

**DEUTSCHES INSTITUT FÜR  
JAPANSTUDIEN**  
**German Institute for Japanese Studies**



**Florian Coulmas**

**The Quest for Happiness in Japan**

*Working Paper 09/1*

*Introduction*

Japan is a fortunate country. What better measure is there to support this assertion than declining mortality and growing life expectancy?! The Japanese do not die during the first precarious months after birth, enjoying as they do the lowest infant mortality on earth. They do not die on the battlefield because their constitution prevents them from going to war. Thanks to social bonds and neighbourhoods that are relatively intact, they do not die of street crime. Violence, though hardly unknown, is not a major cause of death. They don't kill themselves eating too much junk food or drinking too much alcohol. Fatal traffic accidents have been declining steadily. And medical research is making progress improving the protection from coronary heart disease and cancer, the two leading causes of death in Japan. As a result, Japan has over the past half century experienced unprecedented life expectancy gains (Yanagishita, Guralnik 1988). At the beginning of the twentieth century, life expectancy at birth was 44.0 years for males and 44.8 years for females, far below levels in Western countries. At the end of the century, the Japanese topped the world list of life expectancy at 81.25 years on average (85.6 for women and 78.5 for men, in 2006). The massive gain in life expectancy is irrefutable evidence of a highly successful society, and a successful state allowing its citizens to flourish. Longevity has traditionally been regarded as an indication of happiness. If this still holds true Japan must be a happier country now by a large measure than it was a century ago.

Japan is also more prosperous today than it ever has been before. During the half century from 1955 to 2005, GDP per capita grew by a factor of 30. Between 1980 and 2000, Gross National Income per person doubled from 2,063,000 yen to 4,084,000 yen. Most Japanese enjoy a higher level of material comfort than their forebears, living in bigger homes equipped with more amenities. The choice of goods offered to them in the market would have baffled their parents when they were young. Politically they are living in a peaceful, stable and open environment largely free of coercion. Progress in education has been phenomenal. High school enrolment rates gained more than 30 per cent from 1955 to 1970 and were approximating 100 per cent at century's end, and the enrolment rate for university has also been upward. While 12.8 per cent of high school students were progressing to universities in 1965, their share had swelled to 41.3 per cent in 2003. The Japanese have access to all the information they could possibly want being able to make use of it from an earlier age and up to a higher age than previous generations.

Since the 1980s, Japan has consistently ranked among the top ten countries of all three categories of the United Nations Human Development Index, i.e., health, education and standard of living.<sup>1</sup> A prosperous, highly educated, healthy population living in a peaceful land without any obvious external threat: that is Japan in the first decade of the twenty-first

century. Japan's modern history, especially the second half of the twentieth century, is a success story, if success is understood in terms of population growth and national and human development. A deliberate and hardworking labour force, an industrial policy orchestrated by the Japanese government, a strong economy, high educational achievement and a good health care system combined to create a society affording its members a very high level of economic and social wellbeing.

Does success make people happy? People, it might, but a country as a whole? In what sense can the concept of happiness be applied to countries? How can countries be compared with regard to happiness? Can the measuring of happiness be independent of socioeconomic circumstances, expectations and values prevalent at a given place and time? What is the role of culture in the experience, perception and evaluation of happiness? These are some of the questions I wish to discuss in this paper, focusing on Japan, the oldest country on this planet in terms of life expectancy and median age and the first non-western country to experience the demographic transition from high mortality and high fertility to low mortality and low fertility. Japan, notwithstanding its rapid and categorical modernisation and Westernization in the Meiji period, is deeply indebted to East Asian cultural traditions which continue to inform its hypermodern society today. In the past, Asian cultures have not emphasized personal happiness as much as European cultures. At present, however, the promise of and call for happiness is widespread in Japan. It is not least because of this apparent change that Japan's concern with happiness is of special interest. Studying happiness in the Japanese context can contribute to a better understanding of both, the state of Japanese society today and the concept of happiness in cross-national comparison.

Before approaching happiness in Japan, a brief review of the Western tradition is in order, because both the concept of happiness and happiness in its various senses were first put on the agenda of scientific research in Western academe and because current theories of happiness are grounded in Western ideas of progress and fulfilment.

### *The Western tradition*

In Western societies, the idea that happiness is central to human experience has a long tradition. Aristotle in the *Nicomachean Ethics* (1097b22-1098a20) set the tone of an extremely rational understanding of happiness stipulating that following the principles of reason throughout life is what happiness consists in. According to this view, happiness is a long-term project involving a lifetime of rational conduct, rather than momentary pleasure. Aristotle taught that happiness is an end in itself rather than a means to accomplish some

other objective. More categorically Epicurus (341-270 BCE) taught that pleasure was the most important goal in life which could be achieved by those who conquered their fear of the gods and the hereafter. To this end he advocated a scientific worldview which was incompatible with the belief system common in his day that instilled fear of the empire of death in the living.

Together with the Greek gods the rationalist worldview of the Greek philosophers was pushed to the margin by Christianity, but as an undercurrent the Epicurean drive to shed off the fear of the gods wound as an antithetical train of thought through European intellectual history, with various twists and modulations. It implies a measure of responsibility for one's own fate and happiness, proverbially expressed as "Every man is the architect of his own fortune." The notion that happiness was to be striven for actively rather than to be accepted acquiescently culminated in Thomas Jefferson's inclusion of "the pursuit of happiness" into the American Declaration of Independence as an "unalienable right." The Utilitarian doctrine of "the greatest happiness of the greatest number" which around the same time English social critic and moral philosopher Jeremy Bentham (1748-1832) argued should be the guiding principle of moral action, further promoted the idea. This doctrine reemphasised that individual happiness was a good to be made available in this world to many rather than only a select few, while the rest were told to wait for it in heaven. Common this-worldly happiness was a goal of the French Revolution, as it was of the American. Bentham and after him John Stuart Mill with his ideas of social utilitarianism argued in favour of the view that all individuals always pursue what they believe to be their own happiness and that the general happiness is the highest good. Utility determines the impact of actions on the individual's happiness. The purpose of government is to balance individual and public happiness. In the Anglo-Saxon world of the nineteenth century, which was to exercise a strong intellectual influence on Japan, this principle was widely accepted.

The Utilitarians had a profound influence on British legislation and policy at the time when the British Empire was reaching its greatest expanse and hence also had an impact on the formation of the social sciences. The utilitarian conception of society as the aggregation of solitary individuals united by self-interest corresponds to Adam Smith's notion that the common good is advanced not by benevolence but by the pursuit of selfish interest. These ideas have influenced both behavioural psychology and economics; and sociological theories such as social exchange theory and rational choice theory in particular were also formulated against this background. Since the social sciences, including sociology and psychology, as well as economics are a product of European Enlightenment, the scholarly discourse on happiness has generally been informed by a Western point of view.

Notwithstanding the fact that the Enlightenment elevated critical thinking to new levels, the ascent of the West in its wake, the success of imperialism and the advance of

capitalism ensured the dominance of Western views on the pursuit of happiness for generations. Japan, as will be discussed in more detail below, is a prime example of the triumph of the Enlightenment belief in happiness at the expense of other views formerly held.

The Enlightenment led to what Max Weber (1922) called “the disenchantment of the world,” a more rational way of life, that is, than under the conditions of a worldview shaped by Christian promises of paradise in the hereafter. As a consequence, happiness came to occupy the place formerly held by religion, as Karl Marx, himself a belated product of the Enlightenment, had insisted in his *Introduction to A Contribution to the Critique of Hegel’s Philosophy of Right*. Harking back to Epicurus, about whose work he had written his dissertation, and echoing his criticism of priests as well as the anticlerical tenor of the French Revolution, Marx declared: “The overcoming of religion as the *illusory* happiness of the people is the demand for their *real* happiness” (Marx 1976: 379). Ironically, the triumph of capitalism has done more to realize this demand than Marx would have thought possible. In the Imperial countries that subsequently became the developed world the advance of capitalism promoted material affluence as the major purpose in life edging out religion and installing “human happiness as the new god on earth” (McMahon 2006: 8). The unprecedented economic expansion and the population explosion that characterized the twentieth century have made worshipping this god look almost inevitable, although historians are cognizant of the fact that both other paths to happiness used to exist and that happiness has not always and everywhere been the self-evident purpose in life it seems to be from a Western point of view. Since the fall of the Berlin Wall in 1989 rang the death knell of “Real Socialism,” and the adage “to get rich is glorious,” attributed to Deng Xiaoping during a tour of his country in 1992, reverberated throughout China, the striving for private gain has become all but tantamount to the pursuit of happiness the world over.<sup>2</sup> At the same time, the study of happiness, which in the past had principally occupied philosophers, experienced a boom among scholars of various disciplines ranging from economics to neurology.<sup>3</sup>

### *Development*

A major cause of the renewed scientific interest in happiness was the observation in the most saturated societies that increased wealth did not necessarily bring about increased happiness (Diener and Oishi 2000). Economists have for generations wrestled with the question of how wealth and happiness are related to each other, and the generally accepted answer today is that the correlation between poverty and unhappiness is stronger than that between wealth and happiness which is another way of saying that the correlation between material and mental wellbeing becomes weaker with growing affluence.

