

Asian Psychology

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Scope

- **Common mistake:** lump all Asian cultures together.
- Focus on East Asia: People from Taiwan, Hong Kong, Singapore, South Korea, and Japan.
- Share a common source of cultural heritage: Confucianism.
- Since the 1960s Taiwan, Hong Kong, Singapore, and South Korea have been called **East Asian Four Tigers/Dragons**.
- Scholars attributed the success of the Asian Tigers and Japan to **Confucian work ethics**: diligence, frugality, family solidarity



Not the focus here

- Mainland China is complicated: In 1949 China adopted the Marxist ideology; During the **Cultural Revolution** between 1966-1976 China was very critical of the traditional culture.
- India, Pakistan, Malaysia, Indonesia, Philippine, Thailand, Myanmar...etc. have very different cultures.



Respect for authority

As of August 28, 2020

- In East Asia, your **teacher** is like your **father**.
- During the pandemic East Asians listen to **medical authorities** (e.g. In Hong Kong 96.6% people wearing a face mask while going outside).

Rank	Country	Total Cases	Total Deaths	Tot Cases/ 1M pop	Deaths/ 1M pop
1	USA	6083027	185546	18361	560
2	Brazil	3772945	118988	17730	559
3	India	3461240	62713	2504	45
4	Russia	980405	16914	6718	116
5	Peru	621997	28277	18824	856
44	Japan	64668	1226	512	10
48	Singapore	56666	27	9674	5
74	S. Korea	19077	316	372	6
107	Hong Kong	4769	84	635	11
169	Taiwan	487	7	20	0.30
195	Macao	46	0	71	



Value education: Asian students excel in the US



- Asian parents emphasize the importance of education.
- **Education** is viewed as the best way to **climb up the social ladder**.
- Asians accounted for 73 percent of students at Stuyvesant, 64 percent at Bronx Science and 61 percent at Brooklyn Tech, which are top high schools at New York.

Asian students excel in the US



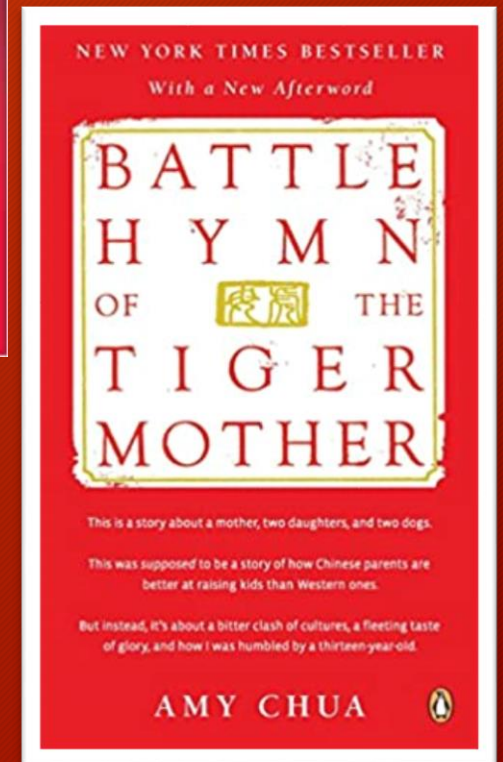
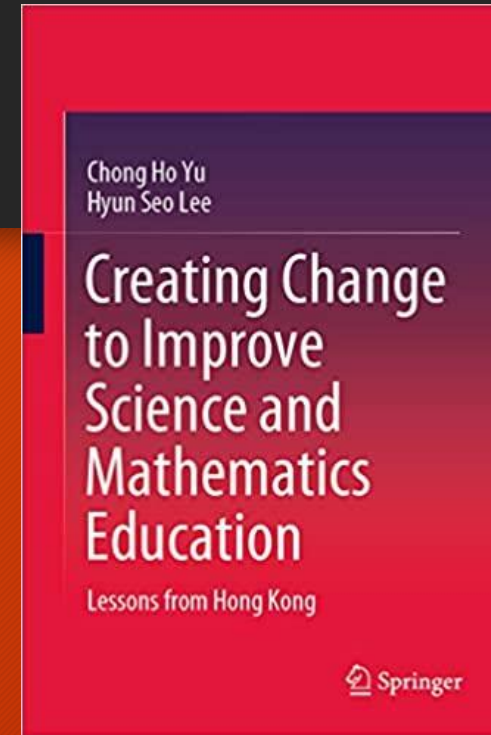
2017 data

	Asian freshmen
UC Berkeley	43%
UCLA	40%
UC San Diego	44%
UC Irvine	46%

But there is a high mental cost.

