

# Historical beliefs and the perception of threat in Northeast Asia: colonialism, the tributary system, and China–Japan–Korea relations in the twenty-first century

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## Abstract

Historical controversies continue to plague northeast Asian politics today, with Chinese and Koreans protesting Japanese history textbooks and Japanese politicians' visits to Yasukuni Shrine, and Koreans protesting Chinese claims that the ancient Kingdom of Goguryo was Chinese, not Korean. Yet, there is little empirical research exploring what, if any, impact historical beliefs have on threat perception and foreign policy preferences in northeast Asia today. On the basis of surveys of Chinese, Japanese, and South Korean university students, this paper explores the

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relationships among beliefs about the past, perceived threat in the present, and foreign policy preferences for the future. Results and their implications for northeast Asian security are discussed.

## 1 Introduction

In early 2005, Japan's Ministry of Education approved the use of the new 2005 version of *The New History Textbook*, published by the Japanese right. Only a tiny minority of Japanese schools had adopted the previous version of the textbook for actual use. The Chinese Communist Party (CCP) and the Chinese people were nevertheless united in condemnation. The official *People's Daily* argued that by 'whitewashing aggression', the *New History Textbook* is a 'provocation to the justice and conscience of humanity . . . and also poison[s] the thinking of young Japanese' (BBC, 2005). Meanwhile, during three consecutive weekends of anti-Japanese demonstrations in April 2005, thousands of Chinese protestors denounced 'revisionist Japanese history textbooks'.

Japanese Foreign Minister Nobutaka Machimura, speaking on Japanese television, denied that Japanese textbooks whitewash Japan's World War II past. The blame for the anti-Japanese protests in China, instead, should fall on the Chinese government, which he claimed indoctrinates young Chinese with a virulent anti-Japanese nationalism. Indeed, the Associated Press reported that high school history textbooks used in Shanghai routinely use the derogatory 'Jap bandits' (倭寇) to refer to Japanese, and suggested that there was a direct connection between racist Chinese history textbooks and the anti-Japanese demonstrations (Bodeen, 2005).

Similar controversies upset bilateral relations in the rest of the region as well. For instance, the two Koreas frequently join China in protesting Japanese history textbooks, but they have also jointly condemned the Chinese claim that the ancient northeast Asian kingdom of Goguryo was Chinese, not Korean. Indeed, the 'Goguryo controversy' that erupted in 2004 was arguably the first major spat in Sino-South Korean relations since their establishment in 1992 (see Gries, 2005).

One response to this spate of history controversies in northeast Asia was the summer 2005 publication of the *History of East Asian Countries*, jointly edited by scholars from China, South Korea, and Japan, and published separately in each country. Although the book claims to promote a 'unified view' of their shared history, what is actually shared is a joint

enmity towards the Japanese right (the Japanese historians involved in the project were all from the Japanese left). Indeed, the Chinese editors are blunt in their foreword, ‘we hope that this book will be a dagger and a spear striking at the Japanese right’ (East Asia, 2005).

Another noteworthy development was a significant fall 2006 change in the middle and high school history textbooks used in Shanghai. The new experimental textbooks downplayed China’s modern history of turmoil and revolution in favor of a vision of stability and growth more in tune with President Hu Jintao’s advocacy of a ‘harmonious society’ that will continue to accept CCP rule (Kahn, 2006). The new textbooks met resistance in Beijing, however, and appear to have been blocked in 2007 (Shanghaiist, 2007).

The limits to the CCP’s tolerance for challenges to its official history were more publicly displayed in January 2006, when an article by historian Yuan Weishi questioning the anti-foreign bias in Chinese textbook accounts of the late Qing period at the turn of the last century led to the closure of its publisher, *Freezing Point* weekly (see Yuan, 2006). *Freezing Point* resumed publication a month later under new editors, featuring an article by historian Zhang Haiping that reestablished the nationalist orthodoxy; it was entitled ‘The Main Theme of Modern Chinese History is Anti-Imperialism and Anti-Feudalism’ (Zhang, 2006).

History textbooks, therefore, appear to play a significant role in both domestic and international politics in East Asia. Indeed, Gerrit W. Gong maintains that, ‘The Cold War’s thaw brought not an end of history [à la Frances Fukuyama] but its resurgence. *Conflicts about the past now shape the future*. In East Asia . . . the battleground will be issues of “remembering and forgetting”’. ‘Strategic alignments’ in East Asia, Gong further contends, ‘will increasingly turn on history’ (2001, pp. 26 and 32, *italics added*).

While there is extensive anecdotal evidence to support Gong’s assertion that ‘conflicts about the past now shape the future’, we have found little empirical evidence in the literature to support such an argument. And mainstream International Relations theory, dominated by realism, would be skeptical. In the realist view, states respond to the regional and global balance of power; they do not harbor grudges. We believe that it is therefore incumbent upon those of us who agree with Gong to provide evidence to support his argument. Do beliefs about the past impact perceptions of threat in the present and future foreign policy preferences? A pair of surveys were designed to find out.

## 2 Design and method

### 2.1 Participants and method

A sample of 181 university students (90 females, 80 males, and 11 who did not indicate their gender) was recruited to participate in the study on a voluntary basis in spring 2007. Of those, 61 were Chinese students at Peking University, 69 were Japanese students at Niigata National University, and 51 were Korean students at Chonbuk National University. Participants ranged in age from 18 to 50 ( $M = 21.12$ ,  $SD = 3.15$ ), and an ANOVA revealed that the Japanese students ( $M = 19.28$ ,  $SD = 1.14$ ) were slightly younger than the Chinese ( $M = 21.77$ ,  $SD = 2.53$ ) and Korean ( $M = 22.90$ ,  $SD = 4.19$ ) students,  $F(2, 171) = 27.113$ ,  $P < 0.001$ .

