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A COMPARISON OF THE HAPPINESS OF PRIMARY SCHOOL STUDENTS IN THE KINGDOM OF BHUTAN AND IN JAPAN

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Abstract

Bhutan garnered attention by setting 'Gross National Happiness' (GNH) as a national policy to support the foundation of the country. The purpose of this study is to investigate whether primary school students in Bhutan are happy and to identify the characteristics of this happiness. The studies compared the happiness of primary school students in Bhutan and Japan. Participants in the investigation were from primary schools and in the 4th to 6th grades. The participants in the study were 48 students of a private primary school in Bhutan, 47 students of a private elementary school in Japan and 50 students of a public elementary school in Japan. The variance analysis was conducted to compare the degree of happiness by school. As a result, the effect between schools was significant ($F(2,142) = 3.99, p < .05$). According to multiple comparisons using Tukey b, 'Bhutan' was significantly higher than 'Japan/Public' ($p < .05$) in terms of happiness. The tendency of 'when they are happy?' shows that the students in Bhutan reported feeling happy in their relationships with people in their daily lives. Likewise, the tendency of 'what do you want now?' shows that students in Bhutan want to obtain things in the future, not the present. It was suggested that primary school students in Bhutan were relatively satisfied with what they have presently, and their future dreams and hopes may enhance the present subjective happiness.

Keywords

Happiness, GNH, Bhutan, Primary School

1. Introduction

‘Gross National Happiness’ (GNH) is instituted as the goal of the government of Bhutan in the Constitution of Bhutan (2008). It includes an index which is used to measure the collective happiness and well-being of the people of Bhutan. The term GNH was coined in 1972 when the then king of Bhutan, Jigme Singye Wangchuck, stated that ‘Gross National Happiness is more important than Gross National Product’ (Ura & Galay, 2004). GNH aims to realise the happiness of the people by reviewing the attitude that emphasises economic growth, considering the traditional society/culture, the people’s will and the environment. GNH consists of four pillars: 1) promotion of sustainable development; 2) conservation of the natural environment; 3) preservation and promotion of cultural values and 4) establishment of good governance.

According to a survey conducted in 2015, the mean current subjective happiness score of Bhutanese people is 6.88 (Centre for Bhutan Studies & GNH Research, 2016). The responses were collected using an 11-point response scale that runs from 0 (not at all happy) to 10 (very happy), which is a general investigation method. In contrast, in the same survey conducted by the Japanese Cabinet Office in 2013, the average was 6.6 (Economic and Social Research Institute, 2012). These surveys indicate that people in Bhutan are happier than people in Japan. However, it is not clear whether the children in Bhutan are happier than Japanese children. Bhutan and Japan are in the same continent, however, there is a large difference in terms of their economic development. In this study, primary school students in Bhutan who were educated under the policy of GNH will be compared with elementary school students who were educated in Japan.

Table 1 shows the ranking of the international comparison of wealth. In the ranking of the International Monetary Fund (IMF, 2018), Bhutan’s Nominal Gross Domestic Product (GDP) is in 165th place, whereas Japan’s is in 3rd place. In addition, with regard to Per Capita GDP, Bhutan is in 128th place, whereas Japan is in 25th (IMF, 2018). In the ranking of the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP, 2018), Bhutan’s human development indicator is in 134th place while that of Japan is in 19th place. Thus, Bhutan is overwhelmingly lower than Japan in any wealth indicator. However, the economic growth rate of Bhutan ranked 11th place, whereas Japan ranked 147th place (IMF, 2018).

