RETRACING THE FOOTSTEPS OF WILHELM WUNDT: Explorations in the Disciplinary Frontiers of Psychology and in *Völkerpsychologie*

Wan-chi Wong
The Chinese University of Hong Kong

In 1927, Wilhelm Wundt’s daughter, Eleonore Wundt, compiled and published a comprehensive catalogue of her father’s works and works in translation. We use this catalogue as a starting point for an examination of the breadth of Wundt’s contributions, the reaction to his works from the international psychological community, and the overall trajectory of his academic career. Two areas of particular interest are Wundt’s view on the nature of psychology and its relationship to other disciplines, and his discussion of the nature of *Völkerpsychologie* and its role in psychology. A close examination of original sources reveals that Wundt anchored psychology in the realm of mental sciences. He regarded “psychology [to be] in relation to natural sciences the *supplementary*, in relation to the mental sciences the *fundamental*, and in relation to philosophy the *propaedeutic empirical science.*” The accomplishments and limitations of Wundtian *Völkerpsychologie* are viewed stereoscopically through the lenses of its explicated conceptions, goals, and methods, on one hand, and of the contemporary advancements in psychology, on the other. Current implications of Wundt’s works and further developments of his ideas are related to Davidson’s theory of epistemology and to present-day deliberations on the biocultural coconstruction of human development. We conclude by considering the continuing relevance of Wundt’s intellectual legacy.

*Keywords:* Wundt, nature of psychology, psychology and other disciplines, *Völkerpsychologie*, cultural-historical psychology

Amid the active research endeavors and the diverse discourse in psychology, efforts to retrace the footsteps of Wilhelm Wundt might seem of questionable value. Around the centennial year of the founding of Wundt’s laboratory, a number of authors made noteworthy attempts to reintroduce Wundt to the scientific community (see, for instance, Blumenthal, 1975, 1977, 1979, 1980; Bringmann & Sheerer, 1980; Bringmann, Tweney, & Hilgard, 1980; Danziger, 1979, 1980a, 1980b; Graumann, 1980; Leary, 1979; Rieber, 1980). At the time, Blumenthal (1979) described Wundt as “[the] founding father we never knew” (Blumenthal, 1979, p. 547). Although three decades have now passed since we marked this centennial, one might still legitimately ask how well we know this important figure in psychology. A discussion of Wundt’s intellectual legacy has implications beyond the value of rescuing this psychologist from undeserved obscurity; however, an examination of the primary and secondary sources relating to Wundt reveals the surprising freshness and relevance of his ideas.

Wan-chi Wong, Department of Educational Psychology, The Chinese University of Hong Kong.
Correspondence concerning this article should be addressed to Wan-chi Wong, Department of Educational Psychology, The Chinese University of Hong Kong, Shatin, NT, Hong Kong. E-mail: wanchiwong@cuhk.edu.hk

229
Our first step in this reexamining of Wundt’s work will be to introduce the comprehensive catalogue of his academic activities compiled by his daughter Eleonore Wundt. This document provides valuable insights into Wundt’s intellectual priorities and into his influence on his contemporaries in the international community. Following this, we examine the history of the reception of Wundtian psychology in the English-speaking world; this is a necessary step so that the epistemological obstacles to a deeper understanding of Wundt can be recognized. Our core explorations of Wundt’s ideas focus on two key areas that have been widely misunderstood: (1) What is the nature of psychology and its relations to other disciplines, in particular to philosophy? and (2) What is the nature of Wundtian *Völkerpsychologie* and its role in psychology? In the light of recent advances in philosophical psychology and cultural-historical psychology, we can further contemplate the unique footsteps of Wundt and prepare for the start of our own journey.

The Comprehensive Catalogue of Wundt’s Academic Activities
Compiled by Eleonore Wundt

Eleonore Wundt served as a valued research assistant to her father during his lifetime, and, after his death, she compiled and organized a catalogue of his academic works. This document, published in 1927, consists of four main sections. The first and second sections simply list all of the original and subsequently revised versions of Wundt’s works and are identical in content, differing only in organization: in the first section, the publications are listed in chronological order, whereas in the second section, they are arranged according to themes. The third section is a list of the translations of Wundt’s works and the languages into which they were translated. The final section describes Wundt’s lecture themes at three universities, Heidelberg (1857–1874), Zürich (1874–1875), and Leipzig (1875–1917).

Clearly, this document is helpful in understanding the orientation and weight of Wundt’s ideas and teachings. The insertion of the section on translated works particularly reflects Eleonore Wundt’s perceptiveness, and offers us an important

1 Danziger (1983, p. 303) reminded us about the “impossibility of supplying an accurate English version” of *Völkerpsychologie*. Diriwächter (2004) expressed a similar view. On the other hand, “*Völkerpsychologie*” had been quite frequently translated into “folk psychology.” The translation of one of Wundt’s key works into *Elements of folk psychology* is a case in point. It should be noted that the meanings of “*Völker*” in German and of “folk” in English is cultural specific. We should also bear in mind the existence of the paradigm of commonsense psychology, which is often referred to as folk psychology (see, for instance, Botterill, 1996; Christensen & Turner, 1993; Jackson & Pettit, 1990; Rips & Conrad, 1989; Stich & Nichols, 2003). The translation of *Völkerpsychologie* into folk psychology is thus inaccurate and misleading. A close examination into the meanings of the German compound word reveals the difficulty in searching for an adequate English version; for this particular search, the phrase “cultural-historical psychology” may be the closest translation. Taking into consideration the unique and rich meanings of *Völkerpsychologie*, which will be explained in the sections on the origins and conception of Wundtian *Völkerpsychologie*, we choose to apply the original German compound word throughout the text. A premature application of the phrase “cultural-historical psychology” to take the place of “*Völkerpsychologie*” may hinder us in capturing its original meanings. Paradoxically, a full embracement of the foreignness of “*Völkerpsychologie*” at this stage may help us to penetrate its spirit, which further paves way for enriching our present-day understanding of cultural-historical psychology.
key to the impact of Wundt’s work on various scientific communities. Unfortunately, Eleonore Wundt’s catalogue has been cited only rarely, although Boring mentioned it in one of his footnotes. Rieber and Robinson (2001) brought it to the attention of the English-speaking world in 2001, by introducing it in the second edition of a book entitled *Wilhelm Wundt in history: The making of a scientific psychology*. Even here, however, the introduction of the catalogue is not comprehensive. It should be noted that only the first part of Eleonore’s compilation was included, and, without translation; the other parts remain inaccessible to the English-speaking world. Perhaps this inaccessibility accounts, in part, for the scientific community’s scant recognition of the significance of such a valuable historical document.

Eleonore Wundt’s classification of Wundt’s works into themes in the second section of her catalogue reveals the multidimensionality and richness of his thinking. Eleonore Wundt classified her father’s publications into nine major categories: (1) natural sciences, (2) psychology, (3) philosophy, (4) pedagogy, (5) history of sciences, (6) literary critique, (7) politics, (8) collected works, and (9) edited journals and books. Among the nine categories, “psychology” stands out as the one with the greatest number of entries, and, significantly, these entries are distributed across the early, middle, and late periods of Wundt’s career. It is worth noting that Eleonore further refined the classification of Wundt’s psychological works into two subcategories: “General and experimental psychology” and “Völkerpsychologie.” Many of the remaining publications fall into the categories of either natural sciences or philosophy. The publications related to the natural sciences were more common in the early period of Wundt’s career, whereas those categorized as philosophical were more prevalent in the middle and later years.

With a view to facilitating the reception of Wundt’s ideas by English-speaking readers, the titles of his major works in psychology were selected from Eleonore Wundt’s complied catalogue and are translated below. They are classified with reference to Eleonore’s subcategories, and are listed according to the publication date of the first edition:

A. General and experimental psychology
   1. *Contribution to a theory of sensory perception* (1862) [specialized Work]
   2. *Lectures on the mind of man and animals/Lectures on the psychology of man and animals* (1863) [specialized work]
   3. *Principles of physiological psychology* (1874) [specialized Work]
   4. *The tasks of experimental psychology* (1882) [essay]
   5. *On the methods of psychology* (1882) [essay]
   6. *On the measurement of psychic processes* (1883) [essay]
   7. *Self observation and inner perception* (1888) [essay]
   8. *Outlines of psychology* (1896) [specialized Work]
   9. *On the definition of psychology* (1896) [essay]
   10. *On pure and applied psychology* (1910) [essay]
   11. *An introduction to psychology* (1911) [specialized Work]
   12. *Psychology struggling for its survival* (1913) [specialized Work]

B. Völkerpsychologie
   1. *Lectures on the mind of man and animals/Lectures on the psychology of man and animals* (1863) [specialized work]
Looking at the major works of psychology listed above, we see that Wundt’s contributions were by no means limited to the field of experimental psychology. In the later phase of his life especially, Wundt concentrated heavily on the field of Völkerspsychologie. In fact, in the last 20 years of his life, he published 10 substantial volumes of work on Völkerspsychologie. Clearly, Völkerspsychologie became a major focus of his research interests. Not surprisingly, Wundt’s writings also largely reflected the focus of his lectures at universities. In his Heidelberg period, Wundt lectured primarily on physiology. Anthropology emerged as a theme of his later lectures. His first lecture on Völkerspsychologie was in the winter semester of 1875, during a brief stay at Zürich University. The topics of his lectures at Leipzig University were general and experimental psychology, philosophy, methodology, and Völkerspsychologie. After a long and fruitful lecturing life, the theme of his last lecture, delivered in the summer semester of 1917, was Völkerspsychologie. In his autobiography, published in 1920, Wundt observed that the most satisfying experiences in his working life involved the field of Völkerspsychologie.

