

The 'History Problem', Domestic Audience Costs, and Public Support in Japan

Yongwook Ryu


Australian National University

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The East Asia Institute
#909 Sampoong B/D, Euljiro 158
Jung-gu, Seoul 100-786
Republic of Korea
Tel. 82 2 2277 1683
Fax 82 2 2277 1684



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Introduction

The so-called “history problem” (*lishi wenti* or *lishi renshi wenti*) relates to the understanding and interpretation of Japan’s past colonialism in Asia, and has been one of the most controversial issues in East Asian interstate relations. Not only has it tarnished Japan’s international image and adversely affected Japan’s relations with the neighboring countries of China and Korea, but it has also derailed the US rebalancing strategy in East Asia by restricting trilateral cooperation between USA, Japan and Korea. Despite significant international audience costs and negative impact on Japan’s foreign relations and security cooperation, why do Japanese politicians and public opinion leaders still make controversial statements about Japan’s past history from time to time? Why does the issue still linger on even when it involves no or little conflict of any material interests?

Existing analyses of the ‘history problem’ provide no answer to these questions, as they focus on the effect of the issue on interstate relations (Suzuki 2007; He 2007; Lawson and Tanaka 2010; Soh 2008) and neglect if and how the issue matters in domestic politics. Furthermore, despite extensive media coverage and heated exchanges of political rhetoric, empirical studies examining the causal effect of the ‘history problem’ are still rare. The predominant case study method based on anecdotal evidence is useful in providing the sociopolitical context, but is of little help in proving a causal effect.

Understanding why the issue persists and how it matters in domestic politics is the first step in explaining why the issue is seemingly intractable. It would also help to find ways to resolve issue. This article, therefore, seeks to fill this academic gap and examines how the ‘history problem’ issue matters in domestic politics by analyzing the effect of the ‘history problem’ issue on the public opinion of Japan. Japan is a key actor in the issue, because of its past actions as well as occasional controversial statements by Japanese politicians. Essentially it is the ‘supplier



country' of the 'history problem' issue.

The article takes experimental approach in order to test the causal effect of the 'history problem' issue on the Japanese public opinion. I design a randomized block experiment in which, first, four blocks are created based on a prior question regarding the degree of national identity, and then the 'history problem' treatment is randomly assigned within those blocks. This experimental design improves on efficiency of simple experimental design by creating blocks, which takes care of variation between those blocks. The research makes an important empirical contribution to the study of East Asian interstate relations by shedding new light on how the 'history problem' issue interacts with national identity and domestic politics to affect regional interstate relations.

The article is organized as follows. First, it will discuss the 'history problem' with a focus on the causes of its salience. The article will then outline the argument and methodology. The next section will present the data and empirical analysis. The final section will present a critical discussion of the findings and their implications.

The 'History Problem': The Definition, Causes and the Puzzle

The so-called 'history problem' issue is one of the most widely reported and analyzed issues in East Asian international relations both by the media and academia, but it is seldom clearly defined. The 'history problem' is a non-material issue concerning the understanding or interpretation of Japan's past colonialism in Asia. While the debate is often about the specifics such as the number of casualties and the parties intensely dispute them, the essence of the issue is whether the parties (mainly, Japan, China and Korea) share the understanding or interpretation of the same past event, namely, Japan's aggression in Asia. As China and Korea bore the brunt of Japanese aggression, the issue is most intense between Japan on the one hand and China and Korea on the other. It encompasses a number of sub-issues such as Yasukuni Shrine (Ryu 2007; Koga 2015), the revision of Japan's history textbook (Burke 2007), the so-called "comfort women" issue (Soh 1996 & 2008) and Nanjing massacre (Chang 2012) among others, each touching on different aspects of Japan's self-understanding of its past atrocities.

