Does Religion Matter for East Asians' Psychological Well-Being? Evidence from Japan, South Korea, and Taiwan

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Introduction

Secularization theorists argued that social differentiation would result in the decline of religion all over the world (Chaves 1994; Dobbelaere 1985; Lechner 1991; Tschannen 1991). As religious organizations gradually loosing authority, their influence on people's social life would diminish, and individuals would become less and less committed to religious beliefs and practices. Nevertheless, these predictions had not been realized. Religions all over the world not only survived, but thrived. Religious institutions remained strong influence on many aspects of human society: culture, the economy, and politics (Sherkat and Ellison 1999). Among all kinds of impacts yield by religious beliefs and practices, their beneficial influence on psychological well-being was one of the most noticeable, recognized, and investigated.

Evidence from studies of Western religion demonstrated that, religious people tend to have greater psychological well-being and life satisfaction. Their personal faith tends to help them to stay optimistic and hopeful in their life goals (Sherkat and Ellison 1999). Consequently, they experience less anxiety and depressed symptoms and maintaine healthier life styles than non-religious people did (Koenig, McCullough, and Larson 2001). Evidence from recent research suggests that, attending religious services once a week but no more was associated with fewer depressive symptoms and anxiety symptoms (Sternthal et al. 2010).

Durkheim (1897) argued that religion was a social force providing functions of integration and regulation to people's lives, and this theme were extended and supported by later theoretical and empirical studies (Levin 1996, Ellison and Levin 1998). Religious congregations provide regular opportunities for social activities that increased interactions among coreligionists (Ideler 1987) and helpe people to maintain social ties, which could provide both emotional and instrumental support (Ellison and George 1994). In addition, religious involvement often require commitment that help to establish role identities and increase ones' self-esteem and personal efficacy (Berger 1969; Ellison 1993; Krause 1995). Religious communities also provide a value system on how to choose healthier life styles and to prevent from deviant behaviors. These teachings help religious people to reduce exposure to stressful life situations (Ellison 1994).

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Religious beliefs provide an interpretative framework to help people find meaning in life. The system is applicable in mundane life as well as when unexpected life events occur (Ellison and Levin 1998). Religious faith is especially important when stressful events such as health problems, accident, or loosing of family members (Idler 1995). It emphasizes a sense of divine control over life and provide comfort to help people coping with these unwanted situations (Ellison and george 1994; Pargament et al. 1988; Sternthal et al. 2010).

Nevertheless, while evidence indicating the positive relationships between religion and psychological well-being appear to be abundant, most of these investigations were conducted in Western societies with Christian as the major sample of religion. Are these theoretical models established from these findings also applicable in East Asia societies? It warrants careful examinations. In his article published in 2007, Steven Reed depict a theme of secular East Asia, indicating that a very high proportion of East Asians do not affiliate to any religion. He emphasize that the cultural context in East Asia is quite different from that of Western Europe, so we should not expect to see the same causes of consequences of religion in these two areas. His analyses also suggested that no consistent differences were found between religious and secular people. The explanation of this unexpected finding offered by Reed was that there may be an internal diversity within the categories examined. That is, the religious people may not be as homogeneous as we think. People in different religious groups may be quite various in terms of socioeconomic background, life experiences, religious beliefs, and religious behaviors. Due to the heterogeneity, it is difficult to depict a unified profile for East Asian religious people.

Extending from Reed's theme of secular East Asia, this article intends to further examine whether religious people and secular people in East Asia are significantly different in terms of their psychological well-being. Using data drawn from AsiaBarometer 2006 survey, this study select Japan, South Korea, and Taiwan as sampled East Asia societies. To address the possible internal diversity among people with religion faiths, this study compare people with different religious identifications in their status psychological well-being as well as their demographic characteristics, social status, religious beliefs, and religious lives. Finally, applying regressional analyses, this study attempts to disentangle the possible mechanism between religions and psychological well-being in East Asia.

Data and Measurement

The data used in this paper were drawn from the 2006 survey in the AsiaBarometer project. The 2006 survey was conducted in seven societies in East and Southeast Asia including China, Hong Kong, Japan, South Korea, Singapore, Taiwan,

and Vietnam, namely, the Confucian cultural circle. Applying multistage stratified random sampling and quota sampling method, around 1,000 adults aged 20 to 69 in each society (except China, where 2,000 respondents were sampled) were selected. Face-to-face interviews were carried out with the common questionnaire translated into local language. Due to the research purpose of this paper, only survey respondents from Japan, South Korea and Taiwan were analyzed. Cases with missing values in variables of interest were omitted from the analyses. The final sample size in each country studied was: 823 in Japan, 897 in South Korea, and 895 in Taiwan.

The measure of the dependent variable, psychological well-being, included two indicators: happiness and life enjoyment. Happiness was measured by the question (Q4) "All things considered, would you say that you are happy these days?" Responses in the 5-level Likert scale ranged from "very unhappy" (coded as 1) to "very happy" (coded as 5). Life enjoyment was measured by the question (Q5) "How often do you feel you are really enjoying life these days?" Responses ranged from "never (coded as 1) to "often" (coded as 4).

