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Exploring the Relation between Karma, Qi, Spirituality, and Subjective Well-Being among People in Taiwan

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ABSTRACT

In addition to recognizing well-being as a multidimensional construct, the potential indicators of well-being also have been recognized as multivariate. Specifically, some recent studies have suggested that various indices of social beliefs, religious attitudes and spiritual practices have been said to be robustly associated with well-being. Therefore, given the overwhelming need for promoting well-being and an increasing recognition of the multivariate indicators of well-being, this research project attempted to evaluate the relation of Qi, karma, transcendental experiences, and spiritual practices with the subjective well-being of people in Taiwan. The relevant data from the national sample of 1,933 participants were subjected to factor analysis to extract relevant factors, which included social and religious attitudes of karma and Qi, spiritual indicators of transcendental experiences and spiritual practices, and positive indicators of subjective well-being. In addition to significant intercorrelations, the hierarchical regression analyses after controlling for demographics suggested that Qi had the highest contribution to subjective well-being, followed by spiritual practices, karma, and transcendental experiences. These results are discussed, their implications are elucidated, and the directions for future research are suggested.

1. Introduction

As the research in well-being has been growing in recent decades, many attempts have been made to define well-being. One such attempt is that well-being is defined as a global assessment of a person's quality of life according to his own chosen criteria. Other attempts define well-being as a broad ranging quality of life that is affected in a complex way by the person's physical and psychological state, personal beliefs and so-

cial relationships, and the salient features of the environment. Although none of the definitions have fully captured the essence of well-being, most of the researchers now believe that well-being is a multidimensional construct, which may include happiness, satisfaction with life, positive relationships with others, purpose in life, meaningful life, realization of the potential, good life, positive functioning, a state of equilibrium, and flourishing.

Just like that the well-being is a multidimensional construct, the indicators and predictors of well-being also

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have been recognized as multivariate, including sociodemographic characteristics, economic and political aspects, cultural and religious elements, contextual and interpersonal dimensions, intrapersonal and existential aspects, and personality traits. Specifically, some recent studies have suggested that various indices of sociological, religious and spiritual belief systems and practices have been said to be robustly associated with the indicators of well-being.

Therefore, given the widely accepted descriptions of well-being and recognition of the multiple of indicators of well-being, and based on both the strong research evidence for the role of certain indicators in the multidimensionality of well-being and lack of it in some other areas, this research project used the large data pool from a national survey in Taiwan to explore the impact of sociological, religious and spiritual indicators on well-being of people in Taiwan.

2. Literature Review

2.1 Positive Psychology and Well-Being

Based on Aristotle's concept of Eudaimonia and the growing interest in positive psychology in the recent decades, scholars have been rigorously studying well-being^[7,27,44]. For instance, already in late 1960s, Bradburn^[3] had begun his research on psychological well-being in the context of ordinary psychological reactions of people in their daily lives. The major part of Bradburn's research focused on the distinctive variance of positive and negative affect in influencing psychological well-being. His model specified that people will have higher psychological well-being to the degree to which positive affect predominates over negative affect, and vice versa. Like Bradburn's argument, Joseph and Wood^[25] believed that psychiatry has adopted a restricted view of well-being in describing it as an absence of distress and dysfunction, and therefore, they have also called for psychology professions to adopt positive measures of functioning. Shah and Marks^[46] considered well-being to be more than just happiness. For them, well-being means developing as a whole person, being fulfilled, and building a flourishing society.

The evolution of positive psychology further emphasized the role of psychology as not only to study the pathology and weaknesses of people, but also to investigate human strengths, resources, and virtues that people employ in the midst of their daily affairs^[35,42,45]. Gable and Haidt^[14] further explained that positive psychology is the study of the conditions and processes that contribute to the optimal functioning or well-being of people, groups, and institutions. Seligman^[44], the undeniable leader of

the positive psychology movement, thought that the topic of positive psychology is well-being, that the standard for measuring well-being is flourishing, and that the goal of positive psychology is to increase flourishing. Some scholars described well-being as achieving one's goals based on the belief that well-being stems from an individuals' perception of their current situation and their aspirations^[11,12]. Rogers^[40] discussed wellbeing in terms of the good life, because he believed that each individual strives towards becoming a 'fully functioning person' by trusting in his/her own organism and being open to experience.

As the interest in positive psychology and well-being has been increasing, many attempts are also being made to define and describe well-being. Shin and Johnson^[47] stated that well-being is a global assessment of a person's quality of life according to his/her own chosen criteria. This statement is reflected in the well-being literature and research^[38,59]. The World Health Organization^[56] described quality of life as the people's perception of their life in the context of their value systems, goals, and expectations. It is a broad concept, being affected in a complex way by an individual's physical health, psychological state, personal beliefs, social interactions and the features of the environment.

