

The Genron NPO
Japan-U.S.-China-ROK Opinion Poll Report

Perception gap among Japanese, Americans,
Chinese, and South Koreans over the future of
Northeast Asia and Challenges to Bring Peace to
the Region

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The situation in Northeast Asia is changing with the rise of China, as the United States set to rebalance to Asia. Against such a backdrop, we have conducted a quadruple joint opinion survey covering the publics in Japan, China, South Korea and the United States. Our concern is how to grasp the ongoing changes in this part of the world, and how to create peace and order in the volatile Northeast Asia region.

The aim of our survey is to find out the opinion of the publics of the four countries regarding the direction of the ongoing changes and security concerns in Northeast Asia. Our belief is that by carrying out the opinion poll, we could identify tasks that should be addressed regarding the future and peace in Northeast Asia. That would indicate some clues for tackling these tasks should lie in public opinion.

Non-governmental diplomacy and solving ongoing issues toward peaceful Northeast Asia

It took almost two years after the inauguration of the Cabinet of Prime Minister Shinzo Abe to realize a summit with Chinese President Xi Jinping due to a diplomatic row over the territorial dispute involving the Senkaku/Diaoyu Islands in the East China Sea, which caused bilateral government-to-government negotiations to be halted. The same held true for Japan's relations with South Korea, although preparations are finally underway for a bilateral summit in early November, the first meeting of its kind in three years.

In such circumstances, The Genron NPO promoted a non-governmental-level dialogue with China and South Korea. In fall 2013, we were able to reach a historic agreement with China, featuring a "No-War Pledge," albeit at a private-sector level.

The Genron NPO has been advocating what we term "Genron Diplomacy," which aims at nurturing responsible public opinion to solve problems and address cross-border issues with the backing of numerous citizens. We attach importance to the role of public opinion in diplomacy because the presence and level of public opinion yields immense influence on government-to-government diplomacy. In Northeast Asia, passionate nationalism in the countries concerned is a major

impediment to the solution of diplomatic problems, thereby creating a political dialogue vacuum in this region.

In democracy, it is a common approach to address pending issues on the basis of public opinion by winning the support of, and participation by, numerous citizens. Therefore, our endeavor is expected to help to build an environment conducive to, and lay the groundwork for, the creation of peace in this region through governmental diplomatic efforts.

Out of such a belief, The Genron NPO called on the Chicago Council on Foreign Affairs (the U.S.), East Asia Institute, our longtime partner in South Korea, and Horizon Research Consultancy Group (China) to cooperate in organizing a four-nation joint opinion survey. These three think tanks are renowned for their broad-based opinion polls in their respective countries or abroad, the findings of which are utilized as a basis for their policy proposals. Eventually, The Genron NPO reached accords with these leading think tanks to carry out a joint opinion poll about the status quo and the future of Northeast Asia, and, based on the findings of the survey, to facilitate a multilateral dialogue for the sake of the future of this part of the world.

What the joint opinion poll brought to light

The four think tanks agreed that they will share the findings of the nine identical questions in their respective annual surveys regarding the future of Northeast Asia and the security in the region. For this year, they have conducted their surveys respectively by October, with 7,000 people in the four countries responding to the surveys in total.

In addition to the findings of the nine questions, The Genron NPO and Horizon Research Consultancy Group carried out their annual joint opinion poll in Japan and China, and posed four more related questions to the publics of China and Japan.

The findings of the quadruple poll can be summarized as follows:

The publics of the four countries share the view that China will continue to increase its clout in the coming 10 years, whereas the U.S. rebalance to Asia is yet to be recognized at a public level and majorities in the four nations see that American influence in Asia will stay the same in the coming decade. However, the view about the influence by country is not necessarily linked to the expectations for each country's responsible behavior in handling world problems and global leadership. In particular, opinion is divided between the Japanese and American publics, and the Chinese and South Korean publics as regards the prospects for China's ability to handle world problems and to assume global leadership.

Another noteworthy finding is the conspicuous inclination of South Koreans to cite confidence in China, and the relatively high confidence in Russia and South Korea, cited by China's public. Such an inclination is also obvious in the findings to the questions pertaining to the importance of bilateral relations. These findings may be quite alarming for the U.S. in that its alliance with South Korea or the tripartite alliance among the U.S., Japan and South Korea might be hampered.

As regards the likelihood of military conflict in this region, the American and Chinese publics are increasingly concerned about China's continued military buildup, and the possible U.S. response in this region, whereas a gap exists among the countries concerned with regard to the likelihood of conflict between Japan and China over the territorial issue, and between China and Taiwan.

When it comes to the presence of U.S. forces in this area, the Japanese, American and South Korean publics favor the status quo, but the American public is rather negative about the use of U.S. troops in case of an emergency in Asia. The survey also brought to light the gap in perception between the American and Chinese publics, and the Japanese and South Korean publics about the stationing of U.S. troops on the Korean Peninsula should a reunification of South and North Korea occur.

In sum, we see a growing gap in perception among the publics of the four countries over the rise of China and the subsequent changes in Asia, fueling concerns about collaboration between the alliance partners and the likelihood of military conflict in the region.

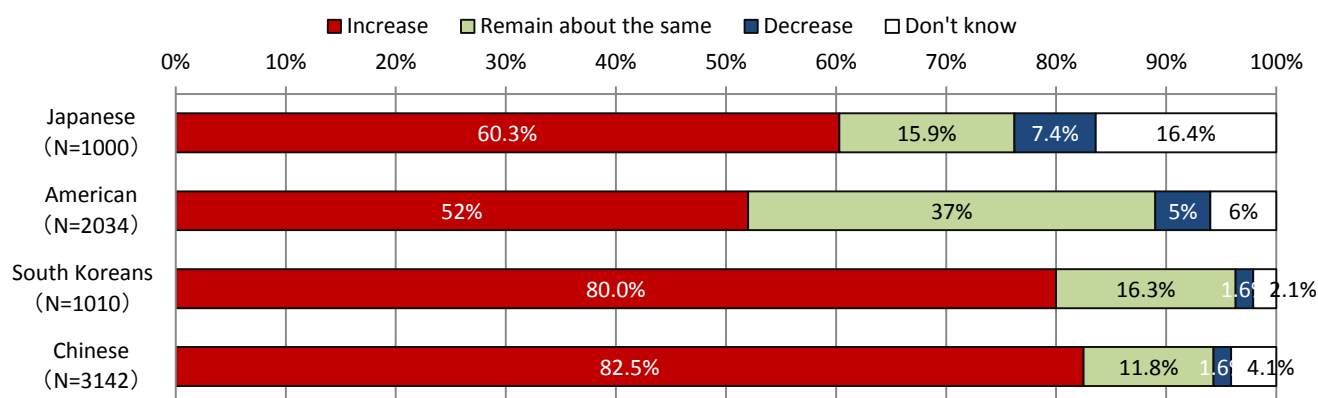
Detailed analysis follows:

Changing of the power balance in Asia will evolve around the Increasing China’s influence for the next ten years

As regards the prospects for Chinese influence strongly affecting the ongoing changes in Northeast Asia, not only the public in China but also those in the three other countries surveyed share the same perception. In particular, South Koreans seem to be more conscious than others about the growing Chinese influence.

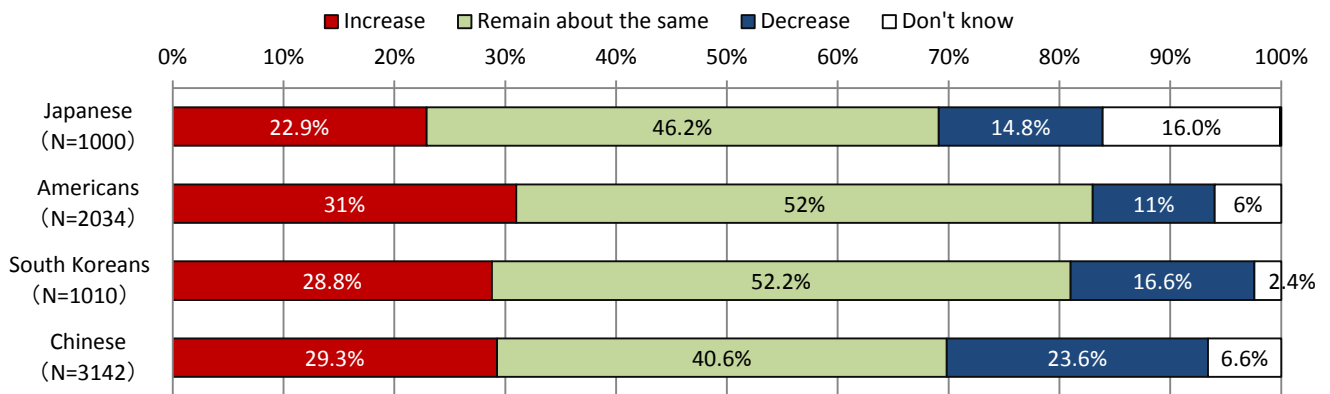
To the question regarding the “influence in Asia in the next 10 years,” 82.5 percent of the Chinese public see a further increase in China’s influence in Asia, whereas the equivalent is 80 percent in South Korea, 60.3 percent in Japan and 52 percent in the U.S.

【China’s influence in Asia in 10 years】



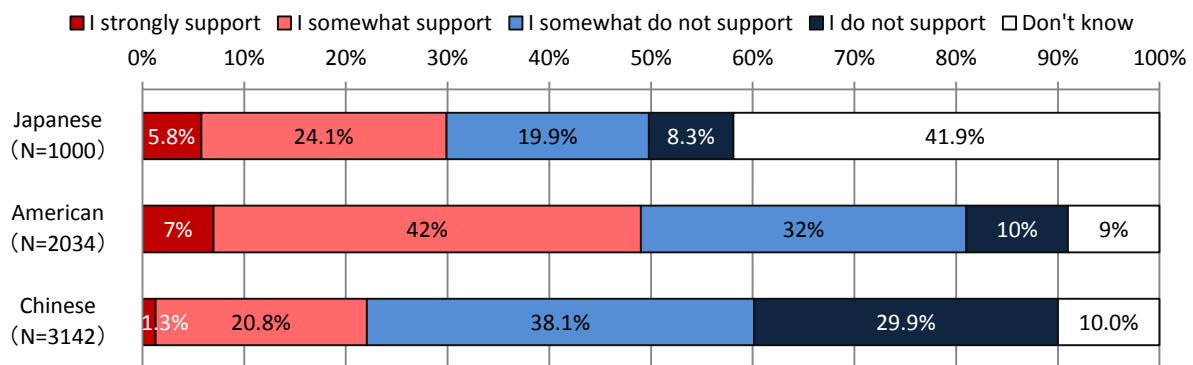
By contrast, only 31 percent of the American public say that the influence of the United States in Asia, which Washington is strengthening with the rebalance, will increase in future, whereas a majority of the Americans say that U.S. influence will remain the same. Meanwhile, less than 30 percent of the Japanese, South Korean and Chinese publics see an increase of American influence in Asia, and about half of them say Washington’s influence will stay the same.