In considering Wundt’s academic activities, special attention should be paid to the two journals that he edited. The first, Philosophische Studien (Philosophical Studies), was published from 1882 to 1903. This journal was renamed Psychologische Studien (Psychological Studies) in 1904, and continued to be published under this title until 1918. Wundt described in his autobiography (Wundt, 1920/1921b) how the titles of these two journals revealed his views on the relationship between philosophy and psychology: he deliberately chose Philosophical Studies as the title of the journal to emphasize that psychology was a part of philosophy. In the foreword to the first issue of Psychological Studies, Wundt (1904/1906) emphasized that there would be no essential difference between the orientation of this journal and that of Philosophical Studies, and clarified that the renaming only reflected the aim of helping to establish the field of experimental psychology. The primary concern of the journal would remain discussion in the philosophical domain, particularly on the topics of epistemology and scientific discourse. Wundt saw a close relationship between philosophy and psychology, and found the examination of this relationship interesting. In a later work, “Psychology struggling for its survival” (Wundt, 1913), he engaged in a stimulating discussion on this topic, applying the analogy of a divorce to the relationship between the two fields. We will return to a more detailed discussion of this work in a subsequent section.
In addition to serving as chief editor of *Philosophical Studies* and *Psychological Studies*, Wundt also contributed numerous essays to the journal. The essays mentioned above, including “On the methods of psychology” (Wundt, 1882), “On the definition of psychology” (1896), “On basic and applied psychology” (Wundt, 1910), “On the goals and methods of *Völkerpsychologie*” (Wundt, 1888), and “*Völkerpsychologie* and developmental psychology” (Wundt, 1916), all first appeared there. Wundt also published a number of important essays on philosophy and the history of sciences in *Philosophical Studies*. These included the three essays entitled “On naïve and critical realism” (Wundt, 1886–1888) and the essay “On the classification of scientific disciplines” (Wundt, 1889).

One of the most interesting sections of Eleonore Wundt’s catalogue of her father’s academic works is the collected record of Wundt’s translated works. According to Eleonore, as of 1927, 17 items of Wundt’s works were translated into Russian, 11 items into Spanish, and 7 items into English. A closer examination also reveals that the content of the items selected for translation varied as a function of language. The items translated into Russian are the most diverse in terms of their content. They encompass general and experimental psychology, *Völkerpsychologie*, and philosophy. Those translated into Spanish are mainly philosophical works. Of the seven items selected for the translation into English, four of them fall into the category of general and experimental psychology.

It is not surprising to learn that Wundt’s works were most comprehensively translated into Russian. During the late 19th and early 20th centuries, the Russian academic circle was well informed about the progress of research in Germany. More noteworthy is the limited number of translations into English, a factor that could reasonably explain the relatively restricted understanding of Wundt in the English-speaking world. According to his daughter, only the following seven items were translated into English by 1927: (1) *Lectures on the psychology of man and animals* (1894), (2) *Ethics* (1897), (3) *Outlines of psychology* (1897), (4) *Principles of physiological psychology* (1904), (5) *An introduction to psychology* (1912), (6) *On the real war* (1915), and (7) *Elements of folk psychology* (*Völkerpsychologie*) (1916).

The Reception of Wundtian Psychology in the English-Speaking World

Titchener and Boring played a significant part in introducing Wundt to the English-speaking world; as a result, they are also assigned primary responsibility for the distorted perception of Wundt’s ideas there (see, for instance, Danziger, 1979; Blumenthal, 1980). A closer examination of Titchener and Boring’s writings, however, reveals that they had a better understanding of Wundt than later generations exposed to their works, either directly or indirectly, might conclude. Nevertheless, both Titchener and Boring anchored themselves firmly in the camp of experimental psychology, and this attitude clearly shaped their emphasis in translating and interpreting Wundt’s works.

In his influential obituary of Wundt, Titchener (1921/1980) discussed three of Wundt’s main ideas: the idea of an experimental psychology, the idea of a social psychology, and the idea of a scientific metaphysics. In the same article, Titchener ended with the statement that “Wundt is the founder, not of experimental psychology alone, but of psychology” (Titchener, 1921/1980, p. 320). Despite this
recognition of Wundt’s role, however, Titchener was convinced that experimental psychology remained Wundt’s dominant idea and greatest contribution. The fact that Titchener translated “Völkerpsychologie” into “social psychology” suggests he might not have grasped the core meaning of this term. His interpretations of Völkerpsychologie also showed a lack of familiarity with the primary sources in this area of Wundt’s psychology. A somewhat dismissive attitude toward Wundt’s work on Völkerpsychologie is evident in Titchener’s memorial statements regarding Wundt. He interpreted Völkerpsychologie as a troublesome subject for Wundt, and considered Wundt’s preoccupation with the problems of Völkerpsychologie as an effort to “bring psychological order into that chaos” (Titchener, 1921/1980, p. 315). He further added that it “furnished a grateful occupation” for Wundt’s old age (Titchener, 1921/1980, p. 318).

Although he is perhaps more famous for setting up a psychological laboratory at Cornell, Titchener was also involved with translating Wundt’s works and with introducing Wundt’s bibliography. Of Wundt’s major works, Titchener chose to translate Lectures on the psychology of man and animal, Ethics, and Principles of physiological psychology. It is interesting to note that the second edition of the Lectures (Wundt, 1892), on which Titchener’s translation (Wundt, 1894/1998) was based, is a massively revised version. Because of the amount of available new materials on Völkerpsychologie and the new positions developed in the field, Wundt completely removed the sections concerning Völkerpsychologie from this edition. According to Wundt’s explanation in the preface to the second edition, these new changes made the revision a project of extensive rewriting. As an Oxford-educated Englishman who completed his doctoral thesis under Wundt’s supervision in 1892 at the Leipzig laboratory, Titchener was dedicated to the cause of experimental psychology and respectful of Wundt’s contribution in this realm. However, his positivistic turn and his further development of the methods of introspection both represent a significant departure from Wundt’s teachings.

Boring, who studied under Titchener, wrote a widely read book entitled A history of experimental psychology, in which Wundt’s works were put into perspective against the background of Fechner’s and Helmholtz’s experiments. Based on the idea that Wundt was primarily a psychologist, who “promoted the idea of psychology as an independent science” (Boring, 1929/1950, p. 310), Boring referred to Wundt as the founder of experimental psychology. In his review chapter on Wundt, Boring’s statements reveal that he was aware of Wundt’s wider scope of investigation: “Wundt never held that the experimental method is adequate to the whole of psychology; the higher processes, he thought, must be got at by the study of the history of human nature, his Völkerpsychologie” (Boring, 1929/1950, p. 322). However, Boring did not attempt to discuss the meaning of Völkerpsychologie. It is worth noting that his efforts to describe Wundt’s experimental psychology were later systematically criticized by Blumenthal (1980).

Many American students returning from Leipzig were more enthusiastic about building psychological laboratories than about studying and disseminating Wundt’s ideas. Blumenthal (1977) was sharp in pointing out that the reception of Wundt in early American psychology reflected a clash between two cultures. He was one of the first American psychologists to examine and reappraise Wundt as the “Centennial of Scientific Psychology” approached (Blumenthal, 1975). There
were also collective efforts to recognize Wundt at the 1979 conference of the American Psychological Association. A number of publications followed in the form of books, special issues of journals, and independent journal articles (e.g., Blumenthal, 1979, 1980; Bringmann & Scheerer, 1980; Bringmann, Tweney, & Hilgar, 1980; Danziger, 1979, 1980a, 1980b; Graumann, 1980; Leary, 1979; Müller, 1979; Rieber, 1980; van Hoorn & Verhave, 1980). After a century, the English-speaking world finally had a chance to more fully understand Wundt’s life and works.

Blumenthal, Danziger, Leary, and Graumann all made important contributions to the discussion of Wundt’s ideas at this time. Blumenthal (1970, 1975, 1977, 1979, 1980), however, remains first and foremost in bringing forth the intricate issues concerning the historical misinterpretation of Wundtian psychology. His discussion about the origin and role of holistic voluntarism in Wundt’s theory of psychological processes is especially worthy of attention (Blumenthal, 1975, 1979, 1980). In his brief review of Wundt’s experimental psychology and Völkerpsychologie, Blumenthal (1975, p. 1082) astutely observed that Wundt’s strict adherence to the canons of experimental procedure “sharply limited his use of experiments in psychology,” and that “a large part of his psychological work is not experimental.” Following closely Wundt’s own expression of his ideas, Blumenthal focused the scientific community’s attention on the importance of Wundt’s Völkerpsychologie.

Danziger (1979) was also critical of the historical interpretation of Wundt. He provided a focused and detailed discussion of the positivist repudiation of Wundt, which helps clarify the negative and distorted reception of some of Wundt’s ideas about psychology. Danziger (1980a) also discussed the historical development of the introspective method, throwing light on the differences between classical introspection, Wundtian experimental introspection, and the systematic experimental introspection exemplified by Titchener and the Würzburg School. In comparing and contrasting the models of science of Wundt and William James, Danziger (1980b) described Wundt’s model as a dual model originating in the German tradition. Specifically, this model refers to the value of both the natural sciences (Naturwissenschaften) and human/mental sciences (Geisteswissenschaften). Science (Wissenschaft), in the German language, carries the meaning of systematic inquiry. In Danziger’s view (1980b, p. 377), scientific psychology according to Wundt would develop on two fronts, namely experimental physiological psychology, as a branch of the natural sciences, and Völkerpsychologie (translated by Danziger as “ethnopsychology”), as a branch of the human sciences. We shall see later the extent to which Danziger’s view is valid by examining Wundt’s original sources.

Based primarily on Outlines of psychology (Wundt, 1896/1897), which represents Wundt’s work as a mature scientist, Leary (1979) examined Wundt’s conception of psychology and its relations to other disciplines. A key contribution of Leary’s (1979) analysis is his clarification that Wundt considered psychology to be an autonomous discipline that is intimately related to natural sciences, the social sciences, and philosophy. His translation of “Geisteswissenschaften” as “social sciences” instead of “mental/human sciences” is nonetheless misleading. Leary has taken an initial step in highlighting an essential aspect for understanding Wundtian psychology. As a prerequisite for a more refined analysis, we need
to understand Wundt's ideas on the classification of scientific disciplines. We can then focus on examining how Wundt's view of the relations among the disciplines was derived from his understanding of the nature of psychology.

During an invited Centennial Lecture at the Annual Meeting of the American Psychological Association, Graumann (1980), a Heidelberg psychologist, put forward the provocative thesis that Wundt had formulated two distinct programs of psychology: the Heidelberg program and the Leipzig program. Whereas the Heidelberg program focused on experiments, statistics and history, the Leipzig program focused on experimental psychology and *Völkerpsychologie*. We are indebted to Graumann for drawing our attention to Wundt's first conception of psychology, as reflected in the introductory chapter of *Contribution to a theory of sensory perception* (Wundt, 1862). Nonetheless, it is questionable whether his interpretation of the two-phase program is sound. Wundt did indeed express differing opinions over the course of his long academic life (see also van Hoorn & Verhave, 1980), and he is well known for his conscientiousness in revising his texts. The key question remains whether these differences are decisive enough to justify proposing a dual program with an earlier and latter phase.

