

СОЦИАЛЬНАЯ ПСИХОЛОГИЯ, ПОЛИТИЧЕСКАЯ И ЭКОНОМИЧЕСКАЯ ПСИХОЛОГИЯ

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The Effect of National Identity and Collective Victimhood on South Koreans' Perception of Trilateral Cooperation

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Abstract

Introduction. Mutual intimacy among the citizens of the three countries – South Korea, Japan, and China – continues to be low. To facilitate trilateral cooperation, it is important to understand public perception towards cooperation.

Purpose examines how psychological factors of national identification and collective victimhood affect Koreans' perception and attitudes toward China and Japan.

Materials and Methods. A survey on 320 participants of Korean nationality was conducted using an online questionnaire to measure national identification, collective victimhood, perceived social norms, and preferences for international policies.

Results. Descriptive statistics show that while most Koreans perceived anti-Chinese and anti-Japanese sentiments as a social norm, participants held more positive attitudes towards them on a personal level. In addition, participants with lower degrees of national identification and collective victimhood, showed more positive attitudes towards Chinese and Japanese and higher preference for diplomatic policies over military policies.

Discussion. The findings underscore the complexity of intergroup relations in the trilateral context. Despite widespread perceptions of hostility towards Chinese and Japanese, individual attitudes show that many Koreans are open to forming friendships across these national boundaries. This discrepancy suggests a disconnection between perceived social norms and personal beliefs, highlighting the potential for improved interpersonal relations through targeted initiatives. Promoting positive individual interactions may encourage broader acceptance and diminish the emotional appeals of nationalism that lead to parochial attitudes and conformity to social norms that support hostility. As evidenced by Germany's post-conflict reconciliation, structured social and cultural exchanges, supported by legal frameworks, can create a conducive environment for peace and collaboration. While the Trilateral Cooperation Secretariat has made strides in improving diplomatic relations, sustained efforts at both individual and societal levels are essential. Increased interaction and exchanges among the citizens of South Korea, Japan, and China can reduce prejudice and promote cooperation, ultimately fostering a more harmonious trilateral relationship.

Keywords: trilateral cooperation, public opinion, national identity, nationalism, collective victimhood, social norms

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Оригинальное эмпирическое исследование

Влияние национальной идентичности и коллективной виктимности на восприятие южнокорейцами трехстороннего сотрудничества

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Аннотация

Введение. Взаимная близость между гражданами трех стран – Южной Кореи, Японии и Китая – по-прежнему находится на низком уровне. Чтобы способствовать трехстороннему сотрудничеству, важно понять, как общественность относится к сотрудничеству.

Цель исследования – изучить, как психологические факторы национальной идентификации и коллективной виктимности влияют на восприятие и отношение корейцев к Китаю и Японии.

Материалы и методы. Опрос 320 участников корейской национальности проводился с помощью онлайн-анкеты для измерения национальной идентификации, коллективной виктимности, воспринимаемых социальных норм и предпочтений в отношении международной политики.

Результаты. Описательная статистика показывает, что, хотя большинство корейцев воспринимают антикитайские и антияпонские настроения как социальную норму, участники на личном уровне относятся к ним более позитивно. Кроме того, участники с более низкой степенью национальной идентификации и коллективной виктимности демонстрировали более позитивное отношение к китайцам и японцам и отдавали большее предпочтение дипломатической политике перед военной.

