# Reflexive modernity in practice: The methodology of comparing German and Japanese parents

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## Old, but unresolved debates: Methodological nationalism, comparative studies, and social science research in the age of reflexive modernity

The days when international survey projects were questioned on a fundamental basis are, fortunately, over. Several decades ago, methodological discourses have come to the conclusion that cross-national studies are essential to the advancement of social empiricism and theory, and, as Kohn (1987: 713) put it,

> […] valuable, even indispensable, for establishing the generality of findings and the validity of interpretations derived from single-nation studies. In no other way can we be certain that what we believe to be social-structural regularities are not merely particularities, the product of some limited set of historical or cultural or political circumstances. [C]ross-national research is equally valuable, perhaps even more valuable, for forcing us to revise our interpretations to take account of cross-national differences and inconsistencies that could never be uncovered in single-nation research.

Since then, a large number of large-scale, heavily funded international survey projects have come into existence, and much of what we know about today's world cannot be imagined without these projects.

Nevertheless, practice is lagging behind theory. These large-scale projects fill a very specific niche in the social sciences, and smaller-scale studies are still bound to "national containers" (Taylor 2003) to a significant degree. Until recently, many researchers have fundamentally criticized the social sciences for not overcoming the systematic biases inherent in nation-centered research and for being blind to the importance of international research. The debates surrounding this topic have declined after peaking in the mid-2000s, but in scientific discourses, the conversation often changes before issues have been resolved (Kuhn 1962), and as such, decline in interest in a particular issue rarely means that the discus-

sion is lacking in merit. In the case of the debate surrounding international research, creating globally useful data is "still not an achievement as much as a target" (Belfiore 2004: 6), and most of the arguments brought forth in this debate remain highly relevant today and it is advisable not to dismiss them. In the first section of this chapter, I will therefore outline some central criticisms of the social sciences as a whole and arguments in favor of international survey research, highlighting the special role that our German-Japanese survey project plays for the advancement of the social sciences.

In a seminal article about migration studies from the early 21st century, Wimmer and Schiller have confronted mainstream social science with the term "methodological nationalism" (Wimmer and Schiller 2002: 302). This term describes the scientific sedimentation of the ancient notion that societies per se are territorially confined entities. As a result of the historically grown national structure of governance, the nation state has become not only a symbol, but a synonym of social cohesion and of society itself. Social scientists have taken this common-sense-notion at face value for a long time, taking the nation state as a natural starting point for social theory and empiricism resulting in a "blockage of insight" (Luhmann 1997: 24) that kept them from viewing society as something bigger than the nation state.

Critics of methodological nationalism have developed and implemented methodologies that successfully overcome the nation state as the central unit of analysis, replacing it with units such as transnational spaces (Faist 2000; Pries 2008), transnational social fields (Basch, Glick Schiller, and Szanton Blanc 1994; Schiller 2005), post-colonialism (Chakrabarty 2000) and cosmopolitanism (Beck and Sznaider 2006), just to name a few key concepts (Amelina et al. 2012). It is, however, important to recognize that defining new units of analysis and discarding the nation state is not necessarily a prerequisite to overcoming methodological nationalism, and sometimes, if the nation state is at the heart of the researched issue, even misguided. The aforementioned critics of methodological nationalism have therefore pointed out from the very beginning that alternative methodologies, while acknowledging the cross-border realities of modernity, must at the same time not forget that the nation state remains an institutional and organizational reality (Wimmer and Schiller 2002, 2003). But despite the fundamentally reflexive and self-aware nature of the discourse on methodological nationalism, most of its discussions and publications are focused on globalized phenomena and bear the imminent danger of leaving the nation state behind altogether, "proclaiming a new cosmopolitan world society" (Pries and Seeliger 2012: 212). There is no question that the

above-mentioned works have managed to find excellent solutions for their specific problems, but it must be stressed that overcoming methodological nationalism is not about finding "*the* [new] unit of analysis or *the* [new] relevant context; [since] this would be an expression of static thinking" (Amelina et al. 2012: 5), which is the very thing that scholars try to overcome when criticizing methodological nationalism. It is about flexible thinking and openness to a bigger variety of units of analysis and contexts that also include, but are not limited to, the nation state. With this in mind, the task that remains for researchers designing projects is to strike the right balance between nation-centered thinking and other approaches.

A second discourse that helps to strike this balance in practice has grown from the discipline of comparative survey research. This discourse has mostly been motivated by the desire to compare nations, and as such, one could say that it carries an inherent pledge to nation-centered thinking and methodological nationalism. However, the discipline can also be seen as a mere intermediary to the discovery of nation-independent truths, when considering that "the very spirit of comparison involves the quest for universals" (Dogan and Pelassy 1990: 19). This tension between national boundedness and the search for universal truths has led to the development of a universalist branch of comparative research on the one hand, and a culturalist branch that eventually became disconnected from the initial idea of comparative research on the other hand (Hantrais and Mangen 2007). The universalist branch is characterized by a constant search for universal truths and expansion of locally developed theories to the global level (see most large-scale international survey projects, such as those produced by the OECD, or Esping-Andersen (1997)). This universalism is heavily criticized for ignoring the complexities of social reality and the fact that universalist models, even when following the questionable assumption that every social truth can be generalized, have to be designed and analyzed with the unique complexities of different social contexts in mind (Hantrais and Mangen 2007).

