Religion and Wellbeing in Hong Kong: Statistical Analysis of Hong Kong Dataset 2013 of World Value Survey

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Abstract

　　宗教與個人及社會的幸福感的關係是社會學中重要的課題之一，相關研究最早可追溯至涂爾幹(Emile Durkheim)的自殺論(*Le Suicide*)。他試圖從一個地方的宗教設施的分佈及社會整體的宗教參與度去解釋該地的自殺率和社會問題。時至今日，為數不少的實証研究已探索出宗教因素對主觀幸福感(subjective wellbeing)的正面影響。然而，大多數研究都以深受基督教文明影響的國家為對象，宗教和主觀幸福感在中國社會中的關係仍然模糊不清。因此，本文嘗試使用第六次世界價值觀調查中的香港數據(2013 年)，分析宗教的四個向度─「宗教所屬」(affiliation)，「宗教實踐」(practices)，「宗教信念」(belief)，及「宗教參與度」(degree of engagement)，對香港人的主觀幸福感會否產生影響。結果顯示「宗教所屬」、「宗教實踐」、以及「宗教信念」與主觀幸福感並無正面關係。雖然「屬於基督教」和主觀幸福感有負面的連繫，高的「宗教參與度」和主觀幸福感有正面的關係。另外，其他社會屬性如年齡、性別、學歷、健康、階層與主觀幸福感也有顯著的關係。

Introduction

Sociological studies of the relationships between religion and well-being of individuals and societies can be traced to the work of Durkheim ([1897] 1951), who attempts to relate suicide rate and other forms of social pathology to the distribution of religious denominations and collective religious involvement. Recently, a large amount of empirical studies have attempted to explore the effects of religion on subjective well-being (SWB). Some of the widely accepted mechanisms include: (1) religion to promote social integration and support, (2) religion as psychological resource, (3) religion as coping mechanism, (4) and religion to promote a healthy lifestyle (Ellison 1991). However, most of these studies are conducted in societies where Christianity is the dominant religion. It remains unclear how religion maybe related to SWB in the Chinese contexts, and which aspects of religion are related to SWB in these societies. Using the World Value Survey 6th Wave Hong Kong Dataset 2013, this paper attempts to explore which aspects of religion— affiliation, practice, belief, or degree of engagement, play a more significant role in the SWB of Hong Kong people. The effects of demographic factors are also examined. This research also contributes to the studies of SWB in Hong Kong.

Subjective Well-being in Hong Kong

Subjective well-being (SWB) refers to how people experience the quality of their lives and includes both emotional reactions and cognitive judgments (Diener 1984). It is defined as a combination of life satisfaction and the relative frequency of positive and negative affect (Diener et al. 1999). The study of SWB is becoming popular globally because it is an important

indicator of quality of life. Researchers and policy makers generally believed that a better understanding of SWB of a given society is an important key to social policy design and improvement of society's prosperity and stability (Cooper 2014).

Recently, SWB has also drawn a lot of scholarly attention in Hong Kong. A quick review of the current literatures indicates that there are some primary surveys examining the SWB of particular age groups or secondary analysis of national surveys, such as the World Value Survey (WVS), to examine factors that affect SWB. For example, Chou's studies (1999), based on a sample of 475 young adults, found that social support (including social network size, social contact frequency, satisfaction with social support, instrumental support, and helping others) is significantly related to the SWB of young adults aged 16-19. Shek and Li (2014), using a three-wave longitudinal study, examined the SWB of adolescents in the junior secondary school years. One of their interesting findings is that academic and school competence positively predicted life satisfaction; time spent in tutoring was positively related to a sense of "hopelessness" of the participants. Besides, based on a standardized questionnaire on the elderly that incorporates self-report measures of well-being, demographic data, and social network, Boey (1998) discovered a significant gender differences in all measures of SWB. Besides, the overall findings indicate that family network and interdependent support make greater contributions to the psychological well-being of the old couples in Hong Kong than their network of friends.

Apart from the above studies, there are a few researches that attempt to approach the topic of SWB from the perspective of religion and spirituality. For instance, Lun and Bond (2013), using the national survey WVS 2005 dataset, showed that both life satisfaction and happiness were positively associated with many measures of religion and spirituality. In addition to this, based on a community sample of older women (N = 180, mean age = 74.2 years), Boey (2003) found that (1) Catholics and Buddhists appeared to enjoy a better mental health status, which seemed to be mediated by better family supports and physical health condition; and (2) subjective feelings that religious faith was a source of strength and comfort, and that it would help in times of difficulty were significantly associated with psychological wellbeing. Their studies suggested that religious factors may have positive effects on SWB and therefore cannot be underestimated in the sociological studies of well-being. In order to further examine the effects of various religious factors on SWB, the latest wave of WVS Hong Kong dataset is analyzed in this paper. Four dimensions of religion, namely, religious affiliation, practice, belief, and degree of engagement are examined. This paper is a modest attempt to contribute to the literatures on SWB, especially its relations with religion in Hong Kong society.