【The United States influence in Asia in 10 years】



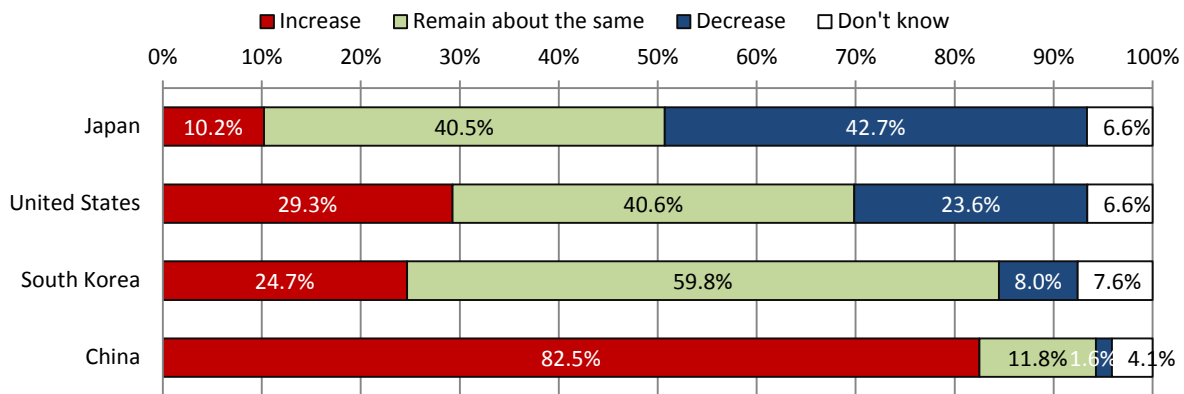
In a separate question, the publics in Japan, the U.S. and China were asked about their view on the U.S. rebalance to Asia. The U.S. public was divided, with 49 percent supporting it and 42 percent opposing. In Japan, the largest number, 41.9 percent, say they “don’t know,” indicating that the concept of the U.S. rebalance has yet to win the understanding of the Japanese public.

【Support for the U.S. Asia Rebalance】



Under these circumstances, more than 80 percent of Chinese cite confidence in the expansion of China’s influence in Asia in future. More than 40 percent of the Chinese public see the influence of the U.S. and South Korea remaining the same in the next 10 years, but 42.7 percent say Japan’s influence in Asia will diminish.

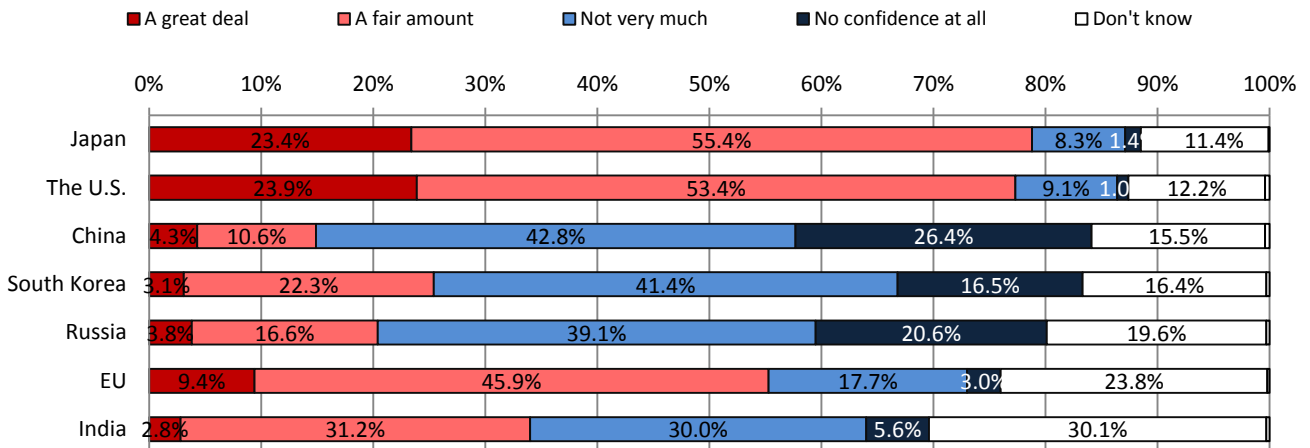
【Chinese opinion on each country's influence in Asia in ten years】



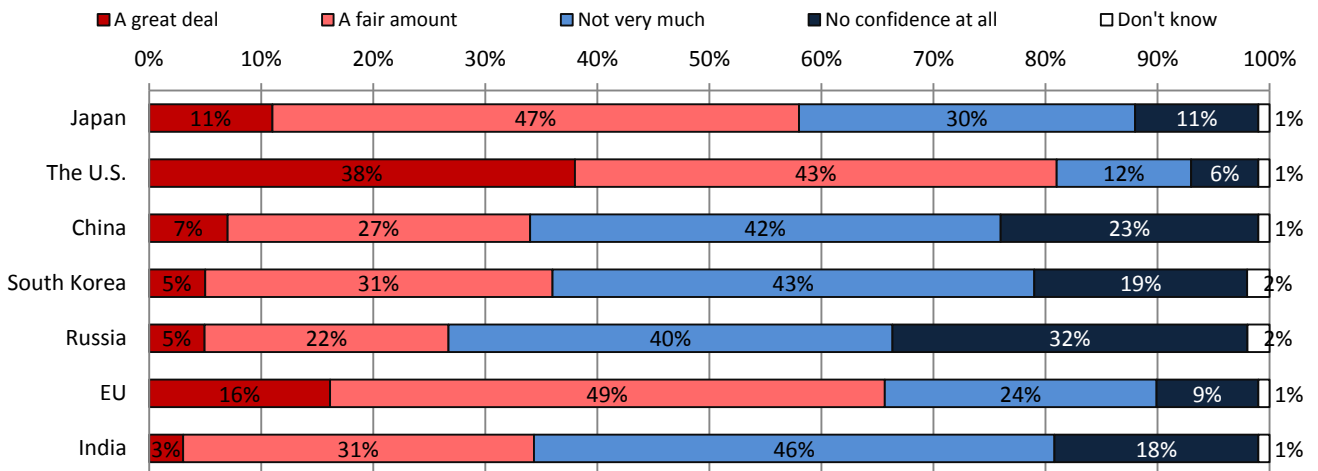
The large gap in perception between Japan-US and China-South Korea, for the evaluation of the country which would deal responsibly with the world problems

However, the view about the influence by country is not necessarily linked to the expectations for each country's responsible behavior in handling world problems. Rather, opinion is divided. For instance, the quadruple survey asked how do the publics in the countries surveyed view six countries – Japan, the U.S., China, South Korea, Russia and India – and the European Union in handling world problems. More than 50 percent of the American and Japanese publics cite confidence in each of the U.S., the EU and Japan for their contributions to the solution of world problems. The rate of confidence by the Japanese public was 78.85 percent in their country, 77.3 percent in the U.S. and 55.3 percent in the EU. The equivalent by the American public was 81 percent in their country, 65 percent in the EU and 58 percent in Japan. In contrast, the publics in both countries cite less confidence in China and South Korea. The corresponding rate by the American public was only 34 percent in China and 36 percent in South Korea, whereas that by the Japanese public was 14.9 percent in China and 25.4 percent in South Korea.

【Japanese opinion on country which would deal responsibly with world problems】

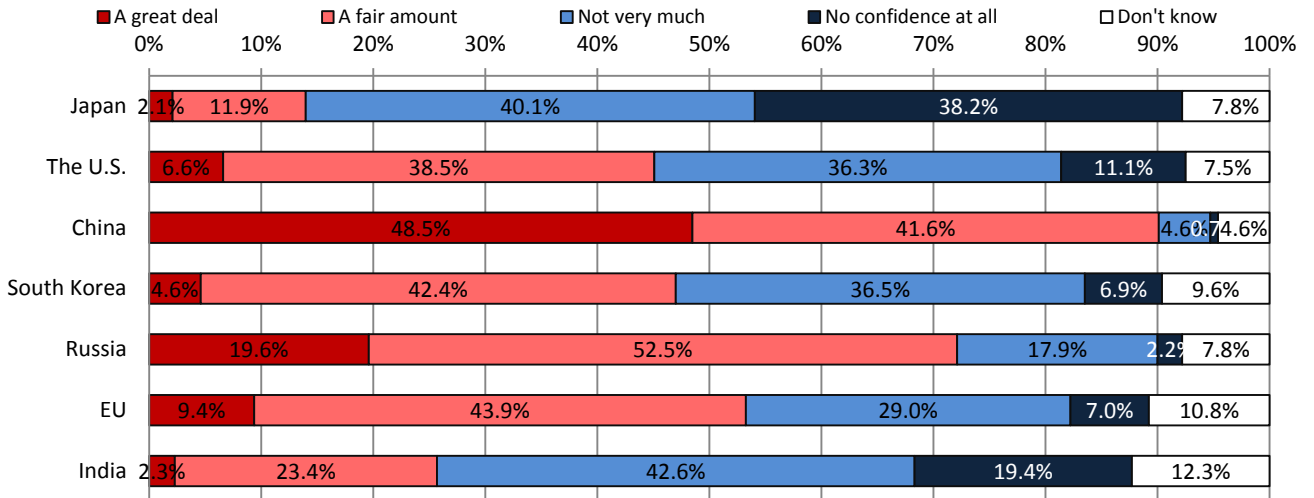


【US opinion on country which would deal responsibly with world problems】

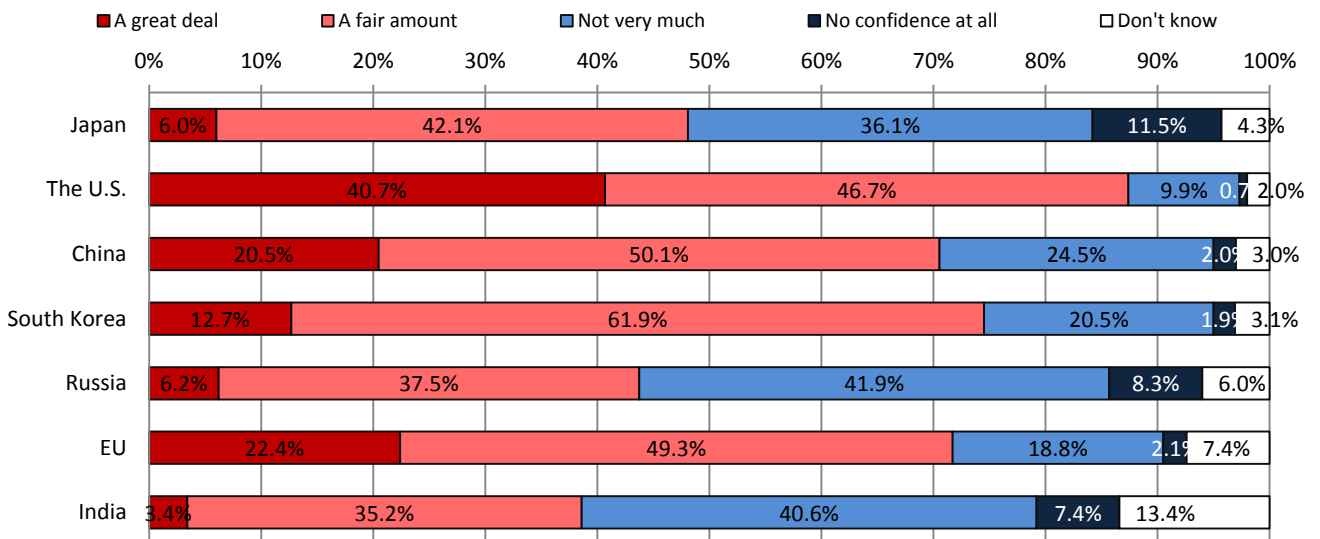


In contrast, 90.1 percent of the Chinese public say China can handle world problems responsibly and more than 70 percent expect Russia to do the same. But only 45.1 percent of Chinese say the U.S. can deal responsibly with world problems. Meanwhile, South Koreans cite strong confidence in China with 70.6 percent, whereas the corresponding rate was 87.4 percent with the U.S. and 71.7 percent with the EU. Only 14 percent of the Chinese public cite confidence in Japan and 48.1 percent of the South Korean public do the same.

