baltes – Kunzman (2004), results from individual studies very consistently show that the concept of wisdom is part of common language, wisdom is a known concept with the adult population and wise persons form that part of reality, which is easy to report about or comment for the majority of people. In agreement with this opinion, Blüch and Glück

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(2004) consider the concept of wisdom and wise person an integral part of everyday speech. Meacham (1990) states that examples of wisdom are present in the lives of many common people.

Research on opinions about wisdom is formed by a set of works realized mainly on European and Northern American student samples³. Results on implicit beliefs about wisdom lead a part of experts to contemplate wisdom in a broader context. The classification process of adjectives characterizing a wise person in Sternberg's research (1986) resulted in denomination of six, mainly cognitive components of wisdom: (1) reasoning ability, (2) sagacity, (3) learning from ideas and environment, (4) judgement, (5) expeditious use of information (6) perspicacity. Study of public beliefs by Holliday – Chandler (1986) introduces 5 factors of wisdom based on item analysis that are partially in agreement with the abovementioned findings (emphasizing the role of understanding and judgement), but brings also social aspects into the general discussion (factors interpersonal skills and social unobtrusiveness.). Sternberg (2003) later incorporates “acting for the common good” into his own definition of wisdom. Baltes – Kunzmann redefine their approach to wisdom as expertise (2004) and the studied phenomenon perceives in a broader context. We assume that under the influence of public information, in the works of several authors the dominantly cognitive image of wisdom was reconstructed to a concept characterizing a wise person as a whole, defined by the sum of intellectual, emotional, motivational, reflective and interpersonal qualities⁴.

Different populations perceive wisdom differently and this has been documented in relation to gender differences (Orwoll – Perlmutter 1990), age (Clayton – Birren 1980), education (Orwoll – Perlmutter 1990) and professional orientation. (Sternberg 1986) Although several researches of implicit definitions of psychological terms related to wisdom (intelligence, spirituality) were intercultural (Yang – Sternberg 1997; Nisbett – Miyamoto 2005; Takahashi – Overton 2002), “only a handful of studies made the study of implicit theories of wisdom beyond the conventional frame of European-American population their goal”. (Takahashi – Overton 2005: 39) Out of these works, only one aimed at the comparison of two or more cultures (Takahashi – Bordia 2000).

Results obtained by Levitt (1999), Takahashi, Bordia (2000) and Yang (2001) – authors of probably the only published studies of opinion and beliefs about wisdom in a non-Western sample – indicate that the concept of Western wisdom based on the dominance of rationality, knowledge and reason

³ In most of the studies quoted below, opinion is defined as verbal expression of attitude.

⁴ We believe, that the above mentioned studies of folk beliefs of non-Westerners on mainstream concepts of social sciences (a) help reveal universality limits of scientists' own theories, (b) make possibilities to reflect own ethnocentrism, (c) enable understanding of the level and importance of cultural differences, (d) allow to widen the view and adopt new approaches.

somehow contradicts the Eastern approaches emphasizing emotions, intuition and last but not least the transcendental field. The following pages will attempt to find at least partial answers also to the question if it is appropriate to think about a more universal form of wisdom within the Eastern cultural context, and if so, which characteristics would meet the universality requirements better than others, even in comparison to the already realized researches conducted on a Western sample.

The choice of Asian population is closely related to our belief that it is impossible to fully understand wisdom without consideration of the cultural context. The civilizations of Asia can be considered the cradle of human civilisation if the birth of large religions, oldest systems of writing and universities are accepted as its measure. Although during human history many nations of Europe and Asia kept business relations or engaged in wars, what linked the participants also on the ideological level, we are confident that the value and ideological systems of both continents developed rather independently. C. G. Jung (1995), indicating the introspectivity of Eastern cognition (in contrast to Western focus on increased control of the environment), says that “it is the East that teaches us the different, broader, deeper and higher understanding, comprehension through life”, where (the Eastern) “man experiences the world and his self as a dream, thus he is fundamentally rooted in the original foundation, attracted to it with such force that his relation to the world is relativized in a way that is often incomprehensible for us”. (p. 214)

Differences between Eastern perspective and Western perception of (not only) wisdom result from long-term divergences of religious and philosophical movements of the individual fields⁵, leading today to two, in many aspects contradictory, paradigms. Moreover, contrast is observable in basic philosophical foundations that generally define phenomena as independent, or on the other hand as mutually linked and closely related to a specific context. Approaches based on rational analysis contrast with intuitive-introspective manner of cognition. The reductionist view of reality can be perceived as the opposite of integration, exclusiveness as the opposite of inclusiveness and the manner of intellectual understanding of reality as totally different from the transcendental experience.