In contrast, scholars of the culturalist approach, taken to its extreme by ethnomethodologists in the 1960s (e. g. Garfinkel 1964), followed the idea that each and every context had to be recognized in all its particularities, rejecting all notions of universalist truth that would even allow for comparisons and generalizations (Hantrais and Mangen 2007). In order to understand social reality, culturalists argue, we need to listen to what empirical social reality tells us and remove grand social theory from our observations. The criticisms of culturalism, if taken to its extreme, stand to reason: It is highly problematic to assume that we can approach, exam-

ine, and describe social realities without developing and/or employing any kind of overarching scientific concept or theory. Any scientific description is based on assumptions and concepts that are common at least to the specific discourse in which its reception takes place. Culturalists operate under the assumption that their empirical data is "unmediated" (Atkinson 1988: 454) and independent from scientific theory, while in practice they depend on unspoken theories as much as anyone. They merely forego the reflection and discussion of their theory, meaning that the conditions of data creation and the implications of their research remain unreflected and elusive.

The lessons learned from universalism and culturalism in comparative studies were that neither leads to a very productive and insightful methodology on its own, because either omits crucial aspects: Universalism omits the particularities of contexts and thereby equates nation states to interchangeable random samples, whereas culturalists insist on their uniqueness up to a point that makes comparison or even wider contextualizations impossible, conveniently ignoring the necessity and value of universal social theories.

Comparative scholars who have managed to position themselves beyond the dichotomy of universalism and culturalism therefore propose to view the nation state as one of several contextual frames of reference that are relevant to individuals. At the same time, different national and subnational legal, political, economic, and socio-cultural systems need to be taken into account as well (Hantrais and Mangen 2007). As a consequence, comparative studies have adopted an approach to the study of multiple nations that not only covers the blind spots of universalism and culturalism, but also accounts for the interplay of universal and cultural social realities by conceptualizing the nation as a context among other contexts. Instead of simply comparing nations, the ideal comparative research project discusses the particularities of the nations under investigation and aims for multi-level analysis (Hantrais and Mangen 2007). Such a project would also examine groups within countries or groups that span across countries, because social realities often generate contexts that do not run along national boundaries. From a sampling perspective, the nations for comparison should be selected with these contexts in mind, and not merely be convenient groups of countries, such as Europe, Asia or all members of the OECD.

From a meta-theoretical standpoint, the essence of both of the discourses outlined above is to overcome dualist thinking. Dualist thinking is part of a modern mindset that is increasingly drawn into question and replaced by more flexible modes of thinking (Beck and Lau 2005). In this regard, methodological nationalism/nationless cosmopolitanism and

universalism/culturalism are two sides of coins that were never really coins to begin with, but rather opposing ends of modernist theoretical spectra, where social entities are almost exclusively conceptualized according to the "'either/or' principle, separating them permanently and unambiguously" (Beck and Lau 2005: 534). The two discourses reviewed above are therefore symptomatic for social sciences that have left modernist thought behind and arrived in a reflexive modernity that questions and overcomes these dualisms, replacing them with a "'both/and' principle" (Beck and Lau 2005: 527).

In light of these deliberations, our project can be positioned within the intellectual realm of reflexive modernity, catering to criticisms and propositions of both discourses outlined above: As a two-nation comparative study, it is "able to examine a much larger number of contextual or micro variables than is feasible in large-scale multinational surveys" (Hantrais and Mangen 2007: 9), transcending the boundaries of many universalist studies while avoiding the narrow scope of a dogmatic culturalism. It incorporates and utilizes the nation as a frame of reference, but relates this frame to other types of contexts, accounting for political, organizational, cultural, and economic implications of being a parent, such as infrastructure, childcare, and education systems, legislation, norms, and values, socioeconomic strata or employment practices. Our project also answers to the critique of methodological nationalism by way of examining a social group that transcends national borders on the one hand, but is heavily shaped and affected by nation-bound realities (like childcare policy) on the other. The parents in our dataset live in two very different parts of the world, but they are equally products and victims of reflexive modernization (Beck, Giddens, and Lash 1994), living in a part of global society where having children is no longer the norm and where the modern assumptions of sustained growth have begun to erode (Ochiai 2014).

This volume attempts to present analyses that do justice to the demands of reflexive modernity, but many more questions could be answered with our data. The remainder of this chapter is dedicated to the details of conceptualization and operationalization of surveys in Germany and Japan, providing transparency as to how this cross-national project was realized. It is also intended to show that we did our utmost to produce datasets accounting for a vast array of contexts, systematic biases, and differences in order to transcend the simplicity of a mere two-country comparison and allow for multi-level analyses that are not bound to the national container.

