

Cultural Silence and Emotional Suppression in Asian-American Families: A Phenomenological Exploration

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ABSTRACT

Objective: This study aimed to explore the lived experiences of cultural silence and emotional suppression within Asian-American families.

Methods: This qualitative study utilized a phenomenological approach to investigate emotional suppression among 24 Asian-American adults residing in the United States. Participants were selected through purposive sampling to ensure diversity across ethnic subgroups and generational backgrounds. Data were collected through semi-structured, in-depth interviews conducted via secure video conferencing platforms. Interviews lasted between 60 and 90 minutes and continued until theoretical saturation was reached. All interviews were audio-recorded, transcribed verbatim, and analyzed thematically using NVivo software. Thematic analysis was performed through an inductive coding process that emphasized participants' subjective interpretations and cultural meaning-making around emotional expression.

Findings: Four major themes emerged from the data: family communication norms, cultural identity and emotional suppression, impacts on mental and emotional health, and pathways to emotional expression and healing. Participants reported indirect communication, emotional stoicism, and intergenerational silence as common patterns within their families. These dynamics were often reinforced by cultural expectations of respect, shame, and self-control. Emotional suppression was linked to internalized distress, difficulty in emotional identification, and barriers to help-seeking. Despite these challenges, participants also described transformative experiences involving therapy, peer support, and bicultural integration that facilitated emotional literacy and relational healing.

Conclusion: Emotional suppression and cultural silence in Asian-American families are shaped by deep-rooted cultural values and intergenerational practices. While these patterns may hinder emotional well-being, participants also demonstrated adaptive strategies and agency in redefining emotional norms. These findings underscore the importance of culturally responsive mental health practices that validate heritage while promoting emotional authenticity.

Keywords: Asian-American families, emotional suppression, cultural silence, intergenerational communication, phenomenological research, bicultural identity, mental health.

1. Introduction

In Asian-American families, the interplay between cultural expectations and emotional expression presents a complex landscape shaped by historical, intergenerational, and societal forces. While emotional health is increasingly acknowledged as a critical component of well-being, cultural norms within many Asian communities continue to place a premium on emotional restraint, silence, and indirect communication. This cultural orientation often clashes with Western ideals of openness, emotional articulation, and psychological transparency, creating a dissonance that particularly affects second-generation Asian Americans navigating bicultural identities (Ang & Tsai, 2023; Zhang, 2024). Emotional suppression—deliberate efforts to conceal, mute, or internalize emotional experiences—is a frequently observed phenomenon in this context, and it holds significant implications for mental health, family dynamics, and intergenerational understanding (Kim & Sasaki, 2024; Sun & Lau, 2018).

Cultural silence and emotional suppression are deeply rooted in values such as collectivism, filial piety, and the prioritization of family reputation. Within many Asian cultural traditions, emotional regulation is not simply an individual endeavor but a relational act, wherein controlling one's emotional expression is associated with respect, maturity, and social harmony (Huang & Huang, 2024; Senft et al., 2023). For example, suppressing negative affect may be seen not as emotional avoidance, but as an act of preserving family dignity or preventing shame (Sharif et al., 2022). These culturally sanctioned norms serve to stabilize social hierarchies and maintain group cohesion but may simultaneously hinder emotional intimacy and psychological openness within the family unit (Huang et al., 2016; Rakhmaniar, 2023).

The psychological implications of such cultural frameworks have garnered increasing scholarly attention. Studies indicate that Asian Americans are less likely to disclose emotional distress, seek therapy, or articulate emotional needs, particularly within family contexts (Chiang et al., 2022; Shahid et al., 2021). The internalization of emotional suppression is associated with heightened risks of anxiety, depression, and psychosomatic complaints (Dong et al., 2019; Zhu et al., 2023). Moreover, Asian Americans are often caught between the cultural norms of their heritage and the expressive expectations of the dominant American culture, leading to emotional dissonance, identity confusion, and relational strain (Lei & Pellitteri, 2017; Suh et al., 2020).