Although none of the definitions or descriptions have fully captured the essence of well-being, most of the researchers now believe that well-being is a multidimensional construct, which may include happiness^[36,3]; satisfaction with life^[8,43]; autonomy, environmental mastery, positive relationships with others, purpose in life, realization of potential, and self-acceptance^[41]; good life^[40]; positive functioning^[25]; a state of equilibrium^[9], and flourishing^[44,46].

Thus, as the literature suggests, researchers for many years have been trying to understand what sort of indicators exactly contribute to well-being, leading to even further confusion whether the multiple well-being models capture the same or distinct indicators of well-being. Consequently, researchers tend to disagree on what constitutes well-being and what specific indicators contribute to well-being, which itself suggests the necessity of accepting well-being as a multidimensional concept that has multiple indicators^[17]. Based on the item contents of this national data set in Taiwan^[13], well-being for this sample of Taiwanese people can be said to be consisting of inner peace and subjective happiness, positive coping, resiliency and hope, comfort, and satisfying interpersonal relations.

2.2 Religiosity, Spirituality and Well-Being

Just like that the well-being is a multidimensional construct, the indicators and predictors of well-being also

have been recognized as multivariate, including socio-demographic characteristics, economic and political aspects, cultural and religious elements, contextual and interpersonal dimensions, intrapersonal and existential aspects, and personality traits^[15]. Recent studies have suggested that various indices of religiosity and spirituality have been said to be robustly associated with well-being^[6,10,19,23,26].

For instance, research studies with medical rehabilitation patients suggested that spirituality^[28] and religiosity^[50] were positively associated with the life satisfaction dimension of subjective well-being. In an adult sample of African Americans, spirituality mediated the relationship between coping style and quality of life^[49]. Among working mothers, intrinsic religiosity and spiritual commitment accounted for a significant variance in the positive affect dimension of well-being^[21]. Thus, as Idler^[23] had said, it could be concluded that the religious, spiritual, and transcendental experiences that are built into the various cycles of life would have a positive effect.

The role of transcendental experiences in well-being warrants a special explanation. Yaden, Haidt, Hood, Vago, and Newberg^[57] did an integrative and organizational review of the self-transcendent experiences. They defined these experiences as the transient mental states marked by increased feelings of connectedness and elevated levels of mental health. In this view, Yaden et al.^[58] say that transcendental experiences do not consist activities or practices that include prayer, meditation, yoga, music, dancing, and many more. Yaden et al.^[57] conclude that these transcendent experiences are pure mental states that increase feelings of well-being. Thus, it is worth considering the role of transcendental experiences in the levels of the participants' well-being.

2.3 Karma and Well-Being

Some major religious traditions, and many folk religious traditions and social belief systems, are centered on the principle of karma^[60,52]. Karma literally means both an "act" and also the "result" of one's action. As a doctrine, karma refers to a cosmic principle by which a person is said to inevitably face the consequences of one's own good or bad deeds both in the past and current lives. Thus, along the logical lines of cause and effect, the doctrine of karma stresses the individual's freedom and responsibility for all of one's actions, resulting in either one's well-being or misfortunes^[1,60]. Anand^[1] thus said that in its fuller sense, karma is an integral doctrine of social and psychological functioning, including a person's cognition, motivation, action, social relations, and consequences. White, Norenzayan, and Schaller^[53] review results also indicated

the value of explicit belief in karma for understanding religion, social cognition, and justice.

However, there is not much research conducted that focused on the karmic beliefs^[33]. A few studies that have included the antecedents and consequences of karma suggested significant outcomes. In the context of illness and health, for instance, the literature review by Anand^[1] indicated that the patients' belief in karma positively correlated with their recovery and psychological well-being. White, Souza, and Prochownik^[54] suggested an evidence for an association between karmic beliefs and prosocial behavior. White, Norenzayan, and Schaller^[53] suggested karmic beliefs might predict social judgments.

Therefore, further examination of people's beliefs about karma is warranted to understand how this particular concept entailing cognition, motivation, and action can affect a wide range of indicators of subjective well-being in the socio-cultural context of Taiwanese people.

