

Hong Kong College Students’ Lay Beliefs about Flourishing ‘心理強健’: A Directed Content Analysis

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ABSTRACT

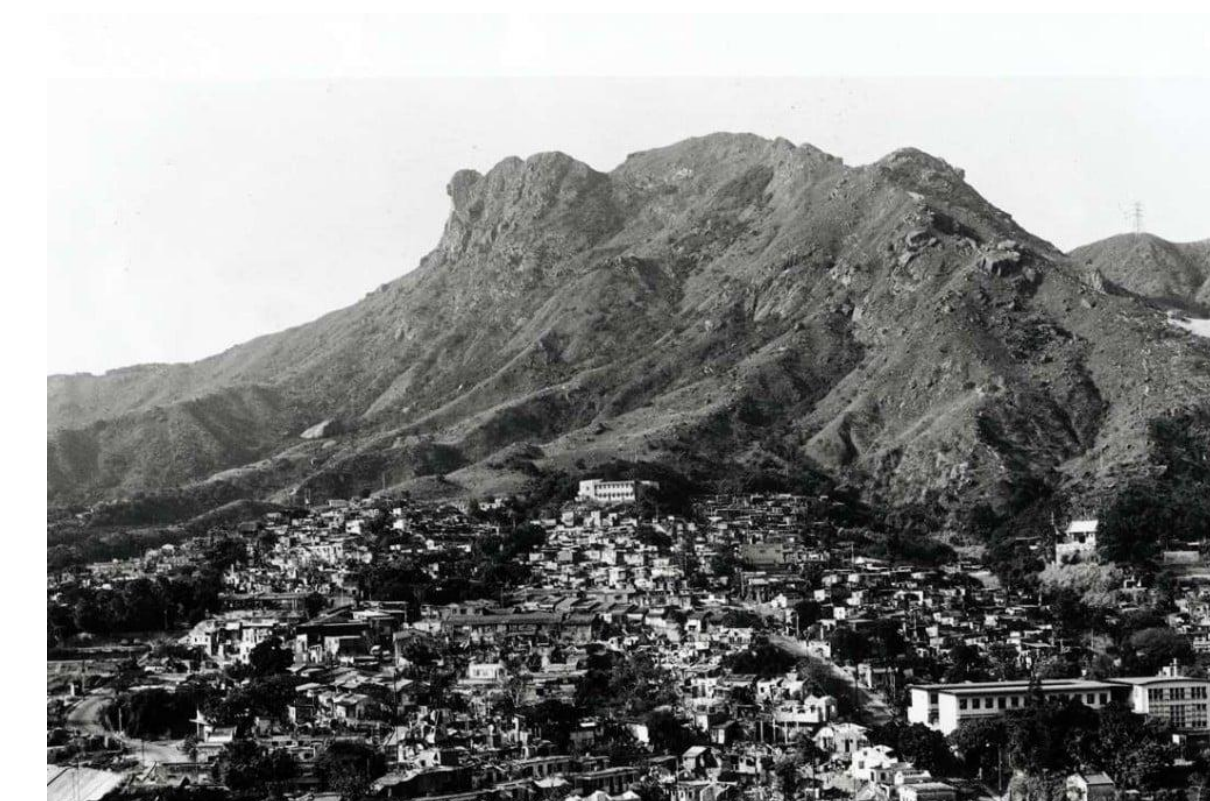
INTRODUCTION AND PURPOSE

PRACTICAL IMPLICATIONS

Flourishing ‘心理強健’—a positive psychological construct that characterizes one’s experience of optimal psychological functioning—has become central in positive psychology (Hefferon et al., 2017). However, cultural variations exist in how individuals understand and experience flourishing (Kiknadze & Fowers, 2023).

In Hong Kong where Eastern and Western cultural values are blended, the local understanding of flourishing remains underexplored. This purpose of study is to explore Hong Kong college students’ lay beliefs about flourishing.

Our findings also provide important practical implications. First, interventions aimed at promoting student well-being should consider integrating the elements of flourishing that are particularly valued by Hong Kong college students, such as resilience and health. Second, flourishing-promoting programs could incorporate cultural values, such as resilience and the Lion Rock Spirit (Lee & Au, 2019), which would resonate with Hong Kong students’ understanding of flourishing. Together, these insights can inform university counseling services, offering tailored approaches to support students in achieving flourishing.



Lion Rock in 1970s

METHODS

Participants

Participants were recruited from a private college in Hong Kong who partook in a prior study on well-being. These participants indicated their consent to participate in an online survey. We received responses from a total of 605 Hong Kong. 209 participants’ responses were removed from analyses because they did not provide any responses to one of our two open-ended questions, resulting in a final sample of 396.

Qualitative Data Analysis

Following prior studies (Li et al., 2021, 2022), we generated two open-ended questions to tap into Hong Kong college students’ lay beliefs about flourishing, ‘what comes immediately to your mind when you think of flourishing?’ and ‘in your opinion, flourishing is...?’ While the first question taps into participants’ associative beliefs, the second question explores their propositional beliefs, based on dual-process and dual-system theories in human cognition (e.g. Frankish, 2010; Strack & Deutsch, 2015). The qualitative data were translated from Chinese to English using back-translation procedure. Then, we used directed content analysis (Hsieh & Shannon, 2005) to examine participants’ lay beliefs about flourishing to the two open-ended prompts. Upon reviewing the literature on flourishing (Kiknadze & Fowers, 2023; Novak et al., 2025) and our data, the third author developed a coding manual with 15 categories including definitions and examples to code participants’ data. The third author conducted a 1-hour training for the first two authors, who then independently coded approximately 10% of the responses based on the coding manual. The interrater reliability was high ($\kappa = .89$) and coding discrepancies were resolved by discussion and consensus. The third author coded the remaining data. After coding the data, we computed the prevalence of the lay beliefs about flourishing in our coding manual. The prevalence of the lay beliefs was assessed by categorical variables (1 = described by participants at least once in any of their qualitative responses; 0 = not mentioned by participants).

RESULTS

Findings from our directed content analysis revealed the top five most prevalent lay beliefs about flourishing: (1) emotional well-being ($n = 188$), (2) resilience ($n = 147$), (3) health ($n = 115$), (4) general positivity ($n = 82$), and (5) cognitive well-being ($n = 45$). Notably, interpersonal duty ($n = 1$) and interpersonal relationships ($n = 16$)—aspects of flourishing theorized to be prevalent in Asian cultures are not supported by our data (Kiknadze & Fowers, 2023).

DISCUSSION

Our findings contribute to multicultural, positive psychological literature. First, aligning with existing studies, our findings provide support for conceptualizing emotional well-being and health as aspects of flourishing. Second, our findings demonstrate culturally unique aspects of flourishing; that is, resilience is an important component of flourishing in Hong Kong. Indeed, resilience is an important cultural value in Hong Kong. For instance, the Lion Rock Spirit is a salient, intergenerational, collective strength that symbolizes resilience, perseverance, and hard work in Hong Kong (Lee & Au, 2019). Third, our findings may caution against researchers imposing stereotypical cultural values (e.g., prioritizing interpersonal duty and relationships) onto Hong Kong—a metropolitan city that blends multicultural, not just East Asian, values.

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