Chapter 1
Introduction

1.1 Asia: Enormous Diversity

It is not an exaggeration to say that Asia is too diverse. Incredible contrasts exist among the 29 societies that this book examines. Demographically, China's population is 1.3 billion and India's is 1.2 billion, whereas the Maldives and Brunei each have populations of roughly 400,000 people. Adult literacy rates range from 28.1% in Afghanistan to 99.5% in Kazakhstan. Life expectancy ranges from 45 years in Afghanistan to 82 years in Japan. Gross domestic product per capita ranges from US$1,000 in Afghanistan to US$57,200 in Singapore. CO_2 emissions per capita, measured in metric tons, range from 0 in Afghanistan to 12.8 in Singapore and 12.6 in Kazakhstan. Internet users per 1,000 people range from 79 in Cambodia to 389,000 in China. The civil liberties index (Freedom House) ranges from 7 in Myanmar to 2 in Japan.

Not only in terms of these, more or less, easily measurable indicators of people's lives, but also in terms of self-assessed happiness, enormous diversity exists. Those respondents who assess themselves as very happy are highest in Brunei at 51.2%, the Maldives at 41.3%, and India at 37.4%. In contrast, those respondents who assess themselves as very unhappy are highest in Kyrgyzstan at 11.5%, Kazakhstan at10.5%, and Nepal at 8.3%.

In terms of daily life priorities, the differences are vast. For instance, in India, people prioritize daily life in the order of health, home, diet, job, and family. In China, people prioritize daily life in the order of health, home, job, medical care, and low crime rates. In Japan, people prioritize daily life in the order of health, family, job, home, and relationships with other persons. In Bangladesh, people prioritize daily life in the order of health, medical care, low crime rates, being devout, and home. In Indonesia, people prioritize daily life in the order of health, diet, home, being devout, and job. In Afghanistan, people prioritize daily life in the order of diet, health, home, being devout, and job. In the Philippines, people prioritize daily life in the order of diet, health, home, job, and family. In Myanmar, people prioritize daily life in the order of health, diet, being devout, home, and job.

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All these findings are meant to be illustrative and to argue that diversity is very strong and that Asia needs to be examined with systematic empirical thoroughness. And this is the aim and thrust of the book. Before laying out the ample empirical findings, some major results are previewed first.

1. Asia as a whole is moving upward: East and Southeast Asia faster, Central and South Asia slower.
2. People in East Asia assess their happiness more negatively than their GDP per capita and the human development index (HDI) suggest.
3. People in Southeast Asia assess their happiness more positively than their GDP per capita and the HDI suggest.
4. People in South Asia assess their happiness more positively than their GDP per capita and the HDI suggest.
5. People in Central Asia assess their happiness more negatively than their GDP per capita and the HDI suggest.
6. People in East Asia tend to prioritize materialist or quality of life (QOL)-sustaining factors (such as housing, standard of living, household income, education, and job) in their daily lifestyle.
7. People in more traditional Southeast Asia (Cambodia, Indonesia, Laos, and Myanmar) tend to prioritize materialist or QOL-sustaining factors in their daily lifestyle.
8. People in more dynamic, more competitive Southeast Asia (Malaysia, Thailand, and Vietnam) tend to prioritize post-materialist or QOL-enriching factors (such as friendships, marriage, neighbors, family life, leisure, and spiritual life) in their daily lifestyle.
9. People in state-dominant Southeast Asian societies (Brunei, Singapore, and the Philippines) tend to prioritize their daily lifestyle in harmony with state-imposed constraints (such as public safety, the condition of the environment, social welfare system, and the democratic system).
10. People in traditional and competitive South Asia (India, Bangladesh, Nepal, and Sri Lanka) tend to prioritize traditional or QOL-sustaining factors.
11. People in South Asia whose societies face the challenge of tropical weather systems and have dominant-state structures (Bhutan, the Maldives, and Pakistan) tend to harmonize public sphere factors.
12. People in Central Asia whose societies are more traditional (Afghanistan, Mongolia, Tajikistan, and Uzbekistan) prioritize traditional or QOL-sustaining factors.
13. People in Central Asia whose state structures are dominant (Kazakhstan) tend to harmonize their lives with public sphere factors.
14. People in Central Asia whose societies have more cleavages and are more competitive tend to prioritize QOL-enriching factors (Kyrgyzstan).
15. Standard of living and marriage or being married are important determinants for overall quality of life in Asia.