2.4 Qi and Well-Being

Qi is generally translated as "vital energy" or "vital life force." Qi is considered as universal, because it is said to embrace all manifestations of energy, including the material and immaterial aspects^[20,30]. Hence, as a vital life force that is universal, the Chinese medical classics suggest that life itself is a gathering of Qi and that the humans, to being life itself, are born with a certain amount of an essential Qi, whose basic elements include genetic endowment, prenatal nutrition, and environment. Thereafter, in order to sustain life, the humans replenish their Qi through meditation, exercise, food and water, and the air. Even the emotional and belief states are important, as they also can influence health and well-being^[30]. Therefore, a healthy and happy life is a dynamic and harmonious integration of all the aspects of Qi. Chinese medical classics also indicate that Qi as a vital force is not only dynamic but it is also in a state of continuous flux from one aspect into another, making the Qi as neither created nor ever destroyed, but only change in its manifestation^[20].

The word "Qigong," which is a combination of two concepts of "Qi" (vital life force or energy) and "gong" (the exercise of working on the Qi), means cultivating energy. The concept of Qigong is based on the Taoist philosophy, and it has been popularly practiced, particularly in China and the Orient, for increasing life vitality and maintaining health. Believing in the Qi theory and practicing Qigong to optimize the flow of energy or Qi within the body is believed to enhance health and well-being by building immunity, resiliency, and the clarity of thought. Thus, as a means of cultivating energy, Qigong refers

to all sorts of mind and body exercises that integrate breathing techniques, physical postures, mind adjustment, and focused intention into one ^[30,32], and thus, it can be sub-classified as spiritual, healing, medical, or martial Qigong ^[30].

The review of research articles reported the positive effects of Qigong on various medical conditions ^[30,32,51] and some of the articles also reported the effectiveness of Qigong on the emotional and psychological well-being ^[22,24,29,32,51]. The meta-analysis by Wang and colleagues ^[51] reported that the psychological benefits the participants mostly experienced were decreased symptoms of depression and improved mood. Improvement of overall quality of life was also reported as one of the frequently mentioned benefits of Qigong. The authors concluded that, in addition to doing breathing exercises and practicing visualization, Qigong practice also involves peer learning, social support, and positive expectation. All these practices, support systems, and cognitive processes could have beneficial effects on psychological well-being.

3. Hypotheses

Therefore, as the literature review has indicated and given the widely accepted descriptions of well-being and number of indicators of well-being, and based on both the strong evidence for certain indicators of well-being and the necessity to explore additional relevant indicators in other cultures and contexts, this research project attempted to evaluate the impact of sociological, religious and spiritual attitudes on well-being among people in Taiwan. Specifically, the socio-religious attitudes included Qi and karma, and the spiritual aspect included transcendental experiences and spiritual practices. This study tested the following specific hypotheses:

1. Appropriate items from the Taiwan national data survey that appeared to have measured the study variables were selected and factor analyzed. Given the data pool with multiple items, it was expected that the respective items would significantly load on the intended study variables, creating relevant and valid measures of Qi, Karma, Transcendental Experiences, Spiritual Practices, and Subjective Well-Being.

2. It was expected that there would be significant positive correlations between the indicators of the study variables, suggesting that the magnitude of the variables increases in relation to the other variables. For example, it was expected that the stronger belief in karma would increase the extent of the use of spiritual practices.

3. After controlling for the important demographics in hierarchical multiple regression analysis, it would be expected that the indicators of karma, Qi, transcendental

experiences, and spiritual practices would significantly contribute to the subjective well-being of people in Taiwan.

4. Method

4.1 Procedure and Participants

This project used the data from the “2014 Taiwan Social Change Survey, Round 6, Year 5: Religion” ^[13]. The total sample consisted of 1,933 participants. As indicated in Table 1, there were 986 males and 947 females, with the age ranging from 19 to 94 and with the mean age of 46. A little over half of the participants ($n = 1114$; 57.6%) were married and had full time jobs ($n = 1003$; 51.9%). About 939 (48.5%) had completed senior high school and below, 256 (13.3%) had some sort of college degree, and 321 (16.6%) had a bachelor’s degree. About half of the participants ($n = 934$; 48.3%) believed in some sort of eclectic and folk religions, followed by Taoism ($n = 301$; 15.6%) and the variations of Buddhism ($n = 288$; 14.9%). There were 200 (10.3%) participants who did not believe in any religion.

4.2 Data Analysis

This research project used the data from Taiwan national survey, conducted by the Academia Sinica ^[13]. The relevant data from the total sample of 1,933 valid participants were subjected to factorial analysis to extract the appropriate study measures. The factorial analyses procedure is explained in the Measures section.

Once the relevant factors and sub-factors were extracted and their reliabilities were tested, the subsequent total measures were tabulated by summing the values on their individual items, and they were further subjected to bivariate correlational analysis to study the strength of the relationship between them. Finally, as it was hypothesized, hierarchical multiple regression analysis was conducted to assess the contribution of the important demographics, followed by karma, qi, transcendental experiences, and spiritual practices to the levels of the participants’ well-being.

