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## A Comparison of the Economic and Cultural Development of Japan and Thailand Through the Human Development and World Happiness Indices

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Honors Thesis

A COMPARISON OF THE ECONOMIC AND CULTURAL DEVELOPMENT  
OF JAPAN AND THAILAND THROUGH THE HUMAN DEVELOPMENT  
AND WORLD HAPPINESS INDICES

by  
Tanner M. Money

Submitted to Brigham Young University in partial fulfillment  
of graduation requirements for University Honors

Geography Department  
Brigham Young University  
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Advisor: Daniel H. Olsen

Honors Coordinator: Samuel Otterstrom

Faculty Reader: R. Bruce Money

## ABSTRACT

### A COMPARISON OF THE ECONOMIC AND CULTURAL DEVELOPMENT OF JAPAN AND THAILAND THROUGH HUMAN DEVELOPMENT AND HAPPINESS INDEXING

Tanner M. Money

Geography Department

Bachelor of Arts

The purpose of this thesis is to make human development and happiness comparisons between two countries that are found in the same region of the world and share similar cultural and historical backgrounds. For this study, the human development measures for Japan and Thailand are compared based on Life Expectancy, Literacy Rates, and Gross Domestic Product (per capita) measures. First, the historical development of Japan and Thailand is presented, highlighting the key historical economic and political moments in each country that has led them to their present state of development. Second, the two countries were compared using quantitative and qualitative data from past and current human development indexing and World Happiness Reports from the United Nations as well as research publications that elucidate how the people of these countries view themselves in terms of their level of development and well-being.

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## TABLE OF CONTENTS

Title.....	i
Abstract.....	ii
Acknowledgements.....	iii
Table of Contents.....	iv
I. Introduction.....	1
II. The Human Development Indices (HDI).....	3
III. The World Happiness Report (WHR).....	4
IV. Japan and Thailand .....	5
V. Cultural Similarities and Differences.....	6
VI. History and Economic Development-Japan.....	10
VII. History and Economic Development-Thailand.....	13
VIII. Recent Trends.....	15
IX. Comparing the HDI and WHR Rankings of Japan and Thailand.....	16
X. Development Perceptions and Suggestions.....	17
XI. Conclusion.....	20
XII. Works Cited.....	22
XIII. Appendix 1.....	26
XIII. Appendix 2.....	27
XIV. Appendix 3.....	28
XV. Appendix 4.....	29
XVI. Appendix 5.....	30

## **Introduction**

For decades, countries around the world have been labeled in development indices as belonging to the “First”, “Second”, or “Third” World countries. However, this “Three Worlds” model has fallen out of favor in recent years, and instead countries are now labeled as “advanced/developed”, “transitioning/developing”, or “lesser developed” (Caporaso 2008). This change in labelling, however, just continues the trend of using blanket metaphors to stereotype certain countries and their patterns of development by using development indices that compare them to advanced/developed countries that are seen as holding the highest developmental standards. The reason for these indices is to justify the intervention of advanced/developed countries and international and non-government development organizations to help these lesser-developed countries to achieve the same standards of development as the “First” world.

As someone who is interested in globalization and its effects on countries, I wish to use this thesis to expand my understanding of both how these development indices are used to measure human development and how countries view themselves regarding their level of development. While visiting Japan and Thailand as a part of a study abroad program sponsored by Brigham Young University, I noticed both differences and similarities between these two countries in terms of economic, socio-cultural, and environmental development. As such, the purpose of this thesis is to examine the differences in development between these two countries and at the same time, shed understanding on the way that the people from Japan and Thailand perceive their own countries regarding their development and happiness. This examination was done in two stages. First, Japan and Thailand were compared based on how they were ranked on the

Human Development Index (HDI) and the World Happiness Report (WHR). To accomplish this, I gathered as many human development datasets as possible from online articles, United Nations publications, and academic journals from the BYU HBLL databases and archives. One example of a data source used is a series of human development reports by the United Nations Development Programme (2019) that contains development indicator data from 2018-2019. Looking at this data allowed me to understand how “developed” these countries are from an outsider’s point of view. I then examined these indices to find possible trends and patterns within the data to understand how these countries are ranked in terms of different types of development.

Second, I looked at how the governments and people of these countries view themselves in terms of their levels of economic, socio-cultural, and environmental development and compare this perception to their actual rankings in the HDI. To do this, I first examined the history of these two countries, highlighting the key historical economic and political moments that led them to their present development state. While doing this, I came to realize on a deeper level the countries’ development journeys. To more fully understand the political and cultural perspectives of people in Japan and Thailand regarding their level of development, I examined research publications related to local accounts from within Japan and Thailand that discussed whether each country was in danger of economic collapse. For example, Glahan (2019), a journalist in Thailand, suggests that Thailand is doing poorly in terms of development because of political corruption and the lack of fair and democratic elections. In the case of Japan, however, the lack of political upheaval has led to development to the point that government officials, in the early 80’s, joked in the past about conquering the world

economically through globalization (Drucker, 1981). Although a dated statement, there is still some truth to the perception. I also examined the current economic and agricultural trends of the two countries. This thesis seeks to advance an up-to-date view of development that relies less on metrics and their associated stereotypes and more upon the quality of life people perceive that they have, based on their cultural views of development and their life experiences.

