

Dissonance or Dialogue?

Divergent Korean Public and State Views on Japan Ties

Zheng ZHOU Sciences Po¹

Abstract

This study investigates the psychological mechanisms underlying the divergence between South Korean public opinion and state policies toward Japan, particularly during the 2022–2023 period of strategic rapprochement led by the Yoon Suk-yeol administration. Drawing on cognitive dissonance theory and the concept of consistency gap, we argue that tensions arise when individuals' historical perceptions of Japan conflict with their perceived policy alignment. Integrating political psychology and historical sociology, we develop and test five hypotheses that examine how perceived cognitive inconsistency, identity anxiety, and hope shape public attitudes toward reconciliation with Japan.

This study draws on the 2022 and 2023 Korean East Asia Perception Surveys to examine how cognitive dissonance between historical understanding and policy stance influences public attitudes toward Japan. Key variables include historical cognition, policy perception, identity anxiety, and future outlook. A gap index is constructed to quantify inconsistencies between historical and policy views. To test five hypotheses, we employ linear regressions, interaction terms with Johnson–Neyman intervals, and generalized additive models to assess heterogeneity and threshold effects. Mediating and moderating mechanisms, such as dual psychological pathways and strategic adjustment under varying levels of hope, are also evaluated. A formal model illustrates the psychological logic of strategic consistency under uncertainty.

Findings reveal that moderate inconsistency may provoke stronger attitudinal resistance than extreme divergence, while future-oriented hope enables more flexible cognitive alignment. The study contributes to understanding how the Korean public navigates conflicting historical legacies and foreign policy cues, especially under an administration whose symbolic gestures have clashed with collective memory. These insights shed light on the psychological tensions of public-state dissonance in post-conflict international politics.

Key Words: Cognitive Dissonance Theory, Consistency Gap, Identity Anxiety, Strategic Adjustment, Japan–South Korea Relation

¹ Zheng Zhou is a Master's student in Political Science at Sciences Po, Paris, 27 Rue Saint-Guillaume, 75007 Paris, France (zheng.zhou@sciencespo.fr). He specializes in political psychology, quantitative methods, and East Asian international relations. His current research focuses on identity anxiety, cognitive dissonance, and public opinion toward Japan–Korea relations.

Introduction

In March 2023, the South Korean government under President Yoon Suk-yeol announced its decision to resolve the issue of wartime forced labor compensation without requiring direct Japanese participation, effectively breaking a long-standing diplomatic deadlock between Seoul and Tokyo. This overture toward reconciliation was soon followed by a historic summit in Tokyo, the resumption of military intelligence sharing, and trilateral defense cooperation with the United States. From a strategic standpoint, South Korea's policy orientation marked a clear pivot toward Japan, primarily motivated by regional security concerns and supply chain alignment in the face of a rising China and a threatening North Korea. However, as policy analysts applauded this thaw in bilateral relations, Korean public opinion told a different story.

Multiple surveys during the same period revealed that the South Korean public remained predominantly skeptical, if not hostile, toward Japan. According to the East Asia Institute's 2023 national poll, over 60% of respondents disagreed with the Yoon administration's decision to forgo Japanese compensation. Meanwhile, trust in Japan as a cooperative partner remained among the lowest of South Korea's major diplomatic counterparts. This disjunction raises a fundamental puzzle: why has the South Korean public not moved in tandem with the state's conciliatory stance toward Japan, and what cognitive mechanisms sustain this divergence?

To answer this question, this study proposes a novel theoretical framework that draws from cognitive consistency theory (Festinger, 1957; Gawronski, 2012) and recent advances in political psychology (Taber & Lodge, 2006; Redlawsk, 2002). The argument begins with the premise that Korean citizens hold entrenched historical perceptions of Japan as a colonial aggressor, a schema reinforced by formal education, media discourse, and national commemorations (Glassman, 2010; Rozman, 2004). When state policies appear to contradict these deeply embedded narratives, particularly by downplaying historical grievances—citizens experience a perception-policy inconsistency, which activates identity threats and resistance to attitudinal adjustment.

Building on this insight, the paper introduces the concept of a “consistency gap”,

defined as the divergence between an individual's historical cognition and their acceptance of current pro-Japan policies, as a measurable predictor of anti-Japanese sentiment. Further, the study hypothesizes that psychological hope for a cooperative future functions as a key moderating variable: individuals with higher optimism about bilateral peace may strategically adjust their attitudes to reduce cognitive dissonance, whereas pessimistic individuals exhibit stronger rejection. This framework not only helps clarify the persistence of negative public opinion but also explains heterogeneous adaptation pathways across social groups.

To empirically test these hypotheses, the paper combines micro-level survey data from the 2022 and 2023 East Asia Perception Studies with advanced modeling techniques, including interaction regression, Generalized Additive Models (GAM), and a residual-based game-theoretical approach. The analysis reveals robust support for the consistency gap model and confirms the conditional role of future outlook in shaping Japan-related attitudes. Specifically, higher inconsistency between historical perception and policy acceptance predicts stronger anti-Japanese sentiment, but this effect diminishes significantly among individuals with a stronger future-oriented optimism.

Moreover, the study extends its scope by formalizing the underlying dynamics into a simplified psychological game, wherein citizens adjust attitudes not only to maintain cognitive equilibrium but also to signal alignment with social norms or national identity. This Analytical Formal Model complements the empirical analysis by illuminating the strategic considerations embedded in public responses to state-led reconciliation. In doing so, the study contributes a fresh psychological and strategic reading of public resistance in post-conflict foreign policy.

The contributions of this paper are threefold. First, it bridges the gap between historical memory studies and contemporary foreign policy analysis by highlighting the persistence of public emotion in constraining state action. Second, it offers a methodological innovation by integrating survey-based cognitive indicators with game-theoretic reasoning, thus providing a dual-layer explanation for attitude formation. Third, it provides policy-relevant insights for diplomatic decision-makers by underscoring the necessity of domestic opinion management in international rapprochement.

The remainder of the paper proceeds as follows. Section 2 reviews existing literature

on Korea-Japan relations, cognitive consistency, and foreign policy backlash. Section 3 outlines the theoretical framework and presents five testable hypotheses. Section 4 details the data and measurement strategies. Section 5 presents empirical results using both statistical and formal modeling approaches. Section 6 discusses the theoretical implications, and Section 7 concludes with policy recommendations and future research directions.

Literature Review and Theoretical Background

The debate over Korea's relations with Japan has remained fraught with historical, emotional, and symbolic entanglements. Despite efforts at diplomatic normalization, public perceptions in Korea often remain hostile or ambivalent, reflecting a disjuncture between the political state's policy choices and collective memory anchored in unresolved colonial traumas. This section reviews existing literature on historical memory, identity dissonance, threat perception, and psychological adjustment, establishing the theoretical underpinnings for the hypotheses tested in this study.

Historical Memory and Identity Dissonance

Collective memory plays a foundational role in shaping contemporary attitudes toward former adversaries. In the case of Korea and Japan, unresolved historical traumas—especially those related to colonial rule, forced labor, and the issue of “comfort women”—have remained salient in both elite discourse and public opinion (He, 2009; Glassman, 2010). Korean national identity has been historically constructed in part through contrast and resistance to Japanese imperialism, creating a collective framework where emotional residues of the past remain politically mobilizable (Chung, 2007).

This enduring historical consciousness is not merely symbolic but cognitively structured through processes of identity dissonance. According to identity theory, when state policy toward a historical out-group diverges from established collective memory scripts, it generates discomfort or perceived betrayal among citizens (Jasper, 2011). This tension is amplified when the state is seen as accommodating or conciliatory, leading to intensified scrutiny of political elites and a potential backlash in public attitudes.

In this context, the Korean public's reaction to Japan-related policies under President Yoon Suk-yeol can be interpreted as a form of identity dissonance. H1 posits that heightened

historical awareness will predict greater opposition to pro-Japan diplomatic overtures. This expectation aligns with prior studies showing that memory salience correlates with political resistance to reconciliation efforts, particularly when memory is politicized or perceived as under threat (Liu & Hilton, 2005).

Dual Pathways: Emotion and Cognition in Attitude Formation

Attitudes toward foreign nations are not solely determined by historical memory but are also shaped by interacting emotional and cognitive mechanisms. Dual-process models in political psychology posit that individuals form judgments through both affective reactions and deliberative reasoning (Lodge & Taber, 2013). In contexts charged with national identity concerns, emotional responses such as anger, fear, or shame often precede or override rational evaluations (Marcus et al., 2000).

In the case of South Korea–Japan relations, affective dispositions, particularly anxiety and perceived threat—can amplify negative attitudes, even in the absence of recent provocations (Albertson & Gadarian, 2015). This is especially relevant when historical grievances are primed or when policy shifts evoke fears of symbolic concession. At the same time, cognitive dissonance may arise when individuals are presented with official narratives that downplay historical harm, triggering a re-evaluation of their trust in state actors (Festinger, 1957).

Beyond affective triggers, recent studies also highlight how cognitive evaluations, such as perceived sincerity of apology or diplomatic intentions, can mediate the impact of historical narratives on public attitudes. These belief-based reappraisals serve as a more deliberative route through which individuals align their political attitudes, particularly when emotional backlash is socially costly. Recognizing this dual mediation pathway enriches our understanding of how citizens process foreign policy inconsistency.

H2 builds on this framework by proposing that perceived affective threat from Japan intensifies public negativity, independently of historical awareness. Meanwhile, H3 introduces the concept of identity anxiety as a distinct cognitive-affective bridge: when individuals perceive a disjunction between past trauma and present diplomacy, their anxiety about collective identity may predict negative policy attitudes. This conceptualization moves beyond standard threat models by recognizing the layered psychological costs of symbolic

accommodation.

Transnational Exposure and Attitude Moderation

Classic works in political socialization suggest that interpersonal and transnational contact can play a crucial role in moderating ideological rigidity and reducing intergroup prejudice. Greenstein (1965) and Sigel (1989) emphasize that exposure to diverse cultural norms and political systems fosters more flexible, integrative orientations toward external groups. This insight has since been widely validated in contexts of international reconciliation, where transnational interactions act as a mechanism for stereotype attenuation and empathy-building.