### The cross-national comparison of well-being

The essence of this cross-national survey project (Parental Well-Being Survey) is its quest for a better understanding of the subjective well-being of parents. It is important to stress the term "subjective" here because in our view, well-being cannot be determined solely by examining income data, employment rates, or other "objective" assessments of an individual's status quo, such as the OECD well-being measures do. Our concept of well-being is rooted in the individual's self-perception and -assessment, meaning that no person other than the respondent him- or herself can provide a correct assessment. Subsequently, we assess well-being with simple and straight-forward questions and take respondent's answers at face value. Such questions have the advantage of offering greater content validity than objective approximations of subjective well-being, but they do not come without drawbacks. Assessments of measurement accuracy are more difficult, because there is sometimes room for interpretation and no simple fact-checking mechanism can be used to determine the accuracy of measures beyond the given answer. In short, survey researchers have to rely on the veracity of the responses. This question of accuracy of subjective measures is especially problematic in comparative studies. In a non-comparative sample, many potentially influencing factors remain consistent: Respondents usually speak the same language, are socialized in the same educational system, live under the same government, are exposed to the same national media, etc. In a comparative survey, however, such constants have to be controlled for or at least taken into account. This chapter discusses some of these factors, as well as addresses other major concerns of comparative studies of well-being and proposes ways of dealing with them.

### Advantages of a two-country study

Cross-national studies of subjective well-being are not new. A large number of high-profile, high-resource studies have directed their efforts towards this topic, and many of them are far bigger in scope than this project (e. g. Abdallah, Thompson, and Marks 2008; Deaton 2008; Helliwell, Layard, and Sachs 2012; OECD 2014). However, there are several issues with cross-national survey research that become even more severe with a rising number of countries in the dataset.

Many potential threats to survey quality become significantly greater when more countries are added (Groves et al. 2004: 50–60). Measurement validity, for example, is harder to establish in cross-national studies than

in national samples, because an item that is a valid representation of a variable in one country might not be in another. This problem becomes obvious when the variable simply does not exist in the other country, resulting in a complete lack of content validity and most likely also statistical reliability. For example, a survey item asking "On a scale from 0 to 10, rate how satisfied you are with the Queen's public appearances" would refer to different persons if asked in England and in Denmark, whereas in Germany, a valid answer would be impossible, because there is no queen. In effect, this is not only a measurement issue, but also an issue of designing a survey that is equally relevant for all involved countries. Many multinational surveys that have grown through expansion from Western projects to the rest of the world have an inherent bias towards Western issues, leading to a downright colonization of survey research (Heath, Fisher, and Smith 2005; Smith, Fisher, and Heath 2011). As a result, the more cultures that are included in a given survey, the more difficult it is to establish measurement validity across the sample and the more restrictive the selection of research questions becomes.

Another potential threat to the quality of cross-national survey data is response bias. In some cultural contexts, an item ranging from 0–10 may be interpreted differently than in others. A prime example for a common response bias in well-being research is social desirability bias (Diener et al. 1995: 10), i. e. the tendency of individuals to give the response that they believe is expected of them. While the relevance of this type of bias depends on the analytical methods used (Diener 1984), controlling for them becomes somewhat easier when explicitly asking respondents about their ideals, e. g. their ideal level of satisfaction[1] (Uchida and Ogihara 2012: 356). However, such response biases become more diverse with a rising number of cultures included in the survey. As a result, control variables have to be more diverse as well, multiplying the total number of survey questions. If controlling for a bias is not possible, accounting for the bias during analysis and interpretation becomes an immensely complex and elaborate endeavor. In contrast, with only two cultures in the sample, potential response biases can be considered and discussed in-depth whenever necessary, making a two-country comparison preferable to multi-country comparisons.

Not only the questionnaire design, but also sampling, data entry, and quality control procedures pose a real threat to the quality of cross-na-

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[1] This was not done in this survey project, since its implementation is a methodological rabbit hole: Answers about ideals will, again, be subject to a response bias that is much more difficult to control. In the end, it is more transparent to discuss known facts about cultural response biases when presenting the results.

tional survey research in the form of processing error. Multinational surveys are usually conducted by separate researching entities in the separate countries that, despite following identical guidelines, may have different practices for data entry and error-checking, such as deciding which outliers are deemed plausible and which are not, or how much time is invested in checking for contradicting answers. Additionally, multinational surveys often struggle with the fundamental requirement of obtaining a sample that is both large enough and representative from each of the participating survey organizations (Heath, Fisher, and Smith 2005: 315). By conducting the survey in only two countries, sampling and survey processing can be realized with a high amount of coordination between researchers from the two countries.

