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RESEARCH NOTE

How did the Japanese Public React to Kim Jong Il's Death?

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Abstract

We present a comprehensive evidence on how the Japanese reacted to the sudden death of North Korea's Kim Jong Il in December 2011, which was an event of enormous significance for Japan's national security. Based on our original, partially panel-structured, multi-wave monthly surveys conducted from December 2011 to March 2012, we analyze how the Japanese learned about his death, how they formed evaluations about its implication, and how their perceptions changed over time. Our findings illustrate that Japan's general public reacted in a remarkably calm and balanced way to the evolving situation, pointing to a basic sense of realism that underlies their attitudinal orientation toward North Korea. This sense, we argue, derives from the confidence widely held in Japan that, while North Korea remains one of the crucial sources of external threats, its overall ability to influence the regional and international dynamics is limited and its threat thus containable within current framework of national security.

1 Introduction

For a period as long as half a century, Japan has been subjected to a number of threats that Democratic Peoples' Republic of Korea (DPRK) has posed to its national security. From the 1970s to the 80s, DPRK abducted more than a dozen Japanese citizens, and it has been suspected ever since that the North Korean regime is also to blame for over a hundred of unaccounted cases of 'missing' Japanese nationals.[1] In its military posture, DPRK has become extremely aggressive, especially since the 1990s, repeating the test-launches of its long-range 'Taepodong' missiles near and over the Japanese territory. Further, in the 2000s, DPRK withdrew from the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty and conducted nuclear tests, and it now officially declares the possession of nuclear weapons. Throughout these years, neither the pressure from international community nor the diplomatic attempts through the so-called six-party talks to tame the outcast regime has produced any significant outcomes. With regard to the bilateral relations in particular, to be sure, Japan and DPRK reached a high point in 2002, when they jointly signed the Pyongyang Declaration, but the optimism evaporated shortly after, as the government in North Korea soon reneged the agreement by pursuing the missile and nuclear tests.

Because the malicious and confrontational policies of DPRK were believed to have been directed personally by its leader Kim Jong Il, his sudden death in December 2011 was deemed, at least for the moment, to be an event of enormous significance for Japan's national security as well as for East Asia's regional stability more generally. In Japan, the news that the North Korean dictator died was first reported on 19 December, immediately after his death was officially announced in Pyongyang. For the next several weeks, the Japanese government, think tanks, and academic community tried to analyze the prospect for change that Kim's death might bring to the DPRK's political system and its foreign policy, while the Japanese mass media spent extensive coverage speculating the

1 Japanese government officially identifies 17 abduction victims (see www.rachi.go.jp). In 2002, DPRK formally admitted and apologized for its involvement in abducting 13 Japanese nationals, 8 of whom it claims had already died, though Pyongyang's accounts of these cases have been critically disputed by the Japanese government and the National Association for the Rescue of Japanese Kidnapped by North Korea, a civic organization consisting of the victims' families and supporters.

process of the North Korean leadership succession. Facing such massive amount of information, analysis, and speculation, ordinary Japanese citizens also had to ponder for themselves how the issues of their concerns, such as the fate of abductees and nuclear threats, would unfold under the new circumstance.

In this paper, we present a first-hand, comprehensive evidence on how the Japanese public reacted to Kim Jong Il's death, and explore the pattern and determinants of their reaction. Based on our original, partially panel-structured, multi-wave monthly surveys conducted from December 2011 to March 2012, we analyze how the Japanese learned about his death, how they initially formed opinions and evaluations about its implication, and how their perceptions changed over time as the uncertainty over the succession process began to fade away with the gradual ascendance of his son, Kim Jong Un, in power. As demonstrated below, our findings all illustrate that Japan's general public reacted in a remarkably calm and balanced way to the evolving situation, pointing to a sense of realism that underlies their attitudinal orientation toward North Korea. This sense, we argue, derives from the confidence widely held in Japan that, while DPRK remains one of the crucial sources of external threats, its overall ability to influence the regional and international dynamics is limited and its threat thus containable well within Japan's current framework of national security. We provide a set of data analysis to support this claim, as our survey also included relevant questions asking the respondents to compare various countries' influence and their potential threat toward Japan, as well as those questions on the utility of Japan's security alliance with the United States.

More generally, in this paper, we seek to make two broad contributions to the literature of foreign policy and international relations. First, the paper highlights the importance of a scientific, evidence-based approach in the analysis of East Asian political dynamics. In our view, much of the existing research on Japan's relations with North Korea is speculative and biased, often relying too heavily on governmental sources and/or interviews with selective policy experts. This paper offers a corrective to such a disproportionate focus at the level of political elites, by conducting original surveys and taking into account the people's understanding of foreign policy. Second, as our survey was conducted on an extremely timely fashion, the paper provides a rare glimpse into how ordinary citizens form their perceptions on national security issues in

response to a major international event. It thus reveals, for example, how the element of uncertainty affects the citizens' perceptions and whether their opinions are susceptible to possible manipulation by either the government or mass media. In short, the paper sheds light on some important aspects of the democratic foundation of foreign policy.

The rest of this paper proceeds as follows. In the next section, we explain the background and rationale for our survey research, and along the way we highlight the Japanese media's extraordinary coverage of Kim Jong Il's death. In the third section, we provide descriptive statistics on how the Japanese citizens learned about Kim's death, as well as some comparative data on their perceptions of North Korea's and other external threats. In the fourth section, we examine how the Japanese public assessed the possibility of change and/or progress in the DPRK's domestic political system and foreign policy. In the fifth section, we explore the cognitive foundations of their calm and balanced reaction, and show how, in the minds of average Japanese, the overall confidence in the existing security framework overrides the perceived threats from DPRK. The final section concludes by discussing the broad implications of the paper and providing some updates on the subsequent development in North Korea–Japan relations.

