Happiness in the Netherlands and Japan since the 1980s

Trends from a generational perspective

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Abstract

Generation theory predicts that distinct generations that co-exist in society in any moment in history not only have different values and normes, life chances and life styles, and actions and choices, but also different views on well-being, including feelings of happiness. This article analyses the impact of generational distinctions when comparing trends in happiness in the Netherlands and Japan. Use is made of the 3-wave datasets of the World Values Survey/European Values study for the 1981-1999/2000 period. To explain trends in happiness one has to take account of country-level characteristics of the Netherlands and Japan (with the Dutch being consistently more happy), of historic events (or period effects with more happiness towards the end of the millennium), but also of individual features (particularly with women being more happy) and generational belonging: both in the Netherlands and Japan the lost or ultraman/new breed generation (born 1955-1970) is a particularly happy generation. It seems to be a specific generational characteristic of this generation, either Japanese or Dutch, to feel more happy. It can be argued that they specifically in their formative years (during the 1970s and early 1980s, in which the future of their own life chances was grim and crises on a wide variety of domains reigned) indulged in hedonism, in an out-going lifestyle, in finding their own way (usually with contemporaries) in the emerging popcultural and new media industries that provided an alternative life course route as the classic ones were more and more difficult to enter. It is also suggested to take account of possible changes in what defines happiness for the youngest generations now their life course has a different logic. Well-being or happiness for them is being able to change and to have fun and challenging experiences.

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Introduction

It is a cliché, but like most clichés, a widely accepted image of reality in both popular and academic discourse: advanced societies, such as Japan and the Netherlands, have experienced massive change resulting today in the co-existence of different generations with very distinct experiences. Assessments of quality of life, well-being, life-satisfaction, happiness and the like, along the lines of generational delineations seem to posses an almost self-evident legitimation. If younger generations grow up in a entirely different society compared to the one of their predecessors, for instance a society with a higher level of physical and socio-economic security, these generations will have and will persist to have other ambitions, expectations, if not values and norms reflecting the typical circumstances in their own period of growing adult (e.g., Mannheim, 1928/1929; Inglehart, 1997). The typical cultural make-up or mind-set of each generation, established, as theory goes, in the formative or youth years of generation members and maintained throughout the lifespan of these members, will enduringly impact their perception of life and its quality, their view of the world close or far away from where they live, their attitudes towards the most profane and most prozaic affairs, and their actions to attain (or not to attain) whatever it is they want (or not want) from life. Of course, there is much debate in social science on the theoretical points of departure and on the empirical validity of generational cleavages in any particular society at any given moment in time (see e.g., Becker, 1992, 1997; Diepstraten et al., 1999; Dekker & Ester, 1995; Van den Broek, 1996).

This paper aims to address the importance of generational perspectives in explaining trends in happiness in the Netherlands and Japan using longitudinal data from the World Values Survey and European Values Study over the last two decades of the 20th century. The rationale to do so will be depicted in the next paragraph. This is followed by a short overview of the data and indicators used to analyze trends from a generational perspective, a perspective that necessitates including age and period effects, or, at least, proxies of these effects. The paragraph after this will present the main findings of the generational analyses, starting with a report on the developments in happiness as such in both countries. The final paragraph will draw some conclusions on the importance of using the generational perspective for assessing trends when comparing different societies.

Generation X, Y, Z

Creating and debating generation images are popular pastimes in many advanced countries, including the Netherlands and Japan. Almost on a weekly basis new images are born. Old ones are discarded, or, better still, are ignored as if they had never been

there. Often these images, new or old, have a normative connotation usually directed towards the youngest generation whose members are 'not as they used to be in former times': their civic and political apathy, for instance, their one-sided love for money and consumerism, their unhealthy interest for trendy clothing and technological gadgets, their indulgence in everything bringing short-lived physical excitement, and, of course, their bad manners. Some Dutch generation labels are fine examples of this tendency; an at random selection from the Dutch news media (see also Diepstraten et al., 1998): the 'generation of nothing' (whose members believe nothing and prefer to do nothing, certainly not for the good of society), the 'generation of enjoyers', the 'back seat generation' (referring to youngsters daily driven to school by their parents), the 'patatgeneratie' (a label coined by the former coach of the Dutch national soccer team indicating the unhealthy lifestyle – eating french fries = patat – and weak attitude of today's young people making a whole generation unfit to perform and compete), the 'laconic generation', the 'bits and pieces' generation, etc. What seems to be of all times is that older generations spent much energy on stereotyping the younger ones (more than vice versa, see Diepstraten et al., 1998, 1999; Vinken, 1997). Especially in popular media and the advertising and marketing industry these stereotypes have proven useful to grasp and understand emerging lifestyle groups and whole decades of history at the same time. The fluidity of these labels, the fact that there are so many labels and that these labels alternate at high speed, is, however, proof in itself that they do not seem to fit generational reality very well.

