

SPECIAL FORUM REPORT 019

Update: Happiness

May/June, 2021

On May 27 and June 10, 2021, the Reexamining Japan in Global Context project gathered for two virtual seminars to provide an update to [prior discussions](#) about happiness held in 2013. The first discussion featured Yukiko Uchida, Professor at the Kokoro Research Center at Kyoto University.

Prof. Uchida first provided an overview of notable developments from her perspective as a psychologist since 2013 when she last joined the symposium.

In 2013, Prof. Uchida noted, Japan was still trying to process and [recover](#) from the 3/11 triple disaster. Companies were facing pressure to save energy and manage risks better. The rebuilding conversation has settled, but there is ongoing discussion around other issues, such as the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), in response to which companies are shifting from a narrow approach to risk *prevention* and management toward the *promotion* of broader goals that benefit external stakeholders as well as society at large. Economically, Abenomics had been associated with modest GDP increases and had helped Japan recover from the 2008 financial crisis, but questions about trust in government and the degree to which policy promises have been kept endure. Today, the COVID-19 pandemic has introduced another shock. Looking at the big picture, we can see that Japan has been through a lot of ups and downs over the course of the last decade.

Nonetheless, Prof. Uchida said that we have not seen massive statistical changes in life satisfaction or happiness. There are some discrepancies in social outcomes related, for example, to socio-economic status and access to education; but overall happiness scores have not changed much. Average scores have remained remarkably stable over time.

Following her overview, participants took turns asking Prof. Uchida questions. The first question concerned the effects, of any, of the COVID-19 pandemic specifically on happiness in Japan. Prof. Uchida reiterated that many statistics suggest that average levels of satisfaction have been quite

stable. However, other data show some changes. For example, the demographics of suicide have shifted. Before the pandemic, the suicide rate was highest among middle-aged men, owing to economic pressures and social expectations. Now, amidst the pandemic, the suicide rate has increased among women, especially housewives. This tells us that something is happening in Japan's household and family dynamics, such that pressures have increased disproportionately for women. We are also seeing an increase in suicides among teenagers, possibly as a result of factors such as school-related disruptions and domestic violence.

The next question asked about a Japanese survey showing that the level of life satisfaction has actually been improving in Japan in the 21st century, despite the Western perception that Japan is a "miserable country." Is there something peculiar about Japan relative to other countries that could help explain this? Prof. Uchida responded that there *have* been some negative trends. The economy has been struggling and community trust has been declining. However, in this context, young people are seeking to optimize and *customize* their happiness on a more individual basis, outside of traditional family or social constraints. For example, people can choose to consume the media they like through the Internet, rather than debating with their families about what to watch on TV. Young people's definition of happiness is closely linked to this idea of customization and individual autonomy. However, young people do not necessarily seek a type of happiness that is connected to ambitious economic achievement. So, although from an outside perspective the economic situation has been declining, the individual pursuit of happiness is tending towards optimization, customization, and minimalism. This may help explain why some people are feeling satisfied with their lives despite various negative social and economic trends. On the other hand, something may be being sacrificed in the process of all this "customization," and this may be masking a degree of unhappiness. For exam-



ple, some people find it very difficult to communicate with others, and they try to avoid conflict, which is easier to do when happiness can be customized rather than negotiated. Of course, this can look like peace and calm on the surface, even if people are actually unhappy and avoiding conflict.

The next question was about the relationship between happiness and the relative stability of Japanese society. It seems that the young tend to be risk-averse but reasonably happy with what is available to them. Does this have something to do with the fact that, from a macro viewpoint, Japanese society has been relatively stable over the last 30 years, despite some big shocks and changes? There have been no major confrontations, for example. Japan is still a reasonably rich country; unless you are very ambitious, you can be satisfied and reasonably well off. However, if there were a big shift in general social conditions, such as the collapse of trust in institutions, higher rates of inflation, worsening crime, etc., would the Japanese psyche change drastically? Prof. Uchida responded that it is challenging to imagine what kind of trigger might emerge to provoke such a shift. After all, Japan has a lot of experience with disasters and dramatic changes. Many people complain about the Japanese government, including their response to the COVID-19 pandemic, but something about Japanese society seems to insulate it from disruption. In this respect Japan differs from many other countries, such as the United States, where it is more common to see social and political movements that seek *systemic* change in some way—or even seek to change the world. In Japan, although there are many complaints about policymakers and social discrepancies, people still largely want to maintain the status quo and a stable life. So, Japan does seem to be a *very* stable country. Perhaps if another country tried to invade Japan, we might see a shift in the Japanese psyche, but it is truly hard to imagine such a shift.

