

The Relationship of Religious Ideas and Social Values to Happiness in Particular Countries or Regions

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Abstract: Japan and Brazil's economies are examined in this research. Through comparing economic performance and happiness indexes, Japan is used as an example of high economic performance with low levels of happiness; Brazil is the opposite example to be studied. This research investigates the social values and religious ideas that may influence Brazil's and Japan's happiness levels and what influences them. Furthermore, it provides some comparisons of the differences in social values between Brazil and Japan. This research found that the social stigma of mental illness in Japan and passive ideas of religious beliefs that disrespect leads to ancestral curses may be contributing to Japan's relatively low happiness index. In Brazil, the kissing culture which is not likely to be seen in Japan, the variation in the proportion of religions, and the Boto legend as an example of religious myths as accomplices to self-defense may be partial factors for the relatively high happiness index.

Keywords: Japan, Brazil, economic performance, happiness index, social values, and religious ideas

1. Introduction

All living beings desire happiness and are frightened of suffering and loss; it is an accepted fact [1]. Throughout history, the pursuit of happiness has been a preoccupation of humankind. Nevertheless, the causes of happiness are as diverse and personal as the billions of human beings they influence [2]; wealth is one aspect that can be analyzed. In contrast, many nations exhibit a clear trend (more income equals happier people) [2]. For instance, the 15 countries with the lowest income inequality (indicated by the Gini index) have an average happiness score of 6.5; The nations with the most significant wealth disparity scored solely 5.2 on happiness. Therefore, it may demonstrate an apparent positive correlation between wealth and happiness. However, there are still exceptions and intricacies worth ing. According to the introduction to Sociology, religion depicts the beliefs, values, and practices associated with sacred or spiritual concerns. Numerous psychological studies have shown that religious persons have better physical and mental health and are more satisfied with their lives [3]. Therefore, this paper explores the relationship of religious ideas and social values to happiness in particular countries or regions.

2. Thesis Statement

By examining Figure 1, compare the data of median wealth per adult across the countries or regions. It is clear that Japan, Korea, and Hong Kong, three developed economies in East Asia, have significantly lower happiness scores than similarly developed Northern or Western European nations. More than that, some countries in South America are considered outliers. With unambiguously lower income and higher income inequality, they stand to have a relatively higher happiness score that the correlation between economic performance and happiness can not explain. Thus, this paper explores the relationship of religious ideas and social values to happiness in particular countries or regions.

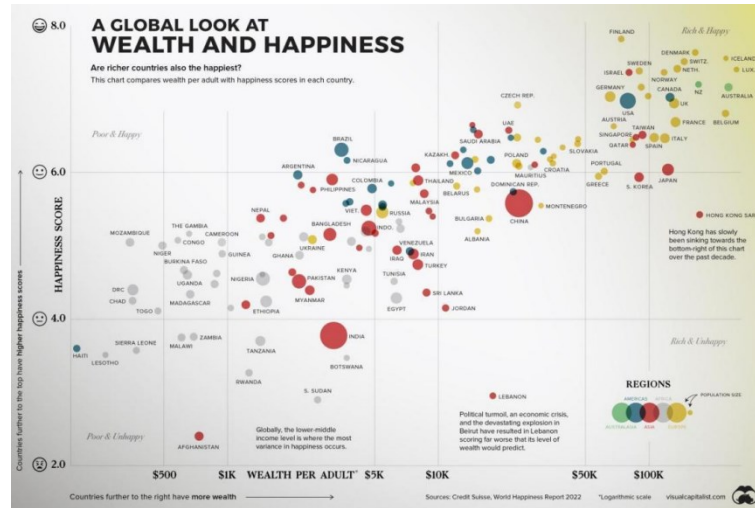


Figure 1: The Chart Compares the Wealth Per Adult and the Happiness index in Each Country

3. Literature Review

3.1. Introduction to the Happiness Index

The Global Happiness Council, a team of independent academic happiness experts, was the organization that initially developed the Happiness Index. Since 2012, this organization has yearly published the World Happiness Report (WHR) [4].

On an annual basis, economies are rated according to the happiness index. This measuring index, derived from survey data in which participants were asked to assess their level of happiness on a scale of 1 to 10, rates the contentment of countries on a range between 1 to 10 [4].

3.2. Social Connection

Social connections are people's connections with others, such as family, friends, colleagues, and acquaintances. These connections may come in many shapes and sizes, from casual contact with strangers to close ties with loved ones. For our mental health and overall well-being, social interaction is essential. It boosts our general quality of life, gives us a sense of belonging, and assists us in managing stress [5].