Comparison of the presented study with existing research studies on the same topic reveals the degree of mutual similarities and differences. A unifying characteristic of these publications (Levitt 1999; Takahashi – Bordia 2000; Yang 2001) is their choice of non-Western sample that is the populations of

⁵ In this regard, Jung (1995) states that “Wisdom of the East focuses our attention to what we have pushed aside as unimportant, that is our inner being. In the East maintained the inner being such strong power over the external being that the world never had the possibility to rip him from his inne roots; in the West, on the other hand, the external being became so prominet that he became estranged from his own inner essence”. (p. 218)

Asia and also that each work used its own, original methodology. Main differences include the selection of the studied sample (Lewitt uses Buddhist monks, Takahashi and Bordia work with the Japanese and Americans, while Yang involves Taiwanese sample in her study), comparability, and scope of the studied concept (inclusiveness).

Research aims

The aim of our research was to find answers to the following five groups of research questions⁶:

1. What are the university students' beliefs and opinions about wisdom? What are the differences between the studied cultures in opinions about wisdom?
2. What is the inner structure (factors) of university students' opinions about wisdom? How do these factors express opinions about wisdom?
3. What is the level of the identified factors in the studied cultures? What differences do the factors of beliefs and opinions about wisdom show in the studied cultures? What is the situation individually in the sub-sets men and women?
4. What are the empiric types of students from the aspect of their opinions about wisdom? What are the differences between these empiric types of students from the viewpoint of their opinions about wisdom? What is the variability of these empiric types from the belief factors aspect?
5. What is the cultural structure by the empiric types? What are the culture differences from the viewpoint of student empiric types characterized by accepting and refusing opinions about wisdom? What are the individual differences for men and for women?

Methods

Respondents

The research sample consisted of 646 students (N = 646) of full-time study of humanities (57.9 % women, Mage = 20.9, SDage = 2.38; 42.1 % men, Mage = 22.2, SDage = 3.00). The sample consisted mainly of Muslims, Hindus and Buddhists. The most numerous ethnic groups were Arabs, Indians, Tibetans, Malaysians and Chinese.

We divided the sample into four cultural groups: Buddhists formed 18.3 %, Hindus 18.3 % and Muslims 63.5 % (22.9 % early Islam, 40.6 % late Islam⁷).

⁶ Findings of past and recent investigations still do not provide enough evidence to formulate a hypothesis within the scope of our empirical interest.

⁷ Category of early Islam is represented by the sample of Arab students, while late Islam refers to the sample of students residing in countries of south east Asia, where the religion was „imported“ centuries later.

Our sample is clear of Christian students as they formed immeasurable minority in the areas of data collection. The groups were composed according to our opinion that the usual approach of national comparisons does not meet the criteria for a deeper understanding of intercultural phenomena, in research aiming to

- a. work with a sample of population formed by linguistically, religiously and ethnically different groups whose historical development was for a major part independent – however they are united today under the same flag, anthem and political government
- b. analyse processes that are mainly formed by a different cultural variables that nationality.

We assume that religion plays a major role in the definition of values within individual cultural contexts and furthermore, this relation is probably intensifying within the context of strongly religious Asian populations.

Methodology, indicators

Method of our own construction focuses on mapping opinion beliefs about wisdom, and at theoretical level is partially inspired by work of Pollack (1992). The questionnaire contained 16 statements reflecting certain attitudes to wisdom, where our main inspiration was Riesel's (2005) method in research on implicit beliefs (opinions) about intelligence). Respondents had to indicate on a 5-point Lickert-type scale (1 = absolutely; 5 = absolutely not) to what extent the characteristics reflected their own attitude. Examples are: "Men are wiser than women" and "Wisdom is hereditary".

The English language questionnaire was administered to respondents at universities with English as the only language of instruction (59.4 % of respondents). Reverse translation was made from the original English language questionnaire version to Arabic and Indonesian (40.6 %).

Procedures

Data was collected at ten universities in several Asian countries (India, Indonesia, Malaysia, and United Arab Emirates) between March 2006 and April 2007.

Participation in the project was voluntary, questionnaires were anonymous and the leading author assisted personally in each administration of the questionnaire.

Data was analyzed according to the importance index of the value of a wise person, which expresses the median value transformed to a scale with min. = 0 and max. = 100 points. Cultural differences from the viewpoint of opinions on the importance of values of a wise person were tested by Kruskal-Wallis test. Correlation matrix of values was studied by factor analysis. Our exploration of

empiric types used a two-step cluster analysis. Differences between cultures or between empiric types from the factor aspect were studied by ANOVA method. Culture structure by empiric types was compared by the chi-square test of homogeneity.