A 15-min survey was implemented with Chinese, Japanese, and South Korean participants. The researcher told participants that the purpose of the study was to assess the relationship between personality and international affairs. After assuring participants that their responses would be kept anonymous, the researcher administered survey packets. Participants filled out a series of questionnaires individually. After completing the packet, participants were thanked for their participation and debriefed. The ethical standards of the American Political Science Association (APSA) and American Psychological Association (APA) were strictly followed during data collection and analysis.

### 2.2 Design

We implemented a three (pasts) by two (nations involved in that past) design, for a total of six conditions. The three pasts we chose were colonial Manchuria (China–Japan and Japan–China), tributary relations between Ming-Qing China and Chosun Korea (China–Korea and Korea–China), and colonial Korea (Japan–Korea and Korea–Japan). These three shared pasts were chosen for a number of reasons. First, they are the most comparable examples of contested histories between the three nations that we could think of. Tributary Chosun clearly differs from the other two, which are cases of colonization, but is more immediate than earlier China–Korea encounters, such as during the Goguryo period. Colonial Manchuria was chosen over, say, the Nanjing Massacre, because it is more comparable with the Japanese occupation of Korea.

Views on Manchuria are also likely to be more malleable than hard set views on Nanjing, so we are likely to get a better range of responses to our questions.

Second, the choice of colonial Korea, tributary Chosun, and colonial Manchuria creates a perfect asymmetry of victim–victimizer roles among the three nations involved. For Japanese respondents, both pasts place Japan in the aggressor or victimizer role. For Koreans, both pasts place Korea in the role of victim or subordinate. For China, the colonial Manchuria past places China in the role of victim, but the tributary Chosun past places China in the role of dominant member of a hierarchical relationship.

Finally, China, Japan, and Korea were chosen because of their interconnected histories, identities, and their intrinsic importance to the future security of East Asia. The interdependence of Chinese and Japanese history and national identities is well known. As Harvard’s Akira Iriye (1994, p. 6) has noted, ‘The modern destinies of [China and Japan] have been so intertwined that it is neither possible nor sensible to separate’ them. In his *The Fracture of Meaning*, David Pollack (1986) presented a ‘hermeneutics of Japanese culture’ for the millennium beginning in the 7th century, when the first extensive Japanese contact with China occurred. Pollack draws on Mencius’ metaphor of a frog at the bottom of a well to make his provocative point: ‘the fundamental meaning of life itself could be expressed only in terms of walls... China was Japan’s walls, the very terms by which Japan defined its own existence’. While Chinese have looked down on Japanese for over a millennium, either benevolently as a ‘little brother’ within Sinic Civilization or malevolently as ‘Jap pirates’ (倭寇), it is only in the modern period that Japan became central to Chinese understandings of the West, modernity, and themselves. Indeed, Peter Gries (2004, p. 36) argues that ‘Japan’s proximity to China, the racial and cultural similarities Japanese share with the Chinese, and Japan’s extensive interactions with China in the modern period justify its designation as “China’s Occident”’. Today, a lack of mutual trust in Sino-Japanese relations constitutes the primary hurdle blocking the development of East Asian regionalism (e.g. Rozman, 2004; Zhang Yunling, 2005).

Although there is an anti-American element to much Korean nationalism today, historically Korean national identity has been built against Korea’s immediate neighbors and frequent military aggressors, Japan and China. Owing to the Japanese colonization of the Korean peninsula

in the first half of the twentieth century, and legacies such as the comfort women and forced labor issues, anti-Japanese sentiment in Korea is both highly visible and well known in the West. Less known is the fact that twentieth-century nationalists like Sin Ch'aeho and Park Chung Hee constructed their Korean nationalism against China, locating the origins of the Korean nation in the martial spirit of the Goguryo Dynasty, who resisted Chinese aggression over a millennium ago. Both rejected the subservience of the more recent Chosun Dynasty's tributary relationship with Ming-Qing China (see Gries, 2005).

Approximately 30 students were randomly assigned to each of the six conditions as appropriate. That is to say, Chinese participants were either asked about colonial Manchuria and Japan or tributary Chosun and Korea, but not about colonial Korea, in which China had no direct part. Similarly, Japanese participants were not asked about tributary Chosun, and Korean participants were not asked about colonial Manchuria.

### 2.3 Measures

The following survey questions were all on seven-point Likert scales, ranging from 1 ('strongly disagree') to 7 ('strongly agree'). They were largely balanced in terms of positively and negatively worded items, which were reverse coded, that is, subtracted from 8, such that a 7 becomes a 1, a 6 becomes a 2, etc.

*Beliefs about the past.* This four-item scale included two positively ('TOPIC prospered' and 'COLONIZER's policies helped TOPIC develop') and two negatively ('COLONIZER's rule was bad for TOPIC' and 'The INGROUP people suffered at the hands of the COLONIZER') worded statements that the respondent was asked to agree or disagree with. So, for the colonial Korea case, the statements would read 'colonial Korea prospered', 'Japan's policies helped colonial Korea develop', 'Japanese rule was bad for colonial Korea', and 'the Korean people suffered at the hands of Japanese'. To create our 'PastBad' scale, the two positive items were reverse-coded, and the four responses then averaged together.