16. Seniors are less likely to feel happy but more likely to have a sense of accomplishment in Asia.
17. Income is more likely to enhance the feeling of achievement but less likely to enhance the feeling of happiness in Asia.

1.2 Asia: Why Is Quality of Life in Asia Important to Examine?

Quality of life is defined as the physical, psychological, and sociological state of being of people. It is broader than happiness because it entails factors such as enjoyment and achievement. Quality of life is also broader than satisfaction because it entails variables such as aspiration and recollection. It is also broader than well-being because quality of life is neutral. It is broader than health because it entails being in the context of one or another factors. Why is quality of life in Asia important to examine? Because, compared to quality of life in North America and Western Europe, quality of life in Asia has not been as comprehensively and systematically examined. The demographic size and diversity of Asia make a thorough empirical examination necessary: Asia is a dynamic and diverse region that is geographically, demographically, economically, politically, and militarily important. The economic development, democratic prospect, and security situation of Asia are hugely volatile and unpredictable in nature. Quality of life is basic in all these three issues. Quality of life is such a comprehensive concept that large-scale, meticulous empirical research is required. In Asia, geographical vastness and diversity have prevented many researchers from designing and implementing large-scale scientific empirical research. This study undertakes such research in a detailed and systematic manner. In the period between 2003 and 2008, one of the coauthors, Takashi Inoguchi, had the opportunity to design and carry out large-scale research with a nationwide random-sampled method in 29 societies in Asia. The thematic focus of the research was "Daily Lives of Ordinary People in Asia."

The many cultures and people of Asia are experiencing rapid economic growth. Annual GDP is growing rapidly in Singapore at 14.7%, Taiwan at 10.5%, China at 10.3%, Afghanistan at 8.9%, India at 8.3%, and Uzbekistan at 8.2%. Other macro-level data is available on the fact sheet of Appendix A.

Little is known about how the ordinary people of Asia live their lives. Asia was ignored in social sciences for a long time due to a lack of survey data, even though about two-thirds of the world's population lives in this region.

The objective of this book is to fill this void and investigate thematically and empirically the quality of life in 29 Asian countries and societies, namely, Afghanistan, Bangladesh, Bhutan, Brunei, Cambodia, China, Hong Kong, India, Indonesia, Japan, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Laos, Malaysia, Maldives, Mongolia, Myanmar, Nepal, Pakistan, the Philippines, Singapore, South Korea, Sri Lanka, Taiwan, Tajikistan, Thailand, Turkmenistan, Uzbekistan, and Vietnam, using the AsiaBarometer Survey data from 2003 to 2008.

This book commemorates the tenth anniversary of the AsiaBarometer. The AsiaBarometer was launched in 2002 when the director Takashi Inoguchi wrote articles with the aim of building the AsiaBarometer Survey Project (Inoguchi 2002a, b, c).

1.3 The Notion of Quality of Life and Research Design

Researchers in the field of quality-of-life study have attempted to define the umbrella term "quality of life" in different ways since 1964 (Storrs 1975; Veenhoven 2000). One way to dichotomize the notion of life quality is from the viewpoint of either the objective or subjective (Shin and Inoguchi 2009a; Veenhoven 2000). One approach focuses on objective conditions in which people live, while the other approach considers how they feel about those conditions and other life circumstances (Shin and Inoguchi 2009a).

Following Doh Chull Shin and Inoguchi (2009a), the studies in this volume take the subjective approach of equating quality of life with subjective well-being. We assume that the word "quality" has an evaluative property that admits degrees of desirability or value. Of the various elements and conditions of life experienced and evaluated, only those to which people impute value count toward the parameter of life quality (Shin and Inoguchi 2009a).

Shin and Inoguchi (2009a), in an edited a volume, studied the quality of life in Confucian societies (China, Hong Kong, Japan, South Korea, Singapore, and Taiwan) in a systematic approach by addressing both values and objective conditions of life. The places and environment where people live and the resources and activities that are available to them affect quality of life directly, but such objective conditions of life also affect quality indirectly through a set of values held by the same people (Shin and Inoguchi 2009a). Shin and Inoguchi and their colleagues begin each country/society chapter with a demographic profile of respondents, lifestyles, value priorities, overall quality-of-life assessments measured by happiness, enjoyment, and achievement, specific life domain satisfactions, and the regression analyses to estimate the effects of demographics, lifestyles, value priorities, and domain assessments on overall quality of life (Shin and Inoguchi 2009b).

