



### A surge of happiness

Japan is in the midst of a happiness boom. Happiness is the subject of an avalanche of books, magazines, blogs and websites. Since the Great East Japan Earthquake in March 2011 alone, more than 500 Japanese books about happiness have been published.

From ordinary guidebooks – “10 ways to make your dog happy” – to academic analyses, the variety of books on happiness is enormous. Among them, some sport “happiness” in their title only to ride the swelling tide without having much to do with the topic itself.

#### Happiness renaissance

In November 2011, NHK broadcast a three-part series about Alain, pen name of French philosopher Émile-Auguste Chartier (1886–1951), whose 1925 *Propos sur le bonheur* did much to popularize the notion of happiness in Japan. In the afterword to his own book about happiness (*Kōfukuron*, 2001), the recently deceased philosopher Takaaki Yoshimoto confessed that, prior to reading Alain’s *Propos*, he, like many of his generation, could not relate to the concept of happiness. Today, there is a huge “Alain renaissance”. Several new editions of his *Propos* have recently been published, including a manga version and an e-book. Nikkei Business Online runs a column called “Reading Alain’s *On Happiness* every day”. Such an upsurge is indicative of something besides popular interest in a dated philosophical book.

#### Happiness in hard times

The attention Alain currently attracts is a sign of hard times. As long as the Japanese economy and population grew, nobody spent much time thinking about happiness; however, both growth rates came to a grinding halt years ago and still show little sign of recovery. The 3/11 disaster was a catalyst for many to reflect on happiness and misery, but the conditions that stimulate a heightened interest in happiness have built up gradually over the years: insecurity, social cleavage, loss of trust and a general lack of orientation in the direction capitalist society should move. Japan is not alone in this unease.

#### Quantification of happiness

The past few months have seen the release of the first *World Happiness Report* commissioned for the United Nations Conference on Happiness (April 2012) as well as the OECD’s *Better Life Index* (May 2012). These publications attract considerable attention in Japan, especially as Japan dropped from 19th to 21st place in the OECD index since the last survey. In a country where people tend to pay close attention to international comparisons, this is cause for much soul-searching among policy makers.

Meanwhile, more surveys about life satisfaction and happiness are conducted by scholars and government agencies, and new publications both respond to and feed the public desire to learn more about happiness. We introduce a few of them in this issue.\* F.C.

#### Quality assessment

In September 2011, the German Institute for Japanese Studies (DIJ) was evaluated by an independent committee of scholars, who came to the following conclusion:

“During the reporting period [2005–2011, editor’s note] the DIJ showed very good performance [...] Its research topics are of long-term social relevance and of great academic interest [...] Over the reporting period, numerous good to excellent works have been published. These studies have been well and widely received by scholars in Japanese Studies as well as in other disciplines, both nationally and internationally. The DIJ organizes conferences and workshops of high academic quality. It further cooperates with German, Japanese as well as international partners [...] The institute’s high media presence as well as the high appreciation of its consulting services in business and politics are impressive.”

The full report of the evaluation committee (German only) is accessible at: <http://www.maxweberstiftung.de/en/ueberuns/quality-assessment.html>

\* A list with more titles is available under [http://www.dijtokyo.org/resources/happiness\\_literature](http://www.dijtokyo.org/resources/happiness_literature).

## Temporary employment in Japan and the economics of happiness

**The number of temporary agency workers has grown rapidly in Japan over the last ten years. In the context of the DIJ research focus on happiness in Japan, it is of interest whether significant differences in the life satisfaction of regular and temporary employees can be identified. A new project at the DIJ analyses this question and its policy implications for the Japanese labour market.**

Since the deregulation of temporary agency work in 1999 the number of agency workers grew rapidly to 1.4 million in 2008. Although this growth slowed down due to the economic crisis in 2009, it is expected that the trend will continue as soon as the economic situation recovers. The question therefore arises whether – and if so which – regulatory policies should be applied to temporary work. Especially with regards to the recent tightening of

the worker dispatch law it is called into question whether these kinds of protective measures will help improve the life satisfaction among workers in Japan.