A close examination of Wundt's writings and activities reveals another type of duality, however, that is more consistent over the course of his academic career. Wundt's writings show traces of his dual interests in experimental psychology and *Völkerpsychologie* as early as his Heidelberg days. The first edition of *Lectures on the mind of man and animals* (Wundt, 1863) contains a large portion of *Völkerpsychologie* in its second volume. After being invited to Zürich University to take up a professorship in philosophy, Wundt formally gave his first lecture series on *Völkerpsychologie* in 1875. Finally, the dual program of experimental psychology and *Völkerpsychologie* found their full actualization, in a more mature and refined form, in the work Wundt produced while at Leipzig University.

Brock (1993) raised the question of how the textbook writers of the 1980s responded to the reexamination and reappraisal of Wundt during the centennial year. He found a variety of different responses and illustrated them with vivid examples. An honest statement was found in the 4th edition of Schultz and Schultz (1987, p. 59):

Thus generations of students have been offered a portrait of Wundtian psychology that may be more myth than fact, more legend than truth. For 100 years after the event, texts in the history of psychology, including the previous editions of this one, and teachers of the history course, may have been compounding and reinforcing the error under the imprimatur of their alleged expertise.

Brock (1993) further observed that the words “may be” and “may have been” in the above paragraph were removed in the 5th edition of Schultz and Schultz’s textbook (1992, p. 79). The above treatment, however, is not the norm. Brock also cited examples of textbook writers who simply ignored the need for revision (e.g., Hillner, 1984) or even blamed Wundt for the problem of misinterpretation by highlighting his ambiguous writing style and extensive revisions (e.g., Kendler, 1987).

The error mentioned by Schultz and Schultz refers to the misrepresentation of Wundtian psychology by Titchener and Boring.
It is important to note that Brock (1993) examined textbooks specifically concerned with the history of modern psychology. A brief survey of textbooks used in general and introductory psychology courses reveals that the coverage of Wundt is usually very limited, especially when compared with more commonly covered historical figures such as Skinner. When Wundt is touched upon, it is often in the context of a brief history of psychology or experimental psychology. Despite efforts to reintroduce Wundt during the centennial year, Wundt’s ideas, especially concerning *Völkerpsychologie*, are rarely mentioned in general psychology texts. The above informal survey included widely used textbooks enjoying good reputations such as those by Gerrig and Zimbardo (1937/2008), Smith, Nolen-Hoeksema, Fredrickson, and Loftus (1953/2003), Feldman (1987/2009), and Wade and Tavris (1999/2008). Efforts to reappraise Wundt have clearly not yet filtered down to the present generation of psychology students.

In recent decades, a growing circle of psychologists has begun to explore the field of cultural-historical psychology, and some of these cultural-historical psychologists have shown an interest in Wundt’s *Völkerpsychologie*. In a conference presentation on interdisciplinary musicology, for example, Allesch and Krakauer (2006) identified Wundt’s *Völkerpsychologie* as one of the theoretical foundations of cultural psychology, although they observed that his influence has lessened over the course of the 20th century. Cole and Engeström, two key figures in the contemporary scene of cultural-historical psychology, made a concise summary of Wundt’s dual program of experimental psychology and *Völkerpsychologie* as a precedent to explicate their positions on the cultural-historical approach (Cole & Engeström, 1993). They also made the interesting observation that Münsterberg, by drawing a distinction between the experimental part of psychology as “causal” and the nonexperimental part as “purposive,” was adhering to Wundt’s commitment to a two-track research program in psychology. In the transition from discussing Wundtian psychology to discussing the cultural-historical approach originating in Russia, Cole and Engeström (1993, p. 4) made this thought-provoking remark: “History (thus far) has been kinder to the originator of the cultural-historical approach associated with the names of Alexei Leont’ev, Alexander Luria and Lev Vygotsky.”

Recognizing Wundt as one of the intellectual ancestors of cultural psychology, Diriwächter (2004) has provided a relatively elaborate discussion on the “forgotten” approach of *Völkerpsychologie* that he traced from Humboldt through Lazarus and Steinthal to Wundt. Diriwächter identified the notion of creative synthesis transformation as a key aspect of Wundtian psychology. It appears that he focused more on a discussion of relevant secondary sources rather than on an in-depth examination of the original sources of Wundt, and made evaluations from some contemporary standpoints of cultural psychology. In the German-speaking world, a more thorough attempt to rediscover *Völkerpsychologie* has been made by Eckardt. In his book entitled *An attempt to rediscover Völkerpsychologie*, Eckardt (1997) explicated the development of *Völkerpsychologie* alongside a collection of the key texts of Lazarus, Steinthal, and Wundt. A further attempt to shed light on Wundt’s legacy was made in a collected work edited by Jüttemann (2006).

One hundred thirty years after the celebrated founding of modern psychology, it appears that we have cleared up some misunderstandings about Wundt’s ideas,
and have gained a deeper understanding of the factors that contributed to their distorted reception and weak legacy. We still fall short, however, of a thorough rediscovery of the essence of Wundt’s psychology. Two major areas, which are still poorly understood by the scientific community, are worthy of a more in-depth examination. The first is Wundt’s characterization of the nature of psychology and its relations to other disciplines. The second is the nature of Wundt’s *Völkerpsychologie* and its role in psychology. We now turn to Wundt’s original writings as the basis for our discussion of these ideas.

Wundt’s View of the Nature of Psychology and Its Relation to Other Disciplines

Three of Wundt’s writings are particularly revealing of his view of the nature of psychology and its relation to other disciplines: (1) “On the classification of scientific disciplines” (Wundt, 1889), (2) the introduction to *Outlines of psychology* (Wundt, 1896), and (3) *Psychology struggling for its survival* (Wundt, 1913).

Examining the First Key Document: “On the Classification of Scientific Disciplines”

“On the classification of scientific disciplines” was published in *Philosophische Studien* in 1889. To my knowledge, this essay has not been translated into English. By 1889, Wundt was dissatisfied with the existing classification of scientific disciplines, which generally was not based on the nature of the subject matter. Therefore, he articulated a new, comprehensive classification scheme on such a basis. First, he broadly divided the scientific disciplines into the two large systems of particular sciences and philosophy. The system of particular sciences was further differentiated into (1) formal or mathematical sciences and (2) real or experiential sciences. According to Wundt, real or experiential sciences share the task of investigating the nature of and relations between the objects of experiences. Natural sciences (*Naturwissenschaften*) and mental/human sciences (*Geisteswissenschaften*) constitute the first and second units of real or experiential sciences. Wundt situated psychology unambiguously as a particular science within the category of mental sciences. It should be noted that no part of psychology was mentioned in the subscheme or in the discussion of natural sciences. The philosophy of mind was considered an important part of the philosophical system.

If we understand Wundt’s views on the subject matter of psychology and his rationale in the classification of scientific disciplines, it is no surprise to learn that he defined psychology as a particular science of *Geisteswissenschaften*. “*Geisteswissenschaft*” has been generally translated as “human science.” It should be noted that “mental science” is a translated term that more adequately reflects the meaning of the original word in German culture. Upon a closer examination of Wundt’s subscheme of the mental sciences, we find that these sciences were broadly classified into three main categories: (A) the sciences of mental processes, (B) the sciences of mental products, and (C) the sciences of the development of mental products: historical sciences. According to Wundt (1889, p. 47), psychology clearly falls into category (A):
A. The sciences of the mental processes
I. The study of the mental processes in human consciousness
   (Psychology in a narrower sense: Individual psychology³)
II. The study of mental processes under particular conditions:
   a. The mental processes of particular beings and communities:
      Animal psychology; Völkerpsychologie
   b. The mental processes and its relation to body processes:
      Psychophysical sciences
      1. The study of the interaction relation between body and mental
         processes: Psychophysics.
      2. The study of the psychophysical organization of a particular being
         and its totality: Psychophysical natural history of animals; anthro-
         pology; ethnology.

It should be noted that Wundt considered philology to be the most general
science of mental products. Other mental sciences in Wundt’s category (B) deal
with particular types of mental products, including the national economy, politics,
systematic law study, systematic theology, theories of a particular art, special
methodological studies of science, and so on. Historical sciences, which make up
Wundt’s category (C), were further differentiated into general history and the
history of particular types of mental products; whereas the former includes
individual history (biography), folk history, and universal/world history, the latter
includes the history of economics, of state and law, of religion, of art, and of
particular sciences. No part of psychology is mentioned in categories (B) and (C)
of mental sciences.

Wundt’s classification of scientific disciplines helps us to clarify important
misunderstandings about his view of psychology. Although Wundt advocated the
application of methods of natural sciences to experimental psychology, he did not
regard any part of psychology as a kind of natural science. Danziger (1980b) correctly
reminded us of the German tradition of perceiving Geisteswissenschaft (mental/
human science) as a science, but his suggestion that Wundt saw experimental
physiological psychology as a branch of the natural sciences is nonetheless incorrect.

³ Individual psychology, according to Wundt (1883/1921c, p. 160), aims to investigate the
typical psychical processes of individual human consciousness, which can be generalized as normal
human consciousness. As individual psychology serves as the necessary foundation of all other
psychological fields, it is, at the same time, general psychology (Wundt, 1883/1921c, p. 161). In
investigating the elements and compounds of human consciousness and their relations, Wundt
suggested the application of the experimental method under which systematic observation of inner,
immediate experience is possible. Mature consciousness, in Wundt’s view, “stands [however]
continually in relation to the mental community in which it has a receptive and an active part”
(Wundt, 1896/1897, p. 296). In recognizing the limitation of individual psychology, Wundt
proposed Völkerpsychologie as a complement in the study of human consciousness. In his revised
2nd, 3rd, and 4th editions of the “logic of psychology” contained in Logik (Wundt, 1883/1895,
1883/1908, 1883/1921c), he consistently highlighted individual psychology and Völkerpsychologie
as the two essential fields of psychology. Despite their differences in scope and method, both
individual psychology and Völkerpsychologie share the same principles according to Wundt (1883/
1921c); these refer to the principle of psycho-physical parallelism, the principle of psychical
actuality, the principle of creative synthesis, the principle of heterogeny of ends, the principle of
intensification through contrast, and the principle of relational analysis.
Among those secondary sources that discussed Wundt’s *Völkerpsychologie*, several misinterpreted *Völkerpsychologie* as the study of mental products. It is true that Wundt viewed mental products and history as rich sources for an analysis of mental processes, but Wundt considered *Völkerpsychologie* to be a unique field, one that should be differentiated from other mental and historical sciences. According to Wundt, the subject matter of *Völkerpsychologie* is higher mental processes, and its methods involve making inferences/interpretations from human mental products rather than merely describing them.