The dominant point of view in happiness research is that of scholars raised and/or residing in affluent societies where this seeming paradox first appeared. To come to terms with it Inglehart (1990) introduced the dichotomy of “materialistic values” and “post-materialistic values,” the latter being pursued by those who can afford it, that is, whose material wants have been satisfied. These countries define the reference point, both for research on happiness and for the kind of happiness others are pursuing. To resist the traction of modernization cum Westernization has generally proved impossible or possible only at the expense of extreme seclusion, as in North Korea or Myanmar. This is the inescapable logic of the contemporary world. No matter whether materialistic or post-materialistic values are at issue, happiness is conceptualized as a good that must be striven for—rather than freedom from pain (*aponía*) or peace of mind (*ataraxía*) as Epicurus taught. In order to realize these values, we must actively *do* something. Happiness is not to be found in the doing, but in the “attainment of whatever it is that people want” (Nettle 2005: 21). The expectation is that the outcome will give satisfaction, rather than the process of doing the job. Regarding their wants, people living in market economies have been remarkably unsuccessful at distinguishing what they want from what the market offers. But this is of little consequence. What counts is that they continue to want something, rather than rest contented. In the mainstream Western tradition—abstracting from asceticism—cannot be dissociated from the pursuit of a goal, it implies active effort. The idea that nonpursuit of happiness may lead to happiness is irreconcilable with this outlook on life.

The “pursuit of happiness” is, of course, anything but happiness, and the “unalienable right” to it has become the duty not to be modest and content with what you have. That is the ideological mainspring of capitalism. Happiness is not to be found in restraint and accommodation to circumstances, but in untiringly producing and consuming goods that will make us richer, wiser, healthier, etc.

This raises the question of the general, specifically the cross-cultural, validity of happiness studies. Obviously, this concern has been addressed in several comparative studies such as the World Value Survey<sup>4</sup>, the Eurobarometer<sup>5</sup> and the World Database of Happiness of Erasmus University Rotterdam<sup>6</sup>. However, it is not clear that the fundamental problem of the historicity and cultural contingency of the concept of happiness has been resolved conclusively.

At times social scientists have been rash to claim universality for the quest for happiness. For example, in a major comparative study on happiness conducted over several years at Erasmus University Rotterdam, Veenhoven concludes that

“there is a clear correspondence between average happiness in nations and the degree to which these nations provide material comfort, social equality, freedom and access to

knowledge. In other words: happiness in nations corresponds with their level of 'development' or 'modernity'" (Veenhoven 1993: 51).

Would a different outcome have been possible? Would it be conceivable for a study of happiness to show that realizing the values most cherished in the most advanced countries of the industrialized world does not enhance happiness; that we have left behind what makes us happy?<sup>7</sup> What would be the point of moving ahead? There is something disquietingly inevitable, if not circular about such results. The circularity does not manifest itself openly because happiness studies do not usually make it explicit that they assess happiness in the sense that this term is understood in advanced industrialized societies. And they do not discuss the question of whether it would be possible for those who are lagging behind to resist the material and intellectual hegemony of the Western world. Since the point of view of the developed world is inherent in all happiness studies, it is ultimately impossible to discuss happiness independent from development.<sup>8</sup> To put it differently, it would seem impossible to study happiness in developing nations as if the more developed countries did not exist, just as it would be impossible to assess the happiness of poor people as if their wealthier neighbours did not exist. Although it appears to denote a purely subjective feeling, the term "happiness" is relational and indexical. For this reason Nettle (2005: 20f.) is right to point out that "to find a definition of happiness that is broad enough to capture the full range of human goods, but does not become an ideological position is an extremely hard balance to strike."

Part of the problem is that in this field two related notions are used, sometimes without proper distinction. These notions are 'happiness' and 'well-being'. While they can be understood in common discourse as meaning roughly the same thing, 'happiness' relates to that which people enjoy and like, while 'well-being' has to do with the beneficial, that which people want and need. It seems obvious that 'hedonic' happiness and 'utilitarian' well-being are not unconnected. Exactly how they are connected is, however, not so obvious. Philosophers (e.g., von Wright 1963) have tried to figure out their mutual relation, suggesting, for example, a causal relationship to the effect that well-being is the source of happiness, but then there is plenty of evidence that the same level of well-being does not guarantee the same level of happiness. How happiness and well-being are interconnected remains a question which comes to the fore acutely when we leave the European context and that of European languages, as will be demonstrated below.

Another difficulty with the notion of happiness is that notwithstanding its subjective nature, the social environment plays a decisive role in determining the experience of happiness. The Rotterdam study is careful to speak of happiness *in* nations rather than *of* nations. Happiness, that much is generally agreed, is in the mind and can be assessed only on the basis of self-report. But self-reports are subject to various influences, especially by

relevant others. What others possess, think and deem desirable affects our judgement as to how happy we are. In the Rotterdam study, material comfort, social equality, freedom and access to knowledge are identified as the crucial factors of happiness in nations. Notice that no emotions enter the picture. Love, affection, friendship, for example, and the desire to lead a meaningful life, not to mention sensual pleasures, intellectual curiosity and spiritual experiences are discounted—perhaps for good reasons because they are hard to measure.

### *The relativity problem*

What is more, happiness is a psychological state relating to our feelings and our judgements about feelings that are subject to a great range of external influences among which the four quoted above, presumably, play a significant role. However, this role is very complex.

For one, material comfort is a vague and relative concept which has little meaning unless it is measured against the material comfort enjoyed by significant others. The same level of material wellbeing may count as affluence in one environment and as dearth in another. Not only is material wellbeing historically contingent, its subjective assessment also depends on possible comparisons, that is, one's neighbour's wealth or that of others in view or imagination.

Similar reservations are in order with respect to the other causes of happiness identified by Veenhoven. Evidently access to knowledge means something quite different today from what it meant as little as a generation ago. A more difficult and fundamental problem is the implicit assumption of a linear progression of knowledge. While at any given time access to the most advanced knowledge would seem to be an advantage over ignorance, it is not clear that the accumulation of knowledge over the millennia has cured more ills than it has brought about; for rare is the beneficial discovery that cannot be put to harmful use. Freedom and social equality, too, are not just hard to measure, but ever since the French Revolution there has been tension between the two as social and political ideals to be pursued: social equality can only be advanced at the expense of freedom.

A yet more intractable problem is that of tradition. The four factors of happiness singled out in the Rotterdam study represent values that have specific traditions in different environments. In the Western world, the Enlightenment and the French and American Revolutions have turned freedom and liberty into highly ideologised notions that subsequent generations have been taught to appreciate as cornerstones of their societies. Where such was not the case, as for example in Japan, it cannot be assumed that freedom is being appreciated in a like manner. Yanabu (1982) has demonstrated that the term that currently means 'freedom', *jiyū*, had to be coined in the early Meiji period for the translation of Western works on morals and society and still had decidedly negative connotations



during the first half of the twentieth century. Dictionaries tell us that *jiyū* means 'liberty, freedom', but they don't tell us and cannot tell us that the concept of freedom means the same in Japan as it does in Europe and North America. The notions we are dealing with here are ideologically charged. It would be imprudent to assume that the notion of happiness is less problematic in this regard.

There is evidence that the cultural context has a bearing on how happiness is conceptualised. For instance, Kitayama and Markus have identified two distinct models of self and well-being and presented strong evidence that the specific contents of the notions of well-being and happiness vary considerably across cultures. In a middle-class North American context "the personal pursuit of happiness and the recognition of this pursuit by the self and others are defining of happiness itself. [...] However, in many East Asian cultures, happiness assumes a different subjective form—it is a state that emerges when taking a critical and disciplined stance to the personal self and thus engaging the sympathy of others" (Kitayama and Markus 2000: 113f.). If the notion of happiness varies across cultures, it stands to reason that the linguistic labels of this notion in different languages differ in meaning. This is a point of some importance: First there are concepts and then there are words, not vice versa. The relativity of happiness is not a linguistic problem, but one of culture, life-world and society. Yet, it brings in its wake the problem of translation.

