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Chapter 10

Eastern Epistemology and the Psychology of the Subjective Self

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SUMMARY

The psychology of the subjective self suffers from an aporia: the self, "objectively" investigated, is not the "subjective" but, rather, the "objective" self. This article attempts to overcome this epistemological difficulty by introducing the concept of *idiomodific*. Coined by Kuroda (1980) to add to the two types (nomothetic and idiographic) of science, idiomodific means to modify individuality, and suggests that in idiomodific science we cannot understand anything without modifying ourselves. Many traditional Eastern disciplines provide examples of this type of epistemology. By reconsidering studies of the *I-experience*, a phenomenon first discussed by Bühler (1923) and now studied mainly in Japan, I show that inquiry into the subjective self in adolescence sometimes results in *idiomodific logic* whereby knowing one's true self results in becoming the true self. Indian thought regarding the self may also help to elucidate this logic. The conclusion of this article is that the self is an idiomodific concept.

INTRODUCTION

In his book, Self and Identity in Modern Psychology and Indian Thought, Paranjpe (1998) noted that "the study of self raises epistemological issues that are beyond the scope of the contemporary philosophy of science, and this is the kind of area in which some of the Eastern traditions have much to offer" (p. 39). In this study, I respond to his suggestion by introducing the concept of idiomodific, a term coined by Japanese psychologist Masasuke Kuroda (1980). Over a century ago, Windelband (1894) classified science as nomothetic and idiographic. Allport (1937) introduced the classification into psychology. However, Kuroda (1980, 2002) later proposed an additional type of science: idiomodific science. Idiomodific means to modify or change individuality. Idiomodific science and the general idiomodific method suggest that we cannot understand anything without modifying our own state of mind and body, that is, our own individuality.

In the first section of this paper, I briefly describe the idiomodific method. Section 2 then introduces studies of the *I-experience* to illustrate the idiomodific method. The I-experience (originally *Ich-Erlebnis* in German) has been discussed by several German psychologists, especially Bühler (1923), in studies of the remarkable experience of the discovery of self in adolescence. The study of the I-experience has not progressed systematically since the publication of the early classical works. Recently, several Japanese psychologists have revived this subject, and I offer here a brief survey of their research

The study of the I-experience may contribute to our understanding of the psychology of self. Since James' (1892/1961) famous distinction between the I and the Me,

considerably less research has focused on I, the self-as-subject, than it has on Me, the self-as-object. This historical trajectory for modern psychology might be natural because it is logically more difficult to empirically investigate the subjective self. The self, "objectively" observed and investigated, is not the "subjective" self, a problem constituting "the epistemological issues" that Paranjpe (1998) has referred to as "beyond the scope of the contemporary philosophy of science" (p. 39). However, the study of the I-experience may open up empirical study on the subjective self by focusing on the psychological experiences of young people discovering that not only the Me but also the I matter for the first time in their lives. In Section 3, I demonstrate that the structure of the I-experience itself might illustrate the *idiomodific logic*. Section 4 suggests that Indian thought on self might illustrate the idiomodific epistemology. Finally, based on these considerations, the problem of self is discussed from a new perspective.

THE IDIOMODIFIC METHOD

As described above, the methodological or epistemological term idiomodific means to modify one's individuality. For example, in Zen or Yoga mediation techniques, one not only recognizes (or observes) the truth (or reality) but also becomes that truth. We can find examples of this type of research method in many Eastern traditions of religious, artistic, and medical praxis. The term idiomodific helps us to understand these traditions not only as practices but also as a type of epistemology. According to Kuroda (2002), the "idiomodific method" characterizes Eastern epistemology, while the "objective observation method" characterizes Western epistemology. However, in Western psychology, Maslow's (1962) psychology, or humanistic psychology and clinical psychology in general, can also be considered idiomodific, to a certain extent. In addition, in the Western philosophy of science, Polanyi's (1956) "tacit knowledge" has some commonalities with idiomodific epistemology. For example, we require tacit knowledge to successfully shoot an arrow at a target. It is difficult to explicitly explain how to shoot well while shooting and observing our own shooting at the same time. When a European philosopher asked his Japanese archery teacher how to shoot, the master replied: "Unify yourself with your target!" As the Zen philosopher Suzuki (1953/1985) commented on the spirit of Japanese archery, "The hitter and the hit are no longer two opposing objects, but are one reality" (p. 8). In this example the essence of tacit knowledge of shooting is precisely idiomodific.