Results

1. Differences in opinions and beliefs about wisdom between studied cultures.

What are the university students' opinions and beliefs about wisdom?

What are the differences between the studied cultures in opinions about wisdom?

Table 1a: Importance indices of general beliefs on wisdom according to 4 cultures

	<i>Islam early</i>	<i>Islam late</i>	<i>Hinduism</i>	<i>Buddhism</i>	<i>Sum</i>
<i>Men are wiser than women</i>	2.0	-7.9	-60.2	-27.5	-18.5
<i>More educated – wiser you are</i>	26.4	39.8	-13.6	31.6	27.4
<i>Wisdom is more important than character</i>	-6	8.8	-36.1	-25.7	-8.4
<i>Animals can be wise as well</i>	-5.4	-19.4	42.1	29.9	7.0
<i>Wise people believe in God</i>	64.2	60.6	-3.4	24.6	42.7
<i>Wise person is able to see what is future coming up with</i>	7.2	4.3	28.6	21.0	13.2
<i>Wise person lives in a strong relation with the nature</i>	30.9	30.4	29.4	38.8	31.8
<i>Wise person has a rich spiritual life</i>	23.4	26.8	16.7	34.9	25.5
<i>Wisdom is hereditary</i>	.0	-9.8	-30.4	-14.2	-11.9
<i>Some nations are wiser than others</i>	29.9	15.0	3.1	38.8	20.8
<i>Happiness is more important than wisdom</i>	29.0	36.2	18.0	37.0	31.3
<i>Wisdom depends on good relations with other people</i>	-6.8	-.3	23.5	26.2	7.0
<i>One day, computers will be wiser than human</i>	-60.1	-38.8	-63.6	-10.0	-44.4
<i>People today are wiser than any other time in history</i>	-26.0	-.8	-25.6	16.7	-9.2
<i>Wisdom is closely related with health</i>	-13.8	7.1	-8.0	-2.2	-2.1
<i>Wise people eat healthy</i>	2.3	20.8	21.2	11.3	15.1

Importance indices of the individual items (with theoretical range -100 to 100 points) containing general opinions about wisdom for the whole sample as well as specific beliefs for each studied culture are shown in Table 1a. Table 1b shows results of testing differences (Kruskal-Wallis test) between cultures from the general beliefs about wisdom importance aspect.

Within the whole sample, statements with the highest degree of agreement were “Wise people believe in God”, or “Wise person lives in a strong relation

with the nature”, or “Happiness is more important than wisdom”. On the other hand, respondents disagreed mostly with “One day, computers will be wiser than human”.

The most significant difference between the studied cultures was presented in the statement “Animals can be wise as well”. Hindus agree with it, late Islam outright refuses the statement. The statement “Wise people believe in God” is quite strongly accepted by the Islamic culture, Hinduism takes a rather ambivalent position. The least difference in acceptance between the cultures was observed in statements “Wise person lives in a strong relation with the nature”, “Wise person has a rich spiritual life” and “Wisdom is closely related with health”.

Table 1b: Testing of differences (Kruskal-Wallis test) between cultures from the aspect of general opinions about wisdom

	<i>Chi-Square</i>	<i>df</i>	<i>Asymp. Sig.</i>
<i>Men are wiser than women</i>	72.744	3	< .001
<i>More educated – wiser you are</i>	54.555	3	< .001
<i>Wisdom is more important than character</i>	52.772	3	< .001
<i>Animals can be wise as well</i>	131.110	3	< .001
<i>Wise people believe in God</i>	128.517	3	< .001
<i>Wise person is able to see what is future coming up with</i>	17.670	3	.001
<i>Wise person lives in a strong relation with the nature</i>	4.578	3	.205
<i>Wise person has a rich spiritual life</i>	11.151	3	.011
<i>Wisdom is hereditary</i>	14.517	3	.002
<i>Some nations are wiser than others</i>	33.502	3	< .001
<i>Happiness is more important than wisdom</i>	28.755	3	< .001
<i>Wisdom depends on good relations with other people</i>	13.026	3	.005
<i>One day, computers will be wiser than human</i>	47.095	3	< .001
<i>People today are wiser than any other time in history</i>	43.117	3	< .001
<i>Wisdom is closely related with health</i>	11.295	3	.010
<i>Wise people eat healthy</i>	16.842	3	.001

2. Groups of opinions about wisdom and explanation of their structure

What is the inner structure (factors) of university students’ opinions about wisdom? How do these factors express opinions about wisdom?