The independent variable of this study was religion affiliation. The survey question (F9) provided a list of 12 specific religions and responses of "other" and "none." During the analyses, the response categories of "Catholic" and "Christian religion other than Catholic" were collapsed to "Christianity", and "Buddhist (Mahayana)" and "Buddhist (Theravada)" were collapsed to "Buddhist." In addition, the "other" category in the three countries was re-categorized to include the minor religions in each country. For instance, the new "other" category in the Japan sample included respondents who affiliated to "Shintoism" and who identified themselves in the original "other categories." Religions included in the "other" category in each country were identified in the footnotes of each table presented.

The intervening variables adopted to explain the relationship between religion and psychological well-being included social status, life stressors, religious belief, and religious life. Respondents' social status was measured by their educational attainment, which was re-stratified from the original responses by AsiaBarometer data organizers to "low", "mid" and "high." The reason of not including family income as measurement of respondents' social status was that educational attainment was highly correlated with family income and usually considered as a more reliable measurement of social status than family income. Also, the variable of family income contained a high proportion of missing values in the data set. Finally, while compared across religious affiliations, respondents did show significant differences in educational attainment, but not in family income. This implied that, regarding the correlation between social status and religion, educational attainment should be a better and more relevant indicator. Prior research found that higher educated people appear to be less

religious than the lower educated do (Iannaccone 1997, Johnson 1997, Sherkat 1998).

The life stressors of respondents were measured by the question (Q7) "Please tell me how satisfied or dissatisfied you are with the following aspects of your life" The 16-item list included housing, friendships, marriage, standard of living, household income, health, education, job, neighbors, public safety, the condition of the environment, social welfare system, the democratic system, family life, leisure, and spiritual life. Responses to theses items were recorded by a 5-level Likert scale ranged from "very satisfied" to "very dissatisfied." In order to create a parsimonious measure of life stressor, responses to these items were each coded from 1 ("very satisfied") to 5 ("very dissatisfied") and then added up. The total score reflect respondents' level of dissatisfaction to their life. Since I did not want to exclude single people from the analyses, the "marriage" item was dropped while making the composite measure. Additionally, since the item "spiritual" life was highly correlated to the independent variable religion, to prevent the problem of multicollinearity, this item was not included.

In order to compare religiosity across respondents affiliated to different religion, measures of religious belief and religious life were examined. Religious belief was measured by the question (Q48) "There are two opinions about the role of chance in the world. In your opinion, which of the following two positions is more correct?" Responses included two statements: "Many things happen for no particular reason at all. It is just a matter of chance;" and "Everything happens for a reason. Even events that look like accidents have a hidden purpose." Respondents choosing the latter statement were coded 1 in a dichotomic variable representing fatalism. The measure of religious life included both religious behaviors and the relevance of religious in personal life. The indicator of religious belief was the question (Q23) "How often do you pray or meditate?" The original 5-level response were recoded from 1 ("never") to 5 ("daily"). The relevance of religion was measured by question (Q21-1) "Which of the following social circles or groups are important to you?" and (Q24) "For each of the following events, please rate the importance of having a religious institution (such as mosque, church, temple, and shrine) or a religious professional (such as imam, priest, and monk) involved." For the former question, those who choose "religion" as important was coded 1 in a dichotomic variable of religious importance. Items for assessment in the latter question include births, weddings, festivals or holidays, and funnels, and the 4-level response categories ranged from "not at all important" (coded as 1) to "very important" (coded as 4). Scores in each of these items were added up to created a composite of religious institutional support.

In addition, in order to rule out confounding effects resulted from correlation between democratic characteristics and religion, gender, age, and marital status were

included as control variables during the analyses. Women are in general found to me more religious and more likely to attend religious activities than men do (De Vaus and McAllister 1987, Miller and Hoffman 1995, Sherkat 1998, Wilson and Sherkat 1994). While women are more likely than men to experience stressful life situation, the social setting and support provided by religious organizations encourage women's participation (Bartkowski 1997). The higher risk aversion among women is makes them more religious (Miller and Hoffman 1995). Also, probably because of the heightened desire for social support and explanation of the meaning of life, elders are more likely to participate in religious activities (Stark and Bainbridge 1987). In addition, while most traditional religions promote family values, religious people are more likely than secular people to enter and stay in marriage (Sherkan and Ellison 1999).

Analytic Strategy

The data analyses consisted of six steps in this study: (1) basic descriptive statistics were presented to show the demographic and religious portfolios for Japan, South Korea, and Taiwan; (2) in order to examine the relevance of religion to psychological well-being, the degree of happiness and life enjoyment between religion believers and non-believers were compared; (3) Psychological well-being among believers with different religious affiliations are further compared to examine the degree of heterogeneity among different religions; (4) sociodemographic backgrounds of individuals with different religious identities were compared; (5) religious belief and religious life among people with different religious identities were compared; (6), regression models of psychological well-being by religious identities, sociodemographic characters, life stressors, and religious belief and life were estimated to identified the probable complex association between religion and psychological well-being.

