

Purpose of Study

The fiscal crisis of many governments amongst advanced nations over the last two to three decades has led to the decline of the welfare state and simultaneously an increase in income gaps between different groups, as well as in anxiety and unhappiness generally shared amongst people. It has become an urgent issue in Japan, too, for researchers in the social sciences to investigate the causes of the problems and propose policies so that the national economy would regain its competitiveness where people would live feeling more secure and happier. Whilst there are numerous academic approaches to this issue, we aim to address it with the use of surveys to identify the correlations between exogenous factors that affect lives of people such as the system of social security, education, employment, family and friends, the existence of social capital and the degree of happiness and well-being as perceived by them. The primary methodology, thus, is similar to the one described by Easterlin (2002) and Hills and Argyle (2002), but we acknowledge and welcome other approaches from diverse disciplines such as sociology.

With this overall goal, the study has four specific areas of concern for cross-national research:

1. Influence of social security on happiness.
2. Effects of work-life balance and employment system on happiness.
3. Effects of education system and economic inequality on happiness.
4. Influence of culture and creativity on happiness.

Implementation of the Project

Background to the current proposal is the study that the Life Risk Research Center of Doshisha University had conducted from 2010 to 2013 by three consecutive panel surveys in Japan. The details of this survey are explained later in this document. Based on this achievement, we have managed to secure a fund from the Japan Society for the Promotion of Science in Japan that supports research during the period between October 2012 and March 2015. This funding allows us to appoint five junior researchers, mostly with doctorates in economics, and send them to five European countries (France,

UK, Germany, Switzerland and Belgium), who would investigate existing studies and data along the similar lines and manage comparative studies between European countries and Japan. The stay of these researchers for a substantial period of time, from six to twelve months at each institution, would enable them to discuss with experts in the field and interested researchers from their host institutions so that they would have better understandings about broader contexts of the study.

The major task of the junior researchers, thus, is to design and manage the local surveys for cross-national comparison through consultation with their colleagues and experts in the countries they are located in. Although the survey will be financed entirely by Doshisha University and undertaken by instructions and commissions by it, it is important that junior researchers will involve local researchers in its implementation to reexamine the suitability of the questionnaire for the specific context of each country and also to confirm the quality of translation. The junior researchers will consult EUSILC and other existing surveys to ensure there would be no duplication. It is also noted that the questionnaire primarily for international comparison may include additional questions that the researchers of the host universities have particular interest in or those that have strong relevance to the individual countries.

Expected Outcome

A major outcome of this international project is to have a conference, open to the public, to compare the results and discuss their implications in Paris in mid-October, 2014. L'EHESSE has agreed to be the host to this conference who would undertake logistical tasks for preparation. The working language will be English. We expect to publish a book collating the papers given at the conference and possibly adding some more. A Scientific Committee will be established to oversee the conference programming and publication. Expenses for travel within Europe and accommodation in Paris will be paid by the project fund that Doshisha University administer, whilst other costs incurred locally to organize the conference will be borne by EHESSE. Subject to the outcome of our application for another fund, we aim to hold a workshop in Kyoto in December 2013, inviting relevant researchers from Europe, where interim reports would be exchanged and discussed. This would help the final conference in Paris to be based on shared information and common understanding.

Academic Members, their Expertise and Particular Roles

Note: All individuals named here and others who would be invited and involved can make academic contributions by giving papers drawing on their own specialties.

Principal Investigators, who would oversee the project in each country.

Toshiaki Tachibanaki: The representative of the project. Professor, Faculty of Economics, Doshisha University. His expertise are in the fields of welfare economics, labor economics, social security, and income inequality.

Sebastian Lechevalier, EHESS, France. An expert on the Japanese economy, he is directing Japan-France foundation.

Bruno Frey, University of Zurich, Switzerland. A prolific writer in the fields of cultural economics and the economics of happiness. His particular involvement with this project would be related to social security and the role of non-profit organizations.

Victor Ginsburgh: Professor of ECARES, Brussel, Belgium.

Senior Researchers at Doshisha University, who would help junior researchers and manage project implementation.

Tadashi Yagi

Yoshio Itaba

Akira Kawaguchi

Nobuko Kawashima

Junior Researchers of Doshisha University

Existing Study of Doshisha University

The survey, commissioned from us and undertaken by the Internet-survey company Goo Research (a subsidiary of a major telecommunication company in Japan), was done through inviting those registered with Goo numbering more than 400,000 in total to access the page where the questionnaire was posted. The number of the respondents were 10,826 in 2010, but significantly reduced to 6,491 in 2012 for we specified that the

same respondents in the same panel would be included so that we can see the changes over time amongst the same people.

One feature of this particular research project is the design of the decomposition of the state of happiness into 5 factors such as positive thinking, anxiousness, optimistic view, enjoyment, and philanthropic view. In addition, the evaluation of the happiness is controlled by personalities such as conscientiousness, neuroticism, openness to new interest, extraversion, and agreeableness. Through this methodology, it becomes possible to extract the pure influence of economic, working and family environment on the state of happiness.

Building on our achievement on the above research project, we have managed to get a fund from the Japan Society for the Promotion of Science that allows us to send junior scholars to universities overseas who would pursue comparative studies along the same lines by working closely with their colleagues in the host institutions.

Timescale

February to March 2013: Academics from Doshisha University have visited five universities to discuss the details of the project and practical arrangements.

December 2013: Workshop in Kyoto (subject to the availability of funding)

October 2014: Conference in Paris

March 2015: The project finishes.

September 2015: Book publication.

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