

## A TAE-BASED QUALITATIVE STUDY OF SUBJECTIVE WELL-BEING FOR AGED JAPANESE MEN

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### I. INTRODUCTION

Due to improvements in public health and advancements in medical care, the average life expectancy of Japanese people has dramatically improved in recent years. In 2009, the population of the elderly (65 years and over) was 22.8% of the total population. At this pace of aging of the population, by 2055, 1 out of every 2.5 citizens will be 65 years or older.

“Aging” is generally considered as negative, but it is time for us to address this topic in a more positive perspective. Now the demographic reality poses questions: What is the purpose of our life? How can we strive for fulfillment even in the face of senility and death? This is a challenge, not only for Japan, but also for the aging world.

The present study applied a TAE-based qualitative approach to assess subjective well-being for aged Japanese, with the focus on a retired male high school teacher. The analysis revealed a contrasting picture of a new-type of individualistic elderly person, on one hand, and the conventional mindsets of the Japanese community, on the other. The TAE-based approach contributed to visualizing the inner world of an individual.

This paper demonstrates the effectiveness of a TAE-based approach for qualitative research. It is divided into two parts: the background information and the TAE process.

### BACKGROUND

Postwar Japan has recorded remarkable economic growth and — in materialistic terms — a large number of newly affluent citizens. It is doubtful, however, that the Japanese have become mentally fulfilled, as well. Rather, our society has put material prosperity before mental well-being, and as a result, the situation of the elderly Japanese has become more complicated. Material prosperity does not necessarily guarantee mental well-being. Since a sense of mental well-being is truly subjective, we need a research approach to explore the individual’s inner dimension.

### II. APPROACHES TO THE STUDY OF AGING

Among various approaches to assess subjective well-being, researchers have often used the revised PGC Morale Scale (Lawton, 1975). The Scale is useful for getting an overview of a particular phenomenon, but it is not designed to assess the complicated inner landscape of the individual.

According to Erikson’s Psychosocial Stage Inventory (EPSI), Stage 8 is late adulthood, the stage at which the challenge to be met is “ego integrity versus despair” (Erikson

et. al, 1997). Erikson's life stage theory defines "ego integrity" as a positive aspect of aging, but does not deal directly with subjective well-being.

Tornstam's (1997) gerotranscendence theory integrates Erikson's description of Stage 9 with Cumming & Henry's (1961) disengagement theory. However, as with the revised PGC, Tornstam's scale of gerotranscendence depends on dichotomous responses and is not sufficient to address the process of how an individual progresses to gerotranscendence.

Based on Tornstam's model, Oda (2003) studied aged Japanese people and suggested that it is important to discover how elderly people do or do not shift to gerotranscendence in the context of a rapidly aging Japanese society.

Gaining the insights from these prior works, Yamaguchi (2008) conducted a questionnaire survey and interviews to study the subjective sense of well-being in relation to aging. Although the study showed Japanese elderly people follow a common agenda for life-span development, such as integrity and gerotranscendence, more than one interviewee expressed discomfort with some of the questions from Tornstam's Gerotranscendence Scale. Yamaguchi shared a sense of discomfort expressed by those interviewees and realized the importance of designing a research approach to be customized to each Japanese aged subject.

### **III. PURPOSE AND METHOD OF DATA COLLECTION**

Our study was a follow-up to Yamaguchi's. In a pilot study, we tested a questionnaire on 167 respondents, and from that data, identified three factors: "forward-looking", "acceptance of aging", and "role consciousness". We then created a 10-question interview, which included items identified with these factors, along with questions representative of the cosmic transcendence measure, the coherence in life measure, and the solitude measure of Tornstam's gerotranscendence theory, as well as questions to get background information and to smooth the way for asking about delicate topics.

#### **GUIDELINES FOR INTERVIEW**

1. What is the most exciting activity in your daily life? What keeps you going forward? (a forward-looking attitude)
2. Is that activity something you have been doing for many years?  
Is there any activity you used to do but have now quit? (If "yes", Why did you quit?)
3. Do you feel comfortable in Nature? (a sense of connection to or feeling part of Nature, etc.)
4. Do you have feelings of coherence and meaning in life?
5. Do you have time to spend with your family and friends?
6. What role do you think you play in your family and your community?

