



Religious/Spiritual CAM in the Foreign-Born Population of the United States

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TERMS AND GENERAL INFORMATION

The **foreign-born population** of the United States includes anyone not born a US citizen, such as immigrants, refugees, and illegal residents. In 2005, the foreign-born population totaled 35,689,000, the highest level since 1930. Latin Americans (53.3%) and Asians (26.7%) account for 80% of the total.

The foreign-born population has contributed to **religious diversification**. The New Immigrant Survey Pilot asked a sample of legal immigrants to state their religious preference. Nearly two-thirds identified themselves as Christians, significantly less than the percentage of Christians in the native-born population. Nearly 20% identified themselves as adherents of religions other than Christianity, significantly more than the corresponding native-born percentage. The researchers concluded that if current trends continue, "the religious landscape in the United States may be substantially altered" in coming years.

"**CAM [complementary and alternative medicine]** is a group of diverse medical and health care systems, practices, and products that are not presently considered to be part of conventional medicine. Conventional medicine is medicine as practiced by holders of M.D. (medical doctor) or D.O. (doctor of osteopathy) degrees and by their allied health professionals. . . . Complementary medicine is used together with conventional medicine. Alternative medicine is used in place of conventional medicine." [National Center for Complementary and Alternative Medicine, NCCAM]

NCCAM identifies **four domains of CAM** that may overlap: mind-body medicine, biologically based practices, manipulative and body-based practices, and energy medicine. Whole medical systems of CAM, such as traditional Chinese medicine and Ayurveda from India, cut across these domains.

The distinctive feature of a **religious/spiritual worldview** is the perception of transcendent entities, realities, and resources that impinge upon or infuse the material world. Religious/spiritual CAM perceives transcendent factors in health and well-being. "Religion" is a more institutionalized, "spirituality" a more individualized perception of transcendence. Religious/spiritual CAM can be found in all four domains of the NCCAM typology and can play a major role in whole medical systems.

SELECTED RELIGIOUS/SPIRITUAL CAM BY GROUP

Note: Counter-intuitively, it may be that "As immigrants stay longer in the US or as their use of English becomes more proficient, the likelihood that they use CAM therapies **increases** as well, and it gradually approaches the level of CAM use by native-born Americans." [Su D et al. Acculturation and the use of complementary and alternative medicine. *Social Science and Medicine* 2008 Jan; 66(2):439-53.]

Latin Americans:

Most foreign-born Latin Americans are Christians, the majority being Roman Catholic. Thus it is not surprising that **prayer** figures into their CAM practices. A study of attitudes toward hospice care among Catholic Mexicans found "a strong emphasis on the use of prayer to deal with issues of dying" but no interest in having a priest visit the patient: "these visits were discouraged, since a priest coming to a home was indicative of someone ready to die." [Gelfand DE et al. Mexicans and care for the terminally ill. *American Journal of Hospice and Palliative Care* 2001 Nov/Dec;18(6):391-6.]

Central Americans use a variety of whole medical systems, some specifically for spiritual ailments. Curanderismo ("the healing"), for instance, sees illness as fundamentally spiritual in nature, a divine punishment for sins. [Padilla R et al. Use of curanderismo in a public health care system. *Archives of Internal Medicine* 2001 May;161(10):1336-40. Also Murguia A et al. Use and implications of ethnomedical health care approaches among Central American immigrants. *Health and Social Work* 2003 Feb;28(1):43-51.]

"The majority of **Haitians** probably practice some degree of both Christianity and Voodoo, although Protestant churchgoers are less likely to than Catholics, and most, if given the opportunity, will use both the ethnomedical and biomedical healing systems. . . . Within the etiological categories of illness, there are those that are considered best treated by Western biomedicine, those best treated by the herbalist, and those that are best treated by the Voodoo priest (houngan) or priestess (mambo)." [Miller NL. Haitian ethnomedical systems and biomedical practitioners. *Journal of Transcultural Nursing* 2000 Jun;11(3):204-11. Also Brown KM. Mama Lola: A Vodou priestess in Brooklyn. Berkeley: U of California P; 1991.]

Argentines are therapeutically eclectic in their health care choices. These include the services of "urban shamans" who practice Santeria, spiritism, and other traditional medical systems in order to "deal with untamed metaphysical powers that exceed the mind-body Cartesian distinction, typical of Western therapies." [Viladrich A. From "shrinks" to "urban shamans." *Culture, Medicine, and Psychiatry* 2007 Sep; 31(3):307-28. Also Murphy JM. Santeria: African spirits in America. Boston: Beacon; 1993.]

Asians:

Although CAM practices and rates varied across several **Asian American groups** in one study, spirituality was the "strongest predictor of any CAM use for most" and "increased spirituality was globally related to increased CAM use." Religious/spiritual CAM practices identified in this study included Ayurveda, curanderismo, group prayer, healing rituals, and meditation. [Hsiao A-F et al. Complementary and alternative medicine use among Asian-American subgroups. *Journal of Alternative and Complementary Medicine* 2006 Dec;12(10):1003-10.]

