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Nationalism and Antagonism: Koreans' Purchasing Behavior towards Japanese Products

by

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Abstract

Korea suffered from Japanese colonization for nearly 50 years in the early 20th century. Such history has left the feeling of victimization among Koreans who directly suffered from colonization as well as among their descendents. This study focuses on nationalism and antagonism by Koreans across different age spectrums. With this, the study investigates how nationalism and antagonism are expressed via Koreans' purchasing of Japanese products. Seventy Koreans were recruited in Seoul, Korea in 2009 and their ages ranged from 19 to 86. Participants filled in a survey that included Nationalism Questionnaire, Antagonism Questionnaire, Japanese Product Antagonism Questionnaire and Japanese Product Quality Questionnaire. The results showed that older Koreans have higher nationalism, but not necessarily higher antagonism toward foreign nations. However, older generations showed a significant degree of antagonism toward Japanese products. Lastly, older Koreans, at the same time, regarded Japanese products to be superior in quality than did the younger Korean generation.

Nationalism and Antagonism: Koreans' Purchasing Behavior towards Japanese Products

Globalization has been accompanied by increased market competition both within and across nations. The number of foreign brands has spread throughout the world and consumers are now getting a wide range of product choices.

Thus it has become a huge concern for marketers in multinational companies to predict whether their products will succeed in new foreign markets. Because consumers often use simple decision rules, for example that products manufactured under a well-known brand name are likely to be of good quality, it has become more essential for multinational companies to use such cues to attract customers (Maheswaran, 2000). There are several cues that could impact consumers' purchasing behavior besides brand name. For instance, product type and attributes, brand image, country of origin could all play important factors in influencing consumers' purchasing decisions (Samiee, 1994). All these factors are complicated and inter-related, and each of these effects would be worth investigating.

In the present study, I focus on how the Country of Origin factors into a consumer's decision. Multinational products, often called Country of Origin (C-O-O) products have recently been focus of study by academic researchers. This is because the differences in consumers' perceptions of products can greatly impact the purchasing decision making process. For instance, Klein (2002) argued that simply letting the consumers know where the product is made could be a cue that affects their judgments of product quality and credibility. Also, Chao (1998) noted that C-O-O information can potentially lead to some distortions in consumers' product evaluations, especially if only the C-O-O information is presented in a single-cue context. Furthermore, it has been demonstrated that C-O-O informational cue serves as a halo, affecting brand attitude

indirectly through beliefs, and may serve as a summary construct to impact brand attitudes directly (Han, 1989).

While the C-O-O factor of a product could influence purchasing decisions, nationalism and antagonism of customers can also impact their decisions as well. Nationalism is a concept that has been linked to both collective behaviors and governmental policies, and to inter-racial relations and stereotypes (Balabanis, 2001). Smith (1995) also defined nationalism as “the primary object of loyalty in the modern world because a nation’s memory is central to identity. On the other hand, antagonism is closely linked with ethnic tension which is more of the nature of powerful symbolic gesture toward the world, rather than of physical violence” (Flere, 1991). Nationalism and antagonism traits can also be expressed in consumer behavior, which can be called as, “consumer ethnocentrism” (Netemeyer, Durvasula & Lichtenstein, 1991). Consumer ethnocentrism is formed through customers’ cultural heritage, cultural traits that they identify with, which in return, impact their purchasing patterns.

When consumer ethnocentrism negatively impacts customers’ evaluations of foreign products, you can call it “consumer animosity,” which can reflect anger related to certain foreign nations. Shimp and Sharma (1987) give a good example of how consumer animosity by American citizens inhibited the purchase of imported products. They argued that although foreign products are of good quality, American citizens believed that buying those products would trigger the loss of domestic job markets, and hurt USA economy, which in turn deter American citizens from purchasing foreign goods.