【Chinese opinion on country which would deal responsibly with world problems】

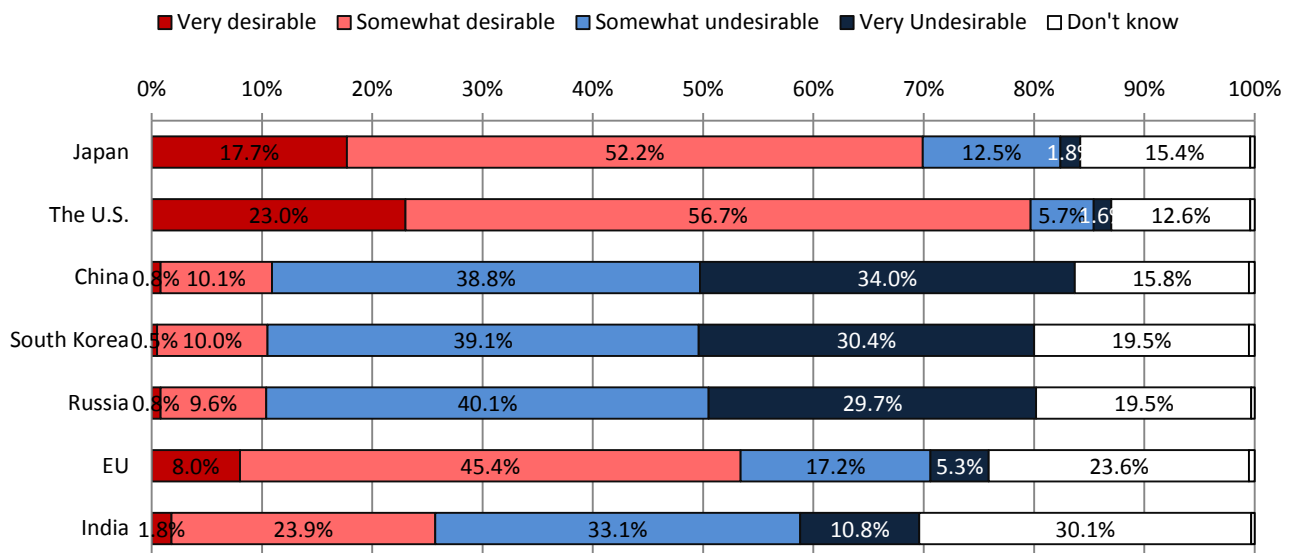


【Korean opinion on country which would deal responsibly with world problems】

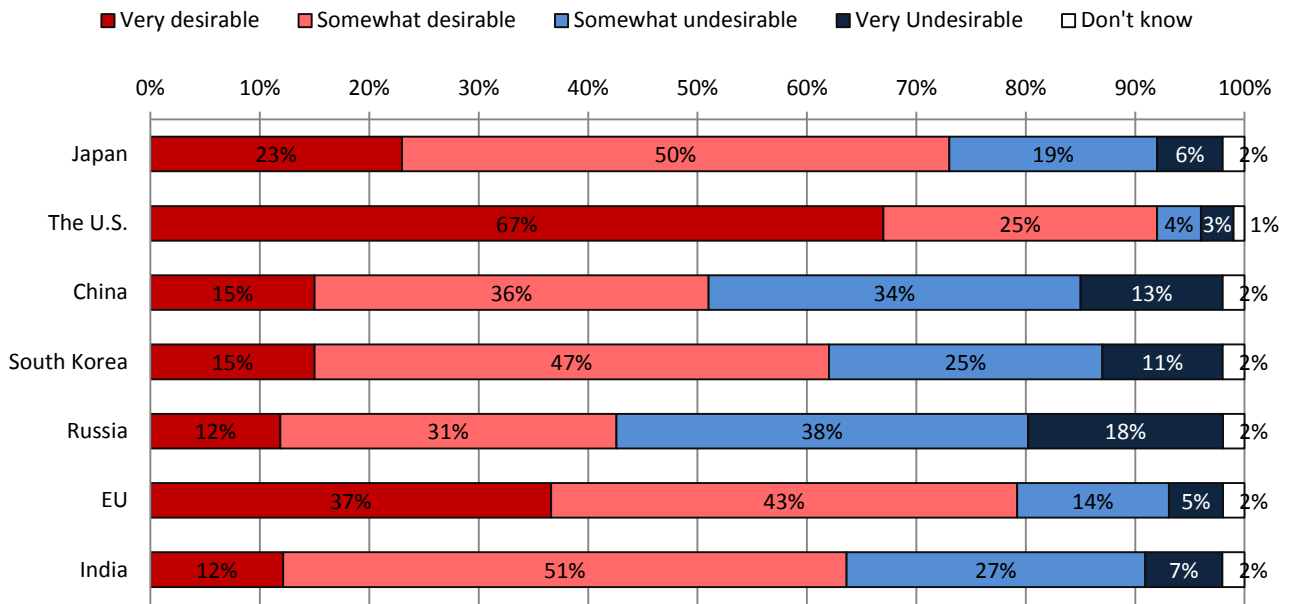


Asked about leadership by each of the six countries and the EU, this has also showed that there is a large gap in perception between Japan/the United States and China. The highest number, 79.7 percent, of the Japanese public say they expect the U.S. to assume global leadership, followed by 69.9 percent with their country and 53.4 percent with the EU. Only 10 percent or so of Japanese cite China, South Korea and Russia. In the U.S., 92 percent of the respondents say the U.S. should take global leadership and 80 percent expect the EU to do so, followed by 73 percent with Japan, 62 percent with South Korea, 51 percent with China and 43 percent with Russia. In contrast, 72.8 percent of China's public expect Russia to assume global leadership, followed by 64.1 percent with the U.S., 53.4 percent with South Korea and 42.4 percent with Japan. Needless to say, the highest number, 85.7 percent, of the Chinese cite their country.

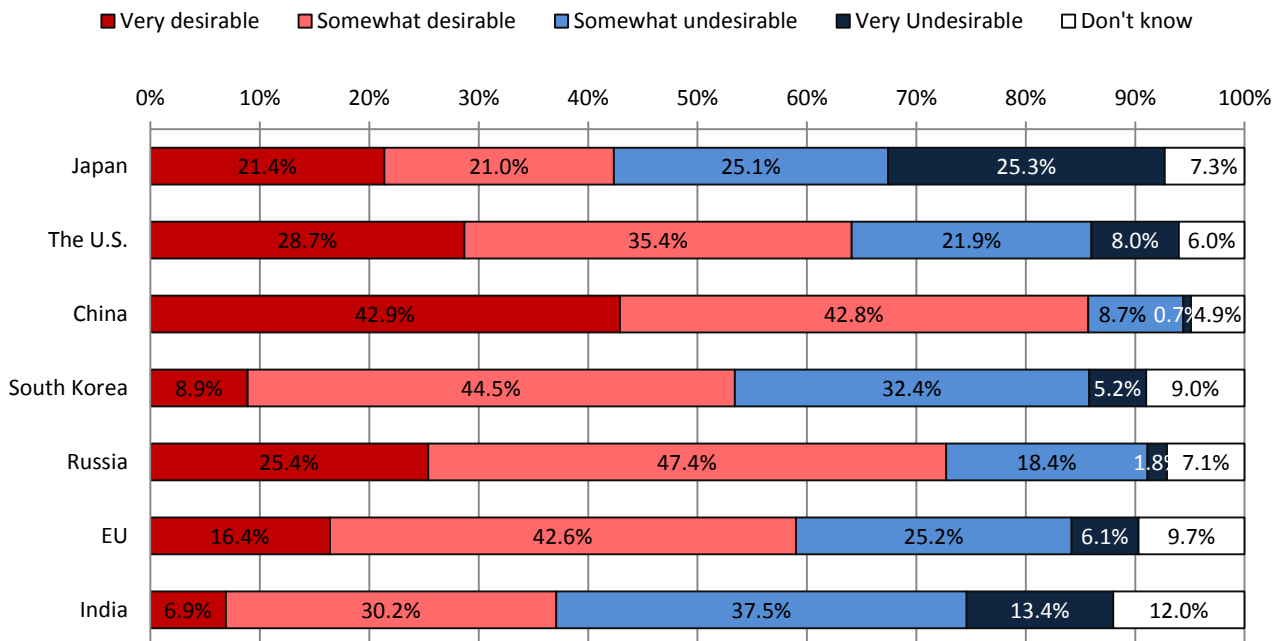
【Country Japanese think that it would be desirable to exert strong leadership in world affairs】



【Country Americans think that it would be desirable to exert strong leadership in world affairs】



【Country Chinese think that it would be desirable to exert strong leadership in world affairs】

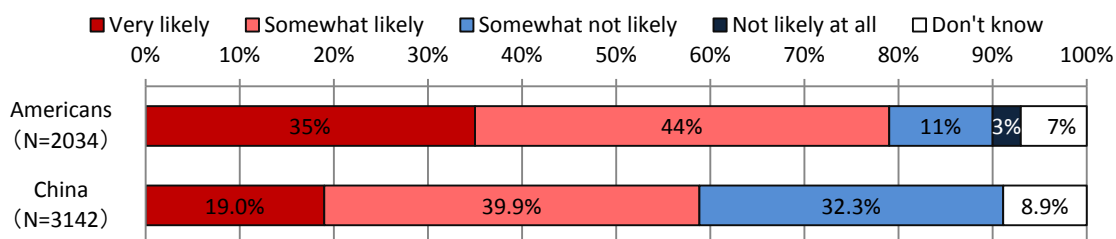


U.S. and Chinese public opinion concerned with the growth of Chinese military power and the U.S. military presence in Asia and the Pacific

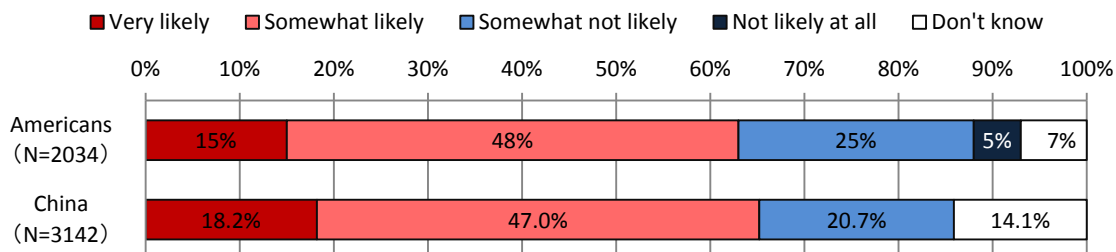
The four-country opinion survey also examined the perceptions of the public in Japan, the U.S., China and South Korea about the potential causes of regional conflict. The responses to the related questions show that the Japanese are less sensitive to the danger of a possible regional conflict and that there are noticeable tendencies in the perceptions on the matter among the publics in the four countries.

