

THE FEELINGS OF SATISFACTION AND HAPPINESS OF THE
JAPANESE AND OTHER PEOPLES

(Some excerpts from my original paper in Japanese
to be carried in our own research bulletin)

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Introduction

Many opinion and attitude studies for international comparison were carried out through Nippon Research Center, whose respondents ranged from children and youth to old people, not to mention the adults in general. Some of the Japanese researchers both from private and public sectors seem not to have understood what a lower level of the Japanese people's feelings of satisfaction and happiness actually mean. They tend to say the Japanese are more dissatisfied and less happy than, say, the Americans and Europeans, and they do not see themselves the reason why the Japanese are so.

My conclusion is that people's feelings of satisfaction and happiness is deeply involved with historical, social and cultural factors in which they live in a given country, and a mere or simple comparison without taking those factors into consideration would not bring about any meaningful insight.

Positioning of the Japanese people's Satisfaction and Happiness In the
International Society

Table 1 and 2 show the following characteristics:

- 1) The Japanese claim to be the least satisfied and least happy next to Koreans, Indians and Africans.
- 2) English-speaking countries such as U.S.A., Canada, Australia and U.K., consistently indicate one of the highest levels of satisfaction and happiness. The highest level comes from Scandinavia.

- 3) Britain is separated from the continental Europe In its people's feelings of satisfaction and happiness.
- 4) Any one of the European countries appears to have its own evaluation system.

Turning to young people aged 18-24 years (Table 3). they indicate a pattern similar to the one recorded by the adults exclusive of a few exceptions. In the West the Swedish youth is the most satisfied. followed by the American, British, German and French. In Asia there is a clear distinction where the Japanese youth claims to be the lowest in all countries and the Philippine youth claims to be the highest in the world on the 7 satisfaction items.

Let us now look at children aged 10-15 years (Table 4). You would see that children do not demonstrate any distinguished difference in the degree of happiness among the countries surveyed.

In summary excluding children, the adults, 18 years and older, show different levels of satisfaction and happiness in different countries. But the problem is that the data used were from a relatively few studies which were conducted at the interval of 4 to 5 years and whose question wordings were not identical. Therefore we will examine some time-series data based on the same questions and answers in order to make certain whether it is true or not.



Examination into the Long-term Stability of the Data

When we discuss the stability of the data, **it becomes crucial** that the data are available for **as long a period** as possible.

A) Japanese Data (Table 5)

Table 5 clearly shows that in spite of a steady and consistent improvement in family income after the war the Japanese have stayed almost the same for the past 24 years in terms of their feelings on perception of satisfaction with their living. The only exception was recorded in 1974, when the percentage of those saying "dissatisfied with their living" increased rather substantially. The year 1974 witnessed a global recession caused by the first "oil shock". Generally speaking, however, the time-series data of Japan indicate that a subjective or psychological well-being tends not to have anything to do **with** an objective or physical well-being.

B) American Data (Figure I and Table 6)

Two kinds of data were available for the United States. Figure I shows the Personal Ladder Ratings (**PLR**) were almost stable during the period of 1959 to 1979; its stability is particularly to be noted when compared to the trends for the National Ladder Ratings (**NLR**).

Another data concern the feelings of happiness among Americans. For the past 23 years the percentage of those claiming "happy" (very + pretty or fairly) remained at **around 90** excepting **1963** and **1965**.



C) French and Italian Data (Table 7)

Helene Riffault provided me with most important and extremely unique findings for the French feelings of happiness recorded in July 1946. Compared to recent figures the French felt much less happy at the time just one year after the war. But that degree of happiness among the French in 1946 a little exceeds the present level of happiness for the Italians. These findings suggest that as far as the French and the Italian are concerned the degrees of perception of happiness among two peoples do not overlap each other under any circumstances.

D) Overall Life Satisfaction among EC Peoples (Figure 2)

On the European Continent the **Denish** claim the most satisfied with life followed by the Dutch, Belgian, German, French and Italian. The former three peoples to some extent tend to come close on near depending on the year of the study. The latter three peoples living in big countries are clearly **lowest** in satisfaction and, at the same time, are separated each other. The islanders, the Irish and British are situated between the former and the latter. Taking all things together, each people in the EC countries have their own particular **attern** of reaction toward satisfaction.