As in Shimp and Sharma’s study, previous research has largely focused on Western nations, including Germany, USA, France and Japan. Those countries represent some of the world’s largest economies, and, in terms of foreign trade, derive much of their imports and

exports from each other (Netemeter, Durvasula & Lichtenstein, 1991). However, not many researchers have focused on Asian countries. So the present research proposes to find out how Koreans' ethnocentrism brings out particular purchasing behaviors. As Ulgado and Lee (1998) note, only few researchers have examined how Korean consumers evaluate foreign products. So studying on Koreans' consumer ethnocentrism on Japanese products would be among the first to do so.

With this in mind, I focus specifically on Korean consumers' behavior toward Japanese products in several ways. First, to understand Koreans' nationalism and antagonism, we examine the resentment and hatred that Koreans have had toward the Japanese. Japanese invaded the Korean peninsula in the early 1900s and destroyed 3000 years of distinct and indigenous Korean history. Koreans, as endogamous ethnic group in the region of East Asia had to endure a colonial period. Although Koreans declared independence after 50 years, chaos followed up, dividing Korea into North and South. Korean descendents still express severe anger towards the Japanese politically, geographically and culturally. Interestingly, although these two nations share entangled feelings of past history, both Korea and Japan now compete as leading exporters of industrial goods, ranging from cameras, televisions, laptops to automobiles (Han, 1988). They are engaged in highly competitive international markets for these common goods. Moreover, these two nations are now building cultural ties together as they export and import soap operas, pop music and games to each other.

Against this background, I develop a set of hypotheses. Although Koreans share a long endogamous history, we expect older Koreans to have a higher degree of nationalism compared to younger Koreans. This is because the older generation was more directly influenced by Japanese colonization than was the younger generation who just learned of the past history from

schools and elders. Rather, the younger generation is expected to have a lower degree of nationalism because they grew up in an era when cultural exchange and cultural cooperation were actively taken place. So the first hypothesis is as follows.

H1: The older the Koreans are, the more likely that they have a higher degree of nationalism.

Secondly, we assume that compared to younger Koreans, older Koreans have a higher level of antagonism toward the world. This relates to older Koreans' experience in colonization and the Korean War, which gave them a sense of victimization by outside forces and the lack of control in terms of their country's sovereignty. More specifically, this older generation had to go through the claim of independence by American military forces which took the Korean peninsula, and later divided the land into South and North Korea. As a victim of the Cold War, the divided Korea had to go through another hardship brought about by the Soviet Union and USA (McCune, 1948). So it would be possible that older Koreans, who went through such chaotic interference by outside forces, have a higher level of antagonism toward the world than do the younger generation.

H2: The older the Koreans are, the more likely that they have higher degree of antagonism.

The third hypothesis relates to how people's anti-sentiment toward a certain nation shapes their purchasing behaviors of the nation's product. There have been numerous research studies on ethnocentric consumer behavior (Netemyer, Durvasula & Lichtenstein, 1991). As Balabanis (2001) notes, consumers in general are favorably biased towards domestic versus foreign products. So our next hypothesis is that older Koreans, compared to younger Koreans, are less favorable towards Japanese products. So we expected the older generation to express less favorable attitudes toward Japanese products because they more directly experienced Japanese colonization than the younger generation did. So our third hypothesis is as follows:

H3: The older the Koreans are, the less favorable they are toward Japanese products when they think of how their purchasing Japanese product will impact Korean society.

The last hypothesis seeks to investigate Koreans' quality perceptions of Japanese products. The reason why we examine this is because there may be discrepancies between Koreans' evaluations of Japanese product quality, and their final decision purchasing behavior. It is said that the image of manufacturing nation can have substantial impact on judgments of product quality (Klein, Ettenson & Morris, 1998). So by informing consumers of the C-O-O of the products, I aim to see how Koreans regard Japanese product quality. Older Koreans were raised in underdeveloped Korean society in an era of chaos, so they were more likely to have been exposed to the higher quality of Japanese products (relative to Korean products) in the colonization period. Because of such past experiences, we propose that older Koreans, compared to younger Koreans hold beliefs that Japanese products have higher reliability and quality.

H4: The older the Koreans are, the more likely they are to believe that Japanese products are high in quality.