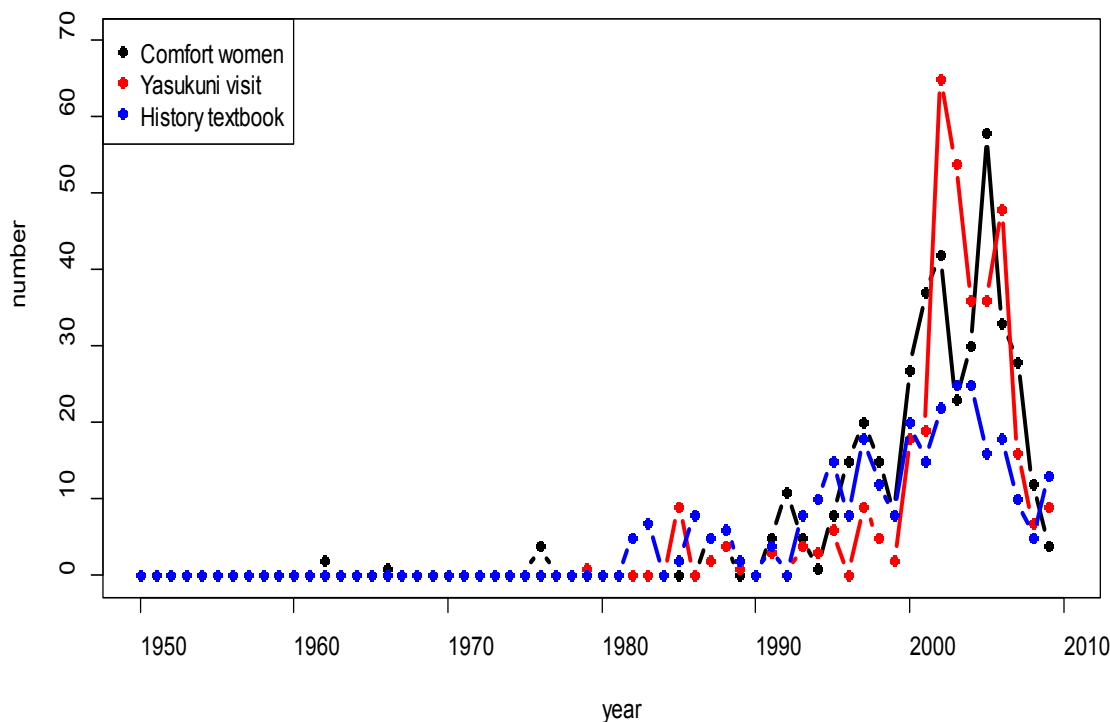
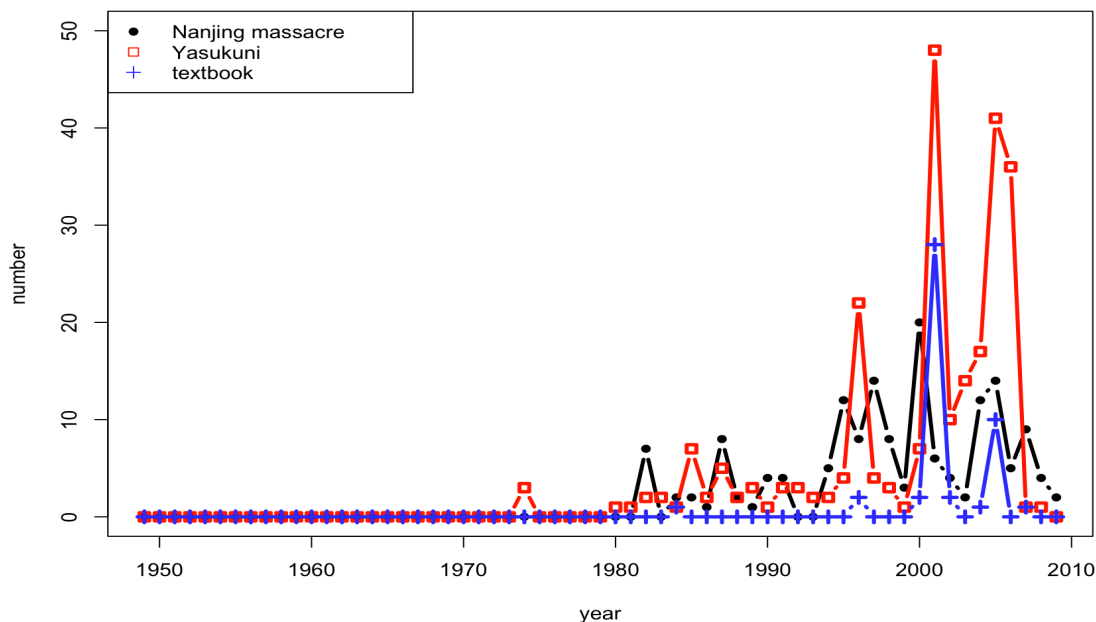
The issue has been particularly intense during the Koizumi administration in the early 2000s and the current Abe administration in the early 2010s. At the center of the controversy were the visits to Yasukuni Shrine by both prime ministers as well as Abe's attempt to reformulate Japan's position on the so-called 'comfort women' (*ianfu*) issue. This year marks the 70th anniversary of the end of WWII, and prime minister Abe will make a statement about Japan's past aggression in Asia. It is expected that he will inherit the Murayama statement, but he may also seek to tone down his apology for the past tragedy. Depending upon the contents of his speech, the 'history problem' issue might intensify in East Asian interstate relations.

The recent saliency and intensity of issue suggests that history is neither linear nor is necessarily about the past. Rather, history is about how the present generations understand and



use the past for present political purposes. Despite the fact that these atrocities were committed more than seven decades ago, they became international controversies only in the 1980s when we expect war memories to be less vivid than in the immediate aftermath of the end of World War II (WWII). Figures 1 and 2 below show the frequency of newspaper articles covering key historical issues between Japan on one hand and China and Korea on the other.

The Number of Articles on Three 'History Issues' in People's Daily, 1950-2010





For China, three historical issues — Yasukuni Shrine, history textbook, and Nanjing massacre — began to appear in the People's Daily (*renmin ribao*) in the 1980s. Before the 1980s, there were three articles on Yasukuni Shrine in 1974, but overall the history problem was non-existent. However, beginning the 1980s, the three issues arose in saliency, which intensified throughout the 1990s and 2000s. In 2001, for example, there were more than 50 articles on Yasukuni Shrine. For Korea, three issues – Yasukuni Shrine, history textbook and 'comfort women' – appearing in Donga Daily were used to measure the saliency of the 'history problem'. Once again, the broad trend is the same. These issues were essentially non-existent before the 1980s, with only one or two sporadic articles. However, the same issues began to appear in the 1980s, and became more frequent throughout the 1990s and 2000s. Both figures show that the 'history problem' became issues only since the 1980s, several decades after the end of WWII.

There are both domestic and international contexts that enable the persistence of the 'history problem'. Domestically, how to interpret and teach Japan's own imperial and colonial history was never clearly resolved at the end of the WWII. The US Occupation Authority sought to purge the wartime militaristic leaders, but the outbreak of the Korean War (1950 – 1953) increased the geostrategic value of Japan for the Cold War and reversed the US-initiated sociopolitical reform in Japan. The US brought some of the wartime leaders back in power. And after the end of the Korean War, Japan entered into the phase of rapid economic development under the Yoshida Doctrine of relying on USA for national security, and Japanese society never really had sufficient time and opportunity to critically reflect on its own past.