4.3 Measures

The data set consisted of 1,933 participants who answered the questions on 85 variables. The variables included a large number of demographics, items on social issues, cultural values and perceptions of different cultures, religious and spiritual beliefs, religious attitudes, personal religious behavior and spiritual practices, beliefs in magic and numerology, behaviors and concepts concerning charitable

Table 1. Demographic Descriptive Statistics

Variable	Frequency (%)	Variable	Frequency (%)
Gender		Job Status	
Male	986 (51.0)	Full time	1003 (51.9)
Female	947 (49.0)	Part time	52 (2.7)
Marital Status		Irregular Jobs	49 (2.5)
Married	1114 (57.6)	Family business	113 (5.9)
Single	560 (29.0)	Unemployed	72 (3.7)
Widowed	132 (6.8)	Student / Trainee	133 (5.9)
Divorced	95 (4.9)	Retired	201 (10.4)
Separated	16 (0.8)	Homemaker	204 (10.5)
Cohabiting	14 (0.7)	Disabled	105 (5.4)
Missing	2 (0.2)	Military	8 (0.4)
Age		On leave	3 (0.2)
Range	19-94 (Mean = 46)	Other	9 (0.5)
Education Level		Religious Affiliation	
Illiterate	86 (4.4)	None	200 (10.3)
Self-study	10 (0.5)	Eclectic (Folk religions)	934 (48.3)
Elementary	261 (13.5)	Buddhism (variations)	288 (14.9)
Junior High	209 (10.8)	Taoism	301 (15.6)
Senior High	469 (24.2)	Protestant	83 (4.3)
College	256 (13.3)	Catholic	19 (1.0)
Technical	182 (9.4)	Yi-guan Dao	39 (2.0)
Bachelors	321 (16.6)	Japanese	7 (0.4)
Masters	121 (6.3)	Unspecified	62 (3.2)
PhD	14 (0.7)		
Other	3 (0.2)		
Missing	1 (0.1)		
N = 1933			

organizations, daily and family life, experiences from childhood, among others. Since this already available data is raw and demographic in nature, this project chose the appropriate data variables and items that represented the respective study variables of well-being, religious beliefs, and spiritual practices. After selecting the appropriate items on specific variables, factor and reliability coefficient analyses (Hypothesis 1) were conducted on these selected items and variables to create the following valid and reliable constructs.

4.3.1 Karma and Qi

The data set had 18 items that measured the participants' social and religious attitudes on 4-point Likert scale, assessing the beliefs from 1 (not at all) to 4 (very much). When these items were subjected to principal component analysis, there were six items that had either low loadings or double loadings, which thus were removed from the analysis. The remaining 12 items were subjected to principal component analysis, which resulted in two significant components, explaining 49.67% of the total variance. The first component, based on the item content, was named as "karma" and consisted of six items with the factor loadings ranging from .54 to .87, explained 36.39% of variance, and had a Cronbach's α of .81. The sample items in this component included, "To meet someone or

be with someone is something that has been predestined in the previous life or several lives before," and "If you do something bad or good, it will affect your destiny later in life." The second component was named as "Qi" and consisted of six items with the factor loadings ranging from .54 to .87, explained 13.28% of additional variance, and had a Cronbach's α of .80. The sample items included, "A person's Qi can be strengthened through cultivation," and "To be healthy physically and psychologically, we have to strike a balance between yin and yang, as well as maintain an adequate blending of the two."

4.3.2 Transcendental Experiences

There were six items in the data set that measured the supernatural experiences on a 4-point Likert scale, ranging from 1 (never) to 4 (often). When these six items were subjected to principal component analysis, they loaded on a single component, with the loadings ranging from .59 to .82 and explained 52.04% of the variance. This component was named as "transcendental experiences" with the sample items consisting of, "Heard God's voice" and "Experienced supernatural healing." This component had a Cronbach's α of .81.

4.3.3 Spiritual Practices

The data set had three items that represented some sort of

belief in spiritual practices, measured on a 4-point Likert scale, ranging from 1 (strongly disagree) to 4 (strongly agree). The principal component analysis suggested a single factor, with the loadings ranging from .71 to .82. This component was named as “spiritual practices,” explained 59.51% of the variance, and had a Cronbach’s α of .67. The sample item in this component included, “It is not necessary to join religious groups for getting closer to Buddha or God. Personal spiritual practices can also make it happen.”

4.3.4 Well-Being

There were six items that assessed the affective states of the participants, measured on a 5-point Likert scale, with the values ranging from 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree). When subjected to principal component analysis, all six items loaded on one component, with the loadings ranging from .64 to .78. Because of the positive affective nature of the items, this component was named as “well-being,” explained 51.92% of the variance, and had a Cronbach’s α of .81. Sample items in this component included, “Feel inner peace and happiness” and “Gain comfort in times of trouble and sorrow.”