In **summary:** the feelings of satisfaction and happiness are in some way subject to economic difficulties or social tension during a given short period of time, but in a long run peoples' perception of satisfaction as well as happiness is significantly stabilized. In addition the **degrees** of **how** satisfied and happy people are vary from country to country. In this context it would safe to say that the Japanese **claim** to be the least satisfied and least happy among peoples in advanced countries.

Now let us turn into a social and cultural **background** which would support the Japanese mode of reaction toward satisfaction and happiness ; Japanese national character **in** a broader sense.



Some Factors Influencing Japanese Perception Of Satisfaction and Happiness

A) View of life: 'If you **work** hard, then you will **be** **happy**.' .

One of the most recent international study of old people (senior citizens) provided us with most striking findings, which indicate that the Japanese old people claim happier than senior citizens in other countries (**Tabel 8**). **This** highest level of happiness perceived by Japanese old people can be partly explained by the results for other questions included the same study. **A majority** of old people in Japan live together with **their** married children (the same is true for Koreans and 3 Thais); they do not feel **lonely**; they do not suffer from psychological uneasiness. More importantly, a **majority** of them had or are having the happiest **time** in **live** during their late **fourties** and afterwards **including** the present moment. In contrast, a mejority of those people in America, Britain and France had their happiest occasions during **their** twenties, thirties and early **fourties** (old people in Thailand can be grouped into the American-European type and **those** in Korea **lie** in between). This suggests, that the Japanese wish to enjoy happiness and satisfaction at a **later** stay of **live**, and **till then they try** to work hard and endure.



This kind of view of life seems to be **acquired** by social education. Small children are naive in this regard. **They** begin being educated as they get older. If the above assumption is true, the Japanese feelings of satisfaction and happiness would change over generations as shown in Figure 3 on the last page of this paper.

B) Group-orientation

The Japanese tend to choose the category in the middle. Following is an average percentage of those choosing the 5th point in the 11 point (10 = 0) scale **questions** (11 questions in total) included in Table 1.

	%
Japan	23
USA	12
Canada	10
Australia	11
UK	13
West Germany	15
France	12
Italy	14
Benelux	12
Scandinavia	9
Brazil	11
Mexico	10
Africa (Sub-Sahara)	13
India	14



Also the Japanese tend to answer "neither" (happy nor unhappy; satisfied nor dissatisfied). Following **is** the percentage of people choosing the "neither" answer category for 9 questions related **to** satisfaction, happiness and **view** of **live** partly **shown** in Table 2.

	%
Japan	39
USA	9
Canada	12
Australia	8
UK	11
West Germany	27
France	25
Korea	37

What make the Japanese to choose in the middle or answer "neither" would be the values which require people **to** place more importance on a (collective) **group** than on an individual. In.the Japanese society people are **expected** to restrain **themselves**, behave and express modest.

Conclusion

Peoples feelings of satisfaction and happiness in any given country are deeply rooted into its own social, cultural and historical climate. An international comparison **among** peoples' level of these feelings without referring to each **climate** would not help people understand each **other**.

Table 2 Peoples' Satisfaction/Happiness in 1979

	<u>Satisfied</u>	<u>Happy</u>
Japan	50%	57%
U.S.A.	89	90
Canada	89	89
Australia	89	90
U. K.	91	91
W. Germany	75	60
France	67	67
Italy	63	61
Brazil	73	76
India	67	65
Singapore	91	90
Philippines	77	68
Korea	39	39

(Note) Survey in 13 Countries of Human Values by Leisure Development Center (Japan) and GIRI.

Satisfied: very/fairly satisfied with my present life

Happy: very/fairly happy

Table 3 Young Peoples' (18-24 years) Satisfaction in 1977

	<u>Mean 7 Items</u>	7 better items
Japan	2.96	
U.S.A.	3.29	
U.K.	3.28	
Australia	3.19	
W. Germany	3.23	
France	2.99	
Switzerland	3.26	
Sweden	3.35	
Brazil	3.37	
India	3.23	
Philippines	3.66	

(Note) The Second World Youth Survey by Youth Bureau. Prime Minister's Office, Japan and GIRI.

