

# Theoretical and Empirical Examinations of Happiness in Korea\*

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*This study begins to overview the causes of a “positive turn” that tends to place a greater emphasis upon joy, fun or pleasure rather than deferred gratification. External factors of socio-cultural changes, such as increasing non-work time and increasing disposable income due to the diffusion of high technologies in the world of work, are examined. Internal, intrapersonal factors, the rise of post-materialist values, the shift in life interest from production to consumption and changing conceptions of work-life balance are also considered. Next, models of happiness that encompass the main thrusts of the past research on happiness across areas of philosophy, economy, psychology and sociology are explored. Then, the “component model,” “need satisfaction model,” “additive integration model” and the “multiplicative integrated model” are discussed. Given the discussion, a “cubic model of happiness,” that takes into account the effects of utility, need and value is suggested. Finally, based on the selections of world survey data on happiness, the levels and correlates of happiness are compared and the current state of the happiness in Korean society is explicated in terms of typical mentalities of contemporary Koreans including relationalism, inner-worldliness and returnism. In that process, special attention is paid to the discrepancies between economic indices and social indices, and policy measures that help to promote GDH (Gross Domestic Happiness), or overall life satisfaction of the nation, is proposed.*

**Keywords:** happiness, component, need, satisfaction, utility, value, mentality, Korea

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## Introduction

Happiness emerged as a topic of academic discourse in 1960s, when the project of modernity, led by the ideology of enlightenment, became suspect. Since late 1990s, neo-liberalism has increased the frustration of highly competitive ways of life, making “happiness” become the key concept in satisfying our needs for quality living.

In Korean society, discussions on happiness focusing on virtues and pleasures of life have been increasing. This trend can be traced back to the late 1980s, when confidence in industrialization reached the highest point due to economic upturns both at home and abroad. Yet, it is thought that discussions on happiness have become a general trend since the early 2000s as the net-generation, who were accustomed to self-expression, came to center stage. Such a tendency can also be detected in recent circumstances, where “happiness of the people” as a campaign platform appeals to voters more than lofty political pledges of “national development” or “social advancement.”

Regarding how discourses on happiness have entered the realm of public debate, three primary hypotheses can be propounded: first, the “reality advancement hypothesis,” ensuring an affluent and more stable life with less economic struggle; second, the “psychological compensation hypothesis,” coveting imaginary happiness amid insurmountable obstacles of life; third, the “shift of attention hypothesis,” steering general interests of a daily life to pleasure from agony. However, it is hard to accept the three hypotheses, considering the prevailing circumstances in modern society, both in developed and underdeveloped countries suffering economic recessions aggravated by the financial crisis of the late 2000s, which started in the U.S. financial markets and spread throughout the world. Other problems include the weakening basis of deceptive false consciousness due to the spread of participative media such as the internet or SNS, and multiple challenges, including the unemployment epidemic, lack of job security, livelihood crisis, threat of terrorism, environmental issues and population aging. Then, why do people still want to talk about happiness despite such adverse circumstances in real life?

## Sources of Happiness Discourse

In recent years, a “positive turn” that tends to place a greater emphasis upon joy, fun, hope or happiness rather than deferred gratification, has been witnessed in every corner of society, preferring joy to sorrow, hope to despair, reward to punishment, encouragement to reprimand, and jubilation to torment. Mottos like “Live a happy life” are good evidence, and a “theodicy of suffering” is now being replaced by a “theodicy of happiness” (Weber 1978; Berger 1990, p. 26). This phenomenon is an outcome of the confluent effect of the following external and internal factors.

### *External Factor: From Work-centered to Leisure-oriented Society*

In traditional society, leisure was not separated from labor, from religious life or ritual activities because social differentiation was not as salient as today. Division of boundaries between work and leisure in the space of daily life can be traced back to industrial society, which promoted a separation between workplace and home. As job duties have been tied to workplaces with specific time frames since the era of industrialization, time after work came to be conceptualized as free time or a time for relaxation or recreation, which contributed to viewing leisure as an independent activity for its own sake. According to S. Parker, a leisure researcher, leisure has become a major social institution by establishing a realm of non-work activities. He notes that leisure is now being recognized as a new form of institution distinguished from work activities as it retains independent values instead of remaining a residual category of labor (1976, p. 48).