*Threat perception in the present.* A five-item threat measure consisted of three general threat items ('The world would be a safer place if the OUTGROUP was weaker', 'OUTGROUP is a threat to INGROUP', and

‘INGROUP should be suspicious of OUTGROUP intentions’) and two specifically military threat items (‘The recent increase in OUTGROUP defense spending undermines INGROUP security’ and ‘OUTGROUP seeks to avoid military conflict with INGROUP’). After reverse coding the final item, the five items were averaged together.

*Future policy preferences.* Two individual items were used to tap policy preferences towards the relevant outgroup, one broad and one very specific. The broad item was ‘INGROUP should adopt a friendlier foreign policy towards OUTGROUP’. A very concrete policy item was also used, taking advantage of the fact that all three nations have maritime territorial disputes with each other: ‘Both OUTGROUP and INGROUP claim sovereignty over the contested X (Takeshima/Tokudo, Senkaku/Diaoyu, Ieodo/Suyan) Islands that lie between INGROUP and OUTGROUP. Our government should aggressively defend its sovereignty over X, even if it means heightened tensions with OUTGROUP’. Thus, for Chinese students in the China–Japan group, this item would read, ‘Both Japan and China claim sovereignty over the contested Diaoyu Islands that lie between China and Japan. Our government should aggressively defend its sovereignty over the Diaoyu Islands, even if it means heightened tensions with Japan’.

### 3 Results and discussion

We begin with an examination of cross-national beliefs about three shared pasts, then turn to perceptions of mutual threat, and bilateral foreign policy preferences between China, Japan, and Korea. We conclude with an examination of correlations among beliefs about the past, threat perception in the present, and future policy preferences.

#### 3.1 Beliefs about shared pasts

What do Chinese and Koreans believe about the past tributary relationship between Ming-Qing Dynasty China and Chosun Dynasty Korea? What do Chinese and Japanese believe about their shared past in colonial Manchuria of the 1930s and early 1940s? And what do Japanese and Koreans believe about their shared past in 1920s through early 1940s colonial Korea? It is often argued that Japanese are in denial about their mid-twentieth-century aggression against their neighbors. Do our survey results affirm that view?

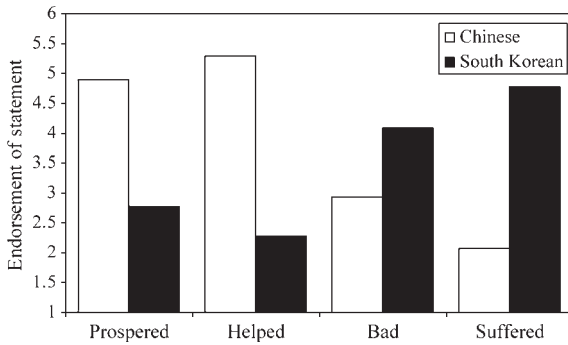
**Table 1** Descriptive statistics: means and standard deviations of preexisting Chinese, Japanese, and South Korean beliefs about colonial Manchuria, colonial Korea, and tributary Chosun Korea–Ming-Qing China relations

Shared past	Nation	Belief	Mean	SD
Colonial Manchuria	Chinese view	Prospered	2.10	1.69
		Helped	1.97	1.47
		Bad	5.70	1.62
		Suffered	6.23	0.97
	Japanese view	Prospered	3.43	1.61
		Helped	3.49	1.84
		Bad	4.51	1.77
		Suffered	5.34	1.45
Colonial Korea	Japanese view	Prospered	3.71	1.85
		Helped	3.65	1.79
		Bad	4.82	1.68
		Suffered	5.59	1.48
	S. Korean view	Prospered	3.15	1.49
		Helped	3.30	1.72
		Bad	4.70	1.78
		Suffered	5.80	1.74
Tributary Chosun	Chinese view	Prospered	4.90	1.69
		Helped	5.30	1.56
		Bad	2.93	1.48
		Suffered	2.07	1.44
	S. Korean view	Prospered	2.77	1.86
		Helped	2.27	1.31
		Bad	4.08	1.77
		Suffered	4.77	1.53

They do not. As Table 1 and Figures 1–3 reveal, our Japanese participants tended to share negative Chinese and Korean views about both colonial Manchuria and colonial Korea. The greatest discrepancy in historical beliefs, instead, was between our Chinese and South Korean students over the nature of their past tributary relationship.

Figure 1 reveals a broad gap between Chinese and South Korean perceptions of their shared tributary past. Where the Chinese students largely agreed that Chosun Korea prospered as a Chinese tributary state, and that being a Chinese tributary helped Chosun Korea to develop, the South Korean students did not. Similarly, many more South Korean than Chinese students agreed that Koreans suffered and that tributary relations with China were bad for Korea. A multivariate analysis of variance (MANOVA) revealed not only that the differences were statistically significant, Wilks' Lambda = 0.382,  $F(4, 51) = 20.65$ ,  $P < 0.001$ , but that the effect size,  $\eta_p^2 = 0.618$ , was massive. Our Chinese respondents either were simply unaware of Korean grievances about their tributary past or do not





Notes:

**Prospered:** *Chosun Korea prospered as a Chinese tributary state.* 作为中国附属国的李氏朝鲜强盛了。조선은 중국의 종속국으로서 발전했다.

**Helped:** *Being a Chinese tributary state helped Chosun Korea develop.* 作为中国的附属国有助于李氏朝鲜的发展。중국의 속국이었다는 사실은 조선의 발전에 도움이 되었다