2 Rationale for our survey research

All the evidence and analysis presented below are based on a series of monthly public opinion surveys, which we originally designed and conducted on approximately 2,500–3,000 nationally sampled adult residents in Japan.[2] We began conducting our first wave in mid-December 2011,

2 All of our surveys were conducted through the Internet with adult residents in Japan, who were randomly sampled from the pool of monitors registered at Nikkei Research, one of the major online survey companies in Japan. For the details of our sampling procedure and monthly participation rates, see Appendix 1. Generally, online surveys have advantages in terms of cost, timeliness, and technology of questionnaire, especially randomization procedures, but their potential disadvantage lies in the lack of sample representativeness. As we recognize this problem, we have compared the web sample used in this research with another sample randomly drawn from Japan's national voters' registry (the latter was used for a different study in which one of the authors participated). According to the comparison (see Appendix 2), although our sample is on average better educated and has higher income, the two sets do not seem to differ on most other aspects, including the Internet access. We thus believe that the mode of our survey does not cause any serious bias in drawing inferences in the analyses below. To be extra cautious regarding this matter,

only hours after Kim Jong Il's death was first reported. We continued our second, third, and fourth waves in the subsequent months, asking the respondents largely the same set of questions. In the interest of documenting the changes in their perceptions over time, our survey series was embedded partially in a panel structure, such that roughly one-third of the December respondents were asked to return to participate in the following surveys, together with the other two-thirds sampled freshly in each month.

At the outset, it must be noted that, in Japan, large-scale, nation-wide public opinion surveys are rarely conducted on the issues of foreign policies and national security. The scarcity, if not total absence, of relevant survey data is problematic in that it may feed confusions and misrepresentations about Japan's public attitudes toward these important matters. The only noteworthy exception is the series of surveys conducted by Japan's Ministry of Foreign Affairs, *Gaiko ni Kansuru Seron Chosa* (public opinion survey on foreign policy). Unfortunately, however, this governmental survey is conducted annually, and it is thus useful only for the task of describing long-term trends in Japan's public opinion.[3] The utility of this series is also severely limited for general analytical purposes, because the government does not make its individual-level data publically available. Hence, it must be cautioned that any inference drawn from its (publically available) aggregate data alone is subject to a critical statistical problem, or what is known as 'ecological fallacy'.[4]

If we turn to organizations outside of Japan, large-scale surveys were conducted repeatedly by the United States Information Agency (USIA) up until the late 1990s on some aspects of Japan's foreign policy and international relations. The USIA survey, however, also suffers from the problem of having been conducted only once a year on average, just like

though, we will also make reservations and/or add justifications, whenever necessary, in the main text or footnote for drawing substantive interpretations.

3 The Japanese government also conducts other surveys related to Japan's foreign relations on a more topical and ad hoc basis. The irregularity of these extracurricular surveys in terms of both timing and content, however, considerably diminishes their utility. For a summary of these governmental surveys, see http://www.mofa.go.jp/mofaj/press/pr/chosa/index.html.

4 Many observers nonetheless continue to rely on this governmental survey in drawing not only aggregate- but also individual-level interpretations in their discussion on the contemporary Japan-North Korea relations. See, in particular, Lynn (2006), as its flawed claim is most relevant to the arguments and evidence presented in this paper.

the Japanese governmental survey mentioned above. Moreover, both the timing and content of the USIA survey were so irregular that, while it might serve the purposes of cross-sectional analyses, its utility for drawing inter-temporal inference is extremely limited. As far as we know, no systematic survey has been conducted in recent years on Japanese public opinion on foreign relations by any agency in the United States, or elsewhere.[5]

The aim of carrying out our own surveys was, generally, to fill this void in the study of Japanese public opinion and, in particular, to capture its short-term changes which may or may not occur in response to important regional and global events. Why do Japanese people react to some but not all international events the way they actually do? What are the social, economic, and other characteristics of those citizens who react to such events? Do the induced changes in their perceptions and attitudes last long, or do they converge back to the original positions after a short while? In the case of Japan, these patterns had never been accurately depicted, nor had their causes and effects ever been systematically analyzed, based on any reliable data.

We believe that the death of Kim Jong Il, as an event, provides one of the most appropriate vehicles through which to pursue such an analysis, for a number of reasons. For one thing, the death of the North Korean dictator, who for years had personally caused a variety of threats to Japan's national security, was unquestionably deemed an important international event. Moreover, virtually all the Japanese citizens became aware of this event at once, as the news of Kim's death was given an extraordinary treatment by the entire mass media in Japan. To be precise, his death was initially reported shortly after noon, 19 December 2011, by a special news release which interrupted regular TV and radio programs. In that afternoon, newspaper companies handed out extra flyers, *gogai*, for free on the streets of Tokyo and other major cities. The media took these extra measures precisely because North Korea's (that

5 USIA data are archived at the Rooper Center. Aside from the surveys on Japanese public, there have been some attempts made by national newspapers and independent academic groups to survey Japan's political elites (mostly, politicians and bureaucrats) on their attitudes on foreign policy and international affairs. These elite surveys, however, are conducted far less frequently, and suffer from the notorious low-response rate problem. Besides, the data from these surveys, even at the aggregate level, are not easily available, and cannot be utilized for the analysis of this paper.

is, Kim's) belligerent and unpredictable actions had long been a source of grave national security concerns.

Further, in the subsequent weeks, the Japanese public was provided with a massive amount of information, analysis, and speculation, and, as a result, even ordinary citizens were pressed to form their own evaluations and opinions regarding the evolving circumstance in North Korea. Although within the circle of Pyongyang elites one of the deceased's sons, Jong Un, had already been named and recognized as the official heir, uncertainty abounded as to whether he would be able to gain support at large and whether the tenuous situation might trigger an internal turmoil or even an outward aggression. Thus, following the initial report, the Japanese government as well as experts in think tanks and academic community began engaging in the analysis of what change/progress, if any, Kim's death might bring to the DPRK's political system and its foreign policy. The Japanese media also continued its extensive coverage, observing and speculating whether the leadership succession would proceed smoothly in the neighboring country. Hence, with all these ongoing activities, Japan's general public was remarkably well-informed about Kim's death and the political process which ensued thereafter.