Religion and Well-being: Theoretical Background

It is generally argued that religion is related to wellbeing through a number of mechanisms. First of all, religious communities are important sources of *social integration and supports*. Through regular interaction with coreligionists, friendships are formed among like-minded persons. Besides, many religious groups provide formal supports, such as church programs (e.g.

for elders, the poor, homeless) and pastoral counseling. Informal supports are also usually available among members, through tangible aid (e.g. goods and services), affective supports (e.g. companionship and comfort), and spiritual support. Social integration and supports among coreligionists maybe more reliable and satisfying due to the shared beliefs about suffering, altruism, and reciprocity among members (McIntosh & Alston 1982; Maton 1987; Maton & Rappaport 1984; Taylor & Chatters 1988). Therefore, it is widely argued that higher religious participation can lead to higher SWB.

Religion are also valuable *psychological resources* for believers. Individuals may gain a sense of self-worth and control by developing an ongoing personal relationship with a divine other, who is believed to love and care for each person unconditionally and can be engaged interactively in a quest for solace and guidance (Ellison, Gay & Glass 1989; Idler 1987; Watson, Morris, and Hood 1988). However, it is also found that while belief in heaven is consistently associated with greater happiness and life satisfaction, belief in hell is associated with lower happiness and life satisfaction (Shariff and Aknin 2014). Therefore, different religious beliefs may have positive or negative effects on SWB.

Besides, religious practices, such as attending services and making prayers, may have complex effects on SWB. Prayer, for example, can be perceived as a means of communicating with the divine being, showing adoration, confession, thanksgiving, supplication, reception, or obligation (Whittington & Scher 2010). It is argued that three forms of prayer (adoration, thanksgiving, reception) had consistently positive relations with well-being measures, whereas the other three forms of prayer had negative or null relations with the well-being measures. This suggests the relationships between religious practices and well-being are rather complicated.

Religious cognitions and behaviors are common and valuable *coping* resources. In particular, religious coping is important for persons dealing with loss events, unexpected calamities, and health problems. (Foley 1988; Pollner 1989; Pargament 1997). On the other hand, a negative religious worldview, such as fatalism, may reduce subjective wellbeing. For instance, four Former Soviet Countries shows a significant correlation between fatalism and low Mental Health (Goodwin & Allen 2002). In Taiwan, belief in *karma* is associated with a lower sense of mastery (Liu 2009); and supernatural belief (e.g. destiny) is associated with psychological distress (Liu et al. 2011).

Some scholars argued that religion could be a driving force to encourage people to engage in society in the forms of volunteer works (Sakurai & Inaba 2014). In the process, believers develop new social networks, experience moral and spiritual growth, and realize that their efforts are contributive to the betterment of society and the spread of gospel.

Some scholars argue that secular organizations can also fulfill similar functions. However, many religious resources have distinctive qualities that secular organizations may not be able to offer, such as religious practice and meaning (Ellison & George 1994), and a sense of social identity generated by religious teachings (Haslam et al. 2009:11). To distinguish the effects of religion from other social networks, Lim and Putnam (2010: 927) went further to argue, "in terms of life satisfaction, it is neither faith nor communities, per se, that are important, but

communities of faith" because "praying together" seems to be better than either "bowling together" or "praying alone" (Lim & Putnam 2010: 927).

We should note that, however, the above ideas are largely based on studies of Christendom. Empirical studies on the relationships between wellbeing and religion in Chinese societies, especially Hong Kong are still inadequate. This is the purpose of this paper to examine whether these "religion-SWB" mechanisms can be found in Hong Kong. The following five hypotheses are derived from previous studies of religion and SWB and will be tested in my analysis.

Hypotheses

H1: Affiliation to religion will be associated with higher life satisfaction.

H2: Higher rates of religious practices will be associated with higher life satisfaction.

H3: Believing in the existence of a divine being will be associated with higher life satisfaction.

H4: Believing in the existence of an undesirable afterlife will be associated with lower life satisfaction.

H5: Higher participation in religion will be associated with higher life satisfaction.

Data and Measurement

Data

Data for this study are taken from 6th wave World Value Survey (WVS) Hong Kong Datasets 2013. I use this dataset because it includes a special set of items on religious affiliations, beliefs, practice, participation not asked in the previous survey in 2005. It also contains a measurement of SWB, namely *life satisfaction*. In addition, it also includes information on demographic and background characteristics, which allows us to examine their effects on SWB.