### *Translation*

It has thus been assumed that cross-national surveys of happiness are subject to cultural bias due to unreliable and/or imprecise translation and that variations in the meaning of key terms, such as 'happiness', in different languages have a bearing on the reported happiness between countries. This supposition deserves to be taken seriously. Veenhoven (1993: 53f.) has tried to refute it with the following three arguments.

- (1) The pattern of difference [of responses, F.C.] must vary with the keywords used. Countries that score high on a question that uses the word 'happiness' can rank low on questions that refer to 'satisfaction' with life, or score middle on a rating between 'best/worst' possible life.
- (2) In bi-lingual countries, ratings of happiness must differ between linguistic categories. Ratings must in fact be closer to same-language populations abroad, than to different-language compatriots.
- (3) Average happiness must be highly similar in nations where the same language is spoken, even if these nations differ considerably in other respects.

For several reasons, these arguments are not conclusive. (1) is a non-sequitur because it confuses the logic of 'can' with the logic of 'must'. That different meanings of key terms can influence the results of a survey does not imply that they must do so, although the opposite is true, that is, 'must' implies 'can'. (2) is also defective because it suggests that language is the *only* variable that has a bearing on surveys that compare different countries, which is incongruous. Among the examples Veenhoven discusses are the two German states prior to their unification, suggesting that "if people are nevertheless about equally happy in these nations, language is likely to color their responses" (Veenhoven 1993: 54). In the event, Veenhoven commits the straw man fallacy by attacking a position nobody defends. No argument has ever been made to the effect that because people in different parts of the world happen to speak the *same* language they have a tendency to report a similar level of happiness. Clearly other factors can have a stronger impact. The possibility of *different* languages having an effect on survey results is confused with a very different claim, namely that the *same* language guarantees similar results. (3) testifies to the same logical error: That different results in self-reported happiness of two groups can be explained in part by the fact that they are speaking different languages in no way implies that speaking the same language is a sufficient condition for two groups to report identical or similar results.

The three arguments against a language-induced bias in cross-national happiness surveys are logically fallacious. Another serious flaw of Veenhoven's line of reasoning is that all of the examples he considers are European languages, languages, that is, that are genetically cognate, share a significant part of their lexicon and have evolved for centuries in the same cultural sphere. Testing languages of non Indo-European stock would certainly be more meaningful. For example, Manabe (2005: 25) points out that in the World Values Survey 1989-1992, the English term *happy* was translated as *gaoxing* ('enjoyment') in Chinese "which is significantly different in meaning." The Chinese semantic field of happiness, joy, pleasure, well-being, etc. can be expected to be structured differently from the English, for both genetic and cultural reasons.

However, this raises the question of the independence of language as a variable. Language is part of the cultural system, which is not to say that the same language couldn't be used in different cultural settings. But, then, under such circumstances, it usually does not remain quite the same language, as, for example, indigenized forms of English in Asia and Africa attest. Whether and to what extent language can be controlled as an intervening factor of cross-national, or rather, cross-linguistic surveys is a question requiring further study.

*Japanese 'happiness'*

The Japanese word most commonly used to translate 'happiness' is *shiaiwase*, but it is by no means the only one. Here are some dictionary definitions of the term. The etymological dictionary "Nihongo Kaidoku Jiten" (Tokyo: Tōyō Shuppan, 2006) gives four meanings of *shiaiwase*, as follows:

*kōun* 'good fortune'

*okotoba* 'what you say'

*meguriawase* 'meet again by chance'

*shiuchi* 'treatment'

The historical dictionary, "Nichijōgo no Imi Henka Jiten" (Tokyo: Tokyodo Shuppan, 2003), explains *shiaiwase* as 'bringing things together' elaborating that the word has been in use in the sense of 'the turn of events' since the Muromachi Period (1333-1573 CE). And the etymological "Nihongogen Daijiten" (Tokyo: Shogakukan, 1995) gives 'fate' as the central meaning, emphasizing the fact that in former times the meaning of *shiaiwase* could be positive or negative, whereas at present it conveys only the positive sense of 'happening'. The common element of these definitions is the coincidental nature of the cause of the circumstances or state of mind referred to.

Other words for happiness include *sachi* and *fuku*. According to the "Nihongogen Daijiten" *sachi* occurs already in the *Kojiki* ("Record of Ancient Matters") of 712 CE where it denotes 'plentiful harvest (of the fruits of the land and the sea)'. Its meaning was hence extended to 'welfare, good luck', highlighting the utilitarian sense of 'well-being'. *Sachi* is a word of Japanese origin rooted in rural culture. By contrast, *kōfuku*, which also means 'happiness', is a compound consisting of the two Sino-Japanese morphemes *kō* 'lucky' and *fuku* 'fortune, good luck' which according to the "Daijisen" dictionary (Tokyo: Shogakukan, 1998) means 'without complaint or discontent', in other words, the happiness of contentedness. This term, like the Sino-Japanese stratum in the Japanese lexicon generally, is more formal than *shiaiwase* and *sachi*, bearing connotations with Buddhism. *Fuku* suggests abundance given by Heaven. The Kōfukuji is a famous temple in Nara, and the Chinese character for *fuku* commonly appears on temples and on amulets sold there. In the written language the semantic connection between the terms discussed above is very apparent, since *shiaiwase* and *sachi* are written with the same Chinese character which also stands for *kō* in *kōfuku*.

**Varieties of “happiness”**

	<u>Reading</u>	<u>Original meaning</u>
幸運、好運	kōun	luck, fortune
お言葉	okotoba	what you say
巡り合わせ	meguriawase	to meet again by chance
しうち	shiuchi	treatment
幸せ、仕合わせ	shiwase	bringing things together
幸	sachi	fortune, happiness
福	fuku	without complaint, good fortune
幸福	kōfuku	abundance, bliss, joy

Without going into philological details, it should be obvious that the Japanese semantic field centred upon the concept of ‘happiness’ differs in characteristic ways from its counterpart in European languages. At present, *shiwase* is the standard term to translate “happiness” which, however, interacts with other terms in subtle ways. Among these terms, not mentioned above, is also *happī* as a loanword which has come to occupy a prominent place in commerce and has also entered everyday language. The fact that a western loanword has invaded this semantic field suggests that certain aspects of the concept are not covered by customary words. Another reason why the Japanese semantic field of ‘happiness’ differs from European languages has to do with the fact that the relationship between spoken and written language in Japanese differs substantially from alphabetically written languages. This is of some importance because surveys are commonly administered in written form. Of course, I do not intend to say that translation is impossible; it most certainly isn’t. However, successful translation does not rely on one-to-one lexical correspondence, but on conceptual equivalence in context. The problem of potential measurement artefacts caused by inadequate translation has not been solved once and for all.

*Methodological difficulties*

The specific difficulty with comparative research lies in the important role played by key terms as stimulus items (Sasaki, Suzuki 2002: 46f.). Happiness research wants to assess happiness across nations by means of empirical methods. In view of the translation problems concerning stimulus items touched upon above, more recent studies use the term “subjective well-being” (SWB) rather than “happiness”, assuming that questions about SWB are less prone to cultural bias than those about happiness. Thus, “happiness,” “bonheur,” “fortuna,”

“shiwase, etc. are thought to signify culture specific forms of life-satisfaction, whereas SWB encompasses the smallest cross-cultural denominator or culturally neutral concept thereof. In order to assess subjective well-being, scale references and dimensions must be defined along which the subjects put themselves. The measurement of subjective well-being and quality of life has been done in different ways, using different scales. In principle, the problem discussed in connection with the translation of “happiness” arises here, too. It does not go away by breaking down the concept of happiness into several composite elements, although these components are more manageable than a global concept such as ‘happiness’. In this sense, what SWB-research studies is not happiness, but the rating of a number of stimulus items relating to certain dimensions such as family, friends, health, level of education, job, financial security, political situation, as the case may be.

Among the most frequently employed and practical tools for measuring subjective evaluations is the Semantic Differential Scale which uses bipolar adjectives (e.g., good vs. bad, right vs. wrong). But bipolarity has its limits which become particularly apparent in translation. The influence of survey-effect on the quality of data is well-known for single-nation studies with a single language. These problems are compounded when generalizations across cultures involving different languages are sought.