Mental cost: Honor & shame

- When a US student earns a B on a test, his father embraces him and says, “I am so proud of you!”
- When a Chinese student receives an A-, his **tiger mom** yells at him, “Not an A or A+ ? I’m disappointed at you! You should study harder! You are a disgrace to the family!”
- The culture of **honor and shame**: try the best to **save face** and afraid of **losing face**.



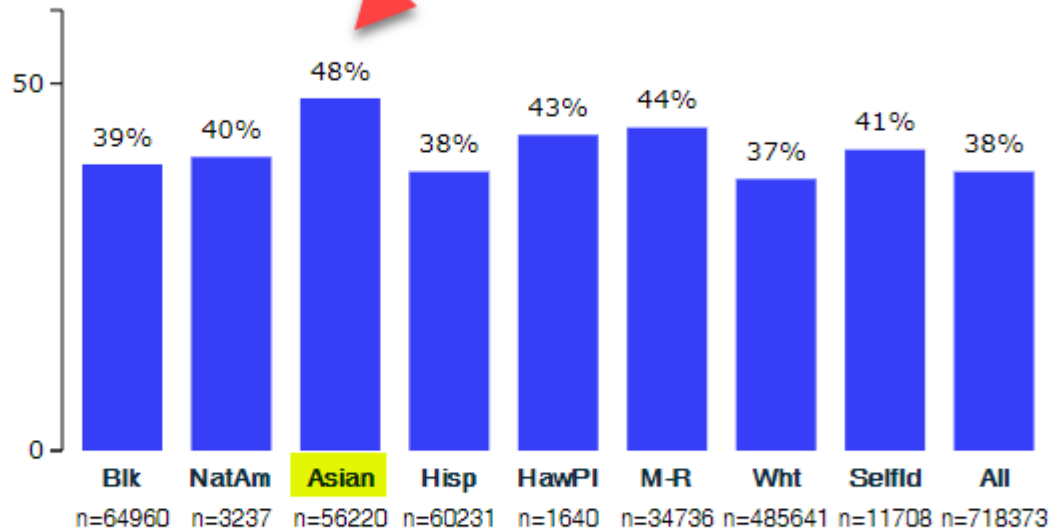
Mental cost: Family first

- American college students: “Follow your passion!”
- Asian students might choose a major to satisfy their parents even if they are not passionate about the subject matter.
- “My child! Forget about art history and English literature! I want you to be a doctor or an engineer!”
- Asian parents care about **the ranking of their children’s university** for the family honor (e.g. My son graduated from MIT? How about your son?”



Aggregate Survey Data

"I have
thoughts of
ending my
life" (in the
last two
weeks)



Race/ethnicity

Percentage of counseling center clients at Aggregate Survey Data who reported "i have thoughts of ending my life" (in the last two weeks) grouped by race/ethnicity.

Blk = African American / Black

NatAm = American Indian or Alaskan Native

Asian = Asian American / Asian

Hisp = Hispanic / Latino/a

HawPI = Native Hawaiian or Pacific Islander

M-R = Multi-racial

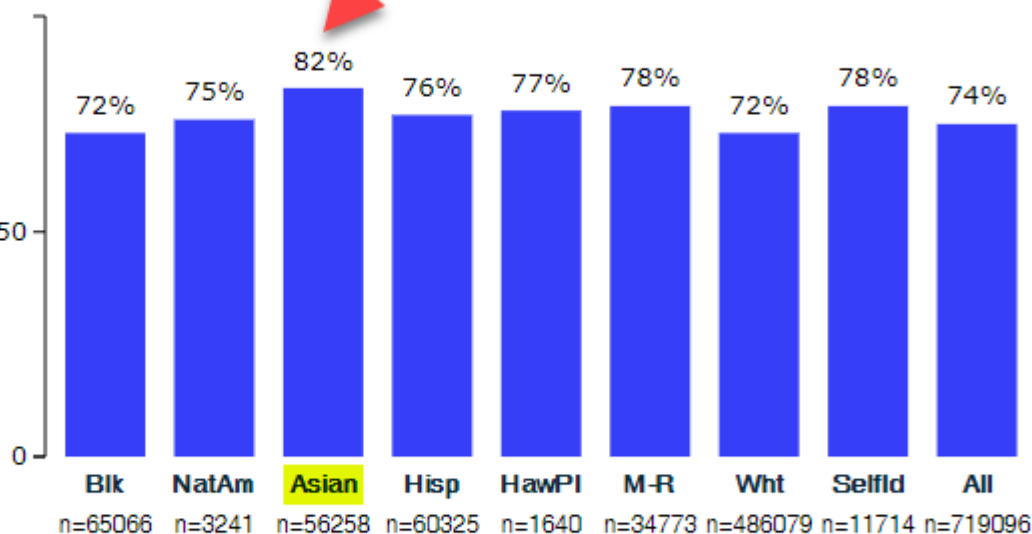
Wht = White

SelfId = Self-identified

Among people aged 15-24 and older than 65, Asian females are at the greatest risk of suicide compared with females of all other ethnic groups.