**Bad:** *Being a Chinese tributary state was not good for Chosun Korea.* 为中国的附属国对李氏朝鲜不利。중국의 속국이었다는 사실은 조선에게 악영향을 끼쳤다.

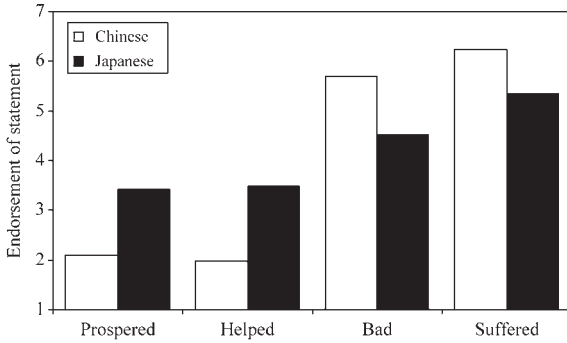
**Suffered:** *The Korean people suffered at the hands of the Chinese.* 韩国人民在中国的压制下受尽苦难。조선인들은 중국인들로부터 많은 고통을 당했다.

**Figure 1** Chinese and South Korean beliefs about the past tributary relationship between Chosun Korea and Ming-Qing China.

acknowledge the legitimacy of those grievances. Either way, the Chinese students viewed the past tributary relationship with Korea as a very positive experience for Chosun Korea and the Koreans.

Figure 2 reveals differences between Chinese and Japanese views of their shared past in colonial Manchuria, although they do not appear to be as great as those between Chinese and Koreans discussed above. To a lesser degree but like the Chinese students, the Japanese students generally agreed that colonial Manchuria did not prosper, and that Japanese colonization did not help Manchuria. Similarly, the Japanese students agree with their Chinese counterparts that Japanese policies were not good for Manchuria, and that the Manchurian people suffered under Japanese rule, only not quite as much. A second MANOVA supports this interpretation of Figure 2, Wilks' Lambda = 0.751,  $F(4, 60) = 4.964$ ,  $P = 0.002$ , with a very large but not massive effect size,  $\eta_p^2 = 0.249$ .

Finally, Figure 3 reveals no clear distinction between Japanese and South Korean beliefs about colonial Korea. While the Japanese students scored slightly higher than Korean students on the 'prospered' and



Notes:

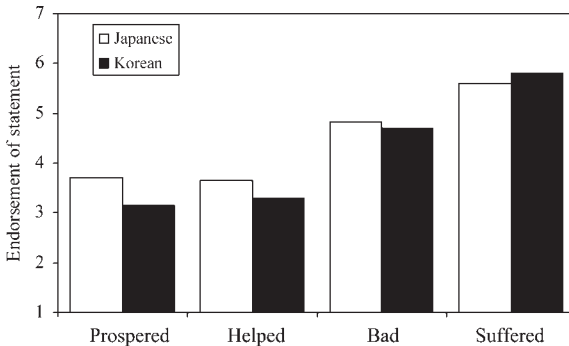
**Prospered:** *Manchuria prospered under Japanese colonial rule.* 日本殖民统治下的满洲强盛了。植民地满洲は繁栄していた。

**Helped:** *Japanese policies helped Manchuria to develop.* 日本政策有助于满洲的发展。日本の政策は植民地满洲の発展を助けた。

**Bad:** *Japanese policies were not good for Manchuria.* 日本政策对满洲不利。日本の支配は植民地满洲にとって悪いものだった。

**Suffered:** *The Manchurian people suffered under Japanese rule.* 满洲人民在日本统治下受尽苦难。中国人は日本人の手によって苦しめられた。

Figure 2 Chinese and Japanese beliefs about Colonial Manchuria.



Notes:

**Prospered:** *Korea prospered under Japanese colonial rule.* 植民地朝鮮は繁栄していた。한국은 일본의 통치 아래에서 발전했다.

**Helped:** *Japanese policies helped Korea to develop.* 日本政策は植民地朝鮮の発展を助けた。일본의 정책은 한국의 발전을 도왔다.

**Bad:** *Japanese policies were not good for Korea.* 日本の支配は植民地朝鮮にとって悪いものだった。일본의 통치는 한국에게 악영향을 끼쳤다.

**Suffered:** *The Korean people suffered under Japanese rule.* 朝鮮人は日本人の手によって苦しめられた。일제 치하 한국인들은 많은 고통을 당했다.

Figure 3 Japanese and South Korean beliefs about Colonial Korea.

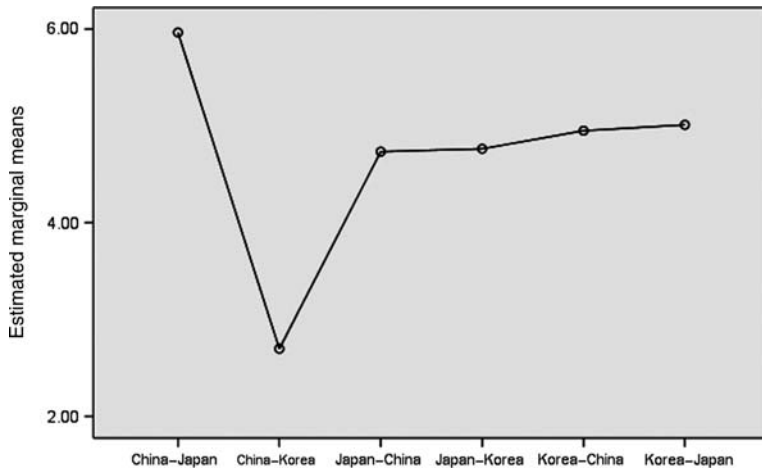


Figure 4 Overall negativity about the shared past by condition.