Some generation stereotypes seem to stand the test of time or at least have, to some extent, survived serious academic study. The much famed and even more criticized generation framework of Henk Becker (1992, 1997) in the Netherlands (see the critiques in Dekker & Ester, 1995, Diepstraten et al., 1998, 1999; Van den Broek, 1996) is, beit in broader strokes than Becker intended, an accurate image of generation cleavages in the Netherlands. Becker defines a generation as 'a clustering of cohorts characterized by a specific historical location and by common traits at the individual level (life courses, value orientations and behavioral patterns) and at the system level (size and composition, generational culture and generational organizations' (Becker, 1992: 23, my translation). In his typology he distinguishes five generations in the Netherlands who had their formative years in the 20th century in quite different historical circumstances: the *prewar generation* (born between 1910 and 1930), the *silent generation* (born between 1930 and 1940), the *protest generation* (born between 1940 and 1955), the *lost generation* (born between 1955 and 1970), and the *pragmatic generation* (born after 1970).

The formative years of the *prewar* generation in the Netherlands were marked by the Depression in the thirties and World War II. Members of this generation grew up at a time of mass unemployment and devastating war, which severely limited their life

chances. These dramatic experiences made this generation particularly apt to want to safeguard its financial security. Their norms and values stress a solid working ethic, sobriety, thrift and a desire for law and order. The formative period of the *silent* generation was in the postwar years of economic recovery and they entered the labor market at a time when jobs were amply available. Though on average, they had much better life chances, by and large members of the silent generation share the traditional norms and values of the prewar generation. The *protest* generation grew up in 'the turbulent sixties', a period of unprecedented economic prosperity and mushrooming higher education. In addition to their generally excellent life chances, they are legendary for their political resistance to 'the capitalist system' and the *bourgeoisie*, and their experimenting with the icons of youth culture: sex, drugs, and rock and roll. Members of the protest generation are assumed to have embraced norms and values that accentuate freedom, self-realization and self-expression, democratization, equality, and political involvement. The formative period of the *lost* generation coincides with the economic recession of the seventies and the mass youth unemployment of the early eighties. These circumstances negatively influenced the general life chances of this generation with lasting adverse effects over their life course.[2] Moreover, the lost generation was adolescent in times of serious social, environmental and geopolitical upheaval during the late 1970s up until the second half of the 1980s: housing speculations and ditto shortages, vivid environmental degradation, and peaking crises in East-West relationships. The future looked grim. This generation at the time labeled itself the 'No Future generation'. Members of the lost generation share many of the values of the protest generation such as self-actualization and freedom, but embrace less exalted expectations, are less interested in political involvement, and exhibit a more down-to-earth 'no-nonsense' approach to societal issues. The *pragmatic* generation grew up in a period of economic recovery and is assumed to have better overall life chances than the lost generation. The alleged small size of this generation implies less severe competition for good jobs and incomes. In view of the recent formation of the pragmatic generation Becker at the time did not speculate on possible distinctive norms and values.[3]

There is not much strong proof that each and every generation discerned by Becker is an actuality on every possible feature (see Van den Broek, 1996; Diepstraten et al., 1999). As predicted the two oldest ones, prewar and silent, seem to overlap strongly in terms of values, as do (not entirely so predicted) the two 'younger' ones of the protest and lost generation both in terms of values and life chances. There does seem to be a strong distinction between these two blocks of generations. The two

[2] Becker re-evaluated the life chances of the lost generation and concluded that they are better than was estimated some years ago (Becker, 1997).
[3] See for an internationally comparative trend study about social and cultural positions of this generation *The future of young generations* (Van Bommel et al., 1995).

older and the two younger ones stand at each side of a serious value gap. The very young generation, the pragmatic, combines values of either two blocks of generations with some more emphasis on the ones of the oldest block (a return to more 'conservative' views). However, there is some evidence at the subjective level – and this is important as will be shown below – that the five Becker generations do exist. A very large majority of people claimed to belong to a generation. The exception, though still a majority, is the lost generation. Asked to typify their own generation without prompting them to which generation they objectively belong (considering only their year of birth), the vast majority of people mentioned circumstances, events and even specific popcultural commodities (music players, ICTs, idols, etc.) that generation theory predicted (see also Ester et al., 2002): the oldest generation members mentioned the severe war and postwar experiences and the icons that belong to these periods (Churchill, the Dutch Queen Wilhemina, etc.); the protest generation exhausted itself in mentioning the Vietnam protests (that they usually did not attend) and their full consumption of American-style popculture agitating against American-style consumerism (the much-famed rock and roll attitude); the lost generation stressed the crises on a broad number of affairs, their no-future prospects and indulgence in hedonism; and the pragmatic one emphasized their unique electrified communication environment and hybrid style preferences. Top priority generation gaps were seen in the distinct norms and values on upbringing, family-life and sexuality, not in attitudes towards work, not in political or social values, not in pop cultural styles. These private lifesphere values were seen as generationally distinct due to formative experiences and as still influential in the lives of generation members even now when they had grown older.

