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Title:

Contrast of Felt Understanding and Intergroup Relations: Within and Between Communities

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Abstract

Felt understanding is linked to intergroup relations. However, almost all of the studies linking felt understanding to intergroup relations have been conducted in a relation that ingroups and outgroups cohabit within a community having a shared superordinate political structure/system (cohabitating target). It is unclear whether this association generalizes to another relation that ingroups and outgroups live in separate communities with different superordinate systems (separate target). The present work investigates whether the predictive role of felt understanding in intergroup relations differs across the two targets—Chinese people in Japan (CIJ) and Chinese people outside of Japan (COJ). Data were collected in Japan by two online surveys among 536 Japanese (189 females) in 2021. Multigroup analysis found that felt understanding was linked to positive intergroup outcomes (positive action tendencies, outgroup trust, intergroup orientation) for both cohabiting and separate target conditions. Also, post hoc mediation analysis suggested that the cohabiting/separate target condition was positively related to felt understanding, and higher felt understanding, in turn, results in the outcomes. These results indicate that felt understanding can be beneficial even in intergroup relations not involving a shared superordinate system and that the level (not the effect) of felt understanding may be influenced by cohabiting/separate targets. Implications for consolidating peace in Japan-China relations are discussed, which may be relevant to other international relations.

Keywords

felt understanding; intergroup relation; cohabitation; meta-perception

Public Significance Statement

Both Japan and China have become economic powerhouses in post-conflict situations, and even though they cooperate economically, the relations between the two countries are not without issues. While it is true that feeling understood is crucial in social relations, can this also apply to international relations that do not share a superordinate political system? The results of this study indicate that the belief of being understood is crucial in Japan-China relations. The findings have implications for Japan-China ties and, by extension, for maintaining peace in other nations connected to both.

Intergroup understanding is crucial for intergroup relations (Demoulin et al., 2009). Given that a growing body of research suggests the role of the way people believe others see them in intergroup relations (Frey & Tropp, 2006; Yzerbyt et al., 2009), it is especially imperative how people believe others understand them. How we think members of an outgroup understand and accept the perspectives of ingroup members is called felt understanding (Livingstone et al., 2020a). Indeed, Livingstone et al. (2020a) provide evidence showing the predictive role of felt understanding in intergroup relations.

However, much of the existing research on the role of felt understanding in intergroup relations has been conducted for outgroup targets cohabiting within a community involving a shared superordinate political structure/ system. How strongly does felt understanding predict intergroup relations for an outgroup target living in separate communities with different superordinate systems? Following a pre-registered research question, design, and analyses, this study addressed this question by investigating whether the predictive role of felt understanding in intergroup relations differs across the cohabitating target and the separating target —Chinese people in Japan (CIJ) and Chinese people outside Japan (COJ).

In the following, we first provide a brief overview of prior research on felt understanding: why it is important, how it differs from other concepts, and the limitation that previous studies are restricted to “cohabitating targets.” Next, we hypothesize about the prediction of felt understanding in intergroup relations for “separate targets” based on theories in intergroup research. This is followed by an overview of Japan-China relations in the context of this study.

Felt Understanding and Intergroup Relations

In interpersonal relations, felt understanding is initially defined as one person's belief that another person knows oneself (e.g., Reis et al., 2017). For instance, you sometimes feel understood by your friend when he or she gives you what you have wanted. Refining this definition in intergroup relations, Livingstone et al. (2020a) defined it as one ingroup members' belief that members of an outgroup understand and accept the beliefs of ingroup members. For instance, people do/ do not feel understood by foreign people in their own country.

This study builds on a growing body of research on the relevance of meta-perceptions in intergroup relations (Frey & Tropp, 2006; Kteily et al., 2016; Vorauer et al., 1998) by investigating felt understanding in intergroup contexts. The unifying element in meta-perception, such as meta-stereotypes and meta-dehumanization, is that group members are concerned about outgroup members' perceptions of an ingroup. For instance, meta-dehumanization is the perception that another perceives one's own group as less than fully human and predicts hostility towards the outgroup (e.g., Kteily et al., 2016).

According to Livingstone et al. (2020b), to the extent that felt understanding concerns 'our' perspectives with 'their' perspectives, it shares common ground with meta-perceptions. However, felt understanding goes beyond this in significant ways because it contains views about how members of another group view one's own (or the ingroup's) viewpoints. To put it another way, it involves third-order intentionality, or second-order theory of mind (Dennet, 1987; Liddle & Nettle, 2006). Livingstone et al. argued that this differentiates felt understanding from variables that address perspectives about outgroups.

In this respect, Livingstone et al. have regarded felt understanding as a meta-meta

perspective (Gillespie & Cornish, 2010; Laing et al., 1966). It covers a level of perception that has been claimed to be essential for inter-subjectivity (e.g., Gillespie & Cornish, 2010). It is also crucial to all of the distinctive features of human sociality, such as sophisticated culture and cooperation (Dunbar, 2003; O'Grady et al., 2015). Therefore, investigating felt understanding provides a significant expansion of meta-perception research in intergroup relations by explicitly examining the higher-order meta-meta level of perception previously recognized as vital in interpersonal relationships (Livingstone et al., 2020b).