Some may doubt whether idiomodific science is truly new, or to what extent it differs from so-called applied science. However, according to Kuroda, applied science only connects the first objectively observed truth with an intended practical goal. In contrast, in the idiomodific method, the attainment of the goal coincides with the recognition of truth. That is, modification and recognition are realized at the same time. For example, in Zen Buddhism, the recognition of *nothing* (the final principle of Zen ontology) is neither the result of objective observation nor that of rational argument. Through the practice of meditation, "the inquirers of Nothing must themselves experience the Nothing, become it, and express it in all of their behavior" (Kuroda, 2002, p. 287).

Study of the Idiomodific Method: Peak Experience

According to Kuroda (2002), Maslow's study of peak experience is essentially based on the idiomodific method. Maslow (1962) asked students to describe the best experience in their lives. Then, based on his own peak experience, he assessed the collected descriptions and recognized many peak experiences among them. This process was not based on the "objective observation method" because how could one "objectively" observe or recognize peak experiences in descriptions that varied greatly in form and content? Rather, the best way to recognize a peak experience was for the reader to experience it in reading the descriptions.

Moreover, such vicarious experience may actually modify our own experience. Imagine that you have had a peak experience. That experience may have been restricted by your age, sex, environment, or other factors. However, reading descriptions written by various people may enable you to experience the peak experience in its various possible forms. That is, the experience of reading may allow us to widen our original peak experience and to give it a more universal form. Studying peak experience may be impossible without modifying our own experience and, as a result, our own individuality.

Study of the Idiomodific Method: Hazama's Primate Research

According to Tsuruta (2003), Japanese animal ecologist Naonosuke Hazama (1899-1972) practiced the idiomodific method through his primate research. Hazama worked under a fieldwork ideal in which the subject and the object were harmonized and handled equally as subjective items, while at the same time they underwent mutual change, according to the actions and changes of the other. His colleague Miyaji commented that "among us primate researchers, Mr. Hazama is the only one who, studying monkeys, has been accepted by them as a monkey. He has gotten 'citizenship in the monkey kingdom.' He really became a monkey!" (Tsuruta, 2003, p. 75) Here, we can identify the typically *idiomodific* logic: knowing A is becoming A.

Idiomodific Logic and the Problem of Self

Now, we can consider the problem of the self by replacing "A" with "self" in the sentence above; knowing the self is becoming the self. In other words, knowing myself is becoming myself. But does this "idiomodific" sentence make any sense? We may be able to replace it with a clearer one: knowing my true self is becoming the true self. However, what does "true self" mean? We may be able to interpret the true self as the "subjective self," but the following question remains: What, then, does "becoming the true self" mean? Before discussing this problem in detail, I briefly present studies of I-experience, because the structure of such experiences helps illustrate idiomodific logic in the process of self-understanding.

STUDIES OF I-EXPERIENCE

As described earlier, several German psychologists have employed the concept of the I-experience to refer to the remarkable experience of the discovery of self in adolescence. Bühler (1923) defined I-experience as "suddenly experiencing the self in its isolation

and locality," while Spranger (1948) defined it as a "metaphysically fundamental experience of individualization." Example 1 is a typical example cited by both Bühler (1923, pp. 45-46) and Spranger (1948, p. 47):

[Example 1 (Case: Rudi Delius)]

I was about twelve years old. I woke up very early. . . . In this moment I had the I-experience (Ich-Erlebnis). — It was as if everything broke away from me and I was suddenly isolated. A strange floating feeling. And at the same time I proposed the bewildering question to myself: Are you Rudi Delius? Are you the same person whom your friends call so? The same who has a certain name and gets a certain mark in school? — Are you the same person as him? At that moment, inside myself, a second "I" faced the first "I" (the one that worked here entirely objectively as a name).

Later, independently of these works, phenomenological philosopher Spiegelberg (1964) examined this phenomenon using the framework of the "I am me" experience. Example 2 is a passage that he cited from a novel by Richard Hughes (1929, pp. 134-139):

[Example2 (Case: Emily)]

She had been playing houses in a nook right in the bows behind the windlass; and tiring of it was walking rather aimlessly aft, thinking vaguely about some bees and a fairy queen, when it suddenly flashed into her mind that she was *she*. She stopped dead, and began looking over all of her person which came within the range of her eyes. . . . Once fully convinced of this astonishing fact, that she was now Emily Bas-Thornton. . . . , she began seriously to reckon its implications.

First, what agency had so ordered it that out of all the people in the world who she might have been, she was this particular one, this Emily; born in such-and-such a year out of all the years in Time, and encased in this particular rather pleasing little casket of flesh? Had she chosen herself, or had God done it?