In exploring the causes of emotional suppression among Asian Americans, it is important to examine early familial interactions. Research shows that emotional modeling in childhood—such as observing parents who avoid open emotional dialogue or respond to distress with silence—plays a formative role in shaping emotional habits (Huang, 2024; Thomas & Haddad, 2022). This modeling is often unspoken, yet deeply instructive, teaching children that emotional restraint is normative and that silence, rather than speech, is a tool for navigating discomfort or conflict. For many Asian-American children, silence becomes both a shield and a script—protecting the family image while guiding future emotional behavior (Leong et al., 2023).

The consequences of such suppression are not merely internal. Emotionally restrained communication within families often leads to misunderstandings, distance, and an inability to provide mutual emotional support. This is especially true in cases where generational and cultural gaps widen the interpretive distance between parents and children (Bebko et al., 2019; Yoo & Miyamoto, 2018). Second-generation Asian Americans, who grow up in Western educational and social systems that encourage self-expression, often find themselves at odds with their parents' values and communication styles (Gee et al., 2020; Kim & Sasaki, 2024). This disconnect may contribute to feelings of isolation or rejection, even when familial love is present but unspoken.

Gendered expectations further complicate emotional expression in Asian-American families. Emotional stoicism is often more strongly enforced in male children, reinforcing traditional ideals of masculine strength through emotional control, while female children may face contradictory expectations—to be both nurturing and emotionally contained (Lin, 2016). These gendered emotional scripts are passed down through subtle cultural messages and reinforced through parenting practices, often with little space for questioning or adaptation (Huang & Huang, 2024). In this way, emotional suppression is not only cultural but also gendered, intergenerational, and structural.

Compounding the effects of suppression is the stigma surrounding mental health in many Asian communities. Psychological distress is frequently medicalized, moralized, or dismissed, with mental illness viewed as a source of shame that reflects poorly on the family (Gee et al., 2020; Shahid et al., 2021). Consequently, individuals experiencing emotional difficulties often remain silent, fearing judgment or misunderstanding from both family and community. This reluctance to seek help is compounded by a lack of culturally

competent mental health services, further discouraging access and engagement (Chiang et al., 2022; Suh et al., 2020).

Recent literature highlights the need for more culturally attuned frameworks to understand how emotional suppression operates in the lives of Asian Americans. Rather than viewing suppression as merely maladaptive, scholars have begun to examine its protective and adaptive dimensions within specific cultural milieus (Ang & Tsai, 2023; Senft et al., 2023). For instance, emotional restraint may serve as a coping mechanism in environments where open vulnerability is not safe or socially sanctioned. It may also reflect deep cultural values that prioritize relational obligations over individual expression (Rakhmaniar, 2023). Understanding these nuances is essential in developing culturally informed interventions that do not pathologize emotional styles but instead contextualize them within broader cultural systems (Huang et al., 2016).

Despite this growing body of research, there remains a need to explore how cultural silence and emotional suppression are personally experienced and interpreted by Asian Americans, particularly within the intimate setting of family life. While quantitative studies have established correlations between suppression and mental health outcomes, fewer qualitative studies have examined the subjective meanings individuals assign to these emotional patterns. Furthermore, the emotional lives of Asian-American families are not monolithic. Intra-group differences based on ethnicity, immigration history, language proficiency, and generational status contribute to a heterogeneous landscape of emotional experiences (Senft et al., 2023; Wang et al., 2024).

The current study responds to this gap by employing a phenomenological approach to explore how Asian-American individuals experience and make meaning of emotional suppression and cultural silence within their families. This methodological choice allows for a deeper engagement with participants' lived realities, capturing the emotional, cognitive, and relational dimensions of their experiences. Phenomenology is particularly well-suited for examining the subtleties of emotional life—its unspoken rules, embodied practices, and evolving interpretations—within complex cultural environments (Kim & Sasaki, 2024; Zhang, 2024).