To confirm the extraordinary media attention given to the news of Kim's death and the succession process, we have conducted a content analysis of the articles that appeared on the front pages of three nationally circulating newspapers, namely *Asahi*, *Nihon Keizai*, and *Yomiuri Shimbun*. In all these three dailies, for the period from 20 December to the end of that month, the articles that featured Kim's death and/or the DPRK's political future were the most sizable in terms of their total column length. That is, they ranked well above other salient topics, such as the aftermath of the Fukushima nuclear disaster and the possibility of consumption tax hikes.[6]

In sum, the question of how the Japanese people reacted to Kim Jong Il's death deserves a thorough analysis, especially in light of the scant

6 In *Asahi*, the total length (i.e. the width) of front-page articles published on DPRK during this period was 397.9 cm, compared with 350.5 cm on the consumption tax increase and 312.4 cm on the nuclear aftermath. In *Nihon Keizai*, the coverage on DPRK measured 278.1 cm, ranked above 273.6 cm on the nuclear aftermath and 101.1 cm on the European financial crisis. In *Yomiuri*, the report on DPRK was 613.7 cm in length, while the nuclear aftermath was 381.9 cm, and the consumption tax increase 311.1 cm.

empirical studies on the Japanese public opinion on national security and foreign policies. In Japan, it was believed unequivocally that Kim had personally directed North Korea's belligerent and despicable actions toward Japan. Kim's sudden death thus provided a peculiar moment for the entire nation of Japan, a sort of juncture at which each citizen had to come to terms with the news, to form his/her own assessment of the evolving situation, and to probe its ramifications for his/her own life and safety.

3 The 'first contact'

Our analysis of Japan's public reaction to the death of Kim Jong Il begins by examining the nature of the 'first contact', that is, when and how the Japanese people initially learned about the news of his death. According to the results of our December survey summarized in Table 1, more than 75% of the respondents replied that they had learned about the news in less than four hours after the initial news-break around noon of 19 December, and more than 95% by the end of that day. Clearly, the news of Kim's death traveled not only quickly but uniformly throughout Japan, without regional, generational, gender, or any other socio-economic categorical differences.[7]

With regard to the question of *how* they heard about the news, more than 80% of the respondents replied, as shown in Table 2, that they initially learned it through Internet news releases or TV/radio programs. Yet, perhaps a more noteworthy finding in this table is that 1 out of every 10 respondents learned about Kim's death in some forms, either direct (8.9%) or electronic (1.5%), of interactive conversations with their friends or family members.

This number seems high for a topic of news, whose informational content is political and international. Because this number accounts for only those who had learned the news *initially* through such communications, obviously, the number of those who actually engaged in interactive conversations *initially* or *otherwise* on the subject during that day is

7 We believe that these results and interpretations, as well as those presented below in this section, are immune from bias originating from the fact that our survey was conducted through the Internet. As shown in Appendix 2, there is no significant difference in terms of media access between our sample and the other sample recently drawn from Japan's national voters' registry.

Table 1 When did you hear about the news?

	Frequency	Percentage	Percentage (accumulated)
12:00–16:00	1,882	75.80	75.80
16:00–21:00	419	16.87	92.67
21:00–24:00	75	3.02	95.69
0:00–6:00, next day	16	0.64	96.34
After 6:00, next day	55	2.22	98.55
Don't know	32	1.29	99.84
Don't want to answer	4	0.16	100
Total	2,483	100	

Table 2 How did you hear about the news?

	Frequency	Percentage	Percentage (accumulated)
TV/radio news program	1,382	55.66	55.66
News releases sent to mobile phones	66	2.66	58.32
Internet	648	26.10	84.41
Newspaper flyers handed out on 19 December	76	3.06	87.47
Newspapers delivered on 20 December	8	0.32	87.80
Conversation with family/friends	222	8.94	96.74
Text messages sent by family/friends	37	1.49	98.23
Others	28	1.13	99.36
Didn't know	13	0.52	99.88
Don't want to answer	3	0.12	100
Total	2,483	100	

estimated to be at least twice as many, perhaps far greater. It thus seems fair to conclude that, despite not being a characteristically household matter, Kim's death was one of the most frequently discussed topics of conversation, at least during that day, among ordinary Japanese citizens.

The speed with which the news spread and the frequency at which it was brought up in social conversations together suggest that the Japanese public took Kim's death with a surprise but with due somberness as well. Such a reaction is understandable, considering the widely shared perception among the Japanese that North Korea has for decades posed a series of threats to their national security. Our survey sheds light

on how critical this perception is, from a comparative perspective. In our December survey, we asked our respondents to express the level of threats which they felt originating from 16 major countries/regions respectively, with a scale between minimum 1 and maximum 5. In the aggregate, as shown in Fig. 1, North Korea ranked the second highest, only next to China, for the level of perceived threats against Japan.

Of course, this public perception may be exaggerated, or even groundless, from military and geopolitical standpoints. Indeed, experts on the Northeast Asian international relations generally agree that the DPRK's threats are largely inconsequential when considering Japan's deterrence capability; some of these experts even stress that Japan's apparent sensitivity at the level of actual policies vis-a-vis Pyongyang cannot be explained from a plain strategic consideration.[8] Such a view, however, should not be taken to belittle the genuineness at the cognitive level of the Japanese people's fear, anxieties, and concerns for their national security. Regardless of whether external threats may or may not be real, the perception of those threats can be real in the Japanese minds, and such a perception surely influences their attitudes toward Japan's relations with other countries.

In sum, the data from our survey well documents the surprising and somber nature of the 'first-contact' impact which the news of Kim Jong Il's death brought about in Japan. His death was deemed an important event, which virtually all the Japanese people became aware of at once and which many of them even brought up in their conversations with friends and family members. The question, then, is how ordinary citizens came to terms with this news and formed their own evaluations about it, to which we now turn.

4 Short-term expectations

Following the initial news release of Kim's death, Japan's media, as indicated earlier, continued extensive coverage on the future of North Korea

8 See, for example, Cha (2001), Hughes (2006), and Hagström and Söderberg (2006). Hughes (2009) takes one step further to argue that the Japanese government intentionally exaggerates the DPRK's threat to justify recent changes in its security policy and defense posture. We disagree with such a claim to the extent it implies that the government can somehow manipulate public opinion in Japan. See our findings presented below, which suggest to the contrary that the Japanese public attitudes toward North Korea can hardly be construed as naïve or manipulable as such.