The next question concerned age and gender differences. Have different demographics experienced different changes over the last few decades with regard to happiness and their psychological experience? Prof. Uchida responded by pointing out that women in Japan tend to report higher happiness scores than men. Moreover, whereas Japanese men tend to report higher levels of happiness as they get older, women's happiness tends to be more stable throughout their lives. But it is unclear whether this pattern will persist as gender roles and conditions continue to shift. For example, middle aged men tend to experience less happiness, due to economic and workplace pressures. It is increasingly common for women to have paid work outside of the home, however, which may positively affect their happiness even though it is still relatively uncommon for Japanese women to rise above middle management.

The next question concerned the mental health impacts of the pandemic and the degree to which the prevalence of these impacts may or may not be decreasing the social stigma of mental illness. In Canada and elsewhere, there has been a

visible increase in mental health challenges due to the collective trauma of the pandemic, including social isolation, job insecurity, and the pervasive sense of threat from the virus. However, it also seems that mental health is being discussed more openly and is being taken more seriously throughout society, which makes it easier for people to seek help for the challenges they are facing. Has there also been an increase in mental health issues in Japan, and has this triggered a similar shift in the overall discussion? Prof. Uchida responded that generally speaking, seeking mental health services is still stigmatized in Japan. However, there are studies underway to assess whether and how the mental health landscape might be changing.

One change has been the emergence of SMS counselling, which leverages technology to reduce the barriers for people to seek and receive mental health care.

Researchers are also analyzing whether there are differences in the *types* of cases being observed during the pandemic versus those that were observed beforehand. They have found that coronavirus-related anxiety rapidly increased at the onset of the pandemic and during the initial stages of lockdowns, but then rapidly decreased again.

Some people also seem to be experiencing a positive effect from the pandemic, especially *hikikomori*, who have been very stigmatized but now feel more normal. There is perhaps a growing sense that it is okay to have a diversity of lifestyles.

The next question was about values. Has there been any evidence of pandemic-related lockdowns shifting people's fundamental values about what is important in life, and has that had any impact on happiness? In Canada, for example, lockdowns have made it difficult to indulge material values, but there has been a greater emphasis on human connection when people can get it. Similarly, more people are seeking opportunities to connect to nature and explore the wilderness. Have there been any similar developments in Japan? Prof. Uchida agreed that value systems are changing due to the pandemic. Ecotourism and exploring nature have been increasing in Japan as well.

Commuting offers another example of the changes taking place. In Japan, especially in the Tokyo and Osaka areas, people customarily get to work via public transportation. Many people are used to commuting more than an hour and are accustomed to crowds and to rushing. People have not necessarily reflected upon their level of satisfaction with this mode of living; commuting to work from a house in the suburbs has simply been taken for granted. Now, people are thinking about this more and asking whether a long, frantic commute is necessary.

Another indication of normative change is the decline of the “stamp system” (*hanko*). The use of personal stamps in lieu of signatures has traditionally been very ritualized in Japan. Documents often need several types of approval, with each official providing a different stamp. Prior to the pandemic, getting the necessary stamps required face-to-face

meetings, but the pandemic has made this difficult. As a result, stamps are decreasingly required and digital signatures increasingly accepted.

These examples point to a value change suggesting that “it is okay to be free.” Of course, this shift is not universal for all companies or people. Many are really struggling with this “new normal.” For example, some managers are very worried that they will lose control of their subordinates during working hours. Of course, there are generational differences at play here as well.