7. Do you feel your physical strength declining?
8. How do you feel when you are philosophizing alone?
9. Do you believe you eventually come to dust (after death)? Do you have any fear about it?
10. How are you now? What environment do you hope to be in?

To focus on the individual's inner world, the interview was customized for each interviewee.

The following is the profile for the interviewee described in this paper.

Male, Mr. C, age 66  
 Present household composition: self and one son  
 Previous household composition: self, wife, a son, and a daughter  
 Occupation before retirement: high school teacher

This interview was conducted at the interviewee's home for about 1.5 hours. The tape-recorded interview was transcribed. (Researcher A, below, is the interviewer in this interview session.)

#### IV. METHOD OF DATA ANALYSIS

The interview data was qualitatively analyzed in order to get an understanding of the interviewee's subjective well-being. The method employed is a theory building method TAE, "a systematic way to articulate in new terms something which needs to be said but is at first only an inchoate 'bodily sense.'" (Thinking At the Edge; Gendlin & Hendricks, 2004). For a researcher engaged in a specific field over a period of years, TAE is useful for interpreting research data by Focusing on a specific issue arising in the course of the research as a research question. TAE Steps help the researcher to articulate some understanding of the data to be analyzed (called a felt sense) while staying with the data. With this 'understanding' in mind, the researcher can address the whole of the data including interviews and observations without losing its intricacies. It is very useful for grasping the subjective dimension of the individual subject. Recently TAE has been applied to qualitative study by Tokumaru et al. (2008).

In the present case, Researcher A, defined a research question to be "subjective well-being among today's Japanese elderly people," a subject theme arising from the research of Yamaguchi (2008). Under this research question, the data from interviews with the subject, Mr. C, was analyzed through 14 TAE Steps.

TAE is able to be implemented by a single researcher alone, but often involves two people, a Researcher and a Guide, working together in analytical process. The Guide creates and holds space for the Researcher to stay with the subject of interest, and facilitates the Researcher's inner dialogue. The Guide is also responsible for taking notes on the analytical

process. In this study, Researcher A was analyzing the data with Researcher B as Guide. The process of analysis of the research data is shown in the Appendix.

## V. DISCUSSION

The TAE-based analysis was helpful for better understanding of the structure of Interviewee C's subjective well-being. The findings are summarized and presented with relevant interview excerpts below:

### **Structure of Mr. C's subjective well-being**

Mr. C formed a new family based on new values after WWII, not a large family, but a nuclear family, and has worked for the family's personal growth. It has given him a sense of responsibility and joy. He has supported the family in an individualistic way of valuing freedom, refraining from over-interdependence. He is still in pursuit of what a new family style should be. He is a new type of father who cooks for his unmarried son.

- *In contrast to the prewar values, my generation was raised in the postwar climate of public opinion opting for European values. I didn't want to obey my parents. I just wanted to be independent, to get married, to form a separate family. Independence must be the ideal life-style. . . everybody believed so. I grew up in such times.*
- *When I'm home, I cook for my son, too.*
- *We take meals at home. My son doesn't like to dine out, either. He also cooks. Simple breakfast, bread, tea, egg and vegetables.*

(Note: It is a "new value" for Mr. C (and his son) to cook for themselves, since traditionally Japanese men do not cook.)

On the other hand, when it comes to being related to the community, his way of thinking is tinged with the influence of the past feudal landlord system. He tends to follow the conventional rules and decisions made by local people, which he has never challenged. He has never tried to develop new relationships with local people. He can be associated with them to the extent that he seeks advice from the landowner of his vegetable garden about how to grow vegetables, but it is not like a landlord-tenant relationship. He has no motivation to take part in or streamline community activities.