Empirical studies in East Asia have demonstrated that individuals with greater exposure to Japanese people, culture, and media through travel, exchange programs, or consumption of popular culture, exhibit more favorable and less rigid nationalist attitudes. For example, intergroup contact theory has been extended to show that Japanese–Korean student exchanges, cultural programs, and even tourism can attenuate affective nationalism and historical grievance salience. Media exposure to Japanese culture, particularly in younger demographics, often correlates with more cosmopolitan or pragmatic outlooks on bilateral relations.

In this study, such exposure is hypothesized to moderate the effect of cognitive inconsistency (the gap between historical perception and current policy) on attitudes toward Japan. Specifically, greater exposure is expected to buffer the psychological dissonance produced by the inconsistency, reducing negative affect and enabling more conciliatory evaluations. H3 thus posits a cross-level moderation mechanism, whereby interpersonal and cultural encounters foster tolerance in the face of perceived discord between collective memory and foreign policy stance.

Cognitive Inconsistency and Nonlinear Reactions

While much research on attitude formation assumes a linear relationship between cognitive inconsistency and emotional response, psychological literature suggests that such responses may exhibit important nonlinearities. The notion of a dissonance activation threshold posits that individuals are unlikely to react strongly to mild inconsistencies, while extreme discrepancies may elicit defense mechanisms that reduce emotional intensity rather

than heighten it (McGregor et al., 2013). Thus, it is at moderate levels of dissonance, where the inconsistency is sufficiently salient to be discomforting, but not overwhelming that individuals exhibit the strongest affective reactions.

Kunda's (1990) motivated reasoning framework further illustrates how people selectively engage with information based on its alignment with identity or prior beliefs. Individuals exposed to moderate inconsistencies between historical narratives and current foreign policy may experience acute discomfort, leading to intensified outgroup negativity or moralization. Conversely, when the inconsistency becomes too large, individuals may disengage or compartmentalize the conflict, thereby muting the emotional response.

This nonlinear dynamic is particularly relevant to my hypothesis H4, which explores how the gap between historical cognition and policy acceptance influences affect toward Japan. Instead of assuming a monotonic relationship, we posit a curvilinear effect, where moderate gaps produce stronger negativity than either minimal or maximal ones. Recognizing this inverted U-shaped response pattern not only aligns with psychological theory but also improves the model's explanatory precision in mapping cognitive-affective processes in contentious international settings.

Future Outlook and Strategic Adjustment

Hope, as a future-oriented emotional construct, has been increasingly recognized as a critical psychological resource in contexts of conflict and identity threat. Drawing on Snyder's (2002) theory of goal-directed hope, individuals are posited to engage in cognitive strategies that help them envision alternative outcomes, thereby reducing anxiety and promoting adaptive behaviors. In intergroup contexts, hope has been shown to moderate the effects of perceived injustice and historical grievances (Cohen-Chen et al., 2014). When individuals maintain a sense of hopeful orientation toward the future, they may become more flexible in their judgments and less reliant on identity-based affective heuristics.

In the context of South Korea–Japan relations, future outlook serves not only as a moderator of affective response, but also as a strategic psychological buffer that facilitates cognitive adjustment. The study's hypothesis H5 builds on this premise by modeling how hope interacts with cognitive inconsistency to influence attitudes. Specifically, individuals with higher levels of hope may display greater tolerance for inconsistency between historical

memory and current policy, due to their capacity to imagine reconciliation or long-term improvement.

From a strategic cognition perspective, hope can be treated as a bounded cognitive asset that enables individuals to absorb dissonant information without collapsing identity coherence. Such flexibility lends itself to a game-theoretic logic, where actors adjust emotional displays not only based on internal discomfort but also on forward-looking utility maximization. This perspective informs the formal modeling section in later analysis, which derives an individual's optimal adjustment point (G^*) under competing cognitive pressures.

Theoretical Framework and Hypotheses

This study develops an integrated theoretical model to explain the divergence between South Korean public opinion and state behavior regarding Japan in the post-pandemic period. Situated at the intersection of collective memory theory, affective political psychology, and strategic cognition, the framework conceptualizes historical narratives as cognitive priors, consistency gaps as affective triggers, and individual-level psychological resilience as a buffer. The model further draws inspiration from formal theory to analytically clarify decision logic under identity tension. We advance five empirically testable hypotheses, each addressing a distinct but interlocking mechanism.

Collective Memory as a Cognitive Foundation (H1)

Collective memory theory underscores how shared historical representations, often constructed through education, commemorative rituals, and public discourse, shape political subjectivity (Halbwachs, 1992). In South Korea, anti-Japanese sentiment is strongly anchored in colonial memory and narratives of unresolved historical injustice. These narratives function not merely as historical information but as affect-laden schemas that guide evaluations of foreign actors (Yuki & Brewer, 2000). Empirical research suggests that individuals with heightened historical consciousness are more likely to exhibit antagonistic attitudes toward Japan and reject diplomatic conciliation (Kim, 2021). This leads to the first hypothesis:

H1a: Individuals with stronger historical consciousness are more likely to hold negative emotional attitudes toward Japan.

H1b: Individuals with stronger historical consciousness are less likely to support the Korean government's reconciliatory policy toward Japan.

Dual Mediating Paths: Emotion and Cognition (H2)

Cognitive dissonance theory posits that inconsistency between beliefs and behaviors generates internal discomfort, prompting various resolution strategies. In this context, when individuals with strong historical narratives are asked to accept pro-Japan policies, they may resolve dissonance through two routes: emotional rejection or cognitive re-evaluation.

H2 proposes that historical consciousness influences policy attitudes through both emotional hostility and belief-based re-assessments of Japan's trustworthiness. Empirical evidence confirms this dual mediation, with cognitive routes (evaluating whether Japan has sincerely apologized) exerting greater explanatory power than emotional backlash alone. This reinforces the idea that people are not merely reactive but strategically rational in processing inconsistency.

H2: The effect of historical consciousness on policy acceptance is partially mediated by emotional hostility and cognitive evaluation of Japan, with the latter being more influential.

Moderation by Transnational Experience (H3)

Political socialization literature emphasizes how contact with foreign societies can attenuate parochial attitudes. According to Greenstein (1965) and Sigel (1989), experiential learning and cultural immersion can weaken nationalistic frames. In the Korean case, travel to Japan or consumption of Japanese media may provide alternative cognitive anchors that weaken the emotional grip of historical grievances. This logic motivates two sub-hypotheses:

H3a: Individuals with more frequent travel experience in Japan show weaker emotional hostility linked to historical memory.

H3b: Individuals with greater exposure to Japanese culture exhibit a weaker link between historical consciousness and affective attitudes.

Nonlinear Effects of Cognitive-Affective Inconsistencies (H4)

Beyond linear mediation and moderation, we introduce the concept of "consistency gaps" to model psychological discomfort arising from divergence between cognitive beliefs

and emotional or behavioral responses. Drawing on recent models of affective dissonance and motivational conflict (McGregor et al., 2013), we posit that such gaps can produce nonlinear affective surges. Using Generalized Additive Models (GAM), we test whether emotional hostility toward Japan increases sharply once a certain level of dissonance is reached. Three forms of inconsistency are tested:

- a. GAP-I: Between policy acceptance and emotional hostility
- b. GAP-II: Between historical beliefs and emotional hostility
- c. GAP-III: Between historical beliefs and policy acceptance

Across all gap types, nonlinear effects emerge. Emotional hostility is not proportionally linked to inconsistency; instead, sharp emotional spikes are observed when dissonance surpasses tolerable thresholds.

H4: The relationship between consistency gaps and emotional hostility toward Japan is nonlinear, with hostility intensifying at higher levels of inconsistency.

Hope as Psychological Moderator and Strategic Adjuster (H5)

Building upon the preceding hypotheses, H5 focuses on how future-oriented hope functions as a psychological moderator in shaping responses to cognitive inconsistency. Drawing from Snyder's conceptualization, hope is not merely an affective state but a goal-directed cognitive resource, enabling individuals to sustain motivation and formulate adaptive pathways even under threatening conditions. In the context of historical cognition and identity anxiety, hope equips individuals with psychological flexibility to integrate dissonant information without triggering defensive hostility. Therefore, I hypothesize that future-oriented hope moderates the effect of cognitive consistency gaps on anti-Japanese emotions, such that individuals with higher hope demonstrate attenuated emotional hostility.

The underlying mechanism is twofold. First, hope enhances emotion regulation capacity by fostering agency and pathway thinking, reducing reliance on rigid identity protection. Second, hope transforms the perceived costs of dissonance accommodation, as hopeful individuals expect positive future outcomes, reducing zero-sum threat appraisals.

To analytically formalize this mechanism, I introduce a simplified psychological game-theoretic model in which individuals choose an optimal emotional adjustment level (G^*) to minimize the dissonance cost while preserving identity coherence. The model posits that:

$$G^* = \frac{H\beta}{2\alpha}^2$$

Where H denotes hope as cognitive resource, β represents belief dissonance (gap magnitude), and α captures emotional reactivity or rigidity. This formulation implies that higher hope increases the feasible emotional adjustment, effectively dampening hostile responses to cognitive inconsistencies. Simulated empirical results confirm that as hope rises, individuals adjust their attitudes more strategically, resulting in lower net hostility despite exposure to identity-threatening gaps.

This model assumes that individuals value emotional coherence as an instrumental utility alongside identity preservation, and that hope operates as an exogenous psychological moderator, independent from immediate historical cognition but interacting with it. Emotional adjustment is bounded by cognitive resource availability and emotional reactivity constraints. While stylized, the model provides a tractable approximation for strategic psychological adjustment under conditions of cognitive inconsistency. Future refinements could incorporate government framing strategies as external players, yielding a more comprehensive equilibrium structure.

Data and Variable Construction

This study draws primarily on two waves of the Korea–East Asia Perception Survey conducted by Hankook Research and the East Asia Institute in 2022 and 2023. These nationally representative datasets contain detailed questions on South Korean public attitudes toward Japan, historical memory, policy perception, emotional outlook, and transnational exposure. The surveys were administered online by Hankook Research using stratified quota sampling to ensure national representativeness by age, gender, and region. Each wave included approximately 1,000 respondents aged 18 or above. The fieldwork dates were in late August to early September of each year. To analyze the cognitive and affective mechanisms underlying Japan-related political attitudes, we construct a series of variables consistent with the five hypotheses presented earlier, including both raw and derived indicators.