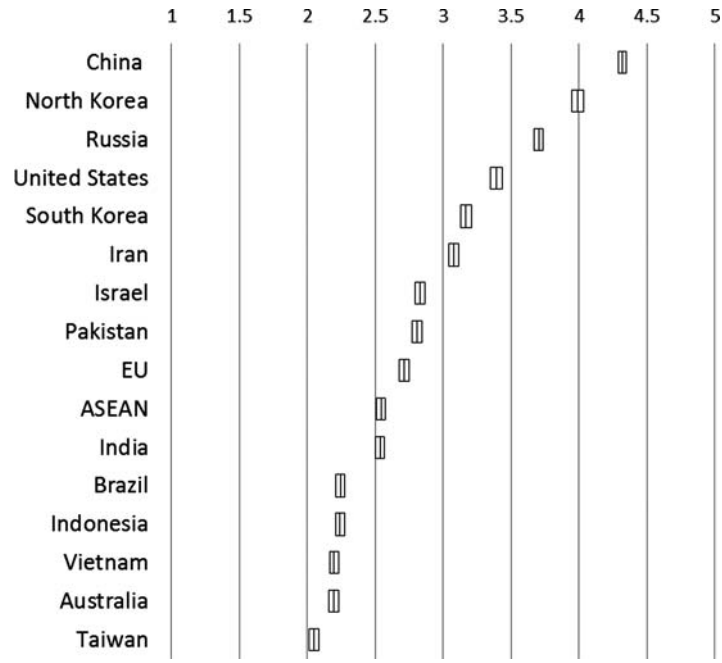

Figure 1 Perceived threat of North Korea in comparative context: mean and 95% confidence interval. 'Threatening' is 5 and 'Not threatening' is 1, while 'Neither' is 3. The straight line within each box represents the average. The length of box is equivalent to 95% upper/lower confidence interval.

for some time. Much of the analysis and speculation focused, of course, on whether the succession in leadership would lead to any change and/or improvement in the DPRK's domestic political system and its foreign policy. In light of the abundance of information, Kim's death presented itself a rare moment, at which average Japanese citizens themselves had to ponder about its various implications.

In the December survey (and following surveys as well), we asked our respondents a set of questions on their expectations for political changes in DPRK. In asking these questions, we randomly split the total sample of respondents into two groups and asked each group to what degree they thought Kim's death would induce a change in the DPRK's domestic political system and its foreign policy, respectively.[9]

9 This random assignment procedure was implemented to avoid the possibility that the answer to one question would influence that to the other if the same respondents were to be asked both questions one after another.

Table 3 summarizes the results. They confirm unambiguously that the respondents have generally perceived what had just occurred in the neighboring country as an event that would have significant political consequences. An overwhelming majority expressed their expectations that Kim's death would lead to changes in both the DPRK's political system (77%) and its foreign policy (65%).

It would not be appropriate, however, to draw too much inference from this finding alone. At least two caveats have to be taken into consideration. First, the respondents' high expectation for change may be retrospective, rather than prospective, in that it may simply reflect the (already-established) conviction that Kim Jong Il had been the powerful dictator. That is, because Kim himself had made every important political decision in North Korea, whoever his successor might be would not likely to match in his totalitarian control of both the regime itself and its policies. To that extent, it is possible that the loaded expectation at this earliest stage had less to do with a prediction of how the situation would unfold than a sheer uncertainty associated with the succession process that was forthcoming.

This rendering leads us to hypothesize that the public expectation for change must have been the highest right after Kim's death, but would bound to decline gradually thereafter. As it turns out, our multi-wave survey series confirms precisely such a trend, as we analyze the results from the panel portion of our sample over time. As his son's (Jong Un's) gradual ascendance in power began to remove many elements of uncertainty, our respondents' perceptions shifted considerably. Figure 2 and 3

Table 3 Would you or would you not expect a change in DPRK's

	Domestic political system		Foreign policy behavior	
	Frequency	Percentage (accumulated)	Frequency	Percentage (accumulated)
Big change	387	32.28 (32.28)	291	22.66 (22.66)
Small change	536	44.70 (76.98)	548	42.68 (65.34)
No change	172	14.35 (91.33)	307	23.91 (89.25)
Don't know	103	8.59 (99.92)	138	10.75 (100)
Don't want to answer	1	0.08 (100)	0	0.00 (100)
Total	1,199		1,284	

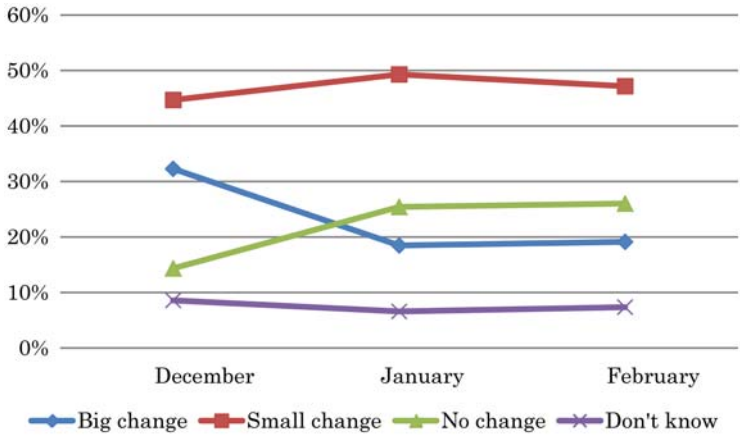

Figure 2 Level of expectation for change in political system

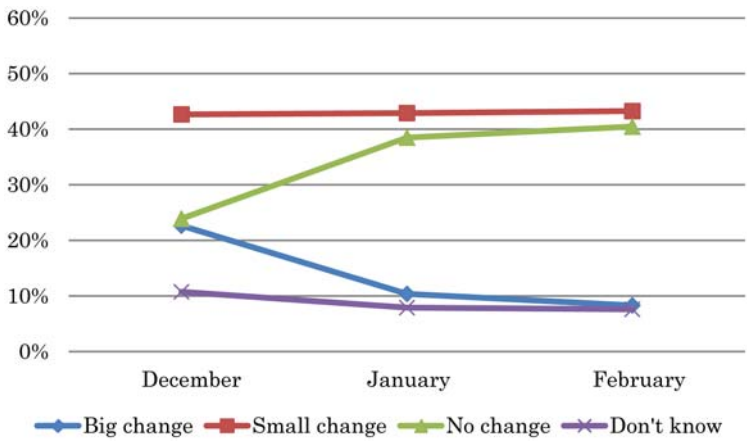

Figure 3 Level of expectation for change in foreign policy

compare the survey results on the prospect for change across the months of December, January, and February; they show clearly a significant decline of 'big change' expectation and a corresponding surge of 'no change' over time.[10]

Second, and more importantly, the initial high expectation for change should by no means be confused as a sign of optimism prevailing among Japanese people. Obviously, the term 'change' is a *descriptive* term, and it

10 We have replicated the same analysis for our entire sample (by adding freshly drawn respondents), but the pattern found was so similar and thus not reported here.

