

Quality of Life in Asia 13

Ming-Chang Tsai  
Noriko Iwai *Editors*

# Quality of Life in Japan

Contemporary Perspectives on  
Happiness

 Springer

# **Quality of Life in Asia**

Volume 13

## **Series Editors**

Alex C. Michalos, University of Northern British Columbia, British Columbia, MB, Canada

Daniel T. L. Shek, Department of Applied Social Sciences, The Hong Kong Polytechnic University, Hunghom, Hong Kong

Doh Chull Shin, University of California, California, MO, USA

Ming-Chang Tsai, Department of Sociology, Academia Sinica, Taipei, Taiwan

This series, the first of its kind, examines both the objective and subjective dimensions of life quality in Asia, especially East Asia. It unravels and compares the contours, dynamics and patterns of building nations by offering innovative works that discuss basic and applied research and emphasizing inter- and multi-disciplinary approaches to the various domains of life quality. The series appeals to a variety of fields in humanities, social sciences and other professional disciplines. Asia is the largest, most populous continent on Earth, and it is home to the world's most dynamic region, East Asia. In the past three decades, East Asia has been the most successful region in the world in expanding its economies and integrating them into the global economy, offering lessons on how poor countries, even with limited natural resources, can achieve rapid economic development. Yet while scholars and policymakers have focused on why East Asia has prospered, little has been written on how its economic expansion has affected the quality of life of its citizens. This series publishes several volumes a year, either single or multiple-authored monographs or collections of essays.

More information about this series at <http://www.springer.com/series/8416>

Ming-Chang Tsai · Noriko Iwai  
Editors

# Quality of Life in Japan

Contemporary Perspectives on Happiness

 Springer

*Editors*

Ming-Chang Tsai  
Academia Sinica  
Taipei, Taiwan

Noriko Iwai  
Osaka University of Commerce  
Osaka, Japan

ISSN 2211-0550

Quality of Life in Asia

ISBN 978-981-13-8909-2

<https://doi.org/10.1007/978-981-13-8910-8>

ISSN 2211-0569 (electronic)

ISBN 978-981-13-8910-8 (eBook)

© Springer Nature Singapore Pte Ltd. 2020

This work is subject to copyright. All rights are reserved by the Publisher, whether the whole or part of the material is concerned, specifically the rights of translation, reprinting, reuse of illustrations, recitation, broadcasting, reproduction on microfilms or in any other physical way, and transmission or information storage and retrieval, electronic adaptation, computer software, or by similar or dissimilar methodology now known or hereafter developed.

The use of general descriptive names, registered names, trademarks, service marks, etc. in this publication does not imply, even in the absence of a specific statement, that such names are exempt from the relevant protective laws and regulations and therefore free for general use.

The publisher, the authors and the editors are safe to assume that the advice and information in this book are believed to be true and accurate at the date of publication. Neither the publisher nor the authors or the editors give a warranty, expressed or implied, with respect to the material contained herein or for any errors or omissions that may have been made. The publisher remains neutral with regard to jurisdictional claims in published maps and institutional affiliations.

This Springer imprint is published by the registered company Springer Nature Singapore Pte Ltd. The registered company address is: 152 Beach Road, #21-01/04 Gateway East, Singapore 189721, Singapore

# Contents

## Introduction

<b>An Introduction to Quality of Life in Japan: Contemporary Approaches</b> .....	3
Ming-Chang Tsai and Noriko Iwai	

<b>Happiness in Japan: A Hierarchical Age-Period-Cohort Analysis Based on JGSS Cumulative Data 2000–2015</b> .....	15
Kuniaki Shishido and Takayuki Sasaki	

## Income, Poverty and Happiness

<b>Happiness in Contemporary Japan: Study of Lifestyle and Values Using the Relative Income Hypothesis</b> .....	49
Hiroo Harada and Eiji Sumi	

<b>Income, Intra-household Bargaining Power and the Happiness of Japanese Married Women</b> .....	77
Xinxin Ma and Xiangdan Piao	

<b>Time Poverty and Maternal Wellbeing in Japan</b> .....	107
Xinxin Ma	

## Aging, Gender, and Migration

<b>Changing Lives of the Japanese Elderly Under Uncertainty: An Analysis of Family Types and Economic Status</b> .....	133
Hachiro Iwai	

<b>Ancestor Worship and Quality of Life: Transforming Bonds with the Deceased in Contemporary Japan</b> .....	151
Masayuki Kanai, Katsumi Shimane and Dang Thi Viet Phuong	

**Intimacy, Similarity, and Equality Among Married People  
in East Asia** ..... 171  
Ming-Chang Tsai

**Quality of Life in Japan and Emigration: The Perspectives  
of Japanese Skilled Immigrants in Australia** ..... 193  
N. Oishi and I. Hamada

**Index** ..... 215

# Editors and Contributors

## About the Editors

**Ming-Chang Tsai** is Research Fellow and Deputy Director of Research Center for Humanities and Social Sciences, CHSS, Academia Sinica, Taiwan. He is President of the International Society for Quality of Life Studies and was former President of Taiwanese Sociological Association and President of Research Committee of Social Indicators (RC55) of the International Sociological Association. His current research project focuses on family relationship, youth, and aging in comparative perspective. His articles have appeared in *Comparative Sociology*, *Globalizations*, *Journal of Marriage and Family*, *Journal of Contemporary Asia*, and *Sociological Research Online*. His recent books include *Global Exposure in East Asia* (Routledge, 2015) and *Family, Work and Wellbeing in Asia* (co-editor, Springer, 2017) ([mtsai304@gate.sinica.edu.tw](mailto:mtsai304@gate.sinica.edu.tw)).