Weighted index: satisfied = 4, more or less satisfied = 3, more or less dissatisfied = 2, dissatisfied = 1; the central point is 2.50. which was prepared by J. R. Rabier.

Table 4 Children's Happiness in 1979

	<u>Home Life</u>	<u>School Life</u>	<u>Mean Two Items</u>
Japan	3.16	3.26	3.21
U.S.A.	3.67	3.18	3.43
U.K.	3.50	3.36	3.43
France	3.51	3.02	3.27
Thai land	3.37	3.23	3.30
Korea	3.31	3.48	3.40

(Note) Survey of the international Year of the Child by Youth Bureau.
Prime Minister's Office, Japan and GIRI.

Weighted index: enjoy very much = 4, enjoy somewhat = 3,
do not enjoy so much = 2, do not enjoy at all = 1; the
central point is 2.50.

Table 5 Japanese People's Satisfaction with Living (1958-1981) (2)

	<u>'58</u>	<u>'59</u>	<u>'60</u>	<u>'61</u>	<u>'62</u>	<u>'63</u>											
Satisfied on the whole	16	17	15	14	16	18											
Justso-so	45	49	45	47	45	45											
Not satisfied yet ...	29	25	28	29	29	26											
Cannot get along	9	6	6	5	5	5											
DK	1	3	6	5	5	6											
							<u>'64</u>	<u>'65</u>	<u>'66</u>	<u>'67</u>	<u>'68</u>	<u>'69</u>	<u>'70</u>	<u>'71</u>	<u>'72</u>	<u>'73</u>	
Fully satisfied	4	5	5	5	6	6	6	5	5	10							
More or less satisfied	57	56	54	55	58	58	59	53	54	51							
Not satisfied yet ...	34	34	34	33	30	31	29	36	35	32							
Very dissatisfied ...	3	4	5	4	4	4	4	5	5	6							
DK	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	1	2							
							<u>'74</u>	<u>'74</u>	<u>'75</u>	<u>'75</u>	<u>'76</u>	<u>'76</u>	<u>'77</u>	<u>'78</u>	<u>'79</u>	<u>'80</u>	<u>'81</u>
							Jan	Nov	May	Nov	May	Nov	—	—	—	—	—
Fully satisfied	4	4	6	4	4	5	9	5	7	5	5						
More or less satisfied	50	47	55	54	54	56	55	59	60	57	59						
Not satisfied yet ...	38	40	34	35	35	34	30	31	29	32	31						
Very dissatisfied ...	7	8	5	5	5	5	5	4	3	5	5						
DK	1	2	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1						

(Note) Opinion poll on National Life by Bureau of Public Relations.
Prime Minister's Office. Japan.

Table 6. Happiness in U.S.A. (1957-1979) (%)

	1957	'63	'65	'71	'72 Spring	'72 Fall	'74	'79
Very happy	35	32	30	29	26	22	40	42
Pretty/fairly happy	54	52	53	61	65	68	50	48
(Happy)	(89)	(84)	(83)	(90)	(91)	(90)	(90)	(90)
Not too happy	11	16	17	10	9	10	9	10
index	2.24	2.16	2.03	2.19	2.17	2.12	2.31	2.32

(Note) Findings for 1957 to 1972 are from ISL "The Quality of American Life". those for 1974 are from "Human Needs and **Satisfactions**" and those for 1979 are from "**Survey in 13** Countries of Human Values". "Pretty happy" was used for 1957-1972. In 1974 and 1979 "**fairly happy**" was used.

