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Asian Culture and Christian Spirituality

Brian Chao, M.A., Rodger Bufford, Ph.D., Mark McMinn, Ph.D., & William C. Buhrow, Jr., Psy.D.
George Fox University

Introduction
Asian-Americans are a broad and diverse group, numbering approximately 10 million in the United States (U.S. Department of Commerce, 2001). Common traditional core values among Asian-Americans include respecting one’s elders and a more authoritarian parenting style, controlled emotionality, inseparability of mind and body, and high academic and occupational goals (Sue and Sue, 2003). Asian-Americans also vary widely in their SES, education, sexuality, and mental health issues—factors often obscured by the “model minority myth” (Yin, 2000).

Traditional Asian-American religious beliefs and systems have been integrated into contemporary psychological research and interventions (e.g. DBT, ACT), but Christian Asian-Americans have seldom been studied.

Defining religion and spirituality remains controversial (e.g., Yick, & Oomen-Early, 2008; Zinnbauer & Pargament, 2005). Here we treat them as inter-related constructs conveying public and private facets of an individual’s or group’s connection with the transcendent.

Relationships among culture, spiritual well-being, and family dynamics were explored among an Asian sample using the FACES-IV, the Spiritual Well-Being Scale, and the SL-Asian Self-Identity Scale. The authors believed that (a) respondents with healthier family scores would report higher spiritual, religious, and existential well-being; (b) respondents with healthier family scores would identify themselves as more acculturated; and (c) higher acculturation would correspond with increased spiritual well-being.

Methods

Participants:
Total: N=117
Gender: 75 female (67.6%); 36 male (32.4%)
Age: 16 to 69, avg = 31.2, SD = 12.8.
Ethnicity: 49 Chinese (44.1%), nine Filipino (8.1%), one Hmong (0.9%), four Japanese (3.6%), 34 Korean (30.6%), seven Taiwanese (6.3%), three Vietnamese (2.7%), and four “Asian-Other” participants.
Religion: Three (2.7%) individuals identified themselves as Agnostic, one (0.9%) as atheist, and 107 (96.4%) as Christian.
Christianity: 13 (12.3%) Catholic, one (0.9%) Eastern Orthodox, and 92 (86.8%) Protestant.
Protestant Denominations: 28 (25.2%) Baptist, 3 (2.7%) Calvinist, 8 (7.2%) Charismatic, 7 (6.3%) Evangelical, 1 (0.9%) Methodist/Wesleyan, 35 (31.5%) Non-denominational, 2 (1.8%) Pentecostal, 13 (11.7%) Presbyterian, 4 (3.6%) Reformed, and 1 (0.9%) Seventh-Day Adventist; nine (8.1%) described themselves as “Christian-Other”.

Instruments:
Demographics, including gender, age, ethnicity, religious and spiritual identity
Spiritual Well-Being Scale
Suinn-Lew Asian Self-Identity Acculturation Scale
Family Adaptability and Cohesion Evaluation Scales – Fourth Revision
Procedure: Participants were solicited by recruiters who assisted in gathering data; most were from communities in southern California, southwestern Oregon and northwestern Washington. However, no data were gathered to identify the geographical location of participants. Access to Survey-Monkey self-report survey was electronically disseminated via e-mail.

Results

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Variable</th>
<th>Cluster 1</th>
<th>Cluster 2</th>
<th>Cluster 3</th>
<th>Cluster 4</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Ethnicity</td>
<td>Korean</td>
<td>Chinese</td>
<td>Chinese</td>
<td>Taiwanese</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rel/Spir. Identity</td>
<td>Protestant</td>
<td>Protestant</td>
<td>Protestant</td>
<td>Protestant</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Denomination</td>
<td>Reformed Baptist</td>
<td>Evangelical</td>
<td>Non-Denom.</td>
<td>Protestant</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Family Satisfaction</td>
<td>10%</td>
<td>99%</td>
<td>40%</td>
<td>13%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Family Comm.*</td>
<td>12%</td>
<td>97%</td>
<td>74%</td>
<td>24%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>FACES-IV Total Ratio**</td>
<td>0.88</td>
<td>2.25</td>
<td>1.94</td>
<td>1.43</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Spiritual Well-Being</td>
<td>109</td>
<td>114</td>
<td>80</td>
<td>46</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cluster N</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>39</td>
<td>11</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Note: N = 111, *p&lt;.01, **ratio &gt;1 healthier, ratio &lt;1 unhealthy, ***1 = Asian culture, 3 = bicultural, 5 = Western culture</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

ANOVA Results For SL-ASIA Scales and SWB, RWB, EWB

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Scale</th>
<th>Results</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>SWB</td>
<td>F(3,107) = 0.28, p = NS</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>RWB</td>
<td>F(3,107) = 0.70, p = NS</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>EWB</td>
<td>F(3,107) = 0.31, p = NS</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

ANOVA Results For FACES-IV Scales and SL-ASIA

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Scale</th>
<th>Results</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Enmeshment</td>
<td>Disengagement</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>F(3,107) = 2.00</td>
<td>F(3,107) = 3.53</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Discussion

1. No significant relationships were found between acculturation on the SL-Asian and either spiritual wellbeing or family styles. Limited range on acculturation, or limitations in the utility of the one-dimensional acculturation scale (Schwartz, Unger, Zamboanga, & Szapocznik, 2010) may account for this outcome.

2. Some weak relationships were found for spiritual wellbeing and family styles. The use of categorical rather than dimensional data for family style may have weakened these results.

3. Cluster analysis, which used dimensional data, was able to identify distinct groups in the sample characterized by differences in acculturation, spiritual wellbeing, and family style. This finding suggests that family style may be more powerfully assessed using a dimensional approach and that there are important relationships among acculturation, family style, and spiritual wellbeing in the present sample.

4. Sample limitations and failure to assess the duration of faith commitment limit generalization from these data. In particular, those who have left family religious traditions are likely under-represented.

5. The finding that those with highest and lowest family adaptability and cohesion scores showed highest spiritual wellbeing scores suggests a curvilinear relationship. Perhaps family stressors are greater at intermediate levels of adaptability and cohesion than at either extreme.

6. Clinically, these data suggest that it is important to attend to both acculturation and family dynamics among Asian-Americans. They also suggest the relationship of these factors to wellbeing may be complex.

References

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Unidimensional Model of Acculturation

Asian Culture
Bicultural
American Culture

Figure 1: Unidimensional Model of Acculturation