‘helped’ items, they also scored slightly higher on the ‘Japanese policies were not good for colonial Korea’ item. A third MANOVA revealed no statistically significant difference between the Japanese and South Korean students, Wilks’ Lambda = 0.932,  $F(4, 49) = 20.65$ ,  $P = 0.473$ . The effect size,  $\eta_p^2 = 0.068$ , was small but not miniscule, and the observed power (0.264) was very low, suggesting that if we had had a larger sample the small difference may have become statistically significant. Regardless, it is clear that the Japanese and South Korean students were in the greatest agreement of our three pairs of student samples about the nature of their shared past. This may reflect a longer period of sustained public discussion of colonial Korea in postwar South Korea and Japan.

Combining our four belief items into a single ‘PastBad’ scale reflecting negativity about the shared past synthesizes these results. The ‘PastBad’ scale had a good internal reliability, Cronbach’s  $\alpha = 0.827$ , meaning that the answers to the four questions cohered, suggesting that they all tapped the same construct. Figure 4 reveals that while Japanese and Koreans share largely negative beliefs about both of their pairs of shared pasts (Japanese with China and Korea, and Koreans with China and Japan), the Chinese have widely discrepant views about their two shared pasts, with very negative views of colonial Manchuria, and very positive views about China’s past tributary relations with Chosun Korea. An ANOVA,  $F(5, 169) = 23.11$ ,  $P < 0.001$ ,  $\eta_p^2 = 0.406$ , confirms the magnitude of these differences.

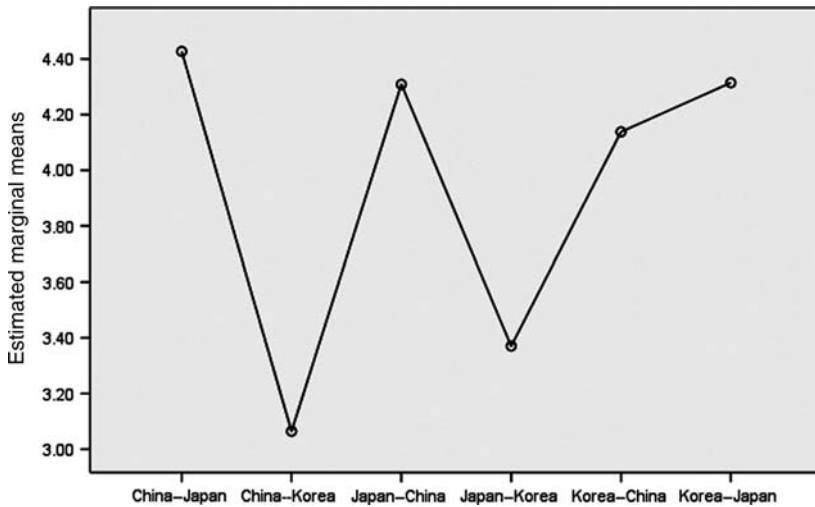


Figure 5 Perceived outgroup threat by condition.

It is important to emphasize that these results reflect beliefs (what happened) and attitudes (whether it was good or bad) about the past; they do not tell us anything about what participants think should be done about it, such as history education, restitution, etc. It is entirely possible, for instance, that our Japanese students who largely agreed with their Korean counterparts and even, to a lesser extent, with their Chinese counterparts, about the malevolent nature of colonial Korea and colonial Korea, would not agree with their Chinese and Korean counterparts on the question of reparations.

### 3.2 Perceptions of mutual threat

How do Chinese, Japanese, and Koreans perceive the threat that they face in each other today? To answer this question, we created a composite threat score by averaging our three general threat questions and two military threat questions. The resulting scale had a fair internal reliability, Cronbach's  $\alpha = 0.639$ , across our three national samples. Using this five-item scale as our dependent measure, and our six conditions as our independent measure, we ran a one-way ANOVA. Figure 5 reveals the results, which were statistically significant,  $F(5, 174) = 12.41$ ,  $P < 0.001$ , with a very large effect size of  $\eta_p^2 = 0.263$ .

Not surprisingly, the Chinese students asked about Japan reported much higher levels of threat perception than the Chinese students asked

about South Korea. This result is over determined from both realist and constructivist perspectives: Japan is both more powerful than South Korea, and Chinese suffered at the hands of Japanese imperialism from the late nineteenth to the mid-twentieth centuries, creating historical animosity towards Japanese, but not Koreans.

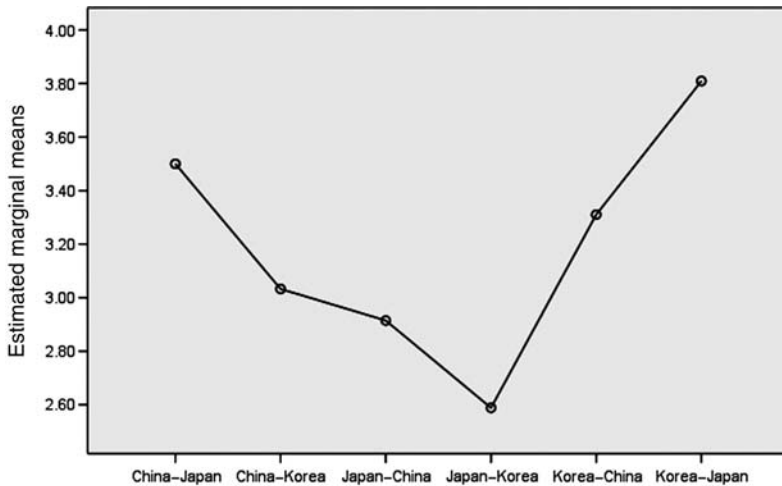
Japanese students asked about China reported much higher levels of threat than those asked about South Korea. From a realist perspective, this is not surprising: Japan has more to fear from a China that is much stronger than South Korea militarily. Interpretive analysts would also note that Japanese have become increasingly alarmed by the rise of anti-Japanese nationalism in China, especially since the massive Chinese protests of April 2005.