As a result, since the end of WWII, there have existed two different groups in Japan that propagate contrasting interpretations of Japan's imperial past. The mainstream group, which consists the majority of Japanese society, believes that Japan's colonialism was an act of aggression waged on the pretext of creating the Greater East Asia Co-Prosperty Sphere and caused much pain and atrocities to other Asian countries. On the other hand, a small but vociferous group of right-wing conservatives believe that WWII was a righteous war of self-survival and self-defense (*jison jie no sensou*) that was forced upon Japan by the circumstances. This group regards the mainstream view and treatment of Japan's history to be 'masochistic' (*jigyakudeki*), which suppresses the national pride of current generations of Japanese, especially youth (Fujioka 1997: 57-60).

The controversy about the revision of history textbook in middle and high schools in Japan vividly illustrates the political battle between these two groups, who differ on the interpretation of Japan's past, the future vision of Japan and what to teach to the next generations of Japanese. From the late 1980s to the early 1990s, there was a progressive trend in Japanese history textbooks, with greater coverage of Japan's colonial past and wartime atrocities. In 1997, all Japanese textbooks approved by the Ministry of Education (MoE), contained references to the "comfort women" and the Nanjing massacre (Bukh 2007). But this progressive trend was soon countered by conservative intellectuals and politicians. In 1995, Fujioka Nobukatsu established an organization named the Association for the Advancement of a Liberal View of History (*Jiyūshugi Shikan Kenkyūkai*), and established in 1996 Japan's Society for History Textbook Reform



(*Atarashī Rekishikyōk ashō o Tsukurukai*, or *Tsukurukai* in short). The members of these conservative organizations criticized existing Japanese history textbooks for offering a “masochistic historical perspective” (*jigyaku sikan*) of Japan’s modern history, thereby imbuing the Japanese with a sense of shame and guilt when the goal should be the opposite: to teach them to be proud of Japan’s past and love their nation (Fujioka 1997: 60).

Internationally, the end of the cold war in the late 1980s terminated the ideological conflict between the two superpowers, and resulted in the formation of new diplomatic relationships between regional countries by suppressing the previous political and security tensions. At the same time, the end of the cold war also opened up new political space for old issues that had remained dormant under the surface during the cold war. Specific historical issues that collectively make up the ‘history problem’ such as Yasukuni Shrine, interpretation of Nanjing Massacre, and history textbook revision, all came to the fore during this period.

No issue illustrates this better than the ‘comfort women’ issue between Korea and Japan. Both Korea and Japan were allies of the USA, and have been important part of the US’s cold war strategy in East Asia. During the cold war, their bilateral historical issues including the comfort women issue were kept under the surface and remained dormant. The Japanese government maintained the position that the issue of war reparations, including compensation for the comfort women, was resolved by the 1965 normalization treaty. And the Korean government did not seek additional redress, nor did it raise the issue with the Japanese counterpart (Soh 2008). But with victims publicly providing testimonies in the early 1990s in Korea, the issue arose in saliency. In January 1992, then Japanese Chief Spokesman Koichi Kato issued an official apology saying, “we cannot deny that the former Japanese army played a role” in abducting and detaining the comfort women and “we would like to express our apologies and contrition.”¹ In 1993, the Kono Statement was issued by the Japanese government and confirmed that coercion was involved in seizing the comfort women. The Statement still remains Japan’s official position on the issue.

However, several high-profile officials and politicians have publicly denied that coercion was involved in recruiting the comfort women. Mayor of Osaka and co-leader of the nationalist Japan Restoration Party, Toru Hashimoto, said that there is no evidence that comfort women were taken away by violence or threat by the Japanese military, and that these women were a “necessary” part of the war.² In 2014, the newly appointed president of NHK Katsuto Momii stirred controversy by saying that their system of forcibly drafting women into military brothels was “common in any country at war.”³ In 2007, prime minister Shinzo Abe remarked that there was no evidence that Japan directly forced women to work as sex slaves. The issue could take on its

¹ Sanger, David E. (1992-01-14). "[Japan Admits Army Forced Koreans to Work in Brothels](#)". *The New York Times* (Tokyo). Retrieved April, 2015; "[Japan Apologizes for Prostitution of Koreans in WWII](#)". *Los Angeles Times*. Associated Press. 1992-01-14. Retrieved April 2015

² Johnston, Eric (23 August 2012). "[No evidence sex slaves were taken by military: Hashimoto](#)". *The Japan Times*. Retrieved March 2015; "[Hashimoto says 'comfort women' were a necessary part of war](#)". *The Asahi Shinbun*. 2013-05-13. Retrieved April 2015.

³ “New NHK head’s ‘comfort women’ remark stirs controversy”, Japan Today. 26 January 2014. Retrieved April 2015.



current intensity and saliency only because the cold war reduced the importance of geopolitical considerations.

An important puzzle relating to the history problem issue is why do Japanese politicians, officials and opinion leaders continue to make controversial remarks and what are perceived as revisionist statements about Japan's past colonialism and imperialism. In addition to the above-mentioned remarks, in February 2012, Takashi Kawamura, mayor of Nagoya, told a visiting Chinese delegation from Nanjing that he believed only "conventional acts of combat" took place in Nanjing, not the mass murders and rapes, and said "such a thing as Nanjing Massacre is unlikely to have taken place." Shintaro Ishihara, former mayor of Tokyo, said of Japan's imperialism, "it was not aggression Deprived of resources, (Japan) had no choice but to expand into Southeast Asia If one defines the war as aggression without such a historical perspective, it merely amounts to masochism or ignorance of history." The list of revisionist statements is considerably longer, and fuels the 'history war.'

While these 'revisionist' remarks is minority and is not shared with most of the public, their impact is far greater. Furthermore, they are quite costly for Japan. Not only has the 'history problem' had a significant negative impact on Japan's relations with neighboring countries with the suspension of summit meetings with China and Korea, but it has made it difficult to improve trilateral security cooperation between US. It has also tarnished the otherwise excellent international image of Japan. Why, then, do Japanese politicians and opinion leaders continuously make what are perceived as revisionist statements despite significant international audience costs and the loss of economic and security benefits?

