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## **Relationship Value Fosters Conciliatory Attitude in International Conflicts**

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**Abstract**

Relationship value promotes conciliatory behaviors in interpersonal relationships. This study examined whether the effect of relationship value extends to international conflicts. After experimentally manipulating the relationship value of South Korea, 524 Japanese citizens were asked their attitudes about issues involving South Korea. In the first part of the study, participants were exposed to a list of Japan's top-three trading partners for six different commodities. In the high relationship value condition, the list included South Korea for all commodities, while in the control condition, the list did not include South Korea. In the later part of the study, participants were asked their attitude toward the idea of Japanese-South Korean co-management of the Liancourt Rocks, islands over the possession of which the two countries are in disagreement. Participants in the high relationship value condition indicated more favorable attitude to the idea of co-management than those in the control condition.

*Keywords:* Valuable Relationships Hypothesis, Relationship Value, International Conflict

In writing about the historical decline of violence, Pinker (2011) notes that one important change in the Middle Ages was the advent of so-called *gentle commerce*, which altered interstate relations from zero-sum games to positive-sum games. Consequently, economic interdependence reduced violence amongst neighboring states, morphing them from adversaries to trading partners. Economic interdependence has contributed to the decline of more recent interstate conflicts. Analyzing a dataset of interstate disputes from 1886 to 2001, Russett and Oneal (2001) revealed that economic interdependence significantly reduces the likelihood that two nations will go to war with each other. Likewise, according to Long and Brecke (2003), countries that undertake successful initiatives of interstate conflict resolution typically have some incentives to improve the relationship with their former opponent. For example, when India initiated reconciliation with China, one of her motives was “to tap into the enormous Chinese market and expand its trade relationship” (Long & Brecke, 2003, p. 83).

The effect of interdependence on conflict resolution is a classic—thoroughly studied—topic in social psychology (Sherif, Harvey, White, Hood, & Sherif, 1961). Inspired by a recent theory of reconciliation in primatology, the *valuable relationships hypothesis* (de Waal, 2000), however, social psychologists have begun to take renewed interest in the role of interdependence (or relationship value) in human reconciliation. Recent empirical studies revealed that people are not just more forgiving of their valuable partners than less valuable ones (Burnette, McCullough, Van Tongeren, & Davis, 2012; McCullough, Luna, Berry, Tabak, & Bono, 2010), people are also more prone to apologizing to their valuable partners in a sincere manner (Ohtsubo & Yagi, 2015). Nevertheless, no studies have examined the question of whether the relationship value (operationalized as perceived economic interdependence) of a particular country fosters *individual-level* endorsements for making peaceful conflict resolution.

Thus, to answer this outstanding question, the present study focused on the territorial dispute between Japan and South Korea over the Liancourt Rocks (*Takeshima* in Japanese, *Dokdo* in Korean), uninhabited islands which both countries claim as their sovereign possession, although South Korea currently controls them. In September, 2012, then-Osaka mayor Toru Hashimoto publicly claimed that Japan should aim at co-management of the Liancourt Rocks with South Korea. His claim was harshly criticized in Japan (“Co-management,” 2012). Because there has been not much progress regarding the dispute since 2012, it is reasonable to expect that many Japanese citizens still disapprove of the idea of co-management. Accordingly, in this study, Japanese participants were exposed (or not exposed) to information indicating that South Korea is an important trading partner of Japan. After this relationship value manipulation, participants reported their attitudes regarding the idea of co-management of the Liancourt Rocks.

## **Method**

### **Participants and Design**

This study recruited 640 participants from the registered respondents of an online survey company, Cross Marketing Inc., Japan. However, 116 participants did not follow the instructions and their data were discarded from the final dataset. The analyzed dataset comprises 524 participants (257 men and 267 women). Participants’ ages ranged from 20 to 87 years old (mean  $\pm$  *SD* was  $44.86 \pm 13.84$  years). These participants were randomly assigned to either the high relationship value condition ( $n = 272$ ) or the control condition ( $n = 252$ ). This study was approved by the research ethics committee of the Graduate School of Humanities, Kobe University, and was conducted in January 2018.