**Noriko Iwai** is Director of the Japanese General Social Survey Research Center and Professor of Faculty of Business Administration, Osaka University of Commerce. She is a principal investigator of JGSS and East Asian Social Survey, an Executive Director of the Japan Sociological Society, and a member of Science Council of Japan. Her current research project is supporting Japanese researchers in the humanities and social sciences to prepare their data for public usage. She has written on family and on trends in Japanese people's opinions. Her recent articles are "Division of housework in Japan, South Korea, China and Taiwan" in *Family, Work and Wellbeing in Asia* (Springer) and "The Impact of the Great East Japan Earthquake and Fukushima Daiichi Nuclear Accident on People's Perception of Disaster Risks and Attitudes Toward Nuclear Energy Policy" in *Asian Journal for Public Opinion Research* ([n-iwai@tcn.zaq.ne.jp](mailto:n-iwai@tcn.zaq.ne.jp)).



## Contributors

**Dang Thi Viet Phuong** Vietnam Academy of Social Sciences, Hanoi, Vietnam

**I. Hamada** Monash University, Melbourne, Australia

**Hiroo Harada** Senshu University, Tokyo, Japan

**Hachiro Iwai** Kyoto University, Kyoto, Japan

**Noriko Iwai** Japanese General Social Survey Research Center, Osaka University of Commerce, Osaka, Japan

**Masayuki Kanai** Senshu University, Tokyo, Japan

**Xinxin Ma** Center for Far Eastern Studies, University of Toyama, Toyama, Japan

**N. Oishi** Monash University, Melbourne, Australia

**Xiangdan Piao** Departments of Urban and Environmental Engineering, School of Engineering, Kyushu University, Kyushu, Japan

**Takayuki Sasaki** JGSS Research Center, Osaka University of Commerce, Higashi-osaka, Japan

**Katsumi Shimane** Senshu University, Tokyo, Japan

**Kuniaki Shishido** JGSS Research Center, Osaka University of Commerce, Higashi-osaka, Japan

**Eiji Sumi** Niigata University, Niigata, Japan

**Ming-Chang Tsai** Research Center for Humanities and Social Sciences, Academia Sinica, Taipei, Taiwan

# Introduction

# An Introduction to Quality of Life in Japan: Contemporary Approaches



Ming-Chang Tsai and Noriko Iwai

**Abstract** This chapter gives a brief overview of current approaches to studying quality of life in Japan. After discussing observations from mass media and anthropological research, an empirical approach to subjective well-being for Japanese society is proposed in order to better understand the levels and patterns of life satisfaction in various domains among Japanese males, females and emigrants. The main findings of each paper in this book are also highlighted.

**Keywords** Quality of life · Gender difference · Aging population · Income effect · Immigration

Japan has been one of the most envied societies in the contemporary era. It has outperformed many other wealthy countries in major indicators of economic growth, democratization, and social development. According to the Human Development Index proposed by the United Nations, as of 2017, Japan ranked 19th among 189 countries in the world. The HDI is a composite index that incorporates life expectancy, educational opportunities and national income level (UNDP 2018). Wealthy Western countries that have been considered examples of high quality of life, such as Luxembourg, France, Spain or Italy, in fact lag behind Japan on this widely used index of living conditions. Also, Japan ranked 22nd among 167 countries in 2018 in the Democracy Index compiled by the Economist Intelligence Unit.<sup>1</sup>

A general indicator like the HDI may miss the detailed patterns or disparity of well-being in a society. Japan has been reported as a typical, strongly patriarchal society in which males dominate major social institutions such as family, enterprises, and government (Sechiyama 2013). It is worth paying adequate attention to this aspect. In the often-cited Gender Inequality Index (GII), another indicator in the

---

<sup>1</sup>The Democracy Index 2018. <https://www.eiu.com/topic/democracy-index>.

---

M.-C. Tsai (✉)

Research Center for Humanities and Social Sciences, Academia Sinica, Taipei, Taiwan  
e-mail: [mtsai304@gate.sinica.edu.tw](mailto:mtsai304@gate.sinica.edu.tw)

N. Iwai

Japanese General Social Survey Research Center, Osaka University of Commerce, Osaka, Japan  
e-mail: [n-iwai@tcn.zaq.ne.jp](mailto:n-iwai@tcn.zaq.ne.jp)

© Springer Nature Singapore Pte Ltd. 2020

M.-C. Tsai and N. Iwai (eds.), *Quality of Life in Japan*, Quality of Life in Asia 13,  
[https://doi.org/10.1007/978-981-13-8910-8\\_1](https://doi.org/10.1007/978-981-13-8910-8_1)

UN's Human Development Project, Japan ranked 22nd among 160 countries. GII uses three dimensions: reproductive health (measured by the maternal mortality ratio and the adolescent fertility rate), empowerment (women's share of legislative seats as well as of secondary education) and labor market participation. As of 2017, Japan holds a position among the top tier, with a rank of 22nd, and fares better than the US, UK or New Zealand (UNDP 2018).

