

A Study on the Acculturation of Elderly Asian Immigrants in the United States Based on Acculturation Theory

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Abstract. This study innovatively examines the influence of collectivism as a cultural tendency on the adaptation of elderly Asian immigrants to U.S. society, highlighting a novel finding that collectivism facilitates adaptation by enhancing willingness to accept community support, which contrasts with common assumptions in individualistic host cultures. Using a quantitative research approach, a questionnaire survey was conducted among 50 Asian immigrants aged 65 and above from China, Japan, and South Korea, measuring their collectivist/individualist tendencies and cultural adaptation attitudes. Key findings include: (1) Most elderly Asian immigrants retained strong collectivist tendencies (mean score: 3.8/5); (2) Collectivism showed a significant positive correlation with willingness to accept community support ($r=0.65$, $p<0.01$), while individualism exhibited a negative correlation ($r=-0.55$, $p<0.01$); (3) Regression analysis confirmed that collectivism positively predicted openness to social support ($\beta=0.35$). The results suggest that collectivism can serve as a facilitator of cultural adaptation, providing a theoretical foundation for community-based intervention programs targeting elderly immigrants.

Keywords: Collectivism, Elderly Immigrants, Cultural Adaptation, Community Support, Cross-cultural Research.

1. Introduction

Immigration, particularly for elderly individuals aged 65 and above, often leads to challenges such as weakened social networks and cultural identity, resulting in isolation and emotional distress. These issues are especially pronounced among elderly Asian immigrants in the United States, where cultural differences exacerbate adaptation difficulties [1-2]. Existing literature highlights the negative impacts of immigration on emotional well-being and social networks. Acculturation stress is noted to contribute to mental health issues, while specific challenges for elderly East Asian immigrants include frustration, depression, and withdrawal due to disrupted social ties [1-3]. Regarding cultural tendencies, collectivism versus individualism is identified as a key dimension, with evidence suggesting that collectivism aids adaptation by promoting cognitive strategies, whereas individualism may hinder it through expressive suppression [4-5]. Furthermore, the importance of community support in facilitating immigrant integration and reducing social isolation is well-documented [6-7]. Building on this foundation, this study makes a novel contribution by examining how collectivism, a retained cultural tendency among elderly Asian immigrants, positively influences their willingness to accept community support for cultural adaptation in an individualistic host society like the United States. This approach contrasts with prior research that often views collectivist traits as potential barriers, instead positioning them as facilitators. By integrating cultural dimensions with social support dynamics, this research provides empirical evidence to inform targeted interventions. To address this, the study poses the research question: Does collectivism as a cultural tendency encourage elderly Asian immigrants to welcome community support for their cultural adaptation to the United States? The following hypotheses are proposed to test this relationship and rule out cultural neutrality in openness to support.

2. Research Hypotheses

To explore the research question—whether collectivism as a cultural tendency encourages elderly Asian immigrants to welcome community support for their cultural adaptation to the United States—

and to rule out the possibility that the level of openness to community support among these immigrants is culturally neutral (i.e., that their willingness or reluctance to receive social support is not influenced by their cultural tendencies, such as collectivism or individualism), the following hypotheses are proposed:

Hypothesis 1: Elderly East Asian immigrants tend to retain their collectivist tendencies after immigrating to the United States.

Hypothesis 2: Among elderly East Asian immigrants, there is variability in individualistic tendencies, with some exhibiting strong individualism.

Hypothesis 3: The tendency of elderly East Asian immigrants to accept social support and community interventions for cultural adaptation is positively correlated with their collectivist tendencies.

Hypothesis 4: The tendency of elderly East Asian immigrants to accept social support and community interventions for cultural adaptation is negatively correlated with their individualistic tendencies.

3. Methodology: Quantitative Design and Data Collection

To test the hypotheses proposed in this study, a quantitative research approach was employed, utilizing a questionnaire survey for data collection. The questionnaire was designed based on the hypotheses to assess the collectivist and individualist tendencies of elderly East Asian immigrants, their willingness to engage in community support activities aimed at facilitating cultural adaptation to life in the United States, and the correlation between these cultural tendencies and their openness to social support. To ensure the validity of findings and rule out the possibility that openness to community support is culturally neutral, the questionnaire included culturally neutral items, such as general attitudes toward seeking help in non-cultural contexts [8-10].