Findings

Table 1 presents means and standard deviation of variables of interest for samples of Japan, South Korea, and Taiwan. Looking at the average scores of happiness and life enjoyment placed on the top of the table, we find that, in general, Japanese people appear to experience a better quality of psychological well-being than those living in South Korea and in Taiwan. The demographic profiles are similar among these three countries, with sex ratio around 1:1, mean age around early 40s, and three-quarter of adults are currently married. The distributions of educational attainment in the three countries exhibit notably differences. Japan displays a highest proportion (47%) of people obtain high education, followed by South Korea (39%)

and Taiwan (27%). Regarding the dissatisfaction of life, South Korean display a highest average score (2.72), followed by Taiwanese (2.66) and Japanese (2.44).

The religious profiles show eminent differences both in the degree of secularization and the heterogeneity of component religions across the three countries. Japan has 60% of people reporting no religion, which is much higher than the proportions in South Korea (44%) and in Taiwan (23%). The high proportion of non-religion in Japan may be associated to its high proportion of people with high education. On the other hand, Taiwan has a highest degree of heterogeneity in components of religious affiliation. With most people affiliating to Taoism (42%) and Buddhism (31%), there are still others affiliate to various religions including Catholic(1%), Christian other than Catholic(2%), Shintoism (less than 0.5%), Confucian (less than 0.5%), and other religion (less than 0.5%). South Korea comes in the second place in terms of the heterogeneity of religious affiliation, with 25% of people affiliated to Christian other than Catholic, 22% to Buddhism, 7% to Catholic, 1% to Confucian, and !% to other religion. For Japanese believers, most of them are Buddhist (34% in the whole population), and others affiliate to Christian other than Catholic (2%), Catholic (1%), Shintoism (1%), and other religion (2%).

In order to further examine Reed's claim (2007) that people with and without religion in the secular East Asia are not different in most characteristics, Table 2 contrasts the psychological well-being of believers with that of non-believers in Japan, South Korea, and Taiwan. In Japan and Taiwan, the differences between believers and non-believers in the degree of happiness and life enjoyment are hardly recognized. However, in South Korea, believers report significantly higher scores in happiness (3.59 vs. 3.44) and life enjoyment (2.88 vs. 2.77), suggesting that religion has some correlation with psychological well-being in South Korea.

Reed (2007) also suspected that the similarity of characteristics between believers and non-believers may resulted from the inner heterogeneity among people with religion. Thus, in Table 3, I contrast psychological well-being across people with different religious affiliation in Japan, South Korea, and Taiwan. In Japan, the mean scores of happiness and life enjoyment somewhat display a pattern. Although the only significant difference found is between Buddhists and those assigned in the category of "other religion" in the measure of happiness, Buddhists display a tendency to report the lowest scores in both happiness and life enjoyment. Since the sample size of people in the "other religion" is very small in number, the meaningful comparison should between Buddhists and Christians. In both measures of psychological well-being, Christians tend to report higher scores than Buddhists do. The reason that these differences do not reach the criteria of statistical significance may due to the small sample size of Christians. Thus, the differences between Buddhists and

Christians warrant further considerations.

Looking at the comparison for South Korean in Table 3, we see significant differences in psychological well-being across people with different religious affiliation. If we focus on the comparison between Buddhists and Christians, we find a similar pattern here as among Japanese sample. Christians report significant higher scores than Buddhists do in both the measures of happiness (3.75 vs. 3.38) and life enjoyment (3.06 vs. 2.77). In addition, while Christians tend to report better psychological well-being than non-believers, Buddhists are more likely to display a worse (or at least no better) psychological profile than non-believer. In the case of Taiwanese sample, the picture we may draw from the results reported in Table 3 is not as clear as those from the Japanese and South Korean samples. The differences in happiness across people in different religious affiliations are hardly recognized. Buddhists and Christians report no differences in happiness. The differences in life enjoyment appear to be more eminent, but still very small. Christians appear to enjoy their lives more than Buddhists do, although the differences are still not significant. It is noteworthy that people affiliated with Taoism in Taiwan report the lowest scores in both happiness and life enjoyment.

Table 4 displays the distribution for gender and marital status by religious affiliation. Studies in Western societies suggest that women are more likely than men to believe in religion, and religious people are more likely to enter and stay in marriage. Can we find the same pattern in East Asian societies? In Japan, although no significant differences found in gender distribution across religious affiliation, we can easily find that Christians exhibit a unique pattern of higher female proportion (53.57%), which is not the case in other religions and among non-believers. Regarding marital status, Buddhists (78.49%) as well as Christians (78.57%) appear to have a slightly higher proportion of married people than non-believers (73.79%).