Wundt’s classification scheme of the scientific disciplines also aids our understanding of Wundt’s so-called dual program of psychology. Wundt clearly saw mental processes as the subject matter of psychology, and he saw psychology as the foundation of all the other mental sciences. As for the subfields of psychology, Wundt again classified them based on the subject matter, rather than of the methods applied. The subfields of psychology mentioned in Wundt’s classification scheme include individual psychology, animal psychology, psychophysics, and *Völkerpsychologie*. Whereas experimental methods could be applied to the first three of these subfields, such methods are not applicable to *Völkerpsychologie*. Wundt spent most of his life in two of these subfields of psychology, namely individual psychology and *Völkerpsychologie*. These two subfields are clearly distinct within the common core of investigating human mental processes. As a result, referring to a duality in Wundt’s program of psychology seems justifiable.

Wundt’s view of the system of philosophy and its relationship to psychology is also of particular interest. According to Wundt, the philosophical sciences are made up of two fundamental sciences: the study of knowledge and the study of principles. The study of principles was further classified into (1) the general study of principles or metaphysics and (2) the special study of principles encompassing philosophy of nature and philosophy of mind. Noteworthy are the further classifications of the philosophy of mind. The general philosophy of mind or philosophical psychology falls into the first category. The second category is concerned with the philosophy of particular mental creations including ethics and philosophy of law, aesthetics, and philosophy of religion. The third category involves theories of the mental development of mankind (i.e., philosophy of history).

How is the philosophy of mind related to psychology? In Wundt’s view (Wundt, 1889, p. 52), the philosophy of mind needs psychology, primarily, as the fundamental mental science. The materials worked out in the subfields of individual psychology, *Völkerpsychologie*, and animal psychology provides a foundation for the philosophy of mind. With further help from theories of knowledge and metaphysics, the general philosophy of mind or philosophical psychology could attempt to develop an integrated view of mental being and life. Such a philosophy of psychology is further related to ethics and philosophy of law, aesthetics, philosophy of religion, and philosophy of history. Wundt was concerned that increased achievement in a particular science might lead to its becoming one-sided. He saw the role of philosophy as crucial in this regard, in that it gives particular sciences the horizon of interconnectedness. On the other hand, philosophy is also dependent upon particular sciences for essential methods and tasks. In brief, Wundt saw the intricate relations between philosophy and particular sciences as a system of mutual interdependencies. It is also worth noting
that Wundt perceived the classification of sciences as a philosophical task that should be attempted from time to time.

Examining the Second Key Document: The Introduction to “Outlines of Psychology”

Wozniak (1999, p. 133) described *Outlines of psychology* (Wundt, 1896/1897) as “by far the best general introduction to the mature psychological views of Wilhelm Wundt,” and offered insights into the origins of this work. In 1893, Külp, one of Wundt’s most outstanding students, published *Grundriss der Psychologie* in which he began to develop the idea of psychology as a natural science. In 1896, Wundt published a work with the same title; Wozniak (1999) interpreted this as a deliberate attempt by Wundt to clarify his position on psychology and to argue against Külp’s views. One year after publication, Judd translated Wundt’s *Grundriss der Psychologie* under the title *Outlines of psychology*.

In the introductory chapter of *Outlines of psychology*, Wundt laid out three governing principles of the psychological position, and illustrated how “a threefold attitude” of psychology to the other sciences could be derived from such principles. This refined discussion is so essential to the understanding of Wundt’s often misunderstood views that it demands to be quoted in full:

The governing principles of the psychological position maintained in the following chapters may be summed up in three general statements:

1. Inner, or psychological, experience is not a special sphere of experience apart from others, but is *immediate experience* in its totality.
2. This immediate experience is not made up of unchanging contents, but of an *interconnection of processes*; not of objects, but of *occurrences*, of *universal human experiences* and their relations in accordance with certain laws.
3. Each, of these processes contains an *objective content* and a *subjective process*, thus including the general conditions both of all knowledge and of all practical human activity.

Corresponding to these three general principles, we have a threefold attitude of psychology to the other sciences:

1. As the science of immediate experience, it is *supplementary to the natural sciences*, which, in consequence of their abstraction from the subjects, have to do only with the objective, *mediate* contents of experience. Any particular fact can, strictly speaking, be understood in its full significance after it has been subjected to the analyses of both natural sciences and psychology. In this sense, then, physics and physiology are auxiliary to psychology, and the latter is, in turn, supplementary to the natural sciences.
2. As the science of the universal forms of immediate human experience and their combination in accordance with certain laws, it is the *foundation of the mental sciences*. The subject-matter of these sciences is in all cases the activities proceeding from immediate human experiences, and their effects. Since psychology has for its problem the investigation of the forms and
laws of these activities, it is at once the most general mental science, and the foundation for all the others, such as philology, history, political economy, jurisprudence, and so forth.

3. Because psychology pays equal attention to both the subjective and objective conditions that underlie not only theoretical knowledge, but practical activity as well, and because it seeks to determine their interrelation, it is the empirical discipline whose results are most immediately useful in the investigation of the general problems of the theory of knowledge and ethics, the two foundations of philosophy.

Thus, psychology is in relation to natural sciences the supplementary, in relation to the mental sciences the fundamental, and in relation to philosophy the propaedeutic empirical science (Wundt, 1896/1897, pp. 15–17, italics in the original text).

In his 1889 paper dealing with the classification of scientific disciplines, Wundt had already made clear his view that psychology is the foundation of all other mental sciences. He also emphasized the importance of the relationship between psychology and the philosophy of mind. In the introduction to Outlines of psychology, he developed more comprehensively his ideas about the relationships between psychology and other scientific disciplines.

Leary (1979) was among the first to point out the significance of this discussion in Outlines of psychology. According to Leary, Wundt saw psychology as an autonomous field, but also as being intimately related to the natural sciences, the social sciences, and philosophy. This interpretation, however, expresses less finesse than Wundt’s original formulation. From the closing remark of the above quotation from Wundt, we can see that there is a difference in “intimacy” and “nature” concerning the relations of psychology to other disciplines—“psychology is in relation to natural sciences the supplementary, in relation to the mental sciences the fundamental, and in relation to philosophy the propaedeutic empirical science.” From this explication of multidimensional relations, the value of psychology can be clearly appreciated. The unique contribution of this discussion lies in the derivation of the threefold relations of psychology to other disciplines from the core nature of psychology (named by Wundt as the three governing principles of the psychological position). Such an analysis is insightful and convincing.

Examining the Third Key Document: “Psychology Struggling for Its Survival”

In “Psychology struggling for its survival” (Wundt, 1913), Wundt applied the metaphor of divorce to describe the then ongoing demand for separation between the fields of philosophy and psychology. In his foreword to this piece, Wundt made clear that in such a divorce philosophy would have more to lose than to gain, and psychology would incur even greater damage. In Wundt’s view, the question of whether psychology is a philosophical science had become a struggle for psychology’s survival.

Advocates for the divorce proposed separating experimental psychology from philosophy, but, in arguing against this position, Wundt pointed out that
experimental psychology is not the whole of psychology. Fields that were just emerging in Wundt’s time, such as child psychology and animal psychology, were only partially accessible by experimental methods, and Völkerpsychologie was very inaccessible using such methods. Wundt also noted that there were many philosophers who taught and researched in the orientation of psychology. Thus, it was clear to Wundt that psychology should not be totally separated from the system of philosophy.

According to Wundt’s observation, almost half of the contemporary psychological literature fell into the areas of metaphysics and the theory of knowledge. He further noted that many of the problems upon which both psychologists and philosophers were working (e.g., intelligence, will, memory) were, at the same time, both psychological and philosophical problems. Looking at the psychological literature, Wundt remarked that it was not true to declare that empirical or experimental psychology had been totally separated from philosophy.

Wundt’s major thesis is that no one would suffer more than the psychologists would if a divorce between philosophy and psychology occurred. In Wundt’s view, many important questions in educating psychologists were closely related to the standpoints of the theory of knowledge and metaphysics. To avoid superficial observation, Wundt recommended that every psychologist should start with a dialogue with the theory of knowledge. According to Wundt, only when there is a close link between the two disciplines of philosophy and psychology is the latter justified in being called the foundation of mental sciences.

Wundt closely observed the development of psychology in the United States, and, by 1913, found that there were 10 times as many psychological laboratories in the U.S. as in Europe. He also found that generally Americans were more applied in their orientation, and cited the efforts to apply psychology to pedagogy as a case in point. Furthermore, the separation of psychology from the teaching fields of philosophy was observed in the U.S. In Germany, psychology was then a theoretical area of research and teaching. With regard to the development of psychology in the U.S., Wundt insightfully remarked that it originated from the country’s own condition, and therefore, it was not necessary for Germany to follow the American model. In response to the German situation, Wundt made three concrete suggestions. First, psychology students should attend lectures and undergo examinations in both philosophy and psychology. Second, “Habilitation” for psychology, the qualification for professorship, should only be granted on the condition that the applicant had undergone a thorough education in both philosophy and psychology. Third, professorships in psychology should be created within the philosophy department, with the goal of effective and independent study of both fields. The above suggestions are obviously very much in tune with Wundt’s belief in the close relationship between philosophy and psychology.

In retrospect, we know that the later development of psychology was generally contrary to the suggestions of Wundt. The emergence of the psychological institute as an independent unit was seen. We might say that the divorce really took place. After more than a century since this divorce, it appears meaningful to develop this metaphor further. First, we could ask ourselves why there was a marriage between philosophy and psychology. Does it imply that they needed each other and were complementary? Wundt has given us many insights into this question. We might further raise the question about the motives for the demand
or struggle for independence. Some sociologists, such as Ben-David and Collins (1966), have attempted to offer an analysis of this question. Then, we come to the most important questions for the future of psychology. Would it be better for the former couple to become good friends again? Would their coming closer together be beneficial to both parties? If the answers to these questions are affirmative, what forms should this communication and collaboration take? For the answers to these questions, we should turn to the field of philosophical psychology, to examine its current state and to work toward a stronger reconstruction of the relationship between philosophy and psychology.

The Nature of Wundt’s Völkerpsychologie and Its Role in Psychology

Wundt’s ideas on Völkerpsychologie were explicated in specialized works, essays, lectures, and speeches. Although his voluminous key works of Völkerpsychologie were completed in the later phase of his life, from 1900 to 1919, ideas in this research orientation had been clearly expressed since the 1860s. The earliest discussion of Völkerpsychologie appeared in the first edition of Lectures on the mind of man and animals (Wundt, 1863). The explication of the goals and methods of Völkerpsychologie, which had been actualized in an essay in 1886, was published in Philosophische Studien in 1888. Mature works on the subject deserving of careful study include the 10 volumes of Völkerpsychologie (Wundt, 1900–1920), the specialized work Elemente der Völkerpsychologie (Wundt, 1912/1921a), and the collected essays Probleme der Völkerpsychologie (Wundt, 1911a). With a view to examining the nature of Wundtian Völkerpsychologie and its role in psychology, we need to tackle a series of questions: What were the origins of Wundtian Völkerpsychologie? What was its conception, and what were its goals and methods? To what extent were the conception, goals, and methods realized in the finished works of Wundt? What are the accomplishments and limitations of Wundtian Völkerpsychologie? What, in the context of other variants, is its legacy as a variant of cultural-historical psychology? What is its role in psychology, taking into consideration its nature and the current advancements of the discipline?