Обсуждение. Полученные данные подчеркивают сложность межгрупповых отношений в трехстороннем контексте. Несмотря на широко распространенные представления о враждебности по отношению к китайцам и японцам, индивидуальное отношение показывает, что многие корейцы открыты к установлению дружеских отношений через эти национальные границы. Такое расхождение говорит о несоответствии между воспринимаемыми социальными нормами и личными убеждениями, подчеркивая потенциал для улучшения межличностных отношений с помощью целенаправленных инициатив. Содействие позитивному взаимодействию между людьми может способствовать более широкому принятию и ослаблению эмоциональных призывов национализма, которые приводят к парохизальному отношению и соответствию социальным нормам, поддерживающим враждебность. Как показало постконфликтное примирение в Германии, структурированные социальные и культурные обмены, подкрепленные правовой базой, могут создать благоприятную среду для мира и сотрудничества. Хотя Секретариат трехстороннего сотрудничества добился успехов в улучшении дипломатических отношений, необходимы постоянные усилия как на индивидуальном, так и на общественном уровне. Расширение взаимодействия и обменов между гражданами Южной Кореи, Японии и Китая может уменьшить предрассудки и способствовать сотрудничеству, что в итоге приведет к более гармоничным трехсторонним отношениям.

Ключевые слова: трехстороннее сотрудничество, общественное мнение, национальная идентичность, национализм, коллективная виктимность, социальные нормы

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Introduction

Recalling the 25th anniversary of Korea-China-Japan trilateral cooperation, the heads of the trilateral states convened the 9th Republic of Korea-Japan-China Trilateral Summit on May 27th, 2024, and adopted a joint declaration longing for the institutionalization and the expansion of the Trilateral Cooperation (Republic of Korea, Japan & People's Republic of China. (2024, May 27). Joint Declaration of the Ninth ROK-Japan-China Trilateral Summit. Retrieved November 20, 2024, from <https://tcs-asia.org/en/data/documents.php>). After the Trilateral Summit, Chinese Prime Minister Li Qiang expressed a desire to collaborate with South Korea and Japan on economic matters, particularly focusing on supply chains and resuming negotiations for a trilateral free trade agreement. South Korean President Yoon Suk-Yeol mentioned that the three leaders concurred on enhancing cultural and people-to-people exchanges, establishing secure supply chain networks, and jointly addressing environmental, health, and other common challenges. Japanese Prime Minister Kishida emphasized the significant responsibility the three nations bear for maintaining regional peace and announced that Japan will host the next trilateral leaders' meeting (Kim, H. & Wu, H. (2024). China premier agrees on cooperation with Seoul, Tokyo but issues veiled rebuke against their US ties. The Associated Press (AP). Retrieved September 16, 2024, from <https://apnews.com/article/south-korea-china-japan-trilateral-6afe4c3e280995a7fc16696edbd0a345>).

However, recent public opinion indicators show that Koreans' favorability towards China and Japan are still very low. Looking at the favorability of neighboring countries of Koreans, China scored 27.6 and Japan scored 26.7 out of 100 (Cho, 2021). Nevertheless, the trilateral countries will continue to increase cooperation in various fields, and human resource exchanges will be more active. The Joint Declaration of the Ninth ROK-Japan-China Trilateral Summit stipulated to increase number of people-to-people exchanges among the three countries to 40 million by 2030 (Republic of Korea, Japan & People's Republic of China. (2024, May 27). Joint Declaration of the Ninth ROK-Japan-China Trilateral Summit. Retrieved November 20, 2024, from <https://tcs-asia.org/en/data/documents.php>).

The present study examines the influence of public perception on foreign policy and international relations. The issue of the pace of social processes is a topic of active discussion among experts from various fields, driven by the rapid, complex, and widespread changes in the economy, social relations, and culture. As a result, shifts in perceptions among the three countries could lead to significant transformations (Diomin & Stepanova, 2023). To this end, we examine the effect of national identification and collective victimhood on Koreans' perceptions towards China and Japan and provide implications for the Korean government's foreign policy on trilateral cooperation.

Theoretical Background

Influence of public perception on foreign policy and international relations. In general, following democratization, authoritative decisions from the state decreased, while the influence of public opinion increased in the process of decision-making for foreign policies (Kim and Lim, 2024). The intercultural differences identified are part of the national culture of the host country's general population (Feshchenko et al., 2024). In countries implementing democracy as their form of government, public opinion cannot be completely ignored. Depending on the accessibility of information, the impact of individual factors on public opinion may vary. Although its influence may be limited depending on accessibility, the words and actions of political leaders can also affect public opinion on certain policies. Individual characteristics such as ideological orientation and information processing abilities also influence the formation of public opinion (Kim et al., 2021). In addition, sufficiently strong and developed organizational culture is the support of cohesion in understanding significant problems (Khotinets et al., 2022).