The growing need for leisure is represented by the fact that workers are increasingly trying to enjoy their leisure time free from heavy workload and job-related stress (S. Choi, et. al. 2008, p. 5; Y. Jeong, et. al. 2014, pp. 83-5). It should be noted, however, such leisure-oriented tendencies have primarily resulted from reforms in productive capacities or production systems rather than from the transition of daily interests. This is because the era of post-Fordism has arrived, where improvements of production technologies and organizations augment disposable time and income, and thus, consumption and having fun are socially encouraged (Aglietta 2000, pp. 366-9; Juego 2011, p. 57).

### *Internal Aspect: Diffusion of Non-Materialist Values*

As in the saying “Man shall not live on bread alone,” a tendency to pursue higher needs for relationships, approval, and self-actualization has long been examined by A. Maslow and many other researchers as the improvement of the standard of living reduces the pressure of survival. This dynamic theory of the hierarchy of needs was followed by E. Mayo’s human relations approach and the neo-human relation school organization theories (Clegg and Bailey 2008, pp. 610-2). Detecting a new view of life from the hippie culture, which rejected key words and phrases of the 1960s and the age of industrialization, such as “productivity” or “efficiency,” F. Emery and E. Trist named that movement as one of “non-materialistic values”(1972, pp. 172-81). Such a tendency was empirically proven by R. Inglehart, who observed thinking patterns of young minds in developed countries in the 1970s, patterns which came to be newly conceptualized as “post-materialist values,” which led a “silent revolution” (1990, pp. 59-60).

The emergence of non-materialistic values, which emphasize qualitative angles of life involving freedom of speech, social participation and improvement of living environment transcending materialistic and physical aspects, has contributed to expanding the cognitive horizon of discourses on happiness by combining with an external transition to a leisure-centered society, and also promoting changes in the purpose of life from objective accomplishments to subjective enjoyment.

### The Meaning of Happiness

Generally defined as a “state of contentment with full satisfaction and joy in a daily life” or a “state of gratification and delight from fulfilled needs and desire” (Veenhoven 1984), happiness can be identified briefly as a “positive state of mind.” To reach this point, however, happiness has witnessed many conceptual transitions over time. According to religious historian M. Eliade, in the age of myth, happiness was to return to Heaven, the long departed home of men, after death. Yet to the school of Epicurus, happiness was deemed as a tranquil state free from physical pain or mental agony. In the meantime, in his pursuit of an alternative to the Epicurean theory of happiness, Aristotle offered *eudaimonia* as noble pleasures brought on by realizing one’s potential over the whole course of a lifetime. In a similar vein,

Cicero and Epictetus of the Stoic school defined happiness as the unity of reason and the world, rather than physical and mental pleasure. As reason was replaced by religion in the Middle Ages, it was thought that happiness was planned by divine providence and it could only be attained later through Christ's redemption. Yet, during the Renaissance, the meaning of happiness returned to a state disencumbered from physical suffering and mental affliction (White 2005, Preface).

As inferred from Kant's statement, "Happiness is now the world's motto," happiness in modern society came to be acknowledged as a state to which humankind as a self-governing agent of action should aspire. In other words, as the definition is moving away from such conventional meanings as "luck" or "serendipity," happiness was deemed as something to accomplish through human creativity, socio-political power, economic success and welfare, moral principles, free interactions and human relationships. This view of happiness was explicitly confirmed by the United States Declaration of Independence of 1776, which clearly stated the pursuit of happiness alongside the God-given rights to life and liberty. This concept of happiness was derived from "life, liberty, and property" argued in Locke's "An Essay Concerning Human Understanding," implying that happiness is a fundamental right to which every citizen should be entitled, and that state rulers and legislators should definitely bear it in mind (Locke 1960). The phrase "happiness of every man" is also included in the French Declaration of the Rights of the Man and the Citizen of 1789, which signifies that the pursuit of happiness has been restored as a civil right, as essential as rights to life or liberty. Such spirit was legalized into the "right to pursue happiness," and the Constitution of the Republic of Korea also clearly stipulates, "All citizens are assured of human worth and dignity and have the right to pursue happiness" (Article 10).