### **The Human Development Indexes (HDI)**

Pakistani economist Mahbub ul Haq devised the HDI as a way to put a human face on the numbers for national income. His dream was to hopefully convince the public and policy makers that development is more than economic output; it also has much to do with the well-being of people wherever they live in the world. He explains that “The basic purpose of development is to enlarge people’s choices. In principle, these choices can be infinite and can change over time. People often value achievements that do not show up at all, or not immediately, in income or growth figures: greater access to knowledge, better nutrition and health services, more secure livelihoods, security against crime and physical violence, satisfying leisure hours, political and cultural freedoms and sense of participation in community activities. The objective of development is to create an enabling environment for people to enjoy long, healthy and creative lives” (Human Development Report Office, 2019HDRO, opening statement).

The HDI is one of four indices published by the United Nations (UN) that evaluates how different countries are progressing regarding development and quality of life issues and is considered the “gold standard” of development measurement and



evaluation (Human Development Report Office, 2019).<sup>1</sup> It was first published in 1990, although its origins date back to 1870. The HDI consists of three main indicators that helps scholars and decision makers measure and rank social and economic development. The first indicator is *life expectancy*, which measures the average lifespan of a person within a country (see Appendix 1 for Japan, by way of example of the indicator), for example and Appendix 2 for the rest of the world). The second indicator is *literacy rates*, which measures educational levels within a country (e.g., Appendix 3, pertaining to Thailand, again, by way of example). The third indicator is *GDP per capita*, which measures the total value of goods and services a country produces, per each of its inhabitants. Thus, large countries can be compared with the same standard as small countries. With each of these indicators, the higher the number (i.e., the higher the life expectancy, literacy rates, and GDP per capita), the more developed a country is. All of these measures are developed through collection of primary data, mostly by government entities, such as the UN.

### **World Happiness Report (WHR)**

In addition to the HDI, my thesis uses the World Happiness Report to compare the well-being of people in the two countries. The WHR is based on a collection of surveys from the U.N. taking data from over 150 countries and compiles the data into a format similarly to the original human development index. Happiness is measured by how citizens see themselves both in an economic as well as a social sense compared to other countries worldwide. The World Happiness Report brings to light specific factors

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<sup>1</sup> The other three developed by the United Nations are the Gender-related Development Index, the Gender Empowerment Measure, and the Human Poverty Index.

that affect the way people view themselves as being happy or not, with these factors including quality of life, cultural influence, and literacy rates.

First developed in 2012 by the United Nations, the WHR brings a different perspective than the HDI numbers. Although the happiness index somewhat borrows core indexes from the original HDI, it differs from its predecessor by presenting data about people's emotional behaviors as well as well-being. According to Jon Hall and John F. Helliwell from the United Nations Development Program, the happiness scale can be measured by a lot of other factors that focuses more on people's lives as a whole:

*“There are three main types of measure: measures of positive emotions (positive affect), measures of negative emotions (negative affect) and evaluations of life as a whole. Together, these three types of report are considered the primary measures of subjective well-being. “Happiness” is often used to describe both measures of positive affect and life evaluation. This brings a risk of confusion, since people might assume that all happiness measures are equivalent, while the evidence is increasingly clear that these two different ways of measuring happiness are distinct in ways that support the credibility of both. That is, “happiness” is used to describe two different things, with the distinction variously described as hedonic vs. eudemonic, 10 or the accumulation of net momentary pleasures vs. a life full of meaning and good purpose.” (2014, Happiness and Human Development Report)*

The most current WHR explains each country's happiness as an amalgamation of factors that contribute to one's well-being. These factors include GDP per capita, social support, healthy life expectancy, freedom to make life choices, generosity, perceptions of how much corruption their country has, and the degree of dystopia, defined as people viewing their society as one that has much suffering and injustice.

### **Japan and Thailand**

We will now consider the nations of Japan and Thailand generally, before we compare their HDI and WHR rankings. These two countries share historical, religious (i.e., Buddhist) and cultural backgrounds. They also have followed a similar trajectory

towards economic development based first on supplying developed economies with cheap labor, then migrating towards diversified and high-tech industries. These trajectories, however, are not temporally similar, in that Japan is presently considered an advanced/developed country, while Thailand is presently aspiring for this development label. The cultural background of both countries are presented, then findings on their differing economic paths will be discussed.

### **Cultural Similarities and Differences**

Several models of national culture lend themselves to comparing Thailand and Japan. Culture is important to consider as part of examining development and happiness because it leads to how a society orients itself to core values. These can either hinder or accelerate a country's development vis-a-vis the rest of the world. For example, if a cultural value allows a large disparity between rich and poor, the latter group may (although not always) be considered by themselves and the rest of the world as less developed and happy.