In South Korea, Buddhists (55.33%) and Christians (58.56%) both have a higher proportion of female than no-believers (38.17%). Also, the proportion of married people is higher among Buddhists (79.19%) and Christians (77.05%) than that of non-believers (72.01%). Similarly, in Taiwan, compared to the non-believers (44.93%), Buddhists (50.18%), Christians (51.85%), and Taoists (48.40%) have a higher female proportion. However, unlike the case in the other two countries, while Buddhists (78.14%) and Taoists (77.93%) have a higher proportion of married people than non-believers (58.94%), the proportion of married Christians is much lower (55.56%). To sum up, the pattern of female prevalence in religion is more apparent in South Korea and in Taiwan, but not in Japan. However, the female proportion in Christians alone is surely higher than non-believers in three countries. Regarding marital status, except Christians in Taiwan, religion believers in general have a higher

probability to be married.

Table 5 presents the comparison of the educational attainment among people with different religious affiliation in Japan, South Korea, and Taiwan. Literature based on studies in Western societies suggest that, as modern education could carry a function of disenchantment, people with higher education are less likely to become religious believers. Is that also the case in East Asia? In Japan, people with no religion do have a higher proportion to obtain high education (50.6%) than Buddhists (40.1%) and people in other religion (32.1%) do. However, Christians in Japan display an even better profile in high education (75%). In South Korea, we find the same higher educational attainment prevalence among Christians. While the proportion of high educational attainment among non-believers (41.5%) is higher than that of Buddhists (28.9%) and people in other religion (17.6%), the proportion among Christians (43.8%) is even higher. In Taiwan, the same pattern prevails. Christians have a highest proportion of the highly educated (48.1%), followed by non-believers (44.4%), Buddhist (20.8%), Taoists (20.2%), and people in other religion (16.7%).

Table 6 presents the comparison of fatalism, prayer, religious institutional support, and religious importance by people in different religious affiliation in Japan, South Korea, and Taiwan. As we have seen in Table 5, people in different may exhibit a different profile in terms of social status. Are religious beliefs and religious life also very different across different religion? In Japan, differences in the proportion of believing in fatalism among people in different religious affiliation are not statistically significant. This is because in Japan even people with no religion tend to believe in fate. The proportion of believe in fatalism among non-believers is as great as 60%, which is not much less than that of Buddhist (63%) and Christians (75%). In terms of religious life, the differences among people affiliated in different religion are statistically significant. Compared to Buddhists, Christians prayer more often (3.75 vs. 3.26), use more religious institutional support (2.76 vs. 2.71), and regard religion as more important in life (0.35 vs. 0.08). In South Korea, differences in fatalism among people with different religious identity are significant. Buddhist (67%) and Christians (64%) are both more likely than non-believers (53%) to believe in fate. Like in Japan, Korean Christians exhibit a more dedicated religious life than Korean Buddhists. Compared to Buddhists, Christians pray more often (3.88 vs. 2.22), obtain more religious institutional support (3.02 vs. 2.29), and consider religion more important in life (0.47 vs. 0.11). In Taiwan, the pattern of religious belief in fatalism is slightly different than that of the other two societies. Compared to religious believers, significantly fewer non-believers believe in fate. However, Taiwanese Christians (56%) are also less likely than Taiwanese Buddhists (67%) and Taoists (64%) to believe in fatalism, which is not the case in Japan and in South Korea. Regarding

religious life, the comparison between Buddhists and Christians in Taiwan display the same pattern as that found in Japan and in South Korea. Christians are more likely than Buddhists to pray (2.85 vs. 2.23), to use religious institutional support (2.62 vs. 2.11), and to think religion as more important in life (0.22 vs. 0.09). In sum, although the comparison of religious belief across religions exhibit somewhat different in these countries, Christians tend to be more involve in religious life than Buddhist do in all three societies.

Tables 7a to 7c display the results of regressional analysis of psychological well-being on religion and other covariates in Japan, South Korea, and Taiwan, respectively. In order to disentangle the possible mechanism between religion affiliation and psychological well-being, the method of progressive regression is applied in the analyses. In model 1, only demographic characters (i.e., gender, age, and marital status) and religion affiliation are included. In model 2, educational attainment is further included to adjust for covariance between religion and social status. In model 3, dissatisfaction of life is added to account for the protective effects of education on psychological well-being. In model 4, religious belief and religious life are finally included to adjust for their covariance with religion. Finally, in model 5, interaction terms between religion and dissatisfaction of life are added to examine whether religion can buffer the hazardous impacts of life stressors on psychological well-being.