In a recent report on the Mother's Well-being index, which ranks 150 countries in the world in 2010, Japan ranked 29th (Tsai and Tai 2018). This index considers not merely maternal health differences, but also policy support for mothers with regard to their entitlements to maternal leave and reentering the labor market. Because this measure concerns welfare policy inputs, higher-income countries, unsurprisingly, occupy most of the top positions. Japan does not perform as well as it does on the HDI, but it is still in the first tier in support for mothers' well-being. Thus, policies supporting mothers have been brought in, and the percentage of females who continued to work after childbirth has increased. However, it still remains at a low 53.1% for those who gave birth in 2010–2014.<sup>2</sup>

There is another index which has been frequently referred to: the Global Gender Gap Index, reported by the World Economic Forum. Japan does not seem to fare so well here: it ranked 110th among 149 countries in 2018.<sup>3</sup> GGI is a composite of four sub-indices. Japan has smaller gender gaps in health and survival<sup>4</sup> (41st) and educational attainment<sup>5</sup> (65th), but larger gender gaps in economic participation and opportunity<sup>6</sup> (117th) and in political empowerment (125th). When it comes to economic inequality between genders, in contrast to health or educational attainment, Japan shows obvious weakness. The Gender Equality Bureau of the Cabinet Office, Japan, posts the above gender equality indices on its website<sup>7</sup> and has proposed measures to substantially reduce the gender gaps in opportunities, benefits and responsibilities.<sup>8</sup>

In contrast to the relatively highly regarded performance on economic growth, democratization, and social development, and to the reserved evaluation on gender equality, some recent observations on Japan cast a totally different picture. Public media have painted a bleak picture of worsening life conditions in Japan which feature fears, worries and discontentment, due to "the increasing cases of workplace-

<sup>2</sup>See *Annual Health, Labour and Welfare Report 2017*, p. 181. The original source of the data is "Fifteen Japanese National Fertility Survey (Survey on Married Couples)", National Institute of Population and Social Security Research.

<sup>3</sup>[http://www3.weforum.org/docs/WEF\\_GGGR\\_2018.pdf](http://www3.weforum.org/docs/WEF_GGGR_2018.pdf).

<sup>4</sup>The sex ratio at birth is 0.95, which ranked 1st. Women live a healthy life four years more than men (57th).

<sup>5</sup>Other than the ratio of enrollment in tertiary education (0.95), there is no gender difference in literacy, or enrollment in primary and secondary education.

<sup>6</sup>The ratio of female legislators, senior officials and managers to males is 15% (129th), which is less than half of the world average, 33%. The ratio of women to men in the legislature is 11% (ranked 130th), which is again less than half of the world average, 28%.

<sup>7</sup>[http://www.gender.go.jp/international/int\\_syogaikoku/int\\_shihyo/index.html](http://www.gender.go.jp/international/int_syogaikoku/int_shihyo/index.html).

<sup>8</sup>[http://www.gender.go.jp/english\\_contents/index.html](http://www.gender.go.jp/english_contents/index.html).

induced depression, number of suicides and deaths through overwork (*karoshi*), the mounting fear of solitary death (*kodokushi*), and people withdrawing from society (*hikikomori*)” (Manzenreiter and Holthus 2017: 1). Many stories gathered from mass media seem to represent “a society hampered by maladaptation” in a post-growth phase in which “increasing proportions of its members, across all age groups, are threatened by dissatisfaction, deprivation, alienation, depression, fear, and hopelessness” (Manzenreiter and Holthus 2017: 1). These and other stories of misery as well as psychopathologies reported in popular media indicate that Japan is not a promising research site for studies on happiness. Indeed, the official statistics of Japan report some similar trends about *karoshi*,<sup>9</sup> *kodokushi*<sup>10</sup> or *hikikomori*.<sup>11</sup>

However, anthropologists of happiness in Japan have argued we should avoid a one-dimensional understanding as such, and suggest a panoptical perspective to look at the society in its entirety. They particularly propose examination of mundane, ordinary practical expression of happiness, and distinctive structural or institutional contexts in which (un)favorable emotions originate or are embedded. Anthropological approaches usually direct research interest into diverse sites where ordinary people are observed giving sensory affect, personal interpretations, cognitive judgements, and concluding remarks on their daily life. As Manzenreiter and Holthus (2017: 2) indicate, anthropological approaches are particularly interested in “explorations of the variety of notions and expressions of happiness, which are conceived of so differently in distinct social and cultural contexts that some researchers are prompted to ask if there remain any commonalities”.

