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Models of Helping, Happiness, and Spiritual Serenity among Indonesian and Chinese Students

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Abstract

In positive psychology, the study of happiness is more popular than that of serenity. Many studies have found connections between helping and happiness and between happiness and serenity. However, research that examines all three variables and how they relate in a model is limited. This study aims to develop models of helping, happiness, and serenity using students from Indonesia and China. A total of 103 Indonesian students and 104 Chinese students contributed to this research. The Helping Attitude Scale (HAS), Subjective Happiness Scale (SHS), Tatmainn al-Qulūb Scale (TQS), and Peace of Mind Scale (PoM) were used in this study. The results show that for Indonesian students, helping is a predictor of spiritual serenity but not of happiness. However, one aspect of helping, belief, can be a predictor of happiness. This model is confirmed using the CFI (0.97), GFI (0.97), and TLI (0.91) parameters. In contrast, for Chinese students, helping is a predictor of happiness but not of spiritual serenity. However, helping is a predictor of one component of spiritual serenity: confidence. This model is confirmed using the GFI (1) and AGFI (0.97) parameters.

Keywords: Helping, Happiness, Spiritual serenity, Peace of mind, Tranquility.

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1. Introduction

Happiness is a common topic of research in positive psychology, yet it has little to do with serenity. Serenity is sometimes referred to by other names, such as *peace of mind* [1], serenity [2], tranquility [3-6] and *tatmainn al-qulūb* or spiritual serenity [7-12]. Serenity has been studied by scholars, but not nearly as extensively as happiness. The range of terminology for serenity is grounded in the diversity of underlying philosophical backgrounds, which makes serenity a

fascinating subject to research and understand. Previous research has discovered a link between helping others and happiness [13-15], as well as a link between happiness and serenity [1, 5, 6, 16-18]. However, there has been no research that examines all three variables and how they can be connected within a single model. It is critical to understand how happiness and serenity can be achieved through helpful behavior in order to be successful.

There is little difference between physical peace and emotional serenity. The phrase *ta'mainn al-qulūb*, which means peacefulness or calmness (*al-sukūn*) in the Islamic tradition, is used to describe the state of spiritual serenity studied in this research. It is accompanied by the belief that one is connected to God [19, 20]. The hallmark of peace is a stable heart [21], which is calm and glad because it is always mindful of God [22]. Calmness (*al-sukūn*) is one component of the construct of spiritual serenity [11, 12]. Another theory complements the meaning of *ta'mainn al-qulūb* with the acceptance (*tarḍā*) that everything is predestined by God [23, 24]. Confidence (*al-yaqīn*) is another aspect of spiritual serenity that must be considered. Someone who is calm and serene must also have a strong sense of self-assurance [25, 26]. Confidence allows a person to do well without being burdened with second thoughts [27].

The concepts of serenity and happiness are intertwined. When attempting to convey the concept of serenity, it is common to use the term "happy" [3]. Yet calmness ranks higher than happiness. Serenity can be defined as affective bliss paired with self-actualization. Happiness, a happy life, and the ability to take comfort in it are all factors in achieving serenity Walker [6]. In this way, persons who are serene must necessarily achieve happiness eventually [28]. According to some research, these two variables can be affected by the performance of helpful behavior. Helping has been found to be related to positive mood [29], well-being [15], and happiness [13]. Almsgiving is another predictor of happiness when it is done in the context of religious practice [30]. Another characteristic strongly associated with helping is altruism [31], which has been shown to be associated with happiness, as well as with both psychological and physical health [32]. Several studies have found helping to be a predictor of happiness. A person helps because they are motivated by gratitude and happiness, a fact which is supported by other research [14]. This is because happiness results in positive feelings, which will in turn increase feelings of empathy and altruism [33].