This project analyses in a first step the macroeconomic relationships between labour market regulations, the social insurance system and the unemployment rate. In a second step, a microeconomic analysis of happiness is added. The life satisfaction of temporary and permanent employees, as well as of unemployed persons, is compared and the underlying happiness determinants of each group are identified. By combining these two approaches, it is possible to evaluate the overall effects of the re-regulation of temporary employment legislation on life satisfaction. Alternative and additional policy measures, such as higher unemployment benefits, can then be evaluated in a similar way.

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## Political participation and happiness in Japan

**Political participation aims at influencing the political decision-making process. It can be understood as the participant’s contribution to improve conditions of living. But how does political participation affect active people themselves – regardless of the outcome of decision processes? How do politically active citizens’ perceptions of self change?**

Research so far has dealt with these questions first and foremost theoretically. A relevant theoretical concept is that of procedural utility. It is assumed that politically active citizens can gain positive utility from participation and thus increase their subjective feelings of well-being. According to this theory, not only the results of decision processes matter, but also the ways in which decisions are reached. Participants gain positive utility most notably when decision-making processes fulfil certain psychological needs that contribute positively to self-perceptions, such as feelings of autonomy, relatedness and competence.

This research project, which was initiated in January 2012, aims to reassess

these theories by empirically correlating political participation and subjective feelings of well-being. Applying qualitative research methods such as interviews and participant observation, this project analyses as a case study citizens’ movements against nuclear energy and for better protection against radioactivity after the triple disaster of 11 March 2011. People active in this movement make use of various forms of political participation, ranging from protesting on the streets to founding a new political party, such as in the case of the recently founded Green Party. The project also makes a contribution to research on developments in Japan’s society and politics after 3/11. Research on political participation in the aftermath of the earthquake, tsunami and nuclear incident has not yet considered the effects of participation on the activists. Studies investigating the impacts on people’s mental well-being after the catastrophe have not yet dealt with political participation in decision-making processes. This project uniquely combines these two strands of research.



► Banner of Japan's newly formed Green Party (*Midori no Tō*) at the anti-nuclear demonstration on 16 July 2012, Omotesandō, Tokyo.

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## Read for you

**Masaaki MEZAKI (2011): *Kōfuku tojōkoku Nippon. Atarashii kuni ni umarekawaru tame no teigen* [A developing country in terms of happiness. A proposal for reinventing Japan]. Tokyo: Iwanami, 263 pages, 1,050 yen (ISBN 987-4757219410).**

The author, a staunch individualist and globetrotter, offers a sweeping review of current happiness research to launch an equally sweeping critique of contemporary Japanese society. Analysing the often observed apparent inconsistency between the country's high levels of material comfort and other objective indices of quality of life, on one hand, and the relatively low levels of subjective well-being and life satisfaction, on the other, Mezaki concludes that collectivism and the failure to develop individuality are to blame. He promotes his concept of "social individualism" as a potential remedy, which – if widely embraced – could make Japan a happier country. Candid and easy to read. *F.C.*

**Fumio ŌTAKE et al. (2010): *Nihon no kōfukudo: Kakusa, rōdō, kazoku* [Happiness in Japan: Inequality, work, family]. Tokyo: Nihon Hyōronsha, 284 pages, 3,150 yen (ISBN 978-4535555983).**