Table 1: International Ranking of Wealth

Organization (Year)	IMF (2018)	IMF (2018)	UNDP (2018)	IMF (2018)
Index	Nominal GDP	GDP Per Capita	Human Development Indicators	Economic Growth Rate
No. of Countries	191	190	181	191
Bhutan	165th	128th	134th	11th
Japan	3rd	25th	19th	147th

Table 2: International Ranking of Happiness

Organization (Year)	A. White (2007)	UN (2018)	NEF (2018)	WIN/GIA (2017)
Report/Index	Subjective Well-being	World Happiness Report	The Happy Planet Index	NET Happiness Index
No. of Countries	178	156	140	55
Bhutan	8th	97th	56th	—
Japan	90th	54th	58th	18th

Despite being relatively poorer than Japan, Bhutan has experienced remarkable economic development in recent years, and there is a high possibility that society and culture will change dramatically in the future. Bhutan is swaying between rapid development and sustainable development models.

Table 2 shows the ranking of international comparison of happiness. There is a big difference between Bhutan and Japan in the subjective well-being and the World Happiness Report. White (2007) surveyed subjective well-being which indicated that Bhutan is ranked 8th while Japan is ranked 90th. According to the United Nations (2018), World Happiness Report includes six of the key variables that have been found to support well-being: income, healthy life expectancy, social support, freedom, trust and generosity. In this survey, Bhutan is ranked 97th and Japan is 54th. The New Economics Foundation (NEF, 2018) published the happy planet index to measure experienced well-being, life expectancy, ecological footprint. In this survey, Bhutan is 56th and Japan is 58th. In the questionnaire survey on pure happiness conducted by The Worldwide Independent Network/Gallup International Association (WIN/GIA, 2017), Japan is ranked 18th in 55 countries, but Bhutan is not included in the ranking.

From the above, it can be argued that ‘richness’ and ‘happiness degree’ do not necessarily coincide with each other depending on the measurement method. In particular, the subjective happiness of well-being had the result that Bhutan, which is not economically rich, is higher than Japan. What is the difference in subjective happiness among primary school students in Bhutan who were educated under the policy of GNH and students in Japan who were living in an economically developed environment?

Based on the above background, the principal objectives of the study were as follows:

- To explore whether primary school students in Bhutan are happy.
- To identify the characteristics of happiness of primary school students in Bhutan and in Japan.

2. Research Methodology

2.1 Participants of Investigation

A total of 145 elementary school students in grades 4 to 6 in Bhutan and Japan participated in the study. These participants were affiliated with 48 private primary schools in Bhutan and 47 private and 50 public elementary schools in Japan. The private primary school in Bhutan was located in Paro province. Even in Japan, elementary schools of the same size were selected, and one private and public elementary school each was selected. The private and public elementary schools in Japan were located in Hiroshima prefecture.

2.2 Procedure of Investigation

The investigation in Bhutan was conducted in September 2018, and the investigation in Japan was conducted in October 2018. The principals of each school consented to the study in writing to confirm that the results of the questionnaire are used for research purposes only, for processing the data so that school names and individuals cannot be identified and so on. The questionnaire was presented to the class teacher using the bearer method along with an explanation of the purpose of the survey. It was also explained that participants are not forced to respond when there is a question which they do not want to answer.

2.3 Contents of the Investigation

The questionnaire required participants to fill out ① grade, ② gender and ③ ‘Faces scale’ for measuring happiness. ‘Faces scale (Figure 1)’ is a single-item scale, which is a measure of seven methods in which simplified facial pictures are arranged horizontally. The