There appears to be some uncertainty about whether happiness can be achieved through helping or whether people tend to help others when they are happy with their own lives. Positive emotions, affection, and positive relationships are examples of where the two concepts intersect [13]. By helping others, people might feel more optimistic and happier. Happiness, on the other hand, elicits sensations, emotions, and empathy, increasing the likelihood that people will lend a hand [14]. Two assumptions might be made: first, that help and happiness are two mutually dependent factors; second, that there is a distinct difference between helping as an independent variable and helping as a dependent variable in a regression analysis. Helping as an independent variable means that to help through a type of habituation or a process that someone can get used to contributes to the production of happiness. Thus, in this position, happiness is regarded as the ultimate purpose of providing help [34]. In the second scenario, helping is the result of someone who is already positive, making it simple for them to provide help. In this case, while happiness does not appear to be able to directly impact the behavior of those who help, it does appear to be associated with happy sentiments, particularly positive relationships [14, 33].

This study investigates to what extent helping can predict spiritual serenity and happiness. In the course of this study, the correlations between helping, happiness, spiritual serenity, and other related variables are examined, after which a psychological model of the three variables is created. This study uses samples of students from Indonesia and China to test the model. Indonesia and China are two of the most populous countries on the planet today, and each has a wide range of cultural issues to address. This study contributes to a deeper understanding of these two cultures' psychological characteristics that influence willingness to help, happiness, and spiritual serenity.

2. Method

This study was conducted with the participation of 207 students, of whom 103 (49%) were Indonesian and 104 (51%) were Chinese. The respondents ranged from 17 to 28 years old, with an average age of 19.69. A total of 16 (8%) male and 85 (41%) female Indonesian students, as well as 66 (32%) male and 38 (19%) female Chinese students answered the survey questions.

In this study, four scales were employed to analyze the data. The helping scale made use of the Helping Attitude Scale (HAS) [35], which has been employed in a variety of studies [29, 36]. The alpha reliability of this scale was found to be 0.85 [36]. The Subjective Happiness Scale (SHS) was used to develop the study's happiness scale [37]. This scale has been tested in several different nations [38-47] and has only a single factor [38, 43, 46]. Alpha values of 0.80, 0.84 [45], and 0.82 [43] indicate the reliability of this scale. The scale also has a good model fit index [38]. The *Tatmainn al-Qulb* Scale (TQS) was employed to measure serenity. The scale contains two components (calmness and confidence), both of which have good factor loading (> 0.5), Cronbach's Alpha ($= 0.836$), and consistency ($r = 0.418 - 0.796$). Items on the scale also exhibit a high degree of difficulty when using the RASCH model approach (separation = 11.25), which is consistent with previous research [12]. This scale has also been utilized in a number of psychiatric intervention investigations, including multiple clinical trials [7, 8, 10]. As an additional tool for the purpose of comparison to TQS, this study used the Peace of Mind Scale (PoM) to assess participants' level of well-being. Item-total correlations range from 0.76 to 0.85 (mean = 0.81), and alpha values range from 0.91 to 0.91. PoM has a single component with an average factor loading of 0.78 [1].

The study used several types of analysis. Correlation analysis was conducted to analyze the correlation between the variables. SEM analysis was used to test the model based on the previous correlation analysis. If the results were not significant, then the correlation would be explored down to the variable dimension level. After that, regression analysis was conducted to predict the relationships between the variables. Both SEM and regression analyses were conducted in the

samples of Indonesian and Chinese students. The final stage of the analysis was to test the model fit of the data for both samples (Indonesian and Chinese students) using the model χ^2 test.

3. Results

The initial stage of the analysis in this study was the correlation test between the variables and characteristics of the sample of Indonesian and Chinese students. Table 1 shows the results of the correlation test for the Indonesian students. It shows that helping is not related to happiness ($r = 0.075$) but does relate to serenity on both the TQS ($r = 0.421^{**}$) and PoM ($r = 0.613^{**}$) scales. Although helping is not directly related to happiness, one of its aspects, belief, is ($r = 0.230^*$) related to happiness. The results demonstrate that helping is directly related to peace of mind. As a result, using the SEM approach, this study went on to investigate the construction of prediction models based on these findings.