Identifying and defining the cultural and social variables that are good predictors of subjective well-being in a given society is another methodological difficulty that must be kept in mind. At the same time, defining a culture in terms of features generally thought to distinguish one from another bears the risk of over-generalization or anachronistic generalization. For example, the individualism-collectivism opposition is widely considered to distinguish societies prioritizing, respectively, personal goals and group goals. Japan has long been considered a paradigm example of collectivism where members of groups are interdependent and group norms have precedence over individual desires. However, while collectivist attitudes may still be determinants of behaviour and social relationships, it would be anachronistic to describe present-day Japan as a collectivist society.

Measuring happiness or subjective well-being by means of questionnaire surveys is a multifaceted undertaking. The problems of translation, stimulus equivalence and culture classification involve complexities that defy simple solutions. At this point, it is not clear whether meaningful comparisons of happiness across nations based on empirical surveys are possible without bias and artefacts. We should not take this to mean that research on happiness is a futile undertaking and that the said problems are insurmountable in principle. But awareness of these problems is essential if more than superficial insight is to be derived from the many cross-national surveys on subjective well-being and quality of life that have been conducted in the course of the past decades. Happiness is not something that is invariable. The universal nucleus of that which makes people happy, if any, seems to be hard

to separate from the ideological shell in which it is couched at any time at a given place. It is against this backdrop that I want to discuss happiness research in and about Japan in this paper. In addition to quantitative research, qualitative reflections about happiness are also taken into consideration.

### *Happiness in Japan*

The three intellectual influences on ordering life in pre-modern Japan, Buddhism, Neo-Confucianism and Daoism, are not overly concerned with happiness. Buddhism teaches moderation, the middle way, the avoidance of extremes as the most promising path to a good life. That the pursuit of material riches will not lead to happiness is a matter of course to Buddhist thinking. The Neo-Confucian order which was predominant during the two and a half centuries of Tokugawa rule does not conceptualize social relations in terms of maximising individual happiness, but rather in terms of harmony and the integration of individuals into the social body. The purpose is peace on the level of government and self-cultivation on that of the individual. Those concerned with accumulating wealth, the merchant class, occupy the bottom rung of the hierarchy of social repute. Daoism focuses on nature emphasising the importance of recognizing and accepting the reality that we cannot control. Like Confucianism it emphasises self-cultivation and holds that the properly cultivated individual mirrors, and conforms to, the natural order of things.

When Japan was confronted increasingly with the superior technology of the Western imperialist powers, specifically with American gunboats, around the middle of the nineteenth century, and the Tokugawa state crumbled, the intellectual elite were looking for new directions. Conforming to the “natural order of things” could not prepare them for meeting the challenges of Western imperialism. Learning from the West was the more promising option. To many intellectuals this meant not just technology, but also a revision of the moral foundations of society.

Nishi Amane (1829-1897), one of the foremost thinkers of his day, was a leading advocate of remodelling Japan on the image of the West. Hailing from a samurai family, he was trained as a Confucian scholar, but was inspired by the practical social thinking of Neo-Confucian heretic Ogyū Sorai (1666-1728) and subsequently devoted himself to learning about the West. Ogyū Sorai (1973) takes up the old Confucian notion of “the rectification of names” and presents his critique of Neo-Confucian social ethics in the form of a philosophical dictionary, the *Benmei* (Distinguishing Names) which offers a reinterpretation of 34 key notions of Confucianism such as ‘the way’, ‘virtue’, ‘humanness’, ‘wisdom’, ‘empathy’, ‘sincerity’, ‘goodness’, ‘the mean’, ‘harmony’, and ‘rectification’, among others. In passing we may note that it does not include any concept that comes even close to

'happiness', which can be taken as another indication that individual happiness was not a focus of Confucian ethics. Like other Meiji intellectuals, Nishi (1875 [1976]) set out to change that. As an alternative to what in his view were the outdated principles of Confucian morality, i.e., humility, generosity, humbleness, modesty, unselfishness, and lack of desire, he posited "The three human treasures" (*Jinsei sanpōsetu*), his reading of John Stuart Mill's social utilitarianism. At the time, Mill's "On Liberty" (*Jiyū no ri*) had been translated by Nakamura Masanao a couple of years earlier, and Nishi himself was working on the translation of Mill's "Utilitarianism" (*Rigaku*).

The three treasures which Nishi advocated as the foundation of a modern morality were health, wisdom and wealth. These were not objectives of and by themselves, but the means for reaching the higher objective "of the most great happiness" (Nishi 1976: 462). For translating "happiness" Nishi uses the Chinese characters *fuku-shi*, "welfare" which, however he glosses as *happinisu*, evidently for lack of a more suitable term. As a prolific translator Nishi created many new terms on the basis of Sino-Japanese morphemes to convey Western concepts, including, for instance, *tetsugaku* "philosophy", *genshō* "phenomenon", and *shinrigaku* "psychology". His interpretation of "happiness" in the utilitarian rather than hedonic sense apparently was such that he did not deem any of the traditional terms for happiness, such as *kōfuku* or *shiwase* appropriate, using *fukushi* throughout the *sanpōsetu* essay. In it he makes a case at length for the social benefits of pursuing individual gain, trying to pre-empt his Confucian critics who were likely to argue that people would not "differ from gamblers and rickshawmen if they want strong arms, sharp intellects, and money" (Nishi 1976: 463). Nishi Amane cannot claim credit for Japan's collective turn to pursuing precisely these goods<sup>9</sup>, but his essay on "the three human treasures" undoubtedly marks an ideological sea change from the social values of Confucianism to those of Western "civilization and enlightenment" (*bummei-kaika*), the reformers' rallying cry of his day.

Ever since, the Japanese have devoted themselves to acquiring the "three treasures" of strong arms, sharp intellects, and money, with vigour and undeniable success. Whether this has brought them closer to the higher goal of happiness remains an open question, but few would deny that the quest for happiness is recognized as a legitimate pursuit, if not a social duty, in present-day Japan. The Meiji reformers may not have brought happiness to Japan, but they did bring the ideology of pursuing happiness in the sense of social utilitarianism that informs and accompanies the capitalist order which Japan then appropriated for itself. In is worth noting in passing that Nishi's glossed term *fukushi* is still being used, side by side with *shiwase* and other terms today when happiness and well-being are discussed in Japanese.

*Promise or duty?*

Arguably, the Confucian heritage of social ethics has not been completely eradicated, but it has been sidelined no longer serving as the principal reference plain for the social discourse on ethical issues. Little remains, notably, of the disdain for commerce, while the unjustified belief that a higher income will make them happier is as widespread in Japan as in any advanced industrialized country. Evidence that in contemporary Japanese society “happiness” has become a major concern is not far to seek.

The Asahi Shimbun of 16 August 2005, carries a discussion between writer Shinya Fujiwara and sociologist Munekesu Mita entitled “Reflections on 60 years after the war in key words.” The first word listed is *kōfuku*, “happiness”. In it Fujiwara singles out the 1960s as the period when the masses experienced a sense of happiness. He states:

“While it used to be the case that the crises of capitalism could only be avoided by creating demand through war or public works, consumer capitalism stimulates demand by means of advertisement and information. The satisfaction of the masses and economic prosperity come to match. During this time [the 1960s, F.C.], a system came to be established in Japan which might be called ‘Happy Capitalism’ (*kōfuku shihonshugi*).”

After years of deprivation during and after the war, the Japanese were ready to consume beyond the level of bare subsistence, ready to enjoy consumption, and ready to embrace the ideology of Happy Capitalism.

The generation of those who experienced both almost incessant economic growth and steady improvement of their personal circumstances throughout their working life are well-disposed to the ideas that possessions and accumulation of wealth are important for their satisfaction and that a market economy maximises well-being. The baby-boomers, born between 1946 and 1949, constitute a significant part of this generation. They reinvented Japan after defeat and the frugal post-war years, turning it into a consumer paradise (Clammer 1997, Garon, Maclachlan 2006). For many of them economic growth meant leaving poverty behind and reaching a level of material comfort. When they started to go into retirement, an NHK TV programme aired 8 January 2007, asked a representative sample of one thousand members of this generation to epitomize their life in one Chinese character. The three most frequently given characters were, in this order, *raku* ‘pleasure’, *nin* ‘endurance’ and *kō* ‘happiness’. Satisfaction with the good life outweighed discontent two to one. The subjects judged their life to be happy although they were not too concerned about happiness.