As researchers have further studied life satisfaction since the 1990s, concepts of hedonics and eudaimonia, presented in Aristotle's *Nicomachean Ethics*, came to academic attention again. From the perspective of hedonics, pleasure is the one and only good, and a life of maximized pleasure is thought to be a good life; on the other hand, eudaimonia defines human happiness as a state of well-being, where the *daimon*, or spirit, is consistent with the virtuous self, granting an ultimate value to the spiritual harmony of an individual (Aristotle 2014). Such observations provide a logical foundation for the modern view of happiness with its emphasis on self-actualization (Deci and Ryan 2000, pp. 227-68).

## Theoretical Perspectives and Models of Happiness

When it comes to critical factors for happiness, the first things that come to mind for most people may include money, power and honor. Actually, it is true that different elements of happiness are thought to be important throughout each stage of the life cycle. Happiness can vary depending on different social factors as well. This can be indirectly confirmed by happiness economics, which refutes the hypothesis that money always brings happiness in a capitalist society. While admitting money is the most critical determinant of happiness, it asserts that once wealth reaches a certain point, there exists no more correlation between money and happiness. Easterlin's argument that the average level of happiness did not increase in proportion to the constant hike in GDP and individual wages across the globe over the past half-century is a representative study proving happiness cannot be bought with money (2002 [1974], pp. 89-125).

Consequently, regarding the measurement of happiness, subsequent researchers have broadened their views on determinants of happiness from such economic components as income or wealth to include personal (health, character), demographic (age, gender), family (marriage, domestic relations), occupational (job duties, positions), institutional (participation, welfare), and circumstantial factors (economic recession, risks), pointing out that happiness is not a linear function depending on a single factor, but a plural equation involving a combination of diverse variables (Veenhoven 1984; Costnaza 2009).

The origin of a multivariate approach on happiness can be traced to the Two Factor Theory propounded by F. Herzberg. Based on a series of studies on job attitudes, Herzberg asserts that motivation factors and hygiene factors respectively influence job satisfaction and dissatisfaction in conflicting ways (Herzberg 1966; House and Wigdor 1967, pp. 369-90). When his logic is applied to happiness studies, the determinants of happiness, or the right side of the happiness equation, are divided into one set of happiness factors, which selectively work on improving pleasant feelings, and another set of unhappiness factors, which only aggravate unhappy emotions. Thus, this reasoning can explain such a phenomenon as the "Easterlin Paradox," that "Without it, you are not happy, but even if you have much, it doesn't guarantee your happiness either."

The multivariate approach has advanced in a new direction with the help of "positive psychology," which emphasizes subjective dimensions of

happiness (Kahneman, et. al. 1999; Kahneman and Krueger 2006, pp. 3-24; Seligman 2006, pp. 3-12). Since the 1990s, when interests in quality of life started to increase, researchers who intended to examine individual happiness with a focus on qualitative features of life have further studied happiness by introducing a conceptual framework of “subjective well-being” and measuring how individuals evaluate their lives in a positive way regardless of objective quality of life (Diener 1984, pp. 542-75; Diener, et. al. 1995, pp. 851-64; Diener and Lucas 1999, pp. 213-29).

This attempt holds grave significance in that it highlights the importance of a desire to acknowledge and accept a given situation from a different angle, paving the way for integrating the Two Factor Theory’s motivation and hygiene factors into the function of needs. With the shift of interests moving towards dimensions of needs that reflect subjective dimensions of individual internal state, happiness calculation has come to involve a question of “how” instead of “where.”