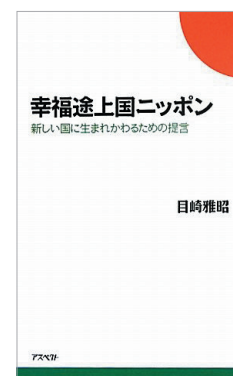
The renowned happiness economist Fumio Ōtake was lead editor for this compilation of select academic contributions to the field of Japan-related happiness economics. Most of the articles are statistical studies based on happiness data, which show correlations between happiness and fundamental socio-demographic variables such as income, gender and age. Furthermore, this volume also covers specific topics like work and unemployment, inequality, family and marriage, as well as work-life balance. Apart from statistical analyses, this volume also contains a methodological reflection on the meaning and methods of happiness economics. Although all of the articles have already been published elsewhere, this book is *the* reference for research in the field of Japan-related happiness economics. Basic knowledge of statistics makes the reading more accessible. *T.T.*

**Sang-jung KANG (2008): *Nayamu chikara* [The power of worrying]. Tokyo: Shūeisha Shinsho, 190 pages, 680 yen (ISBN 978-4087204445).**

A more indirect approach to happiness is presented in this book. Political scientist Kang, who is also a well-known media personality, connects the present time, marked by socio-demographic upheaval and new risks, with the advent of modernity at the beginning of the 20th century. By referring to the intellectual worlds of Natsume Sōseki and Max Weber, Kang shows that – today just as much as about a hundred years ago – the "power of worrying" can help to cope with new situations and mastering hitherto unknown challenges. However, accepting change does not have to invariably equate to giving up long-held values. With nine million sold copies, the book seems to have hit a nerve. A sequel followed in June 2012. *C.H.*

**Hiroyuki ITSUKI (2012): *Shin kōfukuron. Aoi tori no satta ato* [New discourse on happiness. After the blue bird has flown away]. Tokyo: Poplarbee, 240 pages, 1,200 yen (ISBN 978-4591126950).**

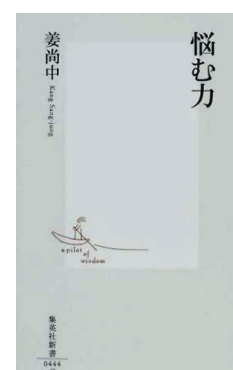
Itsuki, a seasoned author of many books, takes up the eternal topic of fleeting happiness, combining a report on his trip to Bhutan, the "kingdom of happiness", with his take on current events, the rereading of literary works, and Buddha's teachings about the futility of life. Itsuki's reflections are centred on what other authors have written about happiness, if "centred" is the right word. For Itsuki's reminiscences and ruminations do not have a clear focus. There are, however, some recurring themes, such as his criticism of social inequality and cutthroat competition, which, as he sees it, greatly contribute to the unhappiness that characterizes contemporary society. Yet he does not offer any countermeasures that are likely to improve the situation. Rather, Itsuki seeks solace in testimonies to the effect that people can experience moments of bliss even under the most inhumane conditions. His notion of happiness, then, is that of an ephemeral and entirely subjective sensation. *F.C.*



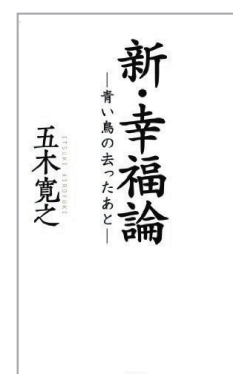
► MEZAKI



► ŌTAKE



► KANG



► ITSUKI

## Forthcoming events

### DIJ Forum:

**Who will care for me when I'm dead? Ancestors, homeless spirits, and new after-lives in low fertility Japan**

Speaker: Satsuki Kawano,  
University of Guelph,  
Department of Sociology  
and Anthropology.  
(DIJ Tokyo, XI/15/2012,  
18:30–20:00).

## Recent publications

### Contemporary Japan 24(2)

*Tourism and Travel in Japan*  
Issue Editor: Susanne Klien.  
Berlin & New York: Mouton de  
Gruyter, 2012.

### Barbara Geilhorn, Eike Grossmann, Hiroko Miura and Peter Eckersall (eds.):

*Enacting Culture. Japanese Theater in Historical and Modern Contexts* (Monographien aus dem Deutschen Institut für Japanstudien, Vol. 51).  
Munich: Iudicium, 2012  
(313 pages).