Additionally, the study seeks to highlight the ways in which participants navigate, resist, or reinterpret cultural expectations around emotional expression. While many participants may describe experiences of constraint and

suppression, others may reveal paths toward healing, adaptation, or cultural hybridity. For example, the increasing visibility of mental health discourse among younger Asian Americans, as well as growing access to therapy and peer support networks, may be reshaping how emotional expression is viewed and practiced in contemporary family settings (Leong et al., 2023; Thomas & Haddad, 2022). By centering these personal narratives, the study contributes to a more nuanced understanding of emotional development in bicultural contexts.

Ultimately, this research aims to inform culturally responsive clinical practice, mental health outreach, and family support services.

2. Methods

2.1. Study Design and Participants

This study employed a qualitative phenomenological design to explore the lived experiences of cultural silence and emotional suppression among individuals raised in Asian-American families. The phenomenological approach was chosen to capture the depth and complexity of participants' subjective emotional and cultural experiences within familial contexts. A total of 24 participants were recruited from across the United States using purposive sampling strategies. Eligible participants self-identified as Asian-American adults who had spent most of their developmental years within culturally traditional family structures. Recruitment was conducted through social media platforms, university networks, and community organizations serving Asian-American populations. The study continued until theoretical saturation was achieved, ensuring that no new themes emerged from the data and that participant narratives were sufficiently rich and repetitive to support the core phenomena under investigation.

2.2. Measures

2.2.1. Semi-Structured Interview

Data were collected through semi-structured interviews conducted individually via secure video conferencing platforms. Each interview lasted approximately 60 to 90 minutes and was guided by an interview protocol designed to elicit detailed reflections on experiences of emotional suppression, family communication dynamics, and the role of cultural expectations in emotional expression. Questions were open-ended and flexible, allowing participants to elaborate on personal narratives while the interviewer

followed up with prompts for clarity and depth. All interviews were audio-recorded with participants' consent and subsequently transcribed verbatim. The semi-structured format allowed for both consistency in the key areas explored and adaptability based on participants' unique experiences.

2.3. Data Analysis

Data analysis was conducted using thematic analysis facilitated by NVivo software. The analysis followed an inductive process that included multiple readings of the transcripts to ensure immersion in the data. Initial coding involved line-by-line identification of meaningful segments, which were then grouped into preliminary themes. Through an iterative process of refinement, the research team developed a structured thematic framework that captured the core elements of participants' experiences with cultural silence and emotional suppression. Codes and themes were continuously compared across interviews to identify patterns and divergences, while memos and reflective notes supported analytical rigor and reflexivity throughout the process. Triangulation was achieved through peer debriefing

and regular consultation among research team members to enhance the trustworthiness and credibility of the findings.

3. Findings and Results

The study sample consisted of 24 Asian-American adults residing in various regions across the United States. Of these participants, 14 identified as female (58.3%) and 10 as male (41.7%). The age of participants ranged from 21 to 39 years, with a mean age of 28.6 years. In terms of ethnic background, the sample included individuals of Chinese-American (n = 7), Korean-American (n = 5), Vietnamese-American (n = 4), Filipino-American (n = 4), and Indian-American (n = 4) descent. Most participants were second-generation immigrants (n = 16, 66.7%), while the remainder were first-generation immigrants who arrived in the United States before the age of 12 (n = 8, 33.3%). All participants held at least a bachelor's degree, with 13 (54.2%) having completed graduate-level education. Recruitment was conducted through online platforms, university networks, and community organizations, ensuring a diverse range of perspectives within the Asian-American population.