Dependent Variables

Two indicators of SWB, *life satisfaction* and *happiness*, have received much scholarly attention in social studies. Happiness refers to the presence of positive experiences and feelings (enjoyment, feeling well-rested, smiling or laughing), and/or the absence of negative experiences and feelings (pain, worry or sadness). It is a relatively transient assessments of wellbeing. In contrast, life satisfaction measures how people evaluate their life as a whole rather than their current feelings. It captures a relatively stable evaluation of life circumstances and conditions. While both indicators are included in the 2013 dataset, this paper adopts "life satisfaction" as our measurement of well-being because it tends to give a more general evaluation of one's life. In the survey, respondents were asked to indicate their life satisfaction from 1 (completely not satisfied) to 10 (completely satisfied).

Religious variables

The effects of religion are examined from four distinct perspectives: (1) religious affiliations, (2) religious practices, (3) religious belief, and (4) religious engagement. *Religious affiliations* is

measured by a set of dummy variables identifying the major religions or religious denominations found in Hong Kong: Buddhist (11.3%), Christian (15.7%), Hindu (0.1%), Muslim (0.1%), Roman Catholic (3.1%), and others (1.1%). Since response rates for Hindu, Muslim, and others are relatively small, they are grouped under the category "others". Christian and Roman Catholic are grouped under the category "Christianity" for they share similar religious traditions, and the fact that respond rate for Roman Catholic is not particularly high. Around 68.5% people reported no religious affiliation. They are the comparison group in the regression equations. In terms of limitations, this question may not be able to capture those religion that are less institutionalized, such as folk religion (e.g. worship of Tu-di gong/earth god and Chai-shen/god of wealth etc.) In fact, the author believe that among those 68.5% who reported having "no religion", not few of them may actually practice or believe in some kind of folk religion. In order not to miss out these religiosities, other variables have to be adopted in the analysis.

Religious Practices are measured based on two questions: (1) "Apart from weddings and funerals, about how often do you attend religious services these days? (0 = never, 96= more than once a week). (2) "Apart from weddings and funerals, about how often do you pray?" (0 = never, 1095 = several times a day). The answers for these two questions are modified in a way to approximately reflect the frequency of attending religious services and making prayer in one year. These two items allow us to measure the religious practices of respondents regardless of their religious affiliation.

Religious Beliefs are measured based on six questions: "(1) Independently of whether you attend religious services or not, would you say you are an atheist or religious person?" (0 = atheist or not religious, 1 = religious). "(2) How important is God in your life?" (0 = not at all important, 10 = very important) "(3) Do you believe in God?" (0 = no, 1 = yes). (4) "Do you believe in hell?" (0 = no, 1 = yes). "With which one of the following statements do you agree most? The basic meaning of religion is?" (5) To follow religious norms and ceremonies (= 0) or to do good to other people (= 1), and (6) to make sense of life after death (= 0) or to make sense of life in this world (= 1). These six questions can capture the different aspects of religious beliefs. For instance, question 1 and 2 ask respondents to identify themselves as atheist or religious, and evaluate the importance of god in their life. Question 3 and 4 examine whether one believes in the existence of a divine being and hell. Question 5 to 6 assess the basic meaning of religion perceived by respondents, whether it is "dogmatic or practical" and "life-oriented or death oriented". The use of a wide range of items enables us to examine the effects of different religious beliefs on SWB. In addition, respondents not identifying themselves with any religion or religious denomination or not practicing any religion (neither attending services nor making prayer) do not necessarily mean that they do not possess some kind of religious beliefs. Therefore, these questions help us capture the religious beliefs held by respondents regardless of their religious affiliation and practice, thereby allowing us to distinguish the effects of *affiliation, practice,* and *beliefs*.

Religious engagement is measured based on the question: "Now I am going to read off a list

of voluntary organizations. For each organization, could you tell me whether you are an active member, an inactive member or not a member of that type of organization?" As the option "religion" is included in the list, it is able to assess whether the respondents is actively engaged in religion or not (0 = not a member or inactive member, 1 = active member). However, it is unfortunate that the question itself does not offer any additional information to the definition of the term "active", although this adjective has to be defined more precisely for the sake of academic discussion. Nevertheless, according to our common sense and usage of this adjective, an "active member of religion" can at least be understood as someone who spends much time and efforts in the organization, participates in more activities (not only services) organized by the group, and enjoys a larger social networks within the group. In other words, this question allows us to differentiate respondents who reported themselves to be actively engaged in religion (and therefore tend to spend more time in social and organizational activities and enjoys a larger social network with the group) from those who do not belong to or are just inactive members of religious organizations.