It seems to make sense to generation members themselves to identify with generations. This is exactly what classic generation theory, as established by Karl Mannheim (1928/1929), would predict. Mannheimian conceptualization of a generation stresses that a generation is not a mere statistical birth cohort. To begin with, a generation refers to individuals who are born in the same historical period, who live in the same socio-cultural space, and are aware of sharing similar youth experiences in their formative years. This conceptualization presupposes that generation members subjectively identify with their generation, are linked by a common biography, have an elementary sense of a joint destiny and of being different from other generations. Generation membership assumes generation *consciousness* and a cognizance that one's generation is *distinct* from other generations. Generation membership thus depends on the subjective views of people in a particular social and historical setting. He discerns three dimensions: generation location ('*Generationslagerung*'), generation as an actuality ('*Generationszusammenhang*'), and generation unit ('*Generationseinheit*'). A generation location refers to individuals born in the same period and socio-cultural

space, who are exposed to a common range of historical events. A generation location is a potential generation that may or may not materialize. This potentiality of generation formation becomes reality by way of a generation as an actuality, which is defined as 'constituted when similarly located contemporaries participate in a common destiny and in the ideas and concepts which are in some way bound up with its unfolding' (Mannheim, 1952: 306). The step from a generation location to a generation as an actuality depends on the recognition of common experiences during the formative period of individuals who are born in the same historical and cultural space or region, who feel connected with their contemporaries because of the common destiny of their '*historischen Schicksalgemeinschaft*'. Thus a generation as an actuality exceeds the mere historical co-presence of individuals. To corroborate this view, Mannheim draws on Dilthey (1875), who emphasized the importance of commonly shared experiences as subjective, mental elements and the impact of the youth period or formative years.

In the Netherlands there seems to be a case for generations existing at the subjective level (feeling distinct at numerous features along the lines of the five-generation format, but feeling still distinct especially because of private sphere values and norms) and to some extent at the objective level (looking at birth cohorts) in terms of values and life chances (especially a distinction between people who were born before 1940, between 1940 and 1970, and after 1970). In Japan there is reason to believe that generations followed a highly similar path in some respects and a very different one in some others. Fujiwara and Carvell (2002) combine official statistics, survey data and qualitative materials and make a plausible case for several generations who exist at the turn of the millennium and whose experiences align sharply with distinct circumstances and events since the 1920s in Japan. The *young seniors* are born between 1930 and 1940 and are (much in line with the Dutch silent generation) frugal savers and cautious spenders, aiming at self-reliance, improving their quality of life and personal relationships and keeping up good health and appearances. The *postwar baby boomers* (another label that is much used to point at the protest generation in the Netherlands) are born between 1940 and 1950, have prosperous careers, are the first generation to live for themselves, identify with values and lifestyles, are very consumption-oriented and are on the look-out for new experiences. The *ultraman generation* is born between 1950 and 1960 and partly overlaps with the Dutch protest generation and lost generation. Strikingly, Fujiwara and Carvell (2002: 81) report as a first feature that, similar to their Dutch lost generation counterparts, this generation has difficulties defining themselves as a generation. Their defining moment relate to rising importance of television (Ultraman is a TV series superhero), the rise and collapse of the bubble economy from which they are now suffering uncertainty if not debts, the crumbling of future securities and in general worries about their future. The *new breed generation* is born between 1960 and 1970 (overlapping fully with the Dutch lost generation) is hedonistic, or as Fujiwara and

Carvell (2002: 97) indicate: ‘the first generation to cultivate a lifestyle that emphasized leisure activities… eating our, playing sports, traveling to popular tourist spots’. Many of them have started their own enterprises in new media areas, choose to stay single, refuse to give up their lifestyle for children and reject prewar values and gender roles. Typical for Japan is, next, the generation of the *second baby boomers* born between 1970 and 1980. In the Netherlands birth rates dropped continuously resulting in the assessment that the pragmatic generation (born after 1970) would be small-sized. In Japan the new breed generation is small compared to the first and second baby boomer cohorts. The second baby boomers also wish to enjoy life, take affluence for granted, are self-absorbed, focused on fun and entertainment and preserving the balance between work and personal life. They combine styles, tastes and high- and low-ranked commodities and extensively use ICTs on a day-to-day basis (see also HILL, 1995). They seem to share a pragmatic view on combining jobs and private lives with the Dutch young generation. As Honda (2004) also shows, many of the twenty-something Japanese choose to live the life of ‘*freeters*’, people who are oriented at getting part-time and short-term contracts to be free to enjoy a personal life and dream about the next steps in their life course (however much they are also forced to do so due to labor market chances as Honda, 2004, also shows). The *teens*, finally, are born between 1980 and 1990 and can probably not yet be regarded a full-fledged generation. They share features (being open to others and to new developments and very busy with incorporating trends that play up their youthfulness, etc.) that young people of every decade of history probably share. It is important, in other words, to take account of characteristics that are typical for a generation and last throughout the lifespan of its members and characteristics that are typical for different phases of the life course (being in education, being employed, having children, etc.) but fade away when people progress from one phase to another. As we will argue further below, it is important to take account of different effects at the same time in order to discern the distinctiveness of generations in terms of values, life chances, and actions.