Even when happiness is observed, anthropological interest lies often in “what anyone means by happiness” (Colson 2010). Happiness, essentially an internal state, is only captured partially from externalities. Diverse measures of all ranges of emo-

---

<sup>9</sup>According to a 2018 white paper on promotion of measures for *karoshi* (<https://www.mhlw.go.jp/wp/hakusyo/karoshi/18/dl/18-1.pdf>) and the 13th Occupational Safety and Health Program (<https://www.mhlw.go.jp/content/11200000/000341159.pdf>) by the Ministry of Health, Labour and Welfare, the number of requests for workers’ accident compensation due to cerebrovascular/heart diseases caused by an overload of work has fluctuated around 830 cases after its peak year, 2006 (938 cases). However, the number of requests due to mental health disorders caused by a significant psychological burden increased from 212 cases in 2000 to 1,932 cases in 2017. Approximately 60% of the workers were affected by severe anxiety, distress and stress relating to their job or occupational lives in 2002 and in 2016. However, note an opposite trend in work-related suicides: the number of suicides induced by job-related issues such as fatigue, unhappy relationships with coworkers, failure on the job or changes in work environment declined during the same period (2,207 cases in 2007 and 1,991 cases in 2017). The total number of suicides similarly decreased, from 33,093 cases in 2007 to 21,321 cases in 2017 according to the above government report.

<sup>10</sup>According to a white paper on aging society by the Cabinet Office, the number of solitary deaths of people over 65 in Tokyo’s 23 wards has increased from 1,451 in 2003 to 3,179 in 2016 ([https://www8.cao.go.jp/kourei/whitepaper/w-2018/html/zenbun/s1\\_2\\_4.html](https://www8.cao.go.jp/kourei/whitepaper/w-2018/html/zenbun/s1_2_4.html)).

<sup>11</sup>The number of people withdrawing from society is estimated to have expanded in Japan based on surveys on life among young people and middle aged, while the estimated population withdrawing from society among people aged 15 to 39 decreased from 696 thousand in 2010 to 541 thousand in 2016 (<https://www8.cao.go.jp/youth/kenkyu/hikikomori/pdf/kosshi.pdf>), it was estimated that 613 thousands of people withdrawing from society among people aged 40 to 64 in 2018 ([https://www8.cao.go.jp/youth/kenkyu/life/h30/pdf/kekka\\_gaiyo.pdf](https://www8.cao.go.jp/youth/kenkyu/life/h30/pdf/kekka_gaiyo.pdf)).

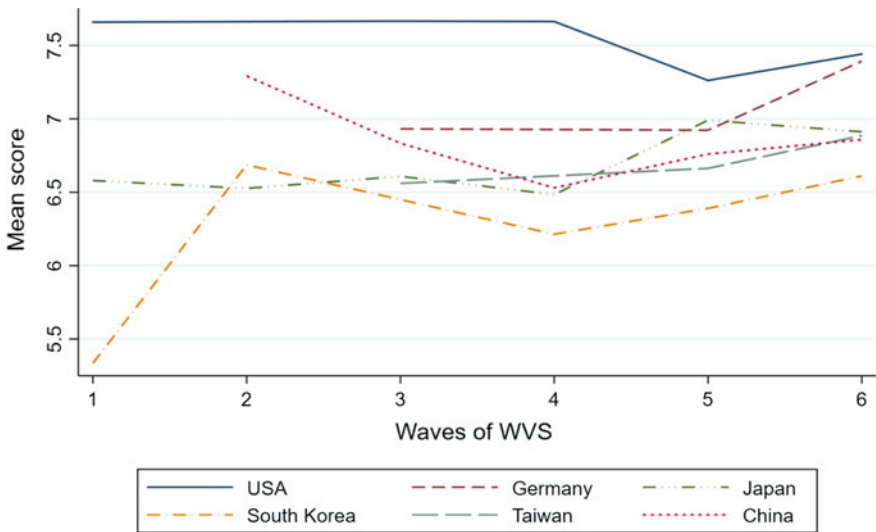
tions are thus needed to grasp the different states of being contented, joyous, glad, lucky, fortunate, jubilant, and so on. How these emotions are particularly apparent at certain moments is equally intriguing. Specific times and spectacular events in which people feel elated are given particular attention. St. John (2012) proposes to look at festivals, in which major common sources of human happiness concentrate on site: chanting, dancing, laughing, social clubbing, and collective trance. Carnivals and competitive sport (particularly between “rival” cities or countries) can also belong to this group. In all these social gatherings, there is a religious element, which has been called the realm of “collective effervescence” (St. John 2012: 10). This way of observing happiness necessarily concludes that a festive event, given its high pleasure, tends to be radical, short-termed, indeterminate, uncertain, and transient. To employ a Durkheimian term, eventful happiness perceived as such constitutes a fundamental “social category” to be differentiated from dry, dull daily routines—there is a clear boundary between the two worlds. Yet in modern society, especially in East Asian societies in which emotional moderation rather than affective catharsis is regarded as more proper in managing the human-environment relationship, a cult of ecstasy for some can be frowned upon or even punished by the social community or legal institution. An intentional pursuit of the “greatest happiness” is not a golden rule. But this does not defy the importance of well-being in human life. As the normative perspective has argued, happiness might not be the main driver generating what is good for individuals or their society, but no social institutional building or individual action can possibly justify itself without giving happiness a suitable role (Bartram 2012). It is critical to differentiate what sort of happiness or satisfaction is deemed desirable across cultures. It is on this issue that anthropological research on happiness seems to have contributed major insights.

