

Making a "Happy" Life as Life Expectancy Increases

Introduction

In the three mail magazines sent out after the end of 2020, we have touched on the following three topics. They were "Actions with SDGs by Japanese Life Insurance Companies", "Introduction of Public Nursing Care Insurance System in Japan", and "Healthcare Services in China Using Smartphone Apps". All of them are related to the promotion of SDGs in some ways. Today, I would like to make a small observation about a "happy" life for us living today. The concept of "happiness" is not explicitly mentioned in the 17 goals of the SDGs. However, it is an important concept that lies behind some of the goals, such as Goal 3: "Good Health and Well-Being", Goal 8: "Decent Work and Economic Growth", and Goal 16: "Peace, Justice and Strong Institutions". In other words, they point to fulfilling "happy" life for all persons.

It is especially obvious in countries or regions where the population is aging, that one of the most important tasks of life insurance companies is to accompany customers' lives and to support their old-age lives. This does not merely mean securing funds for retirement. It is also essential to prepare funds for medical care in old age, as well as to make proactive support to maintain health in old age. The concept of providing services to ensure customers' "well-being" and, more specifically, "happiness" during their long lives is becoming an important philosophy that underpins the management of life insurance companies.

Now, to what extent can "happiness" be defined though it seems to have different meaning by people? In this article, I would like to discuss some aspects of human "happiness".

1. Definitions of happiness from the past (the state of mind)

There are several famous books depicting theories to become happy. Among them, three books written by the philosophers such as Carl Hilty, Bertrand Russell, and Alain are quite famous. I took this opportunity to re-read Russell and Alain's books. First of all, I would like to summarize the important points of the British philosopher Bertrand Russell's (1872-1970) theory of happiness.

- Success is not a panacea, as it is only one element of happiness.
- Don't get involved in the competition for success, but do what you enjoy.
- Don't despair even if you don't achieve it.
- Try to link your work with your purpose of life.

On the other hand, what did Alain (a French philosophy teacher, 1861-1951) say?

- Know that sorrow can always be healed, and let it pass.
- Find joy in everything.
- Accept your fate and live in the reality of the present.
- Don't complain when misfortune strikes you, but smile.

What both books tell in common is the way of the mind preparedness to live each day. They tell us that we will not be swallowed up by fate if we do not lament over what is beyond our control and accept it.

2. Definition of happiness that mankind continues to search for

The past theories of happiness introduced above were our mindset that enables us to endure terrible times of life and maintain our positive attitude. They do not focus on the external objective aspects, such as material wealth, physical and mental health, and social tolerance for free self-expression. Their discussion is about how to protect one's inner self in order to overcome these external objective aspects and how to avoid their negative impact on one's "happiness" as much as possible.

When we think about our "happiness" today, we cannot help considering the external objective aspects that inevitably influences our lives. How does human society confront this issue and try to grasp human happiness? We can get one answer from the World Happiness Report, published by the Sustainable Development Solutions Network, United Nations. (<https://www.unsdsn.org/happiness>)

The level of happiness measured in this survey is the average of the responses to a poll asking people to rate their own level of happiness on a scale from 0 to 10. Therefore, it is only a subjective value of the people surveyed (the data source is a worldwide poll conducted every year by The Gallup Organization established in US). However, the obtained well-being values are regressed using six explanatory variables: GDP per capita, access to social support in times of need, healthy life expectancy, freedom to make life choices, generosity (tolerance for one's own contribution to society), and perception of corruption (perception of the amount of negative emotions and the degree of corruption in society). The results of a regression analysis using six explanatory variables are also published. A country with a higher happiness ranking means only that a higher percentage of people subjectively consider themselves to be "happy". What is more interesting, however, are the conclusions that can be got when the contributions of the six explanatory variables are compared each other, or when the contributions of them are compared across countries. We can see what factors tend to influence the feeling of "happiness" in a particular country more than other factors, or more than the same factors in other countries.