Table 1

Themes, Subthemes, and Concepts Derived from Participant Interviews

Category (Theme)	Subcategory (Subtheme)	Concepts (Open Codes)
1. Family Communication Norms	Indirect Expression of Emotion	Avoiding confrontation, Hints instead of direct speech, Emotional restraint, Deflection through humor
	Role of Nonverbal Communication	Eye contact avoidance, Silence as message, Facial expressions, Tone shifts
	Hierarchical Communication	Speaking only when spoken to, Respecting elders' voice, Withholding opinions, Obedience
	Taboo Topics in Family	No talk about mental health, Avoidance of sex/romance topics, Money as off-limits, Ignoring conflict
	Parental Expectations on Speech	Speak less/listen more, Don't talk back, Maintain harmony, Use formal language
2. Cultural Identity and Emotional Suppression	Silence During Conflict	Withdrawing, Delay in resolution, Passive resistance, Prolonged tension
	Emotional Stoicism as Cultural Ideal	Strength through silence, Emotions = weakness, Pride in endurance, Repressing sadness
	Shame-Based Emotional Regulation	Fear of disappointing family, Shame in vulnerability, Emotional isolation, Self-criticism
	Generational Disconnect in Emotional Norms	Parents as emotionally distant, Second-gen seeking openness, Language barriers, Misunderstanding feelings
	Emotional Avoidance as Survival Mechanism	Numbing, Emotional distancing, Escapism, Disengagement
3. Impact on Mental and Emotional Health	Pressure to Uphold Family Image	Presenting perfection, Hiding distress, Reputation concerns, Protecting family honor
	Internalization of Emotions	Bottled-up anger, Suppressed sadness, Chronic anxiety, Emotional exhaustion
	Difficulty Naming and Processing Emotions	Lack of emotional vocabulary, Confusion over feelings, Emotional delay, Avoidance of reflection
	Emotional Burnout in Adulthood	Constant tension, Fear of vulnerability, Breakdown moments, Loss of control
	Help-Seeking Hesitation	Stigma around therapy, Feeling unworthy of help, Distrust in outsiders, Dependency on self

4. Pathways to Emotional Expression and Healing	Intergenerational Transmission of Suppression	Learning by observation, Repeating parent behaviors, Silence as inherited, Emotional modeling
	Conflicted Cultural Belonging	Feeling split between worlds, Emotional inauthenticity, Lack of cultural fit, Dual identity fatigue
	Building Emotional Literacy	Naming emotions, Journaling, Learning from peers, Emotional education
	Reclaiming Voice in Adulthood	Speaking up, Boundary-setting, Challenging norms, Reparenting self
	Role of Peer and Community Support	Validation from others, Group conversations, Safe spaces, Peer modeling
	Therapy as a Transformative Space	Learning emotional tools, Feeling heard, Undoing shame, Exploring identity
	Culturally Rooted Healing Practices	Mindfulness, Intergenerational dialogue, Cultural storytelling, Art and rituals
	Embracing Bicultural Emotional Expression	Integrating Western openness, Honoring heritage, Balanced expression, Creating new norms
	Interpersonal Empowerment	Advocating for needs, Emotionally present relationships, Teaching others, Modeling vulnerability

Theme 1: Family Communication Norms

Participants commonly described indirect expression of emotion within their families, often characterized by vague gestures, hints, or avoidance. Rather than discussing feelings openly, many learned to communicate through subtle means. One participant noted, “If my mom was disappointed, she wouldn’t say it outright—she’d just stop talking for a while, and we were supposed to understand.” This indirectness, often embedded in expectations to maintain harmony, made emotional exchange unclear and emotionally distant.

The importance of nonverbal communication was emphasized by many participants, who shared that tone, silence, or body language conveyed more than words. As one interviewee put it, “My dad never said he was proud of me, but he’d nod and smile—that was his way of saying it.” Nonverbal cues were both culturally familiar and emotionally meaningful, though sometimes ambiguous and difficult to interpret.

Hierarchical communication emerged as a prominent subtheme, with many participants expressing that their voices were subordinate to elders. Children were often discouraged from challenging parental authority or expressing disagreement. “Growing up, I was always told: ‘You listen, don’t talk back.’ I didn’t even think I could say how I felt,” shared one participant. This dynamic reinforced emotional suppression and maintained power structures within the household.