Background variables

Demographic factors may exert some effects on SWB. Therefore, a number of background variables are controlled in our studies. They include gender (1 = female), age (in years), education (1 = received higher education), employment (1 = unemployed), and marital status (1 = married). As health conditions may affect SWB as well, state of health (1 = bad) is also included. In addition to these factors, the question concerning voluntary organizations requires the respondents to indicate, one by one, whether they are active members of 10 different types of secular organizations or not. This allows us to compare the effect of actively participating in religious groups and in secular organizations on wellbeing. To improve the comparability of these variables, the 10 secular organizations listed in the question are combined into 3 groups based on their similarity using the factor analysis (maximum likelihood estimation, promax rotation) (details not shown here). Group A refers to "sports or recreational organization" and "arts, music, or educational organization". Group B combines "labor union" and "political party". Group C represents "environmental organization", "professional association", "humanitarian and charitable organization", "consumer organization", "self-help and mutual-aid group", and "others". In addition, the factor analysis also suggests "religious organization" is different from the above secular groups and should be dealt with independently.

Table 1. Descriptive statistics for variables

	Min	Max	Mean	SD
Life satisfaction	1	10	6.849	1.839
Sex (female = 1)	0	1	0.545	0.498
Age	18	85	44.666	16.434
Lower class	0	1	0.348	0.476
Bad health	0	1	0.055	0.228
High education	0	1	0.291	0.454
Married	0	1	0.615	0.487
Unemployed	0	1	0.051	0.220
Religious affiliation				
Christian	0	1	0.188	0.391
Buddhist	0	1	0.114	0.318
Other religion	0	1	0.013	0.114
Religious practices				
Attending religious services	0	96	8.431	21.985
Pray	0	1095	95.910	264.016
Belief and meaning of religion				
Religious	0	1	0.200	0.400
Importance of god	1	10	4.855	2.826
Belief in god	0	1	0.587	0.493
Belief in hell	0	1	0.498	0.500
To do good to others	0	1	0.733	0.443
To explain life in this world	0	1	0.666	0.472
Active member of volunteer organizations				
Church or Religious Organization	0	1	0.124	0.330
Group A: Sports, recreational/ arts, music or educational organization	0	1	0.190	0.393
Group B: Labour union/ political party	0	1	0.064	0.245
Group C: Environmental, professional, humanitarian or charity/ consumer/ self-help/ other	0	1	0.183	0.387

N=1000

Results

Table 1 presents descriptive statistics. Life satisfaction has a mean of 6.849, indicating a middle-high level of SWB in overall Hong Kong society. Self-reported Christians and Buddhists are 18.8% and 11.4%. The basic results of other background variables, religious practices, beliefs, and engagement in volunteer organizations are also shown. Table 2 is the bivariate correlations of these variables. It shows that life satisfaction has correlations with most background variables as well as some religious variables. Moreover, background variables and religious variables are correlated on many occasions. Therefore, it is necessary to control the effects of these variables and examine their independent effects on SWB.