The collected works of this book approach the phenomenon of happiness of Japanese by way of empirical investigation. This is a thoughtful response to the current efforts to understanding happiness in this society. Stories, anecdotes, and tales popularized in mass media are often exaggerations of specific cases or personas, and are unsuitable for evaluation of the mass public’s life experiences and consequential well-being. Anthropology as a discipline has a strong merit in providing in-depth description of what is happening in situ, yet it is quite limited in translating specific observations into a general account of a society. In particular, the variations across subpopulations in their feeling of happiness are not examined systematically in a way allowing the levels and differences with regard to how satisfied people feel with lives to be measured, compared and accounted for. An empirical approach is a necessary component of a cross-disciplinary literature to better understand the well-being of the Japanese population. Unfortunately, research outcomes from this approach have been less available. It is this paucity that this book attempts to remedy by providing analysis of various aspects of subjective well-being and specification of the potential factors underlying happiness among Japanese males and females. Working on these issues, authors of this book extensively utilize survey data collected from large, national samples to ensure representativeness. This way of examining the patterns of happiness and evaluating their potential influences provides an effective pathway to answering very fundamental questions about the quality of life in Japan.

# 1 Does Japan Fare Less Well in Quality of Life?

Japan does not perform less well in terms of the individual level of well-being from a cross-national comparative perspective, despite frustrating observations from mass media. In Fig. 1, life satisfaction of Japanese is assessed along with three other East Asian societies, as well as the US and Germany, by a very common measure which solicits a response to this question, “Where would you put your satisfaction with your life as a whole?” (on a ten-point scale). We display the means of the six societies from the first wave to the most recent one.<sup>12</sup> Across a time period of twenty years, the US appears to score the highest, with Germany being second (included in the survey only starting from the third wave). Over time, Japan increased from a mean score of 6.6 to nearly 7.0, still lagging behind the two wealthy Western societies but surely showing an upward trend. China, Taiwan and South Korea registered lower scores and are placed in the lower part of the figure. While the recent surge of life satisfaction in Taiwan and China drew them near to that of Japan (in wave 6), South Korea is slower in catching up.

Figure 1 also reveals that national income plays a role in determining the cross-national difference in self-rated well-being. Happiness at the societal level appears to go up with increasing national income. The US is an exception, however. The US has been extensively studied as an example of what is called the Easterlin Paradox: it is likely that for wealthy countries, as national income escalates, the level of



**Fig. 1** Trends of life satisfaction in six countries (World Values Survey)

<sup>12</sup>The World Values Survey conducted a multiple country survey with an interval of every five years. The first wave was conducted during 1981–1984; wave 2, 1989–1993; wave 3, 1994–1999; wave 4, 1999–2004; wave 5, 2005–2008; and wave 6, 2010–2014.

perceived well-being does not follow its economic growth trend closely (Easterlin 2009; Easterlin et al. 2010). Japan is also mentioned as a case of this paradox, particularly referring to the period after the post-war economic miracle<sup>13</sup> which ended in 1973. Although navigating into an economic bubble between 1986 and 1991, Japan in fact significantly advanced in terms of GNI per capita: from \$13,820 to \$28,540.<sup>14</sup> However, the level of perceived well-being remained unchanged between wave 1 and wave 2 (Fig. 1). In contrast, for lower- and middle-income countries, growth of national income is a factor contributing to subjective well-being.

I note another observation from Fig. 1. The magnitude of increase in life satisfaction over time is small. South Korea experienced a big surge between wave 1 and wave 2, or more specifically, between 1982 and 1990 when the World Values Survey was conducted in this society. Interpretation of a drastic uptrend can be open to a wide range of viewpoints. Yet, fast economic growth during the 1980s should play a role here. Indeed, South Korea's gross national income per capita increased to \$6,360 in 1990 from \$2,040 in 1982,<sup>15</sup> a remarkable growth record by any measure.

Following this introductory chapter, Shishido and Sasaki's chapter in this book also documents a rising trend of subjective well-being in Japan, compiling longitudinal data from the Japanese General Social Survey. This evidence is presented in a sophisticated model of age-period-cohort analysis. This model has a strong advantage of differentiating the period effect from the otherwise confounding influences of the age and cohort factors. In very general terms, Japanese increasingly felt happy during 2000–2015, rather than revealing a collective dismal outlook about life conditions. Two groups show deviations in their perceived well-being, however. First, the authors highlight that those born in 1935–1939 had a significantly lower level of happiness, perhaps because they grew up in the chaos of the post-war era, lost their father in the war, and had less access to adequate education. In addition, younger cohorts who were born in the 1980s reported a lower level of happiness. As the authors contend, Japan's bubble economy and tight labor market seem to have had an unfavorable impact on these "juniors" working in various industries.

## 2 Income, Time Poverty, and Well-Being in Japan

Income perhaps is the factor which receives more attention than others in explaining to what extent an individual's happiness is determined. The income effect hypothesis has long been tested in empirical studies to show that earned income, a proxy of an individual's material conditions, effectively increases life satisfaction across Asian countries with different levels of economic development (Chen 2012; Tsai

---

<sup>13</sup>Measuring National Well-Being: Proposed Well-being Indicators released in 2011 by the Commission on Measuring Well-being, Japan, established in 2010 by the Cabinet Office. [https://www5.cao.go.jp/keizai2/koufukudo/pdf/koufukudosian\\_english.pdf](https://www5.cao.go.jp/keizai2/koufukudo/pdf/koufukudosian_english.pdf).