Table 1.
Correlation test results for the Indonesian students.

No	Variable	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8
1	Helping	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
2	Belief	0.786 ^{**}	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
3	Feeling	0.854 ^{**}	0.541 ^{**}	-	-	-	-	-	-
4	Behavior	0.887 ^{**}	0.562 ^{**}	0.611 ^{**}	-	-	-	-	-
5	Happiness	0.075	0.230 [*]	0.041	-0.024	-	-	-	-
6	Spiritual Serenity	0.421 ^{**}	0.264 ^{**}	0.459 ^{**}	0.332 ^{**}	0.406 ^{**}	-	-	-
7	Calmness	0.612 ^{**}	0.409 ^{**}	0.689 ^{**}	0.448 ^{**}	0.122	0.757 ^{**}	-	-
8	Confidence	0.025	-0.010	0.005	0.056	0.492 ^{**}	0.757 ^{**}	0.146	-
9	Peace of Mind	0.613 ^{**}	0.409 ^{**}	0.689 ^{**}	0.448 ^{**}	0.126	0.761 ^{**}	1.000 ^{**}	0.153

Note: * = $P \leq 0.05$; ** = $P \leq 0.01$.

As shown in Table 2, the results of the correlation test for the sample of Chinese students differ from the results of the Indonesian students. In the sample of Chinese students, helping was found to be correlated with happiness ($r = 0.224^*$) but not with spiritual serenity ($r = 0.159$); however, helping was found to be correlated with PoM ($r = 0.256^{**}$). Spiritual serenity based on TQS is not influenced by any external variables. Although confidence is a dimension of calmness, it has a positive relationship with helping ($r = 0.368^{**}$) and other external variables. As a result, the model that was tested had the following characteristics: helping can be a predictor of happiness and of confidence, which is one of the dimensions of spiritual serenity. Concerning the sample of Indonesian students, belief (one of the helping dimensions) was found to be a predictor of happiness. Helping also served as a predictor of spiritual serenity (see Table 1).

Table 2.
Correlation test results for the Chinese students.

No	Variable	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8
1	Helping	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
2	Belief	1.000 ^{**}	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
3	Feeling	0.909 ^{**}	0.908 ^{**}	-	-	-	-	-	-
4	Behavior	0.643 ^{**}	0.643 ^{**}	0.582 ^{**}	-	-	-	-	-
5	Happiness	0.224 [*]	0.224 [*]	0.234 [*]	0.198 [*]	-	-	-	-
6	Spiritual Serenity	0.159	0.159	0.237	0.183	0.254	-	-	-
7	Calmness	-0.079	-0.080	0.038	0.012	0.044	0.782 ^{**}	-	-
8	Confidence	0.368 ^{**}	0.368 ^{**}	0.373 ^{**}	0.385 ^{**}	0.539 ^{**}	0.782 ^{**}	0.223	-
9	Peace of Mind	0.256 ^{**}	0.256 ^{**}	0.254 ^{**}	0.154	0.761 ^{**}	0.502 ^{**}	0.265	0.566 ^{**}

Note: * = $P \leq 0.05$; ** = $P \leq 0.01$.

Based on the results of the correlation analysis, SEM tests were conducted on the significant variables for the samples of Indonesian and Chinese students. Figure 1 shows the SEM test results for each sample. In the Indonesian sample, helping can only be a predictor of spiritual serenity ($\beta = 0.54^{**}$) but cannot be a predictor of happiness. Helping, however, consists of three dimensions, one of which (belief) can be a predictor of happiness ($\beta = 0.66^{**}$). Conversely, in the Chinese sample, helping can be a predictor of happiness ($\beta = 0.22^*$) but cannot be a predictor of spiritual serenity. However, helping can be a predictor of one dimension of spiritual serenity (confidence) ($\beta = 0.37^{**}$).