We have extracted 5 factors (hypothetical constructs) by the main component method from the correlation matrix using quantitative relation analysis of general opinions importance, followed by the Varimax rotation. These factors exhaust 48.4 % of the overall variance (1. factor 12.0 %, 2. factor 11.0 %, 3. factor 8.9 %, 4. factor 8.5 % and 5. factor 8.1 %). We have identified 5 groups of general beliefs about wisdom that we have named as follows:

1. Traditionalism
2. Spiritual-natural factor
3. Elitism (happiness)
4. Science-technologic factor
5. Health

The existence of these latent construct can be hypothetically explained by their relation to empiric manifestations (factor saturation by items is shown in Table 2).

Table 2: Factor scales after the Varimax rotation

	<i>Factors</i>				
	<i>1</i>	<i>2</i>	<i>3</i>	<i>4</i>	<i>5</i>
<i>Men are wiser than women</i>	.576				
<i>More educated – wiser you are</i>	.511				
<i>Wisdom is more important than character</i>	.556				
<i>Animals can be wise as well</i>	-.596				
<i>Wise people believe in God</i>	.599				
<i>Wise person is able to see what is future coming up with</i>		.384			
<i>Wise person lives in a strong relation with the nature</i>		.737			
<i>Wise person has a rich spiritual life</i>		.753			
<i>Wisdom is hereditary</i>			.486		
<i>Some nations are wiser than others</i>			.509		
<i>Happiness is more important than wisdom</i>			.672		
<i>Wisdom depends on good relations with other people</i>			.418		
<i>One day, computers will be wiser than human</i>				.579	
<i>People today are wiser than any other time in history</i>				.682	
<i>Wisdom is closely related with health</i>					.752
<i>Wise people eat healthy</i>					.604

High values of the first factor (“traditionalism”) are manifested by a high level of agreement with items representing conservative values in (not only) Asian societies, with emphasis on a strong link between wisdom and male gender, education and belief in God. The statement “animals can be wise as well” represents a counter-position (high value of this factor is manifested in low acceptance of this statement) within this factor. Values of the second, “spiritual-natural”, factor are connected to items that relate wisdom with nature and the spiritual. High values of the third factor that we have named “elitism and happiness” represent a high number of opinions linked to the exclusiveness of wisdom related to groups tied by national or hereditary characteristics, and to emphasis on the importance of happiness. High values in factor four emphasize the wisdom of computers and inferior wisdom of all previous generations. We have named it “science-technologic”. The last, fifth factor, expresses the relation between wisdom and health.

3. Factors of opinions about wisdom structures from the cultural aspect

What is the level of the identified factors in the studied cultures? What differences do the factors of beliefs and opinions about wisdom show in the studied cultures? What is the situation individually in the sub-sets men and women?

Although the factors are latent, we have been able to estimate, quantitatively express values for each respondent through the relation of factors to the importance of selected general beliefs. Each respondent has his/her own factor values. Factors have an approximately standard Gaussian layout ($M = 0$, $SD = 1$), thus nothing stands in our way to compare the level of individual factors (using means) by the four studied cultures (see Tab. 3a), Table 3b shows results of the test of cultural differences from the aspect of factors.

Table 3a: Comparison of factor level (M) by cultures

Factors	Islam early	Islam late	Hinduism	Buddhism
traditionalism	.37	.45	-1.18	-.36
spiritual-natural factor	-.10	.01	-.02	.16
elitism and happiness	.05	-.22	.05	.42
science-technologic factor	-.35	.01	-.04	.54
health	-.23	.16	.09	-.15

Table 3b: Testing of differences (Fisher's test) between cultures from the factor aspect

Factors	F	df	P	effect size objective sig.
traditionalism	127.918	3	< .001	.625
spiritual-natural factor	1.362	3	.254	.082
elitism and happiness	10.714	3	< .001	.225
science-technologic factor	16.965	3	< .001	.280
health	5.959	3	.001	.170

The studied cultures are most significantly differentiated by the traditionalism factor. Highest values of this factor were observed in Muslims (late mean $M = 0.45$, early $M = 0.37$). Lowest values for this factor were observed in Hindus ($M = -1.18$). On the contrary, the second factor ("spiritual-natural") has the lowest differentiation power between samples of individual cultures. Strongest acceptance was observed in Buddhists ($M = 0.16$) and negative values were recorded among early Muslims ($M = -0.10$). The Buddhist sample reached highest values also in the factor "elitism and happiness" ($M = 0.42$). This factor is manifested by ambivalent values in Hindus and early Muslims, negative values were obtained from the sample of late Muslims ($M = -0.22$). Extreme values of the fourth factor ("science-

technologic”) were observed positively in Buddhists (M = 0.54) and negatively in early Muslims (M = -0.35). The last, fifth factor, “health” is characterized by highest values in late Muslims (M = 0.16) and lowest values in early Muslims (M = -0.23).