- *To tell the truth, it's great to be friends with local people. But for them, I'm just a newcomer. There is no opportunity to socialize with them in daily life. It is difficult to make the first contact. I feel I should take time to develop those kind of relationships.*
- *I have always hated bothering about and being bothered by others. It's stuffy. It's my policy to lead a carefree life.*
- *Neighbors I've been associated with are Mr. E next door, and Mr. H, who has helped me take care of the vegetable garden, I think. Well, Mr. H comes over to my garden to spray insecticide every day [laughter], yes, he does.*

In terms of subjective well-being, Mr. C is happiest when being comfortably alone while feeling connected with his family. He desires to be related to local people. This desire seems to be fulfilled by being taken care of by local people in a remote place on a pilgrimage.

- *Before setting out, I imagined it would be very hard to walk over 1200 km. But once I started, it was incredible. It was exciting to meet with people, to walk with companions, to be in Nature. Great experience.*

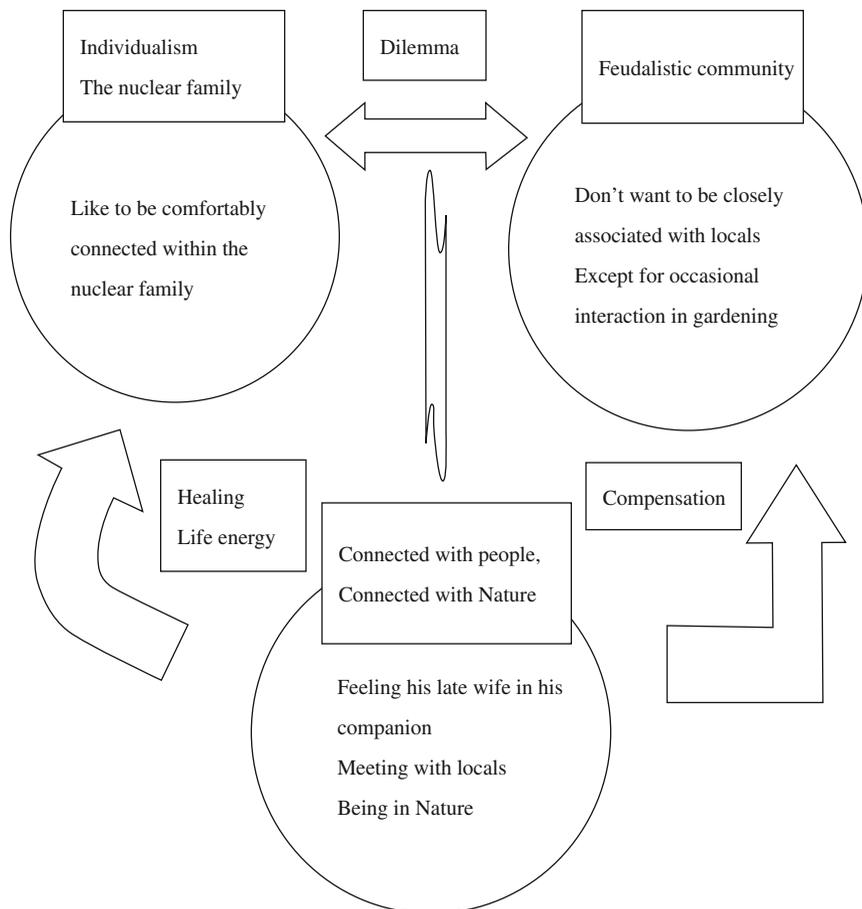
In future, in this direction, he is interested in seeking out what a new family style should be, while in pursuit of his own well-being (feeling connected *and* being comfortably alone). He has no idea of what would happen if he becomes sick, unable to stand on his own two feet.

- *I feel I should be alive. At the same time, I'm afraid of being ill and bed-ridden. My friends have the same feeling. I don't want to become senile [laughter]. I'd rather die than living in senility. . . We are joking with each other.*

## VI. CONCLUSION

This study applied a TAE-based qualitative approach to assess subjective well-being among aged Japanese people, with the focus on a retired male high school teacher.