One of the most prominent frameworks of cultural values is Hofstede's six dimensions as presented in his seminal *Culture's Consequences* (Hofstede, 2001), which developed dimensions based on field research with about 116,000 IBM employees in 60 countries. The six dimensions that emerged are as follows:

-*Power Distance*, a sense of hierarchy or rank in society. High power distance societies have a marked difference in social status, while low power distance cultures are more egalitarian.

-*Individualism/Collectivism*, a sense of prioritizing the individual's interest over those of the group. Highly collective societies prize the well-being of the group, a "we"

mentality. Asian cultures tend to be highly collectivist compared to the U.S. for example, which has the highest individualism scores in the world.

-*Masculinity/Femininity*, which portrays aggression vs. nurturing and separation of gender roles. In highly Masculine societies, men and women perform completely non-overlapping functions. Japan ranks highest in the world on this dimension (men enter the workforce, for example, women do not, for the most part), as contrasted with the Scandinavian countries, where gender roles are more blended (men take care of young children as much as women do).

-*Uncertainty Avoidance*, basically a tolerance of risk. High uncertainty avoidance countries are less comfortable with risk and challenging established truths.

-*Long-term Orientation*, which measures how a culture considers time. Long-term oriented countries emphasize tradition and planning.

-*Indulgence vs. Restraint*, which is a sense of living in the moment's pleasures, rather than suppressing need gratification and living by strict social norms.

The rankings of Japan and Thailand, published in 2001 (and the U.S. as a “control variable,” for comparison), on these dimensions (out of 60 countries, are as follows)<sup>2</sup>:

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<sup>2</sup> For more information about cultural comparisons between countries, see <https://www.hofstede-insights.com/country-comparison/>

Dimension (with rank out of 60 countries)	Japan	Thailand	United States
Power Distance	#33	#21	#38
Individualism	#22	#39	#1
Masculinity	#1	#44	#15
Uncertainty Avoidance	#7	#30	#43
Long-Term Orientation	#3	#7	#14
Indulgence	#42	#40	#12

These rankings mean that the higher the ranking, the more of a particular value a culture has. For example, The U.S. having a #1 ranking in Individualism, it is the most individualistic country in the world, out of the 60 countries in the study. Thailand having a #40 ranking in Indulgence means that country is lower than most in its valuing Indulgence. It should be noted that although the data was collected over 20 years ago, most anthropologists agree that core, foundational cultural values (e.g. respect for modesty) change, very, very slowly, although the manifestation of those values may change with time (e.g. *how* modesty is manifest).

Both Japan and Thailand are fairly similar along the dimensions of status differentials (Power Distance) and individualistic tendencies; both cultures tend to value long-term perspectives and restraint (rather than indulgence). They are quite different, however, in terms of gender role separation (Thai men and women share roles more). As mentioned, differences in perceptions among cultures of these values, for example, a lesser sense of community (Individualism) and women not having the same opportunities as men in the workforce (Masculinity) may affect the measures of development and how happy people perceive themselves to be).

The Lewis Model (Lewis, 2006) of culture classifies societies into three categories: “Linear-active” (cool, factual, and decisive, such as Germany and the U.S., “Multi-active” (warm, emotional, impulsive, such as Mexico, Italy, and Brazil), and “Reactive” (courteous, amiable, accommodating, such as most of the Asian countries). Japan and Thailand together fall into this third cultural category (See Appendix 4 for a full list and representation). As with the Hofstede dimensions, the Lewis model bears on the purpose of this thesis in that the comparative properties of culture lend themselves to perhaps explaining similarities differences in values in perceptions of people in different stages of development and status of happiness. Specifically, in the case of Japan and Thailand, their similarities as “Reactive” cultures in the Lewis model might explain why Thailand is trying to follow the economic model of Japan--cheap labor first, diversifying to manufacturing and up-market service industries later. Both cultures lend themselves to excellence in service as both are courteous, amiable, and good at listening, to this case, the customer. Noting that Japan is on the “Linear-active” side of the triangle (closer to the UK), the “cooler” side, and Thailand is more on the “Multi-active” (closer to Brazil) or “warmer” side, might explain why Thailand’s cultural demeanor is more easy-going Japan and why Thailand is higher on happiness measures than Japan, as discussed below.

A third model of national culture that might explain similarities between Japan and Thailand is Hall and Hall’s (1990) measure of “context,” or the amount of implicit “code” in communication of a society. Low context cultures (such as Northern Europe and the U.S.) value candor and explicit meaning in communication. High context cultures (Asian, Arabic, and Latin American) rely on innuendo, face saving, and indirect messages. Both Thailand and Japan are considered high-context cultures. According to

one researcher, Japan has 16 ways to indicate the sentiment of “no,” without using the actual word “no” (Ueda, 1982).

Cultural differences and similarities are important to the study of development and happiness differences because the values, expectations, and behaviors, which define culture are instrumental in shaping the policy decisions that affect a nation’s well-being. Culture also influences how businesses and governments operate to guide the economic development of their countries.