Furthermore, felt understanding is different from felt liking. Livingstone et al. note that felt liking is characterized by beliefs regarding an outgroup's perceptions of an ingroup. Previous research has revealed that felt liking predicts intergroup orientations (e.g., Putra & Wagner, 2017). It varies from felt understanding, however, in that it does not address the ingroup's own beliefs through the eyes of the outgroup. In fact, Livingstone et al. (2020b) have conducted vignette-based multi-experiments with intergroup contexts such as political views ('leave' and 'remain' voters in the UK 'Brexit' referendum) and inter-generational relations. They manipulated felt understanding (understood vs. misunderstood by an outgroup) in six experiments and tested its effects on intergroup orientations and action tendencies. Additionally, the design of each study contained an orthogonal manipulation of felt liking (liked vs. disliked by the outgroup), which differentiated the effect of felt understanding from the possible effect of just feeling (dis)liked by the outgroup. The results have shown that when felt understanding and felt liking are orthogonally manipulated, those variables have different impacts on intergroup outcomes.

Livingstone and colleagues (2020a) also conducted a series of surveys to examine the role of felt understanding in intergroup relations. The results revealed that in Scottish

and British relations in the U.K., felt understanding was associated with stronger institutional trust and more positive action tendencies. This effect held even after controlling for negative outgroup beliefs and metabeliefs. Furthermore, in relations between Catholics and Protestants in Northern Ireland, felt understanding was related to stronger outgroup trust and greater outgroup forgiveness.

Nevertheless, those studies have been conducted for *cohabitating* outgroup targets. Here, we meant by cohabitating that ingroups and outgroups cohabit in a community with a superordinate political structure/ system. For example, Japanese and Chinese people in Japan cohabit in a society with a shared superordinate system, the Japanese government. Japan has maintained a very homogenous society (Laurence et al., 2021), and the Japanese are a majority compared to foreign residents, including Chinese residents. If a Chinese person residing in a district does not obey local rules (e.g., rules of discarding garbage), Japanese people believe that the Chinese do not understand Japanese culture. Furthermore, Chinese communications appear to be more direct than Japanese (Fang & Faure, 2011), and the Japanese whose communications are more indirect may believe that the Chinese do not know the Japanese perspectives during community gatherings and work meetings. Bear in mind that by cohabiting, we did not mean that ingroups and outgroups simply dwell in one nation, in which sense Livingstone and colleagues have already examined the role of felt understanding for ‘separate’ targets (e.g., the U.K. in relation to the European Union).

However, many intergroup relations, including geopolitical rivalries such as Japanese in Japan and Chinese in China, do not involve a shared superordinate political structure. Even in such relations, there are occasions when people feel misunderstood by outgroups. For instance, media reports that China slammed the Japanese prime minister's visit to the Yasukuni war shrine (The Guardian, 2014). The shrine honors the war dead,

including serious war crimes in World War II, and China charged that Japan was applauding militarism and paying respect to war criminals. On the other hand, the Japanese thought that the Chinese did not understand this because the prime minister's visit to the shrine was to reiterate his promise never to conduct war again. When the Japanese feel not understood in this way, they may want to argue with the Chinese in the media. If those Japanese are businesspeople, they may not want to talk to the Chinese for negotiation. Although it is considered that felt understanding occurs even towards separate targets, are there any differences in the psychological process of felt understanding in intergroup relations between cohabiting and separate targets? In the next section, we will discuss four possibilities for addressing this question from varying points of view in intergroup research.¹

Felt Understanding and Intergroup Relations: Target Difference

First, theoretical perspectives in intergroup literature suggest that felt understanding would be equally relevant for intergroup relations across cohabiting and separate targets (Brown & Hewstone, 2005; Meleady et al., 2019; Pettigrew, 2009). The attitudinal generalization hypothesis proposes that one's attitude towards a target group is generalized to their attitude towards another target group (Meleady et al., 2019; Pettigrew, 2009). Specifically, the attitudinal generalization is stronger when a target is similar to or overlaps with the other target. Given these findings, Japanese attitudes towards Chinese residents in Japan may generalize Chinese people in China. For example, if a Japanese person chats with a Chinese friend living in Japan who attends the same university or firm as this person and think that the friend understands a lot about Japan, the person may want to not only talk with this Chinese friend more but may also want to visit mainland China. One expectation following from this argument is that the benefit of

felt understanding in cohabitating intergroup relations can be generalized even to separate intergroup relations.

