Happiness and the Good Life in Japan

Contemporary Japan is in a state of transition, caused by the forces of globalization that are derailing its ailing economy, stalemating the political establishment and generating alternative lifestyles and possibilities of the self. Amongst this nascent change, Japanese society is confronted with new challenges to answer the fundamental question of how to live a good life of meaning, purpose and value. This book, based on extensive fieldwork and original research, considers how specific groups of Japanese people view and strive for the pursuit of happiness. It examines the importance of relationships, family, identity, community and self-fulfilment, amongst other factors. The book demonstrates how the act of balancing social norms and agency is at the root of the growing diversity of experiencing happiness in Japan today.

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Happiness and the Good Life in Japan
*Edited by Wolfram Manzenreiter and Barbara Holthus*
Happiness and the Good Life in Japan

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Preface

Editing a book, as well as writing for it, is only one of the many tasks that belong to our job description as academics. It is by far not the easiest one – great ideas sometimes no longer look that great when clad in words and forced into structure; words do not come easily, and behind every well-crafted expression is lurking the suspicion that the phrase could have been better placed; publishers are hesitant to publish edited volumes these days, are reluctant to accept unusual projects but gladly leave the tedious labor of copy editing, indexing and marketing to authors; and daily work routines are always overruling the demand for time and attention that a long-term project such as this book actually needs. For all these reasons, having finished a book project is a source of eminent joy, making authors and editors happy at last. That the book topic itself is about happiness, as in this particular case, is fitting.

Just as happiness is a collaborative project, a book like this one would not have been possible without the enthusiasm and support of many others. We want to take the opportunity to express our gratitude to all the participants in the sociology and anthropology sections at the 2014 European Association for Japanese Studies conference in Ljubljana. Our call for papers for a three-day session on happiness and well-being in Japan triggered an incredibly large number of submissions. We finally accepted more than 60 to be presented at the conference, and some of them have been included in this volume. Our thanks to all of our authors, for being patient and willing to respond to our requests for reworking. It was a pleasure working with you and we are thankful for what we have learnt through the collaboration.

We also want to thank the editors of the Japan Anthropology Workshop Series (JAWS), and in particular its founder Joy Hendry, who not only contributed a paper to the Ljubljana meeting but also encouraged us to publish with the series. Thanks are due also to the editorial board for its encouragement and helpful suggestions, to Peter Sowden from Routledge for his enthusiasm and his collaborative spirit. We also want to thank the Faculty of Philological and Cultural Studies, University of Vienna, for supporting this project with funding for conference travel and editorial assistance. Thanks to Ada Brant for her valuable support in language clarification. Many thanks also to Sebastian Polak-Rottmann for compiling the index.
Most thanks as always go to our families, whom we selfishly deserted for too many hours, days and weeks while working on this book. It is to you and the happiness we derive from being with you that we dedicate this publication.

Wolfram Manzenreiter and Barbara Holthus
Vienna, August 2016
It cannot fail to be a happy experience to introduce a book about happiness in these fraught times of distress and disaster, and I am particularly happy that this collection of papers from another successful Japan Anthropology Workshop Series (JAWS) meeting is coming out in our series, partly because my own meager contribution never made it to submission! I did attend the panel at the European Association for Japanese Studies in Ljubljana, however, and the subject was so popular that it ran to two simultaneous panels, each having an abundant audience of sometimes quite voluble, but largely happy participants. These panels were only two of a veritable series of gatherings that the editors have organized to discuss the subject of happiness in Japan: in Vienna, in Tokyo, probably in many other places too, and of all the disciplines that were drawn in and are now becoming published, here the editors have chosen a collection that celebrates an anthropological approach. This is, of course, appropriate for our JAWS series and, again, as many of the contributors demonstrate, indicates the value of close, in-depth research with a group of people that may not be large, but who have shared important aspects of their lives with the researchers. According to the editors, this is the first anthropological/qualitative sociological collection of papers about happiness in Japan, and possibly the first about “the good life” within a single society. They discuss in great detail why this should be the case, and speculate that some of the reason may be the emphasis of Emile Durkheim on finding social facts to describe. From my own now rather ancient training, I would agree with this, because we were warned to shy away from personal feelings and emotions – the stuff of psychology – and stick to “the social.” I passed on the warning to my own students.

Things have changed a lot since then, however, and again, the editors present a good discussion of how that has happened, as well as letting their contributors show for themselves how well an anthropological approach can in fact inform these subjects. My own two-pronged discovery of our advantage was rather unexpected, as it happened. First, when invited to give a talk at an interdisciplinary undergraduate conference on the subject of ‘Emotions’, after I had carried out a project with small children in Japan, my research seemed to equip me to talk of children’s learning and suppression of emotions...
with as much, if not more authority than representatives of the several other disciplines present. I began to rethink some of my early training. Then there was a debate with a psychologist which surprised both of us when we discovered how culturally relative emotions that he thought universal turn out to be when an anthropologist gets involved.

This is all old-hat now – indeed, has been since Gordon Mathews’s groundbreaking study of what makes life worth living in Japan, and I am delighted that Wolfram Manzenreiter and Barbara Holthus have brought together such a delightful selection of papers to illustrate the relatively new interest in well-being and happiness, in Japan and elsewhere. My own recent dalliance with the subject was a small study of what makes retired people happy in Japan, and although I did not gather enough information to merit a paper for this book, I can reveal that many of my old friends and colleagues share my own proclivity to continue doing what we always did – at least if what we did in our working lives made us happy. Doing anthropology made me happy and, judging by the abundance of papers here and elsewhere on this growing subject, it made several others happy too.

If you need a bit of a boost, then, open it up, and see how your own levels of well-being compare with those of your Japanese counterparts!

Joy Hendry
August 2016
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1 Introduction

Happiness in Japan through the anthropological lens

Wolfram Manzenreiter and Barbara Holthus

The good life is a process, not a state of being. It is a direction, not a destination. 
(from On Becoming a Person, a collection of essays by Carl Rogers published in 1961: 186)

Japan of the early 21st century may not be seen as a prime example of a happy people. The rapid aging of society, shrinking household incomes and savings, rural depopulation and economic decline in peripheral regions, the dismantling of the welfare state and the widening of the social gap, plus an increasingly nationalist stance of Japan’s foreign policy threatening peace at its borders and its harmonious relationships with neighbors abroad and minorities at home, are painting a rather gloomy picture of a society resisting in vain the centripetal forces of a downward spiral set in motion when the myth of perpetual economic growth came to a rapid halt two decades ago.

These macro-level developments in policy and economy leave their mark on the lives of the Japanese people, the things they worry about and fear, and the things they experience first-hand. Many of these fears and worries are driven by public, mediated discourse, often but not always substantiated by sheer numbers, oftentimes painting bleak pictures of a “worsening” Japan. Topics include the increasing cases of workplace-induced depression, numbers of suicides and death through overwork (karōshi), the mounting fear of solitary death (kodokushi), and people to withdraw from society (hikikomori). These and other psychopathologies ferment the assessment that post-growth Japan does not naturally thrust itself upon the anthropologist as a promising research site to find happiness, even less to study it. Rather, the stories speak of a society hampered by maladaptation at such a great scale that increasing proportions of its members, across all age groups, are threatened by dissatisfaction, deprivation, alienation, depression, fear, and hopelessness. Japan may still be a far cry from what Edgerton (1992) in his contested critique of cultural relativism would have labeled a “sick society” on the brink of decay, but the apparent inadequacy of some of its institutions or the harmfulness of some of its beliefs indeed are threatening the viability of society.

So why not research happiness in even such a society? “If you want to study happiness, then start with misery,” suggests Parkin in response to
Csordas’s proposal to distill an anthropological approach to morality out of the study of witchcraft and evil (Csordas 2013). Happiness and misery are usually considered mere opposites on one spectrum of the life satisfaction measurement scale, commonly used in quantitative research on life satisfaction and happiness (and misery) (e.g. Bjørnskov and Tsai 2015). Maybe their mutual relationship is, as in the case of morality and evil, much more complex and layered than the assumption of one-dimensional linearity holds. The anthropology of Japan certainly brought about many scholarly accounts on all kinds of social problems that point out why the Japanese possibly are truly unhappy. Kitanaka (2015), for example, looked at people’s sense of self and how it is related to mental health problems, Horiguchi (2011) researched the quality of life of socially withdrawn youth, against the backdrop of cultural discourses on home leaving and adulthood. Smith (2013) embarked on a study of ritualized forms of grieving that help parents overcome the pain of irreplaceable child loss, and Tsuji (2011) and Long (2012) studied the impact of social isolation in a hyper-aged society on commonly shared ideas of death and dying.

Such a gloomy assessment of the state of happiness in Japan seems mirrored in most, if not all figures from large-scale cross-national happiness surveys (see Holthus and Manzenreiter 2017), and supports the focus of anthropology as discipline (and sociology, for that matter, as well) to be more concerned with social problems in society rather than the positive aspects of life. Yet we argue in this book that an anthropology of the good life has to look past a flattened, one-dimensional understanding of happiness as the antipode of misery, and rather pay justice to the multiplexity of a phenomenon that in its entirety involves sensory affect, cerebral activities, feelings and emotions, cognition, reflection, and value judgment. Furthermore, not only individual-level aspects play into someone’s level of happiness or life satisfaction, but also macro-level elements, social structures and institutions are influencing elements in this complex field. The interaction chain in which all these processes are taking place poses huge challenges to the disciplinary division of labor within academia and the possibilities of ethnographic fieldwork. Most of all, this volume asks for anthropological 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 (Johnston 2012).

This is the first edited volume of anthropological studies and qualitative social science research on happiness and well-being in Japan. To our knowledge, it is also the first volume that looks at notions of the good life within a single society. Yet this is by far not the first attempt to demonstrate the potential of anthropology and ethnographical research for a comprehensive understanding of a mood or state of mind that is familiar to human beings all over the world. Still, despite its ubiquity and the recent proliferation of happiness studies particularly in the fields of psychology and happiness economics, we must state that for the time being we know more that we do not know.
about happiness than we have come to know through the existing literature so far. In fact, we think that the dominant positivist approach in happiness research, paired with conceptual ambiguities and its prolific abuse for political and commercial purposes, are responsible for the irritations caused by academic attempts at coming to terms with a central element of human life, usually dearly valued, often actively aspired to, and notoriously difficult to grasp.

An understanding of happiness at “face value” encompasses the capacity to recognize a happy face and differentiate it from an unhappy one, no matter when or where one encounters it, with the ontological constitution of being human. The underlying rationale of such a grave and generalizing statement goes back to Charles Darwin’s musing about *The Expression of the Emotions in Man and Animals* (1872, reprinted in 1998), in which he suggested that emotions and their facial expressions were universal across all human and even non-human primates. A century later empirical research provided the somewhat surprising proof that humans indeed are cross-culturally capable of recognizing six universal emotions at levels well beyond chance, with happiness being one of them, next to anger, disgust, fear, sadness, and surprise (Matsumoto 2006). Most recently, imaging techniques of brain activities and theories of evolutionary biology provided the neurological backbone to Darwin’s reasoning about emotional expressions and hominid social evolution. Having gone through the “Decade of the Brain” and the Human Genome Project, we are now told to accept that “the brain is social” and socio-ecologically adaptive as these qualities enable minds and brains to read intentions of others and share feelings inside others’ minds and brains (Young 2012: 402). Due to inroads into epigenetics and the “neuromolecular, plastic and social brain” (Rose and Abi-Rached 2013: 24), the divide between nature and nurture has nowadays become materially more real than ever (Singh 2012: 110).

Such findings do not neglect the significance of cultural codebooks needed to read more subtle nuances, nor do they disregard the great variety of cultural display rules that emerged among cultural groups in adaptation to their natural environment and habituated needs. Nor are they in conflict with insight from medical anthropology on “local biologies” (Lock 2001) acknowledging the diverging embodied consequences of social experience (e.g. in menopause, hysteria, or attention deficit hyperactivity disorder – ADHD). However, what neurosciences and biogenetics have come to tell social scientists about the interlocking of society and biology must rest uncomfortably with the dominant ontology of social constructivism and the anthropological reason that all cultural variation is discontinuous. Thus a simplistic divide between nature and nurture, which had been the bread and butter of much of 20th-century social anthropology (which occasionally meta-reflected on the division as cultural construct in itself), has been effectively dismissed. The potential consequences of findings from the laboratory delivered a good incentive for social sciences “to become more open to biological suggestions, just at a time when biology is becoming more social” (Meloni 2014: 594).
Being aware of the evidential dawn of neobiological reductionism, Lock (2014) calls for anthropologists to pay heightened attention to this development. Instead of simplistically writing against the pervasive cultural effects of neuroscientific knowledge (Martin 2014), and certainly rather than forging an uncritical alliance with neurosciences, anthropologists should – in line of these new findings – re-theorize their concepts of embodiment. Whatever the outcome, “the spectre of the brain” (Fitzgerald and Callard 2015) has already stirred up the intellectual division of labor and the practical logic upon which the boundaries between natural and social sciences are based. Suffice it to plead for the same kind of sustained and critical attention to interpretative social sciences within neurobiology or empirical (quantitative) takes on happiness.

**The popularity of happiness**

The broadening interest in happiness as a topic of scholarly inquiry is revealed by an unprecedented amount of academic studies, government-sponsored surveys and popular publications on the subject in Japan as elsewhere (Coulmas 2009; Holthus et al. 2015). Not unrelated to that, happiness has also become a policy goal. The Bhutanese Gross National Happiness project presumably became the worldwide best-known political attempt at balancing economic development with its people’s sense of happiness. Similar initiatives of paying attention to quality of life issues beyond economic riches also surfaced in the UK (Layard 2005), France, Canada, Germany, and Japan. In 2010, the Japanese government proclaimed a new economic growth strategy in harmony with a sustainable environment, the fulfillment of social needs, and people’s happiness. Yet after the triple disaster of March 2011, when a magnitude nine earthquake caused a giant tsunami, the meltdown of three nuclear reactors at the Fukushima nuclear power plant, and destroyed or radioactively contaminated large areas along Japan’s northeastern coasts, the ruling party changed from the Democratic Party of Japan (DPJ) to the conservative Liberal Democratic Party (LDP) and expressive political interest in surveying and promoting people’s happiness vanished.

Nevertheless, the world continues to witness the publication of ever more happiness indices and country rankings, like the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) Better Life Index (since 2013) or the *World Happiness Report* (since 2012) (Helliwell et al. 2012). Rooted in a positivist understanding of happiness research, their underlying notions of happiness as something that can be gauged, measured and quantified is expressed by the aggregation of numerous indicators, both objective and subjective. We do not intend to dismiss easily the value of quantitative research on happiness. There is ample evidence that people all over the world are able to identify events and conditions that are augmenting or impairing their state of well-being. People have a fairly stable sense of their state of being and they are able to indicate to what degree their sense of happiness is
fluctuating and how particular experiences of momentary happiness are related to a more enduring sense of overall well-being. Psychologists are still grappling with the possible impact of personality and genetics on the individual’s propensity to be happy (Lauriola and Iani 2015). However, in numerous surveys and experiments they have provided evidence of culture-specific differences in the understanding of happiness. Markus and Kitayama (1991) therefore stated that happiness is a “collaborative project” in all societies, since it is always defined in collaboration with others, yet the ways of collaboration differ across societies. For example, positive social relationships matter in all societies, but feelings of autonomy are only of importance in so-called individualist societies (Oishi et al. 1999). Particularly in Western societies of Europe and North America, people are rather construing their sense of happiness in relation to the self, self-esteem and other internal references, whereas collectivist societies in Asia tend to use norms and the social appraisal of others as their frame of reference (Suh 2000). It should be mentioned that these and other psychologists are well aware of intra-cultural variation, culture-specific response patterns according to the survey setting and the misleading generalization of “individualist” vs. “collectivist,” or by the same token, “West” vs. “East.” Therefore they ask for in-depth single-country studies and ethnographical work, in particular to generate more reliable and valid measures for specific cultures (Selin and Davey 2012).

In the case of happiness economists with their overall concern with national averages and rankings, gauging the availability of economic means, infrastructural, material and other resources against a society’s collective appreciation of their significance is certainly a new and refreshing approach for their discipline as well. Yet we are deeply concerned with research programs that take the meaning of happiness for granted or conflate different levels of emotional and cognitive experiences under the generic terms of happiness and well-being. The burgeoning boom in popular happiness publications in Japan (Coulmas 2009) and elsewhere in the West itself is indicative of a “happiness industry” (Davies 2015), feeding on the widespread belief that living a good life needs attention and attending; that there are ways to happiness that can and should be deliberately explored, and that it is ultimately each and everyone’s responsibility to strive for a happy, fulfilled life. The proliferation of self-help guidebooks and lifestyle manuals hence demarcates another milestone in the expansiveness of “experiential capitalism” (Rifkin 2000: 149) spreading into so far uncharted territories and turning previously non-commercialized spheres into marketable commodities. For all these reasons, many contributions to the debate on happiness must be critically judged for their possible role in the exploration of emotions as a new resource to be bought and sold. The sometimes troubling alliance that has developed between political authorities, behavioral psychologists and economists speaks of a disturbing vision of biosocial engineering and the legitimization of neoliberal attacks on social welfare state principles.
Anthropology’s strained relationship with happiness

Anthropologists, as assembled in this volume, challenge the essentialist claims of a universally shared sense of happiness and the uniformity of emotional life. An anthropological conception of happiness as inherently and conceptually cultural is in our eyes capable of coming forward with a more holistic understanding than psychological or economist approaches can. Until quite recently, complaints that anthropologists have explicitly shunned engaging with the concepts of happiness and well-being were common (Thin 2005; Jiménez 2008; Mathews and Izquierdo 2009; Miles-Watson 2011; Walker and Kavedzija 2015). While this is no longer entirely the case, it is worthwhile to recollect and summarize the main reasons behind the silence of anthropology.

Social anthropologists since the discipline’s inception have been concerned with the in-depth exploration of life worlds other than the one in which they have been raised. For the common goal of understanding the diversity of how people organize their common needs in society and live their lives in a meaningful way, they ventured to tribal societies in out-of-the-way places or immersed themselves in the everyday lives of minorities and subcultures geographically closer to home, but still at a culturally distinctive distance. The commitment of the discipline to give voice, or at least visibility, to the “suffering subject” (Robbins 2013), the extraordinary and marginalized, is a laudable achievement in itself. However, this focus on deficits, deprivation, suffering, and ill-being is a flaw of disciplines such as anthropology—and sociology as well. Thin (2012: 8) calls this a “deficit orientation obsessed with social problems.” The inclination to research social pathologies has also been noted by Butler and Flores (2007). Reflecting on 3,000 papers read at the 2006 conference of the American Anthropological Association, they commented on the marked absence of ethnographies and theories on happiness and well-being, with not a single panel tackling the theme, in contrast to the long history of anthropological inquiry into violence, conflict and suffering. Hence the discipline has seen the evolution of subdivisions on the anthropology of disaster, death, and discrimination, to name but a few, that shed light on the cultural meaning and conditioning of fairly universally shared emotional experiences such as suffering, grievance, bereavement, and mourning.

This ambivalence toward happiness and the ultimate neglect of an experience so important to human lives is furthermore related to the history of the discipline in its constitutional attempts to differentiate culture from the fields of nature. The anthropological tradition of prioritizing mental (values, belief, meaning) over affective (emotions, presentiments, feeling) elements of human culture has eventually led to the rise of the subfield of cognitive anthropology, but not of affective anthropology (Jenkins 1996: 72). The conceptualization of affect and emotion as innate cross-cultural constants could not possibly find wide acclamation, particularly not under the then predominant constructivist epistemology. In their manifesto for an anthropology of the emotions, Lutz and White (1986) remarked that the disciplinary ambivalence and neglect of
cultural categories such as happiness, emotion, and affect reflect a twofold epistemological tension within the discipline. A teleological tension differentiates between universalists and cultural relativists on the basic question if all humans share the same emotions as panhuman ability, a position with which Wierzbicka (1986) and Jankowiak and Fischer (1992) sympathize, or if they experience their lives in emotionally similar but functionally different ways (Beatty 2010). A methodological tension separates positivists from interpretists for their very different reference framework of ethology and evolution (Bodley 2012; Falk 2012) versus sociality and construction (e.g. Mathews 1996; Freeman 2015).

Ethical aspirations and disciplinary history certainly contribute to the adversity to the study of happiness, but there is more to be taken into account, like social theory and methodological considerations. In an interview for *The Journal of Happiness and Well-Being* (Jacobsen 2014: 87–88), the late social theorist Zygmunt Bauman traced the pathological bias at the heart of the *raison d’être* of sociology and anthropology back to the influential thought of Emile Durkheim (1982), a founding figure of both disciplines. Power and authority, as well as norms and values, which generate order as well as inequality, discrimination, and injustice, are all social facts residing in the very society that produces them, and underlying and regulating the behavior of its members. Pleasure, joy, and happiness, which are internal to the individual and markers of the absence of discomfort, misery, and unhappiness, would be – by contrast and by definition – not the subject of anthropological inquiry. Conceptually separating affects, emotions and sensory experiences from the social laws and structural relations that organize social life is perhaps solidifying the sometimes artificial borderline between psychology and social sciences. However, there is ample reason to believe that the *a priori* singling out of happiness from anthropological research is paying justice neither to the significance of emotions and moods as universal human capacities, nor to their thoroughly social nature. Robbins (2015) reminded us that Durkheim was not as ignorant of emotions as Bauman wants us to believe. His interpretation of Durkheim’s elaboration on “Judgement values and the judgement of reality” (1911, reprinted in 1974) reconfigures values as social facts to be understood in their functional relation to basic human needs and the preferential judgment of collective sentiments versus private emotional experiences that are not shared with others. In particular, ritual practice generates emotional effervescence, a cross-culturally known experience of transcendental feeling that gives rise to religious life as well as to the establishment of ideals. Numerous contributions to the anthropology of ritual have acknowledged the significance of positive emotions like joy and the pleasure in sharing common experiences with like-minded people for the forging of *communitas* (e.g. Turner 2012).

Finally, the lack of a basic agreement on what happiness actually is and the conceptual ambiguity deriving from different disciplines and disciplinary subfields have been haunting and hampering the establishment of happiness as a research topic within anthropology. It has been noted that happiness as a
thoroughly private and subjective experience is defying direct observation. To understand the difficulty of grasping happiness, it is useful to differentiate between happiness as affect, which in psychological terms is a precognitive reaction to a triggering stimulation, and happiness as emotion, which is a more complex response to a specific situation and requires some cognitive processing. Since happiness can be ephemeral as well as enduring, it is also possible to think of it as mood, a more lasting state of feeling that involves a structured set of beliefs about future positive or negative affectivity. Conflating sensory experience, emotional force, cognitive reflection and moral judgment into one, the notion of happiness is complicating the separation of body and mind.

However, like other emotions, happiness involves a transitory state that can be experienced but retreats under attempts to describe and analyze it (Colson 2012: 8). As Nobel laureate and founder of behavioral economics Kahneman stated, it is virtually impossible for the mind to be at the same time happy and to realize why or how one is happy. While the experiencing self is living the moment, the remembering self keeps the memories, which do not necessarily comply with the actual past experience or desired future state of affectivity. The dissociation between evaluated and experienced well-being questions the validity of findings from empirical studies that inevitably can only draw on judgments and estimates by the remembering self (Kahneman and Riis 2005). Kahneman's research has contributed much to a “hedonist understanding” of happiness as excess of positive over negative affect, arising from the gratification of basic needs.

This theory was challenged by an alternative or complementary understanding of happiness as response to meaningful experiences, giving life a purpose and the individual a sense of being part of something greater than itself. Key factors that contribute to “eudaimonic happiness” include self-acceptance, autonomy, dignity, personal growth, relatedness, and purposefulness in life (Deci and Ryan 2008). Attempts to give order to the different levels of happiness experiences gave birth not only to a new “semantic cloud” but also to the new branch of positive psychology. One of its champions developed a theory of “authentic happiness” (Seligman 2002) based on a composite of positive emotions, a sense of living a good life, and contributions to a larger purpose. Hence the measurement of happiness was provided by people’s life satisfaction as judgment of their entire life, which itself could be decomposed into domain satisfaction arising from the evaluation of significant life spheres. Ten years later, Seligman (2012) added social relationships and accomplishment to his renewed theory of well-being.

The merger of the hedonist and the eudaimonic strands pushed the notoriously ambiguous notion of happiness into the shadow of the notion of subjective well-being. In its broadest sense, subjective well-being came to encompass life and domain satisfaction with positive affect (experiencing many pleasant emotions and moods), and low levels of negative affect (experiencing few unpleasant emotions and moods; Diener 2000: 34). Most of
these definitions and redefinitions were triggered by psychologists and economists in need of a practicable definition suitable for operationalization and a sound theory to explain what they were measuring. However, also anthropologists have opted for studying well-being rather than happiness, which they see as purely subjective and thus as just the most essential ingredient in a more complex state that includes objective components and affects individuals as well as their collectivities (Mathews and Izquierdo 2009). Yet even researchers specifying the variants of happiness terms in their work often fall short of consequently discriminating between happiness, well-being, and other frequently used concepts.

In summary, emerging from this cross-disciplinary overview is a clear understanding of happiness to be more than just positive emotions and pleasurable experiences. Happiness can be as much a somatic and a cognitive response as a value judgment and an aspiration. Being a multisensory experience, happiness involves affective-emotional, sensory-mental and cognitive responses to the world we are crafting and living in. Happiness is not just the pleasures of living that our experiencing self relishes, but also our remembering self’s overall sense of life being worthwhile. Happiness is enmeshed in multilayered temporalities as individuals in the present look back at their past lives as part of an active process of generating the prospect of positive experiences in the future. Most importantly, happiness is always co-produced in collaboration with others, whether in direct interaction or mediated by shared beliefs and desires. The cognized level of happiness, which we argue must include the precognitive identification of affective stimuli, their interpretation and subconscious translation into emotions and feelings, and their cognitive evaluation and reflection, is ultimately what makes happiness cultural and anthropology qualified to engage.

Anthropological insights into happiness

On a most fundamental level, anthropological research has demonstrated that the experience of joy and happiness is indeed a human capacity of universal reach, albeit one which differs in origins and causes, as much as in the significance it is attributed by individuals and their societies. Studies in the anthropology of happiness have further shown that material wealth and physical health are not universally cherished as the cornerstones of happiness: People in China, for example, have not become happier despite rising levels of income, as Stafford (2015) notes, but are rather affected by the dissolution of a formerly dense social safety net, rising unemployment, economic inequality and the ever widening gap between riches and material aspirations. Yet exposure to the same forces of social change may have different effects on different subgroups of a society, as Jankowiak (2009) finds in his study on the importance of freedom of choice and the means to obtain desired resources in post-Mao China. Ethnographic accounts like these provide insight into the variability of happiness within a society.
Hence anthropologists have rejected the idea that happiness can be assumed to be the priority for humans everywhere, as Bentham’s utilitarianism of “the greatest happiness for the greatest number” has hypothesized (Stafford 2015: 27; Kosaka 2006: xi). Rather than taking the meaning of happiness and the uniformity of emotional life for granted, anthropologists are opposing a preconceived notion of happiness. Ethnographical accounts that approach notions of the good life from the ground up invariably come forward with the cultural specificity and situatedness of happiness in social settings. The variability finds expressions in the specific terms and conceptions that the groups of people researched are using by themselves. More often than not a “common sense of happiness” turns out to be related to basic needs and social wants, to values and morality, and to social relatedness. For Mathews and Izquierdo (2009), who convened a first group of like-minded anthropologists united in their belief that happiness can indeed be cross-culturally studied on the basis of ethnography, these common elements can be distinguished as the physical, existential and interpersonal dimensions of happiness (see Holdgrün, Lieser, and Bondy in this volume for a detailed usage of the model for their analyses).

Being happy or sad are precognitive affects and as such they are also culturally constructed perceptions of the physical dimension that make it possible for people to participate in social life or to be excluded from it. The physical dimension of happiness construes of corporeal sensualities and the placement of the self in the material world, including health and the absence of pain and disability, the capability to move freely, the pleasures derived from sensual experiences of the body in motion or in relation to other bodies, and its aesthetic appreciation, among others. The existential dimension involves ideas and value systems that give people a sense of the meanings of their life. Social relations in the broadest sense, including family relations, membership in social networks and the exposure to friendship, but also professional and formal encounters in organizations, are at the heart of the interpersonal dimension. Mathews and Izquierdo added to their model an overarching structural dimension of local or national institutions and global forces giving shape and structure to the conception, perception, and experience of well-being in the previously mentioned dimensions. The conceptual differentiation between domains and dimensions is originating from the attempt to compare happiness across very different settings, even though in everyday life these dimensions are often inseparably interwoven with each other.

The joy of having food and its central meaning for social well-being have been noticed among the Andaman islanders (Radcliffe-Brown 1922), rural women in northern Ghana (Bull et al. 2010), as well as Amazonian people like the Urarina (Walker 2015) or the Matsigenka (Izquierdo 2009). It can be inferred that the fewer the resources a society can draw on and the greater the insecurity it is facing in satisfying its members’ most fundamental physical needs, the more important the physical dimension becomes in the collective
understanding of happiness. What these and other studies reveal is that having plenty of food or sharing a meal with others is not simply a source of temporary happiness accruing from digesting food, nourishing the body and pleasing its tastes. Rather, the capacity of having or even providing food is connected to a more lasting sense of happiness derived from being able to contribute to the group, to fulfill one’s role in a way as it is expected from others, or to reduce stress and uncertainty that is interfering with the well-being of others.

Surveys of village life in prewar Japan equally stressed the high significance of having enough food, being healthy and living from the fortunes of the land or the sea for rural happiness (Shintani 2014: 119–123). This relationship is also embedded in the etymology of the vernacular Japanese term of sachi, meaning happiness nowadays, but denoting “plentiful harvest (of the fruits of the land and the sea)” in its earliest usage, the Kojiki, from 712 (Coulmas 2009). Well-being contingent upon interpersonal relations is so woven into the social fabric that semantics of many vernacular expressions correlate with a broader understanding of happiness. Ikigai, which is often grasped as a unique Japanese concept referring to the subjective “feeling that one’s life is worth living” as well as to the object or idea that makes one’s life worth living, effectively combines a sense of purpose in life with one’s social commitments (Mathews 1996; Taniguchi 2013). The more common terms of shiawase, literally “bringing things together,” and saiwai, a desirable mood of good prospects thanks to the gods or others, locate the source of happiness outside the individual and in its relationships with local society, and expand the social order to the spirited world (Shintani 2014: 106). Nagao (2013) also argues that well-being in Japan is related to the concept of tsunagari (link), a common term to address issues of morality and solidarity (Nagao 2013); the same can be said for the morally highly charged terms of kizuna (bond) and fureai (connectedness). Buen vivir, “living well,” is a concept that in many anthropological accounts characterizes Amazonian sociality by a frequent focus on emotional comfort and maintaining harmonious interpersonal relationships, which also may embrace non-human and non-animate persons (Walker 2015). Kapwa, a Tagalog word, roughly translates into “shared being” and virtually places the “self in the other.” This transcending understanding of happiness is at the core of a Filipino sense of an including self whose existence cannot be separated from that of the people around it (De Guia 2006). The Cree term miyupimaatisiun, literally “being alive well,” summarizes the Cree concept of well-being as one’s proper sense of place in a broadly defined physical and social Cree landscape. “Being alive well” is the ability to sustain oneself as a member of a complex kin and social network living on Cree land (Adelson 2000). The Sierra Leonean word for well-being, kendeye, emphasizes social over psychological and physical pleasures. Autonomy or individual mobility, albeit dearly longed for in order to enhance personal life chances, pale beside social relationships and responsibilities that enrich the daily lives of the Kuranko with meaning and joy. Well-being under
conditions of extreme hardship is a matter of balance, learning how to live within limits, to accept life’s contradictions and to negotiate obstacles and uncertainties. Hence the pursuit of happiness is not simply a matter of choice, but of practical moral judgment that requires negotiating and balancing (Jackson 2011). For the Matsigenka, happiness affords keeping a balance with their spiritual and physical environment and communities in daily life (Izquierdo 2009). For the elderly Japanese studied by Kavedzija (2015), well-being requires negotiations or “balancing acts” between contrastive values and orientations to the world, such as sociality and the burden of over-closeness, intimacy and a sense of freedom, and dependence and autonomy, among others.

Such conceptions of happiness differ from a subject-centered state of mind to a degree that in many cultures the pursuit of personal pleasurable activities seems to be inconceivable, as Izquierdo commented for the Matsigenka, or simply scandalous, as noted in a survey report of value change in Japan of the early 1950s. At a time when the then new Japanese Constitution already guaranteed that legislation and government must first of all consider the citizen’s right to life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness, Stoetzel (1955: 32) struggled to find an equivalent of the Western notion of happiness both in the Japanese vocabulary and in their worldview in his survey data. According to cultural psychologist Uchida and her associates, Japan is one of many non-Western societies that understands happiness in terms of interpersonal connectedness. In these societies people are less inclined to attach great value to happiness compared to a widespread preference for a balance of positive and negative affect (Uchida et al. 2013), and are less likely to pursue happiness proactively. The sociologist Kosaka (2006: xiii), who derives such a passive approach from Japanese folklore studies, associates happiness with buji, the absence of misfortune. The greatest happiness therefore is when, in a world full of lurking dangers and troubles, in the end nothing happens. The underlying morality of keeping distance from an active pursuit of happiness has also been noted in many ethnographic accounts indicating that happiness is far from being an unquestionable good in every social context (e.g. Walker and Kavedzija 2015). Among the Ifaluk, happiness is often seen to be a source of concern, because a happy person is likely to be unafraid of others and behave in a troublesome way (Lutz 1988: 145). In India, “fear of society” is valued as a good moral emotion prompting correct behavior from bad characters who have no concern for “the beauty of society” (Derne 2009). As Overing (1989) argued, when people strive for beauty in their social relations with others, aesthetics becomes an expression of moral and political value. What these studies show is that thinking and talking about happiness require some kind of evaluation that usually builds on social mores and values (Lambeke 2008), and that under certain conditions happiness is seen as socially non-desirable (Throop 2015). Being tied into larger anthropological debates on subjectivity, they challenge the generalizing claim of a Western model of subjectivity, “where one knows how one feels, and where the
distinction between good and bad feeling is secure, forming the basis of subjective as well as social well-being” (Ahmed 2010: 6).

Wherever emotions of happiness are seen as potentially disruptive and threatening the beauty of interpersonal relatedness, societies have found ways of delegating their unrestrained experience and display to rituals and festive events. Ritual life provides the “cultural techniques of happiness” needed to direct attention away from the self and toward the other (Freeman 2015). Rituals generating feelings of joy, ecstasy, and exuberance during the ritual itself and then leaving people with a sense of peace afterward are a recurring topic emerging from many ethnographic accounts. Japanese festivals are traditionally seen as moments of explicit happiness though, as in other contexts, they are less about the inner state of the participants than about the social order of the community and its flourishing in the course of time. The folklorist concept of medetai is an adjective associated with auspiciousness and its outcome for individual as well as social happiness. Within the ritual context, medetai refers to the prospect of a positive future development in response to the proper ritual practice, posture and display of objects enriching the happiness of the community. Sake, rice, and food are central objects of auspicious veneration during most traditional Japanese ritual, and clothes, dance and music play complementary roles in the confirmation of the auspicious quality of the festival. To fence off bad luck and to shield the community from harm, serious talk and sad topics are banned from these occasions.

Being aware of the human art of suppressing emotions, concealing or faking them or acting them out as wanted by society, anthropologists are qualified to analyze the adjustments to cultural scripts, social frames and moral discourses individuals go through. Ideally they can even move one step further by exploring the moralities giving way to specific “feeling rules” in response to culturally bound “emotion rules.” Drawing out the cultural morality of precognitive and culturally imbedded emotions and preconceived notions of the good life is arguably not an easy task for the ethnographer, yet shunning the challenge would deprive anthropology of a significant chance to contribute to a fuller understanding of emotional life, the role of emotions in everyday life, and how the pursuit of happiness is connecting us with our pasts and futures.

The collection

This collection provides insight into the happiness and well-being of contemporary Japanese, male and female, young and old, married and unmarried, employed, retired, and still at school. As in most previous collections of ethnographic work on happiness, the accounts we have collected here are equally based on fieldwork, interviews and participant observation originally conducted to address social issues and topics other than happiness per se. Only in the notable case of Mathews longstanding interest in what makes life worth living was the research project from the beginning guided by the
concrete aim to explore people’s sense of happiness. Some of the chapters included in this collection came out of the Japan Anthropology Workshop Series (JAWS)/sociology and anthropology section of the European Association for Japanese Studies conference in Ljubljana, convened by the two of us in 2014. While our initial call for papers on the topic of happiness triggered quite critical responses doubting both the timeliness of the topic and its appropriateness for anthropological inquiry, we finally ended up with more than 50 inspiring presentations over three days – and being responsible for the liveliest exchange of opinions so far in the history of the usually rather dormant JAWS mailing list.

This book therefore bears the fruits of the debates at the conference and a year of interaction with our authors. The result certainly demonstrates the great variability of happiness in contemporary Japan. However, it also highlights the centrality of relatedness, which more than any other dimension of well-being appeared throughout the various studies. Chapters of the book thus are divided into two parts on two facets of social life that arguably are essential for making us human and happy (and sometimes unhappy): familial relations and community settings.

All the chapters in Part I remind us of the dramatic changes of life courses and gender relations that impacted family life in recent decades. As a result, generations differ widely in regard to their understanding of marriage, gender roles in the household, and partnership as the locus of emotional closeness. Dalit Bloch’s study of marital intimacy in the life of couples in their thirties and forties demonstrates how younger Japanese have adapted to an egalitarian conception of partnership and emotionally fulfilling spousal relations that are no longer exclusively aimed at familial reproduction. Closeness in the very practical sense of doing things together fosters their sense of happiness and enables them to stand up against societal criticism and standard role expectations.

The underlying notion that conjugal well-being in Japan is not necessarily tied to loving spousal relationships reoccurs in Yosie Moriki’s chapter on physical intimacy, too. Using survey data and the opinions of men and women participating in focus group discussions, Moriki explores how Japanese at the childrearing stage in their lives are making sense of happiness as it relates to physical intimacy in the family. To her informants, marital sexual intimacy is not intriguing, which is in marked contrast to the sense of satisfaction and closeness gained from co-sleeping with their children. Marital sexlessness and co-sleeping practices therefore are seen as two sides of a coin: In a society where family happiness tends to override that of couples, the physical un-intimacy of couples and physical intimacy of a parent-child dyad are functioning well together.

Family life and marriage remain a life goal for most women (and men) in Japan, even though growing numbers remain single well into middle age. Lynne Nakano’s chapter on unconventional life choices of single women in urban Japan demonstrates how her informants’ sense of happiness is
constrained by societal expectations of marriage and the worries of singlehood. While the women she spoke to appreciate independence, personal growth, and achievements in job and society, they also would like to have a family of their own, albeit not at the price of sacrificing one kind of happiness for another. They do not see happiness as coming either entirely from marriage or from self-development, but rather as some combination. Friends are an important source of emotional support and intimacy for the single women.

Laura Dales’s study of friendship sheds light on the way friendship strengthens and extends the mesh of affective and material support for single and married people alike. For unmarried men and women, friendship offers emotional support and connections that bolster life as a minority in a familialist society, while for married women friendships increase resilience to the sometimes stressful expectations attached to mothering and marital life. Hence Dales argues that friendship offers possibilities for happiness and belonging built on ideals and practices of affinity.

Hiroko Umegaki-Costantini’s study on grandparenting suggests that grandchild care represents a novel approach by which retired elderly men can contribute to their sense of well-being. The grandfathers have lost the main pillar of their identity based on work and work-related relations, and establish a new basis for self-worth within the family while maintaining their sense of masculinity through their grandfathering activities. By selected grandchild care activities and leverage of their material resources, they attempt to cultivate emotional relationships across the extended family, particularly through acts of gift-giving with their married daughters.

The final chapter in Part I looks at the happiness of homosexual Japanese. Erick Laurent’s ethnography on gay communities in towns of rural Japan reveals that his informants in fact do not feel overtly oppressed by heteronormativity and are quite happy living a clandestine life. Particularly the fluidity of sexual identity, neither bound to virility nor masculinity, and the decoupling of intimacy and marriage, enable gay men to find happiness in adjusting publicly to societal expectations as married breadwinner in daytime life while embarking secretly on pleasure cruises at night-time. Social, psychological, and legal reasons, among others, explain why Japanese gay men prefer to stay in the closet, seeing “coming out” not as the ultimate goal as it is propagated in the West.

Social activism, however, may also be a cause for happiness, as the first chapters of Part II on self and community suggest. Patricia Steinhoff observes the ongoing activities of members of the New Left protest generation of the late 1960s. She explains how the “making and doing” of activities within Japan’s invisible civil society produces social movement events that bind the participants into social networks focused around these sites of social interaction. The methodological approach of actor-network theory enables her to understand how interactions and the materials activists produce and use generate elevated levels of happiness and well-being. They do not simply find satisfaction through these activities, which display and reinforce their cultural and
social capital. Rather, it is the satisfaction of basic human needs for competence, relatedness, and autonomy that create personal and social well-being.

Phoebe Holdgrün, in her study of young political activists of the Greens Japan party, equally points out the underlying notions of self-determination theory. Referring to the four-dimensional model from Mathews and Izquierdo (2009), Holdgrün shows how political ideals and subjective values, together with social interactions and institutions, have contributed to her informants’ sense of happiness and meaning of life.

Filling an existential void is also a major motive among volunteers whom Susanne Klien has studied in the disaster-hit region of Tōhoku. The data she obtained from extensive fieldwork conducted since April 2011 suggest that volunteering as a social activity should be best seen as a rite of passage in which individuals rethink and reorient their lives. Pursuing their own interests while helping others provided them less with a sense of happiness and more with a sense of meaning against which they made decisions of lasting consequences for their post-volunteering life. Living and working for the moment emerged as their counter-weapon against economic insecurity and pressures to accommodate to life paths that do not comply with their ideals of a sound work-life balance.

A lingering sense of insecurity is by definition part of the transition between youth and adulthood. Christopher Bondy’s account of happiness at the intersection of minority status and youth is part of a larger study on buraku youth identity and their engagement with their community and broader society. From his field notes and in-depth interviews with junior high school students it becomes clear that the young pupils understand being marked burakumin as negative in Japan. However, within the boundaries of the community, there are places, times, and spaces that provide a “protective cocoon,” allowing the young Japanese to feel a sense of worth in being burakumin. Happiness therefore can be seen as the outcome of the intersection of pride, security, and trust in one’s social relations and oneself.

The last two chapters of this part deal with happiness in the context of post-traditional community relations. These formations allow for more flexible lifestyles and provide short-term association with like-minded people, often in the context of special interest, leisure time and amusement activities. Martin Lieser’s ethnographic exploration of the social world of organized die-hard football fans points to the significance of the interpersonal dimension of happiness. Not unlike the social activists analyzed by Steinhoff in this volume, football supporters derive happiness and pleasure from making and doing that generates cultural and social capital, which in turn provides them with a sense of being. The “rules” of football support allow a considerable degree of deviant behavior and physical exuberance, which would be heavily sanctioned outside the stadium.

Similar to the stadium, the Osaka bar researched by Carmen Săpunaru Tâmaș and Adrian Tamaș attracts a group of people who are unlikely to meet in other realms of their life. While the pursuit of instant pleasure and
happiness is the conjunctive element of all regular patrons at this place, the researchers draw a rather gloomy picture of the midnight community. They link the regular night-time partying to escapism from loneliness, to the search for companionship, creating a “false sense of happiness,” and a mixture of desire and guilt associated with addiction from substance abuse. The conclusion to this book features two contributions. It opens with a chapter by Gordon Mathews on “Happiness in neoliberal Japan.” Reflecting on two decades of research on *ikigai* and the prolific happiness guidebook industry in Japan, Gordon argues that Japan is following the neoliberal path sketched by the development in other highly industrialized nations. While Japan is beginning to accept a broader range of life choices, social and institutional constraints on individuals are lessening and happiness is rendered as an individual responsibility. This invites the question if people in a less affluent, increasingly polarized but more individualistic society are becoming happier than previous generations during more egalitarian and affluent times.

Our own conclusion draws specific findings from the chapters together, tying it to the larger anthropological discourses laid out above. As the collection demonstrates, happiness is experienced in myriad ways. The awareness of the state of happiness, the importance put on that emotion, as well as the active pursuit of happiness varies greatly and depends on the agency of people, and is related to social settings and the institutional situatedness of pleasurable experiences. Japanese society nowadays is grappling with fundamental questions of how to live in order to create a life of purpose, meaning, and value. The anthropological or ethnographically situated research of the case studies in this volume help understand how people experience that in their everyday lives, and what is cultural about the heterogeneous experiences of and the reflections on happiness by Japanese.

References


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Part I

Family, intimacy and friendship
2 More than just nakayoshi
Marital intimacy as a key to personal happiness

Dalit Bloch

Introduction

Among the most visible and highly debated changes in post-bubble Japan is the so-called crisis of the Japanese family (Ochiai 1997; Yamada 1998; White 2011). Since the 1990s, popular discourse, institutional criticism, as well as scholarly academic attention have all been focusing on the family’s alleged abettance of Japan’s current demographic malaise. Discussions of Japan’s shrinking population and rapidly aging society lead to the feeling that social norms concerning marriage and family life ought to be reexamined. We find discourses and trends that challenge gender-role norms (Ishii-Kuntz 2003; North 2009; Roberts 2011; Roberson and Suzuki 2003), age-specific normative behavior (Goodman et al. 2012; Rebick and Takenaka 2006; Yamada 2001), and discourses that focus on the widening generation gaps (Mathews and White 2004), the slowly rising number of cohabitating couples (Raymo et al. 2009), single mothers (Hertog 2011), same-sex partnerships (Maree 2004), postponed marriages or life-long singlehood (Nakano 2011), rising divorce rates (Alexy 2011a, 2011b) and a feeling that, as Yoshizumi puts it, marriage itself is what people question in contemporary Japan (Yoshizumi 2003).

Departing from these transformations and inspired by Kingston’s observation of Japan as a “risk society” (Kingston 2011), I nevertheless focus my interest on couples and partnership, and take a close look at the quest for rewarding marital relations. At a time when the family as a social institution is changing its face, the notion of pâtonâshippu (partnership) has emerged in Japan as egalitarian, emotionally fulfilling spouse relations (Bloch 2010, 2011).

While acknowledging the changes listed above, we should bear in mind that for a very long time the family, and particularly marital relations, were sites of tradition and conservatism. Marriage used to be something one does to attain stability in one’s life, to be considered a full member of society, and often for the sake of the family or the ie (Hendry 1981). This is not to say that in the past husband-wife relations (fûfu kankei) lacked love or other emotional involvement, but until recently they were typically characterized by gender role differentiation and emotional distance, albeit strong familiar commitment, between the spouses, who tended to hold pragmatic, nonromantic views of married life.
Over the generations, marital relationships in Japan have come to embody different meanings in private and popular perception, so that young people in Japan today tend to perceive and manage them differently.

In comparative view Japan is not alone; in other Confucian cultures such as China, Korea and Vietnam the extended family was the foundation on which nation and society rested (Cho and Yada 1994), and marriage was seen as a means of forming relations between families, whose best interests exceeded any private concern of the two individuals involved in the union (Tsuya 1994; Huang 2005). However, recent decades have witnessed global economic changes together with demographic and social transformations in many Asian societies. Traditional notions are being challenged by alternative perceptions, although somewhat differently in each country (see for example Cho and Yada 1994; Tsuya and Bumpass 2004). With dramatic demographic changes, prolonged economic slowdown and sweeping social transformations, Japan makes a good case to observe how these changes reverberate in the realm of personal relationship.

Thus far, emotional closeness between spouses has been largely overlooked by social researchers of Japan, or it has served as a means to gain knowledge about issues such as the couple’s functioning in society or Japan’s demographic concerns. Even contemporary studies associate marriage with a lack of personal freedom, which partly explains Japan’s delayed marriage and declining birthrate (Tokuhiro 2010). In my study of relationships and intimacy the point of departure is that in Japan, as anywhere else, couple relationships may be a platform for potential violence and suppression; nevertheless, the common stereotypical expectation, especially but not only among young people, is that of having a gratifying emotional relationship. Ideally speaking, the partners expect their relationships to be the focus of mutual support, care and understanding, but of course not every couple equally achieves (or wishes to achieve) this ideal.

In the following I explore Japanese spouses’ subjective interpretations concerning their own and other people’s relationships, and their perception of conjugal well-being. I delve into one case study meticulously (see Orpett Long 2005 for similar methodology), and unfold Eri’s story of divorce and remarriage, her parents’ resulting shame, and the ways she and her second husband handled the situation. The story reveals how the partners support each other and foster emotional closeness between them in times of difficulty. Next I discuss the image of *nakayoshi*, friendly companionship, as an ideal that seems to be shared by older people and, somewhat differently, by today’s young people.

This chapter is based on field research during a period of three years, from August 2001 to July 2004 in Tokyo, Yokohama, and their vicinity. The research comprises fieldwork and observation through daily life, in-depth interviews, and analysis of popular culture products. I studied men and women who were by and large in their thirties. They were mostly middle class, established financially, heterosexual, born to Japanese parents and raised in Japan, and had married or were dating a Japanese partner.
Background: Eri’s divorce and second marriage

When I met Takagi Eri and Daisuke, aged 37 and 40, they were married for a year and a half. Both were professionals working in the same company. The couple had no children. Eri’s first marriage had been short and miserable, followed by a painful divorce. In response to my question she described an unrewarding relationship with her first husband, allegedly a nice guy from a good family, who failed to notice her real needs for intimacy, care, and a good time together. He was extremely dependent on her and even abusive when just the two of them were at home, while behind her back he was unfaithful and unreliable. Daisuke, a colleague and a friend, supported her along the way until she finally divorced, and they become close. A year later they wanted to get married, at which time Eri’s father stood in their way.

Since her youth Eri remembered her father saying that divorcees are unworthy of trust and in fact somehow abnormal. He even used the term batsuichi (lit: “strike one”), a degrading label for divorcee.3 Eri said that after her divorce her father did not speak to her for about half a year, regardless of her pain, and did not tell his own brothers about it. When she wanted to marry again, her parents said they were hazukashii (ashamed, embarrassed) because of her divorce and because of her second marriage “too soon.” They also told her that they were hazukashii to invite people who had come to the first wedding, feeling they could not ask them to attend their daughter’s wedding again.4

In the following I will explore both Eri’s parents’ and her second husband’s (Daisuke) response and attitude towards her divorce and wish to remarry, as well as Eri’s own reading and subjective account of it. My purpose is to portray a picture of emotional closeness as described by the partners themselves, and what they perceive as the fundamental element of their well-being as a couple. I will do so by exploring their handling of this personal and familial crisis and discussing: a) the inter-generational differences in perceiving divorce as a source of family shame; b) the way partners sustain mutual positive self-image; c) how the partners emphasize their own welfare vis-à-vis the wider family; d) Eri’s and Daisuke’s self-assertion as a (childless) couple; and e) their quest for a relationship that goes beyond “nakayoshi.”

Deactivating shame through humor

As mentioned above, once he heard about Eri’s divorce, her father did not exchange words with her for half a year. His boycott went beyond father-daughter relations to encompass extended family, grandparents and cousins: As Eri’s father refused to tell them about her divorce, being too ashamed to mention it, he made her unable to contact them unless she lied to them by hiding the truth, or disobeyed her father by telling the truth behind his back. Her mother is hardly mentioned in Eri’s accounts of the time, and it is my perception that it was her father who took the decision as to how the parents
should respond, while her mother did not disobey him. Under these circum-
stances her sisters and friends who did keep in touch with her and supported
her were a real source of strength.

It is crucial to understand the family background against which Eri and
Daisuke had to operate in their construction of their own relations. This demeaning
attitude towards divorced persons as deviants, epitomized by the degrading label
batsuichi used by Eri’s father, made their point of departure an uneasy one.
They had to manage a domineering father who found his daughter’s behavior
shameful, not only due to her divorce but also due to her wish to remarry
within a relatively short time. In explaining it to me, Eri said with a smile:

[The whole thing] was really hard for me, but now, my husband jokes
about it! He says “you know, my wife is a batsuichi” as if it was a news
item! He always says in jest that my parents have three daughters but had
four weddings.

We can see that Eri’s husband approached the whole story with humor. He
took what was to Eri’s father a source of shame and to Eri herself a source of
pain, and turned it into a laughing matter. The “horrible secret” that her
father kept even from his own brothers was lightly referred to as a mere joke,
or an item in today’s news. His behavior can be understood in the context of
the widespread notion in both popular and academic discourse of humor’s
healing capacity, but over and above this, I propose viewing Daisuke’s
humoristic attitude as a possible way out of a seemingly dead end; a way to
evade or better manage social sanction or stigmatization. Although humor is
not the exact antonym of shame, I suggest that in this context it serves as its
counterbalance or antidote. Note that Daisuke does not tease Eri, but rather
laughs at her parents and thereby undermines the general social perception
regarding divorcees.

It fits well into the observation by university professor Inoue Hiroshi,
Japan’s leading laughter expert (quoted in Shimizu 2001: 56–57), that laught-
ner, especially what he calls “laughter of social obligations,” is usually sup-
pressed in the vertical-authoritarian structure of society (here represented by
her parents), but abounds in the horizontal structure where all members are
equal individuals (i.e. between the spouses). Needless to say, I am not imply-
ing that Daisuke read this literature and thus calculated his reaction. Rather
my point is that in his keen wholehearted support of his wife he mobilized
humor as a weapon against whatever hurt her or as a remedy for her pain.
Indeed, Eri herself said: “Even for me now it’s something to joke about.”

Self-esteem and a partner’s support

Using humor to disarm an offensive social mechanism is one way in which
the spouses protect their own welfare. Another way is related to how they see
and appreciate each other as persons and as partners in the deep sense of the
word. To make my point clear I draw again on Eri’s narrative, and compare her parents’ view with that of her husband and her own interpretation concerning the state of affairs that led to the couple’s wedding. My purpose is to show how Eri and Daisuke share a common perspective that portrays the protagonist, Eri, as an active agent who skillfully managed, despite the difficulties and with the help of her then-boyfriend and now-husband Daisuke, to orchestrate her life and transform it for the best. Conversely her parents see her as an unfortunate woman to be pitied, too helpless to control her life, and thus dependent on the good will of others. It is not just the difference between the views that concerns me here, but the way the couple adhere to their own version of reality, in a manner that protects them and reinforces their shared agency vis-à-vis social pressures.

Eri told me that her parents got to know Daisuke and realized he was a good person, so finally they too were pleased. “Yes, they like him a lot,” she said, and stopped. Then, in a different tone, she added:

At the beginning, you know, how shall I say it, well, they told me that he probably married me out of pity (dōshō de kekkon shite irun janai ka tto). They told me things such as “Didn’t he marry you just because you got divorced and were pathetic and he took pity on you (kawaişō)?”

She used this seemingly indifferent laconic manner of speaking to convey what seemed to me intolerably harsh things to say. I looked at her, puzzled, and for a moment I felt the blood draining out of my face. What a thoughtless thing to say to your suffering daughter, it must have been humiliating to be told such things, echoed in my head. Yet I remained riveted to my seat; the woman on the other side of the table made it very clear that she needed no sympathy or pity from me.

There was a short moment of silence, and then I heard myself asking quietly about it. Eri, too, spoke quietly now, her eyes filled with tears: “Oh, [it wasn’t like that] at all. He, he tried hard, over and over again (sugoku sugoku nebatte nebatte) to persuade me (settoku shite kurete).” She sobbed, wiped her face with her hand and continued: “Actually, he was my closest confidant (sōdan aite) all that time.”

It was a difficult moment, and both of us sat in an uneasy silence. I knew I was not really invited in, to approach her like a friend, but I was deeply touched so I nearly forgot. I finally said sympathetically that I was sorry, to which Eri answered sharply, “Oh, no problem, I knew I would make very good research material for you.” That was a slap right in my face. I blinked with surprise and in a moment the delusion of closeness faded away. The openhearted conversation was gone, and what was left was just a researcher and “research material.” I was unable to answer immediately, and Eri looked at me almost aloofly. Thinking about it now, that was the Eri who did not want any pity from anyone – Eri who said she was telling me her story just as if she was talking to her girlfriends at the office, her younger unmarried co-workers who came...
to her for a word of advice. “I definitely don’t dislike (kirai ja nai) talking about myself, you see,” she told me lightly. “I’m so happy now that I can support [the other women], like, ‘look, I’ve got divorced, and remarried. Sure you will find your partner, too’.” That was the tough Eri, the owner of her story, who chose what and how to tell me, who felt no shame and had nothing to hide. Alas, painful memories cause pain. They bring to the surface what a person has already forgotten, because memories take on a life of their own.

At any rate, what seemed to me like a very long moment was in fact surprisingly short, as I heard when I listened to our recorded conversation. It was only a few minutes long, after which our conversation got back on track again and other things came up. They will be addressed shortly, but before that I would like to refer to the last part of Eri’s talk.

Eri said that her parents thought Daisuke married their daughter because he took pity on her, since she was a divorced woman and kawaisō (pitiable, miserable, pathetic). This image of Eri as pathetic and hopeless, becoming the wife of a man who pities her, is far removed from the image that Eri herself conveys. See how she confronted me, or how she presented herself as a modern and assertive woman, with a luxurious lifestyle and prestigious career, driving her Jaguar on the streets of Tokyo. However, her parents failed to notice the person she had turned into and thought someone would marry her out of sympathy rather than due to her attractiveness. By the same token they also overlooked the long, close friendship she had with Daisuke which had lasted many years, and his long-lasting support for her, as well as his genuine efforts to win her heart.

In describing this Eri used the verb nebaru, meaning “stick to the effort, without giving up,” to emphasize her husband’s endeavors to woo her and persuade her over and over without giving up on her. Thus, I think that her parents’ image of her as a miserable woman one marries out of pity is far from not only Eri’s own image, but also from her husband’s appreciation of her. It appears from his behavior that to him she was certainly attractive, a woman who was worth waiting for, even for a very long time. Hence I find a considerable gap between those perspectives, regarding the protagonists and the circumstances of their marriage. While talking about her husband’s efforts, which were altogether ignored by her parents, Eri became emotional and tearful. What her parents had failed to see was in fact most valuable for their daughter’s happiness.

In this part we saw that Eri’s interpretation of the events differed from that of her parents because she was aware of her own agency and appeal, as well as the rewarding relationship with her current husband. My impression is that, seeing herself in this light, she hated to be pitied and she could not stand it when her parents patronized her and belittled her strength. It might be that when I saw her tears and responded with sympathy, she thought I was mistaking her tears for weakness and that I, too, was pitying her, and that is why she reacted the way she did. However, Daisuke, unlike her parents, strongly endorsed her version of the events and her image as the woman he wanted to
marry. He even told me that if he had not met her, he would have preferred to stay single all his life. Their common understanding of the episodes strengthened their closeness as two people who shared something peculiar and exclusive to them, from which they could draw comfort and manage without the understanding of others.

A married couple’s well-being vis-à-vis the family’s best interest

We have seen here two different attitudes on divorce, but the generation gap itself is not our main issue. Rather, I would like to explore how the interpretation employed by the younger generation serves them in establishing themselves as a married couple, and how it helps them to create a protected space for themselves.

As explained earlier, approaches concerning divorce, marriage, remarriage and the like are firmly connected to recent transformations evident in present-day Japan. Among these changes are the dramatic rise in the proportion of women who never marry and the rising mean age of first marriage: 31.1 for men and 29.4 for women (NIPSSR 2015). It is against this background that Eri’s delayed marriage (her first marriage took place when she was 31; she then divorced and married Daisuke) should be understood. Eri herself said she wanted to marry but had not found her “Mr. Right,” while her parents put heavy pressure on her to marry at the “proper age”:

When I was twenty-four or twenty-five I wanted to get married very badly. And my parents too, you know. Kyushu is, well, if you’ve passed twenty-five and you’re still single they’ll be terribly urusai (persistent, annoying, nagging) about it in Kyushu, in the countryside. So they told me over and over things like, “we’re sending you some money so you should go (ikinasai) and see a marriage counselor!”

Being a 25-year-old unmarried woman in Tokyo is not unusual, but the norms concerning marriage age for women, especially those of rural origin, are different as we can see from Eri’s parents’ words (see also Retherford et al. 2001). Note how they communicated with their daughter: In telling her to go and see a marriage counselor they used ikinasai – the polite but imperative form of the verb iku which means “to go.” The Japanese language enables the use of various expressions ranging from request through offer or suggestion to order and demand. We can learn a lot from Eri’s parents’ use of the word ikinasai, which, although not uncommon in parent-child communication, is still by far the strongest, most hierarchical, and somewhat unpleasant articulation.

The word hazukashii (ashamed, embarrassed) is not mentioned here, but one can sense it quite clearly since an unmarried woman over the normative marriage age, regardless of the statistics cited above, implies nonstandard behavior. Eri’s parents exercised pressure to goad their daughter since they believed this was the right thing to do, both for the family and for Eri herself.
Following this pressure Eri participated in matchmaking activities such as gōkon parties and even the traditional omiai arranged marriage meetings. On this she said: “I met a doctor once, and a lawyer one time, but I just didn’t like them at all, so I quit it altogether and that’s it.”