Table 7a presents the regression models of happiness and life enjoyment for Japanese respondents. Model 1 of happiness suggests that, adjusting for gender, age, and marital status, the degree of happiness for Buddhists and Christians are not significantly different from that of non-believers. Adjustments of education (model 2) and dissatisfaction (model 3) do not significantly change the coefficients for Buddhists and Christians. Nevertheless, when religious beliefs and religious life are controlled in model 4, the coefficient of Buddhist becomes significantly negative (β = -0.11) This suggests that affiliation with Buddhism may yield negative influence on one's feeling of happiness. The negative effect of Buddhism on happiness was insignificant because it was mitigated by the protective effects of fatalism, which displays significant positive effect (β =0.09) on happiness in model 4. Model 5 shows no significant interactions between religion and dissatisfaction of life is found. On the right panel of the table, model 1 of life enjoyment also shows that Buddhists and Christians do not enjoy their life more than non-believers. In model 3, Christianity exhibit significant positive effects (β =0.24) on life enjoyment. The significant influence of Christianity on life enjoyment is explained away in model by adjustment of religious beliefs and religious life, suggesting that its protective effect is mainly due to the feeling of higher importance of religion, which exhibits a significant

positive effect (β=0.19). Model 5 shows no significant interaction is found.

Table 7b presents regression models of psychological well-being for South Korea respondents. Model 1 of happiness show that Christians are significantly happier than non-believers (β=0.30). Adjustments of education (model 2) and life dissatisfaction (model 3) reduce the coefficient of Christianity (β= 0.30 in model 2, and β=0.23 in model 3), implying Christians' higher degree of happiness is partly due to their higher education and less dissatisfaction of life. In model 4, the coefficient of Christianity becomes insignificant, suggesting that its protective effect is accounted for by religious institutional support (β=0.06). Model 5 shows no significant interaction is found. Model 1 of life enjoyment shows that Christians (β=0.16) and people with religion in the category of "other" (β=0.41) enjoy their lives more than non-believers. When education is controlled in model 2, the coefficient of Buddhist becomes significant (β=0.08), suggesting its protective effect is surpassed by its believers low education. The coefficient of Buddhism then becomes insignificant in model 3 when dissatisfaction is controlled. This suggests that the privilege of Buddhists is partly due to their higher satisfaction of life. In model 4, the protective effect of Christianity appear to be explained away by prayer (β=0.03), suggesting that higher frequency of praying is beneficial to feeling of life enjoyment. Model 5 of life enjoyment shows the significant effect of interaction between Buddhist and life dissatisfaction (β= -0.25), suggesting that the protective effect of Buddhism is more eminent while the score of life enjoyment is slow, but the benefit seems to disappear gradually when life dissatisfaction increases.

Table 7c presents regression models of psychological well-being for Taiwanese respondents. Model 1 of happiness shows that, when gender, age, and marital status are controlled, no significant differences is found among people with different religious affiliation. When further adjustment of education (model 2), life dissatisfaction (model 3), and religious beliefs and religious life (model 4) are included, no considerable change is found among the coefficients of religious affiliations. However, model 4 does show positive effects of religious institutional support on happiness (β=0.13). Model 5 shows no significant interaction is found. Similarly, model 1 of life enjoyment shows no differences across religious affiliations. Further adjustments for education (model 2), life dissatisfaction (model 3), and religious beliefs and religious life (model 4) bring no substantive change in coefficients of religious affiliation. However, in model 4, prayer (β=0.05) and religious institutional support (β=0.22) exhibit significant effects on life enjoyment. Model 5 shows no significant interaction is found.

Discussion

Extended from Steven Reed's (2007) "secular East Asia" thesis, that religious identification and religious practice are less common in East Asia societies, and consequences of religion are insignificant, this paper investigate the relationships between religious affiliation and psychological well-being in three East Asia societies: Japan, South Korea, and Taiwan. The differences in psychological well-being between religious people and secular people are found significant only in South Korea society. In Japan and Taiwan, no recognizable differential between believers and non-believers is discovered. Differences in psychological well-being among people with different faiths are then explored. Once again, significant differences are displayed only in South Korea. However, there appear to be a implicit pattern that Christians tend to be more happy and enjoy their lives more than Buddhists in the three societies and Taoists in Taiwan.

In order to further explore the explanations of the relationships between religion and psychological well-being, sociodemocratic characteristics, religious beliefs, and religious life for people with different religious identification in each society are documented. Female prevalence is more apparent in Christianity than in other religious groups. Religious people are more likely than non-religious people to be married, except for Christians in Taiwan. With regard to educational attainment, differences among religious groups are both significant and substantial. While Buddhists and Taoists tend to be less educated than non-religious individuals, Christians on average obtain higher education than secular people. In general, religious people tend to be more believing in fate than non-religious people. Religious people are also more involved in religious life than secular people. However, Christians tend to pray more often, obtain more religious institutional support, and regard religion as more important in life than their Buddhists and Taoists counterparts. Finally, regressional analyses show that the beneficial effects of religion on psychological well-being seem to contingent upon religious groups. While the positive effects of Buddhism occasionally result from fatalism (e.g., in Japan) or satisfaction of life (e.g., in South Korea), beneficial impacts of Christians tend to result from prayer, religious institutional support, and recognition of religious importance. Significant interacting effect between religion and life dissatisfaction is only found in the case of South Korean Buddhists, suggesting religion in East Asia do not usually buffer the hazardous impacts of life stressors on psychological well-being.