H1: Felt understanding is as strongly linked to positive intergroup outcomes towards a separate target as towards a cohabitating target

Second, thinking from the viewpoint of attitudinal retrieval research (Fazio et al., 1982; Powell & Fazio, 1984; Vázquez et al., 2017), felt understanding may more strongly predict outcome variables. It is relatively challenging to retrieve beliefs about a target that are not directly involved in daily life (Fazio et al., 1982; Vázquez et al., 2017). For example, for the Japanese, when retrieving beliefs about the Chinese in Japan, Chinese residents in their neighborhood or at work would come to mind. In contrast, retrieving beliefs about Chinese in China is considered to be relatively more difficult partly due to less direct experiences with them. This retrieval difficulty may weaken the association of felt understanding and intergroup outcomes. Indeed, one study found that the difficulty of retrieving negative metabeliefs determined whether metabeliefs deteriorated intergroup orientations (Vázquez et al., 2017). Thus, felt understanding may more strongly predict outcome variables for cohabitating intergroup relations (vs. separate ones).

H2: Felt understanding is more strongly linked to the intergroup outcomes towards a cohabiting target than towards a separate target

Third, in contrast to attitudinal retrieval perspectives, dependencies of indirect contact hypothesis suggests that felt understanding may less strongly predict the

outcomes for cohabiting targets (vs. separate ones) (Cao & Meng, 2020; Christ et al., 2010; Mastro, 2009; Wang, 2021). While the news media is not the only way other countries' images and public attitudes are shaped, it is a strong contender for the top spot as a worldwide image-former due to its regularity, ubiquity, and persistence (Galtung & Ruge, 1965; Wang, 2021): news media is supplied on a daily basis (regularity), can be accessed from anywhere through instruments such as television (ubiquity), and is available on the media such as the internet indefinitely (perseverance). For example, Japanese people get information about Chinese people in mainland China through online newspapers or TV news. Also, the media's offerings have historically been negative when it comes to the quality of racial/ethnic depictions (Mastro, 2009, 2015). The Japanese media reports that China does not understand Japan (e.g., Yomiuri, 2014). Furthermore, mediated information is more likely to impact those who have had little or no direct contact with the targets because there is insufficient other information with which to evaluate the targets (Fujioka, 1999; Shapiro & Lang, 1991). Due to limited direct contact with the Chinese in China, the Japanese may compensate for their lack of firsthand information about those Chinese by depending more on media portrayals when making social judgments about them. In this respect, greater dependencies of indirect contact are more comparatively common for separate targets. Due to the dependency of indirect contact for separate targets, felt understanding may less strongly predict the intergroup outcomes for cohabiting targets (vs. separate ones).

H3: Felt understanding is less strongly linked to the outcomes towards a cohabiting target than towards a separate target.

Fourth, though prior research on attitude retrieval and indirect contact dependency suggests that cohabiting targets may differentiate the effect of felt understanding (Mastro, 2009; Vázquez et al., 2017), the targets may also differentiate the level of felt understanding itself. Depending on a cohabiting or separate target, status dynamics can vary. For example, from the Japanese point of view, the Chinese residing in Japan constitute a minority ethnic group, but the Chinese living separately constitute an equal status national group. Despite having restricted access to opportunities and resources, people with low status and power pay close attention to others, reading their thoughts and feelings (Talaifar et al., 2021). Lower-class persons, for example, excel in emotion reading (Dietze & Knowles, 2021), and minority group members were better able to judge the emotions of majority group members than the reverse (Elfenbein & Ambady, 2002). If the Chinese in Japan, a minority group, understand (or are motivated to) Japanese thoughts and feelings, the Japanese are likely to feel understood. As such, Japanese individuals may feel better understood by the Chinese residing in Japan than by the mainland Chinese, and their action tendencies and intergroup orientations may also be more favorable.

H4: Cohabiting target (vs. separate one) is linked to felt understanding and, in turn, the outcomes

These findings suggest several possibilities for the mechanism of felt understanding in cohabiting and separate intergroup relations; these possibilities have yet to be empirically tested. In order to test these predictions, we utilized the relations between Japan and China as a topic to compare a cohabiting outgroup target with the separate one: a comparison of the Chinese in Japan with the Chinese outside Japan.

Research Context

Several conflicts have occurred between Japan and China in the past. In the Sino-Japanese War of 1894-1895, Japan conquered China and ravaged Taiwan. A full-fledged conflict broke out in 1937. The Sino-Japanese battle continued until 1945, when Japan surrendered. Japan and China declared the end of the war and the restoration of diplomatic ties in 1972 (Japan-China Joint Communiqué).

Since then, Japan has given China Official Developmental Assistance (called ODA) and has helped to promote its reform agenda. The Chinese economy has grown steadily as a result of government backing for economic infrastructure development. China is now Japan's most fabulous trading partner, with Japan being China's second-largest trading partner (Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Japan, 2020).

Japan-China relations, meanwhile, are not without issues (Liu & Atsumi, 2008). Former Prime Minister Koizumi's visit to Yasukuni Shrine in 2001, for example, sparked anti-Japanese sentiment. The collision between a Chinese fishing boat with a Japan Coast Guard patrol boat in the Senkaku Islands in 2010 fuelled anti-Chinese sentiment. In reaction to similar provocations by China, Tokyo Governor Ishihara was furious and stated in 2012 his desire to acquire the Senkaku Islands, which sparked controversy.