Tables 4a and 4b show the differentiation of factors by culture, individually for the male and for the female part of the sample. Tables also offer the factor comparison for men and for women. The most significant differences in factor value were observed in the third factor (“elitism and happiness”) in Hindus (men M = 0.62, women M = -0.15) and in the second factor (“spiritual-natural”) in early Muslims (men M = -0.29, women M = 0.24). There are significant gender differences in the Hindu and Muslim samples for the fourth factor (“science-technologic”). The lowest values for traditionalism in general are achieved by Hindus, men (M = -1.29) and women (M = -0.88) alike.

Table 4a: Comparison of factor levels by culture, men (mean)

Factors	cultures				
	Islam early	Islam late	Hinduism	Buddhism	objective sig.
<i>traditionalism</i>	.38	.63	-.88	-.19	.51
<i>spiritual-natural factor</i>	-.29	-.05	-.04	.15	.14
<i>elitism and happiness</i>	.08	-.06	.62	.46	.24
<i>science-technologic factor</i>	-.36	-.10	.15	.85	.35
<i>health</i>	-.11	.08	.04	-.36	.15

Table 4b: Comparison of factor levels by culture, women (mean)

Factors	cultures				
	Islam early	Islam late	Hinduism	Buddhism	objective sig.
<i>traditionalism</i>	.34	.34	-1.29	-.45	.67
<i>spiritual-natural factor</i>	.24	.04	-.01	.16	.09
<i>elitism and happiness</i>	-.01	-.32	-.15	.40	.27
<i>science-technologic factor</i>	-.33	.08	-.11	.37	.24
<i>health</i>	-.46	.21	.11	-.04	.23

4. Empiric typology of respondents by opinions about wisdom

What are the empiric types of students from the aspect of their opinions about wisdom? What are the differences between these empiric types of students from the viewpoint of their opinions about wisdom? What is the variability of these empiric types from the opinion’s factors aspect?

We can picture the respondents in a sixteen-dimensional space of selected general opinions about wisdom. The TwoStep Cluster method identified two empiric types of respondents within this space (respondents are very similar

inside the type, respondents from different types differ significantly from one another). Importance index profiles indicate the content and character of types. Not only do the respondents have specific opinions about wisdom as members of the individual studied cultures, but also respondents as members of different empiric types. (Tab. 5a)

Table 5a: Importance indices of general beliefs about wisdom by empiric types (grouped median)

	<i>Types</i>		
	<i>accepting</i>	<i>refusing</i>	<i>Sum</i>
<i>Men are wiser than women</i>	-1.5	-38.7	-18.2
<i>More educated – wiser you are</i>	53.4	-9.4	27.7
<i>Wisdom is more important than character</i>	12.7	-32.6	-8.1
<i>Animals can be wise as well</i>	-12.0	25.9	7.1
<i>Wise people believe in God</i>	66.3	16.4	44.2
<i>Wise person is able to see what is future coming up with</i>	23.5	-6.4	12.4
<i>Wise person lives in a strong relation with the nature</i>	39.1	23.3	31.8
<i>Wise person has a rich spiritual life</i>	28.3	20.8	24.9
<i>Wisdom is hereditary</i>	8.5	-31.8	-11.7
<i>Some nations are wiser than others</i>	26.7	12.1	20.8
<i>Happiness is more important than wisdom</i>	39.6	21.5	31.4
<i>Wisdom depends on good relations with other people</i>	12.1	-2.0	6.8
<i>One day, computers will be wiser than human</i>	-29.5	-58.8	-44.8
<i>People today are wiser than any other time in history</i>	7.3	-27.7	-9.6
<i>Wisdom is closely related with health</i>	13.0	-20.7	-2.9
<i>Wise people eat healthy</i>	20.9	8.2	15.6

Table 5b: Testing of differences (Mann-Whitney U test) between empiric types

	<i>Mann-Whitney U</i>	<i>P</i>
<i>Men are wiser than women</i>	29822.500	< .001
<i>More educated – wiser you are</i>	18744.000	< .001
<i>Wisdom is more important than character</i>	25915.000	< .001
<i>Animals can be wise as well</i>	29210.000	< .001
<i>Wise people believe in God</i>	24043.500	< .001
<i>Wise person is able to see what is future coming up with</i>	32799.500	< .001
<i>Wise person lives in a strong relation with the nature</i>	35423.500	< .001
<i>Wise person has a rich spiritual life</i>	40527.000	.027
<i>Wisdom is hereditary</i>	28919.500	< .001
<i>Some nations are wiser than others</i>	38076.500	.001
<i>Happiness is more important than wisdom</i>	35183.000	< .001
<i>Wisdom depends on good relations with other people</i>	40801.500	.044
<i>One day, computers will be wiser than human</i>	34701.500	< .001
<i>People today are wiser than any other time in history</i>	30186.000	< .001
<i>Wisdom is closely related with health</i>	29788.500	< .001
<i>Wise people eat healthy</i>	37966.500	.001