<sup>14</sup><https://www.macrotrends.net/countries/JPN/japan/gni-per-capita> Access date: May 6, 2019.

<sup>15</sup><https://www.macrotrends.net/countries/KOR/south-korea/gni-per-capita>.



2015). Recent literature concentrates more attention on the influence of relative income, which has long been identified for its influence on an individual's attitude and behavior of consumption in the tradition of reference group and social comparison theories (Newcomb et al. 1965). Researchers have proposed different approaches to measure relative income, for instance, by comparison with one's parent, neighbors, or coworkers (Firebaugh and Schroeder 2009; McBride 2001). Harada and Sumi's chapter in this book utilizes an index of relative income on a par with the municipal average income. Their finding indicates a positive influence of relative income; yet they also show that the magnitude of the effect of both absolute and relative income is not as substantial as expected. Ma and Piao's article in this book also tested relative income's effect. They adopt an imputation approach by a function of a husband's education, work status and years, and urban residence. This equivalent income is used as a reference point against the reported income of a husband. The ratio of the household income to this imputed income, however, is found to have no correlation with happiness measured on five-point scale. In contrast, absolute income generates a substantial positive influence. It seems that income in general has a favorable influence on well-being in Japan nowadays; but its measures can vary and might not operate equally well across different social groups.

Imputed income from a combination of select demographic characteristics might not effectively reflect a reference group. Since individuals have different focal groups for comparison, it would be more interesting to identify an ideal referent for each specific group, rather than proposing one for use across all subpopulations. Moreover, this imputed group can be thought of as a *positive* reference group—when an individual earns an income close to or higher than that of this group, then favorable outcomes follow (that is, happiness increases). On the other hand, a *negative* reference group (Newcomb et al. 1965: 109) also deserves incorporation into research designs. This is a reference point from which an individual prefers to maintain a distance or a gap. The greater the income difference, the more a person is expected to feel satisfied about his or her socio-economic status and life condition. Evidence for this hypothesis, however, seems to be lacking, at least in this region.

Higher income usually means more time spent on work for certain populations. Therefore, an income effect on happiness can be offset to a certain extent. Ma's chapter on time poverty offers an interesting test of this hypothesis. Time poverty, or lack of discretionary time, is measured by possession of time besides committed activity (working, commuting, caring activities, etc.) and necessary activities (sleeping, eating, etc.). While this definition seems to lead to a measure for lack of leisure time, it is motivated more to capture flexibility and availability of precious *private* time. The finding shows that for both single mothers as well married mothers, the household income does not generate any impact on discretionary time. A suitable indicator of income effect would be income of the working mother, which is, unfortunately, not explored in this study. What seems to interest us is that time poverty is a strong predictor of happiness and mental health. In this sense, time perhaps is more valuable than money when it comes to affecting subjective well-being.

### 3 Ageing and Familial Bonds

Ageing has been a major demographic feature of Japan. As of 2015, people aged 65 and above constitute 26.6% of the population. By 2040 this figure is forecast to increase to approximately 35.3%, which is among the highest in the world (National Institute of Population and Social Security Research 2019). It is in this context that numerous demographic studies and public policy debates have been happening. With the aged population increasing, and the working population shrinking, financial support and care for old parents necessarily become an urgent social problem. Hachiro Iwai's paper on old parents co-residing with children provides informative analysis of how such families fared in the past decades, a noteworthy approach to understanding the changing economic conditions of the retired parents living with their young adult children. A major observation is that along a trend of declining income and pension of the elderly, many of them chose to live with their children, the income of whom also has dwindled during Japan's economic downturns. Iwai argued that for lower-income households, this type of co-residence reveals more mutual dependence across generations. This reflects a sort of family-oriented welfare regime, in contrast to those observed in Western democracies where welfare and economic security are largely institutionalized through governmental policies.

While Iwai's chapter looks at how the non-working elderly fare financially, Kanai, Shimane and Phuong's concentrates on the association of ancestor worship as a family religion with a feeling of happiness in both Japan and Vietnam. This issue, perhaps unconventional at first sight, represents a continuity of patriarchal lineage. It is through establishing a firm connection between the living and their ancestors that an individual can feel he or she is fulfilling a familial role, and thus establish a secure self-identity and earn respect from family and community. Their quantitative evidence shows in Japan and Vietnam that frequency of conducting memorials for ancestors is positively associated with happiness. Also, expectation of being worshiped by descendants is correlated with happiness in a similar way. This study is based on cross-sectional data from national surveys. There is a difficulty in establishing a causal correlation between the variables of concern. Their findings are preliminary but can stimulate future research interest in the direction of religious forms of familial bonds in both cultures.

