



Disentangling Culture and Religion: A Comparative Analysis of Cultural and Religious Personality Constructs

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Abstract

Background: Personality psychology is shaped by both cultural and religious influences. While often intertwined, the distinct conceptual foundations of cultural personality (arising from shared societal norms and ecological pressures) and religious personality (stemming from individual beliefs, practices, and doctrinal adherence) require clearer delineation to avoid conflation in research and practice.

Objective: This paper aims to systematically contrast cultural personality with religious personality by synthesizing empirical findings and proposing conceptual distinctions, with the goal of clarifying their unique and overlapping influences on individual differences.

Methods: A systematic review of literature was conducted, drawing from peer-reviewed articles, books, and empirical studies identified through database searches. The analysis focused on recent publications (post-2010) utilizing validated personality models and



religiosity measurements to extract and compare thematic content, theoretical frameworks, and methodological approaches.

Findings: The review confirms that cultural and religious personality are related yet distinct constructs. Cultural personality operates primarily at a population level, shaping broad trait distributions (e.g., collectivism promoting agreeableness). Religious personality functions at the individual level, showing consistent, albeit modest, associations with traits like Agreeableness and Conscientiousness. While religion often acts as a cultural subsystem, the two diverge in their primary causal mechanisms—cultural personality from ecological and institutional pressures, and religious personality from doctrinal learning and existential concerns.

Conclusion: Cultural and religious personalities represent different levels of explanation and are driven by distinct mechanisms. An integrated yet differentiated understanding is crucial for accurate psychological assessment and theory.

Implication: Recognizing this distinction is vital for cross-cultural research, clinical practice, and organizational policy, as it prevents misattribution of behavior and allows for more nuanced interventions that respect the separate influences of cultural context and religious identity.

Keywords: Cultural Personality, Religious Personality, Personality Psychology, Cross-Cultural Research, Religiosity

1. Introduction

Personality psychology and cultural psychology intersect where cultures shape typical ways of thinking, feeling, and behaving. At the same time, religiosity—individuals' beliefs, practices, and experiences tied to religion—often maps onto distinct personality patterns (Saroglou & Cohen, 2011). Researchers and practitioners benefit from a clearer account of how *cultural* versus *religious* personality constructs overlap and differ, because conflating them can obscure mechanisms in cross-cultural studies, clinical assessment, and social policy (Church & Lonner, 1998).

The study of personality differences influenced by cultural and religious factors has garnered significant scholarly interest in recent years. Culture, defined as the shared norms, values, and beliefs of a group, plays a fundamental role in shaping individual personality by distributing mental-psychological tendencies across populations, which creates variability within cultural groups (Saucier, 2019). This approach moves beyond outdated ideas of culture as a monolithic "national character" and emphasizes how individual personalities reflect complex, dynamic cultural mindsets. Importantly, culture acts as an ideational system that is both shared and unevenly distributed among members of a society, leading to diverse personality expressions even within the same cultural group (Choi et al., 2025).



Religious personality, on the other hand, is conceptualized as a stable, individual-difference characteristic that reflects recurrent patterns of thought, behavior, and emotion related to religious beliefs and practices, distinct yet sometimes intertwined with broader personality traits (Saucier, 2019). Research suggests religiousness manifests as a personality variable with cross-time stability comparable to other personality dimensions in the Big Five taxonomy. However, religious personality cannot be fully reduced to general personality traits or cultural psychological variables; it encompasses specific cognitive and emotional patterns uniquely linked to religiosity (Saucier, 2019).

Empirical data underscores clear distinctions between cultural personality and religious personality profiles. For instance, a pooled analysis of 17 studies ($n=115,686$) in the United States demonstrated that while cultural factors distribute personality traits across populations, religious affiliation is associated with specific variations in traits like agreeableness, conscientiousness, openness to experience, and emotional stability across major religious groups. Religious minorities tended to have lower emotional stability, and Buddhists and Jews showed higher openness to experience relative to other groups, highlighting that religious personality nuances vary substantially by tradition (Jokela & Laakasuo, 2024).

It is also crucial to recognize that while culture shapes broad personality characteristics as adaptations to ecological, historical, and social constraints, religious personality often involves adherence to specific doctrinal tenets and spiritual worldviews that influence social behavior and emotional life independently of cultural personality (Choi et al., 2025; Gelfand et al., 2011). This distinction emphasizes that cultural personality reflects a psychological adaptation to shared environments, whereas religious personality represents an individuated psychological commitment and identification with a set of metaphysical beliefs and practices that can transcend cultural boundaries (Choi et al., 2025).

In sum, the difference between cultural personality and religious personality lies in their conceptual scope and psychological mechanisms. Cultural personality encompasses distributed norms and values shaping broad personality tendencies within groups, while religious personality involves stable, individual-specific dispositions closely tied to religious cognition and affect. This nuanced understanding is essential for advancing psychological theory and tailoring interventions that respect both cultural and religious identity influences on personality and behavior (Choi et al., 2025; Jokela & Laakasuo, 2024; Saucier, 2019).