Table 2. Bivariate Correlations

	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13	14	15	16	17	18	19	20	21	22	23
1	1.000***																						
2	0.089**	1.000***																					
3	0.043	-0.035	1.000***																				
4	-0.140***	0.192***	-0.034	1.000***																			
5	-0.145***	0.156***	0.058+	0.153***	1.000***																		
6	0.037	-0.406***	-0.099**	-0.211***	-0.086**	1.000***																	
7	-0.077*	0.007	-0.013	0.095**	0.127***	-0.088**	1.000***																
8	0.089***	0.410***	0.030	-0.014	-0.010	-0.207***	-0.093***	1.000***															
9	-0.027	-0.044	0.025	-0.078*	-0.002	0.130***	0.032	-0.081*	1.000***														
10	-0.009	0.176***	0.018	0.068*	0.126***	-0.102*	0.020	0.014	-0.173***	1.000***													
11	0.082*	0.032	-0.002	-0.010	-0.028	0.005	-0.027	0.019	-0.056+	-0.042	1.000***												
12	0.006	-0.024	0.096**	-0.104**	0.050	0.120***	0.008	-0.038	0.613***	-0.049	0.064*	1.000***											
13	0.025	0.004	0.085**	-0.056+	0.044	0.109***	0.000	-0.006	0.564***	-0.032	0.069*	0.616***	1.000***										
14	0.038	0.063+	0.013	-0.026	0.069*	-0.003	0.027	0.003	0.426***	0.135***	0.069*	0.439***	0.461***	1.000***									
15	0.024	-0.005	0.093**	0.003	0.055+	0.062+	0.077*	-0.069*	0.480***	0.047	0.143***	0.390***	0.388***	0.436***	1.000***								
16	0.019	-0.056+	0.083**	0.005	0.048	0.092**	0.069*	-0.076*	0.342***	0.093***	0.110***	0.250***	0.239***	0.317***	0.549***	1.000***							
17	-0.031	-0.120	0.093	-0.038	0.005	0.088	0.042	-0.088	0.240	0.076	0.079***	0.190	0.164	0.192	0.421	0.635	1.000***						
18	0.015	0.050	0.013	-0.036	0.005	-0.006	0.067	-0.038	-0.066	0.051	0.019	-0.098	-0.083	-0.033	0.021	-0.025	-0.077	1.000***					
19	0.036	0.154***	0.016	0.061+	-0.016	0.011	0.048	0.088**	-0.106**	0.070*	-0.011	-0.068*	-0.066*	-0.006	-0.016	0.011	-0.057+	0.153***	1.000***				
20	0.073*	0.016	0.070*	-0.086**	0.031	0.074*	0.012	-0.025	0.537***	0.011	0.020	0.606***	0.564***	0.440***	0.360***	0.239***	0.169***	-0.096***	-0.135***	1.000***			
21	0.075*	-0.084**	-0.007	-0.064*	-0.003	0.066*	-0.018	-0.116***	0.098**	-0.019	0.038	0.099**	0.078**	0.122***	0.051	0.060+	0.012	0.005	-0.021	0.211***	1.000***		
22	0.049	0.114***	-0.037	0.062+	0.046	-0.131***	0.130***	-0.006	0.065+	0.102**	0.042	0.036	0.108**	0.174***	0.029	0.001	-0.033	-0.042	-0.034	0.242***	0.275***	1.000***	
23	0.034	0.098**	0.046	0.053	0.047	-0.066*	0.034	0.034	0.095**	0.087**	-0.009	0.091**	0.107***	0.173***	0.110**	0.094***	0.066*	0.004	-0.027	0.245***	0.394***	0.413***	1.000***

Notes: 1 = life satisfaction; 2 = age; 3 = sex; 4 = lower class; 5 = bad health; 6 = higher education; 7 = unemployment; 8 = married; 9 = Christian; 10 = Buddhist; 11 = other religion; 12 = attending religious services; 13 = prayer; 14 = religious; 15 = importance of god; 16 = belief in god; 17 = belief in hell; 18 = to do good to others; 19 = to explain life in this world; 20 = active member of religious organizations; 21 = active member of Group A; 22 = active member of Group B; 23 = active member of Group C.

***p<.001 **p<.01 *p<.05 +p<.10

Table 3 displays the multiple regression analyses of the effects of background factors, religious practices, religious beliefs, and religious engagements on life satisfaction. In terms of background factors, sex, age, class, health, and education is found to be consistently correlated to life satisfaction through Model 1 to Model 5. Female, age, and education have a positive correlation with life satisfaction. In other words, life satisfaction increases along with education level and age, and female tends to report higher level of life satisfaction. Similar to popular belief, lower class and poor health are strongly associated with well-being negatively, as financial stress and health problems tend to reduce life satisfaction. On the other hand, unemployment and marital status appear to have no significant correlation with life satisfaction in the analysis.

The effects of religious variables are presented from Model 2 to 5. First of all, no evidence shows that affiliating to religion has any positive relationships with life satisfaction, except for the category "other religions", as indicated from Model 2 to 5. Even though affiliating to "other religions" appears to have some positive effects on life satisfaction in Model 2 and 3, both the effects and correlation are not strong. The effects also lost their significance after adding other religious variables in Model 4 and 5. On the other hand, a significant negative association between "Christian" and life satisfaction is found in Model 5. The results suggest that religious affiliation alone is hardly a source of life satisfaction. Instead, it may exert negative influence on SWB on some occasions.

In terms of religious practices, the result is quite contrary to the widely accepted idea that religious practices are sources of life satisfaction. Both the frequency of "attending religious services" and "prayer" has no significant association with life satisfaction. That means "attending more services" and "praying more" are not related to an increase in life satisfaction.

The results of the effects of religious beliefs on life satisfaction are shown in Model 4 and 5. The results vary according to the different aspects of religious beliefs. Firstly, being religious or not has no correlation with life satisfaction; atheism or theism exerts no significant influence on SWB. Importance of god is not a factor of well-being either; SWB is not correlated to how important or unimportant they perceived god in their life. While belief in god is not a significant factor of SWB, belief in hell has a negative association with SWB in Model 4. It suggests that those who believe in the existence of hell tend to report a lower level of life satisfaction. However, its effect becomes insignificant when more variables are controlled. In addition, the basic meaning of religion is not a significant factor of SWB (Model 4 and 5). Firstly, whether seeing religion as "to do good to others" or "to follow religious norms and rituals" has no significant effect on SWB; one's practical or dogmatic view towards the meaning of religion is not related to his/her SWB. Secondly, whether respondents believe the meaning of religion is "to explain life in this world" or "to explain life after death" has no correlation with SWB either.