Assessing the feeling of happiness of generations in value surveys

In the following we aim to assess the diversity in happiness between the Netherlands and Japan taking account of generational cleavages. It is plausible to assume that due to the very distinct formative experiences and the resulting diversity in values, life chances, and actions each generation will a different view on their well-being, including the feeling of happiness. It might well be found that the older generations still feel difficulties to assert an overall positive feeling when contemplating on their well-being. The same might go for the cohorts that have been brought back to reality when the economic and political upheaval took their turn. Cohorts that were raised in

affluent, the 'sky-is-the-limit' times, such as the protest or first baby boom generation, might well be less hesitative to present themselves as happy, if not self-confident and complacent. It might also be that these generational differences are equally or perhaps even more important than country differences, in our case, the ones between the Netherlands and Japan. Perhaps only particular generations are responsible for the diversity between these countries. These and other possibilities are explored in this paper.

Use is made of the longitudinal survey data from the related projects of the World Values Survey (Inglehart et al., 2004) and the European Values Study (Halman, 2001; Arts et al., 2003). The European Values Study (EVS) started in the early 1980s and currently consists of three waves (1981, 1990, 1999/2000), including almost all European countries and reserving a central place for religious, family and work values and other attitudes, opinions, and perspectives. Building on the first wave of EVS, the World Values Survey (WVS) evolved using most of EVS questions in many non-European countries, including Japan, and is now covering almost 85% of the world population (Inglehart & Oyserman, 2004). WVS includes an extra wave of data from around 1995 (excluding many European countries, such as the Netherlands). Here we selected data for the Netherlands and Japan from 1981, 1990 and 1999/2000 (in the Netherlands data were gathered in 1999, in Japan in 2000), thus covering the two final decades of the 20th century.

The focus is put on one key variable in all three waves aimed to directly tap people's assessment of their present feeling of personal happiness, a 4-point scale that (after recoding) ranges from 1 not happy at all to 4 very happy.

Based on the year of birth we discern four generations in both countries: the war generation, the baby boom generation, the baby bust generation, and the second baby boom generation. The issue is not that the correctness of the labels of these generations for each country may not be debated, but that the delineations of the four generations yield plausible distinctions. The war generation refers to those born before 1940 and includes the above-described prewar and silent generation of the Netherlands and the young senior generation in Japan (and of course those who had there formative years in and before the long war period in Japan). All three share particular unique formative experiences focused on attaining basic political, physical, and socio-economic security. The baby boom generation, here including the 1940-1955 birth cohorts, coincides with the Dutch protest generation and the Japanese baby boom generation and the older cohorts of the ultraman generation. They at least share formative experiences that shifted the emphasis away from security to self-expression and the enjoyment of an abundance of good opportunities in rapidly developing economies. The baby bust generation is born between 1955 and 1970. It includes the Dutch lost generation, the younger cohorts of the ultraman generation and the whole

new breed generation in Japan. They share a youth period of consciously chosen hedonism, resistance to belonging, and the maintenance of alternative values and lifestyles. Finally, we discern the second baby boom generation, born after 1970, that includes everyone of the Dutch pragmatic and the Japanese second baby boom generation. All share pragmatic views on work and personal life, seemingly aiming at having the former element of the equation (work) serve the latter (personal life). The youngest respondents in our data are born in 1981 and are included in the second baby boom generation.

It is important to include other features as well in order to identify generation effects. In generation analyses aging, period and cohort (or generation) effects are discerned (the so-called APC-model; see Van den Broek, 1996; Diepstraten et al., 1999). Without distinguishing these three effects, analyses are confronted with an identification problem. This means that is will be unclear whether or not an established effect is due to generation membership, to someone's age (or better still, someone life course transitions) or to events that affect everyone at a certain moment in time. Here we use basic proxies for the two latter effects. A proxy for the latter effects, period effects, are the years of data gathering (1981, 1990, 1999/2000) with which we will compare the impact of living in 1990 with living in 1981 and of living in the 1999/2000 period with 1981 and 1990. Basic proxies for age or life course effects are used by including items tapping someone's stage in terms of education (having finished education at a high age) and employment (having full- or part-time employment or being self-employed).[4]

We will start with a rather straightforward trend analysis on happiness, looking at the development in the three waves 1981, 1990 and 1999/2000 in the Netherlands and Japan. Analyses of variance (ANOVA) result in assessments of differences in happiness between the two countries at each moment. A measure of explained variance (the eta^2) indicates the strength of the difference and comparing the scores for each year indicrectly shows whether or not the country differences have inclined or declined.[5] Next, we will repeat these analyses when looking at the four different generations. We can address the differences between countries within each generation and also the extent to which the possible differences develop towards divergence or convergence over time. Finally we analyze the relative impact of generational diversity by performing stepwise logistic regression analyses. In a first

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[4] Based on questions on the age at which one finished/completed full-time education. The responses were truncated in three equal categories (low, modal, high; each including 33% of the respondents). In the logistic regression analyses (see table 3) the highest category was included (1) versus the two others (0). For employment status those indicating to have full- or part-time employment or being self-employed were included (1) versus others (being a student, housewife, retired, unemployed, other, set at 0).

