

Cross-Cultural Differences in Attitudes Toward Altruism, Forgiveness and Gratitude

As a relatively new field of study, positive psychology has rarely been assessed in a cross-cultural context. The present study aimed to compare Chinese, Taiwanese and American cultures in regards to five central aspects of positive psychology: altruism, forgiveness, gratitude, life satisfaction (SWL), and psychological well-being (PWB). Additionally, culture-based perceptions and stereotypes concerning these positive psychological principles were also addressed. A 67-item survey was administered undergraduate students from universities in both China ($n=139$) and Taiwan ($n=112$), and will be administered to undergraduate students at SUNY Fredonia. The survey consisted of items from the Heartland Forgiveness Scale, the GQ-6 questionnaire, the Helping Attitudes Scale, Ryff's PWB, and the SWLS. Half of the participants in each sample answered as themselves and, to address potential stereotypes, the other half answered as they would if they were hypothetically a member of the other culture (e.g. a Chinese participant would answer as if they were an American). Chinese participants who answered for themselves (CS) had significantly higher scores on forgiveness than Chinese participants who answered as if they were Americans (CA). However, CA participants had significantly higher scores than CS participants on the PWB subscales of personal growth and self-acceptance. Taiwanese participants answering as themselves (TS) scored significantly higher in gratitude than Taiwanese students who answered as Americans (TA). Additionally, significant correlations were found in each of the samples between several of the major positive psychological facets. Because this study is still in progress, data from the American sample has yet to be collected. However, preliminary results indicate important differences between the eastern cultures' perceptions of themselves and their perceptions of Americans. We believe that additional findings will further our understanding of the influence of cultures on attitudes and perceptions.

Keywords: Altruism, Forgiveness, Gratitude, Life Satisfaction, Psychological Well-being, Culture