Ayurveda is the dominant whole medical system in **Asian Indian culture**. "The Ayurvedic view of health emphasizes social, environmental, and spiritual contexts, and the key concept is harmony within the organism and within the system of which the organism is a part – that is, society at one level and the universe at a higher level. . . . Ultimately, according to Ayurvedic theory, the body and the cosmos are reflections of each other." [Ramakrishna J, Weiss MG. Health, illness, and immigration: East Indians in the United States. *Western Journal of Medicine* 1992 Sep;157(3):265-70. Also Desai PN. Health and medicine in the Hindu tradition. New York: Crossroads; 1989; Sharma A. The Hindu tradition. Chicago: Park Ridge Center; 2002.]

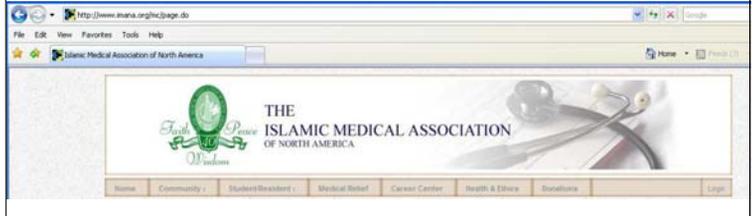
Hmong shamanism is one of the best documented whole medical systems among the foreign-born. "Traditionally, the Hmong view life as a continuous circle of birth and rebirth and believe that two worlds – physical and spiritual – exist side by side. Beings in both worlds may interact with one another in various ways." [Xiong P et al. Hmong shamanism: Animist spiritual healing in America's urban heartland. In: Barnes LL, Sered SS, eds. *Religion and healing in America*. New York: Oxford UP; 2005. p. 439-54. Also Fadiman A. *The spirit catches you and you fall down*. New York: Farrar, Strauss and Giroux; 1997.]
[Asians continued top of next column]

"Both acupuncture and herbs are configured under the heading of **Chinese medicine**. But if we cast a wider net, we draw in a good deal more – not only needles and herbs but also practices like taijiquan and qigong, relationships with the dead in the forms of gods, ghosts, ancestors, medicinal understandings of good, and all manner of divination." [Barnes LL. Multiple meanings of Chinese healing in the United States. In: Barnes LL, Sered SS, eds. *Religion and healing in America*. New York: Oxford UP; 2005. p. 307-31.]

Asian American Buddhists come from countries where temples and monks serve healing functions. "Monks . . . routinely prescribe herbal remedies for particular maladies and chant protective scriptural texts on behalf of laypeople. Specially trained 'healer-monks' can sometimes be found in local [immigrant] Thai temples. These monks may be adept at astrology, palmistry, and shamanic healing. In one case recounted to us, a visiting healer-monk healed a local monk's sprained arm by whisking holy water on him (a common Thai Buddhist ritual) and intoning a special incantation." [Numrich PD. Complementary and alternative medicine in America's "two Buddhisms." In: Barnes LL, Sered SS, eds. *Religion and healing in America*. New York: Oxford UP; 2005. p. 343-57.] A study of depression among elderly Thais states, "Most participants reported that going to the temple was the most effective treatment." [Soonthornchaiya R. Perceptions of depression among elderly Thai immigrants. Chicago: University of Illinois at Chicago Health Sciences Center; 2004.]

The majority of **Muslims** in the US come from South Asia and the Middle East. Healing practices include reciting Arabic passages from the Qur'an over afflicted areas of the body. "Asian Eastern Islamic teaching, guided by the Qur'an, has a direct effect on healing modality through the spirit, soul, and mind and provides homeostasis of life. . . . One must employ a proactive search for cure and recovery to carry out responsibility toward the body as a gift from God to be cared for." [Carter DJ, Rashidi A. Theoretical model of psychotherapy: Eastern Asian-Islamic women with mental illness. *Health Care for Women International* 2003 May/Jun;24:399-413. Also Rahman F. Health and medicine in the Islamic tradition. New York: Crossroads; 1987; Waugh EW. The Islamic tradition. Chicago: Park Ridge Center; 1999.]

SELECTED INTERNET SITES



Note: **PubMed** (www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pubmed/), the free-access Internet site favored by physicians, has limited value for finding information on foreign-born religious/spiritual CAM due to the small number of articles on foreign-born groups in its database and inconsistent keyword indexing on religion/spirituality.

DISCUSSION

As with most minority groups, CAM practices of the foreign-born are under-represented in the medical literature and under-reported by CAM users. The subset of *religious/spiritual* CAM receives even less attention; for instance, two comprehensive studies, the CDC's 2002 National Health Interview Survey and the Institute of Medicine's 2005 report, *Complementary and Alternative Medicine in the United States*, say little about foreign-born religious/spiritual CAM. The latter report identifies particular challenges to conventional medicine posed by religious/spiritual CAM, such as measures of therapeutic efficacy that focus less on physiology than on "intangible, yet nonetheless compelling, personal benefits."

For many foreign-born individuals and groups, the "travail" of "travel" – both words have the same root – is mitigated by religion/spirituality. All the more so in matters of health and well-being. This poster offers a sampling of the relatively few resources that feature foreign-born religious/spiritual CAM and makes the obvious case for more research and greater awareness.