In other words, SWB is not related to whether one perceives religion as more life-oriented or death-oriented.

The effect of religious engagement is shown in Model 5. The effects of other secular voluntary associations are also included here. It is found that being an active member of "religious organization" and "sports, recreational" and "arts, music or educational" organizations (i.e. group A) has a positive effect on SWB. This effect is not found in other secular associations (group B and C); being an active member of other secular groups has no significant effects on life satisfaction.

Table 3. Multiple Regression Analyses (OLS) on Life Satisfaction in Hong Kong (β)

	Model 1		Model 2		Model 3		Model 4		Model 5	
Female	0.059	+	0.060	+	0.058	+	0.057	+	0.057	+
Age	0.104	**	0.108	**	0.109	**	0.102	*	0.101	*
Lower class	-0.124	***	-0.125	***	-0.126	***	-0.129	***	-0.124	***
Bad Health	-0.149	***	-0.146	***	-0.147	***	-0.150	***	-0.148	***
High Education	0.063	+	0.068	+	0.066	+	0.062	+	0.063	+
Unemployed	-0.030		-0.027		-0.027		-0.031		-0.032	
Married	0.048		0.040		0.041		0.041		0.049	
Religious Affiliation (No Religion=ref)										
Buddhist			-0.015		-0.018		-0.024		-0.027	
Christian			-0.040		-0.053		-0.071		-0.089	+
Other			0.058	+	0.057	+	0.049		0.045	
Religious Practices										
Attending religious services					-0.028		-0.029		-0.052	
Pray					-0.051		0.044		0.024	
Belief and Meaning of religion										
Religious							0.013		-0.005	
Importance of God							0.030		0.031	
Belief in God							0.061		0.058	
Belief in Hell							-0.071	+	-0.066	
Meaning of Religion										
To do good to others (to follow religious norms and rituals=ref)							0.003		0.005	
To explain life in this world (to explain life after death=ref)							0.013		0.020	
Active member of Volunteer Organizations(non-member=ref)										
Church or Religious Organization									0.083	+
Group A: Sports, recreational/ arts, music or educational organization									0.061	+
Group B: Labour union/ political party									0.022	
Group C: Environmental, professional, humanitarian or charity/ consumer/ self-help/ other									-0.020	
R^2	0.060	***	0.065	***	0.066	***	0.071	***	0.080	***
Change in R^2			0.005		0.001		0.005		0.009	*

Note ***p<.001 **p<.01 *p<.05 +p<.10
World Values Survey 6th Wave Hong Kong Data, Age 18-85, N=1000

Discussion

This paper examined the effects of different aspects of religion on the SWB of Hong Kong people. First of all, it is found that H1 is not supported in my analysis. Affiliation to religion is

not associated with higher life satisfaction. This result contradicts many studies that argue the positive correlation between religious affiliation and religion. One possible explanation is that "religious affiliation" alone may not be a sufficient factor to explain SWB. For example, based on the author's analysis of WVS 2005 (Terazawa and Ng 2014), a positive correlation is actually found between religious affiliation (Christianity and Buddhism) and happiness. However, after controlling the variable "religious attendance", the effect of religious affiliation becomes insignificant. Therefore, background factors, religious belief, practice, and engagement maybe more important factors of SWB in the case of Hong Kong society. The positive relations between "other religions" and SWB in Model 2 and 3 may indicate that affiliating to Hindu, Muslim, and others are more likely to be related to a higher level of life satisfaction. However, the occurrence of such results may be partly due to the relatively small sample size, and its significance also disappear after adding other variables.