Granted, it is impossible to alleviate all of the aforementioned issues with current research methods and ethics standards. There are also forms of cross-national equivalence that are not discussed here and the violation of which cannot be ruled out completely. However, most of the mentioned issues with multi-national surveys can be significantly reduced or remedied, given a certain amount of similarity between the surveyed cultures, a culturally sensitive survey design, and a reduction of the comparison to two countries. This project's focus on two countries, specifically Germany and Japan, deliberately represents a selection of two countries with significant structural and societal similarities (as outlined in the introduction by Bertram and Holthus 2018 in this volume), which in itself serves to avoid the aforementioned threats to survey quality to a certain degree.

The questionnaires were designed in close collaboration with native researchers from both countries to ensure measurement validity and to avoid ethnocentrism, with most questions being equally relevant and meaningful in both cultures. Questions and translations were selected carefully to minimize response bias. Additionally, all participating comparative researchers are aware of the most common response biases for both countries and all analyses and interpretations are conducted with them in mind. The organizations tasked with the survey operationalization and processing were chosen carefully and instructed thoroughly and repeatedly to avoid processing errors and to ensure a comparable sample collection.

The next section is dedicated to the description of the operationalization of the surveys. After that, I discuss aspects and implications of the survey where equivalence between the two surveys could not be established or is associated with caveats to consider. Finally, I conclude the chapter with key takeaways for readers in order to gain a deeper understanding of the data behind the research presented in this volume.

The primary concern when conducting comparative research on the topic at hand are cultural differences in the meaning of well-being related to language. The following section briefly outlines issues related to the cross-cultural measurement of subjective well-being that support the surveys' questionnaire design. I first address linguistic difficulties that arise when creating comparable items for measuring subjective well-being and then conclude with the approach chosen in this study.

Respondents from different cultures often have different associations with the concept of happiness. In a cultural psychological study conducted in the US and China, Lu and Gilmour (2004: 269) asked respondents about their conceptions of happiness and came to the conclusion that the American conception is characterized by self-realization and excitement, whereas the Chinese conception is one of equilibrium with one's surroundings and calmness. For detailed analyses of the meaning of happiness for Japanese, see Holthus and Manzenreiter (2017) and Manzenreiter and Holthus (2017). These two definitions are not only different, but even contradictory in some aspects. Assuming a more language-centered, philological approach, Oishi (2010: 40) notes that the German and the Japanese terms for "happiness" ("*Glück*" and "*kōfuku*") belong to a group of languages where the respective terms share origins with the terms for "luck" or "good fortune", whereas the corresponding terms in most other languages do not have this common provenance. Based on McMahon (2006), Oishi concludes that the connotation of happiness with luck means that the associated condition is not just understood as a matter of attitude, but also as largely dependent on external events.

While the similarity in the meaning behind these "happiness"-terms would have been conducive to the comparative nature of the project, the strong dependency on external events would have made the measure using these terms too vulnerable to life events difficult to control for in a structured survey instrument. Additionally, happiness-related terms are affect-centered (Oishi 2010: 37), meaning that they are mostly reflective of an individual's current emotional state and therefore carry a bias towards events that lie in the recent past. This bias makes them less fit to answer research questions about the relationship between their well-being and other aspects of their life – which to unravel is one of the main objectives of this project. Therefore, instead of happiness-terminology, we chose to employ satisfaction-related terminology.

The German and Japanese questionnaires in this survey project were designed to capture diverse facets of an individual's life that are considered relevant for the individual`s overall life satisfaction, and questions covering similar facets were grouped together in dedicated sections of the survey. These sections were not designed to replace, but rather to complement overall life satisfaction, which was measured in a single variable at the end of the survey. This combination enabled us to analyze relationships between domain-specific satisfaction and overall life satisfaction while also avoiding an overemphasis or linguistic/cultural bias towards singular domains of life. The chosen measurement of overall life satisfaction was a one-item measure that included an explicit mention of the respondent's "life situation as a whole" (German: "*Leben insgesamt*"; Japanese: "*zentai*") as well as the use of a word that reflects satisfaction as an all-encompassing concept rather than as a momentary feeling. The word used in German was "*zufrieden*", which usually translates as "satisfied", but can also be translated as "content" (PONS Online Dictionary 2015). This adjective can also be etymologically decomposed as "*zu Frieden*", which translates as "at peace" indicating the all-encompassing connotation of the term. This interpretation is supported by the contemporary German dictionary definition as "being in harmony with one's surroundings and therefore […] not wishing for any change to the current circumstances" (Bibliographisches Institut 2015). The Japanese term used for satisfaction was "*manzoku,*" which also translates as both "satisfaction" as well as "content". Its Chinese characters (*kanji*) carry the meaning of "full", "enough" and "be sufficient" (EDRDG 2015), allowing for a more elaborate interpretation as "fulfilled in all aspects of life", which may not be identical to the German "at peace", but matches it in the sense that it is all-encompassing as opposed to the externally defined "happiness"-related terms discussed above.