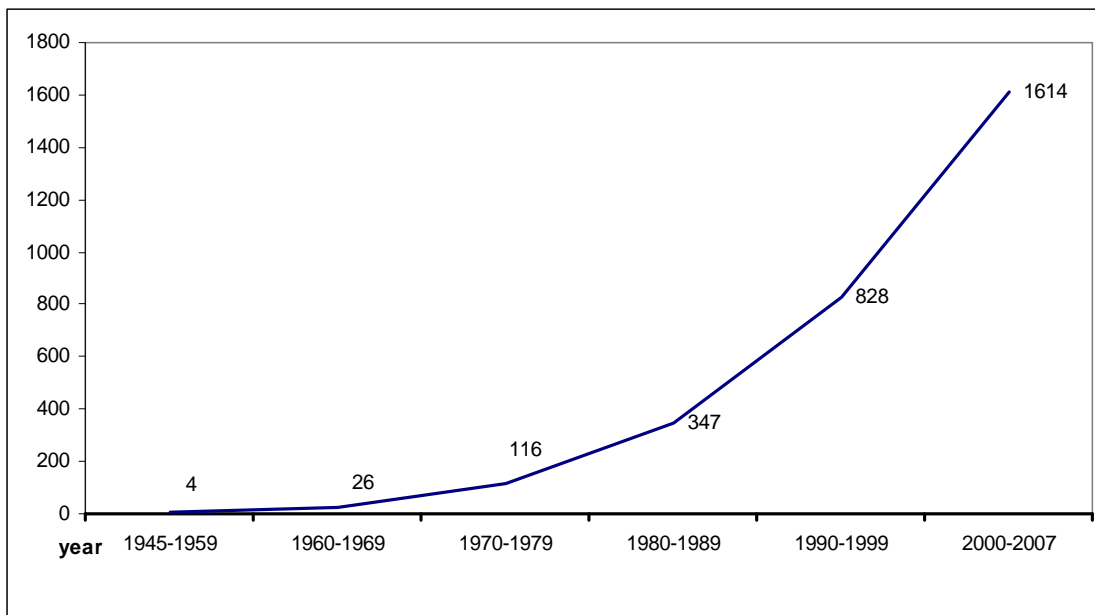


Figure 1. National Diet Library: Book titles including the word *shiiawase* “happiness”, 1945- 2007; n 2935

A search on the catalogue of Japan’s National Diet Library for book titles including the word *shiiawase* yields 2935 entries since 1945. Of these only 146 appeared between 1945 and 1979. During the 1980s, people became more interested in *shiiawase*, witness 347 titles, and during the depressed 1990s the numbers really took off yielding 828 titles, to be all but doubled to 1614 titles during the first seven years of the new millennium when the Japanese society was in the grip of uncertainty in the wake of neoliberal labour market reforms and the happiness boom had come into full swing. Sorted for contents, these books are about love and marriage, spirit and mind, religion, women, and childbearing and child-raising, in this order of frequency. Another search, on the website of the Japan Book Publishers Association, Book.or.jp, produced parallel results, if more accentuated. Of the 1205 books with *shiiawase* in the title just 34 were published prior to 1989, 192 in the 1990s, and 987 thereafter until 2007. As markets fail to produce what “Happy Capitalism” promises, the quest for happiness becomes more urgent, at least inasmuch as it finds expression in book publications. Riding the wave, several magazines and series brought out special issues on happiness, such as *Area*, “The Japanese want to be content: the elusive standard of individual happiness”<sup>10</sup>; *Bungeishunju*, “The new discourse on bliss. What is real happiness?”<sup>11</sup>, and *Ajia Shinseiki 4*, “Happiness. Changing Lifestyles”<sup>12</sup>.

“What is real happiness?” is a question that every generation asks anew, which, however, seems more relevant at one time than another. In present-day Japan it has a high profile, suggesting that economic downturn elicits more attention to happiness, calling to the scene those who can offer counsel, real or imaginary, on the conquest of happiness. Increased

income buys more happiness only up to a level of material care-freeness beyond which increments of happiness become negligible. However, economic downturns, even when from a very high level of affluence to what in comparison to poor countries is still a high level, do affect subjective well-being negatively (Lane 2000: 62). The explosion of publications about happiness is indicative, on one hand, of real hardship which has visited Japan as the “middle class society” of the post-war decades was being replaced by the “gap society” with growing income disparities and a new underclass of the “working poor” (Gotō et al. 2007). On the other hand, it suggests a growing uneasiness with the system of globalized American-style consumption as the main purpose in life, although the belief that purchasable things yield happiness is hard to abandon. It cannot be allowed to be superseded by complacency and an attitude to be content with what one has, because, in contradistinction to the production-driven economy of the catch-up decades after World War II, the economy of present-day hyperaged Japan is increasingly driven by consumption. Seeking happiness through stimulating consumption has become an economic imperative, if not a national duty in Japan. An examination of TV adverts provides additional evidence for this tendency. A spot check search of the approximately 15,000 new TV adverts aired every year revealed that the occurrence of the word *shiwase* in writing doubled between 2001 and 2008 and in speech increased 1.5 fold.<sup>13</sup>

### *Happiness politics*

The economy thrives on the promise of happiness by maximising personal gain. In view of the close links between government and business it is not surprising that the hedonic turn also resurfaced in post-war politics. A brief review of the concept of happiness in Japanese political discourse may serve as an introduction to the context.

“Happiness for one, happiness for all,” such is the refrain of *Warera*, ‘We’, the song of the Liberal Democratic Party (LDP). The tune is reminiscent of a martial song, the lyrics are as follows.

1

We are living in our country

We are building our freedom

Our eyes riveted on the passage of time

Opening up a road from today to tomorrow

Happiness for one, happiness for all

2

To our beloved children

We shall hand down our spirit

And bequeath our ancient culture

Let us engrave this day in our minds

Happiness for one, happiness for all

3

Our mountains and our sea

Our treasures and our lives

Shining bright on the face of the earth

Let us preserve peace in the world without fail

Happiness for one, happiness for all

Happiness for all<sup>14</sup>

The song is void of any political message other than a pledge of happiness, if that can count as one. The LDP is well-known for eschewing specific political commitments that might get in the way of adjusting the government agenda to the demands of the day, but “happiness for one and happiness for all” is a goal that is not difficult to subscribe to for anyone. Other political parties have issued similar pronouncements on various occasions. For instance, the President of the Democratic Party of Japan (DPJ), Ichiro Ozawa, identifies the search for happiness as the very *raison d’être* of politics. In a 2006 TV commercial stressing the importance of every-day life, he states: “The purpose of politics is to make people’s lives affluent and happy.”<sup>15</sup>

The New Komeito which has the backing of the Buddhist lay association Soka Gakkai, has variously employed the theme of happiness in connection with its policies. For instance, in a TV debate of 23 January 2006, the head of the party’s Political Affairs Research Committee, Yoshihisa Inoue, calls on the government to “pull the breaks on widening social disparities in the interest of the happiness of the people”.<sup>16</sup> And according to a campaign speech by Representative Takanori Kanzaki of 20 February 2006, the New Komeito is “the party that most seriously thinks about the happiness of the people.”<sup>17</sup>

Yet, Social Democrats and Communists have no lesser claim to providing happiness to the people. At its tenth regular national party convention on 2 November 2006, the Social Democratic Party (Shamintō) declared, “we want to build a society where the yardstick is not

‘being a winner or a loser’ but ‘being happy or not.’”<sup>18</sup> And the Japanese Communist Party issued a statement prior to the Upper House elections of 2007 disparaging inequality, widening social gaps and cut-throat competition and promising that it would pursue a “policy designed to provide everyone the opportunity to be happy”.<sup>19</sup>

All political parties invoke happiness in connection with specific policy fields such as education and elderly care, but the LDP, which has dominated Japanese politics since its founding in 1955, has been most explicit. At a May Day rally of the Japanese Trade Union Federation RENGO in 2001, Prime Minister Junichiro Koizumi declared: “What is most important is bringing the greatest happiness to the greatest number.”<sup>20</sup> The wording is emblematic of the neo-liberal creed to which Koizumi committed his government and to which large parts of the LDP continue to adhere. It clearly shows that social utilitarianism is by no means out of fashion.

Has the party delivered on its promise? The LDP has been extremely successful in terms of staying in power, but has its prolonged rule brought happiness to Japan? There seems to be wide agreement across the Japanese party spectrum that bringing happiness to the people is what governments should do. It is basically with claims of how to increase happiness that parties compete for voters, an indication that even the critics of the capitalist order of society by and large accept the universe of discourse of Happy Capitalism. Yet, this order has produced its own discontents. Where Japan had excelled in the past, unwelcome developments are in evidence posing new challenges for government, business, and non-state actors.