Kanai et al.'s paper addresses another important issue, which pertains to the "oldest old" people in Japan. As many members of this group do not have a burial place or do not expect to have a relative to take care of their tomb, many of them have started to look for new ways of burial. A "communal grave" discussion group has become increasingly popular nationwide, in which participants who usually have very thin attachment to family gather and discuss their burial plans in advance. And through this collective meeting, a relationship, which is called "burial-friendship", has emerged, with these otherwise strangers evolving into a mutual bond. Alongside this new practice is a more elaborate "cherry blossom burial". The burial place is under a *sakura* tree chosen before death. Those who will be buried in a neighboring

plot get together to discuss various issues of management with “grave-friends”. This practice generates a new social network for the very old people as a result.

## 4 Gender, Intimacy and Migration

Studies of quality of life have regularly surveyed married people’s perceived well-being, often comparing the married with the unmarried group to gauge how a good marriage can enhance one’s level of happiness. There is no dearth of evidence for this hypothesis that marriage facilitates perceived well-being and that unmarried people fare less well in various indicators of life satisfaction among Japanese (Qian and Sayer 2016; Ngoo et al. 2015). One major reason that married people enjoy better emotional well-being is that they possess a close relationship with their partners, among other reasons (Gustavson et al. 2016). Yet what facilitates the sought-after intimacy for couples is not researched much from a cross-cultural perspective. For the case of Japanese couples, what constitutes the major determinants of their intimacy? Tsai’s paper in this book offers comparative evidence on how intimacy is affected by a number of potential factors across Japan, South Korea, Taiwan and China. In contrast to measuring intimacy psychologically as a feeling of closeness or attachment, Tsai argues that intimacy can also be understood as willingness to disclose oneself to one’s spouse, thus emphasizing more the reciprocal exchange of care and concern in conceptual operationalization. More interestingly, a four-country national survey dataset was used for assessment of the influence of assortative marriage and equity factors for intimacy. The findings indicate that similarity in either education or age does not generate a substantial effect. A major decisive factor is equal sharing of decision making power, which is positively associated with intimacy in a consistent manner across the studied East Asian societies. Moreover, a husband’s contribution to housework also helps enhance intimacy in Japan and Taiwan. This paper offers research findings from a cultural context which conventionally features a patriarchal relationship between the couple. Young people nowadays might seek to avoid unfavorable outcomes in marital life by choosing a partner with similar or equal status. This is especially so for females, as they increasingly obtain better education, actively participate in the labor market, and contribute substantially to family finances, frequently not less than their husbands do. The findings reveal ironically that equity between the couple is more important than a wife’s labor market behaviors or a husband’s income contribution when it comes to cultivating intimacy.

The majority of the chapters included in this book present empirical studies using data collected from Japan as well as other East Asian countries for comparison. Oishi and Hamad’s chapter on emigration of Japanese skilled professionals to Australia is distinctive in that qualitative methods are applied. To explore the motivation, agency and actions of this particular group, a standard questionnaire might not obtain the best results, since it is the distinctive types of people, rather than the average ones, that draw research attention in this sort of exploratory study design. For this reason, their study is included to represent an interesting case in which well-being plays a

special role in the decision to emigrate among a selective group of contemporary Japanese. Oishi and Hamada highlight pursuit of gender equality as a key motive for unmarried female specialists. It is more discrimination against women than the barriers in their careers that had pushed them to seek jobs outside Japan. However, after the Fukushima disaster of 2011, female immigrants pointed to potential natural and nuclear disasters as one major reason for exit. This concern with the impacts of environmental risks constitutes a form of “lifestyle migration” rather than sheer economic opportunities. Yet lifestyle migration would be an oversimplified explanation, as Oishi and Hamada also observe that among the skilled workers they interviewed, slow economic growth and the government responses with regard to pensions and other policy malpractices are also cited for explaining why many *families*, rather than *single* men and women, decided to leave Japan. For the families with minor children, a “safe environment” is equivalent to a better quality of life. However, this observation is solely based on middle-class families of Japan. Lower-income people in this highly industrialized society might have a very different idea of what is a better life, an issue for which this edited book does not offer research results.

## 5 Quality of Life in Japan: Looking Forward

How is contemporary Japan doing in terms of quality of life? This is perhaps a question too big to answer for all the chapters in this book. But there are some hints from empirical findings presented here as a collectivity. Life does not seem to have fared worse over time in this wealthy Asian society. Longitudinal observation of how people perceived and rated their life conditions seems to suggest that Japanese on average are able to enjoy a desirable level of life satisfaction. Compared to wealthy Western countries, life satisfaction among Japanese somewhat lags behind. Other East Asian countries appear to be closing their gap with Japan, probably because their economic growth continues while that of Japan has become slow in the past decade or so.

But the editors do not wish to concentrate attention solely on large pictures of happiness of the Japanese. This book primarily aims to examine the detailed structure of life situations as perceived by Japanese people, rather than evaluating it with a broad, large concept, so we have made great effort in decomposing the whole population into different subgroups and examining how one may succeed in seeking a desired way of life while others fall short in terms of the feeling of happiness. Thus, the gender disparity of well-being necessarily has to be explored in depth. That is why papers dealing with the effect of income of employed females, time use for working mothers, or the heads of older families who delayed retirement in order to earn additional income, etc., are included in this book. Of course, these observations and findings are not able to entirely satisfy our curiosity about the different forms of disparity of well-being in Japanese society. Yet, the research outcomes presented here can be seen as one first move to understand the diverse patterns of life quality as provided from an empirical approach.