When it came to taboo topics in family life, many noted that sensitive issues such as mental health, romantic relationships, or personal struggles were not openly discussed. “I was diagnosed with anxiety in college, and when I told my mom, she said, ‘Don’t say things like that, it brings shame,’” recalled one participant. Silence around certain topics fostered emotional distance and left participants feeling unsupported or isolated.

Parental expectations on speech also contributed to emotional suppression. Children were often expected to be quiet, respectful, and obedient. As one respondent reflected, “In our house, being a ‘good child’ meant not talking too much. Speaking up was seen as rude or rebellious.” These expectations silenced emotional expression and reinforced passive roles in communication.

Lastly, silence during conflict was a common strategy. Rather than arguing or discussing disagreements, participants described prolonged silence or passive resistance. “My parents would just stop talking to each other for days. We all knew something was wrong, but no one ever said it,” one interviewee recalled. This silence often heightened emotional tension and left issues unresolved.

Theme 2: Cultural Identity and Emotional Suppression

Many participants viewed emotional stoicism as a cultural ideal, describing how showing vulnerability was perceived as weakness. “Crying in front of my parents was unthinkable. You’re supposed to be strong, especially as the eldest son,” explained one individual. Endurance, restraint, and emotional control were praised, often at the expense of emotional health.

Shame-based emotional regulation was also central to many narratives. Participants described feeling ashamed of their emotions or fearing that expressing them would dishonor their family. “When I felt depressed, I couldn’t tell anyone. I felt like it would make my parents look bad, like I was ungrateful,” one participant admitted. This shame created internal conflict and discouraged help-seeking behavior.

A generational disconnect in emotional norms was reported by participants who felt caught between traditional cultural values and Western norms of openness. “I talk to my friends about everything, but I could never have those

conversations with my parents,” said one respondent. Language barriers and differing cultural expectations widened this emotional gap.

Some participants described emotional avoidance as a survival mechanism, particularly when dealing with intergenerational trauma or hardship. “We just keep going. No time to dwell on feelings,” one person remarked. Others spoke of numbing, shutting down, or withdrawing emotionally to cope with familial or cultural pressure.

Pressure to uphold the family image was another contributing factor. Participants spoke of masking emotional distress to maintain the appearance of a well-functioning, successful family. “No matter how bad things were, I had to smile at family events. We weren’t allowed to show cracks,” recalled a participant. This emphasis on saving face further limited emotional authenticity.

Theme 3: Impact on Mental and Emotional Health

A consistent experience across interviews was the internalization of emotions. Participants frequently described bottling up feelings, which over time led to emotional exhaustion and even physical symptoms. “I didn’t even realize I was angry until I started having migraines every week,” shared one participant. Unexpressed emotions accumulated over years, becoming sources of psychological distress.

Another major issue was difficulty naming and processing emotions. Many described lacking the vocabulary or framework to understand their internal states. “I knew I felt something, but I couldn’t explain it—no one ever taught me how,” said one interviewee. This emotional illiteracy hindered self-awareness and emotional regulation.

Several participants reported emotional burnout in adulthood, especially in relationships or caregiving roles. “I reached a point where I couldn’t feel anything anymore—I was just numb,” reflected one participant. Years of emotional suppression often culminated in emotional breakdowns, with many feeling overwhelmed or disconnected from their inner world.

Help-seeking hesitation was widespread, with participants expressing ambivalence about therapy or emotional support. “I thought therapy was for white people. In my family, you just deal with it on your own,” explained one respondent. Others feared judgment or believed emotional problems should remain private.

Participants also observed intergenerational transmission of suppression, recognizing that their emotional behaviors mirrored those of their parents. “My mom never cried or talked about feelings, and now I realize—I do the same

thing,” said one interviewee. The normalization of emotional silence had been passed down, often unconsciously.