These events have also impacted the Japanese and Chinese people's perspectives (Horiuchi, 2014). According to Horiuchi (2014), the Japanese people believe that China is attempting to take over and dominate Japanese interests. On the other hand, the Chinese people think that Japan is trying to work with the United States and conquer China. As a result, anything one side does is viewed skeptically by the other.

Present Study

The present study aimed to fill a gap in the literature by investigating whether the psychological process of felt understanding in intergroup outcomes varies across a cohabitating target and a separate target. Specifically, we tested four possibilities below in a sample of Japanese adults by comparing orientations towards two outgroup targets with the same outgroup category, one of which lived within a shared political system (i.e., the Chinese in Japan) and the other did not (i.e., the Chinese outside Japan). First, felt understanding is as strongly linked to positive intergroup outcomes towards a separate target as towards a cohabitating target (H1). Whether the outgroup target is the Chinese in Japan or the Chinese outside Japan, the Japanese who feel understood would rate equally positive action tendencies and orientations towards both the targets. Second, felt understanding is more strongly linked to the outcomes towards a cohabiting target (H2). The Japanese who feel understood would rate more positive action tendencies and orientations towards the Chinese in Japan than those outside Japan. Third, felt understanding is less strongly linked to the outcomes towards a cohabiting target than towards a separate target (H3). The Japanese who feel understood would not rate positive action tendencies and orientations towards the Chinese in Japan as those outside Japan. Fourth, cohabiting target (vs. separate one) is linked to felt understanding, and in turn the outcomes (H4). The Japanese would feel better understood by the Chinese in Japan than by the Chinese outside Japan, leading to more positive action tendencies and orientations. Note that due to a lack of previous studies dealing with the differentiating role of the target on the process of felt understanding, we admit that this study is exploratory in nature in that there were four different, equally possible, expectations.

Method

This study employed a between-participants factorial design (outgroup target conditions: Chinese in Japan vs. Chinese outside Japan). The research question, design, methods, and analysis plan for this study were pre-registered at <https://aspredicted.org/y3ai7.pdf>.² Osaka University review board approved this study procedure prior to data collection. Materials, supplementary materials, data, and analytical codes for this study can be found on the OSF site: https://osf.io/wzvsb/?view_only=1af4c1deb64a47a8a1ba564f012293d3

Participants and Procedure

We collected data from 553 Japanese citizens over the age of 18 years old as pre-registered. Although not pre-registered, 17 violators of two attention checks were excluded, leaving a sample of 536 individuals. There were 340 males and 189 females, while 7 identified their gender as “other.” The mean age of the Japanese sample was 44.74 years ($SD = 10.50$, range = 18–80). They were recruited via Yahoo! Cloud Sourcing. Recruitment for this study took place through February 9–12, 2021.

Participants were randomly assigned to one of two between-subject conditions in which an outgroup target in a survey form was depicted either as the Chinese in Japan (CIJ: cohabiting target condition) or the Chinese outside Japan such as those in China (COJ: separate target condition). Specifically, we emphasized the depiction in each condition at the landing page, and 263 of the participants received items that referred to the relation of Japanese-Chinese relations in Japan as the outgroup (CIJ), while the others received items that referred to the relation of Japanese in Japan-Chinese relations outside of Japan (COJ).

We also performed posthoc power assessments using the R package “semPower” to quantify the achieved power of our structural equation modeling (Dong et al., 2021; Moshagen & Erdfelder, 2016). Based on the parameters of our baseline model (e.g., $df = 224$, RMSEA = .08 in the model predicting outgroup trust), a sample size of $N = 528$ yielded a power greater than 99.99 percent to reject an incorrect model at an alpha level of .05. Alternative power assessments that forced the path coefficients to be equal across the two groups revealed comparable power (i.e., >99.99%).

Measures

The materials used were almost the same as the materials used in Livingstone et al. (2020a). Predictive variables include outgroup beliefs, metabeliefs, felt understanding, and intergroup contact. Outcome variables include action tendencies (i.e., negative approach, avoidance, and positive approach intentions), institutional trust, outgroup trust, and intergroup orientation. Note that in the relation of Japanese and Chinese in Japan, institutional trust indicates a superordinate political institution; in Japanese and Chinese outside Japan, it appears to represent merely an ingroup political institution. With this in mind, one may expect no link between felt understanding and institutional trust in separate settings. Still, we measured institutional trust in both environments. The rationale here is to examine if the result varies depending on the targets for the check. Item parceling was carried out. The detailed information about the procedure for item parceling can be found in supplementary materials on the OSF site.

Outgroup beliefs We measured outgroup beliefs using six shortened item versions of the semantic differential scales used by Livingstone et al. (2020a). These items represented beliefs about competence, warmth, and morality of the outgroup. The statement “Chinese in Japan/Chinese tend to be ...” prefaces the list. Responses were

scored from 1 (*positively anchored scale end*) to 7 (*negatively anchored scale end*) ($\alpha = .89$).