4.3.5 Demographics

Demographic questions included the participants’ gender, age, marital status, education level, job status, and religious affiliation.

5. Results

5.1 Factorial Analyses and Reliability Coefficients

To investigate Hypothesis 1 and as indicated in Measures part of the Method section, the relevant data from 1,933 participants were subjected to exploratory factorial analyses to reduce the already available data items to obtain the coherent study measures that capture a linear combinations of raw items in explaining most of the shared variance in that particular construct^[34]. With the item loadings set to .50 and above, the analyses resulted in two measures of socio-religious attitudes (karma and Qi), two spirituality-related measures (transcendental experiences and spiritual practices), and one measure of subjective well-being.

The items on the relevant study measures extracted from exploratory factor analyses were then subjected to reliability tests to determine their internal consistency in forming an appropriate scale that measures the underlying intended construct. Based on the review of the psychometrics, Pallant^[34] suggested that the reliability coefficient

of a scale should be .70 and above. However, Pallant also said that the reliability coefficients might be smaller with fewer items, such as less than 10 items, because the reliability coefficient is an indicator of the mean inter-item correlations and so the values are sensitive to the number of items in the scale. As explained in Measures part of the Method section and as indicated in Table 2, the reliability coefficients for the study scales ranged from .67 to .81. Four measures had .80 and above coefficients and one had a value of .67, very close to the recommended .70 value. Overall, this acceptable range of reliability coefficients indicates that the items appropriately make up the respective scales in assessing the intended construct.

5.2 Intercorrelations

As indicated in Table 2, all the intercorrelations (Hypothesis 2) were significant with the values ranging from .14 to .46, representing small to medium effect sizes (small effect, $r = .10$ to $.29$; medium effect, $r = .30$ to $.49$, and the large effect, $r = .50$ to 1.0). Specifically, Qi had the highest positive correlation with Spiritual Practices, $r = .46$, $p < .001$, suggesting that the cultivation of Qi is in some sense a spiritual practice and vice versa. As expected, the socio-religious attitudes of Karma and Qi were significantly correlated, $r = .41$, $p < .001$, suggesting that those who believe that the current behavior and lifestyle would affect the next life tend to see the importance of practice of Qigong and the cultivation of balance between yin and yang. All the major variables were also significantly and positively correlated with subjective well-being, suggesting that the levels of well-being vary simultaneously with the karma and Qi attitudes, spiritual practices, and transcendental experiences.

Table 2. Reliability Coefficients, Means, Standard Deviations, and Intercorrelations

Variables	α	$M (SD)$	1	2	3	4	5
1. Karma	.81	16.15 (4.13)	---	.41**	.14**	.25**	.32**
2. Qi	.80	11.68 (4.04)		---	.15**	.46**	.38**
3. Transcendental Experiences	.81	6.59 (1.85)			---	.16**	.17**
4. Spiritual Practices	.67	6.62 (2.53)				---	.36**
5. Well-Being	.81	20.57 (5.66)					---
$N = 1933$; ** $p < .001$.							

Hierarchical multiple regression was used to access (Hypothesis 3) the ability of demographics, karma, Qi, transcendental experiences, and spiritual practices to predict the levels of subjective well-being. The results are

presented in Table 3. Important demographic variables, including religious affiliation, were controlled for in Step 1 of the hierarchical regression, which were significant, $F(9, 1923) = 27.01, p < .001, R^2 = .08$. Except the marital status, all the demographic variables significantly contributed to the well-being, with the religious affiliation having the highest contribution ($\beta = .18, p < .001$), followed by education level ($\beta = .14, p < .001$).

When the major predictor variables were simultaneously entered in Step 2 of the regression analysis, the overall model was significant, $F(7, 1916) = 116.30, p < .001, R^2 = .29$, explaining an additional 21% of the variance in well-being, after controlling for demographic variables. On inspection of the variables' individual contribution to well-being in Step 2, Qi had the highest contribution ($\beta = .15, p < .001$), followed by spiritual practices ($\beta = .14, p < .001$), karma ($\beta = .11, p < .001$), and transcendental experiences ($\beta = .08, p < .001$).