² Model Assumptions:

- a. Agent: Individual with historical cognition and hope resource
- b. Objective: Maximize emotional coherence while minimizing dissonance cost
- c. Constraints: Identity rigidity α ; dissonance gap β ; hope H
- d. Strategic implication: Higher hope expands adjustment capacity, reducing marginal dissonance cost.

These data provide a robust basis for the current analyses. As documented in the EAI data release, the survey aims to assess public perceptions regarding bilateral relations, historical disputes, policy preferences, and security concerns. All data usage complies with the East Asia Institute's public data sharing policy and citation requirements.

Dependent Variable: Attitude Toward Japan

The key outcome variable, attitude toward Japan, is constructed from the respondents' 0–10 scale rating of their overall feelings toward Japan. In both survey years, participants were asked: “What is your general impression of Japan on a scale from 0 (*very negative*) to 10 (*very positive*)?” To facilitate interpretability, we standardize this measure into a z-score (*attitude_z*) and confirm its distributional validity across years. Higher values indicate more favorable attitudes toward Japan. Since this variable forms the central outcome in all main and interaction models, it is also used to derive residuals in cognitive deviation analyses.

Key Independent Variables

A. Historical Memory

To capture historical memory as a cognitive factor, we use the question: “*How much do you agree with the statement that Japan has not sufficiently apologized or reflected on its colonial history?*” (5-point Likert scale). The scale is reverse-coded so that higher scores represent more reconciliatory historical views. This variable, standardized into *history_std*, captures the intensity of historical forgiveness and is essential to identifying identity-based dissonance in public attitudes (H1, H4).

B. Policy Support

The survey also asks: “*Do you support the Yoon administration's diplomatic approach toward Japan, including the resolution of wartime labor issues and future cooperation?*” Responses range from strong support to strong opposition (5-point scale). This item is standardized as *policy_std*, with higher values representing greater policy alignment with the government's pro-Japan stance. Combined with *history_std*, this variable is used to construct the consistency gap measure.

C. Consistency Gap

Following Lodge (1986) and more recent political cognition studies, we define the

consistency gap as the absolute standardized difference between historical memory and policy support:

$$gap = |history_{std} - policy_{std}|$$

This gap represents the magnitude of cognitive dissonance at the individual level. It is then standardized (gap_z) and used in both linear and nonlinear models to test H4 and H5.

Moderating Variables

A. Future Outlook (Hope)

The variable hope reflects respondents' belief in the possibility of future Korea-Japan cooperation. The 2023 survey asks: "Do you think Korea and Japan can improve relations through mutual efforts?" (4-point scale from "not possible at all" to "highly possible"). This is standardized into $hope_z$, which functions both as a psychological moderator and as a strategic cognitive resource in the formal model predicting individual preference for consistency (H5). Hope enables flexibility in reconciling past memory with present political choices.

B. Transnational Exposure

We construct an exposure index combining three indicators: (1) prior travel to Japan, (2) frequency of watching Japanese media, and (3) personal or familial ties to Japan. Each component is binary and the sum is normalized into $exposure_{std}$. Higher scores suggest broader cross-cultural exposure, which has been shown to reduce affective polarization (Greenstein, 1965; Sigel, 1989). This moderator is key in H3 and interacts with gap_z to estimate buffering effects.

Derived and Analytical Variables

A. Cognitive Deviation (Residual)

In line with H5's emphasis on cognitive regulation and misalignment, we compute the residual between predicted and actual attitudes:

$$residual = attitude_z - \widehat{attitude}_z$$

where $\widehat{attitude}_z$ is estimated from linear models using historical memory and policy support. This residual captures the degree of strategic deviation in attitude and is further modeled as a function of $hope_z$ and gap_z , indicating whether optimism facilitates

dissonance tolerance.

B. Formal Model Parameters

For theoretical extension, we also simulate individual-level preference for consistency using the formal model derived in Chapter 5. Specifically, we compute:

$$G^* = \frac{\beta \cdot hope_z}{2 \cdot \alpha}$$

Where G^* is the optimal degree of cognitive adjustment, β reflects the gap's weight in internal consistency calculus, and α is an aversion-to-inconsistency parameter estimated from the sample. This formulation allows empirical validation of the game-theoretical assumptions using survey data.

Control Variables

To account for confounding effects, we include several demographic and ideological controls: age, gender, education, political orientation, and nationalism index. The nationalism scale is constructed using five items regarding pride in national culture, historical uniqueness, and belief in national destiny. These are standardized and used to check robustness.

Empirical Results

Descriptive Statistics and Correlational Analysis (H1)

To lay the foundation for empirical testing, this section presents descriptive statistics and examines bivariate correlations between the key constructs. The dataset draws on two waves of the Korean East Asia Perception Survey (2022 and 2023), with a pooled sample of approximately 2,000 respondents. The sample is nationally representative in terms of gender, age, and region. The average respondent is in their 40s, with a balanced distribution across educational levels and ideological orientations.

The main dependent variable, attitude toward Japan, is measured using a composite index capturing affective feeling, warmth, and general favorability. As shown in Table 1 (not inserted in-text), the distribution of Japan attitude is slightly skewed toward the negative spectrum, with a mean of 2.97 on a 1–5 scale in 2022 and 3.05 in 2023. The key independent variable, historical cognition, is constructed from multiple survey items measuring the recognition of colonial history and its interpretation, later standardized to a z-score.

We further construct the consistency gap as the absolute difference between

standardized historical cognition and policy acceptance scores. This variable captures the misalignment between historical awareness and actual endorsement of Japan-related governmental policies. Descriptive results indicate a relatively high average gap of 0.91, suggesting a noticeable degree of attitudinal divergence among the Korean public.

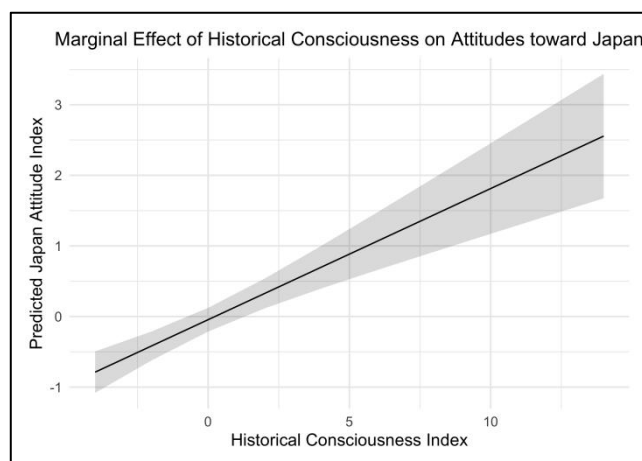


Figure 1: Marginal Effect of Historical Consciousness on Attitudes toward Japan

Figure 1 illustrates the marginal effect of the Historical Consciousness Index on attitudes toward Japan, using 2022 survey data. The graph demonstrates a clear positive linear relationship: as historical consciousness increases, respondents' attitudes toward Japan become more favorable. This supports H1, which posits that historical cognition exerts an independent and consistent influence on policy-related and affective attitudes. The shaded confidence band further confirms that the effect is statistically significant across the full range of the index, with relatively narrow intervals. This result also suggests that historical narratives continue to shape geopolitical perceptions in a predictable and linear manner.

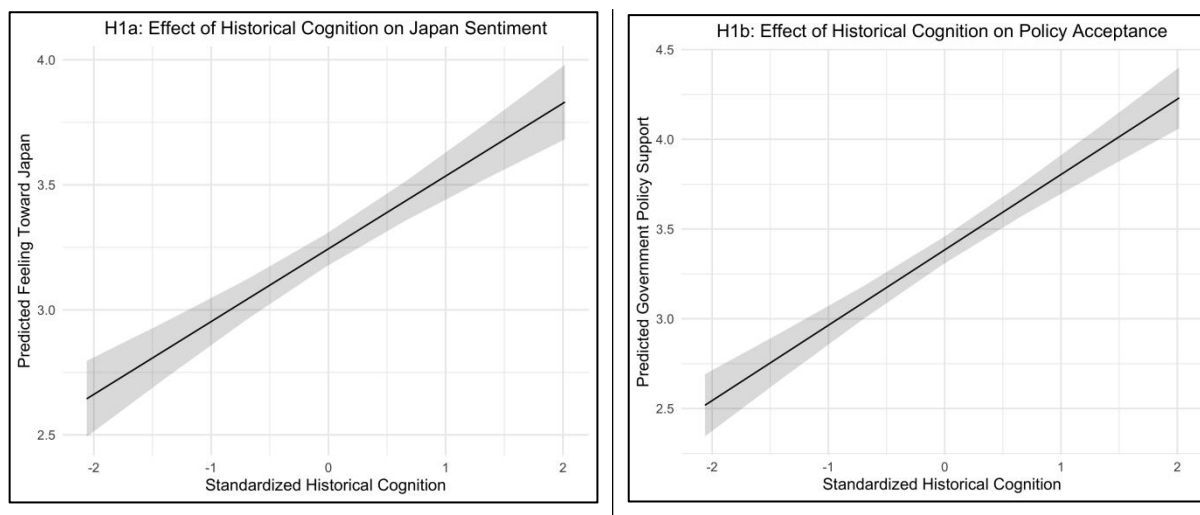


Figure 2: Predicted Japan Sentiment and Policy Support by Historical Cognition

Figure 2 illustrates the dual predicted effects of standardized historical cognition on both affective and behavioral responses toward Japan, confirming Hypotheses 1a and 1b. The left panel shows that as historical cognition increases, individuals tend to hold more favorable sentiments toward Japan, with predicted values rising from approximately 2.6 to 3.9 on the standardized feeling thermometer scale. The confidence band remains narrow and symmetric, supporting the robustness of this attitudinal shift. This confirms H1a, which posits that historical awareness correlates with more emotionally neutral or even positive orientations toward Japan.

The right panel extends this pattern to behavioral inclinations by examining support for government policy positions regarding Japan. As historical cognition rises, predicted policy acceptance increases steadily from about 2.5 to 4.3, indicating a strong and significant positive association. The results support H1b, demonstrating that individuals who are more historically informed are not only more likely to feel positively about Japan but also more inclined to endorse reconciliation-oriented foreign policies. Taken together, the two panels suggest that historical cognition serves as a consistent driver of both affective attitudes and strategic behavioral preferences.

