



## Testing My Hypothesis

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♥ **Japanese People's Low Self-Esteem from Long Ago** According to a 2018 Cabinet Office survey, while the percentage of Japanese people who are "satisfied with themselves" is in the 40s, it is in the 80s in Western countries. Similarly, while the percentage of Japanese people who believe they have strengths is around 60%, it is around 90% in Western countries. Additionally, according to the "2024 World Happiness Report" announced in March 2024, Japan ranked 51st in happiness. What surprised me the most was that Japan ranked 110th in the category of "subjective life satisfaction." The top rankings in both categories were occupied by Western countries, especially those in Northern Europe. In fact, international statistics showing that Japanese people have lower self-esteem compared to Westerners is not a recent phenomenon; it seems unchanged since the Showa and Heisei eras.

♥ **My Hypothesis: "Self-Esteem  $\rightleftharpoons$  Confidence  $\rightleftharpoons$  Happiness"** Thus, I formulated the hypothesis that "self-esteem  $\rightleftharpoons$  confidence  $\rightleftharpoons$  happiness." In other words, people with high self-esteem have confidence, and as a result, their happiness also increases or decreases proportionally. In fact, my hypothesis has some basis. For example, through participating in various KOCHI IYEO events from the "Ship for World Youth" orientation in February to the YOUTH FORUM, I noticed that the leaders and staff of KOCHI IYEO seemed confident, had high self-esteem, and appeared happy. My hypothesis fit perfectly. However, one day I discovered that my hypothesis was incomplete. It was when I asked a friend about my hypothesis. The friend's answer was surprising. "I don't have confidence, but I am not unhappy." ...(That's true, sorry for being presumptuous.) Is the "happiness" one feels different from the "happiness" others perceive? Perhaps even if one is happy, they don't say "I am happier than others"? Is this expression of emotion a norm in Japanese culture? If so, why is that? My hypothesis testing led me into a research study.

♥ **Methods of Measuring Self-Esteem** "Why do Westerners have higher self-esteem than Japanese people?" (Perhaps, why do they express the same happiness more strongly?) To find a clue to solving this problem, I researched the "methods of measuring self-esteem." I found out that self-esteem is often measured by items like "I am satisfied with myself," "I feel that I have worth as a person," and "I sometimes think that I am a worthless person." Continuing, I found that while most Westerners, both adults and children, affirm the first two items and deny the third, less than half of Japanese adults and children affirm the first two items, and many affirm the third item.

♥ **Different "Good Child Conditions" and Their Reasons** It is said that the expectations placed on children about "what kind of person they want them to become" are called developmental expectations. According to a certain Japan-US survey on developmental expectations, Americans are raised from an early age to "have confidence in oneself and assert oneself so as not to lose to others," so even small children are said to assert themselves proudly. On the other hand, Japanese people are raised from an early age to "have compassion, refrain from selfish behavior, and acquire cooperativeness," so even small children are said to act considerately towards their friends. The conditions for being a good child and the direction of self-formation are completely different between Japan and the US, but how did these values come to be? When I immediately looked into this on the KOCHI IYEO hotline, I received the following advice: First, this issue is easier to understand if considered broadly in the context of Japan and the world. In other words, the difference in "developmental expectations" between Japan and the US can also be seen in China, Korea, India, Europe, etc., with a common theme of a "survival of the fittest" society in which "if you don't assert yourself, others will belittle you and you won't survive." To understand this harsh world and reality, it is necessary to study geopolitics and history, and in regions where religious conflicts, colonization, and wars have continued, such harsh environments are more likely to be created. Fortunately, Japan had the natural fortress of the Sea of Japan, and was able to avoid full-scale invasions by foreign tribes, but its long history and facts gave rise to a unique sense of peace and defense among the Japanese people. As for the strong cooperativeness of Japanese people, the rice farming culture that spread to Japan played a major role in forming rural communities united by "water," leading to the rule of the "Japanese village society" that emphasized water (community) over blood (kin). In China, it is said that "blood is thicker than water," but Japanese people naturally created the implicit rule that "water is more important than blood" in symbiosis with nature. "Behind my hypothesis lies geopolitics, history, and culture." It was a research study full of learning.

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