[5] Whether or not, to be more precise, the country to which one belongs is more strongly or weakly associated with happiness diversity in one period of time compared to another.

step we look at country differences in happiness levels in three periods: 1981-1990, 1981-1999/2000 and 1990-1999/2000. Then we add the age or life course effects, then period effects (depending on the period of comparison we add different years), and then generation effects (excluding the youngest, second baby boom generation when comparing with 1981, a year in which members of this generation were too young to participate in the survey). The logic is that when we add a new set of variables in a particular step these variables should have 'added value'. Two possible outcomes are at play: either the variables on the former steps decrease in impact, meaning that the added variables are a better explanation of happiness diversity, e.g. if the difference in happiness between the Netherlands and Japan is mainly due to generation effects, the country, life course and period effects should decrease in impact if not become insignificant. The other possibility is that these effects remain significant and that new variables, such as those tapping into generation membership, either add or do not add to the explanation of happiness diversity. At each step we check the improvement of the model. If the addition leads to a significant increase in model significance we continue; if not, we stop (which was the case when adding interaction effects of being from a particular country and a particular generation). This paper and its analyses, in other words, are explorative: we are not sure beforehand what effects are important in what way.

Happy new breed ultramen from the Netherlands and Japan

The Japanese and Dutch are different in many respects, also in terms of reported well-being and feelings of happiness. As Manabe (2004) reports, comparing the structure of well-being across some seven nations with the WVS-data of 1999/2000 (not including the Netherlands) shows that an individual's feeling of happiness is part of the main dimension (the strongest factor) of reported well-being in most of these nations. Not so for China, but this might be due, as Manabe reports, to translation difficulties yielding a strongly divergent semantic meaning of happiness compared to the other nations included in his analysis (six other relatively large, populous countries, being Japan, Germany, the US, Brazil, India, Nigeria). Happiness, in other words, might well be a key factor in comparing the structure of well-being cross-nationally. Although 'gelukkig zijn' or feeling happy in Dutch and happiness or 'shiawase' in Japanese seem to refer to similar issues of well-being, the evaluation of both does lead to quite different responses, as table 1 shows.

Table 1 about here

On average the Dutch feel more happy than the Japanese in each year of surveying happiness in both countries. The difference between the Netherlands and Japan is vivid and significant, but not strikingly large. The Dutch usually report to be 'quite happy' (between 6 to 5 out of 10 people) and are more likely to report that they are 'very happy' as the last decade of the second millennium closes in (with a mention of 5 out of 10 as well). The Japanese are somewhat more modest and over the last two decades of the 20th century large groups of them (about 6 out of 10) continue to mention that they are 'quite happy'. In 1999/2000 a remarkable 3 out of 10 Japanese people say they feel very happy. There are divergent trend developments in the feeling of happiness in both countries. In the Netherlands the largest leap forward was established in the 1980s: e.g., 3 out of 10 in 1981 reported to be very happy, in 1990 this was 5 out of 10. In the 1990s itself happiness levels remained stable in the low country. In Japan, by contrast, the rise in happiness is modest but steady over the last two decades. The rise is, strikingly, strongest in the post-'bubble' years of the 1990s.

Drawn in broad strokes we might conclude that in the Netherlands the feeling of happiness is quite to very high especially at the end of the 1980s and that in Japan the feeling of happiness is quite high particularly as the 1990s ended. The result is that at the turn of the millennium both countries have more similar levels of happiness than 20 years before and particularly than 10 years before. This is corroborated when we take a look at the eta^2 at the bottom of the table.[6]

How do our four distinct generations respond? Is there evidence that particular generations, e.g. the ones growing adult in respectively the 1980s and 1990s, feel more or less happy? Table 2 reports.

Table 2 about here

Overall, the pattern at the county-level is replicated at the generation-level. Dutch generations, either the war, baby boom, baby bust or second baby boom generation, are more happy than their Japanese counterparts. There is only one exception. The war generations in both countries at the end of the 1990s have similarly high levels of happiness. When born before 1940 and living at the turn of the millennium Dutch and Japanese citizens feel equally happy. The baby boomers (born between 1940 and 1955) in the Netherlands are more happy than their Japanese counterparts, but the trend among this Dutch generation is rather stable. What is more, the Dutch baby

[6] An eta^2 of at least 0,05 reflects a serious association between, in this case, country and feeling of happiness. Eta^2 can be interpreted as a measure of explained variance: e.g. 0,05 equals 5% of explained variance. Here the eta^2 is 8% in the early 1980s, rises to 11% in 1990 and drops to 5% at the end of the 1990s.

boomers experienced a slight fall in happiness in the 1990s. The Japanese baby boomers neatly follow the national pattern, a modest rise in the 1980s, and a strong rise in the 1990s. This trend is also found among the Japanese baby bust generation (born between 1956 and 1970) who particularly picked up in their feeling of happiness in the 1990s. Among the Dutch baby busters the rise in happiness in 1980s is very strong, but this trend came to a standstill in the 1990s. The second baby boom generation (born after 1970, the youngest one being born in 1981) aligns with this pattern in both countries: a higher level of happiness for the Dutch compared to the Japanese second baby boomers. The latter make a giant leap forward in terms of happiness during the 1990s. The former rise modestly in terms of feeling happy. The Dutch second baby boomers, however, seem exceptional within the Dutch generational context. All other, older, Dutch generations experience either a standstill or a modest fall in happiness (still, with feeling quite happy, overall) during the 1990s. The youngest Dutch generation, by contrast, grows in their feeling of happiness, as their Japanese counterparts do, comparatively speaking, in extremo.