The Origins of Wundtian Völkerpsychologie

A good place to begin an examination of the origins of Wundtian Völkerpsychologie is Wundt’s “critical dialogue” with Lazarus and Steinthal, two scholars of Jewish descent. Lazarus was educated in philosophy, law, history, and literature; Steinthal’s major discipline was language study. In 1860, when Lazarus and Steinthal formally put forward their research program for Völkerpsychologie in the form of a new journal entitled Zeitschrift für Völkerpsychologie und Sprachwissenschaft, Wundt had just started his academic career with a focus on establishing the field of experimental psychology. It is evident, however, that Wundt paid close attention to Lazarus and Steinthal’s Völkerpsychologie in developing his own program in this field. The underlying similarities between the two proposed programs are generally obscured in the psychological literature, probably because

---

4 The discussion of Völkerpsychologie appeared in lectures 38–40 (On state and society); 41 (On the moral system); 44–48 (On religion, myths, beliefs, and cults); 53–53 (On language); and 55–57 (On volition).
of the fact that Wundt launched his own program of *Völkerpsychologie* (1888, 1900a, 1888/1911b, 1912/1921a) with a critical response to Lazarus and Steinthal’s research program. Such underlying similarities should be uncovered in the discussion of the origins of Wundtian *Völkerpsychologie*.

Although the lead article published in the first issue of *Zeitschrift für Völkerpsychologie und Sprachwissenschaft* is generally regarded as the birth of *Völkerpsychologie* (see Lazarus & Steinthal, 1860), it should be noted that Lazarus had already published an essay on the concept and possibilities of *Völkerpsychologie* in 1851. These earliest discussions, together with the later explications of Steinthal (1887, 1891), clearly expressed a number of core ideas, which were shared by the Wundtian *Völkerpsychologie*:

1. Individual psychology is not sufficient to give us a comprehensive understanding of human psychological processes.
2. There is an essential interdependence between individuals and communities.
3. The *Volksgeist* (spirit of the folk or collective spirit) plays an important role in the development of individual psychological processes.
4. The *Volksgeist* is also a source for the interpretation of the lawfulness of psychological processes.

Based on the weight of these shared ideas alone, Wundt’s *Völkerpsychologie* clearly owes an intellectual debt to Lazarus and Steinthal.

Being the *Zeitgeist* of 19th century Germany, the concept of *Volksgeist*, in the sense of a collective spirit expressing itself in a certain cultural product, played an indispensable role in the formulation of *Völkerpsychologie* for Wundt, as well as for Lazarus and Steinthal. The origin of the idea of a *Volksgeist* is usually traced back to Herder. Even though Herder did not apply the term in any strict sense, he discussed the spirit of the “folk” (*Volk*) (in the sense of cultural communities) in a vibrant manner throughout his writings and speeches (see Herder, 1744–1803/1968, 1774/1967, 1778–1779/1979, 1784–1791/1995). The concept gained further momentum because of Hegel’s detailed discussion of the objective spirit (*objektiver Geist*) in his *Phenomenology of the spirit* (Hegel, 1807/1999), and through his discussion of *Volksgeist* as an aspect of the philosophy of history (Hegel, 1822–1828/1994). Wundt (1902/1911c) made an attempt to clarify the origin of *Volksgeist* in Romanticism, as represented by Grimm in language study, as well as by Savigny and Puchta in the study of law. The folk (*Volk*), upon which language, custom, and law are created, possess a character that resembles a “historical individual.” According to Wundt, the concept of *Volksgeist* has its roots in such an understanding (Wundt, 1902/1911c). The earliest use of the term “*Völkerpsychologie*” has been traced back to Wilhelm Humboldt (see Beuchelt, 1974, p. 12) and Alexander Humboldt (see Thurnwald, 1924, p. 32). Jahoda (1993, p. 145), in his book *Crossroads between culture and mind*, clarified that Wilhelm Humboldt had not coined the term, though some of Humboldt’s key notions were adopted by Lazarus and Steinthal, the founders of *Völkerpsychologie*. Regardless of the origin of the term, Wundt clearly shared an ideal of a broad humanity, an important underlying theme of his *Völkerpsychologie*, with both Herder and the Humboldt brothers.
Comparative ethnology has a long history that can be traced back to Ancient Greece (see Belke, 1971). What is unique about the genesis of *Völkerpsychologie* in 19th century Germany lies is its emphasis on the psychological aspect with respect to comparative studies of folk. This requires an explanation. With this question in mind, an insightful study made by Leary (1978) sheds considerable light on the matter. In discussing the development of the conception of psychology in Germany in the period 1780–1850, Leary pointed to Kant’s critique of “scientific psychology” and his postulation of an anthropology (see Kant 1798/2006) on one hand, and to a discussion of the German responses in establishing scientific psychology (including those of Fries, Herbart, and Beneke) on the other. Lazarus had evidently attempted to integrate the ideas of Hegel and Herbart in his formulation of *Völkerpsychologie* (see Belke, 1971; Lazarus & Steinthal, 1860). Although there is no account of Wundt’s conscious, critical dialogue with Kant’s ideas in his formulation of *Völkerpsychologie*, it is plausible that the intellectual climate fostered by Kant’s sharp critique and insights played a role in Wundt’s formulation. With the Occidental and German traditions of *Geisteswissenschaften* (human sciences) as a foundation, the urge to develop a new program of psychological studies as the intellectual climate, and the development of *Volksgeist* as an important bridging concept, the conditions seemed ripe for the genesis of a *Völkerpsychologie*. Regarding the genesis of *Völkerpsychologie*, Wundt (1900a) also attempted to offer an explanation in relation to two impulses witnessed in the academic discourse. One impulse refers to the need to find a psychological foundation for certain human sciences (e.g., language study and mythology), and the other to the need within psychology to search for more objective aids in counteracting the subjective approach of self-introspection. According to Wundt’s interpretation, these two impulses, from different orientations, worked together and allowed the ideas of *Völkerpsychologie* to take root in a new science.

**The Conception, Goals, and Methods of Wundtian *Völkerpsychologie***

Wundt articulated his views on the goals and methods of *Völkerpsychologie* in a paper published in *Philosophische Studien* (Wundt, 1888). This paper was slightly revised and reprinted as the first collected essay in the monograph *Probleme der Völkerpsychologie* (Wundt, 1888/1911b). Regarding the major methods of *Völkerpsychologie*, they were first specified in Wundt’s (1883) discussion of the “logic of psychology,” and were further refined in its later revised editions (Wundt, 1883/1895, 1883/1908, 1883/1921c). A comprehensive and refined discussion concerning the conception, goals, and methods of Wundtian *Völkerpsychologie* can be found in the introduction of volume 1 of the 10-volume *Völkerpsychologie*. It should also be noted that the preface and introduction to the *Elemente der Völkerpsychologie* (Wundt, 1912/1921a) made further important clarifications regarding the conception and methods of *Völkerpsychologie*.

In characterizing Wundt’s stance toward *Völkerpsychologie*, we should first take note of Wundt’s high opinion of the creation of the term “*Völkerpsychologie***.” In one of his late essays entitled “*Völkerpsychologie und Entwicklungspsy- chologie***,” Wundt (1916, p. 194) expressed the view that *Völkerpsychologie* is one of the most accurately and beautifully constructed words in the German language. We know that the German language allows new words to be formed by combining
existing ones. The combination of “Völker” (folk) and “Psychologie” (psychology) was, in the eyes of Wundt, so powerful and rich that he regarded it as a masterpiece of language (Wundt, 1916, p. 194). Such a claim becomes comprehensible if we go deeper into Wundt’s conceptual clarifications of Völker (folk) and Psychologie (psychology). In a previous section, we established that Wundt defined psychology as a discipline for studying mental processes. According to Wundt, the concept of folk embraces various communities including families, classes, clans, and groups. In response to the question of where the origin of the highest mental values and human attainments lies, Wundt’s (1912/1921a, p. 4) answer rested in “the union and reciprocal activity” of the various communities. Wundt (1912/1921a, p. 5) further explained that “the term ‘folk psychology’ (Völkerpsychologie) singles out precisely the folk as the decisive factor underlying the fundamental creations of the community.” Thanks to the rich meaning of the folk, Völkerpsychologie becomes a psychology of mankind (Wundt, 1912/1921a, pp. 4–5). This leads us to a better appreciation of Wundt’s discussion on the relation of psychology to other disciplines. His claim, made in Outline of psychology, that “psychology is in relation to natural sciences the supplementary, in relation to the mental sciences the fundamental, and in relation to philosophy the propaedeutic empirical science” (Wundt, 1896/1897, pp. 16–17), becomes more justifiable in view of the rich potential of Völkerpsychologie.

In the introduction to volume 1 of Völkerpsychologie, Wundt (1900a) identified three pairs of basic concepts in Völkerpsychologie for discussion, namely Volksgeist and Volksseele (collective spirit and collective mind), Vorgeschichte and Geschichte (prehistory and history), and Einzelne and Gemeinschaft (individual and community). Through the process of conceptual clarification, Wundt strove to make clear the nature and tasks of his proposed Völkerpsychologie.

While admitting that Geist (spirit) and Seele (mind) are two interchangeable concepts applied in history, Wundt was aware of the subtle difference in meanings in the Occidental tradition. Although both refer to a special, higher form of being, mind is related to the body whereas spirit is not. Vico crystallized his understanding of this difference in an elegant phrase: “With the soul/mind we live, with the spirit we sense” (Vico, 1668–1744/1988, p. 85). Wundt (1900a) preferred to use the word “Volksseele” (collective mind) to characterize the core concept of his proposed Völkerpsychologie, because of his intention to highlight psychological processes as the subject of investigation. According to Wundt, psychological processes fall into the realm of the mind not the spirit. In explaining the formation of the collective mind, Wundt stressed that it is not the mere addition of units of individual consciousness, but the combination of unique psychic and psychophysical processes that would not be possible in individual consciousness. The core characteristic of the collective mind, according to Wundt, lies in the continuity of psychological processes that go beyond an individual’s life span.