At this, another consideration: who was God? She had heard a terrible lot about Him, always: but the question of His identity had been left vague, as much taken for granted as her own. Wasn't she perhaps God, herself? Was it that she was trying to remember? However, the more she tried, the more it eluded her. (How absurd, to disremember such an important point as whether one was God or not!) (pp. 134–136).

A sudden terror struck her: did any one know? (Know, I mean, that she was some one in particular, Emily — perhaps even God — not just any little girl.) She could not tell why, but the idea terrified her (p. 139).

However, since these classical works, the study of the I-experience has progressed little in the West. Recently, several Japanese psychologists, whose studies I review below, have revived the topic.

Survey of Recent Research in Japan

Takaishi (1988) conducted the first systematic research on the I-experience phenomenon. Hypothesizing that the I-experience may not be a special experience, but

occurs in everyone, at least partially, she created an I-experience scale comprised of seven sub-aspects. She then administered a questionnaire based on the scale to 622 junior high and high school students. The subjects were also asked about the estimated age at which they experienced aspects of the scale and what the associated situations and consequences were. Most of the subjects reported at least one or more partial experiences; the first I-experiences occurred mainly around the age of 10, and the dominant triggers were conflict in their relationships with friends.

Watanabe (1992) administered a questionnaire containing four passages illustrating the I-experience to 227 undergraduate students and asked them to "describe your first impressive memory of any thoughts you have had that are similar to these passages." Forty-five of the cases reported were assessed as I-experience, for example:

[Example 3]

At the age of 6 or 7, on some fair Sunday, just before noon, I was in an upstairs room of my house. I was vaguely gazing at the sunlight through the window. Suddenly, I thought, "Why am I me? Why am I here?" [woman, age 19] (p. 33)

[Example 4]

At the age of 10 or 11, I thought, "Why was I born as me, Ichiro? If I had been born as one of my friends, then who would be this Ichiro?" [man, age 18] (p. 34)

Peaks for first experiences were distributed between the ages of 10 and 14. However, in nine cases, the first experiences occurred between the ages of 3 and 9.

Amaya (1997) researched this experience in two groups: 160 college students and 18 junior high school children. Her method included semi-structured interviews. The results indicated that 10.6% of the college group and 65.0% of the junior high school group had had an I-experience. Amaya suggested that the difference between the age groups indicates that almost all people have had an I-experience in childhood but that it is progressively forgotten during adolescence.

Watanabe and Komatsu (1999) asked 345 undergraduates to complete an "I-experience Questionnaire" containing 19 items and requiring "yes" or "no" responses. Respondents were then asked to describe their memory of their first I-experiences. The results indicated that 29.9% had had at least one I-experience. Peak ages for the first experience occurred between the ages of 6 and 11. All 145 cases assessed as I-experience were classified into the following three sub-aspects:

- 1. Questioning the origin and basis of the self
- 2. Separation of I and me
- 3. Awareness of original uniqueness of the self

Figure 1 illustrates typical expressions and hypothetical relationships:

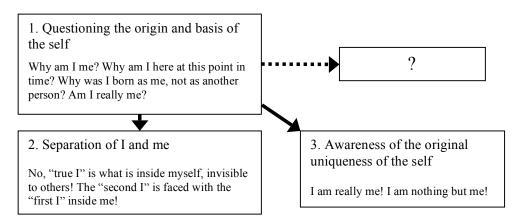


Figure 1. Three sub-aspects of I-experience, their typical expressions, and their hypothetical relationships to each other. Is there another sub-aspect or any other course?

PROCESS OF THE I-EXPERIENCE ILLUSTRATING IDIOMODIFIC LOGIC

As noted earlier, research on the I-experience may open the door to the empirical study of "I," the subjective self, by focusing on the various psychological experiences of young people who are first discovering that not only the "Me" but also the "I" matters.

The First Step: Self-Evident Knowledge of Me is no Longer Self-Evident

Why do descriptions of I-experiences contain expressions such as, "Why am I me?" "Why am I here and at this time?" and "Am I really me?" as illustrated in Fig. 1? I observe myself and know that I have a certain name and get certain marks in school; I know that I live in a particular "here and now." This is self-evident knowledge of my self.

However, suddenly, I may question myself as Rudi Delius did: Am I really me? Am I really the person who has a certain name and gets certain marks in school? This question may, as happened in the case of Emily, take another form: Why am I the person who has a certain name and gets a certain mark in school, that is, the person who lives in a particular "here and now"? In these expressions, "I" may refer to the subjective self, "me," or "the person who . . . " to the objective self. Therefore, the self-evident identity between "I" and "Me" is no longer self-evident in these questions. In other words, the self-evident knowledge of myself is no longer self-evident. This may be the first step toward searching for the self, not in an objective but a subjective way.