The next question concerned the spread of conspiracy theories and [disinformation](#) during the pandemic. We have seen this problem manifest intensely in the United States, with profound effects on politics and society. In Japan, although the problem is less conspicuous, there are also people who falsely believe that former President Trump won reelection and who believe that they are being victimized by “elite” Japanese society. Social conditions appear to allow radical conspiracy theories to spread in Japan as well. From a psychological point of view, how should we understand this phenomenon, and how should we deal with it? Prof. Uchida pointed out that some people *want* to believe these types of things, and this motivation makes it very difficult to deradicalize someone once a conspiracist worldview has taken hold. Some evidence suggests that people who feel constantly under threat, powerless, and unsatisfied are more likely to be radicalized by these types of worldviews, so it is worth considering the conditions that encourage these feelings to arise. Relatedly, a new collective shared reality can seem like an antidote to isolation. Even if that reality is a dark fantasy, it can provide social bonds, especially online. However, over the long term it increases conflict and drives people into further isolation from their friends, family, and society as a whole. So, this underscores how important it is to combat isolation, powerlessness, and fear.

The next question concerned regional differences within Japan. The commenter observed that many Sendai students, for example, report that they are happy, but not ambitiously so. Rather, they are simply content with what they have, especially materially speaking. This seems different from during the bubble period. Today, by comparison, the students’ expectations are very shocking. Many want to stay in the region. They are happy with life in Sendai, even after the earthquake, tsunami, and nuclear disaster. It seems like they take almost a minimalist approach to life. The trend seems to be similar in Korea, where many young people have relatively modest and stable expectations, especially with regard to materialism. Prof. Uchida replied that there seem to be some similarities among East Asian countries in terms of stability, minimalism, and material expectations. However, there are differences—Singapore may be a good example. Regionally, core cities that are big enough to satisfy young people with infrastructure, universities, shopping malls, etc., may allow them to optimize their happiness. In smaller cities, this is

harder to do. People have to leave to go to university, for example. The availability of education and other resources is thus important to consider in accounting for local happiness and expectations. If we compare Sendai and Tokyo, there are some similar trends. Recent data from Tokyo and Osaka suggest that happiness is relatively stable, and many people are taking a minimalist approach. Young men in particular do not necessarily want to own fancy clothes, watches, and so on, but will increasingly pay a subscription or rental fee to be able to access these items as they need them. The growth of this “sharing economy” is allowing people to make very different choices and, in fact, gives people *more* choice as they seek to customize and optimize their happiness.

The next question related to [environmental concerns](#). Throughout the West, many mental health professionals are increasingly pointing to “eco-anxiety”—traumatic feelings related to climate change, biodiversity loss, plastic pollution, and other global crises, as well as to the poor response from many leaders to date. Is “eco-anxiety” being observed or discussed in Japan? Prof. Uchida replied that environmental concerns in Japan tend to be localized, even among young people. People may care about their neighbourhood or city environment, but it can be psychologically difficult to fathom the larger context of systemic challenges. This localization of concerns also stems from a type of modesty. Many Japanese people feel that they have no power to change these types of big problems, and that “prestigious people should think about this; I’m not that kind of person.” This kind of modesty is unfortunately connected to ignorance, both of the nature of the problems and of the capacity of local communities to drive larger changes.

The next commenter asked about definitions. How should we define happiness, especially following the outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic? Prof. Uchida responded that “happiness” has a very narrow definition—it relates to one’s emotion, feelings, and mood. “Wellbeing” is a broader term that may help us to think about questions such as, “What is the good life”? It can capture more of people’s experience and concepts such as *ikigai*.

