

pear to be complementary to modern technology and science – it may also be argued to be based on parallel and similar modes of thought.⁶³⁶ And apart from highlighting ancient local forms of competent and efficient interaction with the forces of nature, these ancient wisdom traditions must also be recognised as empowering peripheral local communities and reducing their vulnerability and dependence vis-à-vis the encroachment of a global capitalist economy and ideology (cf. Quanchi 2004). However, the more typical effect in a context of globalisation is destruction of traditional wisdom, and then outside researchers and local specialists may be exhorted to join hands to preserve and record local ways of knowing that may be unique in the world (Balick 2006).

Q. THE COELACANTH: KNOWN TO AFRICANS, UNKNOWN TO NORTH ATLANTIC SCIENCE. The following example may bring out the dangers involved in the idea of such complementarity: In the 1930s-40s great excitement was caused by ichthyology identifying the first living Coelacanths (*Latimeria chalumnae*) off the coasts of South Africa and the Comores Islands – as a species of jawed fishes virtually unchanged since the Devonian geological period, c. 400 million years ago, and thought to be extinct for at least 60 million years. However, it turned out that this fish had been commonly known since times immemorial among the modern population of Madagascar. Here, under the name of *combessa* its meat had constituted a despised but cheap relish, while – over the last hundred years – the rough scaly skin was used as an abrasive e.g. in the repair of bicycle tyres! If international science had been able to make contact with local fish-related practices on Madagascar at an earlier point in time, it would never have considered the Coelacanth extinct. Yet we cannot say that African wisdom here surpassed global science, for whereas the fish was less than common from an African perspective, it is only from the evolutionary perspective evolved in science since the mid-19th century CE that the scientific identification of the Coelacanth was a significant event, even (Terofal 1975) ‘the most important scientific feat in modern history’.

4. *The psychology of wisdom.* In the field of psychology, intensive work over the last few decades on such topics as personality, life span, maturity, aging (in other words, gerontology), moral reasoning, and acceptance / forgiveness of finitude including failure and death (stimulated, in part, by the progressive aging of the population of the developed countries) has produced a focus on wisdom that is empirical, comparative, theoretically orientated, and conceptually highly sophisticated. Here, in the consideration of what makes a good life; what a wholesome society and future; what forms of interaction and communication are conducive to well-being and meaning; and what

Here we are touching on the discussions, during the last quarter of a century, of ‘indigenous knowledge systems’, which however our present scope does not allow us to go into.

⁶³⁶ Cf. Jiang 2005; Jones & Culliney 1998; Capra 1978; Zukav 1979.