Metabeliefs Metabeliefs was assessed using six semantic differential items. These items were based on outgroup beliefs. However, we modified this measure so that the statement “Chinese in Japan/Chinese think Japanese tend to be ...” prefaces the items. Responses were scored from 1 (*positively anchored scale end*) to 7 (*negatively anchored scale end*) ($\alpha = .88$).

Felt understanding Felt understanding was measured with shortened 6 item versions of the scales used by Livingstone et al. (2020a); for example, “Chinese in Japan/Chinese have a good understanding of what Japanese think.” Three items were negatively phrased, and scores on these were subsequently reversed. Participants responded to each item on a 7-point scale ranging -3 (*completely disagree*) through 0 (*neither*) to 3 (*completely agree*) ($\alpha = .85$).

Action tendencies We measured action tendencies regarding Chinese residents in Japan using ten items developed from Mackie, Devos, and Smith (2000). This scale consists of three subscales: positive approach (e.g., talk to them, $\alpha = .90$), negative approach (e.g., confront them, $\alpha = .83$), and avoidance tendencies (e.g., avoid them, $\alpha = .93$). The items were prefaced with the statement, “Please indicate the extent to which Chinese in Japan/Chinese make you want to ...”. Participants responded to each item on a 7-point scale ranging from 1 (*not at all*) to 7 (*extremely*).

Institutional trust We assessed trust in the superordinate institution, which contains the ingroup and outgroup (Japanese government), with six items used in McKnight, Choudhury, and Kacmar (2002). Items included statements such as, “The Japanese government is interested in the well-being of Japanese people.” Participants

responded on a 7-point scale ranging from -3 (*completely disagree*) through 0 (*neither*) to 3 (*completely agree*) ($\alpha = .93$).

Outgroup trust We measured outgroup trust with six items used in Noor, Jame Brown, and Prentice (2008). Items included statements such as, “Chinese in Japan/Chinese try to be fair.” Three items were negatively phrased, and scores on these were subsequently reversed. Participants responded on a 7-point scale ranging from -3 (*completely disagree*) through 0 (*neither*) to 3 (*completely agree*) ($\alpha = .91$).

Intergroup orientation We measured intergroup orientation with seven semantic differential items used in Livingstone et al. (2020a). These were preceded by the statement, “The relationship between Japanese and Chinese in Japan/Chinese is ...” Responses were scored from -3 (*positively anchored scale end*) to 3 (*negatively anchored scale end*) ($\alpha = .96$).

Additional measures This survey contained an additional measure whose data are not analyzed here: four-item scales of ingroup identification; three-item scales of intergroup contact.

Analyses

As specified in the preregistration plan of this study, we conducted a multigroup structural equation model to compare the effect of felt understanding on intergroup relation outcomes across a cohabiting target and a separate target.³ Additionally, we explored a post hoc possibility in mediation analysis, which we realized after receiving insightful comments from the reviewers and the editor and reflecting on the rationale and interpretation of the results. All tests were performed using *Mplus* version.7 with the maximum likelihood estimator (Muthén & Muthén, 2012).

Results

Multigroup Analysis: Predicting Intergroup Relational Outcomes

A multigroup structural equation model was run to assess the impact of felt understanding on intergroup outcomes towards a cohabiting target and a separate target (the analyses reported are of latent variables). Outgroup beliefs, metabeliefs, and felt understanding were entered as the primary predictors and allowed to correlate with each other. The six intergroup outcomes, avoidance, positive approach, negative approach, outgroup trust, intergroup orientations, and institutional trust, were entered as exogenous variables, and their errors allowed to correlate. This analysis controlled for age and gender. Standardized path coefficients of felt understanding for each outcome variable in both contexts of CIJ and COJ are reported in Table 1. Descriptive statistics and correlations between all scales are reported in Table 2.

Table 1

Table 2

As shown in Table 1, felt understanding predicted action tendencies (except a negative approach) in both CIJ and COJ. Felt understanding was related to lower avoidance (CIJ: $\beta = -.330$ vs. COJ: $\beta = -.220$) and higher positive approach intentions (CIJ: $\beta = .368$ vs. COJ: $\beta = .174$). Likewise, felt understanding predicted outgroup trust in both CIJ and COJ. Felt understanding was associated with greater outgroup trust (CIJ: $\beta = .332$ vs. COJ: $\beta = .251$). Moreover, felt understanding predicted intergroup orientations towards CIJ and COJ. Felt understanding was associated with more positive intergroup orientations (CIJ: $\beta = .261$ vs. COJ: $\beta = .345$). Lastly, felt understanding did not predict institutional trust for both.

Though not pre-registered, we directly examined whether the difference in the predictive power of felt understanding between CIJ and COJ was statistically significant. All paths were allowed to change among targets in the full model, following Bollen (1989) and Taylor et al. (in press). As each path was bound to be equal among CIJ and COJ, the resulting model fit was compared to the prior model using the χ^2 difference test (Satorra & Bentler, 2001). The path from felt understanding to positive approach only differed significantly between the two targets, χ^2 diff (1) = 4.60, $p = .031$. Note that moderation analyses revealed similar patterns: only in predicting two action tendencies (positive approach and avoidance), cohabiting target slightly reinforced the predictive power of felt understanding (see the OSF supplementary materials). These results support H1, rather than H2 and H3.