The survey targeted elderly Asian immigrants aged 65 and above from countries including China, Japan, and South Korea, with a sample size of 50 participants. This sample was recruited through community organizations and senior centers in the United States to ensure relevance to the study population. While a sample size of 50 may be considered relatively small, potentially limiting the generalizability and representativeness of the results, it was chosen for feasibility in a pilot study context, allowing for initial exploration insights into the research question. Future studies with larger samples could enhance representativeness and statistical power. The questionnaire consisted of three main sections: the first collected demographic information, such as age, gender, country of origin, and duration of residence in the United States; the second measured cultural tendencies using items adapted from Hofstede's dimensions, with statements like "I prioritize the interests of my family and community over my personal interests" for collectivism and "I emphasize personal independence and self-reliance" for individualism, rated on a 5-point Likert scale from "Strongly Disagree" to "Strongly Agree"; the third evaluated willingness to accept social support, including items such as "I am willing to participate in community-organized cultural adaptation activities," also rated on the same Likert scale [11].

Data analysis involved descriptive statistics to summarize participant characteristics and cultural tendencies, followed by inferential statistics to test the hypotheses. Specifically, Pearson correlation coefficients were calculated to examine relationships between cultural tendencies and willingness to accept social support, and multiple regression analysis was conducted to assess the predictive power of collectivism and individualism on openness to community interventions. Interpretation of findings focused on whether the results supported the hypotheses, while acknowledging limitations such as the small sample size and potential biases in self-reported data, to provide insights into the role of cultural factors in immigrant adaptation [12-13].

4. Results

A total of 54 questionnaires were distributed, with 50 providing valid responses, resulting in a response rate of approximately 92.6%. The sample consisted of 22 males and 28 females. The majority of respondents (80%, or 40 individuals) were aged between 65 and 75 years, while 20% (10 individuals) were 75 years or older. In terms of country of origin, 60% (30 respondents) were from China, 20% (10) from Japan, and 20% (10) from South Korea. The average duration of residence in the United States was 3 years, with a range from 1 to 4 years.

Descriptive statistics indicated that the respondents' collectivist tendencies had a mean score of 3.8 on a 5-point Likert scale, suggesting a strong retention of collectivism as their primary cultural tendency after immigration. In contrast, individualism tendencies averaged 2.5, indicating relatively low levels of individualism. Regarding willingness to accept social support for cultural adaptation to U.S. society, the average score was 3.1, which reflects a generally positive attitude toward engaging in community support activities.

However, the small sample size of 50 participants limits the representativeness and generalizability of these findings to the larger population of elderly Asian immigrants. This constraint is particularly evident in subgroup analyses, such as those based on country of origin, where sample sizes are even smaller (e.g., 10 respondents per country), potentially reducing the reliability of inferences. As a result, these results should be interpreted with caution, and future studies with larger samples are recommended to confirm and expand upon these insights.

5. Discussion

The results of this study indicate that collectivism, as a cultural tendency among elderly Asian immigrants, positively influences their cultural adaptation to the United States, particularly when supported by community services. This aligns with prior research on ethnic minority students, which has shown that collectivist orientations facilitate adaptation to environments with differing cultural values. The underlying explanation may lie in the widely accepted notion that collectivism promotes group cohesion, helping individuals navigate new cultural settings more effectively. Consequently, elderly Asian immigrants with stronger collectivist tendencies are more inclined to engage in community-based cultural adaptation programs and seek assistance from social workers, thereby harnessing collective resources to mitigate the challenges of cultural transition. For instance, they might participate in community cultural exchange groups, where they share experiences with fellow immigrants and learn about American customs collaboratively, which can help alleviate feelings of cultural disconnection.

In contrast, those with pronounced individualistic tendencies are more likely to handle cultural adaptation independently, minimizing their reliance on social support. This approach may result in increased vulnerability to loneliness and isolation during difficult times, which could account for the negative correlation observed between individualism and willingness to accept community assistance.

Implications for the Current Study: Although Asian immigrants often display cultural tendencies that differ significantly from those of the host society, such as the individualism prevalent in the United States, the collectivist nature of elderly Asian immigrants makes them more receptive to community interventions for successful cultural adaptation. In other words, a substantial portion of elderly Asian immigrants, who are currently grappling with negative emotions stemming from cultural shock, are likely to welcome community services. Investing in such programs could therefore generate significant positive outcomes, enhancing the overall life experiences of Asian immigrants in the United States

6. Conclusion

In summary, this study tackles the important question of how collectivist cultural tendencies impact the cultural adaptation of elderly Asian immigrants in the United States, especially when

bolstered by social support systems. It addresses a key gap in existing literature by challenging the prevailing view that collectivism may pose barriers in individualistic societies like the U.S., instead demonstrating its potential as a facilitating factor. The research innovates through the application of Hofstede's cultural dimensions theory combined with social support models, providing a nuanced analysis of this understudied population. Key findings reveal a strong positive correlation between collectivism and willingness to accept community assistance, which enhances adaptation outcomes and reduces negative emotions such as cultural shock. This positions collectivism not as an obstacle but as a valuable resource for successful integration. For future directions, exploring specific mechanisms—such as the role of community programs—and conducting longitudinal studies to monitor long-term changes in adaptation dynamics would offer deeper insights and inform targeted interventions.

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