### **Materials and Procedure**

After providing demographic information, participants first engaged in the relationship

value manipulation task, which was purportedly a test of their knowledge about Japanese trading partners. Participants in the high relationship value condition were asked to guess the top-three countries from which Japan imports *communication equipment*, *metal products*, and *petroleum products*, and the top-three countries to which Japan exports *electrical instruments*, *steel*, and *plastic*. Therefore, this task consisted of six quizzes (i.e., the six commodities were presented in the above order to all participants). For each quiz, participants were allowed to spend one minute to provide their answers. Once they finished answering or one minute elapsed, participants were given the correct answers and asked to type the correct answers in blank spaces to ensure they had paid attention. After typing the three trading partners for the given commodity, participants proceeded to the next commodity. For the aforementioned commodities, in terms of imports and exports, South Korea is among the top-three trading partners (these commodities were chosen based on the actual Trade Statistics of Japan in order to avoid deception:

[http://www.customs.go.jp/toukei/suii/html/time\\_latest.htm](http://www.customs.go.jp/toukei/suii/html/time_latest.htm)). In the control condition, participants were asked to guess the top-three countries from which Japan imports *clothing*, *organic compounds*, and *crude oil*, and the top-three countries to which Japan exports *photographic materials*, *automobile parts*, and *motors*. For these commodities, neither in terms of imports or exports, is South Korea one of the top-three trading partners. Most of the participants whose data were discarded typed nothing, something other than country names, or incorrect country names in this task.

Participants then completed a manipulation check by rating how important they thought the relationship between Japan and the following eight countries is on an 11-point scale (0 = *not important at all* to 10 = *very important*): France, United States of America, Thailand, China, United Kingdom, Indonesia, South Korea, and Germany. The seven countries other than South

Korea were filler items. In the next section, participants rated their approval of Japan's compromises to four countries in the context of four different political issues. The four countries and issues were Russia and disputes over Northern Territories, South Korea and the comfort women issue, China and the *Senkaku* Islands (*Diaoyu* Islands) dispute, and North Korea and the abductee issue. Again, the three countries other than South Korea were fillers. In the final section, participants provided their opinions in response to a hypothetical peace treaty with South Korea that entailed Japan-South Korea co-management of the Liancourt Rocks: (i) To what extent they would approve of this treaty (0 = *not at all* to 100 = *very much*); (ii) what proportion of Japanese people do they think would approve of this treaty (0% to 100%); (iii) how likely they think this treaty would be a success (0% to 100%); (iv) how guilty they would feel if this treaty was proposed by South Korea and Japan turned it down (1 = *not at all* to 7 = *very guilty*).

## Results

The manipulation check items were analyzed first. Participants in the high relationship value condition rated South Korea, but not any other countries, significantly more important than those in the control condition (see Table 1 for relevant statistics). Therefore, the manipulation of relationship value of South Korea was successful.

To test the hypothesis, the two most relevant dependent variables (approval of compromise over the comfort women issue, approval of the hypothetical peace treaty with South Korea), along with other variables, were submitted to *t*-tests. As shown in Table 1, the relationship value manipulation significantly increased the approval of the hypothetical peace treaty, while the effect was not significant for the approval of compromise over the comfort women issue.

Collapsing the experimental and control conditions, correlations between perceived

relationship value of South Korea and pro-conflict resolution attitudes were all significant at the .001-level (see the left column of Table 2). It is noteworthy that the perceived relationship value of South Korea was also positively correlated with approval of compromise to Russia, China, and North Korea (see Table 2). This result suggests that the perceived relationship value of South Korea may be confounded with a general peaceful attitude. Accordingly, the three compromise-approval scores associated with the above three countries were averaged, and used as a proxy measure of a general pro-peace attitude. The above correlations remained significant after controlling for the effect of pro-peace attitude (see the right column of Table 2). More importantly, the effect of the relationship value manipulation on approval of the hypothetical peace treaty remained significant even after controlling for pro-peace attitude by an Analysis of Covariance,  $F(1, 521) = 4.02, p = .045$ . Therefore, the observed effect of relationship value manipulation is not simply attributable to individual differences in pro-peace attitudes.