This paper contrasts cultural personality (how cultural contexts and cultural syndromes shape trait distributions and behavioral profiles) with religious personality (personality manifestations associated with religiosity/spirituality). We synthesize major empirical findings and propose conceptual distinctions and methodological approaches for disentangling the two.



2. Methodology

The methodology for this review article is based on a comprehensive systematic review of existing literature (Karki, D'Mello, Neupane, et al., 2024; Mahat et al., 2023) examining the distinctions between cultural personality and religious personality. Relevant academic articles, books, and empirical studies were identified through extensive database searches using keywords related to cultural personality, religious personality, and their psychological underpinnings. Inclusion criteria focused on recent peer-reviewed publications, particularly those from 2010 onward, to ensure up-to-date insights, with emphasis on studies employing validated personality models and religiosity measurements. Data were extracted and analyzed for thematic content, comparative findings, and theoretical frameworks (Karki, D'Mello, Mahat, et al., 2024; Neupane et al., 2024) addressing how culture and religion differently influence personality constructs.

3. Results

3.1 Conceptual definitions of Cultural personality

Cultural personality refers to characteristic patterns of cognition, affect, and behavior that emerge from cultural contexts and social structures (e.g., individualism–collectivism, cultural tightness–looseness, ecological demands). Culture shapes both mean levels and expressions of basic personality traits and creates culturally specific behavioral syndromes. Cross-cultural research shows both universality (Big Five traits can be found broadly) and culture-specific variation in trait profiles and behavioral repertoires (Triandis & Suh, 2002).

Recent scholarship moves beyond outdated notions of "national character" and treats culture as a dynamic, integral context for personality development. Culture influences patterns of personality traits, behavioral preferences, and identity construction. For instance, collectivist cultures—characterized by interdependence and group cohesion—tend to promote traits such as agreeableness and conscientiousness, valuing social harmony and responsibility. Conversely, individualistic cultures encourage openness to experiences and extraversion, fostering autonomy and personal exploration. Socioeconomic status (SES) also interacts with culture to influence traits; higher SES is linked with greater conscientiousness, emotional stability, and openness, highlighting an economic dimension to cultural personality shaping. These insights emphasize the necessity of culturally sensitive methodologies to appreciate how culture and environment dynamically influence personality traits over time (Choi et al., 2025).

3.2 Conceptual definitions of Religious personality

Religious personality denotes the set of personality tendencies and dispositions that are correlated with religiosity/spirituality — including moral concerns, ritual participation, trust in supernatural agents, and community-oriented behaviors. Religiosity may be conceptualized multidimensionally (belief, practice, experience, belonging). Empirical meta-analyses indicate consistent but modest associations between religiosity and traits such as Agreeableness and



Conscientiousness, with smaller or mixed associations for Extraversion, Neuroticism, and Openness (Saroglou, 2010).

The study of religious personality investigates how religiosity intertwines with personality traits across diverse cultural contexts. The Big Five personality traits—extraversion, agreeableness, conscientiousness, neuroticism, and openness—show differential relationships with various facets of religious beliefs and practices. Meta-analytic findings reveal that agreeableness and conscientiousness consistently correlate positively with intrinsic religiousness, suggesting these traits support religious commitment and prosocial behavior. Neuroticism links more with extrinsic religiousness or religious fundamentalism, often reflecting anxiety-driven or socially motivated religiosity. The relationships, while statistically significant, usually have small effect sizes, implying the involvement of numerous moderating factors such as cultural background and individual experiences. Cross-cultural research confirms these patterns but also underscores variability depending on religious traditions and societal contexts (Furnham & Fenton O’Creevy, 2024).

3.3 Intersection of Culture and Religion in Personality

Emerging literature highlights that personality's interplay with religion cannot be disentangled from the cultural environment. For example, in multicultural and globalized societies, individuals exhibit multicultural identities and "cultural frame switching," adapting their self-concept and religious expressions based on situational cultural cues (Doucerain et al., 2024; Ertanir et al., 2024). This dynamic process impacts how religious personality manifests, influencing attitudes, rituals, and spiritual experiences. Additionally, religious personality shapes key social behaviors and ecological perspectives, linking spirituality to broader concerns like community well-being and environmental stewardship. The current research calls for integrative models that consider personality, culture, and religiosity as co-constituting forces rather than isolated variables (Baranski et al., 2024).

Future directions emphasize the need for longitudinal studies and interdisciplinary approaches to better understand the fluid, reciprocal relationships among cultural personality, religiousness, and environmental contexts. This holistic view aids in explaining youth behavior, decision-making, and identity negotiation in rapidly changing societies, thus informing psychological practice, communal policies, and educational frameworks that accommodate diverse cultural and religious backgrounds (Chauhan, 2025).