### **History and Economic Development - Japan**

Over the past 60 years, Japan has recovered from extensive infrastructural damage during World War II to become one of the most successful economies in world history. Cohen (2015) states that during the Tokugawa era (1603-1863), Japan’s economy was characterized by pre-capitalist patterns of development due to the use of primitive technologies. It seems that the country during that time was struggling with human development while in the process of transitioning into a more capitalistic society. As Chiavacci and Lechevalier (2017) note, Japan’s developmental success came about between the 1970s and 1990s through developing its political economy on a macro level. That is, Japan’s political leadership determined that certain industries, like consumer electronics and automobiles, would be critical to its future success, then diverted resources (like tax incentives) to those industries. They couldn’t have been more correct in their assessment, as Japan, through the industrial-government guidance became the second largest economy in the world by the 1980s. It’s been said that if it were not for

voluntary export quotas, industry observers say the US car industry would have been wiped out by the quality and value of Japanese competitors.

Can it be said that the foundations for the economic miracle of Japan were laid before WWII and the 1970's? Political economists and even anthropologists might debate the phenomenon, as in the cultural values of collectivism and long-term orientation being in place decades and even centuries before. It has been said that the large Japanese trading company has a rolling 300-year business plan. Nobody will be around to implement that plan, but it shows the nearly infinite, stable planning horizons of Japanese business culture. The difference between pre- and post- WWII industrial planning is that Japan was mostly closed to the rest of the world before 1852 when the U.S.'s Navy's Commodore Perry used his warships to force the Japan government to open its ports for trade. Even from then until WWII, Japan was essentially a feudal, agrarian society, run by shoguns. It was after WWII, when General MacArthur imposed western government structure on the country, that industries with the names of Mitsubishi, Mitsui, and Sumitomo were practically conscripted into service for the greater good of Japanese industrial growth, which took off within 15 years of the end of war. The foundations for the growth may have been in place before that, however.

Economic Surveys published by the OECD library summarize Japan's economic development through this time period, which was thus marked by continual expansion after WWII. This means that Japan has needed to work and continues to need to work harder than ever to raise productivity levels as well as adapting to become environment/climate change friendly, to boost their industrial output in the long run (OECD 2019, Executive Summary). According to the A-Z World of Business database



(Frost 2019), Japan struggled greatly after WWII, as did many countries, obtaining much needed economic subsidies. One of Japan's most notable accomplishments was the development and exporting of high-value goods such as electronics (e.g., Sony and Matsushita or Panasonic) and motorized vehicles (e.g., Toyota and Honda). This was somewhat made possible by the fact that Japan's government provided generous social programs in health care and education for its citizens, who didn't have to privately pay for these programs, which translate into higher life expectancy and literacy rates, as they stand today. The higher literacy and education levels, in turn, provided the brainpower (for example, home-grown engineers), needed for the electronic and car industries to thrive domestically at first. Then, when intense competition at home produced high quality products and strong brands within Japan, the Sonys and Toyotas of Japan went forth to dominate global markets in their product categories.

This is how Japan became the world's most prolific import-export economy, which it had to do in order to survive and thrive as a nation. It traded raw material imports for finished goods, since it had very little by way of natural resources (i.e., oil, copper, iron ore, lumber, arable land) of its own to fuel industrial growth internally as well as feed its population (the largest supplier of rice today for Japan is California, not Japan). Pearl Harbor was attacked to prevent the U.S. from thwarting Japan's expansionist plans to capture more natural resources, particularly oil, the lifeblood of any industrial and military ambitions. Let alone feeding its population (Related to the government's support of industry, Stockwin (2018) dives deeper into the complexities of Japan's past political systems and describes five transformations in Japan's history that made its political system what it is today. These are: (1) the revolutionary changes of the

Meiji period (1868–1912), leading to modernization, militarism, and ultimate defeat in war; (2) occupation, democracy, economic resurgence and single-party dominance (1945–1990); (3) growth, electoral reform and neo-liberalism (1991–2006); (4) Liberal Democratic Party decline and the opposition in power (2006–2012); and (5) authoritarian leadership with weak opposition (2012 onwards). It is the second period, post WW-II to its peak in the early 1990's, that corresponds with the political-industrial cooperation that boosted Japan's growth in the 1970's and 80's, discussed earlier. Without these five transformations in play, the author argues that Japan would not have become the nation it is today, with its highly successful industrial and development track record.

### **History and Economic Development - Thailand**

From ancient times, the country of Thailand has been fortunate to escape armed conflict for most of its history, avoiding European colonization and involvement in both World Wars. This is an important fact pertaining to development, since Thailand was able to avert not only armed conflict, but the budget drain and crippling debt from the expenses of wasted resources. This is why Thailand's economy has been very stable compared to other countries of similar size to Thailand that have not been as wise or lucky, such as Cambodia and Laos.

As Feeny (1982) notes, between 1880 and 1975 it was rice and rubber exports that barely saved the country from economic depression and helped bring about many years of financial success. Johnston (1981) discussed how Thailand relied mostly on being able to produce its own crops in short spurts of time rather than being able to export them outside its borders due to trying out different methods of financial progress during the

late 19th and 20th Centuries. According to the A to Z world business database, Thailand has a competitive advantage in the exporting of bananas, rice, corn, and cassava. It is important to keep in mind that agricultural exporting historically comprised 90% of Thailand's economic activity. Eventually, as the standard of living rose, Thailand has made a slow transition to assembling products as a cheap labor country for manufacturers in search of ever more competitive cost structures for their firms.

