



# **Master in Advanced European and International Studies**

**European Integration and Global Studies**

## **Abstract**

South Korea and Japan's "history problem" has continuously reared its head over the past decades. Among rising tensions in the international and East Asian spheres, increased cooperation between them would be favorable. Therefore, this thesis sought to answer the research question of if the "history problem" will continue to cause bilateral frictions or if Japan and South Korea are on track to solve it. The thesis is grounded on the theoretical concept of collective memory. A literature review was conducted to confirm the hypotheses that 1) Japan and South Korea have contrasting sets of collective memory based on governmental rhetoric, that 2) have been incorporated into the respective country's national identity, shaped by 2.a) salient memories and 2.b) victimhood and/or perpetrator identities. This thesis identifies potential factors working for or against reconciliation. It concludes that collective memory may continue to cause tensions unless the underlying factors that shape it, i.e. national identity shaped by salient memories and victimhood/perpetrator concepts, are resolved.

**Keywords:** collective memory, memory politics, South Korea-Japan relationship, history

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**List of Abbreviations**

ASEAN	Association for South-East Asian Nations
AWF	Asian Women's Fund
DPRK	Democratic People's Republic of Korea
ECSC	Economic Coal and Steel Community
EU	European Union
FTA	Free Trade Agreement
GG	Government-General
ICC	International Criminal Court
ICJ	International Court of Justice
JCP	Japanese Communist Party
JSP	Japanese Socialist Party
LDP	Liberal Democratic Party (of Japan)
NATO	North Atlantic Treaty Organization
NGO	Non-Governmental Organization
PM	Prime Minister
PRC	People's Republic of China
RCEP	Regional Comprehensive Economic Partnership
ROK	Republic of Korea
SCAP	Supreme Commander of the Allied Powers
UN	United Nations
US	United States (of America)

## Russow: South Korea and Japan's "History Problem"

USSR     Union of Soviet Socialist Republics

WTO     World Trade Organization

WWII    Second World War

*What's past is prologue.*

- William Shakespeare, *The Tempest*

## Introduction

The Republic of Korea (ROK)<sup>1</sup> and Japan are both democracies, share deep economic ties, cultural and ethnic similarities, and form a security alliance with the United States (US). Contrary to what this might lead one to believe, the relationship between the two is and has been strained. The reason lies in the "history problem"<sup>2</sup>, a term used to describe bilateral tensions evoked by shared history, primarily caused by Japan's colonization of the Korean peninsula. As the international system is challenged by a rising People's Republic of China (PRC)<sup>3</sup> and the nuclear threat of the Democratic People's Republic of Korea (DPRK)<sup>4</sup>, especially for the US and by extension the Western international order, a better-functioning relationship between Japan and South Korea is strategically important. But the history issue has not been solved and disagreements have continued to emerge.

Based on the theoretical framework of collective memory, this thesis aims to examine why the history issue has remained so persistent. It will investigate the different collective memories about the countries' shared history to answer the question whether the memory of this history will continue to matter in the foreseeable future, or if Japan and the ROK are on track to overcome it. To this aim, this thesis conducts a literature review.

The first chapter of this thesis covers the theoretical framework. It explains what the concept of collective memory encapsulates and where it came from, then delves into its usage in politics to offer a background of the politicization of many issues in the ROK-Japan case. Lastly, the chapter

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<sup>1</sup> Hereafter referred to interchangeably as the ROK or South Korea. 'Korean', unless otherwise specified, refers to the people of the ROK. 'Korean peninsula' encapsulates both North and South Korea.

<sup>2</sup> Or "history issue", used interchangeably in this thesis.

<sup>3</sup> Hereafter referred to as PRC or China interchangeably unless otherwise specified.

<sup>4</sup> Referred to interchangeably as North Korea or the DPRK in this thesis.

encompasses concepts of trauma and victimhood, as both are deeply entrenched in the national identities of the two countries, influencing their political interactions.

The second chapter of this thesis gives an overview of the colonization of the Korean peninsula, starting with the historical background that made Japanese annexation possible. It will focus especially on the historical facts relating to the "comfort women", as this is one of the issues that continue to spark tensions.