We may say that in both cases mentioned, when Eri’s parents urged her to marry at the normative age and when, after her divorce, her father felt hazukashii and refused to talk to her, the parents placed the family’s assumed best interests before those of their daughter. It is quite comparable to the widespread perception in previous generations when fujin kankei (husband-wife relations) were seen as an extension of the family household (ie), which therefore monitored mate selection and marital life. As Hendry clearly illustrates, it was not very long ago that marriage-related behavior in rural Japan placed greater emphasis on the best interests of the household, rather than on individual gratification, and “the demands of the family were considered more important than any personal love and affection” (Hendry 1981: 18; Ochiai 2005; and see also Vogel 1968). So in his day-to-day relations with his peers in the social environment of Japan’s inaka (countryside) Eri’s father felt that, although his daughter was the one who got divorced, he himself had lost face and that the family as a whole was affected by this. Eri’s second marriage, too, seemed to him improper, taking place so shortly after the divorce. In approving Eri and Daisuke’s betrothal, he asked them to have a small wedding, with no guests from their workplace, to spare him the feeling of hazukashii in meeting the same guests for the second time. Although Eri and Daisuke are a “workplace marriage” (shanai kekkon), a couple who met at work and who have many friends from their shared workplace, they acceded to his demand as a face-saving measure meaningful to him. At the same time, they got married when they wished, and withstood the pressures to give up or wait.

Eri’s father, motivated by his responsibility to the family’s façade, responded with shame and resulting sanctions whenever his daughter was involved in any “transgression” (delaying marriage, getting divorced, wanting to remarry too soon). Eri’s husband, on the other hand, was motivated by his responsibility towards his partner and by his sincere desire to marry her. He stresses he would rather have remained single than marry a woman that he did not really want to be with, and constantly makes fun of the idea that his wife is a batsuchi, since he knows she was protecting herself from misery and would be much happier like that. For him marital happiness is essential, and a relationship where both partners can prosper is one thing he will not forego. We see that whereas family considerations are still important, emerging values of conjugal happiness and welfare are highly regarded.

Yet, Daisuke supports Eri without challenging her parents’ authority, and this should be read against the tension between new developments and enduring notions regarding Japanese family; although the traditional form of the ie no longer exists, there still seems to be special sensitivity in Japan to the extended family and the household (Ronald and Alexy 2011), and marriages still tend to be viewed as a family matter, not merely the decision of two
individuals. It is my impression, reinforced by other interviews as well, that young couples make an effort to keep in touch with their parents and attempt to prevent ruptures, which, given the importance attached to the family, I reckon to be one healing aspect of spousal relationships.

**Marital intimacy: For its own right**

An additional facet concerning Eri and Daisuke’s relationship relates to their future plans. Eri said to me that currently they are considering the possibility of having a baby. Thirty-seven-year-old Eri says: “We’re thinking maybe we’ll have a baby, or *sono mama demo, futari dake demo, it’n janai kana tio*” (perhaps staying like this, just the two of us would be perfect for us). Without being apologetic or trying to explain herself, Eri said it clear and loud: “We’re thinking about it, considering the possibility of being parents” (emphasis added). It may well be that they decide to remain childless, and they are not alone, as we can learn from the rising demographic trend in Japan today (Cabinet Office, Government of Japan 2014).

I argue that this idea, that a couple sustains itself for its own right, free from the need to justify itself by being productive or reproductive, which once was a social obligation of the spouses towards their family and society, is a new way to understand conjugal relationships. Their well-being is articulated not in terms of the social expectations from them to support Japan’s shrinking population, nor in terms of their social roles as a mother and a father, but rather in terms of free choice and agency. Their happiness lies not in realizing the ideal of parenthood but in leading a rewarding partnership. Being spouses and partners, sharing exclusive and fulfilling togetherness, are the things that seem to count most for them. Their mutual relationship may serve as an extension of, or a possible alternative to, other familial ties, such as with children, parents, and extended family; and while they do not cut themselves from these ties, they may nevertheless resist them under certain circumstances, as we saw in previous pages. In asserting themselves as a couple, they offer an alternative reading to the persisting social norms regarding marriage and parenthood ideals. This may differ from the viewpoint of their parents and older generations, but are shared by Eri and Daisuke, and other people from their reference group.

**Nakayoshi na fūfu is not always enough**

During my talk with Eri, I asked her if there was something she would like to learn from her parents, in family matters, couple relations and the like, and she immediately said, “Sure there is.” “What sort of things?” I asked. It seemed that it was obvious to her, but when I asked her to be more precise she did not have an easy answer. Her mother was a housewife and she herself a working woman wanting to pursue her career, she said, so it was not work-related matters. “And my father was a typical Japanese salaryman,” she continued, and now her words came pouring out:
My father was *zutto shigoto bakkari de* [always busy with work], and always used to return home very late [at night]. However, since he retired he has become a man of many hobbies. He started to engage in ballroom dancing, the Mahjong game, golf, and trips overseas. So now he enjoys all those things. I am starting to cry again but, well, I think it was when I came back on my own to my parents’ home in the countryside one time. And, just as I got there, both of them [my parents] just started to dance together. They pressed on the button of a tape-recorder, you know, and both of them twirled in circles around the *tatami* mat room, and I saw them like this, dancing around like that, and thought to myself, oh, how I wish I could also be like that one day! [Said directly to me:] I am starting to cry again but these are tears of happiness so please don’t be upset about it. [She continues to talk:] I thought how much I would love to be like that, a couple that even in old age lives together as such *nakayoshi na fūfu*! (friendship spouseship). And you know, when my father was younger he often used violence […] he was a very frightening father […] it was like, he did use to slap us here and there, you know […] It’s like, you know, not violence but, I think it’s maybe what was quite common for Japanese fathers who are now in their seventies or eighties. However, his image was that of a scary father so we were afraid, we never disobeyed him. That’s how it was. Anyway, after he retired, my mother too began to be able to say what she wanted to, and they came to have *ii taitō no kankei* (a nice relationships on an even ground), and I think that’s truly an ideal.

Eri glorified her parents’ *nakayoshi*; her father’s violence and her mother’s submissiveness are forgiven and forgotten over the years, and a vivid picture of the old couple dancing in their Japanese-style living room to the sweet music of ballroom dancing pouring out from a simple tape-recorder erased all pains. Their daughter, who saw this unexpectedly, was moved to tears and even some years later when she shared the story with me she cried again. I nodded but wondered why. Could the reason be that, as she and many other people have said, it was because she never saw her parents, during all the years they lived together, in any intimate (not sexual, but close) moment? All she could remember when I asked her about it was how her father used to come home late from work and pour out all his problems in a grumbling tone over a bottle of beer, to her mother who nodded her head quietly and did not say a word. It might be that against the background of her father’s past violence, her parents’ unexpected physical closeness and their mutual pleasure as they danced was very different from how she used to imagine them. As they got older her father grew softer and her mother became more assertive and they finally managed to relate to each other on a more equal footing. The emotional exchange between them also changed, in a way that bridged some of the gap not only between them but also between them and their daughter, who watched them and was moved to tears.
Let me now juxtapose this image with another one, more recent, which verbally and visually portrays what Eri treasures in her current relationship. I asked Eri if she could share with me a moment when she told herself how happy she was that she had married her partner. “We-ell,” she said reluctantly, “what shall I say, it’s something that I feel everyday.” She spoke, and then stopped, as if telling me that I had not phrased my question correctly and she was dismissing it. However, when I replied in an interested tone, she continued as follows:

Yeah, you know. How shall I put it? It’s like, *daradara shitetu toki toka* (when we just linger), when we just linger on the sofa, *nandaro* (how shall I say). Yeah, it’s, when we just do nothing, *kuitara na* (idly), *nama kemono nan da kedo* (lazily), and then all of a sudden, as if it’s a birthday or something, he would produce flowers and that. [She stopped and thought for a moment, and then said decisively:] No, it’s not that! Anyway, it’s that *sugoku daijii ni sarete iru natte* (I think he really cares for me) day by day. Therefore, it’s not the flowers or anything like that, I guess. Yeah, it’s that day by day he just takes such good care of me, that’s what I think. He regards my opinion highly. He makes an effort to grant my wishes to anticipate whatever I want to do. He doesn’t do any cleaning or cooking or laundry and such, but other than that, he tries his best day by day to satisfy whatever I’d like to do, from the biggest to the smallest and most trivial thing. And I really appreciate it.

Perhaps there was something unfair in my question, as intimacy is indeed not meant to be explained. By asking this I hoped she would agree to share with me a particular visual memory of a time and place that was only theirs, to which I do not belong and by definition would never be able to fully comprehend; to share with me a certain sensation, although both of us know that it evaporates when uttered and put into words. Being a very private person myself, I deeply empathized with Eri’s initial resistance and her subsequent hesitation. However, she started with the cliché of flowers and soon dismissed it. Then she spoke about her husband’s efforts to make her happy and satisfied, and her feelings that she is the one who is being cared for and looked after (*daijii ni sarete iru* is a passive form), being pampered, respected, and treated well day by day, “from the biggest to the smallest and most trivial thing,” as she put it. Eri emphasized the couple’s togetherness as the thing itself – regardless of what they do or do not do at that time (note the repeating idioms such as: just linger together, just linger on the sofa, just do nothing, idly, lazily).

Indeed, one may say that Eri and Daisuke are not a “typical” couple, although they are not singular in their lifestyle either. They do not have children, both work full-time in a large communications company, they are well paid and live in their newly purchased apartment on the 26th floor in downtown Tokyo. Now, imagine this scene of the two of them relaxing together on the sofa in their neatly arranged apartment, doing nothing in
particular or watching television together lazily at the end of a work day, and juxtapose this image with that of the two elderly people dancing in their living room. It is apparent that the two “snapshots” convey somewhat similar feelings, but they are also very different, as there is, after all, a difference between nakayoshi and daiji ni suru (take good care of someone), and “my mother began to be able to say what she wants” and “he regards my opinion highly,” and between exercising power, and offering active support.

It is somewhat insensitive to compare the couples in this way and I am sure the above description does not cover all partners; nevertheless, looking at the two couples, Eri and Daisuke, and Eri’s mother and father, does accentuate the differences between them. On the one hand, in both scenes, the married couple is absorbed in its own togetherness and does not need the presence of other people to affirm it. On the other hand, the two couples differ in their age, occupation, lifestyle and, above all, in their apparently different interpretation of the notion of couple intimacy and joy. For the elder couple, it may sweeten the autumn of their life like a consolation prize, if they survive the trend of divorcing in older age and manage to adjust to the changes. Still, even without it, life can continue to be lived as always, since the many years of violence, poor communication, and emotional distance (described colorfully by Iwao 1993; Lebra 1984) cannot be erased. For the younger couple, communication is one of the things without which marriage loses meaning. I am aware that this description is an uneasy fit for people who have a more pragmatic or traditional view of marriage, but it should be noted that Eri divorced her first husband for reasons like this and Daisuke declared he could have lived his life unmarried if he had not met Eri (see also Alexy 2011a, 2011b). Yet despite the differences, there is no abrupt gap between the two generations but rather a winding road. Eri herself said she saw her parents’ nakayoshi as an ideal, and she was not the only one who said so.

Concluding remarks

This chapter is based on in-depth interviews with two of the 40 people I interviewed during my study on couple intimacy and relationships in Japan. We have observed a single, distinct sequence of events of one couple, from Eri’s first marriage to her current relations with Daisuke. While this couple (or any single couple) is not representative of others, careful reading of their narrative unfolds their perception of their conjugal well-being. It casts light on the ideas, hopes and main concerns shared by many Japanese people in their thirties and forties.

Eri’s relationship with her supportive and affectionate husband is juxtaposed with her parents’ relationship, while Eri’s first marital relationship is only briefly referred to, due to space limitations. From the intersection of these experiences we obtained a more refined perspective on what Eri lacked in her earlier relationship and what she treasures in her current one. As the crisis in Eri’s first marriage got worse, disparity between generations and
regions (Eri and Daisuke in the metropolis vis-à-vis their families in the more traditional region of Kyushu) became all the more evident. We saw that when she finally divorced her aloof husband, it was a source of family shame for Eri’s parents, but Eri and her new spouse in their self-assertion as a couple offered an alternative reading for the events and disarmed the emotional norm of “shame” with humor. I deliberately used “shame” (hazukashii) as my example here because, being such a vital, omnipresent concept in Japanese society, it highlights the emotional capacity of the couple to manipulate and resist old suppressive notions (Hirata 1997). By preserving their narrative and self-image as active agents who transformed their lives for the better, they resist demeaning norms and stigmatization. With the mutual support of each other together with friends from their milieu, they need no other social affirmation to justify themselves, not even the presence of children so as to make them a “normative family.”

The chapter also presented terminology and imagery that were appreciated, although not in the same way, by both the younger couple and their parents. One such example was the ideal of friendly husband-wife relations (nakayoshi na fufu), and the continuing emphasis on the wider family is another example. Thus, the tension between changing and continuing conditions and discourses is the background against which the couple evolves, conducts and performs. As we have seen, for Eri and Daisuke closeness fosters well-being of the spouses, and ideally speaking, is actively cultivated by both partners who make a conscious effort to satisfy and support each other. These observations concur with Uchida’s idea that personal happiness is connected to interdependence and collectively achieved well-being, and is embedded in the social context (Uchida 2014). However, it seems that the context of reference itself has shifted and the meaning of marriage itself has changed in popular perception, from something that one must do to attain social stability or enter “the adult social order” (Mathews and White 2004), to an act based on personal choice and private preferences. In reference to Yoshizumi’s comment (Yoshizumi 2003) that marriage itself is being questioned in Japan, I would reply that it certainly depends what sort of marital relation is at stake. Couple relations in themselves came to be a “space” where intimacy, support, and coherence are sought. These ongoing processes involve new understandings of what life together as a couple may mean and bring about new practices as an extension, and at the same time a workable alternative to the husband-wife relations of previous generations. Marital relations came to be an aspect of one’s individuality, and a site of personal and conjugal well-being and gratification in sometimes uneasy reality.

Acknowledgements

I am indebted to the Japan Foundation whose generous scholarship enabled my prolonged fieldwork. I also thank Ben-Gurion University and Tel-Aviv
University for their financial support. The research on which my chapter is based benefited from the helpful advice of Niza Yanay, David H. Slater and Iwao Sumiko. I thank deeply all the people who let me study their lives.

Notes

1 I use the word happiness, as translation for *shiawase* in Japanese, which my interviewees used in their narratives, usually with reference to specific examples or situations. I also use the term well-being when addressing a more general satisfactory condition, which includes a feeling of happiness, as well as a stable situation of health and welfare (*American Heritage Dictionary* 2011).

2 Indeed, in 1970s urban Japan, the rise of feminist awareness together with the images of romantic love and ideals such as “friends-couple” (*tomodachi fisfu*) flourished and emphasized friendship and equality in marriage (Ochiai 1997; Sakamoto 1999). However, these ideals remained mostly unrealized during that time since most couples led separate lives in two parallel worlds in terms of space, role, and gender: the man as breadwinner and the woman as housekeeper (*sararinman* and *sengyo shufu*, respectively).

3 A colloquial word that refers to someone who has been divorced and removed from the family register (*koseki*). He or she is indicated by an *x* (*batsu*) striking out their name. In Japan the symbol *x* is used to show something that cannot be done or is no good, as to mark an incorrect answer in school. Thus, *batsuichi* gained the meaning of “a one-time failure” or “one marriage gone bad so there is a mark against you because maybe there is something you did to cause the divorce or have some kind of personal flaw” (Noll 2004: 103). Nowadays, when family registers are administrated by computer, the spouse is no longer struck out with an *x*, but is indicated by “divorced” or “removed.” However, the term *batsuichi* has not yet disappeared from the Japanese language.

4 Recent trends in Japan point to the rising number of divorces and remarriages, as well as a change in the attitude towards divorced people and their families. However, the system of *koseki* (family registration) has not yet lost its power and still influences daily family life in Japan, as we can see not only from the experience of divorced people but also from single mothers who have to face stigmatization and pressures even from their own parents, and have to take crucial decisions concerning the registration of their “fatherless” children (see Hertog 2011).

5 For example, Shimizu asserts that humor can relieve stress, is an effective cure for stress-related disorders, helps cope with fear and depression, and more (Shimizu 2001).

6 Similarly, when she told me about her female co-workers who look at her in envy and admiration as she advises them, I felt she was quite comfortable to be envied like that and display her happiness like a winner.

7 We must bear in mind that we have not heard the voice of the older couple, whose view is conveyed only by their daughter.

8 During my research I also met people who told me there was nothing at all they wished to learn (*minaraitai*) from their parents, as far as marital relations are concerned. At the same time, others stressed various aspects of “being on good terms” using the expression of *nakayoshi* to describe that ideal.

References


3 Physical intimacy and happiness in Japan
Sexless marriages and parent-child co-sleeping

Yoshie Moriki

Introduction

This chapter discusses physical happiness in the Japanese family, focusing on people who are at the childrearing stage in their life course. Utilizing results of surveys and opinions of men and women participating in focus group discussions, this study critically explores how Japanese are making sense of happiness as it relates to physical intimacy. In particular, issues concerning sexual intercourse among married couples are examined to explain physical happiness in Japanese society. In Japan, low frequencies of marital intercourse, or “sexless marriages,” have become a social phenomenon in recent years (Moriki et al. 2014). The term “sexless” was first coined by a Japanese psychiatrist who encountered numerous married couples who were leading peaceful married lives but not actively engaging in sexual intercourse with the partner. These “patients” did not see the situation as a problem (except for cases where a child was desired), placing the psychiatrist in a difficult position for medically treating them (Abe 1994). The term was formally defined by the Japan Society of Sexual Science in 1994 as: “[I]f, despite the absence of unusual circumstance, there has been no consensual intercourse or other sexual contact between them for a month or longer and it is expected that such a state will further persist over a longer period of time” (Abe 2004: 18). Since then, the issue has attracted great public attention within and outside Japan. One reason for the domestic interest in the issue is perhaps that Japanese people started to realize that they do not know much about their own sexuality (Futamatsu et al. 2004). Attention from abroad could be of surprise, as found in a Canadian newspaper article that reported the proportion of sexless Japanese with the headings “Marriage without bliss” and “No sex, please: We’re Japanese” (The Globe and Mail 2008). Whatever the reasons might be, people inside and outside Japan are trying to make sense of sexless marriages in Japanese society.

Given the wide prevalence of sexless marriages and large public interest, an important question now is to investigate the relationship between sexlessness among married Japanese and their physical happiness. Instead of trying to give a quantitative yes-or-no answer to this question, this chapter provides a
A qualitative framework to conceptualize the happiness of married Japanese in terms of physical un-intimacy between couples and in contrast with physical intimacy between parents and children. It is well reported that Japanese society is child-centered, and children and their needs matter most in family life, particularly when the children are young (Goldstein-Gidoni 2012; Lebra 1984; Small 1998; White 1987). Given such a family system, it is the aim of this chapter to show how the physical un-intimacy, on the one hand, and intimacy on the other hand are inter-connected for Japanese people.

In the following sections, issues related to sexless marriages are first examined with regard to frequency, reasons, and extra-marital sexual activities. The second section then discusses parent-child co-sleeping as an example of physical intimacy typically observed in Japan. As shown later with focus group discussion data, Japanese couples clearly realize that co-sleeping with children is their choice and feel that being able to co-sleep is a precious opportunity in life as parents. In the concluding section, it is explained that physical un-intimacy of couples and physical intimacy of a parent-child dyad are not competing factors of physical happiness in Japan. Rather, these issues are functioning well together in a society where family happiness tends to override that of couples.

Qualitative text data included in this chapter come from two sets of focus group sessions that the author organized in 2009 and 2013 in Tokyo. The first sets (2009) were organized with 48 married men and women (24 of each) residing in the Tokyo metropolitan area. A primary aim of these sessions was to understand the Japanese concept of marriage and the role of marital intercourse in married life. Although it was not our intention to specifically recruit “sexless” people, most participants turned out to be involved in a sexless or near-sexless marriage. The second sets (2013) were organized for the purpose of identifying the meaning of mothering in Japanese society. A total of 35 people (12 men and 23 women) residing in central Tokyo participated. As a part of mothering and parenting practices, the issue of parent-child co-sleeping was widely covered in these sessions. All discussions were recorded and transcribed (discussions were held in Japanese only and translated into English by the author).

**Sexless marriages and physical un-intimacy among Japanese couples**

Low frequencies of sexual intercourse within marriages have been a well-noted social phenomenon in Japan. For example Kitamura, who conducted a series of national surveys on sexuality issues (Danjo no seikatsu to ishiki ni kansuru chôsa, Survey on Life and Attitudes of Men and Women), reported that the sexless trend has intensified, with the latest proportion being 45 percent of married people (Japan Family Planning Association 2015). Another study that used different representative national survey data (Shigoto to kazoku ni kansuru zenkoku chôsa, National Survey on Work and Family) also showed that the sexless percentages were 45 percent in 2007 and 46 percent in 2010 (Moriki 2012). As a note, both studies used the definition of “sexless” as...
defined by the Japan Society of Sexual Science (not having sexual intercourse for more than one month). Thus, based on these surveys, it seems sound to say that about half of married people in Japan are in a sexually inactive marriage. In fact, according to the National Survey on Work and Family, nearly one-fourth of married respondents are literally sexless, having had no sexual intercourse with a spouse over the past year (Moriki et al. 2014). As a comparison, although it is not easy simply to compare figures due to differences in survey specifications, one American study (the National Survey of Families and Households 1988) suggests that the average frequency of intercourse during the previous month of the survey was 6.6 and 7.0 times for males and females, respectively (Rao and Demaris 1995), which is about twice as high as figures found in comparable Japanese data (Moriki et al. 2014).

Besides such frequencies, what is more relevant are the reasons for being sexless and people’s views on their marital sexual life. One of the few scientifically reliable surveys that tapped into these aspects of sexless marriages revealed that Japanese people have passive attitudes towards marital sexual life (Japan Family Planning Association 2015). According to this survey, major reasons among married people for not being able to be more positive about having sex were: a) tiredness from work (21 percent for males and 18 percent for females); b) no particular reason after a birth (16 percent for males and 17 percent for females); c) (having sex is) too tiring (mendokusai) (10 percent for males and 24 percent for females); and d) feeling like an immediate family member towards the spouse (10 percent for males and 5 percent for females). What these results indicate is that marital sexual intercourse does not count very highly in the daily lives of Japanese and people are not too excited about marital sexual activities.

In addition, a recent web-based survey (Nippon no sekkusu, Japan Sex Survey), conducted in 2013 by a Japanese condom company, reveals the lax attitudes of Japanese people towards regular sexual activities. According to the Japan Sex Survey, the average frequency of sexual intercourse among people who are married or with a sexual partner was 2.1 times per month. Of the 11,368 respondents (married or with a specific dating partner), 35 percent feel that the frequency is usual, while 26 percent feel that it is low and 33 percent very low. Therefore, a majority of respondents seem to acknowledge that their sexual life is not very active. However, of such people who feel the frequency is low or very low (6,703 cases), almost half (44 percent) reported that they do not want more sex. The major reasons why are that “sex and/or romantic relations are too tiring (mendokusai)” (44 percent), “[sex is] no longer needed because of age” (39 percent), “[there is] no sexual desire” (34 percent), and they “are too tired from work and/or housework” (23 percent). On the other hand, for those who indicated that the frequency is low or too low and who want more sex (3,735 cases), the major reasons why are that “the partner is not interested in sex” (40 percent), “[they are] too tired from work and/or housework” (24 percent), there is “no cue to start sex” (23 percent), there is “no time from work and/or housework” (20 percent), “children
and family members are there” (22 percent), and there is a feeling of “boredom with the partner” (16 percent) (Sagami Rubber Industries 2013).

One point that needs to be carefully evaluated is that the “sexless” phenomenon described here is a lack of sexual activity with the spouse (or partner). That is, sexless marriages do not necessarily imply that there is no sex at all in the life of Japanese. For that, the Japan Sex Survey also provides a good source of information to speculate on extra-marital activities. The survey reported that of those people who are married or with a specific dating partner, 21 percent have one or more alternative sexual partners (Sagami Rubber Industries 2013). On extra-marital relations, Araki (2014) also found in her data that 11 percent of males and 5 percent of females in their forties to seventies in 2000 and 32 and 14 percent, respectively, of them in 2012 were in “close relationships” with someone who was not the spouse (close relationships included not only sexual relations but also intimate romantic relations without physical involvement). It is not easy to estimate the accurate level of extra-marital relations, but according to currently available data, it should be acknowledged that the incidences of such relations might not be rare.

The suggested prevalence of extra-marital relations is, in fact, not surprising in light of contextual data obtained from focus group discussions that the author organized in 2009. The issue related to extra-marital sexual activities often emerged, particularly in male groups. This topic was not originally intended to be covered in the discussions, for privacy concerns, but the participants were quite open about the topic, and episodes related to extra-marital affairs were abundant. Such episodes included going out to a commercial sex establishment with business clients as a part of business entertainment or enjoying such services with close male friends as part of an outing at night; becoming intimate with an old classmate after a school reunion; and keeping a regular but casual girlfriend (meaning that the relationship is intended to stay informal). Therefore, one can speculate that physical intimacy is available outside marriage, whether it be commercially based services or a romantic relationship with someone in particular. In this respect, a statistic provided by the aforementioned Japan Sex Survey is suggestive. Those who are married and have an alternative sexual partner had sexual intercourse with the spouse only 1.7 times on average per month, while they had intercourse with the alternative partner 2.4 times per month (Sagami Rubber Industries 2013), implying that marriage is not always the place where regular sexual intercourse is found.

Thus, as a hypothesis, it could be that physical satisfaction is something that is not expected to be pursued within the framework of a marriage, where a couple become parents and are expected to behave as such. Lebra (1984) calls the Japanese family structure “filio-centric,” where children are the highest priority. She explains that in this cultural conditioning of a family, the major role of the husband is reduced to father, a supplier of living expenses and the seed of a baby, whereas the mother’s self-identity is essentially reduced to being the caregiver to the child.
The sense of filiocentricity was observed during the focus group discussions as well. Rather than the presence or absence of sexual intercourse (or quality of it) in a marriage, a point that emerged from the discussions was whether the marital relationship was working out in the framework of a family. Participants across different sessions, regardless of age, gender, and educational background, emphasized that they had become a family, so that not having frequent sexual intercourse was a natural consequence. Thus, as the quotes below show, an absence of physical intimacy with a spouse did not trouble them; it was, instead, taken as more of a positive development in their marital life:

Well, I also do not think there is a problem right now as we function well as a family. But it is rather awkward to answer this type of question [about the frequency of sexual intercourse] since we do not have much of it.

(35-year-old man with a one-year-old child)

After we started to live together, sex suddenly disappeared from our daily life, and it seems that neither of us is particularly unhappy about it. Our emotional distance actually shrank. Our closeness as a couple increased. The frequency of sex and that [emotional closeness] are not going in the same direction. I think we have become a family in a very good way.

(32-year-old woman without a child)

For the family to be functioning properly, marital sexual intercourse tends to weigh more as a reproductive activity than as a means of communication as a couple. This point was expressed in the opinions of the focus group participants in such ways as “Japanese are like that [about sexless marriages]” and “sexual communication is not necessary once you get to know each other well.” Some of them also mentioned that they do other everyday activities together so that having sexual activities with the spouse is not important as a couple. Similarly, a group of university-educated women with child(ren) agreed that frequent sexual intercourse with the spouse is not needed, and having sex is often mendokusai (too tiring). Overall, what they cared about was a feeling of “connectedness,” a sense of unspoken harmony in the family. One man explained that although he and his wife have sex only once in one or two months, he is comfortable with their relationship because they share ishin denshin (tacit understanding).

Therefore, it is suggested that sexless marriages are not something unique or abnormal for the Japanese. In this context, an absence of marital sexual intercourse is something that should be understood as part of the expected and generally accepted family life course. In the child-centered family, the physical un-intimacy of couples is not something that drastically impacts the well-being of the couple involved, since the couple’s attention is often on the maintenance of the family, not the maintenance of romantic relations involving physical intimacy between couples.
Parent-child co-sleeping: Temporal happiness as parents

In contrast to the physical un-intimacy between couples, physical contact with children is much more openly emphasized in Japanese society. Gregory (2011) argues that the Japanese (yet English-sounding) word “skinship” (literally meaning physical contact, especially between a mother and her child, and also referring to bonding through physical contact) is a good conceptual tool to ethnographically analyze kinship. He uses the concept of skinship to examine kinship among the Halbi speakers in east-central India. In Japan, skinship is manifested by such common practices as parent-child co-bathing and co-sleeping, which is supposed to strengthen the emotional bonds between parents and children (Lebra 1984; Shand 1985). Moreover, on the co-sleeping practice, Latz, Wolf and Lozoff (1999) compared sleep practices between Japan and the United States, and pointed out that differences in the expected degree of parent-child physical contact are a reflection of different marriage systems; even with a decline in matched marriages, a marriage remains socially a union of two families in Japan, whilst the romantic involvement of parents is a primary condition of a marriage in the United States.

Parent-child co-sleeping is widely observed and valued in Japan. The strong preference of Japanese parents for co-sleeping has been noted in academic literature as a culturally defined counter-example to solo sleeping in the West, particularly in the United States, where co-sleeping is usually considered out of the parenting norm (e.g. Ball et al. 1999; Lozoff et al. 1984; Rath and Okum 1995). The empirical research, however, on Japanese co-sleeping remains little. An often-mentioned study is by Caudill and Plath (1986), in which they reported that a majority (79 percent) of children, aged one to five, slept together with a parent or parents, and about 10 percent did so with extended kin, based on data collected in three cities in Japan (Tokyo, Kyoto, and Matsumoto). Only 2 percent of children of that age group slept alone. Even a significant proportion (68 percent) of older children aged six to ten co-slept with a parent or parents. They also pointed out that co-sleeping was chosen even when an extra bedroom was available in the house. Another study by Wolf et al. (1995) examined parental practices regarding children’s sleep in Japan, Italy, and the United States. They confirmed that of the three countries examined, Japanese children had most body contact, and the Japanese parents were more likely to be together with their children when they went to sleep. The difference was particularly sharp when the Japanese were compared with the white American sample, in which a definite independent sleep pattern was found.

Studies have explained that the preference for co-sleeping and the encouragement of physical contact for securing the parent (mother)-child emotional bond is attributable to the Japanese cultural emphasis on harmony and connectedness. Small (1998) suggests that Japanese parents are trying to instill a sense of dependence, a valued quality in the harmonious Japanese society, in
children through co-sleeping arrangements. It is a way of achieving a strong bond, first between the mother and the child, and then to a group and essentially to the entire Japanese society (Wolf et al. 1995). Therefore, the practice of co-sleeping is not just a sleeping arrangement, but a way of socially reproducing a culturally desired parenting style and the resulting socialization of children who grow up to fit into Japanese society.

Because co-sleeping is heavily integrated into the way Japanese culture and society are formed, it is a natural consequence that Japanese parents, as members of society who grew up within a co-sleeping environment, derive happiness from it. Lebra (1984) wrote that the instrumental value of co-sleeping (keeping warm or convenience for night feeding) is subsumed to the enjoyment of the physical contact itself. Supporting the emotional value of co-sleeping, the episodes of feeling happy or comfortable associated with co-sleeping were found frequently in data from focus group discussions. For example, the quotes below show that these parents gain a sense of happiness by co-sleeping with a child as a family unit. Notably in the second quote, the father also finds happiness, the source of his peace of mind, by co-sleeping, and more importantly by seeing the mother (his wife) and the child sleep together:

**After all, when I am sleeping next to my child, I feel happy and secure. So, I would like to co-sleep as long as I can. Even if it is difficult to have a sound sleep as a result, it is all right with me right now.**

(35-year-old woman with a one-year-old child)

**My child really feels at peace when sleeping with her mother. This is my subjective impression, but I can tell that it is good for the child. She sleeps peacefully, holding hands with her mother […] I see that my child relies on my wife, and being able to feel that way is the source of my peace of mind.**

(39-year-old man with a two-year-old child)

A distinctive sleeping arrangement that symbolizes “happy sleeping” in Japan is called sleeping in the shape of kawa no ji, where children sleep between parents in the shape of the Chinese character kawa (川, meaning “river”). As has been noted by Caudill and Plath (1986) and Jenni and O’Connor (2010), space availability and/or climate play only a minor role in deciding on kawa no ji co-sleeping. Some people choose to co-sleep when a larger room becomes available, as in the case below. This mother made the decision to co-sleep in kawa no ji realizing that the time for co-sleeping is a comparatively short period:

**We had just moved to a new house, and my husband said, “Let’s all sleep in kawa no ji.” Before that, we had slept on a bed. It was a small bed, so only the children and I slept on it while my husband slept alone in a separate room on a futon. With the move, we have a space that is large**
enough for everyone to sleep together. We then decided to co-sleep all together since it is only in this period of our family life that we can do that.

(42-year-old woman with children aged four, seven, and ten)

Another point that repeatedly emerged is that participants expressed their hope to continue the current co-sleeping arrangement until their children say they no longer want to co-sleep with them. What is clear is that parents believe that co-sleeping is beneficial for the well-being of young children. They also painfully realize, however, that the child will eventually grow out of the co-sleeping arrangement. Therefore, the parents appreciate the co-sleeping moment as a precious temporary opportunity in life for their own sakes:

In my family, we sleep in kawa no ji as our child is still small. I think that’s ideal. The only problem is that I am not sure how long she [the child] will want to sleep with us. I would like to sleep together with her as long as possible, until she starts to complain about the arrangement.

(47-year-old man with a five-year-old child)

In addition, some participants specifically mentioned that sleep time is also an important time for interaction between parents and children. Even in sleep, the time together is considered to be “quality time” for the parent-child dyad. This concept was reiterated in the never-married group, in which participants talked about ideal sleeping arrangements for their future families. It is interesting that these people in their twenties are counting on co-sleeping, perhaps with a vision of creating a family in which both the father and the mother work, as a way of making sure that they secure time with the child:

If both my husband and I were working and could not secure enough time to be with the child during the day, then I would want to co-sleep until the child enters elementary school. Because we would not have enough time with the children, I would want to use the sleeping time to give a sense of security by sleeping together.

(Ms. D, 27 years old)

I also would like to co-sleep with my child until the child enters elementary school […] I simply feel that it’s better for the child if we secure some time to be together, even if that means being together through the night while we are sleeping.

(Mr. A, 26 years old)

Co-sleeping in the Japanese context is not necessarily observed as an instrumental reason, but as more of a manifestation of cultural values that emphasize happiness as a family. A baby born in Japanese society is raised co-sleeping with a parent and learns to derive a sense of security and comfort
from that arrangement. It is then, in fact, quite understandable that the baby
grows up to be an adult who values the parent-child physical closeness, which
easily leads to physical (but not emotional) distance from the spouse.

Conclusion

This study has shown how the physical un-intimacy between couples and the
physical intimacy between parents and children are positively connected in
the concept of the Japanese family, constituting a sense of physical happiness
for the people involved. As Caudill and Plath (1986) stated about Japan, cul-
tural emphasis is placed on the nurturing function of the family, with its
sexual function de-emphasized. In this perspective, the sexless and co-sleeping
issues discussed in this chapter are two sides of a coin. That is, when we flip a
story of passively motivated marital sexual intercourse, actively pursued
parent-child co-sleeping activities appear. Both issues can be considered a
“problem” by certain people outside the cultural meaning, but from the
viewpoint of Japanese, as clarified by focus group discussion data, they are
common enough situations, embedded in the normative Japanese family
context. Because parenthood is socially constructed with expected rights and
responsibilities (Townsend 1997), it can be argued that both sexless marriages
and parent-child co-sleeping are dimensions of socially endorsed good
parenthood and parenting.

The analyses presented here suggest that sexless marriages can be con-
sidered as a part of the normal developmental processes of a Japanese family,
especially when an additional child is not desired. Because the couple invests
effort in the maintenance of the family, it is no wonder that “becoming a
family,” a concept that inherently implies growing sexual distance between the
husband and wife, is regarded positively by focus group participants. For
them, marital sex is, consciously or unconsciously, principally a reproductive
activity, needed for the development of the family. Thus, once the couple’s
reproductive goal has been achieved or given up, it is understandable that
people avoid wasting time and energy for sexual activities with the spouse,
feeling that they are mendokusai (too tiring). This study also indicated that
sexless marriages do not necessarily mean that Japanese people are asexual;
some data included here imply that sexuality simply may well be expected to
be sought outside the reproductive sphere (i.e. marriage and family).

In exchange for the growing physical distance between spouses, Japanese
couples seem to gain a sense of comfort by co-sleeping with a newly added
family member. Analyses have shown that the prevalent parent-child co-sleeping
arrangements are regarded as something Japanese parents are happy with; for
them, it is a temporary source of happiness only allowed during a certain
period of their life. It is indeed the parents who are “comforted” by the co-sleeping
arrangements. Co-sleeping is a symbol of the happy family life they strived to
achieve, and also confirmation that one is a responsible parent. In this regard, a
husband saying that he feels happy watching his wife and daughter sleeping
together next to him is a good illustrative case to explain his sense of happiness. It should also be noted that, as has been pointed out in previous studies, co-sleeping in Japan is more of a choice than an instrumental need, such as for space limitations and climate considerations. People clearly prefer to set up co-sleeping arrangements, especially between the mother and child(ren), whenever the situation allows. Thus, some parents with young children even emphasized that they want to continue the co-sleeping arrangements as long as possible until their children start to suggest alternative arrangements.

The mirroring relations of sexless marriages and parent-child co-sleeping should be further examined in terms of values and the meaning of coupling in Japan. Satō (2008) points to the strong impacts of “familism” and the resulting weakness in “couple culture” in Japan. He thinks that a historical perspective is useful in understanding cultural differences in the expression of intimacy and affection between Japan and the West. Similarly, Atoh (2000) argues that a reason for the increasing proportion of non-marriages in Japan may be related to the lack of experience with dating practices in Japanese society. Empirical data, however, on coupling and parenting behaviors are largely missing. Understanding more about the cultural conditioning of coupling and parenting is an urgent agenda for making better sense of physical happiness in Japanese culture.

Acknowledgements

This work was supported by: a) a grant to the Nihon University Population Research Institute from the Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports, Science & Technology (MEXT), 2006–10, in the form of a matching-fund subsidy from the Academic Frontier Project for private universities [Project number 06F007]; and b) the MEXT Grant-in-Aid for Young Scientists B [Grant number 24720395].

Notes

1 Detailed specifications of survey questions differ between surveys. For instance, the National Survey on Work and Family asked respondents aged 20–59: “How often have you had sexual intercourse with your spouse during the past year?” For the sexless statistics, only respondents who had been married longer than one year and those in their first marriage were included. The Survey on Life and Attitudes of Men and Women asked respondents aged 16–49 who had ever had sex: “How often did you have sexual intercourse during the last month?”

2 The survey includes a total of 14,100 respondents (7,050 males and 7,050 females) in their twenties to sixties. Of them, 9,621 are married and 1,747 have a specific dating partner.

3 Some data from this survey were obtained via personal communication with Sagami.

4 Since response rates of survey data for the study are low (36 percent for 2000 and unreported for 2012), caution is needed in reading the figures.
It does not, however, mean that all Japanese are content with sexless marriages. For example, there are some sporadic indications that women with already grown children feel they are missing out due to the absence of sexual contact with the spouse (see Kameyama 2012). Also it has been reported that some women who want a second child feel difficulties with sexlessness (see Moriki et al. 2014).

References


4 Happiness and unconventional life choices
Views of single women in Japan

Lynne Nakano

It used to be commonly stated that marriage and family were the primary sources of happiness for women in Japan. Multiple indicators, however, reveal considerable skepticism on this point. A 2013 NHK survey found that only 28 percent of women over the age of 16 agreed with the statement that “marriage brings more happiness [than being single]” (kekkon shita hō ga shiawase), while 36 percent disagreed (sō omowanai) (Excite News 2013). Popular TV dramas, such as the critically acclaimed 2008 drama, Araundo 40 (Around 40), show the struggles of single women in contrast to housewives without taking a stand on which life is happier (Freedman and Iwata-Weickgenannt 2011). Skepticism toward marriage is seen in women’s life choices as a growing number of women remain single into middle age. In 2012, 34.5 percent of women aged 30 to 34, 23.1 percent of women aged 35 to 39, 17.4 percent of women aged 40 to 44, and 12.6 percent of women aged 45 to 49 had never married (NIPSSR 2012). Given these figures, we can estimate that significant numbers of women in their thirties and forties will never marry.

At the same time, marriage remains a life goal for most women in Japan. A 2014 survey by the National Institute of Population and Social Security Research of 18- to 39-year-old women who had never married found that 88 percent intended to marry at some point in their life and only 8 percent intended never to marry (Kōsei Rōdōshō 2014: 66). Studies also routinely find that single people are not as happy as those who are married. Inoguchi and Fujii (2009) concluded that being married and the quality of married life are two of the most important factors shaping quality of life in Japan. Analyzing the Japanese government-administered National Survey on Lifestyle Preferences (Kokumin seikatsu senkōdo chōsa) of the years 2010 and 2012, Tiefenbach and Kohlbacher (2013: 7) found that people who live with a spouse report significantly higher levels of happiness than those who do not. Similarly, a national survey of 2,579 respondents aged 20 to 59 conducted by insurance company Meiji Yasuda Life in 2011 found that 54 percent of married women reported being “happy” (shiawase), compared to 26.8 percent of never-married women. Of the married women who report being happy, the most common reason given for happiness was having a husband (36.8 percent), followed by being healthy (29 percent). Having a partner apparently
raises levels of happiness for single women as well. For never-married women who reported being happy, the greatest source of happiness was having a lover or partner (31.9 percent) (Meiji Yasuda Seikatsu Fukushi Kenkyūjo 2013). Studies of other countries such as the United States and Canada also show that married people report greater happiness than those who are never married, or are divorced, separated, or widowed (Diener et al. 1999).

Tiefenbach and Kohlbacher (2013: 7) found that higher levels of income result in higher levels of happiness for both women and men in Japan, although more so for men than for women. Their study demonstrates that working conditions such as being a manager, a regular employee or an irregular employee are not significant factors for women’s happiness but are important for men, with men in management positions being significantly happier than non-managers, and male irregular employees significantly less happy and satisfied than male regular employees (Tiefenbach and Kohlbacher 2013: 17). Having high amounts of savings does not show a significant impact on happiness, but having no savings has a very high negative impact on women (Tiefenbach and Kohlbacher 2013: 18).

Are single women in Japan happy? Women who are single into their thirties have been described as social and economic “losers” in the media, in contrast to married women who are described as “winners” (Goldstein-Gidoni 2012: 203–207). This rhetoric emerges from bestselling books such as Junko Sakai’s 2003 Makeinu no tōboe (The distant cry of loser dogs), which emphasize the struggles of single women to live meaningfully in a society that expects them to marry and care for a family. Sakai’s sympathetic and tongue-in-cheek use of the phrase “losers” when referring to single women, however, was lost in the media’s recycling of the term. Sakai’s book emphasizes that single women encounter difficulties in society, but does not suggest that single women are less happy than married women.

This chapter argues that single women face challenges in obtaining happiness because singlehood means that they are living an unconventional life in a society in which the conventional life path of marriage has been clearly staked out. While married women make a choice that is seen as part of the “natural” life course for women, single women feel the need to explain to themselves and others why they have chosen to remain single. Single women understand that marriage comes with expectations of heterosexual reproduction, and the sacrifice of their careers and interests for the family. Married women may be expected to care not only for their own husband and children, but for their husband’s family members as well. Yet marriage is also understood to bring happiness from having children and the comfort of having a clearly defined place in a family and in society. Singlehood, on the other hand, means freedom from the rigid expectations of marriage, yet it brings financial problems as women earn less than men, are disadvantaged in promotion, and face difficulties of obtaining intimacy and challenges in defining a place for themselves in a family and in society. I argue in this chapter that single women feel that they have to choose between marriage with its limitations and singlehood
with its worries. The decision to remain single, however, also provides opportunities for personal growth and the search for alternative ways of achieving happiness outside conventional life paths for women.

This chapter considers the views of women who remain single into their thirties and forties, based on interviews I conducted with 35 single women in Tokyo, some of whom I met repeatedly between 2001 and 2014. The interviews were supplemented by participant observation as I spent time with women in their homes, at restaurants and coffee shops, and on day trips. The women I interviewed are of neither the wealthiest nor the most impoverished classes; they earn enough to be able to support themselves and pay for meals out and entertainment. About half had come to Tokyo as young adults for work or study and live in rented apartments, and half are natives to the Kanto region in Eastern Japan and live with their parents. There is diversity in their educational backgrounds and career trajectories, as the sample included women who were high school graduates, university graduates, and one PhD. They work in a range of occupations such as technicians, clerical workers, accountants, secretaries, and include full-time permanent (seishain) and contract staff (keiyaku, haken shain).

Studies show important differences in women’s views of marriage according to educational level and occupational status. Ogura (2003: 34–38) found that women with low levels of education feel that they must marry to put food on their table; marriage for them is for survival (seizon). She observed that junior college-educated women hope for a husband who will support them financially while helping with housework (izon), whereas university-educated women want marriages in which they are able to continue in their careers (hozon). Rosenberger (2013: 55–57) found two kinds of single women: “successful” singles who are financially and emotionally stable, and “struggling” singles who may be financially independent but are caught in tensions and frustrations. Okano’s (2009: 266) longitudinal ethnography of urban working-class women entering adulthood shows that these women are not looking to marry as a way to obtain a middle-class life. Rather, the most important consideration surrounding potential marriage partners is that they should feel comfortable (igokochi) with the man and his family. This study builds on these findings to consider the ways in which single women talk about and conceptualize happiness and the obstacles they encounter.

The study of women in Tokyo is part of a larger study in which I interviewed single women in Hong Kong and Shanghai between the ages of 25 and 55. Although this chapter focuses on women in Tokyo, I occasionally refer to the studies in Shanghai and Hong Kong to place the Tokyo study in comparative perspective. My general impression is that single women in Hong Kong are happier than single women in Tokyo, and that single women in Tokyo are happier than single women in Shanghai. These findings are relevant to the main argument in this chapter that single women are happier when the pressures to marry are less intense; pressures are highest in Shanghai and lowest in Hong Kong, with Tokyo somewhere in the middle.
However, I also found that pressure to marry brings opportunities for happiness to those who decide to live outside convention.

Societies provide contexts that influence people’s levels of happiness. At the same time, happiness is also a matter of personality and choice. Some people may be happy or unhappy regardless of their role in society or the society in which they live. I build on anthropological approaches to happiness and well-being explained by Mathews and Izquierdo (2009: 5), who argue that there is no single universal pursuit of happiness, but rather multiple “pursuits of happiness.” They argue that happiness is culturally specific yet also transcends cultures because happiness is based on commonalities that we share as human beings. In this chapter I explore the culturally specific ways in which happiness is discussed by single women in Japan, and also individual levels of happiness. In interviews, I asked women about whether they were “satisfied” (manzoku) with their lives and asked what they thought about the phrase “a woman’s happiness” (josei no shiawase). Single women’s approaches to marriage and happiness are the focus of the remainder of the chapter.

**Happiness and marriage**

Marriage in Japan does not refer simply to the joining of two individuals, but to a package that for women involves childbirth, commitment to a mothering role at the expense of career and individual interests, and potential responsibility to care for one’s husband’s household and family members. The close relationship between marriage and childbirth can be seen in national figures showing that the average age of first marriage for women in 2012 was 29.2 and the average age of first birth for women was 30.3 (Kōsei Rōdōshō 2014: 58). In other words, women on average become pregnant within their first year of marriage. When women are asked to state the greatest advantage of marriage in national surveys, the most commonly selected response is “ability to have children and a family” (kodomo ya katei o moteru), followed by “obtaining a psychologically comfortable place for oneself” (seishinteki yasuragi no ba ga erareru). In a 2010 national survey by the National Institute of Population and Social Security Research, 46.4 percent of women respondents said that they found marriage attractive because of the ability to have family and children, and 29.8 percent of respondents said that they could obtain a comfortable place for themselves (Kōsei Rōdōshō 2014: 70). My informants accept marriage as involving this package of childbirth, childcare, and self-sacrifice, as well as comfort and security.

Nonetheless, when I asked women in Tokyo whether marriage is necessary for happiness, nearly all women told me that it is not necessary. They said that happiness is a personal matter that differs for individuals. This view is reflected in national statistics which show that most people feel that marriage is not necessary (kanarazu shimo kekkon suru hitsuyō wa nai); in 1984 only 34.4 percent of people surveyed agreed with this statement, but in 2008, 59.6 percent said they agreed (Kōsei Rōdōshō 2014: 61). In other words, we see a
growing acceptance of neoliberal beliefs that everyone is responsible for their own happiness. At the same time, the institution of marriage with its rigid expectations has changed little from previous generations.

Women who are most intent upon marrying want the whole package of childbirth, family, and social recognition that it brings; they are not primarily interested in developing a relationship with a husband. This attitude is prevalent in Japan, as a 2012 study by the National Institute of Social Security and Population Research found that 56.1 percent of never-married women between the ages of 18 and 39 agreed with the statement: “I will marry when I reach a certain age” (aru teido no nenrei made ni wa kekkon suru tsu-mori). A smaller percentage indicated that the individual characteristics of the partner are more important than the marital package, as 42.6 percent agreed that “it is fine to remain single until an ideal partner is found” (risō no kekkon aite ga mitsukaru made wa kekkon shinakutemo kamawanai) (Kōsei Rōdōshō 2014: 67).

Some younger single women in my sample feel strongly that the only way that they can obtain happiness is to marry, and as I have kept in touch with informants over the years, I found that these women generally ended up getting married through arranged meetings (omiai) by family and friends or professional matchmaking services. One woman, aged 29 and who worked in sales for an advertising company, told me at our first meeting: “I really want to marry! The problem is my boyfriend; he’s not ready.” She was considering breaking up with him to find a partner who was ready to marry. A few years later she married and had two children.

Women who remain single into their late thirties and forties are more open to different possibilities for marriage and are more ambivalent about the idea that marriage is the only way to obtain happiness. Consider the views of a 33-year-old woman who graduated from a top university in Tokyo and works as a civil servant in a government-affiliated institution. In response to the question, “Do you agree that a woman’s happiness comes from marriage?” she said:

I don’t agree with it as a general principle, but I think it’s true for myself [laughs]. I am finding that I’m conservative in some ways. Even though I’ve spent my life thinking about my career, I think in the future it would be good for me to marry and have children and a husband in the traditional sense.

When I asked how marriage would improve her life, she said: “I think it will give me my own place. I would have my own children and family.” She explained that she sees her single life as enjoyable in part because it is temporary, to be followed by a period in which she will devote herself to her children and husband. Although she states that she wants to marry, she prolongs singlehood well into her thirties and may remain single into her forties and beyond as she refuses omiai, or an arranged meeting with potential
partners, and will not meet men through commercial dating services. She prefers to wait until she meets someone through work or introductions by friends. She explains that if she does not meet an appropriate person in the next few years, she will settle down into a more permanent single life, and at that point her way of constructing happiness for herself would change; she would seek happiness in singlehood.

Women who were the most anxious to marry were the least satisfied with their single lives. However, most women who really want to marry do so through the channels that are available for this purpose. Women who remain single into their thirties and forties say that they want to marry but prefer to wait for an appropriate person. In the meantime, they seem to enjoy their lives as single women.

**Happiness for single women**

The women I interviewed commonly explained their happiness in terms of self-development, freedom, and independence. Informants said that remaining single allows them to develop themselves as individuals. They said that they have the freedom to enjoy their lives, that they contribute to society by earning their own living, and that they have become polished in the ways of the world – they travel, learn foreign languages, and develop their own sophisticated consumer tastes. Their replies echo national surveys which show that the most attractive feature of being single for women is having freedom in one’s movement and lifestyle. In the 2010 *Shussan dōkō kihon chōsa* (National Fertility Survey) conducted by the National Institute of Population and Social Security Research, 71.4 percent of single women surveyed indicated that “freedom in movement and lifestyle” was the most attractive aspect of being single (NIPSSR 2011: 7). Women I interviewed compared their single lifestyles to the married lifestyle of their friends, and asserted that they are happy because of their freedom to develop their tastes and interests. A 32-year-old clerical worker, for example, travels to the United States twice a year to attend pop music concerts. Another, who goes to Europe every year to follow downhill skiing competitions, explains:

> My friends who are married and have children tell me that they envy my free lifestyle. Last year I went to Norway to watch a ski competition. I like that sort of thing. It was my first trip to Europe and I went directly to the countryside in Norway.

She adds: “When I hear the word ‘single’ (*dokushin*) I think it has a positive connotation. It makes me think ‘freedom!’”

In his discussion of *ikigai* or what makes life worth living in Japan, Mathews argues that there are two main conceptions of *ikigai* in Japan: commitment to group or role (*ittaikan*) and self-realization (*jiko jitsugen*) (Mathews 1996: 17–26). The single women I interviewed who said that they enjoy being
single express an *ikigai* that clearly falls into the category of “self-realization” (*jiko jitsugen*). For previous generations of women, this sort of *ikigai* would have been difficult to develop because nearly all women married, and once married, the mother role is assumed to take precedence over all other activities.

Single women who are satisfied with their decision to remain single reflected on their past decisions to reject suitors and proposals, stating that the man was inappropriate and marriage to him at that time would have resulted in unhappiness. They said that they have preserved their current happiness by deciding to remain single. A 46-year-old unemployed woman saw that many of her friends married because of convention; they married when they reached the “appropriate age” – usually given as approaching 30. Yet she felt that for many of her friends, marriage was a mistake, and she is glad that she avoided marrying when she felt similar pressures. Although at the time of the interview she was unemployed and faced serious financial problems, she did not regret remaining single. She reflected that men who were interested in her in the past wanted her to be a housewife, and that such a life would not have made her happy. She said: “It would have made the man happy, but not me!”

In other words, many single women said that they wanted to marry yet generally expressed satisfaction with their lives. A 34-year-old Tokyo native who works as a corporate leadership trainer at a firm in Tokyo and lives with her parents said that she wanted to marry, but when I asked if she was satisfied with her life, she answered: “I am satisfied! Work is enjoyable. I sometimes wonder if something is wrong, if I’m too satisfied. If I was dissatisfied, I would make changes (fuman ga areba ugoku darō)!”

While satisfied, many feel that they might be even happier if they had a partner and were married. A 34-year-old woman said: “It might be more fun if I had a partner. It’s easy to meet people, but hard to meet someone you would want to marry.” Women understand that it is difficult to find a partner who would improve their lives. As single women, they are able to work, control their money, and decide how to spend their time. This would all change if they married and had children.

The majority of single women I interviewed do not see happiness as coming either entirely from marriage or from self-development, but rather as some combination. Many informants want to continue to work, develop themselves, and have a family, but they feel that they have to choose between two different kinds of happiness. As they consider how to balance the two kinds of happiness, they remained single into their thirties and forties.

**Single women and intimacy**

Although most of the single women I met expressed satisfaction with their lives, arguably, many face problems in obtaining intimacy. All of my informants were childless, which reflects the national statistics that in the past decade only about 2 percent of all births occurred outside wedlock. Further,
of 35 women interviewed, less than half had romantic partners. These findings are in line with national statistics showing that 49 percent of single women aged 18 to 34 do not have a “partner of the opposite sex” (kōsai shīte iru ise i wa inai) (the figure was 61.4 percent for men; NIPSSR 2012: 35). It should be pointed out that the wording of the question is highly problematic because it does not ask about same-sex partners, and it shows the assumption of universal heterosexuality held by the survey designers. In any case, in my findings, older women are less likely to have a romantic partner of any gender. This lack of partners and children led to challenges of obtaining intimacy and finding meaning in life.

In Japan, the source of intimacy and companionship for adult women is usually not a woman’s husband whose time is occupied by work, but her children and other women, usually through networks created through their children. Single women obviously lack this source of networking and instead find intimacy in other ways. About half of my informants in Tokyo live with their parents. In Japan as a whole, 75 percent of single women live with their parents (NIPSSR 2010: 21). For the majority of these women, living with their parents provides intimacy and comfort. Women said that their mothers do their laundry, cook their meals, and have a hot bath waiting for them when they come home from work. This pattern of living has been described by Yamada Masahiro as the “parasite single” lifestyle (Yamada 1999). I found that when relationships between the adult daughter and parents are good, and they usually are, adult daughters said that they are able to talk with their parents and enjoy their company. A 32-year-old manager at a large national bank explained: “When I come home from work, I have a hot bath and a meal waiting, and I can talk to my parents about my problems. I really enjoy living with them!” A few women I interviewed said that they had poor relationships with their parents, and that living together was a source of stress rather than comfort. Most women, however, worry more about the practical consideration of how to care for their parents as their parents age, whether they would need to quit their jobs to do so, and how they would survive financially given gender discrimination in the employment market (see Nakano 2014). As they are childless, single women worry about their own elder care and about losing their parents’ companionship when their parents pass away.

About half of my informants had come to Tokyo from other parts of Japan and live alone. The vast majority of these women live alone in rented apartments. In my sample, only two had purchased condominiums. Living with roommates or romantic partners is uncommon in Japan, and only one informant lives with a same-sex friend, and none lives with a romantic partner. For these women who have left their natal family and friends to come to Tokyo, intimacy is more obviously a problem than for native Tokyoites. Most women I interviewed said that they maintained platonic friendships with other women, and a few had platonic friendships with men. Single women’s friendships, however, usually do not constitute a community of friends, but involve friendships with individuals who they know from school, the workplace, or
hobby groups. Women reported that their friendships developed according to shared interests. For example, a 54-year-old regularly travels to Korea with a high school classmate who shares her interest in Korean dramas, and visits shrines within Japan with a primary school classmate who shares her interest in domestic travel.

It is helpful to compare this situation with that of Hong Kong, where women tend to say that they find happiness in their natal and extended families because they live physically closer to family members due to the small geographic size of the city, and because family members rely on each other for financial help, social welfare, and other support. As a result, families tend to meet each other frequently, usually once a week for a meal, and as adult women in Hong Kong tend to have many siblings, they have more opportunities to become involved in the care and financial support of their nieces and nephews. Tokyo women do not assume that happiness would come from their families in this way, and do not express a sense of lacking or loneliness. Rather, Tokyo women are more concerned about their ability to continue to have the resources to live their current lifestyle.

A few single women I met in Tokyo appeared to be extraordinarily happy; they seemed to have figured out how to live well. Because they are not living a conventional life with its pattern of relationships, Tokyo women have opportunities to create their own social networks and ways of making life worth living. A 35-year-old woman who worked for her family business explained that she had decided to live on her own terms:

One of my friends married in her twenties and for several years didn’t have children. Then she had her first child and five years later she had her second. She told me that before she married everyone asked her, “When are you getting married?” And after she married they asked her “When will you have kids?” And after she had her first child who was a son they asked her “When will you have a daughter?” She said that the demands people make on you never end. It’s better that you stay single and live your life as you please.

Other women similarly told me that they felt much happier after they gave up trying to conform to others’ expectations. Sometimes the decision to break with convention came through personal traumas. The woman above decided to break with convention after her father died; after his death, relatives and neighbors stopped urging her to marry because she had moved in with her mother and was keeping her mother company. Another woman said that she left Japan for Australia through the working holiday program when she reached the age of 29, to escape unbearable pressures to marry as well as problems at work. When she returned to Japan she was more determined than before to live her own life, rather than conform to others’ views.

A small number of women I met created their own social networks and ways of obtaining happiness. A 45-year-old computer technician travels to
cities in Asia several times a year. She and her friends have created a small community based on shared interests in Asian movies, food, and travel. When one person in the group makes a trip to an Asian city, she or he informs the others and those who are interested and available join the trip. When one of the group members mentioned that he thought he should get married, she discouraged him:

I told him, “Stop talking about gloomy things like marriage! If you marry you’re going to have to give up your overseas travel, you’ll have to stop buying this expensive video equipment and DVDs, you know.” He’ll never want to do that. I guess it’s the same for men and women. We don’t want to give up our freedom.

Marriage would take them away from what made their life worth living, and away from the community of people who shared their interest, as they could not continue to spend time and resources on travel if they married.

Single women are often criticized for being selfish in the media (Nakano and Wagatsuma 2004), but the women I met understood that their lives would change if their parents required elder care. A woman in her forties explained:

I complain about the little things but actually I’m pretty happy. My greatest worry is about what will happen if my parents get sick. How can I take care of them and continue to work? And if I can’t work, how will I pay the bills?

She has an older brother who in conventional Japanese family practices would be expected to care for their parents, or more accurately, the older brother’s wife would be expected to do the caregiving. However, in her family, they had agreed among themselves that she would take this responsibility. She remains ensconced in family responsibilities and sees her happiness as being contingent on her parents’ continued good health.

**Conclusions**

This chapter has argued that the inflexibility of the institution of marriage makes it difficult for single women in Tokyo to achieve happiness. That being said, single women’s experience of happiness is a product of their views of their lives. Single women who strongly want to marry are the least happy because by definition they have not achieved their life goal. Many others, however, want to marry yet seem happy with their lives and are not making an effort to find a partner. The happiest are a small number who have decided that they will not follow convention.