Table 4 Would you or would you not expect a progress in

	Bilateral relations		Nuclear problem		Abduction negotiation	
	Frequency	Percentage (accumulated)	Frequency	Percentage (accumulated)	Frequency	Percentage (accumulated)
Big progress	62	7.34 (7.34)	83	9.80 (9.80)	51	6.45 (6.45)
Small progress	239	28.28 (35.62)	205	24.20 (34.00)	174	22.00 (28.45)
No progress	362	42.84 (78.46)	408	48.17 (82.17)	408	51.58 (80.03)
Don't know	181	21.42 (99.88)	150	17.71 (99.88)	158	19.97 (100)
Don't want to answer	1	0.12 (100)	1	0.12 (100)	0	0.00 (100)
Total	845		847		791	

does not contain the meaning of 'improvement' or 'progress' in any positive sense. In order to highlight such *evaluative* perceptions more accurately, we must turn to another set of questions included in our survey, which asked explicitly the constructive, forward-looking implications of the evolving situation. For these questions, we randomly split the sample into three groups: one of them was asked most generally whether Kim's death would induce any 'progress' in Japan–DPRK bilateral relationship, while the other two groups were asked about possible 'progress' in the two major issues of their concerns, that is, the DPRK's nuclear development and the negotiation over the remaining abductees. The results are summarized in Table 4.

These results, in comparison with those in Table 3, reveal that the Japanese people generally were far more reserved in making positive projections about North Korea, even as they faced the death of its all-mighty dictator. Indeed, the contrast between the descriptive and evaluative perceptions is so striking that these results were unlikely to be born out simply of the particular (online) mode of the survey. With regard to the evaluative perceptions, it was less than 40% of our respondents who expressed any sense of optimism, while the majority, by choosing to answer either 'no progress' or 'don't know', indicated that they were unconvinced of any improvement forthcoming. Especially when they were asked about the prospect of the nuclear and abduction issues specifically, the respondents' attitudes were unmistakably 'pessimistic', as just about a half of them (48 and 52%, respectively) could not foresee any progress.

Given this gap between the two levels of perceptions, descriptive and evaluative, it would be wrong to construe the nature of the observed public reaction in Japan as merely impulsive or emotional. In our view, the difference revealed in our survey is rather indicative of average Japanese citizens' ability to discern different implications flowing out of such tenuous and complicated event as the dictator's death in the hostile neighboring country. At the least, our findings are at odds with those claims, often alleged without reliable data, that in Japan the mass media can somehow manipulate public opinion on foreign policies generally and on Japan's relations with North Korea in particular (e.g. Lynn, 2006; Hughes, 2009).[11] Quite the contrary, Japan's public reaction to the

11 See also Samuels (2010) for a less extreme, more nuanced claim about the 'framing' effects in the public treatment of abduction issues in his comparative analysis of Japan and South Korea.

event was remarkably calm and balanced, suggesting that a certain sense of realism seems to have been at work directing their attitudinal orientations.

We do not assert, of course, that all Japanese citizens are equally equipped with this sort of analytical ability. It is rather more likely that such ability varies from one individual to another, depending on a collection of personal attributes, especially his/her interests and background knowledge in the regional and international affairs. This can be confirmed by analyzing the individual-level data of our survey, which enables us to investigate the pattern of reactions across different types of Japanese citizens. A reasonable hypothesis is that the more 'politically sophisticated' the respondents are, the less likely they are to be optimistic about the possibility of 'progress' in either the general bilateral relationship or specific problems of abductions and nuclear development. We can test this hypothesis by examining the correlations between the evaluative perceptions and the level of political knowledge individual respondents possess.

The results summarized in Tables 5, 6, and 7 support this hypothesis. The correlation coefficients are statistically significant consistently across all three areas.[12] We have further replicated the same analysis for the following (January) survey, focusing on the panel portion of our sample, but found that the statistically significant difference disappeared between the two groups (the results are not reported here). This indicates that even less politically-sophisticated citizens 'caught up' with more sophisticated ones in their evaluations only after a month. These findings, based on the individual-level data, thus leave little room for the allegation about the manipulability of Japan's public opinion regarding North Korea.

In sum, the set of evidence presented so far suggests that the people in Japan reacted to Kim Jong Ill's death in a calm and balanced way, sorting out different aspects of its potential ramification. This, of course, begs the question: what made it possible for them to react in such a calm and balanced way? To pursue this line of inquiry requires us now to

12 We have also tested the correlation between the level of political interest and the degree of optimism, but found no interaction between the two. Generally, in the public opinion surveys conducted in Japan, the ratio of those who reply that they are interested in political matters and/or international affairs is high and there is thus not a significant variance on that score in the first place. In our surveys as well, approximately 80% of the respondents replied that they are either 'interested' or 'somewhat interested' in international matters.

Table 5 Perception of bilateral relations and political knowledge

	Big progress	Small progress	No progress	Total
Low knowledge				
Frequency	37	121	146	304
Percentage	12.17	39.80	48.03	100
High knowledge				
Frequency	25	118	216	359
Percentage	6.96	32.87	60.17	100
Total				
Frequency	62	239	362	663
Percentage	9.35	36.05	54.60	100

Pearson's chi-squared = 11.41; Pr = 0.003; Fisher's exact = 0.00.
Kendell's tau-b rank correlation = 0.10; Pr = 0.00.
Notes: Our survey included six questions to measure the level of knowledge in international affairs, and those respondents who were able to answer correctly three or more of these questions were categorized as 'High' and the rest as 'Low'. The set of these six questions were determined as the best mix from the list of more than 60 questions, by applying what is known as the 'item response theory', so as to best distinguish the level of the respondents' knowledge.

Table 6 Perception of nuclear problem and political knowledge

	Big progress	Small progress	No progress	Total
Low knowledge				
Frequency	50	121	178	349
Percentage	14.33	34.67	51.00	100
High knowledge				
Frequency	33	84	230	347
Percentage	9.51	24.21	66.28	100
Total				
Frequency	83	205	408	696
Percentage	11.93	29.45	58.62	100

Pearson's chi-squared = 16.78; Pr = 0.00; Fisher's exact = 0.00.
Kendell's tau-b rank correlation = 0.14; Pr = 0.00.
Note: See Table 5.