### *Discontents*

Since the depressed 1990s, economic insecurity has increased and the population reacts by expressing anxiety. 69.5 per cent of the respondents of a Cabinet Office survey across Japan in September 2007 said they were concerned or anxious about life, a record high.<sup>21</sup> And there is reason to be concerned, because it is not a foregone conclusion that Japan will be able to maintain its high standard of living.

In recent years, educational standards have been on the decline. Extreme social withdrawal (*hikikomori*) of an unknown but large number of youths has become a recognized social problem that is indicative of a society with a less collectivist outlook than used to be the case. Crime rates have been rising generally, and, sad testimony to population ageing, among the elderly in particular. *Kaigo tsukare* or ‘care-giving fatigue’ is the label under which an increasing number of crimes are reported in the press. Cases such as that of a 90 year-old Osaka man who strangled his bedridden wife<sup>22</sup>, or the 89 year-old husband from Asahikawa, Hokkaido, who killed his demented spouse, on her request, as he said<sup>23</sup>, are becoming more

common, as the age of both perpetrators and victims continues to rise. In many cases the question whether despair or mercy were behind these deeds remains unresolved, but that they represent one of the discontents produced by Happy Capitalism in the hyperaged society is obvious enough.

Another worrisome characteristic of Japanese society in the twenty-first century is the growing incidence of clinical depression. According to an estimate by the Ministry of Health and Labour, clinical depression will rise from fourth rank in 2000 to second rank in 2020 of all diseases and thus become a major health care issue. This is of particular concern because depression is a major trigger of suicide. Suicide has many causes, social, economic and medical. No unified explanatory theory exists, and none will be suggested here. For present purposes suffice it to note that the hyperaged society as it presents itself at present is one with a suicide rate that is much higher than fifty years ago when the level of material comfort of virtually all Japanese was much lower (Ōmura 2006: 147f.). In international comparison Japan's suicide rate is in the higher range of industrialized countries.<sup>24</sup> It is generally true that in rich countries suicide rates are higher than in less affluent ones. And the case has been made, for statistical reasons, that there is no tangible relationship between national levels of happiness and incidence of suicide (Veenhoven 1993, chapter 5). However, that increasing suicide rates are indicative of both a high degree of individualism and decreasing happiness in a society would seem hard to contest. What Japan's high incidence of suicide suggests is that two of its most striking accomplishments, longevity and affluence, do not guarantee happiness.

Further, the neo-liberal reforms of Japan's economy that were carried out in the name of the greatest happiness for the greatest number have led to greater income disparities. Some measure of inequality is unavoidable in market economies and conducive to business activity, but the inequality in Japan has surpassed levels in most other OECD countries and the advent of poverty, that, some critics fear, in combination with the expensive education system will be reproduced (Tachibanaki 2006). This raises the question whether the happiness of a disadvantaged section of the population is being sacrificed at the altar of the evasive promises of Happy Capitalism.

Next, the division of labour between the sexes is being renegotiated. This is a consequence of a more individualistic lifestyle that has taken root in Japan, the increased need and desire of women to engage in gainful employment, and the declining ability and willingness of women to care for elderly parents and parents in law. However, although the government declared 2008 "year 1 of work-life balance" and the Japan Business Federation (Keidanren) promotes work-life balance in the interest of achieving higher productivity<sup>25</sup>, no new equilibrium has been found yet. Women have reacted to the shortcomings of Happy

Capitalism by not marrying or not having children; for all that is known about happiness, not a happy choice.

Perhaps the strongest expression of the discontents of Happy Capitalism in hyperaged Japan is the plummeting birth rate and the population decline it brings in its train. Historically, population decline is associated with catastrophes: war, epidemics, famine. That a society that is living in peace and affluence and enjoying the highest standard of public hygiene and health would enter a phase of negative population growth is unprecedented. There are, of course, good arguments that population decline is not a problem and may, indeed, be a boon: less congestion and environmental degrading; lower real-estate prices; quality rather than quantity of education; more freedom from family duties and a wider choice of self-realization, to mention but four areas where fewer people could be seen as holding the promise of improvement. Conversely, it is difficult to find compelling arguments why a nonviolent and apparently spontaneous reduction of the Japanese population should be considered a loss. However, the complexity of social life is such that it is illusory to identify a single cause of changed reproductive behaviour. We can only hope to understand the fertility decline of Japan (and other highly industrialized countries) if we see it as society's response to a variety of contingent forces, such as, technological innovation, improved health care and the population ageing it brought about, a shift from the production of goods to the production of knowledge, the globalization of markets, and ideological reorientations, among others. A comprehensive explanation as to what exactly the society reacts to by lowering the fertility rate is still elusive.

Yet, on a fundamental level, a population that fails to reproduce itself has no future and is hence less future-oriented. More people have no descendents for whose future they feel responsible, while at the same time the concerns of those who are in need of help now and have only a few years to live are pushed to the foreground. It becomes more difficult to set the sights on the future which is uncertain under any circumstances. The confidence of being able to accomplish something and improve life for everyone, so characteristic of the post-war decades of reconstruction, is slipping away. At this time, Japan has no bold vision or long-term project other than to conserve what has been accomplished. Culturally, leaving descendents used to be one of the most important concerns linked to the family as the source and centre of happiness. Ancestor worship made the continuation of the family desirable, making it the locus of linking the past with the future. With the number of children per family declining and that of childless couples rising, this cultural tenet has evidently weakened. As a member of a family that is part of the stream of life flowing from the past to the future no longer is how an increasing number of Japanese conceive of their existence, which is more focussed on the present where fulfilment and happiness is sought in consumption.

*A new discourse on happiness*

It is against this backdrop that a new critical discourse on happiness is taking shape in Japan. Representing a generation that put work above all else, Taichi Sakaiya (2001), former head of the Economic Planning Agency and a prolific writer who with his 1976 so-entitled novel coined the term *dankai no sedai* 'babyboom generation', speaks of a life full of uncertainties and challenges where happiness was elusive, something perennially "for tomorrow" which perhaps he will attain as his options become less with the onset of old age. Writer Kei'ichi Itō, looking at the backside of happiness, declares that "rather than how to be happy, I want to ponder the question of how to reduce unhappiness" (Itō 2001: 144). After a decade of recession and restructuring, unhappiness became a concern for many, for the project of "capitalism as culture," so called by the highly influential former minister of finance Eisuke Sakakibara (1993) lost some of its glamour during the 1990s. With bankruptcies, unemployment, crushing debts and rising suicide rates, consumer capitalism became the target of a plethora of critical essays. The ever-hungry consumer proved to be hollow inside and unable to offer any orientation when markets fail. Criticism directed against a lifestyle shaped by consumerism was voiced in many quarters. For instance, comedian and TV producer Masao Kimura (2006: 89) writes:

The 120 million Japanese belong to the richest eight per cent of the world population. There is data to the effect that Japan's food leftovers account for 25 per cent of all discarded food in the world. [...] Although we have become such a wealthy and luxurious country, we keep looking for what is insufficient and still want things. It is not enough to live off the backs of poor countries and people. With such a lifestyle we can never attain happiness.

Philosopher Gen Kida (2001) observes that the words *kōfuku* and *shiwase* were not originally used in the contemporary sense of "happiness," which leads him to conclude that in former times the Japanese were not consciously seeking happiness. As the principal reason for this he identifies the spirit of Confucianism which emphasized a social order of harmony rather than individual psychological conditions. He moreover points out that, in contradistinction to the Western tradition where happiness is also conceived as a divine blessing, the Japanese have no religious associations with happiness. This conceptual distinction continues. Happiness (*kōfuku*) to the Japanese is nothing but a personal state of mind. Japan's recent happiness discourse, according to Kida, is thus an expression of excessive egotism.

The search is on for sources of happiness outside the framework of repeated cycles of acquisition, consumption and disposal. Jirō Watanabe (2001: 84), professor of the University of the Air, identifies three aspects of happiness: (1) safety, living in security, (2) being

unerring about one's purpose in life, and (3) finding one's way without anxiously comparing one's hopes and disappointments with those of others. And historian Shōji Tachikawa (2001) contemplates the sense of happiness that flows out of being prepared to die at any time, while Emura (2001), former mayor of Takatsuki City, Osaka Prefecture, discovered fulfilment and happiness in what at first he thought was hell on earth, caring for his bedridden unconscious wife. Rather than active pursuit of something that must be acquired, it is a more passive sense of happiness reminiscent of *ataraxia* or peace of mind that preoccupies these thinkers.