3.3. The Definition of Self-Categorization Theory and Social Identity Theory

John Turner and his colleagues created the self-categorization theory. Self-categorization theory aims to comprehend and clarify how individuals create cognitive images of themselves and others concerning various social categories. This theory's fundamental tenet is that individuals categorize

themselves and others according to the underlying characteristics they find particularly salient and that this process of social categorization affects various attitudes, emotions, and actions [6].

Social identity theory, which came before self-categorization theory, held that individuals not only develop a sense of personal identity through reliance on characteristics that make them distinctive but also possess multiple social identities based on their membership in social groups. When these social identities are highlighted, people favor members of the relevant group (also known as in-group members) over those who belong to other social groupings (also known as out-group members).

The self-categorization hypothesis is created to explain the cognitive processes by which individuals label themselves and identify themselves in terms of membership within various social groupings. Compared to social identity theory, self-categorization theory places a far more considerable emphasis on intragroup (i.e., within-group) processes. However, there is significant conceptual overlap between self-categorization theory and social identity theory, to the point that both theories are sometimes referred to as the social identity approach [6].

Previous studies in this field focused on the nation's overall happiness. However, they lacked details on particular economies with lower-than-expected happiness rates or mainly focused on the Christian religion in the United States [7]. Thus, to analyze some factors that may bring positive or negative effects on a country's happiness, whether values and religious aspects may improve or reduce happiness, it is helpful to devote attention to these elements to strengthen the overall happiness performance of nations with similarities.

4. Some elements of religion and values in Japan which may diminish happiness

4.1. Introduction of Japan's Economic Performance and Happiness

Japan, a developed country located in East Asia, known for the third most significant economy in the world, is ranked 27th in the nominal GDP per capita ranking, 38th in the real GDP per capita (Purchasing Power Parity) ranking in 2022, and 116th in the Gini coefficient in 2023. However, Despite remarkable economic performance, Japan is not one of the happiest countries in the world. The happiness index ranking of Japan is 54th.

Taiwan was ranked 24th, while Singapore was ranked 32nd in contrast. Six elements are considered while determining the ranking: per capita GDP, social support, healthy life expectancy, freedom of choice in one's actions, generosity, and perceptions of corruption [8].

4.2. Social Stigma of Japan

"Social stigmas are incredibly pervasive in every aspect of Japanese life" [9]. Japan has a comparatively low prevalence of Common Mental Diseases (CMD) [10]. A review makes it clear that during the past ten years, the prevalence of CMD in Japan has been mostly steady. In the last 10 to 15 years, there has been a roughly 1.2- to 1.6-fold rise in the 12-month prevalence of mental health treatment usage [11].

However, the stigma associated with mental health in Japanese society is a possible explanation for Japan's low frequency of CMD. Japanese culture has taught its citizens that mental illness is humiliating and denotes a lack of resolve [10].

The general population had notable negative attitudes toward individuals with mental illness. In an online survey, 56% of participants believed that those with schizophrenia could pose a threat to children. In another survey involving the general public, 48% and 61% expressed reluctance to hire a person with schizophrenia. Additionally, percentages ranging from 58% to 74% indicated they would not vote for a politician with schizophrenia, and 54% to 58% would not support a politician with depression. A study found that dementia ranked lowest in desirability compared to cancer, stroke, and

heart disease among elderly individuals in the three towns examined. Another investigation discovered that over 40% of the public considered dementia a source of shame [12].

Similar attitudes were noted among professionals. For instance, an examination of industrial workers and government employees found that only 26% believed individuals with delusions and hallucinations could live in the community without hospitalization. Even among medical students, a considerable portion (82% of respondents) held the stigmatizing view that individuals with schizophrenia were frightening due to unpredictable behavior. The study also highlighted that about 77% of students thought living alone in an apartment was unsafe for mentally ill patients. A qualitative study indicated that home-visit nurses underestimated the understanding of the surroundings and daily life skills of patients with schizophrenia [12].

According to Self-categorization theory, which claims that individuals would label themselves to a group that has specific characteristics, in Japanese society, with the prejudice and social stigma mentioned, the individuals may feel ashamed if they have a mental illness, therefore not trying to find a cure, it would possibly worsen the illness if this phenomenon is becoming more common. There is the possibility that this prejudice and social stigma of mental health can harm the happiness of Japanese people. Moreover, it may keep worsening the general happiness.