Table 7. Happiness In France (and Italy) (1946-1978) (%)

	July 1946	Spring 1975	Spring 1976	Fall 1976	Fall 1977	Fall 1978
Very happy	8	16(6)	15(4)	11(4)	15(7)	12(7)
Fairly happy	44	55(48)	61(54)	60(42)	63(58)	60(48)
Not very happy	40	27(44)	22(38)	27(52)	21(34)	26(44)
Other	5	—	—	—	—	—
NA	3	2(2)	2(4)	2(2)	1(1)	2(1)
Index ...	1.65	1.89 (1.60)	1.92 (1.65)	1.81 (1.51)	1.95 (1.73)	1.85 (1.62)

(Note) Findings for 1946 are IFOP-ETHAR and those for 1975 to 1978 are from the EC Commission. Figures in **parentheses** indicate **Italy**.

Table 8 Old Peoples' (60 years and older) Happiness in 1981 (%)

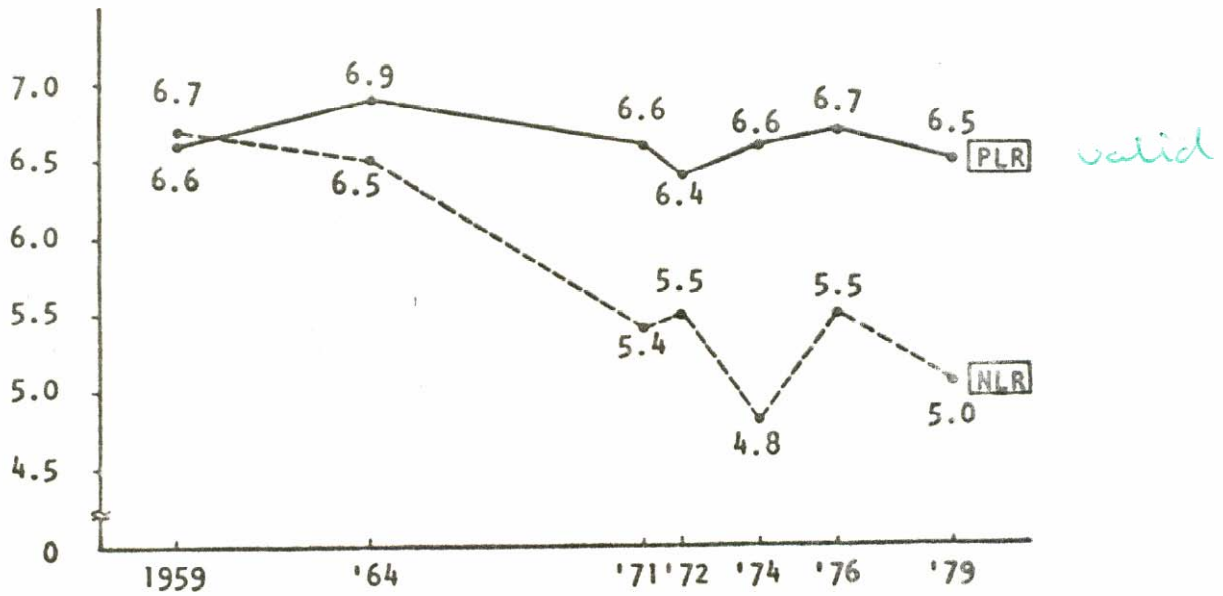
Q "Compared with people of your age. do you feel you are **happier** or less happy?"

invalid

	<u>Japan</u>	<u>Korea</u>	<u>Thailand</u>	<u>USA</u>	<u>UK</u>	<u>France</u>
Very happier	49	27	12	30	28	4
Somewhat happier	20	12	14	23	26	18
Sam or equally happy	22	36	38	40	38	64
Somewhat less happy	6	16	18	4	2	10
Definitely less happy	1	8	10	2	1	1
NA	3	1	9	2	5	3