3.3.1 Culture → Personality: population-level shaping

Cultural ecologies, institutions, and socialization shape the distribution of personality traits across societies. Scholars argue that both social-structural factors and cultural syndromes (e.g., tightness, collectivism) contribute to population-level differences in average trait scores and behavioral templates. This means “cultural personality” often refers to patterns that reflect broad, stable social influences rather than narrower belief systems (Triandis & Suh, 2002).



3.3.2 Religiosity–personality associations

Meta-analytic and large-sample studies find relatively stable small to moderate associations between religiosity and certain personality traits. Studies report that religiosity tends to be positively associated with Agreeableness and Conscientiousness, sometimes Extraversion, and shows weaker or inconsistent relations with Openness and Neuroticism. However, effect sizes vary across cultures, religious traditions, and measurement choices (Saroglou, 2010).

3.3.3 Religion as part of culture (and vice versa)

Religion may be embedded within culture (religious norms often form a core part of a society's cultural values), and culture shapes the form and prevalence of religiosity in a population. The relationship is bidirectional: culture influences religious expression, and institutions shape cultural values. Several reviews emphasize that religion can be conceptualized as a cultural subsystem with its own norms, rituals, and moral economies — making the separation between “cultural” and “religious” personality analytically challenging (Saroglou & Cohen, 2011).

3.3.4 Conceptual distinctions: where cultural and religious personality diverge

Indicators	Cultural Personality	Religious Personality
Level of explanation	<i>Cultural personality</i> is often a population- or societal-level descriptor (average profiles, cultural syndromes).	<i>Religious personality</i> is primarily an individual-level disposition (degree and character of religiosity), though it aggregates at the societal level.
Primary causal mechanisms	Cultural personality primarily arises from ecological pressures, institutions, child-rearing practices, and normative expectations.	Religious personality arises from doctrinal learning, ritual participation, existential concerns, moral communities, and selective socialization processes. While both rely on socialization, religiosity often introduces unique cognitive and existential schemas (e.g., beliefs about supernatural agents, the afterlife).
Measurement operationalization	Cultural personality metrics use nation- or group-level indicators (Hofstede dimensions, cultural tightness/looseness) or aggregate personality trait means.	Religious personality is measured by scales of belief, practice, experience, importance, and identity (e.g., intrinsic/extrinsic religiosity; spirituality scales).



Function and behavioral repertoire	Cultural personality prescribes broad social patterns (e.g., deference vs. autonomy).	Religious personality predicts specific behaviors associated with worship, ritual, moral choices, and group-boundary maintenance.
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4. Discussion: theoretical implications and examples

- **Overlap through moral communities.** Religiosity and culture both create moral communities that reward certain trait expressions (e.g., cooperation, rule-following). Thus, observed correlations between religiosity and Agreeableness/Conscientiousness may reflect both individual predispositions and cultural reinforcement (Saroglou, 2010).
- **When culture substitutes for religion.** In secular societies where cultural institutions supply cohesion and norms, “cultural personality” patterns may arise in the absence of religious systems; conversely, in highly religious societies, religion may be the primary cultural engine. Comparative data suggest the effect sizes of religiosity–personality associations vary across cultural settings (Jensen, 2021).
- **Practical consequences.** For clinical assessment, organizational selection, or intergroup work, distinguishing cultural baseline trait distributions from religiosity-linked tendencies avoids misattribution (e.g., mistaking culturally normative deference for individual submissiveness due to religiosity).

5. Conclusion

In conclusion, this analysis firmly establishes that cultural personality and religious personality, while frequently intersecting, are conceptually and mechanistically distinct constructs. Cultural personality is a population-level phenomenon, emerging from broad ecological, historical, and institutional pressures that shape the distribution of traits and behavioral templates within a society. In contrast, religious personality is an individual-difference variable, rooted in specific doctrinal beliefs, ritual practices, and existential concerns that foster stable dispositions.

The primary distinction lies in their level of explanation and causal pathways. Culture creates a broad normative framework for social adaptation, whereas religiosity introduces unique cognitive schemas and moral commitments that can transcend cultural boundaries. Although religion often functions as a cultural subsystem, its associated personality patterns are not reducible to broader cultural traits. Recognizing this differentiation is paramount for advancing psychological theory, as it allows for more precise modeling of the factors that shape human individuality.

Ultimately, moving beyond a conflated view of these constructs is essential. A clear-eyed understanding that an individual's personality is shaped by both their cultural context and



their religious commitments, in independent and interactive ways, provides a more robust foundation for cross-cultural research, clinical assessment, and the development of effective, culturally and religiously sensitive policies and interventions.

Transparency Statement: We confirm that this study has been conducted with honesty and in full adherence to ethical guidelines.

Data Availability Statement: Authors can provide data.

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Authors' Contributions: The authors conducted all research activities i.e., concept, data collecting, drafting and final review of manuscript.



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