The editors of this book also wish to encourage more work on quality of life in Japan. It is through a look into the experiences and expressions about life conditions that we can understand this society better—and in an evidence-based way. Again, we also know of recent endeavors with a qualitative perspective. There have been few exchanges between the two approaches, which is unfortunate, especially because researchers interested in this topic ideally should be interdisciplinary in using theories and welcoming different research traditions and field techniques (large-scale surveys, observation in natural settings, focus interviews, etc.). We hope that readers of this book at this moment find our chapters insightful as well as helpful in crafting future research agendas, be they quantitative or qualitative.

## References

- Bartram, D. (2012). Elements of a sociological contribution to happiness. *Sociology Compass*, 6, 644–656.
- Chen, W. (2012). How education enhances happiness: Comparison of mediating factors in four East Asian countries. *Social Indicators Research*, 106, 117–131.
- Colson, E. (2010). Happiness. *American Anthropologist*, 114, 7–8.
- Easterlin, R. (2009). Lost in translation: Life satisfaction on the road to capitalism. *Journal of Economic Behavior & Organization*, 71, 130–145.
- Easterlin, R. A., McVey, L. A., Switek, M., Sawangfa, O., & Zweig, J. S. (2010). The happiness–income paradox revisited. *Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences*, 107(52), 22463–22468.
- Firebaugh, G., & Schroeder, M. B. (2009). Does your neighbor's income affect your happiness? *American Journal of Sociology*, 115, 805–831.
- Gustavson, K., Røysamb, E., & Borren, I. (2016). Life satisfaction in close relationships: Findings from a longitudinal study. *Journal of Happiness Studies*, 17, 1293–1311.
- Manzenreiter, W., & Holthus, B. (2017). Introduction: Happiness in Japan through the anthropological lens (pp. 1–21).
- McBride, M. (2001). Relative-income effects on subjective well-being in the cross-section. *Journal of Economic Behavior & Organization*, 45, 251–278.
- National Institute of Population and Social Security Research. (2019). *Population Projections for Japan (2016–2065): Summary*. Tokyo: NIPSSR.
- Newcomb, T. M., Turner, R., & Converse, P. E. (1965). *Social psychology: The study of human interaction*. London: Routledge & Kegan Paul.
- Ngoo, Y. T., Tey, N. P., & Tan, E. C. (2015). Determinants of life satisfaction in Asia. *Social Indicators Research*, 124, 141–156.
- Qian, Y., & Sayer, L. C. (2016). Division of labor, gender ideology, and marital satisfaction in East Asia. *Journal of Marriage and Family*, 78, 383–400.
- Sechiyama, K. (2013). *Patriarchy in East Asia: A comparative sociology of gender*. Leiden: Brill.
- St. John, G. (2012). Altered together: Dance festivals and culture life. *American Anthropologist*, 114, 9–10.
- Tsai, M.-C. (2015). Happiness and sociability in a nonrecursive model: The US and Taiwan compared. In F. Maggino (Ed.), *A life devoted to quality of life—Festschrift in honor of Alex C. Michalos* (pp. 297–314). The Netherlands: Springer.
- Tsai, M.-C., & Tai, T.-O. (2018). How are mothers faring across the globe? Constructing a new Mothers' well-being index and assessing its validity. *Applied Research in Quality of Life*, 3, 647–670.

UNDP (United Nations Development Programme). (2018). *Human development indices and indicators 2018 statistical update*. New York: United Nations.

**Ming-Chang Tsai** is a Research Fellow and Deputy Director of Research Center for Humanities and Social Sciences, CHSS, Academia Sinica, Taiwan. He is President of the International Society for Quality of Life Studies, and was former president of Taiwanese Sociological Association and President of Research Committee of Social Indicators (RC55) of the International Sociological Association. His current research project focuses on family relationship, youth, and ageing in comparative perspective. His articles have appeared in *Comparative Sociology*, *Globalizations*, *Journal of Marriage and Family*, *Journal of Contemporary Asia*, *Sociological Research Online*. His recent books include *Global Exposure in East Asia* (Routledge, 2015) and *Family, Work and Wellbeing in Asia* (coeditor, Springer, 2017) ([mtsai304@gate.sinica.edu.tw](mailto:mtsai304@gate.sinica.edu.tw)).

**Noriko Iwai** is Director of the Japanese General Social Survey Research Center and Professor of Faculty of Business Administration, Osaka University of Commerce. She is a principal investigator of JGSS and East Asian Social Survey, an Executive Director of the Japan Sociological Society, and a member of Science Council of Japan. Her current research project is supporting Japanese researchers in the humanities and social sciences to prepare their data for public usage. She has written on family and on trends in Japanese people's opinions. Her recent articles are "Division of housework in Japan, South Korea, China and Taiwan" in *Family, Work and Wellbeing in Asia* (Springer) and "The Impact of the Great East Japan Earthquake and Fukushima Daiichi Nuclear Accident on People's Perception of Disaster Risks and Attitudes Toward Nuclear Energy Policy" *Asian Journal for Public Opinion Research* ([n-iwai@tcn.zaq.ne.jp](mailto:n-iwai@tcn.zaq.ne.jp)).