Especially noteworthy is cultural anthropologist Tamotsu Aoki's 2003 essay on the pursuit of happiness under the conditions of globalization. On the basis of his experience as a student of Buddhism in a Thai monastery decades ago Aoki develops the notion of "small happiness" as opposed to "great happiness". The latter refers to grand designs of how to better the world and accomplish happiness for a nation if not humanity at large, all-encompassing convictions, promises of salvation and ideologies many of which have brought a great deal of unhappiness onto the world. By contrast, the former concerns the simple pleasures and satisfactions of a fulfilled life.

What distinguishes Aoki's writing is that he reflects on how the quest for happiness is affected by the currents of time. With the end of the Cold War, formulas for achieving "great happiness" have fallen out of fashion. Neoliberal reformers still promise happiness for all, but that increased wealth does not lead to increased happiness is by now a commonplace. Rather, evidence is accumulating that the relentless race for riches to which the capitalist system subjugates everyone curbs happiness. In particular, it diminishes our ability to appreciate small happiness. Reflections on happiness thus lead to a critique of Happy Capitalism, the ideology that most faithfully reflected the reality of Japan's phenomenal resurgence after her defeat in World War II. But the Japanese or, to put it less generally, an increasing number of them, do not enjoy the fruits of their success. Preoccupied with material pursuits – though concerned nowadays less with getting ahead than with not falling behind – they are more affluent and more individualistic than they were a half a century ago, and they exhibit a higher degree of psychological distress, lower social skills and are more likely to become victims of crimes or to commit suicide. The new discourse on happiness – that of critical essays rather than that of how-to guidebooks – is indicative of the present crisis of Japanese society and the search for a new purpose and anew morality beyond that of material success and the struggle and discipline to achieve it.



*A broad field of research*

Japan occupies a special position in the realm of contemporary happiness research which mainly grew out of Economics and Psychology departments in western countries. Japan, where statistical data about a wide range of issues abound, is a favourite reference point for comparisons, although a great deal of research about the happiness, subjective well-being, welfare and contentedness of the Japanese remains to be done. Among the questions calling for further investigation in economics, the social and political sciences and cultural studies are the following.

**Economics and Business Administration**

- What does the diminishing increase of happiness with increasing affluence imply for the future of Japan's economy?
- What is the trade-off between unemployment and inflation in terms of happiness?
- What are the effects of income (in)equality on happiness?
- What is happiness in organisations and how can it be measured and advanced?
- How does job satisfaction relate to overall happiness?
- What is the meaning and significance of happiness for personnel management? (Are happy employees more effective?)
- How does life-satisfaction and GNP per capita in Japan correlate and what similarities and differences in this correlation can be observed with other countries?
- Does the notion of Gross National Happiness deserve to be taken seriously?

**Sociology**

- How do transformations of the labour market and family structures interact and what do they imply for social harmony and happiness?
- Does happiness depend on social security?
- Is social welfare a common good, and if so, is the government or the market superior as its guarantor?
- To what extent is the welfare state responsible for the happiness of the people?
- What do advances in gender equality imply for the life satisfaction of the Japanese?
- Do life expectancy gains entail increased happiness? If not, what should be done in order to avert a decrease of happiness as a consequence of population ageing?
- Are children an important/dispensable part of a happy family life? (What does Japan's low birth rate mean in terms of life satisfaction?)

- How important for a happy life is sex? (Why is the frequency of (marital) sex in Japan markedly lower than in other industrial countries?)
- How should elderly care be organized in order to secure the greatest happiness for the greatest number?
- Is work a source of happiness?
- Is work-life balance a recipe for increasing happiness?

### **Political Science**

- Can family and social policies affect the happiness of the people?
- Has democracy increased the happiness of the Japanese and, more generally, does democracy make people happy?
- How does political participation relate to happiness? (Is the differential size of electoral districts and hence the differential “value” of individual votes a cause of malcontent?)
- How do political parties tackle the issue of happiness and how do they differ from each other in this regard?
- Assuming that married people are happier than unmarried people, as several surveys suggest, what should be the consequences for social and family policies?
- Is the happiness of the people a viable political aim or but an ideological marketing slogan of political parties and other political agents?
- How is citizens’ satisfaction influenced by economic conditions and translated into voting behaviour?
- Are political stability and efficient government related to happiness?
- Have recent deregulation and market liberalisation policies of the Japanese government been conducive to the happiness of the people?

### **Cultural Studies**

- How universal is the “pursuit of happiness”?
- What are the conceptual foundations of happiness in Japanese intellectual history and what are its most important expressions in philosophy and literature?
- How does the lexical field of 幸福 etc. correspond to that of “happiness”, “fortuna”, “Glück”, etc.? What are the implications for cross-cultural and cross-linguistic studies of happiness?

- How were Japanese ideas about happiness affected by Japan's modernization as of the mid 19<sup>th</sup> century? (What were the continuities and discontinuities in values and attitudes?)
- What have Japanese religions to say about happiness?
- What is the impact of consumerism on Japanese notions of happiness and on the happiness of the Japanese?
- To what extent are moderation, self- cultivation and other traditional values still (or again) recognized as effective means to attain a "good life"?

## References

- Aoki, Tamotsu. 2003. Gurōbaruka no naka de no kōfuku no tsuikyū – ‘chīsana kōfuku’ to shūkyō no sezokuteki imi [The pursuit of happiness in globalization. ‘Small happiness’ and the secular meaning of ascetic practice]. In: *Ajia Shin-seiki vol.4*, eds. Tamotsu Aoki et al., *Kōfuku. Henyō suru raifusutairu*, Tokyo: Iwanami, 63-81.
- Aristotle. *Nikomachische Ethik*, ed. Günther Bien. 1972. Hamburg: Felix Meiner Verlag,
- Choden, Tashi, Takayoshi Kusago, Kokoro Shirai. 2007. *Gross National Happiness and Material Welfare in Bhutan and Japan*. Thimphu, Bhutan: The Centre for Bhutan Studies. <http://www.bhutanstudies.org.bt/admin/pubFiles/GNH-MaterialWelfare-part1.pdf>
- Clammer, John. 1997. *Contemporary Urban Japan: A sociology of consumption*. Oxford: Blackwell.
- Diener, Ed and Shigehiro Oishi. 2000. Money and happiness: income and subjective well-being across nations. In: Ed Diener and Eunkook M. Suh (eds.) *Culture and Subjective Well-being*. Cambridge, Mass.: The MIT Press, 185-218.
- Emura, Toshio. 2001. Tsuma no kaigo de kizuita hontō no shiawase [Realizing genuine happiness through caring for my wife]. *Bungeishunju* vol. 79, 10: 47f.
- Garon, Sheldon and Patricia L. Maclachlan (eds.). 2006. *The Ambivalent Consumer in East Asia and in the West*. Ithaca, New York: Cornell University Press.
- Gotō, Michio et al. 2007. *Kakusa shakai to tatakau* [Struggling with the gap society]. Tokyo: Aoki Shoten.
- Inglehart, Ronald. 1990. *Cultural Shift in Advanced Industrial Society*. Princeton: Princeton University Press.
- Itō, Keiichi. 2001. Watakushi no kangaekata – nariyuki makase [My way of thinking – take things as they come]. *Bungeishunju* vol. 79, 10: 144f.