The analysis revealed the dynamic inner structure of the subject Mr. C: a contrasting picture of the new-type individualistic elderly person caring for his nuclear family, on one hand, and an aged man with the conventional mindsets of the feudalistic community, on the other. His inner dynamism can be explained by two social factors. First, in postwar Japan, individualism was advocated among those seeking freedom from the old values, which spurred a shift from a large-family system to a nuclear family system. Second, in the course of agricultural reconstruction after the war, agricultural land reform was implemented and the tenant farmer system was abolished, but vestiges of the landlord system still remain in people's lives and consciousness, and affect the framework of the community. These two conflicting factors are found to underlie his subjective well-being. Our analysis suggests that a feeling of happiness and gratitude he enjoyed during the pilgrimage worked to mitigate the dilemma he experiences in community life.



An instance of one individual helps visualize the reality in Japan, and our data demonstrates that it is difficult for the community to support elderly people, and for the elderly to be supported by the community while respecting diverse values, such as independence/individualism and traditional mindsets/paternalism.

The results of this study suggest a direction for public policy to tackle with the said challenge in the aging Japanese society, namely, how to create space where every person can feel comfortable being alone *and* connected with family at the same time, affording room for striving toward a new family style. For example, a welfare system that supports elderly people to live next door to their families, keeping a comfortable distance and feeling part of the community might be recommended as a choice. Importantly, such system should prioritize individual needs with the view of enhancing “subjective well-being” for each elderly person.

To visualize the inner dimension of an individual, a method like TAE is useful for assessing subjective well-being. As its further application, the TAE methodology focusing on a single individual might be of significant help to policy makers in identifying and respecting individual needs toward better welfare system. The authors are interested in conducting interviews with more elderly subjects in order to gain a deeper understanding of subjective well-being among aged Japanese people.

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## **APPENDIX: TAE-BASED ANALYSIS OF QUALITATIVE RESEARCH DATA**

### **I. PROCESS OF ANALYSIS**

#### **I-1) PREPARATION**

**Step** TAE Step 1: Let a felt sense form (Gendlin & Hendricks, 2004:12)

**Procedure** Researcher A makes a transcript of an interview session with Interviewee C and reads the data in depth. Researcher A gets a felt sense about the topic: subjective well-being for aged Japanese. This felt sense is processed as follows.

#### **I-2) STEPS 1-5: SPEAKING FROM THE FELT SENSE (IBID:12-15)**

**Step** STEPS 1-5 help to “find what is more than logical in your felt sense,” “notice that you don’t mean the standard definitions of the words,” “write a sentence or fresh phrase to say what you wanted each of the three words to mean,” and “expand what you wanted each word to mean by writing fresh, linguistically unusual sentences” (ibid: 13-15).

**Procedure** Researcher A stays with the felt sense and describes the crux of it, with Guide B taking notes of words or phrases. Researcher A writes a short sentence which speaks from the felt sense. By repeating this process, at the end of Step 5 Researcher A comes up with a sentence to express the crux of her felt sense:

*Calm, large, leisurely, fond of history, calm and "just as I am." This is a good thing about Japan. Because it's not flashy, it is more understandable. . .*

#### **I-3) STEPS 6-9: FINDING PATTERNS FROM FACETS (INSTANCES), WRITE FREELY (IBID: 15-17)**

**Step** STEPS 6-9 help to “collect facets,” “allow the facets to contribute detailed structure,” “cross the facets,” and “write freely” (ibid: 15-17).

**Procedure** The researchers returned to the interview data to collect instances that seemed to express the whole felt sense, selecting 14 instances with various aspects of the whole data. Because the data is voluminous, this research extracts the number of instances which seemed necessary for expressing the whole felt sense, more than just the four suggested in the original TAE instructions. Next, patterns were derived from these 14 instances.

**Table 1: Collecting facets and deriving patterns (STEPS 6 & 7)**

Instance	Pattern
Instance 1. My son has never dined out. Even when I go out, he comes home to cook for himself. Instance 2. Well, when I'm at home, I cook for both of us.	Pattern 1. The family is important.
Instance 1. I can imagine how a foreigner is inspired by something valuable in the Japanese heritage. On a pilgrimage to temples in Shikoku, I found myself finishing the journey with a foreigner as companion. Instance 2. My generation is known as opposed to the prewar feudal paternalism. (But) the extended family system may be a good aspect of those days.	Pattern 2. I know a good thing about Japan.