Table 7 Perception of abduction negotiation and political knowledge

	Big progress	Small progress	No progress	Total
Low knowledge				
Frequency	28	95	164	287
Percentage	9.76	33.10	57.14	100
High knowledge				
Frequency	23	79	244	346
Percentage	6.65	22.83	70.52	100
Total				
Frequency	51	174	408	633
Percentage	8.06	27.49	64.45	100

Pearson's chi-squared = 12.25; Pr = 0.00; Fisher's exact = 0.00.
Kendell's tau-b rank correlation = 0.10; Pr = 0.00.
Note: See Table 5.

broaden the scope of our analysis and explore more generally the cognitive foundations of Japanese public opinion on national security and foreign policies.

5 Confidence in national security

In this section, we explore the cognitive root of Japan's public reaction toward Kim Jong Ill's death in December 2011. For this purpose, we again utilize the individual-level data based on our original survey, which includes a set of questions asking respondents' appraisal of various countries' influence and threats, as well as their views about Japan's security alliance with the United States. DPRK, as already indicated, ranks among the highest in terms of threats that the average Japanese citizens perceive to be originating externally. Nevertheless, as we show below, the Japanese people generally believe that the DPRK's ability to influence the regional dynamics is limited and its threat is thus containable well within Japan's current framework of national security. This confidence, we argue, forms the very basis of their calm and balanced reaction to Kim Jong Ill's death, documented in the above section.

Let us begin by investigating the nature of Japanese perception of various countries' threats and influence. Table 8 summarizes the set of

Table 8 Correlations between perceived threat and influence

	United States	China	North Korea	Russia	South Korea	Taiwan	India	EU	ASEAN
Coefficient	0.139	0.337	0.303	0.276	0.258	0.238	0.105	0.145	0.077

$N = 1{,}038$.

correlations between the perceived threats from major countries and these countries' perceived 'influence toward Japan'.[13]

According to this table, the correlations are high, particularly for North Korea and China. In fact, their correlation coefficients stand out so much that these two countries by themselves appear to belong to a separate category. This perhaps reflects that North Korea and China are the two countries currently regarded as most unfriendly, or even hostile, in the minds of average Japanese citizens. The underlying sense of hostility, in other words, translates the perception of 'influence' into that of 'threat' and vice versa more directly with regard to these two countries than others.

The cognitive parallel drawn between North Korea and China, however, does not stretch too far in the Japanese minds. What is ultimately critical is not the threats themselves but rather the strategic manageability of those threats, or whether the given threats can be neutralized or controlled by their own defense forces and allies' security commitments. On this score, the perceived threat from North Korea and that from China entail quite different effects. To put simply, the Japanese generally perceive China's threat as sufficiently formidable to the extent that it affects their overall confidence in the existing US–Japan alliance. The perceived threat from North Korea, on the other hand, has no such bearing.

To see this key difference, we now turn to a pair of questions included in our survey regarding the utility of the US–Japan security alliance. The questions are phrased as follows:

13 The perceived influence was measured by an 11-point scale, between 0 as 'no influence at all' and 10 as 'very strong influence'.

> Do you agree or disagree with the following two opinions about the current US–Japan security alliance?
> Opinion A: The likelihood that Japan faces international crises increases because of the existence of the alliance, as Japan might be entangled with American foreign policy and military strategy.
> Opinion B: The likelihood that Japan faces international crises increases if it were not for the alliance, as Japan might be abandoned by American foreign policy and military strategy.[14]

These two questions together pertain to capture the fundamental dilemma, or the trade-off between two types of risk, that Japan is said to incur in forming the security alliance with the United States. These are usually dubbed as 'the risk of entanglement' (Question A) and 'the risk of abandonment' (Question B).[15] Thus, to borrow a jargon from economics, the overall utility that each individual citizen attaches to the US–Japan alliance must be some form of function that includes these two types of risk as its elements.

How, then, do the perceived threat/influence of China and North Korea, affect this utility calculation? The results of our regression analysis, summarized in Tables 9 and 10, reveal some important insights.

First, neither the influence nor the threat of North Korea has any effect, as far as the citizens' perception of entanglement risk is concerned (Table 9). The only element, which has some positive effect on this perception, is China's threat, indicating that the more he/she fears China's threat, the more utility he/she attaches to the existence of US–Japan security alliance despite the presumed entanglement risk. Hence, in this context, North Korea is not placed schematically in the same category as China in the minds of Japanese people.

Second, our findings regarding the Japanese perception of abandonment risk are even more evident on the cognitive divide between China and North Korea. According to Table 10, both the influence and threat of China have negative effects on this perception, suggesting that the

14 The respondents were given five main choices for answers, 'I agree', 'I would agree, if I were to choose', 'I cannot choose to agree or disagree', 'I would disagree, if I were to choose', and 'I disagree', together with 'I do not know' and 'I do not want to answer'.

15 See Tsuchiyama (1995, 2004) for a comprehensive analysis of how this concept of dilemma applies to the history of US–Japan relations in the post-World War II period.

Table 9 Cognitive sources of entanglement risk

Model	1	2	3	4	5
Influence of China	0.00943 (0.019)				−0.000582 (0.022)
Influence of North Korea		0.000354 (0.012)			0.000303 (0.014)
Threat of China			0.0741 (0.039)		0.0919* (0.044)
Threat of North Korea				−0.00821 (0.027)	−0.0330 (0.0315)
Sex	−0.207** (0.069)	−0.205** (0.071)	−0.203** (0.068)	−0.204** (0.0691)	−0.198** (0.0711)
Age	−0.000755 (0.002)	−0.000798 (0.002)	−0.000986 (0.002)	−0.000770 (0.002)	−0.000848 (0.002)
Education	−0.0564 (0.043)	−0.0565 (0.043)	−0.0563 (0.043)	−0.0562 (0.043)	−0.0552 (0.043)
Constant	3.466*** (0.291)	3.540*** (0.253)	3.226*** (0.296)	3.570*** (0.263)	3.265*** (0.318)
N	954	954	954	954	954
R^2	0.009	0.009	0.013	0.009	0.0146
Adjusted R^2	0.005	0.005	0.009	0.005	0.007
Prob. > *F*	0.050	0.055	0.0123	0.0539	0.0518

Notes: The results above show the coefficients (and standard errors) from OLS regression analyses with varying statistical significance levels (*$P < 0.05$, **$P < 0.01$, ***$P < 0.001$). The dependent variable ranges from 1 to 5, whereas '1' indicates that the respondents feel the risk most strongly and '5' indicates that they feel the risk most weakly. For the variables "Influence" and "Threat", see footnote 13 and Figure 1. "Sex" is coded as "1" for male and "2" for female. "Education" ranges from "1" as elementary/junior-high to "4" as four-year college/university.