Perhaps, the most surprising result displayed in Figure 5 is that our South Korean students reported feeling almost as threatened by China as by Japan. Media and academic coverage has tended to focus on the positive aspects of Sino-South Korean relations since the normalization of their relationship in 1992. There has been much less attention to conflicts such as the Garlic Battle of 2000, or the controversy over the ancient Kingdom of Goguryo that began in 2004. Given South Korea's relatively small size, and vulnerable position between the two great powers of China and Japan, Korean students understandably report the highest overall levels of threat perception.

### 3.3 Foreign policy preferences

What kind of foreign policies do our Chinese, Japanese, and South Korean students advocate towards their northeast Asian neighbors? To answer this question, we ran one-way ANOVAs on our general and specific policy items. The general item, 'INGROUP should adopt a friendlier foreign policy towards OUTGROUP', was reverse coded to be consistent with our threat measure and the other policy measure, which both code negative attitudes with higher scores.

The result of the first ANOVA,  $F(5, 174) = 2.38, P = 0.04$ , is displayed in Figure 6. The effect size was moderate,  $\eta_p^2 = 0.06$ , and several patterns are clear. First, the Japanese students appeared the most accommodating, preferring a friendlier foreign policy towards their two northeast Asian neighbors. Second, and not surprisingly, the far left and right points in the figure reveal that Japan was the target of the greatest ire,



Item wording:

*“INGROUP should adopt a friendlier foreign policy towards OUTGROUP”.*

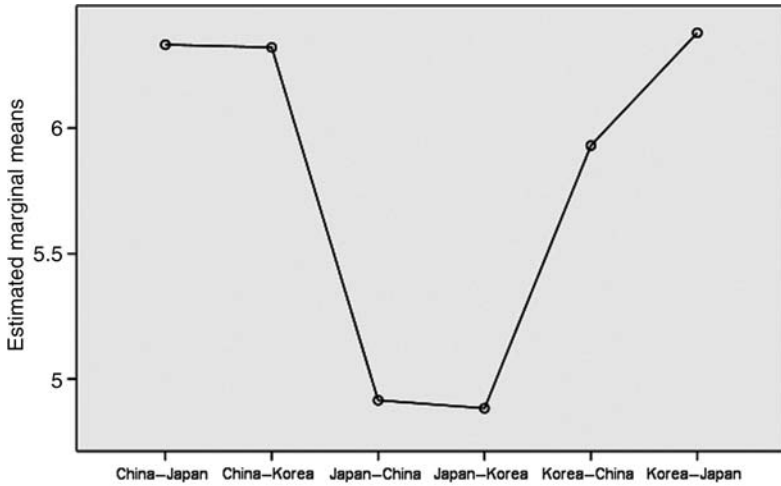
- China–Japan: 中国应该采取对日本更友善的外交政策。
- China–Korea: 中国应该采取对韩国更友善的外交政策。
- Japan–China: 日本は中国に対して友好的な外交政策を採用すべきである。
- Japan–Korea: 日本は韓国に対して友好的な外交政策を採用すべきである。
- Korea–China: 한국은 중국에 대해 더욱 우호적인 정책을 취해야 한다.
- Korea–Japan: 한국은 일본에 대해 더욱 우호적인 정책을 취해야 한다.

*All items reverse coded.*

**Figure 6** Preference for a tougher foreign policy towards the outgroup by condition.

with Chinese and especially South Koreans disagreeing the most with the notion that their governments should be friendlier towards Japan.

A second ANOVA,  $F(5, 174) = 7.81$ ,  $P < 0.001$ , on the real-world policy item about aggressively defending the sovereignty of disputed islands, revealed a large effect size,  $\eta_p^2 = 0.18$ . As Figure 7 displays, participants in all three countries agreed substantially that their governments should aggressively defend their national territory. This was especially true among the Chinese students, who appear to have responded to this question as a matter of principle, with a mean of 6.33 on a 1–7 scale, and a full 44 out of 61 respondents choosing 7 out of 7, ‘strongly agree’. Surprisingly, the Chinese students asked about Suyan Islands dispute with South Korea were just as passionate about territorial defense as were their classmates asked about the much better known Diaoyu Islands dispute with Japan. Our Japanese student sample was again the



Item wording:

*“Both OUTGROUP and INGROUP claim sovereignty over the contested X (Takeshima/ Tokudo, Iendo/ Suyan) Islands that lie between INGROUP and OUTGROUP. Our government should aggressively defend its sovereignty over X, even if it means heightened tensions with OUTGROUP”.*