4.3. The Problem of Religious Ideas in Japan

4.3.1. The General Religion Composition of Japan

As of 2018, 69.0% of the people in Japan practiced Shint, 66.7% practiced Buddhism, 1.5% practiced Christianity, and 6.2% practiced other faiths, according to the government of Japan [13].

In Japan, religion is a mash-up of concepts from Buddhism and Shintoism. Contrary to the West, religion is not a doctrine or frequently preached in Japan. Instead, it is a set of moral principles and a way of life nearly indistinguishable from Japan's social and cultural norms [14].

4.3.2. Passive Ideas in Japanese Religion

The passive ideas of Japanese religious ideas are not scarce. After the Second World War, Japan became one of the most industrialized countries in the world, yet despite this, people there still have worries about their older years despite advances in science and technology [15].

Kaneko instructed his Osaka Ichiritsu University college students to write openly on religion [15]. Most students held a relatively passive view of religion, believing it not to be deeply involved with but rather something supernatural that is naturally appreciated and worshipped through rituals and not to be taunted by acting disrespectfully [16]. Only a tiny percentage of students had strongly positive or negative opinions about religion. One student mentioned how she practices Funeral Buddhism and offers sacrifices to her ancestors in her research [15]. Despite not feeling like she belongs to a specific religion, she believes it is crucial to honor her ancestors and that doing so will result in a curse [16]. A further student claimed that she does not consciously consider religion. However, she also claimed in her writings [16] that she frequently draws inspiration from local deities [15]. According to Kaneko's [16] analysis, people of all ages shared the same passive attitudes about the word "religion." These cases had fewer replies than national polls, necessitating more [16].

Nowadays, the psychological concern that people have of *muenbotoke*—restless ancestors without legitimate descendants to care for them—remains one of the primary purposes of practicing burial ceremonies [17].

Buddhist temples perform funeral rites to ward off disasters that restless ancestors' disturbed spirits could bring on for the family's future generations. Japanese parents frequently warn their children that disrespecting their ancestors will cause them to suffer a supernatural curse. In Japanese, it is told “bachigaataru” [18].

Because of these religious ideas of the possibility of being cursed by their god or ancestor, Japanese people, especially the younger generations, may have fearful thoughts about religion. These burdens carried from birth to death may lead to fear caused by excessive reverence for their ancestors. They may also drag down the spiritual condition of the Japanese people, thus lowering the country's overall happiness performance.

5. Some Elements of Religion and Values That May Enhance Happiness in Brazil

5.1. Introduction of Brazil's Economic Performance and Happiness

Brazil is a South American nation comprising half of the continent's surface area. It is also the fifth-largest nation on the planet [19]. Also known for its football, Brazil is the nation that often crowns the World Cup.

However, the economic performance is not excellent. With 79th in GDP per capita, 87th in real GDP per capita ranking in 2023, and the Gini coefficient is 10th in 2022 (0.49) [2]. These data state that Brazil is not only poor in economic performance but also one of the economies with the most significant income inequality. However, by searching for the chart [2], Brazil is ranked 37th in happiness and notably is the sole nation with a median wealth per adult of less than ten thousand dollars in 2022 (3469 USD).

5.2. The Kissing Culture of Brazil

Undoubtedly, it is worth exploring to discover what values may help grow happiness for Brazilian People. Therefore, Kissing culture may be a significant factor.

Brazilian customs and traditions place a high value on kissing [20].

In Brazil, kissing someone on either cheek while greeting or wishing them well is customary. This usual behavior is widespread among Brazilians and is not simply reserved for close acquaintances or family members [20].

Brazilians frequently give each other cheek kisses as a sign of friendship and warmth, even when they are only acquaintances or coworkers [20]. When they first meet, these traditions put total strangers extremely physically near one another. Rodriguez [21] believes that the Brazilian custom of kissing is a sign of how hospitable and open the people there are, and it speaks volumes about how warm their society is.

Nearly 5,000 years ago, the First Kiss in History Was Documented [22]. A kiss can reduce stress and boost dopamine levels. That is probably one of the reasons why kissing has been popular for close to 5,000 years. These benefits can be why Brazilians are happy since the social distance of strangers in Brazil can often be quickly shortened.

According to social connection, Brazil's kissing culture can positively impact mental health and overall happiness.

5.3. The Religion Structure of Brazil

Brazil has been predominately Catholic since the Portuguese invaded it in the 16th century. Brazil has an estimated 123 million Roman Catholics, more than any other nation worldwide [23].