With regard to the concepts of Vorgeschichte and Geschichte (prehistory and history), a criterion for differentiation has been given in the form of the characteristics of the natural community and the cultural community, which, respectively, are further characterized by the dominance of the collective and the individual. Wundt (1900a) disagreed with this position and held that the difference is a matter of degree rather than kind. In response to this issue, Wundt was particularly interested in investigating the threads that link higher
cultural development to its beginnings. Finding these threads and examining the lawfulness of this development were considered to be the most difficult tasks for Völkerpsychologie (Wundt, 1900a).

The existence of the community as a spiritual unit was regarded by Wundt (1900a) as a precondition for both Völkerpsychologie and history. He further grounded Völkerpsychologie on the dialectical relationship between individual (Einzelne) and community (Gemeinschaft). According to Wundt (1900a), the spiritual values created by the community, though rooted in the characteristics of the individual mind, are a specific art, and are in a position to facilitate the new development of an individual mind. The medium, in respect to the link and interaction of individuals and communities, understandably rich in form, was identified by Wundt (1900a) as a focus for study in Völkerpsychologie.

Wundt never wavered in his insistence that the overarching goal of Völkerpsychologie (Wundt, 1883/1921c, 1888, 1900a, 1888/1911b, 1912/1921a) was to complement individual psychology in the investigation of higher psychological processes. Wundt (1900a) held the view that complex problems in Völkerpsychologie could be investigated after simple questions of physiological psychology had, to some extent, been explained. Perceiving Völkerpsychologie as an essential field of psychology, Wundt (1888/1911b) further proposed that findings in this field would offer valuable inspiration for individual psychology. One of the most succinct formulations concerning the concrete goal of Völkerpsychologie can be found in the introduction to volume 1 of Völkerpsychologie. In identifying the development of human communities and the emergence of cultural products as the materials for analysis, Wundt (1900a) made it clear that the goal is firmly anchored in the investigation of the underlying psychological processes.

Wundt was fully aware of the importance of proposing adequate methods that were consistent with the proposed conception and goals of Völkerpsychologie. He built his discussion based on a critique of the program of Lazarus and Steinthal (Wundt, 1888, 1900a). One of the major disagreements between Wundt and Lazarus and Steinthal lies in the scope of Völkerpsychologie. The scope identified by Lazarus and Steinthal (1860/1997), including language, mythology, religion, literature, sciences, and history, is evidently all encompassing. Wundt counter-proposed the three major areas of language, mythology (including arts, myths, and religion), and the moral system (including law and culture). Noteworthy is Wundt’s understanding that the contents of these three areas of the collective mind are parallel with the key entities of individual consciousness, namely the thinking, feeling, and volition processes. Whereas language reflects the thinking processes, the feeling and volition processes underlie mythology and the moral system, respectively. Wundt admitted that other areas, such as history, literature, and biography, could serve as sources of psychological knowledge, but regarded them neither as part of Völkerpsychologie or as its aids. In contrast to his immense effort to delineate clearly the major areas of Völkerpsychologie as materials for analysis, Wundt did not specify any detailed methods of analysis in his specialized essay on this theme (Wundt, 1888) or in the 10 volumes of Völkerpsychologie. Nonetheless, he did propose two major methods in his discussion on the “logic of psychology” (Wundt, 1883, 1883/1895, 1883/1908, 1883/1921c), namely the comparative-psychological and the historical-psychological methods. Regarding the comparative-psychological method, Wundt (1883/1921c) referred to a comparative
study of historical and ethnological facts from psychological perspectives. As for
the historical-psychological method, this concerns the historical relations of
psychological processes (Wundt, 1883/1921c). In essence, Wundt’s proposed
methods sought to make inferences about the psychological processes by exam-
ing the collective mind embodied in cultural products (e.g., language, arts,
myths, religion, and law). This interpretative approach resembles one that is
usually adopted in the human sciences.

In *Elemente der Völkerpsychologie*, subtitled “Outlines of a psychological
history of the development of mankind,” Wundt adopted a different method from
that used in his extensive 10-volume work on *Völkerpsychologie*. He explained
this orientation in a conscious and lucid way in the preface to this supplementary
work:

> Instead of considering successively the main forms of expression of the folk mind
> [collective mind, referring to language, mythology, and moral system], the present
> work studies the phenomena, so far as possible, synchronously, exhibiting their
> common conditions and their reciprocal relations. Even while engaged on my
> earlier Task I had become more and more convinced that a procedure of this latter
> sort was required as its supplement. Indeed, I believed that the chief purpose of
> investigations in folk psychology must be found in a synthetic survey. (Wundt,
> 1912/1921a, p. xiii)

Wundt did not regard the major areas of the collective mind as independent
entities, although he held the view that a separate examination of each of the
various areas was a prerequisite to understanding the whole. In a synthetic way,
his 1912 study attempted to echo one of his earlier stated goals of *Völkerpsy-
chologie*, namely to find the threads and to examine the psychological lawful-
ness of human development from its very beginning to its higher cultural form (Wundt,
1900a, p. 18). Despite the difference in emphasis from the 10 volumes of
*Völkerpsychologie*, Wundt’s adopted method of analysis in his 1912 study still
falls into the interpretative paradigm of human sciences.

*The Accomplishments and Limitations of Wundtian Völkerpsychologie*

To address the question of how far the conception, goals, and methods of
Wundtian *Völkerpsychologie* have been realized, we have to examine carefully
Wundt’s finished key works. In the foreword to the 10th volume of *Völkerpsy-
chologie*, Wundt noted that new contents had been added to *Völkerpsychologie*,
but the main lines of thought remained the same as in the period from 1900 to
1919. The 10 volumes fall generally into three main areas of *Völkerpsychologie*. Wundt clearly considered the study of language to be an integral aspect of
*Völkerpsychologie*, as it constitutes the theme of volumes 1 and 2 of *Völkerpsy-
chologie* (Wundt, 1900a, 1900b). The second main area, collectively termed
mythology, is dealt with in volumes 3 to 6. Specifically, Wundt discussed the arts
in volume 3 (Wundt, 1905/1919) and myth and religion in volumes 4 to 6 (Wundt,
1905/1910, 1906/1914, 1909/1915). The new contents of *Völkerpsychologie* men-
tioned by Wundt primarily refer to the study of society in volumes 7 and 8
(Wundt, 1917a, 1917b). The genesis of these new areas of study may have partly
reflected a need to respond to the emerging discipline of sociology, and partly a
growing interest in tracing the development of society. Volumes 7 and 8, on the
study of society, together with volumes 9 (*Justice and Law*) (Wundt, 1918) and 10 (*Culture and History*) (Wundt, 1920), fall into the main area of the moral system in the Wundtian sense.

Wundt was true to his promise: he offered detailed descriptive discussions on the main areas of *Völkerpsychologie*, and then made efforts to analyze the underlying psychological processes. We turn first to his discussion of the phenomenon of language (Wundt, 1900a, 1900b). The first two volumes of *Völkerpsychologie* provide an assiduous analysis of the development of language, from expressive movement, through gesture language, spoken sounds, phonetic changes, word building, and sentence building, to semantic changes. Wundt’s contributions to the field of linguistics, particularly in the area of gesture language, are well recognized. Wundt also made a fine contribution in discussing the semantic changes of language, which he regarded as a reflection of conceptual developments. It is noteworthy that Wundt, at the start of his project, identified thinking as the major psychological process underlying language use. However, throughout the course of his analysis, he discovered the importance of affect in the origins of language, which included not only the development of gesture language, but also the beginning of sentence building, and the genesis of new concepts. Wundt informs us that thinking plays an important role in the reconstruction of sentences and in the development of concepts, and further reminds us of the links between affect and cognition. He also argued that sentence building is an act of will based on affective processes. In the closing chapter of his two-volume work, Wundt critically examined the existing theories explaining the genesis of language, and proposed a developmental theory based on his own analysis. With his new theory, Wundt postulated that the development of human consciousness is necessarily anchored in the open-ended development from expressive movement, through gesture, to the use of language. Accordingly, human expression of ideas, feelings, and thinking would find their adequate form in each stage of language development.

In the second main area of *Völkerpsychologie* (i.e., mythology, including arts, myths, and religion), Wundt (1905/1919) highlighted imagination as the underlying psychological process. Recognizing visual accessibility, productivity, and spontaneity as features of imagination, Wundt further stressed the role of inherited strong affects in such a psychological process, which could serve as a natural source for further thinking. Based on his individual psychology, Wundt explained that imagination is not a particular kind of human ability, but a product of the association and apperception of elementary psychological processes. In his refined analysis of the genesis of different art forms (including visual arts, architecture, dance, music, literature, and drama), Wundt (1905/1919) illustrated the essential interactive role of affect and volition in the actualization of imagination. In a similar vein, Wundt (1905/1910, 1906/1914), in his detailed analysis of the manifold types of myths, showed how close affect and volition belong together. Identifying affects (e.g., fear, hope, love, hate, anxiety, anger, and jealousy) as the strongest stimulator for imaginative ideas, Wundt argued that the volition process of myth making is, in its essence, an affective process, in the sense that the act of completion would gradually pacify the feelings involved. Although myths had been a research target in other disciplines, most studies did not share Wundt’s mission of revealing the underlying psychological processes in this area. For
instance, Wundt (1905/1910) uncovered the psychological needs in the unique creation of “protective demons,” namely the fear of danger and the wish for help. Through his interpretation of ethnological data, Wundt (1909/1915) put forward the hypothesis that the idea of God originated from a fusion of the characteristics of heroes and demons in myths. In discussing the underlying psychological processes of religion, in which affects, ideas, and volition were found to be closely related, Wundt (1909/1915) perceptively pinpointed the motive for fortune seeking, the need for the actualization of moral ideals, and the feeling of belongingness to a supernatural world.

Wundt (1917a, 1917b) began his study of the third main area of *Völkerpsychologie* by reviewing the development of society. He found that nation states emerged from natural communities through wandering and fighting, whereas modern states developed from the mixed forms of monarchy, oligarchy, and democracy. He postulated that this development reflected an interaction between external conditions and human motives. Regarding the lawfulness of political development, Wundt particularly highlighted the principle of creative synthesis and the principle of the heterogeneity of ends. In discussing the origin and development of justice and the order of law, Wundt (1918) insightfully proposed that volition was the principal underlying psychological process. At the same time, he was aware of the relations between conceptualization and the act of intending. He also reminds us that there are both conflicting motives and a dominant motive in human interactions. Specifically, he explained the development of the order of law in terms of two conflicting motives, namely the individual will versus the collective will of the community. After his review of the development of culture, however, Wundt (1920) did not engage in any psychological analysis. Instead, in the last volume of his 10-volume work, it appears that one of Wundt’s major concerns was to raise questions about the future of culture and to remind us of its relationship with how social life is built.