I won't go into the details here, but let me introduce the latest results published in 2021. The highest ranked country or region in Asia is Taiwan which is ranked the 24th. And Japan is ranked the 56th.

Some of you may feel strange that Japan, which enjoys developed economy and material wealth, is ranked the 56th. One of the reasons pointed out for this is the low level of tolerance (tolerance for one's own contribution to society). This is a very characteristic fact that describes Japanese society. As a Japanese, I also feel that my networks with my local community of residence are extremely weak, and I haven't had any experiences of participating in any social contribution activities recently. For Japan, in order to become a society where people can feel more "happiness", it is necessary for each person to find ways to be connected

with society, something that has been lacking in Japan up to now i.e., ties with “bond” in a book titled "Capital of Happiness", which will be discussed later in section 3(1), and ties with “connection” as pointed out by the Dai-ichi Life Research Institute Inc., which will be discussed later in section 3(2), and also ties with “interval” between ourselves and society as the place where "happiness" is born in a book titled “Life Span of Happiness”, as discussed later in section 3(3). It is very interesting because it makes us very aware of the connection with society.

However, what I would like to describe here is neither the latest rankings nor the improvement of "happiness" of Japanese people. What I would like to emphasize is that we should be aware of the external objective aspects, such as material wealth, physical and mental health, and social tolerance for free self-expression, as assumed factors for a person to be “happy”.

< Ranking of Happiness 2021 published by UN > <https://worldhappiness.report/ed/2021/>

Ranking	Country/Region	Score	Ranking	Country/Region	Score
1	Finland	7.84	70	Mongolia	5.68
2	Denmark	7.62	∴	∴	
3	Switzerland	7.57	77	Hong Kong	5.48
4	Iceland	7.55	∴	∴	
5	Netherlands	7.46	79	Vietnam	5.41
6	Norway	7.39	∴	∴	
7	Sweden	7.36	81	Malaysia	5.38
8	Luxembourg	7.32	82	Indonesia	5.34
9	New Zealand	7.28	∴	∴	
10	Australia	7.27	84	China	5.34
∴	∴		∴	∴	
24	Taiwan	6.58	87	Nepal	5.27
∴	∴		∴	∴	
32	Singapore	6.38	89	Maldives	5.20
∴	∴		∴	∴	
42	Uzbekistan	6.18	100	Laos	5.03
∴	∴		101	Bangladesh	5.02
54	Thailand	5.98	∴	∴	
∴	∴		114	Cambodia	4.83
56	Japan	5.94	∴	∴	
∴	∴		126	Myanmar	4.43
61	Philippines	5.88	∴	∴	
62	South Korea	5.85	129	Sri Lanka	4.32
∴	∴		∴	∴	
			139	India	3.82

3. Examples of Contemporary Theories of Happiness in Japan (A Prescription for Real Daily Life)

(1) "Capital of Happiness"

First of all, I would like to introduce a book titled "Capital of Happiness", written in 2017 by Japanese author Akira Tachibana. He says that in order to get "happiness," each person should be aware of what he or she can influence with own will. They are freedom, self-actualization, and ties with communities. Each

of them is strongly connected to financial assets, human capital, and social capital. Human capital is the ability to earn wealth on one's own, and social capital is the ability to earn wealth through relationships with the surrounding community. The quantity and quality of the three elements vary depending on whether a person is of working age or retired, and depending on his or her innate abilities. He explains that happiness is created when these three elements are transformed within each person in his or her own unique way.

Those who are completely retired will live merely on their financial assets. The strongest people are those who have all three elements in abundance even when they are aged, but in fact, there are no such people. Who is the strongest in an aging society? It is those who maintain their human capital forever, in other words, those who maintain lifelong active service as much as possible. To do so, it is important to choose what you love as your job.

(2) "Strategies of Happiness for a 100-Year Life"

The next book I'm going to introduce is, "Strategies of Happiness for a 100-Year Life". This was published in November 2019 by the Dai-ichi Life Research Institute Inc., a think tank of the Dai-ichi Life Group (only the Japanese and Chinese versions are available).