Table 10 Cognitive sources of abandonment risk

Model	1	2	3	4	5
Influence of China	−0.0646** (0.019)				−0.0615** (0.022)
Influence of North Korea		0.00561 (0.012)			0.0337* (0.014)
Threat of China			−0.173*** (−0.040)		−0.137** (0.044)
Threat of North Korea				−0.0571* (0.028)	−0.0287 (0.031)
Sex	0.158* (0.070)	0.140 (0.072)	0.142* (0.069)	0.156* (0.070)	0.112 (0.071)
Age	−0.00518*(0.002)	−0.00450 (0.002)	−0.00441 (0.002)	−0.00448 (0.002)	−0.00331 (0.002)
Education	−0.0419 (0.044)	−0.0416 (0.044)	−0.0425 (0.043)	−0.0400 (0.044)	−0.0430 (0.043)
Constant	3.183*** (0.298)	2.628*** (0.260)	3.401*** (0.303)	2.854*** (0.270)	3.672*** (0.323)
N	953	953	953	953	953
R^2	0.020	0.009	0.028	0.013	0.038
Adjusted R^2	0.016	0.005	0.024	0.009	0.031
Prob. > *F*	0.000	0.050	0.000	0.010	0.000

Note: See Table 9.

more he/she feels influence/threat from China, the more (negative) utility he/she attaches to (not) having US–Japan security alliance because of the presumed abandonment risk. In the case of North Korea, on the other hand, the results are mixed and far less transparent. North Korea's threat has no statistically significant effect on the Japanese perception of the risk of abandonment. Moreover, according to our results, the greater influence he/she perceives from North Korea, the less utility he/she attaches to the existing US–Japan alliance. We take this evidence as suggesting that the Japanese citizens feel self-sufficient about their capability of coping with the North Korean influence. In their minds, North Korea's overall ability to influence the regional and international dynamics is limited and its threat thus containable well within Japan's current framework of national security.

In sum, the results of our survey highlight the fundamental schematic divide between North Korea and China even though these two countries are similarly regarded unfriendly or hostile to Japan. Certainly, in the minds of many average citizens in Japan, it would require the alliance with the United States to cope with China's influence. The influence of the Pyongyang regime, however, does not constitute something that requires the alliance to deal with; or, to be more precise, North Korea's influence is regarded as something that they could or should not count on the alliance with the United States to deal with. These pieces of evidence together elucidate a solid cognitive foundation upon which Japanese citizens were able to maintain their calm and balanced reaction to the sudden death of Kim Jong Ill.

6 Discussion and conclusions

Kim Jong Ill's death provided a critical moment for the entire nation of Japan, at which not only the political elites and the mass media but ordinary citizens were also pressed to form their own evaluations about the volatile situation in the neighboring country in relations to their own national security. The evidence presented in this paper indicates that the Japanese public reaction was not impulsive or emotional, but was rather calm and balanced, characterized by the ability to sort out different aspects of the event and evaluate their respective meanings. At the basis of such a reaction, we have argued and demonstrated, lies the confidence widely shared among the Japanese people in the existing security framework.

This paper has presented a rare and important glimpse into how Japanese citizens form their attitudes about national security and foreign policies and how their perceptions develop over time. To that extent, the evidence and analysis offered here has broad implications, even though this paper has focused on Japan's public reaction to one particular (although important) external incident. More specifically, the insights gained in this study, based as they are on the originally designed monthly surveys, contribute to the study on Japanese public opinion, which has for a long time suffered from the paucity of utilizable data in areas of national security and foreign policies. The unfortunate consequences of the scarcity have been confusions and misrepresentations in the literature with regard to the characteristics of Japanese public opinion. Some critics, indeed, have even gone as far to suggest that the Japanese public opinion is susceptible to manipulation by either the governmental propaganda or media's sensationalism. Such a characterization is false and utterly unfounded. Now that we have in this paper presented an alternative perspective with reliable evidence, the onus is now on those critics to provide empirical evidence for their own claim.

This discussion may lead to an important follow-up question. If Japanese ordinary citizens formulate their own attitudes and evaluations independent of governmental and/or media's influence, why does the Japanese government and media continue to exaggerate DPRK's threat? While this question is beyond the scope of the present analysis, we can distinguish two possibilities. The first is that their behavior is strategic, in that the government has its own political reasons for exaggerating security problems originating from North Korea (in order, for example, to justify requests for defense budgets), and the media has its own commercial interests in spreading sensational stories about the mystifying regime. The second possibility is that their behavior is rather sincere, not strategic. That is, the government and media are indeed less cool-headed than the general public with regard to North Korea, perhaps because they deal directly with special interest groups, especially the National Association for the Rescue of Japanese Kidnapped by North Korea, which represent extremely vocal opposition to the DPRK. To judge which of the two possible scenarios is more likely would require conducting specially designed parallel surveys, one like those conducted by us on the general public and the other on governmental officials and media organizations. Only a systematic comparison of the results between these

two surveys would reveal whether the perception held at the elite level with regard to North Korean threat truly deviates from that of ordinary citizens in Japan.

Before we close this paper, let us provide brief updates. In late February 2012, there was a moment of easing tension in East Asia, when North Korea, under the new leader Kim Jong Un, reached an agreement with the United States to suspend the development of nuclear tests and uranium enrichment in exchange for American food aid. DPRK also agreed, then, on a moratorium of long-range missile launches and to resume the so-called six-party talks, which have not been held for almost five years. Only a few weeks later, however, North Korea suddenly changed its posture, announcing that it would go ahead with a missile launch, thus forfeiting any prospect of détente in the region. The test launch was conducted indeed in mid-March, during the week of celebration making the 100-year birthday of the nation's founding leader, Kim Il Sung.