Finally, many spoke of conflicted cultural belonging, feeling alienated both within their family and broader society. “I wasn’t American enough to be open, but not Asian enough to be silent. I didn’t fit anywhere,” one participant stated. This dual cultural tension contributed to feelings of isolation and emotional instability.

Theme 4: Pathways to Emotional Expression and Healing

Participants described building emotional literacy as a key step toward healing. They learned to name and explore emotions through self-education, journaling, or therapy. “Just writing about how I felt helped me figure out what was going on inside,” one person shared. Learning to identify emotions brought clarity and relief.

Reclaiming voice in adulthood was a powerful theme. Many participants described consciously unlearning emotional silence by speaking up, setting boundaries, and practicing vulnerability. “Now, I say what I need. It was scary at first, but it changed my life,” noted one participant. This reclamation was often described as liberating and empowering.

The role of peer and community support was essential for many. Support groups, friends, and chosen communities provided validation and modeled new ways of expressing emotion. “Talking to other Asian-Americans who felt the same helped me not feel so alone,” said one participant. These safe spaces offered a counter-narrative to family silence.

Several participants highlighted therapy as a transformative space, where they could explore feelings without fear of judgment. “For the first time, someone actually listened and didn’t tell me to just toughen up,” one interviewee recalled. Therapy helped many develop emotional tools and challenge internalized beliefs about shame and expression.

Others found healing through culturally rooted practices, such as mindfulness, storytelling, or reconnecting with intergenerational narratives. “Meditation helped me sit with my feelings without judgment. It felt like a cultural bridge,” one person noted. These practices integrated tradition with emotional growth.

The process of embracing bicultural emotional expression allowed participants to merge the emotional restraint of their heritage with the openness of their social context. “I’m learning to cry and still feel proud of my roots.

It doesn't have to be one or the other," shared one interviewee. This integration fostered emotional balance.

Finally, participants spoke of interpersonal empowerment, using their own journeys to support others. "I talk to my younger siblings about feelings now. I want them to know it's okay," one respondent said. By modeling vulnerability and authenticity, many became emotional advocates in their families and communities.

4. Discussion and Conclusion

The findings of this phenomenological study highlight the complex and culturally embedded nature of emotional suppression and cultural silence within Asian-American families. Four primary themes emerged from the data: family communication norms, cultural identity and emotional suppression, impact on mental and emotional health, and pathways to emotional expression and healing. Participants described communication dynamics characterized by indirect expression, hierarchical structures, and taboo around sensitive topics. Emotional stoicism, shame-based regulation, and intergenerational transmission of silence were repeatedly mentioned. These patterns had tangible impacts on participants' psychological well-being, shaping their internal emotional lives and influencing their relationships with family and peers. At the same time, the data revealed hopeful narratives of transformation, including the development of emotional literacy, therapeutic engagement, and culturally adaptive pathways toward emotional openness.

The theme of family communication norms reflects the enduring influence of collectivist cultural frameworks that prioritize harmony and respect over individual expression. Participants frequently noted that direct confrontation or emotional expressiveness was discouraged in their households. This aligns with previous findings that Asian cultures often emphasize emotional restraint as a moral virtue, particularly in family contexts where hierarchical relationships prevail (Huang et al., 2016; Rakhmaniar, 2023). Nonverbal cues, prolonged silence, and indirect communication were not merely strategies but learned scripts passed down intergenerationally. As echoed in prior research, such indirectness is deeply rooted in Confucian values that promote respect for elders, filial piety, and the minimization of conflict to uphold family unity (Ang & Tsai, 2023; Senft et al., 2023). The internalization of these values fosters a style of communication where emotional needs are often subordinated to familial obligations.