The Second Step (1): Course $1\rightarrow 2$

In the second step, the search for self diverges into two courses, as suggested in Fig. 1. We can observe the process of one course (from 1 to 2) in the description of Rudi Delius, who proposed a bewildering question: "Am I really me?" At the end of his description, he found a kind of answer: Inside myself, a second "I" faced the first "I." In

other words, he found the "second I" (self-as-subject) totally distinct from the "first I" (self-as-object).

In fact, in our collection of cases of I-experience (Watanabe & Komatsu, 1999), we found many examples of this kind of self-discovery, where self-as-subject faced the self-as-object. In these examples, the former is sometimes called "my true self" or "something like a soul." Typical examples include, "I am not really what people consider me to be," and "my true self is invisible inside me." We can find an extreme example of this antagonism in the final passage of Emily's case: "God" (self-as-subject) faced "just any little girl" (self-as-object).

The Second Step (2): Course $1\rightarrow 3$

Figure 1 shows another course, from 1 to 3, illustrated below:

[Example 5]

One day, in the upper grade of primary school, I asked myself why I was me, just one of many persons in the world. Afterwards, I answered that I was me, I was distinct from other persons, and I would never become another person. [woman, age 20] (Watanabe & Komatsu, 1999, p. 18)

Example 5 precisely illustrates the process of course 1 to 3. In her childhood, the woman proposed a question to herself: "Why am I me?" At the end of this description, she discovered an answer on her own: "I am me." While in logical terms, this answer is not truly an answer, psychologically, it may be. Before this experience, she was, without any consciousness of who she was. But afterwards, she accepts with consciousness who she is. We might find this type of self-acceptance in the identity formation process of people belonging to some minority.

Knowing my True Self is becoming the True Self

Now, we can return to the question posed at the end of Section 1: What does "true self" mean in the sentence "knowing my true self is becoming the true self"? I propose that the process of the I-experience illustrates this idiomodific sentence.

The First Step

First, reconsider subsection 3.1, the first step, which described the case in which self-evident knowledge of "myself" is no longer self-evident. When the children (age 6-12) asked themselves "Why am I me?" or "Am I really me?" what happened to them? Why was the self-evident knowledge of not self-evident anymore? It was because they had begun to search for their true self, self-as-subject, without clearly knowing what they were doing. However, recall the sentence, knowing my true self is becoming the true self. The second step illustrates idiomodific logic.

The Second Step (1): Course $1\rightarrow 2$

We can find idiomodific logic clearly illustrated in the description of Rudi Delius. The boy experienced the second I (self-as-subject) as totally distinct from the first I (self-as-

object). Did he find the second "I" by some kind of observation? The answer is no, the self being observed is always the objective self. He found the subjective self, not by observing it but by becoming it. He did not observe that "a second I faced the first I." He himself, as the "second I" faced the "first I." In other words, he experienced himself as himself

The Second Step (2): Course $1\rightarrow 3$

In the examples of course $1\rightarrow 3$, we can find another illustration of idiomodific logic. In Example 5, a girl aged eight posed a question: Why am I me? She then answered her own question: I am me. Before this experience, she was who she was, without consciousness. However, with that question posed to herself, the self-evident identity between I and me was no longer self-evident. Finally, she, as subjective self, consciously accepted herself as objective self. In other words, she realized the "true self" by becoming the objective self as subjective self.

The Second Step (3): Course $1\rightarrow$?

One may ask if there is any other course, except that of $1\rightarrow 2$ and $1\rightarrow 3$, that illustrates idiomodific logic. The answer is *yes*, but it arises from neither the study of I-experience nor that of other psychological works. Rather, this course is recognized in the history of Indian thought about the self. In the next section, I describe the historical course from *atman* to *Brahman* in Indian thought as another way to illustrate idiomodific logic and method

FROM ATMAN TO BRAHMAN

Indian thought about the self began nearly 3,000 years ago, as recorded in a paragraph from the *Brhadaranyaka Upanishad*:

Ushasta Cakrayana said: "You explain this to me like a person saying, "It is a cow. It is a horse." Explain to me the Brahman who is present and experiencable, who is the atman (Self) of all." "It is your atman (Self). It is in all." "What is in all, Yajnavalkya?" "You cannot see the seer of seeing, you cannot hear the hearer of hearing, you cannot think the thinker of thinking, you cannot know the knower of knowing. It is your atman. It is in all. Anything other than it is nothing." And Ushasta Cakrayana kept silent. [(Br., 3, 4, 2. Trans., from the Sanskrit by P. Lal (1974). "Self" is supplemented by the translation of Max Mueller (1879/1962)]

Here we find the clear understanding that knowing the true self (atman) is a kind of oxymoron since the self, being known, is not the subjective, but the objective, self. You cannot know your self, the knower of knowing. However, we may pose other questions: How had the great Yajnavalkya known that our self (atman) was the Brahman, who is the atman (Self) of all? How and why could he realize that our true self was the Self of everything? The Upanishadic texts offer several suggestions. However, they are not well integrated. We find more integrated answers to these questions in the philosophy of Vedanta, developed over 1,000 years later.