Single women’s happiness emerges from the freedom to live their lives as they choose rather than be subjected to the obligations of marriage. For most women, this means continuing to work while spending time with friends,
traveling, and developing their interests. As with the working-class women studied by Okano (2009), my informants do not view marriage as a way of improving their social class status. Rather, they are worried that marriage would entail obligations to care for a husband and his family members which would create unhappiness even as marriage would improve their financial and social status. A 36-year-old woman who works as a nightclub hostess, for example, broke off her engagement with a wealthy businessman because she realized that he would expect her to serve him and would not consider her happiness. She prefers to live an economically unstable life independently to an unhappy middle-class life.

In my study of Hong Kong, Shanghai, and Tokyo, I found that single women are happiest in Hong Kong, where social pressure to marry is the weakest. Greater social pressure leads to greater obstacles and inconveniences in obtaining happiness. In Shanghai, women face immense pressure from family, friends, and colleagues to marry and have a child. Many women I met in Shanghai feel that they have no choice but to marry according to schedule. In Hong Kong, single women feel more comfortable about remaining single but are not free from family obligations. Rather, Hong Kong single women are expected to contribute financially and socially to their natal families.

The question of what makes life worth living (ikigai) for women is shaped by the state and popular media. In Shanghai, the state media place strong pressure on women to marry, labeling single women as “leftovers” (shengnu) (see Fincher 2014; and To 2015), and in effect prevent consideration of alternative meaningful life paths in public discourse. Some women I interviewed in Shanghai referred instead to Western media such as the US cable TV show Sex and the City, and the bestselling memoir Eat, Pray, Love by American author Elizabeth Gilbert, as providing narratives that resonated with their search for meaning outside marriage. In general, women in Shanghai had difficulty articulating what made life worth living, although a few women had come up with their own answers such as service to others or service to society.

The Hong Kong government has not launched campaigns urging single women to marry, but popular media such as TV shows and newspapers portray women using negative terms such as “gong leui” (literally, “Hong Kong woman”) that characterize Hong Kong women as over-achieving, demanding, and unattractive to men (see Nakano 2015). Nonetheless, for reasons outlined above, single women in Hong Kong are able to claim commitment to their natal families as a legitimate alternative form of meaning even as this alternative continues to view women as primarily responsible for family and home.

In Japan, conservative politicians occasionally blame single women for population decline in the context of Japan’s falling birthrate and aging society. Along with sympathetic fictional representations of single women in TV dramas discussed earlier, mainstream popular media often view single women negatively and circulate negative terms such as “parasite single” and “loser dog” mentioned earlier, in spite of neutral (in the case of “parasite single”) or ironic (in the case of “loser dog”) origins of the terms. However, popular
media intended for women such as women’s magazines present a heterogeneous range of meanings of marriage and life possibilities for women (Holthus 2010). Tokyo women I interviewed state that marriage is only one possible avenue of meaning for women. Nonetheless, women I interviewed have difficulty stating what made their life worth living (ikigai). Rather, they talk about wanting to protect the life that they currently live. They wish to avoid the obligations of marrying into a family in which they would need to care for a husband and their in-laws, and they want to prolong their relative freedom before they need to care for their own aging parents.

Happiness emerges not only through one’s own decision making; it is also supported or hampered by social institutions. The problem in all three cities I studied is that the institution of marriage is rigid and narrow in its expectations of heterosexual reproduction, childcare, service to family members including parents and in-laws, and sacrifice of one’s career and personal development. While some aspects of this package such as having a place in society, a family, and the intimacy of children, are attractive to my informants, single women are ambivalent about whether this package would lead to greater happiness than the lives they currently lead. Simply encouraging women to marry is thus not a satisfactory way to raise levels of happiness among women. The marriage package as it stands today appeals to some women but not all, and the rising levels of non-marriage show ever greater levels of ambivalence among both women and men.

The binary structure that forces women to choose the marriage and family package or face social marginalization remains in place in all three societies because the governments and corporate elite of these societies are committed to its continuity, believing that their societies have flourished on a division of labor in which women are responsible for the family and home. Although Japanese Prime Minister Abe has proclaimed that he welcomes women in corporate management and boardrooms, corporations have not laid out policies that would effectively allow women to continue their careers and care for children. Government commitment to a narrow definition of family emerges from reluctance to construct a comprehensive social welfare system, as all three societies rely on family members, usually women, to provide care for the young, elderly, and disabled. In this model, alternative family forms such as childbirth outside marriage, homosexual coupling, and cohabitation are highly discouraged and stigmatized.

The rigidity of the marriage and family systems in all three societies compromises the happiness of both the married and the single, women and men. This system does not accommodate the diversity of preferences for intimacy, sexual orientation, and the need for flexibility in the timing of education plans, career trajectories, and family formation. The result is a widespread rejection of marriage, as we are witnessing. This rejection does not consist of an outright rejection of marriage and family; the majority of women and men in all three societies want to marry, and there is no viable alternative path to obtaining social recognition, intimacy, and financial security. Rather, women
and men on a massive scale delay marriage through a series of decisions to wait for an appropriate partner with whom making the sacrifices necessary for the institution would seem worthwhile.

Acknowledgements

Substantial parts of the work described in this chapter were supported by funding from the Research Grants Council of the Hong Kong Special Administrative Region, China (Project No. CUHK4018/02H). Initial research was made possible by a 2001 Summer Grant for Research and a 2001–02 Direct Grant awarded by the Chinese University of Hong Kong. I thank Moeko Wagatsuma and Chan Yim Ting for their assistance in conducting this research.

References


5 Friendships, marriage and happiness in contemporary Japan

Laura Dales

[F]riendship as a relationship stresses affinities, be it of a particular kind – having a similar upbringing – or of a general sort – being human beings. Whether it appears in actual relations or in narratives, friendship is played against that which is seen to differentiate and potentially separate.

(Barcellos Rezende 1999: 92)

Introduction

This chapter examines the perceived meanings of friendship in the lives of unmarried and married Japanese. While marriage and kin relationships may retain discursive centrality for their function (and dysfunction) in contemporary Japan, friendship suggests possibilities for happiness and belonging built on ideals and practices of affinity. In light of demographic shifts in delayed and declining marriage rates, investigation of these relationships challenges the dominance of familialism, and redresses the privileging of conjugal relationships in research on intimacy (Roseneil and Budgeon 2004: 138).

Using four case studies that reveal perceptions of friendship and marriage, in this chapter I suggest some gendered differences in notions of friendship as ideal and practice, and the role of friendship in the creation of happiness, belonging and meaning for unmarried and married individuals. I argue that for those who are not married, and particularly for those who do not have children, friendships may acquire meaning, both in relation to marriage and as a site of belonging or meaning. The intimacy that friendship produces does not necessarily override or displace marital intimacy, both because familial and extra-familial intimacy may be contiguous, and because the marital relationship is not necessarily emotionally intimate to begin with (Mathews 2003). Nonetheless, the relationships that individuals form outside marriage warrant further scholarly attention as significant sites of intimacy, belonging, and well-being in a familialist society. These findings echo observations of friendship made in other places, at other times, but are nuanced by the weight and meaning afforded to family, marriage and other relationships, at a particular given moment in Japanese socioeconomic history.
In the contemporary Japanese context it is unlikely that friendship, or even non-marital romantic relationships, will supplant marriage or the reproductive family. While extramarital fertility remains low and the low birthrate an issue of national concern, it seems probable that marriage will retain its discursive and material significance as socioeconomic foundation for people’s lives. However, the increased number of adult singles – never married, divorced and widowed – in Japan has drawn attention from both scholars and social commentators (see for example Dales 2015a, 2015b; Nemoto 2008; Sakai 2003; Shirahase and Raymo 2014; Ueno 2007, 2012).

The data introduced here come from two projects. The first, conducted from 2009–11, focuses on “unconventional” women, taken to mean women whose life courses diverge from the stereotypical. This category includes never-married and divorced women, single mothers, women who cohabit, and women who marry late. This project involves 34 interviewees, aged 30–49 years.1 The second is an ongoing project examining intimate relationships outside the family.2 This project explores some of the ways in which intimate relationships (friendships, workplace relationships and romantic relationships that do not lead to marriage) are formed and sustained in contemporary Japan, among women and men, married and unmarried, heterosexual and queer. Both projects involve ethnographic fieldwork and in-depth, semi-structured interviews. Most interviews were conducted entirely in Japanese, although some interviewees switched between English and Japanese. Informants were recruited via the snowballing method, as well as through participation in events I organized or attended, including public seminars and workshops. To date I have interviewed 22 men and 41 women, aged 19 to 59 years. In addition to qualitative interviews, I attended seminars, participated in dinners and other social events with interviewees, and joined activity clubs (a running club and a university volunteer circle) to observe the socializing and friendships of members.

The semi-structured interviews I conducted did not explicitly address the question of individuals’ happiness, nor did I ask married individuals about their present level of contentment or well-being relative to their unmarried years. Rather, the reflections on happiness, contentment and well-being introduced below were elicited through broader discussions of friendship, marriage and life events. The discussions reflect one of the key aims of this current research: to understand what kinds of intimacies develop beyond reproductive and natal families. In particular, I am interested in the connections and tensions between marriage and friendship. While the project addresses the meanings and implications of marriage and friendship for Japanese women and men broadly, in this chapter I focus on heterosexual men and women of a typically marriageable age.

As Uchida and Kitayama have noted, in Japan, happiness is at least in part contingent upon interpersonal context, “to be optimized within a web of social relations with other people” (Uchida and Kitayama 2009: 453). Relationships, and by extension belonging, are integral to “the good life,” or the
notion of happiness that psychologists, following Aristotle, define as eudaimonia, in contrast to hedonia (Ryan et al. 2008). Hedonia focuses on the outcome of good living and temporal positive affect, while eudaimonia focuses on the way one lives and achieves purpose in life (Uchida et al. 2014: 208). Eudaimonia is less an outcome than a process: namely, the process “of fulfilling one’s virtuous potentials and living as one was inherently intended to live” (Deci and Ryan 2006: 21).

Weber (2014) proposes that happiness might be conceptualized as a binary of “smaller” and “greater” happiness, where the former is connected to personal lives and experience, and the latter more closely linked to projected goals and expectations. This distinction resembles the categorization of hedonia and eudaimonia, and the differing focus on outcome or process.

The overlap between the “greater” and “smaller” happiness also reflects the public social meaning that is ascribed to personal events, for example marriage and employment. Marriage ideally evokes smaller happiness for individuals, through fulfillment of affective needs such as companionship, as well as material needs such as economic security. However, it also evokes greater happiness when viewed as the attainment of social maturity, the gateway to reproduction, and a step in the creation of “a good life.” Conversely, singlehood may be understood as a source of smaller happiness, promoting diverse social interactions and enabling non-familial relationships to develop new and meaningful weight. Singlehood may divert time and energy towards work, self-improvement or study, or other meaning-making activities that foster long-term well-being (Ryan et al. 2008). Positive discourses of singlehood contribute to a greater happiness by providing support for demographic shifts already in play, by offering new forms of belonging and de-stigmatizing lifestyles that are increasingly common (Dales 2015b).

**Marriage and singlehood: Factors in friendships**

It is now a truism that Japan is a low-fertility, hyper-aged society. It is also well-recognized that low fertility is directly related to delayed and declining marriage levels. In effect, Japanese people are spending less of their adult lives married. Marriage remains a rite of “passage into responsible adulthood,” and the sole legitimate site for childbearing and childrearing (Maree 2004: 541; Hertog 2009). In 2013 the average age of first marriage for women was 29 years, for men nearly 31 years, compared to 25 years for women and 28 years for men 30 years earlier (NIPSSR 2015). While individuals are marrying later, the desire to marry ostensibly remains high: Kato (2010) notes that in the 2002 National Fertility Survey, among men and women in their early thirties, less than 10 percent intended to remain single all their lives. Nonetheless, as the average age of first marriage steadily climbs, it becomes less likely for even marriage-minded individuals to find partners as they age (Kato 2010: 72). The desire to marry reflects the economic and social meanings with which marriage is imbued, including perceived maturity and stability. These
benefits are persuasive pull factors. The desire to marry also reflects a resilient push factor: the stigma that remains attached to singlehood as a life-long status, particularly but not exclusively for women (Cook 2014; Dales 2015a, 2005).

The perceived implications of marriage can be simply characterized as risk versus security (Dalton and Dales 2016). Tenacious gendered expectations of women (as fulltime home makers) and men (as primary breadwinners) make marriage unappealing to those who do not, or cannot, comply (Nemoto 2008; Nemoto et al. 2012). Indeed, Nemoto’s young, unmarried male informant calculates that the gains of marriage are outweighed by its constraints:

You lose many things when you marry, while you gain something, too. But my image is that you sacrifice and lose 90% of what you have, and you gain only about 10%. I think people call that 10% “happiness.”

(Nemoto 2012: 1687)

The perceived “happiness” that flows from singlehood may be traced to the autonomy it enables, or indeed demands. If marriage enables the creation of (reproductive) family, it can also restrict non-familial relationships:

If you’re in the same situation you have the same topics of conversation, and also it’s easier to do things together. You can go and eat a meal together. The first priority should be the kids, so the mothers, who are friends of mine, we do the same things.

(Satoko, 33 years, married, two sons)

Satoko is a bright, well-dressed 33-year-old Japanese woman married to an Englishman, with two sons under five years old. In this quote, she offers one example of how motherhood shapes friendship practices in particular ways. Her friendships involve shared practices, a shared identity that enables belonging. While Satoko suggests these can be supportive, even producing new friendships, the ideals and practices of marriage and motherhood may also constrain the practices of friendships between women, particularly between single and married women in Japan.

Satoko describes her pre-marriage friendships as mainly formed at nightclubs. She now sees these friends only rarely. Although not particularly driven to have children, marriage brought motherhood “naturally” to Satoko and her husband, and she is keen to stay at home with her children “while they are small.” For Satoko it is motherhood rather than marriage that appears most to shape her socializing, but the centrality of motherhood to marriage (for women with children) makes the two roles hard to separate.³

Allan (1996: 94) observes that “the patterns of people’s friendships reflect and are built around their social locations and social identities,” and I suggest that this is particularly so when social identity is prescriptive of time usage
and daily routine. Lifestyle factors such as time and availability inevitably influence the kinds of activities that may foster and constrain friendships:

After graduating, after 30 of course everyone gets married and goes to different areas, so we grow more and more distant … Not all my friends are in the same situation as me. For example I’ve got two kids and I’m married and not working, but some of my friends are working and not married, and they don’t have kids. They have a completely different lifestyle, so the time we [are available to] see each other is different. For example, I have free time in the mornings but my friend works. When she finishes work it’s late at night, and I can’t go out because the kids are sleeping. That’s often why we can’t meet up.

(Satoko)

In addition to a lack of free time and lifestyle-related differences in daytime routines, Satoko sees her lack of private income as a factor in lifestyle choices:

I don’t have an income, so if I use up all the money on the kids, I can’t or don’t want to spend on myself. So if I had my own income I think I’d try to spend a bit more on myself.

The economic autonomy that Satoko identifies as absent is an example of the structural factors that shape friendship practices. While most women in Japan continue to work after marriage, many leave full-time work after having children. The absence of a private disposable income, and more generally the financial pressures of raising a family, influence the ways that married women conduct their friendships.

Masumi is in her late thirties, a thoughtful professional woman with postgraduate qualifications. Originally from a rural area, Masumi moved to a mid-sized city for tertiary education and then to another city for work. She lives alone, and while she feels that she may yet marry in the future, Masumi appears unconcerned about her present marital status. In part, this reflects her connections with others on the periphery:

Most of my friends [from my hometown] are married, and I end up being friends with people who aren’t married, so most of the people around me are unmarried. And there are some people older than me. I don’t really have a sense of urgency, but that’s not to say I’m rejecting marriage. I think I’d like to marry, if I had the opportunity (kikai ga areba).

(Masumi, late thirties, never married, childless)

Like many singles, Masumi seems to view marriage “as normal and beneficial, yet not necessarily as a requirement” (Nemoto et al. 2012: 1657). Further, she observes that a central benefit of her single life is autonomy, and the freedom to choose her own path and pace:
When you are by yourself you can use your time freely. I only recently started to earn money, and until then I was always struggling. But now its fun. I’m ten years behind other people. Everyone else finished university and became an OL [office lady] and started earning money, but I took out loans to do postgraduate study. When I think about it like that, I feel I don’t have to be the same as other people. Some part of me believes I will get married sometime.

Masumi rationalizes her lifestyle and status as a function of her career path, which she describes as relatively delayed. She reflects upon the way that her life course has been shaped by work, particularly in relation to others in her cohort. For Masumi it seems that the possibility that she will not marry is mitigated by other elements of her life that bring satisfaction – namely, her work and friendships:

I would be okay to be alone [single] my whole life. I think there will be more people like me, so maybe people in this situation will start to live together – I think they do it now even – and help each other, and I think the notion and way of thinking is changing so I’m not worried. In order to be able to do that I have to save money and I have to build my career. I think saving [money] for yourself is important. Friends and networks are important, too.

Masumi’s observation illuminates the connection between personal expectations of the future – what lies ahead for the individual – and an awareness of the social landscape changes that may allow the future to be better (or worse) than expected. She highlights those elements of the future in which she feels she has agency, including work and savings, and notes that the likelihood of sharing this future with others is reassuring. This observation suggests the overlap between “greater” and “smaller” happiness discussed above. For Masumi, the hope to marry sits alongside the recognition that not marrying might also be acceptable. While marriage and motherhood, with their attendant time and lifestyle constraints, are central factors in Satoko’s friendship practices, for unmarried women like Masumi the function of friendship is symbolic as well as practical. She does not suggest expectations of material support from friendships – focusing instead on the need to be independent – but nonetheless implies that the uncertainty or marginality of being unmarried is balanced by an awareness of the growing proportion of similarly positioned adults. Some of these unmarried adults are within Masumi’s network, but beyond this is the imagined community of the unmarried (Anderson 1991), an amorphous but increasingly visible group positioned outside the boundaries of the reproductive family. This recognition, “at once personal and generic,” engenders belonging (Allison 2013: 172), which alongside autonomy may well cushion the discomfort of being an unmarried woman in a society that prioritizes marriage and family.
Friendship, happiness and belonging

Friendships enable the creation and expression of identities, offering the opportunity for people to develop and practice skills and competencies that may not be revealed in other relationships (Eve 2002: 405). The capacity to create, as well as to maintain, friendships is mediated by the meanings given to friendships among different groups: mother-friends (mamatomo), working men, students, and the elderly. The social weight of friendship is balanced against other requirements: paid and unpaid work, and the obligations that flow from other roles (such as neighbor, daughter, non-governmental organization volunteer).

Consequently, friendships are built and maintained within and between other relationships. In this emotional landscape, life changes that alter the individuals’ time, resources and affective energy lead to a restructuring and realignment of relationships. Caring for small children curtails mothers’ time and energy for the kind of activities that may have characterized their friendships before children. Full-time work means that socializing is restricted to non-work hours or areas easily accessible from the workplace. It is inevitable that friendships reflect these limitations, and that individuals make strategic (and/or sometimes unconscious) choices relating to the maintenance of particular relationships over others.

Belonging is a social phenomenon, denoting affective connection to a community of others. It cannot be understood except in relationship; neither can it be created or maintained independently of social interaction, whether this occurs virtually or in real life. For individuals who feel marginalized or vulnerable, belonging can produce a sense of security, engagement and hope. Similarly, while happiness is ultimately a subjective (that is, solitary) experience, it is essentially situated within a social context of people and place (see the chapter by Bondy in this volume).

The subjectivity of belonging, like happiness, renders it difficult to define, and even harder to quantify. The weight of belonging in Japan has been well established, and as Slater and Galbraith (2011: n.p.) observe, “[i]n a culture where connection and belonging is the fundamental prerequisite for so much else, not the least of which being social and gender identity, the worst thing that can happen is to be cut off.” Most visible in its absence, belonging does not presume sociability so much as meaningful connection in the relationships one cultivates: the quality, rather than quantity, of interactions. Belonging may be activated through marriage: the legal and social conjoining of individuals into a single unit, which also enables membership in the socially sanctioned group of “married” individuals.

The categorical distinction between “unmarried” (particularly never-married) and “married” reveals itself particularly in relation to childbearing, where “unmarried” presupposes “childless” and where single motherhood weighs differently on divorced, widowed and never-married mothers (Dales 2013; Ezawa 2006). While the meaning of categories such as “married” and “unmarried” may shift according to the context (Kavedzija 2015), the practical implications of
singlehood seem to retain salience across all social contexts. Being married or unmarried delineates the allocation of time and energy to relationships that most define or support one’s sense of belonging, and alters the practical functions that one expects and demands of intimate non-familial relationships.

**Work and men’s friendships**

The linked heteronormative ideals of romance and family enmesh men as well as women. Among Japanese men, the reasons for delayed or non-marriage may be varied (Cook 2014; Nemoto et al. 2012). Nemoto et al. (2012: 1676) suggest that for highly educated men, late marriage occurs as a result of the combined weakened marital age norm, a strengthened value on autonomy and work, and an increasingly negative view of marriage. Work may represent an alternative path to fulfillment and social recognition for unmarried men in stable regular employment.

However, the last two decades have seen drastic changes to employment trends and practices, and subsequently the experience and perceptions of work for Japanese employees. The commitment to workplace interpersonal relations, sustained in activities within and outside work hours, has been compromised by job insecurity, poor(er) working conditions, and downshifts in what employees might expect from employers.

Even for regular employees, the workplace can impede as well as facilitate interpersonal relationships. Corporate practices, particularly long working hours, limit the time and energy that workers have to pursue interests and relationships outside work. This is prohibitive for the creation and maintenance of intimate relationships, both romantic and platonic, for both women and men (Yoshida 2011). In addition to the lack of time for non-work-related activities, a work-focused life may also limit exposure to different worlds, producing “one-dimensional” individuals (Yoshida 2011: 223). This is particularly so for men, as Japanese masculinity has been shaped by socioeconomic pressures underpinned by the “[s]ingle-minded devotion to work, expected of Japan’s ‘corporate warriors’” (Yoshida 2011: 224). Conversely, an absence of fixed (regular) employment can make men unmarriageable (Cook 2014; Meyer-Ohle 2009: 139).

The case of the freeter crystallizes the connection between Japanese men’s marriageability and employment (Cook 2014). Cook (2013: 33) notes that the precarity of the freeter situation leads to a sense of double failure in male freeters, who fail to “embody both norms of masculinity and the attributes of adulthood.” For men who work outside full-time employment, economic instability jeopardizes other possibilities for socially ascribed maturity, including marriage and children. Consequently it also delimits the possibilities for a version of happiness built around the desire for meaning and purpose. Like hope, the desire for fulfillment cannot be removed from social engagement and implication (Crapanzano 2003: 26).
Takuya is a friendly 32-year-old man, living alone in a mid-sized city. He currently works on contract as a non-regular worker (hiseiki shain) in the student volunteer support office of a university. Takuya has never been employed as a regular employee (seishain), but since graduating from university he has been “freelance or freeter,” as he notes, primarily in welfare and nonprofit organizations. He does not spend his free time with colleagues from his workplace, although he does socialize with others in his field:

[LD: Do you go out with colleagues outside work?]

Not at all. Or if I do, it’s with people who are exactly at the same level […] not from here, who work at specialist volunteering offices. Or sometimes we meet students for a meal […] Otherwise, these are people I only meet at work.

I have a few friends from university days, but I don’t see them much. Most of the people I call friends are […] connected with my activities, volunteering activities. The majority.

(Takuya, 32 years, never married, childless)

For Takuya, his work does not really feel like work and overlaps with his personal interest in volunteering. His decision to take up a position as a non-regular worker reflects his engagement in the field of nonprofit organizations. His close relationships tend to revolve around these activities. He also notes that among this network of people engaged in volunteer work, he is able to discuss his work concerns:

Because everyone is experiencing the same things. If anything, I’m one of the fortunate ones, because if I need to discuss something there is someone sitting next to me [at work]. I’m lucky, you know. But for others, most of them are [working] alone and have no one to get advice from, so I think that would be an environment in which you’d really like to talk. So when we meet, we talk.

While these relationships are not work-based, they are work-related. Takuya suggests that part of this friendship practice involves emotional supportive-ness and giving advice, aspects of men’s friendship that are sometimes downplayed in research (Wright 1982):

Of the people who are on my [phone] contact list, the people I knew before university … well there are only maybe five. That’s how much I’m … well, in one sense its common interests. It’s a connection in order to do something, friendship. So at the moment, the people I’m doing volunteering with, we might occasionally go for a drink, or we might occasionally go for a drive. And when that [activity] relationship ends, the friendship … well it’s not particularly that I end it, but I just don’t particularly make contact. That’s how it ends up.
In Takuya’s case, friendships serve to support work, though they do not necessarily originate in the workplace. He observes that most of his friendships are transient and recently formed, through participation in volunteer activities, but does not express any sense of loneliness or lack. Rather, he notes an abundance of opportunities to socialize and engage:

Working at a university I speak with lots of students at work … and I speak with a lot of people in volunteering as well. So [rather than being lonely], in fact I feel like I’d like to have one or two days a week where I’m alone.

As Atsumi (1979), Dasgupta (2013) and others have noted, relationships built at work, through tsukiai (built on mutual obligations) and in the seniority-based senpailkōhai dyad, are underpinned by “emotional closeness, reinforced by the power asymmetry between the partners” (Dasgupta 2013: 271). For Takuya, platonic intimacy is forged through particular shared activities, but is not necessarily maintained after the activities cease. His workplace relationships do not supplant his non-workplace relationships. For men who work as regular employees (seishain), it may be that friendship is likely to develop as a corollary of work relationships, particularly in light of work conditions that require long hours spent together. For Takuya it appears that the blending of his hobbies and his work produces the same effect – a circle of engagement based on shared time together, which naturally dissipates when the activities end. In this context, work relationships may develop into friendship, or a relationship that looks like friendship (even if it is not classified as such). The closeness of the relationship both enables and is enabled by the purpose it serves, but in Takuya’s case, this forecloses the possibility of development beyond a particular timeframe. Slater and Galbraith (2011: n.p) suggest that this reflects a core feature of masculinity in Japan, which is about “being willing and able to take part in, and contribute to, some collective project.”

The workplace offers a site for the creation of relationships built around “shared hardships and shared pleasures” (Rohlen 1989: 27). Work relationships may also grow beyond place and time, perhaps sustained by such “shared pleasures,” or common underlying interests. Masao is a lively 47-year-old geography professor, married for 17 years to a former classmate. His wife works at a publishing company, and they decided not to have children. He and his wife are busy, with little free time: “We both bring work home.” Within this limited leisure time, Masao maintains friendships particularly with university classmates who also studied geography, “On the phone … or we go out for a drink once a year.” He notes that friendships become harder to maintain over time:

Relationships end, people have families, get busy. It’s as if [the friendship] was animated just for a fixed period of time (aru ittei no kikan dake moriagatteita kanji).

(Masao, 47 years, married, childless)
In addition to his former classmates, Masao’s socializing also includes his colleagues and current and former students, reflecting the centrality of work as a space for creating intimate relationships. For Masao, this reflects both common interests (geography), common lifestyles, and time constraints. However, among all the men interviewed in the project thus far, Masao is unusual for his explicit mention of technology in creating and maintaining friendships. Although he rarely sees his friends in person, Masao uses email as a method of maintaining his friendships: “With my university friends, on a busy day [I email] maybe three times. We suddenly get into debates and stuff.” He reflects that his comfort with email relates to his early familiarization:

My high school friends were pioneering, and I used to exchange emails with them. In those days it was groundbreaking. And because I got used to it early on, email is best. For work purposes as well, my friends are at their computers every day drawing maps and things, so they can see email immediately and reply immediately, so it’s convenient.

For Masao, friendships developed through shared history (of university study) are maintained through practices of contemporary contact and professional connections. As an academic, his proximity and relatively free access to technology (email) enables a sense of community that is both professionally and affectively grounded. Thus his workplace relationships have blurred into the social space beyond the workplace. Where work is central and time-consuming, it is not surprising to see friendships flourish when they are built around, though not necessarily *at*, work. In Masao’s case this lends currency and durability to relationships that do not necessarily involve self-disclosure or even regular shared activity (Messner 1992: 232).

By contrast, for Takuya, close social relationships are fluid and context-situated. A young man, his closest relationships are mostly less than ten years old, and he observes that he does not have any childhood friends. His most regular social contact is not with friends, but with colleagues or acquaintances, and these relationships follow social conventions of hierarchy that delimit intimacy.

While Takuya does not seem unhappy with his social life, he is more explicitly concerned with the implications of professional instability on his chances of marrying:

I think definitely, even now in Japan it’s taken as a given that men have the financial capacity to support [their wives]. And I think, as a man, I want to do that too. And I’m not keeping up with what I think is the ideal 32-year-old male financial capacity, so I feel like I’m in debt.
Friendship beyond marriage: Gendered differences

As a married woman with small children, Satoko, in contrast to Takuya, expresses nostalgia for her childless life and friendships. While she is emphatic that she loves being a mother, she is ambivalent about the sacrifices to her socialization. Marriage, and particularly maternity, have shifted her friendship practices, even as she notes the resilience of her personal values:

My lifestyle has changed so my routine is different, but I don’t think my values have particularly changed. So sometimes, compared to my friends’ lifestyle [which] I used to have … sometimes I feel jealous because I don’t have any free time, I can’t even go out at night time like them, but also I’ve been appreciating having my own family to relax with, so it’s a bit difficult to compete with my friends because our lifestyles are completely different.

In the study thus far, marriage appears to represent a symbolic and practical shift of interpersonal focus for Japanese women. As Oliker (1989: 40) observed in the United States, while marriage does not delimit the emotional lives of women, all else being equal, it does alter the time and affective energy available to women to construct and maintain intimate relationships outside the marriage. While marriage may insulate women against the precarity of singlehood and its travails (Dales 2013), it may also weaken the strength of relationships that offer meaning and connection beyond family. Furthermore, the need to develop relationships beyond the family, like the need for independence, is as critical for married women as it is for those never married. As Ueno noted, in her bestselling treatise on being a single person in old age, “[i]f everyone, at some point, ends up alone, the difference is just whether you start preparing for it earlier, or later” (Ueno 2007: 2).

By contrast, the impact of marriage – both as a practice and as a status – on friendships seems far less significant for men. For Takuya, his unmarried status is a barrier to fulfillment, or a eudaimonic sense of purpose, but he did not mention marriage – either the status of others or his own singlehood – as a factor in friendship formation or maintenance.

Neither Takuya nor Masao, nor most of the other men interviewed thus far, suggest dissatisfaction with their social arrangements: most men interviewed, married and single, seem content with their friendships, desiring neither more friends, more socializing, nor more intimacy. This finding suggests several possible interpretations. First, this may reflect a pragmatic conceptualization of friendship, as a set of practices that shift over the life course. As Takuya’s experience suggests, the transience of certain intimate relationships does not diminish the immutability of the ideal of friendship.

Relatedly, it may support a gendered view of friendship, in which male friendships are characterized as less focused on self-disclosure, more likely to be instrumental and based on shared activities (Felmlee et al. 2012: 519;
Wright 1982). While this characterization has been challenged as essentializing and obscuring variation within men’s friendships (Rumens 2011: 18), work remains central to the definition of hegemonic masculinity, significant both to those who comply and those who diverge from the ideal (Dasgupta 2013: 170). For non-regular and regular employees alike, the workplace is typically the space outside the home most constantly attended and most weighted by interpersonal interactions. The hours spent at work inevitably create relationships of familiarity, although they may not allow intimacy. While friendships with direct colleagues may not be possible, for some individuals (such as Takuya) the wider work context may lead to the development of close, if bounded, relationships. Thus in concrete ways, non-work relationships that require time and engagement, and/or that do not have an explicit purpose or goal, may well be undervalued. While the workplace may present important opportunities for belonging and socializing, it is arguably an ambivalent space for interpersonal relationships for Japanese women and men.

What is noteworthy here is the way that friendship shifts are understood in relation to marriage, and the gendered difference that subsequently appears. For Satoko, it is natural but regrettable that she has lost touch with her pre-motherhood friends. For Masumi, unmarried friends are those with whom she feels most connected. Writing on American society in the 1980s, Oliker (1989: 85) observed that “between single and unmarried women, childless women and those with children, a gulf separates their interests, priorities and problems.” This gulf is not present in men’s discussions, suggesting that the implications of marriage (and fatherhood) to friendship are either downplayed or less significant for men than for women. Thus while Masao observes that friendships end for reasons including marriage – “people have families, get busy” – his own “busy”ness reflects work rather than familial relationships. Thus what constitutes an interruption or obstacle to friendship is shaped by gendered non-friendship relationships and practices. Similarly, for Takuya, the transience of his friendships is natural, but not regrettable. Marriage may be a marker of maturity for Japanese men, but it does not appear to effect the categorically divisive life change that it does for Japanese women.

Connections: Between friendship and happiness

Joy is the experience of a growth from one state of being to a more efficient one as it is happening. It is the experience of that quantum leap of the body, of the self as it is moving into a higher capacity to act.

(Hage 2002: 152, emphasis in the original)

Hage suggests that joy, which might be understood as a concentrate of happiness, is a process rather than an endpoint. The experience of this process
marks joy as inherently subjective and inevitably ephemeral, as it cannot be maintained indefinitely. While joy may not last, arguably the capacity exists to act so that results from the joyful growth remain, and produce effects beyond the process itself.

This capacity, which implies both agency and eudaimonia, does not seem limited to the formation of a single relationship, even where that relationship is accorded a hegemonic meaning. That is to say, the act of marriage does not necessarily ensure or enable the capacity for connection, although it may engender an outcome that supports well-being through scaffolds of social recognition, economic security and fulfillment of expected norms.

The formation and maintenance of friendships may represent both cause and effect of happiness. As individuals reach out, forming connections with similarly positioned others, they establish new possibilities for intimacy, fun, self-knowledge, and contentment. Through relationships they experience the positive affect of connection and belonging. These relationships in turn enable growth, the leap to new capacities for social engagement, new community, and belonging. The relationships may begin with joy, and will likely generate joy, and it is this affect that supports and fuels the maintenance of friendship through practice. Friendships bind individuals together in what Ingold (2011: 63) terms a “meshwork,” the “entangled lines of life, growth and movement.” However, friendship also enables independence, cultivated “through multiple and varied relationships of support” (Kavedzija 2015: 65).

Friendships are located within lives, and are subject to the structural factors that shape lives; thus economic and political shifts unavoidably also generate social and affective impacts on individual relationships. Marriage (or divorce), relocation for work or education, unemployment, ill health, and the physical care of infant or elderly dependents, are all examples of the kinds of entanglements that can develop between personal relationships and other lines of movement, at an individual and societal level.

Further, while relationships from formative years at school and university retain significance after graduation, relationships built on regular meetings or based on shared practices may offer greater scope for intimacy and belonging. The workplace, which can both challenge and support the development of friendships, may offer different affective possibilities to women and men, the married and the unmarried. Friendships developed at work may reflect the pragmatism of shared hours and pressures. For unmarried men, the workplace may limit possibilities for marriage while at the same time encouraging relationships based on adherence to particular goals. For unmarried women, particularly those with children, work may provide an opportunity to build networks among the similarly positioned.

For Takuya friendships are pragmatic connections that function at particular moments, and fade beyond that time. For Masao, friendships fed by work thrive, fostered also by technology that enables connection without physical meeting. For Satoko, friendships grow (and thrive) from shared practices and routine, as well as values. For Masumi, friendships engender
meaning through community, particularly as singlehood positions one outside the discursive ideal. Here then is a caveat to be made: The discussions above are at best snapshots of Japanese individuals and their perceptions and experiences of friendship. These perceptions of friendship are not necessarily or exclusively the product of marital status or gender. What can be gained from the perceptions is a sense of how friendship and marriage entangle individuals in particular ways, and how these entanglements support or constrain opportunities for connection and belonging, before and beyond marriage. This is significant in the Japanese context, because of the increasing percentage of the population who are not, or will not, be married in the coming decades.

Conclusion

In this chapter I have sketched some of the functions of friendship for Japanese women and men, with particular attention to its relationship to marriage. The four case studies introduced here reflect just some of the salient factors in the creation of intimate relationships beyond the family, including marital status, gender, economic capacity and lifestyle. I suggest that the gendered differences in friendship practice are inextricable from economic factors such as work status, as well as the social meanings ascribed to unpaid work (such as mothering) for women and men.

The connections that Satoko, Masumi, Takuya and Masao perceive in their relationships portend a broader sense of belonging: an identity (shaped by activity, ascribed status, or common experience) that both supports existing, external relationships and develops new possibilities, relational and personal. While the agentic potential of friendships is limited – perhaps hinted at only in Masumi’s reflection on her future as an unmarried woman – the relationships that each interviewee describes as “friendship” nonetheless suggest the ways that individuals construct themselves, in relation to others, as beings who belong, and in belonging, achieve happiness as eudaimonia.

As evidenced by the literature used in this chapter, some of this study’s findings echo observations made in the UK, Europe and elsewhere. The significance of co-presence and shared activities, the contextualization of friendship within other relationships, and the shifts in marriage patterns and household formation have been noted in other contexts (see for example: Roseneil and Budgeon 2004; Rumens 2011; Eve 2002; Oliker 1989). An in-depth comparison is beyond the scope of this chapter, but it is worth noting that cross-cultural studies of interpersonal relationships have typically taken a Japan/US focus as representative of an “East–West” divide (Schug et al. 2010; Oghihara and Uchida 2014). In fact, the case studies presented here may be peculiarly Japanese only insofar as they are products of the economic and sociocultural specificities of postmodern Japanese society. Thus for example, the highly gendered nature of Japanese labor practices and patterns may alter
the weight of work in male friendship practice in Japan compared to, say, Australia.

In Japan, as elsewhere, friendship, more than just a dyadic relationship, is constituted by the social fabric: what Eve (2002: 395) calls “the substratum making individual exchanges possible.” The relationships that enable friendship may also, simultaneously or over time, damage or diminish the strength of friendship. For women, this may include motherhood, which produces conditions that both enable new friendships between a mother and other women, while also potentially limiting friendships that the mother may have formed before having children. For unmarried and childless women, friendships may represent alternative paths to meaning and identification, alongside and in lieu of romantic relationships, and within and beyond the constraints of work. For men, the substratum is dominated by work and workplace relations, and although marriage and children may also affect friendships, they are less significant until or unless the men are primary caregivers.

While marriage features centrally, as an ideal and practice, for many Japanese women and men, intimate relationships beyond the family both strengthen and extend the mesh of affective and material support. For married mothers, friendships may bolster resilience to stress and the social expectations attached to mothering, reinforcing women’s sense of belonging by virtue of their foundation on common limitations of time and energy. For unmarried women and men, particularly those past the “marriageable” age, friendship may represent a contiguous path to marriage, offering the emotional support, meaning and connections that bolster life as a minority in a familialist society.

Notes

1 This project was funded by the Japan Society for the Promotion of Science (ID P09751) and conducted in collaboration with Beverley Yamamoto at Osaka University.
2 Australia Research Council Discovery Early Career Researcher Award (DE120101702).
3 See for example Kaneko et al. (2008: 42), whose survey data suggest 71 percent of married women agree that “if married, one should have children.”
4 In 2005, 48 percent of 30–34-year-old married women, and 54.5 percent of 35–39-year-old married women were in the workforce. Married women’s labor force participation rate increases to 66 percent of 40–44-year-olds and 71 percent of 45–49-year-olds, before tapering off after the age of 50 (NIPSSR 2012).
5 Yoshida’s female interviewees suggest that this is particularly an issue for unmarried men, while noting that married men’s tendency to be absent from home due to work is a disincentive for the women to marry (Yoshida 2011: 222–223).

References


6 Grandfathering in contemporary Japan
Altruistic and self-serving means
to happiness

Hiroko Umegaki-Costantini

Men belonging to Japan’s post-war baby-boom generation (dankai sedai), born in the late 1940s, began retiring from the workforce en masse in 2007. These middle-class salarymen retirees typically enjoy relatively good physical health and access to significant economic resources in the form of savings and retirement pensions. In conjunction with Japan’s high average life expectancy, the prospect of an unprecedentedly long period of healthy and comfortable retirement thus invites consideration of what for these men constitutes personal happiness and, in a broader sense, their well-being.

For the previous generation of middle-class Japanese men, the salaryman life course, which became increasingly prevalent over the first few post-war decades, entailed a working life of dedication to one’s company, whether large or small. A marker of status rather than a particular profession, the salaryman career embodied norms that extended beyond the workplace to the familial sphere, where it connoted expectations of social reproduction through heterosexual marriage (Dasgupta 2000). On one hand, ideologically these men were characterized as daikokubashira, after the central pillar sustaining the structure of the traditional Japanese house, and were widely seen to fulfill a central role in supporting both their immediate families and the nation at large (Gill 2003; Roberson 2003; Hidaka 2010). Work may thus be regarded as having been the foundation of their sense of personal well-being. At the same time, fathers’ limited involvement in domestic matters (Ishii-Kuntz 1993; Allison 1994) resulted in the seeming paradox of a “fatherless society” (Doi 1973) in which the moral and authoritative influence of absent fathers (Vogel 1963; Ishii-Kuntz 1992) was mediated by mothers in the home (Wagatsuma 1977; Allison 1994). Yet, because their professional devotion also limited the time available for personal hobbies, their domestic absence during their working lives meant that salarymen came to face difficulties adjusting to life at home upon retirement. This struggle came to be reflected in derogatory metaphors like sodai gomi (useless “oversized rubbish” that takes up a lot of space) and nure ochiba (“sodden, fallen leaves” that cling annoyingly to wives’ feet),¹ which emerged in the 1980s as popular terms for retired men who had lost the guiding sense of purpose they had enjoyed in their professional self-identities.

Today, as the men of the dankai generation² enter their own retirement, it
seems likely that they will try to find ways of avoiding or contesting such negative characterizations. In doing so, however, they must somehow adjust to the shifting context of the domestic sphere amidst the current demographic and socioeconomic situation of increased life expectancy, economic recession, low birth rates, and women’s increased participation in the workforce.

For Japanese mothers, employment often entails struggle with the demands of childcare (Rebick 2006; Roberts 2011). In this context, an emerging trend among Japanese grandfathers towards taking a greater interest in grandchild rearing has drawn recent interest in the Japanese media. Traditionally, in multi-generational households, childcare responsibilities generally fell to the mother and (usually patrilineal) grandmother (Long 2014). As nuclear families became the norm in the post-war period, grandparental involvement with child rearing decreased as changing residence patterns and Japan’s economic growth gave the elderly a degree of independence from their children and diminished expectations of children’s support of parents based on filial piety (Yu 2009: 104‒105). Recent attempts by Japanese grandfathers to involve themselves in childcare may thus be seen to represent a truly new expression of their family role, and not simply a resurgence of older patterns of inter-generational support. In cases involving the children of a married daughter, such practices could even be construed as a break with the stem-family kinship structure that characterized Japan’s pre-war ie system, in that grandfathers’ involvement establishes ongoing connections between households that are structurally separate from a classic kinship perspective.3 Ironically, dankai-generation grandfathers, whose career commitments once limited day-to-day involvement with raising their own children, are now finding in retirement that they have relatively good health, means, and time to assist with raising their grandchildren. This raises the question of motivation. As I argue in this chapter, grandchild care represents a novel approach by which grandfathers may seek personal happiness and well-being.

Following the lead of anthropologist Gordon Mathews, any understanding of happiness needs to be grounded in “how happiness is conceived of, expressed, and experienced” (Mathews and Izquierdo 2009: 1) by people in specific situations. For grandfathers, the fact that grandchild care involves them with their extended families suggests that examining the relations that these men have with their family members may yield valuable insights into their personal conceptions of happiness. In doing so, it is helpful to draw on a recent anthropological approach that reinterprets kinship as “relatedness,” a less rigid and more fluid concept expressed in and constructed by everyday practices in local contexts (Carsten 2000; see also Parkin 1997). Focusing on relatedness allows us to look beyond normative kin rules and pay attention to the ways in which family relationships are actively shaped by their subjects. The prospect of grandfathers carving out a domestic child-raising role not conventionally seen as a male domain invites us to consider how these men reconcile grandchild care with their own sense of masculinity. In the Japanese context the model of the salaryman life course remains the basis for what may
be termed “hegemonic masculinity” (Connell 2005: 76–81), even if this status is being increasingly challenged and revisited (Mathews 2003; Roberson and Suzuki 2003; Dasgupta 2013). Discussions of subordinate masculinities, by contrast, have tended to focus more on homosexual gender identities (McLelland 2000; Lunsing 2001) and workers in precarious models of subsistence such as day laborers (Gill 2001) and, more recently, freeters (temporary workers; Cook 2013), than masculine identities in the domestic context. Focusing on the changing role and practices of grandfathers thus offers an opportunity to consider variant masculinities inside the family, thereby complementing the growing literature on masculinity.

In this chapter, to understand whether and how grandchild care contributes to grandfathers’ happiness, I discuss efforts by recent retirees and retiring salarymen in Japan to make meaningful contributions to their extended families, highlighting the ways in which recently retired grandfathers are involving themselves in caring for their grandchildren, how they frame their motivations, and what they receive as a result of such involvement. I draw on ethnographic fieldwork I carried out over the summer months of 2013 and 2014 in the city of Kōjō, located in Hyogo Prefecture in central Japan, where I observed and interacted with Japanese families in diverse everyday contexts, attending community events such as summer festivals, children’s activities, and local symposia. I also carried out narrative interviews with middle-class recently retired or retiring salaryman grandfathers and some of their family members. I conclude that the happiness grandfathers derive from grandchild care comprises several mutually reinforcing aspects. Grandfathers perform select grandchild care activities and leverage their resources to cultivate emotional relationships across the extended family, particularly through acts of gift giving with their married daughters. Through these close relationships, they are able to establish a new basis for self-worth within the family while maintaining their sense of masculinity, which contributes to their sense of well-being.

**Grandfathers’ practices of grandchild care**

To understand the context for grandparental involvement in childcare, it is important to consider how post-war changes in the Japanese family structure have affected the relative distribution of childrearing responsibilities, notably by shifting these onto mothers. At the same time as the nuclear family became more prevalent in the post-war period (see Ochiai 1994), weakening the structural link to the husband’s parents’ household, husbands became increasingly absorbed by their role as salarymen in Japanese companies. As a result, mothers found themselves bearing the burden of childrearing more than in previous generations.

One perspective on how mothers have adjusted is provided by Mori-san, a woman in her mid-forties who serves as the director at the Kosodate Sentā (Center for Childrearing), a public childcare facility launched in 1988 in Kōjō. In her view, the norm that mothers should look after children (hahaoya ga ko
o mirun ya) has weakened, while at the same time it has become easier for daughters to ask their own parents to take children to the facility. She has also observed a growing trend for grandparents to travel to Kōjō from the larger centers of Kobe and Osaka, one to two hours’ drive away, to mind their daughters’ children, such as by accompanying them to immunization appointments and the like. Mori-san further observed a number of young mothers having come back to Kōjō to live close to their own parents, often at their parents’ encouragement. The pressures of motherhood thus lead to closer relations to the mother’s parents.

Traditionally grandmothers have played an important role in grandchild care especially for mothers who struggle to meet work commitments and family responsibilities (Kenjoh 2007). Yet whereas grandmothers have typically provided support in the form of domestic help (Vogel 1963), grandfathers’ involvement in grandchild care (especially with the children of their daughters) is a truly novel pattern of family interaction. For grandfathers the absence of any established norms or role models on which to draw means that the nature and basis for such relationships represents an important matter for ethnographic inquiry. To this end, the following section introduces the experiences of a number of men who have established relationships with their grandchildren as a starting point for understanding the scope and limitations of grandfathers’ practices of grandchild care. This is followed by an in-depth look at one informant in particular whose experience suggests how involvement with grandchildren can also redefine grandfathers’ relationship with their own daughters.

The scope and limits of grandfathers’ involvement in childcare

In the context of a novel family relationship, grandfathers need to establish their role in grandchild care. This depends, in part, on their own lived experience of the practice of grandchild care, as was explained to me by Yamamoto-san, a 61-year-old man whom I came to know after meeting his daughter Mari at a local summer festival event for families. A former salaryman for an accounting firm and city hall worker in his retirement, Yamamoto-san has set up a real estate business with his son, though his participation in the venture is only part-time. In his view, the personal enjoyment derived from spending time with his grandchildren is sufficient explanation for his involvement in grandchild care:

On weekends, I sometimes take my grandchildren out for meals without their mother for things like sushi, yakitori or okonomiyaki, when I’m in the mood for these foods. I take them when I feel like it (boku no kimagure) […] I take them out because it’s fun to eat with my grandchildren […] It’s not to give my daughter and son-in-law time to go out as a couple, leaving their children with me. That is not a concern of mine.

(Author’s emphasis)
Yamamoto-san stresses his own enjoyment and takes care to point out his grandchildren’s parents’ leisure time is not a motivation for spending time with his grandchildren. Babysitting to allow parents to have time for couples’ activities is not considered by my informants to be something that warrants their help. For the older generation, marriage tends to be viewed more as a pragmatic relationship, less as an emotional link between spouses (Tokuhiro 2010). Grandfathers thus tend to view couples’ leisure together as being of limited importance for sustaining the relationship, which means they generally consider such matters beyond their sphere of interest.

Grandfathers’ provision of help depends on their own values. Whereas leisure may be devalued, a job is seen as an activity that warrants a mother being away from her children, and so helping their daughters meet work commitments is another reason my informants offer to explain their involvement in grandchild care. Mitsui-san, aged 65, is a retiree who worked at the city hall. He has two adult children, a daughter and a son. When we met at his home, he told me: “I feel sorry for my adult children having to live at a time when income levels are so low.” This sympathy motivates him to provide grandchild care and to support his daughter’s career so that she can earn an income and find fulfillment, while he gets to enjoy time with his grandchildren.

Grandfathers may also sometimes offer support that allows daughters to pursue activities that their fathers do not consider strictly necessary. For instance, on one occasion, Yamamoto-san looked after his grandson for almost a full day in Osaka while Mari attended a seminar out of personal interest. While Mari would not have been able to attend the seminar without her father’s help, it seems clear in this situation that decision-making authority lay with Yamamoto-san rather than his daughter.

Some grandfathers I spoke with became quite animated and passionate about the prospect of passing on part of their own knowledge, experience and customs to their grandchildren. Hosomi-san, a former high-school teacher introduced to me through K-Family Support, a local not-for-profit childcare facility, told me that he feels duty-bound to teach his grandchildren about nature:

To learn by experience – this is key. For example, I taught my grandson about the seven grasses of spring (haru no nanakusa) by pointing out seri (Japanese parsley) growing on the roadside in spring on the way back from his kindergarten. This way, he can learn about the nanakusa through personal, hands-on experience […] I think there’s great value in learning our connection with nature […] As grandparents we have lived in touch with nature, and it’s a very important task for me to give my grandchildren a way of thinking about nature. Teaching them this is something that I can do as their grandfather […] I can teach them about life through my own experience.

Along with the substance of his learning, Hosomi-san implicitly desires to impart a way of life (“in touch with nature”) and a way of learning (“by experience”), a charge he feels he is in a unique position to fulfill as a grandfather.
An interest in transmitting particular interests to grandchildren was frequently suggested by my informants. Yamamoto-san wants to teach his grandchildren how to hold chopsticks so as not to embarrass themselves in public, a skill he believes they might otherwise not learn. Sakai-san, who has two daughters and one son, feels the desire to teach his grandchildren about regional customs and rules, such as how to pray at a local shrine, in order for them to learn to fit into the local community. He believes this is important even though his own children (the parents of his grandchildren) tell him that such things are no longer relevant to Japanese society. Mitsui-san, for his part, is keen to instill respect for hierarchical relationships of seniority (jōge kankei) and courtesy (reigi) towards others in greeting:

I scold children in our community as well, because these parents today, they don’t scold […] Seriously. Now in my day, we weren’t brought up to speak to our elders without using respectful language. But these days there are no seniors, no juniors – they’re all just friends […] I just simply can’t think that way […] Children should talk to their elders and their older friends using respectful language […] I don’t think I’m asking for too much, but these young parents don’t say anything […] Children who have a grandfather and grandmother are a bit different – these kids are polite, they can do what they’re told, like greeting people on the street properly […] I don’t think grandfathers and grandmothers are useless.

While Mitsui-san feels disappointed by young parents who do not scold their children, he considers the real problem to be families that lack a grandfatherly figure like him to play a disciplinary role. The reproduction of social norms and customs, a charge he associates with the role of grandfathers, is for him a prime motivation. Likewise, in their respective emphases on social courtesy, chopstick etiquette, and religious observance, these men express a common desire to help socialize their grandchildren into their own conception of societal norms, regardless of whether this accords with the views of the interceding generation. This contributes to grandfathers’ sense of self-worth, as they feel they can do this particularly well.

Even so, my informants demonstrate a preference for steering clear of potential conflicts with parents when it seems that their actions might be seen to go too far. In the words of Hosomi-san, the former school teacher:

I don’t care to involve myself with the grandchildren to the extent that my daughter and I might disagree […] When I am involved, I’m able to imagine how the person feels, so I try to avoid such situations. I don’t want to be involved in grandchild care to that extent (soko made). I don’t do that much because that is not my obligation (gimu) as grandfather.

(Author’s emphasis)
Although discussing concerns about children’s behavior with parents was part of his professional duties as a school teacher, as a grandfather Hosomi-san does not feel the obligation to voice disagreements about his grandchild’s behavior and development to the extent of straining his relationship with his daughter. For him this represents a clear boundary to the extent of his involvement. In this he could be seen to be acknowledging the possibility of inter-generational differences over ideas of propriety. This is not to say that Hosomi-san ignores parental views; rather, he determines his actions by factoring in his understanding of parental preferences through self-reflection rather than discussion.

Grandfathers’ concerns for avoidance of short-term harm are generally much more evident than any emphasis on the grandchildren’s longer-term development, such as physical growth or academic performance at school. Mori-san, at the Center for Childrearing, stresses the sense of responsibility grandparents feel to ensure that their grandchildren do not suffer any physical injury while in their care. As Mitsui-san notes:

It’s easier in a way, as I don’t have responsibility for my grandchildren like I had for my children [...] I have a responsibility while I’m looking after them, but I just have to make sure they do their homework and do not hurt themselves.

Mitsui-san’s feelings of responsibility towards his grandchildren’s development do not extend beyond the time he spends with them. Not that he ignores their longer-term development, as evidenced by his concerns that “we shouldn’t spoil grandchildren by helping too much (amayakashi sugitara akan) [...] such as by getting their things ready for school,” but he does not feel such things to be his main responsibility. Like my other informants, he believes that the parents retain responsibility for ongoing care of the children.

Similarly, requests for assistance for domestic chores such as cooking, doing the laundry or cleaning for their grandchildren are seen by my male informants as jobs for grandmothers, rather than themselves. Nor do they generally take on grandchild care in the evening (such as by getting children ready for bed) or overnight, as this would require grandfathers to acquire particular skills and capabilities with which they have little previous experience. Even when taking on the novel role of grandchild caregiver, then, these men continue to take it for granted that domestic work is a woman’s domain. They tend to take on roles that they know how to perform, differentiating their duties much as they did during their working lives.

The enjoyment of time spent with grandchildren is a source of happiness for grandfathers. They avoid conflict with parents, and are selective as to their reasons for providing support and the specific practices they are willing to perform. These limits suggest that from the grandfathers’ perspective the benefits of grandchild care need to be regarded not so much in the context of the child’s development than of the grandfather’s overall relationship with the children’s parents.
The impact of grandchild care on grandfathers’ relationships with their daughters

Grandfathers’ involvement in grandchild care practices may deepen their relationships with their children. Conversely, intimacy in relations with their adult children may lead to grandfathers’ involvement in grandchild care. A perspective on unpacking the relationship between intimacy and involvement is provided by Yamamoto-san’s experience. Yamamoto-san’s involvement with his son in the family real estate business notwithstanding, it is evident that he has a much more intimate relationship with his daughter and her three children than with his married son, who has one child. Although he sees his son most days at work, he seldom visits his son’s house – just two to three times per year, for example on Father’s Day and on his own birthday. Conversely, he visits his daughter’s house for dinner three to four times per week and regularly goes out for dinner with his daughter’s family. He does not go out with his son’s family, despite the fact that they live very near. Yet, when his children were young, Yamamoto-san describes his relationship as having been equally close with both his son and daughter:

Since my children were elementary school students, they participated in the sports club activities of baseball [for my son] and volleyball [for my daughter] until high school. At the time I was close to both children equally by always accompanying [them to their practices and taking them to the competitions] […] I often visited my daughter when she was a college student in Kobe but I rarely went to see my son when he was a university student in Osaka […] because he was not so pleased with my visits. My wife usually went to see him by herself by train […] [Even when I did visit] he was not so glad although he did not complain about my visits. I had a feeling that I was not welcome. It was much more comfortable visiting my daughter. My wife and I would visit her [almost self-invited], and take her and her friends out to dinner. I went to my son’s place only when I needed to bring something from home for him which required using the car as he was in Osaka.

By the time the children were at university, the divergence between Yamamoto-san’s feelings towards his adult children had deepened. In particular, he feels distanced by what he regards as his son’s emotional independence:

I talk with my son about some things, but not private matters – things like social relations in the local community, the elderly, our business […] It’s also that I feel bad when I visit his family because it’s as if I were walking into his home with shoes on (kazoku no naka ni dosoku de agaru kanji). Also, I feel like I have to be on my best behavior around my son’s wife (wakayome ni ki o tsukau). So I visit his house only when I am invited, whereas I visit my daughter’s house when the mood strikes me. In
particular, her husband [his son-in-law] is usually not there in the early evening. I feel like I can relax (ki o tsukawanai) at her house [...] It’s much more comfortable to have a chat with my daughter [...] We talk about the children [his grandchildren], and even make a lot of jokes and laugh together over dinner. It’s fun [...] Women become soft and friendly when they chat but men instead start to contain themselves [...] Sons become like complete strangers (aka no tanin).

Yamamoto-san feels welcome at his daughter’s house, and is keen to visit her, especially when the absence of his son-in-law dispenses with the need for formal behavior. These are moments of pleasure for him, as is apparent from his expressiveness when he recounted these moments during our interview. On the other hand, Yamamoto-san feels presumptuous when visiting his son’s family without having a particular reason or excuse because he considers his son’s home to be his daughter-in-law’s domain. He is reluctant to intrude on his daughter-in-law’s space, though not his daughter’s. This attitude is thus inconsistent with ie norms, which would place him in a position of comfortable authority in his son’s household, and also out of sync with the traditional pattern of the nuclear family, given his desire to maintain the relationship with his daughter and her children.

Yamamoto-san’s 36-year-old daughter Mari suggests an alternative perspective on this relationship. Mari, who teaches at one of Kōjō’s kindergartens, says: “My father helps by going to fetch my child at the school bus stop every day. This actually helps me out a lot as I cannot pick him up myself, since I work full-time.” She greatly appreciates his constant support of her parenting, emphasizing that, “[o]ur household wouldn’t be able to function without my parents (Oya ga inai to uchi wa mawaranaï).” In practical terms her father’s contribution is instrumental to her ability to work at a job she finds personally fulfilling.

Yamamoto-san’s desire to protect his daughter represents another core motivation for his involvement with his daughter’s children. At the time of my first interview with him, in fact, Mari was on leave due to poor health. Even so, Yamamoto-san continued to pick up her son Takeshi at the bus stop, despite the fact that his doing so was no longer strictly necessary. He explained that he continued to do so in part because he was concerned that were people to see that Mari was well enough to fetch her son, they would think that she was therefore well enough to work and judge her harshly. He feared that she would lose face and trust at her workplace. Understanding this, Mari was grateful to him for continuing to pick up Takeshi during her illness, while for his part, he derived fulfillment by shielding her from a difficult situation.

Over time, as Yamamoto-san has become aware of the daily joy afforded by fostering a close relationship with his grandchild, he has come to look forward to these moments together with his grandson:
I see my grandchildren [daughter’s children] every morning and evening […] I fetch Takeshi [his daughter’s eldest son] from the school bus stop every day. I’m happy to do so, just because I like doing it! Fetching my grandchild is something I look forward to (tanoshimi). After picking him up I take him back to my office and let him play on my computer or take him back to his home.

(Author’s emphasis)

For Yamamoto-san, grandchild care provides two benefits, namely the intrinsic satisfaction of performing the act, and the instrumental sense of self-worth gained from being needed. Yamamoto-san derives day-to-day pleasure from grandchild-rearing practices embedded in his affection towards his daughter.

As in other cases discussed in this chapter, Yamamoto-san is an example of a grandfather who differentiates his time investment in his grandchildren, devoting greater attention to his daughter’s children than his son’s. His agency in these family relationships – that is, his decisions about which relationships to prioritize – reveals that he does not feel constrained by traditional patriarchal norms (i.e. those that would otherwise privilege his relationship with his son’s family). As his children grew up, he became closer to his daughter, whose marriage and motherhood have necessarily changed her situation and the nature of their relationship.