- **China-Japan:** 日本和中国同时宣称处于两国之间的争议地区钓鱼岛的主权属于自己。即使两国的关系会因此而紧张，我国政府也应该强烈而肯定地维护对钓鱼岛的主权。
- **China-Korea:** 韩国和中国同时宣称处于两国之间的争议地区苏岩礁的主权属于自己。即使两国的关系会因此而紧张，我国政府也应该强烈而肯定地维护对苏岩礁的主权。
- **Japan-China:** 日本と中国の間に位置する争点となっている尖閣諸島に対して、中国も日本も主権を主張している。日本政府は、たとえ中国との緊張を高めることになっても、尖閣に対する主権を積極的に守るべきである。
- **Japan-Korea:** 日本と韓国に位置する争点となっている竹島に対して、韓国も日本も主権を主張している。日本政府は、たとえ韓国との緊張を高めることになっても、竹島に対する主権を積極的に守るべきである。
- **Korea-China:** 한국과 중국 모두 한-중 사이에 위치한 이어도의 영유권을 주장하고 있다. 우리 정부는 중국과의 갈등이 고조되더라도 이어도에 대한 주권을 적극적으로 수호해야 한다.
- **Korea-Japan:** 한국과 일본 모두 한-일 사이에 위치한 독도의 영유권을 주장하고 있다. 우리 정부는 일본과의 갈등이 고조되더라도 독도에 대한 주권을 적극적으로 수호해야 한다.

Figure 7 Aggressively defend sovereignty over disputed islands, by condition.

most pacifist, the least likely to advocate an aggressive defense of territorial sovereignty.

### 3.4 Correlations among measures

Do beliefs about the past relate to perceptions of threat in the present and future foreign policy preferences? A first rough cut of zero-order correlations among our four-item negative beliefs about the past scale, five-item perceived threat scale, and two single-item policy measures for all 175 Chinese, Japanese, and Korean students surveyed is displayed in

**Table 2** Overall correlations among negative beliefs about the shared past, threat perception, and foreign policy preferences (general and specific) for all students

Variable	PastBad	PerceivedThreat	TougherForPol	DefendIslandSov
PastBad	–	0.239**	–0.084	–0.075
PerceivedThreat		–	0.200**	0.279**
TougherForPol			–	0.174*
DefendIslandSov				–

\*Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (two tailed).

\*\*Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (two tailed).

Table 2. It reveals, first and foremost, that negative views of the past were indeed strongly and positively related to the perception of outgroup threat,  $r = 0.239$ ,  $P = 0.001$ . In other words, the more students viewed their shared past as a negative one, the more they perceived threat from the relevant outgroup. Second and also intuitively, the more outgroup threat students perceived, the more they advocated a tougher foreign policy towards the relevant outgroup,  $r = 0.200$ ,  $P = 0.007$ , and the more they agreed that their leaders should aggressively defend their territorial sovereignty,  $r = 0.279$ ,  $P < 0.001$ .

Given the asymmetry of the three countries' historical experiences, it may be problematic to lump all our subjects together, however. Table 3, therefore, displays those same correlations for the Chinese and Japanese samples separately. The top half of the table shows that for the Chinese students, the only statistically significant correlation is between negative beliefs about the shared past and the perception of threat in the present,  $r = 0.526$ ,  $P < 0.001$ . This is a massive correlation, strongly suggesting either that beliefs about a negative shared past caused heightened threat perception in the present, or vice versa.

The bottom half of Table 3 displays the correlations for the Japanese student sample. Here, a very different but clear pattern of results appears. The more the Japanese students recognized the malevolent nature of their past histories in colonial Manchuria and colonial Korea, the *less* likely they were to perceive outgroup threat ( $r = -0.253$ ,  $P = 0.036$ ), advocate tough foreign policies ( $r = -0.320$ ,  $P = 0.007$ ) towards China and South Korea, or push for the aggressive defense of the Senkaku or Takeshima Islands ( $r = -0.351$ ,  $P = 0.003$ ). These students clearly appear to have internalized the 'lessons of the past'. The more they



**Table 3** Correlations among negative beliefs about the shared past, threat perception, and foreign policy preferences (general and specific) for Chinese and Japanese students

Variable	PastBad	PerceivedThreat	TougherForPol	DefendIslandSov
PastBad	–	0.526**	0.083	0.142
PerceivedThreat	–0.253*	–	0.150	0.171
TougherForPol	–0.320**	0.387**	–	0.052
DefendIslandSov	–0.351**	0.424**	0.157	–

Note: Chinese data is above the diagonal; Japanese is below the diagonal.

\*Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (two tailed).

\*\*Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (two tailed).

recognize the negative aspects of their past colonial conquests, the more pacifist they seem to have become. Finally, most intuitively, and the most strongly, the more the outgroup threat the Japanese students perceived, the tougher the foreign policy towards the outgroup they advocated ( $r = 0.387$ ,  $P = 0.001$ ), and the more aggressively they argued for the territorial defense of the disputed islands ( $r = 0.424$ ,  $P < 0.001$ ).

#### 4 2008 China survey

To validate and extend these cross national survey results, we conducted a second survey with a larger sample of Chinese university students. A total of 109 students completed a paper survey in the fall of 2008, using the same methods discussed above. Thirty nine were male, 53 were female, and 17 did not report their gender. Their ages ranged from 18 to 24, with a mean age of 20.27 (SD = 1.32).