Shin and Inoguchi (2009a), in their edited volume, conceptualize the quality of life as a multidimensional, multilevel phenomenon. In assessing quality of life, people consider all the things that matter to them and judge the overall quality of their lives as a whole, while at the same time, people choose particular aspects or domains of their lives and judge each of those domains separately (Shin and Inoguchi 2009a). Therefore, the AsiaBarometer asked two sets of questions. The first set of three questions taps the overall quality of life in terms of happiness, enjoyment, and accomplishment. The second set uses a variety of questions to tap levels of satisfaction or dissatisfaction with 16 life domains on a five-point verbal scale. These two sets of questions serve as our indicators of two levels of quality of life, global and domain specific.

Inoguchi and Seiji Fujii (2009) studied the quality of life in Japan and found that, when satisfaction levels for 16 specific life domains are grouped into three life spheres, namely, materialist, post-materialist, and public, none of the domains in the public life sphere statistically nor significantly affect the overall quality of life, while some of the domains in the post-materialist life sphere and a few of those in the materialist life sphere determine the level of overall quality of life in Japan. We intend to extend the analysis about Japan to 29 Asian countries and societies using the AsiaBarometer Survey pooled data from 2003 to 2008. We focus on the relationship between overall quality of life measured by happiness, enjoyment, and achievement and satisfaction levels for the 16 specific life domains.

To find determinants for quality of life, we test three sets of predictors, namely, objective conditions of life, lifestyles, and value priorities (Shin and Inoguchi 2009a). We hypothesize that the quality of life people experience depends on their value preferences and priorities. Under this modeling, we propose that quality of life and the objective conditions of life are separate concepts. People evaluate their life experiences based on their own judgments. Their evaluations also depend on how they compare themselves with other people. Subjective well-being cannot be inferred accurately by objective indicators of life circumstances. Subjective feelings can be measured accurately only by asking people directly to what extent they find their life conditions pleasant or unpleasant, and/or fulfilling or disappointing (Shin and Inoguchi 2009a).

We also postulate that the production of more material goods and services does not necessarily enhance the quality of citizens' lives. Although up to a certain point greater production of such material resources generally does have a favorable impact on people's lives, beyond that point, more production can actually detract from the overall quality of life by causing congestion, pollution, and dehumanization. Thus, enhancing citizen well-being depends less on investment in economic growth and more on policies that promote good governance, liberty, democracy, trust, and public safety (Shin and Inoguchi 2009a).

1.4 Organization

Chapter 2 introduces the AsiaBarometer Survey Project. We explain the details about the project including its aim, scope, rationale, principles of questionnaire formulation, future prospects, and the way the AsiaBarometer Survey contributes to scholarship and development of the region of Asia.

Chapter 3 goes over overall evaluations of well-being in Asia. It compares the extent to which people experience feelings of happiness, enjoyment, and achievement in the 29 countries/societies.

Chapter 4 focuses on how people feel about specific life domains. It compares the extent to which they are satisfied or dissatisfied with 16 specific life domains, and it identifies the particular domains and spheres of domains that they find most and least satisfying. The life domains surveyed are housing, friendships, marriage,

standard of living, household income, health, education, job, neighbors, public safety, the condition of the environment, social welfare system, democratic system, family life, leisure, and spiritual life.

Chapter 5 focuses on lifestyles. Specifically, it highlights the various ways in which people live their lives in terms of spending time and money and interacting with other people at home and abroad. It also examines the extent to which respondents access public utilities and digital devices.

Chapter 6 analyzes how people prioritize their values. It identifies distinct value orientations through an examination of which resources and activities respondents value above all others and examines how value orientations differ significantly among the 29 Asian societies.

Chapter 7 estimates independent effects of demographics, lifestyles, value priorities, and domain assessments on the overall quality of life—happiness, enjoyment, and achievement. We run regressions for each society and for all of Asia using the pooled data.

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