### **Discussion**

This study demonstrated the effect of international relationship value on conflict resolution at the individual—psychological—level. Previous studies have shown that relationship value contributes to peace-making at the country level (Long & Brecke, 2003; Russett & Oneal, 2001). The present study showed that experimentally increasing the perceived economic interdependence of a particular country (South Korea in this study) led to greater support for a hypothetical peace treaty with the country. However, as a first step to examine the effect of international relationship value, this study is associated with several limitations: The effect size was noticeably small (Cohen's  $d$  was only 0.19); and whether the effect extends to other types of intergroup conflicts, such as intrastate conflicts and transnational conflicts, is yet to be examined. Thus, future studies need to investigate the generalizability of the finding and its effect size so as



to obtain a clearer idea about the application potential of the reported finding.

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Table 1

*Means of the Variables of Interest as a Function of Relationship Value and the Results of t-tests*

	Control Mean (SD)	High Value Mean (SD)	t -value (df if not 522)	p-value	Cohen's d [95% CI]
<b>Manipulation Check</b>					
France	6.72 (20.7)	6.65 (2.07)	0.37	.709	-0.03 [-0.20, 0.14]
U.S.A.	8.53 (1.94)	8.43 (1.79)	0.62	.534	-0.05 [-0.22, 0.12]
Thailand	7.21 (2.00)	7.34 (1.86)	0.74	.462	0.06 [-0.11, 0.24]
China	6.72 (2.78)	7.03 (2.41)	1.35 (498.03)	.179	0.12 [-0.05, 0.29]
U.K.	6.77 (1.99)	6.97 (1.90)	1.14	.257	-0.10 [-0.27, 0.07]
Indonesia	7.01 (2.08)	7.06 (1.91)	0.29	.771	0.03 [-0.15, 0.20]
<b>South Korea</b>	5.10 (3.14)	6.12 (3.04)	3.75	< .001	0.33 [0.15, 0.50]
Germany	7.09 (1.95)	7.05 (2.05)	0.25	.804	-0.02 [-0.19, 0.15]
<b>Approval of Compromise to:</b>					
Russia	2.51 (1.15)	2.54 (1.16)	0.32	.750	0.03 [-0.14, 0.20]
<b>South Korea</b>	1.89 (1.16)	2.00 (1.17)	1.09	.276	0.10 [-0.08, 0.27]
China	1.96 (1.09)	2.03 (1.12)	0.76	.449	0.07 [-0.11, 0.24]
North Korea	1.70 (1.09)	1.79 (1.10)	0.92	.358	0.08 [-0.09, 0.25]
<b>Opinions to the Japan-South Korea co-management of the Liancourt Rocks</b>					
Self-Approval	30.79 (30.58)	36.68 (32.55)	2.13	.033	0.19 [0.01, 0.36]
Others' Approval	31.41 (22.77)	34.42 (23.17)	1.50	.135	0.13 [-0.04, 0.30]
Prospect of Success	26.10 (25.99)	27.43 (25.19)	0.60	.551	0.05 [-0.12, 0.22]
Guilt	2.70 (1.77)	2.81 (1.72)	0.67	.501	0.06 [-0.11, 0.23]

*Notes.* The degree of freedom (df) of the reported t-tests were 522 otherwise noted.

Table 2

*Correlations between Perceived Relationship Value of South Korea and Pro-conflict Resolution Attitudes (Left Column) and the Corresponding Partial Correlations Controlling for the Effect of Pro-peace Attitude (Operationalized as the Average of Approvals of Compromise to Russia, China and North Korea)*

	Correlation with Perceived Relationship Value of South Korea	Partial Correlation Controlling for Pro-peace Attitude
Approval of Compromise to:		
Russia	.21	--
<b>South Korea</b>	.33	.22
China	.29	--
North Korea	.15	--
Opinions to the Japan-South Korea co-management of the Liancourt Rocks		
Self-Approval	.41	.34
Others' Approval	.31	.23
Prospect of Success	.42	.36
Guilt	.42	.35

*Notes.* All correlation coefficients and partial correlation coefficients are significant at

the .001-level.