The Fourth State Offers Direct Experience of the Atman-Brahman

Paranjpe (1989) wrote, "an inquiry into the nature of the self is at the very heart of Vedanta" (p. 196). Vedanta is one of the six major orthodox schools of Indian philosophy. The theoretical system of the school, like other schools such as Sankya and Yoga, arose from the attempt to provide well-integrated theories based on the exegesis of the Upanishadic texts. Among several versions of Vedanta, the nondualistic interpretation (Advaita) of the Upanishads is the most influential.

According to Advaita Vedanta, Brahman is the ultimate reality. It is ubiquitous, formless, and essentially indescribable, but can be approximately characterized as being, consciousness, and bliss. "The individual self (atman) is ultimately the same as the single, formless Brahman. But it appears to be different, due to primeval misconstrual" (Paranjpe, 1989, p. 187).

How are we able to attain the realization that our true self is the Atman-Brahman? There are several systematic methods for realization of the self. One of them, the path of contemplation (*dhyana*) is the most influential and is especially important for the purpose of this paper. Through contemplation, we can experience the altered state of consciousness that Upanishadic sages called the "fourth state of consciousness" (Paranjpe, 1989, p. 188). Also called *Samadhi* in the Advaita Vedanta and Yoga schools, this state is characterized by the disappearance of intentionality or a subject-object split and offers a direct experience of an undivided, nondual, and unchanging self, called the Atman-Brahman (Paranjpe, 1998, p. 356).

Knowing my True Self (Atman) is Becoming the True Self (Atman as Brahman)

Vedantic inquiry into the nature of self can be considered an exact illustration of idiomodific logic and method. Vedantic inquiry began with a great philosopher realizing that the true self was not known since the self, being known, was not the subjective but the objective self. Over a thousand years later, we see the completion of this idiomodific logic: knowing my true self is becoming the true self. To know my true self, I transform myself into an altered state of consciousness, Samadhi, in which I experience directly my self (atman) as Brahman. Knowing my true self (atman) is becoming the true self (atman as Brahman).

Some passages of the Upanishads may be identified as historical starting points for inquiry into the self, while the I-experience as its beginning in individual development. In Vedanta the method is consciously idiomodific, while in the latter, young people obey idiomodific logic without consciousness. However, both cases include the idiomodific sentence "knowing your true self is becoming the true self."

CONCLUSION

From Hume (1739/1868) to Harré (1985), many modern philosophers and psychologists have suggested that "self" is a false concept. It is neither observed nor verified in a normal state of consciousness. However, as considered here, self is an *idiomodific concept*. Knowing your true self is becoming the true self.

"Idiomodific" means to modify or change individuality or the state of mind and body. This term was coined by Kuroda to abstract the methodological or epistemological characteristics common to many Asian traditions of religious, artistic, and scientific praxis. In these traditions, what matters most in attaining knowledge is neither empirical observation nor rational theorizing but rather the transformation of the inquirers themselves. Some similar ideas may exist in Kuhnian and post-Kuhnian philosophies of science, where knowledge is attained not by anonymous observers using some automatic principle but by proficient scientists, by means of creativity (e.g., Kuhn, 1970). We cannot attain any scientific knowledge without transforming ourselves into skilled scientists.

The heart of idiomodific epistemology lies in the following sentence: Knowing A is becoming A. This idiomodific logic is especially important in cases in which "A" refers to something with subjectivity. The something may be the self, some subjective state of consciousness, or others (not only humans but also animals).

One may ask the following: "You have suggested various courses of the search for "true self" and various kinds of "becoming the true self." Which course is the best, and which self is the truest?" However, since the self is not something existing objectively in the world, we have no objective criterion by which to answer these questions (here, I use the term "true self" to designate self-as-subject or subjective self). However, this does not mean that our inquiry has to be arbitrary. A number of Eastern traditions have developed their own systematic methods for realizing the true self. We can experience these methods ourselves, compare them, and discuss them openly. Kuroda (1980) suggested that idiomodific science has its own proper form of evidence, logic, and systems. What must be elaborated is the proper epistemology, that is, the proper form of evidence, logic, and systems, for the psychology of, and inquiry into, the self.

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