Ethnographic evidence suggests that young parents are choosing to live closer to the mother’s own parents rather than her parents-in-law in recent times. This facilitates the involvement in childrearing by the maternal grandparents (Roberts 2011). Yamamoto-san’s desire to help his daughter, to reduce the burden of childrearing and to facilitate her decisions to work, allows him to enjoy spending time with his daughter and grandchildren and gives him something to look forward to. For Yamamoto-san, happiness includes not only moments of joy experienced in the practices of everyday life, but also the anticipation of these moments. In this fashion, Yamamoto-san and his daughter have developed and are maintaining a close emotional relationship through the daily practices associated with childrearing. Building on an initial base of intimacy, grandchild care becomes a reflexive strategy for reinforcing father-daughter intimacy, an intimacy that is important for Yamamoto-san’s sense of well-being.

**Gift-giving practices in the family**

The previous sections document how grandfathers have become involved with grandchild care for the pleasure of time spent with their grandchildren as well as that derived from supporting their daughters. As a novel social role, this involvement entails negotiation with their grandchildren’s parents, consistent with the view of roles being negotiated anew in Japanese families. As argued by family sociologist Yamada Masahiro, the Japanese family can no longer be
seen as a fundamentally stable unit (if ever it could), and family relationships are now being “restructured,” in no small part due to the economic pressures families have faced over Japan’s long years of economic recession (Yamada 2003). As Japanese family norms change, therefore, access to economic resources may be expected to surface as a topic of major interest in the ongoing and mutual negotiation of roles and relationships.

For the grandfathers I interviewed, access to and control over economic resources play an important part in (re)shaping family relations, not only in terms of their daughters’ ability to work but also with reference to more tangible family resources. Many of my informants, in fact, provide financial support to their married daughters in the form of gifts, and all discussed economic resources in their accounts of family relationships. This section addresses the question of why grandfathers might provide such support, and how such support is framed.

Commensality is one example of a practice that illustrates the role of gifts in family relationships. Although sharing of food and other substances has been shown to be a basis for moral and affective ties extending beyond links of affiliation or consanguinity (Lambert 2000), my fieldwork reveals how the sharing of food can play an important role in relatedness among family relationships.

Fukui-san, a 69-year-old retiree I met at a symposium on regional development hosted by a local business association, is a former automotive company employee. His daughter, 35 years old, is married with three children, aged eight, ten, and seventeen. He lives approximately ten minutes’ drive away from his daughter’s house and generally meets with her family once a week during the school term and twice a week over school holidays, often treating them to meals at restaurants. In Fukui-san’s words:

Grandchildren are thought to be the center of the family, but in fact I’m the center because I pay for meals. I pay because I have money […] It’s a good deal for them to go out with me. So they ask me to go for meals together! [He smiles.] The children’s parents think wisely […] We can have family contact (kazoku no fureai) over a meal out, which is precisely why I go out for meals with my daughter and her children. I sometimes ask my grandchildren at the beginning of the meal if they love me. They say “I love you!” although my oldest grandchild has stopped saying this. They are so adorable!

By choosing to pay, Fukui-san feels able to secure a central position (chūshin) in the family, the “center” of the family, at least for the duration of the meal. His gift giving is thus a strategic attempt to elicit a reciprocal return on his gift in the form of the gratitude and affection of his daughter and grandchildren.

This provides an interesting example in contrast to the argument, advanced by Katherine Rupp (2003), that gift-giving sustains the patriarchal system. Rupp observes that in the context of gift-giving for seasonal and life cycle events, women (as gift givers) “must explicitly acknowledge the higher status
of the other person and ask for that person’s continued favour and assistance. […] Although women are the primary givers of gifts, they give as the subordinate halves of the marital units” (Rupp 2003: 161–162). The structure of social relations determines the form of the exchange – who gives, who receives, and for what purpose – thereby reaffirming and sustaining the hierarchical structure. In contrast, I would argue that Fukui-san’s strategy is not based on a pre-supposed hierarchical relation with his daughter and grandchildren, but rather his hope to nurture these family relations. He expects that by paying for meals, he is creating occasions that generate ties of affection with his daughter and grandchildren.

Though Fukui-san stresses the desirability of “family contact” with his daughter and her children, his notional family conspicuously does not extend to his son-in-law. As in the case of Yamamoto-san, Fukui-san’s involvement with his daughter and her children does not accord with notions of family structure based on the traditional ie norm or the basic nuclear family. Rather, it is reflective of a sense of relatedness that has arisen out of the nature and frequency of their interaction.

Indeed, Fukui-san feels uncomfortable visiting his son-in-law’s home for dinner, where he feels that he would no longer be the “center” of the family. Rather, he creates situations by arranging for meals at restaurants, which enable him to protect his masculine pride by paying for the meals and positioning himself as the provider. Although retired and living off his pension and savings rather than a salaried income, he feels the need to express and maintain his sense of masculinity through demonstrations of financial support, just as he did when his daughter was single. His contributions shape his relationships with his daughter and her family, allowing him to feel content as a valued family member who plays a part in the family’s sense of well-being.

The pattern of financial support in relationships also features prominently in Yamamoto-san’s account. When his daughter married, Yamamoto-san bought a house for his daughter, which he felt to be his role as a parent (oya no yakume):

That house came on the market just before the wedding, and since they were going to get married, I bought the place thinking that I would have them live there (sumasō to omotte) […] I guess I kind of pushed them into it (oshitsuke). It would be easier for them to live here than in some apartment. That was my pitch […] Anyway, my daughter was also working, and so was my son-in-law, so when a kid came along, well, my office is near here, and we [my wife and I] knew we would have to look after the kid, so you could say it ticked all the right boxes […] I didn’t really think about [how it might be hard to pull off if his relationship with his son-in-law soured]. I never thought about how it might feel [for the son-in-law] from a personal perspective. I just thought it would be convenient to set them up in a house close by (chikaku ni oite oitara ee). [I also thought it would be nice if our sweet Mari would live close to us] […]
Well, there’s that too, but I also believe it’s our role as parents. Afterwards, they can do what they like, since I’ve done this much (soko made) [with regard to the role of the parents]. You could say it’s the cornerstone (ishizue) of being able to live so as to provide stability for your own children. To that extent, I think it’s something we parents have to do. And I believe a home is the best foundation for that.

Acting on his own strongly held views, Yamamoto-san prepared what he considered to be the most important base for his daughter’s new married life. His belief that a house is important for married life impelled him to “push them into it.” Recognizing that he and his wife will provide childcare support, he still acknowledges his desire to be physically close to his daughter. Yamamoto-san considers his parental responsibility to include his daughter, even though she is now married, and he has redefined his notion of immediate family accordingly.

As the distinction between fathers’ and daughters’ households becomes blurred, structural norms are no longer reliable as a guide to family relationships as the actual practices by which relatedness is constructed and expressed (Carsten 2000). My informants, for example, bring their daughters closer by leveraging material resources as well as facilitating opportunities for commensality and looking after grandchildren.

Nonetheless, looking at family relations through the prism of happiness cannot avoid the question of whether and to what degree such motivations are self-serving. Yamamoto-san presented the house as a wedding gift, and it is clear that he cares, in an altruistic sense, for his daughter’s well-being. At the same time, his selection criteria were self-serving in the sense that he chose a house located relatively close to his own office so as to facilitate frequent visits. Yamamoto-san acknowledges that his purchase of a good-sized home with a garden was sufficiently attractive from his daughter’s family’s perspective that it would have been difficult to refuse. His use of the term oshitsuke demonstrates his recognition that he effectively imposed his decision about where to live on his daughter and her husband, suggesting that he was well aware that his gift would increase the likelihood of his desires being fulfilled. At the same time, his daughter is also delighted to have received the generous gift, which she could not have afforded otherwise.

The use of financial resources as a means to facilitate the establishment of intimate relationships and pursue instrumental goals is also evident in the experience of Hosomi-san, the retired school teacher. Hosomi-san believes that relationships between grandfathers and grandchildren are strong because of the economic dependency of the interceding generation. He speculates that more economic opportunities would prompt young parents to move to where they could earn higher incomes and send their children to childcare facilities when they could afford it, resulting in fewer opportunities for grandparents to look after their grandchildren.7 Desiring to ensure that his daughter stayed close at hand (temoto ni oite okitai), Hosomi-san bought land just 15 minutes’
walk from his house for his daughter to build a house on after her marriage. Hosomi-san’s son-in-law, although an eldest son, has no intention of moving back to his home town of Kobe, where his parents live, as this would entail a commute of more than an hour. Living in Kōjō, where they pursue dual careers as school teachers, their reasonable, stable income and lack of mortgage, thanks to the gift of property, affords them a comfortable lifestyle, and allows Hosomi-san to keep his daughter physically and emotionally close.

Importantly, Hosomi-san’s access to financial resources gave him not only the ability to be generous, but also control over how to be generous. A gift of land comes with an implicit reciprocal obligation to remain close, and while Hosomi-san’s daughter and son-in-law might take the time and trouble to sell the land and move, to do so would entail a restructuring of the relationship. This gift may be considered through the distinction American anthropologist Annette Weiner (1985) makes between “alienable” and “inalienable” goods. The value of an alienable good does not depend on the owner: For instance, had Hosomi-san given a gift of cash this would have been essentially alienable in that his daughter’s family would have been free to spend it as they wished. Inalienable goods, conversely, derive their value from their owners; even when they are gifted, the relationship established (or reinforced) between giver and receiver makes them difficult to pass on. Through gift giving, property, which in normal transactions is an alienable commodity, becomes to some degree inalienable, as the substance, location, and occasion of the gift effectively work together to tie the land to the giver. For Hosomi-san, then, his gift may be seen to bind his daughter and son-in-law to him.

Gift giving thus offers a way for grandfathers to place themselves in their families. This contrasts with the often negative view of retirees as non-contributors to society (Ueno 2008), or of being of limited value in domestic settings where women dominate (Alexy 2007). Thus, for grandfathers who are able, the careful selection and provision of gifts in the form of significant and durable financial resources – even houses and property – may be regarded as an integral component of grandfathers’ relational strategies. Still, material resources are simply a means to an end, namely the emotional happiness engendered by the affection, gratitude and attention they receive when spending time with their daughters and grandchildren. However, because gift giving also entails the restructuring and establishment of new relationships with daughters and their immediate families, it is important to examine how this reciprocity plays out in the longer term.

Masculinity and future well-being through gift giving

As we have seen, while most of my informants enjoy visiting their grandchildren regularly and providing occasional help to their daughters, these acts do not in themselves constitute a primary motivation for their grandfatherly involvement. While gift giving tends to shape relations across the extended
family, from my informants’ perspective it is the relationships they negotiate with their daughters that they consider truly important.

One means for grandfathers to connect with their daughters is through their grandchildren. Fukui-san, who often takes his grandchildren to go shopping and out for dinner, is very happy and excited to talk about his everyday experiences, often remarking that “grandchildren are so adorable” (mago wa kawaii yo). However, more in-depth discussion reveals that Fukui-san’s primary interest in caring for his grandchildren is that doing so offers regular opportunities to spend time with his daughter. At these meetings he often provides her with “secret money” (naishokin), small amounts of cash he intends her to keep hidden from his son-in-law to save against the possibility of some future emergency, especially divorce, which is a subject Fukui-san is particularly concerned about. As there is still a stigma in Japanese society towards women who wish to live by themselves, he worries that his daughter would face a very difficult situation in case of divorce, particularly financially. For her part, his daughter is glad to receive the secret money, acknowledging that it might become useful one day, as well as that it gives her father some joy to be able to provide it. His concern about divorce is not the only reason why Fukui-san wants to keep the cash gifts secret.

The secret money is part of a strategy by which Fukui-san seeks to negotiate the transition to retirement. Being a financial provider, it has been argued, is a key element of salaryman masculinity during one’s working life (Dasgupta 2013). As their daughters marry out, the sense of masculinity associated with the role of being the daughter’s financial provider is potentially lost. For dankai-generation grandfathers, who retain access to economic resources even in retirement, finding ways to continue in the role of provider offers a chance to maintain this familiar sense of masculine identity. To do so openly, however, risks being seen as a challenge to or deception of their sons-in-law. The secrecy of the gift, justified by the specter of (potential) divorce, allows Fukui-san to support his daughter and maintain his role as financial provider, continuing the terms of their previously existing relationship, and thereby sustain his sense of masculinity in the family.

The grandfathers I spoke to do not give gifts or offer their time capriciously. Rather, they take care when considering the nature of their material gifts and remain selective as to how and when they involve themselves in grandchild care. They do so in order to maximize the gratitude and appreciation they receive from their daughters, thereby affirming their sense of masculinity as providers. They protect their sense of masculinity by limiting their involvement, for example by declining to change diapers or cook children’s meals – activities at which they may be capable, but still consider to be inconsistent with male norms. This reaffirmation of their sense of masculinity provides emotional stability, and thus a foundation for their well-being.

While Fukui-san’s practice of doling out his gift giving a little at a time allows him to spend more time with his daughter and nurture their emotional bond, his hopes extend beyond this interaction. After divulging the secret of
his covert financial support, Fukui-san revealed to me that he hopes to be looked after when he is no longer able to care for himself. Even should his daughter not be able to take care of him personally, he hopes that she will use the funds he has provided to maintain their relationship: “I’d like my daughter to continue visiting me, using the secret money to buy me apples and other treats (naishokin de ringo kattari shite mi ni kite hoshii).” The secret money may thus be seen as an investment intended to nurture long-lasting emotional bonds that will ensure the maintenance of their relationship, and thus provide an incentive for her to visit him when he is no longer physically able to visit her. The anticipation of care in old age is something Fukui-san regards as a reciprocal return for his investment of time and money in his daughter and grandchildren, expedited by the financial mechanism of the secret money. The ongoing investment of time and economic resources during grandfathers’ years of relative good health are thus deployed in particular ways in an attempt to ensure security in later life.

In supporting their families, Fukui-san and the other grandfathers thus feel that they are also investing in the future; they commonly expressed a wish to be cared for by their own daughters if and when this should become necessary later. Yamamoto-san, for one, is troubled by the idea of no longer being able to care for himself, remarking that “I would hate to impose on so many others – better I should die suddenly, while I’m still healthy. That’s the way I’d like to go (ōzei no sewa ni nattara meiwaku […] Koron to shinana akan shi koron to shinitai).” However, while Yamamoto-san expects to be able to afford any necessary end-of-life care, he also confided that, ideally, he would like to be looked after by his daughter, though he acknowledges that this would be difficult in reality. He hopes that his development of a more intimate relationship with his daughter before her marriage and their ongoing relationship afterwards (e.g., buying the house, their visits and frequent communication, picking up his grandchild from school, paying for meals at restaurants) will ensure that she maintains the relationship when he begins to require care.

This anticipatory reciprocity underlying retired grandfathers’ gift exchanges with their daughters is something that can only unfold over the longer term. Looking to the future, they hope to enjoy their daughters’ continued support when they require care towards the end of their lives. Their daughters, however, are not under any binding obligation to care for their fathers in old age. This is not a normative transfer to their own daughters of a duty of care that once fell to the daughter-in-law under the norms of the traditional inter-generational household. Rather, grandfathers aim to channel their daughters’ agency through the careful nurturing of emotional bonds to secure their future well-being. This reveals a tension underlying the grandfathers’ gift exchanges with their daughters and the immediate families of their daughters. The ways in which grandfathers care about and find happiness in their daughters’ well-being certainly have elements that could be regarded as altruistic. Yet these altruistic elements are tempered by the self-serving desire
of these men, in the near term, to safeguard their sense of masculinity by acting strategically and selectively in regard to the help they are willing to provide, and, in the long term, to secure care for their old age. Paradoxically, grandfathers offering gifts that balance their own interests with those of their daughters increases the well-being of both.

Conclusion

The recent emergence of the novel phenomenon of Japanese grandfathers’ involvement in caring for grandchildren, especially their daughters’ children, invites the question of how such practices contribute to their happiness in retirement. Though over time they have come to appreciate more the intrinsic enjoyment derived from spending time with their grandchildren, grandchild care is seen by these men as a means to establish and maintain positive new family relationships, which enable grandfathers to maintain a sense of masculinity that provides a foundation for their emotional stability.

This sense of well-being is also supported by expectations of care and support in their old age. Grandfathers carefully arrange their gifts in order that they also feel less insecure about the future. The relative wealth of the grandfathers I have discussed in this chapter, a result of their careers as salarymen during Japan’s economic boom as opposed to the next generation’s experience of a stagnant economy, represents a key element in their practices of gift exchange. This suggests that whether the roles being created by the grandfathers of the dankai generation will be open to the next generation will depend in large part on relative levels of intergenerational wealth. Moreover, recognizing this fact also invites us to consider whether and how grandfathers with access to fewer material resources, but still with relatively good health and long life expectancy, might derive happiness and well-being from grandchild care. This remains a subject for further study.

Finally, the grandfathers and daughters I interviewed expressed their current satisfaction with the balanced relations of gift exchange they share. It remains to be seen how they will feel about their choices when the need for care becomes a reality. In the longer term, will such gift exchanges continue to be perceived as a source of happiness? In establishing and maintaining novel relations with their daughters’ families, grandfathers display agency, not simply accepting their predetermined role but actively forming the families of which they wish to be a part. They find self-worth and feel content in their relationships with loved ones, and so achieve happiness.

Acknowledgements

I would like to express my gratitude to Professor Roger Goodman, Professor Glenda Roberts, Dr. Emma Cook, Dr. Stephen Robertson and my supervisor Dr. Brigitte Steger for their helpful comments and encouragement. I also thank Ms. Kazuko Sakaguchi and the editors of this volume, Dr Barbara
Holthus and Professor Wolfram Manzenreiter, for their thoughtful suggestions and consistent support. Lastly, I am grateful to the Great Britain Sasaki Foundation for fieldwork funding and a generous scholarship enabling me to carry out this research, and to my informants for sharing their experiences.

Notes
1 The popular critic Higuchi Keiko used these two terms to describe retired men based on stories she heard from full-time housewives. The terms became very popular and were selected as buzzword of the year in 1981 and 1989, respectively.
2 In this chapter I consider men born around the time of the dankai sedai generation, usually defined to include people born between 1947 and 1949. However, the phenomena I address are by no means limited to men born in the post-war baby-Boom years.
3 Though long abolished as a legal structure, the ie model retains a normative influence on family attitudes and behaviors (Hidaka 2011).
4 I have used pseudonyms for informants, associations, and the city in order to preserve their anonymity.
5 The phrase “seven grasses of spring” refers to the custom of eating rice porridge made with the seven grasses (nanakusa gayu) to celebrate the arrival of spring.
6 The phrase dosoku de agaru literally means to enter a place without taking off one’s shoes (a breach of etiquette wherever shoes should be taken off, such as in a private home). The phrase is used to refer to intruding on or disturbing someone’s privacy.
7 This inversely echoes the results of a comparison of grandparental involvement in childcare in Taiwan and Japan by sociologist Wei-hsin Yu (2009), who found that it was the relative poverty of the older generation that ensured grandparental involvement in the Taiwanese case. By contrast, Yu found the relative wealth of Japanese grandparents to increase the likelihood that they would involve themselves (or be asked to become involved) in providing care for their grandchildren (Yu 2009: 104–105).

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7 Japanese gays, the closet and the culture-dependent concept of happiness

Erick Laurent

Introduction

At the end of Ozu Yasujiro’s 1949 movie Late Spring (Banshun), the father character, played by Ryū Chishū, says to his on-screen daughter Noriko, played by Hara Setsuko, who is about to marry: “Now you can be happy!” (narun da yo, shiawase ni!), to which the sublime Hara Setsuko answers in her own inimitable way, “yes” (ei).

In Japanese, what has been translated as “happiness” (shiawase), is a word always mentioned at weddings, just as if happiness were a keyword identified with married life, especially where women are concerned, or even as if only marriage, as a choice of way of life, should be associated with happiness, a quite recent connection that seems to date back to the 1940s, according to Joy Hendry (1979, 1995).

At least two questions arise from this. First, how should one understand the very concept of “happiness”? Is it universal, culture-dependent, or somewhere in between? What is a suitable cultural definition of happiness in Japan? Second, what about happiness for people who do not marry, or who, in Japan, are not supposed to marry, LGBTQ persons, for example? For most lesbians, gays, bisexuals, transsexuals, or queers marriage usually is neither a matter of choice nor a source of happiness.

Through this chapter, I intend to focus on the question of happiness for Japanese gays in particular, and how it can be attained. Notwithstanding all legal, medical, and moral considerations, the fundamental consideration should be how sexual minority people live their everyday lives. This includes “Are LGBTQ people happy?,” “Can their happiness be measured by their degree of visibility,” or whether they have “come out”? Clearly, the stable life of an established couple – not to speak of marriage and children – is not the only possible pattern of partner relationship between two persons. Indeed, as is well known, such a pattern does not guarantee happiness; far from it. However, a stable partnership of a married couple from which children will eventually emerge, used to be (and in Japan still is in a de facto sense) a sentimental, romantic, ideal model, to be attained in order to obtain certain rights and – yes, happiness.
Happiness as a culture-dependent concept

In order to assess the influence of culture on the concept of happiness and its content, and, consequently, to elicit a possible “cultural definition” of happiness, besides anthropological literature and fieldwork, I found it necessary – despite my anthropologist’s reluctance to do so – to have a closer look at what the social (and cultural) psychologists have had to say about this issue. Indeed, for some decades, social psychologists have devoted a lot of energy to cross-cultural research on the question of happiness. Dozens of books and articles have been published on the subject. Likewise, psychological research on emotions, for example, increasingly relies on anthropological findings, with culture being taken more and more into account in such research (Suh et al. 1998).

Anthropologists know well that individual and society are but two faces of the same reality (with regard to Japan, see Lozerand 2015). Despite the great individual variation, as well as the question of cultural heterogeneity which is often overlooked by social psychologists, and without falling into another version of the infamous “psychology of peoples,” we also must recognize that scientific and empirical psychological research can be of enormous help, *mutatis mutandis*, to anthropology. Consider, for instance, its value in clarifying the cultural constructions of emotions (such as happiness) or motivations, the cultural aspects of affect, the influence of cultural norms on individuals, or even the psychologically based classifications of cultures, to mention just a few.

Of course, happiness, as a state of mind, as well as the longing for it, may be considered universal, part of the “subjective well-being.” However, its meaning, its components, the way it is structured among other emotions and the way it relates to other cultural attributes, are very complex and sometimes ambiguous, thus depending on several cultural agents. Likewise, the ways to reach happiness may also pertain to various cultural parameters, such as ethos, values, norms, or habits. Hence Uchida and Kitayama (2009: 441) state that “cultures differ substantially in terms of what people seek to do in both attaining happiness and avoiding unhappiness.”

Unfortunately, most of the studies on happiness, at least before the 1990s, used to take for granted that happiness should be assessed according to Western criteria, such as individual achievements, free choice, and without relation to other members of society (Kitayama et al. 2006; Uchida and Kitayama 2009; Uchida and Ogihara 2012; Hitokoto and Uchida 2014). As an alternative, the concept of “interdependent happiness” has been coined to account for patterns that would suit non-Western cultures like Japan better (Hitokoto and Uchida 2014). Thus, there has been a huge body of research in social (and cultural) psychology that tends to show (or even prove) several tendencies, as far as the cultural coloration of happiness is concerned, in a very broad sense. These studies, carried out mainly in cross-cultural perspective, are based on psychological tests, empirical systematic approaches, and precise statistical
analyses. Among the results of these studies, three points seem to be of particular interest in this case.

First, a broad consensus seems to have been established among social psychologists concerning the categorization of cultural models of self and happiness (Uchida and Kitayama 2009; Hitokoto and Uchida 2014). According to Suh et al. (1998), Japan appears to stand quite low on the individualism–collectivism scale, indicating a rather collectivist country, as opposed to, for example, the United States, which has the highest rating among the investigated countries, indicating a very individualistic country as a whole.

On the one hand, according to the individualism-driven model, prevalent in most “Western” cultures, the self is rather independent and autonomous. Internal and personal aspects of happiness are stressed, related to self-esteem, personal accomplishment, emotional expression and one’s positivity. Infinite and attainable through personal pursuit, happiness is to be maximized. Mostly high-arousal emotions are seen as desirable, like self-esteem, personal achievement, being excited or elated (Uchida and Ogihara 2012; Hitokoto and Uchida 2014).

On the other hand, in the collectivism-driven model, exemplified by East Asian cultures, the self is interdependent – that is, related to other members of society. Interpersonal and social aspects of happiness are stressed. Since it is linked to harmonious patterns of social relations, happiness is related to relational balance, human support, positive social engagement (that is fulfilling relational obligations, adapting to social norms, etc.) and social harmony. It is to be optimized through relations to others. According to Uchida and Kitayama (2009: 443), “ideal positive affect is much lower in intensity and arousal and, thus, more subdued in Asia than in the United States.” Low-arousal emotions, like social supportiveness, social harmony, and being calm or relaxed, are seen as desirable in order to gain happiness (Uchida and Ogihara 2012; Hitokoto and Uchida 2014). In this respect, being “interpersonally harmonized with other people, being quiescent, being ordinary, and connected to the collective way of well-being” (Hitokoto and Uchida 2014: 6) also appear to be very important factors (Hitokoto and Uchida 2014). The notion of “ordinariness” is another important aspect of interdependent happiness, since “being not ‘normal’ could harm group performance” (Hitokoto and Uchida 2014: 6).

Second, the Western conception of happiness is unequivocally positive. For example, 98.2 percent of the words related to happiness freely given by American students in one study by Uchida and Kitayama (2009) are positive; that is, related to positive hedonic experience or personal achievement. On the contrary, the Asian conception is more ambivalent and holistic. Japanese include negative features in their definition of happiness, such as factors related to social disruption and transcendental reappraisal (for example, to deny any objectivity to their own feeling of unhappiness). In the same study, only 66.7 percent of the words freely given by Japanese students are positive. Concretely, Japanese are more likely than Americans, for example, to link
happiness with unhappiness. For Japanese, these are not exclusive, distinct emotions. Indeed, these opposites tend to be considered in a dialectic fluctuation, while Americans (Westerners) tend to reify them as object-like entities (Uchida and Kitayama 2009; Uchida 2010). For Japanese, happiness is a temporary state, to which the mere absence of negative events also belongs, something almost never encountered in the American way of thinking about this issue (Uchida 2010; Hitokoto and Uchida 2014).

Third, in coping with unhappiness, Western and East Asian societies tend to employ different strategies. This is particularly important when considering modes of activism, for example among LGBTQ people. Whereas, according to the study by Uchida and Kitayama (2009), Americans usually rather display externalized behavior, like anger, aggression or frustration, Japanese turn towards self-improvement and transcendental reappraisal, denying any objectivity to their feelings of unhappiness. Rather, they try to contextualize them in order to restore harmony and interdependence with the surroundings.

Naturally, even if the psychological/scientific literature tends to “essentialize” the concepts and reify the tendencies, such as the opposition between “the West” and “East Asia,” this does not mean that these cultures do not understand each other or that they do not have access to each other’s set of values (see Geertz 1973). For instance, the concept of “interdependent happiness” is, needless to say, also relevant to Westerners in some respect, though to a much lower degree than for East Asian people, and not in a systematic way. My main point here is that such an opposition, when carefully handled, can yield some very interesting consequences and fruitful thoughts, and the ideas contained therein seem to be paralleled by various findings from anthropological research and experience (including my own).

**Japanese and “Western” modes of activism**

The Japanese feminist movement in the 1960s–70s never seemed preoccupied by the question of homosexual rights. The gay liberation movement in Japan came from the United States and influenced certain urban gay milieus from the 1970s onwards (Laurent 2011: 154–156). Nowadays, the activist groups are quite few in number and concentrated in urban areas. Most of the gays I interviewed did not feel concerned by their activities, being mundanely more concerned in finding sexual partners in their area than in participating in political actions.

Between August 2000 and August 2003, I conducted formal fieldwork (participant observation and interviews) in gay communities (gay bars, pride parades, meeting places like parks or saunas, and other “gay-marked” places) mainly in small and medium-sized towns in rural Japan (Shizuoka, Naha, Morioka, Takamatsu, Tokushima, Miyazaki) (Laurent 2011: 25–28). This formal period of fieldwork has been (and still is) combined with an informal study (mainly involving observation) in “gay-marked” places. I am always a bit surprised by the ways in which activists work, as well as by how negatively
they are perceived by local gays (most of whom are closeted). Most Western activists seem to take for granted that gay liberation is needed and must inevitably go through the process of having pride parades and increasing social visibility, and that coming out is the universal key to freedom and happiness. “Homosexuality is perceived to be a problem in the West because of the implication of the individual freedom and the liberation it comes from” (Offord and Cantrell 2001: 241). As Hawkins puts it: “In America, being gay involves [...] the public proclamation of a sexual identity in rebellion against a repressive society. It means the development of pride, to counteract homophobia that surrounds all of us” (Hawkins 1999: 504). “[C]ommodifying gayness without conscious elaboration inside a cultural context is not productive” (Hawkins 1999: 508). In Japan, as closeted homosexuality is mostly tolerated, the urge for political or legal lobbying is not felt with the same intensity as in “the West.” One cannot but feel concerned by the strong Western influence on gay activism in Japan, which seeks to impose its presence as undeniable, and to change society. Indeed, most activists I met and/or interviewed, either as members of groups (like OCCUR) or as individuals, carried indeed a Western-based agenda, trying to promote pride parades and pushing gays to come out (Laurent 2011: 150–164; Offord and Cantrell 2001). Far from being unique to Japan, this phenomenon can be witnessed in most Asian countries, whose activists often spend several years studying in the United States or Europe before returning home (Laurent 2005, 2015).

While not wishing to downplay the progress acquired through the gay liberation movement in Western countries, I would like to draw attention to two problems that can arise if the importance of local sociocultural particularities is underestimated, namely ethnocentrism and reductionism.

The imposition of Western paradigms, ways of thinking and models of activism while postulating that “happiness,” although supposedly a universal concept, may only be defined according to “Western” standards, undoubtedly falls within the sphere of ethnocentrism. Indeed, it could be considered tantamount to Japan bashing, even racism. The same pattern of generalization would regard all Japanese women as belonging to one monolithic group of pitiful housewives who have no choice in life but to submit to a caricaturized social model. One cannot make people happy against their will, and by imposing one’s own etic set definition of happiness.

When it comes to Japan, there seem to be a lot of texts and theories based on pure cultural relativism. Consider, for example, Lévi-Strauss (2011: 34), who goes as far as regarding Japanese culture in opposition to a singular concept of “the Western culture.” Conversely, as a kind of reaction to this, just as if the concept of cultural relativism needed to be denied absolutely as far as Japan is concerned, one can also find lots of examples of extreme universalism (for example, the French LGBTQ activist Georges-Louis Tin). It seems that Japan (and hence Japanese culture) must be particularized, explained in special terms, specifically categorized, or even in some ways “forgiven,” for being a so-called developed country without being Western per
In some strange way, it also seems that universalists of all kinds have never forgiven Japan for being an “other” (oriental, Asian, Eastern, etc.) while, at the same time, belonging to the exclusive club of developed countries. It is as if they mean to deny any specificity to Japan, showing that it is not different from any other country. In other words: “We’re all the same, universal.” Clearly, happiness on the one hand, LGBTQ on the other, are possible targets of cultural relativism and extreme universalism. More than ever, thus, we need to let the people concerned speak for themselves.

Universal activism tends to violate the necessary by-product of anthropological research that is relativism (in the broadest sense, both as a methodological attitude and as a philosophical position). Essentialism is indeed implicit in one single notion of (LGBTQ) “liberation” whatever the circumstances, just as if there were only one single notion of “healing,” “marriage,” etc. One does not have to be “liberated” from the same chains, shackles or yokes in different societies, different cultures or in different epochs. Let us not forget that in Japan, antagonism against same-sex relations is a characteristic of modernity (Laurent 2011; Mc Lelland 2005). Moreover, gay identity is not universal, given once and for all, but rather constructed on, and from, a certain social and cultural background. Without entering into the old debate of essentialism versus cultural relativism (or culturalism), even if the present topic cannot really escape it, it seems important to state that homosexuality, as well as homosexual identity, are interactional, fluid phenomena being constantly redefined through personal experience.

In Japan, coming out of the closet is not necessarily a “rite of passage towards freedom” as Herdt (1996) once put it in reference to Western societies. The act of not coming out does not necessarily mean denying oneself or even suffering from a deprival of one’s freedom. Hence must not we anthropologists, more than anyone else, perceive and interpret everyday life inside the complex frame of local society, with its own rights and duties, and must not we accept these sociocultural practices as part of reality? Judging other cultures (including their complex emotions like happiness and the pursuit thereof) by the criteria of one’s own amounts to nothing else but ethnocentrism. It is simply not right (methodologically as well as ethically) to imply an evolutionary step between a “closeted situation” viewed as somehow inferior, and an “out situation” which is assumed to be superior and hence evidence of an “authentic life” for gays (Mc Lelland 2005).

However, rejecting essentialism, without falling into the trap of cultural relativism, does not mean refusing any political or social commitment. If social or political commitment respect, to a certain extent, elementary cultural values and norms, such commitments will be made more effective.

My second point of contention concerns the tendency towards reductionism. The act of encouraging individuals to come out, i.e. compelling them to recognize both their own sexual identity and their membership within a particular social movement, foregrounds the concept of sexual orientation as a criterion vis-à-vis the perception and definition of social relationships as a
whole. This means in a way focusing the interpretation of social reality solely on one's sexual orientation, as well as reinforcing the importance of sexual factors in the multidimensional classification of a person and his or her identity. We know that in Japan, sexual phenomena are not always considered according to the same fixed homo/hetero binary construction as in most Western countries (see Laurent 2005, 2011, 2015; Offord and Cantrell 2001), and that they do not bear the same importance in social encounters. More fluid than fixed, sexual identity and sexual matters in general are rather considered as play or fun, and also as belonging to the private sphere.

A Japanese man may very well deny being homosexual while having sexual encounters with men, in the sense that such sexual behaviors do not account for a "sexual identity," or an "identity" in a broader sense, which is not defined according to absolute criteria. Likewise, masculinity and virility are not always related to sexuality per se, but rather to social roles. The fact of being gay, in Japan, is rarely linked to an invariant, strictly defined identity. My point here is that Western-style activism sexualizes everything, which amounts to a kind of reductionism.

The closet?

The reasons why Japanese gays tend not to come out of the closet are to be considered according to four dimensions: social (“What are the neighbors going to say?”), psychological (“It’s just a phase, I’m not a fag!”), legal (“I’m gonna get sacked”), and educational or more precisely the lack of instruction (“What on earth is happening to me?”). Such a partition may not be homogenous or exhaustive, but it serves to illustrate the dilemma experienced by each young Japanese gay who has just become aware of his sexual orientation: to come out, or not, of the closet? And how? The answers to these questions, of course, are first to be understood from a universal perspective (homosexuality per se), but then they are also determined by specific aspects of Japanese culture and society.

Let us not forget that the expression “coming out of the closet” was coined by Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick in 1990, in a US sociocultural context and during the early years of the AIDS epidemic; in other words, it reflected the realities of life in a particular place and time. On this basis, it would appear difficult, 25 years later, to attempt to interpret the closet according to the criteria which prevailed at that time. Just as yesterday’s insults (like fag or okama) have been (or are being) reclaimed by LGBTQ themselves, is it going too far to assume that the closet itself could have become – or perhaps may always have been – a place to “develop” oneself, to affirm one’s sexuality with serenity, without fear of oppression? Kosofsky Sedgwick herself said in an interview with Têtu, a French gay magazine, in 2008 that she was having difficulties imagining what the closet might represent and imply outside the American social and cultural context.

In Japan, to judge from most of my fieldwork interviews, the so-called “closet” does not seem to be considered as a yoke or prison cut off from the
outside world. Indeed, I would suggest that the expression “coming out of the closet” could never have been formulated as such in a Japanese cultural context. Primarily, this may be because sexual minorities in Japan do not encounter a treatment as harsh as in most Western countries (few homophobic attacks, little police harassment and fewer acts of overt, blatant discrimination). As Mc Lelland (2000: 215–216) puts it, “[i]f being gay is primarily understood in terms of preferring a certain kind of sex, then Japan is actually quite an easy society in which to live.”

Moreover, the closet rarely functions as an “isolating device.” For example, gay cruising in bars and parks enables the meeting of certain types of persons one would never have met in other circumstances, because of social, economic, or educational barriers (Laurent 2011, 2015). We can also take urban spaces as an example. Even if the gay-marked places are separated from heteronormative spaces in the sense one needs specific codes (proper gestures, attitude, words, etc.) to access them, they are often the very same spaces used by all members of society at different times or in different ways (Laurent 2011):

For a heterosexual, I think it is rather difficult to find a sexual partner in a topographic or economic sense. For gays, there exists in a way a community through which one can always find someone. There are no fixed “meeting places” (hattemba) in the heterosexual world […] For example if a man picks up a girl in a supermarket, where can they fuck? Whereas for gay people, they can always go to the toilet together …

(45-year-old gay barkeeper from Morioka)

**Cultural factors regarding activism**

There seem to be at least four factors that play a role in the non-acceptance of Western modes of activism by most Japanese LGBTQ: marriage, social oppression, social visibility, and a general suspicion towards activism.

First, marriage and married life in Japan do not bear the same meaning as in most Western countries. It is most of all a brick in the social wall, considered from the macro-perspective. Unmarried adults are viewed as suspicious (psychologically unbalanced, lacking maturity or neglectful of their social and moral responsibilities). One still has to start a family to be considered a full member of society. Hence, many gays are willing to commit to married life, wanting to fulfill their roles of husband and father, while having sexual encounters with men on the side. On the micro-level, as is well known, married life in Japan is anything but a prison. Indeed, it is not regarded as an encroachment upon individual freedom, at least for men. Extra-conjugal sexual relations are often regarded with great tolerance. Fidelity is not, for men at least, considered an essential virtue (see for example Sekiguchi et al. 2000). “Intimacy” does not bear the same meaning as in the West either. Married couples do not often go out together at night or even on weekend
trips. This leaves free space and time to experience one’s own kind of sexuality, and devote oneself to other commitments, such as meeting men in bars and parks, as far as gays are concerned. There is a spatial and temporal freedom in Japanese marriages that gays who are married to women are able to take advantage of. In other words, marriage is not at all incompatible with a gay active nocturnal or even diurnal life. Double life is not that uneasy or uncommon. Most gays I interviewed were able to navigate through this quite well. Besides, because of the existence of such freedom within marriage, society does not really forgive gays not playing the social game of conforming to the same rules as heteronormative marriages. What happens to the wives is, of course, another (yet very important) story, although this does not fall within the scope of this chapter.

Second, the feeling of being oppressed by society is not as distressing as it seems to be in most Western countries. “A man can only feel discrimination if he is out of the closet, when ordinary people know he is gay” (31-year-old teacher from Shizuoka):

– The other day, at the office, a colleague said jokingly: “My little K., do you fancy blokes, by any chance?” Or also my direct supervisor touches my chest, caresses my back or put his hand on my buttocks. I think they are just joking. Each morning, at the general meeting, my direct supervisors, who must be between 40 and 50 years old, wink just to tease me. Then of course I blush and they can’t stop laughing.
– But what do you think of all that?
– I don’t really know. I like it. How can I put it? I don’t think this is really a serious matter. They are having a good time, that’s all. And so am I, after all.
– You don’t think this is a rather cruel way of teasing people?
– Well, maybe … but in a good way. For example, when we finish work, one of them usually takes me in his arms and says “you did a good job, today” [laughs].
– And you never get angry about that? It never annoys you?
– Never!

(28-year-old office worker from Shizuoka)

– You admitted earlier that you were called faggot when you were a kid.
– That’s because I have been raised by women and my gestures are very effeminate.
– You don’t think of it as discrimination?
– No. When we were kids, we didn’t know what it meant. We just thought “ah, they’re just teasing me.” But when I think of it now, maybe, this was discrimination, but kids never think that far.
– But it was hard for you, no?
– No, because we were three or four kids being called “faggot,” so I was
thinking “everybody gets the same treatment”; I mean any boy who was very slim, small and a bit of a wimp. I never gave it a real thought.

(32-year-old gay barkeeper from Naha)

Moreover, many of the gays I interviewed spoke of an obvious (and not especially difficult) “social duty or responsibility” to conform to society’s rules (for example, to marry). For the gays interviewed by Hawkins (1999: 309), the “construction of a mask is viewed as a lesser imposition than it would be in the West.” Indeed, Japanese individualism, which does exist, cannot really be straightforwardly related to the European or American sense of it, which is often interpreted as arrogant and “protest-like” from a Japanese perspective (see for example Lozerand 2015). Rather, Japanese individualism can only exist in accordance with society’s general expectations, the place of individuals being always considered inside the society. The feeling of not being oppressed may come from a resistance to changing lifestyle, values, behavior, etc. Any deviation from the cultural mainstream decreases well-being. Thus, to adapt oneself to social norms seems to be one of the keys to happiness in Japan (i.e. Suh et al. 1998; Uchida and Oghihara 2012).

Besides, in Japan, homosexuality is not mentioned in the law. Indeed, throughout Japanese history, the legal apparatus has tended to focus upon family, reproduction and social control. Even if we can witness a “pathologization” of homosexuality from the Meiji period onwards, it is hardly seen as “perverse” in a religious sense, as in most Western countries. The anti-homosexual campaigns have often emerged only after social disturbances have occurred, and rarely against homosexuality per se. Morality is socially dependent and socially oriented, not religiously determined. Overt, blatant physical acts of homophobia are almost unheard of in Japan. Homosexuals are (only) condemned because they do not conform to social standards and do not fulfill their social “duties.” Most of the gays I interviewed thus rarely consider that their rights are denied, and do not have the constant feeling of being “trampled by the majority”; neither do they perceive their everyday lives nor their “nocturnal cruisings” in terms of “rights.” On the contrary, coming out could be detrimental to family and friends, towards whom most gays feel they have a (social) duty. To come out would only lead to marginality, a burden most (non-activist) gays are not at all willing to shoulder (Laurent 2011, 2015).

Third, social visibility does not necessarily imply social recognition. In contemporary Japan, sexual minorities are routinely portrayed in the media in ways that strongly reinforce stereotypes. At the same time, the media fails to do its basic job of providing the general public with reliable information about them. The social visibility of sexual minorities has also been hampered by attitudes in certain periods of history. As one notable example, medical and legal discourses during the Meiji period, which were indirectly influenced by Western values, considered homosexuality to be unfit for a “modern nation,” although such a view would generally be regarded by Japanese today.
to concur with “typical” or “traditional” Japanese beliefs (Laurent 2011). The dissemination of stereotypical ideas by societal gatekeepers tends to prevent most people from understanding that sexual minorities might possess specific sexual identities, which could represent an alternative pattern to heterosexual identity. This lack of understanding, in turn, prevents most Japanese from considering sexual minorities to be on the same moral, social or legal levels as heterosexuals.

One of the problems faced by sexual minorities in Japan is the fact that they are defined by others. With the exception of an ephemeral “gay boom” in the very beginning of the 1990s (Laurent 2011; Mc Lelland 2000, 2005; see also Dobbins 2000: 72–73), Japanese mass media (with the obvious exception of the specialized gay press), routinely subjects sexual minorities to ridicule, as can be seen on television on almost a daily basis. Moreover, Western-influenced activists also define their agenda for them, without taking sociocultural specificities into account. As it stands, there does not seem to be a place, so far, in Japan for “self-definition” among sexual minorities, which conforms both to Japanese sociocultural spheres, and the personal criteria of LGBTQ people.

Fourth, and last, Japanese activist groups (like OCCUR), that seek to promote a Western agenda and try to enforce a pattern of “homo-normativity” (Duggan 2003; cited in Mc Lelland 2005: 180), have so far failed to help sexual minorities in any meaningful way. Most non-activist gays I interviewed do not trust these groups to represent them or provide them with a better life, accusing them instead of trying to impose Western ideas, strategies, and modi operandi onto them. Most of the informants in Hawkins’s (1999) study expressed the same feelings. As Mc Lelland (2005: 180) states, “OCCUR’s constant referencing to U.S. models of gay and lesbian activism as well as its lack of interest in indigenous Japan modes of queer identity and community have also proven alienating to many.” At the official level, the only groups or centers that cater to LGBTQ issues are those operated by the Ministry of Health, Labor and Welfare (MHLW), such as “Akta” in Tokyo, “Zel” in Sendai, “Rise” in Nagoya, “Dista” in Osaka, “Haco” in Fukuoka and “Mabui” in Okinawa (Ichikawa 2010). However, these centers consider HIV and AIDS to be their primary and indeed almost sole concerns, even though the day-to-day functions of such centers go well beyond the provision of services and support for AIDS patients, and, indeed, beyond health issues in general. Nonetheless, reducing the spread of AIDS remains their main goal, and is also the only reason why they receive official funds. Such centers are very different, for example, from community centers or organizations like the “Gay and Lesbian Center” in Manhattan, or their equivalents that can be found in most major Western cities. Moreover, according to the people in charge of most of these places (personal communication), the release of the subsidies by the MHLW can never be taken for granted. Rather, it seems to be thrown into question each year. As a consequence, the very existence of such centers is constantly threatened.
By contrast, to most Anglo-Saxon cultures, sexual identity (which is in itself very fluid) in Japan is not necessarily related to political identity. In Japan, (sexual) minorities do not become de facto activists, in some sort of essentialist way (Laurent 2011, 2015; Henninger 2014):

Being gay does not force one to fight for minority rights, as if the mere belonging to a sexual minority meant an obligation to stand for its rights or identity. It does not sound very Japanese to me.

(35-year-old teacher from Naha)

As far as Western forms of activism – like urging individuals to “come out” – are concerned, there is evidence from a range of studies (for example, Ogihara and Uchida 2014), of an awareness among Japanese of the negative effects of Western-like individualistic thinking and behavior. In this regard, we can certainly indeed interpret the act of coming out of the closet as an example of rather strong individualist conduct, according to Japanese sociocultural criteria. Individualism in Japan is qualitatively different from the forms of individualism found in most Western cultures. Ogihara and Uchida (2014) show that in Japan an individualistic orientation is associated with a deterioration in close relationships (concretely, having fewer close friends), as well as with a decrease in “subjective well-being” (hence, in happiness). Indeed, by acting in an individualistic manner (that is, by performing an act that is interpreted as highly individualistic), Japanese feel the need to distance themselves from close, interdependent relationships, and as a consequence, fear that they have to be isolated (which may not be the case in Western cultures). It seems difficult for them not to regard individualistic acts in general as selfish, or performed against the entire society. Therefore, according to Ogihara and Uchida (2014), Japanese have problems maintaining strong social relationships while acting in what is considered to be an individualistic way, as if they lacked the effective behavioral strategies to deal appropriately with individualistic acts, or an individualistic lifestyle within a Japanese cultural context. Thus by being more individualistic, such as by coming out of the closet, many Japanese feel less happy. This very act decreases their degree of happiness.

“Transplanting both the structure and the values of one culture into another might not work if individuals do not have the strategies to adaptively act out their values in the given structural setting” (Ogihara and Uchida 2014: 8). From an anthropological perspective, this might seem like slightly twisted reasoning, but it corresponds very well with social psychological experiments and theory. Moreover, it seems in complete agreement with my own direct anthropological “feelings” and informal encounters from the field.

Interestingly enough, the naming of the “pride parade,” as they are usually called in English (or merely “pride” in French until very recently), rarely contains the word “pride” in Japan, since that would suggest a too personal, individualist emotional stance. In Tokyo, the parade was known as the “Tokyo Lesbian and Gay Parade” (1994 to 1999); “Tokyo Pride Parade”
(2007 and 2010), and “Tokyo Rainbow Pride” (since 2013). The word “pride” has never been used in the other Japanese cities where parades occur (Osaka, Fukuoka, Sapporo, Kyoto, Okinawa), except in Kobe in the year 2007 (“LGBTQ Pride March”). Most people usually refer to the event simply as the “parade.”

Worthy aspects of the closet

The fact of not being able to express [that I’m gay] is quite stressful. However, I’m also happy about it: I may not be free, not out of the closet, […] but I have friends!

(40-year-old physician from Morioka)

As mentioned above, there seems to be a strong dialectical dimension in the Japanese conception of happiness, negative features being part of its very cultural definition (Uchida and Kitayama 2009; Uchida 2010). In this respect, could we not go as far as to consider it legitimate and culturally appropriate to try to find or even build happiness out of the very fate of being “unhappy,” socially excluded (living one’s own individualistic sexual orientation in a so-called “collectivist culture”)? Indeed, is it not entirely appropriate for individuals to make use of their social exclusion through secret visits to gay bars and other meeting places? Indeed, the absence of social visibility offers an aspect of play and fun that should not be neglected. In my interviews, as well as informal encounters, I heard several stories linking the secrecy of the closet to fun, a thrill and happiness, sometimes even comparing their nights out to a festival that differs from daily routine. The feeling of a thrill, numerously mentioned by my informants, may derive from behavior that many Japanese might consider “anti-social”:

It’s hard, but the secrecy thing is so cool, thrilling! It’s really classy [iki ga aru ne]. If young people become “normal,” it’s boring. Young gays coming out of the closet start a “normal” life, without hiding. There is no thrill anymore. That’s what I think. For example, look at you [referring to the author], you are out, and there is no place in your life for the excitement to break the rules.

(40-year-old hairdresser from Takamatsu)

This may not be specific to Japanese gay culture, but the secrecy of not coming out can be considered as part of the “fun of being an outcast,” and valued for this very reason. Most of the men I interviewed did find some sort of pleasure and pride in performing “forbidden” practices, behind the back of mainstream society, their colleagues, parents, friends, and so on. In their secret world, unknown to the outside, they can be playful, naughty, silly, filthy or just themselves. Most of them seem to value finding themselves in such a
situation as “night marginals” or “quiet mavericks.” I am not sure such feelings are equally strong for lesbians. However, these feelings may also allow them to maintain a cohesive community, some identity, and hence group solidarity in a situation of “social oppression,” all of which may be difficult to sustain with the same intensity where openness and total freedom prevail. Clandestine activity also implies a specific language, and a characteristic humor tinged with a sort of aggressive irony, which can also sometimes be used as a recognizing signal, a kind of in-group code.

Japanese gays’ extended (hidden) families, encompassing friends, sex friends, previous lovers, friends’ lovers, etc., are centered mainly around bars or, more recently, the Internet, roughly sharing an affinity to the same (libidinal) type(s). Each bar houses one or several activity groups (sports, travel, etc.). These “families” exist in parallel to biological families, sometimes bearing a greater importance than the latter, giving psychological, social, and even financial balance to gays. The gay bar seems to be a key factor to gays’ happiness in Japan. Whereas in “the West” (such as New York, Paris, Berlin), a gay bar is mainly a place to pick up sexual partners, be it for one night or for one’s entire life, in Japan, even if it might occasionally perform this same function, a gay bar is much more than that (Laurent 2011). Could we not go as far as to say that, thanks to the structure provided by gay bars, there is no need in Japan for activists in the Western sense of the word? These structures allow the creation and framing of communities of destiny, or moral communities.

Clandestine activity generally suggests a strong structural organization, in order to reduce the risk (of being discovered), while maximizing the efficiency (of leading a “happy” life, meeting similar persons, etc.) (Pollak 1982). In this respect, in Japan, the culture of secrecy in gay milieux leads to a strongly defined and very efficient “typology of libidinal types,” important in order for people to meet in bars, parks, or on the Internet. Indeed, in specialized media, bars and other meeting places, gays are classified according to a number of “types” which importance as well as the precision of its divisions could be considered a characteristic of the Japanese gay world. The “typology of libidinal types” translates into different groups labeled as “specializing in …,” “… sen” in Japanese. For example, people sexually interested in overweight people would be named debusen, which means “specializing in fatties,” those interested in young people are known as wakasen, in older people as fukesen, in foreigners (that is Caucasians) as gaisen, from the word gaijin meaning “foreigner.” The list is always modulated, with new categories and labels appearing and disappearing all the time, mainly on specialized websites.

The typology also serves to give some sort of positive image to non-standard, non-normative sexual orientations. In such a way, without really being accepted as such, at least gay men, as a category, can be apprehended, first in the culture and then by society. The men I interviewed consider this typology as playing an essential role in their sexual life, helping them with the
construction of sexual objects, the determination of the targets of their desire; in a word, the recognition of their sexual identity. This typology also avoids the strict individualism of a sexual identity (with which many Japanese may have problems), by circumscribing it into a more collective and culturally accepted definition.

Japanese forms of militancy: The “quiet mavericks”? 

In any personal conflict emerging from social maladjustment, the individual will try to adapt to social criteria, rather than to change society. The Western model of confrontation activism, being rather virulent, vocal and demonstrative, does not seem to suit Japanese culture and society, in the sense that this model is perceived as vulgar, uneducated, uncivilized, and immature, falling into a sort of sociocultural dissonance or incongruity. Moreover, sex is not in an obvious way connected to rights or politics, rather belonging to more private spheres. Hence, the necessity of gay activism is not (strongly) felt in everyday life. A lot of the gays I interviewed said: “We are not attacked in the streets or in parks,” “We can live our sexual orientation quite comfortably, while hiding as gays,” and “What use is gay activism?”

The heteronormative social model and the procreation-driven heterocentric form of marriage are not necessarily assaulted head-on by LGBTQ people in Japan. The main activist organization, OCCUR, that pushes LGBTQ towards political and legal protest-like forms of action, is quite negatively perceived by a majority of gays, especially in rural areas. Even if one can witness the existence of a blurred macro-gay community in Japan, parallel to a lot of stronger micro-communities formed around bars or among the same types, they have almost nothing to do with “militancy” per se, as it is usually understood in Western countries.

While most Japanese gays try to build their everyday lives while respecting the rules of the social game, Western-influenced activists try to make their presence felt. To this end, they disregard established social rules, and seek to gain acceptance by changing society. For most Japanese gays, it is not about changing society and it is not so important to be accepted as such. Consequently, a softer approach, centered on education (school education as well as general public education) seems rather appropriate in a Japanese context. Unfortunately however, the mass media do not fulfill their job at all in that respect:

Most analysts of Japan [...] have tended to ignore all but the loudest forms of resistance (e.g. demonstrations, movements, and explicitly rebel-like individuals) [...] Incidentally however, it may be precisely [the] less visible, quieter stratum that most effectively negotiates seemingly contradictory cultural pressures in the Japanese context [...]  

(Toivonen et al. 2011: 3)
Conclusion

Just as happiness cannot be automatically linked to weddings or married life for heterosexuals, social visibility, gay pride parades, and coming out cannot either for homosexuals. As suggested in the title of this chapter, yes, there can also be, indeed, happiness inside the Japanese closet, while respecting cultural norms in a certain way.

Rather than gaining rights and respect for one’s forms of sexuality, if the most important thing is to be “happy” (in whichever form of its meaning), it would appear that Japanese gays are not doing so badly.

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Part II

Self and community
8 Makers and doers
Using actor-network theory to explore happiness in Japan’s invisible civil society

Patricia G. Steinhoff

Introduction

Why would activists from the New Left protest generation of the late 1960s remain involved in a host of social causes decades later? Are they not angry and depressed by the failure of the radical dreams of their youth? Although “happy radical activist” may seem like an oxymoron, what can those who remain politically active in an invisible civil society tell us about how such participation produces happiness and well-being? This chapter looks for answers to these questions through close observation of their activities, using an actor-network theory approach.

Japan’s invisible civil society is my name for the connections among a wide variety of small groups with ties to the New Left protest cycle of the late 1960s to early 1970s. They are deeply engaged in political and social causes, but seem to be invisible to mainstream Japanese society because of their very loose organization and the nature of the causes they advocate. The notion of an invisible civil society is ripe for analysis using actor-network theory, and this analysis draws on some of its concepts (Latour 2005; Law 1999). Actor-network theory (ANT) contends that social organization and meaning are very tentatively constructed through the performance of interactions that encompass not only human actors, but the non-human materials they produce and use. It proposes a rigorous methodological approach to follow traces of these interactions in order to reveal the social networks and connections they generate. This approach fits well with my aim of focusing on what people actually do in their interactions, and how the non-human materials they produce and use contribute to our understanding of how such activity produces happiness and well-being.

The activities in such groups and their intertwined networks constitute an alternative or subaltern civil society (Warner 2005) that is largely invisible to mainstream Japanese society. In general, participation in civil society activities is thought to produce a public sphere where people learn about issues and develop informed opinions that are essential for democratic political participation (Calhoun 1999; Habermas 1989; Hall 1995; Putnam 2000). Such participation also builds trust and provides social rewards through the
creation of durable social networks, or social capital (Bourdieu 1986). Higher social capital is associated with other measures of well-being, but the extent of social networks is often simply counted as an objective indicator, without probing into how or why it leads to well-being.

Research on social movements (one form of civil society activity) has emphasized the importance of social networks both as mobilization channels and as motivations for continuing commitment (Curtis and Zurcher 1973; Diani 2007; Kriesi et al. 1995; McAdam and Paulsen 1993; Snow et al. 1980). Such research takes a more dynamic approach, suggesting that pre-existing social networks draw people into social movements, but once engaged, people build additional social networks within the movement which are reinforced through collective activity. Other social movement research probes further into how these social network ties and commitment are developed, finding that the act of participating in demonstrations has a transformative effect that builds social solidarity and a sense of collective identity (Fantasia 1988; Klandermans 1992; Turner 1999). Extending this inquiry through an actor-network analysis, the chapter examines the “making and doing” activities that participants contribute voluntarily to produce social movement events, which in turn bind them into social networks focused around these sites of social interaction.

The term “well-being” is widely used as a synonym for “happiness” in social science research, but with disciplinary variations in definition and approach. Sociological definitions tend to be more objective and structural, while psychological ones are more subjective and oriented to individual feelings. Beyond the objective and structural social network effects proposed by social capital theory and social movement theories, social psychological self-determination theory (SDT) provides a mechanism and criteria to explain how participating in these civil society activities produces subjective well-being. While based on the needs of individuals, it has looked particularly at how social contexts can support or thwart well-being.

SDT posits three basic human psychological needs for competence, relatedness, and autonomy, which facilitate “optimal functioning of the natural propensities for growth and integration, as well as for constructive social development and personal well-being” (Ryan and Deci 2000: 68). Deci and Ryan (1985) outlined a continuum of motivation types based on their degree of self-determination. Intrinsic motivation (in which individuals seek out activity that provides inherent satisfaction) and the higher forms of extrinsic motivation (involving personally valued outcomes or the full integration of values into the self) are sometimes combined into a composite category of autonomous motivation. Experimental SDT research has demonstrated that autonomously motivated activity such as civil society participation is strongly linked to satisfying psychological needs for competence and autonomy, and also seems to satisfy needs for relatedness. Moreover, social contexts in which individuals participate with autonomous motivation produce more positive outcomes in terms of learning, performance, personal experience, and well-being (Ryan and Deci 2000).
Most of the research in SDT, as well as much social capital research on well-being, relies on questionnaires that report people’s feelings about participation or correlate levels of social participation with other measures of well-being. In contrast, this chapter makes a modest attempt to “reassemble the social” for Japan’s invisible civil society by re-examining observational data collected in one recent period of field research. It will start with the most elementary sites of interaction and trace where they lead, rigorously trying “to lay continuous connections leading from one local interaction to the other places, times, and agencies through which a local site is made to do something” (Latour 2005: 173). My aim is to reveal what participants are actually doing and making in and for these temporary sites of interaction, and how the connections across these sites construct an invisible civil society. I will explore how such voluntary activity produces well-being by linking the behavioral evidence from ANT to the criteria for autonomous motivation in SDT.

**Methods**

Social movement scholars understand public meetings and rallies, demonstrations, and petitions to authorities as the main forms of a modern repertoire of contention through which social movements challenge authorities and advocate for change; this repertoire can be adapted to any issue in any location, and has now diffused worldwide (Tarrow 1994; Tilly 1978, 1995). Through my research on the most radical New Left groups that went underground at the peak of the New Left protest cycle, I stumbled upon a distinct type of social movement activity, the trial support groups that supported persons on trial for their political activities. Observing these groups after the end of the period of New Left protests made me aware of the broader invisible civil society and its extensive networks. I have been studying members of Japan’s invisible civil society as social movement actors for many years through participant observation, interviews, and the mini-media they produce. As part of my fieldwork I have observed the two main types of gatherings (public meetings and demonstrations, or shūkai and demo) of various groups intermittently since the early 1980s, and have also attended planning meetings for such events. I routinely visit key specialized institutions within the invisible civil society, where I learn of new developments, subscribe to their newsletters and newspapers, and purchase the books and journals they produce. As curator of the Takazawa Collection of Postwar Japanese Social Movement materials at the University of Hawai’i (www.takazawa.hawaii.edu), I have also organized and helped to catalogue a tremendous array of print materials and other objects produced by the Japanese New Left. In the Takazawa collection these objects are detached from human interactions, but they are preserved as traces of the specific gatherings and networks in which they were originally embedded within the New Left.