First, the American and Chinese publics are more cognizant than others about the likelihood that China's stepped-up reinforcement of military might and the U.S. deployment of forces in the Asia-Pacific region might spark a conflict in Asia in future. For instance, close to 80 percent (79 percent) of the American public see China's military buildup as likely or highly likely to trigger a regional conflict and the corresponding figure for the Chinese public is close to 60 percent (58.9 percent). And 65.2 percent of the Chinese and 63 percent of the Americans are cognizant of the likelihood that U.S. military deployment in the Asia-Pacific region will cause a conflict.

【Source of conflict in Asia: The growth of Chinese military power】

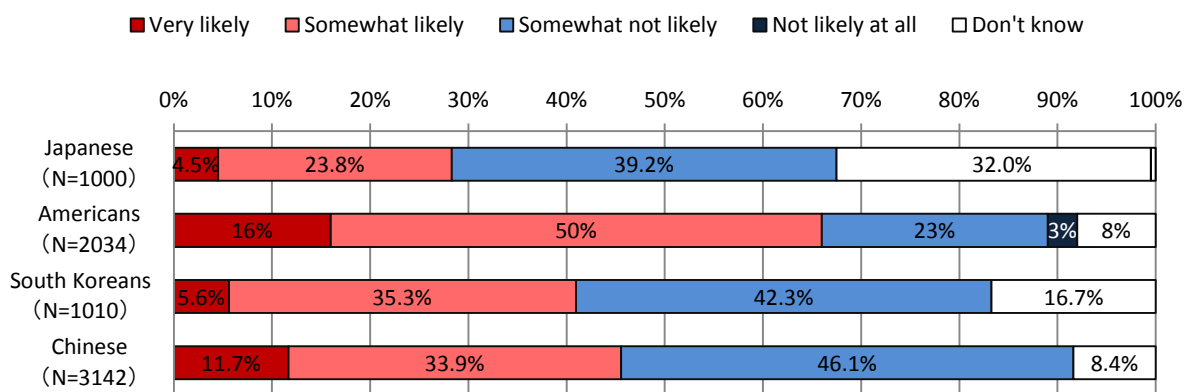


【Source of conflict in Asia: The U.S. military presence in Asia and the Pacific】

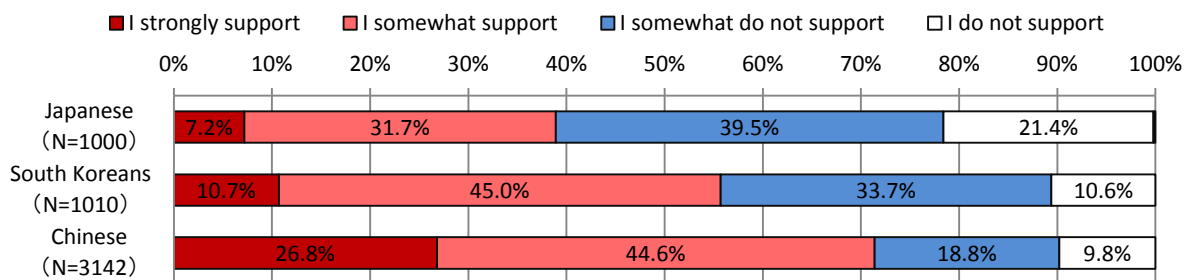


However, there are differences in perceptions among the publics of the four countries about bilateral confrontations. For instance, 66 percent of the American public reply that it is likely or highly likely that a conflict will occur between China and Taiwan, but only 45.6 percent of the Chinese public see it that way. Similarly, 71.4 percent of China’s public see the likelihood or high likelihood of Japan and China being engaged in a conflict in future, but the corresponding figure for the Japanese public is only 38.9 percent, with almost an identical 39.5 percent saying that Japan-China conflict is not likely. When it comes to a conflict between Japan and South Korea, 54 percent of South Koreans are conscious of its likelihood, but only 22.6 percent of Japanese public is conscious of it.

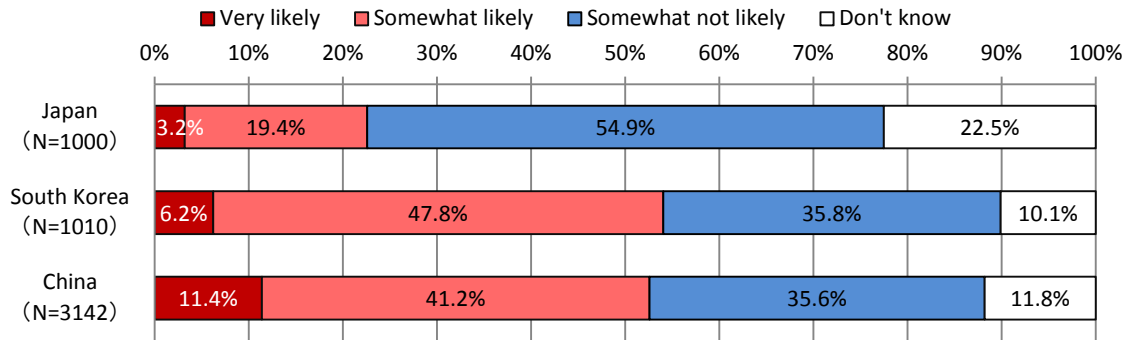
【Source of conflict in Asia: The relationship between China and Taiwan】



【Source of conflict in Asia: The relationship between Japan and China】

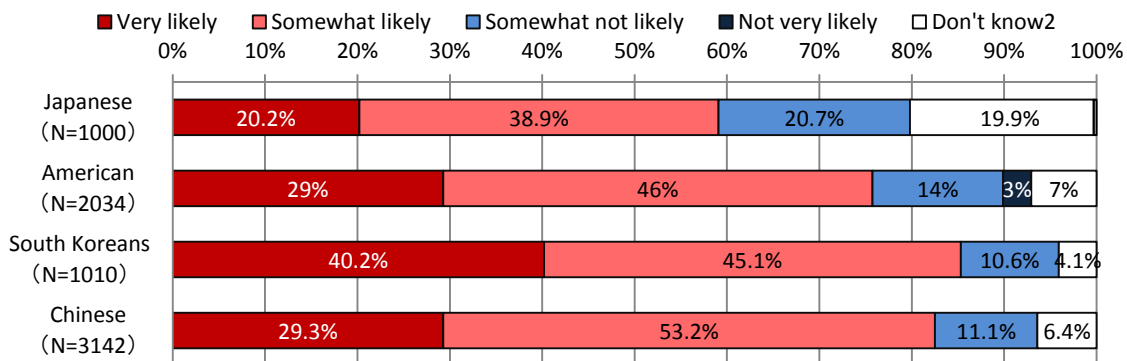


【Source of conflict in Asia: The relationship between Japan and South Korea】

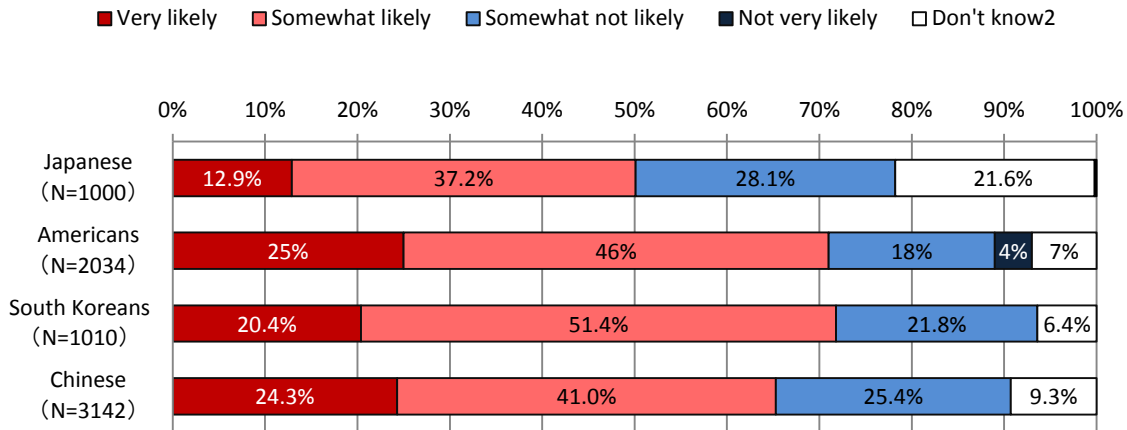


Third, a majority of the publics in the four countries is aware of the fact that there exist sources of potential conflict in Northeast Asia. Among them are “competition over vital energy resources” (cited by 59.1 percent of Japanese, 75 percent of Americans, 85.3 percent of South Koreans and 82.5 percent of Chinese) and “the spread of nuclear weapons to new countries in Asia” (by 50.1 percent of Japanese, 71 percent of Americans, 71.8 percent of South Koreans and 65.3 percent of Chinese).