As a unique approach, the authors have invented a “Pattern Form” that allows us to collect all other instances to which the relevant pattern applies. For research purposes, this Pattern Form is helpful for ensuring that all applicable instances are captured. It also allows us to identify any instances of the pattern in reverse. Moreover, it is useful for grouping similar instances efficiently. The Pattern Form is modeled after the M-GTA Analytic Worksheet. For example:

**Table 2: Pattern Form**

Pg. S.2, L8	I have never been involved deeply in the community, because I don't come from this area.
	C: I always hate bothering about and being bothered by others. I like a carefree life. So being a member of a large family is far from my lifestyle. But at the same time, a large family system came from economic or workforce necessity of farmers, I think.
Other instances with the same Pattern	
Just next-door [laughs] I've rented a vegetable garden from Mr. E and have grown vegetables for more than ten years. It's not like a hobby, but I have been working in this way to grow organic vegetables without using chemical fertilizers.	
Note: It's natural to do as the local people do.	

Then, all Patterns are crossed with each other, and new findings are written down by checking with the felt sense. Apply Pattern 1 derived from Instance 1 to Pattern 2 derived from Instance 2, Pattern 2 derived from Instance 2 to Pattern 3 derived from Instance 3, and so on. Crossing in 182 combinations is carried out. Then write freely the findings from the preceding analytical steps.

**Table 3: Pattern Form (Crossing)**

1. Keeping company with high-school mates	
Pattern	Findings from crossing
2. I feel good being ordinary	In company with friends, I'm true to myself. I feel carefree, because I don't have to worry too much about others
3. I used to wish to lead a meaningful life. Now I think differently. I just want to be myself (be as I am).	I can be myself with my high school friends. We became friends in adolescence, and they are lifelong friends. They are not my family, but I can build close relationships.

**I-4) STEPS 10-14: BUILDING THEORY (IBID: 17-24)**

**Step** Of STEPS 10-14 for theory-building, STEPS 10-12 help to “choose terms and link them,” “ask into the inherent relations between the terms,” and “choose permanent terms and interlock them” (ibid: 17-22).

**Procedure** Step 10: Three keywords (terms) expressing the whole felt sense are chosen: A: “as I am,” B: “family,” and C: “comfortableness of being alone.” Place the keywords in “A IS B” so as to write a sentence that is true for the felt sense. Do the same with “B IS C,” and “C IS A.”

A=B	As I am IS family
A=C	Family IS comfortableness of being alone
B=C	Comfortableness of being alone IS as I am

**Step 11:**

Next, from the felt sense, find a term that tells the inherent link in the sentence “A IS inherently B.” Do the same with BC, and CA. Arrows indicate new Terms

- As I am IS inherently (has the very nature of) family → I don't want to be bothered by others
- Family IS inherently (has the very nature of) comfortableness of being alone → resistance to a large family
- Comfortableness of being alone IS inherently (has the very nature of) as I am → local people

**Step 12:**

Choose three Terms that express the whole felt sense. In this case, O: local people, P: my own family, and Q: comfortableness of being alone. These three terms were interlocked and defined into the following sentences:

OPQRS interlocked/defined

O: Local people, whose ways I have to follow, never change, never let me feel comfortable being alone, and never grow along with me because, unlike my own family, they are not what I create of my own will.

P: My own family can be changed, because I can communicate my own will to them; it allows me to be comfortable being alone; is not like local people whose ways I have to follow.

Q: In the company of local people to whom I can't say what I think, and whose ways I have to go along with, I can't feel comfortable being alone; but with my own family, I can say what I want and can feel change.

R: My own will can be felt when I'm with my own family, which is related to the comfortable-ness of being alone, but is not communicable to local people whose ways I have to follow.

S: "Follow" (the verb) has no room for change, because I have to follow the local people's way, but I don't have to "follow" when I'm with my own family; therefore, there is room for change, allowing me to feel comfortable being alone.

Then, R: "my own will," S: "follow," and T: "change" were added, and "comfortable being alone" was substituted for "as I am," "change" for "new." Findings from checking with the felt sense were written down.