Method

Participants

A total of 70 participants completed a survey questionnaire. The ages ranged from 19 to 86 years old. Male participants comprised 58.6% of the total participants, and the remaining 41.4% were female. The educational level of the sample was high, as 92.8% of all participants had a higher degree than high school diploma. Only 7.2% of all the participants had education levels equivalent or lower than middle school. All the participants lived in Seoul or around the suburban area of Seoul, Korea.

Procedures

The initial survey was drafted in English. However, since the target participants were Koreans, the survey was translated into Korean by a native Korean scholar, then proof-read by a graduate school student currently attending a university in Korea. This was a critical step to ensure the appropriateness and adequacy of all measures in the survey. Once the survey was completely translated, participants were recruited in Seoul, Korea from July to August, 2009. Participants filled in the questionnaire and turned it in to the experimenter. There was no time limit for completing the survey form. However, it generally took more time for the older generation to read and complete the form than the younger generation.

Measures

First set of questions was a Product Aspect Questionnaire (see Appendix E). It asked how important each of the following were in the participant's purchasing decision: country of origin, price, design, and warranty factors. They were simply asked to rate each of these 4 items on an 11-point scale (-5: very unimportant, 0: neutral, +5: very important).

The second questionnaire was composed of a Nationalism and Antagonism scale (see Appendix A, B). This measure was adapted from Kosterman and Feshbach's research on the Nationalism and Patriotism Scale (1989) and CETSCALE (Shimp & Sharma, 1987). Several items were modified in an attempt to achieve a more balanced scale. Participants were asked to indicate their attachment to the home nation, Korea, by rating their agreeableness to each sentence item. Nationalism measure included sentences like, "Although at times I may disagree with the government, my commitment to Korea always remains strong." Meanwhile, Antagonism scale measured like, "An important thing for Koreans is to unite and integrate power to compete with other nations." The participants were asked to rate their agreement with each of these sentences on an 11-point scale (-5: strongly disagree, 0: neutral, +5: strongly agree).

The third was a Japanese Product Antagonism scale (see Appendix C). Questions explicitly asked participants to assess the impact of their purchasing behavior on the Korean economy. Statements such as, “It is not right to purchase Japanese products, because it puts Koreans out of jobs” were administered (Izard, 1977; Peterson, Hover, and Wilson, 1986). These measures were intended to capture dimensions of antagonism which are specifically related to the choice between domestic and foreign products, not broad concepts of political antagonism toward the world. There were 8 items in total, and participants indicated their agreement with each of these items on an 11-point scale. (-5: strongly disagree, 0: neutral, +5: strongly agree).

The fourth and final measure was a Japanese Product Quality scale (see Appendix D). Klein (2002)’s Product Judgments measure was developed and modified into 11 questions in total. To make sure that participants do not explicitly realize that the study focused on Korean’s antagonism towards Japanese products, 5 items asked about the quality of Japanese products, while the remaining measure included 2 questions each for China, American, and Germany products. People rated sentences like, “Products made in Japan are carefully produced and have fine workmanship,” by indicating their agreement on 11-point scale (-5: strongly disagree, 0: neutral, +5: strongly agree).

Results

Recall that the first hypothesis predicted that older Koreans would show higher level of nationalism. Seven items in the questionnaire assessed the degree of Koreans’ nationalism. To make sure that each item in the questionnaire was reliable, reliability tests were conducted to see their internal consistency. When item 3 was deleted, Cronbach’s alpha for the remaining six items was found to be reasonable ($\alpha=.75$) (See Appendix A for the items used). Given the high internal consistency for the items assessing nationalism, we assess the correlations between

nationalism and other variables. The results in Table 1 suggest that the older generation has higher a degree of nationalism compared to younger generation, $r(70) = .51, p < .001$. (see Table 1 and Figure 1).