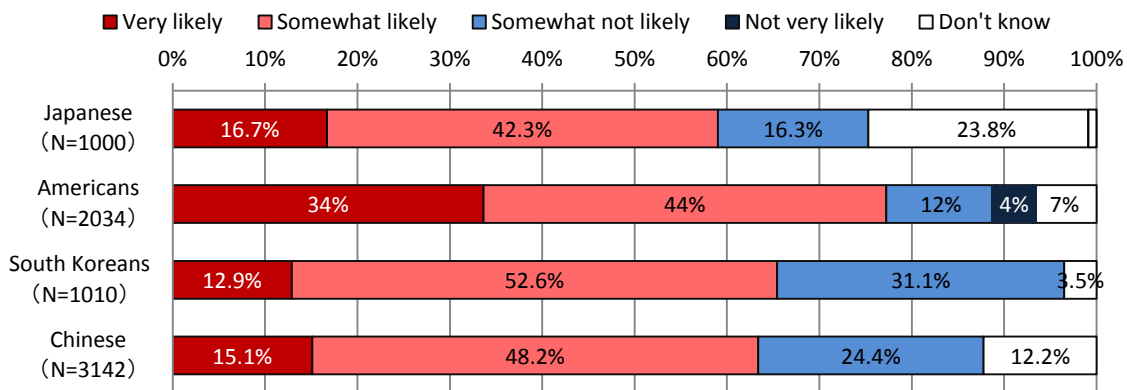
【Source of conflict in Asia: Competition over vital energy resources like oil and gas】



【Source of conflict in Asia: The spread of nuclear weapons to new countries in Asia】



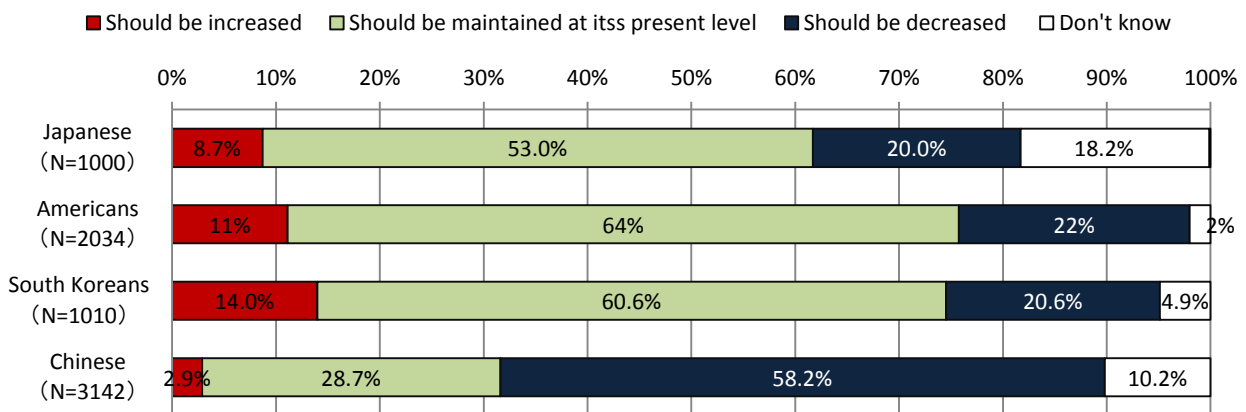
【Source of conflict in Asia: Situation on the Korean Peninsula】



Majorities in Japan, United States and South Korea want to keep US military presence at its present level

As regards the presence of U.S. military forces in volatile Northeast Asia, a majority of Japanese, South Korean and American think that it should be maintained at its present level (64 percent in the U.S., 60.6 percent in South Korea and 53 percent in Japan). In contrast, the highest number, 58.2 percent, of China’s public say the presence of U.S. forces in Asia should be reduced, although it is noteworthy that close to 30 percent (28.7 percent) of China’s public favor the continued presence of U.S. forces in Asia.

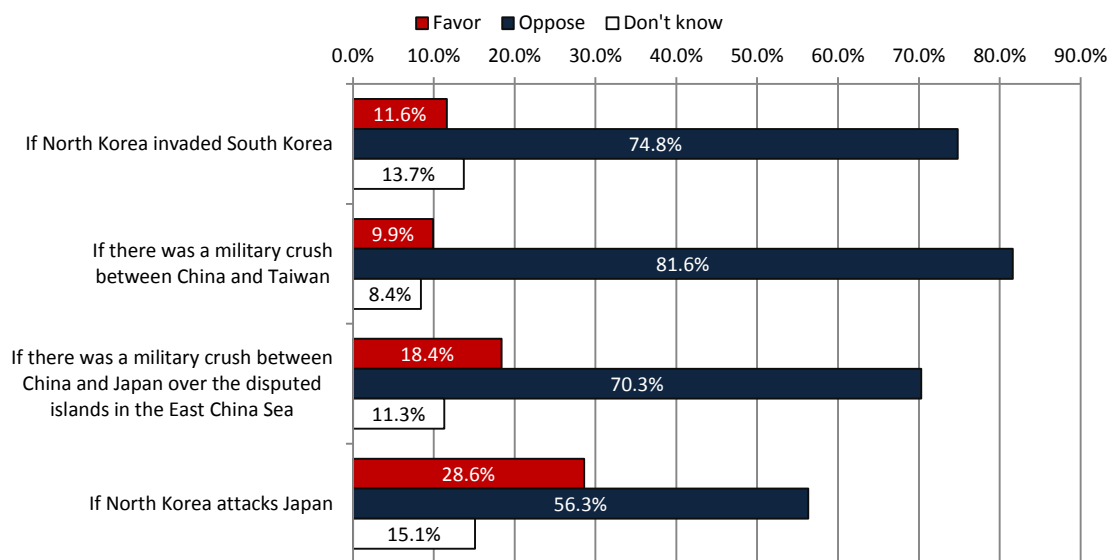
【The U.S. military presence in the Asia-Pacific】



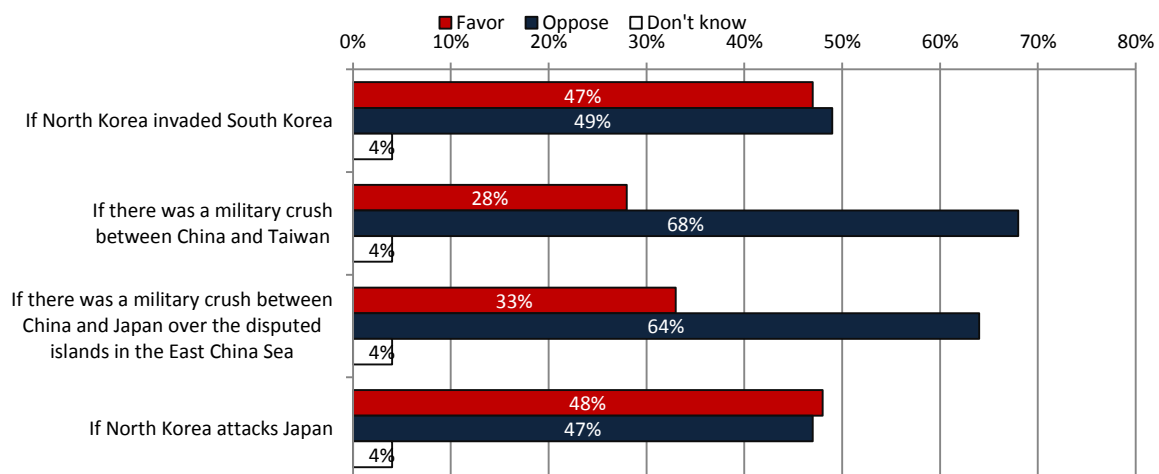
U.S. public reluctant to send the U.S. troops to conflicts in Asia

Asked about what circumstances the use of U.S. force might be justified, the survey found that about 70 percent of China's public are against the use of U.S. force in any of the hypothetical conflict surveyed. It is also found that there is strong opposition among the U.S. public to the use of U.S. force in Asia. In particular, American public sentiment is quite negative over the use of American force in a military conflict between Japan and China, and between China and Taiwan, and the American public is divided with regard to other situations.

【Situation where Chinese think that using U.S. troops would be justified】



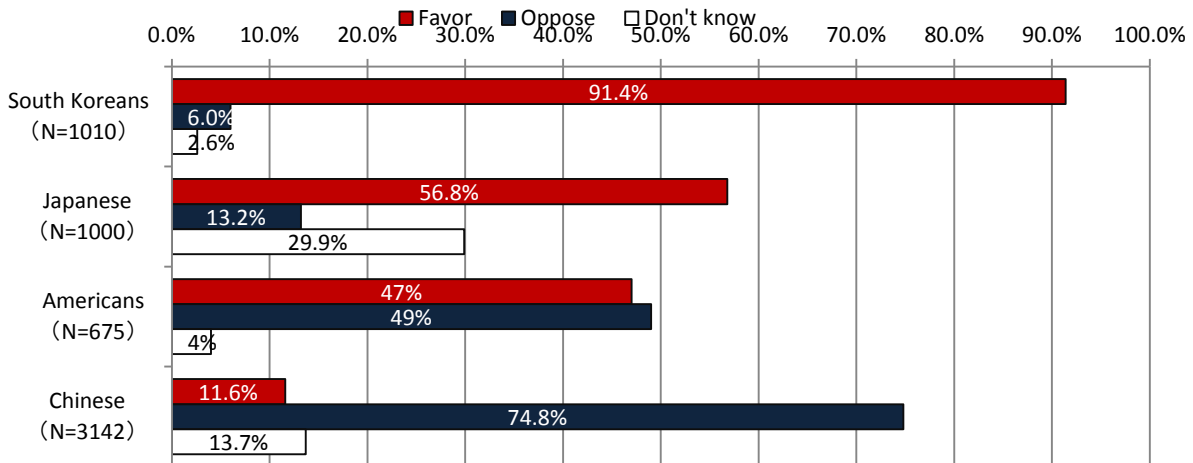
【Situation where Americans think that using U.S. troops would be justified】



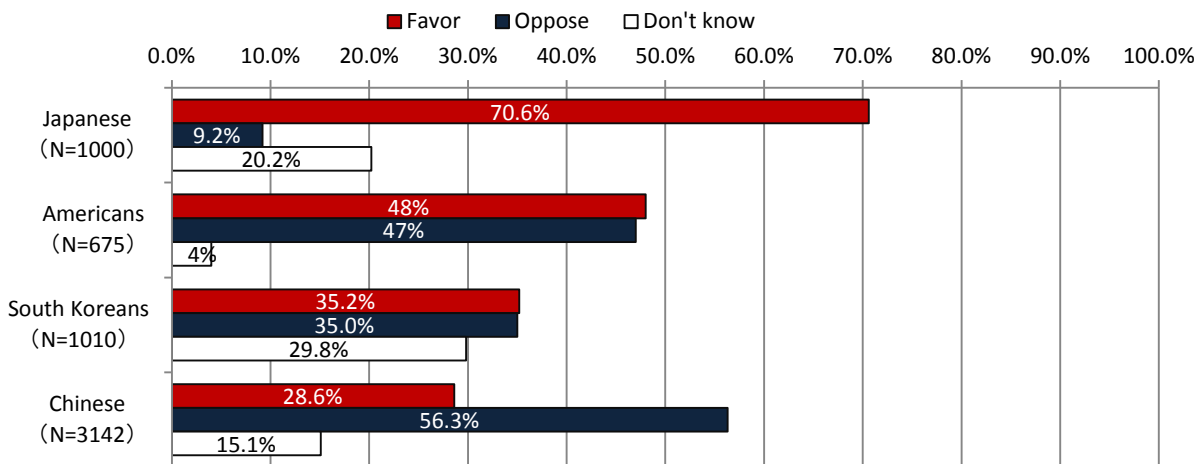
For instance, 91.4 percent of South Koreans support the use of U.S. force in case of an emergency on the Korean Peninsula (or North Korea’s invasion of South Korea) and 56.8 percent of Japanese reply the same (with only 13.2 percent of Japanese public opposing). However, the American public is divided on this matter, with 47 percent supporting and 49 percent opposing, while 74.8 percent of Chinese oppose it (11.6 percent supporting).

Should North Korea attack Japan, 70.6 percent of the Japanese support the deployment of U.S. forces (with 9.2 percent opposing), but again, the U.S. public is divided, with 48 percent supporting and 47 percent against. The South Korean public also remains divided on the matter, with 35.2 percent supporting, 35 percent opposing and 29.8 percent “don’t know.” In China, 56.3 percent of its public oppose the use of U.S. force should North Korea attack Japan, but close to 30 percent (28.6 percent) support it.