Table 3. Results of Regression Analyses on Well-Being

Steps and Variables	F	R ²	β	t	95% Confidence Intervals
Step 1	27.01**	.08			
Gender			.09	3.87**	.474 to 1.450
Age			.07	3.23*	.002 to .009
Marital Status			.02	.66	-.155 to .077
Education Level			.14	5.55**	.075 to .157
Occupation			.09	3.90**	-.175 to -.058
Religious Affiliation			.18	7.96**	.040 to .066
Step 2	116.30**	.29			
Gender			.06	3.11*	.252 to 1.114
Age			.03	1.68	.000 to .006
Marital Status			.01	.05	-.105 to .100
Education Level			.12	5.01**	.059 to .136
Occupation			.04	1.89	-.103 to .002
Religious Affiliation			.11	5.54**	.021 to .045
Karma			.11	4.79**	.080 to .190
Qi			.15	6.12**	.138 to .267
Transcendental Experiences			.08	3.98**	.122 to .360
Spiritual Practices			.14	6.16**	.215 to .415
N = 1933; **p < .001; *p < .01.					

6. Discussion

This exploratory quantitative research project investigated the relation of karma, Qi, transcendental experiences, and spiritual practices to the subjective well-being of general population in Taiwan over and beyond the selected demographic variables. The significant results are discussed in

the following paragraphs.

6.1 Intercorrelations

The bivariate correlational analysis indicated a significant correlation between karma and Qi. As a vital life force, Qi is a manifestation of energy in different forms, both material and immaterial [20,30]. The principle of karma is understood as both a deed and the consequence of such a deed [1]. Thus, the relation between Qi and karma is interpreted as that of the universal manifestations of energies affecting us from specific patterns based on karma from our both past and current lives [16]. Goldman [16] says that on the physical side some people look fairly healthy but experience certain strange illnesses that nobody is able to figure out. On the internal side, some people have lots of recurring conflicts in their lives that just seem to make no sense. Some of these various problems could have been caused by bad karma from the past life. In other words, the bad fruits and negative consequences of karma from the past life are transferred as a source of negative information into the current life's vital force or energy field, causing both physical problems and internal conflicts. Goldman [16] says that once the residual negative energy information from the past life is cleared, the bad karma-induced health or other problems lessen or disappear. The same could be said of the good karma in the past life, which would have been transferred as a positive energy into the current life, and which can be increased or balanced through the practice of Qigong.

Qi and spiritual practices were significantly correlated. According to the Chinese medical classics, the life itself is a gathering of Qi or vital energy. In order to both gather and sustain this vital energy, people have to replenish it through various practices of Qi [20]. One such known practice is Qigong, which is also sub-classified as a spiritual practice [30]. Hence, it is evident from this research results that Qi and spiritual practices are significantly correlated due to the exercise of Qigong viewed as a spiritual practice in replenishing the vital energy. The content of the scale items also indicate that a person's Qi can be strengthened through cultivation of Qigong and the personal spiritual practices that focus on Qi also help to replenish the vital energy. In fact, the experts view Qigong through three broad categories. The first is medical Qigong, which is practiced to heal self and others, and from which acupuncture, herbal medicine and massage are originated. The second is martial Qigong, which focuses on physical prowess, and the third is spiritual Qigong, which is practiced to attain enlightenment. The spiritual practice of Qigong uses mantras (sacred chanting), mudras (hand positions), silent sitting meditations, and prayers to pursue

self-awareness, tranquility, and harmony with nature and self, leading to the final enlightenment^[39].

6.2 Regression Analyses

In addition to the significant correlations, the hierarchical regression results also indicated that some of the important demographics and all the independent variables were significant in predicting the participants' subjective well-being levels. Among the demographics, religious affiliation and education had the highest contribution to well-being, respectively. Studies have indicated that people who have a religious faith or identify as religious tend to report higher levels of both physical and subjective well-being, regardless of any particular religious affiliation or specific religious activities. Overall, the ideological underpinnings of religious beliefs and a greater sense of coherence that flows from such beliefs may result in better psychological well-being^[18]. Therefore, based on the content analysis of the items that created subjective well-being, it could be said that people who are affiliated to some sort of religion tend to find inner peace and happiness, gain comfort in times of trouble or sorrow, have hope for a better future, and find satisfaction through positive social interactions.

Education levels also showed a significant contribution to well-being. Studies have shown some specific mechanisms linking education and various outcomes^[5]. Some scholars^[4,5] referred to these as the absolute, relative, and cumulative mechanisms. The absolute mechanism implies that education has a direct effect on well-being through development of embodied resources and capabilities, elevated reasoning power and analysis, increasing productive capacity and the sense of success. The relative mechanism proposes that the effects of education on well-being depend on an individual's level of education in relation to others. In other words, if the absolute mechanism has to do with developing resources and capabilities, the relative mechanism is relevant for defining social relations and social status. The cumulative mechanism proposes that the effect of education on well-being is conditional on the average level of education of the peers or surrounding groups. In addition to these mechanisms, Desjardins^[5] proposed the role of agency in explaining the link between education and well-being. Agency is referred to an individual's capacity to choose and to act. Therefore, it appears that the people who receive education possess the intellectual and psycho-social capabilities, which are important in shaping decisions and behaviors that are associated with the positive outcomes, including well-being.