According to the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD), "Thailand has made remarkable socio-economic progress over the past several decades. Sustained strong growth has turned it into an upper-middle income country, brought down poverty and delivered advances in a number of well-being dimensions" (OECD Development Centre, 2019, abstract), although the rising prosperity has not been shared equally across the country. Although Thailand is considered a developing country based on HDI rankings, government officials are continuing to invest in manufacturing and the exporting of consumer goods. Development, of course, is a continuum. Such policies will likely lead to moving Thailand further along that continuum, closer to Japan's status as a fully developed economy.

However, to underscore the fact that Thailand still has a considerable distance to go along that continuum when it comes to development, Bosworth (2005) discusses the history of Thailand's development as a whole. He writes about four things that can become important landmarks in Thailand's development that could help the country improve in the future as long as Thailand takes these principles to heart. Those are, 1) increased productivity, 2) improved capital services, 3) good labor supply, and 4) educational attainment. Although the article was written 15 years ago, these principles

remain guideposts to help Thailand continue its development progress, which most observers would say the country has made so far in the 2000's along these dimensions.

### **Recent Trends**

Now that the thesis has discussed perspective between data numbers and citizen opinions, we will now further examine what these two countries have been doing to boost their economic fortunes. In recent news involving economic prosperity of these two countries, Thailand has been involved with shareholder investment practices to improve GDP per capita overall. According to a new article published by the *Asia New Monitor* in Bangkok, Thailand has come up with a new way to have foreign investors feel more comfortable spending time and resources within Thailand's borders. This new program, called "The Thailand Futures Exchange," aims to make trading between Thailand and countries outside its borders become more effective by adding better service to the program. Data from the Population Reference Bureau suggest that Thailand has been migrating more towards urban development as 57% of the population now live in urban areas of the country. Data from official CIA databases confirm that Thailand is currently making good progress on cutting poverty levels by half and has been doing so since 2013.

Japan has been the beneficiary of some favorable economic developments as well. A company report published in January of 2020 by Hitachi High-Technologies explains the current trend of how the company is flourishing in spite of the lingering recession in Japan. The report brings to light the details on how the company is doing on the whole by showing how stock prices and profitability have been on the rise. The Population Reference Bureau of Japan suggests that Japan favors urbanization with 92% of the people living in urban areas as well as 65% of people living in cities of more than a

million. The World Factbook funded by the CIA databases brings to us more insight about Japan's industrial growth over the past 20 years when it comes to exporting finished products in exchange for natural resources and fossil fuels.

### **Comparing the HDI and WHR Rankings of Japan and Thailand**

The thesis will now compare Japan and Thailand along the lines of quality of life as measured by the HDI and the WHR. HDI is used to compare the human development of various countries. The two nations in the current study have a relatively similar approach to culture and religion, including a collective mindset. In comparing Japan and Thailand's HDI rankings, the countries are ranked 19 and 83 respectively. Japan ranks very high in the HDI rankings with a value score of 0.909, and as such it is grouped with countries that have a "very high" level of human development, while Thailand has a value score of 0.755, grouping it with countries that have a "high" level of human development.

Continuing with life expectancy rates between the two countries, we see that Thailand has a life expectancy rate at birth of 75.5 years with Japan at 83.9, suggesting, among other factors, that Japan has a better healthcare system than Thailand. Expected years of schooling/ literacy rates tells us an interesting story. Japan's years of schooling stands at 15.2 years, while Thailand's sits at 14.7 years, which means both countries roughly have their citizens obtain as much education as the other. Japan's literacy rate is 99%, whereas Thailand's is 93%, indicating slightly less literacy in the latter. Last but not least, there is GDP per capita and what it shows us with how a country is doing financially as a whole. Interestingly enough, Japan stands at \$5.15 trillion (\$39, 290 per

capita) in 2018 and Thailand at \$529 billion (\$7,273 per capita).<sup>3</sup> This might indicate that while Thais do not enjoy the same income level as Japanese, Thailand may lag Japan in economic development but not in other ways, such as perceived well-being.

Regarding the World Happiness Report, Appendix 4 shows an excerpt from the world happiness rankings, with Japan and Thailand both exhibited. Japan is ranked 62 while Thailand is ranked 54 in the most current data, suggesting that Thailand's citizens are happier than those of Japan, although since 156 countries are in the ranking, it could be debated that the two are pretty (and both relatively high) close in their levels of happiness.

### **Development Perceptions and Suggestions**

If one were to visit either Thailand or Japan and ask its residents whatever or not they are developed, they may not give an expected nor uniform answer. Not only do people's opinions vary from one person to another, but what development actually means to individuals in different countries can vary widely. Therefore, a search for consistency within Japan or Thailand among its citizens could be fruitless. As Japan currently stands, HDI ranks the country high, as the human development in the country has been doing very well for the past 70 or so years. However, the country has been mired in recession for the past 25 years.