【Support for using U.S. troops: if North Korea invaded South Korea】

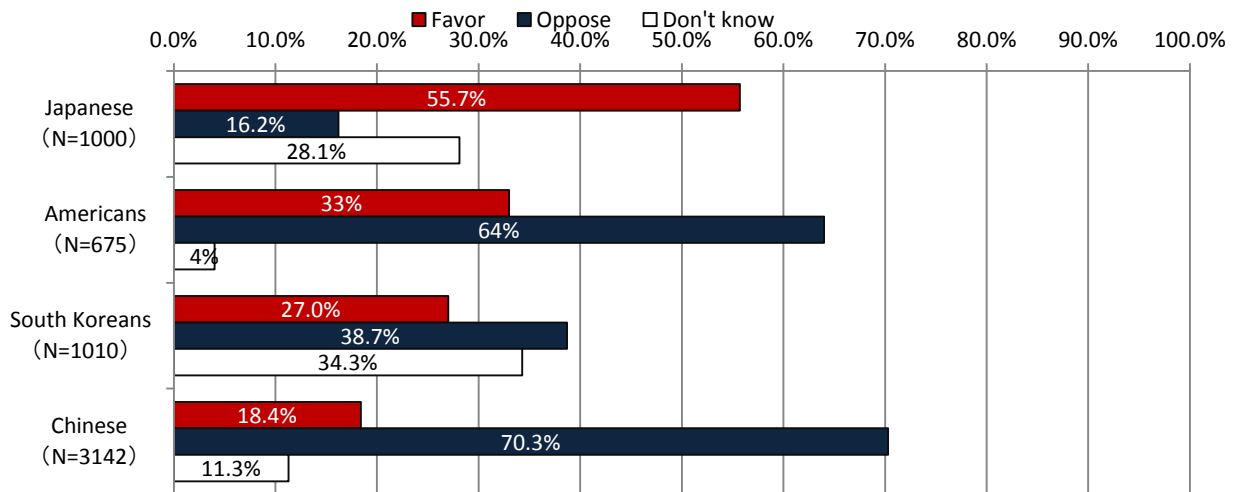


【Support for using U.S. troops: If North Korea attacks Japan】

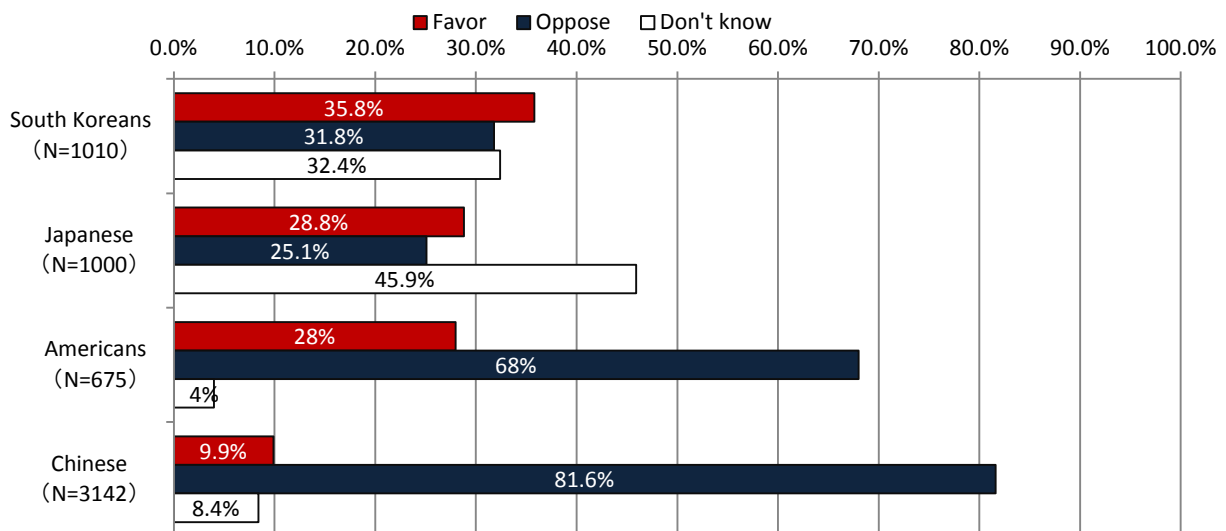


The American and Chinese publics are more likely to oppose the use of US forces for a military conflict between Japan and China, and between China and Taiwan. If China initiated a military conflict with Japan over the disputed Senkaku/Diaoyu islets, 55.7 percent of Japanese support the deployment of U.S. forces, with 16.2 percent opposing. However, 64 percent of the American public oppose it (33 percent supporting) and 70.3 percent of Chinese are against it (with 18.4 percent supporting). In South Korea, 38.7 percent of its public oppose the use of U.S. force (with 27 percent supporting). When it comes to a possible China-Taiwan conflict, 68 percent of Americans and 81.6 percent of Chinese oppose the use of American forces, and public opinion in Japan and South Korea on the matter is divided, with only 30 percent or so in each country supporting the deployment of U.S. forces.

【Support for using U.S. troops: If China initiates a military conflict with Japan over disputed islands】



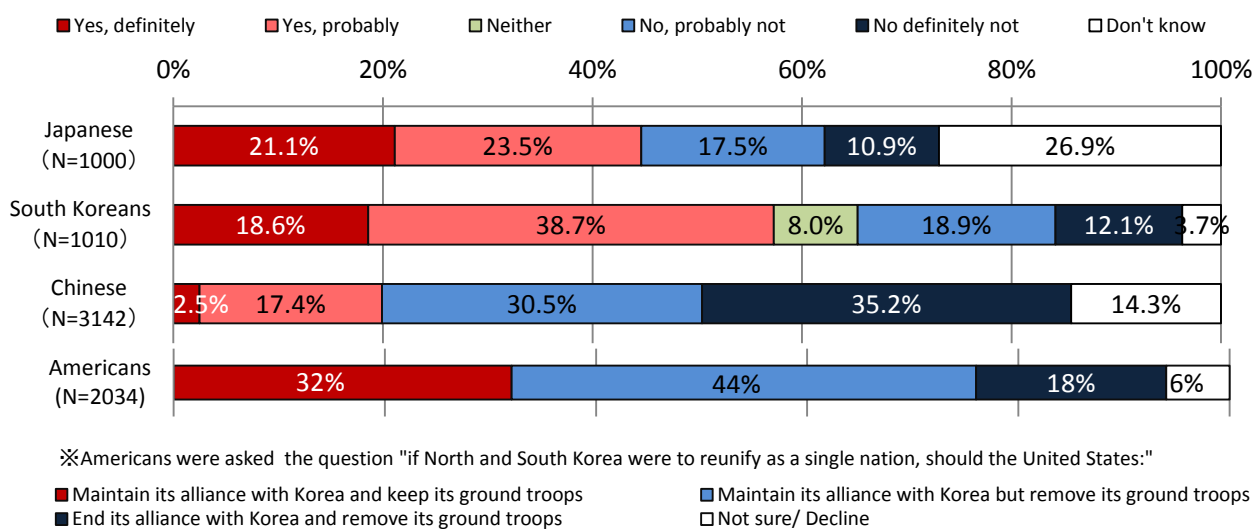
【Support for using U.S. troops: If China invaded Taiwan】



Japan/South Korea and China/U.S. divided on the role of U.S. ground troops in the Korean Peninsula

In a related question about the deployment of U.S. troops in South Korea if North and South Korea were to reunify as a single nation, public opinion of the four countries were divided. Relatively, many people in South Korea (57.3 percent, as against 31 percent opposing) and in Japan (44.6 percent, as against 28.4 percent opposing) favor maintaining U.S. troops on the Korean Peninsula after reunification. In contrast, 65.7 percent of China's public oppose it (19.9 percent in favor). In the U.S., 32 percent of the public favor the continuation of the alliance and maintaining the U.S. troops on the Korean Peninsula, and 44 percent favor keeping the alliance but want the U.S. troops to be removed. Further, 18 percent favor termination of the alliance and removal of the troops, meaning a combined 62 percent of the American public favor the withdrawal of U.S. troops from the Korean Peninsula if reunification was realized.

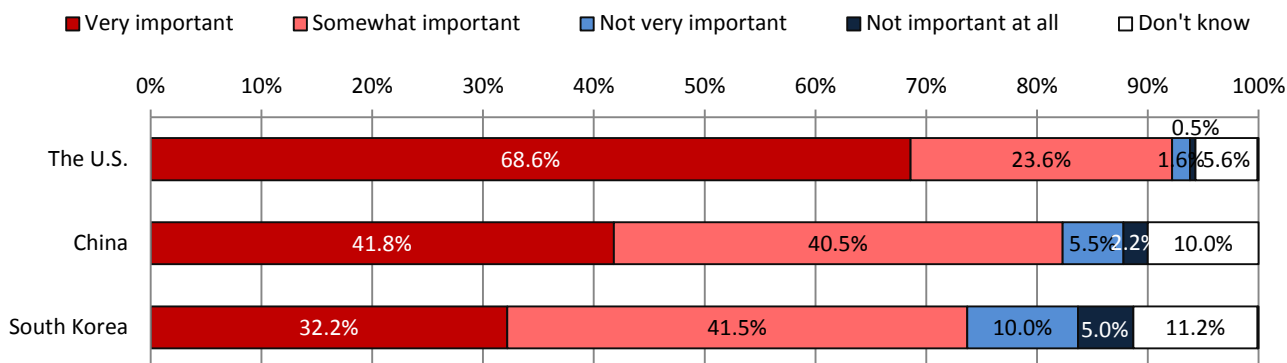
【U.S. ground troops in the Korean Peninsula after reunification】



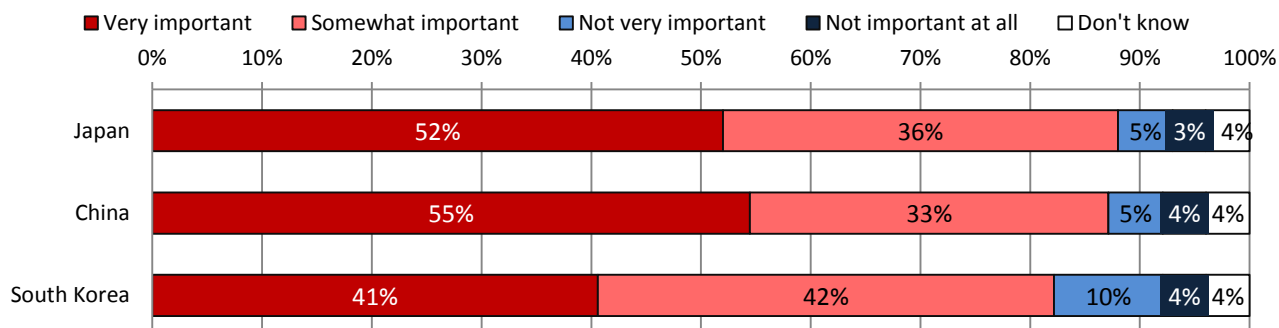
South Korea's China shift is also visible on the question of important bilateral relations

Asked about the importance of bilateral relations, as many as 92.2 percent of the Japanese public cite relations with the U.S. as “important,” followed by 82.3 percent with China and 73.7 percent with South Korea. For Americans, relations with Japan and China are equally important, with 88 percent, respectively, saying “important.”