Besides, the negative association between Christianity and life satisfaction (Model 5) maybe understood from the following five angles. (1) People with lower lever of life satisfaction (e.g. because of sickness or poverty) tend to attend church to seek help and comfort. (2) Christian organization has a long history of social welfare development, whose services tend to cater to the needs of the less privileged and the sick, who usually have lower level of SWB. It is common that they become Christians after receiving supports and services from churches. However, these two explanations are not supported in the bivariate correlations analysis (Table 2). It is actually Buddhists that are more likely to be associated with lower class, bad health, and non-higher education. (3) This leads us to rethink the possibility that, becoming a Christian may actually have negative effects on SWB, which are not captured in the survey. (4) One possibility of such negative effects is that attending church would inevitably increase the opportunity of having quarrels with others, especially among those who share different political opinions. This phenomenon was particularly common in 2013, the year the survey was conducted, when Hong Kong society was politically unstable due to debates of democratization and other social problems (e.g. China-Hong Kong conflicts). In fact, not few church members that I encountered in my field studies reported similar experience. Some even reported that the pastors would express political views during services that they found angry and unacceptable. This kind of negative experience may trade-off the positive effects of "affiliation to Christianity" on SWB. (5) Last but not least, due to differences in cultural and social background, the effects of religious affiliation on SWB may also be different among various societies. Further studies are required to figure out the reasons.

My analysis does not show any evidence to support H2 either. Frequency of attending religious services (external religiosity) or making prayer (internal religiosity) has no significant relationships with SWB. These results are contrary to many studies conducted in Western

societies as well as in Chinese societies (Chang 2009, Terazawa and Ng 2014). While the reason for such results is still not clear, three possible explanations are: (1) attending religious services (Sunday services, masses, sermons etc.) may not promote social integration (social well-being) because interactions among members are uncommon during services, who usually just sit there and listen. (2) Similarly, making prayers is usually a private and individual practice which does not promote social wellbeing either. (3) Life satisfaction is a more general evaluation of one's well-being. It is possible that religious services and prayers may be more likely to be related to happiness, another indicator of SWB which tends to measure a more temporary state of well-being. For instance, singing hymns and listening to preaches during services may likely induce a sense of happiness for a short time. Making prayers may also engender a sense of divine connections that generate positive affect. (4) Finally, it may not be religious practice, but other factors (e.g. religious beliefs and degree of organizational engagement) that affect SWB in Hong Kong society.

H3 is not supported by the results either. Neither "theist", "importance of god", nor "belief in god" is associated with life satisfaction. These results partly agree with the author's studies of WVS 2005, which shows no significant effect of religious belief (importance of god) on SWB. One possible explanation for such result is that belief in god does not necessarily promote SWB since "god" can be the source of both good and bad events (e.g. disasters or challenges from god) in both Christianity and Chinese cultures (e.g. folk religions). Divine protection and divine punishment are the two sides of the same coin. Therefore, the idea that "god has to be worshipped and to be afraid of" may instead generate a sense of awe, which can induce both negative and positive influence on SWB, which cancel each other out and no significant net effect is shown in the analysis.

In addition, the basic meaning of religion was believed to be a possible factor of SWB. It is because the idea of "to do good to others" and "to explain life after death" might promote reciprocity (social support) and help explain the ultimate concerns of death respectively. However, my analysis shows no evidence to support this thought. One explanation is that while the questions ask the respondents whether they agree with these ideas or not, they do not assess if they really "do good to others" in daily life or have their "concerns of death" explained by religion. Respondents only reported their general views towards the meaning of religion, and such "views" may not have any "solid" effects on life satisfaction. Suffice it to say that the Hong Kong's data showed no significant effects between religious beliefs/meaning and SWB. One may also argue that the questions in the survey failed to capture some of the religiosities shared by Hong Kong people that are too cultural specific to be understood with the same questionnaires used in all countries. For instance, the notion of *karma*, transmigration of soul, and *Dao* (the Taoist interpretation of the law of nature) are important beliefs that could

possibility affect SWB. Failure to show significant associations between religious beliefs and SWB may be due to limitations of survey questions.

Model 4 shows a negative association between belief in hell and life satisfaction. Belief in an undesirable afterlife is negatively associated with life satisfaction. It is because hell is widely perceived as a place of eternal torment in an afterlife in many mythological, folklore, and religious traditions in Chinese society. People who did bad things would be sent to hell, judged by *Yanluowang* (the god of death), and punished for what they did. It is possible that people who believe in the existence of hell are affected by the negative image of hell and worried that they would one day suffer from eternal torment. This worry may exert negative influences on life satisfaction. The second explanation is related to the association between belief in hell and ethical behavior. It is argued that religious malevolence may contribute to the encouragement of rule-following, through the deterrence value of supernatural punishment. However, such "punishment" and the "mental stress" to abide by those moral rules may have negative effect on well-being (Shariff and Azim 2014). In fact, this negative association becomes insignificant after controlling the variable "degree of engagement" in Model 5. It appears that there is not enough evidence to support H4 in the analysis. The exact linkages between belief in hell, religious engagement, and SWB have to be investigated later,