Aggregate Survey Data

Depression
above Low cut
score (CCAPS-
34)



Race/ethnicity

Percentage of counseling center clients at Aggregate Survey Data who reported depression above low cut score (ccaps-34) grouped by race/ethnicity.

Blk = African American / Black

NatAm = American Indian or Alaskan Native

Asian = Asian American / Asian

Hisp = Hispanic / Latino/a

HawPI = Native Hawaiian or Pacific Islander

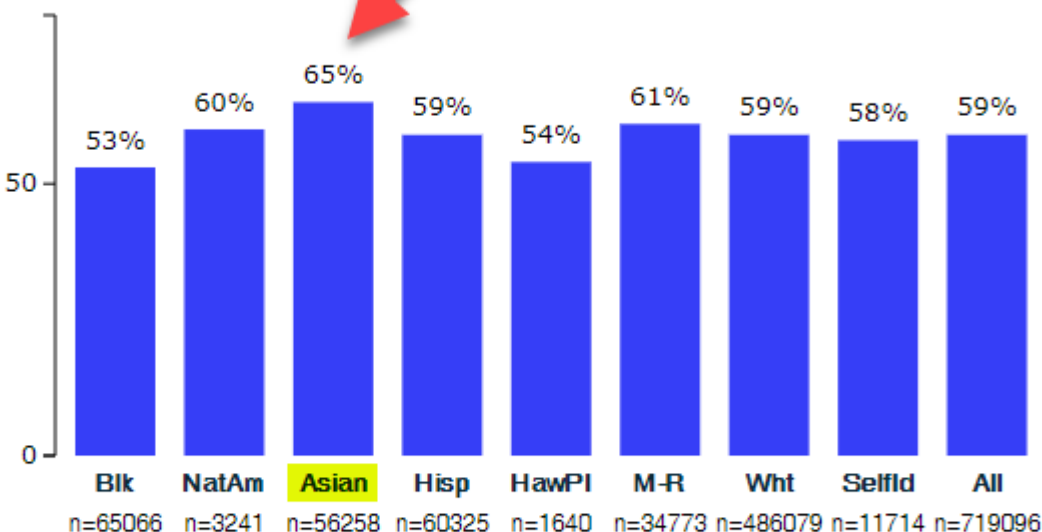
M-R = Multi-racial

Wht = White

SelfId = Self-identified

Aggregate Survey Data

Social Anxiety
above Low cut
score (CCAPS-
34)



Race/ethnicity

Percentage of counseling center clients at Aggregate Survey Data who reported social anxiety above low cut score (ccaps-34) grouped by race/ethnicity.

Blk = African American / Black

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Asian = Asian American / Asian