With the integration of this need-focused perspective, methods of calculating happiness can be categorized into four types: (1) the component model, which is centered on the existence or degree of happiness determinants; (2) the need satisfaction model, which measures individual happiness depending on the subjective gratification of needs; (3) the additive integrated model, which arithmetically combines the previous models and (4) the multiplicative integrated model. Out of the four models, the fourth is considered an advanced schema that comprehensively reflects the effects of all the variables. Mathematical formulations of the four models are as follows:

#### (1) Component Model

$$H = \sum_{i=1}^n X_i = X_1 + X_2 + X_3 + \dots + X_n$$

#### (2) Need Satisfaction Model

$$H = \sum_{i=1}^n NS_i = NS_1 + NS_2 + NS_3 + \dots + NS_n$$

#### (3) Additive Integrated Model

$$H = \sum_{i=1}^n X_i + \sum_{i=1}^n NS_i = X_1 + X_2 + \dots + X_n + NS_1 + NS_2 + \dots + NS_n$$

## (4) Multiplicative Integrated Model

$$H = \sum_{i=1}^n X_i * N_i = X_1N_1 + X_2N_2 + X_3N_3 + \dots + X_nN_n$$

The self-preservative capability of human beings is enhanced through proactive responses to intrinsic needs. If the “pursuit of happiness” is considered part of an independent effort to preserve one’s existence and life, happiness can be deemed as collaboration between gratification of needs, a passive actant, and choices and realization, an active actant.

The utilitarian philosopher Jeremy Bentham once proposed a “hedonic calculus” as a way to satisfy the needs of British society in the early 19th century and to accomplish “the greatest happiness of the greatest number of people” (Bentham 1789). Designed to set the priority of needs, his calculus was later followed by the development of a “hedonometer” and a series of techniques to measure and control happiness (Drakopoulos 1991, pp. 19-38). In this operation, however, a subjectivist counterargument was posed that it is impossible to standardize and rank subjective needs of an individual in an objective, uniform way; accordingly, the utilitarian theory of needs has come to face utter modification (Nussbaum and Sen 1993, pp. 2-3).

Subjective aspects of needs have been materialized as they diverge from the boundary of utilitarian utility and enter the realm of preference. It implies that delight and self-worth attained by the gratification of needs may vary depending on the value granted to those needs (Eyal, et. al. 2009, pp. 35-43; Pogany 2012). This notion is reflected in recent research on quality of life, establishing a concept of preference in the subjective realm of needs, which is hard to integrate in a utility function adequate to analyze the objective need system. Thus, by developing a new dimension of values separate from that of needs, intellectual elaborations on the theory of happiness can be elevated beyond the objectivistic approach, which both economics and psychology have conventionally pursued. The synthetic model, which integrates this view into the multiplicative integrated model mentioned above, is mathematically formulated as follows:

## (5) Synthetic Model

$$H = \sum_{i=1}^n X_i * N_i * V_i = X_1N_1V_1 + X_2N_2V_2 + \dots + X_nN_nV_n$$



The component model, the need satisfaction model, and the additive integrated model, all of which calculate the level of happiness as a total sum, present happiness as a form of length measurable with a yardstick. The multiplicative integrated model perceives the level of happiness in a form of a square measure. The final, synthetic model, however, which multiplicatively incorporates aspects of values, presents the level of happiness as a form of volume. The image of happiness as volume can be found in daily expressions like a “basketful of happiness” or a “bundle of happiness.” This alternative model of happiness with aspects of values incorporated provides a reliable clue to understanding the mystery of sharing epitomized in the saying, “A trouble shared is a trouble halved, while a joy shared is a joy doubled,” and transcending the zero-sum view of happiness, which says “Your misery is my happiness.” Although the fundamental merit of the synthetic model lies in its extensive scope of consideration encompassing the issues of conventional factors, economic utility, psychological needs and societal values altogether, it may be helpful to promote arguments regarding public as well as private happiness under a cross-cultural perspective.