The third chapter delves into the development of relations after 1945 and examines which instances played a significant role. Therefore, the Tokyo Trial and the Treaty of 1965 which normalized relations will be looked at, followed by an in-depth account of the four main issues that have sparked controversies in the 1990s and after, namely the Yasukuni Shrine, the history textbooks, Dokdo islands, and "comfort women". Apologies rendered by Japan and their reception in the ROK are recounted. Lastly, the chapter focuses on the trade dispute of 2019. These issues serve to illustrate the conflictual potential of the history issue.

Chapter Four analyzes how these issues are remembered to understand which memories are part of a national narrative and which ones are not, and their respective impact. The chapter looks at public opinion in the two countries to underline the relationship between collective memory and national identity.

The fifth and last chapter evaluates pathways to reconciliation. Firstly, collective memory in other countries' relations is looked at to draw some conclusions for the ROK-Japan case. Thereafter, geopolitical, cultural, and economic factors that could facilitate reconciliation are examined. The chapter further evaluates the role of the US as a potential mediator and the trilateral security alliance between the three countries. Lastly, the chapter evaluates whether all these factors are sufficient for reconciliation.

In conclusion, the thesis explains that the memory issue may remain politically relevant for as long as the national identities are founded on bilateral antagonism, while acknowledging that some progress can be made through security alliances and other forms of collaboration.

## 1. Theoretical Background

Various terms exist that attempt to encapsulate the notion that memories always relate to the historical and societal context they are recalled in or that refer to their political impact. In this thesis, the term "collective memory" will be used after defining what is understood under this term grounded on existing literature. Additionally, this chapter will delve into existing literature on memory and politics, as well as concepts of victims, perpetrators, and trauma, and explain how they are relevant to this thesis.

### 1.1 On Collective Memory

The hallmark work coining the term *Collective Memory* stems from Maurice Halbwachs<sup>5</sup>.

To understand any type of social or collective memory, Halbwachs first postulates that all our individual memories are deeply settled within the social groups and frameworks we belong to. Despite only individuals being capable of remembering, we are in fact only ever able to do so by relating ourselves to the social context and groups that we live and have lived in. Such groups can be our immediate or extended family, our generation, or even our ethnicity or nation – a single individual can and does belong to various groups during their lifetime, many of them at the same time. Therefore, our memories are multiple and subject to change; constantly evolving.

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<sup>5</sup> Information regarding Halbwachs stems from Maurice Halbwachs, *The Collective Memory*, 1st ed. (New York: Harper & Row, 1980). For references to his work and its importance see for example: Erika Apfelbaum, "Halbwachs and the Social Properties of Memory," in *Memory*, ed. Susannah Radstone and Bill Schwarz, Histories, Theories, Debates (Fordham University Press, 2010), 77–92, <https://www.jstor.org/stable/j.ctt1c999bq.9>; or Jan Assmann and John Czaplicka, "Collective Memory and Cultural Identity," *New German Critique*, no. 65 (1995): 125–33, <https://doi.org/10.2307/488538>.

Whenever we remember, we remember out of our present context. Therefore, whether this is done consciously or not, whenever we remember, we recall our memories through the lens of the present, with the present's needs and viewpoints in mind, and we actively select and reconstruct it to fit. Thereby, collective memory is a mechanism through which we, as individuals, remember (or forget) the past by reconstructing it through the present's perspective on what is, will, or should be meaningful and important for the given group we're remembering within.

This coins the start of the term *social* or *collective memory*.

Halbwachs also touches on *historical memory*, which is to him the events that are remembered in national history. Olick<sup>6</sup> differentiates further between autobiographical memory, historical memory, and collective memory. The first we experience ourselves, directly; the second is formed by events that only reach us through some kind of record, which we are not "organic[ally]"<sup>7</sup> related to. Historical memory is that part of our past that does not play an important role in our current lives, while collective memory does. This past is "active", it "forms our identities"<sup>8</sup>.

