

## Influence of national identity on ideology of autonomy in social welfare\*

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Group identification is well known to promote group-oriented attitudes. As national identity is a kind of group identity, it is considered to promote negative attitudes toward the economic divide and support for an indiscriminate welfare policy for all people in society. Here, we conducted a survey to investigate the association between national identity and welfare orientation. The results showed that a strong national identity promotes an orientation focused on autonomy, but not equality. These findings suggest that as opposed to criticisms of the economic divide, self-identification seems to be the most important factor in helping people justify their economic situation.

**Key words:** distributive justice, national identity, autonomy, economic divide

### Introduction

#### *Economic disparity and redistribution through social security*

The current Japanese social security system, which guarantees public insurance and pension to all citizens of Japan, is rare among systems around the world (Katori, 2017). It aims to assist citizens in three ways: “self-help”, in which each person helps himself or herself; “mutual aid”, in which people help each other as needed; and “public assistance”, in which the government helps people based on certain prerequisites. In the Japanese welfare system, self-help is considered fundamental, mutual aid is meant to supplement a lack of self-help, and public assurance provides support for those who cannot be helped through self-help or mutual aid.

The social welfare system in Japan was designed mainly from the viewpoint of fundamental human rights, and as such, it is intended for the needy, the disabled, and the aged; however, it has become closely associated with economic disparity. The original purpose of the social security system was to provide the support for individuals faced with a variety of obstacles, including diseases, injuries, deliveries, death, aging, and unemployment, but its payments and benefits help compensate for the income gap. According to data published in 2014 by the Ministry of Health, Labour and Welfare of Japan, the Gini coefficient for the initial income before collection of tax and premium was .570, but decreased to .376 when considering the influence of taxes and social security, resulting in a 34.1% degree of

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improvement (Director-General for Policy Planning, Ministry of Health, Labour and Welfare, 2016). Because improvements in the Gini coefficient of taxes and social security were 4.5% and 31.0%, respectively, the Japanese social security is considered to play a crucial role in reducing economic disparity. As the Japanese social security system is based on “self-help” and “mutual aid” and performs a redistribution function via “public assistance”, it is supported by many Japanese citizens (Katori, 2017).

Incidentally, even if economic disparities exist objectively, they do not necessarily lead to negative feelings or dissatisfaction in the same way. According to a precedent study, distributive justice involves the following principles which people feel fair: equity, equality, need, ability, effort, accomplishments, equal opportunity, marketplace supply and demand, the common good, reciprocity, and a specified minimum wealth. In these principles, the equity principle is thought to be used most frequently (Deutsch, 1975) or combined with other minor principles (Leventhal, 1980). Generally, people support the equity principle, which is consistent with ratio of contributions to rewards (Adams, 1963; Walster, Berscheid, & Walster, 1973). However, the equity principle is not always applied for social decisions. As it eventually becomes easy to produce differences in people’s economic conditions, those who are eager to avoid conflict with others do not want to apply the equity principle; rather, they value an equality principle that distributes resources uniformly, or a need principle that makes up for other disadvantages (Leventhal, Michaels, & Sanford, 1972). Therefore, multiple principles are included in the concept of distributive justice, and perceived fairness in terms of economic disparities can change depending on social values, resulting in changing opinions about the Japanese welfare system, which helps manage the economic divide.

### *Two sides of the national identity effect*

National identity is defined as ‘the continuous reproduction and reinterpretation by the members of a national community of the pattern of symbols, values, myths, memories, and traditions that compose the distinctive heritage of nations, and the variable identification of individual members of that community with that heritage and its cultural elements’ (Smith, 2010). From a function perspective, national identity causes people to perceive an in-group called “us” and arouses feelings of mutual coexistence and cooperative consciousness (Nakatani, 2003).