The second hypothesis predicted that older Koreans would also exhibit higher level of antagonism towards the world compared to younger Koreans. To measure Koreans' responses to the antagonism scale, four items were used to find out their internal consistency. Cronbach's alpha showed a high internal reliability when item 2 was deleted. ($\alpha = .94$) (See Appendix B for the items used). Then, a regression analysis was run to find out the relationship between Korean people's age and their degree of antagonism. However, the result showed that older generation do not necessarily have higher degree of antagonism towards the world than younger generation, $r(70) = .08, p > .54$. (see Table 1 and Figure 2).

For the third hypothesis, we tested whether older Koreans have higher level of antagonism, especially towards Japanese products. All eight items had high internal consistency ($\alpha = .83$). (See Appendix C for all the items.) Correlation analysis (Table 1 and Figure 3) indicated that older generation show higher antagonism toward Japanese products when they think of how their purchasing behavior would impact their home nation, Korea, $r(70) = .66, p < .001$.

Although we focused on Japanese products, we then measured Koreans' perception of Japanese products more from technical and professional perspectives. Five items in the Japanese Product Quality scale showed high reliability to one another when the fifth item deleted ($\alpha = .90$) (See Appendix D for the items). The regression analysis showed that when reviewing Japanese products' technology, design and overall quality, older Koreans showed higher favorability towards Japanese products ($r = .24, p < .05$) (see Table 1 and Figure 4).

Additional finding

With the items from the Product Aspect Questionnaire, we tested whether the older generation exhibited any difference in their purchasing behavior of a product. Price, Design, Warranty, Country-of-Origin variables were regressed on Age using Bonferroni correction. Results of the regression analysis showed that older generation is much likely to focus on a product's Country of Origin when they were making a purchase choice, $r(70)=.46, p<.001$. However, age did not have a differential effect in terms of how much people focused on price, design, or warranty of a product when making a purchase.

Discussion

In this study, we identified and explored how Koreans in different age groups perceive Japanese products. To understand differing Koreans' perception by age, we first looked at nationalism, antagonism toward foreign nations, antagonism towards Japanese products and their evaluation on the quality of Japanese products. This study showed very interesting results, as it revealed that older Koreans have higher nationalism for their own country, but not necessarily higher antagonism toward foreign nations. However, older Koreans showed higher level of antagonism toward Japan, when we gave questions that asked how purchasing Japanese products would impact Korean society. Although older generations showed a higher level of disgust when thinking of Japanese products' impact on Korea, they at the same time held beliefs that Japanese products have higher credibility and quality. Also, we saw in the additional finding, that older generations were more likely to attribute a product to its country of origin when they were making purchase choice.

These findings are unique as the results show that the purchasing behaviors are affected by many aspects, such as nationalism, antagonism, age and historical experiences. Although the results are complicated, we can look back into some previous literature to better understand these

particular results. First, the results of hypothesis 3 and 4 can be linked together; the discordance of the fact that older Koreans showed animosity to Japanese products when they think purchasing impacts on Korean society, but at the same time showed higher favor to Japanese product quality is supported by Klein's explanation (2002). She argues that angry consumers do not distort or denigrate images of a target country's product; they simply refuse to buy them when they have to make a purchasing decision. She further explains by saying that consumers can hold non-protectionist views about foreign products and feel that their purchase is perfectly appropriate in general, but still refuse to buy the product of a specific country. Likewise, it seems that Japanese products' high quality is greatly respected by older Koreans, but older Koreans' high nationalistic trait triggered them to think that it would be a betrayal to Korea if they buy Japanese products. Klein, Ettenson, and Morris (1998) who conducted research on Chinese consumer ethnocentrism toward Japanese product, also indicated in their research that Chinese consumers' animosity toward Japan was related negatively to their willingness to purchase Japanese products, but this effect was independent of their judgments about the quality of Japanese products. Just like in the case of Chinese consumers, older Korean generation who were exposed to colonialism and war-related factors were more closely associated with animosity toward Japan.