In 2007 I spent three months in a more systematic effort to observe invisible civil society events involving different groups and issues, and to trace the
links between them, using a purposive snowball method. My strategy was to go to one event, take careful notes, and photograph the layout of the meeting space and all the groups participating in a demonstration. I also collected all pieces of paper that were available as handouts or for general distribution, which invariably included fliers for other events. I then selected the next event to attend from the fliers, trying to get as broad a distribution as possible of different topics and groups, and including both public meetings and street demonstrations. Hand-written field notes from the events plus the material evidence generated by participants and collected on-site comprise the data. Thus this study repurposes participant observation data I collected earlier (before I had ever thought about either happiness or actor-network theory) for the analysis in the present chapter.

Temporal and social origins of the invisible civil society

Contemporary Japan’s invisible civil society is a byproduct of the decline of the late 1960s–early 1970s New Left protest movement. Students mobilized by hierarchical national New Left organizations participated in large street demonstrations along with people mobilized through labor unions and issue-specific organizations, to protest the Vietnam War, the Joint Japan–US Security Treaty (AMPO), environmental pollution, and other issues. Simultaneously, students on college campuses throughout Japan began protesting over local campus issues using a new horizontal organizational model, the all-campus struggle committee (Zenkyōtō kaigi) that led student strikes on 162 college campuses between 1968 and 1970. The government cracked down on violent protests at the end of 1968, arresting a total of 31,852 students from 1968 to 1971. Many more thousands of students were subjected to police surveillance and harassment. While the crackdown brought violent protest under control and made protest participation too risky for many, it also produced a new movement to provide trial support for students who had been arrested, and led small groups of student activists to continue their activities underground.

By the mid-1970s the era of mass protests had ended, but it had left its mark on a generation of young people. A relatively high proportion of them shared experiences of political concern and activism infused with New Left social values, producing distinctive, generational forms of cultural capital that are recognized and valued within that milieu. In addition, through political activism they had acquired some very specific practical knowledge and skills such as how to study issues and articulate positions, how to organize public meetings and demonstrations, how to publicize events, and how to produce and distribute alternative media using available low-cost technologies. Many people with this background wanted to continue political activity, but without the negatives of New Left hierarchical organizations and unpleasant confrontations with the police. They continued to meet together in various gatherings that came to constitute the invisible civil society, a process similar to
what Melucci (1988, 1995) has called submerged networks. Although the participants had previously been involved in very public New Left organizations, they found new ways to continue political activism through less formal structures to avoid repression.

Finding the invisible civil society

In *Reassembling the social: An introduction to actor-network theory*, Bruno Latour (2005) describes the three “moves” by which an actor-network analysis proceeds: localize the global, redistribute the local, and connect the sites. Summary descriptions and specific examples from my field notes of particular events illustrate how the non-human actants are embedded in the interaction (localizing the global). The analysis then follows the traces from these events outward as well as backward and forward in time, to sketch briefly the networks that they generate (redistributing the local), and to identify some of the important connectors that help to stabilize and maintain the invisible civil society (connecting the sites).

To localize the global, the analysis focuses on specific local gatherings of two types. *Shūkai* are public meetings that have a particular theme or purpose and are normally held in a rented room, but also include large public rallies; *demo* are demonstrations held on public streets or at symbolic locations that direct a political message to some target, but also address a broader audience of non-participants. The two types overlap, because street demonstrations and other *demo* in outdoor spaces generally begin with a *shūkai* to rally the participants, and may end with one or more smaller *shūkai* before the participants disband. Both types of activities require substantial advance planning as well as preparation of the non-human objects that are essential to the interaction.

*Shūkai*

Information about such gatherings is disseminated widely within the invisible civil society through print publications as well as word of mouth and announcements at meetings. I provide a sustained example from the first event I attended in spring 2007, which was put on by the trial support group for an underground bombing group from the early 1970s that supports several prisoners, including two on death row. This event, called the *Ōkami ga kita shūkai*, was organized by Shienren and I found out about it from the March issue of their newsletter *Shienren Nyūsu*, which I received by mail in Honolulu. The day before the *shūkai* I went to the underground bookstore Mosakusha to pick up a range of newsletters, in order to get some idea of where it had been advertised. When I went to the cash register to pay for my purchases, a woman I knew from an anti-emperor group emerged from the back area where she had been working. She showed me the *Ōkami ga kita shūkai* flier and asked if I knew about it (*Ōkami ga kita shūkai*, April 17, 2007).
The location of the gathering is usually a room in a local community facility, which can be reserved for a small fee by anyone who lives in the district, but occasionally meeting space is made available by a sympathetic religious organization. Although their activities are strictly legal, some of the groups and individuals participating in the invisible civil society are still under observation by security police, whose presence outside the building confirms that this is indeed the meeting place. While the majority of shūkai today do not have security police stationed outside, their occasional presence traces back to the historical links between the invisible civil society and the New Left protests of the late 1960s and early 1970s. For the 2007 set of events, my field notes indicated the absence of security police at events that were only indoor shūkai. However, there were police present at all of the events that also featured a demonstration, including plainclothes security police stationed outside the entrance to the shūkai.

The organizers arrange and decorate the space before the meeting begins. Often a banner with the name of the event hangs across the wall behind the area where speakers stand or sit. Just inside the entrance there is a table staffed by one or two organizers, who greet people and encourage them to sign a meeting book with their name and contact information, collect a small entrance fee to cover the costs of room rental and handouts, and distribute packets of duplicated or printed materials that have been prepared for the event. In addition to a program for the event listing speakers and other activities, the packet generally includes other printed or duplicated materials provided as background for the main activity, such as copies of relevant newspaper or magazine articles. There were ten items in the official handout for the Ōkami ga kita shūkai. In addition to a 16-page document containing the main program and a number of related items, the packet included several fliers for other events: several shūkai; a play and a concert; advertisements for other publications; and a signature petition form for someone on death row in a completely unrelated case. Participants also received two decorated bookmarks related to the event and were invited to select a souvenir from a display of small handcrafted pins made from miniature photocopies of the covers of books about the bombing group. Copies of the speaker’s outline were later distributed to the audience.

A separate table near the entrance to a shūkai holds free materials; these items are not directly related to the event, but serve to inform the participants about other gatherings and other issues. Most are fliers that advertise a particular forthcoming event and contain contact information for the sponsoring organization(s) and the location of the event, often with a map. In addition, the fliers invariably contain detailed background information about the topic of the event, ranging in length from a paragraph to a full page. These free materials are deposited by someone attending the gathering, who may have been asked to do so by someone who is not present. Thus the free materials provide traces that lead to many other future gatherings and to many other organizations and issues of interest to participants in the invisible civil society,
as well as being remarkably informative about the issues. The free table at this same shūkai contained copies of two newsletters, plus four fliers for different organizations and their publications and three fliers for upcoming shūkai and demo, all densely covered in text on both sides.

Many shūkai also contain one or more tables where items are sold. These are most often publications produced by small organizations, ranging from recent issues of newsletters (which are normally distributed by mail subscription to members and supporters of an organization), to monthly magazines, pamphlets, and books. Most of the books are published by small publishers and are not readily available at conventional bookstores. Some organizations also produce and sell other objects, such as stickers, T-shirts, DVDs, and handmade arts and crafts. Volunteer representatives of these organizations staff the sales tables. The tables embody network relations through both individual actors and organizational affiliations, interacting through the non-human materials sold at the gathering that were produced elsewhere. A small meeting of 20 to 40 people might have one unstaffed table, with a sign indicating the price of the materials and a place to put the payments. A meeting with an anticipated audience of 60–100 persons may have several sales tables set up at the back of the room, which participants visit before and after the main program and during breaks. This Shienren event was in the larger size range, but had only one sales table of materials from the Mosakusha bookstore.

A master of ceremonies welcomes the participants and introduces each element in the program. The focus is most commonly a featured speaker or a panel discussion, but may also be a film showing or other cultural presentation. These presentations are in-kind contributions to the cause for which the provider is not paid. The activity is broadly educational, but it also embodies a particular point of view and advocates for a cause. It thus contributes to the development of an informed citizenry capable of forming opinions on public issues (the essence of a “public sphere”), even though much of the audience may already be quite knowledgeable about the issues. The main attraction of the Ōkami ga kita shūkai was a speech by Yasuda Yoshihiro, a famous defense lawyer for death penalty cases who was well known to the group. He spoke about the complexity of death penalty cases with many contemporary examples.

In addition to the main event, there are generally two other components to the program: a discussion period when people can ask questions or comment on the main activity; and an announcement period when persons who have made arrangements in advance may give brief reports about other events or activities of interest to the participants. The announcements serve as verbal links between the gathering and other events, and sometimes refer to materials available at the free or sales tables. In this particular shūkai, there were nine reports from people involved in support for specific legal cases, including reports on the current health of persons in prison and reports about various trials and appeals, some from lawyers involved in the cases. Some cases were directly connected to the sponsoring organization, but others were not. In the
discussion period that followed, the main speaker also discussed several additional death penalty cases in which he was involved, some of which were represented on the free table through event fliers or publications.

After a shūkai there may be an after-party at a nearby pub where participants continue conversing over drinks and snacks. The Ōkami ga kita shūkai included a potluck dinner in the same venue, which had been announced in advance and for which there was an additional fee to cover the cost of drinks and extras. The meal began with a banzai toast and followed the usual format for such events in Japan. As people were standing around several small tables eating and talking casually with friends, the master of ceremonies (MC) invited participants, especially those who had come from other cities, to introduce themselves. One by one, people went up to the microphone to make rambling self-introductions and comments that nobody listened to. Some speakers used the occasion to promote their own recent publications or to make impassioned political speeches.

This single event depicts a standard pattern found in thousands of shūkai produced and attended by participants in the invisible civil society, and highlights the integral role of material objects created and distributed by the participants. Some of these elements are found throughout Japanese society, while others are specific to the New Left and the invisible civil society. I have no interview quotes saying how happy the participants are, and no pencil and paper questionnaires that report their feelings. The evidence I present is that they have spent so much time making and doing the things necessary to produce this event, while their behavior reveals their pleasure at coming together at this site to interact through these material objects with people who share their values.

Demonstrations

While there is a constant flow of shūkai offering information and advocacy about many different issues, demonstrations are more episodic and clustered. They either arise in response to some immediate issue (which can sometimes build into a continuing protest campaign), or are timed for particular anniversary dates. The most common form of demo is a street demonstration, but the term also encompasses other types of symbolic actions carried out in public spaces, such as sit-ins and collective performances (Gonoi 2012). Their centerpiece is a public performance, usually outdoors, that is directed at a specific target but plays out before an audience of passersby. Consequently, the demo is one of the few activities of the invisible civil society that penetrates public space and thus makes itself visible to mainstream society. During the three months of intensive fieldwork on invisible civil society gatherings in 2007 I followed eight demonstrations on several different issues. These events were advertised in the same way as shūkai, through fliers or announcements at other events. All also involved a shūkai, which was sometimes very informal and barely distinguishable from the demo.
The preparation for a demonstration involves some additional steps beyond what is required for a shūkai. Since most of the organizations are quite small, different groups with similar interests pool their resources to plan and sponsor demonstrations that they hope will mobilize a much greater number of participants than any of the groups could muster on their own. To do so, they form a temporary organizing committee (jikkō iinkai) that contains representatives from the main sponsoring organizations. The event itself is promoted and carried out in the name of the organizing committee, which bears the name of the event followed by “organizing committee.” If it involves a street demonstration, the required permit is usually issued in the name of the organizing committee, rather than the name of a sponsoring organization.

Unless it features an indoor shūkai, a street demonstration generally begins and ends at a public park near a train or subway station. The demonstration route and timing must be negotiated with the local police along with the group’s access to the parks. A big demonstration may hold its initial rally in an auditorium or outdoor arena, and that space must also be reserved and rented for a fee. Most outdoor demonstrations do not have an entry fee, which means that sponsors must cover the costs in other ways. All demonstrations have police present, but the amount and types of police presence vary according to the perceived threat posed by the group, rather than its size. In addition to the usual fliers and handouts, demonstrations also involve other types of material objects that are essential to the interaction and must be prepared in advance.

The focal point of a demonstration often involves the presentation of written petitions to officials, although this may not be readily apparent to an outside observer. A very early Occupation-era law, the Petition Law (Seigan hō) requires public officials to accept such petitions respectfully, and thereby provides an opening for groups to make their claims directly to representatives of government agencies. The term for “petition” used in this law encompasses not only petitions for which large numbers of individual signatures have been collected, but also written statements that express the organization’s views (Steinhoff 2008). One hot issue that sparked demonstration activity in spring 2007 was the long-running conflict at Henoko in northern Okinawa over plans to expand a US military base there in order to transfer US Marines from a base in urban Naha that the United States had promised to close. The US military intended to expand the base at Henoko with an aircraft runway projecting into the ocean and had begun to survey the offshore site. The focus of the protests was the fact that the Japanese government had dispatched a self-defense force ship to protect the surveyors from local Okinawan protestors, who went out in small boats trying to prevent the survey.

I observed three small protest gatherings in front of the Defense Ministry in Tokyo sponsored by different coalitions of groups, which meant that several petitions were presented at each event. Two of the demonstrations took place on the sidewalk in front of the Defense Ministry and thus did not require a
police permit for a street demonstration. One occurred just as workers were leaving the ministry at the end of the workday and was billed as a “protest action” (kōgi kōdo). A long line of protesters stood on the sidewalk along the front wall of the ministry, headed by a contingent of monks from Okinawa in saffron robes, chanting to drum accompaniment. Police presence was very light. The group conducted a brief shūkai for the participants, with an MC and speakers using a portable loudspeaker. Then a representative came out of the ministry gate and the presentation of half a dozen petitions began. A spokesperson read each group’s petition in a loud, angry voice, to a very junior ministry official standing formally with an impassive expression on his face. At the end of the reading, the paper petition was formally handed over to the agency official with polite bows on both sides (Fukki 35nen Henoko kōgi kōdo and shūkai, May 15, 2007). A second event a few days later was similar, except that it combined the Henoko issue with a broader concern over Japanese self-defense force involvement in Iraq, and the protesters along the sidewalk were holding up gory pictures of Iraq war victims (World Peace Now 5–19 Bōeichō ningen no kabe, May 19, 2007).

Another event the same day began with a fairly informal shūkai at a neighborhood park near the Defense Ministry. The official focus was to protest Japanese military involvement in the Iraq war, but many of the speeches protested the military ship sent to Henoko. The participants then moved out into a street demonstration complete with a police platform truck to guide the demonstration on the street, a sound car to lead the demonstrators in their chants, and another big police van at the rear. The event was sponsored by the “Organizing Committee to Create a New Anti-AMPO Action” (Atarashii Han-Ampo kōdō o tsukuru jikkō iinkai) and many of the participants were old activists well known to the police. The 50 or so demonstrators, a few wearing all-purpose demonstration vests with clear plastic pockets for inserting the day’s protest slogan, were accompanied by 35 plainclothes security police plus a large number of uniformed police on both sides of the demonstrators, but no riot police. When they got close to the Defense Ministry the demonstration stopped across the street from the entrance and a big argument ensued, with the police insisting they had to move on and the demonstrators insisting that they had an appointment to deliver petitions. The matter was settled when the junior representative came out from the Defense Ministry gate to receive the petitions. The designated speakers were allowed to cross the street to deliver their petitions, while the rest of the demonstration was held under police guard on the opposite side. The people reading the petitions engaged in a little intimidation by making a point of reading and recording the name badge of the ministry official. After five petition statements had been read, the speakers went back across the street and angry interchanges with the police continued as the demonstration moved in fits and starts toward its destination (5–19 Bōeichō kōgi kōdō, May 19, 2007).

These examples illustrate the basic patterns and variability found in small demonstrations and also reveal the wide array of material objects that are
part of demo interaction. These features are scaled up dramatically for large demonstrations, which require a great deal more work by the organizing committee and often have some sponsorship by more institutionalized organizations with greater resources. The second hot issue that inspired demonstrations in spring 2007 was the Abe government’s efforts to revise the Japanese Constitution in order to change Article 9, the famous clause in which Japan renounces war and its right to maintain offensive military forces. This perennial issue took on new urgency in 2007 because of new Diet measures facilitating a constitutional referendum, as well as its high priority on the government’s agenda. I observed two large demonstrations opposing constitutional change, both starting with a big rally at Hibiya Park and then marching through the Ginza, but sponsored by very different coalitions of organizations. The first was officially sponsored by the “2007 May 3 Constitution Rally Organizing Committee” (2007nen 5.3 kenpō shūkai jikkō inkkai) but also had eight organizational sponsors and some heavyweight backing, as demonstrated by its slick professional flier and the participation of opposition party Diet members.

I had arrived well before the starting time for the shūkai in the Kōkaidō auditorium in Hibiya Park, but the auditorium was already filled to capacity with 5,000 people and there was a huge crowd milling around outside, where a big screen had been set up along with massive loudspeakers. We all sat on the ground for the extensive rally, and then the MC announced the sequence for the demo: first the jikkō inkkai, Diet members, and representatives of the main citizens’ groups, then people participating as individuals, then religious groups, followed by women’s groups, democratic groups (minshu dantai), labor unions (Zenroren, Zenrōkyō and 20 unions), and finally political parties. The MC cautioned that there might be trouble from right-wing groups, but said to ignore them and keep the demonstration safe and peaceful. It took some time for 5,000 people to pour out of the building and for the additional 1,000 people outside to get to their designated assembly points, but within about 15 minutes the first groups were moving out into the street to begin the demonstration.

The police presence around the demo lines was very light and simply facilitated movement of the demo and the cross-traffic. There were virtually no riot police directly policing the demonstration; however, some were visible on the side streets, where they were holding back some right-wing sound trucks a block or two away. There were also people posted all along the route who passed out copies of the brightly colored flier explaining what the event was about. The demo line was walking in very relaxed French style three or four abreast, in very casual order. There were lots of banners on poles, but some groups had various gimmicks and there were also a lot of handmade cloth banners that the lead row of a group held as they walked. There were a few groups attempting to do response chants, but mostly people just walked along, chatting with their friends and smiling at the passersby.

My strategy for observing large street demonstrations is to move quickly to the end point of the route as the first groups arrive, and then collect video
clips of every group as it arrives. This allows me to capture the banners, signs, and other paraphernalia carried or worn by each group. There was no list of all the participating groups in the materials distributed at this demonstration, but my assistant later identified at least 70 groups from my photographs of their banners. They included peace groups, women’s groups, and labor unions. Many groups identified themselves as 9Jō no Kai (“Article Nine Association”), a national network of local groups that had mobilized very quickly in response to the perceived danger to Article 9. Some local women’s groups had created elaborate hand-quilted banners, while other groups carried fans, balloons, or other gimmicks labeled “9Jō no Kai.” This demonstration had mobilized support from institutionalized constituencies well beyond the invisible civil society, although I learned of it by “following the traces” from one gathering to another.

If this demonstration straddled the outer limits of the invisible civil society, another demonstration a few weeks later fell more squarely within it and was organized by recognized New Left leaders from the 1960s. This second event was officially named “Changing Article 9 of the Constitution Cannot be Permitted, May 15 Joint Action” (9jō kaiken o yurusanai 6.15 kyōdō kōdō), and was held at the Hibiya Park large outdoor amphitheater. As I approached I noticed 40–50 plainclothes security police standing at the edge of the path. The event was free, but volunteers at the reception table were selling plastic clappers and 9Jō ribbon banners. The shūkai began promptly at 6:15 pm after a live musical warm-up. Propped up on a chair beside the central podium was a large photograph of Kamba Michiko, the Tokyo University student who was trampled to death in a demonstration around the Diet building on June 15, 1960 at the height of the 1960 AMPO protests. The event was timed to commemorate her death and her photograph was later carried at the head of the demonstration. Nineteen speakers seated on the stage represented the major New Left protest generations and issues, from 1960 AMPO through the late 1960s New Left protests, the peace and anti-nuclear movements, right up to contemporary protest activity represented by writer and freeter activist Amemiya Karin, student protesters at Hōsei University, and the protests at Henoko in Okinawa. Brief speeches linked all of these issues to the current problem of protecting Article 9 and preventing constitutional revision.

Just before 8:00 pm, the MC announced the demonstration route and everyone rose to practice the response chants with raised fists. As people began moving out of the amphitheater with banners fluttering in the twilight, the sound of a faster-paced chanting to drum accompaniment grew louder and louder, the first indication that the demonstration was divided into two distinct groups. The first half was a traditional left-style demo with older groups doing response chants behind the lead sound truck, but walking in the casual French style. The second half was a newer-style “sound demo” in which younger groups moved or danced to faster-paced chants accompanied by bongo drums, whistles, and the clappers everyone had purchased, followed
by a sound truck with a DJ playing faster music and adding commentary. A few demonstrators on the sidewalk passed out fliers to passersby.

As these examples illustrate, *demo* are more complex than *shūkai*. They usually are planned by an organizing committee with representatives from multiple groups. Several different kinds of police may participate (Steinhoff 2006). The presentation of petitions adds still more participants. Because demonstrations usually take place outdoors on public property, they also may interact with an audience of passerby and the occupants of right-wing sound trucks who try to mount a counter-demonstration. Material objects also proliferate in demonstrations, starting with the application for a street demonstration permit and the permit itself, and the petitions that are read aloud and then handed over to agency officials. In addition to the same kinds of print materials found at *shūkai*, demonstrations often add *demo* vests and the pre-printed signs that slip into them, signs, flags, and banners that advertise the groups and their positions, portable megaphones, sound cars to lead a street demonstration and sometimes additional apparel to wear, such as printed T-shirts and headbands. In the two large demonstrations there were still other objects, such as fans, clackers, and printed ribbons, and the musical instruments and sound truck used in the sound *demo*. The police also bring special-purpose vehicles including platform cars and megaphones from which to direct a demonstration, police buses that bring police to the venue, and the special shields, masks, gloves, and nightsticks that riot police use when they are deployed.

Needless to say, I did not distribute questionnaires asking demonstration participants if they were happy. My on-site observation, confirmed by the video clips, shows that they were having a good time walking, chanting, or dancing along with their friends and displaying the various material objects they had made or acquired for the occasion. The only people who did not appear to be having a good time were the various types of police, who were being paid to manage traffic and protect the public from the demonstrators.

**Redistributing the local**

If we follow the direct traces outward from what has come together in one *shūkai* or *demo*, they lead to other times and places where smaller groups have come together to do something: as an organizing committee meeting to plan the event and produce the handout materials and the fliers advertising it; as persons involved in the routine volunteer activity of making and distributing newsletters and pamphlets for many different organizations; and as organizers and participants in other *shūkai* and *demo* on many different issues as part of the activity of advocacy organizations. These print materials are integral to the interactions at all of these events; their production and distribution forms a major part of volunteer activity and they leave traces that help us to follow the trails that tie the invisible civil society together. Similarly, the cloth banners and cardboard signs that demonstrators carry identify the groups and
their messages, and the very range of groups and messages that appear in a single large demonstration exemplify the breadth and diversity of the invisible civil society’s networks.

The overall parameters of the invisible civil society and the number of people who participate regularly are unknown, but many people participate in several organizations and attend events sponsored by an even wider array of groups. These overlapping memberships and forms of participation produce a dense and complex network despite its ephemeral and episodic nature. The network exists to the extent that people continue to participate in gatherings and make and consume related material objects. Because of their experience in the New Left protest movement, they avoid any connection to government or to hierarchical formal organizations. These groups are loose, informal, and quite fragile, falling well below the threshold of the 1996 Non-Profit Organization (NPO) Law. Those who are dissatisfied simply stop coming. Members volunteer to help with the tasks that need to be done, based on their skills and willingness to contribute time. Through these fragile organizations, participants with skills and experience have perpetuated the invisible civil society for nearly half a century.

People volunteer not only out of commitment to particular causes, but also because they enjoy socializing with their friends. Shūkai and demo are social occasions where people meet old friends and sometimes make new ones. While in mainstream Japan the idea of participating in a street demonstration is completely outside the comfort zone of most people, it is a familiar, nostalgic activity for these groups. Planning an event and putting together fliers and newsletters or creating politically themed handicrafts become small group social occasions as well as satisfying ways to contribute their skills to a cause they value. Within the culture of the New Left and the invisible civil society, shūkai and demo are organized social events where social capital is created and reinforced, just as the church social or civic club might be in other parts of society. These gatherings are simultaneously occasions where people share, display, and reinforce a style and values based on their New Left protest experience as a distinctive form of “cultural capital”; volunteer to contribute their skills to produce material objects and plan social events in the service of causes they support, and receive acknowledgment from their peers for doing so; and create and reinforce “social capital” through interactions with a network of people that also involve the creation, distribution, and utilization of distinctive material objects.

Connecting the sites

The traces from some shūkai and demo also lead to more specialized and stable sites that serve as mediators and collectors for many groups. One such site is the cooperative bookstore Mosakusha, the last vestige of what during the late 1960s and early 1970s was a national network of underground bookstores serving the vast readership of the New Left. Mosakusha carries books
and magazines published by small publishers on topics of interest to the New Left. These publications are generally rejected by the two dominant national book and magazine distributors, which purchase the entire output of major publishers and distribute them to bookstores throughout Japan on six-month consignment. Mosakusha carries books and publications for a much longer period of time through direct arrangements with small publishers. It also accepts organizational newspapers, newsletters, pamphlets, journals, and other materials on consignment from organizations that produce them. It serves as a central distribution point for the print and digital media and other artifacts produced by groups in the invisible civil society, operating a physical storefront where people go to deliver materials on consignment and to purchase them, plus a website through which materials can be ordered (Mosakusha 2011). The people who seek such materials know where to find them. People outside the invisible civil society are unlikely to notice the ramshackle storefront on a quiet little side street in Shinjuku covered with handbills and posters, and even less likely to step inside. Like the portals to the world of wizardry in the Harry Potter books, Mosakusha is hiding in plain sight, recognizable only to those who know it is there.

Another type of specialized site serves groups that advocate for a particular issue, as a clearinghouse for information and coordination of joint activities. In keeping with the invisible civil society’s avoidance of hierarchy, these specialized organizations operate as information hubs and provide some centralized services, but they do not stand in hierarchical relationship to the groups affiliated with them. As organizations, the clearinghouses remain small operations with a few poorly paid staff, relying heavily on donated services, facilities, and volunteer labor. They can often be identified by names that include the terms renrakukai, renrenraku kaigi (liaison group or council), or more recently netto (short for network). They generally produce a regular newsletter that reports on current and forthcoming activities of their affiliated groups, and they also provide support services for larger events on behalf of their network. Of the eight organizations listed as sponsors of the 5.3 Hibiya kenpō demonstration, five were identified by their names as clearinghouse organizations that actually represent a larger array of individual local groups. Another 16 participating groups were identified from their banners as clearinghouse organizations, including many left union federations. Researchers interested in a particular social or political issue generally find a clearinghouse that is a rich source of information by “following the traces” to or from it.

Another more ephemeral form of mediating and collecting site is the organizing committee formed when groups collaborate to produce a shūkai or demo, hoping to attract a larger audience than they could muster on their own. Each sponsoring group sends a representative to the organizing committee for the event, who participates in planning meetings and reports back regularly. Delegates to the organizing committee know what is required to plan a large event, and they work hard individually and collectively to make
it happen. They work with other people who are not members of their own group, but employ a common body of knowledge and skills. After the event they usually meet one more time to review what went right and wrong, but then the organizing committee disbands. Participation in organizing committees for events extends the network ties of both the individual representative and the organization that he or she represents. It is perhaps the epitome of the strong participant-weak organization nature of the invisible civil society as a whole.

The layout of the meeting room, the structure of the program, and the print materials and group banners that are so essential to these events are all very similar in format. Members of many hundreds of separate small organizations that operate informally with volunteer labor replicate these standard patterns as they plan and produce thousands of different gatherings and the materials that are integral to them. They apply skills they developed through participation in the New Left, incorporating the particular style and format of these activities as they are practiced within the invisible civil society, but with room for individual creativity. Participants carry these skills from one group to another, and practice them when they meet in committees of representatives from different groups.

The common concerns and rhetoric of the New Left also tie the sites and actors together. There is a common language and style within the New Left and the invisible civil society, underscoring the fact that these are social movement groups engaged in advocacy and protest. Events may be called shūkai or demo but they also may be called kōgi kōdō (protests). Petitions, slogans, and response calls use assertive verb forms; they are peppered with words like hantai (oppose) and kyōhi (reject). The invisible civil society is involved with a broad range of political and social issues, but it is also characteristic of the New Left to draw connections between different issues and to view them as interrelated parts of a distinctive shared worldview. This ideological perspective, traceable to the original national New Left organizations of the 1960s, permeates the discourse of the invisible civil society from the speeches at shūkai to the array of materials on the free table.

I have described five events representing two major issues that prompted multiple demonstrations in spring 2007, the protests at Henoko in Okinawa, and resistance to constitutional revision that would change Article 9. In fact, those two issues permeated many more events in that period of fieldwork, and often overlapped. Speeches at two of the Defense Ministry protests also talked explicitly about Article 9. More basically “Article 9” and “Henoko” are everyday terms within the invisible civil society, which evoke strong emotions and are connected to a shared body of historical and political knowledge with which the participants are very familiar. Each was a very current issue generating demonstrations in spring 2007, but also had very deep roots within the New Left. The return of Okinawa to Japanese control was the central issue of the 1970 AMPO revisions, and thus the New Left has long been focused on
Okinawa and the US military presence there. Similarly, Article 9 has been a perennial issue uniting opposition parties against the ruling Liberal Democratic Party since the 1950s and was central to the 1960 AMPO protests. Both issues remained just as salient in 2015.

**The pursuit of happiness through protest**

Close examination of gatherings in the invisible civil society and the materials with which they carry out their social interactions demonstrates how this network is perpetuated. As true civil society organizations, they are independent of the state and expend a tremendous amount of time and energy in activity that produces a lively alternative public sphere of highly informed citizens. Although outwardly these small organizations are engaged in somewhat confrontational advocacy that is generally directed at organs of the state, their internal relations are convivial and largely harmonious. They find personal satisfaction through these activities, which display and reinforce their cultural capital and social capital. Yet social networks alone do not adequately explain the happiness and sense of well-being of participants in the invisible society.

An actor-network theory analysis has revealed the centrality of what they do and make in their invisible civil society interactions, and helps discredit the notion that they must be angry and depressed because they support unpopular causes. The same evidence also reveals the sources of their social satisfaction: It is the making and doing itself that produces well-being. Self-determination theory helps explain the significance of this tremendous outpouring of “making” and “doing” by linking it to the satisfaction of basic human needs for competence, relatedness, and autonomy, which in turn produce both personal and social well-being. Their activities of making and doing express their competence, which they contribute voluntarily to social causes they value. These contributions are shared through social interaction, producing the well-known effect of social network participation on well-being. Their activity expresses personal autonomy on multiple levels. It is voluntary social activity, which also reflects lifestyle choices that diverge from the mainstream of Japanese society, in pursuit of New Left ideals that are not majority views.

In sum, Japan’s invisible civil society is full of “makers and doers” who engage in autonomously motivated activity in support of causes they value. These activities of making and doing satisfy psychological needs for competence, relatedness and autonomy, which in turn facilitate social development and personal well-being. This is the same satisfaction that others might obtain from hobby and craft activities or organizing other types of social events, but they carry deeper meaning for participants in the invisible civil society because they embody personal values. Hence their social activities are comparable to voluntary activities in religious groups, or more broadly to civil society participation in political and advocacy organizations.
Acknowledgements

This chapter originated with a presentation at the International Symposium on Civil Society, Political Participation, and Happiness sponsored by the German Institute for Japanese Studies in Tokyo and held in Bad Homburg, Germany, May 23–25, 2013. A revised version was presented at a panel on happiness in Japan at the European Association for Japanese Studies meetings, Ljubljana, Slovenia, August 28, 2014. Some sections were previously published in Steinhoff, Patricia G., “Finding happiness in Japan’s invisible civil society,” in a special issue edited by Tim Tiefenbach of VOLUNTAS: International Journal of Voluntary and Nonprofit Organizations 26(1) (2015), 98–120, and are republished here by permission of the publisher. My thanks to the Institute of Social Science, University of Tokyo, the Fulbright Commission, and the Japan Endowment at the University of Hawai’i, which have supported parts of the data collection at various times.

References


9 Dimensions of happiness for young political activists
A case study of “Greens Japan” members

Phoebe S. Holdgrün

Introduction

The withdrawal of the young from political engagement is said to be a global phenomenon (Putnam 2001; Fahmy 2006; Sherrod 2006). Political apathy and a passive attitude towards political activism among younger age groups are clearly visible in Japan when considering voter turnout as an indicator: the elections for the House of Representatives on December 14, 2014 saw the lowest turnout among voters in their twenties (32.58 percent) and thirties (42.09 percent), while voters in their sixties had the highest voter turnout (68.28 percent) (AFPFE 2015).

Positive psychology theories correlate political participation and subjective well-being. Though there have been some quantitative studies testing these theories, the question of how far these two go hand in hand requires further empirical evidence. This chapter aims to contribute to this by exploring the links between participation in politics and various dimensions of happiness (Mathews and Izquierdo 2009), particularly among younger activists in their thirties. It will do this by exploring their motivations and how they value and evaluate their activities, as well as to what extent happiness plays a role here.

Kaase (1995) broadly defines political participation as all activities by citizens who become voluntarily active in order to influence the political system on various levels. To be politically active, there are many “conventional” and “unconventional” ways of varying intensity and frequency (Geißel and Penrose 2003; Kaase 1995). One “conventional” way requiring considerable amounts of commitment and energy is to become an active member of a political party organization. As there are few young people engaging in this particular form of activism in Japan, where in general party membership is low (Neumann 2002), this chapter will ask what motivates this minority of young Japanese who are committed to a political party organization.

Of the many party organizations in Japan, the Green Party of Japan (Midori no Tō – Greens Japan), launched on July 28, 2012, attracted numerous new members as a result of the triple disaster of March 11, 2011. Among these members were several younger people. Nevertheless Greens Japan is a small organization that did not yet meet the formal requirements of being a
national political party when this study was conducted. The green movement in Japan has its origins in the early 1980s, and affiliated political organizations such as Niji to Midori (Rainbow and Green), Midori no Kaigi (Green Congress), Midori no Tēburu (Green Table) or Midori no Mirai (Green Future) have in vain tried to gain a seat in the House of Councillors ever since. Members explained that the number of members and supporters reportedly almost doubled in the aftermath of the nuclear accident in Fukushima, and that the time seemed right for another attempt at the National Diet. Thus, one year in advance of the election for the House of Councillors in July 2013, a new organization was established: the Green Party. Yet all candidates of Greens Japan were defeated during the 2013 elections and prospects for electoral success at the national level appeared to be extremely low. Despite these unfavorable conditions, younger people kept on joining the organization and many of them even ran for local office. Considering that these members devoted substantial time and energy to a political organization whose chances of electoral success seemed low – and at a time when most young Japanese did not even vote – they stand out notably from their peers and provide a particularly interesting case study.

This study is based on data from seven semi-structured interviews conducted between 2012 and 2015 among members of Greens Japan (five women, two men), all living in the Kantō region, who were between 30 and 39 years old at the time of the interview. I chose people in their thirties as a case study for young party activists because Japanese people in their twenties are rarely politically active, therefore activists in their thirties must be understood to be still very young in the context of political activism. According to a survey among 1,498 members and supporters, of the 726 who responded only 22 Greens Japan members were in their twenties, while 78 were in their thirties. The chapter’s findings reveal that the institutional framework of the political system surrounding the party organization has a negative impact on individual party members’ levels of happiness. In contrast, interpersonal relations within and outside the party, as well as feelings of satisfaction regarding autonomous decision making and taking action, increase subjective well-being.

In this chapter I will present an outline of the theoretical framework and a review of relevant literature, followed by an analysis of the empirical data by exploring how perceptions and institutions, interactions with people, as well as autonomy and feelings of having found new meaning in life, all impact on levels of happiness.

Political participation and dimensions of happiness

The reasons why political participation is assumed to have an effect on subjective well-being are numerous. Theories on political participation emphasize that “political participation is likely to yield psychic benefits, increasing the participating individual’s sense of efficacy, political knowledge, and feeling of
empowerment” (Weitz-Shapiro and Winters 2011: 103). Drèze and Sen (2002: 359) point out that “participation can also be seen to have intrinsic value for the quality of life. Indeed, being able to do something through political action – for oneself and for others – is one of the elementary freedoms that people have reason to value.” Positive psychology provides the theoretical explanation for the correlation between political participation and subjective well-being. Scholars differ in their understanding of the direction of causality, leaving the question of whether it is participation that makes people happier, or whether it is the happy people who become active and participate, as explained by the broaden-and-build theory of positive emotions (Fredrickson 1998, 2001, 2004), an object for research. This chapter, however, focuses only on the former by asking in what sense political participation can contribute to subjective well-being.

One explanatory approach is provided by self-determination theory (Deci and Ryan 2000; Deci and Vansteenkiste 2004). This theory builds on the assumption that humans are inherently proactive and strive towards growth, development and well-being, but that the outcome of this pursuit depends to a great extent on the surrounding social environment. In the event that psychological needs for feelings of competence, relatedness (feeling a sense of belonging and connectedness) and autonomy (a sense of independence and of having a voice in decision making) are addressed during this pursuit, subjective well-being will increase (Weitz-Shapiro and Winters 2008). Furthermore, Frey, Benz and Stutzer’s (2004) related concept of procedural utility explains that subjective well-being does not only depend on the outcome of a certain process, but rather the way the process itself takes place is equally important. Utility is generated if the basic psychological needs for competence, relatedness, and autonomy are addressed, no matter if the outcome is the desired one. Regarding political participation, this means that the desired outcome of an election is not the one singular factor that generates utility, but also the quality of decision-making processes can have an impact on subjective well-being.

Studies on the correlation of happiness and political participation usually apply quantitative methods. Several studies ask for the direction of causality, such as Veenhoven (1988), who argued both that unhappiness makes people become active, as well as that it is the happy people who become more involved. Some of those studies support the model of self-determination theory (Frey and Stutzer 2000a, 2000b, 2005, 2006; Dorn et al. 2007; Pacheco and Lange 2010), others support the causal explanation that happy people are more likely to participate (Weitz-Shapiro and Winters 2011; Flavin and Keane 2012). The findings often refer to particular forms of political activities and particular population groups, and as such disentangle seemingly contradictory findings: On the one hand, protest activities have been associated with dissatisfied people (Marsh 1977; Barnes et al. 1979), but Lorenzini (2015) finds that life satisfaction facilitates protest activities in the case of unemployed youth in Europe.
This study will consider this in the case of Greens Japan and their defeat at the 2013 House of Councillors elections, for processes both within and outside the party. In order to find out more about the mechanisms contributing to feelings of happiness, this chapter analyzes narratives on political participation and happiness by distinguishing how psychological needs for competence, relatedness and autonomy are being addressed. Moreover, the study explores experimentally the four dimensions of happiness as suggested by Mathews and Izquierdo (2009), who distinguish between the physical, interpersonal, existential and structural dimensions. Of these, the interpersonal dimension addresses the feeling of relatedness to others, which is one of the general psychological needs explained by self-determination theory and procedural utility. Autonomy and competence, the two other psychological needs referred to by self-determination theory, are also aspects of the value and meaning of life which is being described by the existential dimension. As such, some parallels can be drawn between self-determination theory, procedural utility, and the dimensions of happiness as defined by Mathews and Izquierdo (2009). The structural dimension asks how institutions shape the conception of happiness. In applying this to my study, I ask how political participation and politically active citizens are perceived by hegemonic discourses in a particular society and how this relates to their happiness. I also question how institutions impact the process and outcome of political activism in a way that can affect well-being.

Studies on participation and happiness, youth, and green parties

This study diverges from many others on politically active “youth” (Torres et al. 2013: 12; Rijke 2009) by defining party members in their thirties as “young,” but there are also studies on the political participation of younger age groups addressing different age ranges, which largely move from adolescents to grown-ups in their thirties (Lorenzini 2015). The two opposing lines of argumentation in studies on young people and political activism are: a) participation of (young) people is declining (Putnam 2001), and b) civic engagement did not decline but changed in nature and thus a broader view on participation is needed, because young people conceptualize political engagement in a changing repertoire (Youniss 1999; Sherrod 2006; Marsh et al. 2007; Torres et al. 2013).

Among studies on Japanese youth and political engagement, and in keeping with the general broad lines of argumentation, Takahashi and Hatano (1999) stress that while young Japanese are highly educated, and despite a vibrant student movement during the 1960s, there has evolved an apparent lack of political knowledge and involvement. The latter is due to feelings of not being well represented by political parties and because of difficulties in participating. Cassegård (2013), however, reveals that there exists a new protest culture among young Japanese that is rooted in the 1980s and 1990s and connected to the freeter (furī tā) movement of people in irregular employment. Obinger (2013), Kingston (2015), O’Day (2015) and Slater et al. (2015) point to current alternative forms of
participation among Japanese youth. My study, by contrast, focusses on young Japanese who choose the conventional way to participate in a political party. Happiness is not a focus in one of these academic studies. Scherrer highlights how feelings of being rewarded and of being outstanding contribute to developing political identities in the case of young French activists (Scherrer 2001: 238, 232–233). This is particularly interesting for the case of Greens Japan, as there is seemingly no reward, and because being “outstanding” is valued differently in Japan.

Academic studies on green parties in general address party characteristics, transformation over time, and issues of success and survival as an organization (Müller-Rommel 1994; Müller-Rommel 1992; Frankland et al. 2008; Spoon 2009, 2011), but there are no studies that relate to participation, happiness and younger members. Bennie (2004), somewhat closer to the aims of this chapter, examines reasons for joining and leaving political parties by studying the case of green party membership in Scotland and finds that “collective incentives” (Bennie 2004: 211) rather than “selective rewards for membership” (Bennie 2004: 206) were key motivations for joining the party, but that the decision to remain a committed member depended highly on “organizational effectiveness and concrete political outcomes” (Bennie 2004: 210). While Bennie reflects that participation can also imply individual rewards such as “feel[ing] good about themselves” (Bennie 2004: 207) and that negative experiences lead members to leave the party (Bennie 2004: 211), further impact on the subjective well-being of members as a means to stay or leave is not clearly considered. Yet collective incentives, such as the nuclear accident in Fukushima, as well as the importance of effectiveness and outcomes for subjective well-being, were also issues in the narratives of Greens Japan members.

While environmental movements in Japan have been widely studied (Aldrich 2013; Avenell 2012; Broadbent 1998; Danahar 2003; Hasegawa 2004; McKean 1981, just to name a few), the number of studies on Japanese green party organizations is small and they focus on reasons for weakness and electoral failure (Jain 1991; Lam 1999; Schmidt 2013; Zimmeck 2013). Higuchi et al. (2010) reveal that electoral institutions, party competition and the degree of post-materialism in Japanese society do not sufficiently explain the failure of green party organizations in Japan. However, they find that people in the social milieu who would be a natural support basis for green parties – contrarily to their counterparts in countries such as Germany – tend to be passive, apolitical and thus not supportive of the party in Japan. So far there has been no qualitative study considering the perceptions and self-evaluations of activists of Greens Japan in relation to feelings of subjective well-being.

Elevating happiness through party activism?

The following sections will examine how younger members of Greens Japan articulate subjective well-being in relation to their engagement for the organization
by considering psychological needs and each of the structural, interpersonal and existential dimensions of happiness (Mathews and Izquierdo 2009).

**Setting the frame: perceptions and institutions**

The following subsections will highlight two aspects that emerged from the empirical data and which I associate with the structural dimension of happiness as defined by Mathews and Izquierdo (2009). First, in Japan, political participation for some reason has a negative image and is thus clearly distinguished from the common pursuit of happiness. This is not a formal institutional rule, yet setting a frame for my research subject. Second, institutions outside and within the party impact the process and the outcome of political activism in a way that relates to generating subjective well-being.

**Perceptions: the image of political participation**

A young male member explained that – before becoming a candidate for his local ward assembly himself – he was disappointed when he first met local politicians of various party backgrounds:

> They were not people of excellency, [...] they seemed to me like people who cannot work properly [...] I met several different people, and I got startled: such people were doing politics, and I thought, if that was so, it might be better, if I do it myself [laughs], and this became my starting point, but this is a reason I cannot tell so loudly.

(Mr. T., aged 38, January 26, 2015)

While being disappointed by politicians made Mr. T. run for office himself, the negative view of politics and politicians alienate many people and withhold them from any political activity. This is also true for young activists before they became members of Greens Japan: some mentioned that they strongly disliked politicians in general (Ms. O., aged 33, July 19, 2012; Ms. K., aged 36, December 6, 2014), others explained a lack of interest and knowledge and did not even vote (Mr. T., aged 38, January 26, 2015), as this young woman illustrates:

> In case somebody around me – in fact, there weren’t many such people – talked about politics, I thought this is something shady and strange, and that this person was saying something difficult, and [...] the thought to start a lively discussion with this person never came to my mind, I really thought that politics is something that has nothing to do with me [...] and maybe because politicians have a dirty image, ordinary people – and that included me back then – have the view that they don’t want to have anything to do with politics [...] If the people around me knew what I am doing [with the Greens] they would for sure ask me whether I am all
right, and they might think that I am being tricked by some strange party. Religion and party have a strong touch of taboo in Japan.

(Ms. A., aged 30, April 28, 2013)

This quote reveals how issues related to politics and activism are seen as something uncommon. For people like the young woman quoted above, who led the “normal” life of an employee and who did not want to stand out, something like political engagement is nothing desirable in their lives. It is not a constituent part of their pursuit of happiness, such as, for instance, marriage might be for many people. The negative image itself makes it rather undesirable for “normal” people to become involved in political action and to stand out. The perception of politically active people and full-fledged politicians as belonging to a different world (see also LeBlanc 1999: 85) or in a very negative way makes feelings of relatedness to such people unlikely and undesired – and thus reinforces the idea that political participation and happiness are mutually exclusive.

To become politically active under such conditions, there needs to be a strong incentive or stimulus (Milbrath and Goel 1977): for many of the new party members, the nuclear accident in Fukushima became a personal turning point. However, even with such a strong incident as a catalyst for action, reservations against political activism and politically active people still lingered when they became interested in the Greens and still prevailed even after at least one year of activism:

I still understand the feeling [of not wanting to have anything to do with politics] very well, half of me is still there […] When we are doing political activities, I feel a strong resistance […] and, frankly said, I don’t want to do it. I think [that I am doing] something that I must not do, and I get concerned about it.

(Ms. A., aged 30, April 28, 2013)

Interestingly, this young female member feels able to join in the activities despite her strong resistance and negative feelings against politics, because the Greens deal with political activities in a relaxed and uncalculating manner: “The people within the Green party do not have a bad or dirty image” (Ms. A., aged 30, April 28, 2013). Thus, even if reservations prevail, and even if some activists are careful of whom they talk to about their political activism (especially if they are employed and not making their living by political office), their personal attitude has changed. However, the prevailing negative image of political action suggests that political engagement hardly qualifies as a contributor to happiness. In fact, for people who do not want to stand out, it might contrarily even increase unhappiness.
Structural impacts: electoral system and party rules

The institutional impact on subjective feelings of happiness regarding political activism is evident on two levels: a) institutions outside the party, such as the electoral system, formal and informal institutional rules in decision-making processes within assemblies at both national and local levels; as well as b) structures within the party. This applies to both outcome utility and procedural utility. This section will touch on aspects related to the impact of the electoral system at national level and decision-making processes within the party.

The institutional framework of the national electoral system in Japan has a considerable effect on the uncertain condition and the extremely low prospects for the future success of Greens Japan, which in turn has an impact on feelings of outcome utility and subjective well-being for young green activists. Higuchi et al. (2010) argued that including proportional representation in the national electoral system in Japan has improved chances for smaller parties and that the electoral structure should therefore not be the main reason for the Green Party’s lack of success. Yet the results of the House of Councillors elections in July 2013 were a disappointing experience for members of Greens Japan. The set conditions for standing for election as a political party on the proportional representation list required the Greens to invest a considerable amount of energy and money in order for them to be eligible: the party had to nominate a minimum of ten candidates, and each candidate had to pay a 6 million yen deposit (shokutakukin). With no successful candidate, the deposit money was not paid back. As the Greens are not supported by any large companies, raising the sum meant a very high hurdle that brought the organization to its limits:

There were several people who optimistically said, “it will be all right.” But now we have this result […] I was shocked […] What else could we have done better? Such was our regret, it was a great shock, yes […] Based on this result, we have to think about ourselves […] The atmosphere was such that members strongly said, “if we continue like that it will not work,” and I said that, too.

(Ms. I., aged 30, March 29, 2014)

On the one hand, the existing system including proportional representation alone does not facilitate success for smaller parties, because eligibility is dependent on a large amount of money. Greens Japan managed to clear this hurdle once, but it barely left any resources for the next Upper House elections in 2016. The electoral system in Japan renders electoral success and, as such, outcome utility of electoral processes for a minority party such as Greens Japan highly unlikely, at least at the national level.

On the other hand, it is unlikely that procedural utility was generated to a large extent during the national electoral process. In addition to the very high financial burden, interviewees report media coverage of their organization to
be almost nonexistent and find this unfair. Another major deficit during election campaigning was the lack of volunteers. The membership of the Greens is still very low and therefore, as one of the interviewees says, there were “always the same faces” (Mr. T., aged 38, January 26, 2015). Thus national electoral politics are not a promising facilitator for subjective feelings of happiness among activists of Greens Japan. Consequently, around 20 percent of members quit the membership after the electoral defeat of 2013. A considerable number of people were disappointed to such an extent that they felt unable to continue their activities for the Greens (Ms. I., aged 30, March 29, 2014). Others felt that they should not give up because then “the others” would have been the “winners,” and because they also felt there might be future success (Ms. O., aged 33, July 19, 2012; Mr. T., aged 38, January 26, 2015).2

Furthermore, structures and decision-making processes within the party provide a more satisfactory regulatory framework contributing to the generation of procedural and outcome utility: the participatory structures aim at equally empowering all members, and, due to a lack of members, the chances of being promoted quickly are high. Many interviewees gained access to crucial party positions despite being young and having low seniority within the organization: some of them became members of the executive board despite having only been a member for around half a year (Mr. S., aged 31, January 26, 2015). On the other hand, the participatory system also leads to hours of discussion, often without any real outcome. This in turn consumes time and energy and thus receives criticism from some younger members (Ms. I., aged 30, March 29, 2014). As such, structures within the party itself are determinants for both satisfaction and dissatisfaction among the younger members.

Political activities are perceived by the surrounding social environment as not contributing to happiness. Institutions such as the national electoral system impede the generation of procedural utility and outcome utility. In this regard, political activities are unlikely to result in subjective feelings of happiness for members of Greens Japan.

**Happiness through interacting with people**

When it comes to the interpersonal dimension of happiness, there needs to be a distinction between interactions outside the party and within the party. When asking younger members of Greens Japan directly about what makes them happy and what is fun in regard to their political activities, the answers often relate to meeting other people (Ms. K., aged 36, December 6, 2014). They report subjective feelings of happiness because interpersonal exchange contributes to: a) feelings of like-mindedness and sharing the same ideals – the psychological need for relatedness, so to speak; and b) the opportunity to meet personalities that are perceived as fascinating and inspiring to oneself. A young female activist explains how a new world opened up for her in her interaction with like-minded people:
I met members of the Green Party, and I got the impression that this was a great new world! [...] I had never seen such people among my colleagues and my friends, and they all were talking naturally about all [the problems] [...] I had to think about all by myself until that moment, and they were also taking action [...] And I was very moved, because yes, there existed such a world.

(Ms. A., aged 30, April 28, 2013)

The young activists appreciate the fact that it is easy to talk to other people within the party as everybody shares the same ideals (Ms. K., aged 36, December 6, 2014), and that there is a freedom of action and speech within Greens Japan (Mr. T., aged 38, January 26, 2015), something that might not necessarily be the case in other political parties in Japan. The female member quoted above also recalls how she was not only moved because she finally had met people who shared her ideals, but how she was fascinated by peers of her own age, leaving a strong impression on her:

[Two young female members] invited me to come to the Youth Group meeting, and I felt very happy that they let me participate so easily, even though I don’t know anything and I don’t have any experiences. And they were very beautiful and cute and elegant, and they had opinion[s] and are active, though they are of my age, and I thought it was good that I had the opportunity to meet them and I was very happy because of that.

(Ms. A., aged 30, April 28, 2013)

Interpersonal relations also have a high impact on the decision to become active and to continue activities. Some widely known figures – they, too, being in their thirties and being members of or standing close to the Greens – were often mentioned when asking about the motivation for becoming active for the Greens (Ms. A., aged 30, April 28, 2013; Ms. K., aged 36, December 6, 2014; Mr. S., aged 31, January 26, 2015). A young female member explains what makes her happy in her political engagement:

I can meet lots of very fascinating people. When pursuing activities in this way, I can meet various great people who are active in broadly different genres, and I think “wow, there are so many wonderful people!” These meetings make me very happy. And besides [...] there was a meeting of the Global Greens, [...] of people throughout the world who have the same thinking and [...] are active and this was emotional for me and I became very happy and feel I want to give my very best. This is a feeling of happiness.

(Ms. O., aged 33, July 19, 2012)

Interactions occur among members and supporters within the party organization, but members also perceive encountering people of various backgrounds,
who are not necessarily members of Greens Japan or the international network of green parties, Global Greens, as positive. Knowing people with the same ideals and meeting inspiring personalities can happen both within and outside the party. However, the narratives particularly emphasize the positive aspects of interpersonal relations within the party and are less concerned with interactions outside the party. Members committing a large amount of time and energy to party-related activities, for example by being elected as members of local assemblies, communicate and interact with people within and outside the party, but not all of these interpersonal activities surrounding their political engagement result in elevated feelings of happiness. On the contrary, the narratives reflect a more critical attitude towards the communication and interactions with other politicians within the local assemblies or with members of the local town administration. In fact, local assembly members of Greens Japan – often being the only representatives of the Green Party and, at least in the case of the interview partners, part of a small opposing minority within the assembly among an overwhelming conservative majority – report difficulties and that the position as a representative in the assembly is frustrating. As singular members within the opposition they claim there is a lack of understanding from politicians of the majority (Ms. O., aged 33, July 19, 2012; Ms. K., aged 36, December 6, 2014). Local assemblies are perceived as a world most different from the Green Party. They are dominated by male politicians, as female members who recount unpleasant experiences and who have witnessed sexual harassment critically note (Ms. K., aged 36, December 6, 2014). Young Green assembly members complain about the lack of discussion within the local assemblies and about the attitudes of members of the (conservative) majorities (Ms. O., aged 33, July 19, 2012; Mr. S., aged 31, January 26, 2015). They view decision-making processes within Greens Japan as exemplary for participatory democracy and compare them to local assemblies (Mr. S., aged 31, January 26, 2015).

While activities within the party seem to be much easier compared to political office in local assemblies, and while there are highly pleasant interpersonal experiences within the party, such as careful discussions, mutual understanding, sharing of ideals and, to a certain extent, “wonderful people” (Ms. O., aged 33, July 19, 2012), the interpersonal aspect in party activities is not always perceived as positive and as particularly contributing to subjective well-being. As mentioned above, there are many individualistic people (koseiteki na hito) within the party (Ms. K., aged 36, December 6, 2014) who are perceived as “strange” by some of the young members:

It’s still the first step [for the Greens in Japan], and there are strange people, different people, that was a shock for me, there were many somehow weird people, they are not false, but they are very particular,
and, frankly spoken, I thought for myself, when I went to the first meeting, whether I could do with these people.

(Ms. A., aged 30, April 28, 2013)

Young activists also deplore the fact that members of their own age are only a minority within the party, even though the number of younger members has increased over the last decade. For one young woman, party activities are “not so much fun” because there is a lack of people of her own age and gender. She is convinced that young people should run for office and that it is necessary for young people to become representatives (Ms. I., aged 30, March 29, 2014). While she complains that there are few young female members, others claim that there are many women among the younger members, or that numbers are balanced. While the actual number of female members between 30 and 39 remains uncertain, participant observation revealed that young women, even if few compared to older age groups, are clearly visible.

One activist mentions a differing style of communication when comparing older to younger party members:

There are many people in their sixties [...] And these people love to fight [...] When I watched that for the first time, I thought that this is scary and that it seems they are disputing [...] and I thought that Greens Japan is a place a little difficult for activities. And I think there are many such people, and the young kids who see that, [...] they are people who want everyone to be in harmony, and there are many young people that withdraw [from being active] when they see these fighting activists. We need to build a movement that is as much fun as possible.

(Ms. K., aged 36, December 6, 2014)

Not only is it assumed that potential members of a young age will withdraw from activities, but one young member of the party executive committee reports clashing attitudes between younger and older members when – for example – it comes to the speed of reaching decisions and taking concrete action. Young members are frustrated, as older members – being the majority – have more power to make decisions. They also mention that the grassroots democratic decision-making processes are tiring (Ms. I., aged 30, March 29, 2014). To this extent, interpersonal interaction is sometimes evaluated negatively rather than positively.

Whether positively perceived encounters of like-mindedness and inspiration prevail or whether frustrating experiences dominate, might have an impact on the persistence of participation in the long run. However, interpersonal aspects in relation to political activities have high potential to result in elevated levels of well-being, and young members report positive experiences, particularly in regard to activities within the party or with people who support the party ideology.
Happiness through autonomy and a meaningful life

Young Green Party members address various nuances of values and meanings of life in regard to their political activities. More precisely, three aspects or gradual stages relate to the existential dimension of happiness.

The first stage is subjective well-being deriving from the autonomous decision to act. Autonomy is valued, first, in regard to the conscious pursuit of subjective happiness: one activist explained how he used to be unhappy, despite being a regular and well-paid employee at a big company, and how he became aware that his superiors always looked unhappy, too. He finally quit his job and worked as a freeter before becoming an active member of the Greens and was running for local office when my interview with him took place. Asked whether he felt happiness when thinking about the changes in his life, he answered that he wanted to make his living by saying what he wanted to say and by doing something that he was interested in. Unlike his time as an employee, he now has the chance to do so through his political activities. However, he was not able to make a living out of that at the time of the interview (Mr. T., aged 38, January 26, 2015).

In addition, second, the autonomous decision to be active, not for oneself, but in order to really change something, is significant, as the following quotes illustrate:

Until that time I had only complained about society [...], but it’s not only about complaining, but about changing something, and if I don’t move, nothing will change, and I thought I should not complain but try to move, and then I stood for election.

(Ms. K., aged 36, December 6, 2014)

I was deeply inspired when I watched Miyake Yōhei on YouTube. To say it simply, until that time I wanted to be active in social movements, but I thought that in fact, I was not. I was complaining and saying that this and that is not good. But I did not reach the point to say how to do it myself.

(Mr. S., aged 31, January 26, 2015)

These two activists feel they have new meaning in their life because they have consciously stopped complaining, as they say, and are trying to initiate change. Beyond that, members consciously endeavor to take steps to change society for the better and to build a society with an environment in which they want to live, for their children’s sake (Ms. A., aged 30, April 28, 2013; Ms. I., aged 30, March 29, 2014).

The second stage goes beyond valuing autonomous decisions and activities and illustrates how outcome utility, however small the outcome may be, contributes to the feeling that life is worth living. Feelings of having an impact on policy change, of political efficacy, are very low as the Greens are only represented in local assemblies and only as an extremely small minority. Yet
small successes count – for example, when local assembly members feel they are helping people, and are thanked for it, as a local assemblywoman explains: “I was able to help people, and that was really good” (Ms. K., aged 36, December 6, 2012; see also Ms. I., aged 30, March 29, 2014).

The third stage encompasses the understanding of political activities as a natural part of life, which only one interviewee, who had been active for more than a decade and with great intensity despite her young age, mentions: “[Political participation –] it is one part of life. It is not something distant and separated from daily life […] politics comes in naturally” (Ms. O., aged 33, July 19, 2012).

This understanding goes beyond stages one and two: it means overcoming the negative perception of political activism, and not quitting because of adverse institutional impact, but it also means that the autonomy to raise one’s voice and to act for change is not something outstanding or to be proud of, but rather something to be done as a matter of course. Thus political participation would then represent one aspect of a satisfied life and as such can “naturally” become a constituent part in the pursuit of happiness.

Conclusion

This chapter started out asking in what sense the generating of happiness is facilitated through political activities in the case of younger members of Greens Japan. It did this by examining narratives of members of Greens Japan in their thirties and by drawing on theoretical concepts explaining the relevance of psychological needs such as autonomy, competence and relatedness, as well as the structural, interpersonal and existential dimensions of happiness. In regard to the case of Greens Japan, exploring key motivations for joining and remaining an active party member over time contributes to research into the low level of membership as well as the lack of success for green party organizations in Japan. While there are other approaches, such as collective action research, focusing on the perspective of happiness adds to further understanding of these issues.

For the three dimensions of happiness I examined here, structural and discursive features of the surrounding social and political environment turned out to have a severe impact on lowering levels of happiness in regard to political participation, both in terms of the process as well as the outcome. This finding is in line with the self-determination theory arguing that the outcome of the individual pursuit of happiness greatly depends on the surroundings. The narratives have also shown that in order to understand how happiness can be elevated through political activism, it is important to distinguish not only between procedural and outcome utility or various dimensions of happiness, but also between activities within and outside the organization in question, as there are different levels of surroundings and each has a different impact on happiness.
On the other hand, interpersonal aspects in relation to political activities, both within and outside the party, have a high potential to elevate subjective well-being. When considering the existential dimension, autonomous decision making and taking action, experiencing outcome utility, and ultimately perceiving political participation as a natural part of life, are significant issues.