This shows that the recognition of the importance of cooperation by the citizens of the three countries is equally important to national level efforts to facilitate trilateral cooperation. Therefore, it is necessary to understand to what extent Koreans are satisfied or dissatisfied with trilateral cooperation and conduct an empirical study on what factors affect their preferences. To achieve trilateral cooperation between China, Japan, and Korea the citizens of the three countries must hold positive beliefs and attitudes toward cooperation and a strong intention to carry out actions necessary to promote cooperation. While previous studies mainly dealt with political attitudes toward Korea-Japan relations and Korea-China relations from a macroscopic view, the present study additionally explored two individual level variables, "national identity" and "collective victimhood", to examine Koreans' perception and attitudes towards Chinese and Japanese.

National identification. Social identity refers to how individuals define themselves based on their membership in social groups (Tajfel & Turner, 2004). According to social identity theory, individuals positively maintain and enhance their social identity by evaluating their own group (ingroup) more positively than the other group (outgroup) and enhance self-esteem by defining themselves through positive characteristics of their ingroup. This basic assumption of social identity theory has accumulated supporting evidence through various studies on intergroup relations and has been widely applied to studies on understanding and resolving conflict between groups. National identity, one of various social identities held by individuals, is a key variable in analyzing individual attitudes regarding international relations.

National identity is an important factor in understanding foreign policy initiatives, as it is based on the status, role, and identity of a country in international relations (Choi, 2018). In addition, national identity strengthens collective cohesion of people within a nation, and when such collective cohesion intensifies, ethnocentrism develops in the form of exclusive nationalism. Therefore, strong national identification as a Korean, can cause negative outgroup perceptions towards China and Japan, which may lead to stereotypes, prejudice, and discrimination against Chinese and Japanese. In a previous study that examined Koreans' attitudes toward Japan, historical events experienced by East Asian countries have deepened hostility towards each other and have negatively affected regional stability (Choi, 2018).

Collective victimhood. The second variable used to examine Koreans' perception towards Chinese and Japanese is collective victimhood. Collective victimhood refers to a shared belief that one's group has been intentionally and undeservingly harmed by another group (Noor et al., 2017). Collective victimhood is a concept commonly used in studies on intergroup relations, which has been applied to understanding conflict between Protestant and Catholic communities in Northern Ireland (Lynch et al., 2018), and the Israeli-Palestinian conflict (Schori-Eyal et al., 2014). According to the previous studies, group members with strong collective victimhood, had higher tendencies of easily justifying violence inflicted on the outgroup by the ingroup, and lower tendencies of forgiving or reconciling with the outgroup.

Subsequent generations inherit the experiences and status as the victim experienced by previous generations, and give moral justification to their ethnocentric beliefs. The shared narrative provides meaning to the conflict as a collective memory in a consistent manner to ingroup members (Bar-Tal, 2003). Collective memory focuses on conveying the past from the perspective of the ingroup's current situation and requirements rather than providing objective facts. Therefore, collective memory of past victimhood has strong connotations of bias, selection, and distortion in accordance with the goals and purposes of the ingroup. However, group members believe that the collective memory of victimhood is based on objective facts and understand history through a black-and-white framework of the perpetrator and the victim. Through this process, collective victimhood strengthens the positive image of the ingroup and denies the legitimacy of the outgroup (Baumeister & Hastings, 1997). It also reminds ingroup members of the violence and pain that the ingroup has suffered for a long time and strengthens the perception that the ingroup is the victim of conflict and violence inflicted by the outgroup. In the context of international relations, prolonged conflict with neighboring countries continues to breed collective victimhood. The historical context of Korea-Japan and Korea-China relations amplifies the negative perception towards Japanese and Chinese among Koreans through such collective victimhood. Japan suppressed Korean people and culture during the colonialization of Korea (1910–1945), and the anti-Japanese sentiment in contemporary Korean society also stems from the Japanese occupation of Korea. China illegally intervened in the Korean War (1950–1953) to deter the unification of the Korean Peninsula led by South Korea and is still North Korea's communist ally even up to this day. Such historical contexts of Korea-Japan and Korea-China conflicts breed collective victimhood among Koreans, stemming from their historical suffering at the hands of Japan and China.