The next commenter asked about communication. How does in-person communication compare psychologically to digital communication? Prof. Uchida replied that face-to-face communication of course has some downsides. For example, we cannot always choose who we meet with. However, there are advantages as well, such as small talk and exchanges of social capital that foster trust. Without in-person interactions, it is very difficult to reap these benefits. Amid the pandemic, if we want to see someone, we need to make an appointment—and we need a reason to do so. This is very different from before, where you might enjoy spontaneous small talk before or after a meeting, or after running into someone. Sometimes this is tiresome, but it can also be very relaxing and easy. Additionally, human beings communicate using many kinds of channels—voice, tone, body language,

etc. With a small, two-dimensional screen, it is very difficult to communicate to the same degree that we can in person. Of course, while the pandemic continues, masks will also make things difficult when we are able to meet in person. So, we have to learn new ways to communicate, and to find ways to deliver benefits associated with in-person communication, even when we cannot meet face-to-face.



The next discussion featured Prof. Nick Powdthavee, Professor of Behavioural Science at the Warwick Business School and IZA Research Fellow. The conversation began with his overview of empirical trends in happiness and wellbeing as well as trends in policy and research.

Prof. Powdthavee began by describing some of the major trends in policy since 2013. A particularly notable one is that many leaders have started to demonstrate serious interest in mental health and wellbeing. For example, New Zealand's Prime Minister Jacinda Ardern and her government have allocated funds to a "wellbeing budget." This budget was created to fund policies that improve the mental health and wellbeing of New Zealanders, based on evidence about what works and what matters.

The U.K. offers another example. The government of former Prime Minister David Cameron was the first to recognize that we need to define societal success. Governments and commentators often look at indirect indicators such as GDP, but when Cameron took office in 2010, he instructed the Office of Statistics to start collecting data to measure wellbeing directly. British citizens have now been asked four main wellbeing questions every year. The data collected are nationally representative.

The four questions measure three dimensions of wellbeing:

1. "How satisfied are you with your life overall?" This question measures *life* satisfaction and is a measure of *cognitive wellbeing*. It effectively asks respondents to take stock of their past, present, and future; to reflect on where they are in the course of their lives; and to describe how satisfied they feel with where they are, how they are doing, what they are earning, and so on.
2. "How happy did you feel yesterday?" This question assesses *affective* or emotional wellbeing (mood), which tends to fluctuate day by day.
3. "How anxious did you feel yesterday?" This question also measures affective wellbeing.
4. "Do you feel that what you do in your life is meaningful?" This question taps into the dimension of *purpose* and worthwhileness.

Thus, one question measures *cognitive* wellbeing; two measure *affective* wellbeing (mood); and one measures *purpose*. Together, these questions capture different dimensions of

happiness and and evoke the concept of *ikigai*.

Measuring across these multiple dimensions of wellbeing (cognitive, affective/emotional, and purpose) reveals some interesting findings. For example, while economic indicators such as employment and income predict life satisfaction (cognitive wellbeing) quite well, they do not predict affective (emotional) wellbeing. So, for example, unemployed people tend to report much lower life satisfaction than employed people, but unemployed people can still have good emotional days. In fact, on average, unemployed people report similar levels of affective wellbeing to employed people, despite having much lower life satisfaction overall. This seems to be because unemployed people have more time to do things that are positively correlated with affective wellbeing.

Similarly rich and revealing data are increasingly available for other jurisdictions around the world. For example, the World Happiness Report has been running for nearly 10 years. The Gallup World Poll has been collecting information on all of these dimensions of wellbeing as well. Recently, Japan has been ranking around 50th in the world in these reports.

So, in sum, governments around the world have taken a lot of interest in measuring happiness and wellbeing.

In terms academic research trends, in 2013 happiness research tended to focus on correlations between micro and macro determinants of life satisfaction. Since then, academics have also looked a lot at differences between individuals and groups. For example, why are people from certain groups more or less affected by certain events in their lives? What allows some people to be more resilient than others? Can we explain people's ability to bounce back from particular life events? What role is played by childhood experiences and personality traits? These questions cannot be answered by looking solely at economic proxies for wellbeing such as GDP.

A recent book titled *The Origins of Happiness* (co-authored by Prof. Powdthavee) sought to answer these questions using "cohort data." Cohort data offer advantages over other data types, such as cross-sectional data, which reflect a given point of time, or longitudinal data, which track the same people over time. To get meaningful insights into happiness over the course of one's life, we need data from a much longer period of time.