This all-encompassing type of measurement is also known as global measurement. An additional benefit of this type of measurement is that it represents the most well-established way of measuring subjective well-being and has been applied in numerous studies, including internationally renowned cross-national projects (see Diener, Kahneman, and Helliwell 2010 for a selection of prominent examples). As in most studies, the surveys in this project operationalized global measurement as a one-item measure. Several items used in the surveys were taken from internationally recognized survey studies in Germany and Japan and approved for conceptual equivalence by a professional translator.

Q<small>UESTIONNAIRE CONSTRUCTION AND SURVEY OPERATIONALIZATION</small>

*Item selection*

The first part of this project was the 2009 study on parental well-being (Bertram and Spieß 2011). The questionnaire for this study was based on a theoretical concept for parental well-being that was specifically developed for the survey. This concept was in turn based on a well-known and tested model conceptualizing child well-being, as developed and used by UNICEF (Adamson 2010, 2013; Adamson et al. 2007), which incorporates the six dimensions of material well-being, health and safety, education, relationships to peers, behavior and risks, and subjective well-being. Therefore, the German survey similarly mapped parental well-being into six dimensions. This model was eventually modified as a result of the 2010 analysis, to consist of seven dimensions: economic well-being, health and personality, educational well-being, family well-being, employment well-being, family policy well-being, and partnership well-being. The questions in the German parental well-being survey, therefore, were designed to cover the main aspects of subjective parental well-being in terms of these dimensions.

Most of the items in the questionnaire were drawn from other well-known surveys, such as the Socio-economic panel (SOEP) (TNS Infratest Sozialforschung 2008), the International Social Survey Programme (ISSP Research Group 2013), and the German Youth Institute (DJI) Family Survey (Bertram 1991). For details regarding the items used in the surveys and their respective sources, refer to Holthus, Huber, and Tanaka (2015) and Bertram and Spieß (2011). The questions covered the following areas:

- Satisfaction with different areas of life
- Health and stress factors of the parents
- Goals and styles of raising children
- Organization of everyday life with the children
- The actual care situation
- Personality markers of the parents
- Social networks
- Acceptance of family policy measures
- Educational background
- Employment situation
- Living area/housing situation
- Family background

Attempts were made to make the Japanese survey as similar to the German counterpart as possible. Even though the main question categories

have stayed the same, some items were dropped, Japan-specific questions added, and some questions changed to better fit the Japanese context. Using the German questionnaire as a model, translations were made paying the utmost attention to the issue of functional equivalence.

As described above, the original German parental well-being survey was derived from a selection of questions from several well-known surveys. During the modification process of the Japanese questionnaire, where possible, survey items were matched with equivalent items from well-established surveys within Japan, mostly the National Family Research of Japan (NFRJ03) survey and the Japan Household Panel Survey (JHPS 2010 1st Wave).

*Sampling*

The German study was conducted by TNS Infratest Sozialforschung in 2009. The population consists of mothers and fathers in households with children between the ages of 0 and 6, before their enrollment into elementary school. The design of the study called for women and men to be surveyed in equal parts, with about 1000 mothers and 1000 fathers.

The survey company selected its research subjects for the main survey from its own pool of respondents using quota for residence (by state i. e. *Bundesland*), gender, nationality, and single/dual parent status. The quota were drawn from the 2007 Microcensus (Statistisches Bundesamt 2008). Residence, gender, and nationality were represented according to the overall German population. The regional distribution by state was selected proportionally to the entire population. The percentage of non-German nationals was estimated on the basis of the numbers of all foreign couples with children under the age of 18, living in Germany, namely 15.9 percent for women and 14.5 percent for men. The percentage of mothers and fathers without German nationality within the sample population respectively was 15 percent both for mothers and fathers.

Regarding the percentage of single parents, in the 2007 Microcensus, 13.1 percent of women and 0.5 percent of men with their youngest child under age 6 are identified as single parents. Based on this, the following quota were defined: 14 percent single mothers and oversampling single fathers to 1 percent in order to decrease the statistical error margin for analyses involving this subgroup. Eventually, 223 interviews with single parents were conducted, amounting to 16.6 percent among the women, and 4.9 percent among the men. Thus, the percentage of single parents within this sample for the parental well-being survey is higher than in Germany's overall population. For more details on the German sample population, see Bertram and Spieß (2011).

A total of 1002 interviews with fathers and 1050 interviews with mothers were carried out. Average length of each face-to-face interview was 69 minutes. 51 interviewers were used, so that on average four interviews per interviewer were conducted. Yet 229 interviewers only accomplished one or two interviews, whereas a fourth of the interviewers conducted six or more interviews. One interviewer carried out 20 interviews.

In 2010, the German Institute for Japanese Studies Tokyo and the Benesse Institute for Child Sciences and Parenting joined forces in order to mirror the parental well-being survey in Japan. The Japanese Parental Well-being Survey (JPWS), originally scheduled for 2011 was conducted in January and February 2012, after a delay due to the triple disaster in Japan that occurred on March 11, 2011. The study was conducted by Shin Joho Center, Inc..