## Current Manifestation of Happiness in Korea

Economists have long considered gross domestic product (GDP) as the most universal indicator to evaluate the state of national development. Yet, with the announcement of the Easterlin Paradox, which shows average happiness to be inconsistent with an increase in individual GDP, alternative indices like Gross National Satisfaction (GNS) and Gross National Happiness (GNH) have been proposed as a metric for happiness. Such efforts have been more assiduously made since the 1990s, when happiness started to emerge as a major subject matter of sociological discussions.

Among them, three notable examples include the World Database of Happiness, led by Dutch sociologist R. Veenhoven, which annually releases happiness indices integrating data relevant to happiness and satisfaction with a tool called “research synthesis,” a type of meta analysis, amid the deluge of information (Veenhoven 2005, pp. 27-30); the World Values Survey Association founded by Inglehart of the University of Michigan, which presents results of the World Values Survey conducted in more than 100 countries with the same inquiry every five years; the New Economics Foundation established by The Other Economic Summit in 1986, which has produced the Happy Planet Index since 2006.

The Korean economy has made remarkable improvement in a very short period of time due to state-led development policies rigorously conducted from the 1960s. However, it is generally perceived that Korea's non-economic sectors are relatively falling behind its "world-class economy," and a multitude of indicators prove this notion. In terms of economic indicators, including the scale of economy, trade volume, foreign exchange reserves and the number of listed companies, Korea ranks around the world's top 10, but in the meantime, when it comes to such social indicators as birth rates, divorce rates, suicide rates and the corruption index, it remains in the middle-lower ranks. Such an inconsistent reality is plainly reflected in indicators related with happiness in Korea, which ranks around the middle across the globe and close to the lowest among OECD countries (Helliwell, Huang and Wang 2016).

## Korean View of Happiness

Considering that happiness is savored through the habits of the heart, discussing the dominant views of happiness in Korea is needed in order to understand the very nature of happiness in Korean society. As the old saying goes, "(Wo)men and melons are hard to know." It definitely is difficult to understand what people really think because, unlike visible and tangible materials, thoughts belong to an intangible psychological realm; human minds tend to change easily under given circumstances, and inner feelings are often concealed or distorted due to social taboos or face-saving. Despite such difficulties, however, key mentalities of Korean people can be generally described with three concepts: relationalism, inner-worldliness and returnism (Kim 2013, pp. 7-17).

### *Key Mentalities in Contemporary Korea*

#### **Relationalism**

Based on in-group consciousness, a pattern of favoring one's in-group over out-group members, Korean relationalism emphasizes kinship centered on blood ties. As the family system is shifting in favor of a nuclear family, a traditional emphasis on kinship has been reproduced as familism, in which family comes first (Hahm 2014, pp. 87-128). The phenomenon can be easily found in daily lives, like in television dramas often featuring close family ties or "secrets about birth," but more profoundly, it is vividly revealed through a

series of confirmation hearings showing that most corruptions, such as a false resident registration or real estate speculation, were committed for the sake of children's education or the inheritance of property.

Yet, as interactions outside family or relatives became inevitable due to urbanization, individualization and the weakening of domestic ties through the breakdown of traditional communities, relations focused on one's hometown or alma mater arose, ultimately leading to the prevalence of favoritism based on blood, regional and school ties in Korean society (Hahm, 2014 pp. 87-128). With work- or SNS-related connections recently added, Korean society is now represented as a web of human networks full of varied intimate relationships.

### **Inner-Worldliness**

It was Max Weber who pointed out that inner-worldliness, stressing mundane happiness and comfort, rather than granting independent values to life after death, was inherent in the Oriental culture. Inner-worldliness has exerted a solid influence in Northeast Asia, in particular, where Confucianism, deemed as a worldly religion or an advanced socio-ethical system, has long served as a principle of living life (Schluchter 1979, pp. 163-4). Retaining the confinement of time and space, inner-worldliness has caused various phenomena in Korean society.