To conclude: Mostly all Dutch generations are more happy than Japanese generations in the last two decades of the 20th century. In the 1990s the rise in happiness among all Japanese generations is strong leading to equal levels of happiness among the oldest generations. All Dutch generations in this period, except the youngest, experience a hold in the rise of happiness and even a slight back fall. The Dutch and especially the Japanese second baby boomers feel much more happy at the turn of the millennium.

Let us now see what the relative impact of these generational differences is in trends of happiness, an impact that can only be addressed when including other relevant features, as has been argued. Table 3 shows the findings of a series of logistic regression analyses.[7]

Table 3 about here

First of all, we compare 1981 with 1990, which excludes the youngest second baby boomer generation (did not participate in the 1981-surveys). The difference between Japan and the Netherlands is important and remains important even when adding life course effect proxies (first), a period effect (second), and generation effects (third). The country effect does not decline in importance, meaning that it stays important to know from what country individuals are when addressing trends in happiness, even

[7] The focus is put on those who indicate to be very happy (1) versus others (0). Dividing the population into very and quite happy versus the not very happy and not happy at all yielded very low numbers of people in the latter category.

when we know their life course stage, the period in which they live, or the generation they belong to. Life course effects, at least the proxies we used for these effects, are not important. Gender is: women, either Japanese of Dutch, either having finished a higher education or not, being employed or not, or being from a particular generation, are more happy than men are. There are no life course effects, but there are period and generation effects adding to the country and gender impacts. At the end of the 1980s people are more happy as such than they were at the start of the 1980s. Of course, here we use a crude indicator for a period effect: the year of interview. This indicator of course only implicitly includes significant events that characterize the early or late 1980s.[8] Which events and circumstances have been crucial is yet unclear; that these event and circumstances are crucial is a fact. Furthermore, being a member of the baby bust generation is of great importance: baby bust generation members have become more happy than the other generations have (regardless of their nationality, of course). The ultraman/new breed and lost generation seem to have recovered from the no future perspective of the early 1980s: they might particularly have profited very well from the bubble economy in Japan and the declining geopolitical threats since the fall of the Berlin Wall – both concerns, economic and political, that were at the heart of their formative years.

Comparing happiness developments in 20 years time, between 1981 and 1999/2000, again excluding the youngest generation, we can again see that being from the Netherlands or from Japan remains an important factor, although the importance does eventually decline somewhat after adding other effects. Again, women are more happy than men, and, when adding only life course effects (and not period or generation effects yet), there is a positive effect on happiness of one of the proxies of life course transitions, being the attainment of high levels of education. These people have experienced a prolonged period of education in their life course and enter posteducational life with higher qualification than their counterparts have: this makes them attribute feelings of more happiness. Yet, this reasoning does not hold after entering period effects. It is not aging or making life course transitions, it is the period in which one lives that yields higher levels of self attributed happiness. The end of the millennium, better still the events and circumstances at this time, has made people, Japanese or Dutch, happier. Generation effects are insignificant: being from the war generation, the baby boom generation or the baby bust generation or not does not affect the feeling of happiness over a two-decade period. In the first decade it did (and

[8] This is of course not unique to this indicator. Basic indicators such as age, gender and education also suggest to tap into phenomenon without further clarification, such as developmental stage or experimentation with establishing intimate relationship (age), different perspectives on balancing work and family life (gender), or the accumulation of cultural and even social capital (education).

we will see it does also in the second period), but in the two-decade period, generation membership does not seem to matter much.

For the 1990-1999/2000 period we can include all four generations, also the youngest second baby boom generation. Again, being Japanese or Dutch is relevant and remains relevant even when adding other effects. Also again found is a strong positive effect of being female. Life course effects are again irrelevant and this is the third time we find this result. It is a serious indication that perhaps aging or making specific transitions in the life course, at least as far as attaining higher educational positions and being in the phase of full employment go, is not affecting people feeling of happiness. Perhaps other life course transition effects, e.g. those related to the private realm (establishing intimate relationships, or, by contrast, losing these relationship) may well be influential. Those related to the public realm of work and education are far less important compared to country and gender differences. We do find that living at the end of the millennium is positive compared to living at the start of the 1990s. This period effect probably reflects the difference between economic pessimism in the early 1990s (the bubble economy in Japan had just busted and the economic progress in the West was disappointing after early optimism since the fall of the Berlin Wall) and economic optimism, if not hyper-optimism in the late 1990s related to the rise of fast-moneymaking ICT-economies. Besides this period effect we find a particular generation effect: again the baby bust, or ultraman or lost generation, is more happy in the last decade of the 20th century. Their feeling of happiness in this era is significantly higher than the one of the war generation, the baby boom generation, and also the second baby boom generation.