Second, as we found in the 4th hypothesis, it is possible to explain the reason why younger generation is less likely to rate Japanese products quality lower compared to the older generation. Younger Koreans are more exposed to dynamic and successful development in recent Korean industry (Ulgado & Lee, 1998). The Korean industry has demonstrated a current success of domestic corporations, such as Samsung, LG and Hyundai as leading multinational companies. Because the younger generation has been exposed to a more continuous and

qualitative success of Korean products as they grew up, they seem to be less impressed by Japanese products. On the other hand, the older generation who grew up during political chaos, and a cheap agriculture and labor-oriented market, were likely to think of Korean industries as inferior compared to those of the then most powerful Asian country, Japan.

The additional finding also showed that younger Koreans care less about country of origin. Younger Koreans' low nationalism score can explain the reason behind it. Fong (2004) notes that the young generation seems to choose global identity over local identity. So it is natural for the younger generation to be less likely to be devoted to their home nation, nor do they divide world into in-group or out-group as their parents do. Rather, they are more used to internationalism and globalization, which explains the reason why they care less about the country in which a product is made.

Although this study uncovered interesting results, it has some limitations. First, the recruitment of the participants was skewed to a group of individuals who had high educational background and high social economic status. Because of the limited social network of the researcher who conducted this research, the participants were largely friends, cousins, church group members of the researcher. Also nearly 10% of the old participants were members of retired elementary school presidents. Secondly, some older Koreans, who appeared to have impaired cognitive functioning, did not seem to understand the items on the questionnaires well enough; they told the researcher that they just chose a random rating for certain items. In addition, some questions were radical and failed to bring a more balanced response from the participants. Moreover, some of the items under different scale categories, for instance, a question from nationalism scale and one from antagonism scale, were actually similar to each

other. Antagonism questions should have been more clearly developed to be different. Finally, the number of the items was too small to conduct additional analyses.

Future research should be more carefully conducted by collecting data from a large number of individuals that represents the all the Korean generations. Their socio-economic status, educational background, and both suburb and urban cities should be taken into consideration when collecting the survey. Second, survey should be more carefully built by making it more concise and easy-to-understand. The overall survey that we used in this research was too long, and each item in the questionnaire was lengthy. So by picking up some of the essential items, and excluding unnecessary items would save time and effort for both the experimenter and participants. Third, some of the items in the questionnaire should be more neutral. Neutral questions would help participants to think more objectively and eliminate possible demand artifacts. Fourth, questions in each scale should be distinctive from one another. Clearer definitions of nationalism and antagonism scale must be established. Lastly, we can further develop future research by looking at the degree of nationalism, antagonism, age and quality of a certain foreign product and how these factors interplay with one another for a purchasing decision. For example, certain ethnic group could be more influenced by its nationalistic belief while other ethnic groups are influenced more by antagonistic belief. Likewise, one group might show a great purchasing behavior difference by age spectrums, while other groups do not.

This research identifies and tests the effect of a previously unrecognized factor in the study of Korean consumers' Japanese product purchase. A macro-level sociological phenomenon that has received virtually little attention in the research literature in marketing is shown here to be related to the consumers' likelihood of purchasing products from Japan. As such, this research

provides a basis for developing a better understanding of international consumer and exchange behaviors. So although this research was quite a new start in this area of psychology and marketing, it would be worthwhile to further develop and explore in the future. Moreover, on a broader scale, this study provides useful knowledge about international animosity and its effect on product purchase by target customers. Taking this into account, and applying the results to real situations, this research has the potential to guide the development of strategic marketing not only for Japanese companies, but also for Korean domestic companies as well. For instance, the finding suggests that domestic business units may successfully use nationalistic emotions in their local television advertisement to persuade consumers to choose domestic products. Likewise, there are a variety of marketing strategies that can be implemented to better equip a company or a corporation to successfully target customers in foreign nations.