After controlling for the important demographics in the first step of the regression analysis, all the independent variables were significant in predicting well-being. Qi had

the highest contribution to well-being. As the vital life force, Qi is said to be the manifestation of energy in life, both in its material and immaterial forms. As an immaterial form of energy, Qi contributes to the social, internal, and subjective form of well-being. The belief in and the mindset around Qi and its related concepts and practices, such as Qigong, appear to influence physical health and psychological well-being^[30]. In particular, the research has reported, that the belief in Qi and the practice of Qigong optimize the flow of both physical and mental energy, which in turn, enhance the positivity and well-being through the mechanism of creating positive cognitions, improving the clarity of thought, developing openness to view things in a new way, and generating energy to learn new things and to engage in new behaviors^[32,51].

For instance, based on the conceptualization of Qi in this study, it could be said that people who embrace the concept of Qi and practice it through Qigong, believe that the cultivation of Qi can cure physical diseases; acquiring strong Qi can ward off all harms, and learning to adequately blend the yin and yang can create a healthy balance between them. In fact, viewing the universe as a big magnetic field and considering an individual in the universe as a small magnetic field summons for a harmonious connection of the individual with the universe. The universe is said to be permeated by the vital life force (Qi) and the individual is expected to gather the Qi that is essential for his or her life from the universal Qi. Such a continuous gathering of vital Qi ultimately leads one to have a better physical and psychological well-being.

Karma also significantly contributed to well-being. The doctrine of karma attributes the quality of a person's life to that person's freedom in and responsibility for all the actions^[1]. In other words, karma is a cause-effect belief by which a person inevitably has to face the consequences of one's own good or bad deeds, both from the past and current life. Thus, intuitively, people who strongly believe in the doctrine of karma should be more likely to engage in good deeds with an expectation of reaping relevant karmic rewards^[31], which could be the subjective experience of well-being, as indicated in this research.

Like belief in gods, belief in karma may be a socially-relevant teleological thinking with a tendency to ascribe purpose to life events and natural phenomena^[55]. Ascribing purpose to life events and natural phenomena, even if they are the results of bad karma, appears to put a positive spin to even the explicit karmic endorsements such as the statements in this study: "to meet someone or be with someone is something that has been predestined in the previous life or several lives before," or "marrying the wrong person is a debt from a previous life." That is,

ascribing a positive attribution to pre-destined life events and giving the agnatic traits to karma seem to have some specific positive consequences^[37] to the participants in terms of relationship satisfaction, positive emotions, and resiliency that emerged as the specific indicators of well-being in this particular research study.

Spiritual practices and transcendental experiences also made a significant contribution to well-being. Research has indicated that spirituality, as both a belief system and dynamic construct, involves an internal process that seeks personal authenticity and wholeness in deriving meaning and purpose in life, and thus become an inner source from which flow the aspects of well-being^[2]. Thus, the participants in this study appeared to have agreed that spiritual growth is a part of self-growth that is both personal and internal to an extent that it is not necessary to join religious groups to become connected with God but rather spiritual practices are sufficient to experience God, get in touch with one's potential ability and even discover the supernatural power that acts as an inner source of subjective well-being. In other words, spirituality as a belief and dynamic process in seeking personal authenticity and inner potential assists individuals to tap into the sources of inner peace, happiness, comfort, hope, and optimism, which are generally considered as the relevant indicators of subjective well-being.

After controlling for religious affiliation, transcendental experiences were also the source of well-being for the participants in this study. That is, irrespective of religious affiliation, participants' concrete transcendental experiences described in the forms of being possessed by gods or filled with the spirits, having the visions of gods or sacred deities, hearing god's voice, and experiencing some sort of supernatural healing, increase the levels of subjective well-being. In other words, people who have transcendental experiences also lead a life of inner peace, happiness, comfort, hope, and optimism, and tend to establish healthy social contacts that lead to relationship satisfaction.

Spilka, Hood, and Gorsuch^[48] say that the transcendental experiences may or may not have a religious or holy connotation. But, the transcendental experiences that are perceived as having contact or union with a transcendent or ultimate divine reality are known as mystical experiences, as is the case of the participants in this study. Transcendental experiences in their mystical form have several key characteristics, some of which include: a profound sense of unity; a sense that the experience is noetic; a sense that the experience is holy or spiritual; a sense of ineffability or impossibility of describing the experience in words, and the presence of positive affect^[48]. Intuitively, the presence of noetic sense and positive feelings

contained in the participants' transcendental experiences assist them in elevating their well-being.