Table 3 shows the regression test results for the Indonesian sample. The data in the table shows that the relationships between the variables in the model are quite strong with all p values below 0.01. The smallest beta coefficient is 0.29 and indicates belief as a predictor of happiness. The largest beta coefficient is 0.83 and indicates feeling as a predictor of helping.

Table 4 shows the regression test results for the Chinese sample. The data shows an interesting phenomenon, particularly as regards spiritual serenity. The results show that in this model, spiritual serenity does not produce a good dimensional structure that allows the values of p , z , and standard errors to be found; this will be discussed in more detail below. However, the data does reveal that in the Chinese sample, helping can be a predictor of happiness ($\beta = 0.22^*$) and confidence ($\beta = 0.37^{**}$). Different models have, of course, produced different indices.

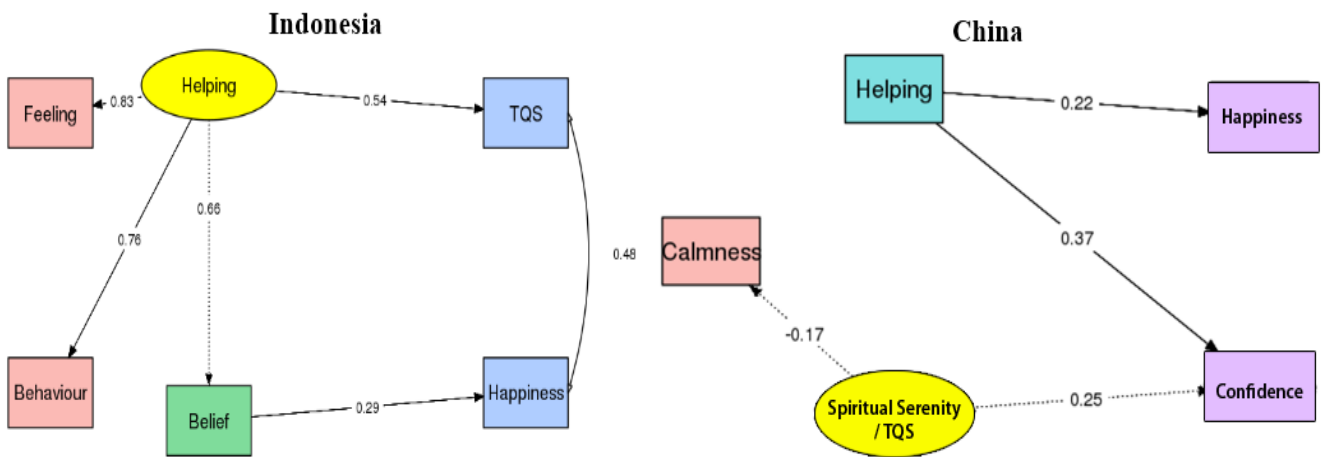


Figure 1. SEM test results for Indonesian and Chinese students.

Table 3. Regression test results for the Indonesian sample.

Variables	Predictors	B	SE	Z	p	β
Helping	Belief	1(1-1)	0.00	5.873	< 0.001	0.66
Helping	Feeling	1.35(0.93-1.78)	0.22	6.26	< 0.001	0.83
Helping	Behavior	1.08(0.73-1.42)	0.18	6.1	< 0.001	0.76
TQS	Helping	0.99(0.59-1.39)	0.20	4.86	< 0.001	0.54
Happiness	Belief	0.32(0.12-0.52)	0.10	3.18	0.001	0.29

Table 4. Regression test results for the Chinese sample.