【Important bilateral relationship for Japanese】



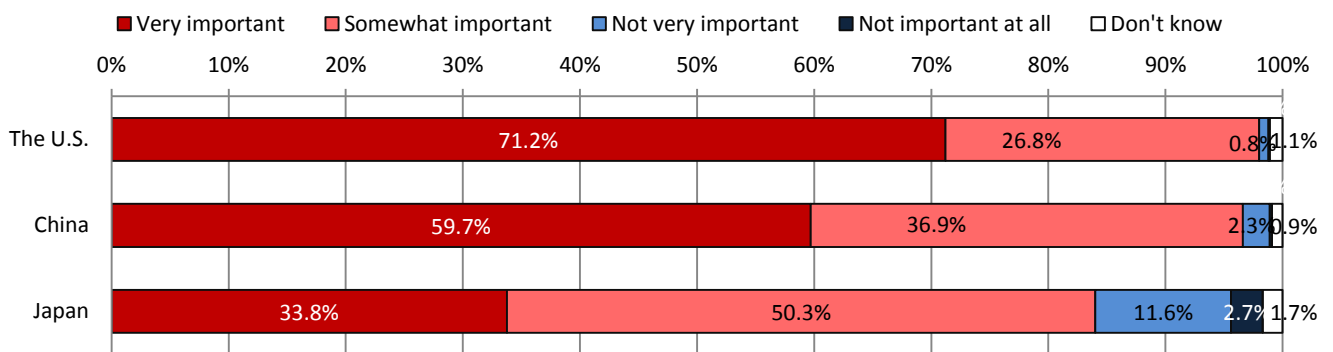
【Important bilateral relationship for Americans】



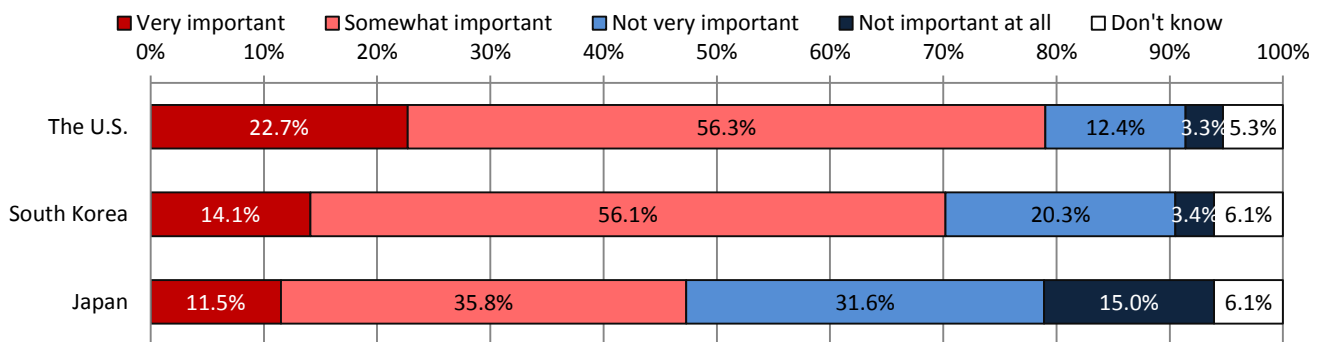
The highest number, 98 percent, of South Koreans view relations with the U.S. as important and an almost identical 96.6 percent describe ties with China as important. And 84.1 percent of South Koreans say relations with Japan are important.

For Chinese, relations with the U.S. are regarded as their most important bilateral ties (78 percent), but as many as 70.2 percent view South Korea as such. However, the Chinese opinion on relations with Japan is divided, with only 47.3 percent saying “important” and 46.6 percent “not important.”

【Important bilateral relationship for South Korean】



【Important bilateral relationship for Chinese】



The majority of Chinese regard South Korea as reliable

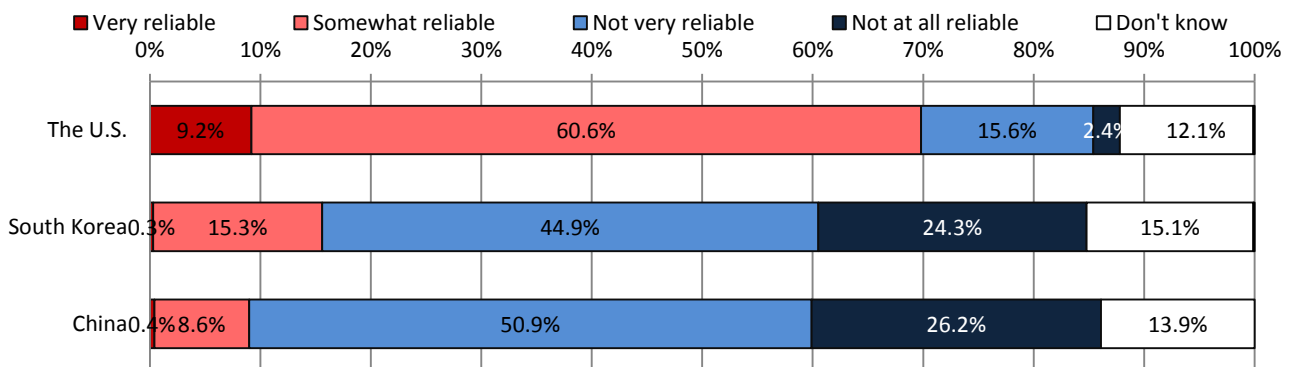
The publics in Japan, the U.S. and China were asked which country they trust most – Japan, China, South Korea and the U.S.

For Japanese, the U.S. is the most reliable country among the three, with the highest number, 69.8 percent, saying they trust the U.S. either “very much” or “somewhat.” But only 15.6 percent of Japanese public trust South Korea and 9 percent trust China.

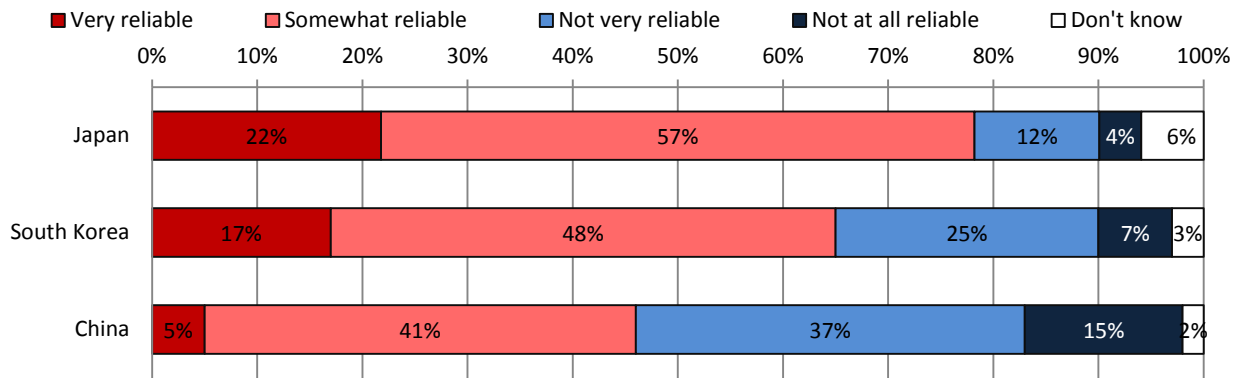
For Americans, the most reliable country among the three Asian powers is Japan, with 79 percent citing Japan, followed by 65 percent saying South Korea and 46 percent China.

Meanwhile, the highest number, 56.3 percent, of China’s public cite South Korea as “most reliable” or “somewhat reliable,” and the corresponding figure is 33.9 percent for the U.S., much lower than the combined 61.3 percent of the Chinese respondents who say they cannot trust the U.S. either “at all” or “somewhat.” And only 8.9 percent of China’s public say they can trust Japan, with as many as 86.4 percent (combined) saying they cannot trust Japan.