It cannot be denied that a confined view of time, which thinks life ends with death, has promoted an attitude that seeks to solve problems promptly while contributing to rapid growth and institutional reforms in Korean society. It should also be reckoned, however, that a myriad of social shams and risks result from shoddy management pressed for time. In the meantime, the confined view of space, which perceives a secular world as the only place to fulfill one's desire, has also led to stressing materialistic dimensions for tangible outcomes. It is clear that such practical attitudes have been partly for making the country an economic powerhouse with a population of 50 million and a 20,000 USD per capita GDP. Yet, secularism with an emphasis on tangible effects has turned the society into a utilitarian playing field of winner-takes-all rivalries by spreading a materialistic view of human nature, which claims that politicians, intellectuals and humans in general are in fact self-interested snobs; this notion has caused such side effects as a loss of social trust and self-esteem (Yee and Chang 2011, pp. 153-72).

### **Returnism**

A compensation mentality based on the idea of retributive justice is the

cornerstone of the precepts of major religions like Judaism, Buddhism, Christianity and Islam, as well as the mundane life ethics represented by such expressions as “a mixed blessing” or “the good comes with the bad.” Today’s Korean society can be characterized by fierce rivalry aggravated by a confined view of one’s lifetime. Such aggravation pushes the compensation mentality to an extreme form of returnism in which people are yearning to be rewarded for personal pain and suffering (Kim, Lee and Chang 2015, pp. 5-34).

Since the 1997 financial crisis, in particular, lost expectations for rapid growth and exacerbated uncertainty for the future have massively produced defeatists, who see themselves as failures or victims in the opportunity structure, creating out of bleak inferiority a diversity of disobedient resistances. A general repulsion of top dogs in the boss-subordinate relationship and a popular preference for “B”-rated culture can be deemed as an expression of compensation mentality, which claims “a sincere indemnification for all the sufferings that I went through.” A high suicide rate, among the highest in the world and rampant random crimes are also catastrophic examples of returnism practices, which often occur as social defeatism reaches the critical point. Its legacy can also be found in customs like a grudging admiration of others’ talents or jealousy of a neighbor’s success. Modern manifestations of returnism are starkly revealed by the equality of outcome, which rejects unequal treatments of any kind, or illegal collective actions, arguing that “persistent nagging wins,” or “public sentiment prevails.”

### *Luck-seeking Orientation: An Overarching Mentality*

Then how can the mentality of Korean people, in which such tendencies are entangled in a threefold spiral rather than a simple multi-track, be condensed? For that purpose, predispositions of relationalism, inner-worldliness and returnism can be translated into a single phrase: “enjoying life-long happiness with in-group members.” Presumably inherent in such wishes is the “awareness of sublime bliss,” a yearning for socio-economic success and mental and physical well being.

Here, it should be noted that the happiness pursued by Koreans is neither a divine bliss attainable through suffering and redemption, nor public ideas such as liberty, equality, and justice. Rather, it mainly belongs to a practical category involving worldly success. As inferred from a season’s greeting, “May you receive a lot of luck in the New Year,” the happiness in Korean minds is not a feeling of gratification achieved by fulfilling intrinsic

desires, but much closer to external luck-like power, wealth, health, fame and prosperity of offspring. Accordingly, it can be argued that the luck-seeking mentality longing for a carefree life is inherent in the Korean consciousness of sublime bliss, the center of the “secular trinity” of relationalism, inner-worldliness and returnism. From such a world-view, all the factors evoking emotions like sorrow, affection, rage, delight and worthiness are not things to be independently relished, but rather elements of a predetermined fate to passively accept and endure. A popular consensus of such common sayings such as “all the luck in the world coming through” or “7% luck 3% talent” also reflects a passive mentality of wishing for luck.