When explaining trends in happiness it is important to look at generations this result shows. Not only do we have to take account of country-level characteristics that explain trends in happiness (between Netherlands and Japan, in this case) and of historic events and circumstances at particular moments of time (period effects), but we also have to look at individual features (particularly gender) and at meso-level phenomenon, in this case the extent of generational belonging of those who share the same formative experiences. Both in the Netherlands and Japan the lost or ultraman/new breed generation is a particularly happy generation.

Conclusions

Rapid and pervasive societal change results in societies in which generations co-exist that have very distinct formative experiences. These experiences induce a feeling of a shared history and a common destiny with contemporaries, a feeling of generational belonging. It is possible to discern different, partly overlapping generations in the Netherlands and Japan that seem to share such feelings. These generations not only

feel to be distinct as a generation from former and later generations due to different formative experiences, but will also be recognizably different during their whole life span in terms of their values and attitudes, life chances and lifestyles and even concrete actions and choices they make. Consequently, they may very well have divergent views on what quality of life represents, on how they define well-being, on what it is that makes them feel happy and satisfied with life. Generations that have experienced war and severe insecurities in their youth years, may define happiness as the absence of these circumstances and even if these are absent may, when reporting on happiness, reflect on these youth experiences resulting in a lower happiness level thoughout their life span. Those, by contrast, who have been raised in happy times, may well be more optimistic even when times are hard.

Taking account of generational distinctions is important when comparing the level of happiness between countries, the analyses show. Particularly the baby bust generation, also labeled the utraman and new breed generation in Japan or lost generation in the Netherlands, is the vanguard of happiness. They distinguish themselves between the older and the younger generations with a higher level of happiness. They are more happy than the two older generations as the 1980s progress, and as time goes by in the 1990s they are also more happy than the younger generations growing up in this period. It seems to be a specific generational characteristic of this baby bust generation to feel more happy. In their formative years during the 1970s and early 1980s, in which the future of their own life chances was grim and crises on a wide variety of domains reigned, they indulged in hedonism, in an out-going lifestyle, in finding their own way (usually with contemporaries) in the emerging popcultural and new media industries that provided an alternative life course route as the classic ones were more and more difficult to enter.

Of course, country differences are not irrelevant, what is more, they persist to be highly relevant. The Japanese, and each generation within the Japan (except the oldest at the end of the 1990s), are less happy than the Dutch. Here we did not go into exploring what makes people from these countries as such more or less happy. Of course, many characteristics at many levels may play a role, probably not in the least place characteristics of a cultural nature such as individualism-collectivism, uncertainty tolerance or avoidance, femininity or masculinity, etc.[9] Country diversity itself is important regardless of generation members. Moreover, we did not find any particular interaction between country and generation belonging. There are no specific Japanese or Dutch generations that are more or less happy than others. There is no generation in particular, therefore, that is responsible for the country diversity, e.g., a

[9] See Vinken et al., 2004 on comparing cultures at the macro-level with these and other cultural dimensions.

specific Japanese generation of baby boomers that is less happy to such an extent that the country's lower happiness is due to them only.

Also important are individual-level chracteristics, meaning gender distinctions (with women being more happy), and period effects. Living at the end of the 1980s and at the millennium has autonomously made people more happy compared to the early 1980s. Exactly what the events or circumstances at these years have caused this positive happiness effects is subject to further study. Life course effects, finally, are irrelevant, it can be concluded for this moment. The proxies we used for these effects are of very limited importance over or beyond country, gender, period and generation effects. Of course, it is worth considering more and perhaps more appropriate indicators for life course effects. It is argued in life course sociology that life courses in advanced societies are changing very strongly and that, as a result, life goals, such as well-being, are perceived in other ways, especially since the generation born after 1970. This generation, in Japan or in the Netherlands, has learned to monitor if life is given them what they as an individual want, to avoid choices that pin them down on one predictable life track and to change their life plan as long (see Vinken, 2004). Well-being or happiness for them is being able to change and to have fun and challenging experiences. It is interesting for further progress in cross-cultural happiness study along the perspective of generations and life courses to include possible ways to tap into the changing definition of happiness and, broader, well-being or the quality of life.