Inconsistent with the findings in Western societies, the differences in psychological well-being between religious and secular people in East Asia are not always recognizable. That is, religion does not often yield positive effects on people's feeling of happiness and life enjoyment in East Asia societies, except for certain religion in certain society (e.g., Christianity in South Korea). According to

secularization theory, the importance and impact of religion in social life has declined in modern societies. Hence, advocates of secularization theory may be excited to find their arguments applicable in East Asia societies. However, as suggested by Reed (2007), one alternative explanation of the "non-findings" may lie in the inner diversity of religions examined. While most evidence in beneficial effects of religion on mental health and psychological well-being are based from investigations of Christianity in Western societies, how can we be so sure that the same principle can be fully applied in Eastern societies? What if some intrinsic differences in religious practices between Christianity and traditional Eastern religions such as Buddhism and Taoism that can result in different kinds of impacts on individuals' spiritual life? As shown in the analyses, South Korea, as a country having the second highest proportion of Christians in Asia, is the only society exhibiting significant differences in psychological well-being between religious and secular people. Also, Christians in East Asia tend to be different in social status and have different style of religious practice than their Buddhists or Taoists fellow. In addition, consideration of the inner diversity of certain religion across different areas in East Asia needs to be included. For instance, analyses in this paper show Christians in Taiwan appear to be different in certain aspects to their counterpart in Japan and in South Korea.

The current study is limited in several aspects. First, the measurement of psychological well-being used in this study is less than satisfied. Other measure of psychological well-being such as self-esteem or psychological distress should be included when discussing the psychological effect of religion. Second, the measure of religious practice in this study is also less than comprehensive. To illustrate, one of the most common indicator of religiosity, religious attendance, is not included in the questionnaire. Lacking of this measure could make the results of this study less comparable to similar studies conducted in Western societies. Third, since the proportion of Christians in East Asia societies in general is low, the number of Christians in the data set applied for current analyses is small and cannot afford for further analyses that need more statistic power.

Accordingly, future research on this topic should consider collecting more suitable data in terms of better measurement in key variables of interest and larger sample size. Also, in order to further investigate the relationship between religion and psychological well-being in East Asia, it is required to address the cultural and history context both for different religion and for different societies in East Asia. Furthermore, base on the empirical evidence collected, future researchers are encouraged to consider establishing a theoretical model that can be more appropriate for the explanation for the phenomena discovered in Asian societies.

Tables for ABAP Paper

Table 1. Descriptive Statistics and Bivariate Regression with Psychological
Well-Being for Japanese, South Korea, and Taiwan

	Japan		South Korea		Taiwan	
	Mean	SD	Mean	SD	Mean	SD
Happiness	3.70	0.83	3.53	0.89	3.55	0.93
Life Enjoyment	2.98	0.66	2.83	0.74	2.69	0.74
Gender *(proportion)*						
Male	0.52	0.50	0.51	0.50	0.52	0.50
Age	45.04	13.67	42.03	13.05	40.86	11.83
Marital status *(proportion)*						
Married	0.75	0.43	0.75	0.43	0.73	0.44
Education *(proportion)*						
Low	0.08	0.27	0.19	0.39	0.32	0.47
Mid	0.45	0.50	0.42	0.49	0.41	0.49
High	0.47	0.50	0.39	0.49	0.27	0.44
Dissatisfied Life	2.44	0.52	2.72	0.51	2.66	0.45
Religion Identity *(proportion)*						
No Religion	0.60	0.49	0.44	0.50	0.23	0.42
Catholic	0.01	0.09	0.07	0.26	0.01	0.09
Other Christian	0.02	0.12	0.25	0.43	0.02	0.14
Buddhist	0.34	0.47	0.22	0.41	0.31	0.46
Shintoism	0.01	0.11	-	-	0.00	0.03
Confucian	-	-	0.01	0.10	0.00	0.03
Taoism	-	-	-	-	0.42	0.49
Other	0.02	0.14	0.01	0.09	0.00	0.07
Fatalism	0.62	0.49	0.59	0.49	0.60	0.49
Prayer	2.48	1.57	2.49	1.55	1.99	1.14
Religious Institutional support	2.55	0.69	2.44	0.88	2.18	0.52
Religious importance	0.05	0.22	0.19	0.39	0.05	0.23
N	823		897		895	

Table 2. Compare Means of Psychological Well-being by Religious Identity (believers vs. non-believers) in Japan, South Korea, and Taiwan

		Happiness	Life enjoyment
Japan	Believers	3.69	3.00
	Non-believers	3.70	2.97
South Korea	Believers	3.59*	2.88*
	Non-believers	3.44*	2.77*
Taiwan	Believers	3.54	2.68
	Non-believers	3.56	2.71

One-Way ANOVA: * p< .05; ** p< .01

Table 3. Compare Means of Psychological Well-being by Religious Affiliations in Japan, South Korea, and Taiwan