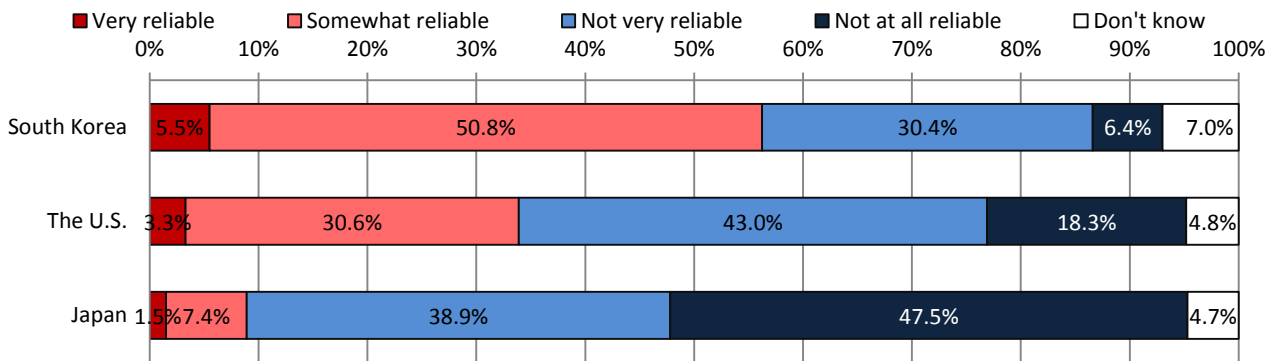
【Reliable country for Japanese】



【Reliable country for Americans】



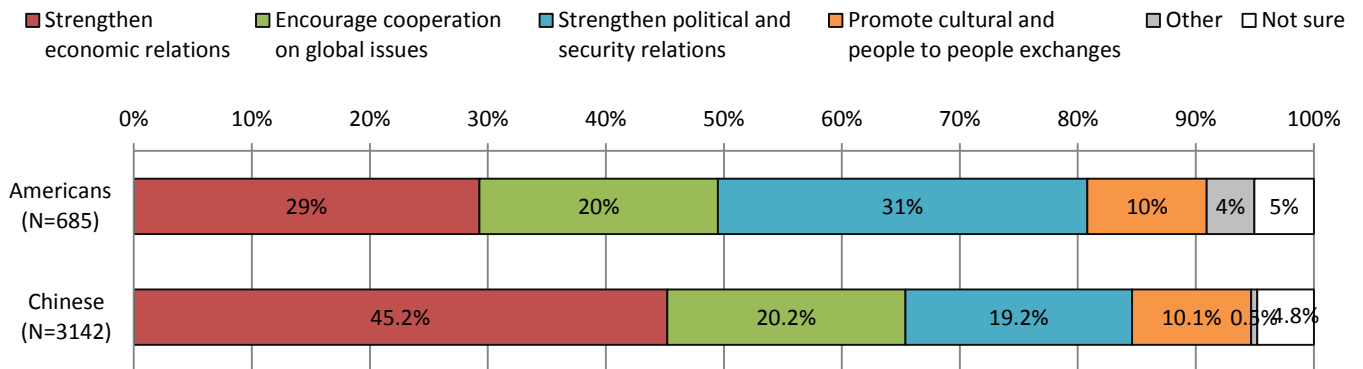
【Reliable country for Chinese】



Ways to improve bilateral relations

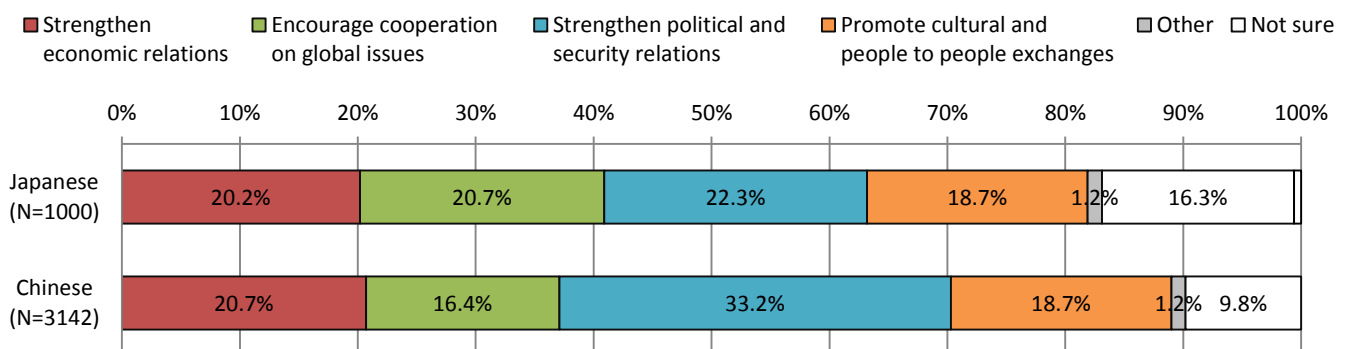
Asked about the most helpful ways to improve bilateral relations, 31 percent of Americans think “strengthening political and security relations” is the answer, followed by “economic relations” with 29 percent while the largest number, 54 percent, of Chinese cite “economic relations.”

【Ways to improve U.S.-China relations】



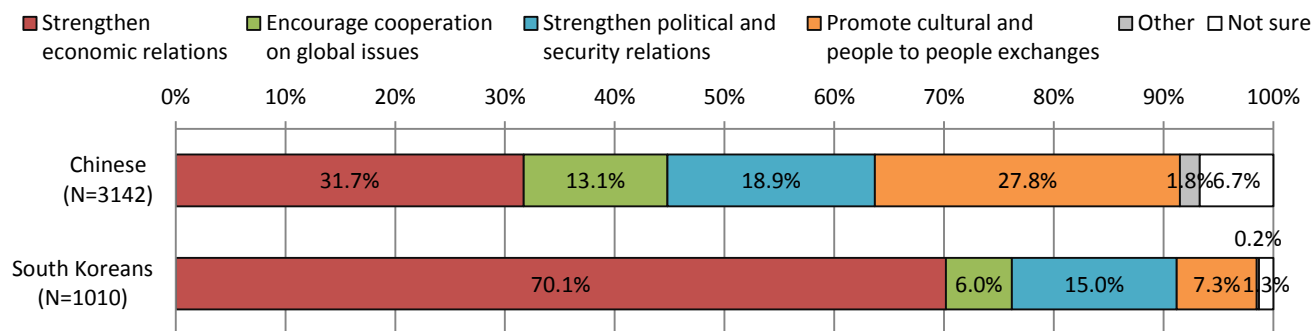
As regards Japan-China relations, Japan’s public is divided and cannot pinpoint specific ways, the largest number, 33.2 percent, of Chinese cite “strengthening political and security relations,” followed by “economic relations” with 20.7 percent.

【Ways to improve Japan-China relations】



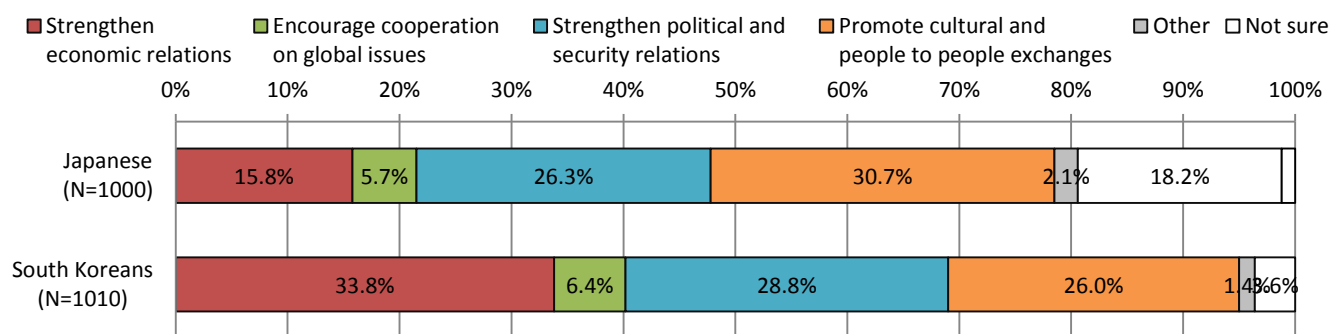
When it comes to relations between China and South Korea, an overwhelming 70.1 percent of South Koreans cite “economic relations,” whereas 31.7 percent of Chinese cite “economic relations,” followed by “cultural and people-to-people exchanges” with 27.8 percent.

【Ways to improve China-ROK relations】



As regards Japan-South Korea relations, the largest number, 30.7 percent, of Japan’s public favor “cultural and people-to-people exchanges,” followed by “strengthening political and security relations” with 26.3 percent. Only 15.8 percent cite “economic relations.” In contrast, the largest number, 33.8 percent, of South Koreans think strengthening economic relations is the most helpful way to improve relations with Japan, followed by “strengthening political and security relations” with 28.8 percent and “cultural and people-to-people exchanges” with 26 percent.

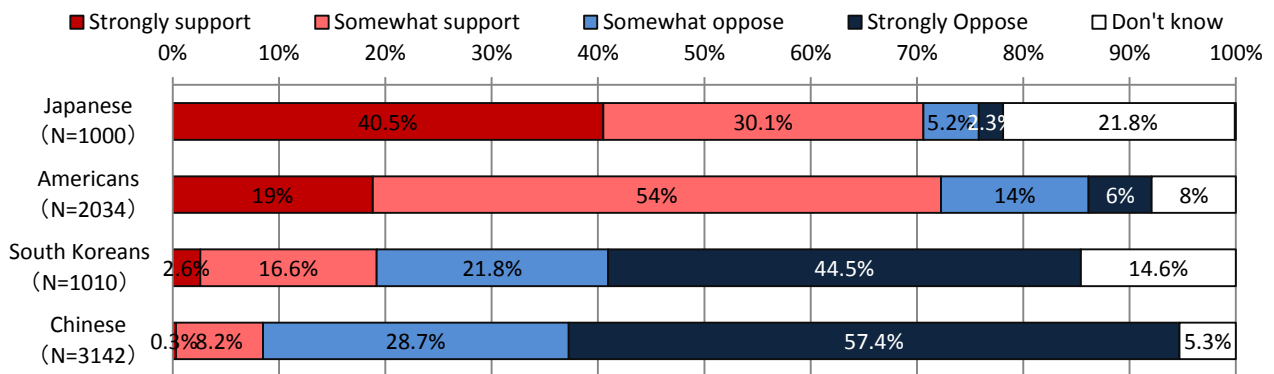
【Ways to improve Japan-ROK relations】



The large majority in China and South Korea oppose Japan becoming a permanent member at the UN Security Council

To the question regarding Japan’s bid to become a permanent member of the U.N. Security Council, 70.6 percent of the Japanese and 73 percent of the Americans support it, whereas 66.3 percent of the South Koreans and 86.1 percent of the Chinese are opposed to it.

【Support for Japan becoming a permanent member of UN Security Council】



Conclusion

The quadruple opinion poll has revealed a somewhat alarming trend in the public opinion in the four countries. There has emerged a schism in the security alliance between the U.S., Japan and South Korea, countries that have been deemed to share the fundamental values of democracy and the security concerns in this region. That is, we see a conspicuous tendency among the South Korean public to cite confidence in China and to attach importance to bilateral relations with Beijing. The publics in the four countries see a continued increase in China's influence in Asia and South Koreans seem to be most sensitive to the prospects among the publics of the four countries, resulting in their overt inclination to trust China.

According to the findings of the survey, many people in Japan, the U.S. and South Korea do not favor a further expansion of U.S. force in Asia while the publics in countries other than those directly involved are divided over the use of the U.S. military in any conflict in this region. More important, many Americans do not support the continued stationing of U.S. troops on the Korea Peninsula should a peaceful unification of North and South Korea materialize. These findings will serve as key points in discussing security issues in Northeast Asia in future.

Amid a rising China, public views are divided and filled with concerns over the direction of ongoing changes, and the likelihood of conflicts, primarily because of the presence of adversarial bilateral relations, especially rivalry between the U.S. and China over security matters. Another reason is the absence of a venue for dialogues and a mechanism of governance for the prevention of crises in Asia. Meanwhile, the publics in the four countries share a prospect that the U.S. influence in Asia will not increase in future apparently because the significance and the process of the ongoing U.S. rebalance to Asia is not yet fully recognized at the popular level.

The findings of the survey are important in that they have highlighted the tasks for the construction of peace in Northeast Asia, not to mention its significance. How should we confront the instability and build a stable peace in this region? To this end, it is imperative to create a venue for dialogue where many citizens in the countries concerned can discuss the issues for peace-building as their own problems. We firmly believe that the latest joint opinion poll has marked the first step toward that end.

Genron NPO – Japan

The Genron NPO survey in Japan was conducted from April 9 to 30, 2015 among a national sample of 1,000 adults, 18 years of age or older. The survey was fielded in 50 regions of Japan, with 20 samples from each region collected based on a quota sampling method at the individual level using 2010 census data. The survey was conducted face-to-face, with the questionnaire left with the respondent and then collected a few days later. The margin of error ranges from ± 4.6 to ± 6.0 percentage points depending on the specific question.

The Chicago Council Survey – United States

The analysis in this report is based on data from the 2015 Chicago Council Survey of the American public on foreign policy. The 2015 Chicago Council Survey was conducted by GfK Custom Research using their large-scale, nationwide online research KnowledgePanel between May 25 and June 17, 2015 among a national sample of 2,034 adults, 18 years of age or older, living in all 50 US states and the District of Columbia. The margin of error ranges from ± 2.2 to ± 3.1 percentage points depending on the specific question.

East Asia Institute – South Korea

The East Asia Institute survey in South Korea was conducted by the Han-Kook Research Company between April 17 and May 8, 2015 among a national sample of 1,010 adults, aged 19 years and older. It uses a quota sampling method based on region, gender, and age and the interviews were conducted face to face. The margin of error is ± 3.1 percentage points.

Horizon Research Consultancy Group – China

Horizon Research Consultancy Group conducted the survey in China from August 25 to September 11, 2015 among an urban sample of 3,142 adults, aged 18 years and older. The survey used the PPS sampling method and was conducted face to face across all tier 1-4 cities in 29 provinces. The margin of error is ± 1.8 percentage points.