The U.K. has been collecting data based on entire cohorts of people born in a certain time window and following them over the course of their lives. The first such cohort is from the National Child Development Study (NCDS). This cohort includes every single baby born during a one-week period in 1958. The data collection began with interviews with the babies' mothers. Follow-up interviews with the mothers and children have continued every five years since. Additional cohorts were added in 1970 and again in 2000. These data sets help researchers to see the long-run effects of various socio-economic determinants of wellbeing. For example, if you are born in a certain economic class, are you doomed for life?

Are you more resilient?

Governments often tend to focus on things that are important in our lives *today*, such as income and education. These are certainly worthwhile policy focuses. Education, for example, tends to lead to good jobs, marriage, and better health. However, education does not explain overall life satisfaction terribly well.

On the other hand, cohort data reveal other important—and neglected—opportunities for policy intervention. For example, we know that mental health *does* predict life satisfaction quite well, and cohort data reveal that a person's adult mental health is predicted in large part by their parents' mental health while they are young, and by their mother's mental health in particular. Even if someone is born in a rich family, if their mother is depressed, chances are this will affect the child's own mood and have long-term impacts on their life satisfaction well beyond childhood.

This academic research has huge implications for public policy. If the policy goal is to increase life satisfaction and happiness for as many people as possible, we should be pouring resources into supporting maternal mental health and childhood wellbeing.

Following Prof. Powdthavee's preliminary remarks, forum participants had the chance to ask questions.

The first question concerned methodology. Are there measurement challenges associated with wellbeing research? Are there cultural differences in terms of how people self-assess and describe their state of mind? Have any new measurement tools, such as brain scans, been introduced? Prof. Powdthavee responded that it is difficult to make intercultural and international comparisons precisely because different cultures *do* assess and communicate their happiness very differently. For example, Japanese people do not like to overstate *or* understate their happiness. However, despite cultural differences, we know we can trust the way that people report their wellbeing within a society, because this reporting does allow us to make useful and accurate predictions. Thus, for example, in the Japanese context, if someone reports they are unsatisfied with their job, we know they are more likely to quit. Further, it is possible to make comparisons within a society since people will tend to assess and report their happiness in similar ways.

It can also be helpful to look at the different dimensions of wellbeing, not just life satisfaction. For example, someone might report that, overall, they feel content. However, if you ask them, "How often did you smile yesterday?," or, "How frequently do you feel anxious?," the answers might offer a more nuanced picture. These types of questions on affective wellbeing do not require the same type of subjective evaluation as more general or open-ended questions associated with life satisfaction. Instead, they require an assessment of frequency. So, they can help to paint a more accurate and detailed picture of how a person is actually feeling even though those feelings fluctuate from day to day.

It is also possible to assess affective wellbeing based on certain physiological or neurological data, for example through brain scans, or measuring heart rate and stress hormones. These types of measurements can certainly be very helpful for individuals and medical practitioners. However, the OECD has noted that we need to re-think how we are defining societal progress, and the large-scale research involved in this endeavour requires a different approach. We obviously cannot measure everybody's cortisol levels or brainwaves. We need something that is measurable, cost-effective, and validated at a large scale as well. So, we should not rule out some role for physiological measures of affective wellbeing, but we should also not rule out asking survey questions across all three dimensions.

The next commenter asked about age groups. Are there validity concerns for comparisons across generations? Prof. Powdthavee replied that it is a difficult question to answer and more qualitative research is needed to assess such "cohort differences" between generations. For example, one generation might perceive a happiness score of 8 out of 10 to be euphoric, whereas someone from a different generation might consider the same score to be low. What explains such differences? We need to be able to understand the benchmarks and societal norms for given demographic cohorts—for example, by asking, "How do you perceive a happiness score of 8 out of 10?"