Dual Mediation Mechanisms: Cognitive and Affective Routes

To test H2, we employed a dual mediation model to explore whether the effect of historical cognition on policy acceptance is channeled through two distinct psychological

mechanisms: cognitive reinterpretation (via political trust) and affective reaction (via emotional feeling toward Japan). This design is consistent with cognitive dissonance theory, which suggests that individuals facing internal contradictions between historical beliefs and current policy stances may seek resolution through either belief adjustment or emotional reinforcement.

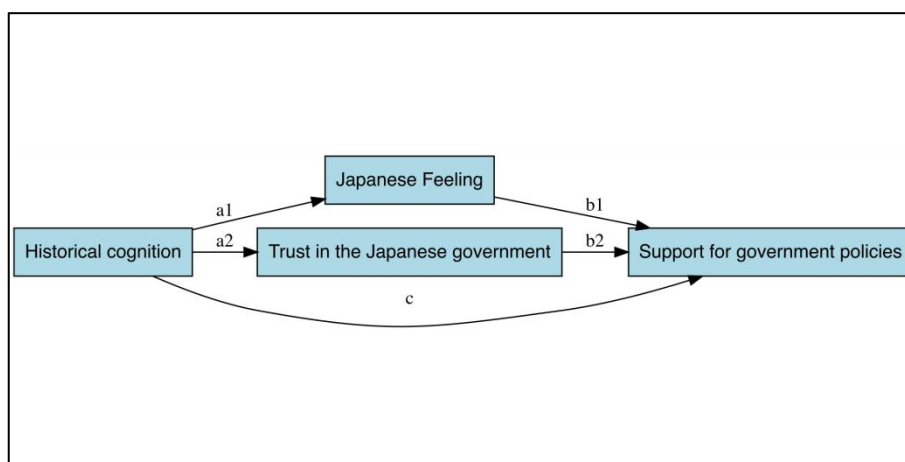


Figure 3: Structural Path Diagram of Dual Mediation Mechanism

We first visualized the theoretical structure of the mediation model (Figure 3), highlighting the parallel paths from historical cognition to policy support through trust in the Japanese government and Japanese feeling, respectively. This path model reflects a cognitive route (Historical cognition → Trust → Policy support) and an affective route (Historical cognition → Feeling → Policy support).

To empirically estimate the strength and significance of each mediation path, we conducted causal mediation analysis using nonparametric bootstrapping with 1,000 resamples. The results are presented in Figure 4, which reports the average causal mediation effects (ACME) and 95% confidence intervals for both mediators.

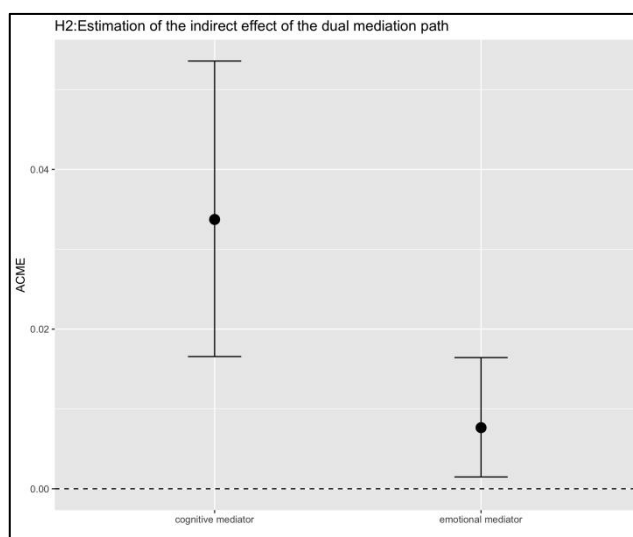


Figure 4: Estimation of the Indirect Effect of the Dual Mediation Path

The results reveal that both the cognitive and affective mediation paths are statistically significant, but the cognitive path is notably stronger. Specifically, the ACME for the cognitive mediator (trust in the Japanese government) is approximately 0.034, while the affective mediator (Japanese feeling) accounts for a smaller indirect effect of about 0.008. The confidence interval for the cognitive path does not cross zero and is considerably wider, indicating greater explanatory power.

This finding confirms H2 and underscores the primacy of cognitive reinterpretation over emotional response when individuals reconcile their historical consciousness with contemporary political decisions. While emotional reactions toward Japan do matter, they appear to play a more secondary role compared to rational trust evaluations.

Theoretically, this result aligns well with the dissonance resolution mechanism: when faced with inconsistency between past grievances and current policies, individuals are more likely to rationalize their position by questioning the legitimacy or sincerity of the policy actors (the Japanese government or their own leaders), rather than merely intensifying reflexive hostility. Such reinterpretation serves as a coping strategy to reduce psychological tension without necessarily escalating emotional negativity.

In addition, the robustness of the cognitive pathway suggests that public resistance to reconciliation is not merely the result of deep-seated emotional hatred but involves considered assessments of actors' intentions. This distinction is critical in understanding how policy communication might recalibrate public opinion. Specifically, enhancing trust through

transparent diplomacy or institutional commitments could potentially offset historical grievances, whereas emotional appeals alone may not suffice.

Taken together, these findings provide a more nuanced view of the mechanisms through which historical cognition affects policy attitudes. The dual-path mediation model not only offers empirical support for H2 but also refines our understanding of collective memory and political dissonance. Rather than being purely affective or irrational, public attitudes toward reconciliation are at least partially shaped by reasoned interpretations of past–present consistency.

Moderating Effects of Personal Experience and Cultural Contact (H3)

To further disentangle the complexity of attitude formation, this section examines whether individual-level contact with Japan, either through direct personal experience or symbolic cultural exposure, can buffer the effects of historical cognition on contemporary Japan-related attitudes. Hypothesis 3 posits that exposure to the outgroup may disrupt the automatic translation of historical resentment into political hostility by introducing alternative perspectives and enhancing empathy (Pettigrew & Tropp, 2006; Zaller, 1992).

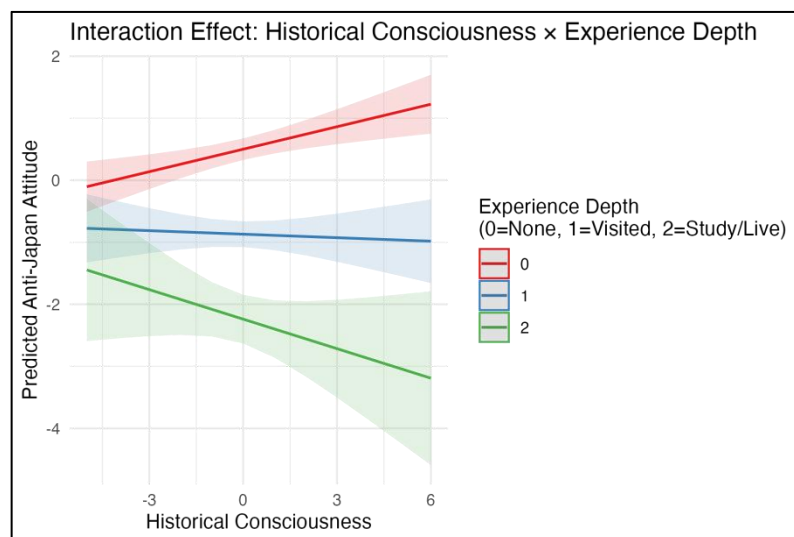


Figure 5: Interaction Effect of Historical Cognition × Experience Depth on Japan Attitude

As shown in Figure 5, the interaction between historical cognition and the depth of direct experience (having visited or lived in Japan) is statistically significant. Respondents with little to no direct experience exhibit a steeper negative relationship between historical cognition and pro-Japan sentiment, consistent with the notion that historical beliefs can serve

as unchallenged defaults in the absence of countervailing personal exposure. In contrast, those with rich firsthand experience, whether through study abroad, professional exchange, or travel, demonstrate significantly attenuated effects of historical resentment on political views.

Figure 6 delineates the region of significance along the moderator (experience depth) continuum. The analysis confirms that historical cognition significantly predicts Japan-related hostility only when experience depth is low. Beyond a threshold of approximately 0.5 standard deviations above the mean, the slope becomes statistically indistinguishable from zero, suggesting that personal exposure can fully buffer the historical effect. This supports the contact hypothesis (Allport, 1954) and demonstrates the cognitive elasticity of attitudes under conditions of direct outgroup engagement.

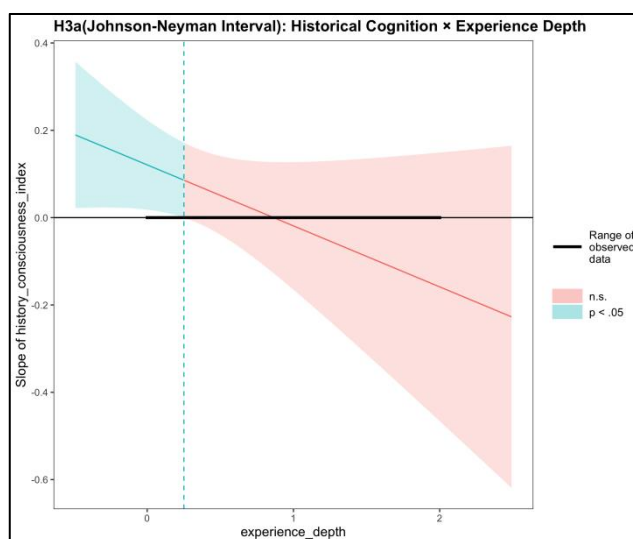


Figure 6: Johnson–Neyman Interval: Moderation of Historical Cognition by Experience Depth

Turning to symbolic forms of contact, we examine whether cultural consumption, such as viewing Japanese media, engaging with pop culture, or learning the Japanese language, similarly moderates historical cognition effects.

Figure 7 reveals a weaker but still statistically meaningful moderating effect. Among respondents with low cultural exposure, increases in historical cognition are associated with steep declines in positive attitudes toward Japan. However, the slope of this relationship becomes notably flatter among those immersed in Japanese culture. Even if individuals with strong historical grievances consume Japanese content, their emotional response appears moderated by an alternative affective repertoire shaped by familiarity and symbolic

proximity.