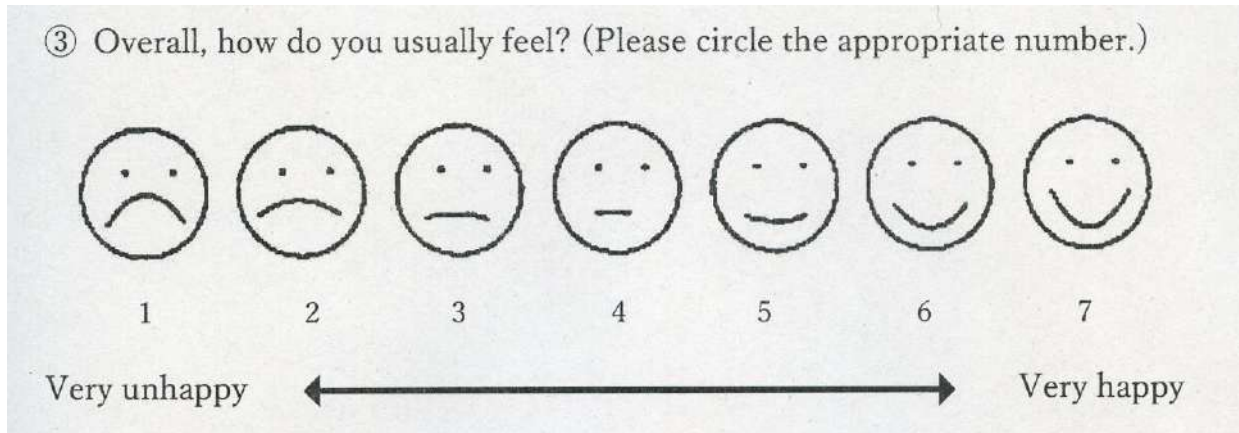


Figure 1: *Faces Scale*

participants chose one option from ‘Very unhappy’ (mouth is bending extremely downward) to ‘Very happy’ (the mouth is bending extremely upward) against the question ‘Overall, how do you usually feel?’ The participants circled the most appropriate number. Also, in order to grasp the happiness of elementary school students at the time, free description was available for the question ④ ‘When do you think you are happy? You can list as many points as you like’. Furthermore, in order to grasp what the elementary school student wants, ⑤ ‘What do you want now? You can write as many points as you like’ asked for a free description for the response.

3. Results

3.1 Multiple Comparisons by School

Table 3: *Multiple Comparisons by School*

	School	<i>N</i>	Happiness (<i>SD</i>)
①	Bhutan	48	5.63(1.12)
②	Japan/Private	47	5.26(1.07)
③	Japan/Public	50	4.88(1.62)
	<i>F</i>		<i>F</i> (2,142) = 3.99
	Multiple Comparison		③ < ①*
	*: <i>p</i> < .05		

The variance analysis was conducted to compare the degree of happiness by school. As a result, the effect between schools was significant ($F(2,142) = 3.99, p < .05$). According to multiple comparisons using Tukey b, ‘Bhutan’ was significantly higher than ‘Japan/Public’ ($p < .05$). In addition, the single-item scale on happiness is reliable, effective and commonly used (Abdel-Khalek, 2006; Harry, 1976; Stull, 1988; Swinyard, et al., 2001).