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Table 1

Correlation Matrix for Multiple Factors (N=70)

	Age	Nationalism	Antagonism	Antagonism toward Japanese Products	Perception on Japanese Product Quality
Age	-				
Nationalism	.51**	-			
Antagonism	.08	.11	-		
Antagonism toward Japanese Products	.66**	.56**	.04	-	
Perception on Japanese Product Quality	.24*	.29*	-.18	.23	-

Note. ** $p < .01$. * $p < .05$

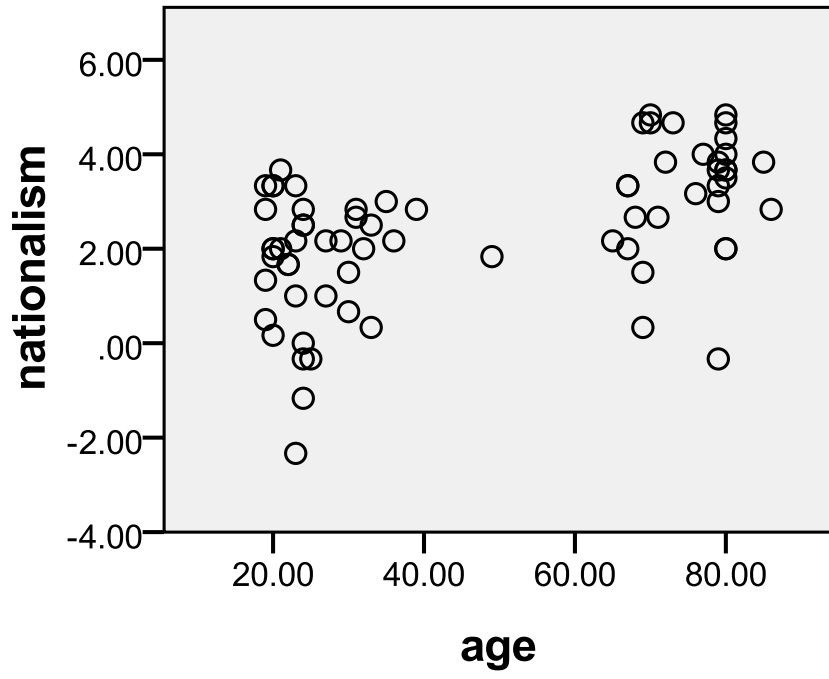
Figure Captions

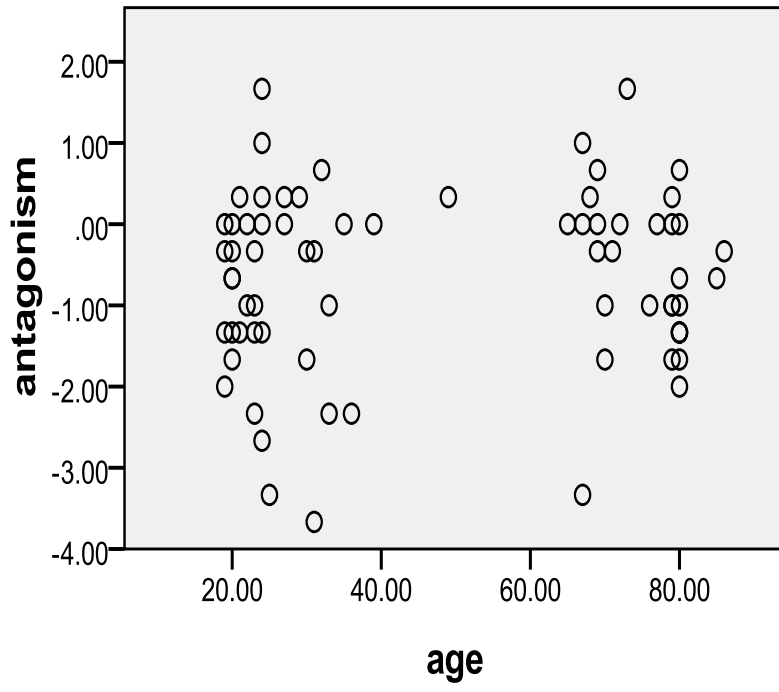
Figure 1. Correlation of age and nationalism