		Happiness	Life enjoyment
Japan	Buddhist	3.66†	2.98
	Christianity	3.70	3.15
	Other[a]	4.04†	3.14
	No religion	3.70	2.97
South Korea	Buddhist	3.38**	2.77**
	Christianity	3.75**	2.95**
	Other[b]	3.41**	3.06**
	No religion	3.44**	2.77**
Taiwan	Buddhist	3.57	2.69
	Christianity	3.56	2.81
	Taoism	3.51	2.67
	Other[c]	3.83	2.83
	No religion	3.56	2.71

One-Way ANOVA: † p< .10; * p< .05; ** p< .01

[a]: including Shintoism, and other religions
[b]: including Confucian and other religions
[c]: including Shintoism, Confucian, and other religions

Table 4. Comparison on Demographic Characteristics (gender and marital status) by Religious Identity in Japan, South Korea, and Taiwan

| | | Gender | | Marital Status | |
		Male	Female	Married	Not married
Japan	Buddhist	54.48%	45.52%	78.49%	21.51%
	Christianity	46.43%	53.57%	78.57%	21.43%
	Other[a]	51.41%	48.59%	73.79%	26.21%
	No religion	51.41%	48.59%	73.79%	26.21%
South Korea	Buddhist	44.67%**	55.33%**	79.19%	20.81%
	Christianity	41.44%**	58.56%**	77.05%	22.95%
	Other[b]	58.82%**	41.18%**	82.35%	17.65%
	No religion	61.83%**	38.17%**	72.01%	27.99%
Taiwan	Buddhist	49.82%	50.18%	78.14%**	21.86%**
	Christianity	48.15%	51.85%	55.56%**	44.44%**
	Taoism	51.60%	48.40%	77.93%**	22.07%**
	Other[c]	66.67%	33.33%	66.67%**	33.33%**
	No religion	55.07%	44.93%	58.94%**	41.06%**

χ^2 test: * $p < .05$; ** $p < .01$
[a]: including Shintoism, and other religions
[b]: including Confucian and other religions
[c]: including Shintoism, Confucian, and other religions

Table 5. Comparison on Educational Attainment by Religious Identity in Japan, South Korea, and Taiwan

| | | Educational Attainment | | |
		Low	Mid	High
Japan	Buddhist	8.6%**	51.3%**	40.1%**
	Christianity	5.0%**	20.0%**	75.0%**
	Other[a]	21.4%**	46.4%**	32.1%**
	No religion	6.5%**	42.9%**	50.6%**
South Korea	Buddhist	29.4%**	41.6%*8	28.9%**
	Christianity	14.4%**	41.8%**	43.8%**
	Other[b]	41.2%**	41.2%**	17.6%**
	No religion	15.8%**	42.7%**	41.5%**
Taiwan	Buddhist	31.5%**	47.7%**	20.8%**
	Christianity	18.5%**	33.3%**	48.1%**
	Taoism	43.4%**	36.4%**	20.2%**
	Other[c]	16.7%**	66.7%**	16.7%**
	No religion	13.5%**	42.0%**	44.4%**

χ^2 test: * $p < .05$; ** $p < .01$
[a]: including Shintoism, and other religions
[b]: including Confucian and other religions
[c]: including Shintoism, Confucian, and other religions

Table 6. Comparison on Means of Fatalism, Religious Institutional Support, and Religious Social Circle by Religious Identity in Japan, South Korea, and Taiwan

		Fatalism	Prayer	Institutional Support	Religious importance
Japan	Buddhist	0.63	3.28**	2.71**	0.08**
	Christianity	0.75	3.75**	2.76**	0.35**
	Other[a]	0.64	3.96**	2.77**	0.43**
	No religion	0.60	1.89**	2.43**	0.01**
South Korea	Buddhist	0.64*	2.22**	2.29**	0.11**
	Christianity	0.64*	3.88**	3.02**	0.47**
	Other[b]	0.59*	2.65**	2.38**	0.18**
	No religion	0.53*	1.60**	2.08**	0.03**
Taiwan	Buddhist	0.67**	2.23**	2.11**	0.09**
	Christianity	0.56**	2.85**	2.62**	0.22**
	Taoism	0.64**	2.00**	2.25**	0.02**
	Other[c]	0.50**	3.33**	2.58**	0.50**
	No religion	0.46**	1.48**	2.06**	0.02**

One-Way ANOVA: * p< .05; ** p< .01
[a]: including Shintoism, and other religions
[b]: including Confucian and other religions
[c]: including Shintoism, Confucian, and other religions