Variables	Predictors	B	SE	Z	P	β
Happiness	Helping	0.21(0.03-0.4)	0.09	2.31	0.021	0.22
Confidence	Helping	0.35(0.18-0.52)	0.09	3.97	< 0.001	0.37
Spiritual Serenity	Confidence	1(1-1)	0	-	-	0.25
Spiritual Serenity	Calmness	-1.82(NA-NA)		-	-	-0.17

Table 5 shows the fit index of both models. Based on the parameters in the table, each of the Indonesian and Chinese models has three parameters that fit with different indexes. The Indonesian model fits with CFI (0.97), GFI (0.97), and TLI (0.91). As for the Chinese model, it fits with GFI (1), p-value (0), and AGFI (0.97). In TLI, the Chinese model produces negative numbers (-0.93). The problem with the spiritual serenity variable structure in the Chinese model will be discussed in the discussion.

Table 5. Model fit test results for Indonesian and Chinese samples.

Items	χ ²	df	χ ² /df	p	CFI	GFI	AGFI	TLI	RMR	SRMR	RMSEA (95% CI)
INA Result	9.01	4	2.25	0.06	0.97*	0.97*	0.87	0.91*	6.16	0.08	0.11(0-0.21)
CHN Result	32.32	2	16.16	0*	0.36	1*	0.97*	-0.93	18.84	0.13	0.38(0.27-0.5)
Criteria	χ ² /df < 3			> 0.05	> 0.9	> 0.9	> 0.9	> 0.9	< 0.05	< 0.05	< 0.1(< 0.05)

Note: INA = Indonesia; CHN = China; *=Accepted.

4. Discussion

Besides being a predictor variable, helping is itself influenced by other variables, such as empathy [48], positive or negative mood [49], gratitude, envy [50], and gender [36]. However, most notable from the results of this study are the cultural factors [51]. In Indonesia, helping behavior affects happiness through the belief dimension. Helping in Indonesia is a cultural routine that is related to values and beliefs [52]. In Indonesia’s Islamic tradition, helping has become a necessity, and a person who does not want to help is considered a bad person [53]. Therefore, the belief dimension of helping is very important; without belief, the helping behavior is simply a routine and does not have an emotional impact. Therefore, in the Islamic tradition in Indonesia, it is not good for someone to help without sincerity. Sincerity is an important component of helping [54]. Sincerity is a value that teaches that helping must be done solely for the purpose of pleasing God and not for self-interest [30]. Table 6 illustrates the difference between the helping scores of the Indonesian and Chinese samples.

China has a culture of helping that differs from Indonesia’s. If Indonesia takes religion as the basis of their helping tradition, Chinese society bases it on indigenous cultural teachings and ancestors [55]. Chinese society considers giving to be an obligation of every human being, leading to good relationships, reciprocity, and family values [56]. Therefore, their

helpful behavior encompasses all dimensions; belief ($r = 0.224^*$), feeling ($r = 0.234^*$), and behavior ($r = 0.198^*$) were all related to happiness.

Table 6.
Difference in helping scores between the Indonesian and Chinese samples.

Variables	Nationality		p	ηp2	OP
	Indonesia	China			
Helping	53.90	46.20	0.000	0.163	1.000
Belief	53.51	46.58	0.000	0.150	1.000
Feeling	52.62	47.45	0.000	0.084	0.990
Behavior	54.00	46.11	0.000	0.215	1.000
Happiness	50.35	49.65	0.606	0.001	0.081
Spiritual Serenity	52.61	44.91	0.000	0.134	0.998
Calmness	54.94	40.38	0.000	0.495	1.000
Confidence	47.55	52.37	0.000	0.069	0.971
Peace of Mind	52.19	47.87	0.001	0.051	0.909

Note: ηp2= Effect, OP = Observed Power.

No difference in happiness was found between the Chinese and Indonesian respondents ($p = 0.606$). This shows that the level of happiness in both samples was nearly identical. However, although the level of happiness was the same, the way helping makes them happy is different. In the Chinese sample, helping directly impacts happiness, while in the Indonesian sample, only the belief dimension of helping has an impact on happiness. In addition, it is important to note that the happiness referred to in this study was subjective happiness.