There are many theories and assertions designed to understand the awareness of sublime bliss in Korea in line with the age-old mentality of wishing for luck represented by practices like shaman rituals and fortunetelling. In today’s Korean society, however, conventional familism has transformed into relationalism of personalized networks, going against universalism, while traditional inner-worldliness and returnism have degenerated into pragmatic secularism and compensatory returnism. Likewise, the world-view of contemporary Koreans praying for good luck has evolved beyond that of traditional society (Kim 2013, pp. 7-17).

In a meritocratic society with a weakening structure of social class, Koreans still engulfed by the pursuit of social success are fully recognizing personal networks of influence, dubbed as “connections” or “strings,” as structural obstacles, which are hard to overcome with personal talents or endeavors. In this sense, Korean society can be seen as a high-grid society, where the in-group consciousness based on interpersonal relationships is functioning in multi-layered and multifaceted ways (Jeong 2005, pp. 239-52). Consequently, those who have felt a severe sense of deprivation due to the constraints of the opportunity structure are mostly committed to developing new relationships that may help them achieve their goals, rather than seeking innovative alternatives in order to overcome the structural limits. Instead of praying to mountain gods in front of a bowl of freshly drawn water, Koreans are now developing a new form of awareness of sublime bliss that will compensate for their sufferings by pursuing success through stepping stones of luck called personal connections.

## Misfortunes amid Mercies

What is the root cause of low levels of happiness among Korean people,

describable as “unhappiness in the midst of prosperity,” similar to “poverty in the midst of plenty”? If their psychological characteristics are added to the final equation of happiness  $H = \sum X_i * N_i * V_i$ , in which value factors are reflected in the multiplicative method that involves a dimension of needs, possible interpretations are as follows.

There would be little dispute that Korean society has seen a remarkable advance, if not prosperity, both economically and institutionally over the past half century. It has made great strides in terms of improving quality of life through changes directly related to survival and convenience, which leads to an estimation that Korean people are not greatly deprived compared to their counterparts in developed countries in terms of general life conditions, the first consideration in happiness equations.

Accordingly, in order to explain low happiness in Korea as a collective phenomenon, need factors should be keenly investigated in connection with the three aforementioned mental characteristics: relationalism, inner-worldliness, and returnism. Such traits can be observed in daily Korean expressions like “*kkirikkiri*” (buddy buddy), “*ppalippali*” (faster faster), and “*manimani*” (many many), which paralyze an individual’s self-sufficient capability to control the size of the “happiness bag” to put any given luck in. The larger the size of the bag, the better, in order to possess “more and faster” sharing with “birds of a feather.” Therefore, under the influence of vicious rankism, where only winners exist and losers are not given a chance to rise again, Koreans’ social needs, a determinant in satisfaction models, are spiraling out of control, subject to the logic of maximalism that argues “the greater, the better.” Consequently, Koreans experience an increased deficiency of needs.

In addition, the Korean value system represented by the “worldly awareness of sublime bliss” is driving society’s happiness equation into a unique pattern. According to Jeong-ho Choi, a representation of happiness Koreans pursue can be defined as a modified form of traditional luck-wishing mentality closely intertwined with the shamanism underlying Korean culture. He then classifies the core of the conventional frame of mind into four types: longevity, wealth, status, and male offspring. As the household bond is weakening today, Choi adds, the number of male offspring is gradually being eliminated from the category of desirable values. Instead, longevity, wealth and status are still considered decisive factors guaranteeing one’s happiness. Here, longevity is directly related with oneself, and wealth is mainly given and taken within the boundary of a family, but on the other hand, social status is exerting an absolute influence as the most universal, comprehensive and

overarching value of success in Korean society regardless of units of social actions such as individuals, families and local communities, or boundaries of social activities (2010, pp. 193-6).

Choi presents a diagnosis that aspirations for health, wealth and status are now ever intensifying while Confucian restraints are receding, but under the current situation, where neo-liberal principles are spreading through every corner of life, a deeper consideration should be given to structural changes in the value system, which herd society into a fierce competition for material success as the accumulation of wealth and achievement of social status have become a huge black hole sucking in other social values. To sum up, the equation of happiness in Korea with neo-liberalism centered on an institutionalized ruthless rivalry is oversimplified into an equation with two variables: the accumulation of wealth for familial well-being and the attainment of social status for the glory of a family or social recognition have become utterly dominant, overthrowing other social values.