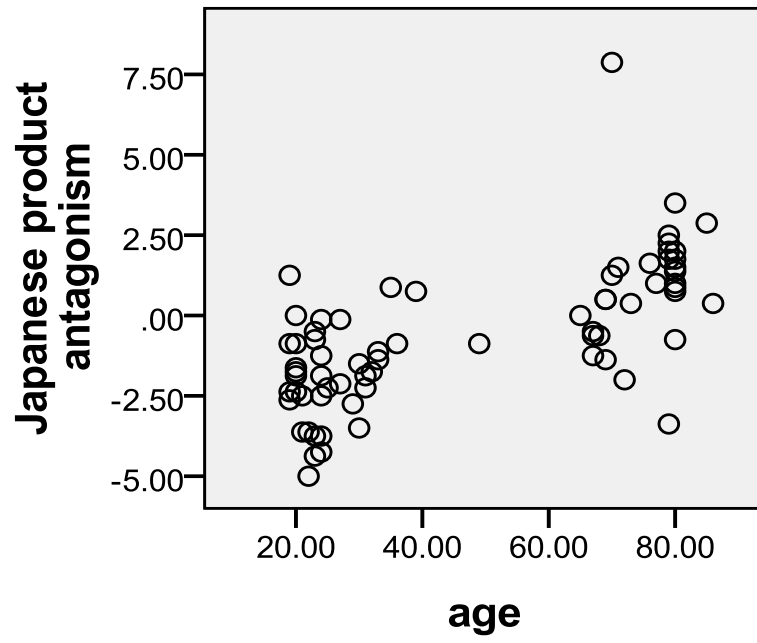
Figure 2. Correlation of age and antagonism

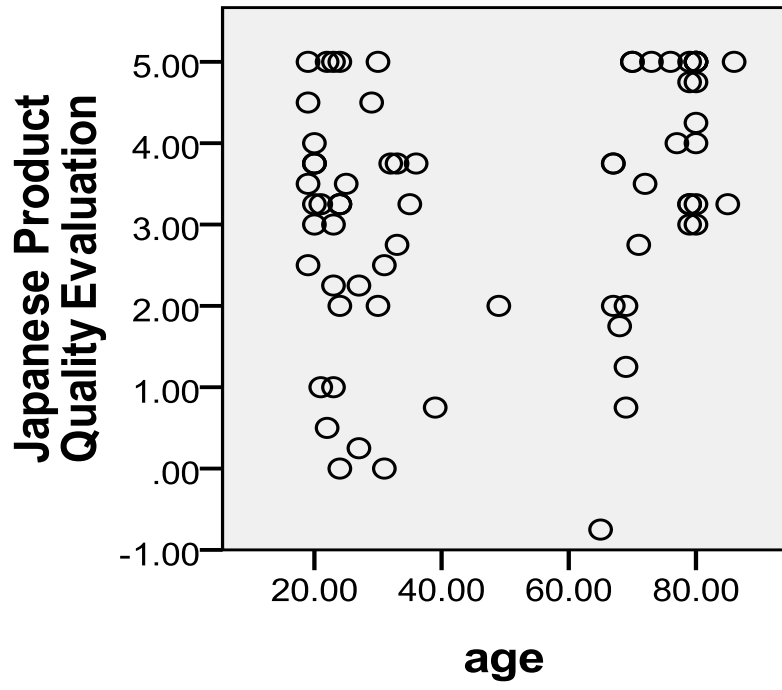
Figure 3. Correlation of age and Japanese product antagonism

Figure 4. Correlation of age and Japanese product quality evaluation









Appendix A

Nationalism

Items	Note	11 point scale										
1. Although at times I may disagree with the government, my commitment to Korea always remains strong.		-5	-4	-3	-2	-1	0	+1	+2	+3	+4	+5
2. The fact that I am Korean is an important part of my identity.		-5	-4	-3	-2	-1	0	+1	+2	+3	+4	+5
3. It is not constructive for one to develop an emotional attachment to his/her country.	Item deleted	-5	-4	-3	-2	-1	0	+1	+2	+3	+4	+5
4. In view of Korea's moral and material superiority in the world, we should have the one of the powerful say in deciding UN policy.		-5	-4	-3	-2	-1	0	+1	+2	+3	+4	+5
5. The first duty of every young Korean is to honor the national Korean history and heritage.		-5	-4	-3	-2	-1	0	+1	+2	+3	+4	+5
6. In a sense, I am emotionally attached to my country and		-5	-4	-3	-2	-1	0	+1	+2	+3	+4	+5

emotionally affected by its

actions.