### Dan Tidten:

*Inter Pares. Gleichheitsorientierte Politiken in Japan* [Equality politics in Japan] (Monographien aus dem Deutschen Institut für Japanstudien, Vol. 50).  
Munich: Iudicium, 2012  
(194 pages).

## Call for papers

*Contemporary Japan*  
For more information, visit:  
[www.contemporary-japan.org](http://www.contemporary-japan.org)

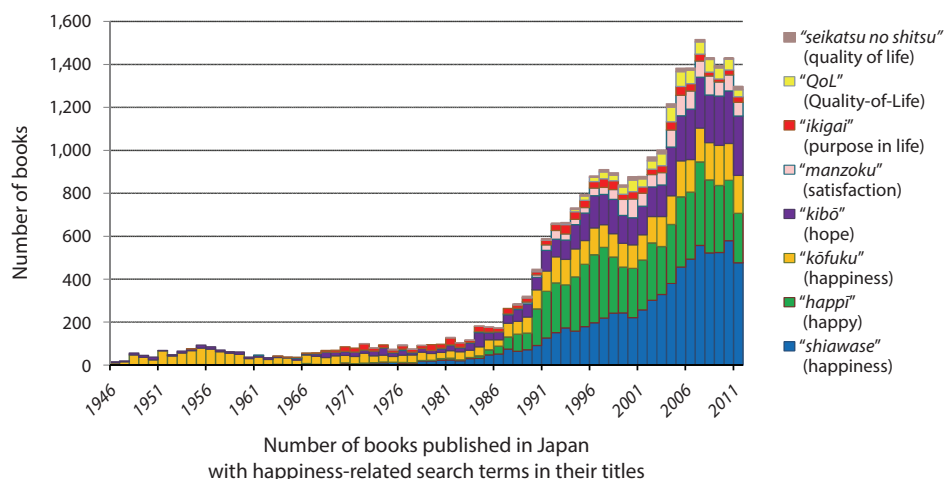
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## Diversification of "happiness"



Source: Online catalogue of the National Diet Library (as of 19 September 2012), <http://iss.ndl.go.jp/>.

## Catchword

### 災後 (saigo)

Japan writes the Year "P.D. 1" (Post-disaster, year one; *saigo ichinen*). *Saigo* is written using the character for "disaster" (*sai*), which is also the second character of the word "earthquake catastrophe" (*shinsai*), and the character for "after" (*go*). Interestingly, the word is a homonym of the word "last/end" and thus carries with it, intended or not, a finite, pessimistic tone.

The term was first used about a month after the events of 11 March 2011 by Mikuriya Takashi. In his article in the magazine *Chūō Kōron* (5/2011, pp. 24–31), the political science professor from Tokyo University declares the postwar period (*sengo*) as over and sees the beginning of a new epoch – *saigo*.

The term quickly became popular and was used by numerous authors writing about the new post-disaster age (*saigo jidai*) and the rise of a new society (*saigo shakai*). If, however, the shared experience of the triple disaster will really cause a fundamental change of society remains to be seen in the coming years. *B.H.*

## DIJ advisory board



The following four professors have joined the DIJ advisory board this year (from top to bottom):



► Prof. Dr. Sebastian Conrad, Free University of Berlin;  
► Prof. Dr. Takenori Inoki, Aoyama Gakuin University;



► Prof. Dr. Ulrike Schaede, University of California, San Diego;  
► Prof. Dr. Yukiko Uchida, Kyoto University.



The following members continue to support the institute's work: Prof. Dr. Kaori Hayashi (Tokyo University), Prof. Dr. Gisela Trommsdorff (University of Konstanz), Prof. Dr. Klaus Vollmer (University of Munich) and Prof. Dr. Gesine Foljanty-Jost (Martin Luther University of Halle-Wittenberg), who became the newly elected head of board.

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