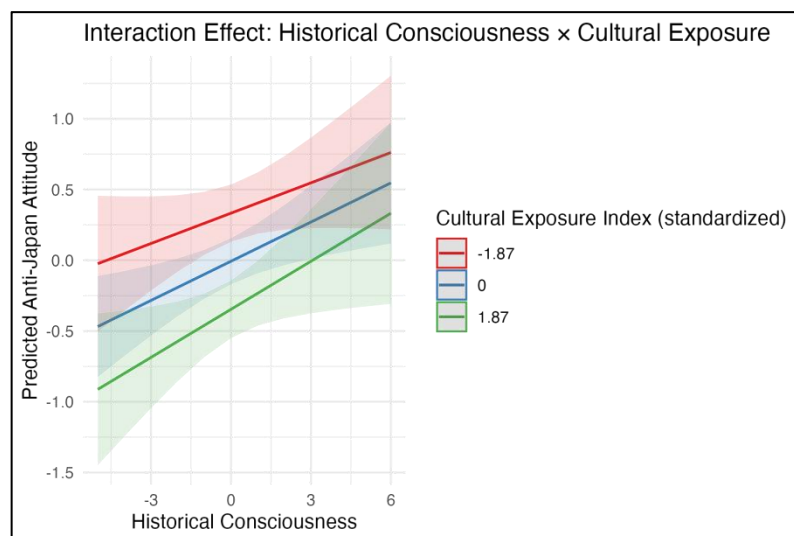


Figure 7: Interaction Effect of Historical Cognition × Cultural Exposure on Japan Attitude

In theoretical terms, this pattern aligns with dual-process models of political reasoning, which suggest that political attitudes are not fixed outputs of stored beliefs but are instead contingent on the availability and salience of interpretive frames at the moment of judgment (Lodge & Taber, 2013). Both personal experience and cultural familiarity appear to function as competing frames that dilute the influence of adversarial historical cognition.

From a statistical standpoint, these findings provide robust evidence for moderated effects. In both H3a and H3b models, the interaction terms are significant, and visual inspection of the slopes corroborates that the conditional marginal effect of historical cognition is strongest among the least exposed—and weakest among the most exposed respondents.

Importantly, these results refine our understanding of how intergroup attitudes are constructed. While H1 confirmed the foundational role of historical memory in shaping Japan-related sentiments, H3 demonstrates that such narratives are not impervious to challenge. In fact, lived experience and symbolic familiarity can reframe or soften historically rooted hostilities. This suggests that public opinion on foreign policy is not merely an echo of past grievances but a dynamic equilibrium shaped by both memory and lived interaction.

Finally, the combined findings of H3a and H3b offer practical insights for policymakers. Facilitating interpersonal exchanges and promoting cultural diplomacy may

serve as effective strategies to reduce public resistance to reconciliation. Even in societies with deeply entrenched historical narratives, outgroup contact, whether material or symbolic, can create cognitive dissonance that destabilizes rigid hostility and fosters more nuanced attitudes.

Nonlinear Effects of Cognitive Inconsistency (H4)

While previous sections have demonstrated the role of historical memory and dual mediation in shaping public attitudes, this section explores whether inconsistency between different cognitive components, beliefs, emotions, and policy preferences, triggers nonlinear responses in Japan-related attitudes. According to cognitive dissonance theory, individuals seek coherence among their beliefs and actions. When discrepancies arise, particularly between entrenched historical views and contemporary policy stances, people may react with heightened emotional responses rather than reasoned adjustments. H4 posits that such inconsistencies, or “cognitive gaps,” predict nonlinear shifts in public opinion, with attitudinal extremity emerging once the inconsistency exceeds certain thresholds.

Three operationalizations of cognitive inconsistency were tested, corresponding to three types of gap variables: (1) the inconsistency between policy stance and affective feelings (GAP Type I), (2) the discrepancy between historical beliefs and affect (GAP Type II), and (3) the divergence between historical memory and policy acceptance (GAP Type III). To test the nonlinear effects of these variables on anti-Japan sentiment, we used Generalized Additive Models (GAM), which allow for flexible estimation of smoothed, nonlinear relationships.

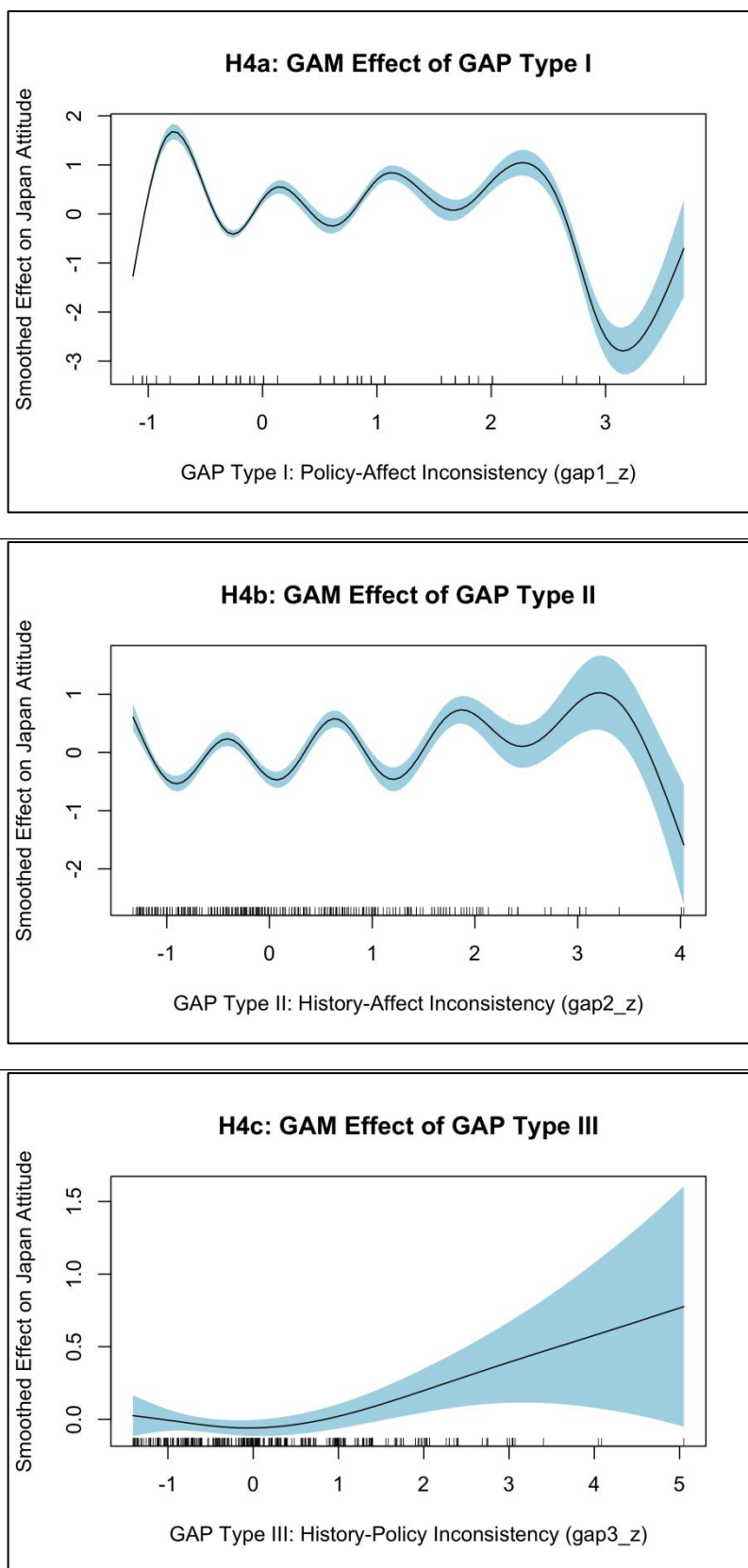


Figure 8: Nonlinear Effects of Cognitive-Affective Gaps on Attitude Toward Japan (H4a–H4c)

As shown in [Figure 8](#), the effect of policy-affect inconsistency (*gap1_z*) on Japan

attitudes follows a wave-like nonlinear trajectory. When inconsistency is low to moderate (*gap1_z* between 0 and approximately 1.5 standard deviations), the predicted attitudinal response remains relatively stable. However, once inconsistency surpasses a threshold of about 2.5 standard deviations, anti-Japan sentiment increases dramatically. Interestingly, a second peak in hostility appears at the extreme right tail of the distribution, suggesting that psychological coping mechanisms may temporarily suppress emotional reactions at intermediate levels of inconsistency, only to be overwhelmed at higher thresholds. This pattern suggests oscillating psychological tension: minor dissonance may be tolerated or rationalized, but extreme dissonance can exceed psychological resilience and trigger sharply negative evaluations.

For GAP Type II (*gap2_z*), which captures the divergence between historical beliefs and affective perceptions, the GAM plot shown in [Figure 8](#) reveals a different but equally nonlinear pattern. The curve shows a consistent upward trend, indicating that larger inconsistencies are associated with increasingly negative attitudes toward Japan. The smoothed line displays oscillations at moderate gap levels, but the slope becomes notably steep as the gap exceeds 3 standard deviations. This suggests that individuals who believe strongly in historical injustices but simultaneously report low emotional hostility may experience psychological dissonance that later intensifies into strong rejection. Conversely, some may struggle to reconcile emotional detachment with deeply rooted historical convictions, producing a late-onset backlash.

GAP Type III (*gap3_z*) captures the inconsistency between historical memory and policy acceptance. Among the three gap variables, this type exhibits the clearest and most monotonic effect. As [Figure 8](#) shows, the GAM plot indicates a steadily rising slope with minimal fluctuation. The shaded confidence band remains narrow for much of the curve, indicating precise estimation. This suggests that individuals who simultaneously internalize historical grievances and support reconciliation policies, or vice versa are most prone to heightened hostility. In other words, this particular form of dissonance may reflect a deeper identity conflict, one not easily rationalized or managed through selective coping.