According to data from the most recent Brazilian census, the number of Protestants has continued to grow over the past decade, from 26 million in 2000 to 42 million in 2010, representing 22 percent of the total population [23]. These two are the mainstream religious faiths in Brazil. In addition, the number of Brazilians with no religious affiliation is increasing, reaching 15 million in 2010, or 8 percent of the population [23].

5.4. The Religious Freedom in Nowadays' Brazil

Henterly [24] says, "In Rio de Janeiro, you can see God everywhere." Brazilians frequently conclude conversations in person or over the phone with the phrase "Fica com Deus," which translates to "Stay with God." It is hard to stroll the streets without seeing a seller selling the ever-favorite bracelets made of bright ribbons bearing the name Senhor do Bonfim, which translates to Our Lord of a Good End [24].

Henterly [24] claims that she knew right away when she first came to Brazil that religion is not a taboo topic to discuss freely. Syncretism of many religions and spiritual ideas is quite frequent in Brazil, even though Catholicism is the most widely practiced religion there. Indigenous and African faiths have significantly impacted Brazilian Catholicism. Many Catholics in Brazil participate in African religious ceremonies and hold an orixá, or Native American god, as a deity [24].

The percentage of Brazilians identifying as Catholic has been progressively declining in recent decades, and the proportion of non-religious individuals is increasing. In 1970, less than a million people in Brazil had no religion, but by 2010, the number had grown to 12 million [23]. These changes in the religious landscape may mean that the personal shift of religion or different religious ideas is acceptable to some extent in Brazil. Accordingly, religious freedom may have a positive effect on general happiness.

5.5. The Boto Legend (O Boto Cor de Rosa)

An Amazon River dolphin is said to change into an attractive man at night who seduces women, causes them to get pregnant, and then changes back into a dolphin before dawn. Unmarried Amazon women have used the boto mythology to excuse undesired pregnancies for centuries [24].

This mythology shows that some Brazilians rely on religious myths to support themselves. Although the boto myth may show some violence problems in women, Around 7.4 million Brazilian women experienced physical abuse in 2022, including punches, slaps, and kicks. This amounts to 14 women being abused per minute [25]. Nevertheless, it can still provide an optimistic view that the Brazilians may use some myth as a spiritual relief, making them feel better after making mistakes. It can be considered as a factor that improves mental health and happiness.

6. Discussion

Japan is used in this thesis as a typical example of good economic performance with low happiness. In contrast, Brazil is used as an example of poor economic performance with high happiness. The thesis looks at both social values and religious concepts.

In the section on social values, this paper discusses social stigma in Japan as a negative example. It analyzes it with self-categorization theory to conclude that Japanese bias towards psychological issues may affect the happiness of Japanese people. In the case of Brazil, the Brazilian kissing culture is discussed as a positive example and analyzed with the concept of social connection. This type of greeting may lead to closer relationships because it can effectively break down social barriers and shorten social distances. In contrast to Japan and East Asian countries, where this type of greeting might be seen as overly affectionate or even a sign of debauchery, in Brazil, it is a polite way of greeting that platonically expresses affection.

in the section on religious beliefs shows that Japanese people, especially young people, have a passive view of religion. Moreover, the Japanese attach great importance to respecting ancestors and think disrespecting will lead to the curse of restless ancestors. This passive notion may lead to an increased psychological burden and a lower sense of well-being. Brazil's religious freedom, on the other hand, has manifested itself in recent years. Catholicism is still the hallmark of Brazilian religion, and Catholics attend African religious services and worship their gods. Moreover, the decrease in the

overall percentage of Catholics is shown, and the increase in the percentage of non-believers may reflect the freedom of religion in Brazil today. The use of the Boto legend by Brazilian women also reflects that some Brazilians sometimes rely on myths to excuse themselves, which may lighten the burden and thus enhance happiness.

7. Conclusion

This paper explores the relationship of religious ideas and social values to happiness in certain countries or regions. Japan and Brazil are used as the subjects of the study. It was mainly pointed out that regarding social values, the Social Stigma-prejudice against psychological problems in modern Japan may lead to the increasing severity of underlying psychological problems, causing a decline in overall happiness. Kissing produces dopamine directly and effectively breaks down social barriers and makes people closer to each other.

In terms of religious ideology, it was pointed out that the Japanese culture of fearing gods and ancestors or being cursed may cause some people to take a passive view of religion and may also increase the psychological burden, which may impact the sense of well-being. In Brazil, the changing religious landscape may also indicate today's freedom of religion and the fact that the local boto legend is sometimes seen as a shield for the commission of sins.

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