As in the German case, the Japanese survey used a sub-sample of a master sample, owned by MARSH Co, Ltd., a company that since 1998 has been building up a sample population of 521,932 people (by October 2011) for marketing research, government opinion polls, and other social surveys. The population includes residents from all 47 prefectures, with a wide variety of social backgrounds in terms of age, gender, and socio-economic conditions. The master sample was used although random sampling for a mail-in survey is more favored by Japanese sociologists. This decision was intended to counter certain disadvantages of random sampling in Japan, and in order to apply the same sampling method as in the German case. A significant disadvantage of random sampling would have been that, in view of the fact that the Japanese survey was carried out in the name of a foreign institution (namely the German Institute for Japanese Studies), the response rate through random sampling was expected not to exceed 20 to 30 percent. The sample number necessary to reach the same number of valid responses as in Germany of at least 1000 mothers and 1000 fathers was therefore estimated to be unreasonably high and too costly.

The quota sample was taken from the master sample pool of 238,705 men and 283,227 women. Among these, there were 34,483 parents with children between the ages of 0 to 6 years of age: 10,569 fathers and 23,914 mothers. Ideally, the quota variables for the Japanese sample would have perfectly duplicated the ones in Germany. This was achieved in the case of residence, gender (of the parent) and single/dual parent status. However, the population of foreign nationals living in Japan (about 1.7 %) is not nearly as big as in Germany (about 8.7 % in 2010, OECD 2017), meaning that nationality was and still is a poor quota variable for Japan, both in terms of increasing the probability of obtaining a representative sample and in terms of choosing a variable that, if represented accurately,

would be helpful in answering research questions that are relevant to Japanese society. Nationality was therefore replaced by, to avoid sampling only middle class families in Japan's increasingly stratified society (Sugimoto 2010), household income – determined to be the most appropriate candidate for the fourth quota variable.

Quotas were imposed to mirror the Japanese population distribution by region and income levels as per the March 2011 Basic resident register (MIC 2011) and the 2007 employment status survey (MIC 2008). The regional distribution of the Japanese population, and specifically the population of parents with children between the age of 0 and 6 years, was based on the ten larger regions into which Japan is commonly divided. Stratification quota were based on a division of annual household income into three categories, a) under 4 million yen, b) between 4 to under 10 million yen, and c) over 10 million yen. As in the German survey, a simple 50/50 quota was used for the gender variable, so that a roughly equal number of mothers and fathers from non-identical households participated in the survey. Also equivalent to the German survey, the percentage of single mothers and fathers was oversampled to reduce the error probability of statistical procedures involving single parents. The census statistics on single parents from 2005 (MIC 2010) tell us the following: In all, there were a total of 7,352,410 fathers and 9,827,968 mothers living with children in 2005 in Japan nationwide. Among these, there are 8,179 single fathers and 160,459 single mothers with children up to age 5. That means we have a percentage of 0.11 percent of single fathers with children ages 0 to 5 and 1.63 percent of single mothers. Calculated for our sample of 1,000 mothers and 1,000 fathers, this makes 1 single father and 16 single mothers. Through an oversampling of single mothers and fathers it was decided that 5 single fathers and 37 single mothers were to be surveyed. The return rate from single parents was 100 percent, with all surveyed single mothers and single fathers participating in the study.

With an anticipated response rate of 90 percent and an actual response rate of 95.4 percent, the quotas were sufficiently met to avoid weighting the data. The final sample in the Japanese survey consists of 2,136 responses, of whom 1,031 are fathers and 1,103 are mothers. For more details on the Japanese sample population, see Holthus, Huber, and Tanaka (2015).

*Pretest*

In Germany, a pretest was conducted in February 2009, with a total of 102 persons (43 fathers and 59 mothers). The goal of the pretest was to establish the validity of the survey questions and determine the length of the

interviews. The desired interview length was 60 minutes. As the pretest interviews took much longer and were on average 87 minutes long, a significant number of questions were omitted before proceeding to the main survey, which was conducted in April and May 2009. The final questionnaire consists of 113 questions.

The pretest in Japan was conducted with employees of Benesse Corporation in November 2011. Five men and five women, all of whom parents of children between the ages of 0 and 6, participated in the pretest. The pretest had two goals: (1) to learn how long it took to complete the survey; and (2) to get detailed comments on the questionnaire by the participants about which questions they had difficulty understanding, and which questions they thought were missing in regards to their own personal well-being. As a result, the questionnaire was slightly shortened and some questions were modified for better understanding and unambiguous meaning.