3.2 Correspondence Analysis

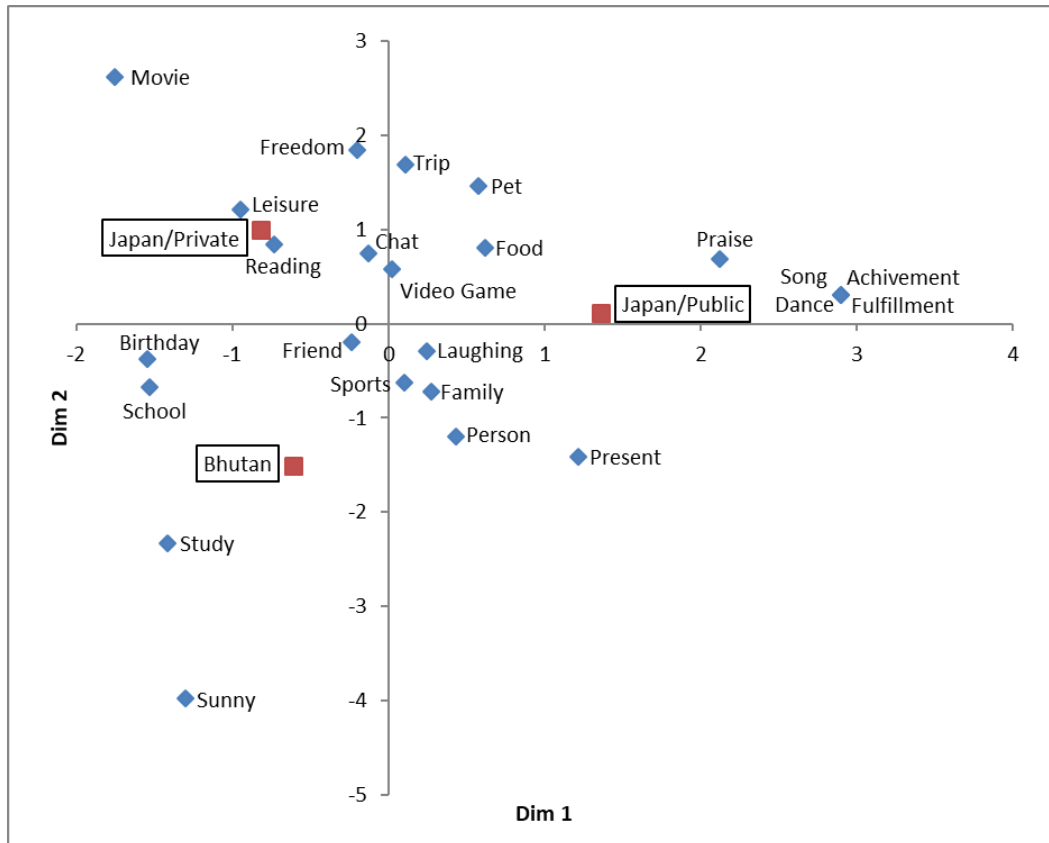


Figure 2: Tendency of Expression of ‘When they are happy’ by school

Figure 2 shows the result of mapping ‘When they are happy’ in a 2-dimensional space by applying correspondence analysis based on the school type and 23 categories. The contribution ratio was 60.4% for the first axis and 39.6% for the second axis. In the positive direction of Dimension 1, many items were targeted for infrequent things distant from daily life such as ‘Movie’, ‘Freedom’ and ‘Trip’. In contrast, in the negative direction, items such as ‘Sunny’, ‘Study’ and ‘Present’ were targeted for items that are usual things and close to daily life. Therefore, Dimension 1 can be said to be the ‘unusual-usual’ dimension. In the positive direction of

Dimension 2, many items were targeted for internal matters related to the internal aspects of the individual, such as 'Achievement/Fulfilment' and 'Praise'. Meanwhile, in the negative direction, many items were targeted for external matters related to the relationship with other people and the outside, such as 'School', 'Birthday' and 'Movie'. Thus, Dimension 2 can be said to be an 'internal-external' dimension.

There are 'School', 'Study', 'Sports', 'Friends', 'Family' and 'Person' in a relatively short distance around 'Bhutan'. The children in Bhutan feel happy in their relationships with people in their daily lives. There are 'Leisure', 'Reading', 'Freedom', 'Video Game' and 'Movie' in a relatively short distance around 'Japan/Private'. The children from the private school in Japan feel happy during activities which are unusual, virtual or related to fantasy. There are 'Praise', 'Achievement/Fulfilment', 'Song/Dance' and 'Present' in a relatively short distance around 'Japan/Public'. The children from public schools in Japan feel happy in internal satisfaction obtained by stimulation from others.