Surprisingly, despite the importance of the question for our understanding of the 'history problem', there is very little empirical research on this question. Knowing what permits or motivates Japanese politicians to make controversial remarks about Japan's past colonialism could offer a new perspective on the generation, persistence and dynamics of the issue. Given that this is a key part of the existence and intensification of the history problem issue, an answer to it would provide potential ways to resolve the issue.

Argument

Why do Japanese politicians and officials continue to make controversial statements about historical events that happened more than 70 years ago, even when doing so would have an adverse impact on Japan's international image and its relations with neighboring countries? To a large extent, what politicians preach reflects what they believe in. Therefore, Koizumi's visits to Yasukuni Shrine despite the advice of the foreign ministry not to do so reflected his personal belief that he was doing so to pay respect to the war dead and strengthen the postwar values of peace and liberty, and that it was a matter of heart (*kokoro no mondai*) (interview with a senior MOFA official, July 2011).

However, personal beliefs and values alone cannot be a sufficient explanation. I assume that politicians are self-interested egoists who seek to maximize their chances of being (re)elected. This is particularly true for politicians in democracies who are elected by the public, and hence



they need to care about how the public will consider their remarks and statements (Przeworski, Stokes, and Manin 1999). This entails that politicians, especially those in democratic countries, would adopt actions that would enhance their chances of being (re)elected and avoid other actions that would hurt their chances. Simply stated, the presence of a domestic audience that punishes or rewards politicians for their actions and remarks holds the key for accounting for the generation and persistence of the ‘history problem’ issue.

I hypothesize that it is the lack of domestic audience costs that enables Japanese politicians to make ‘revisionist’ remarks. Because their words and deeds would not incur any domestic political costs, they are relatively unconstrained in making such statements. Indeed, the ‘history problem’ issue is simply not high on the voters’ agenda, and like most other countries, elections in Japan are usually dominated by economic growth, jobs, welfare, pensions, and other important socioeconomic issues, with the ‘history problem’ issue occupying a very minor status in the constellation of election issues. This argument leads to the following hypotheses with regards to public sentiments toward China and Korea and public support for hardline foreign policy.

Hypothesis 1: the ‘history problem’ issue would not have any significant impact on the Japanese public sentiments toward China and Korea.

Hypothesis 2: the ‘history problem’ issue would not have any significant impact on the Japanese public support for hardline policy regarding the disputed islands

While the lack of domestic political audience costs may permit conservative politicians to make ‘revisionist’ statements, there could also be a more positive incentive for conservative politicians to make such statements. Playing up the ‘history problem’ or related issues may be a useful means to mobilize nationalistic groups in Japan in support of conservative political agenda. In this case the ‘history problem’ issue will matter only for the nationalistic segment of the Japanese public.

Hypothesis 3: the ‘history problem’ issue has a significant effect on the sentiments and policy preferences of those citizens with a high degree of national identity.

The hypotheses relate to domestic political dynamics that may help us account for the generation and persistence of the ‘history problem’ issue. I test these hypotheses in this paper.

Methodology and Data

Previous studies examining the effect of the ‘history problem’ issue heavily rely on anecdotal evidence. While such evidence is useful in providing the context within which the issue is discussed, it cannot conclusively tell us if the issue has an independent causal effect. It could be the case that military and political tensions as well as negative sentiments could be a function of



some other underlying changes such as changing power balances, domestic socioeconomic conditions or political situation, and that the ‘history problem’ is spuriously correlated with those tensions and negative sentiments.

In order to examine a causal effect of the history problem, I adopt experimental approach. In particular I employ randomized block experimental design that prime the ‘history problem’ issue. This particular method achieves greater efficiency than simple randomized experiment (Horiuchi, Imai and Taniguchi 2007). The idea is to first create more or less homogenous blocks based on some other important factor that is an important source of variation in the dependent variable, and then randomly assign the treatment within each block. I create four blocks based on the respondents’ existing degree of national identity, and then randomly assign the treatment of the history problem (i.e. a mention of the ‘history problem’ in a passage about Korea/China). The measure of national identity is the question “if someone said something bad about Japan, do you feel as if he said something bad about yourself?”, with four possible levels: strong disagree, somewhat disagree, somewhat agree, and strongly agree. As national identity is an important factor that influences one’s sentiments toward foreign nations as well as one’s foreign policy preferences, it is a legitimate variable to use to create blocks. The national identity question is asked relatively early on in the survey and kept as far away from the experiment, so as to avoid the respondent’s answer to the national identity question affecting s/his answers to the experimental questions.

There are two different treatment passages: one for China and the other for Korea. Both passage are catered to the particular bilateral situation with Japan. For example, in the case of China, the experimental situation involves the conflict over the Senkaku Islands or Diaoyu Islands in Chinese, while the Korea passage mentions the Dokdo or Takeshima dispute. In the treatment passage, the first sentence is the main treatment aimed at priming the ‘history problem.’ There are two other manipulations relating to economic interests and military power, both of which are expected to affect the dependent variables. I deliberately make the situation be about the disputed islands, not only because they are real disputes between the countries, hence enhancing the external validity of the experiment, but also because it will be a harder test. The control passage does not contain the first sentence that primes the ‘history problem’ issue. The rest of the control passage is the same as the treatment passage. A sample treatment passage is given below. The sentences or clauses in bold are the experimental manipulations.