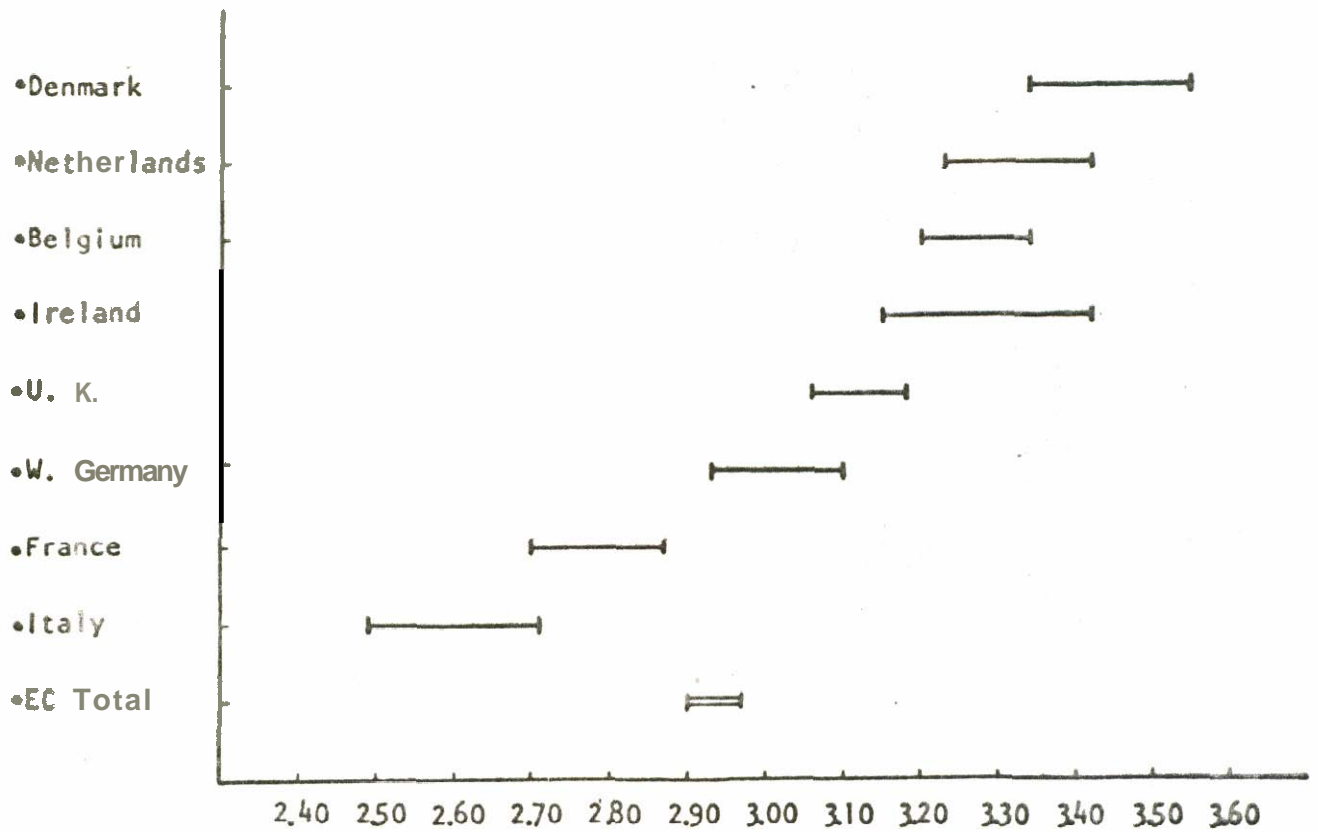
(Note) International Study of Old People by Bureau of Old Age, Prime Minister's Office, Japan and GIRI.

Figure 1 Personal Ladder Ratings (PLR) - PRESENT and National Ladder Ratings (NLR) - PRESENT in U.S.A. (1959-1979)



(Note) Ratings for 1959 and 1964 are from Institute for International Social Research. those for 1971 to 1976 are from Potomac Associates, and those for 1979 are from the Gallup Organization, Inc.. The questions for PLR and NLR consist of the 11 point self-anchoring striving scale.

Figure 2 Range of Fluctuation in Overall Life Satisfaction in EC countries (1973-1981)



(Note) The EC Commission. The scale indicates weighted Index: very satisfied = 4, fairly satisfied = 3, not very satisfied = 2, not at all satisfied = 1. "Range" demonstrates both maximum and minimum values for a given country.

An Image of
Levels of Satisfaction and Happiness
by Generation in Japan