For Thailand, economist Kalayanee Senasu (2020) makes several suggestions to make the quality of life in Thailand's rural areas better for those who live there. For

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<sup>3</sup> HDI information gathered from <http://hdr.undp.org/en/composite/HDI/>.

example, Senasu suggests that government and business interests need to be balanced in order to reduce poverty and encourage profitability of companies.

On the other hand, Japan is doing well at the moment development-wise but there is always room for improvement. A MENA report published in August of 2019 that talks about the Tomei Express and how Japan's transportation system can still be improved. At the moment, most of Japan's trains are going through the country's regions that are currently under development so being able to make improvements to these train transportation routes would be very beneficial to the country.

Nakanumura (2019) shows how a few Asian countries like Japan, Thailand, and South Korea have seen some temporary setbacks when it comes to economic development. Nakanumura suggests that in order to improve productivity and growth within a country, there needs to be flexible relocation by putting assets in more effective sectors of the workforce. If companies within Japan practice these skills, then they would be much better off.

In their study comparing the happiness of Japan and The Netherlands, Takashi, Fukushima, and Hagiwara (2018) note that indices do not necessarily tell the entire story of how developed a country is. Holland is purported to have one of the highest levels of happiness in Europe, higher than Japan's, but the researchers found that Japan's level of happiness was similar, when examining the actual sources of happiness. Japan relied more on family, whereas the Dutch rely more on other individuals. In another study related to Japan's level of happiness in terms of self-conceptualization, Cousins (1989) explores self-perceptions of youth in Japan regarding their country, finding that Japanese tend to reference more social norms that are abstract than Americans in defining their

self-concepts. Such social referencing may or may not lead to more happiness, but the method of defining self-concept might explain differences in how that happiness is grounded in self-worth and culture (collectivism versus individualism).

Also related to the topic of perceptions, Thailand has a quantitatively lower HDI score of the two but as the “quantity versus quality” suggests, people’s opinions might be different than what actual data might show. Senasu (2019) explains to her readers that she has come up with her own data to measure happiness through a series of questionnaires and observations. Bunsit (2015) considers the idea of how obtaining and self-worth among the people of Thailand is achieved through autonomy and the ability of a person to micromanage one's own time. Thus, what one culture or country perceives to be enjoyable might differ from another’s perceptions.

In my own experiences traveling in both countries, I had the perception that Thailand was much by far and away the more optimistic (defined as a positive mental attitude and cheery outlook on life) place—“the Land of Smiles,” as the citizens they call it—with much less to be optimistic about than Japan. That is, the standard of living is quite a bit lower in Thailand, but it doesn’t seem to negatively affect the attitude of the Thai people. This is why Japan might be expected to be happier than Thailand, but it is not.

If I could somehow make suggestions to both Japan and Thailand for a better future, I would say first, for Japan, it needs to focus more on the well-being of its citizens through a few means. One way would be through job creation through public programs. Japan is a collectivist society, but its public welfare can sometimes lag other seemingly



developed economies of Asia and Europe, in my observations. For example, retirees in Japan could be put back to work in social service roles, such as mentoring youth.

Another idea would be to relax immigration policies, which in Japan are some of the strictest in the world. With Japan's population, letting younger people from other nations in would improve the economy through a larger consumer base and more productive labor pool.

As for suggestions for Thailand, it also has room for improvement. First, boosting its productivity rates and work ethic would increase its chances to develop faster than other aspiring economies in Southeast Asia (like Cambodia). It could accomplish this by taking advantage of its cultural value of low Masculinity in the Hofstede model, meaning, gender role equality of men and women doing the same things in society. This is key in expanding a skilled workforce. Second, Thailand could improve the quality of life for its people by improving the environment. Air and water pollution is a huge problem in Thailand, especially in the large cities (for example, dead animals floating in the waterways, which I have seen), as is common in many countries. However, water quality in rural areas is also a concern. The government could take the lead in making much-needed improvement there by enacting regulations to improve the environmental situation.

## **Conclusion**

The aim of this thesis was to make human development and happiness comparisons between two countries that on the surface seem similar in some ways, such as culture, history and religion, but that are different in terms of their economic development. Japan seems far ahead of Thailand in some ways economically, with

brands that dominate the world market. Consumers everywhere have heard of Honda and Panasonic, but few know of Thailand's Singha (beverages) or Asava (clothing) or brands.

Quantitative measures such as Life Expectancy, Literacy Rates, and Gross Domestic Product (per capita) measures were used, along with the qualitative measures of culture and opinions of its citizens as borne out in research. Key historical economic and political moments in each country that has led them to their present state of development were also presented.