Table 7a. Regression Model of Psychological Well-Being for Japan

	Happiness					Life Enjoyment				
	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)
Male	-0.11†	-0.11*	-0.05	-0.05	-0.05	-0.14**	-0.14**	-0.09*	-0.09*	-0.09*
Age	-0.01*	-0.004†	-0.004*	-0.005*	-0.01*	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00
Married	0.50**	0.49**	0.40**	0.41**	0.40**	0.29**	0.28 **	0.20**	0.20**	0.20**
Religious Affiliation										
Buddhist	-0.03	-0.02	-0.08	-0.11†	0.07	0.02	0.02	-0.03	-0.06	0.20
Christianity	0.02	-0.01	0.06	0.00	-0.29	0.19	0.17	0.24†	0.13	0.04
Other[a]	0.34*	0.37*	0.21	0.16	0.17	0.17	0.18	0.06	-0.05	-0.04
Education										
Mid		0.09	0.05	0.06	0.06		0.09	0.06	0.08	0.08
High		0.22*	0.11	0.12	0.12		0.14	0.05	0.06	0.07
Dissatisfaction			-0.66**	-0.65**	-0.63**			-0.55**	-0.56**	-0.52**
Fatalism				0.09†	0.09 †				0.06	0.06
Prayer				0.02	0.02				0.02	0.02
Religious importance				0.03	0.03				0.19†	0.18†
Religious Institutional support				-0.01	-0.01				-0.05	-0.05
Buddhist *dissatisfaction					-0.07					-0.11
Christianity*dissatisfaction					0.12					0.04
R²	0.075	0.083	0.247	0.251	0.252	0.049	0.052	0.234	0.244	0.256

† p< .10; * p< .05; ** p< .01

[a]: including Shintoism, and other religions

Table 7b. Regression Model of Psychological Well-Being for South Korea

	Happiness					Life Enjoyment				
	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)
Male	-0.08	-0.12†	-0.15**	-0.14*	-0.14*	-0.08	-0.11*	-0.14**	-0.12*	-0.12*
Age	-0.02**	-0.02**	-0.01**	-0.01**	-0.01**	-0.02**	-0.01**	-0.01**	-0.01**	-0.01**
Married	0.44**	0.42**	0.36**	0.35**	0.35**	0.29**	0.27**	0.22**	0.21*	0.21*
Religious Affiliation										
Buddhist	0.02	0.03	-0.01	-0.05	0.56	0.08	0.08*	0.05	0.02	0.69*
Christianity	0.30**	0.29**	0.23**	0.11	0.40	0.16*	0.15*	0.10†	-0.02	0.19
Other[a]	0.12	0.14	-0.06	-0.11	-0.09	0.41*	0.44	0.27†	0.22	0.24
Education										
Mid		0.12	0.00	-0.01	0.00		0.13	0.03	0.03	0.03
High		0.31**	0.08	0.07	0.08		0.29**	0.10	0.09	0.10
Dissatisfaction			-0.77**	-0.76**	-0.68**			-0.65**	-0.64**	-0.56**
Fatalism				0.07	0.07				0.03	0.03
Prayer				0.04	0.04				0.03†	0.03
Religious importance				-0.04	-0.04				0.02	0.02
Religious Institutional support				0.06†	0.06 †				0.03	0.04
Buddhist *dissatisfaction					-0.22					-0.25*
Christianity*dissatisfaction					-0.11					-0.08
R²	0.104	0.116	0.299	0.306	0.309	0.085	0.099	0.293	0.299	0.303

† p< .10; * p< .05; ** p< .01

[a]: including Confucian, and other religions

Table 7c. Regression Model of Psychological Well-Being for Taiwan

	Happiness					Life enjoyment				
	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)
Male	-0.22**	-0.23**	-0.24**	-0.23**	-0.23**	0.02	0.00	-0.01	0.01	0.00
Age	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00
Married	0.00	0.04	-0.02	-0.04	-0.04	-0.08	-0.02	-0.06	-0.08	-0.08
Religious Affiliation										
Buddhist	-0.02	0.01	-0.07	-0.05	-0.02	0.02	0.07	0.02	-0.02	0.05
Christianity	-0.02	-0.03	-0.05	-0.12	-0.01	0.11	0.09	0.07	-0.05	0.58
Taoism	-0.11	-0.09	-0.12	-0.12	0.58	-0.03	0.02	0.00	-0.01	0.54
Other[a]	0.30	0.34	0.29	0.19	0.20	0.14	0.21	0.17	-0.04	-0.03
Education										
Mid		-0.05	-0.09	-0.09	-0.09		-0.01	-0.03	-0.03	-0.03
High		0.15	0.01	0.01	0.01		0.33**	0.24**	0.24**	0.24**
Dissatisfaction			-0.74**	-0.74**	-0.64**			-0.54 **	-0.52**	-0.42**
Fatalism				-0.02	-0.02				-0.04	-0.04
Prayer				-0.02	-0.02				0.05*	0.05*
Religious importance				0.13	0.13				0.23*	0.22†
Religious Institutional support				0.13*	0.13*				0.03	0.03
Buddhist *dissatisfaction					-0.01					-0.02
Christianity*dissatisfaction					-0.04					-0.23
Taoism *dissatisfaction					-0.26					-0.21
R²	0.018	0.024	0.151	0.158	0.162	0.006	0.036	0.137	0.149	0.153

† p< .10; * p< .05; ** p< .01

[a]: including Shintoism, Confucian, and other religions

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