Moderating Mechanism: Psychological Game Structure of Hope and Strategic Dissonance

(H5)

To test Hypothesis 5, this section investigates whether the relationship between cognitive consistency gap and attitude toward Japan varies across levels of individual hopefulness. We integrate three levels of empirical analysis: interaction effect visualization, threshold-based Johnson–Neyman analysis, and behavioral alignment with a formal strategic preference model. Collectively, these steps assess whether hope modulates the psychological decision process underlying identity-attitude dissonance.

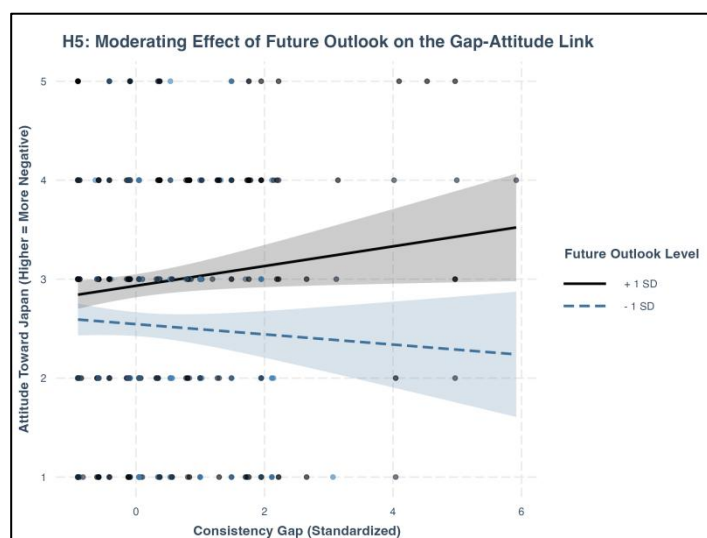


Figure 9: Moderation of Consistency Gap Effect by Future Outlook (H5a)

Figure 9 visualizes a classic moderation structure, where the effect of consistency gap on anti-Japan attitude depends on respondents’ future outlook. Among individuals with higher levels of hope (+1 SD), the relationship is significantly positive: larger dissonance corresponds to stronger hostility. In contrast, among those with lower hope (–1 SD), the slope becomes negative, implying that the same cognitive inconsistency may be resolved through adjustment rather than increased hostility. The divergence between these two lines underscores the role of individual belief in shaping interpretive frames for cognitive conflict. While high-hope individuals may construe inconsistency as an existential threat to identity requiring defensive amplification, low-hope individuals may instead default to resigned disengagement.

To more precisely locate the transition point of significance, Figure 10 applies a Johnson-Neyman analysis to identify the region along the hope continuum where the slope of

the consistency gap becomes statistically significant. The plot shows that only above a centered hope value of approximately +0.8 does the slope turn significantly positive, reinforcing the idea that optimistic future beliefs are essential for the consistency gap to transform into affective polarization. Below this threshold, the relationship is indistinguishable from zero, indicating the absence of reliable linkage. This suggests that hopeful individuals are more cognitively responsive to discrepancies between historical recognition and policy preference, possibly because they perceive alignment as achievable and worth striving for.

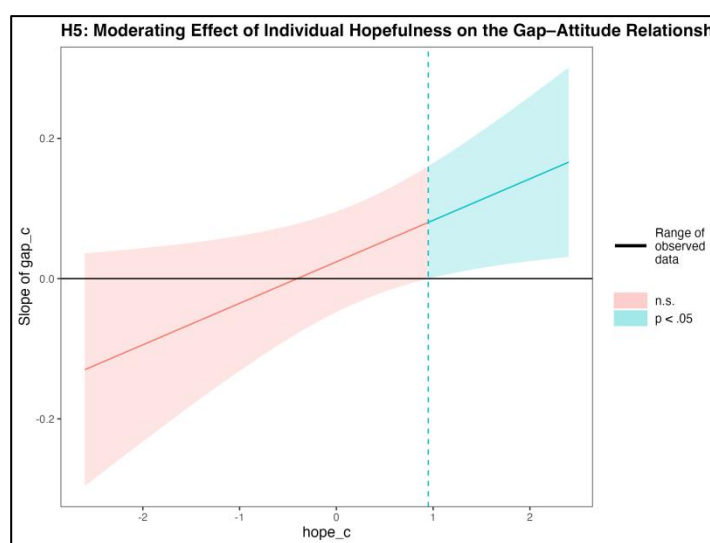


Figure 10: Johnson-Neyman Interval for the Moderation by Hope

Expanding the behavioral interpretation, [Figure 11](#) presents the predicted strategic preference curve derived from a formal model of dissonance management. Here, the vertical axis represents the likelihood of selecting a dissonance-based strategy, while the horizontal axis tracks increasing gap size. The red curve corresponds to high-hope individuals, the blue to low-hope ones. Both curves exhibit sigmoid (logistic) patterns, but with different thresholds: high-hope individuals remain committed to adjustment up to a larger inconsistency level, beyond which the cost of resolution exceeds perceived efficacy, prompting a strategic shift to dissonance. By contrast, low-hope individuals begin favoring dissonance at much smaller gaps. This difference illustrates the cognitive flexibility granted by hope: higher expectations about the future support longer commitment to psychological realignment.

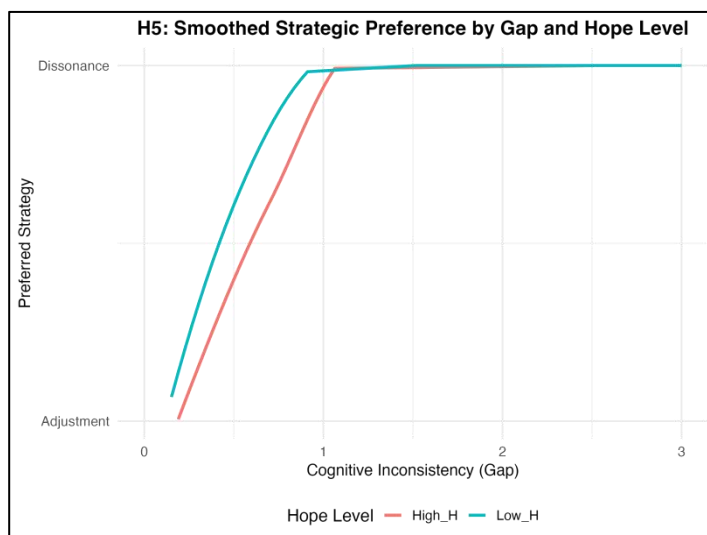


Figure 11: Predicted Strategic Preference under Varying Hope Levels

Figure 12 tests the predictive alignment between the theoretically derived optimal response (G^*) and respondents' reported attitude toward Japan. The observed positive correlation confirms that individuals whose model-estimated strategic stance favors high cognitive reinforcement tend to exhibit stronger negative attitudes. Although variation around the regression line remains large, reflecting noise from unmodeled factors and measurement error—the consistent trend validates the basic psychological game structure. It implies that individuals make attitude adjustments in a way consistent with their estimated Nash-like strategy, further supporting the behavioral realism of the hypothesized framework.

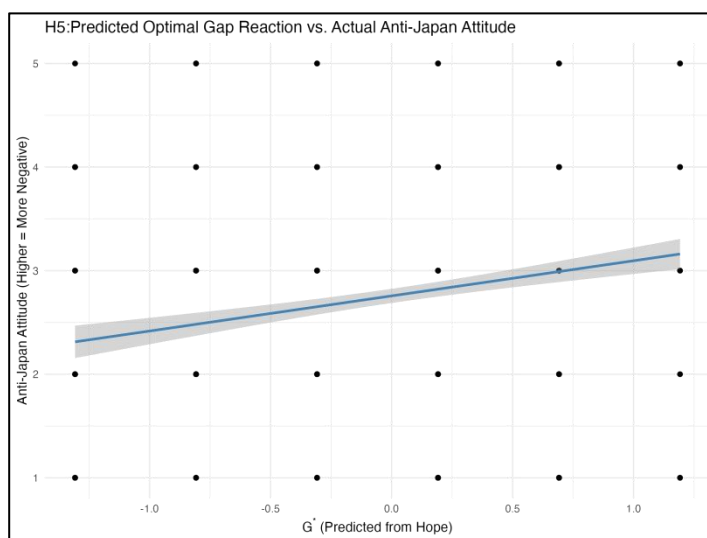


Figure 12: Predicted Strategic Preference under Varying Hope Levels

Taken together, these findings reinforce the dual psychological mechanism embedded

in H5. First, individual hopefulness moderates the cognitive resolution of consistency gaps by adjusting the threshold at which defensive strategies are adopted. Second, hope operates as a cognitive elasticity factor that delays the switch from adjustment to dissonance, supporting rational models of expectation-based dissonance management. As such, the evidence corroborates the existence of an internalized, belief-sensitive response function that governs whether identity tension translates into intergroup negativity.

Conclusion

This study set out to examine the cognitive and psychological mechanisms underpinning South Korean public attitudes towards Japan in the context of persistent historical disputes and recent strategic rapprochement initiatives. Utilizing a series of hypotheses (H1–H5), it systematically tested the roles of historical cognition, policy perception, identity anxiety, cognitive inconsistency, and future outlook in shaping attitudinal divergence.

Empirical findings reveal several critical patterns. First, as hypothesized in H1, historical cognition remains a robust predictor of both negative sentiment towards Japan and resistance to policy rapprochement, reaffirming the enduring salience of colonial memory in bilateral relations. H2 further uncovers dual mediation pathways whereby identity anxiety and cognitive inconsistency jointly transmit the effects of historical cognition to attitudes, suggesting that affective and cognitive channels operate in tandem rather than isolation. H3 shows that transnational exposure and interaction depth moderate identity anxiety's impact, indicating that even limited experiential contact can recalibrate emotional responses to historical grievances. H4 identifies a nonlinear "activation threshold" in cognitive inconsistency, implying that moderate dissonance triggers stronger affective backlash compared to extreme incongruence, a nuance often overlooked in classical cognitive dissonance literature. Finally, H5 integrates a formal model of strategic adjustment to demonstrate that future outlook moderates dissonance resolution, with optimistic individuals showing greater alignment with the model's $G \times$ optimal reaction point, thereby bridging psychological adaptation theories with strategic cognition modeling.