Preliminary Mediation Analysis: Mediating the Effect of Target

Although the expectation of differences in the effect of felt understanding across the targets was mostly refuted (except for positive approach), there may be differences in the level of felt understanding itself between the targets. The cohabiting target condition (vs. separate) may predict the intergroup outcomes via felt understanding. However, readers should be aware that we realized this possibility from the comments made by the reviewers and the editor during the reviewing process; hence, we only present our mediation analysis as a preliminary evaluation that merits further investigation in future research.

The errors of endogenous outcomes were allowed to correlate. Bootstrapped mediation with 2000 replications was estimated (Figure 1). Regarding the mediational paths of interest, the target condition (1 = cohabiting target vs. 0 = separate target) was

positively related to felt understanding ($\beta = .31, p < .01$). Higher felt understanding was also related to four outcomes, specifically avoidance ($\beta = -.35, p < .01$), positive approach ($\beta = .32, p < .01$), outgroup trust ($\beta = .34, p < .01$), and intergroup orientation ($\beta = .34, p < .01$). The bootstrapped indirect effects were significant for the four outcomes. That is, consistent with the status difference hypothesis (H4), felt understanding mediated the impact of the target condition on outcome variables. The direct effects between the target condition and the outcomes were not significant, except for positive approach ($\beta = -.18, p < .01$) and outgroup trust ($\beta = .07, p < .01$). In sum, there was mediation for avoidance, positive approach, outgroup trust, and intergroup trust, which supports H4.

Figure 1

Discussion

Recent evidence has shown that felt understanding uniquely explains intergroup relations (Livingstone et al., 2020a). However, this work has been limited to a target where ingroups and outgroups cohabit in a community with a shared superordinate system, leaving open the question of whether the psychological process of felt understanding in intergroup relations would depend on such cohabitating targets. This question is vital because previous intergroup research suggests several possibilities on the process of felt understanding in intergroup relations. Focusing on cohabiting and separate targets, this article addressed the question, which helps to explain the process of felt understanding in geopolitical rival relations.

We found that felt understanding positively predicted intergroup relation outcomes regardless of whether it was a cohabitating or separate target. For CIJ and COJ, felt understanding was associated with lower avoidance tendencies, higher positive

approach tendencies, greater outgroup trust, and more positive intergroup orientation. Additionally, felt understanding mediated the link between the target conditions and the intergroup outcomes. The cohabiting target condition (vs. the separate one) is linked to higher felt understanding, resulting in lower avoidance tendencies, higher positive approach tendencies, greater outgroup trust, and more positive intergroup orientation.

This study makes essential advances on previous work by demonstrating that the positive effect of felt understanding for intergroup relationship is not limited to a cohabitating target with a superordinate system but can spread to a separate target without it. Intergroup understanding is essential for intergroup relations (Demoulin et al., 2009). Given that a growing body of research on metabeliefs shows that how ingroup members feel outgroup members view them has a role in intergroup relations (Frey & Tropp, 2006; Yzerbyt et al., 2009), how ingroup members believe outgroup members understand them is especially important. Livingstone et al. (2020b) maintained that felt understanding has a distinguishing feature that differentiates it from metabeliefs in that it involves meta-meta perspective (Gillespie & Cornish, 2010; Laing et al., 1966). Investigating their claim with a separate target, consistent with attitudinal generalization hypothesis (H1), we found that felt understanding positively predicted intergroup outcomes in CIJ (cohabiting) and COJ (separate). This is important since the previous findings of felt understanding in intergroup relations were obtained in cohabitating relations, despite the fact that many intergroup relations don't involve common superordinate political structures. By showing the unique role of felt understanding can be generalized to a separate target, this study adds to the relatively few current studies on felt understanding in intergroup relations.

Although the expectation of variances in the impact of felt understanding between the targets was generally rejected (H2 and H3), there appear to be variances in the meta-perception of felt understanding between the targets (H4). Preliminary mediation analysis

found that the cohabiting target condition (vs. separate one) was linked to felt understanding, leading to positive intergroup outcomes. The Japanese felt more understood by the Chinese in Japan than the Chinese in China, and action tendencies and orientations towards the former were favorable. Previous research on status and power suggests that persons with low status and power pay great attention to others, understanding their thoughts and feelings (Talaifar et al., 2020; Elfenbein & Ambady, 2002). Our approach focusing on outgroup targets incorporates previous supports for the association between lower status and higher understanding towards higher status groups (e.g., Elfenbein & Ambady, 2002) and the link between felt understanding and favorable intergroup outcomes (e.g., Livingstone et al., 2020a). This was discovered through an ad hoc preliminary analysis, and more research is required to gain definitive proof.