6.3 Implications and Conclusions

An increasing number of contemporary scholars and professionals in the interdisciplinary area of positive psychology and well-being are moving beyond the restrictive view of well-being as an absence of distress and dysfunction to an elaborate view that adopts multiple measures of positive functioning. In this sense, well-being entails developing as a whole person, making a contribution to the community, and building a flourishing society, which are achieved through investigating and promoting human strengths and virtues and resources that people employ in the midst of their daily chores. In other words, just like the concept of well-being is viewed as a multidimensional construct, so also the indicators and predictors of well-being have also been recognized as multidimensional, including relevant demographic factors, political and economic aspects, cultural and social elements, religious and spiritual dimensions, contextual and interpersonal aspects, and personality traits. Under this premise, this research explored the relation of the socio-religious attitudes of karma and Qi and the spiritual aspects of spiritual practices and transcendental experiences with the subjective experience of well-being.

The significant results from this study validate the general view of positive relation between the social aspects of religious beliefs and the subjective experience of well-being. But, the findings from this study that the rarely investigated socio-religious attitudes of karma and Qi significantly relate to well-being add further evidence to expanding the scope of research investigation beyond the Western-oriented social practices and religious traditions that include non-Western samples. For example, the social and religious belief in the doctrine of karma forms the core value of millions of people in the world, particularly those who are affiliated with some major religious traditions, such as Buddhism and Hinduism, various folk religions, and even with those who do not profess belief any organized religion or atheists. When people endorse that their karmic beliefs strongly influence their past, present, and future lives, the necessity to investigate such a belief in the context of promoting their current healthy functioning and well-being is warranted. Moreover, when karma literally means both an act and the result of one's action, it seems obvious to help people examine their cognitions, motivations, behaviors and morals, and how all these impact their well-being.

Another socio-religious attitude that is infrequently studied and yet makes a significant contribution to the

overall well-being of people is the concept of Qi and the practice of Qigong. Although Qi is understood from the perspective of Chinese medical classics and thus certain people throughout the world, particularly in the orient, professionalize themselves in this field and practice it for various medical reasons, the results of this study also suggest that Qi can be non-associated with any particular religion or belief system and thus promote it as a useful source of well-being. For example, the concept of Qi indicates that the humans are born with a certain amount of essential positive Qi, which can be increased through the cultivation of the basic elements, such as acceptance of genetic endowment, eating healthy, creating conducive environment, and learning to deal with stress through positive thoughts and behaviors.

Time and again research studies have reported the importance of spirituality and spiritual practices to healthy psychological functioning and subjective well-being. In particular, transcendent and mystical experiences appear to be part of many people's spiritual lives that create meaning and purpose, and elevate well-being. But, such experiences are neither easily comprehended nor assuredly explained by those who go through them, and they are neither easily accepted nor clearly understood by others. Yet, people go through them more often than people can imagine, and hence, such experiences need to be affirmed and validated, and their impact on overall well-being of people who encounter them has to be recognized.

Finally, on the one hand, this exploratory research study has affirmed the relation of general religiosity and spirituality to well-being, and on the other hand, further validated the necessity of investigating the underexplored indicators of well-being, such as karma, Qi, and transcendental experiences. Yet, this research has its own limitations. First of all, the measures used in this study were derived from the items in relevant categories from a national data pool. Even though the factor analyses indicated reliable scale coefficients, thus suggesting that the measures would have assessed the intended construct, it would be warranted to replicate these results by using the same measures with different populations and thus replicate their reliability. Second, most of the variables fall in the domains of Eastern societies, religious beliefs, and spiritual practices. Thus, although the results are significant due to the control of religious affiliation of the participants, it would be better if these results are replicated with people in the West who endorse different social values and mostly believe in Christianity and its denominations. Third, differences for religious affiliation using the similar measures could be tested in the future studies. This study was not able to test this hypothesis due to the unequal number

of participants in various religious groups, particularly a small number of participants in the Catholic and Christian groups. Finally, it should be noted that the analyses in this study were correlational and regression in nature, and therefore, causal mechanisms cannot be established.

As a brief conclusion, it can be said that in spite of its specific limitations, the significant results from this study once again endorse the importance of socio-religious and spiritual indicators of multidimensional well-being, irrespective of religious affiliation and geographical location. In particular, the relation of karma and Qi with well-being needs to be emphasized and further investigated. The results would also help the professionals, particularly in the fields of education, social work, and psychotherapy, in designing suitable courses, workshops, and in implementing appropriate interventions to assist the needy and to promote the overall subjective well-being of people in Taiwan.

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