What significant specific features can be derived from the profiles? The “accepting” type (56 % of respondents) – is in general characterized by higher agreement with items on opinions about wisdom that the “refusing” type. Table 5b shows that the smallest differences between empiric types occurred with the statements “Happiness is more important than wisdom” and “Wise person has a rich spiritual life”.

For a deeper understanding of empiric types we need their image in the three-dimensional space of opinion’s factors (Tab. 6a). Within the “accepting” type, mean values of all five factors are positive, the strongest is “traditionalism”. Within the “refusing” type, below average values of all factors are negative; the first factor – traditionalism is the most frequently refused. This factor possesses the strongest differentiation power between empiric types (see Tab. 6b), the least differentiating is the third factor, “elitism and happiness”.

Table 6a: Comparison of the factor level by empiric types

	accepting	refusing	sum
<i>traditionalism</i>	.52	-.66	.00
<i>spiritual-natural factor</i>	.14	-.18	.00
<i>Elitism and happiness</i>	.13	-.16	.00
<i>science-technologic factor</i>	.22	-.28	.00
<i>Health</i>	.24	-.31	.00

Table 6b: Testing of differences (Fisher’s test) between empiric types from the aspect of factors

	<i>F</i>	<i>df</i>	<i>p</i>	<i>objective sig.</i>
<i>traditionalism</i>	309.854	1	< .001	.58
<i>spiritual-natural factor</i>	15.131	1	< .001	.16
<i>elitism and happiness</i>	12.302	1	< .001	.14
<i>science-technologic factor</i>	39.942	1	< .001	.25
<i>health</i>	49.766	1	< .001	.28

Tables 7a, 7b, 7c and 7d compare the factor levels by empiric types, individually for each of the studied cultures. The strongest factor differentiating types in all cultures is “traditionalism”. As opposed to other cultures, some inconsistency is specific for the accepting Hindus because they do not accept traditionalism. Remarkable is also that the mainly refusing Buddhists (refusing type) accept elitism and happiness as well as the science-technologic factor.

Table 7a: Comparison of factor levels (M) by empiric types, Islam early

Factors	Types		
	<i>accepting</i>	<i>refusing</i>	<i>objective sig.</i>
<i>Traditionalism</i>	.69	-.08	.45
<i>spiritual-natural factor</i>	-.01	-.23	.09
<i>elitism and happiness</i>	.23	-.22	.23
<i>science-technologic factor</i>	.01	-.84	.40
<i>Health</i>	.10	-.69	.39

Table 7b: Comparison of factor levels (M) by empiric types, Islam late

Factors	Types		
	<i>accepting</i>	<i>refusing</i>	<i>objective sig.</i>
<i>traditionalism</i>	.61	-.02	.40
<i>spiritual-natural factor</i>	.12	-.31	.20
<i>elitism and happiness</i>	-.10	-.56	.21
<i>science-technologic factor</i>	.16	-.42	.30
<i>health</i>	.33	-.33	.32

Table 7c: Comparison of factor levels (M) by empiric types, Hinduism

Factors	Types		
	<i>accepting</i>	<i>refusing</i>	<i>objective sig.</i>
<i>traditionalism</i>	-.28	-1.36	.52
<i>spiritual-natural factor</i>	.25	-.07	.15
<i>elitism and happiness</i>	.88	-.11	.36
<i>science-technologic factor</i>	.39	-.13	.21
<i>health</i>	.52	.00	.20

Table 7d: Comparison of factor levels (M) by empiric types, Buddhism

Factors	Types		
	<i>accepting</i>	<i>refusing</i>	<i>objective sig.</i>
<i>traditionalism</i>	.17	-.91	.61
<i>spiritual-natural factor</i>	.43	-.13	.27
<i>elitism and happiness</i>	.49	.35	.07
<i>science-technologic factor</i>	.73	.34	.18
<i>health</i>	.09	-.40	.21

Tables 8a, 8b compare factor levels by empiric types individually for men and for women. In both sub-sets alike, traditionalism is the most differentiating factor for the empiric types. Accepting men have an ambivalent relation with the spiritual-natural factor. Refusing men accept to some extent elitism and happiness.