The Asian countries of Japan and Thailand are indeed different but paradoxically similar in many ways. For example, both countries have similar ideas and strategies when it comes to promoting development in their countries: rural agriculture to simple manufacturing to more complex industries and higher profit services. The earlier stages of humble beginnings imply a lower standard of living, while the later imply higher purchase price parity and higher standard of living. What the HDI and WHR numbers don't tell us, however, is the more subtle nuances of happiness among the populous. The quantitative results may not be the whole story. Hopefully in the future, Japan and Thailand will continue to make improvements in their human development and happiness to bring their citizens the worry free well-being that all citizens of the globe deserve. That is, all people who strive to improve their lot in life should be able to enjoy the fruits of their development efforts and a happy existence.

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## APPENDIX 1

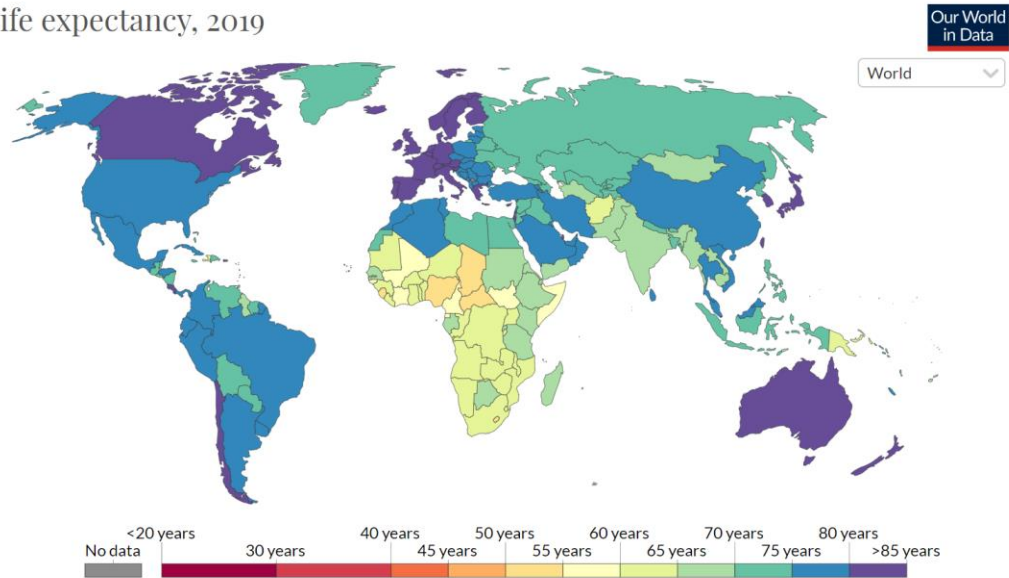
### Life Expectancy Rates - Japan

Health		Life expectancy at birth (years)
		84.5
	Life expectancy at birth (years)	84.5
	Adult mortality rate, female (per 1,000 people)	37
	Adult mortality rate, male (per 1,000 people)	68
	Age-standardized mortality rates attributed to noncommunicable diseases, female	180.1
	Age-standardized mortality rates attributed to noncommunicable diseases, male	320.2
	Child malnutrition, stunting (moderate or severe) (% under age 5)	7.1
	Current health expenditure (% of GDP)	10.9
	Life expectancy at birth, female (years)	87.5
	Life expectancy at birth, male (years)	81.3
	Life expectancy index	0.992
	HIV prevalence, adult (% ages 15-49)	0.1
	Mortality rate, infant (per 1,000 live births)	1.9
	Infants lacking immunization, DPT (% of one-year-olds)	1
	Infants lacking immunization, measles (% of one-year-olds)	3

Source: United Nations Development Program. “Human Development Reports.” | Human Development Reports, 2019

## APPENDIX 2 Life Expectancy, Worldwide

Life expectancy, 2019



Source: Riley (2005), Clio Infra (2015), and UN Population Division (2019)

Note: Shown is period life expectancy at birth, the average number of years a newborn would live if the pattern of mortality in the given year were to stay the same throughout its life.

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Source: Riley (2005), Clio Infra (2015), UN Population Division (2019)