The South Korean government has repeatedly criticized the Japanese government that it lacked the correct historical understanding regarding WWII based on Yasukuni shrine visits by Japanese politicians and the ‘comfort women’ issue. In addition, Korea has a territorial dispute over Takeshima with Japan. Japan’s official stance is that Takeshima is part of Japanese territory and under Japanese sovereignty, and that S Korea illegally occupies the territory. S Korea insists that Takeshima is part of Korean territory, and there is no international dispute over Takeshima. In recent years, the Korean government and citizens have strengthened their effective occupation of the territory through the construction of buildings on the island. The



Korean actions **affect Japan's economic interests**. The South Korean military is **weak, and it is expected that Japan will succeed** in taking over the island by force

Once the respondent reads an assigned passage, s/he answers three questions that are the dependent variables (DVs). The first DV measures the level of threat perception of China/Korea. The question is “do you perceive threat from China/Korea” with four possible levels to choose from. The second DV is the level of trust of Korea/China. We asked the respondents after they have read their assigned passage “Do you generally trust Koreans (or Chinese) or do you not trust Koreans (or Chinese)?” The answer was measured on a 1 to 7 scale. The last dependent variable is a binary variable measuring the Japanese public support for a hardline policy, and the respondent was asked to answer “Do you support the Japanese government using force to claim Takeshima (in the case of Korea)/to defend Senkakus (in the case of China)?” Because of the research design, we can attribute the difference in responses to the three dependent variable questions to the treatment

The data come from a national online survey conducted in Japan in April 2014. The survey was web-based and run by Nikkei Research. A representative random sample of respondents (more than 35,000 people) were invited to participate in the survey, and those who agreed were then given the url where they could log on and complete the survey. The respondents were first asked to answer the question measuring the level of their national identity. Depending upon what their answer was to that question, they were then put into one of the four blocks. After that, there were a series of questions about other sociopolitical and socioeconomic questions. The experiment came toward the end of the survey. The ‘history problem’ treatment passage was then randomly assigned to the respondents. Below is the table with descriptive statistics.

Table 1 Descriptive Statistics of the ‘History Problem’ Experiment

# of invitees	36,731
# of participants (%)	3,216 (8.8%)
Sample sizes for four blocks	550 / 1306 / 733 / 499
# of missing data	135

The participation rate is about 8.8% i.e. 8.8% of those who were invited to participate in the survey actually participated in the survey. While the original sample of invitees was a representative sample of the population, the final sample of respondents is not. The respondents were a self-selected group. This is problem for the external validity of the experiment and generalizability of the findings beyond the sample to the entire population. It is virtually impossible in this kind of online survey experiment to ensure that the final sample is representative of the population. While it is impossible to correct this self-selection bias, I checked if the covariates of the final sample closely approximates those of the general population. The four blocks contained 550, 1306, 733, and 499, respectively. The variables are measured in the following manner.



Dependent Variables

Support for Use of Force (Force): “Do you support or do you not support the use of force by the Japanese government either to claim Takeshima from South Korea or to protect Senkakus from China?” The variable is measured on a four-point scale: strongly oppose; oppose; support; and strongly support.

Level of Threat Perception (Threat): “Do you perceive or do you not perceive threat from Korea/China?” The variable is measured on a four-point scale: strongly perceive; perceive; perceive little; do not perceive at all.

Level of Trust (Trust): “Do you generally trust Koreans/Chinese?” The variable is measured on a seven-point scale from very high to very low.

Independent Variables

Degree of National Identity (NatID): This is the block in the experimental design. The question we used to measure one’s degree of national identity is, “if someone said something bad about Japan, do you feel as if that person has said something bad about you?” (Sniderman, Hagendoorn, and Prior 2004). Since there were four blocks, there are four levels of NatID: very strong; strong; weak; and very weak.

History Problem (HisPro): This is the treatment factor in the experiment, and is binary. Those who were assigned to the treatment passage in the survey with a mention of the ‘history problem’ issue, are denoted as 1. The control group is 0.

China and Korea (Country): By the experimental design, the China and Korea scenarios are also randomly assigned. The dependent variables could vary according to the other country. 1 denotes Korea, while 0 denotes China.

Analysis and Findings

This section presents the statistical analysis of the effect of the ‘history problem’ issue on the three dependent variables: (1) support for the use of force, (2) threat perception of China/Korea, and (3) level of trust of Chinese/Koreans.

General Treatment Effect of the ‘History Problem’ Issue

Support for the Use of Force

Due to Article 9 of the constitution, the Japanese government is restricted in using force to settle international disputes, except for situations of self-defense. Surprisingly, given the very low percentage of missing data (less than 2%), the respondents to the survey seem not concerned or aware of the problematic nature of using force either to take over Takeshima from South Korea or to protect Senkakus from China under the current constitution. In the focus group pre-trial, the interviewees opined that the question about the use force did not raise the constitutional issue in their minds.

The statistical analysis reveals three major findings. Our main treatment factor, namely, the ‘history problem’ issue has little effect on the public support for the use of force in the disputed



islands. Its effect is both statistically significant and is small in magnitude. But what matter are one's degree of national identity and who the opposing country is. The deeper the respondent's sense of national identity is, the more s/he supports the use of force by the Japanese government either to take over Takeshima or protect Senkakus. In addition, the support for the use of force is less when the other country is Korea than when it is China. If the situation involved Korea, it decreased the support for using force by -0.331.

Table 2 The Effect of the 'History Problem' on Public Support for the Use of Force in Disputed Is

	Estimate	Std. Error	Pr(> t)
(Intercept)	1.676	0.051	< 2e-16 ***
NatID	0.159	0.020	1.95e-15 ***
HisPro	-0.003	0.031	0.922
Country (1=Korea)	-0.331	0.031	< 2e-16 ***

Threat Perception of China/Korea

Threat perception is an important variable in affecting conflict. For some, it is the decisive intervening variable between event and response in international crisis (Cohen 1979: 3). When threat is not perceived, there can hardly be a mobilization of resources for defensive or offensive purposes, even in the face of apparently objective evidence. Threat perception also fuels a significant military build up, and causes the security dilemma (Christensen 1997; Ball 1993/94). Does the 'history problem' issue influence Japan's threat perception of China/Korea?