The specialized monograph *Elemente der Völkerpsychologie* (Wundt, 1912/1921a) represents another of Wundt’s key accomplishments. This book discusses human development in terms of four broad periods, namely the primitive age, the totemic age, the age of heroes and gods, and the age of development to humanity. Rich data were drawn mainly from research works in ethnology. Wundt offered fresh interpretations, as well as presenting facts and rival theories. His discussions on the marriage system, the breeding and the use of domestic animals, and the origin of the God-Idea are some of the outstanding examples of such an approach.

Wundt’s ambition in this unique piece of work was not limited to offering fresh interpretations of existing theories of human development. He was very clear about his motive in tracing the threads of human development from the primitive state to a state of higher cultural development. The subtitle of the book reveals Wundt’s aim of providing a psychological explanation for this historical development. Specifically, he intended to raise questions about the conditions for and the lawfulness of such development.

*Elemente der Völkerpsychologie* offers detailed descriptions of the four periods in human history. The discussion of each period starts with an analysis of the external conditions of human life and society at the time. Wundt showed that, as history proceeded, human communities became more and more sophisticated. He succeeded in illustrating how the unity and reciprocal relations of various
communities played an important role in fostering human values and attainments, which is one of the key postulations of his *Völkerpsychologie*. For example, Wundt convincingly showed the role of key changes in external conditions in the rise of the age of heroes and gods. These changes include the reorganization of marriage, the differentiation of classes and occupations, and the rise of cities. Another outstanding example is his perceptive discussion with regard to the age of development to humanity. According to Wundt, four main steps paved the way for the emergence and actualization of the age of development to humanity. The first was the rise of the world empires in human history. The second, made possible by a common language, was the development of a world culture, which was at once both cosmopolitan and individualistic. The third was the spread of world religions including Christianity and Buddhism. Wundt referred to the fourth step as the creation of a “world history,” in which he claimed there exists a “conscious experience of historical continuity [that] includes a recognition of the effect of individual personalities upon the destinies of people” (Wundt, 1912/1921a, p. 514). Following Wundt’s analysis, we are able to deepen our understanding of how the complexity of interaction among communities contributes to human development.

Throughout this discussion, it was also Wundt’s intention to highlight the interaction of external conditions and inner motives. Based on a detailed study of the human activities of tilling the soil and securing milk (during the age of heroes and gods), Wundt piercingly showed how external conditions were mixed with religious impulses. As for the rise of world religions, Wundt attempted to give an explanation in terms of the interaction of two forces, namely superpersonal deity and folk mythology, on one hand, and the common need for redemption from suffering, on the other.

Lastly, it is worth mentioning that Wundt made a conceptual clarification of humanity and a critique on the influential philosophy of history of his time in the final chapter of *Elemente der Völkerpsychologie*. It was his conviction that a sound philosophy of history should be built on the foundation of a psychological account of the development of mankind. His monograph *Elemente der Völkerpsychologie* could be regarded as a first step in actualizing such a conviction, and it appears that Wundt saw it in this light.

In retrospect, it is evident that the conception of *Völkerpsychologie* penetrated the 10-volume work as well as the specialized monograph *Elemente der Völkerpsychologie*. In these works, Wundt was also conscientious in actualizing his proposed methods. The answers to the question of how far the declared goals of *Völkerpsychologie* have been attained are not straightforward, even though we could agree with Kraepelin that the 10-volume work of *Völkerpsychologie* is a respectful memorial to German creative power (see Steinberg, 2002). From the above discussion of Wundt’s key works on *Völkerpsychologie*, we should note that numerous valuable insights into the underlying psychological processes of the collective mind, embodied in language, mythology, and the moral system, were offered by Wundt. Despite Wundt’s use of the terms “law” and “lawfulness” in his writings from time to time, his *Völkerpsychologie* is a type of research which falls within the paradigm of interpretation; the rich and thought-provoking results could be attributed to the “refined spirit” (*feiner Geist*) of Wundt, in the Gadamerian sense (Gadamer, 1960/1986). The limitations of Wundt’s studies are
nonetheless evident. First, we can see that some discussions on underlying psychological processes were not as comprehensive as others. It has been stated that the interaction between individuals and communities constitutes a focus of the study of Völkerpsychologie. It appears that such a declared goal was not satisfactorily dealt with in the 10-volume work, although traces of such a discussion can be found in Elemente der Völkerpsychologie. Furthermore, links were not consistently made between the psychological processes of Völkerpsychologie and those of individual psychology, even though some efforts were made in the 10-volume work. It is probably not feasible for one man at one time to complete the tasks set by Wundt. When we relinquish this unrealistic expectation, we are in a better position to appreciate his accomplishments. Last, but not least, the accomplishments and limitations of Wundtian Völkerpsychologie can only be better understood in the context of contemporary developments in psychology, to which we shall immediately turn.

**Wundtian Völkerpsychologie Appraised in the Light of Russian Cultural-Historical Psychology**

Vygotsky is generally regarded as the founder of Russian cultural-historical psychology. As aptly clarified by Veresov (1999, p. 103), this approach “has its own history and “geography” in the world of psychology of 19-20th centuries.” Among the intellectual precursors identified by Veresov, it is of particular interest to us that Wundt was one of them. Indeed, Vygotsky’s main thesis (Vygotsky, 1896–1934/1997b)—that higher psychological processes are cultural in origin, and that their development could only be satisfactorily explained historically—bears a significant similarity to the key postulation of Wundtian Völkerpsychologie. Nonetheless, Wundt’s possible influence on Russian cultural-historical psychology has barely been explored. This might be an intriguing task.

Close examination of the six volumes of the collected works of Vygotsky reveals that the young Russian psychologist was very familiar with the state-of-the-art of psychology in Germany. Using the indices of this six-volume critical edition (Vygotsky, 1896–1934/1987, 1993, 1997a, 1997b, 1998, 1999, 1997a, 1997b, 1998, 1999), we find that Vygotsky mentioned Wundt’s views and methods on many occasions. Interestingly, his references to Wundt lie mainly in the area of individual/experimental psychology. These include his comments on Wundt’s writings on children’s speech, indicative gesture, written speech, compensatory processes, and fantasy activity on one hand, and his critiques of Wundt’s experimental methods on the other. The only rare case of him actually discussing Wundt’s Völkerpsychologie is the following piercing criticism:

Wundt himself, the founder of both experimental psychology and ethnic psychology, having worked out the problems of cultural development from the psychological aspect, separated these two spheres of research as far as methodology was concerned with an impassable boundary (Vygotsky, 1896–1934/1997, p. 33).

---

5 Other precursors mentioned by Vereson are Mead, Dewey, Durkheim, and Cassirer. van der Veer (1988), in a review article, traced the origin of the concept of sociogenesis to Pierre Janet.
In retrospect, Vygotsky did not offer a rigorous definition of the concept of higher psychological processes, even though he discussed topics like voluntary attention, memory, will/volition, thinking, formation of concepts, imagination, and creativity as examples of such processes. With respect to the definition of this important concept, shortly before his death he stated that “a precise definition is not something that belongs to the beginning phase of scientific knowledge” (cited by Meshcheriakov, 2000, p. 43). Luria, who succeeded Vygotsky as one of the key figures of this Russian school, nevertheless made an attempt to solve the problem. According to Luria, higher psychological processes are “complex and self-regulating, and are social in origin, mediated in their structure, and conscious and voluntary in their mode of functioning” (cited by Meshcheriakov, 2000, p. 43).

With regard to Vygotsky’s unique contribution to the cultural-historical approach to psychology, there has been an increasing convergence of opinion toward recognizing his articulation of sign mediation as a key dynamic of development in higher psychological processes⁶ (e.g., Bugrimenko & El’konin, 1994/2002; El’konin, 1996/2002; Meshcheriakov, 2000; Veresov, 1999; Wertsch, 1985). Sign mediation, as a focus of analysis, would help to unveil the interaction of cultural artifacts and individual consciousness in a dialectical way. Methodologically, Vygotsky (1896–1934/1987) developed the experimental-genetic method for observing micro changes. He also proposed “word meaning” as a unit of analysis that could capture human consciousness in a holistic, possibly irreducible way.

In the light of the uniqueness and coherence of the Vygotskian approach we are more aware of the limitations of Wundtian Völkerpsychologie, particularly its failure to address the dialectic between cultural-historical collective consciousness and psychological processes on an individual level. It is worth remembering, however, that Wundt’s Völkerpsychologie, as a variant of cultural-historical psychology, helped to pave the way for the birth of Vygotsky’s approach. It is tempting to speculate that Wundt’s formulation of Völkerpsychologie, which was known to Vygotsky, facilitated the latter’s articulation of his main thesis in the study of higher psychological processes. It is also possible that the “impassable boundary” that Vygotsky noted between Wundt’s dual program of experimental psychology and Völkerpsychologie provoked him to develop a more holistic and dialectical approach. Understandably, there are other sources of the Vygotskian approach. The intellectual heritage of the Silver Age in Russia and the Hegelian concept of mediation are two indispensable sources. Vygotsky’s historical consciousness as a Jew and his own cultivation in the literary arts may also have served as important contributing factors for such a unique approach.