Facing unhappiness, we often console ourselves by clinging to a faint idea of hope and being grateful for small mercies amid misfortunes. It must be a lop-sided reflection of a wishful thinking that everything is going to be fine. However, if the accumulation of wealth and the attainment of social status are solely acknowledged as success, and people tend to be committed to such confined goals, it is highly likely that Koreans will face a paradoxical risk of “misfortunes amid mercies” contrary to “mercies amid misfortunes.” In nature, wealth and status are not motivational factors which enhance happiness as they increase; rather, they are hygiene factors, which aggravate dissatisfaction as they decrease. In order to enhance our level of happiness, it is necessary to upgrade such hygiene factors to a certain level. But activation of motivation factors should accompany this as well. The most convincing one may be the restoration of “relational value” that is far from the “possessive and positional values” represented by wealth and status respectively (Bruni 2013, pp. 173-8).

The worth of relational value is a reminder that happiness is not limited to personal matters. The happiness of Korean people, which remains in gridlock despite advances of external circumstances, is also a function involving overall social factors like working hours, wage gaps, job stress, family relationships, governance structure, class relations, social participation, and tragic disasters, as well as personal health, needs, and worldviews. High rates of suicide, divorce and alcohol consumption, along with low rates of marriage in Korean society can be fully explained along with the theory of public happiness taking account of public values, which reflect

social meanings of human existence.

## Conclusion: What is to be done?

In recent Korean society, one of the most remarkable changes in consciousness is the fact that the ethos of authenticity, which peaked from the age of industrialization through the era of democratization, is being replaced by that of superficiality. The driving force behind this new notion mainly rests on enjoying life without the burden of heavy, lofty causes or moral values involving human struggles and existence. The protagonists of this new spirit are the “post-386 generation.” Generally dubbed as a new generation by the media and the advertising business, they are born after 1971 and raised during the post-Cold War and information era. Beneficiaries of rapid growth, they grew up under less political oppression than their predecessors, blessed with the consumer and image culture of the 1990s. They are emotional beings adept in pursuing freedom and individuality, strongly expressing themselves, stressing individualism and post-materialism, preferring sensuous judgment to rational thinking (Kim 2009, pp. 30-1).

It may be premature to draw a comprehensive conclusion on their view of life as one that disregards authenticity, but two things are clear: they are happiness seekers, who put comfort and pleasure first over suffering and agony by chasing spontaneity, individuality, intimacy and aesthetic elements rather than introspection, civic engagement, sociality, and ethicality, and that they consider agility, by which they can adeptly struggle through the tough world of aggravated uncertainty, as a new social value.

Also pertinent to a high demand in access-based relations that can promptly deal with piles of tasks in the age of high speed, this tendency is rapidly spreading throughout other age brackets along with the diffusion of mobile telecommunication devices featuring lightness, thinness, shortness, and smallness such as cell phones, tablets, smart phones and smart pads. Therefore, as agility is universally recognized as an adequate, effective quality to deal with this ever-changing world, the term “smart,” epitomizing that agility, has become a prevalent word of the times in leading social innovations (Kim 2013, pp. 10-26).

To sum up a series of discussions regarding the creation and calculation of happiness, ways of enjoying happiness can be divided into three types: first, a beneficiary type focusing on achieving external happiness; second, a realization type concentrating on gratifying desires toward happiness; and



third, a creative type, zeroing in on vigorously creating happiness. It is highly likely that benefits from happiness and its realization may result in a “hedonic treadmill,” which fails to promote happiness after reaching a certain point. Therefore, in this “smart” age inundated with shallow, trivial happiness, there is an urgent imperative to expand the ventricle of the creative happiness, which is expected to invigorate life by promoting a value-adding function to deepen the box of happiness.

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