The Subjective Happiness Scale (SHS) [37] needs to be reviewed, especially when associated with variables that are actions (not emotions or perceptions). The happiness measured by this scale is subjective happiness or hedonic happiness [57]. When combining it with another happiness scale, it must also measure hedonic happiness, as there is an established difference between hedonic and eudynamic happiness [58]. Eudynamic happiness sees happiness objectively as someone's ability to achieve an optimal psychological condition [59]. Concerning helpful behavior, it seems that helping is very closely related to psychological abilities such as affect and positive relationships [13, 14, 33].

Another scale that needs to be reviewed is TQS. This scale seems to be suitable only in Muslim culture because it was built on Islamic teachings and traditions. This study has found that two dimensions of TQS do not produce good structures in Chinese samples although they produce good structures in Indonesian samples. This is what causes the Chinese sample's TLI to be negative (-0.93). Fortunately, this research anticipated the problem by including PoM. PoM is built based on Chinese tradition [1] and should be able to replace TQS in Chinese samples. The results show that in both samples, PoM correlates with helping. However, what is interesting is that helping predicts PoM more strongly in the Indonesian sample ($\beta = 0.73^{**}$) than in the Chinese sample ($\beta = 0.26^{**}$). That is, the items mentioned in PoM can be understood and implemented by Indonesians, perhaps because the PoM scale is more inclusive than the TQS, which applies exclusively to believers in God. Further study is needed to confirm this, however.

Table 7.
Theistic orientation of the Chinese sample.

Variables	Chinese Theistic Orientation		p	ηp2	OP
	God Believer	Non-God Believer			
Helping	48.79	51.20	0.220	0.015	0.231
Belief	48.88	51.11	0.221	0.015	0.230
Feeling	48.46	51.53	0.100	0.026	0.376
Behavior	49.19	50.80	0.315	0.010	0.170
Happiness	48.94	51.05	0.273	0.012	0.194
Confidence	48.74	51.25	0.181	0.017	0.266
Peace of Mind	49.38	50.61	0.530	0.004	0.096

Note: ηp2= Effect, OP = Observed Power.

One limitation of this research is the cultural differences between Chinese and Indonesian people in their understanding of serenity. The Indonesian Islamic tradition understands serenity in a theocentric way, whereas the Chinese tradition understands serenity in an anthropocentric way (see Table 7). In the Islamic tradition in Indonesia, serenity is closely related to the remembrance of God [19, 20, 60], whereas, in the Chinese tradition, serenity is closely related to a feeling of harmony [1]. This is likely the reason the TQS did not produce the same quality structures in both samples. In addition, we found that 100% of Indonesian respondents believe in God, while 49.03% of Chinese respondents do not believe in God. Thus, it is clear that TQS cannot be applied to people who do not believe in God.

TQS does distinguish components that tend to be anthropocentric (confidence dimension) and others that tend to be theocentric (calmness dimension). It is this dimension (confidence) that is not affected by theistic or atheistic orientation (see Table 7, $p = 0.181$). People who do not believe in God can achieve high scores for this dimension, implying that this dimension is indeed anthropocentric. As for the dimension of calmness (theocentric), Chinese respondents who do not

believe in God cannot fulfill it, thus TQS automatically does not complete and does not test the respondents who do not believe in God. This is the reason TQS does not create a good structure for the Chinese model and it may also explain why, in the Chinese sample, helping is not related to spiritual serenity or the calmness dimension, but is related to the confidence dimension.

5. Conclusion

This study has shown that helping can have a positive impact on happiness, spiritual serenity, and peace of mind in several ways. Cultural differences cause the relationships between these variables to be different and result in different empirical models. Future research can expand on this study by conducting comparative studies on other nations or cultures to confirm and explore how models of helping can affect happiness and spiritual serenity.

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