Table 8a: Comparison of factor levels by empiric types, men

Factors	Types		
	<i>accepting</i>	<i>refusing</i>	<i>objective sig.</i>
<i>traditionalism</i>	.66	-.35	.52
<i>spiritual-natural factor</i>	.02	-.31	.15
<i>elitism and happiness</i>	.17	.10	.04
<i>science-technologic factor</i>	.14	-.31	.20
<i>health</i>	.21	-.46	.33

Table 8b: Comparison of factor levels by empiric types, women

Factors	Types		
	<i>accepting</i>	<i>refusing</i>	<i>objective sig.</i>
<i>traditionalism</i>	.40	-.85	.62
<i>spiritual-natural factor</i>	.24	-.09	.18
<i>elitism and happiness</i>	.09	-.32	.21
<i>science-technologic factor</i>	.29	-.26	.30
<i>health</i>	.27	-.22	.24

5. Comparison of empiric types by the four cultures

What is the cultural structure by the empiric types? What are the culture differences from the viewpoint of student empiric types characterized by accepting and refusing opinions about wisdom? What are the individual differences for men and for women?

We can perceive each of the studied cultures as a set of two empiric types. The arrangement of empiric types serves as a differentiating factor for the cultures. Table 9 shows for example also that Muslims are more “saturated” by the “accepting” type. This is a significant difference in comparison to Hindus. Buddhists have an even structure. We observed some resemblance in the arrangement of types between early Muslims and Buddhists.

Table 9: Cultural arrangement by empiric types

			Culture				Sum
			<i>Islam early</i>	<i>Islam late</i>	<i>Hinduism</i>	<i>Buddhism</i>	
Types	<i>accepting</i>	<i>quantities</i>	86	183	18	51	338
		%	58.1 %	74.1 %	16.5 %	51.0 %	56.0 %
	<i>refusing</i>	<i>quantities</i>	62	64	91	49	266
		%	41.9 %	25.9 %	83.5 %	49.0 %	44.0 %
Sum		<i>quantities</i>	148	247	109	100	604
		%	100.0 %	100.0 %	100.0 %	100.0 %	100.0 %

Chi-square(3) = 103.035 p < 0.001 V = 0.413

Note: Original number of participants (N = 646) has lowered, a result of incomplete responses to the whole set of statements, to N = 604.

Tables 10a, 10b show the cultural arrangement by empiric types, individually for men and for women. There are significant differences between cultures in both cases (women are more differentiated than men).

Overall, both genders prefer the “accepting type”. The table indicates that the type ratio in early Muslims of both genders is in agreement with the state of the whole sample. In late Muslims is the gender difference not substantial. Hindu-men are mainly refusing, Hindu-women are even more refusing in nature. Buddhist men and women are evenly matched within the types.

Table 10a: Cultural arrangement by empiric types, men.

			Types		Sum
			accepting	refusing	
cultures	Islam early	quantity	58	39	97
		%	59.8	40.2	100.0
	Islam late	quantity	68	24	92
		%	73.9	26.1	100.0
	Hinduism	quantity	8	21	29
		%	27.6	72.4	100.0
	Buddhism	quantity	17	18	35
		%	48.6	51.4	100.0
Sum		quantity	151	102	253
		%	59.7	40.3	100.0

Chi-square (3) = 21,955 $p < 0,001$ $V = 0,295$

Table 10b: Cultural arrangement by empiric types, women

			Types		Sum
			accepting	refusing	
cultures	Islam early	quantity	28	23	51
		%	54.9	45.1	100.0
	Islam late	quantity	115	40	155
		%	74.2	25.8	100.0
	Hinduism	quantity	10	70	80
		%	12.5	87.5	100.0
	Buddhism	quantity	34	31	65
		%	52.3	47.7	100.0
Sum		quantity	187	164	351
		%	53.3	46.7	100.0

Chi-square(3) = 80.759 $p < 0.001$ $V = 0.480$

Discussion

Individual opinions about wisdom of the Asian university students (shown in Tab. 1a) studied in relation to religion are a partial documentation of the differences and similarities spectrum between Asian cultures. A dominant

agreement in opinions about the key role of spirituality, approach to nature and health in the context of wisdom definitely confirms current findings in this field of research (Levitt 1999; Takahashi – Bordia 2000) and also the theories formulated by experts. (Yang 2001) Similarly, items with the largest difference in the level of acceptance on individual cultural levels according to our assessments provide findings coherent with our anticipations. The relation between wisdom and belief in God in early Muslims partially reflects the level of society secularization. However, we believe that its background is to be primarily found within the context of the monotheistic doctrine of Islam (values of the tropical Muslims sample indicate also in other items some, often remarkable divergences in beliefs on the axis of one religion). Extreme values measured in Hindus on the item related to wisdom of animals emphasize again the religious message (and somehow confirm the appropriateness of choosing religion as the basic cultural variable) where animals are important representations of a deity.