Perceived social norms. Social norms reflect individual perception of attitudes and behaviors that are believed to be shared by ingroup members toward a specific group (Ajzen, 1991). In situations of high uncertainty, individuals are motivated to compare their private attitudes to norms of the group they belong to (Festinger, 1954). When they perceive inconsistencies between their attitudes toward a specific group and the perceived social norms, they feel uncomfortable and are motivated to reduce this discomfort (Prentice & Miller, 1993). For example, they may internalize the perceived social norms and change their attitudes accordingly. In the present study, we examined the relationship between Korean's perceived social norms regarding anti-Chinese and anti-Japanese sentiments in the Korean society, and their individual attitudes towards Chinese and Japanese. More specifically, we also examined the effects of the motivation to conform to such sentiment on individual perceptions of Chinese and Japanese.

Materials and Methods

Measures

National identification. The degree of national identification as a Korean was measured through a reconstructed six-item questionnaire ($\alpha = .86$) adapted from previous social identity research (Hogg & Hains, 1996) through a 7-point Likert scale (1 "not at all", 7 "very much"). Participants were asked (1) how much they felt they belonged as a Korean, (2) how glad they were to be ethnic Korean, (3) how similar they felt to other Koreans as a whole in terms of general attitudes and opinions, and (4) how much they felt they had a strong bond with other Koreans.

Collective victimhood. Collective victimhood was measured through a reconstructed three-item questionnaire ($\alpha = .87$) widely used in previous studies (Vollhardt, Nair, & Tropp, 2016) through a 7-point Likert scale (1 "not at all", 7 "very much"). Participants were asked the following items: (1) The suffering of our nation is different from that of other nation, (2) The suffering of our nation is unprecedented in history, (3) The damage our nation suffered is incomparable to any other nation.

Perceptions of Chinese and Japanese. Perceptions of Chinese and Japanese were measured by directly asking participants' attitudes and attitudes of most Koreans perceived by the participant. Individual attitudes were measured through a two-item questionnaire on a 7-point Likert scale. Participants were asked (1) How much they disliked Chinese/Japanese and (2) How willing they were to be friends with Chinese/Japanese (1 "not at all", 7 "very much"). Perceived social norms were measured through a four-item questionnaire on a 7-point Likert scale. Participants were also asked (1) How much do they think most Koreans hate Chinese/Japanese and (2) How much do they think most Koreans are willing to be friends with Chinese/Japanese (1 "not at all", 7 "very much").

Attitudes toward Korea-China relations and Korea-Japan relations. The Korean government's foreign policy on trilateral diplomacy between China, Japan, and Korea can be categorized into policies supporting military measures and policies supporting diplomatic cooperation. This study focused on evaluating participants' attitudes toward Korea-China relations and Korea-Japan relations by measuring preferences toward military policies and diplomatic policies. Preference for military policies was measured through a three-item questionnaire on a 7-point Likert scale (1 "not at all", 7 "very much"). Participants were asked the following items: (1) Korea must strengthen its military capabilities to prevent China/Japan from threatening Korea, (2) Korea must strengthen its military capabilities against threats from China/Japan to protect the sovereignty of Korea and (3) The best option Korea can take in the face of conflict with China/Japan is to strengthen its military capabilities. Preference for diplomatic policies was measured through a three-item questionnaire on a 7-point Likert Scale (1 "not at all", 7 "very much"). Participants were asked the following items: (1) The best way to reduce the risk of the conflict with China/Japan is for Korea to communicate frequently with Japan/China. (2) Korea should make diplomatic efforts to resolve conflicts with China/Japan. (3) Diplomacy and negotiations are the best options Korea can take to resolve conflicts with China/Japan. All analysis was performed through IBM SPSS 22.