Table 3. The Effect of the 'History Problem' on the Threat Perception of China/Korea

	Estimate	Std. Error	Pr(> t)
(Intercept)	2.047	0.062	< 2e-16 ***
NatID	0.234	0.024	< 2e-16 ***
HisPro	0.067	0.037	0.072 .
Country (1=Korea)	-0.652	0.037	< 2e-16 ***

The statistical analysis shows that the 'history problem' has a weak effect on Japan's threat perception of China/Korea. It increases threat perception, but the effect is significant only at the 90% confidence level. Once again, the degree of national identity and country matter a great deal. The degree of national identity has a positive effect on the threat perception of China/Korea, which means that the deeper one has internalized national identity, the higher s/he perceives threat from China/Korea.

The Level of Trust of China/Korea

The third analysis is about the trust level of China/Korea. Trust is an important factor both for ingroup and intergroup cooperation (Kydd 2005). It is also a kind of emotion toward another



person or group. The level of trust Japanese have of Chinese and Koreans in general would be an important indicator for Japanese emotions toward the latter two countries as well as for interstate cooperation.

Table 4. The Effect of the ‘History Problem’ on the Level of Trust of Chinese/Koreans

	Estimate	Std. Error	Pr(> t)
(Intercept)	3.522	0.056	< 2e-16 ***
NatID	-0.070	0.022	0.0014 ***
HisPro	-0.015	0.034	0.650
Country (1=Korea)	0.233	0.034	7.11e-12 ***

Once again, the ‘history problem’ treatment has no effect on the level of trust. While the sign is in the expected direction, it is not statistically significant. The other two factors – national identity and country – are statistically significant. The degree of national identity has a negative relationship with the level of trust of Chinese/Koreans. This entails that the deeper a Japanese citizen has internalized the sense of national identity, the less s/he trusts of Chinese and Koreans. The country factor is also significant. The Japanese public trusts Koreans more than Chinese, and improves the trust level by a factor of 0.233.

The empirical analyses thus far have revealed interesting findings. First and the most important finding is that the main experimental manipulation – ‘history problem’ issue – does not influence the public support for using force and Japanese trust level of Chinese and Koreans. When it has an effect on the threat perception of China and Korea, it is statistically significant only at the 90% confidence level, suggesting that there is a rather weak relationship.

Second, the block in the experimental design, namely, the degree of national identity, is consistently important for all three outcome variables. The analyses suggest that the deeper one’s sense of national identity is, the more s/he supports the use of force and perceives threat from China/Korea and the less s/he trusts Chinese and Koreans. This findings confirms the importance of nationalism as a potential source of conflict in East Asian international relations (Gries 2005; He 2007; Ryu 2014; Hefele, Merkle, Sturm 2013).

And lastly, whether the situation involves China or Korea matters for Japan’s threat perception, trust level and support for the use of force. In general, Korea fares better than China. The Japanese public generally trusts Koreans more than Chinese, perceives less threat from Korea than from China, and is less willing to support the use of force against Korea than against China. This may be due to a number of different factors such as regime type, societal and cultural affinity through the spread of Korean popular culture, lack of power rivalry in the case of Korea, or the fact that Takeshima is under Korean control whereas the Senkakus are controlled by the Japanese government at the moment. Whatever the reason may be, the difference between Korea and China is statistically significant across all three outcome variables I have examined.



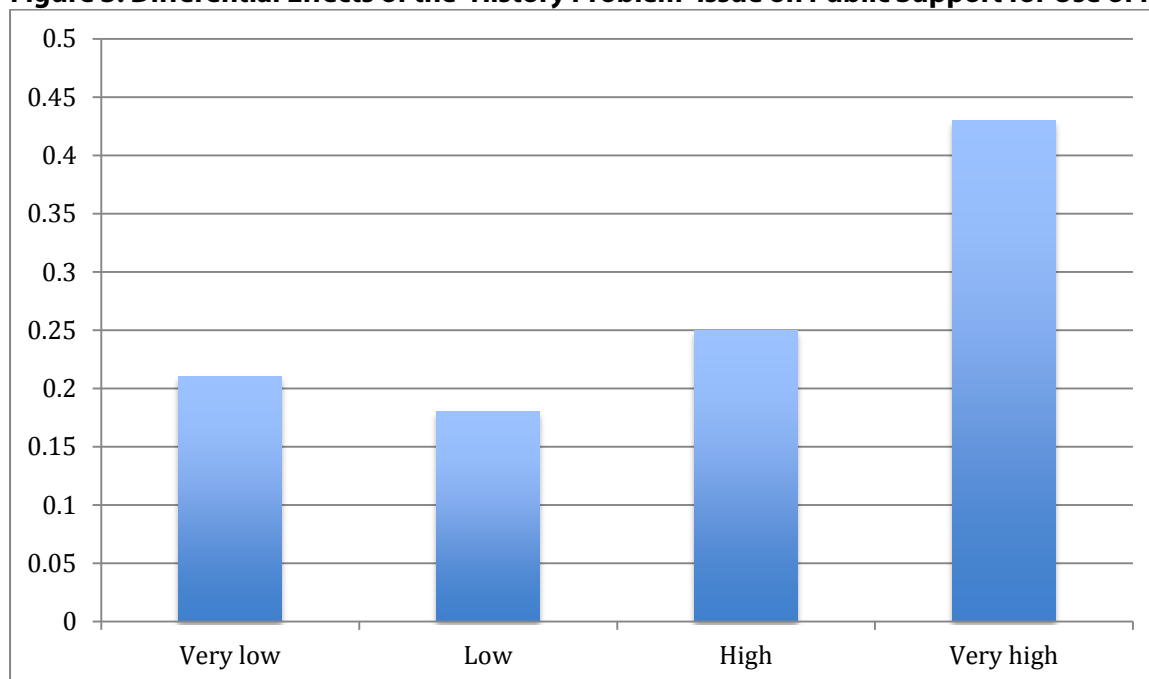
Differential Treatment Effect of the ‘History Problem’ Issue

While the ‘history problem’ treatment does not seem to influence threat perception, trust and support for hardline foreign policy, it could well be the case that its effect is limited to a particular group and different for different groups. In this section I examine the differential effects of the ‘history problem’ treatment for the four different groups of national identity. Treatment effect could vary across the four groups. Since national identity is an important factor in determining the dependent variables, it could be that the history problem matters for some groups but not for others.