The next question concerned the role of societal stigmas in happiness and wellbeing. To what degree is population unhappiness in Japan and elsewhere related to societal stigmas around mental health? Prof. Powdthavee acknowledged that this is an important question. In Japan, deviations from the societal norm are often stigmatized. Unfortunately, such stigma persists with regards to speaking about mental health issues and having mental health needs as well. If you broke your arm and someone said, "Oh, that is nothing, it is all in your head, just change your attitude," everyone would recognize this as terrible and hurtful advice. However, people do this all the time to individuals who are struggling with their mental health—and not only in Japan.

Just ten years ago, mental health was similarly stigmatized in most countries. However, thanks partly to advocacy and transparency by high-profile people such as Prince Harry in the U.K., that stigma has been declining over time in the West. In Britain, we know that one in four people will suffer a mental health problem at some point in their life, and we know that people in countries around the world share these struggles and needs. So, hopefully we can make progress in Japan as well through conversations such as this.

Eliminating stigma and increasing mental health resources can help a lot of people. We know that the suicide rate is quite high in Japan, for example. In the U.K., psychiatric health care has become very accessible. The National Health Service (NHS) has an app that shows people where they can go for mental health services—often for free—and within a

one-mile radius.

Funding and de-stigmatizing mental health has huge benefits for people, and also for the country as a whole. We know, for example, that people take sick leave more for mental health challenges than for physical health challenges. Of course, the government has a major role to play, but private corporations also need to take this mental health crisis seriously. Leaving mental health stigmatized and unsupported has huge costs for businesses and the economy.

These shared mental health challenges have become even more important during the COVID-19 pandemic. The pandemic is having a massive impact on people's mental health, but this dimension can go unnoticed, especially in societies where people do not feel safe or lack the language to even talk about what they are experiencing and articulate what they need.

Mental health is also very relevant to conversations about elder care and [aging societies](#). The U.K. has a Minister of Loneliness. Loneliness is one of the biggest killers of older generations. Committing resources to the challenge has resulted in some great policies. For example, there have been small-scale studies co-locating nurseries with old peoples' homes. These types of initiatives can really help to support elders' mental health and help the kids as well, with improved outcomes for all involved.

The next question was about "silver linings." Have there been any upsides to the COVID-19 pandemic in terms of happiness and wellbeing? Prof. Powdthavee replied that there is no doubt that many people have experienced improvements in their wellbeing. However, on average, the evidence shows that the pandemic has been very hard on people, especially women. For example, in Korea, women have disproportionately borne the brunt of housework and childcare while also trying to work from home. It is also worth noting that the divorce rate has gone up.

A follow-up question asked about introverts and extroverts. Early in the pandemic, some people suggested that introverts would fare better. Has this been observed? Prof. Powdthavee replied that it is tough to answer this question conclusively at this point. It is easy to imagine that the answer would be yes, to the extent that you can hold everything constant, and introverts actually get more time to themselves. However, if everyone else is home too, this could be a big problem for introverts.

It also matters not just whether people *want* to work from home, but also whether they *can*. For example, how well set up is their home environment? How well supported have people been as they have been asked to adapt?

The next question was about the relationship between longevity, end-of-life challenges, and wellbeing. It seems that the pandemic has sharpened many people's sense of mortality. Japan is one of the longest living countries but struggles with its aging and shrinking population. In newspapers and online, many people have commented on the risks associ-

ated with living for *too* long. These risks include health challenges such as dementia as well as running out of pensions or savings and being unable to live decently at the end of one's life without feeling like a burden on someone else. How does this growing awareness of aging and end-of-life risks affect the conversation around wellbeing? Prof. Powdthavee acknowledged that, in a number of countries, people are indeed living longer than ever before. When this increased longevity combines with pressures on young people related to finances, climate change, housing, and so on, leading to a lower birth rate, the trends combine to produce an aging society in which resources get stretched as elder-care needs increase.

We know that if you are lonely and unhappy, you are more likely to die. If you live *too* long, happiness drops off quite a lot because of the health problems that often come with aging. People tend to report low life satisfaction and wellbeing before they die.

This does not really answer the question, however. Is there a better solution than a right to die? If we can maintain older generations' health and quality of life, and also foster better [opportunities](#) for them to still contribute and have purpose, then people may not feel that they need to die early.