Concerning procedural utility in the case of Greens Japan members, whereas autonomy and, in particular, relatedness play a prominent role when it comes to generating positive feelings, the psychological need for competence is not mentioned in the narratives to the same extent. One possible explanation for this is that Japanese culture does not value emphasizing one’s own achievements positively. In contrast, the guidance and advice of others and role models are often appreciated. However, the participatory structure within Greens Japan gives young members easy access to the necessary competences for engaging within the party or even for standing for election, regardless of seniority. Thus, even if they previously did not have any political knowledge, as Takahashi and Hatano (1999) point out for young people in Japan, this can change very quickly once they become a party member.

Without comparing narratives of young green activists to older, particularly long-term activists, it cannot be fully assessed whether these results on happiness and political activism are specific to the generation of young party members in their thirties, and this point requires further research. The narratives have revealed that low numbers of young party members and the differing style of communication between younger and older members cause some frustration to the younger members. The excitement of having taken action on one’s own and of meeting like-minded and inspiring people was visible every now and then. However, this does not necessarily relate to the age of party members but could be due to the relatively short experience in contrast to people who have been active for many decades – these positive feelings might give way to disillusionment over time.

Acknowledgements

I would like to thank my intern Deborah Will for her research assistance.

Notes

1 This study started out by assuming that all four experimental dimensions might be addressed in the narratives of young members of Greens Japan. However, the physical dimension of happiness did not become a substantial topic and thus the following sections will only focus on the structural, the interpersonal and the existential dimensions.

2 In addition to the impact of institutions on the national level, institutional rules on the local level, such as the local electoral system or decision-making processes within the local and prefectural parliaments, impact feelings of outcome and procedural utility, but I will not go into detail here.
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10 Living and working for the moment
Motivations, aspirations and experiences of disaster volunteers in Tōhoku

Susanne Klien

Introduction

This chapter examines issues surrounding the subjective well-being and life satisfaction of (former) disaster volunteers in northeast Japan as phenomena closely related to an ongoing diversification of lifestyles, individualization of life courses, and the renegotiation of work-life balance in contemporary Japanese post-growth society. More than four years after the Great East Japan Earthquake, numerous revitalization and social entrepreneurship projects have emerged in the towns and cities of the disaster-stricken region which, in fact, can be traced back to chance encounters among volunteers. For example, Akio, a former disaster volunteer who had been working as a professional cook before the earthquake hit the region in March 2011 (hereafter 3/11), opened an izakaya-style restaurant on one of the main streets in central Ishinomaki two years after the disaster. His staff consists of former volunteers who have chosen to remain in the area, and many of the regular customers are former volunteers as well. Tōhoku has also seen the emergence of a number of networks aimed at pursuing alternative lifestyles that involve accommodation and office sharing with others, thus cutting down on living expenses. A well-known example of this is Ishinomaki 2.0 – a group of locals and non-locals with backgrounds in architecture, design, IT, advertising, and landscape planning, who are not only trying to restore Ishinomaki, one of the worst-hit cities in Miyagi Prefecture, but to create an entirely new place. Members also engage in numerous activities that could be considered volunteering, able to do so with funding from various sources. For example, a 27-year-old local who came back from Tokyo after 3/11, started a project that organized regular tea breaks for local residents, thus providing an opportunity for locals to get together and discuss problems. This project was funded by the Nippon Foundation for Social Innovation, a nonprofit, philanthropic, private foundation aimed at realizing a more peaceful and prosperous global society. This project involved considerable volunteer spirit, as working time was not regulated and the funding was limited to three years.

In this chapter, I focus my analysis of happiness in Japan on individuals between 20 and 40 years of age, who have come to Miyagi and Iwate from...
all over Japan to engage in volunteer work. Quantitative international comparisons of volunteering have shown that in the case of Japan, the most important reason for volunteering was that “it gives a new perspective,” while in all other countries “to help others” unanimously ranked first (Hustinx et al. 2010: 364). In this regard, I vividly remember a young man from Osaka in his early twenties who was not in education, employment, or training (what sociologists would call ‘NEET’) asking his fellow (female) volunteers for advice on how to find a girlfriend while we were all lining up shells on ropes on the picturesque Oshika Peninsula. The task on that day was easy, so there was plenty of opportunity for chitchat. The discussion became so animated that eventually one of the volunteer supervisors admonished everyone to get back to work.

There are a number of distinctive reasons why volunteering deserves our attention with regard to the analysis of subjective well-being. First of all, by its very nature, pro bono activities are acts that are defined as beneficial for society being carried out by individuals. Thus, volunteering can be considered to be a meeting point of individuals within a larger societal context, which promises insight into the negotiation of subjective well-being on the range between hedonism (striving to maximize pleasure) and eudaimonic motives (doing good). Second, the wish to make a contribution to society (shakai kōken) has been described as a prominent feature of contemporary youth in Japan (Furuichi 2011: 72). Third, the blurred lines between social
entrepreneurship/innovation and political action within which volunteering often takes place (Toivonen 2015: 256) are quintessential for the “future of work” as described by Gratton (2011: 159), a future which focuses on social engagement and work as a personal experience rather than as a structured obligation (Gratton 2011: 175) and hence involves an inherent sense of subjective well-being.

To date, ethnographic studies of individual volunteering experiences in Japan are still rare (Stevens 1997; Ozawa 2001; Nakano 2005; Ogawa 2009; Klien 2013). I claim that a focus on disaster volunteers is highly instructive, because the trajectories of these individuals show the eminent role of the search for subjective well-being in a generation of youth that came of age in post-growth Japan. The empirical data I obtained from extensive fieldwork conducted between April 2011 and August 2014 suggest that for many individuals, engaging in volunteer activities has had a profound impact on their values and lives. However, as many had already been seeking opportunities to change their lives before the disaster, volunteering turned out to be a welcome opportunity to rethink and reshape their lives. These selected narratives illustrate the ongoing struggle in Japanese society to depart from orthodox life-styles confined and regimented by (mostly white-collar) jobs to a new lifestyle where temporary identities are adopted and shed, and work and leisure converge (Gratton 2011: 159). Individuals admit that many of their activities are difficult to differentiate into leisure or work, some concede that they occasionally oversleep, and all of my interviewees indicate that they do not know how long they will be pursuing their present activities. Younger volunteers tend to emphasize that they aspire to have a job they enjoy doing, but many seem at a loss to pinpoint exactly what they want to do (Kosugi 2003: 230). In this catch-22 situation, volunteering may come in handy as a useful way of gaining time to consider what one wants to do.

Since volunteering is self-motivated, unpaid work that is in the public interest, it is commonly associated with altruism and empathy (Nakano 2005: 3). However, I argue that many volunteers are in fact pursuing their own interests while helping others. More specifically, the accounts of my informants demonstrate the same spirit that convinced Miura (2010) to argue that many volunteers are in fact searching for their purpose in life while helping others and thus share the qualities of “self-searching migrants” described by Kato (2010: 51). I will show that, regardless of the numerous reasons that motivate individuals, volunteering provides an arena for reintegration into and engagement with society, rather than a “retreat from society,” as stated by Stevens (1997: 238), where the reshaping of individual identities occurs and the transition from structured lifetime employment to more self-determined alternative lifestyles with work, leisure, and life often being wrapped into one, is salient.

In order to explore perceptions of subjective well-being among disaster volunteers, I distinguish between physical, interpersonal, existential, and structural factors (as defined by Mathews and Izquierdo 2009). I use “well-being”
as a synonym of quality of life, with a special focus on people’s own internal states of mind. However, a caveat is called for: Mathews has pointed out previously that “we cannot ethnographically compare happiness as experienced as we cannot get inside other people’s minds” (Mathews 2006: 151) and are “largely trapped in our own selves” (ibid.: 151). I agree with this view but suggest that ethnography is a means of and attempt at getting close to people’s minds. Several interviewees indicate their increased sense of subjective well-being through greater self-determination and self-realization as a result of their relocation. Thus, the case studies presented here show individual happiness as being predominantly utilitarian, as youth tend to talk about their sense of satisfaction in terms of actively doing something (Coulmas 2008: 6). In other words, happiness emerges from pursuing personally meaningful activities that are related to self-actualization yet contribute to the broader community. Furthermore, this chapter is informed by Thin’s notion of “prudential ethnobiography,” i.e. “telling and analyzing life stories while paying attention to both cultural context and to how good those lives are for the people living them” (Thin 2012: 324).

Digging, painting walls, walking dogs, bartending: Some remarks about methodology

Having experienced the Great East Japan Earthquake in 2011 in Tokyo and having a direct relative (the youngest sister of my grandmother) and her family in Sendai who narrowly escaped from the disaster, I went up the Pacific coast at the end of April 2011 to help her and her family. What started out as a very private act awakened an interest in me for the problems of offering volunteering and aid of being accepted, the intricacies of which Slater (2015) poignantly describes. I attended volunteer information exchange events in Tōhoku, volunteered with nongovernmental organizations (NGOs) such as Peaceboat and smaller groups, and spoke with volunteers in action, former volunteers, volunteer group employees, residents, and so forth.

This chapter is based on ethnographic research conducted at sites throughout Tōhoku, specifically Miyagi and Iwate Prefecture, including Ishinomaki, the Oshika Peninsula, Rikuizen Takata, and Kesennuma, although the focus here is mostly on Ishinomaki. Volunteer activities included cleaning private photos stained by the tsunami, helping to carry out local festivals such as the Tanabata Matsuri in Rikuzen Takata or local Shinto festivities in Ogatsu, near Ishinomaki. Volunteering also included helping fishermen restart their activities and digging up earth contaminated by sea salt. Furthermore, it included doing leisure activities with children in temporary housing community rooms and chatting with senior citizens while drinking tea. I also volunteered to help paint walls and sell goods from Rikuzen Takata at a Tōhoku fair in Tokyo. I attended numerous volunteer events both in Tōhoku and Tokyo, and carried out semi-structured and unstructured interviews with volunteers, former volunteers, NGO employees, and local citizens who had
benefited from volunteering activities as well as those who had not had direct interaction with volunteers. In addition, I talked to residents who expressed their doubts about volunteering. Along with participant observation, data for this study were also derived from qualitative interviews with more than 40 respondents who had either migrated from urban areas to Tōhoku or led a lifestyle between the disaster area and an urban area. Participants were found largely through snowball sampling, which, due to the dense networks of newcomers, turned out to be highly effective for identifying potential interviewees.

Rigid discipline and admonition pervaded everyday volunteer life. When we were ordered to sing the *Anpanman* song from a well-known children’s cartoon TV series every morning before going off to volunteer work, I could not help but feel as if I was part of a cult. When I asked staff what this singing was about, they drily remarked that this was to boost morale. While the extent of regulation varied from one volunteer group to another, in general, a sense of strict rules and obedience shaped the volunteer routine, although there were occasional cases of individuals failing to respect the rules. In retrospect, earlier fieldwork involved more physical exertion, while in later stages activities took on a more social aspect, i.e. social exchange with local (and originally non-local) residents, such as organizing a one-night bar event with a fellow anthropologist at the Reconstruction Bar in Ishinomaki, or chairing a dating event organized by Ishinomaki 2.0 for (former) volunteers seeking like-minded individuals to start relationships.

“I never introduce myself as a volunteer”: Volunteers and the struggle for identity

The empirical data obtained during fieldwork and from in-depth interviews suggest that for many, engaging in volunteer activities has a profound impact on their values and lives. However, numerous interviewees had already been seeking opportunities to change their lives before the disaster; and, in retrospect, volunteering turned out to be a welcome opportunity to rethink and reshape their lives. One of the key characteristics of such individuals is the desire to lead “a life of their own,” i.e. to lead lives over which can have control (Beck 2003: 272) against a background of a growing “ethic of individual self-fulfillment and achievement” (Beck 2003: 273) and the wish to depart from standardized life courses.

In the current section, I am going to explore the continuing activities of former volunteers who have chosen to remain in the area. I will discuss how such lifestyle options could be interpreted in light of Japan’s changing society and values. However, let us first try to understand what volunteering means in a Japanese context. The definition of volunteering and its distinction from other social activities is becoming increasingly difficult. The definition of “volunteer” includes the three general characteristics of free will, gratuitousness, and public benefit. Other features that are, in Japan, frequently
associated with volunteering are subjectivity (shutaisei), progressiveness (senkusei), and creativity (sōzōsei) (Shibata et al. 2011: 1). However, participant observation and interviews in the field have clearly shown that, in many cases, these features cannot necessarily be taken for granted. We have “coercion/credit volunteerism” (Rausch 1998: 14), i.e. individuals who are persuaded by their peers or seniors to join in volunteering. There is also paid volunteering (yāshō borantia), and a number of individuals who use volunteering to reintegrate into society instead of as a way to pursue activities in the public interest. I have argued elsewhere (Klien 2013) that the precise definition of volunteering is extremely difficult and the question of who defines what qualifies as volunteering is still unresolved (in line with Avenell 2012: 72; Nihei 2010: 113; and Toivonen 2015: 265). Many of the individuals I spoke with engage in volunteering on the side, while conducting other projects they have established themselves (often with peers they met while volunteering), and do not see themselves predominantly as “volunteers.” This implies that volunteering is a means to an end for them and that, ultimately, the line between volunteering, work, and leisure is fluid.

Borantia chūdoku (volunteer addiction), jiko gisei (self-sacrifice), jiko manzoku (self-complacency): Many terms typically associated with volunteers and volunteering in contemporary Japan are replete with negative connotations despite the fact that the borantia gannen, i.e. Year 1 of Volunteering was officially declared to be 1995, the year of the Great Hanshin Earthquake. Even individuals who are obviously engaging in volunteer work deny that they are volunteering, adding that they are doing this for themselves. The continued skepticism volunteers face is tied to a suspicion of individuals who come from outside the community and are difficult to place in the social hierarchy. In many cases, locals simply do not understand what volunteers actually do and why they have come in the first place.

The opening remark in the section title is from an interview with a 25-year-old female photographer from Tokyo who originally came to Ishinomaki as a disaster volunteer. She points out that because of the lack of understanding and resulting suspicion of local residents about what volunteers actually do and what motivates them to spend so much time in a place they are not originally from, she never says that she is a volunteer when she introduces herself (Iida 2012). Another 25-year-old female from Okinawa, who came to Ishinomaki in June 2011 to do volunteer work for a while, points out that despite the fact that she now does paid work at an izakaya, people still call her “volunteer” instead of using her name (Iida 2012). Other former disaster volunteers describe having complex feelings about receiving various goods such as vegetables or rice from their local neighbors for free, as they feel gratitude on the one hand but on the other are also concerned about being perceived as “having made their way up from being former volunteers” (borantia agari) (Iida 2012).

These accounts imply an overall negative attitude towards volunteers in general. This skepticism about what volunteering actually is was palpable in
conversations with local shop owners in central Ishinomaki. One soba restaurant owner in her seventies concedes that residents should appreciate volunteers’ efforts, but that she still does not quite understand what they actually do. Other non-local social business entrepreneurs point out that they do not strive to volunteer (although they have done their share of volunteering). Others who gave up their original professions after the Great East Japan Earthquake and now spend their time organizing ochakko tea breaks for local disaster victims, mention that their work is half-volunteer, half-employed, since they are financed by funding from the Nippon Foundation.

**Between purpose in life and precarity?**

It’s actually fun having two workplaces and places of residence. And in today’s economically unstable world there is no absolute security. Having two places of residence and several jobs also means a reduction of risk. This lifestyle helps me maintain my motivation and has a positive effect on me mentally speaking.

(Rina, 36, single, from Tokyo)

I do not have long-term plans. I don’t think I could lead this kind of life if I did.

(Miho, 41, single, from Tokyo)

I can’t really say that this is my work but I do get paid while doing this […] I am not doing this for money or some purpose … this all happened naturally.

(Tōru, 35, single, from Kobe)

I am doing this work because I want to contribute to society while becoming prosperous both in an economic and human sense.

(Kei, 36, single, from Tokyo)

These statements from interviews conducted in 2012 and 2013 with male and female volunteers show the situation of a new generation of youth caught between the aspiration for more self-determination and purpose in life on one hand, and a sense of insecurity on the other. Japan’s labor market has changed considerably in recent years, taking on the typical features of a “postindustrial” economy that has a high proportion of precarious, non-standard laborers (Toivonen and Imoto 2012: 4) and widening gaps between social strata. The lack of perspectives for securing lifelong employment shapes people’s attitudes towards work. It is evident that “work” and “life” have become increasingly intertwined and that members of this generation show a relatively high degree of reflexivity (Gratton 2011: 168).
Rina has been commuting between Ishinomaki and Tokyo since May 2011 after coming to the area as a disaster volunteer. She worked in architecture offices for more than a decade before setting up her own design office and managing a communal living project in Tokyo. In April 2013, she established a small restaurant near Ishinomaki station. The restaurant combines local revitalization, creation of employment, promotion of community resources, and involvement of existing local industries (more details will be provided later in this chapter). The second statement (above) is from an interview with a female former disaster volunteer who relocated from Tokyo to Rikuzen Takata in 2011 and is presently working for a nonprofit organization. The third statement is an excerpt of an interview with a male interviewee who is originally from Hyōgo Prefecture in Western Japan. Tōru came to Ishinomaki as a disaster volunteer to bridge the time between two jobs, but eventually decided to give up his new job in Tokyo. He has started a revitalization project with several other former disaster volunteers on the Oshika Peninsula. The last statement is from an interview with Kei, a Tokyo-born textile designer. He also originally came to Tōhoku as a disaster volunteer but remained for longer, having opened his own shop with the help of other former volunteers. It took them more than a year to restore and convert an abandoned shop into a sparkling boutique, doing all the work by themselves. His shop assistant is a young woman from Hokkaido whom he met while volunteering. These are just some of the many projects that attempt to combine sustainability, post-disaster reconstruction, and “a volunteer lifestyle” – a work and life mode that fits into a “triad of work” model, in which paid employment, volunteer work, and self-initiated activities are complementary fields of activity and the meaning of work “extends beyond the contours of paid labour” (Kühnlein and Mutz 1999: 301).

Start-up entrepreneurs, slackers, and visionaries?

In this section I will discuss in more detail these cases and other (former) disaster volunteers’ stories in order to highlight how pro-social activities contribute to the subjective well-being of volunteers, and how individuals struggle to make ends meet while pursuing a life that makes sense to them personally.

The first case is 26-year-old male Tomoyoshi from Chiba Prefecture. Formerly, he was a stressed-out company employee who worked 18 hours a day and lived in an expensive flat in Meguro, Tokyo. He quit his office job and became a freelance social entrepreneur based in Ishinomaki and began to volunteer regularly. For him, volunteering is a means to an end, i.e. establishing contacts in the region. This fits well with Kaneko’s (1992) claim that volunteering often constitutes a form of networking and mode of establishing social relations or tsunagari, as well as Brown’s (1999: 3) hypothesis of volunteering as “a form of civic engagement through which individuals can make meaningful contributions to their own visions of societal well-being”:
I think I have changed considerably. I view my own life from different perspectives, it is extreme [...] and it is great fun to have a proper dinner with my mates. Before, I stayed at my office until late at night, ate take-away bento boxes from the convenience store, like dog food. My life quality is better in many ways now.

(Tomoyoshi, 26, Chiba)

Tomoyoshi states that he earns 30 percent less in cash compared to his previous life in Tokyo but that he now has much greater freedom in terms of time management. He remarks that in retrospect, his life as a company worker seemed mediocre in terms of life quality. Back then he was, just like every other company employee, always thinking, “When will it be Friday so that I can get some rest?” Now, he has a less structured way of working and admits that he often even forgets what day of the week it is. He says that he oversleeps occasionally – something that would never have happened when he was a company employee in Tokyo.

He is part of a social entrepreneur project on the Oshika Peninsula close to Ishinomaki. The project aims to create jobs for local residents by using local resources in an innovative manner. He shares a flat in a run-down office block in Ishinomaki with his three other project colleagues. Asked about his career and future, he chuckles, saying he has no idea (do shimasho ne), nevertheless exuding self-confidence. He seems content with his current lifestyle, but is also confident that he could find a job in a company if the social entrepreneur project did not work out. This may be true, given the fact that he has a degree from one of the elite universities in Tokyo. Tomoyoshi talks about how he enjoys making money. At the same time, he also yearns for quality of life and indicates that he enjoys his present rich social life. His most important aim in life, however, is to tackle new projects and challenges. Volunteering seems to be a mere means to an end for him; he enjoys volunteering but also distances himself from it, saying that volunteering should be done by those who want to dedicate themselves exclusively to such activities.

The second (former) volunteer is Kei, a 36-year-old male from Tokyo who was working in Kyoto as a designer at the time of the earthquake. While volunteering with the NGO group “On the Road,” he came across several abandoned tairyōbata (literally “big catch banners,” or ship flags). These fishing vessel flags are hoisted on special occasions or when an exceptionally good catch has been made. Kei now runs his own shop called Funade311 in downtown Ishinomaki, selling products made of recycled ship flags. Funade means “departure of the ship” and the brand name refers to starting a new life after 3/11. The project has created local employment: Seven local women are involved in the project, doing piecemeal work from home (naishoku).

Kei observes that his values have changed considerably as a result of volunteering. He used to be more focused on material concerns, whereas he now emphasizes that it is important not to focus exclusively on making money. He says that he earns more now than in Kyoto and feels more
satisfied with his social life as well, since he has a network of like-minded peers around him. He concedes that he spends his leisure time mostly with other former (non-local) volunteers who have remained in Ishinomaki for various reasons. Like most of the other newcomers, he says that since he really enjoys his work, there is no clear-cut division between work, leisure, and private life. Like others, he adds that he does not know how long he will be staying in Ishinomaki, but for the time being “there is no reason not to stay.” At the same time, he points out that he frequently makes trips to Tokyo and other parts of Tōhoku for professional and private reasons, i.e. to visit family, get new inspiration for his work, relax, and just enjoy himself with friends. Like many of his peers, i.e. former disaster volunteers who have chosen to remain in town, he maintains strong connections with the local community through the nature of his work, but also transcends the locality in both his professional and leisure activities.

The third case is 36-year-old Rina, whose lifestyle involves two places of residence: Tokyo and Ishinomaki, a situation chosen in order to maintain her motivation and to reduce risk. Having come to Ishinomaki in May 2011 to join one of her architect acquaintances in disaster volunteering, she eventually restored an abandoned house in central Ishinomaki and opened a restaurant to support volunteers arriving from Tokyo in the early morning hours after traveling on the less expensive night bus. The restored wooden house exudes a
distinctly sophisticated urban ambiance, with furniture that one would expect in a stylish café in Naka-Meguro rather than in some back street in a depopulated town in Tōhoku.

Restaurant staff include a local woman in her early sixties, a local in his late twenties, and several former disaster volunteers who have also chosen to remain and work at other jobs in the creative industry.
The restaurant also serves as a venue for various events, such as dating events aimed at helping individuals who wish to start a family. This is intended to serve the larger goals of revitalization and increasing the population of the town. The overall goals of the project combine local revitalization with the creation of workplaces and promotion of community resources (Matanle and Rausch 2011; Assmann 2015). Some may argue that opening the restaurant in April 2013 will not turn around Ishinomaki’s bleak demographic reality of aging and depopulation. However, the restaurant makes an important symbolic difference on this desolate side street with abandoned shops.

Furthermore, the restaurant also “expanded” temporarily beyond Ishinomaki when it took part in the Reconstruction Bar Ginza Project on several occasions in 2013 and 2014. The Reconstruction Bar was established by Ishinomaki 2.0 in central Ishinomaki in the wake of 3/11 with the help of disaster volunteers, and has since served as a meeting spot for individuals from all walks of life. The Reconstruction Bar has held occasional events in a venue in Ginza, Tokyo, with food provided by Rina’s restaurant project.

Rina’s restaurant thus serves as an example of a project that has contributed to the revitalization of Ishinomaki, but also transcends the local community both in terms of the range of the project as well as the owner’s style of living and working. In 2013, the project received the “Good Design Award” for its reinterpretation of local traditional food culture from a non-local vantage point.

With the success of the project so impressive, I asked Rina about her work-life balance since adopting her “two-pronged lifestyle.” She says that she has been trying to cut down on work and increase leisure time, but between the commuting time and the long hours spent between Tōhoku and Tokyo, the manifold job activities she engages in, plus the maintenance of social relationships in two places, she feels permanently overworked. She hopes to spend more time in Ishinomaki in the future. The fact that she has managed to find a place of residence could be seen as the first step. Prior to opening the restaurant, she used to stay with a friendly couple, but had no privacy when staying in Ishinomaki. Now Rina occupies the second floor of the wooden house, above the restaurant:

I feel that the restaurant can be seen as a first step towards finding my roots in Ishinomaki. Before, I felt more like coming home to Tokyo when I went back but now, it’s not so clear anymore. I have friends in both places, I feel [at] home in both Tokyo and Ishinomaki […] Leisure? I don’t really have it now but thinking about it, I have more of it in Ishinomaki. In Tokyo, I just work, also because I usually spend my weekdays in Tokyo and the weekend in Ishinomaki and also take part in local matsuri here in Ishinomaki.

The gap between aspirations and daily life may be the ultimate challenge faced by many former volunteers. On the one hand, a key motive behind their
relocation is often the hope of achieving greater self-fulfillment through a new life with more recreation time. However, in reality, many of the individuals I interviewed over the years admit that they have yet to achieve a truly satisfying work-life balance, conceding that despite their initial aim to pursue the “individual good life” (Bauman 2008) by escaping the drudgery of precarious postmodern urban working conditions, they often work long hours. When I asked Rina about her future plans, she stated that she is not the type of person to make long-term plans, but rather feels at ease adapting to the respective needs of changing circumstances. This lack of medium- and long-term planning is a prominent feature of many narratives and could be interpreted as a way for individuals to hedge their bets in an increasingly insecure postindustrial society.

The fourth case I present here is 30-year-old Keita, born in Gunma Prefecture. Keita works as an architect for a well-known Yokohama-based office, but has been living in Ishinomaki since April 10, 2011. The member of Ishinomaki 2.0 relocated to Ishinomaki soon after 3/11, as his architecture office had connections to the disaster area. Although he has a professional background as an architect, he feels the limitations of the focus of orthodox architecture on the built environment and points out that he and his office partners prioritize the social context behind buildings. Presently, he hardly does any conventional architecture work, but also says that he is not sure how long his present status will continue as a (paid) partner of an architecture office based in Yokohama, who has been dispatched to Ishinomaki. Asked about his plans for the future, he says that he is not sure how long he will stay in Ishinomaki as he could be ordered to go back to the Tokyo area soon, but he thinks that he will keep on doing similar activities, either in Ishinomaki or in other places; he says that he could also envision himself working in developing countries.

Given his unusual working arrangement in Ishinomaki, Keita’s case is unique and quite different from the other cases presented here as his relocation was not initiated by him, but by his company, although he did have the choice to stay in Yokohama after 3/11. When I asked him about his work-life balance, he sighed, saying that the reality for him right now was that work is equivalent to life. In other words, when he is in Ishinomaki, he does not have much of a private life. It is often unclear to what extent his activities are work-related. For example, the barbecue party he just attended was work-related even though it was on the weekend. He is supposed to have Tuesdays off, but recently, he just sleeps on Tuesday mornings because he is exhausted from overworking, yet still comes to the office in the afternoon as there is so much work to do. He laughed, saying that his lifestyle resembles that of a salaryman. Compared to the other individuals discussed in this chapter, who all engage in activities they created on their own initiative, Keita seems to identify less with his work, which is not self-initiated.

Due to his long working hours, he tends to eat ready-made food from the convenience store, just as in Tokyo. He would like to enjoy the town and the
leisure options more, and expresses his regret that he has not had the chance
to do so despite having spent so much time there since 2011. He added that
he hopes to do so in the future but chances seemed slim, given the fact that he
was overloaded with work and, just like Rina, had to commute between two
places of residence, if not weekly then at least once a month. As he needed to
go back to Yokohama regularly for work, he had recently found a room
where he could leave his belongings and stay for a monthly rent of a mere
13,000 yen. In Ishinomaki, he lives in a shared house with other members of
Ishinomaki 2.0, at a rent of only 25,000 yen, which amounts to just 38,000
yen per month for two places of residence. Keita’s case illustrates the chal-
lenges of pursuing a job in the creative industries while having a good life at
the same time, showing that individuals may perceive their daily activities as
personally meaningful but still feel that they are working at their limit, with
insufficient or even no private life.

**Diversification of lifestyles, reflexivity, and purpose in life**

Nowadays, there are many people who are constrained by the way of
thinking that it is normal to be employed by a big company. But coming
to think about it, we only have a history of thirty or forty years that
young people in Japan graduate from university and then go on to work
as company employees. We need to understand that this mode of work-
ing is not the only option. Of course we don’t claim that our (different)
mode of working is the right one, we just hope to make people aware
that there are many different ways of working and living.

(Furuichi and Matsuhima 2013: 48)

So what do these in-depth narrative accounts by (former) volunteers tell us in
a broad sense? They show that, in a nutshell, Japan is in the midst of a tran-
sitional period between a departure from the standard lifelong employment
model to a postindustrial economy with diversifying lifestyles and the quest
for a life that makes sense to individuals (*jibun rashiku ikiru*), and also involves
contributing to society in some way (*shakai kōken*). The individuals intro-
duced in this chapter illustrate the diverse range of backgrounds volunteers
come from: elite university graduates with a taste for risk and adventure who
have quit their lifelong company jobs in pursuit of more inspiring challenges;
former self-employed individuals who have never pursued lifelong employ-
ment and put great emphasis on quality of life and self-determination;
employees who are trying to make the transition to a new mode of work and
life by setting up their own projects while still pursuing their office work; and
individuals who continue to pursue their former employment. In general, the
diverse array of migrant cases presented here makes the impact of an
increasingly unstable labor market and the associated flexibilization of work
and life (*ryūdōka*) on individual life courses evident, with certain
characteristics of a “do-it-yourself” biography (Beck 1992). However, the narrative accounts presented above also illustrate the salience of systemic constraints some of these individuals, spurred on by the promise of a more fulfilling way of life, continue to find themselves exposed to in their ongoing attempts to renegotiate their work-life balance: They all struggle with long working hours and a lack of leisure time and private life to the point that personal agency seems out of their reach or at the very least a long way off unless they are prepared to opt for radical change.

As Zukin has argued, culture “intersects with capital” (Zukin 1988: 3), to result in the social and economic change of a destination. The above cases confirm the intricate intersection of migration, culture, and capital in the sense that despite the aspiration of most individuals to leave the “rat race of daily work” and go beyond materialist affluence, earning a livelihood does indeed continue to shape their daily lives to some degree. As indicated by Benson and O’Reilly (2009), the narratives suggest that despite aspirations for a higher quality of life, in practice many of these (former) volunteers have a difficult time changing their habits – for example, certain modes of life remain after relocation, such as excessively long work hours or, in extreme cases, a life consisting entirely of work, as in the cases of Keita and Rina. These stories give us a sense of how Japanese people in their twenties and thirties are trying to bridge the gap between a growing emphasis on values such as personal satisfaction, self-actualization, and a meaningful life, with a lingering sense of insecurity and pressures to conform. Their main strategy is living and working for the moment.

Discussion

These vignettes demonstrate the salience of subjective well-being and its intricate relation with the quest for self-fulfillment, self-realization, and a purpose in life, but also show the complex entanglement of the pursuit of a better life with the constraints of routine life and work. After carrying out interviews with more than 40 (former) volunteers, I agree with one informant who observed that if you have ten volunteers, they will have ten different stories, i.e. ten different motives for their respective life courses. What these narratives share, however, is that they show a generation that is different from previous ones of salaried workers in that they tend to question working conditions and the work-life balance, even if some of them seem still trapped in the drudgery of company work. These trajectories also show the various elements that make up subjective well-being. Volunteers tend to mention the physical dimensions of well-being, eating good food, getting enough sleep, etc., but also to the ontological dimensions (Mathews and Izquierdo 2009: 263) such as having a sense of fulfillment and a clear vision of what they wish to do with their lives. Most of the volunteers discussed above lead fulfilling lives because they are in pursuit of their own projects rather than carrying out tasks conceived by others. Being part of a group, engaging in personal
relationships, and working together for a good cause also featured prominently. The fourth — structural — dimension defined by Mathews and Izquierdo (2009) is evident in the sense of gradual social change volunteers implied through their statements: Although they do not explicitly refer to the radical reform of society, many openly remark that they do not aspire to the lifestyles of their parents and the norms and lifestyles prescribed by Japanese society. Numerous interviewees match the criteria ascribed to the category of “quiet mavericks” described by Toivonen et al. (2011: 1–9), i.e. determined individuals who find “creative and integrative ways by tactfully negotiating conformist pressures” with the ultimate aim of “engaging with society on their own terms,” but also “actively shaping social change.”

This study shares White and Mathews’s (2004: 199) idea that historical generational change expresses itself in “a vast array of individual choices and micro-interactions rather than through organized protest or even conscious generational solidarity.” I consider an ethnographic approach a valuable method since it helps us understand individually led change and grasp the complexity of individual perceptions of well-being. It is also an effective tool for emphasizing individual narratives while relativizing self-evaluations of their extent of happiness and taking into account the non-verbal reifications of subjective well-being over an extended period of time.

According to the young bestselling sociologist Furuichi Noritoshi, jobs may be less secure but people do not care as they are increasingly living for the moment (Furuichi 2011: 102–104). The emerging generation of Japanese youth still seems to derive considerable ontological legitimacy, if not purpose in life, from work (Mathews 2003: 110–111), the only difference being that the boundaries between work and leisure are less clearly defined and work seems more self-determined. Nevertheless, as the above cases illustrate, individual accounts are dominated by the insecurity of labor and the challenges of actually making a clean-cut departure from the conventional immersion in work.

Thus, I contend that these narratives of post-3/11 youth indicate a gradual, albeit slow, departure from previous lifestyle values. All (former) volunteers discussed above refer to the joys derived from social interaction while pursuing personal priorities. Mathews has called this the balance between a sense of belonging (ittaikan) and self-realization (jiko jitsugen) (Mathews 1996: 212–213). Hence, the balance between self-determination in the pursuit of a project deemed worthwhile and interpersonal relationships is pivotal for the optimization of subjective well-being, as became evident through the cases discussed above. Those interviewees who made a clean-cut break with their former regular employment seem more content with their lives than the volunteers who continue to struggle in their office jobs, despite the lingering sense of precarity. Some of them have already worked in this kind of environment and dismiss it as a perspective that they either do not wish to revert to at all, or only as a last resort. All in all, compared to previous generations, the individuals discussed in this chapter show the notion of “living one’s own
life” (Beck 2003: 272), coupled with greater initiative to obtain more control and self-determination over their own lives, aspiration to self-realization, and a greater degree of self-reflection – trends that are increasingly evident in contemporary Japanese society (Kosugi 2003: 222; Hansen 2012: 143–144; Kato 2010; Allison 2013: 135). On the down side, some individuals do not seem to have the agency to implement their aspirations in practice.

My data show that regardless of the multiple reasons why individuals engage in (post-)volunteer activities, pro-social engagement generally provides a salient increase in subjective well-being both in a hedonistic (a good life as the pursuit of pleasure) as well as in eudemonic aspects (a good life as the pursuit of meaningful self-actualization). Concrete aspects relate to enhanced levels of social interaction, higher levels of self-determination, and overall life satisfaction. Nevertheless, numerous former disaster volunteers (apart from those described here) also report a lingering sense of insecurity due to irregular work patterns and income coupled with unclear long-term work perspectives. The majority of volunteers, however, seem to grapple with this sense of insecurity by focusing on short- and medium-term projects, and temporary and small-scale happiness. Perhaps most interestingly, the impact of volunteering is not limited to the volunteering experience itself but exceeds far beyond: Many interviewees mention having stopped devoting their time exclusively to pro bono activities for financial reasons, but many of them continue to engage in volunteering in some way or another. Furthermore, the network of peers they met during that time continues to be an important part of their lives. Many have started projects with former volunteer colleagues and spend a considerable part of their leisure time with them. Many also state that their set of values has undergone great change as a result of their volunteering experiences, in most cases a departure from the passive accumulation and consumption of material goods to a more creative, reflexive, and innovative lifestyle.

Notes

1 All names are pseudonyms to protect the privacy of interviewees.
2 Although I did not consciously limit the age range of my interviewees, the ages of all interviewees naturally fall within this age bracket.

References


Miura, Seiichiro. 2010. Jibun no tame no borantia: Ibasho arimasu ka, hitsuyô to sarete imasu ka [Volunteering for one’s own sake: Do you have a place in society, are you needed?]. Tokyo: Gakubunsha.


To be a teenager is, by definition, to inhabit an in-between stage. One is neither a child nor an adult and at the same time, one is, as White (1994) describes, torn between these two forces. To fluctuate between these two is part of a larger process of determining who one is, and how to present oneself, not as child, but closer to being an adult. This state affects youth everywhere, albeit in different ways. At this intersection, as we shall see, it is also possible to address issues of well-being. I define well-being as the outcome of the intersection of pride, security, and trust in one’s social relations and oneself. In this chapter, I consider factors related to well-being among a particular group of teenagers. Specifically, I examine the sense of well-being among a group of buraku youth to consider how their experiences stem from the intersection of youth and minority membership.

The burakumin, as Japan’s largest minority group, present an interesting case to engage with in studies of well-being. The burakumin are ethnically Japanese and bear no physiological markers of difference from majority Japanese. Long marginalized and looked down upon in Japanese society, their markers of difference are based on a legacy of complex historical divisions during the Tokugawa Era (1603–1867) (Amos 2011). These categorical divisions changed in early Meiji (1868–1912) (McCormack 2012), but the social and political marginalization continued into the 20th century (Bayliss 2013). In contemporary society, markers of burakumin have centered on occupation (Hankins 2014) and area of residence (Davis 2000), though as these scholars have noted, such simplistic categorizations are imperfect markers. Stories of experiences of discrimination, from marriage to employment, continue to this day (Saito 2014). While there are some data available at the local level, it is impossible to determine how widespread such incidents are.

For the purpose of this chapter, I consider well-being as constructed through an interconnection of four factors that scholars have discussed. The first is a sense of trust in others (Chang 2009; Helliwell and Wang 2011); the second is a sense of pride in belonging to a group, which increases a sense of self-worth (Whittier 1995); the third is a strong connection to community (Helliwell and Wang 2011). All of these factors, as scholars have shown, promote a sense of well-being. The fourth category comes from Mathews and
Izquierdo’s (2009) groundbreaking work on well-being. In it, they highlight several important factors in how we understand well-being in different societies and social settings. Well-being is not a matter of individuals or social groups “feeling happy” or not. The reality is much more complex and requires a deeper engagement with a variety of other structural and cultural factors.

Without undermining the various ways other scholars engage this, there are two broad issues Mathews and Izquierdo note that I want to use as a starting point for considering well-being among buraku youth. The first is the connection between individual autonomy of well-being and the encroachment of outside forces (Mathews and Izquierdo 2009: 252) that can impact well-being both positively and negatively. In other words, we must also pay attention to the importance of risk and elements that challenge well-being.

The second area that Mathews and Izquierdo highlight, and one which I hope to expand further in this chapter, is the connection between well-being and the body. Indeed, as they note, “there is a physical dimension of well-being, involving how individuals conceive, perceive and experience their bodies in the world” (Mathews and Izquierdo 2009: 261). However, my interest here in connecting well-being with the physical is less about the body itself and more about the location; the “physical where” of well-being. I argue that this is an integral component to understand well-being. The connection to place, as a socio-physical location where well-being is established, grows and expands over time, must also take its place as a central factor in how we understand well-being. Highlighting the where of social relationships is not something exclusive to studies of well-being or burakumin. As MacDonald et al. (2005) articulate, place is connected to security and comfort as well as conflict, crime and poverty. Though their study centers on class, parallels can be found with buraku issues when they write “[this work] stresses how class experiences are mediated through place” (MacDonald et al. 2005: 877, emphasis in original). Tickamyer echoes this, demonstrating that “spatial arrangements are both products and sources of other forms of inequality” (Tickamyer 2000: 806). In short, place also matters when we consider social relationships and well-being; place is not just where we find interpersonal experiences, but also shapes those experiences. With this as an understanding of the where, let us now consider the factors at the center of well-being: trust and risk.

**Trust, risk and well-being**

Trust, risk and well-being are integrally intertwined. Indeed, as Helliwell succinctly puts it, “trust matters to subjective wellbeing” (Helliwell 2011: 258). In order to better understand this connection, I will turn to a discussion of the relationship between trust and risk. Trust, as Coleman (1990: 91) describes, is “an incorporation of risk into the decision of whether or not to engage in [...] action.” As such, trust and risk are both part of any social
action. As Smith rightly notes, trust is inherently social. She writes, “increased trust (trusting and trustworthy behavior) relies on [...] social co-operation” (Smith 2005: 309). Not only is trust social, but so too is risk. Continuing, she argues that the “negative effects of trust [including risk] will lead to feelings of betrayal, withdrawal from social engagement and an avoidance of social co-operation” (Smith 2005: 309). In other words, both trust and risk impact one’s well-being. This social component of trust, and its relationship to well-being, is echoed in the work of Ward and Meyer. Trust, they argue, is the “glue” that binds social relations together, both individual and structural (Ward and Meyer 2009: 356). In addition, they posit that well-being is built on trust (Ward and Meyer 2009: 346). Without it, we cannot interact with others, leaving us vulnerable to a dramatic change in our well-being.

Where then does this interconnected relationship between trust, risk and well-being occur? Smith highlights the role of education in shaping trust, including trusting and trustworthy behavior (Smith 2005: 309). Education is only one component, however. While institutions do play a role, as Ward and Meyer (2009) demonstrate, we should consider both individual and structural components. The work of Gibbs and Angelides bridges this divide quite nicely. In it, they highlight the importance of friendship, trust and well-being. They suggest that trust is an outcome of social relationships, arguing that trust “implies an emotional engagement that is usually perceived and acknowledged by the recipients as actions intentionally benefiting their well-being” (Gibbs and Angelides 2008: 220). In short, it is social relationships and friendships that allow us to be both open with ourselves and in turn trusting that others will be open as well, which allows an increased sense of security and well-being.

While trust and risk are central components of well-being, one may not always be aware of this relationship. Endress suggests that “in many cases and social situations a person may also not be aware of the risk implied by a certain action, interaction, or economic transaction” (Endress 2012: 116). Yet, if Smith is correct (and I believe she is), trust is an outcome of socialization with an awareness of risk, allowing people to protect, among other things, their well-being (Smith 2005: 302–303). This point is echoed by the work of Kelly et al. Referencing the work of Wilkinson and Marmott, they note, well-being is established in part through social cohesion, “defined as the quality of social relationships and the existence of trust, mutual obligations and respect in communities or in the wider society” (Wilkinson and Marmott 2003, in Kelly et al. 2009: 23).

The connection to existing social networks built on trust strengthens well-being, while risk puts that well-being in peril. As Helliwell summarizes, “people are more likely to trust those with whom they have regular social interactions. Mistrust hurts wellbeing in two ways. It lowers willingness to engage with others, and such engagements are themselves productive of well-being. And the lower trust perceptions also lead directly to lower levels of subjective wellbeing” (Helliwell 2011: 259). Well-being is, in part, an outcome
of this interconnectivity of trust and risk. This is especially true as we consider the experiences of well-being among a group of \textit{buraku} youth.

Place and people \textit{both} matter as each influences our understanding of well-being (Tickamyer 2000; Krekel et al. 2015). How best to join these two themes, place and people? One way is through the concept of a “protective cocoon.” The idea of a “protective cocoon” comes from the English sociologist Anthony Giddens. While Giddens defines this as “the defensive protection which filters out potential dangers impinging on the external world and which is founded psychologically upon basic trust” (Giddens 1991: 244), I would expand the definition. His model of a “protective cocoon” places this protection inherently within the realm of the individual. Rather, I would posit, we should also consider a protective cocoon as the realm of both social and physical relations, a socio-physical place. It is a place in social relations where, as Giddens notes, trust is paramount. In building this trust, however, we must also be cognizant of the importance of \textit{where} this trust is created. In short, we must also pay attention to the structure of places in order to understand how such protective cocoons are created and maintained.

It is important to note that the protective cocoon does not suggest that all risks or challenges to well-being are removed. Individual well-being is challenged within for myriad reasons. The same problems that teenagers everywhere have to deal with, from relationships with friends, to bullying, to jealousy, all exist within the protective cocoon as well. However, here I aim to describe the relationship between the protective cocoon and well-being for a particular group of youth \textit{qua burakumin} and their well-being vis-à-vis the outside world.

\textbf{Community and well-being}

Well-being, especially for youth, is integrally connected to one’s community; one experiences well-being through home, neighborhood, and school. I am not trying to argue that school is necessarily a place that elicits a sense of well-being among all youth. Indeed, for many, school experiences can be quite the opposite. Junior high school in particular can be an intense time for many (Fukuzawa and LeTendre 2001). Rather, as school is such a central component of youth experiences, we must also consider its role in structuring well-being.

Part of how a protective cocoon is structured for youth in Japan is an outcome of school attendance. Junior high school, the final three years of compulsory education, is the last opportunity students have to interact with children who are, more or less, like them. I do not mean to suggest that all children share the same experiences, are from the same neighborhood or that junior high school is necessarily a place of happiness for all. Rather, because attendance in public junior high school tends to be based on area of residence, as opposed to entrance exams in high school, broadly speaking the experiences of the youth are comparable. Interactions with outsiders are kept
to a minimum and the youth are able to make use of this structured space to experiment with their sense of self in an environment that is familiar.

The data used here come from a larger study of how *buraku* youth engage with being *burakumin* within their community and the broader society (Bondy 2015). As its foundation, the research examines young *burakumin* at a critical point: the transition at the end of junior high school as they begin to move beyond their protective cocoon. Through participant observation and in-depth interviews from 2001 to 2014, starting when the youth were in their last year of junior high school and continuing into adulthood, I am able to address broader issues of well-being, trust and security among *buraku* youth.

In talking with the youth about their community and school (the structured space that I consider as part of the protective cocoon), many of them mention the importance of security and comfort found therein, separate from engagement with *buraku* issues. As Minoru, an engaging first-year junior high school boy describes:

>I like living here. [This community] has a really strong commitment to human rights. Not everyone, of course, but people really do seem to care about it.

This is echoed by Akemi, a talkative, bubbly third-year girl, when describing her town:

>It’s like the greeting here, that really shows that people care. In most towns, people talk about the weather or something like that. Here, when they see each other, they ask, “did you eat?” It used to be that *burakumin* here were really poor. That shows that even if people don’t have much, they really do care about each other and want to help.

This sense of well-being as fostered through a connection to community is not an accident. In contrast to much of the rest of the country, *buraku* issues in this community are openly engaged with and embraced. *Buraku* issues were not isolated topics. Throughout the community, youth are presented with reminders to make connections with other *burakumin*, local or not. From entering preschool through completing junior high school, many are aware of their background and do not think of it as being anything other than positive. The entrance to the junior high school features a stone monument to the Suiheisha, a pre-war *buraku* social movement organization. Further, the community center has a permanent sign, declaring itself “a liberated town” (*kaihō sengen no machi*) and the sign over the entrance to the town hall calls on everybody to work together to eliminate *buraku* discrimination. All of this acts to make *buraku* issues visible and a source of pride.

The youth find discussions of *buraku* concerns virtually everywhere they go. Community leaders infuse *buraku* discussions into the community as a whole, creating a local culture that is inseparable from *buraku* issues and firmly
places pride in being burakumin as a core component of well-being for the youth. The lessons in school also echo this, not only through special classes on buraku issues, but also by incorporating buraku issues into other classes, from Japanese language to social studies and history.

The youth in the community, like youth elsewhere, are presented with an idealized version of their community, where one would be “protected,” but in the case of the burakumin youth, this takes on extra salience. Knowledge of the “outside” is often mediated through the stories of elders, community leaders, and teachers. Teachers in school, in particular, often emphasize how special this community is because of the centrality of buraku issues. The outside, by contrast, is presented as a “scary” place. Community, then, is suggested to the youth as a place of security, comfort and well-being. The sense of well-being the protective cocoon provides is not just the case for buraku youth, though, as we shall see, the connection to outside is of particular concern for them, as their minority status is inextricably linked with place.

**Pride and well-being**

Youth in communities throughout Japan have a similarly structured environment where they are encouraged to be comfortable in their home community and comfortable with themselves. For the burakumin in this community, an additional component greatly adds to their sense of well-being: pride. The community designs events to emphasize belonging and trust, suggesting that one should have pride in being burakumin. The Festival of Liberation, a summer festival that takes place over two days, serves as an example of encouraging pride. While the central theme is buraku issues, the festival is in other ways just like other summer festivals found throughout the country. It connects the experiences of being burakumin (reinforcing a sense of pride) and place. The Festival of Liberation centers on a dance performance that highlights how open and welcoming the community is. In short, it acts to encourage people to have pride in their community and in being burakumin. This event also provides a sense of comfort and security for the youth. As Tetsuya, a third-year boy exclaims:

> I really like the festival. We get to talk and play with friends, but we get to talk about these important things too. Because people from outside the town also come, maybe seeing the festival as they pass by, they might have a chance to learn about this too.

The Festival of Liberation is a place where their experiences are centered and validated. It makes their understanding of being burakumin worthy, something that they can feel good about, in contrast to the prevailing message in Japanese society. The festival opens with two junior high school students reading the Suiheisha declaration, and closes with two others reading from a founding statement of the Buraku Liberation League,\(^2\) the post-war successor
to the Suiheisha. Perhaps more than anything, festivals are fun. There is a
desire to go, see friends and enjoy the atmosphere. Connecting a fun event to
broader social issues, to take pride in being burakumin is integrated in such a
way that both lessons are readily embraced.

Symbols, while carrying meaning, do not necessarily carry long-lasting
meaning or create a sense of positive well-being among youth by themselves.
What is also necessary is a sense of what these symbols represent in specific
ways that serve as a lesson of pride and well-being among the youth. These
lessons are found in the school curriculum.

When marginalized people’s experiences and histories are ignored in school
curricula, to say nothing of society at large, the underlying message that it
sends to students is that their voices and their experiences do not matter. In
an attempt to challenge this, the school created classes that would create a
positive sense of self in being burakumin, highlighting individual and collec-
tive contributions to Japanese society, and thus encouraging pride in mem-
blishment among the youth. Lessons of pride in membership carry tremendous
impact in how minority youth view themselves and their self-worth (Tatum
1999). The students in the junior high school have special classes throughout
the year that center on buraku issues. This was partially based on the then
present, but subsequently terminated, Dōwa Education, a national policy
designed nominally to address buraku issues, though this goal was often
ignored (Bondy 2013). The students in this setting are presented with different
classes based on grade level. First-year classes focus on teaching children to
interact with others, regardless of real or perceived difference, and the
importance of supporting others.

It is in the second year when students really begin to learn more about the
history of burakumin. They are taught that in the early modern Tokugawa era
outcast communities were the ones that made drums to be used in festivals,
that made the brushes used in calligraphy, and that made the tools for the tea
ceremony. Such lessons led one informant, a young woman from Osaka who
had a similar educational experience, to comment, “Japanese culture is
buraku culture.” The third-year students are then presented with a more con-
temporary history, from the mid 19th century Meiji Restoration forward.
Here, the students learn that though political and social systems had changed,
things did not necessarily improve for burakumin. At the same time, they
learn that burakumin did not simply accept their social position; rather, many
openly and actively challenged the social order and demanded a greater
degree of equality and fair treatment.

These lessons carry a strong message of pride in being burakumin. They are
designed to rectify the broader environment that burakumin face. As one
employee of the board of education notes, “as children breathe in the air, they
are inhaling discrimination. Teaching about buraku issues like this is as if
we’re giving fresh air to all the children.” These lessons help to strengthen a
sense of well-being among the youth. As Junko, a leader in her third-year
class and more broadly with buraku issues reflected,
I’m really glad that we’re getting these kinds of lessons. This way, in the future, when people say something negative about burakumin, I can say that they’re wrong and tell them the truth about buraku history.

A similar point about these classes was made by Miyuki, a shy third-year girl, but in a much more personal way:

I feel like with these classes [on buraku issues], I can really understand how much people have gone through. My mom is burakumin and my dad isn’t. If they hadn’t overcome discrimination, I wouldn’t even be here.

The outcome creates and reinforces a sense of identity as burakumin, and as Mathews and Izquierdo remind us, “one’s cultural identity and one’s sense of well-being are intrinsically linked” (Mathews and Izquierdo 2009: 252). These lessons all act to encourage a sense of identity and well-being in being burakumin. This identity is not simply an oppositional identity against majority society as a result of discrimination, but also of a positive contribution burakumin have made to broader Japanese history and culture. The interconnectivity of pride, identity, and well-being all act to reinforce each other, so long as people feel comfortable with each component.

While the school provides the setting whereby youth learn of pride in membership as burakumin, it does so within a clearly structured system, constrained by the same elements of schools elsewhere: there are not many opportunities for the youth to interact with people beyond their community. As a result, there is little to disrupt this sense of well-being. Because of the limited opportunities, the youth are able to be open with being burakumin and create a positive well-being, forged through a sense of comfort and trust with others.

Trust and well-being

The school system is only one area within the protective cocoon, albeit the place where the children spend most of their organized time. It is nonetheless limited in the direct approaches it can take to buraku issues. What else could the youth do to develop a sense of pride and well-being in being burakumin? What students could do, and nearly one-third of the school population did, was to participate in a joint Buraku Liberation League and school-run evening program, the kodomo kai, or Children’s Club. It is in the Children’s Club that youth are able to be much more open and interact in ways they could not in school. It is a learning place, but it is also a social place. Children there would often speak of how much it means to them to have somewhere to go, where they can be “open” with others (even the same friends from school), and really “be themselves.” As Ayako, a quiet second-year girl describes:
School is fun and all, but the Children’s Club is where I can really talk about things. I know I won’t be judged and I can be myself. It’s a really warm place.

Minoru also states: “this is where I can learn to be comfortable standing up for myself.” The Children’s Club provides the structured space for youth to begin the personal project of presenting themselves as burakumin. These meetings provide a place where the youth can learn a counter-narrative of what being burakumin means in contemporary Japan. It encourages a sense of understanding that one should be open about being burakumin, one should not be ashamed of who the burakumin are, and that one should, in short, find a sense of well-being in being burakumin. This well-being is built on trust in others (Ward and Meyer 2009).

The Children’s Club also allows for, and indeed encourages, a disruption to a presumed sense of well-being. Using textbooks published by Amnesty International, the youth are presented with a critical exposure to actions of Japan. Highlighting the relationship between Japan and Korea over the course of the 20th century, the books present a much more realistic portrayal than their school textbooks do. After reading one book, Tetsuya, the popular third-year boy, comments to no one in particular: “Wow, Japan did some really awful things. Still, I’m glad we’re learning about them though.” Such challenging of the approaches they find in standard textbooks and lessons can lead to a break in the trust they place in school. However, this is not reflected in how they respond to school lessons. In history class in school, the youth do not reject those lessons as being incompatible with what they had learned in the Children’s Club. As Tetsuya’s comment suggests, rather than questioning the validity of their school lessons after being presented with alternative narratives, the youth still maintain their trust in school and teachers.

Well-being at risk

As noted earlier, well-being is both structured and interpersonal, and the protective cocoon is where we can observe both elements. It is based in part on the structure of schooling, the boundary definitions of what is, and what is not, a buraku district, and the meaning of being burakumin that people internalize. The sense of well-being developed is, of course, not a permanent state. Both elements are fluid, and as such, bring about a change in happiness and well-being.

The protective cocoon does not remove all sense of risk. Within it, the youth are able to establish a sense of trust with one another and learn pride in being burakumin. At the same time, they learn that the outside world is full of risk. The youth are often told of when, not if, they will face discrimination. This sense of unease about the future, then, reinforces the connection between place and well-being. The district means security, trust, and a positive sense of being. Conversely, the teachings of the school and community mean that the
outside, beyond the protective cocoon, is scary. While the move outside the protective cocoon can be a source of stress for all youth, regardless of background, it is not the same for burakumin, who may mark themselves as different (and potentially set themselves up for discrimination) simply by sharing the name of their home community. For the buraku youth in this study, the outside world is a place where they will face discrimination and will likely not find the same sense of security and well-being that they find within the cocoon. This lack of trust, or risk, reminds us of Helliwell’s (2011: 259) finding on the close connection between diminished trust and “lower levels of subjective well-being.”

The idea of risk outside the protective cocoon is presented to the youth through local channels, but it is also reflected in national policies. At the time I was completing my initial fieldwork in the community, over 30 years of national policies designed to aid buraku communities, known as Dōwa Laws, were being dismantled. The termination of these laws, a frequent topic of discussion at numerous school and community settings, are presented to the youth as another example of the risk and unease that will face them beyond the community.

Locally, risk is presented within the school by having guest speakers come to share with the youth their experiences beyond the protective cocoon. These guest speakers include the elderly, who speak of how they faced structural discrimination in schools growing up. One guest, a middle-aged woman, told the youth about marriage discrimination she faced, having married a person from a buraku district. Most closely connected to their own experience is that of a high school student who graduated from the same junior high school. He shared with the junior high school students stories of what he had experienced outside the protective cocoon, and these experiences were, understandably, much more immediate. The stories of all three guests reflect the same message: discrimination is “out there.” What is not said explicitly, though it is implied, is that this place, this protective cocoon, is a place where the well-being of the children can be protected; in short, it is safe at least in terms of one’s buraku identity. Other forms of risk, from crime in the community to bullying in the schools, do exist, as they do everywhere. The outside, where trust is limited, diminishes one’s well-being.

Thus the process of well-being is fluid and changes through the life course. The youth in this study face the fluidity of well-being by leaving their protective cocoon, leaving the place where they find their well-being as burakumin. This means not only leaving the physical location, but also taking leave of the direct, immediate interpersonal connections that helped to create their sense of well-being to begin with. For the buraku youth in this study, this occurs first and most dramatically when they matriculate to high school.

One of the most difficult challenges for children in high school, regardless of background, is to present themselves as being “just like everyone else.” This is not to suggest that all youth are the same, but rather that marking oneself as different, however defined, is a daunting concept for youth. For
buraku youth, presenting oneself as “just like everyone else” means implicitly not sharing their buraku background. Yet as the lessons they learned are that they will face discrimination if sharing their identity, this not sharing creates a sense of unease, disrupting their socialized self, which has encouraged openness as a contributing factor to well-being.

This tension was succinctly illustrated by Tetsuya in describing the interactions with his new friends from high school: “In junior high, we learned how to have the strength to challenge discrimination in high school and beyond […] but now […] I don’t know […] I don’t really have that strength.” Here, we see his well-being outside the protective cocoon challenged, creating a sense of unease. Miyuki, the shy girl quoted above, also describes, with a sense of unease in her voice, discussing her interactions with her new friends in high school:

Nowhere in school can we talk about buraku issues. I want to talk with my [new] friends about buraku concerns, but it’s just too hard. I can only talk with junior high school friends.

Interpersonal relationships are essential in maintaining well-being. When there is not yet trust with others, as in Miyuki’s case, the well-being once held is gone. The fluidity of well-being is made real for these youth.

**Conclusion**

To return to the points addressed at the start of the chapter, the protective cocoon is safe because it reinforces a sense of trust in others, encourages pride in belonging to a group, strengthens the connection to the community and solidifies the well-being of the youth by holding back the encroachment of outside forces. All of these interconnected elements contribute to well-being for these youth. These factors can also be considered through the framework provided by Mathews and Izquierdo (2009), which highlights the physical, interpersonal, existential and institutional forces that shape well-being.

Well-being, developed through interpersonal channels, emphasizes how “individuals conceive, perceive and experience their own relation with others” (Mathews and Izquierdo 2009: 261). This sense of well-being in being burakumin is also a result of the relationships built within the protective cocoon. The youth are taught about and encouraged to recreate a sense of pride in who they are. Pride is used to challenge the dominant view of burakumin in society. It reinforces a sense of well-being by rejecting the dominant models of (mis)understanding who the burakumin are. When the youth in the community are taught of pride in membership, they are also taught about the importance of depending on others to maintain well-being in a world that they will likely find isolating. Maintaining a close relationship with those around them acts as a form of protection from the possibilities of disrupting their well-being.
Well-being, as considered through an existential dimension (Mathews and Izquierdo 2009: 261), allows us to address the issue of values and meanings. In this case, we can approach issues of pride as also providing a core component of these values and meanings. Youth learn of pride in being burakumin in school lessons and community events. They then are able to interact with others in order to create an elevated level of well-being. The openness of buraku issues informs the youth that this is part of who they are and, as such, it is not something to hide. Here, buraku issues are to be engaged with openly. A result of such openness is to provide a degree of comfort, of security, of well-being.

