Biological, Psychological and Social Bases of Health and Behavior

Thailand’s Happiness from a Hedonic, Eudaimonic and Biopsychosocial Perspective

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The following script evaluates Thailand under hedonic and eudaimonic aspects. In a second step the scope of investigation is broadened within new global criteria for wellness under the biopsychosocial model. It is argued that although Thailand is famously named the ‘Land Of Smiles’ much development is required to maintain and improve public happiness on societal level for its future.

**Hedonic and Eudemonic Aspects of Well-Being in Thailand**

In terms of immediate SWB (‘Average Happiness Yesterday’), Thailand ranks second right after Ireland. In terms of positive affect it ranks globally high at place 8 and in terms of least negative affect it takes place 14, even before ‘happiness leader’ Denmark (Helliwell, 2012, p.44-50). In the summative country index by country Thailand takes a respectable place 18 among the world’s most happy countries according to the combined World Values Survey/European Values Survey. However, in the World Gallup Poll (WGP) and on life-evaluation Thailand ranks only at place 52 in the Average Cantril Ladder by Country (Helliwell, p. 36). The statistical picture of Thais as happy-go-lucky people who live for the moment, but have issues with cognitive long-term accounts of their lives appears accurate.

The eudaimonic approach offers thus the best prospects to develop tangible strategies as it connects to practical and meaningful long-term societal goals as well as individual life-goals. Since Thais already rate high on the hedonic SWB index, diversification towards a more meaningful life would create the largest benefit (Ryan & Deci, 2001, p.148).

There are two major components to consider for evaluation. The first one is Thailand as a socio-centered culture which is set by default in a tight network of personal social networks nurturing positive affect. The second component is the developmental status as an evolving agricultural society which has only recently reached the status of an industrialized nation. As such Thailand offers historically lesser societal, political and economic institutional differentiation as many Western cultures. This impacts boundary conditions of psychological development such as personal growth and environmental mastery since many aspects of life are still set within traditional and slowly-evolving life-worlds.
The Bio-physical Domain

Significant unhappiness is measurable in impoverished provinces such as Lamphun or Rayong for the rural poor and lonely elderly people who get left behind in the rapid economic development, leading to the highest national suicide rates (Department Of Mental Health Thailand, 2011). Elimination of extreme poverty and social inclusion (Helliwell, 2012, p.9) are critical goals and it has been shown that government spending on agricultural research, electrification and rural education has a large poverty reduction impact (Shenggen et al., 2008).

The Psychological Domain

To increase Thailand's life-evaluation index the nurturing of autonomy, environmental mastery and personal growth (Ryff, 1989) via more differentiated education programs would complement existing strengths of self-acceptance and positive social relations.

The Social Domain

To increase happiness on life-evaluation for mainstream Thai society, major contributors to unhappiness such as inequality between the countryside and the ruling elites in Bangkok need to be diminished and eventually overcome. Inequality has already led to violent conflict in 2010 and has left a deep divide within Thai society every since (Ganesan, 2010). Muslim minorities in the South need to be socially included in mainstream Thai society (Harish, 2006). Civilians should not be left alone to suffer frequent terrorist attacks (Barter, 2011).

Critical thinking and problem-solving skills in schools lack dearly (Ahuya, 2011) since both aspects are neglected in the bureaucratic and centralized Thai education system (UNESCO, 2000) which is largely based on learning by memorizing and passing all students (James, 2008). Inability to compete in the global workforce threatens the future economic status as the physical foundation for happiness. Teacher-training, focus on an educated workforce and better pay for public servants to fight widespread corruption (Political & Economic Risk Consultancy, Ltd., 2012) would be key-points for public policies to increase societal well-being and happiness.
Discussion

One component often overlooked is the relation of SWB and life-evaluation in the context of personal and cultural negotiation and conflict. The situation of women in Indian society would be a good example (PMNCH, 2012) that happiness cannot be naively assigned without acknowledging underlying cultural conflicts. For Thailand this would synonymous with bridging the class divide.

(697 words)

References