The factor of traditionalism presented by items emphasizing education, faith and gender (“men are wiser than women”) reached significantly higher values in Muslims, which is in agreement with our anticipation and also with relevant literature. (See Tureček 2007⁸). Buddhists recorded the highest values in the little differentiated spiritual-natural factor as well as significantly higher values in the factor elitism and happiness. This can be probably explained by their social position induced by their refugee status in a country where the majority population extends over a billion inhabitants⁹.

A little surprising are low values of Hindus in questions related to spirituality and in the score of the second factor. Here, our findings are significantly in disagreement with our anticipations. Due to other results, we consider, but do not accept the hypothesis that respondents were overcautious in working with the scale (Van Vijver – Leung 1997), mentions the median tendency in Japanese) – Hindus had extremely high values in the elitism and happiness factor (general beliefs about wisdom) and exceptionally low values of acceptance of the statement “Wise people believe in God”. In regard to our findings many experts report a growing, but still only a symbolic level of secularization of the Indian society, even in urban centres. Acceleration of social change is well-captured in sociological journals very recently (Nadeem 2009), three years after collection of our data. Remarkable in this context is the strong disagreement with the item “Wisdom is hereditary” – we assume that this proper finding could be the right indicator for the developing social change

⁸ Tureček (2007) offers variety of examples documenting a strong relation of Islam with tradition and history.

⁹ Happiness is one of the basic theses of the Buddhist doctrine, although only rarely considered the goal of the spiritual development, it is one of the development's symptoms that in the long run is often regarded as a reliable indicator of carmic merits.

in the society whose internal structure has been organized by the caste system, characterized especially by rules of heredity, for thousands of years.

Values of the science-technologic factor reach their peak in the Buddhist sample, a population that is the most distant from modern technologies in our sample. We intent to understand these findings in relation to the flexible character of Buddhism as “atheistic religion” (or philosophy) and with regard to the historical fact that there has never been a conflict between Eastern religions and scientific knowledge, unlike in our society.

We have created an empiric typology based on cluster analysis, which divided participants into two types. The best differentiating factor within all cultures was traditionalism. Our comparison of cultures shows the following results: answers of the Muslim populations are generally more accepting, answers of Buddhists were balanced while Hindus (mainly women) tend to give refusing answers.

The gender comparison shows that women of each culture score higher in the factor health and in the spiritual-natural factor. It is assumed that the definition of wisdom is conceptually the widest in Asian populations out of all, and our findings indicate that women of these societies define wisdom within the maximum level of inclusiveness – in the context of mental and physical health, spiritual dimensions or the relation of individual with the nature. Traditionalism, factor with high values in Muslims, scores higher in Muslim men than women (he same for early and late Islam), similarly to Hindu and Buddhist men (although their median answers are on the other end of the scale than Muslims), which is easily explained by the set of advantages traditionally related to men in these parts of the world.

Conclusion

According to the results of our research and in agreement with the findings of Takahashi, Bordia (2000) and anticipations formulated by Yang (2001) and Sternberg (2003), wisdom can be largely considered a culture specific concept. Our results confirm the anticipated cultural variability of wise person characteristic also in the context of historically and geographically close Asian populations. Prototype of a wise person in the inclusive (Eastern) definition present a unique research object example, characterized by a complexity that includes characteristics of practically all major topics of psychological knowledge (cognition, emotionality, social skills, motivation). From this perspective, wisdom extends into fields that are exclusive in other psychological concepts and participates in their unique mutual combination. The universally positive connotation of wisdom was extremely useful in recording some variables of the studied cultures – also due to the use of the snow-ball effect within the presented research we are currently better at

anticipating how the cultural differences mirror in public definitions, opinions, theories and in the general understanding of reality. We believe cross-cultural orientation in research offers many possibilities for future investigation that leads to practical applications of its findings.

Ivan Brezina's academic interest is based in cross-cultural studies. As a researcher of the Institute of Experimental Psychology (Slovak Academy of Science) he has carried out number of comparative studies on diverse populations of Asia, Roma populations of Slovakia and indigenous populations of South America. Besides wisdom, main topics of his study include cultural values, personality structure, loss-aversion and implicit beliefs about virtues. Presently, he lectures at Comenius University in Bratislava, and at Cyril and Method University in Trnava.

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