Public Support for the Use of Force

How does the treatment effect of the ‘history problem’ issue differ across the four blocks on the question of supporting the use of force in the disputed islands? Figure 3 shows the differential treatment effects. The horizontal axis is the degree of national identity (i.e. four blocks), and the vertical axis is the treatment effect. The figure reveals that the treatment effect is significantly higher for the ‘very high’ group. What this means is that within those respondents who have self-identified as being very high on national identity, the ‘history problem’ manipulation resulted in a significant increase in the support for using force in the disputed islands. The treatment effect for this group is more than double the treatment effect for the ‘very low’ and ‘low’ groups.

Figure 3. Differential Effects of the ‘History Problem’ Issue on Public Support for Use of Force



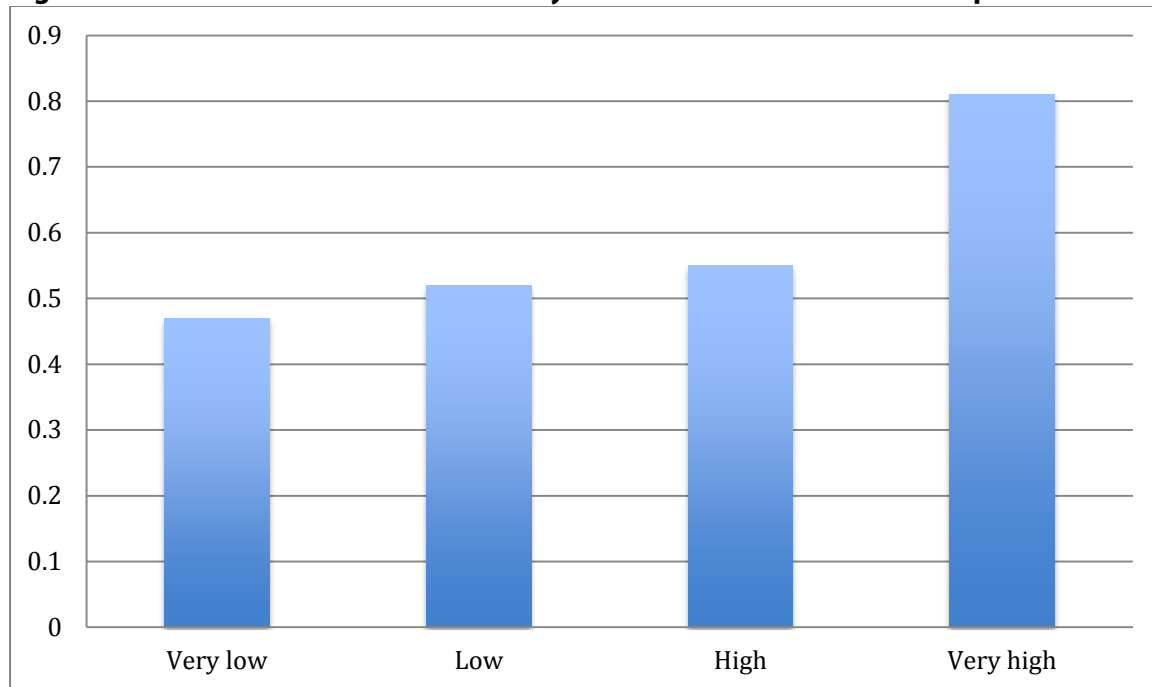
Threat Perception of China/Korea

The treatment effect of the ‘history problem’ issue also differs for the four groups when it comes to threat perception of China/Korea. As Figure 4 shows, the treatment effect increases only slightly as the degree of national identity increases, but the increase significantly larger for the ‘very high’ group. The effect almost the double the treatment effect for the ‘very low’ group (0.81



vs 0.46). The analysis reveals that within those respondents who have self-identified as being very high on national identity, the ‘history problem’ manipulation increases the Japanese public threat perception of China/Korea, and this treatment effect is significantly greater for the group that identified themselves as very high in terms of national identity.

Figure 4. Differential Effects of the ‘History Problem’ Issue on Threat Perception