Consider early retirement, for example. There is some evidence suggesting that early retirement can lead to early mortality in and of itself, because it can lead people to feel that their life is not meaningful. However, "retirement" does not need to mean "doing nothing." Early retirement can lead to a new sense of purpose if people choose to retire and are able to find other things to do that add to their lives.

So, it is important that we consider not only how to make older generations healthier, but also how to allow them to feel that they can contribute to society. Redefining societal wellbeing may require redefining retirement as well.

The next question was about the nature of happiness and what people want. What would happen, for example, if we could artificially induce happiness, as was posited in Aldous Huxley's *Brave New World*? Would it be dystopic? How many people would opt for a life in which happiness is "artificially" boosted, versus a "natural" life with ups and downs? Prof. Powdthavee agreed that it is an interesting thought experiment. However, people who would say "I would rather live a natural life" are probably already quite happy or have a sense of agency and autonomy such that they know they can choose to pursue happiness. Other people do not have that sense or experience of autonomy. Many people have trauma or a chemical imbalance in the brain and may have to take medication—a "happy pill"—to support their recovery and ability to live a happy life at all. It is important that we do not stigmatize this need.

A final question asked about happiness and wellbeing in the student population. Anecdotally speaking, surveys of students seem somewhat mixed. Many are not necessarily unhappy about online classes, but when asked about student

life as a whole, many appear to be deeply depressed. Is this consistent with a more general trend? Prof. Powdthavee responded that, from what we know, young people have suffered most from the pandemic. This is supposed to be one of the greatest times of their lives, especially for university students. They do adjust their expectations in terms of how teaching is delivered, but it is harder for them to adjust their expectations with regard to the rest of university life.

It is important to recognize that many people meet their spouse, make long-term friends, and have other life-shaping

experiences at university. When they do not get the chance to bond face-to-face, this might have a large long-term impact on their social life, family life, and career. This is not necessarily evident in economic data, but is enormously important nonetheless. We know, for example, that people who graduated during or just after the 2008 financial crisis have been much worse off over the long term than those who graduated just before the crisis. Regrettably, we can expect to see similar results for those young people whose lives have been disrupted by the pandemic.



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Online discussions, May 27 & June 10, 2021

Interviewees

- Professor Yukiko UCHIDA, *Kyoto University*
- Professor Nick POWDTHAVEE, *University of Warwick*

Project Directors

- Professor Masayuki TADOKORO, *Keio University*
- Professor David WELCH, *Balsillie School of International Affairs, University of Waterloo*

Participants

- Professor Yasushi WATANABE, *Keio University*
- Professor LEE Seung Hyok, *Tohoku Gakuin University*

Project Assistants

- Mr. Aladdin DIAKUN, *Crisis Century*
- Dr. Kazuki FUJIYAMA, *Kyoto University Graduate School of Law*



Yukiko Uchida is Professor of Cultural and Social Psychology at the Kokoro Research Center, Kyoto University. A former member of the Cabinet Office of Japan's Commission on Measuring Wellbeing, Prof. Uchida's research focuses on cultural variations in emotion and social relationships, the role of practices and meanings in constructing psychological functions and self-systems, the meanings of happiness and unhappiness, emotion, empathy, emotional support, and effect of each on social relationships. Prof. Uchida's most recent book is *Thinking About Our Happiness: A Cultural-Psychological Perspective* (Tokyo: Shinyosha, 2020).



Nattavudh (Nick) Powdthavee is Professor of Behavioural Science at the Warwick Business School, University of Warwick, specializing in wellbeing (or happiness) economics and behavioural economics—subjects in which he has published over 40 articles. Prof. Powdthavee is currently Associate Editor of the *Journal of Behavioural and Experimental Economics* and was the Chief and Founding Editor of the *International Journal of Wellbeing*. He is co-author (with Andrew E. Clark, Sarah Flèche, Richard Layard, and George Ward) of *The Origins of Happiness: The Science of Well-Being over the Life Course* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2018).



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