In Japanese society, which is rapidly aging and has a low birthrate, individual burdens are expected to increase, necessitating reduced payments. In such a situation, national identity could promote compliance with the government and its policy for super aging society. As is well known, individuals with strong group consciousness find it easy to agree with others (Deutsch & Gerald, 1955) or behave according to group norms and values (Turner, 1987). With the rapid aging and low birthrate in Japan, the government has made the following decisions in recent years: partial abolition of the special exemption for spouses, abolition of the old person allowance, abolition of a fixed reduced tax rate, a reduction of the public pension deduction, the introduction of a reconstruction tax, increases in national health insurance

charges and the long-term care premium, and the introduction of a macro-economy slide formula<sup>1</sup>. In the situation in which personal burdens are rising and payments are decreasing, the Japanese government has begun demanding that people in the working generation bear a greater burden because each younger generation should help their older generation (e.g., Japan Pension Service, 2019; Ministry of Health, Labour and Welfare, 2019). Individuals that have a strong national identity are expected to provide more support to such demands and agree to such policies, even though they are not advantageous.

However, national identity can also cause the opposite phenomenon. It has been confirmed by many studies that people tend to treat others favorably in the group situation (e.g., Brewer & Campbell, 1976; Brown, Condor, Mathews, Wade, & Williams, 1986; Tajfel, Billig, Bundy, & Flament, 1971), but only when the comparison with the out-group is salient. Therefore, the question remains of whether people support disadvantageous policies even when no out-group is clear. In addition, the phenomenon called the “black sheep effect” is also known, in which exclusive attitudes for other members in the same group are formed (Marques, Yzerbyt, & Leyens, 1988). Individuals who self-identify with their group perceive a favorable group image as a part of their own self-image. Then, if they perceive an inferior member to be spoiling the group image, they are motivated to remove that person from the group to preserve a positive image. Applying this phenomenon to economic disparities and social security, an individual with strong national identity would find it difficult to regard those poorer than themselves as “compatriots”, “brethren”, or “we”.

Such a phenomenon is in accordance with a precedent study on just world beliefs. Because conservatives more commonly believe that the world is fair, they consider people less fortunate to be in such a situation because of their own lack of ability, and thus are not motivated to reform society (Furnham & Procter, 1989). People who identify with current society attribute the distress of the poor to their internal nature and thus consider them to be “black sheep”.

### *Purpose*

The Japanese social security system has adopted an insurance method because benefits are decided in proportion to the insurance premium, such that the system is in accordance with the equity principle based on individual self-help efforts. However, as the Japanese social insurance system also guarantees a minimum standard of living for all and collects insurance premiums in proportion to individual incomes, it is based on the equality and need principles and functions to buffer economic disparity. In this way, two different ideas—people’s autonomous orientation to accept equitable disparities and their equal orientation to restrain it—are included in the Japanese social security system. On the other hand, there are two possibilities in regard to national identity. First, national identity restrains the motivation

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<sup>1</sup> A system to control the amount of pension payments in consideration of decreases in the number of insured, average life expectancy, and economic conditions. (<https://www.nenkin.go.jp/service/jukyu/kyotsu/shikyu-chosei/20150401-02.html> February 11, 2020)

to seek self-interest if it promotes compliant attitudes toward the nation. Second, individuals separate themselves from their weaker counterparts to maintain a group-based identity that allows them to dismiss economic disparities easily. Therefore, in this study, we examined two functions of national identity, namely whether individuals with a strong national identity would value equality or autonomy.

## Method

### *Procedure*

In this study, we carried out a postal survey on Japanese voters aged  $\geq 18$  years as of January 1, 2019. The survey area consisted of five cities across the country and two areas in each city: Shiroishi-ku and Higashi-ku in Sapporo-shi, Taito-ku and Adachi-ku in Tokyo-to, Nakamura-ku and Minami-ku in Nagoya-shi, Nishinari-ku and Ikuno-ku in Osaka-shi, and Higashi-ku and Hakata-ku in Fukuoka-shi. In total, 2,000 people were extracted from each local electoral list to be sent a questionnaire by mail. All surveys were collected using self-addressed stamped envelopes. The study period was from February 1 to 22, 2019. The participants received no reward for responding to the survey.