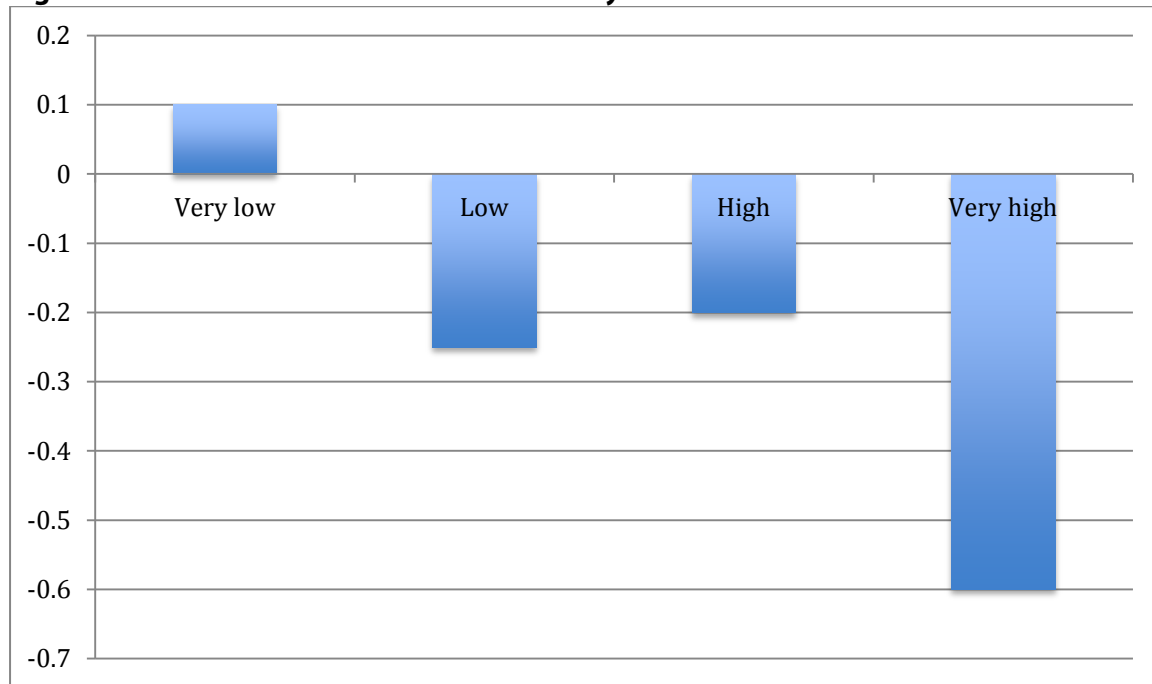
The Level of Trust of Chinese/Koreans

The final analysis involves examining the average treatment effect across the four groups on the question of the trust level of Chinese/Koreans. The result is once again consistent with the previous findings. As figure 5 shows, the average treatment effect for the ‘very high’ group is significantly different from the effect for the other groups. The ‘history problem’ manipulation reduces the trust level of Chinese/Koreans for the ‘very high’ group compared to other groups, and the difference is statistically significant. It is also interesting to note that for the ‘very low’ group, the ‘history problem’ manipulation slightly increased the trust level of Chinese/Koreans.

The three analyses all show the consistent pattern that the average treatment effect for the ‘very high’ group (i.e. those who have self-identified as having an acute sense of national identity) is significantly larger than the effect for the other groups. What this suggests is that the effect of the ‘history problem’ issue may be limited only to a certain segment of Japanese society, namely, nationalistic groups. It can mobilize them to support hardline foreign policy toward neighboring countries, increase the public threat perception of China/Korea, and reduce the level of trust of Chinese/Koreans.



Figure 5. The Differential Effects of the 'History Problem' Issue on Trust Level



Conclusions

The article examined domestic audience costs as a potential explanation for the generation and maintenance of the 'history problem' issue. Using the method of survey experiment, it tested whether the issue has an independent causal effect on a number of important outcomes: support for the use of force, threat perception of China and Korea, and trust level of Chinese and Koreans. We can draw two major conclusions based on the findings.

First, the 'history problem' does not have an effect on the public support for use of force, public threat perception of China/Korea, and public trust of Chinese/Koreans. This finding suggests that the domestic audience in Japan is not so concerned with the 'history problem' issue, and hence is unlikely to punish politicians who make 'revisionist' statements. As politicians are unlikely to incur costs for making revisionist statements, they are relatively unconstrained in doing so. This can be one reason why the 'history problem' is generated and sustained.

Second, while the issue does not seem to matter for the general public, it matters for a particular group, namely, those with a high sense of national identity. The treatment effect for this group is significantly different from that for other groups. This finding suggests that the 'history problem' can be a useful means to mobilize nationalists in support for hardline foreign policy and to generate anti-foreign sentiments and threat perception. What this entails is that there could exist a positive incentive for conservative politicians to play up the issue and strategically use controversial remarks as a way to boost up public support for conservative political agenda.

The article focused on Japan, but China and Korea are also important in understanding the



dynamics of the ‘history problem. Future research should seek to explore how and why the issue is so prevalent in those two countries, especially focusing on the role of the media in magnifying the conservative voice in Japanese society, which still remains a minority viewpoint. ■

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Author's Biography

Yongwook Ryu
Australian National University

Dr. Ryu was born in South Korea and grew up both in South Korea and New Zealand. He first completed his BA in Economics and Politics and International Relations at Victoria University of Wellington, graduating top of his class with the K J Scott Memorial Prize. He then moved to The University of Auckland for his BA (Hons) in Political Studies, where he graduated with First Class Honours. Later he went on to do his AM and PhD in Government (or political science) at Harvard University as a Frank Knox Fellow, where he specialised in International Relations.

His main research expertise covers international relations of East Asia, the foreign policies of China, Japan, and Korea, ASEAN, and identity politics. His PhD dissertation examined the different patterns of interstate relations between Northeast and Southeast Asia since the 1980s, and showed how identity-related issues have affected the contrasting evolution of interstate interactions in the two sub-regions of East Asia. He has completed a book monograph based on his PhD thesis.

His current research projects focus on several topics. First, he is working on two book-length projects that investigate China's economic statecraft and historical issues in contemporary Korean politics and foreign policy. In addition, he has three journal article projects: (1) China's threat percept of Japan; (2) socialisation within ASEAN; (3) the effect of the "history problem."

Publications include:

- (with Maria Ortuoste) "Democratization, Regional Integration, and Human Rights: The Case of the ASEAN Intergovernmental Commission on Human Rights," *Pacific Review*, 27(3) 2014: 357-82.
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- Young-Hwan Shin, the Executive Director of EAI Fellows Program
Tel. 82 2 2277 1683 (ext. 112) fellowships@eai.or.kr
- Typeset by Young-Hwan Shin