Olick postulates that Halbwachs' idea of collective memory actually incorporates two ideas, which are not entirely contradictory: the previously explained individual memories that are framed by our social context, but also "collective commemorative representations"<sup>9</sup>, where memories are formed not only by the individual through a social lens but also by the symbols and narratives that are publicly available. To Olick, this differentiation can be traced back to whether one perceives culture as something that an individual constructs or as

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<sup>6</sup> Jeffrey K. Olick, "Collective Memory: The Two Cultures," *Sociological Theory* 17, no. 3 (November 1, 1999): 333–48, <https://doi.org/10.1111/0735-2751.00083>.

<sup>7</sup> Olick, 335.

<sup>8</sup> Olick, 335.

<sup>9</sup> Olick, 336.

something that is contained within society by such publicly available symbols. In favor of the second approach to collective memory, venturing further than the notion of individual memories framed by societal context, Olick argues that not all patterns of sociation can be explained through just the psychological processes of the individual. Additionally, symbols are at least to an extent autonomous from the perception and thereafter reconstruction of the individual; they react to pressures that fall out of the explanatory capacity of an individual's interests or activities.

Olick argues in favor of using the term of collective memory as somewhat of an umbrella term referring to "a wide variety of mnemonic processes, practices, and outcomes, neurological, cognitive, personal, aggregated, and collective"<sup>10</sup>.

Following a similar line of argument, Apfelbaum<sup>11</sup> postulates that collective memory includes the traditions, norms, and customs that are encapsulated by a shared cultural background. Historical memory is for her the very foundation for collective memory.

Jan Assmann refers to those traditions, norms, and customs within the framework of what he calls *cultural memory*, which encompasses the "fateful events of the past" that are remembered through "cultural formation" (traditions, texts, monuments) as well as "institutional communication" (recitation, anniversaries)<sup>12</sup>. The purpose of this cultivation lies in forming, stabilizing, and communicating a group's self-image.

He also emphasizes that not only does our cultural memory exist only in relation to a group, it also distinctly *distances* us from others: we are this, *they* are

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<sup>10</sup> Olick, 346.

<sup>11</sup> Apfelbaum, "Halbwachs and the Social Properties of Memory", 91.

<sup>12</sup> Assmann and Czaplicka, "Collective Memory and Cultural Identity", 129.

something else<sup>13</sup>; a phenomenon referred to in psychology with the terms *in-group* and *out-group* and their effects<sup>14</sup>.

Aleida Assmann<sup>15</sup> offers a structured definition of collective memory: According to her, it consists of *social memory*, which is based on past experiences and is therefore bottom-up, and *political or national memory*, which is mediated and top-down, referring to governmental rhetoric and its impact on national identities.

Especially relevant for the scope of this thesis is what she understands under political memory, because it is communicated through those images and symbols that are deemed most important, i.e. highly affectively charged and especially convincing. The fact that such culturally created memory is supported by symbols renders it long-lasting, unbound by time.

She also points out that forgetting is, or can be, just as much of an intentional cultural or political strategy as remembering. Our culture or national identity is shaped inherently by a selection of which events of the past we remember and which ones we forget<sup>16</sup>.

For this thesis, *collective memory* shall refer to such concepts of political or national memory of (certain) past events that are supported by symbols, traditions, practiced commemorations etc., following the assumption that we, as individuals, remember only within the scope of the groups that we belong to. In this case, the relevant groups are the nations of Japan and South Korea in and through which their respective peoples remember or forget their shared past.

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<sup>13</sup> Assmann and Czaplicka, 130.

<sup>14</sup> Gazi Islam, "Social Identity Theory," in *Encyclopedia of Critical Psychology*, ed. Thomas Teo (New York, NY: Springer, 2014), 1781–83, [https://doi.org/10.1007/978-1-4614-5583-7\\_289](https://doi.org/10.1007/978-1-4614-5583-7_289).

<sup>15</sup> Aleida Assmann, *Der lange Schatten der Vergangenheit* (Verlag C.H.BECK Literatur - Sachbuch - Wissenschaft, 2011), <https://doi.org/10.17104/9783406622625>, 37.

<sup>16</sup> Assmann, 61.

This thesis postulates as its first hypothesis that there is a differing set of such collective memory in Japan and South Korea, building on the shared historical past that is remembered through the present. This collective memory is shaped by governmental rhetoric, the narratives that have established themselves within the two countries, as well as by cultural traditions or symbols. The divergence between these memories has led to long-term tensions that continue to the present.