In total, 721 citizens responded to the survey (response rate: 36.1%). The respondents' characteristics were as follows: 381 (52.8%) women, 331 (45.9%) men, 9 (1.2%) unknown; mean age  $\pm$  standard deviation (*SD*),  $54.47 \pm 16.79$  years; 2 teenagers, 71 in their 20 s, 80 in their 30 s, 97 in their 40 s, 150 in their 50 s, 150 in their 60 s, 133 in their 70 s, 26 in their 80 s, 1 in their 90 s and 11 unknown; 167 (23.2%) were regular staff, 159 (22.1%) were contract, temporary, or part-time employees, 97 (13.5%) ran an independent business, 96 (13.3%) were jobless, 92 (12.8%) were home managers, 24 (3.3%) were students, 15 (2.1%) were in corporate management, 8 (1.1%) were local government staff, 7 (1.0%) were freelancers, 13 (1.8%) were other, and 43 (6.0%) were unknown. Regarding type of job, 111 (15.4%) were specialists, 105 (14.6%) were salespersons or had a service job, 76 (10.5%) had a desk job, 72 (10%) worked in a production process, transportation, machine operation, construction, digging, transportation, cleaning, or packing, 58 (8.0%) were managers, officers, or directors, 24 (3.3%) were unclassifiable, 5 (0.7%) worked in security, 2 (0.3%) were in the agricultural, forestry, or fishery industries, 43 (6.0%) were unknown, and 225 (31.2%) were not applicable. Regarding educational background, 283 (39.3%) had completed high school, 200 (27.7%) university or graduate school, 140 (19.4%) junior college or technical school, 60 (8.3%) elementary and junior high school, 4 (0.6%) other, and 34 (4.7%) unknown. The mean of household income per year was 6,238,400 yen ( $SD = 7,455,960$ ).

### *Items and scales*

The following items that simplified those used in a precedent study (Karasawa, 2002) were used to construct a national identity scale ("I think Japanese people are excellent", "I am proud to be Japanese", "I think Japanese people value courtesy and manners", "I love

the nation of Japan”, and “I want to continue living in Japan from now on”). In addition, items on inclusivity, which refers “basking in related glory: BIRG” (Cialdini, Borden, Thorne, Walker, Freeman, & Sloan, 1976) (“I am proud when a Japanese person wins the Nobel Prize” and “I support Japanese teams competing in athletic events”) were added because identification to the group promotes boasting other member’s performance. The respondents replied to each item on a five-point scale (from 1, “completely disagree” to 5, “completely agree”). Next, we performed a factor analysis (principal factor method), and only one factor was extracted; therefore, the factor axis could not be rotated. The results of the analysis, which are shown in Table 1, were confirmed, and a national identity variable ( $\alpha = .86$ ) was created from averaging the item scores.

*Table 1.* National identity items and factor loadings.

	National identity	communality
I am proud I am a Japanese	.759	.563
I love the nation of Japan	.750	.475
I am proud Japanese persons win the Nobel Prize	.689	.474
I think Japanese people are excellent	.689	.437
I support Japanese teams in athletic meetings	.661	.365
I want to continue living in Japan from now on	.604	.359
I think Japanese people value courtesy and a manner	.599	.577
<i>factor contribution</i>	3.249	-
<i>contribution ratio (%)</i>	46.409	-

Items regarding orientations on equality and autonomy in the welfare system were prepared. Depending on the degree of importance, the respondents rated each item on a five-point scale, from 1, “not important at all” to 5, “very important. As factor analysis (principal factor method, varimax rotation) was performed, as shown in Table 2, the extracted factor scores were regarded as equality and autonomy because the factor loading values were about .70. The equality ( $\alpha = .74$ ) and autonomy orientations ( $\alpha = .65$ ) were created from averaging the item scores.

*Table 2.* Results of the factor analysis of welfare orientation.