Theoretically, these results contribute to several strands of literature. They expand identity anxiety theory by evidencing its role beyond domestic intergroup tension, positioning it as a mechanism constraining international reconciliation. The nonlinear inconsistency findings refine Festinger's cognitive dissonance resolution theory by demonstrating that affective rejection may peak under moderate rather than extreme cognitive gaps. Furthermore, the formal modeling approach in H5, though preliminary, illustrates the potential of integrating psychological variables such as hope into strategic behavioral frameworks, pointing towards a promising synthesis of political psychology and analytical formal theory.

From a practical perspective, these insights carry important implications for policymakers seeking stable Japan-Korea rapprochement. The enduring cognitive and emotional inertia identified suggests that elite-led diplomatic efforts may falter without addressing mass-level psychological barriers. President Yoon Suk-yeol's administration (2022–2024) pursued unprecedented conciliatory gestures towards Japan, including resolving wartime forced labor compensation disputes and resuming trilateral security cooperation with the United States. While these moves temporarily strengthened diplomatic ties, they triggered substantial domestic backlash rooted in unresolved historical resentment, contributing to sharp declines in Yoon's approval ratings. Ultimately, his declaration of martial law in 2024 to quell domestic protests, and his subsequent impeachment in 2025, illustrate the political risks inherent in top-down reconciliation efforts that neglect public cognitive and emotional adjustment. These findings underscore that initiatives fostering meaningful transnational interactions, public commemorative reframing, and future-oriented narratives are critical to recalibrating entrenched sentiments and ensuring that diplomatic rapprochement is not only strategically viable but also socially sustainable.

However, several limitations warrant caution. The dataset's cross-sectional design precludes causal temporal inferences, and measures of identity anxiety and hope rely on single-item indicators, limiting psychometric robustness. Additionally, the formal model in H5, while theoretically motivated, remains abstracted from actual behavioral choice data, underscoring the need for future experimental or behavioral validation. Expanding these models to account for elite framing effects and geopolitical cues would further enhance explanatory power.

Future research should build on these findings by testing the generalizability of cognitive inconsistency and identity anxiety mechanisms in other post-imperial dyads, such as China-Japan or Germany-Poland. Moreover, integrating experimental priming designs with formal strategic modeling could yield richer insights into how psychological traits interact with contextual incentives to shape historical reconciliation attitudes. In sum, this paper demonstrates that public attitudes towards Japan are not merely reflections of historical knowledge or policy preferences, but emergent properties of complex cognitive dissonance processes, identity anxieties, and future-oriented psychological adaptations. By elucidating these undercurrents, it contributes to both academic theorization and practical pathways for transforming diplomatic deadlocks into durable dialogue.

Word Count: 7374

Appendix

A. Supplementary Regression Tables

This section presents the baseline OLS regression models evaluating the main effects of historical cognition on two core dependent variables: affective attitudes toward Japan (“Japan Sentiment”) and acceptance of Japan-related foreign policy. These results serve as empirical tests for Hypotheses 1a and 1b.

Variable	Coef. (Feeling)	Std. Error	t value	p value	Coef. (Policy)	Std. Error	t value	p value
(Intercept)	2.192	0.236	9.27	<0.001***	3.137	0.270	11.62	<0.001***
hist_cognition_z	0.291	0.034	8.62	<0.001***	0.420	0.039	10.89	<0.001***
age	0.187	0.115	1.63	0.104	0.129	0.132	0.98	0.327
gender	0.074	0.067	1.10	0.271	-0.019	0.076	-0.25	0.801
education	-0.093	0.080	-1.17	0.244	0.067	0.092	0.74	0.461
ideology	0.505	0.076	6.69	<0.001***	-0.063	0.086	-0.74	0.461
N	1003				1003			
Adjusted R ²	0.126				0.105			

Table A1. Effects of Historical Cognition on Japan Sentiment and Policy Endorsement

Note: This table reports standardized coefficients for two separate OLS models. “Japan Sentiment” is measured by feeling thermometer scores, and “Policy Endorsement” by support for government policy. The variable *hist_cognition_z* is the standardized index of historical understanding. Both models control for demographic variables and ideological orientation. The positive and significant coefficients on historical cognition confirm its predictive power across affective and policy domains. *Significance codes:* *** $p < 0.001$; ** $p < 0.01$; * $p < 0.05$.

Table A2 presents the results of interaction models testing H3a and H3b. The analyses examine whether the impact of historical cognition on Japan attitudes is moderated by different dimensions of international experience. In Model H3a, deeper personal experience abroad significantly dampens the effect of historical cognition, suggesting that intensive exposure may weaken identity-based constraints. In contrast, in Model H3b, the interaction between historical cognition and broader cultural exposure is insignificant, though both predictors show strong main effects.

H3a: Historical Cognition × Experience Depth

Variable	Coefficient	Std. Error	t value	p value	Significance
(Intercept)	-0.056638	0.18732	-0.302	0.762	
history_consciousness_index	0.120827	0.037459	3.226	0.001	**
experience_depth	-1.369664	0.112954	-12.126	<2e-16	***
Age	0.011248	0.003335	3.372	0.001	***
Gender2	0.017957	0.110678	0.162	0.871	
history_consciousness_index × experience_depth	-0.139706	0.064558	-2.164	0.031	*

H3b: Historical Cognition × Cultural Exposure Index

Variable	Coefficient	Std. Error	t value	p value	Significance
(Intercept)	-0.367481	0.199426	-1.843	0.0657	.
history_consciousness_index	0.092303	0.033073	2.791	0.00536	**
culture_exposure_index	-0.181703	0.033029	-5.501	4.78e-08	***
Age	0.007290	0.003718	1.961	0.05019	.
Gender2	0.016224	0.116920	0.139	0.88967	
history_consciousness_index × culture_exposure_index	0.011170	0.018234	0.613	0.54029	

Table A2. H3: Moderating Effect of Overseas Experience

Note: Both models include standardized covariates and identical controls for age and gender. Significant interaction effects are observed in H3a only. *Significance codes:* *** $p < 0.001$; ** $p < 0.01$; * $p < 0.05$.

This appendix section presents the results of Generalized Additive Models (GAM) evaluating the nonlinear effects of different types of consistency gap (gap_z) on attitudes toward Japan. Three models are estimated separately for GAP Type I (low policy endorsement & varying historical views), Type II (moderate alignment), and Type III (strong historical view divergence).

GAM Nonlinear Effects of GAP Types I

Variable	Estimate	Std. Error	t value	p value	Sig.
(Intercept)	-0.68964	0.15229	-4.528	6.66e-06	***
age	0.12884	0.07669	1.680	0.0933	.

gender	0.04168	0.04484	0.930	0.3528	
ideology	0.26075	0.04847	5.380	9.29e-08	***
s(gap3_z)			9	96.96	***

Adjusted R² = 0.496, Deviance explained = 50.2%, N = 1008

GAM Nonlinear Effects of GAP Types II

Variable	Estimate	Std. Error	t value	p value	Sig.
(Intercept)	-1.08834	0.19264	-5.650	2.10e-08	***
age	0.16967	0.09716	1.746	0.0811	.
gender	0.03112	0.05692	0.547	0.5847	
ideology	0.46139	0.06110	7.551	9.72e-14	***
s(gap2_z)			9	18.04	***

Adjusted R² = 0.190, Deviance explained = 19.9%, N = 1008

GAM Nonlinear Effects of GAP Types III

Variable	Estimate	Std. Error	t value	p value	Sig.
(Intercept)	-1.12422	0.20561	-5.468	5.75e-08	***
age	0.17310	0.10387	1.666	0.0959	.
gender	0.03243	0.06087	0.533	0.5943	
ideology	0.47904	0.06475	7.398	2.91e-13	***
s(gap1_z)			2.927	3.541	*

Adjusted R² = 0.0704, Deviance explained = 7.53%, N = 1008

Table A3. H4 GAM: Nonlinear Effect of Consistency Gap

Note: All models include controls for age, gender, and political ideology. The smooth term s(gap_z) indicates the presence and significance of nonlinear patterns. Adjusted R² values reflect model fit. *Significance codes:* *** $p < 0.001$; ** $p < 0.01$; * $p < 0.05$.

This section evaluates the moderating role of hope on the effect of consistency gap (gap_z) on attitudes toward Japan, as proposed in Hypothesis 5. A formal interaction model was estimated including demographic and ideological controls.

Variable	Coefficient	Std. Error	t value	p value	Significance
(Intercept)	2.813535	0.187345	15.018	<2e-16	***
gap_c	0.023996	0.036493	0.658	0.511	

hope_c	0.151763	0.027611	5.497	4.92e-08	***
gender2	0.040367	0.069139	0.584	0.559	
age	-0.010372	0.002283	-4.542	6.25e-06	***
income	0.0125	0.018733	0.667	0.505	
ideology	0.071367	0.020154	3.541	0.0004	***
gap_c:hope_c	0.059182	0.02704	2.189	0.0288	*

Table A4. H5: Interaction between Consistency Gap × Hope

Note: This model includes centered variables for gap_c and hope_c, and their interaction term. Statistically significant interaction ($p = 0.029$) suggests that higher levels of hope buffer the potentially alienating effects of cognitive dissonance. *Significance codes:* *** $p < 0.001$; ** $p < 0.01$; * $p < 0.05$.

B. Predicted Attitude Trends by GAP Types

This section presents predicted marginal effects of the three types of consistency gaps, defined in our nonlinear Generalized Additive Models (GAM), on attitudes toward Japan. The plots are based on fitted values from the GAM models for H4 and visualize the nonlinear shape of each GAP’s influence.

