Well-Being of Nations—A Cross-Cultural Perspective

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1 Introduction

The papers collected in this special issue were first presented at the International Symposium on the Well-being of Nations—A Cross-cultural Dialogue organized by the Graduate Institute of Philosophy, National Central University in Taiwan on November 5–6, 2006. The major objective of the symposium was to report and compare the well-being of nations under a cross-cultural perspective. The papers included here address issues of well-being in Australia, Taiwan, and Hong Kong from different perspectives, as well as the relationship of well-being of individuals and well-being of nations on a global level.

Recently, there has been increasing media coverage of reports of global rankings of well-being of nations using different criteria of measurement. Behind these national well-being statistics, one interesting question that requires deeper thought is whether there is a harmonious alignment between the well-being of a nation and the well-being of its citizens. The paper by Ruut Veenhoven—“Well-being *in* Nations and Well-being *of* Nations, Is There a Conflict Between Individual and Society?” aims to address this important question: Is there a conflict between the well-being of a nation and the well-being of individuals living in that nation? Veenhoven distinguishes four aspects of the well-being of a nation—good external conditions, appropriate internal functioning, positive external effects and system maintenance. Each aspect has to be measured separately because one measure cannot meaningfully capture all. A measure of Happy Life Year is used to measure an individual’s well-being. Analysis of the data from 92 nations reveals a close correspondence between the well-being *of* nations and well-being of citizens *in* these nations. This appears in strong correlations between Happy Life Years and the position of the nation in the world system, the functioning of public institutions in the nation, the productivity of the nation, and the stability of the system. Harmony seems to exist between individuals and society. The paper by Robert Cummins, Anna Lau, David Mellor and Mark Stoke, “Encouraging Governments to Enhance the Happiness of Their Nation: Step 1: Understand Subjective Wellbeing,” tries to connect the relationship of the knowledge of the well-being

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of citizens and governments policy responsibilities. It uses data of the subjective wellbeing of the Australian population collected via the Australian Unity Wellbeing Index over the 6-year period 2001–2006, and a Theory of Subjective Wellbeing Homeostasis to report the well-being of the Australian population. It argues that subjective wellbeing can be scientifically measured to provide knowledge of the well-being of citizens. To enhance the well-being of a population, policy makers need to have this body of knowledge in order to develop related policies. The paper considers ways to communicate this knowledge to policy makers. The rapid economic development of China has lifted millions of Chinese from grinding poverty but also created major disharmonies. In response, the Chinese leadership has advocated a national goal of establishing a harmonious society. As a Special Administrative Region of China, Hong Kong as its share of social disharmony which is manifested in the increasing wealth gap between the rich and the poor, as well as the gridlock in the debate about the pace of democratic progress, among others. Resonating China's harmony concern, the problem of developing social harmony has become a major policy concern of the Hong Kong government. The paper by Simon Ho and Raymond Chan, "Social Harmony in Hong Kong: Level, Determinants and Policy Implications," takes up this important issue, and reports the findings of a community-wide survey on how Hongkongers perceive the state of social harmony in Hong Kong. The survey finds that there is a moderate level of perceived social harmony and that Hongkongers are fairly satisfied with the community's social harmony. The paper by Po-Keung Ip, "Developing a Concept of Workplace Well-being for Greater China," attempts to develop a notion of workplace well-being applicable to the Greater China Region: China, Hong Kong, and Taiwan, that share overlapping cultural values and practices. In today's increasingly globalized workplace, this concept is especially significant for China as a factory of the world. As more multinational corporations are operating in China, foreign values and cultures have been brought to the local workplace. Whether these foreign values and cultures have a good fit with local values and cultures is critical to the success of a workplace where people with different cultures cooperate, communicate and interact. The paper tries to construct a concept of workplace well-being suitable to such a multicultural workplace by integrating universal and Chinese values to inform the construction of the components of workplace well-being. These values help to make the concept relevant to the Chinese culture. The construct serves as a basis to develop specific indicators to measure well-being in the workplace. The World Health Organization (WHO) has developed a generic measure of quality of life (QOL) called the WHOQOL Questionnaire. The questionnaire has 24 aspects distributed over 6 domains: physical, psychological, level of independence, social relationships, environment, and spirituality/religion/personal beliefs. In view of the cultural diversity of nations, the questionnaire has to be adapted to different nations for effective measurement. Even within the same cultural community, diversity can be found due to sub-cultural variations. A case in point is the situation in China, Taiwan and Hong Kong. The paper by Grace Yao and Chia-huei Wu, "Similarities and Differences among the Taiwan, China, and Hong-Kong Versions of the WHOQOL Questionnaire," critically compares the Chinese versions of the questionnaires of China, Taiwan and Hong Kong, with respect to the questionnaire development process, response scale generation, psychometric properties (reliability and validity), national items, and population means. The paper reveals that differences do exist among these sub-cultures of Greater China. Pei-shan Liao's paper, "Parallels Between Objective Indicators and Subjective Perceptions of Quality of Life: A Study of Metropolitan and County Areas in Taiwan," explores the consistency between objective indicators and subjective perceptions of the quality of life in cities and counties in Taiwan with respect to medical services,

domestic finances, work, education, leisure, public safety, and environmental quality. Subjective and objective rankings of each domain of quality of life for 23 areas are compared. The paper finds that there is no significant correlation between objective indicators and subjective perceptions, except in domains of education and environmental quality.

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Guest Editor