	Equality	Autonomy	communality
Being equal about the burden, support on all nations	.761	.192	.576
Supporting people equally unconditionally	.757	.057	.617
Supporting people in proportion to the tax and the premium to have been paid	.130	.685	.476
Supporting people according to the performance and the contribution to the society	.084	.684	.486
<i>factor contribution</i>	1.176	0.978	2.154
<i>contribution ratio (%)</i>	29.408	24.441	53.849

## Results

### *Score distribution*

Considering that the average national identity score was in the 4 range with an *SD* in the 0.6 range, as shown in Table 3, the score distribution was relatively high. On the other hand, regarding the two welfare orientation variables, the answers about the autonomy orientation tended to be slightly positive, but those about the equality orientation tended to be slightly negative.

*Table 3.* Mean, standard deviations, and correlations.

	N	Means	SD	Equality	Autonomy
National Identity	716	4.140	0.643	.074*	.132**
Equality	711	2.544	1.021		.216**
Autonomy	711	3.371	0.937		

\* $p < .05$ . \*\* $p < .01$

### *Influence of national identity on the orientation toward welfare policy*

To examine the effects of national identity on both the equality and autonomy orientations, hierarchical multiple regression was done in the following two steps. In the first step, equality and autonomy were used as the objective variables, and demographic and situational variables<sup>2</sup> and national identity were used as the explanatory variables. In the second step, interaction variables were added between the national identity and other variables.

As can be seen in Table 4 regarding the analysis of autonomy, the value of  $\Delta R^2$  was significantly increased ( $p < .05$ ), suggesting that step two was more suitable. After examining each value, it was confirmed that the interactions of household income and national identity and of university education and national identity promoted autonomy, whereas being jobless and the interaction of male sex and national identity restrained autonomy.

<sup>2</sup> Most of the categorical variables are dummy variables (applicable (1)/ not applicable (0)). Only household income level was assigned the following values: <2 million yen per year (-1), 2–10 million yen per year (0), and >10 million yen per year (1).

*Table 4.* Results for the autonomy orientation.

	Step 1	Step 2
Male	.044	.038
Over 60 years old	-.049	-.054
Household income (per year)	.052	.069
Number of family members	-.043	-.033
(Job)		
Corporate management	-.089*	-.084†
Irregular labor	-.054	-.033
Self-employment	-.054	-.053
Homemaker	-.017	.003
Student	.016	.029
Jobless	-.151**	-.139*
(Education level)		
University/graduate school	-.036	-.024
Junior college/professional school	.052	.027
Elementary school/junior high school	.031	.046
National identity (NI)	.167***	.163
(Interaction effects)		
Male × NI		-.151*
Over 60 years old × NI		.016
Household income × NI		.137*
Number of family members × NI		-.028
Corporate management × NI		-.071
Irregular labor × NI		-.012
Self-employment × NI		.090
Homemaker × NI		-.058
Student × NI		.080†
Jobless × NI		.051
University × NI		.139*
Junior college/professional school × NI		-.008
Elementary school × NI		.006
<i>Adjusted R</i> <sup>2</sup>	.032**	.057**

The numbers are standardized partial regression coefficients.

†  $p < .10$ , \*  $p < .05$ , \*\*  $p < .01$ .

On the other hand,  $\Delta R^2$  value was not significantly increased in the analysis of equality, as shown in Table 5; therefore, the result of step one was adopted, and only the negative effect of university education was statistically significant.

*Table 5.* Results for the equality orientation.