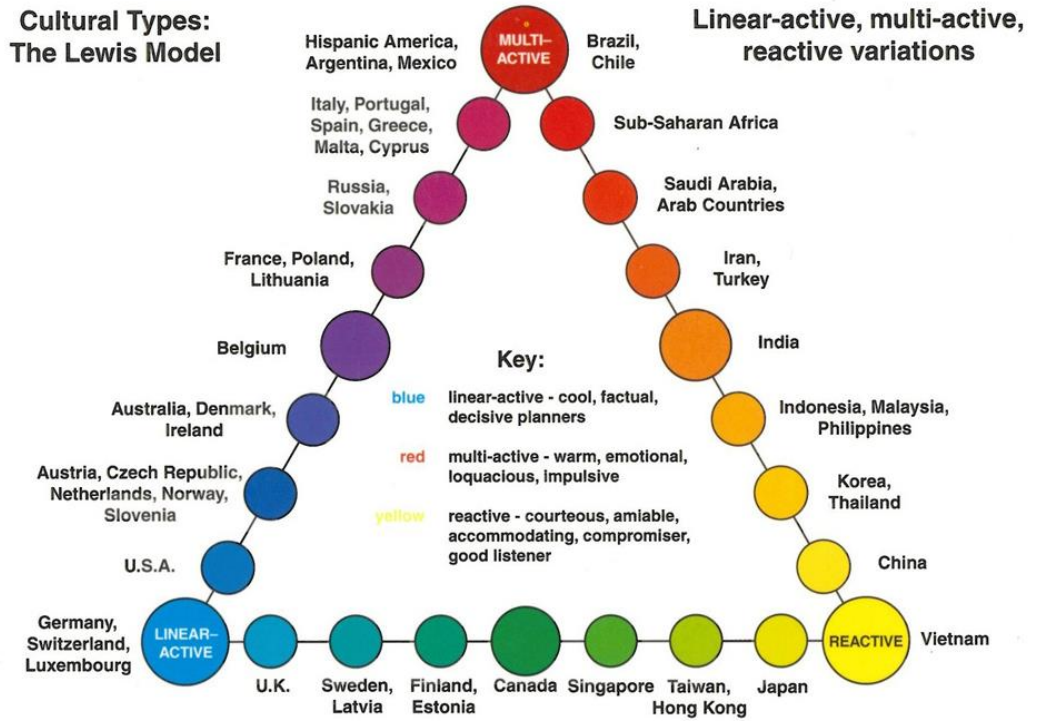
## APPENDIX 3

### Literacy Rates, Thailand

Education	Expected years of schooling (years)
Expected years of schooling (years)	14.7
Education index	0.665
Expected years of schooling, female (years)	14.8
Expected years of schooling, male (years)	14.5
Government expenditure on education (% of GDP)	4.1
Gross enrolment ratio, pre-primary (% of preschool-age children)	74
Gross enrolment ratio, primary (% of primary school-age population)	100
Gross enrolment ratio, secondary (% of secondary school-age population)	117
Gross enrolment ratio, tertiary (% of tertiary school-age population)	49
Literacy rate, adult (% ages 15 and older)	92.9
Mean years of schooling (years)	7.7
Mean years of schooling, female (years)	7.5
Mean years of schooling, male (years)	8.0
Percentage of primary schools with access to the internet	99

Source: United Nations Development Program. “Human Development Reports.” | Human Development Reports, 2019

APPENDIX 4  
The Lewis Model of National Culture

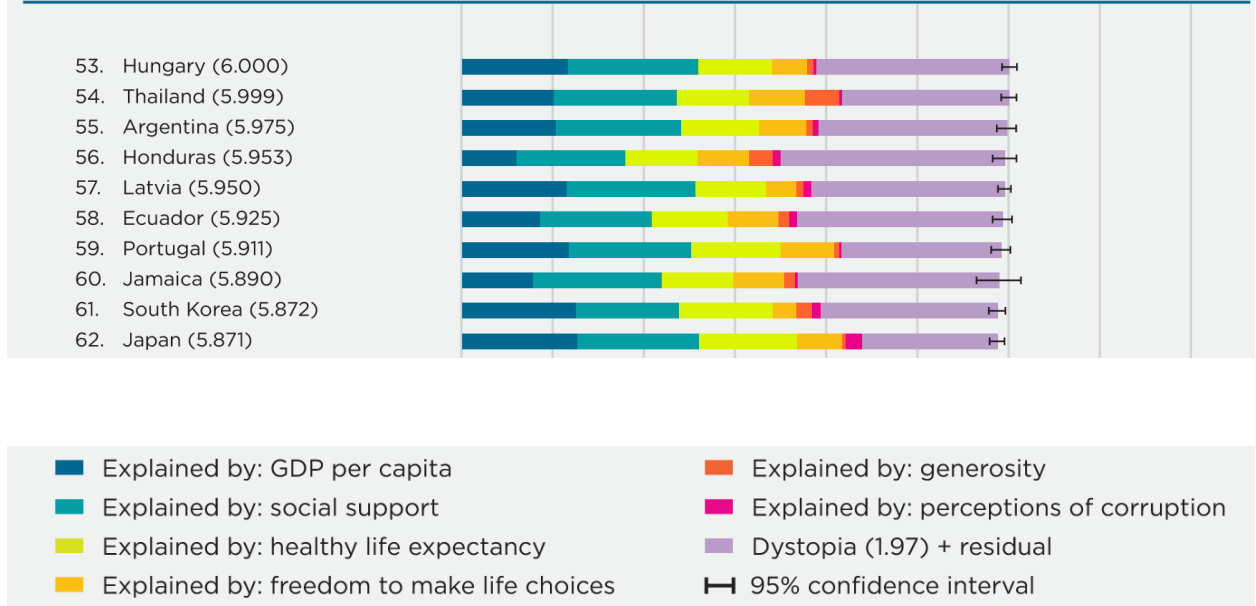


Source: Lewis, Richard D. (2006), "When Cultures Collide: Learning Across Cultures."

## APPENDIX 5

### World Happiness Report, Including Japan and Thailand

**Figure 2.1: Ranking of Happiness 2017–2019 (Part 2)**



Source: Helliwell, J., Layard, R., & Sachs, J. (2019). World Happiness Report 2019, New York: Sustainable Development Solutions Network.