Results

Participants

Three hundred and twenty Koreans participated in an online questionnaire. The demographic composition of participants is presented in Table 1.

Table 1

Demographic Composition of Participants

Age	Male	Female	Other	Sum
10~19	82	36	2	120
20~29	62	66	4	132
30~39	20	46	2	68
Sum	164	148	8	320

National identification and collective victimhood. Descriptive statistics on national identification and collective victimhood are presented in Table 2. The average level of national identification as a collective victimhood were both relatively high ($M = 4.93$, $SD = 1.10$ for national identification, $M = 4.26$, $SD = 1.35$ for collective victimhood). In

addition, national identification and collective victimhood was significantly correlated, $r = .70$, $p < .05$ showing that national identification as a Korean and collective victimhood are closely linked in the shared cognition of many Koreans.

Table 2

Descriptive Statistics of National Identification and Collective Victimhood

Category	M	SD
National Identification	4.93	1.10
Collective Victimhood	4.26	1.35

Descriptive statistics on national identity and collective victimhood according to age are presented in Table 3. The results show that the younger generation held higher degrees of national identification and collective victimhood. This suggests that collective victimhood and the associated national identification are passed on through generations, and are further strengthened.

Table 3

National Identification and Collective Victimhood by Age

Age	National Identification	Collective Victimhood
19 and below	5.04	4.42
20 to 29	4.83	4.39
30 and above	4.71	4.02

Attitudes toward Chinese and Japanese. Descriptive statistics of attitudes toward Chinese and Japanese are presented in Table 4. For both attitudes toward Chinese and Japanese, personal attitudes regarding hostility was lower than the perceived social norm, and personal attitudes regarding friendliness was higher than the perceived social norm. The results show that although Koreans perceive hostilities towards Chinese and Japanese as a social norm in Korean society, they did not necessarily comply to the norms and showed high willingness to befriend Chinese and Japanese on a personal level.

Table 4

Descriptive Statistics of Attitudes toward Chinese and Japanese

Classification	Attitudes	M	SD
Chinese	Hostility (Personal)	4.76	1.52
	Hostility (Perceived social norm)	5.54	1.26
	Friendliness (Personal)	3.91	1.66
	Friendliness (Perceived social norm)	3.58	1.40
Japanese	Hostility (Personal)	3.71	1.69
	Hostility (Perceived social norm)	4.83	1.31
	Friendliness (Personal)	5.04	1.36
	Friendliness (Perceived social norm)	4.56	1.15

Multiple regression analysis was conducted to analyze the relative influence of national identification and collective victimhood on attitudes toward Chinese and Japanese, respectively, and the results are presented in Table 5. The relative influence was determined through the standardized regression coefficient. Both national identification and collective victimhood significantly predicted all dependent variables related to personal attitudes toward Chinese and Japanese. This is consistent with the theoretical basis of our prediction that people with higher degrees of national identification and collective victimhood have stronger negative perceptions toward Chinese and Japanese as hostile outgroups.

Table 5

Regression Analysis of the Effects of National Identification and Collective Victimhood on Attitudes towards Chinese and Japanese

	Hostility (China)	Friendliness (China)	Hostility (Japan)	Friendliness (Japan)
National Identity	.20*	-.20*	.31**	-.27**
Collective Victimhood	.22*	-.33**	.17*	-.19*

Note. * $p < .05$; ** $p < .01$.

Attitudes toward Korea-China relations and Korea-Japan relations. Descriptive statistics of attitudes toward Korea-China relations and Korea-Japan relations are presented in Table 6. For China, preference toward military policies was higher than diplomatic policies ($M = 5.13$, $SD = 1.53$ for military policies, $M = 4.67$, $SD = 1.12$ for diplomatic policies), and for Japan, preference for diplomatic policies was higher than military policies ($M = 4.12$, $SD = 1.50$ for military policies, $M = 4.80$, $SD = 1.20$ for diplomatic policies). The results show that Koreans hold different attitudes regarding policy preferences toward China and Japan, preferring military policies towards China, while preferring diplomatic policies towards Japan.