The book explains that there is no common standard of "happiness" for everyone, and that by accumulating situations in which each person feels "happy" based on his or her own sense of values, the person can improve his or her QOL and also can create a state of well-being. This state of well-being, in turn, leads to further proactive actions to feel "happiness", and this virtuous cycle amplifies "happiness". After that, the author turns his attention to Japanese society, where the population is aging. He points out that in the past, living a long life means enjoying "happiness", but nowadays, living a long life has given us new challenges, and there are three kinds of uneasiness that must be addressed in order to live a "happy" life: to lose health, to exhaust assets, and to become isolated. Then he points out the importance of maintaining health, assets, and connections over a long period of lifetime in order to prevent each uneasiness from getting harder. Ideally, we should try not to lose any of them as much as possible. Furthermore, it is desirable to have the volume of all three elements in a full form. In this book, he uses the metaphor of life as a spinning-top. When each of the three elements is kept in balance with the volume required by each person, the spinning-top composed of these three elements can keep turning vigorously (i.e., life can be kept stable and fulfilling).

Based on the results of a survey of 20,000 people, this book focuses on the various aspects that make up a modern person's life: family, work, connections, consumption, and health, and carefully shows what kinds of things make people uneasy and when they feel happy. The book also provides countless hints to keep the spinning-top of life turning strongly.

What is the difference between this book and the above-mentioned "Capital of Happiness"? It is that it treats and discusses "health" as an important component that can be lost. It is true that we can discuss

"happiness" without considering health. That is also a meaningful and useful discussion. However, it is true that we, who live in the real world, receive pain and pleasure from the five senses of our body, and cannot leave our body, cannot help being aware of "health" when we talk about life. In this sense, this book is a discussion of the real life of each person.

(3) "Life Span of Happiness" (100 years of life guided by hormones and intestinal bacteria)

Finally, I would like to introduce another contemporary Japanese book on how people should pursue "happiness" in an aging society. This was written by a doctor named Hiroshi Ito in 2018. He says that maintaining good health is a very important factor in the pursuit of "happiness" (he does not say it is "essential", but he says that there is "considerable overlap" between "health" and "happiness"). Then, based on his knowledge as a doctor, he introduces a specific path to "happiness" by activating hormones and intestinal bacteria in our bodies.

The book gives the reader a great insight by pointing out that "happiness" is always "in-between". This "in-between" has various meanings. The first basic point is where happiness exists. The author says that "happiness" is found in the present, which is "between" the past and the future. When we feel a pleasant change in the present, we feel happy. There is no happiness in the past, and there is no happiness in the future. Happiness in the past is not what we are looking for, and happiness in the future is only meaningful to those who live in the present, in the sense that it brings hope to the present.

And "happiness" is not something to be felt alone. It is something that is created "between" you and your family, you and others, and you and society. Happiness is born when we make efforts to fill the gaps between ourselves and the outside world.

4. Summary

As we have seen above, the historical writings on "happiness" have taught us how to keep peaceful mind so that we do not lose "happiness" even when we are in adversity.

On the other hand, the modern theories of "happiness" suggest methods for us to live a "happy" life in relation to the economy and society. The external environment surrounding people, is also a factor of "happiness" in the data published by the United Nations. Three books I introduced above also have this point in common. These are discussions that clearly focus on the consumer and economic life that supports real life.

There is no contradiction between traditional arguments and modern prescriptions. And for those who sincerely pursue "happiness" in life, they are both important discussions. It cannot be said that anyone can be "happy" on mental satisfaction alone. At the same time, it cannot be said that everyone can be "happy"

only by economic or health conditions. In order to achieve mental “happiness” and “physical “happiness”, it is important for everyone to face the ancient and modern theories honestly and to make efforts to achieve their own "happiness". And perhaps we can find our certain “happiness” in such efforts themselves. Finally, I realized that ultimate happiness may lie between the present and the future.