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Tables

table 1 : feeling of happiness in the netherlands (nl) and japan (j): percentages

	1981		1990		1999/2000	
	nl (n=1221)	j (n=1204)	nl (n=1017)	j (n=1011)	nl (n=1003)	j (n=1362)
1 not at all	0,2	1,6	1,2	0,8	0,6	0,6
2 not very	2,4	13,9	5,4	15,2	4,3	9,9
3 quite	62,2	61,5	47,0	60,8	49,3	58,7
4 very	33,1	15,1	46,2	16,9	45,8	27,8
dk/na	2,1	7,9	0,2	6,2	0,1	3,0
m (1-4)	3,24	2,74	3,38	2,81	3,40	3,08

source: merged files netherlands and japan from wvs1981-1993 (icpsr 6160; steinmetz archive #p1202) and wvsevs 1999-2002 (icpsr 3975; steinmetz archive #p1623); unweigthed; m differs significantly between countries at p<.000 within each year (ANOVA); eta^2 happiness by country in 1981: 0,08; 1990: 0,11; and 1999/2000: 0,05.

table 2 : feeling of happiness in the netherlands (nl) and japan (j) by generations: percentages and means (m)

	1981		1990		1999/2000	
	nl (n=1221)	j (n=1204)	nl (n=1017)	j (n=1011)	nl (n=1003)	j (n=1362)
war (≤1939)	(n=452)	(n=472)	(n=316)	(n=305)	(n=211)	(n=354)
1 not at all	0,7	1,7	1,3	0,7	0,9	0,0
2 not very	3,3	15,7	8,9	16,7	6,6	8,5
3 quite	61,1	62,7	46,8	60,3	52,6	61,6
4 very	33,0	13,3	42,4	15,4	39,3	27,7
dk/na	2,0	6,6	0,6	6,9	0,5	2,3
m (1-4)	**3,22**	**2,75**	**3,29**	**2,77**	3,29	3,12
boom (1940-55)	(n=416)	(n=382)	(n=346)	(n=407)	(n=286)	(n=390)
1 not at all	0,0	1,0	1,7	0,7	1,0	0,5
2 not very	2,2	12,8	4,0	12,5	5,2	7,4
3 quite	59,1	61,8	49,4	66,1	53,8	63,8
4 very	37,5	16,8	44,8	16,2	39,9	24,9
dk/na	1,2	7,6	0,0	4,4	0,0	3,3
m (1-4)	**3,31**	**2,79**	**3,37**	**2,89**	**3,33**	**3,06**
bust (1956-70)	(n=323)	(n=345)	(n=300)	(n=241)	(n=371)	(n=354)
1 not at all	0,0	2,0	0,7	0,4	0,0	1,4
2 not very	1,2	12,5	3,7	16,6	2,7	10,7
3 quite	68,1	60,5	42,3	56,0	45,8	54,0
4 very	27,6	15,4	53,3	19,9	51,5	31,6
dk/na	3,1	10,1	0,0	7,1	0,0	2,3
m (1-4)	**3,17**	**2,68**	**3,48**	**2,81**	**3,49**	**3,11**
boom2 (≥ 1971)	(n=0)	(n=0)	(n=55)	(n=58)	(n=134)	(n=264)
1 not at all			0,0	3,4	0,7	0,4
2 not very			3,6	20,7	3,0	14,4
3 quite			58,2	46,6	44,0	53,8
4 very			38,2	17,2	52,2	26,9
dk/na			0,0	12,1	0,0	4,5
m (1-4)			**3,35**	**2,53**	**3,48**	**2,98**

source: merged files netherlands and japan from wvs1981-1993 (icpsr 6160; steinmetz archive #p1202) and wvsevs 1999-2002 (icpsr 3975; steinmetz archive #p1623); unweigthed; if **bold** m differs significantly between countries at p<.000 within each generation in each year (ANOVA); eta^2 happiness by country in 1981 for the 3 generations resp. 0,08, 0,09, and 0,06; for the 4 generations in 1990 resp: 0,09, 0,09, 0,15, and 0,16; idem in 1999/2000: 0,01, 0,03, 0,07, and 0,08.

table 3 : happiness in the netherlands and japan from an APC-perspective: odd ratios

	happiness 1981-1990	happiness 1981-1999/2000	happiness 1990-1999/2000
japanese	**0,32**	**0,46**	**0,37**
japanese	**0,32**	**0,47**	**0,37**
female	**1,30**	**1,46**	**1,40**
high educated	0,93	**1,16**	1,07
employed	0,54	1,01	1,00
japanese	**0,32**	**0,43**	**0,37**
female	**1,28**	**1,46**	**1,41**
high educated	0,93	1,03	1,06
employed	0,94	0,92	0,99
1990	**1,48**		
1999/2000		**1,84**	**1,29**
japanese	**0,32**	**0,44**	**0,37**
female	**1,25**	**1,45**	**1,36**
high educated	0,89	1,01	0,99
employed	0,89	0,94	0,93
1990	**1,49**		
1999/2000		**1,85**	**1,25**
boom	1,18	1,03	1,00
bust	**1,24**	1,11	**1,43**
boom2			1,22

source: merged files netherlands and japan from wvs1981-1993 (icpsr 6160; steinmetz archive #p1202) and wvsevs 1999-2002 (icpsr 3975; steinmetz archive #p1623); unweigthed; if **bold** odds ratios (exp[B]) differs significantly at p<.05; logistic regression on happiness (very happy=1; else=0) with war generation as reference category.