The last hypothesis H5 (higher participation in religion will be associated with higher life satisfaction) is also supported in the analysis. Compared to non-member, being an "active" member of religious association is a predictor of higher life satisfaction. Except for Group A, similar effects are not found among other secular organizations. There are at least three possible explanations for such results. First of all, an active member of religion tends to spend more time and effort in organizational activities and have more opportunity to develop human networks with other group mates. It is possible that through engaging in organizational activities more actively, e.g. volunteer work, mission, and gathering, participants can develop a sense of community and build closer ties with other co-religionists. This enhances the social wellbeing of participants. Secondly, the significant difference between engaging in religious organization and in secular organizations (Group B and C) can be attributed to the fact that the former is a "provider" of worldview and moral norms (e.g. altruism and love). When shared by members, these religious ideologies may facilitate the formation of human relationships, mutual support, and trust among members, improving social well-being of participants. Secular groups, though also promote their own organizational goals and cultures to their fellow members, maybe less likely to promote social integration (human relationships, reciprocity, and trust) comparable to religious organization. It is because these communities of faith are "bonded" by supernatural powers, and members are connected to each other as "brothers and sisters" or "relatives" in church or Buddha Hall for example. Thirdly, for the positive association between Group A and

SWB, it suggests that participating in sports, recreational, arts, music, or educational activities are sources of life satisfaction. This result also agrees with popular beliefs that engaging in sports and arts are related to a higher level of SWB, through promoting physical and mental health (e.g. Ruseski et al. 2014).

Lastly, this analysis confirms the effects of demographic factors on SWB in Hong Kong. Female tends to report a higher level of life satisfaction probably because they are more likely to be housewives, enjoy more free time, and are less engaged in dangerous works etc. While SWB is expected to decline along with age as growing older tends to be associated with poorer health, less money, and fewer social contacts, my study shows the opposite trend in Hong Kong. It is probably because getting old may lead to an increase in career stability and life platform in Hong Kong. Education also has positive effects on SWB, which is likely due to the attainment of a better career path and a better understanding of stress coping techniques. On the other hand, lower class and poor health are related to a lower level of SWB. It is because financial stress and health problems are negative factors of well-being.

Conclusion

The effects of religion on SWB in Hong Kong are examined in this paper. Many religion-SWB mechanisms suggested in previous studies are not supported in the Hong Kong dataset. According to the results, religious affiliation, practices, and belief are not predictors of high SWB in Hong Kong. While Christianity tends to be associated with lower SWB, active engagement in religious organizations is positively related to SWB. Therefore, instead of religious affiliation (which religion they belong to or identify with), practice (how do they practice their religion), and belief (what do they believe in), organizational engagement in religious group (time and effort spent in group activities, and social network developed with members) appears to be a more significant factor in predicting SWB in Hong Kong.

Becoming a Christian may actually have negative effects on SWB because churches may become places for quarrels among those who share different political opinions. Particularly common in 2013, Hong Kong society was politically unstable due to debates of democratization and other social problems (e.g. China-Hong Kong conflicts). This is proved by the author in his field studies in various church facilities. Further studies are required to figure out the reasons.

This study also reveals the significant effects of religious engagement on SWB. It is because a community of faith tends to be a breeding ground for social integration and mutual support. Relationships among members are intimate (e.g. family, brother and sisters, relatives, master-disciple, junior and senior). They are connected together by an overarching bonding force that advocates altruism and love. Therefore, actively engaging in organizational activities, such as volunteer activities, and formal/informal gatherings, can generate social capital (trust,

relationships, and reciprocity) and thereby promote social well-being.

There are some directions for future studies. Firstly of all, while WVS contains question sets that ask basic information about religious affiliation, practices, beliefs, and degree of engagement, they may not be able to capture some dimensions of religiosity. Especially, some cultural specific questions and options are not available in the questionnaires. For instance, the options for folk Buddhism or folk Taoism are not available in the question of affiliation. Other religious practices, such as ancestors worship or offering paper money or incent to gods, are not included in the survey either, which may be important factors on SWB. Religious belief, such as karma and transmigration of soul etc. are also popular in Hong Kong, regardless of religious affiliation and practices. Including these cultural specific items into the survey may reflect the relations between religion and SWB more accurately. Finally, in order to capture how active engagement in religious organization is actually related to SWB, some questions shall also be included for future surveys. For instance, how many friends do you have in religious organizations and other organizations? If you have some problems, would you like to share with people of the same religious or secular organizations? Do you receive support from people of the same religious or secular organizations? These questions would allow us to measure the social capital (relationships, trust, and reciprocity) of respondents generated in religion and other social organizations. Besides, it would also be interesting to distinguish the quality of human networks found in religion and secular groups, so as to understand whether "community of faith" is a unique factor for SWB or its effects are just similar to "community of habits".

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