

# Global Attitudes and Structural Balance

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How states view one another is based on a myriad of discrete events, and also **impacts each** state's foreign policies. How states perceive one another, however, can be explained by how the other state views them. There are four principles of how interstate perception works: the subject of perception, the target of perception, the reciprocal dynamics involved, and the structural balance. For example, Japan's view of North Korea is arguably determined by such factors as 1) Japan's views of foreign countries in general, 2) the world's view of North Korea, 3) North Korea's view of Japan, and 4) Japanese allies' and adversaries' views of North Korea. More than 80% of a nation's view of a target nation have been correctly predicted with **these** four factors.<sup>1</sup> Let's look at the principles of target, reciprocity, and structural balance in more detail.

[Target]: Country A is more likely to show a positive tendency towards country B if other countries also appear to hold friendly views. According to this logic, country A is more likely to show hostility to country B if other countries do the same.

Perception is often a consequence of the actions of the target. For example, it is natural for countries to show disapproval of countries that disregard human rights and develop nuclear weapons. The negative views that countries all over the world have toward North Korea are a result of such actions. Perception of South Korea, Japan, China, Russia, and the United States are all also often the product of their actions.

[Reciprocity]: If country B shows hostility toward country A, country A is more likely to be hostile in reflection of this. Conversely, if country B is positive towards country A, country A is once again more likely to show the same in response.

The country viewed in such terms by another is most likely to reflect the same kind of attitudes: the country will show hostility if **the** other demonstrates negative feelings, and the country will show the reverse if the other expresses positive views. Their reciprocal views, however, are not always symmetric since views are dependent on their potentially unequal power positions and history. Especially in countries with a past of imperialism, the views toward other states are often affected heavily by history. For example, the level of hostility that South Korea has against Japan is much stronger than the level of negativity Japan harbors toward South Korea. Furthermore, South Korea's weaker position relative to that of Japan has resulted in South Korea being more vigilant about Japan than China and the United States are.

[Structural balance]: If a **friend of** country A demonstrates a positive attitude toward country B, then country **A** is more likely to display the same attitude towards country **B**. Following this same logic, if a country that country A is friendly with shows negative attitudes toward country B, country A will do the same. Consequently, country A would **not** show positivity towards **both countries B and C that** display mutual hostility.

The bilateral relation between two countries is often affected by a third-party country. Amongst **many explanations** of such a logic, one **important theory** is that of structural balance: 'Friend(+) of a friend(+)' and 'enemy(-) of an enemy(-)' are viewed as a friend(+), while 'friend(+) of an enemy(-)' and 'enemy(-) of a friend(+)' are viewed as an enemy(-). Simply put, it is easier to be friendly towards an ally's ally, while it

is also easier to be hostile to an ally's competitor or a competitor's ally.

South Korea and Japan also do not strictly depend on bilateral relations; the role of third countries that are allies of both South Korea and Japan, including the United States, is important. In fact, if both South Korea and Japan were on good terms with the United States but hostile to each other, the three countries would have a very unstable relationship. For the United States, a friend's enemy becomes a friend, and for both South Korea and Japan, a friend's friend becomes an enemy while an enemy's friend becomes a friend. In order to resolve such cognitive dissonance, it is either necessary for South Korea and Japan to come to good terms or for one of the countries to become hostile to the United States.

Another aspect of this structural balance can be examined once North Korea is placed in this situation instead of the United States. If the Seoul-Pyongyang relations were friendly while the Seoul-Tokyo relations along with the Pyongyang-Tokyo relations were both hostile, this would create a stable political relationship. Because a friend's enemy is an enemy and an enemy's enemy is a friend, there is no dissonance. This reasoning also applies to when the relationship between Seoul and Tokyo is positive while those between Seoul and Pyongyang along with Pyongyang and Tokyo are negative. China can replace North Korea in this equation as well and be explained using the same reasoning. A stable multilateral relation is established when all participants show positivity towards one another, when negativity is displayed to the same country, or when the same views are divided into two blocks.

Interestingly, the peoples of each Northeast Asian country can be divided up by their attitudes toward foreign countries. Although the ratio of the people in China who favor North Korea and Russia is bigger than that of those who support the United States and Japan, they are still easily separable. Especially under the circumstances where North Korea and the United States are in opposition against one another, few Chinese view both countries either positively or negatively; this simply results in the people of China having to choose one side in order to establish structural balance. Similarly, few Chinese people view both South Korea and Japan with the same level of positivity. Rather than having the same attitudes towards both countries, Chinese people often choose to show support for one of them by separating the distant and the friendly.

Japan offers another interesting case. Most people in Japan view both South Korea and China either positively or negatively. Compared to this, there are relatively few Japanese people who view the two countries differently. The friendliness of Japanese people towards South Korea is often paired with that of the Japanese people towards China. In contrast, positive views that the people of Japan have for the United States do not align with their positive feelings for North Korea.

Just like other countries, South Koreans do not display the same positivity towards both North Korea and the United States. Based on structural balance, few people share the same views towards the two different countries in opposition. For the South Korean people who recognize the value of the alliance between South Korea and the United States, negativity towards North Korea is the norm. However, those who already have a positive view towards North Korea are unlikely to be supportive of the alliance with the United States. In South Korea, the North Korea issue is polarized due to so-called 'South-South Conflict'. South Korean people are more likely to support the government's North Korea policies that their rival group criticizes. This is called the internal linkage of the South-South Conflict. South Koreans' polarization of views towards North Korea is extended to their polarization with respect to the relationship with the United States and China as well. This is called the external linkage of the South-South Conflict.<sup>2</sup>

Based on the 2005~2018 survey data published by the Pew Research Center, the number of Americans that had a positive view of China fluctuated between as low as 35% (in 2014) and as high as 52% (in 2006).

In recent polls (2019 and 2020), however, favorable ratings have declined to just 26%. Throughout the period of 2005 to 2018, the percentage of Americans with negative views towards China remained between 29~55% while they reached 60% in 2019, and hit 66% in 2020. More specifically, the number of Americans who indicated that they do not have confidence in the Chinese President Xi Jinping increased to 71% in 2020. Republicans, Republican-leaning independents, and older Americans displayed higher levels of negativity towards China than did Democrats, Democratic-leaning independents, and younger Americans.

The relationship between the United States and China has become more hostile. The two countries even shared the same viewpoint on North Korea's denuclearization at one point, but mutual cordiality and agreement has not lasted. More recently during the COVID-19 outbreak, the two countries showed mutual disagreement in almost all areas including politics, economics, and public health. Their mutual antagonism is at a point where the two countries are forcing third countries to choose sides. Given such circumstances, it would be hard for a third-party country to remain on good terms with both the United States and China. Unless there are significant changes in the relationship, it is most likely that two opposing blocs will be formed. The size of each bloc may vary considerably from only one country to a large majority.

It is logical to expect that countries will most likely side with the bloc upholding democratic values and peace. Therefore, it is crucial for superpowers to work for democracy and peace in order to get more support from the world. Furthermore, each country should remain cautious in preventing its national image from being distorted for political purposes.

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<sup>1</sup> Chae-Han Kim, "Explaining Interstate Trust/Distrust in Triadic Relations," *International Interactions*, Vol 33, No 4 (2007), pp.423-430.

<sup>2</sup> Chae-Han Kim, "The Linkage of the South-South Conflict," *Journal of Peace and Unification Studies*, Vol.2, No.2 (2010), pp.137-158. [김재한, "남남갈등의 연계성" 『통일과 평화』 2집 2호]