The results of this study have practical implications for international relations as well. Specifically, this study indicates that felt understanding can still be relevant to separate intergroup relations. This is especially important in democratic nations such as Japan because public opinion has the potential to affect and determine diplomatic activities and international relations (Horiuchi, 2014; Wang, 2021). This is not to argue that the public can always sway a country's diplomatic activities and international relations, but there are times when public opinion may have an impact on international relations, such as the Brexit vote, which affected the U.K.'s relations with the E.U. (Wang, 2021).

This finding also has implications for people who wish for peaceful relations between countries such as Japan and China. In general, for the Japanese, it is often unlikely to seize opportunities to contact Chinese people outside Japan directly. In contrast, felt understanding does not require direct contact, as noted earlier. It is possible to grab chances to feel understood by those Chinese via media indirectly (e.g., Youtube,

Social Network Service, T.V.). Some Japanese people wish for positive relations between Japan and China. Thus, felt understanding can be a means for people hoping reconciliatory relations between nations to alter unfavorable orientations toward an outgroup country.

It should be noted that this paper is not without limitations. Felt understanding did not predict negative approach tendencies in both cohabitating context and separate context. This unexpected result might be due to cultural factors such as self-concept collectivism. According to the theory of naïve dialecticism (Nisbett & Masuda, 2003), East Asians have a malleable self-concept and are receptive to contradictory ideas. For example, even if the Japanese feel not understood by the Chinese, those Japanese may think that their values vary and that it is no wonder that the Chinese do not understand them. This may not result in adverse reactions to the Chinese in Japan (e.g., confrontation). Also, collectivists do not want confrontation in interpersonal relations (Ohbuchi & Takahashi, 1994; Ozaki, 1987), and this preference may strongly influence the evaluation of negative approach intentions no matter what beliefs.

Furthermore, contrary to our expectation, felt understanding did not predict institutional trust in not only COJ (separate target) but also CIJ (cohabiting target). One possibility for this could be the impact of the decline in trust in the Japanese government. Japanese people disapprove of the coronavirus management skills of their government in COVID-19, which may strongly influence the evaluation of institutional trust. Another explanation is that group status dynamics in Japan between Japanese and Chinese people impacted the result. The previous study by Livingstone and colleagues, in which felt understanding predicted institutional trust, collected data from a minority group in the relationship between groups such as Scotland and the United Kingdom. In contrast, the Japanese sample in this study constitutes a majority group compared to the Chinese living

in Japan. The Japanese feeling of being understood by the Chinese probably has nothing to do with perceptions in the superordinate institution, which is dominated by the majority.

Lastly, we did not address the question of what different representations of superordinate categories ingroups and outgroups hold. The accessibility of the superordinate category is vital, but whether it can influence intergroup outcomes depends on how society perceives it (McKeown, 2014). With quantitative and qualitative data, McKeown (2014) examined how British Protestants and Irish Catholics would perceive the Northern Irish identity. Future studies adopting their methodology help us understand the applicability of a superordinate category to the real world as well as research on contextual moderators of felt understanding in intergroup relations.

Conclusion

This article adds to the previous research on the psychological process of felt understanding in cohabiting intergroup relations (e.g., Livingstone et al., 2020a) by demonstrating that it can also be beneficial in separate ones. We revealed that felt understanding was linked to positive action tendencies, outgroup trust, and intergroup orientation across cohabiting and separate targets, which was consistent with the attitudinal generalization theory. The findings demonstrate the generalizability for the benefit of felt understanding to drive positive intergroup relations beyond cohabiting targets. The current study also suggests intriguing new research avenues for the future. Further research into target differences in the level of felt understanding would be advantageous in gaining a better understanding of the mechanisms that underpin felt understanding in intergroup contexts.

Conflict of Interest

The authors have no conflict of interests associated with this manuscript.

Footnote

1. Despite having hypothesized H1 through H3, we did not pre-register these hypotheses in advance. During the peer review process, H4 was developed post hoc.

2. We did not pre-register the precise hypotheses for what differences in the effects of felt understanding across targets would emerge, though we had formulated three promising hypotheses. This is because the study is exploratory by nature since there is a dearth of research addressing differences between the targets in the advantages of felt understanding. As a result, we merely pre-registered that we would investigate whether or not there were variances across targets. As such, we pre-registered research question, research design, measurement variables, data collection, and sample size in this study. Simply pre-registering those would help limit the proliferation of potentially harmful research practices known as QRPs, such as *p*-hacking (Bosnjak et al., 2021; John et al., 2012).

3. Although not pre-registered, to test measurement invariance of the scales between the target conditions, we carried out a multigroup confirmatory factor analysis before the primary analyses. All the variables in this study showed metric invariance across the two contexts, which allowed for comparability of regression slopes (See OSF supplementary materials).