- Kida, Gen. 2001. Nihonjin no 'Kōfukuron' [The happiness discourse of the Japanese]. *Bungeishunju* vol. 79, 10: 28-31.
- Kimura, Masao. 2006. Oosaka ryū 'oowarai' gaikō o oshierutaru [Lemme teach you the diplomacy of 'great laughter' Osaka style]. In: 'Magazine 9jo' henshūbu (ed.) *Minna no kyūjō*. Tokyo: Shūeisha Shinsho, 79-87.
- Kitayama, Shinobu and Mayami Karasawa. 2002. *Omoiyari no gokeisei to nihonteki jiko no seisei* [Reciprocity of sentiments and the generation of the Japanese self]. Kyoto: Kyoto University, Sōgō ningen gakubu.
- Kitayama, Shinobu and Hazel Rose Markus. 2000. The pursuit of happiness and the realization of sympathy: Cultural patterns of self, social relations, and well-being. In: Ed Diener and Eunkook M. Suh (eds.) *Culture and Subjective Well-being*. Cambridge, Mass.: The MIT Press, 113-161.
- Lane, Robert E. 2000. *The Loss of Happiness in Market Democracies*. Yale: Yale University Press.
- Manabe, Kazufumi. 2005. Cross-national comparison of the structure of well-being: Examination based on data from the world values survey. *Kwansei Gakuin Daigaku, Shakaigakubu kiyō* 98: 17-32.
- Manabe, Kazufumi. 2006. The culture of happiness and satisfaction in Asia. In: Takashi Inoguchi et al. *Human Beliefs and Values in Striding Asia. East Asia in Focus: Country Profiles, Thematic Analyses, and Sourcebook, Based on the AsiaBarometer Survey of 2004*. Tokyo: Akashi Shoten, 295-310.
- Marx, Karl. 1976. Zur Kritik der Hegelschen Rechtsphilosophie. Einleitung. In: *Karl Marx/ Friedrich Engels - Werke*. Berlin: Karl Dietz Verlag, Berlin. Volume 1. pp. 378-391.
- McMahon, Darrin. 2006. The History of Happiness and Contemporary Happiness Studies. New Directions in the Study of Happiness, Notre Dame University, Oct. 22-24, 2006. <http://www.nd.edu/~adutt/activities/documents/McMahonNotreDameTalk.pdf>
- Nettle, Daniel. 2005. *Happiness. The science behind your smile*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Nishi Amane. 1875. Jinsei sanbō [Three human treasures]. *Meiroku Zasshi* nos. 38, 39, 40, 42 (translated by William Reynolds Braisted, *Meiroku Zasshi*. Journal of the Japanese Enlightenment, Tokyo: Tokyo University Press, 1976, pp. 462-467, 475-479, 486-491, 513-516.)
- Ogyū Sorai. 1973 [1737] Benmei (Distinguishing names). *Nihon shisō taikai*, vol. 36, eds. Yoshikawa Kōjiro et al., Tokyo: Iwanami Shoten.

- Okayama, Hajime. 2003. Ajiateki kōfuku ron [A theory of happiness in Asia]. In: *Ajia Shin-seiki vol.4*, eds. Tamotsu Aoki et al., *Kōfuku. Henyō suru raifusutairu*, Tokyo: Iwanami, 27-48.
- Ōmura, Eishō. 2006. Happiness and unhappiness: A clinical sociological approach. In: Kenji Kosaka (ed.) *A Sociology of Happiness, Japanese Perspectives*. Melbourne: Trans Pacific Press, 146-190.
- Prieler, Michael et al. 2008. *The Representation of Older People in Japanese Television Advertising*. Deutsches Institut für Japanstudien, Tokyo, Working Paper 08/2.
- Sagers, John H. 2006. *Origins of Japanese Wealth and Power: Reconciling Confucianism and Capitalism, 1830-1885*. New York: Palgrave Macmillan.
- Sakaiya, Taichi. 2001. Shiawase ha, itsumo 'ashita' [Happiness is always 'tomorrow']. *Bungeishunju* vol. 79, 10: 50f.
- Sakakibara, Eisuke. 1993. *Bunmei toshite no Nihon-gata shihonshugi* [Japanese-style capitalism as civilization]. Tokyo: Tōyō Keizai Shinpōsha.
- Sasaki, Masamichi and Tatsuo Suzuki. 2002. *Social Attitudes in Japan. Trends and Cross-National Perspectives*. Leiden: Brill.
- Tachibanaki, Toshiaki. 2006. *Kakusa shakai. Nani ga mondai nano ka* [The differential society. What is the problem?]. Tokyo: Iwanami Shinsho.
- Tachikawa, Shōji. 2001. 'Kimochi ii', itsu shinde mo ii' to iu kōfukukan [The sense of happiness of feeling good and being ready to die at any time] *Bungeishunju* vol. 79, 10: 90f.
- Veenhoven, Ruut. 1993. *Happiness in Nations. Subjective appreciation of life in 56 nations 1946-1992*. Rotterdam: Erasmus University, RISBO, Center for Socio-Cultural Transformation.
- von Wright, Georg Henrik. 1963. *The Varieties of Goodness*. London: Routledge & Kegan Paul.
- Watanabe, Jirō. 2001. Kōfuku no mitsu no kyokumen [Three aspects of happiness]. *Bungeishunju* vol. 79, 10: 84f.
- Weber, Max. 1922. *Wirtschaft und Gesellschaft. Grundriss der verstehenden Soziologie*. Fourth edition prepared by H. Winkelman. Tübingen: J.C.B. Mohr, 1956.
- Yamaguchi, Kazuo. 2007. Fertility decline and work/life balance. *Economy, Culture and History, Japan Spotlight Bimonthly*, November, December. <http://www.rieti.go.jp/en/papers/contribution/yamaguchi/02.html>
- Yanabu Akira. 1982. *Honyakugo seiritsu jijo* [On the formation of translation words]. Tokyo: Iwanami Shoten.

Yanagishita, Machiko and Jack M. Guralnik. 1988. Changing Mortality Patterns that Led Life Expectancy in Japan to Surpass Sweden's: 1972-1982. *Demography* 25/4, 611-624.

- 
- 1 In 2006, Japan ranked 7<sup>th</sup> of 177 countries on the Human Development Index.  
[http://hdrstats.undp.org/countries/country\\_fact\\_sheets/cty\\_fs\\_JPN.html](http://hdrstats.undp.org/countries/country_fact_sheets/cty_fs_JPN.html)
  - 2 As Diener and Oishi (2000: 185) put it: "Although people have many goals, one is struck by the degree to which material prosperity has become an important aim in most societies."
  - 3 Nettle (2005: 15) refers to a bibliography of more than 3000 happiness studies published since 1960 and the Journal of Happiness Studies that was launched in 2000.
  - 4 <http://www.worldvaluessurvey.org/>
  - 5 <http://www.cap-lmu.de/publikationen/2007/eurobarometer.php>
  - 6 <http://worlddatabaseofhappiness.eur.nl/>
  - 7 Lane (2000) is one of the few studies seriously calling into question whether market economies and democratic political systems are conducive to individual happiness.
  - 8 Not surprisingly, the Human Development Index (HDI) calculated by combining with equal weighting the indices for life expectancy, education and standard of living (GDP per capita) is taken into account in most happiness studies.
  - 9 Sagers (2006) offers an overview of Japanese economic development during the nineteenth century, pointing out the importance of Ogyū Sorai for separating practical economic thinking from Confucian orthodoxy. At the same time, he maintains that Japan's rapid transition to a capitalist economy owed much to the Tokugawa period's Confucian legacy.
  - 10 "Manzoku shitai nihonjin: tsukuridasenai 'watakushi dake no shiawase no kijun'" 13(7) 2000.
  - 11 "Shin-kōfukuron. Hontō no shiawase to ha?" 79(10) 2001.
  - 12 "Kōfuku. Henyō suru raifusutairu" Ajia Shinseiki 4, Tokyo: Iwanami Shoten, 2003
  - 13 The spot check was carried out by Michael Prieler based on the commercial database Video Research Comhouse CM Digital Library which includes all newly broadcast advertisements in Kanto area since 1996. Cf. also Prieler et al. 2008.
  - 14 Lyrics by Tokiko Iwatani, composition by Naozumi Yamamoto, author's translation. The song can be heard and the lyrics read at <http://www.jimin.jp/jimin/jimin/touka/index.html> (inspected 2/2008)
  - 15 <http://www.dpj.or.jp/news/dpjnews.cgi?indication=dp&num=9016> (inspected 2/2008)
  - 16 <http://www.komei.or.jp/news/2006/0123/5210.html?kw=%B9%AC%A4%BB>
  - 17 <http://www.komei.or.jp/news/2006/0220/5440.html?kw=%B9%AC%A4%BB>
  - 18 <http://www5d.biglobe.ne.jp/~tosikenn/mizuho060211.htm>. At the time, *kachigumi* and *makegumi* (winners and losers, respectively) were catchwords of public discourse about the direction in which the society was moving.

- 19 The statement was issued by the Osaka Prefecture chapter of the JCP,  
[http://www.jcp-osaka.jp/2006/12/2007\\_3.html](http://www.jcp-osaka.jp/2006/12/2007_3.html)
- 20 <http://www.jtuc-rengo.org/updates/before2003/weekly/2001/week2001may/01may11.html>
- 21 Cabinet Office, <http://www8.cao.go.jp/survey/h19/h19-life/index.html>
- 22 Asahi Shimbun, 2/13/2008, evening edition, p. 15
- 23 Asahi Shimbun, 2/29/2008, morning edition, p. 39
- 24 [http://www.who.int/mental\\_health/prevention/suicide/suiciderates/en/](http://www.who.int/mental_health/prevention/suicide/suiciderates/en/)
- 25 <http://www.keidanren.or.jp/english/policy/2007/109.html>