This well-being in being burakumin is also a product of place. It is in this realm that I have tried to expand on the model presented by Mathews and Izquierdo. People experience well-being through interpersonal interaction and in physical locations. Here, I argue how community acts to provide a protective cocoon and allows for openness, and through that encourages a sense of well-being. People created the label of burakumin, established who was and was not part of this label, based on myriad historical reasons, but by the Meiji period and reinforced through the Đowa Laws in the late 20th century, this label was also geographic. Being marked as burakumin in broader Japan is a negative, but within the boundaries of the label and of the community, there are places, times, and spaces where people can and do feel a sense of worth in being burakumin.

The boundary of place is both a symbolic and a physical construct. When we consider well-being, the role of location should be considered as an additional component. Place matters, not just for buraku issues, but in any understanding of well-being. The where of well-being should also take its part in future considerations of well-being. Physical locations do matter in social experiences, as others have shown, and it is of no surprise that it matters in well-being as well.

Well-being is not permanent. As Mathews and Izquierdo expertly argue, the encroachment of outside forces “shape how well-being is conceived, perceived and experienced” (Mathews and Izquierdo 2009: 261). The protective cocoon provides one way to resist this encroachment. It is where youth learn of their background, and the potential outcomes of the burakumin label in broader society. These outcomes are presented to the youth as scary, unpleasant, and unhappy events. They leave their district based on how the Japanese education system is structured, venturing out to interact with others who do not share their knowledge or views on buraku issues. They first encounter such differences at a vulnerable time, when entering a new school, as well as simply being a teenager. Their relationships therein also highlight the fluidity of well-being. Each new setting and each new interaction reminds them of this fact. Well-being then, for these youth, is a complex mix of people, places and time. All three interact to reinforce a sense of well-being, even if it is temporary.

Any study of well-being is, alas, only a partial picture of the full complexities of individual and group experiences. While this chapter has examined...
well-being for a group of *burakumin*, it cannot hope to capture all of the experiences the youth face, for that was not its purpose. What this chapter has aspired to is to consider how one’s identity as *burakumin*, something that is admittedly only part of who each youth is, is nonetheless an essential component in the well-being of each youth within this particular community.

**Notes**

1. All names are, unless otherwise noted, pseudonyms.
2. The Buraku Liberation League is the largest, most powerful, though by no means only, social movement group for *buraku* issues (Davis 2001). Their approach centers on directly combatting discrimination and encouraging pride in membership.

**References**


Christopher Bondy


12 “My life is Taiyō Kōmuten”
On the relationship between organized football fandom and happiness in Japan

Martin Lieser

Introduction

Football, also referred to as association football, soccer, or sakka in Japanese, is known as “the global game” and is played by 265 million people across the globe, according to a 2006 survey by the global governing body Fédération Internationale de Football Association (FIFA 2006), making it arguably the world’s most popular sport. It is not only popular in terms of participation, but even more so in terms of spectatorship. The final match of the Brazil World Cup in 2014 attracted an estimated television audience of 1 billion (FIFA 2014). Nearly 3.5 million people visited the actual game venues. The globalization and commodification of football have made the sport into a highly fashionable entertainment business. British sociologist Ian Taylor refers to a previous edition of the World Cup, namely the 1994 finals in the United States, as the largest “mass marketing of happiness” ever (Horne 2002: 202).

This chapter attempts to provide an evidence-based analysis of the possible relationship between football fandom and fan happiness. For that purpose, I have traced the emergence of organized football support in Japan through the rather short history of professional football in this country. The term “fan” is widely used today but can refer to a very diverse group of people. It is generally used to describe an obsessed individual who has an intense interest in a certain team, celebrity, show, band, or similar. The term is commonly associated with popular culture rather than high culture, where terms like aficionado or scholar are more commonly used (Crawford 2004: 19). Apart from that, the term fan can refer to a wide variety of individuals – for example, someone who goes to a stadium on a regular basis, an armchair fan who only follows sports on television, or someone who participates in a public viewing event during a big tournament. Yet it is not possible to assume that all spectators in a stadium share the same motivation for being there. In the case of the football World Cup in Japan in 2002, Manzenreiter (2006: 156) showed that even though a seemingly uniform mass of spectators assembled for the matches, these were actually a multitude of people who functioned both as an audience for the sport performance and also “as actors in a variety of activities loosely connected with the performance on the pitch.” Also, fan
identities are not static, but fluid and change over time depending on a variety of influencing factors. For these reasons, it is very important to define what we really mean when we talk about fans.

For lack of a catchier term, I refer to the specific groups I looked at in my research as organized fan groups. Within the European context, a very similar subculture of organized, die-hard football fans is known under the commonly used term “ultras”; in Japanese there is no equivalent. In sports media, gōru ura (behind the goal), is sometimes mentioned, a term also used often by the fan groups themselves. This may grasp the concept even though the meaning is not very clear. Sometimes the literature makes a distinction between active sapōta (supporters) and more passive fan (fans), but that usage is neither particularly clear nor concise. Thus, organized fan groups are used to refer to relatively stable, voluntary formations of football fans who support a specific club.

This chapter is largely based on ethnographic fieldwork among one of the most notorious of such groups in Japan, named “Taiyō Kōmuten” (hereafter only named Taiyō). As the latter part of the name, Kōmuten, translates to “construction company,” it needs to be emphasized that this is not a company, nor in fact any other kind of formal organization. It is a voluntary formation of about 200 fans of Kashiwa Reysol, a club in Japan’s top professional football league, the J-League. Members are not passive fans or mere spectators, but rather active supporters who display a distinct type of support culture, which will be explained in more detail over the course of this chapter.

Rather than looking at the somewhat abstract concept of happiness as a whole, I will explore the well-being of these football fans using the four experiential dimensions proposed by Mathews and Izquierdo (2009: 261). These are: the physical dimension of well-being (how individuals conceive, perceive, and experience their bodies), the interpersonal dimension (how individuals conceive, perceive, and experience their relationships with others), the existential dimension (how individuals comprehend the values and meanings in their lives), and lastly, the dimension of national institutions and global forces (how they shape the ways that well-being is conceived, perceived, and experienced among individuals in different societies). The first two, the physical and the interpersonal dimensions of well-being, are the most relevant for this case study.

The first thing that comes to mind when thinking about the relationship between watching football and happiness might be the effects of a favorite team winning or losing a match or a championship. From my research I find, however, that the effects of such events are rather limited. Of course, they cannot be denied entirely. Otherwise, how could we explain support for a notoriously unsuccessful team? Why do fans stick with one team rather than repeatedly changing their allegiance? In this chapter, I argue that Japanese organized football fans find a type of community in their football support which they do not experience in other parts of their lives.
This community affiliation adds considerably to their interpersonal and (to some extent) physical well-being, as evidenced by a quote by one of the group leaders, which I borrowed for the title of this chapter: “My life is Taiyō Kōmuten” (personal interview, November 30, 2012). Although the entire interview was conducted in Japanese, my informant felt the need to emphasize this point by using English. Also, note that he did not say, “My life is Kashiwa Reysol.” Rather than the football club (i.e. the fan object), the fan group itself has become such an important part of his life that for him, without the fan group there would be no life.

Post-traditional communities

To make the concept of organized fan groups more accessible and comparable to other social formations, I will apply the concept of post-traditional community. The basic premise behind this concept is that traditional communities such as church, neighborhood associations, and others have in recent decades increasingly lost influence and significance in people’s lives, evidenced by declines in membership and participation. Those traditional communities are marked by long-term involvement, with specific ethnic and social criteria or place of residence typically being the significant determining factors for belonging to a traditional community.

Post-traditional communities, in contrast, allow for more flexible lifestyles and provide short-term association with like-minded people. Post-traditional communities have been conceptualized as post-subcultures (Muggleton and Weinzierl 2003), club cultures (Thornton 1995), neo-tribes (Maffesoli 2000), and scenes (Hitzler and Niederbacher 2010). Scenes, for example, are defined as community formations around a central topic, mostly in the realm of music, sports, fashion, or media. They have their own lifestyle with a distinct jargon, manners, gathering places and localities, schedules, rituals, festivals and events, and in some cases clothing styles. An important aspect of the definition of a scene is that members can see themselves as belonging to one or more scenes. Members typically leave the scene after a while (e.g. some years) when personal circumstances change or they lose interest. For example, setting up a family, moving, or finding a (new) job are life events that often change the focus and priorities of scene members (Hitzler 2008: 64–66).

Scenes are sometimes compared to clouds in respect to their permeability. It is relatively easy both to join and exit a scene. The borders are blurry and affiliation and proximity to the core is not always clear (Hitzler 2008: 56). In fact, one of the distinctive features of post-traditional social formations is that there are no effective means of sanctioning participation. They rely on appeal rather than coercion. Today, for young people in particular, there is a multitude of attractive options to choose from, leading people to move between different scenes and personal combinations of music, sports, and fashion scenes (Hitzler 2008: 68).
Case study

Kashiwa Reysol and the city of Kashiwa are in many ways characteristic of the typical J-League club and its hometown. Kashiwa is a city of about 400,000 inhabitants, located in Chiba Prefecture on the fringes of the Tokyo Metropolitan Area. Almost one third of the population commutes to Tokyo for work, according to the 2010 census. At the same time, the city serves as an urban center for the surrounding more rural areas of Chiba and Ibaraki Prefectures. In marked distinction from the concentration of professional baseball in metropolitan Japan, quite a number of football clubs were founded in regional areas like Kashima (Ibaraki) and Niigata. Kashiwa lies somewhere in between these two extremes.

Kashiwa Reysol developed out of Hitachi’s company football team. It was renamed Hitachi FC Kashiwa Reysol in 1993 and joined the J-League in 1995, just two seasons after its official launch. In contrast to the semi-professional company team and in accordance with league regulations, the name of the city or hometown became an official part of the team name. The latter part of the name is made up of the Spanish words rey (king) and sol (sun), meaning sun kings. This refers to the parent company Hitachi, which is written with the Sino-Japanese character for sun. So even if the club is usually referred to as Kashiwa Reysol, the reference to its parent company and main sponsor still remains.

The first 15 years in professional football have not been very successful for Reysol, the sole exception being its victory in the 1999 J-League Cup (a standalone tournament among J-League teams with a group stage and subsequent elimination games). At the end of the 2009 season (during which the first part of my fieldwork was conducted), the club was relegated to the second division, J2, the biggest setback in the club’s history. The next season, however, Kashiwa finished first, securing immediate promotion back to J1, and in the following 2011 season the club even won the J-League title. Although Reysol has not been able to repeat its overall league victory, it has managed to win three trophies in consecutive seasons, completing the run with the win of the Emperor’s Cup in 2012 and the J-League Cup in 2013. Thus, Kashiwa Reysol is today recognized as one of the more successful football clubs in Japan and a potential title contender. During my various research stays, the club performed very well at times and very poorly at others. These different stages of success and failure that occurred during my research ensure that results are not biased and show that success and failure indeed do not have a strong influence on fans’ subjective well-being.

Like other J-League clubs, Kashiwa Reysol played in front of sell-out crowds during its early years. During the first crisis of the J-League in 1997, average attendance, in Kashiwa and elsewhere, plummeted to less than half. In anticipation of the 2002 World Cup finals, co-hosted by Japan and South Korea, attendance figures began to rise again in stadiums throughout the country. In 2012, Reysol’s average attendance was 13,768 compared to an
overall league average of 16,498. This lower attendance compared to other teams is partly due to a lack of capacity. Reysol started playing their home games at Hitachidai stadium in Kashiwa. This stadium, however, did not fulfill J-League regulations, which require a minimum capacity of 15,000. Therefore, the football club and Chiba Prefecture jointly built a new stadium in Kashiwa-no-ha, a few kilometers outside the city, which was opened in 1999. However, this supposedly more modern stadium was difficult to access; visibility was impaired and the greater distance to the pitch in the multi-purpose sports arena had a detrimental effect on atmosphere. The Kashiwa-no-ha stadium was used for a limited number of matches only, and fan-led protest eventually caused the club to abandon it altogether in 2009. A new solution was found to increase the capacity of Hitachidai stadium, where only a few meters separate the first row of spectators from the action on the pitch, by building additional stands in 2012. Since its inception, two to three of the home games against teams that draw larger crowds have been played at the much larger National Stadium in Tokyo. This affects the average attendance figures of home games and explains why, for example, the average of 18,118 spectators per game in 1995 far exceeded stadium capacity in Kashiwa city.

Taiyō Kōmuten is one of two main fan groups of Kashiwa Reysol. The group was founded in 1993, shortly after the establishment of Kashiwa Reysol and prior to their admittance to the J-League. A handful of men around the age of 30 wanted to improve and organize support for the team during matches, and the number of members quickly grew. Four of the founding members are still active today. Currently the group consists of about 200 fans, who at the time of my research ranged in age from nine to a little over 50 years old. Taiyō collaborates with another group of about the same size, RYKN (pronounced reiken), to support the team at all matches. They always occupy the same area in the stadium, behind the goal, and orchestrate the support, which consists of chanting, clapping, beating drums, waving flags, jumping, displaying banners, and similar activities. One of the leaders – the so-called kōru rida (call leader) – is in charge of coordinating the performance during matches, standing in an elevated position on a platform in the center of the stands. He uses a megaphone to shout his commands and gestures towards the drummers and trumpeters to signal their turn to lead a new chant. A couple of sub-leaders are positioned in similar positions at the edge of the central area occupied by the two groups to help encourage other spectators to join in. The goal is to create continual audio-visual support for the team for the entire duration of the game.

As mentioned above, these organized fan groups are present at all matches, whether at home in Kashiwa or at away games. The latter take them to distant locations throughout Japan, including Kyūshū and Hokkaidō. With the club regularly participating in the AFC (Asian Football Confederation) Champions League in recent years, members also frequently travel to other Asian countries and Australia as well – the longest journey being to Saudi Arabia in 2013. Not all 200 members attend every match, but they do
manage to assemble a sizable group each time. Traveling with the team is a practice in marked contrast to professional baseball in Japan, where fan clubs are divided into regional chapters and fans seldom travel long distances to games away from home (Takahashi 2011: 72).

**Methodology**

I began researching Kashiwa Reysol fans in 2009 by exploratory observation, as I did not know exactly how the spectators and fan groups were structured. At three J-League games, I positioned myself close to the center of the stands where the active supporters are located to observe their performance from the outside. This helped me get a better idea of whom I could contact to gain access to the group. When I came back for a fourth game, I planned to approach one of the sub-leaders. However, when I arrived in the stands it was I who was approached by two members of Taiyō and invited to join them behind the goal. As I was introduced to the leaders and other members, I disclosed my interest in doing research on the fans, something they were very open to. I learned that my being approached by the fans was not a coincidence but rather something they do before every match and which they call *scouting*: Small groups of Taiyō members scan the stands for young males who are at the match alone or in a small group. This is a very important part of growing the group. Thus my initiation into the group resembled that of other members. I gradually got to know more and more members and how the group worked, and was introduced to the various activities. One of the members who had scouted me became my gatekeeper, and much later I myself temporarily became a gatekeeper to another new member.

My initial research stay lasted about three months. The main part of my research was conducted over the course of four months in 2012, with additional shorter research stays in 2013 and 2014. The ethnographic research consisted mainly of participant observations and qualitative interviews aiming to “produce a coherent, focussed analysis of some aspect of the social life that has been observed and recorded, an analysis that is comprehensible to readers who are not directly acquainted with the social world at issue” (Emerson et al. 1995: 142). Moreover, this account should also be “largely understandable to the research participants” (Pearson 2012: 13) in order to ensure an authentic account. While most participant observation took place around and inside stadiums on match days, a considerable amount of research was also conducted in pubs and restaurants, on the road, and on days when there was no football. Research was also not restricted to the time of physically being in the field. Modern technology has allowed me to continue following the group even after leaving Japan. The group has a password-protected private website where members post information and a message board. Communicating with the research participants via modern messaging systems allows me to answer unresolved questions, clarify and verify accounts, and to observe
developments without being there in person, which is a considerable difference from the classic onsite ethnographies carried out by Malinowski and Lévi-Strauss.

The fan group as social network

When asked what they enjoy about being a football fan, all of my informants replied that the social interaction it offers is one of the most important factors, if not the most important one. While I did not ask specifically what they enjoy about being a member of Taiyō, most replied in this manner. Being a member of the organized supporters’ group has become synonymous with being a football fan for many. In the group, the members find something – a type of community – that they do not experience in other parts of their lives. To understand what is so special about the social relationships within the group, we need to take a closer look at how inclusion and exclusion work in the case of Taiyō.

As mentioned above, Taiyō has implemented a scouting system. They are very eager to actively grow the number of people involved in the group. Two hours before kick-off at home games the gates to the stadium open and Taiyō and RYKN are always the first to enter. After the first tasks of placing the banners and securing the designated support area behind the goal are completed, various groups and individuals engage in further preparatory activities, one of which is scouting. While the terrace is steadily filling up with spectators, groups of two to four roam the stands to look for potential new members. Small groups or individuals are targeted, while larger groups, families, and couples are ignored. When someone is identified as a possible candidate, he is approached and asked if he would like to join them in the area behind the goal, usually while emphasizing how much more fun it is to engage in active support with the group. More often than not, the invitation is declined, and it is not unusual that a group of scouts returns without having recruited anybody. However, the important thing is that they try.

There are only a few restrictions on who can become a member. The only set criterion is gender. Members of Taiyō and of RYKN must be male. The leaders of the groups came to this decision at the very beginning. Taiyō is an exception in this regard, as most other groups in Japan, where football consumption has been successfully marketed to both female and male audiences, do not have such a rule – although “late in 1993 Crazy Calls [back then the dominant fan group of Urawa Reds] banned women from the key support area behind the goal” (Moffett 2002: 76). Still, although the share of female spectators at J-League games is relatively high, the members of all clubs are predominantly male, with males occupying the leadership roles. This corresponds with Crawford’s general observation that “female followers of male mass spectator sports often find their patterns of support and ‘authenticity’ as ‘real’ fans questioned by other, most notably male, supporters” and also “might find their progression into the highest levels of [the fan] career
structure limited” (Crawford 2004: 47). Moving along the career path means that through social interaction fans’ “patterns of interest, involvement, and levels of knowledge of a sport or team will often change over time though this progression need not be linear but far more complex” (Crawford 2004: 46). Female fans are often prevented from assuming responsibilities within fan groups, such as being a call leader, and in some cases are even prohibited from joining the fan group at all. The Japanese incidences of male exclusivity and female marginalization are explained by Manzenreiter (2008: 252) as a response to the crisis of hegemonic masculinity in wider society. In the football stadium, fans found a space where they could, to a certain extent, set their own rules.

**Transcending social structures**

Professional football in Japan is associated with the clubs’ hometowns. Fans are (ideally) recruited based on where they live, were born, or where they grew up. Although most clubs still have a strong connection to their parent company, the marketing of the J-League has successfully concealed this. This situates football in the public realm rather than being associated with the corporate world (baseball) or the education system (high school and college sports). Watching football is clearly designated as a pastime activity. People with diverse social, educational, and occupational backgrounds are drawn to the stadiums. The members of Taiyō reflect this, as the organized group does not discriminate based on these criteria. Members of Taiyō include students at all levels, including elementary school and university, as well as white- and blue-collar workers. Members are graduates of the nation’s most elite universities as well as people who dropped out of the education system after compulsory schooling, i.e. middle school. One member is a ministry official, while another works in the administration of a red light business. There are barkeepers, a luxury handbag salesman, a university professor, several mechanics, a couple of teachers at different levels of the school system, and so on. They are all welcome at Taiyō and, more importantly, their social status does not affect their position within the group.

Taiyō Kōmuten has implemented a hierarchical system. The leader and founder of the group is assisted by a small group of representatives who help him in making decisions and leading the group. However, the hierarchy is not a strict one and does not allow leaders to command other members at will, instead being in place mainly for organizational purposes. Moreover, the selection of the leaders is not based on social status or age. While older members are usually addressed in a more polite way by the younger ones, the social hierarchy within the fan group is not based on seniority. Members can raise their status by showing commitment to the group through regular attendance and participating in preparation for and during matches. Thus even young or less educated members can be in charge of decisions affecting elders. This system is not only accepted by all members, it is also a great motivational factor and source of interpersonal well-being.
Asked what he enjoys about being a fan, the leader of Taiyō responded: “Communicating with people [...] The smartest in Japan, Tōkyō University and Kyōto University graduates, as well as some who only finished junior high school – such different people gather here” (personal interview, December 2, 2012). He himself has a rather simple background and is not in regular employment. However, he is very charismatic and became the leader despite the fact that a teacher and office workers, among them a graduate from Waseda, one of Japan’s most prestigious private universities, were among the founding members. They all enjoy the company of people they would most likely have no relationship with if it were not for football.

The unique characteristics of the J-League – being built on regional support and promoted as a leisure activity – have helped create a fan culture that successfully transcends the social structure of Japanese society. This is not only true for social status but also for age. As mentioned earlier, members of Taiyō were between the ages of nine and around 50 at the time I carried out my research. Young fans are often introduced to the group by older brothers or cousins. Teachers may also bring along some of their students, or a group of elementary school students might be scouted. It is less likely that fans over 40 join the group, but it can happen if, for example, friends who are already members introduce them. However, in general, older members have been part of the group for a longer period of time.

The activities of the supporters’ group are rare occasions for people of different generations to engage in ongoing relationships. In the 1980s and 1990s, conflict between the generations in Japan appeared to be developing into an acute problem. The media coined the term shinjinrui, or “new species,” for a new generation that was portrayed as having fundamentally different attitudes and even not being “Japanese” anymore. Because they grew up in an affluent Japan long after the years of war and reconstruction, they were more focused on consumption than previous generations (Mathews and White 2004). The founding members of Taiyō belong to this generation, having been around the age of 30 in the early 1990s. While one of them says that he followed company football before, he mostly became interested in football with the emergence of the J-League. Baseball and sumō were the sports they had followed before. In contrast, the younger generation, who went to school in the late 1980s and 1990s, grew up playing football. These different generations were brought together in one space by the newly founded regional J-League clubs.

A common characteristic among J-League spectators is that they are from the same city or region as the team they support. Apart from that, they typically have very diverse backgrounds. This is reflected in the composition of organized supporters’ groups like Taiyō. It can be observed that this does not lead to conflict, but instead is one of the main sources of interpersonal well-being among the members. The older generation, like the leader, enjoys the company of younger people and children. The youngsters likewise enjoy being around older and more experienced members. They often ask for advice in
personal or educational matters and are glad to be able to do so in this informal setting.

The system employed by Taiyō is egalitarian in the sense that status in the hierarchy is not based on socioeconomic characteristics or age. This provides a very different experience from work, school, and even other pastimes such as club activities at school, which are marked by set hierarchical orders, and are often based on seniority. There are only two distinct types of status for Taiyō members: gakusei (“students”) and shakaijin (“adult or full members of society”). This is an important distinction when it comes to organizing and financing activities. In general, shakaijin pay more and thus subsidize the gakusei who are not seen as being fully adult due to being students. Most commonly, this system is used for organizing travel to away games. Ahead of the game, typically at least one week in advance, members must confirm whether they will go to the venue with the main group (hontai). Costs are then calculated based on the means of transportation and include gasoline, parking, and highway fees. The sum is divided – but not equally among all members of the main group. Gakusei always pay less than shakaijin. The same system is applied to membership fees and social gatherings in restaurants and bars, which removes a huge threshold. After all, match tickets, transport, and related expenditures such as food and drink during group activities all cost money. As the elders substantially subsidize young members, it makes participating in group activities much easier for them. One of the advantages of this system is that students typically have more spare time than the working population. They are more likely to participate in group activities on weekdays, for example, if they can afford it financially. Thus the system has a major impact on participation rates. The young members are grateful to have this opportunity and when transitioning to shakaijin, are willing to provide others with the help they themselves experienced. On the other hand, the system does not distinguish between different occupations and incomes. Working members with a low income and/or family commitments travel to away games less often than others.

To summarize these findings: Taiyō consists of a broad range of people from different age groups and with varying social backgrounds who (depending on their participation rate) spend a considerable amount of time together. The members find joy in the diverse composition of the group as they experience social interactions with individuals they would otherwise most likely not have contact with.

A group of friends

As participating in group activities becomes a significant part of their lives, Taiyō members begin to consider fellow members to be friends. Given the size of the group, this represents an unusually large circle of friends. Especially in cases where individuals do not have many social relationships, joining a fan group can have a significant impact. One of my gatekeepers is originally from
Kyōto and moved to Kashiwa when he started working at a hotel in Tōkyō. He told me: “When I moved here from Kyōto, I didn’t have many friends” (personal interview, November 13, 2012). Joining Taiyō changed this completely. Not only newcomers, but also individuals who may otherwise be outsiders or simply shy can experience this. Another member, Jō, who is now one of the group’s leaders, had been going to Kashiwa Reysol games by himself for a period of eight years. His dream was to join one of the organized supporters’ groups but he did not know how and was afraid or embarrassed (hazukashii) to ask anybody about joining. When he was finally scouted by members of Taiyō in 2002, he was very happy (ureshii): “Yatta (I made it)” he says when remembering that moment and continues: “By joining Taiyō, I made a hundred new friends” (personal interview, November 30, 2012).

The activities of the supporters’ group encompass much more than just cheering on the team during a match. Even when a game starts at seven in the evening, the core of the group meets at eight in the morning on match day. One reason for this is to be able to line up early and thus secure the top spot in the queue of waiting fans – which in turn allows them to enter the stadium before anybody else and thus to occupy the area behind the goal. However, Taiyō and RYKN have been the established leaders among team supporters for years and it is highly doubtful that other spectators would contest their position. There are other reasons behind keeping to this time schedule, as Jō confirms: “Queuing up is not necessary. But you spend lots of time with the other members” (personal interview, November 30, 2012). During this long period of time between meeting in the morning and the actual match, many different preparatory activities take place. Meetings are held, banners, flags and other materials are collected from a container near the stadium, and so on. However, throughout the day, there are also extended periods when members just wait, talk to each other, joke around, eat together, and have a good time. Having fun and joking around is very important. The meetings in which the leaders announce timetables, strategies, rules of behavior and such are never absolutely serious, but always contain elements of comedy (o-warai). While some members are clearly more often at one end of a joke than others, this easy-going manner of interaction generally underpins that the hierarchies and rules are less strict than they might seem at first glance.

Furthermore, a group within the group, called shinjin gakari (“responsible of new members”), is in charge of developing new ways of finding new members and thinking about how to better engage these new members in group activities. All members of Taiyō are divided into 12 sub-groups, which have the primary function of making it easier to organize activities. Each sub-group has a leader who, for example, checks in with the individual members about if and when they will show up for matches and other events. The ideal would be that all members show up to all games and engage in all group activities, which is clearly not the case. Some people have other commitments and some simply choose not to participate fully. In my sub-group there are, for example, two members who regularly show up for games but always arrive
just an hour before kick-off and leave right after the game. They are interested in watching the game and supporting the team, but do not fancy joining in the other group activities.

However, there is also a core of at least 60 members for whom the supporters’ group has developed a self-purpose. They try to go to every game and to engage in all fan group-related activities. Their fellow supporters have become friends, sometimes even very close friends who invite each other to their weddings, or go to concerts, baseball games, or wrestling events together. One group of Taiyō members often goes hiking together on weekends when there is no game. The fan group facilitated finding these friends.

**Freedom and deviant behavior**

A third contributing factor to the members’ subjective well-being is that they experience a relatively large degree of freedom. This may seem counter-intuitive given the way the fan group is organized. However, this structure is experienced as being vital for the group to run smoothly. As mentioned above, the atmosphere is easy-going. After all, all members participate voluntarily and leaders thus try to ensure that they have a good time.

When football was being professionalized in the early 1990s, most Japanese were not yet familiar with the sport, let alone its fan culture. Even some of the founders of organized supporters’ groups (like the one of Taiyō) admit that they were initially not interested in football that much. Rather they were interested in the relative freedom that becoming a football fan provided: freedom to make noise, to show subversive imagery like a portrait of Che Guevara, for example, and, in general, to behave in a way that would not be considered socially acceptable in another context (Hashimoto 2006: 111; Shimizu 2002: 138). Similarly, one of the Taiyō core members today, Jō, states: “I don’t know a lot about football. I only became interested when the Kashima Antlers were founded in Ibaraki [where he is from]. I hated football before that. Even now I like the cheering more than football itself” (personal interview, November 30, 2012). Especially in the beginning, there were not many rules in place to regulate crowd behavior. On the contrary, officials of the football clubs were more interested in igniting the atmosphere. In some cases, clubs even hired samba bands and other entertainers to create a vivid atmosphere more like what they knew existed in South American and European stadiums (Manzenreiter 2008: 252). Organized supporter groups were encouraged to form but mostly developed independently from these official efforts. Yet they also looked abroad for inspiration, especially to Brazil, and Italy, where the 1990 World Cup was held. The Italian professional football league Serie A was considered to be the best competition at the time, with some of the world’s best players joining Italian clubs. The Serie A was also at the forefront of selling international broadcasting rights (Doidge 2015: 55). This meant that Japanese football fans were able to watch Italian football on TV and not only became interested in the game itself, but also in what went
on in the stands. In this way, the Italian ultras’ style of organized support – or at least the visual and acoustic aspects of it – strongly influenced the development of Japanese fan culture.

In an extreme instance of copying Italian and South American role models, Japanese fans started lighting flares in the grandstands (Shimizu 2002: 136). As this was quickly prohibited, they found new, creative ways to express their emotions. For a very short period, fans of Kashiwa Reysol used dry ice to create smoke, thus achieving a similar visual effect to the flares (Moffett 2002: 81). However, this proved overly laborious and no less dangerous, and the idea was abandoned as well. While watching an Italian football broadcast, some of the fans spotted riot police with dogs inside the stadium, which sparked another idea. They recorded the sound of a barking dog and played it when the opposing team’s goalkeeper first arrived in front of their bleacher, to intimidate him. While the international media often portray Japanese football fans as being polite and considerate for gathering up the trash on their side of the grandstand after a match, it is quite common for teams to face a hostile atmosphere at away games.

Although self-policing has been working well for the most part, there are some risks that arise from the deviant behavior of organized football fan groups in Japan. For example, when fans of the Urawa Reds barred foreign visitors from entering the fan group sections at their stadium in March 2014, the banner displayed at the entrance of the stand reading “Japanese only” in English script was widely understood as being racially motivated. According to the fans involved, it was directed at foreigners coming to see the game who allegedly have insufficient command of the Japanese language to support the team properly. In response to what J-League officials declared a xenophobic act, no fans were allowed to attend the next home game and the club was ordered to play in an empty stadium (a punishment unique in the history of professional football in Japan). In addition, the club was charged to pay a considerable fine. The club itself responded as well, banning a total of eleven fan groups. The dissolution of the so-called “Curva Est” federation of organized supporters seems to be a harsh punishment, but it is primarily nothing more than lip service to the J-League and Japanese society at large to maintain appearances (tatemae). While some individuals involved in the incident were indeed banned from going to the stadium, this was not the case for most members of the fan groups; they were just not allowed to display their group names anymore. Around 20,000 members of the Urawa Boys, the biggest of the eleven groups and probably the biggest supporter organization in Japanese football, are still paying their membership fees and the same people are still in charge of running the fan group, as an informant, a member himself, has told me.

In case of severe transgressions, clubs often try to find a middle ground between publicly condemning violations and maintaining their still fragile fan base. The same strategy was actually applied in Kashiwa. Taiyō was officially banned after a scramble in the bleachers among supporters of the same
team during the 2011 season. The fans directly involved were banned for life, while the group's leader got a six-month ban and the group itself was officially dissolved. This means that Taiyō is no longer allowed to display the group name and symbols, although the group is essentially still active and its name is also still in use internally.

Apart from this deviant dimension of fandom, the nature of the game of football itself offers freedom. Being a continuous flow sport, football provides a different dynamic from interval sports such as baseball, something that is reflected in the fan culture (Kelly 2004: 85). There is a great variety of chants that can be interrupted quite abruptly if they do not fit the current situation, for example, if the opposing team maneuvers the ball into a promising position. Then an encouraging, rhythmic chant might be switched to a more disruptive one. In contrast, Kelly (2004: 86) calls the support at baseball games “exceedingly monotonous.” Although a leader orchestrates support, fans often have the option of freely choosing between different roles within a chant. There is also a large degree of freedom to express one’s individual emotions – both positive and negative. During the ecstasy of a last-minute goal, fans fall into each other's arms free from restraint. If they think a referee made a wrong decision, they storm the fence and swear at him, equally free from restraint. While basic rules of behavior are negotiated within the group and the system of group responsibility ensures that members stay within certain limits, they still have much more freedom than in other circumstances. This freedom to express emotion is atypical in Japanese society and contributes to physical well-being. Some members even state that they are not that interested in football, and that the cheering itself is what they enjoy most.

**Conclusion**

This chapter shows that organized football fan groups constitute a relatively new form of post-traditional community that is different from similar groupings in Japan. The members experience subjective well-being through finding a form of community that they do not experience in other parts of their lives. The groups successfully transcend the social structure of Japanese society by allowing individuals to join and develop their fan careers regardless of age and social background. This creates a unique mix of young and old individuals with different levels of education who enjoy spending time together. Furthermore, the football environment provides freedom to express one’s emotions, which enhances the members’ physical well-being. Even if they have to endure such hardships as continuing to cheer through 90 minutes of rain or spending the night in front of a stadium with temperatures close to freezing, they consider participating to be worth it.

What is remarkable and a key characteristic is that the group is not institutionalized. It is totally dependent on its members voluntarily spending a considerable amount of their leisure time on facilitating the community
through collective action. This is a big difference from, for example, a university sports club, which, once established, becomes an “institution completely independent of its players” (Dalla Chiesa 2002: 1991), as membership is limited to students’ time at the university, and the hierarchy determined by school year.

For core members, the fan group becomes an important part of their lives, which they often have to balance against other commitments and options. During the course of my research, one of the younger members decided against studying abroad, because he would have missed too many games and group activities. One of the leaders and founding members, who is an office worker, turned down a promotion at his company for the same reason. Another member, who lives with his wife but has no children, opted for a minivan with seven seats when buying a new car, so that it could be utilized for trips to away games. These are a few examples of decisions with a great impact, but members make more mundane decisions almost every week: whether to study for an exam or skip class to attend a mid-week game in a distant part of the country; whether to use vacation days to spend time with the family or go on a trip to Vietnam to attend an AFC Champions League match; and so on. Often they decide in favor of the fan group. Of course, these decisions can also lead to stress and thus reduce well-being. However, I found that fans repeatedly decided in favor of the fan group even though previous decisions have had negative effects – because they are rewarded by the sense of community they experience and they themselves help shape within the fan group.

**References**


Foreword: Memento Mori

As we were editing the manuscript for the current chapter, something happened that made us reconsider and eventually rewrite the introduction. It was during the Golden Week (those precious non-working days at the beginning of May) and, like most people who live and work in Japan, we were on a pleasure trip when we received a message from one of our acquaintances/informants, letting us know that Mr. Fernandez had passed away that morning in a car accident. Mr. Fernandez had just finished a long night of drinking at Bardis, the subject of the present study, promised the bartender that he would sleep in the car, but had apparently changed his mind and tried to drive to his office. The only fortunate aspect of the accident: No innocent bystander was involved. We received first the announcement, then information about the wake and funeral. We had never been particularly close (although we observed him in his interaction with the group, we had not had the chance to actually interview Mr. Fernandez), so we sent our condolences to the people whom we thought were his friends and continued our trip. So did they. Both as anthropologists and expats, we have always been and often made aware of the cultural differences between ourselves and the Japanese, yet we did expect some kind of manifestation of grief, spontaneous or socially enacted. In his extensive study on the significance of crying, Tom Lutz stated (an affirmation that we were later able to confirm, during a study on ritual crying in Japanese culture) that, according to cultural materials collected in the Human Relations Area Files, crying at death was present in all cultures except one (Lutz 2001). Crying or similar manifestations of emotion are social rituals that can be observed in many aspects of contemporary Japanese life, yet Mr. Fernandez, who used to be extremely popular among the Bardis group of revelers, who used to organize crazy wig-and-fire parties, had died suddenly, and his “friends” continued to travel, eat good food, take funny pictures and upload them on Facebook as if nothing had happened. While we agree that everybody has their own way of expressing grief, globally accepted social etiquette definitely does not suggest sharing photos of yourself slurping noodles or happily touring wineries on the day your friend passed away. This
is exactly what happened, to our increasing surprise, on the day Mr. Fernandez died in an accident.

Our readers and fellow researchers may wonder how this is relevant to our study. The answer is simple: Although we could not have planned or anticipated such an event, it definitely emphasized that the rules of conduct guiding the “after midnight” community are different from the ones that apply in daily (and we use the word “daily” literally here) life. We can be affected by what happens in a book or a movie, may even shed some tears, but that will not influence our behavior in the real world; most people would not change their vacation plans because Jenny dies in “Love Story.” People who frequent Bardis, a bar in the Nishi Tenma neighborhood of Osaka, close to the famous Kita Shinchi entertainment district and only one block away from Do with Café, the stage of the resplendent drag queens in Kansai, live “normal” lives completely separated from the spicy, stolen moments of happiness that come after midnight.

Bardis and its community

The present chapter is a case study that originated in a series of fortunate coincidences; we did not actively search for the topic, nor did we plan the project in advance, but at some point the subject became too fascinating to ignore. Bardis, the focal point of the discussion, was opened in February 2012, as a kind of annex to On and On, a dance club in Umeda (the northern part of central Osaka). At the time, On and On was ranked number two among dance clubs in Osaka, the main criteria considered being the décor, the quality of the service and drinks, as well as the customers’ behavior. The club featured DJs well into their fifties and catered to a clientele from the same age group, which is why disturbances and conflicts were almost nonexistent. The only downside was the Japanese law that forbids dancing after 1:00 am, and it is thus that Bardis came into being: as a place where regular customers from the dance club could gather and wait for the right time to get on the dance floor, and to continue partying after the club had to turn off its sound system and close the doors.

The owner of Bardis, Mr. Masatoshi Kobayashi, is also the manager of the dance club. He opened the new establishment as a “bar,” under the rules and regulations of the Amusement and Entertainment Business Law (fūzoku eigyō hō). In the beginning, some simple foods were served (that being the rule for drinking spots operating after midnight), but a few months later that service was discontinued and a list of nearby eateries that could provide food at all hours of the night was compiled. Soon – most likely at the customers’ request – a karaoke machine was added to the available entertainment facilities, taking Bardis one step closer to a sunakku (snack bar). The notable difference was that the person listening to the customers’ woes and praising them for real or imagined achievements and qualities was not an elderly (and motherly) lady, but a handsome young man. All Bardis features considered, it
is quite difficult to include it in one of the known, established kinds of drinking places: The oshare (always wearing black and white, usually a vest of some kind, perfectly coiffed hair) bartender and the polished counter would suggest a classic bar, yet the loud music and the low quality of the drinks served makes this categorization difficult. The bartender is indeed good looking and friendly, but no more than requested by good manners, so the place is not particularly attended by single women and it has no hint of a host bar. As mentioned above, this is a case study and we have not had the time for extensive comparisons, yet as far as we could ascertain from interviews with customers, bar owners and bartenders in the Osaka area, Bardis is quite a unique place on the Osaka nightlife stage. Besides providing a space where regular customers could stay from early evening until late morning (Bardis breakfasts will be discussed later in our analysis), it is also the establishment where other fūzoku eigyō workers from the neighborhood gather to unwind after hours, a gesture that goes beyond the mere courtesy generally displayed towards similar businesses in the area.

We first entered Bardis by chance, when, after a work dinner, we wanted to have one more drink at the club at around midnight and were guided to “a nearby bar” because “it would be a shame to pay the entrance fee for just one hour.” Besides being a fortunate incident that became the origin of the present study, this event shows the tight connection between the two establishments and suggests a pattern for acquiring clientele. It must also be mentioned that Bardis is located at the end of a cul-de-sac, where it would be impossible to enter casually, just because you were strolling around looking for a place to have a drink. According to Mr. Yosuke Fukushima, the bartender, in the three years since the opening, nobody ever went there without an introduction from a previous customer. Plainly speaking, Bardis is a small place with stale air, loud music and poor-quality drinks (even the most faithful customers laugh and say “Oh, yes, the drinks are really bad, but that’s because Fuku-chan doesn’t drink, so he can’t make tasty drinks”), yet people keep going there and once inside they stay until morning on most nights, and on every night of the week for the hardcore fans. This is the phenomenon that triggered our study: Why would people keep going to a place that apparently has no redeeming features? Why would they spend so much time there?

During our research we interviewed 13 regular customers (they would usually spend their Friday and Saturday nights there, and would visit again at least once during the week), Mr. Kobayashi (the owner), Mr. Fukushima (the full-time bartender), a part-time bartender, Mr. Minoru Matsumoto (the owner of On and On, the dance club), as well as the owner of a nearby restaurant who caters to Bardis and sometimes joins the regulars’ party. For a while we went to Bardis assuming different roles: One of us (Adrian) was the ordinary guy looking for a good time, and the other (Carmen) was the serious researcher. The research project was mentioned only later, when we decided to collect data not only through observation, but also through formal interviews.
The main concept used in our chapter, “under-the-counter happiness” was defined before conducting the interviews. In the former communist country where we were born, “under-the-counter” (or “under-the-hand,” to put it in Romanian) was a term used to designate numerous products that were available only to a privileged few, through a network of intricate connections. We applied this concept to the eclectic group of people who form a community united by its pursuit of happiness in a nightclub and a bar. Bardis (unlike most similar businesses) is not advertised anywhere; people either know about it and go there, or they might be aware of something happening after the dance club closes (the dance club does advertise and is not so selective when it comes to its clientele), but they are not members of the “secret circle.” The “under-the-counter” system in communist Romania functioned under similar rules: The products were not available and the store shelves were obviously empty, just as the dance club obediently closes its doors one hour after midnight, but a select group of people had the means to obtain the goods hidden “under the counter.” The visible behavior pattern is not the only similarity; the psychological mechanism is the same: Acquiring the desired goods led to a certain level of satisfaction/happiness, followed by a lingering feeling of fear (in communist Romania, fear of being caught doing something illegal; in the case of Bardis customers, fear of not making it to work on time or not being able to perform satisfactorily after a night of alcohol and karaoke) and guilt (the guilt of having something not available to others, for the Romanian citizens; and the guilt of breaking the rules of socially acceptable behavior, for the Japanese revelers). In both cases, the behavior is comparable to the symptoms of substance abuse: Short-term happiness followed by guilt, panic attacks (experiences described by our informants), the decision to quit, followed by a repetition of the exact same actions.

Both through research and observation, we have come to the conclusion that the happiness our informants were looking for was not the kind based on personal fulfillment, as appears to be the case in the Western world, nor on achieving the social harmony and balance that Kitayama and Markus (2000) suggest are indicators of happiness for Japanese people. Our fieldwork took place in what Manzenreiter (1998: 359) calls “pleasure-seeking” Japan, a place where the pursuit of happiness has hedonistic tendencies (most activities that are performed at Bardis lead to “contentment, delight, ecstasy, elation, enjoyment, euphoria, exhilaration, exultation, gladness, gratification, gratitude, joy, satisfaction,” terms that the Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy (Stanford University 2015) lists under the “pleasure” category), combined with a desire to escape the real world. Analyzing the Japanese concept of sakariba, Linhart concludes that for most Japanese men, who live under the pressure of social and family obligation, the drinking places are “a zone of liberty (kaihō kūkan), often the only one they have [...] The sakariba is the only place where the organization-man, a ‘correct person’ (majime ningen) – necessarily correct because he has a lifetime commitment to both his firm and his family – can act fumajime or ‘incorrectly’” (Linhart 1998: 238). Bardis is
indeed a place where people can act in complete disregard of the established social norms, but many of them do not lead daily life rigidly constrained by such norms, as is the case of the salarymen mentioned by Linhart (1998). They do try to escape from the real world pursuing a kind of pleasure that usually ends at dawn, setting invisible but clear limits to this midnight community. The owner of a nearby restaurant stopped talking to a Bardis customer because the latter posted some photos on Facebook, something he should not have done, because, to quote our informant, “what happens here ends in the morning and other people should not know about it.” Yet the world they are escaping from does not necessarily appear as one of socially imposed constraints, but rather one haunted by loneliness, as our analysis shall demonstrate.

During our interviews we promised to respect our informants’ privacy and did not ask many personal questions (although in many cases relevant information was offered voluntarily). We shall only use the nicknames that we obtained permission for, and the names of the owners and staff, who are part of the study only as facilitators, and not true members of the midnight community.

One night at Bardis unfolds according to the following pattern: One or more “friends” would stop by for a drink before heading to the dance club, then return after midnight and continue drinking, singing karaoke and trying to come up with amusing activities: Wearing clown wigs, painting on sleeping people’s faces, kissing each other – we are referring here to heterosexual men – and taking photos, trying out thongs and again digitally saving the image for future entertainment. More often than not, such “wild” fun would end up with one or more of the participants sleeping on the sofas inside the bar or on the steps outside. The players are usually male, although there are some permanent female members of the group, and their interaction with the others is quite interesting.

As Linhart notes, “the sakariba is predominantly a place for men. Men take the active role; they are the guests who pay for amusement, while women’s role is mainly to serve the men and earn money” (Linhart 1998: 236). This statement is partly true for Bardis; the customers are indeed mainly men, but there are no women to serve them and no women who expect them to pay for their drinks. The women who go to Bardis regularly are usually in their forties and have stable income sources; in many cases, they are business owners, a fact which grants them equal status within the group. As Martin says, “[w]omen who contribute to the group or family’s well-being are empowered relative to those in societies where women do not” (Martin 2015), and by not being financially dependent on the male customers, the female customers enjoy equal rights at Bardis: They might be asked (or do it of their own volition) to kiss somebody or show their bras, but such gestures often seem void of any sexual significance and we never observed two people bonding sexually or leaving Bardis together, although the love hotels are in the immediate vicinity. Such gestures, which would at least contain the hint of
an invitation in the Western world and in other places in Japan, appear to be no more exciting than donning a wig or drawing a moustache on a sleeping man’s face. It is interesting to observe how sex (one of the main factors associated with pleasure) holds a clearly minor position on the list of midnight pleasures the Bardis customers pursue. Although most of the customers are either single or divorced, they do not seem to be looking for specific companionship when they go to Bardis. We do know of three customers who were married at the time of our research: the deceased Mr. Fernandez, who was also involved in a declared open relationship with another woman, Mrs. H., a young and attractive club dancer who sometimes partied there more as part of her job, as she never appeared there when she was not dancing at the nearby On and On; and Mrs. K., a rich lady in her early sixties, who had declared that she enjoyed being surrounded by young people, so she would arrive early in the evening, pay for a few rounds of drinks for all the people who happened to be there at the same time, drink only pear juice herself and drive home before midnight. We admit that, coming from a culture where all forms of night entertainment seemed to lead to a single goal – sex – its absence from the Bardis community was quite surprising. One informant even declared to us: “You gaijin only think about sex, but we Japanese are different. And Japanese women don’t even like sex!” One person’s opinion does not represent a general truth, of course, but if we combine it with the phenomenon described above, we may conclude that the statistics connecting Japan’s low birthrate with the increasingly low sex drive of the Japanese people may contain more than a grain of truth.

**Freedom, happiness and alcohol**

Going to a bar in search of companionship or temporary relief from daily problems is not a rare occurrence either in the Western or Asian cultures, nor are relationships created in a drinking spot something out of the ordinary. At Captain Kangaroo, one Osaka bar so popular that it is among the top Lonely Planet (2015) recommendations, we could observe several groups of regular customers who first associated over a drink after work and then became close friends. In a behavioral pattern similar to the one from Bardis, they would gather there regardless of the day of the week and sometimes stay until morning, old customers even waiting for closing time in order to have breakfast with the manager. They would also engage in drinking games, dancing both inside the bar and in the street, comparing more or less intimate body parts, and the omnipresent face painting. Considering the widespread social tolerance towards public intoxication in Japan, such actions are not in the least surprising. In her research on Tokyo hostess clubs, Allison (1994) provides an accurate description of the Japanese attitude towards drinking and getting drunk, in total opposition to the stigma it would be attached to in the Western world:
The behavior that accompanies the drinking – throwing up, urinating in public, dancing on train platforms, falling asleep stretched out on the seat of a train, making passes at or otherwise insulting someone normally shown respect, speaking openly about things that usually go unsaid – all such behavior is for the most part excused [...]. Like insanity in the United States, drunkenness in Japan gains one an immunity from acts or behavior committed “under the influence.”

(Allison 1994: Kindle location 837)

However, even when it comes to such alcohol-induced behavior, there is an important difference between the establishments analyzed by Allison, Captain Kangaroo and other bars in Osaka, and Bardis: in most bars, people would go as a group, either in a work-related function or as friends. At Bardis, customers become a tightly knit group only after having arrived there. The groups we observed at Captain Kangaroo, for example, arrange to meet there and perform various activities together outside the bar, such as camping, hiking, barbecues or simple dinners. Bardis customers have almost no interaction with each other except for what happens inside the bar. They go to Bardis knowing that at least one of their acquaintances will be there, and in many cases the bartender himself would contact customers to let them know that so-and-so is already there and maybe they want to drop by for a drink. This complete lack of interaction outside the artificially created Bardis
environment is one of the most striking characteristics of the “midnight community,” emphasized by the unfortunate incident described in the introduction. Members of the “midnight community” more likely spend more time with each other than with their own families, they celebrate birthdays and even New Year there together, but once out of the confined and strangely secure borders of the night world, all contact and relationship cease to exist.

Cahn defines two types of “friendship” relationships in Japan: *tsukiai nakama*, the unavoidable connection between people who work together and which is very likely to end once the business relationship ends, and *shinyū*, which is based on personal affinities and shared interests and values (Cahn 1984). Bardis customers do not belong to either of the categories: Their relationship is not dictated by any kind of obligation, associating with people in the most intimate ways (excluding sex, but including close inspection and photographing of body parts that usually stay hidden) does not lead to profit in the business world, but at the same time one cannot talk about a genuine character affinity or mutual values, since most of the time a normal conversation at Bardis is impossible. Members of the Bardis community come from various social strata: a five-star hotel manager, a lawyer, an accountant, a couple of salarymen, one former convict of currently dubious occupation (a very nice and well-mannered gentleman otherwise), a restaurant owner, the owner of a transport company, the bartender from an Osaka swingers’ club, one gentleman with unconfirmed Yakuza associations. The only thing that connects them is their faithful attendance at the bar, in the pursuit of something akin to happiness.

Our research started from the following question: Why do people go there in an almost religious manner and what makes them spend about three nights a week in a small, dark space, full of cigarette smoke and alcohol fumes, their eardrums shaken by extremely loud karaoke sounds? In this, we started from an assumption that seems to be common in Western culture, “that a man can relax at home with his wife and kids” (Allison 1994: Kindle location 2065). We were aware that that was not necessarily the case in Japan, having become acquainted with the term “one cushion”: stopping at a restaurant/bar or at least the very cheap and convenient *tachinomi* (standing bars) for a short break between work and family life.

In an attempt to find out how true this perception was, we asked the question, “Where do you feel happiest?” to friends and acquaintances from several continents. The answer choices were a) home; b) work; c) bar/restaurant; d) gym; e) nature (forest/park/beach). In the first place, in order to get as many answers as possible from Japanese subjects, we used our Japanese students and those of our friends, but when we realized that the answers of individuals who have not experienced real life separation from family and various aspects of night life yet would not help our analysis, we decided to exclude them. The data we used here came from 90 respondents, from Japan, Austria, Belgium, Finland, France, Hungary, Israel, Poland, Romania, Russia, Australia, Canada, the United States, South Africa, Thailand and
Nepal. The respondents were all over 30 and employed, and the fact that we personally knew them helped us interpret the data. The members of the Bardis community were not included and, with five exceptions, all answers were either a) home, for those who had children, or e) nature, for those who were either single, or childless, but who lived what can be considered fulfilled and happy lives. We had two people indicating b) work, one being the owner of a very successful travel agency, whose work takes her and her family across the globe, and one person who had just gotten their dream job, working with children and international organizations. Three people said c) bar/restaurant: Two of them are stay-at-home mothers with very small children, so we would not be very far from the truth in assuming that what they had in mind was not a dimly lit bar with loud karaoke or fancy drinks, but a nice restaurant where they would not have to worry about cooking or cleaning after the meal. The other is a single woman in her late thirties, Japanese, who does not frequent Bardis, but who regularly goes to a different establishment because she finds it easy to talk to the bartender. Our informants from Bardis all said c) bar, when we interviewed them individually, and since we know that they only rarely go to other places, it is obvious that Bardis was the place to which they were referring.

During our interviews with the informants, we asked two more questions: First, why do you go to Bardis?; and second, how do you feel there: a) happy (shiawase); b) fun (tanoshi); c) energetic (genki); d) relaxed (rirakkusu); e) satisfied (manzoku)? It must be mentioned here that our informants were quite bewildered and clearly expressed their doubts about the purpose of our research; once we assured them that we do not intend to criticize anybody and no visual material will be published without permission, they did talk to us openly, but sometimes the reasons for their actions seemed to elude them. To the first question, we received various (albeit not very different) answers:

- It’s fun.
- I like Fuku-chan (that is, Mr. Yosuke Fukushima, the bartender).
- I meet friends here.
- I don’t know why. Sometimes, even when I don’t plan to come, I find myself here.

The most interesting statement was, “Only sad, lonely people come here.” While we have no way of accurately gauging happiness or sadness levels, it is true that the pattern of frequenting Bardis, particularly for those customers who go there on week nights, seems to indicate a need for companionship, to avoid returning to a place where nobody awaits them. The data we obtained through interviews suggests that this is the case: One informant was single, living with an elderly mother with whom he did not get along well; another was divorced, with two children who lived with her mother, because she had to work late most nights; another was also divorced, had a girlfriend, but she would not marry him because she was a public worker, while he was a truck
driver during the day and bartender in a swingers’ club for three nights a week; and yet another was a recent widower who spent much of his time at Bardis telling whomever was willing to listen about the places he had visited with his wife.

One surprising result was that when referring to the second question, all our subjects either completely ignored the choices, or said b) fun, adding kokochi-ii (“comfortable”). We also interviewed a club dancer, who frequents the place not for personal reasons, but as a courtesy to fellow workers from the same mizu shōbai trade (“sex amusement”), and who is familiar with the regular customers. When asked why she thought the same people gathered there every week, she responded with precisely the same word: kokochi-ii. Not only a comfortable place, but a place to be. A place to belong.

**Elusive happiness and ephemerality**

In their analysis of happiness as a cultural construct, Uchida, Norasakkunkit and Kitayama state that in North America, happiness is centered on the self, “a state contingent on both personal achievement and positivity of the personal self,” while “in East Asia happiness is likely to be construed as a state that is contingent on social harmony and, thus, on a balance among different selves in a relationship” (Uchida et al. 2004: 227). In other words, when comparing Occidental and Asian cultures, happiness can be seen as the well-being of the individual self versus the self in harmonious relationship with the community. In both cultures, however, solitude does not lead to long-lasting happiness, as we are basically social beings and are programmed to crave companionship. The company of another human being and maybe, in the best-case scenario, a meaningful long-term relationship is what most people who frequent bars alone are looking for, whether they are aware of it or not. In many cases, they do obtain the desired result: We personally know three couples who met at Captain Kangaroo and eventually got married. Real friendships were forged there, the proof being the activities organized outside the bar environment, in broad daylight, by people who initially met at night.

Nevertheless, this is not the case of the “midnight community.” The activities they share take place exclusively at night, beginning with subdued drinking followed by increasingly loud singing, then pranks and a type of slapstick fun that seems designed to proclaim that the participants are enjoying themselves to the maximum. The hardcore members will stay until late morning, almost noon sometimes, and the only activity they perform together that does not require artificial lights is a late breakfast somewhere in the Nishi Tenma neighborhood. Bardis itself, with its lack of windows and soundproof walls, is an isolated environment, an unreal world characterized not by what it offers, but by what it lacks. According to Tada (1980), within Japanese leisure, alcohol and a collective setting are what sets an individual free, and it is this kind of unlimited yet futile freedom that can be observed at Bardis. Participants find an ephemeral happiness through the lack of
responsibility for one’s actions and behavior, lack of peer judgment (or approval, for that matter: Once inside Bardis and as long the imposition on the others is not too great, one can follow one’s heart’s desires), lack of stress and lack of concern about what the others might think. If for a certain member even the lack of his necktie would be a grave offense during daytime, the same person will find that wearing a thong and sitting on a sleeping fellow’s head is perfectly acceptable at Bardis. Also, for somebody who has nobody and nothing awaiting at home, the Saturday night fiesta followed by the Sunday alcohol-imbibed breakfast becomes an event to look forward to during the week.

Both through personal observation and as a result of interviewing Mr. Fukushima, we came to realize that the busiest nights at Bardis are Friday and Saturday, as can be expected, and also Thursday, which is rather surprising, taking into account the fact that Thursday night would be followed by a workday. However, as mentioned at the beginning, many customers do not hesitate to spend weeknights at Bardis, one young female informant actually stating that she “needed to take a break from Bardis.” Ms. M. has two jobs, being an office lady during the day and a club dancer at night; she is divorced and has two children who live with her parents, but whenever she has a night off she comes to Bardis, because she needs “to relax and feel good.” Mr. K., the truck driver/bartender in the swingers’ club, also comes regularly whenever he is not bartending, “to have fun in his own way,” and according to his testimony, even when he gets extremely intoxicated in other places, feels the need to come and unwind at Bardis. “I usually regret it,” he said, “because the hangover is worse after I come here, but somehow I have to come.” Another customer, a salaryman in his mid-twenties who discovered the bar during a party to celebrate his upcoming move to Canada ended up working there part-time, not for cash, but for drinks and companionship. The customer in question had first gone to Bardis in spring 2013, his move to Canada for language learning purposes being scheduled for December the same year. Despite the fact that he had already quit his job in the summer, he finally managed to get away from Bardis and follow his original plans in autumn 2014.

We find that all these actions are strong indicators of addiction, not to alcohol, but to an environment that is a substitute for real human relationships and which, like any addictive substance, has only short-term efficacy, thus requiring increasingly frequent and stronger doses. Friday and Saturday are the obvious choices for drinking until late at night (or early in the morning), the bar is closed on Sunday (when its customers have to recover from hangovers) and Monday, and by Thursday withdrawal symptoms appear and customers head to Bardis whether they had planned to or not. The illusion is further supported by the bartender, Mr. Fukushima, who has proven an excellent listener, much like the rabbi in the joke, who tells all those who come to him with a complaint, “You are right.” Regardless of his personal likes and dislikes, he joins the fun without exception, but his personal life is a well-kept
secret – as far as we know, we were the only ones, besides the owner of the bar, who knew that he had a serious girlfriend whom he intended to marry. The deception was not meant for the single women attending the bar for its handsome bartender (as we mentioned at the beginning, which is not really the case at Bardis), but is rather part of the game that sets Bardis outside the borders of the real world. As most of the customers are single, divorced or widowed, the bartender (who is younger than most of them) with a steady girlfriend would be a permanent reminder that he is different, that he simply works there and might not need their companionship as much as they need his. A single young man with love troubles, on the other hand, becomes a welcome member of the group, especially when they jokingly try to introduce him for romantic purposes to various women, only to conclude that he is gay and should attempt to find a male partner.

The only way to escape addiction and the illusory world of the “midnight community” is to find a cure for loneliness, a phenomenon that we were able to witness. Charley, one of the regular customers, found a girlfriend and eventually got engaged, a fact which put an end to his long visits to Bardis. He still goes there once in a while, usually accompanied by his girlfriend, but the visits are short, more of a way to politely keep in touch with the bartender than a true desire to become again an active member of the community. Another proof of the shift from midnight to midday, from an isolated, closed world to the real world that most of us can witness, are his Facebook photos: While the old ones, dark, ridiculous, and sometimes half obscene, have not been deleted, they have been replaced by bright ones, taken in the various spots he visited with his girlfriend, with smiles that have not been affected by alcohol consumption.

Conclusions

In the introduction to her study on the Tokyo hostess world, Allison notes that the nightlife behavior she analyzed is “a fixture of life in Tokyo, particularly among corporate middle-class men,” and she goes on to wonder: “What kind of fixture is it? And what does it fix, to what end, and for whom?” (Allison 1994: Kindle location 168). The hostess phenomenon she studied is specific to Japanese society, as is the social acceptance of alcohol consumption (while in our native Romania most commercial breaks end with the warning that excessive consumption of salt, sugar and alcohol is bad for health, in Japan, particularly before the end of the year, when all the corporate parties take place, medicine and supplements that help you drink more without suffering the consequences are widely advertised), and one cannot help but wonder what are its purposes and effects on society. When we decided to make Bardis our research site, our aims were to discover both the mechanisms that created and maintain the “midnight community,” and whether this is an isolated phenomenon in Japanese nightlife or a universal feature. Due to various limitations, we were unable to perform an extensive
analysis of bars in Osaka, therefore the present chapter remains a case study. However, after having interviewed owners, managers and bartenders from several establishments both in the posh Kita area (northern Osaka) and in the gaudier and more youth-oriented Minami area (southern Osaka), we can state with a high degree of confidence that Bardis is, if not a unique, at least an extremely rare environment. Loneliness and the search for companionship are features that define the customers of other bars in Osaka (and most cities of the world, for that matter), but the creation of an exclusively “midnight community” at Bardis was facilitated by several elements combined. First, the location and environment isolate Bardis from the exterior world, creating boundaries more solid than those in a bar where people can casually enter because they liked the sign or just felt like having a drink after dinner. Second, the long opening hours (which are not entirely legal) mean that by the time customers get home on Sunday morning, they are tired enough not to worry about having to fill somehow the loneliness of a Sunday without family or friends. Third, being an introduction-based establishment and a fairly small one ensures a clientele who will not act violently or cause any damage to the bar. This in turn allows the customers to behave in any manner they wish, and thus they feel completely unrestrained, while the owner does not fear the destruction of his business or unwanted visits from the police. In this respect, we may say that the members of the “midnight community” do have something in common: Their raucous behavior is limited to singing, getting drunk and the above-mentioned slapstick jokes, which may be annoying, but which are not harmful. This lack of boundaries, rules, and peer judgment combined with the illusion of friendship is what keeps the “midnight community” addicted to Bardis, and, like any addiction, it leads to a vicious circle: People go to Bardis looking for a happiness that will elude them as long as they avoid forming relationships in the real world, relationships that may have rules and restrictions, but which last beyond the symbolical last clock strike that marks the end of the ball.