*Survey method*

Participants of the German survey were interviewed in face-to-face interviews. Interviews were computer-assisted (CAPI), in order to provide plausibility checks. Cultural differences and financial constraints in the Japanese survey led to a few inconsistencies between the two surveys. The biggest difference was the switch from face-to-face interviews to mail-in surveys. This led to a few necessary modifications in the design of the questionnaire due to the fact that it had to be self-explanatory, as compared to the German questionnaire which was designed with pre-survey training sessions for interviewers in mind. However, while this modification was necessary due to financial constraints, it also had a cultural component: East Asian societies place considerably higher value on saving face than western ones (Kitayama and Cohen 2007: 723), resulting in a bigger risk of social desirability bias in face-to-face situations as compared to anonymous surveys (Schwarz and Strack 1999: 77). This tendency lead to the conclusion that a mail-in survey would be likely to result in more credible responses than a face-to-face interview, thus actually improving the quality of the data.

A further modification due to financial constraints concerned the gratuity for the survey participants. Between 60 € and 100 € were paid as reimbursement to each survey participant in the German survey, whereas in Japan, respondents received a bookstore gift card of ¥ 1000 (approximately € 10) as gratuity. This was viewed as an acceptable modification, as it was in accordance with local standards. In Japan, it is customary to give participants such a book coupon (*toshoken*), usually with a value of

¥500, approximately a value of €5. As this questionnaire was longer than the average in Japan, it was decided that the usual gratuity should be doubled. Therefore, even though the gratuity was significantly lower than in Germany, it was actually rather on the high end for local standards. The high response rate of 95.4 percent indicates that the lower gratuity was not detrimental to the respondents` willingness to participate.

In light of the cross-national comparison, these modifications should not be viewed as constraints, but as improvements to the survey quality. As Heath et al. (2005: 321) point out, identical methods and measurements often lead to the illusion of comparability rather than true comparability.

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ISSUES OF NON-EQUIVALENCE

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The following section will present cases where equivalence between survey items is not guaranteed or where certain caveats apply when analyzing and interpreting the data. This section is not exhaustive, but it addresses important cases for secondary data analysts, especially those that cannot be discovered and judged easily without the following considerations in mind.

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*Translation issues*

</div>

While many items could be transferred into Japanese by using equivalent items from other renowned surveys, some of the items, especially the ones taken from the 2006 German childcare study (Bien 2007), had no Japanese equivalents yet and therefore had to be translated in cooperation with experienced translators and native Japanese researchers for operationalization. During the translation process, two items stood out as particularly problematic.

One of these items belongs to a group of questions asking about the importance of various achievements in life. The German item "*sich etwas leisten zu können*" roughly translates to "to be able to afford something for oneself", whereas the meaning of the Japanese item "*nanika o jibun de nashitogeru koto* can also be translated as "to accomplish something on one's own". While the Japanese term *nashitogeru* can be interpreted in a similar manner to the German item, its meaning lacks the unequivocal reference to financial independence that is implied in the German item.

A second item for which translation was difficult, belongs to a group of questions referring to what the respondent views as important for his or her youngest child's training and education. The German item "*Ge-*

*horsam gegenüber den Eltern*" translates to English as "obedience to the parents", however, the Japanese team for a multitude of reasons made the final decision to use the expression "*oya o tasukeru koto*" instead, even though the meaning it conveys is different and means "helping one's parents", which implies the good will of the child to provide help, whereas the German item places emphasis on the parent's instructions and the child's readiness to comply unconditionally. Subsequently, these two items cannot be used for direct comparative analysis.

### Differences in social and administrative structure

A number of variables are dissimilar between Japan and Germany due to differences in social and administrative structures. For example variables directly pertaining to the education system and particularly in regards to educational attainment of the two countries have to be used with caution when conducting comparative analyses. In most cases, the educational systems of the two countries are too different to allow for direct comparisons between educational attainments. Germany's dual system allows individuals to graduate from high school after 9 years of school. After this, they can proceed with a professional education that combines on-the-job training with a dedicated tertiary education system that is separate from academic education. Due to this, the importance of academic education and university degrees is far less important for a successful career than in Japan, where going to university is the only way to obtain higher education and is in practice a prerequisite for most professional career paths. As a result, the ratio of university graduates cannot be directly compared between Japan and Germany. Furthermore, the fact that the dual system in Germany integrates on-the-job training and tertiary education into one system, in combination with the absence of formal certificates pertaining to on-the-job training in Japan makes it close to impossible to perfectly match different types of high school education or trainings in Germany to Japanese equivalents. Any comparisons must therefore be done with these severe limitations in mind and research questions have to be formulated in a way that does not presuppose equivalence of educational certificates.

Another group of variables that need to be used with the utmost caution are variables related to occupation and employment. In social surveys in Japan, it is customary to incorporate company size as an indicator of the prestige of a person's occupation, as it is commonly accepted that larger companies have more prestige, and that this prestige translates directly into the social status of the companies' employees. The German labor market, however, is much more diversified, especially in regards to

small- and medium-sized enterprises, which make up a large part of the German economy. Therefore, the role company size plays for the social status of an employed individual in Japan is however not considered as important for the case of Germany and therefore was not included in the German survey.