Appendix B

Antagonism

Items	Note	11 point scale										
<p>1. An important thing for Koreans is to unite and integrate power to compete with other nations.</p>		-5	-4	-3	-2	-1	0	+1	+2	+3	+4	+5
<p>2. The alleviation of poverty in other countries is their problem, not ours.</p>	<p>Item deleted</p>	-5	-4	-3	-2	-1	0	+1	+2	+3	+4	+5
<p>3. Korea should be more willing to share its wealth with other suffering 3rd world nations, even if it doesn't necessarily coincide with our political interests.</p>		-5	-4	-3	-2	-1	0	+1	+2	+3	+4	+5
<p>4. Children should be educated to be international-minded to support any movement which contributes to the welfare of the world as a whole, regardless of special national interests.</p>		-5	-4	-3	-2	-1	0	+1	+2	+3	+4	+5

Appendix C

Japanese Product Antagonism

Items	Note	11point scale										
1. Large Japanese companies are preventing Korean companies from growing in the international market.		-5	-4	-3	-2	-1	0	+1	+2	+3	+4	+5
2. When one buys a Japanese product, he/she is a national traitor.		-5	-4	-3	-2	-1	0	+1	+2	+3	+4	+5
3. If you are Korean, you should not buy a Japanese product no matter how good it is.		-5	-4	-3	-2	-1	0	+1	+2	+3	+4	+5
4. Japanese use sneaky strategies to invade foreign market.		-5	-4	-3	-2	-1	0	+1	+2	+3	+4	+5
5. Only those products that are unavailable in Korea should be improved by imitating Japanese.		-5	-4	-3	-2	-1	0	+1	+2	+3	+4	+5
6. One is boosting the Japanese economy when he/she buys Japanese products.		-5	-4	-3	-2	-1	0	+1	+2	+3	+4	+5
7. It is not right to purchase Japanese products, because it puts Koreans out of jobs.		-5	-4	-3	-2	-1	0	+1	+2	+3	+4	+5

8. Japanese always look for chances

to invade Korea and to regain their

-5 -4 -3 -2 -1 0 +1 +2 +3 +4 +5

power on the peninsula.

Appendix D

Japanese Product Quality

Items	Note	11 point scale										
1. Products made in Japan show a very high degree of technological advancement.		-5	-4	-3	-2	-1	0	+1	+2	+3	+4	+5
2. Products made in Japan show a very high degree of technological advancement.		-5	-4	-3	-2	-1	0	+1	+2	+3	+4	+5
3. Products made in Japan are usually quite reliable and seem to last the desired length of time.		-5	-4	-3	-2	-1	0	+1	+2	+3	+4	+5
4. Products made in Japan are usually a good value for the money.		-5	-4	-3	-2	-1	0	+1	+2	+3	+4	+5
5. I enjoy buying products made in Japan.	Item Deleted	-5	-4	-3	-2	-1	0	+1	+2	+3	+4	+5

Appendix E

Product Aspect

How important is each of the following dimensions if you were to consider buying a foreign durable product with an unknown brand name?

Items	11 point scale										
1. Country of Origin	-5	-4	-3	-2	-1	0	+1	+2	+3	+4	+5
2. Design	-5	-4	-3	-2	-1	0	+1	+2	+3	+4	+5
3. Warranty	-5	-4	-3	-2	-1	0	+1	+2	+3	+4	+5
4. Price	-5	-4	-3	-2	-1	0	+1	+2	+3	+4	+5