Participants' narratives about cultural identity and emotional suppression revealed the psychological burden of maintaining emotional control in the face of culturally prescribed roles. Emotional stoicism was often praised or expected, particularly among male children, while vulnerability was associated with shame or weakness. Prior studies confirm that Asian-American youth are socialized to regulate emotions in ways that align with cultural ideals of self-control and emotional propriety (Kim & Sasaki, 2024; Sun & Lau, 2018). Shame, in particular, was a powerful mechanism of emotional regulation, reinforcing silence and emotional concealment. These findings resonate with the work of Zhang, who emphasized the impact of social and familial variables on the socioemotional development of Asian Americans, showing how shame and honor ideologies shape behavior and emotional self-concept (Zhang, 2024). Moreover, the tension between first-generation and second-generation perspectives on emotion underscored a generational gap in emotional norms, as younger participants often felt alienated by their parents' emotionally distant behaviors (Huang, 2024; Thomas & Haddad, 2022).

A particularly salient theme was the impact of emotional suppression on mental and emotional health. Participants described chronic internalization of negative emotions, difficulty identifying and expressing feelings, and an increased vulnerability to emotional burnout. These experiences are corroborated by quantitative findings linking suppression to adverse psychological outcomes, such as heightened anxiety, depressive symptoms, and somatic complaints (Shahid et al., 2021; Zhu et al., 2023). Suppression was not only associated with personal distress but also with fractured interpersonal relationships and diminished self-understanding. In some cases, emotional restriction led to significant ruptures in familial bonds, as participants felt unable to connect meaningfully with parents or siblings. Research by Chiang supports this dynamic, illustrating how help-seeking and emotional disclosure are hindered in Asian-American adolescents by familial expectations and culturally rooted stigma (Chiang et al., 2022). Further compounding the issue, participants often delayed or avoided seeking professional help due to internalized stigma and concerns about burdening others, echoing Gee's findings regarding mental health service avoidance in Asian-American populations (Gee et al., 2020).

Despite these challenges, the theme of pathways to emotional expression and healing offered evidence of agency, resilience, and cultural negotiation. Many participants described learning to articulate emotions

through therapy, peer support, and bicultural integration. Some found validation and emotional tools through professional counseling, where they began to undo patterns of suppression instilled during childhood. This reflects a broader trend in the literature, suggesting that culturally competent therapy—particularly when it acknowledges both cultural values and individual emotional needs—can be transformative for Asian Americans (Huang & Huang, 2024; Leong et al., 2023). Others found solace in community-based spaces or through engaging in mindfulness and cultural practices that bridged emotional growth with ancestral heritage. Dong's research supports the idea that resilience among Asian-American immigrants is closely tied to both cultural continuity and adaptive strategies developed in response to acculturative stress (Dong et al., 2019). Participants who embraced bicultural frameworks often described a newfound sense of emotional agency—combining expressive practices common in Western culture with values of respect and restraint rooted in their heritage.

An important contribution of this study is its attention to the heterogeneity of emotional experiences within the Asian-American community. Participants varied in ethnicity, immigration generation, gender, and socio-economic status, all of which shaped how emotional suppression was understood and experienced. This supports the argument advanced by Senft and colleagues that Asian Americans are not a monolithic group, and that significant within-group differences exist in emotional norms, coping strategies, and family dynamics (Senft et al., 2023). These differences are often overlooked in mainstream psychological research, which tends to generalize across ethnic lines. Similarly, Wang's work with Chinese and Korean-American caregivers highlighted how even subtle cultural variations can influence emotional expression, family caregiving roles, and perceptions of support within the same broad racial category (Wang et al., 2024). By centering diverse voices within the Asian-American diaspora, the present study helps illuminate the nuanced ways culture, identity, and family systems intersect.