Figure 3 shows the result of mapping 'What they want' in a 2-dimensional space by applying correspondence analysis based on the school type and 32 categories. The contribution ratio was 68.8% for the first axis and 31.2% for the second axis. In the positive direction of Dimension 1, many items were targeted for invisible nonmaterial matters such as 'Health', 'Affection' and 'Peace'. Meanwhile, in the negative direction, the items were targeted for material matters of the form such as 'Bicycle', 'Comic/Magazine' and 'PC (Tablet)'. Therefore, Dimension 1 can be said to be a 'nonmaterial-material' dimension. In the positive direction of Dimension 2, items were targeted for the future such as 'Occupation (Dream)', 'Car', 'Trip' and so on. Meanwhile, in the negative direction, many items were targeted for things that are practical, such as 'Watch', 'Camera', 'Money', 'T.V.' and 'Pet'. Therefore, Dimension 2 is said to be 'future-present' dimension.

There are 'Leisure', 'Sports Equipment', 'Occupation (Dream)', 'Trip', 'Motorcycle' and 'Car' in a relatively short distance around 'Bhutan'. The children in Bhutan desire both nonmaterial and material things. At the same time, they want both these things in the future, not in the present. Around 'Japan/Private', there are 'Money', 'Toy', 'Food', 'Smartphone (Mobile)', 'T.V.' and 'Friend' at a relatively short distance. The children in a private elementary school in Japan want something that is highly entertaining. Around 'Japan/Public', there are 'Living',

‘Clothes’, ‘Pet’, ‘Music’, ‘Manga/Magazine’ and ‘Bicycle’ at a relatively short distance, thus indicating that the children in a public school in Japan desire material and practical things.