Furthermore, the occupational landscapes of Japan and Germany are so distinctive, that a shared classification did not seem the ideal solution. International systems of occupational classification such as the ILO's ISCO-08 (ILO 2004) often contain between 200 and 500 categories and are therefore exceedingly costly to operationalize – usually by asking open-ended questions and reliance on ex post facto classification by data coders. Since this effort was considered disproportionate to the resources and main objectives of this project, the most common systems for each country were adapted from SOEP (TNS Infratest Sozialforschung 2008) and JHPS 2010 (Keio University Institute for Economic Studies 2011), respectively. Ex post facto classification according to international scales was then implemented according to the specific needs of each analysis, the results of which can be viewed in other chapters of this volume.

Income is per se an incomplete measure of wealth or poverty, especially when children and young families are investigated (Smeeding and Rainwater 2003). Therefore, income was weighted for most comparative purposes according to the modified OECD scale proposed by Hagenaars, De Vos, and Zaidi (1996). Even then, however, the assumption of equivalence of income categories between Germany and Japan is somewhat impeded by methodological issues. The German sample surveyed household income after tax, i.e. disposable household income, because this number is more relevant in determining a family's financial standing and is also the better known figure for the surveyed individuals themselves. However, the Japanese income data was drawn directly from the survey company's database as one of the quota variables and therefore did not allow for modifications. This data represents the before-tax income, making a direct comparison difficult. However, this is not to say that the two societies' social strata cannot be compared. One way to approach this issue is to calculate the socio-economic status of respondents as a combination of several other variables, increasing the amount of information that is used for stratification.

Another set of items that poses some difficulties to comparative purposes are the items that designate whether or not the respondent is living together with each family member or not. Japanese companies often operate under a system that spontaneously relocates employees, which causes their families, usually wife and children, to often remain

behind in their old place of residence in case relocating would be problematic for school-age children. This practice is called *tanshin funin* (literally: "proceeding to a new appointment away from home") and is usually surveyed in Japanese household questionnaires. Since a comparable concept does not exist in Germany, the Japanese items have one more category than the German ones, rendering a direct comparison difficult. This issue was addressed by computing an additional variable in which all cases of *tanshin funin* were recoded to indicate that the respondent is not living together with the family member in question, since this is the answer that Germans in a similar situation would have been forced to give.

## Other differences

Some items in the questionnaire had a structure that was closely tied to the survey method, necessitating workarounds for comparability. A battery of questions related to the respondents' degree of satisfaction with their lives was amended by including additional items in the Japanese survey which are non-existent in the German survey. Specifically, Japanese respondents were asked about their satisfaction with:

- their own education
- their own knowledge and practice of childrearing
- childcare support from family members other than their spouse
- infrastructural childcare support
- governmental financial support for children
- "time policies" of the government, in particular governmental consideration for the work hours of employees with children

Furthermore, due to the different survey methods, the German and Japanese datasets had different types of missing values. For example, the German dataset differentiated between values where respondents did not answer a question deliberately and values where an answer did not apply to the respondent's situation. True missing values, i. e. where the survey does not indicate any information about the respondent, were not present in the German dataset due to the face-to-face method, whereas such values were present in the Japanese survey. In order to provide for analyses where statistical procedures demand identical categories of missing values, some variables were recoded to designate all missing values equally. The original information contained in the different types of missing values was preserved in separate datasets. Researchers using the datasets are therefore advised to use different datasets for comparative and in-country analyses.

## Conclusion

This chapter has focused on describing and analyzing in detail the practical and theoretical challenges of conducting cross-cultural comparative, quantitative research. These challenges are not only limited to linguistic distinctions, but also include cultural and socio-structural differences between countries and are important to consider in any meaningful analysis. Particularly when comparing the subjective well-being of people in different countries, the complicated endeavor is further intensified, calling for a culture-sensitive approach. This is not only generally the case for qualitative but also for quantitative studies – as is the analysis of the Parental Well-being Survey, which lies at the heart of this edited volume.

The main argument of this chapter is that the variables in this cross-cultural survey conducted in Germany and Japan can be classified into four groups according to their usability in cross-cultural applications: Most of the question items have been designed with data equivalence in mind and can be used without reservations, as long as fundamental knowledge of the two cultures and their comparability is accessible to the analyst. A second group of variables can be used with the information given in this chapter. The third group of variables are those for which equivalence can be established by analysts according to their specific needs, but the implementation of a one-fits-all solution for both countries was not possible. Therefore, authors in the following chapters have dealt with these variables in different ways, making them suitable for their specific comparative purposes and particular set of research questions. The last group of variables in the Parental Well-being Survey dataset are those which cannot be used for comparison due to cultural or methodological incompatibilities between the surveys. However, taken separately for the individual countries, these variables certainly aid in deepening our understanding for either country.

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