Finally, nine main terms were determined: "local people," "my own family," "comfortable being alone," "my own will," "follow," "change," "as I am," "new," and "growth." Through using each term once at least, by addition and substitution, a theory was structured in Step 12:

- My own family, newly created, can be changed by my own will, and has potential for growth. Because I can communicate my own will, I can be as I am and feel comfortable being alone. Local people, whose ways I have to follow, cannot be changed, won't grow. I cannot communicate my own will to local people.

**I-5) ENDING THE ANALYSIS**

**Step** Step 13: is to "apply your theory outside your field," and Step 14 is to "expand and apply your theory in your field" (ibid: 22-24). Step 14 says: Once a theory is developed, further distinctions and implications follow without you inventing them (ibid: 23)

The theory was applied to the data, and findings were written down while returning to the felt sense of "subjective well-being for aged Japanese."

**Analysis** Toward the ending of theory-building, the topic of postwar agricultural land reform spontaneously came up in conversation. Findings from input mainly by Researcher A about the topic were as follows:

In the structure of the theory, “local people” are a remnant of the old landlord system, and even today there remains a traditional way of thinking that the community follows the opinion of those who have owned land since long ago, as in a tenant-farmer-to-landlord relationship.

With those findings in mind, it was possible to compare “relationship with local people” and “relationship with family” in the interviewee’s data. A table was drawn up, showing these two in relation to the topic of “a pilgrimage” which featured prominently in the interviewee’s story.

**Table 4: Comparison with another topic (a pilgrimage)**

Local people	Family	Pilgrimage (a journey to 88 temples in Shikoku)
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Feudalism</li> <li>• Large family</li>   <li>• Landlord</li> <li>• Never grow</li> <li>• Never change (preserve status-quo)</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Individualism</li> <li>• Nuclear family</li>   <li>• Tenant farmer mentality (even though not in actuality)</li> <li>• Strive for personal growth</li> <li>• In pursuit of a new style</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Independent decision-making</li> <li>• Travel in pairs (Even when traveling alone, a pilgrim is spiritually “accompanied” by Buddhist Sage Kobo; also, in the interviewee’s case, he felt his late wife was his companion)</li> <li>• Self reflection (for personal growth)</li> <li>• In pursuit of something (oneself)</li> </ul>

Based on the table, “on a pilgrimage” was applied to “the structure of the theory” from this process to produce the following result, which helped clarify the meaning of “on a pilgrimage” for the interviewee and understand better what the interviewee thinks of his relation to the family and the community.

“On a pilgrimage” applied to the theory

I can decide for myself to set out on a pilgrimage. It gives me opportunities for self reflection and personal growth. Although I can't express myself, I have freedom of decision: to set out or not or come back home, etc. Away from daily life, being in Nature, as I am, I can feel comfortable being alone. Local people (in Shikoku) welcome pilgrims caringly. I don't have to follow their ways, although I comply with the rules for pilgrim attire. I can be associated with local people, with other pilgrims, sharing about my late wife and what memorial service I want to hold for her, about illness, about whatever I want to share (personal growth). The attitude of local people looking after pilgrims is the same as in the past.

The analysis revealed the conflict of the new-type individualistic elderly (the nuclear family) and the feudalistic obligation for the community (it's wiser to follow the opinion of those who have owned land).

**Table 5: Summary of Findings**

Individualism (the bond of an individual (man) and an individual (woman) based on love	Feudalism (The tie of a family and a family)	Challenge to the future of the Japanese society
The nuclear family	Community	To find solutions to how the community should support the elderly and how the elderly should be supported by the community

The aging society has posed the question of what role a community should play for people who are less and less connected in terms of kinship as well as locality. An instance of one individual helps visualize the situation in Japan, demonstrating that it is difficult for the community to support elderly people and for the elderly to be supported by the community while respecting each other's values.

**NOTE:**

1. Gendlin's original TAE gives instructions of A=B, A=C, B=C in Step 10, and "A is inherently B" and "A is inherently C" in Step 11. In this study, the authors modified the procedures to interrelate ABC in series.

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