Vygotsky, Luria, and Leontiev have been referred to as the “troika” of the Russian cultural-historical psychology. Are Cole and Engeström (1993) right in

---

⁶ His ideas on the nature and role of sign mediation were expressed in his key works including Thinking and speech (Vygotsky, 1896–1934/1987), “The history of the development of higher mental functions” (Vygotsky, 1896–1934/1997b), and “Tool and sign in the development of the child” (Vygotsky, 1896–1934/1999). Also noteworthy is a remark made by El’konin, that “one of the principal themes of [Vygotsky’s] diary entries in his last years was the riddle of symbolic mediation” (El’konin, 1996/2002, p. 10).
saying that, when compared with the Wundtian variant of cultural-historical psychology, history thus far has been kinder to this Russian approach? A closer scrutiny of the Russian scene reveals that Vygotsky’s program remained largely on paper, because of his tragic early death. Luria, although he succeeded in implementing a well-designed study in Soviet Central Asia that lent support to the cultural and social foundation of cognitive development (see Luria, 1976), mainly devoted his energy to investigations in neuropsychology (see Luria, 1979). Leontiev (1940/2005, 1975/1978), along with a group of followers in postrevolutionary Russia, worked out an activity approach in Kharkov (see Sokolova, 2005). The understanding of the “Russian cultural-historical school” in the Anglo American world, though enthusiastically elucidated by some Western and Russian researchers including Cole, Wertsch, Scribner, John-Steiner, Davydov, and Zinchenko, turned out to be incomplete. In particular, Vygotsky’s core ideas on sign mediation has only recently generated significant renewed interest, compared with his highly publicized ideas on the role of social interaction in learning and development (see Rogoff, 1990; Rogoff & Lave, 1984; Stetsenko, 1999). In recent decades, there has been a further development of the activity approach (e.g., Chaiklin, Hedegaard, & Jensen, 1999; Engeström, Miettinen, & Punamäki, 1999; Gromyko, 2001/2004; Lektorsky, 1990), which has been characterized by analyzing joint activity in addition to individual activity. There have also been some efforts to combine this approach with the Vygotkian one, under the name of the cultural-historical activity theory (CHAT; see Daniels, 2007; van Oers, Wardekker, Elbers, & van der Veer, 2008). Nonetheless, we could not help questioning whether there are more continuities or discontinuities between the two approaches. There have been legitimate queries about the possibility of a genuine integration of the Vygotskian and the activity approaches (e.g., Toomela, 2000; Veresov, 1999). The former chooses sign mediation as the focus of analysis, whereas the latter chooses an activity (individual or joint). A counterview is represented by Arievitch (2008), who argues for the common grounds of the cultural-historical activity theory. Firmly anchored in the tradition of Vygotsky, Leontiev, and Galperin, Arievitch finds significant continuities among these leading Russian psychologists and attributes the misunderstandings to a narrow interpretation of their views and concepts.

A new variant of cultural-historical psychology, crystallized in the concept of the “dialogical self,” has entered the scene of contemporary psychology (e.g., Hermans, 1996, 2001, 2002; Hermans & Kempen, 1993; Hermans, Kempen, & van Loon, 1992; Leiman, 2002; Valsiner, 2005; Zittoun, 2006). Incorporating the ideas of Bakthin (1895–1975/1994, 1975/1988, 1963/1989,) and Vygotsky, this rich concept appears as promising for studying the dynamics between the intricate cultural-historical entities as a great dialogue, and the inner dialogues of the multilayered self. Initial attempts have also been made to integrate Simmel’s concept of the “cultivated self” and Boesch’s symbolic action theory into the analysis of the dialogical self (Josephs, 2002).

In view of the long history of the Russian cultural-historical approach, the recent rediscovery and resurrection of Vygotsky’s core ideas (see the six-volume critical edition of his collected work; Veresov, 1999), and the newly emerged paradigm of studying the dialogic self, is there a role for Wundtian Völkerpsychologie in the future development of cultural-historical psychology? Taking into
consideration that Wundtian *Völkerpsychologie* focuses on interpreting cultural products as a means of inferring psychological processes, it still serves as an indispensable component in the great dialogue in the Bakhtinian sense. Specifically, it provides a precondition for a study of certain mediation process between the collective consciousness and the individual consciousness.

**Wundtian Völkerpsychologie Viewed Through the Lens of Recent Advancements in Psychology**

In previous sections, we have reviewed Wundt’s stand on the essential relationship between philosophy and psychology. Specifically, he highlighted the role of the theory of knowledge as a precondition for helping us to avoid superficial observations in psychology (Wundt, 1913). To revisit Wundtian *Völkerpsychologie* from the present horizon, it seems particularly interesting to call upon Davidson (1980, 2001), a distinguished contemporary philosopher, who has expressed insightful views in the areas of epistemology and the philosophy of psychology.

In a lucid and succinct piece entitled “Three varieties of knowledge,” Davidson (1991/2001) explicated the nature and interdependence of the three types of knowledge, namely knowledge of our own minds, knowledge of other minds, and knowledge of the shared environment/physical world. In arguing against the priority of any single type of knowledge, Davidson made it clear that all three forms are irreducible and interconnected aspects of the same reality. Where they differ is in the mode of access to reality, which ranges from subjective, through intersubjective, to objective. The powerful metaphor that ends the essay is noteworthy: “The three sorts of knowledge form a tripod: if any leg were lost, no part would stand” (Davidson, 1991/2001, p. 220). With this metaphor, Davidson set a high standard for what could be regarded as “knowledge that stands.” For the “modest” aim of setting a stable tripod, one has to pay great care to the modes of access to reality; herein lie the methodological implications of Davidson’s epistemology. Using Davidson’s metaphor as a lens to examine the present state-of-the-art in psychology, how well have we applied our subjective, intersubjective, and objective modes of access to reality?

When we apply Davidson’s metaphor of the tripod to examine Wundtian experimental/individual psychology, it is evident that the mode of access to reality was objective and subjective; intersubjectivity barely had a place. To view Wundtian *Völkerpsychologie* through the lens of Davidson’s epistemology, it first appears that there is no simple answer. What sort of knowledge are we concerned with? What are the major modes of access to reality that are involved? Studying language, mythology (including arts, myths, and religion), and the moral system (including law and society) from the cultural-historical perspective, Wundtian *Völkerpsychologie* appears, at first glance, to deal with the shared environment. Taking into consideration the fact that Wundt went beyond the analysis of events and objects to the underlying psychological processes, it appears that the subject matter falls into the realm of “knowledge of other minds.” Upon careful deliberation, varied cultural products, which constitute the themes of Wundt’s

---

7 According to Davidson, this essay “comes closest to pulling together the main ideas” in his book entitled “Subjective, intersubjective, objective” (Davidson, 2001, p. XVII).
Völkerpsychologie, are entities where “shared environment” and “minds of others” intersect. As for the mode of access to reality, Wundt engaged in critical dialogues with other researchers’ findings; he also made clear his interpretations and inferences for readers’ scrutiny. In this sense, we might regard the major mode of access of Wundtian Völkerpsychologie as intersubjective.

If the further development of Wundt’s Völkerpsychologie is our goal, Davidson’s theory of knowledge could serve as a helpful conceptual tool. In enquiring how cultural-historical factors are decisive in the development of higher psychological processes, we should design studies that fully respect the holistic nature of the different varieties of knowledge, and apply different modes of access to reality in a possibly irreducible way. In view of the interconnection of different sorts of knowledge, a promising future program for Völkerpsychologie probably lies at the intersection of the areas of individual mind, collective mind, and cultural products, with the creative and optimal application of different modes of access.

Since the birth of psychology as an academic discipline, its subfields have had varied courses of development and subsequent advancements. One subfield that has shown remarkable progress in contemporary psychology is (developmental) cognitive neuroscience (see Johnson, 1997/2005; Munakata, Casey, & Diamond, 2004; Nelson & Luciana, 2001). With the invention of new techniques such as neuroimaging, scientists are excited by the discovery of new knowledge in relation to the biological foundation of human cognition (and affect). Leading German neuroscientists discussed the present and the future of neuroscience in the form of a manifesto (Elger et al., 2004). Amid such a Zeitgeist, Wundt’s insights about the importance of a cultural-historical perspective are particularly meaningful. Defining psychology as a mental science, Wundt recognized the limitations of a biology-based psychology for the study of the individual as a willing and thinking subject. In his Outline of psychology, he eloquently expressed that “a form of psychology, which has turned into hypothetical brain mechanics, can never be of any service as a basis for the mental sciences” (Wundt, 1896/1897, p. 18). Echoing Wundt today, we could raise the question of how far neuroscientists are in a position to explain the dynamics of the development of higher psychological processes.

There are voices that cast doubt on the recent overenthusiasm for the latest advancements in neuroscience. Hampe (2007), a German scholar educated in philosophy, psychology, neurobiology, and genetics, questioned the assumption that visualizations of brain structures could be considered as insights into the essential reality of human existence. He further asked why we could not consider social conditions as the processes that underlie psychological phenomena, during which the brain structures might be representing certain kinds of expression. A group of European and North American psychologists, mainly at the instigation of German psychologists, have united to call for a perspective of biocultural coconstructivism (see Baltes, Reuter-Lorenz, & Rössler, 2006; Li, 2003). Citing empirical evidence on neuronal plasticity, they attempted to show the role of cultural factors in human development. Noteworthy in this discourse is the refined framework of biocultural orchestration of developmental plasticity proposed by Li (2003). Encompassing three levels of time scales (i.e., human phylogeny, life span ontogeny, and moment-to-moment microgenesis), Li intended to show the possibilities of the biocultural coconstruction within and across a certain level of time
scale. The interactive processes could be multidirectional and reciprocal. Existing empirical evidence concerning these interactive processes has also been provided.

From the perspective of Li’s (2003) proposed framework, Wundt’s Volkerpsychologie contributed substantially to the clarification of the role of culture in the time scale of human phylogeny. Looking through the lens of the same framework, we discover that Wundt’s Volkerpsychologie never adequately explored how cultural-historical factors would influence life span development and moment-to-moment changes. The cultural products and the underlying collective mind identified by Wundt are, nonetheless, valuable anchors for studying the dynamics of life span ontogeny, as well as human microgenesis. This idea, when added to Li’s framework of biocultural orchestration, would evidently lead to its further enrichment. If we aim for further development of Wundt’s Volkerpsychologie, the multidirectional and reciprocal interactive processes postulated by Li could serve as guidelines for an active research program with a varied research design.

Conclusion

In discussing Wundt’s legacy, we should not overlook the extensive, critical dialogues he made with the trends and traditions of his day, but perhaps it is less true to his legacy to review his work than to include it in extensive, critical dialogues with the trends and traditions of our times. In identifying the critical points of the present discussion, which include Wundt’s views on the relations between psychology and other disciplines on one hand, and his formulation of Volkerpsychologie on the other, we did not intend to undermine Wundt’s contribution to experimental psychology. Our major goal was to explore the most misunderstood legacies of Wundtian psychology. Specifically, we have attempted to reevaluate Wundt’s views on such fundamental questions as the nature of psychology and its relationship to philosophy. We have also asked whether cultural-historical psychology is merely a subfield of psychology worth pursuing, or, in reality, a core element of the discipline, particularly where higher psychological processes are concerned.

Acknowledgments

I would like to express my heartfelt thanks to Christian Allesch, Igor Arievitch, Amy Chak, Gerd Jüttemann, and Patrick Wong for their valuable feedback. I also owe special thanks to two anonymous reviewers for their constructive comments.

References


van Hoorn, W., & Verhave, T. (1980). Wundt’s changing conception of a general and


Received March 6, 2008
Revision received March 6, 2009
Accepted March 10, 2009