Hisp = Hispanic / Latino/a

HawPI = Native Hawaiian or Pacific Islander

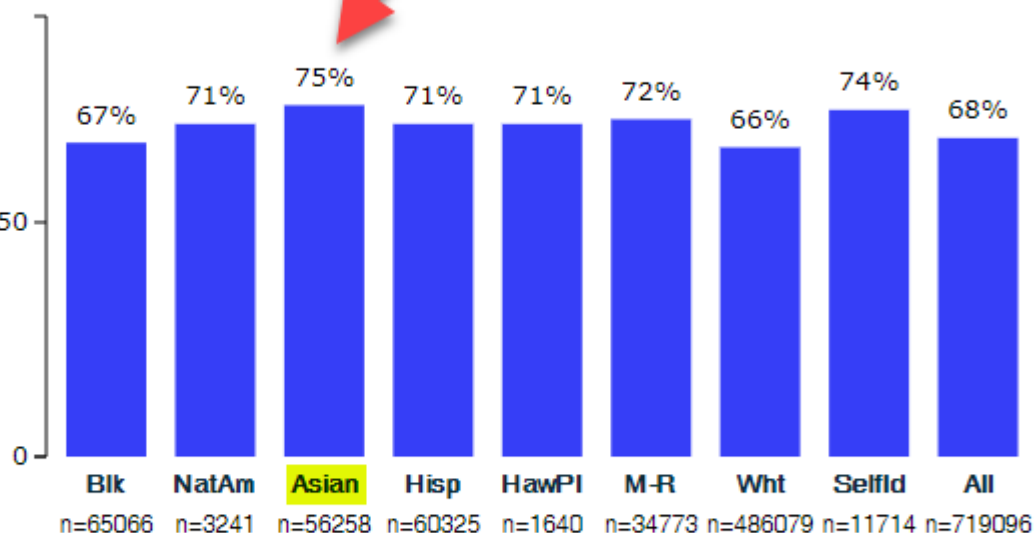
M-R = Multi-racial

Wht = White

SelfId = Self-identified

Aggregate Survey Data

Academic
Distress above
Low cut score
(CCAPS-34)



Race/ethnicity

Percentage of counseling center clients at Aggregate Survey Data who reported academic distress above low cut score (ccaps-34) grouped by race/ethnicity.

Blk = African American / Black

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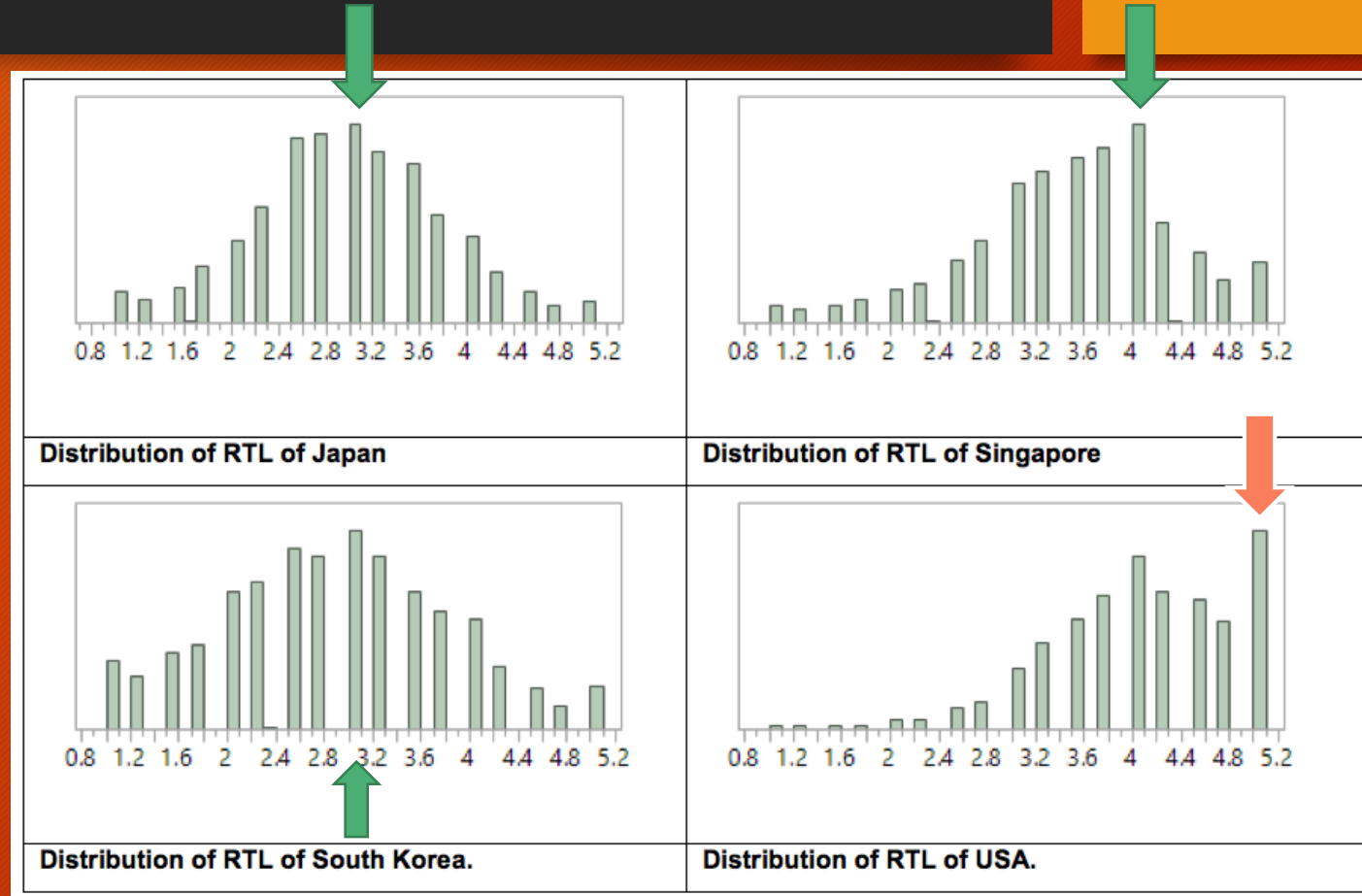
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Humility is the norm