This study also builds on Huang's recent findings that emotion regulation strategies can moderate the effects of discrimination and family stress on mental health outcomes in Asian-American parents (Huang, 2024). Participants in the present study echoed this protective dimension, describing how emotional regulation sometimes served as a form of emotional armor in the face of racism, intergenerational trauma, or community expectations. Although suppression had negative emotional consequences

for many, it also offered structure, stability, and a culturally coherent framework for navigating complex family systems. As Yoo and Miyamoto argue, emotional styles cannot be judged solely through a Western lens; instead, they must be understood in the context of their adaptive value within specific cultural ecologies (Yoo & Miyamoto, 2018). Recognizing the dual nature of suppression—as both burden and survival tool—is critical for culturally sensitive analysis.

The results of this study also provide insight into the processes of change taking place within Asian-American families. Several participants described challenging the emotional norms of their upbringing by initiating conversations with parents, setting boundaries, or modeling vulnerability for younger siblings. These acts of resistance and adaptation reflect the ongoing evolution of cultural identity and emotional life within immigrant communities. In some cases, participants described a renegotiation of roles, where emotional openness became a shared goal across generations. Others found that while change was difficult, incremental shifts were possible through patience, reflection, and mutual learning. As Huang (2024) and Lin (2016) suggest, intergenerational healing often begins with small acts of dialogue that challenge silence and introduce new ways of being emotionally present (Huang & Huang, 2024; Lin, 2016). These accounts affirm the potential for growth within culturally bounded systems and highlight the importance of acknowledging both resilience and constraint in psychological research.

5. Suggestions and Limitations

While this study offers valuable insights into the emotional lives of Asian-American families, several limitations should be acknowledged. First, the sample consisted of highly educated participants who were fluent in English and largely second-generation immigrants. This may limit the transferability of findings to first-generation immigrants with limited English proficiency or lower access to educational and mental health resources. Additionally, all participants voluntarily engaged in a conversation about emotional suppression, which may suggest a level of awareness or willingness to reflect that is not representative of the broader community. The phenomenological design, while rich in depth, does not allow for generalization to all Asian-American populations or for the establishment of causal relationships between suppression and mental health outcomes. Finally, ethnic representation was somewhat uneven, and future studies could benefit from greater

inclusion of South and Southeast Asian participants to ensure a more comprehensive understanding of pan-Asian experiences.

Future research should explore the role of language, generational status, and acculturation in shaping emotional norms across diverse Asian-American subgroups. Longitudinal studies could also examine how emotional suppression evolves over time, particularly as individuals move through developmental stages, form partnerships, or become parents themselves. Additionally, studies focusing on non-binary and LGBTQ+ individuals within Asian-American families could offer critical perspectives on how gender, sexuality, and cultural expectations intersect to influence emotional expression. Research that incorporates both quantitative and qualitative methodologies may also enhance our understanding of the interplay between emotion regulation strategies, cultural values, and psychological outcomes. Lastly, collaborative research with community-based organizations could facilitate participatory inquiry and ensure that findings are both culturally grounded and practically relevant.

Practitioners working with Asian-American individuals and families should approach emotional suppression not as a pathology to be corrected, but as a culturally situated coping strategy that carries both protective and detrimental dimensions. Therapeutic spaces must be attuned to the relational and intergenerational contexts that shape emotional expression, creating room for clients to explore both the constraints and the strengths embedded in their emotional worlds. Interventions that incorporate storytelling, mindfulness, and bicultural identity integration can help individuals reconnect with emotional authenticity without compromising cultural integrity. Mental health professionals should also engage in cultural humility, recognizing the diversity within Asian-American communities and avoiding one-size-fits-all approaches. Supporting clients in bridging emotional worlds—between silence and voice, heritage and adaptation—can foster healing, self-understanding, and stronger relational ties.

Authors' Contributions

All authors have contributed significantly to the research process and the development of the manuscript.

Declaration

In order to correct and improve the academic writing of our paper, we have used the language model ChatGPT.

Transparency Statement

Data are available for research purposes upon reasonable request to the corresponding author.

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Declaration of Interest

The authors report no conflict of interest.

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Ethical Considerations

The study protocol adhered to the principles outlined in the Helsinki Declaration, which provides guidelines for ethical research involving human participants.

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