In the midst of this upheaval, we conducted our final round of survey on North Korea. In response to our direct question 'do you think that the recent agreement with the United States represents a sign of change in the North Korean foreign policy?', it was only 15% of our respondents who answered 'yes', and 84.5% said that they were either skeptical or pessimistic. Furthermore, in the subsequent questions for those who answered positively to the above question, we also asked whether any 'progress' could be expected, and about 40% of those respondents replied negatively, again demonstrating a huge gap between descriptive and evaluative perceptions.

These results, of course, were all expected from the evidence and analysis based on the previous rounds of our survey. As far as North Korea is concerned, short-term developments on the surface do not sway or influence the minds of Japanese citizens so easily. We therefore conclude that it would take some truly unprecedented event, such as a rise of revolutionary movement or collapse of the Pyongyang regime itself, for Japan's public to react in a way drastically different from what we have revealed in this paper.

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Appendix 1

Each month, our sample was randomly drawn from Nikkei Research's registered monitors. By a stratified random sampling procedure, the appropriate number of respondents was assigned to each category of gender as well as six regions in proportion to the actual demographic data reported in Jūminkihondaichō (Basic Residence Register 2009). The samples' age, however, was set to range only between 20 and 70 years old. The overall allocation is as follows.

	Male (%)					Female (%)					
Areas/Ages	20s	30s	40s	50s	60s	20s	30s	40s	50s	60s	Total
Hokkaido/Tohoku	0.9	1.2	1.1	1.3	1.1	0.9	1.1	1.1	1.4	1.3	11.5
Kanto	3.2	4.2	3.5	3.3	3.3	2.9	3.9	3.2	3.2	3.4	34.1
Chubu	1.6	2.1	1.8	1.9	1.9	1.5	1.9	1.7	1.9	2.0	18.1
Kinki	1.4	1.8	1.6	1.6	1.7	1.4	1.9	1.6	1.6	1.8	16.3
Chugoku/Shikoku	0.7	0.9	0.8	1.0	0.9	0.7	0.9	0.8	1.0	1.0	8.8
Kyushu/Okinawa	1.0	1.1	1.0	1.3	1.0	1.0	1.2	1.1	1.3	1.2	11.1
Total	8.8	11.4	9.8	10.3	10.0	8.4	10.9	9.5	10.3	10.6	100.0

As explained in the main text, roughly one-third of the December respondents were asked to return to participate in the following surveys, while the other two-thirds were sampled freshly each month. To be more precise, the panel portion of our sample was drawn separately from the pool of Nikkei Research's monitors earlier in September, to whom we had conducted other surveys not directly related to North Korea. All those chosen monitors received e-mail invitations, were instructed to access to a web site, and were asked to take a survey. The individual records of participation and of their answers were strictly kept anonymous using unique IDs and passwords. After finishing the survey, participants were rewarded for their participation according to the rule set by Nikkei Research. The amount, format, and timing of these rewards vary by their preferences and participation records, and this information is not publically available.

The dates of the survey and participation rates for each month are summarized below.

Dates and participation rates of survey for each month

	December	January	February	March	April
Started on	16 December 2011	20 January 2012	17 February 2012	16 March 2012	20 April 2012
Finished on	22 December 2011	26 January 2012	23 February 2012	22 March 2012	26 April 2012
Panel sample					
Invitation sent	1,239	1,167	1,125	1,093	1,054
Response received	1,045	1,126	1,093	1,062	1,009
Participation rates (%)	84.3	96.5	97.2	97.2	95.7
Fresh sample					
Invitation sent	9,591	10,083	10,088	10,397	14,097
Response received	1,745	2,392	2,325	2,343	2,252
Participation rates (%)	18.2	23.7	23.0	22.5	16.0
Total participation	2,790	3,518	3,418	3,405	3,261

Appendix 2

The comparison was made between our December sample and the sample drawn in 2010 from voters' registry by a group of researchers at Waseda University (available at http://www.globalcoe-glope2.jp/w-casi.html).

The differences across those items that we believe are relevant to our analysis are summarized below.

	Our sample		Alternate sample	
	N	Percentage	*N*	Percentage
Frequency to watch TV				
Not at all	113	3.4	23	1.6
1 day a week	137	4.1	35	2.4
2–3 days a week	284	8.5	124	8.7
3–5 days a week	383	11.4	122	8.5
Everyday, almost every day	2,416	72.1	1,128	78.7
Don't know	15	0.5	1	0.1
Don't want to answer	4	0.1	0	0.0
Frequency to read newspaper				
Not at all	605	18.1	161	11.2
1 day a week	268	8.0	75	5.2
2–3 days a week	252	7.5	106	7.4
3–5 days a week	253	7.6	101	7.0
Everyday, almost every day	1,940	57.9	989	68.9
Don't know	25	0.8	1	0.1
Don't want to answer	9	0.3	1	0.1
Average Internet usage per day				
30 min or less	102	3.0	Average 1 h 58 min	
30min–1 h	435	13.0		
1–2 h	1,051	31.5		
2–3 h	768	23.0		
3–4 h	431	12.9		
4–5 h	206	6.1		
5 h or more	340	10.0		
Education				
Elementary/Junior-High	26	0.8	174	12.1
High School	678	20.2	533	38.6
Two-year college/programs	685	20.4	248	17.3
Four-year college/university	1,910	57	284	19.8
Don't want to answer	53	1.6	15	1
Annual income				
200 million or less	213	6.4	187	13

Appendix Table *Continued*

200–400 million	587	17.5	397	27.7
400–600 million	743	22.2	294	20.5
600–800 million	580	17.3	200	14.0
800–1,000 million	365	10.9	115	8.0
1,000–1,200 million	209	6.2	59	4.1
1,200–1,400 million	117	3.5	22	1.5
1,400 million or more	160	4.8	33	2.3
Don't know	149	4.5	70	4.9
Don't want to answer	229	6.8	56	3.9
Interest in politics				
Interested	864	25.8	481	33.6
Somewhat interested	1,728	51.6	666	46.5
Not so much interested	548	16.4	212	14.8
Not at all interested	181	5.4	71	5.0
Don't know	26	0.8	3	0.2
Don't want to answer	5	0.2	0	0.0