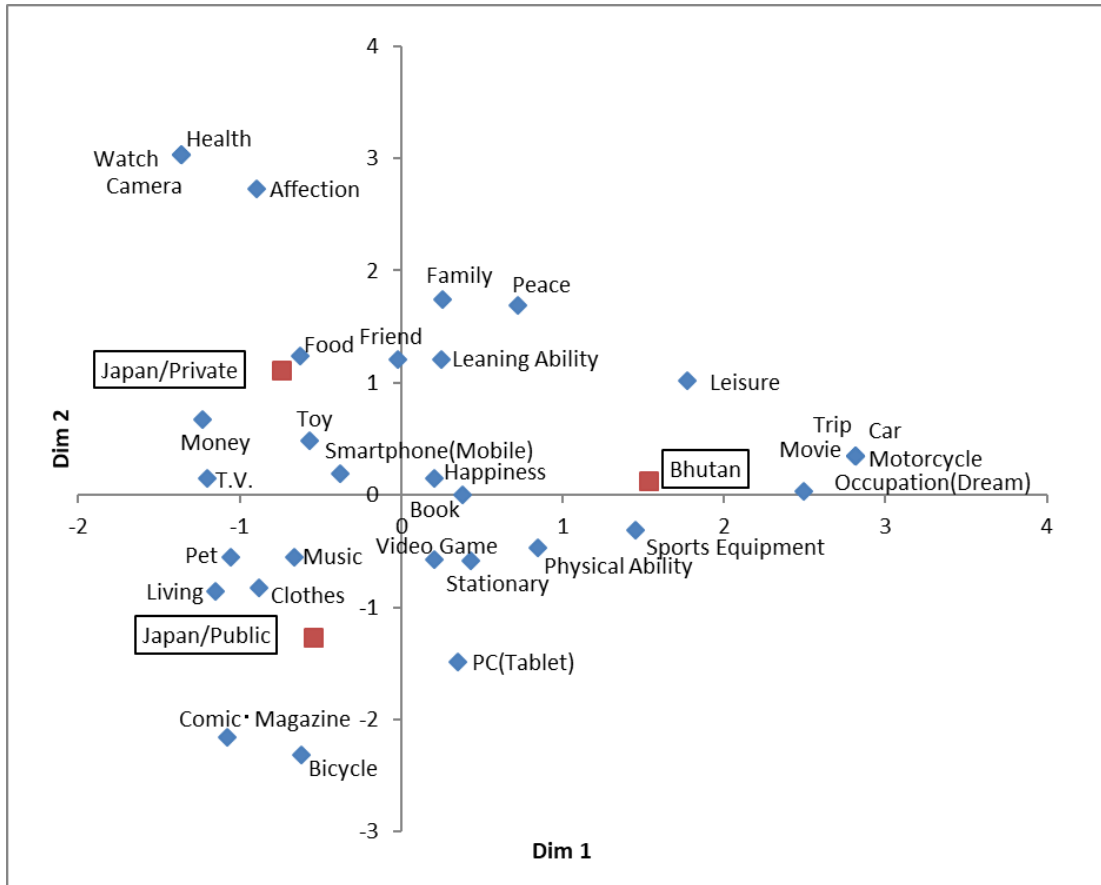


Figure 3: Tendency of Expression of ‘What they want’ by school

4. Discussion

Multiple comparisons among schools showed that the levels of happiness of students in Bhutan were significantly higher than those of students in ‘Japan/Public’ ($p < .05$). In Japan, a private elementary school has a high tuition fee and can only be attended by children whose families can afford such a school. However, elementary school students in ‘Japan/Public’ are obviously wealthy in terms of material things compared with students in Bhutan. Nonetheless, students in Bhutan have a significantly higher degree of happiness, indicating that they are less likely to feel happiness in material things.

In the expressive expression of 'When they are happy' by correspondence analysis, students in Bhutan have found that they feel happy in their relationships with people in their daily lives. Likewise, the tendency of 'What they want' shows that students in Bhutan want to obtain things in the future, not the present.

From the above, it is considered that students in 'Bhutan' have a relatively high level of happiness, even though the situation is not rich economically, and may be satisfied with the current situation. One of the reasons is that the contents of GNH are also found in the primary school curriculum, and it is conceivable that the direction in which people aim for happiness is shown in educational activities. Ministry of Education, Royal Government of Bhutan (2009) required teachers to teach each subject through GNH's way of thinking instead of having GNH as one subject. In a recent study by Dunaeva (2018), social well-being is connected with our relations with others and our feeling of security related to the environment. In addition, the fact that students in Bhutan can feel happiness in their daily lives may enhance their subjective happiness. Furthermore, they are relatively satisfied with what they currently have and want something in the future such as 'Occupation (Dream)', 'Car', 'Motorcycle' and 'Trip'. They have dreams and hopes to enjoy in their future. This may be the reason for increasing their current subjective happiness.

On the contrary, although the life of children in Japan is materially richer than those in Bhutan, public school students in Japan may be not satisfied with the current situation compared to students in Bhutan. The reason is that they do not feel happiness in their daily lives such as 'School' or 'Study'. Also, they want to obtain material and practical things such as 'Living', 'Clothes', and 'Comic/Magazine', which implies that they want to have them in the present, not in the future. The students from public schools in Japan have little expectations for the future compared with students in Bhutan.

Bhutan was able to increase the levels of happiness and education in the country because the values of Mahayana Buddhism are widely adopted by the people. Givel (2015) showed that the goal of modern GNH in Bhutan is based on Mahayana Buddhist principles to increase happiness for everyone. In addition, Bakhati (2017) stated that incorporating the core human values exemplified in Buddhism into school curriculum aims to promote values-based education. In fact, Buddha stated that real happiness does not come from acquiring or consuming material things. Happiness is a state of mind resulting from inner mental causes, not from external material causes (Harvey, 1990). However, as Western values and the era of economic materialistic values penetrate

Bhutanese society, the happiness levels of the people will also change. Brocks (2013) pointed out that while the standard of living for people in Bhutan has increased, the country faces challenges in their ability to manage rising consumption levels. This seems to be realistic in view of the current situation that the economic growth rate of Bhutan is ranked 11th in the world. It is thought that the living environment will change in the future due to the overflow of material in the lives of children in Bhutan. As a result, their material desire may increase. At that time, it is unknown whether the current happiness of children in Bhutan can be maintained. Additional studies of the happiness of children in Bhutan are strongly suggested.

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