	Step 1	Step 2
Male	-.003	-.018
Over 60 years old	-.028	-.032
Household income (per year)	-.076	-.067
Number of family members	-.081 <sup>†</sup>	-.088 <sup>†</sup>
(Job)		
Corporate management	.005	.004 <sup>†</sup>
Irregular labor	.004	-.001
Self-employment	.019	.022
Homemaker	.019	.013
Student	.077	.078 <sup>†</sup>
Jobless	-.034	-.036
(Education level)		
University/graduate school	-.116*	-.112*
Junior college/professional school	-.077	-.092 <sup>†</sup>
Elementary school/junior high school	.086 <sup>†</sup>	.065
National identity (NI)	.050	.078
(Interaction effects)		
Male × NI		-.047
Over 60 years old × NI		.023
Household income × NI		.050
Number of family members × NI		-.004
Corporate management × NI		-.011
Irregular labor × NI		-.028
Self-employment × NI		-.033
Homemaker × NI		-.047
Student × NI		.023
Jobless × NI		.001
University × NI		.045
Junior college/professional school × NI		-.054
Elementary school × NI		.104*
<i>Adjusted R</i> <sup>2</sup>	.029**	.025 <sup>†</sup>

The numbers are standardized partial regression coefficients.

<sup>†</sup>  $p < .10$ , \* $p < .05$ , \*\* $p < .01$ .

## Discussion

### *Welfare policy orientation*

If a national identity maintains and enhances personal identity, individuals who have a strong national identity are thought to not feel sympathy for less fortunate others because they contribute less to a desirable identity; they prefer others who are self-reliant and can be easily supported in an autonomous welfare system. Regarding our analysis of autonomy, because increment of the  $R^2$  value was significantly high, we adopted the result of step two. At first,



according to step two, a jobless person was found to be negative in autonomy. It is thought that people without a stable income would be apprehensive of being disadvantageous under an autonomous system in which benefits are provided in proportion to payments. On the other hand, regarding individuals who had a high household income and a university or graduate school education, a national identity was confirmed to promote autonomy. Even if national identity promotes psychological separation from unfavorable others, such an effect would be applicable only to those admitting their own advantages, not the vulnerable. Furthermore, we found that a national identity weakened autonomy in men, which is the opposite tendency to those who consider themselves advantageous. It has previously been reported that compared with Japanese women, Japanese men are less happy (Cabinet Office Gender Equality Bureau, 2014) and have more negative attitudes (OECD, 2020). Therefore, Japanese men are thought to consider themselves as being more socially vulnerable than Japanese women. Japanese men who identify strongly with the country may not wish for the welfare system to become advantageous for the powerful. After all, both advantageous and disadvantageous people alike would come to support a convenient welfare system for themselves as their national identity becomes strong.

On the other hand, based on the analysis about the relation between national identity and the equality orientation, the *adjusted R<sup>2</sup>* value did not significantly increase; therefore, step one was adopted. The average equality score was slightly lower than the median, suggesting that the people showed a somewhat negative attitude in general. In addition, it was confirmed that the people with higher education, particularly those with a university or graduate school degree, showed a negative attitude toward the equality orientation. It is considered that individuals who faced more competition to achieve higher examination scores or employment might perceive more easily the disparities produced through self-effort.

### *Conclusion*

Through an analysis of the orientation toward welfare policy, we confirmed that national identity promotes the autonomic orientation among individuals who are aware of their own advantageous situation. On the other hand, the influence on national identity on the equality orientation was not confirmed. From these results, we can see that national identity promotes the ideology for autonomy, but not the motivation to resolve economic disparities.

After the 1980s, conservative political parties, such as the Republican Party in the US, the Conservative Party in the UK, and the Liberal Democratic Party in Japan, promoted neoliberal policies that criticized the non-efficiency of the Keynes-style nanny state in the postwar period and were based on an ideology aiming at the restoration of individualism (Masuda, 2007). Thus, conservative parties emphasized the value of liberty and often aimed to liberalize. Thus, it is considered that they were supported by the individuals with a strong national identity who respected autonomy more than equality.

Furthermore, considering that Japanese people have had great success in regard to the Olympic Games and the Nobel Prize, people would regard such successful persons as “fellow-

countrymen”, be proud of their achievements as their own, and promote the strengthening of national solidarity. However, at the same time, such favorable feats for the nation may promote indifference to less fortunate people within the country, which could function to divide further the rich and poor.

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