- 2017 Program of International Assessment of Adult Competency (PIAAC).
- Self-report of readiness to learn (RTL)
- In Japan and S. Korea most people rated themselves in the middle; in Singapore the distribution is a bit skewed.
- Most Americans reported the highest score!



2015 PISA Results

	Math Score		Science Score		Self-efficacy		Self-belief		Ambition	
Country/Region	Mean	SD	Mean	SD	Mean	SD	Mean	SD	Mean	SD
China	541.74	100.84	528.34	98.56	0.06	1.17	0.19	0.87	2.98	0.73
Hong Kong	550.55	88.48	525.60	79.58	-0.07	1.22	0.21	0.95	2.80	0.80
Japan	533.30	88.18	539.03	93.28	-0.46	1.22	-0.51	1.02	2.64	0.82
Macau	543.98	79.03	528.59	81.84	-0.03	1.12	-0.50	0.81	2.63	0.81
S Korea	523.91	99.97	514.75	95.00	-0.02	1.23	0.34	0.98	2.84	0.75
Singapore	557.08	95.75	545.95	104.60	0.07	1.14	0.42	0.94	3.00	0.79
Taiwan	539.20	103.79	530.85	99.85	0.19	1.19	-0.01	0.89	2.92	0.76
USA	474.35	87.92	502.60	98.04	0.29	1.29	0.65	0.95	3.25	0.72

Humility is the norm: 2015 PISA Results

- 2015 Program of International Student Assessment (PISA).
- Asian nations and regions are top-performers.
- Asian students reported low scores of self-efficacy, academic self-belief, and ambition in spite of good performance in math and science.
- Humility is the norm among Asians
- American students did not perform well in math and science tests but self-ratings of self-efficacy, academic self-belief, and ambition are very high.

Paradoxical

- Asian parents brag about the ranking of their children's university, but **seldom praise their children** because of fear that this will encourage laziness and ego inflation.
- The norm for the children: **Be humble.**
- “I am very humble and my parents are proud of it!”



Harmony: Family, social, political...

- Asians tend to maintain group harmony (**River crabs**).
- **Avoid confrontation** unless it is absolutely necessary.
- During the 1980s Japanese cars challenged the big three.
- In 1982 two former auto workers who were laid off by Chrysler mis-identified Chinese American Vincent Chin as a Japanese and Chin was beaten to death.
- They were ordered to **pay a \$3000 fine; no jail time**.
- Chin's mother fought and lost the legal battle. The two men were cleared of all charges in 1987.
- **No riot and no further retaliation.**



Harmony and shame/honor

- Asian Americans are less likely to report domestic violence.
- In the past it was socially acceptable for a Korean man to beat his wife.
- Try to accommodate in order to maintain the family integrity. It is perceived that divorce would affect their children.
- Divorce is a stigma.
- **Lowest divorce rate ≠ happy marriage!**

2014 American Community Survey: Divorce or married more than once.

	Females	Males
Asian Americans	18%	16%
White	38%	36%
African Americans	42%	42%
Hispanics/Latinos	30%	27%

Implications for teachers and professors

- Teachers and professors should not lump all Asians or all Chinese people together as a single group. When you encounter a Hong Konger or a Taiwanese, ask the person **what identification is preferable**.
- Encourage Asian students to **study or do something they like**, rather than pleasing their parents only.
- Praise Asian students to boost their **self-image**.
- They are constantly under tremendous pressure. Look for **signs of mental distress** (e.g. suicide attempt, depression, social anxiety, academic anxiety...etc.), and take **proactive actions**.

Implications for social workers and psychotherapists

- Many Asians are unwilling to reveal feelings or personal issues to a therapist. Rather, they turn to their family and close friends for help.
- Looking for professional help is considered “shameful”. Avoid this unless it is absolutely necessary.
- The therapist-client relationship is not seen as a partnership; the therapist is considered the **authority**. If the therapist gives them advice, they tend to listen.
- The Confucian culture and likes the “**middle way**,” not extreme measures (confrontation). Suggest different options and encourage them to choose the “happy medium.”