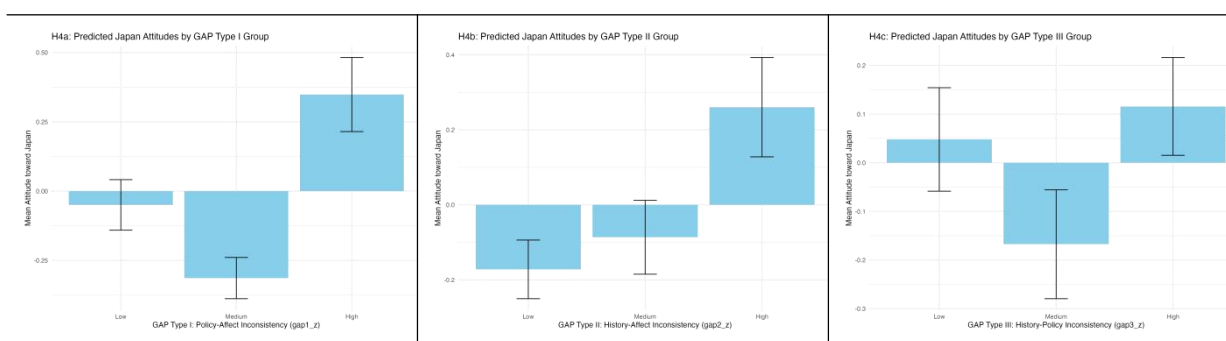


Figure B. Predicted Attitudes toward Japan by GAP Type (I–III) Based on Nonlinear GAM Estimates

Note: Each figure shows predicted mean attitudes toward Japan across three levels of consistency gap (Low, Medium, High), generated from smoothed GAM estimates. The vertical bars represent 95% confidence intervals. The horizontal x-axis categorizes standardized gap values into terciles, while the y-axis reflects standardized attitude scores (higher values indicate more positive attitudes). The plots reveal clear nonlinear effects in line with Hypothesis 4a–c, where Medium gap levels are often associated with the most negative attitudes.

C. Formal Model: Strategic Dynamics of Consistency Gap and Hope (H5)

This appendix presents a formal model to clarify the strategic mechanism underlying Hypothesis 5 (H5), which proposes that the effect of consistency gap on Japan attitudes is moderated by individual hope. The model conceptualizes political attitude formation as a

response to cognitive dissonance, moderated by forward-looking emotional expectations.

C.1 Assumptions

We assume individuals are rational actors who choose political attitudes based on a trade-off between cognitive dissonance and emotional resilience. The model builds on the following assumptions:

- 1) Individuals are aware of their internal dissonance, defined by the consistency gap between historical cognition, affective disposition, and policy stance.
- 2) They possess varying levels of hope about future inter-state reconciliation or domestic resolution.
- 3) Political attitudes toward Japan are a strategic expression of internal alignment and external signaling.

C.2 Game Setup

We define a single-player decision-theoretic model, where the citizen chooses their attitude toward Japan from the set $A = \{\text{Oppose, Neutral, Support}\}$. Let:

$g \in \mathbb{R}_{\geq 0}$ denote the consistency gap, standardized.

$h \in [0,1]$ denote the hope level, where 1 represents maximum hope for future reconciliation.

$a \in A$ be the action taken.

C.3 Payoff Function

We assume that choosing a political attitude involves a trade-off between minimizing internal dissonance and maximizing perceived socio-political coherence. Let the utility function $U(a; g, h)$ be defined as: $U(a; g, h) = -\delta(a; g) + \theta(a; h)$. Where: $\delta(a; g)$ is the dissonance cost of choosing action a , increasing in g . $\theta(a; h)$ is the hope utility, capturing how hopeful expectations buffer negative affect. We model these components as:

$$1) \delta(a = \text{Support}; g) = \alpha g$$

$$2) \delta(a = \text{Neutral}; g) = \beta g$$

$$3) \delta(a = \text{Oppose}; g) = 0$$

with $\alpha > \beta > 0$, indicating that supporting Japan under inconsistency is costlier than neutrality.

$$1) \theta(a = \text{Support}; h) = \lambda h$$

$$2) \theta(a = \text{Neutral}; h) = \mu h$$

$$3) \theta(a = \text{Oppose}; h) = 0$$

with $\lambda > \mu > 0$, suggesting hope elevates the utility of supportive or neutral attitudes.

C.4 Optimal Attitude Choice

The individual chooses $a^* = \arg \max_{a \in A} U(a; g, h)$, comparing utilities:

$$1) U(\text{Oppose}) = 0$$

$$2) U(\text{Neutral}) = -\beta g + \mu h$$

$$3) U(\text{Support}) = -\alpha g + \lambda h$$

As h increases, $U(\text{Neutral})$ and $U(\text{Support})$ increase, making moderate or positive attitudes more likely even under high g .

C.5 Proposition

Proposition 1. For sufficiently high h , the marginal disutility of g is offset, increasing the probability that $a^* = \text{Neutral}$ or *Support*.

Formally, $\exists h^* \in (0, 1)$ such that for $h > h^*$, $a^* \neq \text{Oppose}$ even if $g > 0$.

This proposition aligns with the empirical finding of a positive interaction term between consistency gap and hope in Table A4.

C.6 Implications

The model captures the compensatory role of hope in attitude formation under cognitive dissonance. It explains why individuals with high inconsistency gaps do not uniformly oppose Japan: hope buffers the cost of inconsistency. The model offers a formal rationale for interpreting the statistical significance of gap \times hope in the regression.

C.7 Limitations and Extensions

The current model is static; dynamic or repeated versions could explore how hope and gap co-evolve. Introducing state-level strategies or media cues could further enrich the signaling structure.

Reference

- Albertson, B., & Gadarian, S. K. (2015). *Anxious Politics: Democratic Citizenship in a Threatening World*. Cambridge University Press.
- Allport, G. W. (1954). *The Nature of Prejudice*. Addison-Wesley.
- Bayat, A. (2013). *Life as Politics: How Ordinary People Change the Middle East*. Stanford University Press.
- Brubaker, R. (2004). *Ethnicity without Groups*. Harvard University Press.
- Carver, C. S., Scheier, M. F., & Segerstrom, S. C. (2010). Optimism. *Clinical Psychology Review, 30*(7), 879–89.
- Chung, E. A. (2007). The Politics of Identity in Korea: History, Nationalism, and the Future. *Harvard Asia Quarterly, 11*(1), 13–22.
- Cohen-Chen, S., Halperin, E., Crisp, R. J., & Gross, J. J. (2014). Hope in the Middle East: Malleability beliefs, hope, and the willingness to compromise for peace. *Social Psychological and Personality Science, 5*(1), 67–75.
- Festinger, L. (1957). *A Theory of Cognitive Dissonance*. Stanford University Press.
- Gawronski, B. (2012). Back to the future of dissonance theory: Cognitive consistency as a core motive. *Social Cognition, 30*(6), 652–668.
- Glassman, J. (2010). Bounding the Spaces of Exception: South Korea's Camptown Prostitution Problem. *International Feminist Journal of Politics, 12*(3–4), 329–352.
- Glassman, H. (2010). *War Memory and the Politics of Commemoration in East Asia*. Routledge.
- Greenstein, F. I. (1965). *Children and politics*. Yale University Press.
- Halbwachs, M. (1992). *On collective memory* (L. A. Coser, Ed. & Trans.). University of Chicago Press.
- Han, E. (2017). *Contesting National Identity in South Korea: The Politics of Nationalism under Park Chung Hee*. Routledge.
- He, Y. (2009). *The Search for Reconciliation: Sino-Japanese and German-Polish Relations since World War II*. Cambridge University Press.
- Huddy, L., & Khatib, N. (2007). American patriotism, national identity, and political

- involvement. *American Journal of Political Science*, 51(1), 63–77.
- Inglehart, R., & Norris, P. (2017). *Cultural Backlash: Trump, Brexit, and Authoritarian Populism*. Cambridge University Press.
- Jasper, J. M. (2011). Emotions and Social Movements: Twenty Years of Theory and Research. *Annual Review of Sociology*, 37(1), 285–303.
- Kunda, Z. (1990). The case for motivated reasoning. *Psychological Bulletin*, 108(3), 480–498.
- Lerner, J. S., Li, Y., Valdesolo, P., & Kassam, K. S. (2015). Emotion and decision making. *Annual Review of Psychology*, 66, 799–823.
- Lind, J. M. (2008). *Sorry States: Apologies in International Politics*. Cornell University Press.
- Liu, J. H., & Hilton, D. J. (2005). How the past weighs on the present: Social representations of history and their role in identity politics. *British Journal of Social Psychology*, 44(4), 537–560.
- Lodge, M., & Hamill, R. (1986). A partisan schema for political information processing. *American political science review*, 80(2), 505-519.
- Lodge, M., & Taber, C. S. (2013). *The Rationalizing Voter*. Cambridge University Press.
- Marcus, G. E., Neuman, W. R., & MacKuen, M. (2000). *Affective Intelligence and Political Judgment*. University of Chicago Press.
- McGregor, H. A., Zanna, M. P., Holmes, J. G., & Spencer, S. J. (2013). The structure of self-concept and the stress-buffering function of hope. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, 105(1), 86–102.
- Pettigrew, T. F., & Tropp, L. R. (2006). A meta-analytic test of intergroup contact theory. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, 90(5), 751–783.
- Redlawsk, D. P. (2002). Hot cognition or cool consideration? Testing the effects of motivated reasoning on political decision making. *The Journal of Politics*, 64(4), 1021–1044.
- Rensmann, L. (2017). *The Politics of Unreason: The Frankfurt School and the Origins of Modern Antisemitism*. Suny Press.
- Rozman, G. (2004). *Northeast Asia's Stunted Regionalism: Bilateral Distrust in the Shadow of Globalization*. Cambridge University Press.

- Scott, J. C. (1990). *Domination and the Arts of Resistance: Hidden Transcripts*. Yale University Press.
- Sigel, R. S. (1989). *Political learning in adulthood: A sourcebook of theory and research*. University of Chicago Press.
- Snyder, C. R. (2002). Hope theory: Rainbows in the mind. *Psychological Inquiry*, 13(4), 249–257.
- Stephan, W. G., Ybarra, O., & Morrison, K. R. (2000). Intergroup threat theory. In *The Psychology of Prejudice* (pp. 235–256).
- Taber, C. S., & Lodge, M. (2006). Motivated skepticism in the evaluation of political beliefs. *American Journal of Political Science*, 50(3), 755–769.
- Yuki, M., & Brewer, M. B. (2000). Intergroup relations in East Asia: A social psychological approach. *Asian Journal of Social Psychology*, 3(3), 223–241.
- Zaller, J. (1992). *The Nature and Origins of Mass Opinion*. Cambridge University Press.
- East Asia Institute. (2022). *Survey on Korean Public Attitudes Toward Japan and U.S. Alliances*. Retrieved from <https://www.eai.or.kr>
- East Asia Institute. (2023). *Survey on Korean Public Attitudes Toward Japan and U.S. Alliances*. Retrieved from <https://www.eai.or.kr>