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Table & Figure

Table 1

Multigroup Structural Equation Modeling Results for Differential Effects of Felt Understanding Across Groups

Dependent variable	Chinese residents		Chinese	
	β	<i>SE</i>	β	<i>SE</i>
Negative approach	.132	.125	.098	.094
Avoidance	-.330**	.085	-.210**	.074
Positive approach	.368**	.088	.174*	.077
Inst. trust	.163	.125	.125	.090
Outgroup trust	.332**	.080	.251**	.060
Intergroup orientation	.261**	.087	.345**	.070

Note. Each analysis controls for outgroup beliefs, metabeliefs, age, and gender. β = standardized coefficients; *SE* = standardized error. We report unstandardized coefficients with 95% CI and the effects of those controls in the online Supplemental Materials.

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

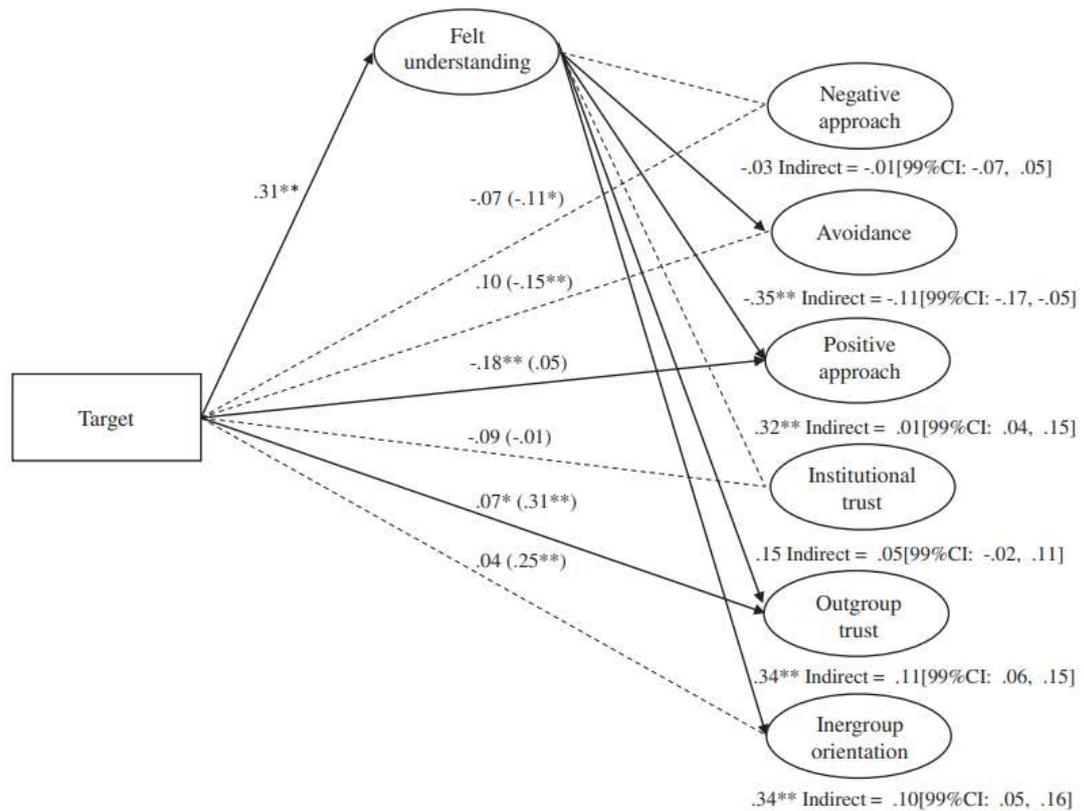
Table 2*Zero-Order Correlations and Descriptive Statistics for All Variables Analyzed in This Study*

Variable	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9
1. OGB	4.44	1.03	—								
2. MB	3.90	1.01	.204**	—							
3. FU	3.46	1.04	-.570**	-.287**	—						
4. IC	3.19	1.28	.001	-.145**	-.085*	—					
5. NA	2.31	1.22	.259**	.069	-.167**	.150**	—				
6. A	4.35	1.51	.613**	.124**	-.532**	.013	.226**	—			
7. PA	3.58	1.27	-.604**	-.115**	.485**	.086*	-.084	-.698**	—		
8. IT	2.92	1.23	-.108*	-.126**	.153**	.026	.144**	-.050	.047	—	
9. OT	3.38	0.71	-.701**	-.144**	.637**	-.055	-.169**	-.658**	.623**	.168**	—
10. IO	3.22	1.08	-.597**	-.249**	.597**	-.074	-.188**	-.575**	.473**	.208**	.654**

Note. OGB = outgroup beliefs; MB = metabeliefs; FU = felt understanding; IC = intergroup contact; NA = negative approach; A = avoidance; PA = positive approach; IT = institutional trust; OT = outgroup trust; IO = intergroup orientation.

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

Figure 1
Structural Equation Bootstrapped Mediation of the Indirect Effect of Target on Intergroup Outcomes Through Felt Understanding



Note. Nonsignificant paths indicated with dashed lines. Values are standardized path coefficients with ones in parentheses total effects. This analysis models age and gender as covariates and models outgroup beliefs and metabeliefs as mediators. Target represents the cohabiting (1) versus the separate condition (0).

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