We were interested specifically in whether our 2007 findings about the links between Chinese beliefs about shared pasts and the perception of threat and future policy preferences in the narrow bilateral contexts of Sino-Japanese and Sino-South Korean relations could be extended to broader beliefs about the past tributary system in general, and future policy preferences about the East Asian regional order as a whole. We therefore created three two-item scales. The first replicated two of the items on beliefs about the past Ming-Qing China – Chosun Korea tributary relationship, ‘During China’s Ming and Qing Dynasties, Chosun Korea prospered as a Chinese tributary state’ (中国明清时期,李氏朝鲜因成为中国的附属国而强盛) and ‘Being a Chinese tributary state was bad for Chosun Korea’

(作为中国的附属国对李氏朝鲜不利), reverse coded. The second scale tapped beliefs about the tributary system in general: ‘The tributary system benefited ancient China’s tributary states’ (朝贡体系对古代中国的附属国有利) and ‘The tributary system suppressed the development of ancient China’s tributary states’ (朝贡体系抑制了古代中国附属国的发展), reverse coded. The third scale sought to tap preferences regarding the nature of the future East Asian regional order. It contained two statements, ‘East Asia today would benefit from the reconstruction of the ancient Sino-centric regional order’ (今日东亚将会得益于中国中心体系的重建) and ‘China’s East Asian neighbors should follow China’ (在东亚地区的中国邻国应该遵从中国). These three two-item scales had Cronbach’s alpha of 0.64, 0.68, and 0.62, respectively, indicating a fair level of internal reliability.

Table 4 reveals that the means of all three scales were just slightly above the midpoint of the four, indicating that as a whole our Chinese university student sample did not hold extreme views about China’s tributary past or the East Asian future. It also shows that bivariate correlations between the three scales were all statistically significant (all  $P$ s < 0.001) and very large. The tributary relations with Chosun Korea and the broad tributary system scales correlated the most,  $r = 0.469$ . This is not surprising given that the former is basically just a subset or instance of the latter. The Chosun tributary relations scale also correlated strongly with the Sino-centric East Asian future item,  $r = 0.331$ . Finally, the beliefs about the tributary past scale correlated even more strongly with the preference for a future Sino-centric regional order scale,  $r = 0.438$ .

The results of this 2008 survey, therefore, both replicate and extend the results of the China portion of our 2007 survey. Attitudes towards

**Table 4** Means, standard deviations, and correlations among beliefs about the tributary system in general, beliefs about China–Chosun Korea tributary relations, and preferences for a future Sino-centric East Asian regional order (2008 Chinese students sample)

Variable	Mean	SD	Tributary	Chosun	SinoEA
Tributary	4.90	1.27	–	0.469**	0.438**
Chosun	4.65	1.22		–	0.331**
SinoEA	4.13	1.44			–

\*\*Correlation is significant at  $P < 0.001$  (two tailed).

the past once again correlated with preferences regarding the future. But this time the referent was broadened from Sino-Japanese and Sino-Korean relations to East Asia as a whole, and a very strong relationship emerged between beliefs about China's past tributary system, and preferences for a future Sino-centric regional order.

## 5 Conclusions

The most important finding of this empirical study is that beliefs about the shared past matter for the perception of threat in the present and future foreign policy preferences. Among university students, certainly, security and insecurity in Northeast Asia are not just a question of the balance of economic and military power in the region, but also hinges on the impact that beliefs about the shared past has on the perception of threat.

This study also reveals, however, that just how beliefs about the past matter in the present can vary considerably across nations. For our Chinese students, there was an extremely strong positive correlation between negative beliefs about the past and outgroup threat perception in the present. For our Japanese students, however, the relationship was reversed: the more they recognized the negative impact of their past colonization of Manchuria and Korea, the less they perceived threat from China or South Korea and the less they advocated for tougher foreign policies, suggesting a contrary historical pacifist effect.

The second major finding of this study was more substantive, concerning the symmetry and asymmetry of beliefs about the shared past among the Chinese, Japanese, and South Korean university students surveyed. As Figures 1–3 reveal, there was a basic symmetry in Japanese and South Korean understandings of their shared past in colonial Korea, but a massive asymmetry in the Chinese and South Korean understandings of the tributary relationship between Ming-Qing China and Chosun Korea, with Chinese and Japanese understandings of colonial Manchuria lying between these two extremes. Overall, the Japanese students surveyed appeared aware of the negative impact of their colonial rule on Korea and Manchuria, while the Chinese students appeared largely unaware of negative views of their tributary relations with Chosun Korea. The symmetry of Japan–Korea understandings may help explain why the Japanese prime minister was able to successfully apologize to the South Korean prime minister in 1999, with a Japan–China apology failing just 1 month later.

The asymmetry of China–South Korea understandings about their shared tributary past may also help explain how the Chinese could have stumbled into the Goguryo controversy in 2004, completely unaware of how negatively many Koreans view their shared past.

Finally, Figures 5–7 reveal that while our Chinese and Japanese students perceived comparable levels of threat in northeast Asia, our South Korean students perceived more, a finding overdetermined by both balance of power and historical explanations. When it came to foreign policy preferences, however, our Japanese students score significantly lower than both the South Korean and Chinese students, suggesting that awareness of past military excesses may be dampening the impact of threat perception on foreign policy preferences among these Japanese students.

Although we were able to replicate a portion of our 2007 findings with a second 2008 survey among Chinese students, future studies are needed to verify and expand on all of these preliminary findings. First, our limited sample size may account for some of the inconsistencies in our correlations. A larger sample would therefore be desirable. Second, our Japanese students appear to have been both remarkably pacifist and aware of the negative impact of Japan's past colonization of Korea and China. A more diverse or even simply different Japanese university sample would therefore be desirable to validate the generalizability of our Japanese sample.

To expand on these findings, future surveys should also include items tapping the perception of relative power, a variable highly likely to also impact the perception of outgroup threat and foreign policy preferences (Rousseau and Garcia-Retamero, 2007). Data on perceptions of relative power will not just help us understand China–Japan–Korea similarities and differences in beliefs about the past, threat perception, and foreign policy preferences, but will also help us better understand the differential and possibly interacting impact of power and beliefs about the past on threat perception and foreign policy preferences.

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