Table 6
Descriptive Statistics of Attitudes toward Korea-China and Korea-Japan Relations

Classification	Attitudes	M	SD
China	Military Policies	5.13	1.53
	Diplomatic Policies	4.67	1.12
Japan	Military Policies	4.12	1.50
	Diplomatic Policies	4.80	1.20

Multiple regression analysis was conducted to analyze the relative influence of national identification and collective victimhood on attitudes toward Korea-China relations and Korea-Japan relations, respectively, and the results are presented in Table 7. National identity significantly predicted policy preferences toward Japan, and collective victimhood significantly predicted all dependent variables except for preferences of diplomatic policies toward China. As with attitudes toward Chinese and Japanese, the results show that people with higher degrees of national identification and collective victimhood, held stronger perceptions toward China and Japan as potential threats, and people with lower degrees of national identification and collective victimhood, held stronger perceptions toward China and Japan as partners for cooperation.

Table 7
Regression analysis of the effects of national identification and collective victimhood on attitudes toward Korea-China relations and Korea-Japan relations

	Military (China)	Diplomacy (China)	Military (Japan)	Diplomacy (Japan)
National Identification	.15	-.13	.30**	-.24*
Collective Victimhood	.35**	-.12	.31**	-.16*

Note. * $p < .05$, ** $p < .01$.

Discussion

Based on social identity theory and collective victimhood, the present study attempted to derive implications for trilateral cooperation between China, Japan, and Korea based on the public opinion of Koreans towards China and Japan, and Chinese and Japanese. First, regarding the attitude of Koreans toward Chinese and Japanese, most Koreans responded that they thought most Koreans held anti-Chinese and anti-Japanese sentiments. That is, hostility towards Chinese and Japanese was perceived as a social norm. However, on the individual level, participants responded that they did not hold negative attitudes toward Chinese and Japanese, but on the contrary, were willing to befriend them, showing that while participants perceived that anti-Chinese and anti-Japanese sentiments were prevalent among Koreans as social norms, they did not comply to them. It is necessary to explore further the differences in psychological mechanisms between those who conformed to the perceived social norms and those who did not, and how these differences relate to public perception and attitudes toward China and Japan through future studies.

In addition, people with lower degrees of national identification and collective victimhood showed higher willingness to befriend Chinese and Japanese, higher preference for diplomatic policies, and lower preference for military policies. National identification is a concept deeply related to nationalism. The negative effects of nationalism are manifested in the form of parochialism and exclusive nationalism, relying on the emotional appeal of nationalism in addressing foreign policy (Park, 2009). As such, emotional appeals based on nationalism are likely to worsen international relations. It would be important to promote mutual understanding to minimize the impact of exclusive nationalism on trilateral relations (Choi, 2018).

In conclusion, both individual and social level efforts are required to facilitate cooperation between China, Japan, and Korea at the national level (Ahn, 2019). Accelerating cooperation in the higher political sphere could be an effective way to reduce intergroup tension because it can help people make less defensive and more cooperative choices (Kim, 2021). Therefore, to increase cooperation in the higher political sphere, exchanges in various fields including politics, economy, and culture should be expanded quantitatively and continued qualitatively in a consistent manner (Kim, 2016). For example, in the case of Germany, social and cultural exchanges and cooperation through a specific legal and institutional

basis contributed greatly to settling peace and easing tensions without being swayed by political situations (Kwon, 2018). Cooperation between China, Japan, and Korea is improving in part, led by the Trilateral Cooperation Secretariat, but there are still some hostilities remaining in the perception of citizens. However, because human behavior and attitudes can change through environmental and social factors, more interaction between the citizens of the three countries will strengthen cooperation, and likely reduce prejudice and discrimination.

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