Notes

1 In this chapter we are going to use the names that we agreed on with our informants. In most cases, they are either the real names or the nicknames they use while frequenting the bar that is the subject of our study.
2 Despite being generally associated with prostitution and gambling, establishments categorized under the generic term of fūzoku eigyō include all types of restaurants, bars, cafés and other similar businesses.

References


Part III

Conclusions
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Introduction

In Japan in the 2010s, social and institutional strictures on individuals are lessening, and Japan is beginning to accept a broader range of life choices than was the case in the last four decades of the 20th century, when the middle-class corporate employee husband/full-time housewife model was the societal ideal if not the reality. In this sense, Japan seems to be following the neoliberal wave sweeping the globe, rendering well-being and happiness not a societal but rather an individual responsibility. Will a poorer but more individualistic and socially diverse Japan of the future be happier than a richer but more socially constraining, group-oriented Japan of the high-growth era?

In this chapter, I provide glimpses of Japanese happiness and its lack in an era in which Japanese structural differences from many Western societies are diminishing due to the global wave of neoliberalism. I begin by discussing how Japanese society is less happy in statistical measurements than it should be, given Japan's comparatively high level of global well-being in terms of objective indicators such as education levels and life expectancy. This may be due in part to linguistic and cultural errors of measurement, but it may also be due to the fact that Japanese society has had a number of structural inflexibilities that may work against optimal happiness for some of its members. I then discuss how happiness is fundamentally individual; we can measure how happy a person is, but not what makes them happy, which varies from person to person. Even within its role-bound recent past, idealizing the corporate worker/full-time housewife family, happiness has been individual; but this is all the more so today, in that social and institutional strictures on individuals are lessening, and my data point to the fact that there is a sense of heibon no shiawase (ordinary happiness) held by many in Japan. Japan today is changing both in terms of increasingly accepting a broader range of life choices than in the recent past, and in allowing more room for the individual.
Japanese unhappiness: A fault of measurement or a fault of society?

Most social scientists who study happiness believe that statistical measures are the best way to proceed, using surveys asking respondents questions such as, “Overall, how happy are you with your life?” on a scale of one to ten, and then using responses to compare specific populations within a given culture or across cultures. However, anthropologists tend to believe that statistical measures are not fully sufficient to understand happiness: They leave out the sociocultural context, which is most essential. Anthropologists typically do extended ethnographic research, talking to a very small number of people at great length about their lives. If social scientists such as psychologists and economists who use statistics to examine happiness are broad and shallow in their research, by asking many people to answer survey questions without ever actually speaking to them, anthropologists are narrow and deep. I am an anthropologist; however, before discussing my own ethnographic study of happiness, let me briefly discuss what the statistical study of happiness in Japan can offer, as well as why it is lacking. I do this because the statistical analysis of happiness in Japan and elsewhere has been extremely influential, and thus needs to be addressed.

One recent extremely comprehensive survey of happiness cross-culturally is the *World happiness report* (Helliwell et al. 2013). In this survey, Japan does not score as highly as might be expected. Very broadly speaking, countries that score highly on the Human Development Index (United Nations Development Programme 2014), which ranks countries in accordance with an array of objective variables such as life expectancy, education and income, score high measurements of happiness as well: personal senses of happiness are typically closely linked to objective measures of well-being. However, whereas Japan ranks 17th on the Human Development Index for 2013 (United Nations Development Programme 2014), it ranks only 43rd in the *World happiness report* (Helliwell et al. 2013: 22), below societies such as Thailand, Mexico, and Saudi Arabia. Japan has one of the highest life expectancies, and is one of the most educated and prosperous countries in the world (Coulmas 2010: 1–2), but apparently its people do not feel particularly happy, at least as indicated by these survey results, and as reflected in other cross-cultural surveys of happiness as well. Why might this be the case?

It may be that cross-cultural statistical surveys of happiness are flawed, and cannot be fully relied upon. In Diener and Suh’s (2000) seminal edited book *Culture and subjective well-being*, one chapter asks, “Why are North Americans happier than East Asians?” (Suh 2000: 64, 72). This is what statistical surveys unambiguously show, but do these surveys really reveal the reality of happiness or its lack, or are they rather the product of surveys themselves and their culturally shaped responses?

There are very significant reasons for thinking that the latter may be the case. In a society such as the United States, declaring in one of its founding documents the inalienable right to “the pursuit of happiness,” its members
may seem all but culturally required to pursue and proclaim happiness in order to feel fully American. In East Asian societies such as Japan, on the other hand, personal modesty is a key social value – one should not boast about one’s success or declare too loudly one’s well-being. To proclaim happiness, even in an anonymous survey, may be an affront to good manners. Thus it seems very plausible that North Americans are not “happier than East Asians,” but are simply more willing to proclaim their happiness on a survey form (Mathews and Izquierdo 2009: 7).

Coulmas (2010: 9–11) points out that the problem in cross-cultural comparisons of happiness is both one of language – Japanese terms for happiness such as shiawase do not have the same semantic domain as terms such as happiness, and thus translation is problematic – and also of culture, as discussed above, with happiness meaning different things and being valued to different extents in different societies. Uchida and Ogihara (2012) argue that while in Euro-American contexts, happiness is defined in terms of personal achievement, for East Asians, happiness is defined more in terms of interpersonal connectedness, implying that measurement of happiness on a common cross-cultural scale may potentially be problematic. Plath (1980) makes a similar argument from an ethnographic perspective concerning the meanings of maturity in Japan as opposed to the United States. Psychologists investigating well-being, such as Uchida and her collaborators, have become increasingly aware of the difficulties in cross-cultural measurement, and have been exploring the cross-cultural construals of happiness in very subtle ways. However, while psychologists and other quantitative social scientists are clearly becoming more sophisticated, they are nonetheless wholly reliant on statistical surveys in their cross-cultural comparisons, and thus cannot avoid the biases that may be inherent in these surveys. I have argued (Mathews 2012) that in order to avoid such biases, cross-cultural statistical surveys of happiness must be combined with ethnographic interviews and interpretations by specialists in a given society in order to get a fully valid picture of the state of happiness in that society.

Despite my skepticism, however, I do think that statistical measurements of happiness may indeed have a degree of validity. Although cross-cultural biases of various sorts are inherent in such surveys, the data of these surveys should not be ignored. In the case of Japan, the fact that subjective senses of happiness lag considerably below more objective indicators of well-being may be due not simply to problems in surveys but to problems in society.

Japanese society over the past 60 years has had a number of inflexible structural features that seem likely to create unhappiness in a significant number of its members. One feature has been the inflexibility of career paths. In societies such as the United States and Australia, individuals may try a number of different career paths in their lives before settling on one: They may not “find themselves” until they are in their thirties or later. A person who goes to law school or earns a graduate degree in their thirties or forties with the aim of starting a new career is common and unremarkable: People
may change their jobs and careers with some frequency. In Japan, however, this remains unusual. In Japan, there is a ritualized shūshoku katsudō (short: shūkatsu), the “job-hunting” period beginning, for prospective white-collar workers, in one’s junior year of university; if one does not engage in shūkatsu by one’s late twenties, at absolute latest, then finding a career-track job may be impossible (Genda 2001: 82). It is true that “lifetime employment” in Japanese corporations has been significantly fraying, and it is also true that many young people quit their career-track jobs a few years after beginning them. Nonetheless, the system of shūkatsu for lifetime employment has meant that a significant number of Japanese are stuck in jobs that they feel no calling towards, and that they may dislike, simply because they did not realize what they wanted to do in their lives until it seemed too late to change. Over and over again, I have heard in my interviews complaints like this from a salaryman in his late forties: “I didn’t know what I wanted to do with my life when I was in my early twenties, so I became a salaryman for the company that seemed most prestigious among those that offered me employment. Sometimes I do wish that I’d followed a different path in my life.” There remains little flexibility in large companies for individual growth and transformation.

A second factor has been the marked division of gender roles in Japan since around 1960 (Nagata 2004: 129), whereby men have been expected to work outside the home to economically support their families, and women, after marriage and the birth of a child, to stay home and raise their children and do the housework. Thus a women who has sought a career faced – and still faces, to a degree – considerably greater obstacles, such as discrimination and lack of recognition and promotion, than her counterparts in most Western societies. By the same token, a man who has sought to devote himself to family has typically not been able to do so, due to the demands of work. This is significantly changing (Mathews 2014; Rebick and Takenaka 2006), but still remains – the average wage of women as compared to men remains lower in Japan than in any other developed country. This is not to say that a woman who wants to live for work or a man who seeks to live for family cannot do it – of course they can – but only that significant social and structural barriers remain, barriers that may discourage and dissuade them.

There are other structural barriers as well, such as those inherent in the educational system, in its emphasis on memorization and examinations at the expense of critical thinking. All in all, Japanese institutions seem to continue to embody a degree of structural inflexibility that make Japan a significantly less happy society than it might otherwise be, simply because these institutions do not allow individuals much choice and much room as to how they seek to live their lives.

Yet Japanese society does seem to be significantly changing, in the experience of a wide range of people with whom I have spoken: While institutions such as companies and schools may remain relatively inflexible, Japanese society as a whole seems notably more individualistic and accepting of
individual difference than it was 30 and 40 years ago. I first lived in Japan in 1980, and first began doing ethnographic research in Japan in 1989 (Mathews 1996), in Sapporo, ethnographically investigating *ikigai*, “that which makes life seem worth living.” Over the past 25 years, I have followed many of the same people in their lives, and come to know various new people too, to understand several dozen Japanese people and their senses of happiness in their lives quite well. This chapter is based on interviews conducted in 2011, and then again in May and June 2015, with 35 Japanese individuals in all, as to what happiness means to them in their lives in a very practical sense.

I also read a dozen popular Japanese advice and self-help books addressing in different ways the question of how to lead a happy life in Japan. Coulmas (2010: 14) has discussed the explosion of book publications on happiness in Japan in the 1980s, 1990s and 2000s, as well as the tendency in the 2000s of political parties to include terms such as happiness (*shiawase*) in their slogans. Since then, the “explosion” has continued: In going to Japanese bookstores in May and June 2015, I found that if I had bought every book with happiness in its chapter titles, I would have left every medium-sized bookstore that I went to with more books than I could comfortably carry. Why has there been such an explosion of books on happiness? I discuss this below: Based on both the interviews I conducted and the advice books I have perused, I explore in the pages that follow what happiness means in Japan today. However, before turning to Japan, we must consider what happiness means in a more universal sense.

**The individuality of happiness/the individualization of Japan**

The experience of happiness is individual: While we can surmise as to what makes someone happy, and while we can ask them what makes them happy, the experience of happiness is fundamentally subjective. Surveys such as those discussed in the last section ask “How happy are you with your life?” and can numerically compare across cultures and between individuals, but they do not get at the source or experience of happiness. Cross-cultural research on happiness explores elements that can increase happiness. Broadly speaking (see Layard 2005), within a country, the top quarter of income earners tend to be a little happier than the bottom quarter, but not much. In personal happiness, “relative deprivation” is a key factor: It is not what we have that counts, but how that compares to what everyone else has. We are in a “status race,” whether for money, rank, or reputation; but the problem with a status race is that you cannot ever really win. In most countries, age is not a factor – if anything, older people are somewhat happier than younger people on average. Gender is not a factor either. Looks are not a factor, researchers say, nor is IQ; education is a small factor (Layard 2005: 62). There is a significant genetic component to happiness: perhaps 50 percent of happiness is genetic, researchers have estimated (ibid.: 62). Seven factors most important to happiness in the United States in particular, but probably elsewhere as well,
include: a) family relationships; b) financial situation; c) work; d) community and friends; e) health; f) personal freedom; and g) personal values (ibid.: 63–73).

These factors are no doubt in play in Japan as well, despite cultural differences, and yet ultimately these factors do not get at individual happiness, for they cannot probe the barriers of the individual mind. To take the matter at its most extreme, it is at least possible that a mass murderer or a child molester is supremely happy in what they do. These examples are utterly repugnant, but because happiness is subjective, we cannot judge otherwise. One recent advice book states (Hirokane 2014: 184), “if you ask ten people, you'll find ten different things that make them happy.” I tried to get at this in my interviews by asking three questions: a) “If you saw your life today when you were 20, how would you feel? Would you be satisfied? Relieved? Disappointed? Why?” b) “What was the happiest time of your life? What were you doing that made you so happy?,” and c) “In your life these days, when are you most happy?” With these three questions, I sought to get at happiness in both its intimate day-to-day aspects – happiness as experienced in one’s day-to-day life – and its life course aspects: happiness as felt as unfolding over the course of one’s life. I also asked two broader questions: d) “Do you think that most people in Japan are happy? Why?/Why not?” and e) “What changes in Japanese society could make it happier, do you think?”

Japan in the 1960s, 1970s, and 1980s was sometimes described as being fundamentally different in its premises from Western societies. Robert J. Smith devoted his book Japanese society: Tradition, self, and the social order (1983) to showing how an advanced industrial society could emerge from outside Western Europe or the United States that was based on fundamentally different sociocultural premises than those Western societies. Among these premises are the immersion of the individual into social role and group: men devoting themselves to their work and company, and women to their families. This is depicted, to take just one of countless examples, in a chilling story by Kuroi Senji (1990), describing how a man finds that his wife no longer responds to her name anymore, but insists that he call her “wife” and she call him “husband” – as if to signify that the individual self has been entirely swallowed by role. Today, the pressure of role and group on the individual remain more powerful in Japan than in many Western societies, but these exert somewhat less power than in the recent past.

If Japanese society in its postwar version has indeed been based on a sacrifice of personal freedom of choice, as was discussed in the last section, many lives have not followed this pattern – in my research over 25 years, I have known some Japanese at all stages of the life course who are remarkably individualistic, following their own path in life regardless of what anyone else says about them, and regardless of any institutional pressures they may face (see, for example, Mathews 1996: 118–123, 155–160). I have often felt that the most individualistic people I have ever met are Japanese, in that, unlike Americans, they have had to vociferously resist social and institutional pressures in asserting themselves; if these people are successful in following
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their own path, they are often remarkably happy in their lives. I have also
known corporate workers and full-time housewives, sararīman and sengyō
shufu, who are generally happy in their lives; while the social conformity
demanded by these roles has been quite marked, some I have spoken with
have found this conformity to be not a burden but a blessing (see, for example
Mathews 1996: 57–62, 70–75). Nonetheless, for most of the people I have
spoken with over the years, from 1989 to 2015, the burden was significantly
felt, particularly by corporate workers – I have met a number of sengyō shufu
who felt very happy in their lives, but I have never known a sararīman who
expressed complete happiness with work life. These roles very much con-
strained the life freedom of those who held to them in their larger life course,
but within their standard patterns of childraising and climbing the corporate
ladder, happiness on a day-to-day and year-to-year basis remained very much
individual, unknown to others. I interviewed a couple in their sixties in 2015
who, when they discussed the happiest time of their lives in the past and
today, were surprised at one another’s answers: the joy he had taken in fly
fishing when he was in his forties, the enormous pleasure she takes in watch-
ing Korean dramas. Even in the most patterned and structured lives of com-
pany workers and housewives, what makes them happy is individual, and may
be unknown even to those to whom they are closest.

Today, the social and institutional strictures upon individuals are sig-
ificantly lessening in Japan, at least among the people I interviewed as com-
pared to 20 and 30 years ago. A professor in his fifties told me in 2015 of how his
wife as a child was forced to drink milk with her school lunch in her elementary
school; no one in the class could leave unless she drank her milk, and so every
day she was forced to do something that made her physically ill for the sake
of rules binding the larger group. Today, “this is unthinkable,” he said: Teach-
ers are more cognizant of individual differences and problems, and would
not force a student in this way. This tolerance for individual difference is not just
the case in schools but also in companies, I was told. A corporate executive in
her fifties, working at a well-known Japanese company, spoke of how, when she
began her work 30-some years ago, “if your superiors asked you to go drinking
with them, you had to do it. But today that’s no longer true. Today, young
employees will just say, ‘Sorry, I have something else I have to do tonight,’ and
brush you off.” She portrayed this change as a corporate response to growing
individualism among employees, rather than to a loosening of the company
itself, except as a necessary response. But the corporation has changed:
Although she was too modest to note it, she herself had attained a corporate
rank that few or no female employees could have hoped for 30 years ago.

This shift should not be exaggerated. I spent an afternoon in June 2015
with seven young people ranging from 18 to 30 years of age, who had decided to
leave Japan to go to the United States for undergraduate or graduate training,
and were at a Japanese English-language school preparing for the transition.
When I asked these young people why they wanted to leave Japan, a corpo-
rate employee with a career-track position said that her company had no
understanding at all of what she sought to do in her life, and it was her hatred of the limitations that it placed upon her that had led her to quit a job that many young people would give much to have. A high-school student said that his hatred of the conformity of his school life had led him to seek a better, more accepting education overseas. Others I interviewed also emphasized that companies and schools remain mired in their conservative ways – as a teacher told me, “the best way to make Japan a happier society is to transform the school system!”

The psychologist Kawai Hayao criticizes parents who say they want their children to be happy, but what they really mean is for their children to get good grades, and then go to a good university and work for a good company (Kawai 2014: 23–24). This is the standard middle-class life course that is disdained for being too limiting by many, and which is also recognized as unattainable for increasing numbers of young Japanese, for whom a full-time career-track job may never materialize. However, antipathy towards institutions such as companies and schools seems held only by a minority of the young Japanese I know. To return to the class, the other five students expressed no dislike for Japanese institutions, and no sense that their lives were constrained by institutions such as school or company; they said, simply, that, in the words of one, “Japan is small, and I want to challenge myself in a bigger world.” They felt that Japan was a comfortable rather than a constraining place to live, but they simply sought something larger. When I asked all the people I interviewed, “How would you describe Japan as a society, in brief?,” “comfortable” and “convenient” were the adjectives they most often responded with. The professor in his fifties responded:

Japan seems so secure and peaceful. Yes, it’s not as rich as it was 25 years ago, but it’s very easy to lead a good life. The downside is that young people have no more big dreams. Still, they can live comfortably, even if they can’t become full-time employees in big companies. By living with their parents, they can lead reasonable lives: no one is worried about starving. They can have māmā no seikatsu (an ordinary type of living), heibon no jinsei (an ordinary life) and that’s enough for them.

Overseas news reports often are pessimistic in their reporting about Japan, emphasizing that the country has been economically bypassed in the past 25 years, that the population is aging and decreasing, that young people cannot find regular employment in a constrained economy, and that there is a growing number of truly poverty-stricken people, such as single mothers or old people whose pensions are insufficient to pay for things such as heating. All of these are true, but it is also true that Japan remains, in general, a wealthy society, as well as a society more flexible than in its recent past. This is the root of the feeling of heibon no shiawase (ordinary happiness) among many of the people I interviewed. Life for them was not great, but pretty good, they sensed.
A man who, when I interviewed him 25 years ago, felt resentment at Japanese society for all its constraining effects of people’s lives today feels quite differently. He had been a sarariman for a few years, then quit, divorcing his wife and leaving his family in the process, to start his own coffee shop. Now, after ten years he has closed his coffee shop and seeks to try his fortune overseas. As he told me in June 2015, “I really feel a great appreciation for Japan now. I’ve been able to live freely, exactly as I want to in this society,” despite the atypical path he has taken. Although there has been a toll suffered by the people around him for his path (as his 22-year-old son told me, “I like my father because he is a really interesting human being, but he was the worst father [otōsan toshite, saitei”], and although he faces an uncertain future (I asked him, “what will you do if no one in Australia wants to give a job to a guy in his fifties who doesn’t speak much English?”), he feels quite happy in his life because he has been able to live as he wants in a Japanese society that was wealthy enough and tolerant enough to enable him to do so. He fears that Japan will go bankrupt in a few years, but for now enjoys the happiness that Japan’s prosperity has enabled him to feel.

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In Japanese books of the 1960s, 1970s and 1980s discussing happiness and ikigai, the sense of what makes life seem worth living, an interesting conflict was apparent. Some books spoke of ikigai in terms of living for others and sacrificing one’s own selfish desires in order to create a better society (Niwano 1969), while others described ikigai in terms of living for oneself and finding one’s own path towards self-realization (Kobayashi 1989; see Mathews 1996: 12–26). Advice books written on happiness in the 2000s and 2010s follow the same broad trajectories; one can still find both kinds of books, with one book advocating that “you should be useful to others” in your work and life in order to be most fulfilled (Ōyama 2015), and another saying that “you should separate yourself from the group, particularly the company, and follow your own path in life” (Kawakita 2015). Of course these two ideals are not necessarily contradictory, but typically they are phrased as if they are: of subordinating one’s own desires to others versus following one’s own path.

In the advice books I read in 2015, it seems that the tide has shifted towards the self. It is difficult to find many books urging self-sacrifice – instead, they more typically say, “develop yourself”; “follow your own individual path in seeking happiness.” One book advises young women who are told that they should quit their jobs and get married and have children, to think hard: “If you try to fit the image of happiness, or imitate other people’s happiness, it won’t make you happy” (Arikawa 2010: 69). This book is quite conservative in many respects, not least in addressing itself to women as if they were a different entity from men, and yet it in the end advocates one’s own individual judgment about one’s life over all else, particularly over sekentei, the constraining opinions of other people. Another book, written
especially for men who have reached the age of 50, advises that the reader should “appreciate your parents but don’t be Mother Teresa” in taking care of them (Hirokane 2014: 59): They have raised you, but you have your own family and life to be concerned about. It also says, “don’t compare yourself to other people, for you are yourself and they are themselves […] But if you feel like you need to complain about something and have to compare […] then make sure that you compare yourself to people less well off than you, so that you won’t feel envy” (Hirokane 2014: 47–48). It counsels, “keep a degree of distance from your wife […] If you don’t want to be deserted by your wife, leave her her own space and respect her as a human being” (ibid.: 160–161). It advises, “by the time you reach age fifty, throw away life dreams you cannot possibly attain […] Instead of dreams, have plans and aims” (ibid.: 115, 119). These are very practical – while a few of these bits of advice have a particular Japanese resonance (relating, for example, to the growing prevalence of post-retirement divorce sought by wives who cannot bear to live with their husbands now that they are home all the time, and who bear a particular resentment at having to care for the husband’s parents), by and large these are the kinds of commonsense advice that are universal for aging men in affluent countries anywhere.

The most interesting advice book I read (Pha 2015) was one specifically aimed at those presumably young people who do not want to work for a company, who do not want to have a family, and who do not seek to make money – those who have left Japanese conventional norms. This is genuinely new in Japan: There were no books like this in Japan 30, 40, and 50 years ago. The book’s author, who gives himself the very un-Japanese pen-name “Pha,” was a graduate of a top university and an employee of a company, but quit after a few years, once he found that he could make enough money to survive by designing internet webpages. He talks at length about his life in a “shared house” with other unmarried friends, his ability to live cheaply on 1 million yen per year (a staggeringly small amount by Japanese standards), and his very unhurried life. Most important for this analysis is his discussion of how Japanese society has changed: “Fifty years ago, the ideal in Japanese society was that everyone marries … with the husband working for a company and the wife raising the children … This was the ideal model of the happy family … But with societal change, this model can no longer cover many people … That is only one way of living, but today alternatives to this are not yet fully accepted, and so people are suffering” (Pha 2015: 9–10).

Japanese society has changed because economically companies cannot afford to offer full-time jobs to all who seek them, and a single income often cannot support an entire family. Much of Japanese societal worry over furitâ (“freeter,” or young people who work in temporary rather than regular employment) and parasaito shinguru (young people in their thirties and older who continue to live at home with their parents rather than getting married to start families of their own) has been misguided, in that these new choices of young people often do not reflect their own free will, but rather their limited
possibilities within an increasingly unfavorable economic environment. At the same time, however, the increasingly broad array of lifestyles this can offer, as highlighted by the pseudonymous Pha, represents a more diverse set of possibilities for personal happiness than existed in Japan of the 1960s, 1970s and 1980s. One of the happiest people I interviewed was a woman in her early fifties who has never married, and who teaches a dozen students English in her tiny apartment to make her living, and who, although economically straitened, seems to have few worries. When I asked her about her future, she said, “I will choose a few close friends, and we will live together in our old age.”

From these books, as well as from interviews, I see two large trends. First, and most obvious, is exactly the situation described in the book by Pha discussed above: Japanese economic and societal trends in recent years mean that the old sarariman/sengyō shufu model family is becoming unsustainable as the single Japanese model; diversity must emerge to fit the reality today for many people, younger people especially. Beyond this, there seems to be an increasing reliance in all these books, whether more or less “liberal” or “conservative,” on the individual: the individual is told, unequivocally, “decisions about your life are finally yours alone.”

Why is this happening? One reason is that the Japanese group model, based on the security of family and company, has distinctly frayed, with lifetime employment no longer secure for many employees even of large companies, and with divorce rates increasing. Thus only oneself can be relied upon. However, this is linked to a larger shift: the worldwide sweep of neoliberal ideology, whereby governments increasingly abdicate responsibility for providing for their citizens’ welfare and well-being, and happiness becomes a fundamentally individual responsibility.

In her indictment of the American happiness industry, Ehrenreich (2009: 100) explores how “positive thinking” becomes “a means of social control in the workplace, a goad to perform at ever-higher levels,” masking the reality of corporate restructuring and downsizing. With real jobs disappearing, the positive thinkers counseled people to work ever harder on themselves (ibid.: 193) – unlike totalitarian societies, where the state monitors people’s thoughts, in the United States people monitor their own thoughts. A similar process seems to be taking place in Japan. Ikeda (2015: 26–29), to take just one example, offers these philosophical maxims: “Don’t compare your happiness to others … You can’t judge happiness by externals such as money … Happiness is not external but internal … Be grateful for being alive.” All of this is quite true, and even wise, but is at the same time a virtual neoliberal primer: This advice, most basically, is that “happiness is your responsibility – it’s all up to you.” As Marx might have written were he alive today, “happiness is the opium of the people,” since by focusing on their own happiness, people ignore the injustices in their society and may not work to rectify those injustices; indeed, they may not even comprehend those injustices.
As touched upon earlier, almost all the Japanese people I interviewed spoke of greater room for individual leeway in Japan today than in the recent past. Most I spoke with viewed this positively, as portrayed in the last section, but a woman in her fifties I interviewed – a part-time teacher – noted that while Japan is indeed becoming freer for individuals, what this means is that those who can express themselves and are capable do very well, but those who cannot, simply fall back into their old roles, and complain, but do nothing. She spoke specifically about Japanese women:

In mass media today, women see superwomen, who can do everything. They think, “why can’t I do that?” and make excuses because they cannot. Japan is better than before in terms of sekentei – the opinions of other people don’t matter as much as they once did – but because there are many ways that an unhappy woman can make her life better, those who cannot do this can only complain. Japan is freer than before but there is a huge gap between those who can express themselves and who are capable, and those who can’t …

This is true in terms of gender, with capable women such as the executive mentioned earlier potentially free from past gender role restrictions, but it is also true in terms of social class. Japan is, increasingly, a class society (Gotô et al. 2007), with an ever-growing gap between rich and poor, just as is the case in most capitalist societies in our neoliberal era, not least the United States. In a world in which secure social roles are for more and more people a thing of the past, happiness is a matter of individual effort and consciousness alone.

A bestselling book in 2015 is entitled Kazoku to iu yamai (The illness called family) (Shimojū 2015), with unremittingly dark accounts of family dysfunction, due in her analysis to everyone only playing their social roles and never being individuals. In my interviews, I found remarkably few marriages that seemed happy (see Mathews 2014). Partly, a couple’s complaints about one another to me reflected personal modesty (in Japan, one does not typically gush, “oh, we are so happy together!”), but more so reflected general discontent. When I asked couples, “If there is reincarnation, in the next life do you want to be together?”, I saw many shrugs and eye rolls, but only rarely an assent. I earlier mentioned the advice book that warns middle-aged men that after retirement their wives may have every reason to leave them, since they have lived different lives for 30 or more years (Hirokane 2014: 158–161). This was echoed in my interviews: A married woman in her fifties, possibly reflecting on her own future with her retired husband, said: “For lots of women I know, after 30 years of being apart [with the husband at his company most of the time], there’s no reason to be together after the husband retires.” A woman in her sixties bluntly said, in front of her husband, that she was upset even seeing him around the house, and was far happier when he was away. I naively asked why couples could not sustain the happiness they
had once felt with one another, and was told, “You don’t understand. All couples have so many secrets . . .”

Japan, like all societies, has always had a degree of loneliness, but in an earlier era, when roles were more readily sustainable as the basis for marriage, this may have been less keenly felt. Today, when roles – man as breadwinner, woman as childrearer – are widely seen as insufficient as the basis for marriage (Mathews 2014), this loneliness becomes more readily apparent. Suga (2014) discusses at the start of his book three incidents in which, in the midst of individuals lost in their smartphones, two people – most often a young person and an old person – interconnect, and argues that this is how happiness can be arrived at. In a Japan that has always prided itself on interpersonal understanding (as in old-fashioned terms like _ishin denshin_ referring to a sense of unspoken implicit understanding between Japanese people), it seems jarring that Suga (2014) needs to bring up such examples. I interviewed only one person who said that the key to happiness is helping other people. She is one more person living a life as Pha (2015) advocates, a person who has very little money herself but still seeks to help others in her daily life.

For others I spoke with, however, the neoliberal self-oriented pursuit of happiness seemed key, sometimes in terms of almost mathematical calculation. An insurance agent in his forties thought of personal happiness in terms of risk assessment:

> Happiness is a matter of whether to take big risks with big payoffs or smaller risks with smaller payoffs, or no risks at all. As a _sararîman_, I have taken only low risks in my life, but my wife has always preferred no risk. This is why we are so unhappy together: She wants to raise our sons to go to good universities and enter good companies, but I think that in today’s world they must be able to take more risks.

Kawai (2014: 42–45), in a brief essay, discusses “the calculation of happiness,” like Benjamin Franklin, and argues for its impossibility. Indeed, Gilbert (2006) has shown us rather clearly that we have no idea what will make us happy in the future: it is a mystery to ourselves. However, in the neoliberal calculation of happiness, this is a dangerous insight: One needs to know what makes one happy, and to steadily work to pursue it in one’s life.

There is also the genetic basis of happiness. I interviewed a couple, one of whom is a doctor with high status in his work, the other his estranged wife, who has no status in society, no children, and by some conventional accounts, no meaning. Yet she was one of the happiest people I interviewed, and he one of the unhappiest, for what seemed to be purely genetic reasons: “Oh, we’ve always been like that!,” I was told.

I interviewed a woman in her forties who had made a serious suicide attempt the year before, while she was briefly away from her husband and two children and expecting no one to find her. She has since been in extensive
medical treatment for depression. She told me, “If I can be at 80 percent of normal happiness, that’s fine, my doctor and I agree … You talk about Japanese society and happiness. But being happy is not a matter of society. It’s a matter of the structure of your brain.” Her suffering has been very real, of course, and her emphasis on brain structure and medicine is absolutely apt, given her illness. Still, I cannot help but wonder: Is the ultimate neoliberal solution to the problem of happiness to provide medicines, akin to Huxley’s soma, the pleasure drug of his Brave New World (1977), making everyone blissfully happy while they scurry around like worker bees? Is that, in a few decades, the future of Japan and the world? This may be the logical outcome of a fully neoliberal world, where we rely on our doctors for our personal, smiling, competitive advantage.

Conclusion

I began this chapter by considering why Japan had a relatively lower place in worldwide happiness rankings than its objective indicators of well-being would seem to warrant. I speculated that, aside from cross-cultural problems of measurement, which are quite real, these low happiness rankings may also result from the fact that Japanese society has been structurally inflexible in such a way that Japanese outside the societal mainstream may feel unfulfilled. However, as I subsequently discussed, these structural inflexibilities are increasingly giving way in a Japanese society that enables more individual leeway than it did in the recent past, and which may be eventually coming to accept diverse lifestyles beyond the earlier middle-class ideal of husband as company employee and wife as housewife and mother. If this is indeed happening, then Japanese society may become happier. However, as we have seen, this greater diversity is in large part the result of economic difficulties – the earlier middle-class ideal is no longer sustainable, and so alternative lifestyles are emerging. We may be seeing at present and more and more in the future a more economically straitened and also a more socially diverse Japan than in the recent past, in an increasingly neoliberal world. Will this also be a happier Japan? In this chapter, based on limited evidence, I cannot even venture to guess. However, this, I suspect, is a key question for happiness research in the years and decades to come: will a poorer but more socially diverse, freer, more individualistic Japan be a happier society than the richer but more socially constraining and group-oriented Japan of a few decades past? The answer to this question, once it is arrived at decades from now, may provide insights into how a happy and fulfilled society anywhere in the world might best be structured.

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15 Conclusion

Happiness as a balancing act between agency and social structure

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The studies in this volume offer diverse approaches to the well-being of different social groups of Japanese: men, women, married and single, homosexual and heterosexual, young and old, children, parents and grandparents, as well as members of (organized) social groups, be they political parties, volunteer organizations, minority groups, football clubs, or patrons in cocktail bars. Several chapters particularly focus on young Japanese – adolescents (Bondy), or young adults in their twenties and thirties (Lieser, Holdgrün, Klien, Nakano, Bloch). The older generation is the focus of the studies by Mathews, Steinhoft and Umegaki-Costantini. These all offer glimpses into people’s lives at different times in their life cycle.

How happiness is related to biological or social age and how happiness changes over one’s life course is, however, not part of the questions this final discussion attempts to answer. Rather, we want to come back to the general questions that are of significance for the social scientific study of happiness. Are the Japanese happy, what is it that makes them happy, and how do they construe their sense of happiness?

Starting with the most obvious, we feel it is justified to say that the Japanese represented in the case studies of this volume are doing well, both on account of their own estimates of their well-being and as seen through the researchers’ interpretive lens. Despite the rather gloomy outlook extracted from mass media reports on the larger political and socioeconomic environment that enforced changes in Japanese society at many institutional levels, and despite the low values of life satisfaction and subjective well-being that most international surveys attest to the Japanese, the micro-perspective reveals a quite different impression. The difference from the macro-data may be due to the pathological bias of anthropology discussed in the Introduction. Our authors have overwhelmingly dealt with groups of people who are labeled as different, deviant, marginalized or otherwise sidelined. The people and communities, as well as the form of social institutions they have decided on, are believed, by the researchers as well as by the people themselves, to be different from the “norm” of mainstream society. Bloch describes Eri and Daisuke’s marriage as “not typical,” due to the close and friendship-based relationship they have with each other. Members of the communities
studied by Lieser as well as Tamaš and Tamaš even point to the “uniqueness” of their communities as they both cut across socioeconomic categories and lie outside everyday life. The football fan club Lieser analyzes is also considered unique in that it is the only club of its kind that does not allow female members, and the nightclub Bardis hosts a particular “midnight community” said not to be found in other locations (Tamaš and Tamaš). Nakano and Dales focus in their chapters on unmarried women, whom they call “unconventional.” In the case of Holdgrün and Bondy, they point to the minority status of the people they study, on the one hand Greens Japan party members, a very small minority within the political establishment of Japan, and on the other hand burakumin, Japan’s largest minority group. Also grandfathers who help with the care of their grandchildren (Umegaki-Costantini), as well as rural gay Japanese men (Laurent) must be considered exceptional, and as such constituting minorities within Japanese society.

So how can outsiders and minorities possibly be equally happy or even happier than “average Japanese,” particularly in a collectivist society that promises satisfaction and fulfillment to those who follow the mainstream? This must appear to be paradoxical on first sight, but we assume that it is exactly the (partial or subversive) divergence from mainstream society that a) provides a larger range of lifestyle choices and possibilities of self-actualization, and b) notably accentuates the crucial and so far rather ignored role of agency for happiness. A third reason might be that the people studied for this volume are hardly ever asked about their overall sense of happiness but rather examined in particular contexts, such as marriage, family, and social organizations. With Japan faring poorly in cross-cultural comparison of overall life satisfaction, we see that in certain domain-specific satisfaction Japan seems to be doing quite well. We know from the seminal book on Culture and subjective well-being (Diener and Suh 2000), which provided a suggestive argument for the establishment of a cultural psychology, that in quantitative studies, cross-national differences of life satisfaction are smaller for ratings of specific aspects of life than for overall evaluations. Thus our material seems to underline the point that the focus in cross-cultural comparisons of happiness should preferably lie in domain-specific satisfaction and happiness.

Happiness in this volume is discussed both in the realm of private settings or situations, of which sexual intercourse might be considered the most private, as well as in public settings, such as within publically visible organizations (even though the behavior within can also be considered private), but not in terms of the labor market and workplace experience. These institutions belong to a set of structures that, from the perspective of workers, have been either resistant to change or have changed for the worse. Since the world of work and employment continues to be of crucial significance in postindustrial society for social status, participation chances and even the possibilities of future generations, it may be very simply due to the fact that this domain has been missed out in our studies, that the Japanese represented in this volume appear to be happier than expected.
Finally, the unexpected higher sense of well-being may be due to the particularities of the research methodologies used. All our authors have utilized qualitative research methods, either qualitative interviews, focus groups, participant observation, extended case studies of one or more people, or a combination of these methods. As such, this collection is contributing to the debate on happiness in keeping faith with the findings and insights of ethnographic and qualitative social research, which time and again have eluded neat theoretical formulation. The chapters in sum support Freeman’s (2015) assumption that happiness is configured differently in different social and cultural contexts and that diverse experiences of happiness are fundamentally linked to varying experiences of the self. They expand on our knowledge of happiness in Japan, showing both the diversity and breadth of experiences that matter to people in their everyday lives for their personal happiness, and that even within Japan alone there is “more than one possible ‘road to affluence’” (Sahlins 2006), as human needs and wants differ and societies and the people within them have developed different solutions to the means to satisfy them.

Hence as one major outcome of this project we can conclude that the chapters give proof to the diversity of lifestyles and aspirations and consequently diverse experiences of happiness and well-being within contemporary Japan, a society that previously has often been described as unique for its homogeneity. There would be many more angles to research, to discover, or to expand if wanting to give full justice to the diversity of the Japanese people. No single study, either in the form of a journal article or as a monograph, can explore this diversity in comparable depth. Only the accumulation of different research foci on happiness within the framework of an edited volume can do that, which points to the advantages this publication provides.

Several common themes develop out of the chapters, two of them being the most prevalent: one is the interplay and struggle between social norms or social structure(s) and the freedom or agency to live against them, or conform to them, but always with a conscious mind to the barriers of social conventions around oneself. The other theme is what Mathews and Izquierdo (2009) have termed the interpersonal dimension of happiness, and what we would call here issues of relatedness or social networks and their importance for happiness and well-being. In the following, we will frame our discussion on the studies in this volume with the help of these two themes. We will also occasionally link the findings back to the larger anthropological discourse on happiness, as we laid it out, in a highly abbreviated manner, within the Introduction to this book. We close the book with an outlook of what remains to be done, where gaps remain, and where new questions develop from the material presented here.

**Agency versus social norms and structures**

Mathews argues in his chapter that the inflexibilities of structures and norms that characterized Japanese society and the social scientific discourse on it
have loosened over the last few decades. Coupled with escalating economic uncertainties, the structural changes of society have given way to alternative, more individualistic lifestyles beyond the salaryman-centered male-breadwinner model. In general, Mathews blames neoliberal ideology for an increasing pressure put on the individual for the responsibility of creating one’s own happiness. In the longer time perspective that Mathews is taking, as he embarked on his research of well-being (*ikegai*) in 1989, significant changes within Japanese society, its institutions, norms, values, and structures can be seen, just like in any society in the industrialized world. On the micro-level, these changes are more likely to be embraced by the younger generation, and as new attitudes, lifestyle options and organizational possibilities also impact their relationship with their parent and older generations, a generational conflict is almost inevitable in coexistence. Bloch discusses the generational conflict born out of these changes in values and norms, as Eri and her second husband Daisuke clash with her parents over the divorce from her first husband. Such social changes are, however, not ubiquitous throughout the country. Regional differences do exist, hinted at by Bloch, as she identifies the crisis over Eri’s divorce not solely as a generational clash but also as the disparity between metropolitan and rural Japan. This distinction becomes also apparent in Nakano’s sample of unmarried women living in Tokyo, yet whose birthplace or families of origin are spread throughout the country.

As families are arguably the most important social institution in the lives of people, values regarding gender roles and families, marriage, and childbirth are of utmost importance to the private lives of Japanese. In contemporary transitional Japan, old and new values and patterns coexist and significantly influence individual lives and decision making. So we see changes in marriage and household formation patterns, such as in the fact that Japanese are marrying later and less, in a rising “quest for rewarding marital relations” and “partnership” (Bloch), in Japan being a low-fertility, hyper-aged society, in the rising divorce rate, and in the declining stigma attached to divorce and singlehood, yet with regional variations within the nation-state Japan (Bloch; see also Kumagai 2008, 2014 for more regional variations of Japanese families).

Other social institutions, such as the economy, in particular the labor market, the education system, or political institutions have remained fundamentally inflexible, remaining male dominated, consensus oriented, and resisting change as best as they can, which is most likely one of the major causes for the slumping Japanese economy which struggles hard to adjust to the changing larger, globalized environment. On a personal level, for many in Japan economic change first of all means a decrease in job security, worsening working conditions, lower income levels and a perception of rising inequality. No matter how much or how little institutions, norms or values change, all of these institutions exert some structural *constraint* on individuals’ actions (see also the Introduction). However, to what degree do they *determine* the actions of individuals? Bourdieu (1977) or Giddens (2009) would disagree on the
force or form of structural constraints and the possibilities of agency, but they would not subscribe to the determinist view of the Durkheimean or Marxist traditions. Since these social theorists – as well as most other sociologists – have not considered how these constraints of social structures and the realm of agency impact the degree or level of happiness and well-being for the individual, however, it is up to us to shed light on this interplay for our understanding of happiness in Japan.

Klien argues that due to the larger instability of jobs, the decline in permanent employment positions plus the greater number of people working as freeters or NEETs have had some significant effect on people’s desire for renegotiation of work-life balance and their subsequent choice to engage in volunteer work and altogether alternative lifestyles. In the case of people who engaged as volunteers after the triple disaster in the Tōhoku region, they enacted agency in bypassing the systemic structures of stable employment and siding with the victims of the earthquake. Actively choosing employment paths beyond regular employment, coupled with an intensified focus on the self, has had a positive effect on their happiness even in their post-volunteering life stages.

Not only society on the macro-level creates constraints on individuals and their actions. Also on the micro-level, communities have their own set of rules, some stricter, some less so, which again can impact the individuals within, depending if they have the freedom to choose their line of action against these limitations, as most rules do limit action for institutions to keep their individuals at bay. The constraints of the hierarchical structures within the Greens Japan party have had a negative impact on the well-being of those party members ranking low in the hierarchy, as Holdgrün found in her study. Not having the freedom for agency is a clear power issue. Having power or freedom is often connected to an increase in happiness, whereas on the other hand, not having the freedom for action decreases happiness. We see that nicely playing out in what Steinhoff entitles the “making and doing” of people engaged in Japan’s “invisible civil society,” organizing rallies, demonstrations and the like for their political causes. The structures within the social movements studied by Steinhoff leave room for action, which is beneficial to the sense of well-being and happiness among the social movement members.

In the private realm of marriages and partnerships, Bloch shows how her research subjects are active agents, shaping their lives, while being constrained, but in the end not being determined, by the remaining social norms of stigmatizing divorce. Other social norms, for example, involve marriage restricting the degree of freedom to engage in non-familial relationships and friendships. Yet Dales shows how the individuals she studied, being aware of these norms, nonetheless engage in friendships, another example of agency providing elevated happiness. Further normative ideas on marriage are understood to impact the personal freedom of the married, with constructing marriage as a pragmatic, non-romantic, emotionally distant agreement between the two sexes, with children at the core within the economic unit of
the family. Those who long for children and having a “family” succumb to
marriage, even many homosexual men as well, as Laurent finds in his study.
Yet the homosexual men he interviewed take action insofar as they feel the
social constraints, but then do not let them interfere with their desires. Rather,
they choose to live out their homosexual desires such as by going to gay bars and
spending time within the gay community, yet nonetheless within the framework
of publicly displayed compliance to normative, heterosexual marriages. So the
rules remain more or less intact on the outside, while taking the freedom to
engage in (sexual) friendships with other, homosexual partners, on the side
(Laurent). The same pattern is described in Moriki’s analysis of heterosexual
married couples. She describes a high rate of extramarital, in her case het-
erosexual, relationships. So in both instances, marriage is engaged in as a
normative “umbrella” of complying to social rules and values, but the agency
of the married individuals points to the fact that these people resist being
determined by their compliance.

Rules, norms, and values are highly culture dependent and are more or less
internalized by the individuals within. How one acts within or in opposition
to these constrictions depends on the culture one lives in, but individuals will
always reference their actions against these constraints. Even though this is
the case in all societies, in collectivist Japan the awareness of these constraints
is particularly heightened in comparison. This is what makes the analysis of
Japan so particularly interesting for the study of happiness and the interplay
between agency and structure. In Japan, adapting to social norms is com-
monly appreciated as something that guarantees social harmony, which is
valued over conflict. Japanese perceive interdependency of individuals as an
important element of understanding the self within society.

An example for this are the homosexual men Laurent analyzes. According
to the commonly held view in liberal Western cultures, “coming out,” so the
“extreme” form of agency against the social norms and values attached to the
romanticized ideal of marriage and the hegemonic heterosexual norm, is
highly valued and idealized as a courageous step forward to claim individual
freedom rights. Yet the expressive refusal of compliance with hetero-
normativity bears with it the danger for conflict. In Japanese culture, one’s
sexual orientation is considered a private matter and thus “coming out” as a
public action is not the idealized goal. People seem to arrange themselves
within the normative framework and live double lives, thus being able to
combine normative heterosexual marriage and homosexual relationships.
Living in that way brings happiness with it, whereas in “the West” this
camouflage might be criticized as hypocritical or submissive and thus more
likely to cause dissatisfaction and unhappiness. One could relate this double
standard with the ubiquitous emic distinction between omote and ura (front
and back), comparable to the idea of frontstage and backstage behavior, as
Goffman has identified and labeled it.

Our authors are of diverging opinions when it comes to understanding the
relationship between agency, social structural constraints, and happiness.
Whereas Laurent refers to Uchida and Ogihara (2012), stating that “to adapt oneself to social norms seems to be one of the keys to happiness in Japan,” Bloch on the other hand sees that free choice as expressed through agency elevates subjective well-being. Lieser also sees that being free from social norms is an expression of individuality and thus brings happiness to the football fans who find that free space within their activities at the football club. In that regard, the football stadium provides a ritualized space for breaking away from conventional rules, similar to what traditional festivals offer to the community. Whereas the single women studied by Dales and Nakano have to make sense of their choices within their everyday lives against the social constraints of mainstream culture. Holdgrün and Steinhoff see autonomous decision making as essential, equally for the satisfaction of the Greens Japan party members and social movement participants. For those who deliberately engage in social movements and volunteer organizations, it is rather the refusal of lifestyle choices offered by mainstream society that leads to a heightened sense of happiness. It appears that one way or another, emplacement as “the positive engagement with one’s social environment” (Moore 2013: 36) is closely related to the experience of happiness. More often than not, similar to hope, this sense of emplaced happiness experience, the empirically grounded yet always uncertain expectation is “predicated on the experience of being integral to the lives of others” (Jackson 2011: 92). This relation has also been explicitly emphasized in Bondy’s study among the buraku youth.

The question then becomes why people act one way or another within the confines of the social. For that, we need to pay attention to people’s aspirations and expectations, which are important triggers for purposeful action or non-action, and which are also directly linked to happiness. First of all, all studies in this volume support a constructivist approach to happiness which, very much as Jackson said about well-being, must be seen “not as a settled state but as a field of struggle” (Jackson 2011: ix). Second, we observe that people in their decisions are not exclusively led by goal orientation and rational decision making, but also take moral aspirations of a better future, affective needs for intimacy and care, and the appraisal of tradition into consideration. The difficulty of relating desired ends with diverse and usually situated everyday behavior rules has already been pointed out by Max Weber in his seminal outline of interpretive sociology (Weber 1922). Only if we turn our attention to the complexity of motivations causing agency, adding the moral, emotional and ritual dimensions to the rational, do we come closer to understanding if and to what degree happiness and well-being are perceived as ultimate goals of action in Japan. As we have seen throughout the collection, the need for relatedness, community, and social networks is a fundamental aspect and motivator, which has been seen at the core of all preceding chapters. Happiness can be a fleeting, temporary sensation, such as reported to be the case for some of the volunteers Klien studied, or for all of the bar patrons studied by Tâmaş and Tâmaş. However, in as far as their happiness is
also deriving from the happiness of others, those they support or those they
party with, it cannot be solely understood as an expression of hedonist plea-
sure. What Tâmaș and Tâmaș consider as “false happiness” of the midnight
community is clearly resonating with Throop’s assumption that while “the
experience of happiness may be considered by some to be a necessary condi-
tion of living well, it can never in itself be a sufficient one. In short, there must
be more to life than happiness if life is to be lived ‘well’” (Throop 2015: 58).

If the relationship between feeling well and living well is placed in the
context of the entire collection of studies, it becomes apparent that the
eudaimonic dimension of happiness, giving life a sense, a meaning and a
direction, is of much more importance to a grounded understanding of hap-
piness in Japan. Steinhoff, Holdgrün, and Klien see the desire for more con-
trol and self-determination over one’s own life as important motivators. Some
individuals, Tōhoku volunteers, social movement participants and Greens
Japan party members, manage to have agency to implement their aspirations
and thus report being happier with their lives because of it. The question
remains of how this individual happiness is linked to the happiness of society,
either on the immediate level of their local relations or within the larger
dimension of society they want to change for the better. Even if individuals
engage in activities that can be considered altruistic, making individuals feel
that they have a purpose, nonetheless there is also an additional desire, a self-
serving desire: in the case of volunteers, for their self-actualization, for a
meaningful life beyond conformist workplaces (Klien), and in the case of
grandfathers helping with the care of their grandchildren, a desire for inti-
macy with their daughter and her future caregiving obligation for the grand-
father in return (Umegaki-Costantini). It is this combination of self- and
other-oriented goals of agency that provides happiness in these areas of
people’s lives.

**Relatedness and social networks**

The idea that relatedness and social networks, so the ties that bind us within
our families, communities and circles of friends, are beneficial to a person’s
happiness and well-being, is undisputed (see Introduction). This has also been
substantiated throughout all the chapters in this volume, as they can all been
seen, among other distinctive elements, to boil down to the interpersonal
dimension of happiness (Mathews and Izquierdo 2009). However, it is exactly
this dimension that is again most influenced by culture.

What friends provide is a circle of like-minded people around oneself
(Dales, Lieser, Steinhoff, Tâmaș and Tâmaș, Klien, Holdgrün), which matters
significantly to the well-being of people. While there is certainly a need to
differentiate between friends in the sense of nakama (member), chijin
(acquaintance), tomodachi (companion) and other culture-specific categories,
we think that some contributions to this volume have neatly demonstrated how
valuable emotional connectedness with others has become in contemporary
Japan. Friendships provide alternatives to the networks of material and emotional support that family relationships typically offer. Friendships are important in themselves, and their effectiveness is certainly not outcome-dependent. Football fan club members are not less happy with their community membership if the football club loses. The social interaction within this community, the bonds with others and mutual trust more than make up for real game losses “their” football team might encounter (Lieser). Friendship and closeness is driven by shared values and like-mindedness, and not having to feel constraint within these relationships serves as a buffer to existing larger societal pressures. These friendships also surpass differences in age and social strata, which are particularly diverse among the football fans and the bar patrons. Both settings provide their members with temporal or lasting affiliation to a group of like-minded people who beyond the common interest in football support or night-time companionship differ largely in terms of age, occupational background and social strata (Lieser, and Tamaş and Tamaş). Equally within families, it is closeness and intimacy that bring satisfaction and emotional happiness. The marriage between Eri and Daisuke analyzed by Bloch is a perfect example of that. The grandfathers Umegaki-Costantini researched also report maintaining or even improving intimacy with their daughters through their grandchild care, which then serves to improve the satisfaction of the grandfathers.

In contrast to the needs for community and relatedness, many Japan scholars (e.g. Klien, Mathews, Laurent, Nakano) have testified to an increasing (desire for) individuality, which in part is also driven and facilitated by neoliberal tendencies (Mathews). The Western interpretation of individuality is that it has a positive correlation to one’s level of happiness. That this does not always have to be the case and depends very much on culturally dependent models is exemplified in Laurent’s study. He argues that Japanese gay men who show their “individuality” by “coming out” are less likely to be happy than the ones living “ordinary” married lives, but who secretly enjoy the community of like-minded people in gay bars and the gay community. So one has to distinguish how one’s individuality is seen as possible to be expressed, because expressing one’s sexual identity to mainstream society is a public statement and thus potentially threatening, linking this back to the relationship between agency and social norms.

All chapters describe that their research subjects commit a large amount of time and energy to their community or social network. Tamaş and Tamaş even go so far as to describe this urge for being within their chosen community as an “addiction” of the bar patrons, craving this “temporary” impact on increasing their happiness. Committing a large amount of time and energy to a community or one’s social network further aids in the feeling of connectedness and relatedness, freeing the individuals from the potential of loneliness, and building trust among the community members. This becomes evident in the meticulous descriptions of the concurring deliberations and preparations for political protest or football support studied by Steinhoff and
Lieser. Their case studies sustain the argument that the cultural capital gained from long-term commitment to a matter is inseparably linked to the members’ social capital, which is a source of their sense of belonging, fulfillment and meaning.

Trust is also an essential element for the subjective well-being of individuals, something that has been established by numerous quantitative studies internationally. Bondy describes the burakumin junior high school students he studied as being able to establish high levels of trust within their minority community, and through that gaining higher life satisfaction. This is particularly elevated by the fact that the world outside the community is perceived as being riddled with risk and fear of discrimination. In the case of Moriki’s study on marital happiness, the practice of co-sleeping is to create an environment of trust between child and mother, with a particular focus on parents increasing their child’s well-being. So the intimacy between mother and child is valued higher than physical intimacy between the married couple. This observation neatly fits with the conventional understanding of marriage as the institutional preposition for societal reproduction. However, Bloch’s study of a childless married couple provides insight that this is not always seen that way. She reports how the friendly companionship and communication between the partners has positive effects on the couple’s happiness, without having to shift the focus away from the intimacy between the partners toward the intimacy with the child.

The significant positive relationship between marital status and happiness is also undisputed within quantitative happiness studies. Yet this does not have to mean that single people are necessarily less happy than married people, as this very much depends on whether singlehood is a freely chosen state of being or if marriage is the desired yet so far unachieved state. Yet this is usually not analyzed in detail. However, this could be an important element in Japan, where being single and being economically deprived often are closely entwined, which could be part of the puzzle for singlehood to have such a negative influence on life satisfaction. Nakano clearly distinguishes between the two options of why one is single, as that is imperative for our understanding of why some singles, in her study women, are happy with their lives whereas others lament it. Those having chosen to remain single gain their happiness from the fact that they had the freedom to choose their path and to make their own decisions without conforming to the social pressures and external expectations of getting married, expectations that are still strong in Japan in comparative perspective to other industrialized countries. Internalizing these social pressures, yet not being able to live up to them, clearly suppresses the well-being of the individuals. That where pressures are low, single women remain happier, is one of the main messages in Nakano’s chapter. Also Dales argues for some of the single women she studied to be able to evoke happiness out of their singlehood, as it denotes freedom and autonomy. In Japan, the decision about marriage is very much an either/or decision, as marriage and the networks that are attached to it promise
elevated social capital or, in the case of rejection, risk marginalization from society. Friendship circles for singles can help balance these extremes, as well as makeshift recreational communities or modern voluntary associations like fan clubs or social movements.

**Fluid and diverse: Happiness in Japan**

Our findings shed light on the fact that autonomy and self-determination have positive effects on the happiness of diverse groups of individuals studied in this volume. Greens Japan party members (Holdgrün), New Left social movement members (Steinhoff), and single women (Nakano), are all said to exhibit autonomy in their choice of activities or lifestyle choices. Yet, as we stated in the Introduction, studies have shown autonomy only to matter in individualist societies (Oishi et al. 1999), which Japan is arguably not, despite its neoliberal trends and growing acceptance of neoliberal beliefs in recent years. So this contradiction, striving for autonomy yet within a collectivist society, exemplifies Japan's transitional state. It is this clash of two opposites that wears down on the individuals. As Dales in her chapter already notes, there are different versions of happiness in existence within contemporary society, Japan being no exception. Routine life and work constraints are so overpowering that only small pockets exist to go beyond that for finding autonomy, self-actualization and self-fulfillment. Our discussion on the constant (re)negotiation between agency and structure finds mention also in the Introduction, where we mention Kavedzija (2015), discussing the “balancing act” between values, intimacy and freedom of elderly Japanese. We would argue, though, that this balancing act is required of all Japanese, young and old, between one’s agency and the social structure, norms and values of society at large, and people around oneself.

Despite it in sum being a diverse group of people who have been studied here in these different chapters of the book, we do find commonalities among them as laid out in the previous pages. All of the research subjects are adolescents (in the case of the burakumin junior high school students) or adults, mostly in their twenties and thirties. The well-being of younger children has not been studied here, even though it has been considered, as in the case of parents desiring to improve their child’s well-being by facilitating intimacy through co-sleeping. Happiness of the elderly is another void of this collection, even though the social activists (Steinhoff) and ordinary citizens from Hokkaido (Mathews) clearly belong to the age group of people close to retirement. However, none of the people studied here is suffering from poverty, hunger, or major health issues, or has reported having experienced violence, bereavement, or having been seriously affected by disaster (though volunteers helping those affected by the triple disaster areas of northeastern Japan are at the center of Klien’s study). These commonalities are often forgotten or taken for granted, not just by scholars but the individuals themselves, but experiences such as these would most likely have serious effects on
happiness and well-being of individuals, no matter the other circumstances in their lives. Thus the focus in all studies is on the individual and personal happiness and life satisfaction at a certain moment in their lives. These could be very differently interpreted even briefly later, illustrating the distinction between experiencing and memorizing self which was identified by Kahneman (Kahneman and Riis 2005; see Introduction).

In sum, we see that the seemingly simplest lives are highly complex, responsible for the high variability of happiness even within a society. We have shown how cultural markers influence the experience of, and aspirations for socially acceptable frames for happiness. Yet still the variability within a culture remains immense. The different domains of people's lives, be they part of the public or private selves, are intertwined in such multifaceted ways that the study of overall happiness, and life satisfaction for that matter, continue to be a highly complex and difficult undertaking. We think that the material presented in this book has made a strong point for the anthropological study of happiness, in Japan and elsewhere. Yet it has revealed also that questions do remain. One of the most pressing is how happiness changes over the life course of the individual. Knowing that happiness is a fluid state, shifting with life circumstances, how does it change over the course of a life? We know from quantitative researchers that age is a disputed variable within happiness research: Some researchers see a U-shaped pattern of happiness, meaning that happiness is high for the young and old, but low for adults in their prime. Other researchers have argued just the opposite. We know that different institutions matter to our lives at different stages; we know that social networks, their strengths, their breadth, also significantly vary. Distinct pressures as well as possibilities for agency exist depending on the life stage of a person. With the chapters in this book having spared the study of the happiness of young children as well as the elderly and people at the end of their lives, these are certainly questions that are important to answer in future studies.

As we mentioned in the Introduction, several disciplines have embarked on the study of happiness, none yet with fully satisfying results. We argue for the need for interdisciplinary research on the subject, both in terms of foci as well as research methods, to get to the core of eventually understanding happiness. The interplay between psychological factors, such as personalities, genetic dispositions, cultural variabilities, macro-structural and institutional frames, as well as personal experiences and values have to be considered, and happiness must be studied in its temporal, fluid or ephemeral state and in its long-term evaluation, usually termed life satisfaction. These bridges between the disciplines are needed, particularly between qualitative and quantitative research for a holistic understanding. We make a first step in this direction by bringing together anthropologists and quantitative sociologists for a further study on happiness in Japan (Holthus and Manzenreiter 2017).
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