## 1.2 Politics, History, and Memory

I have already established that a nation's collective memory is formed by its images and symbols. These, in turn, are selected in relation to their political power and affective impact.

On a wider scope, Meyer defines the term *politics of history* ("Geschichtspolitik") as "how and by whom, as well as through which means, with which intention, and which affect past experiences are brought up and become politically relevant"<sup>17</sup>.

Shain<sup>18</sup> writes that collective memory can influence decision-making in numerous ways. Langenbacher gives some examples, such as "determining who is responsible for a given historical trauma", "deciding who influences domestic debates", "forming" a nation's identity "in the international realm" or "developing [...] foreign policies" meant "to rectify the causes of the traumatic memory"<sup>19</sup>.

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<sup>17</sup> Erik Meyer, "Memory and Politics," in *Cultural Memory Studies: An International and Interdisciplinary Handbook*, ed. Ansgar Nünning and Astrid Erll (De Gruyter, 2008), 173–80, <https://doi.org/10.1515/9783110207262.3.173>, p. 176.

<sup>18</sup> Yossi Shain, "Conclusion: Collective Memory and the Logic of Appropriate Behavior," in *Power and the Past: Collective Memory and International Relations*, ed. Eric Langenbacher and Yossi Shain (Georgetown University Press, 2010), 213–24, <https://www.jstor.org/stable/j.ctt2tt597>.

<sup>19</sup> Eric Langenbacher, "Collective Memory as a Factor in Political Culture and International Relations," in *Power and the Past: Collective Memory and International Relations*, ed. Yossi Shain and Eric Langenbacher (Georgetown University Press, 2010), 13–50, p. 19.

A nation's history or memory politics convey messages to others about that nation's values, its current regime or its intentions, and thereby facilitate or hinder "reconciliation, trust and [...] peace"<sup>20</sup>.

Central to all instances of collective memory in politics is a certain struggle over which is the dominant narrative of history, often involving people in positions of power, scholars, but also the media<sup>21</sup>. Especially "salient memories"<sup>22</sup> can legitimize specific actions, for example US' President Bush legitimizing his *war on terror* through the traumatic i.e. salient memory of the terrorist attacks of 9/11.

The profound impact of the Second World War (WWII) or the Holocaust on the international system is another example of collective memory playing a role in politics. In fact, many institutions, such as the United Nations (UN) and some of its resolutions (e.g. the Geneva Convention on genocide), the International Criminal Court (ICC), many non-governmental or governmental institutions with the aim of *remembering*, or even the constitutions of Germany and Japan are rooted in some form of collective memory of WWII<sup>23</sup>. The European Union (EU) itself can be seen as such a project – with the historical aim of ensuring peace on a territory plagued by many wars, especially considering the Holocaust's horrors and the promise to "never again" (German: *nie wieder*) let anything alike happen.

In whichever way, memories are always at the core of international politics and give frameworks to international behavior.

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<sup>20</sup> Langenbacher, 24.

<sup>21</sup> Shain, "Power and the Past", 218.

<sup>22</sup> Shain, 222.

<sup>23</sup> Duncan Bell, "Introduction," in *Memory, Trauma and World Politics: Reflections on the Relationship Between Past and Present*, ed. Duncan Bell (London: Palgrave Macmillan UK, 2006), 1–29, [https://doi.org/10.1057/9780230627482\\_1](https://doi.org/10.1057/9780230627482_1), p. 15.

This thesis postulates that both Japan and South Korea have incorporated collective memory into their concepts of national identity, which in turn amplifies the difficulties in their bilateral relations (hypothesis 2). It further hypothesizes that specific ("salient") memories have been reinforced and remembered in the ROK and Japan and aims to identify these (2a).

### 1.3 Memory and Trauma, Victims and Perpetrators

Collective memory has been increasingly used in the fields of politics and international relations since the 1990s<sup>24</sup>, focusing mostly on Europe or the US, with Germany and its past during the Holocaust as the most obvious and often studied example<sup>25</sup>.

WWII impacted the world so profoundly that it has had an effect on how we remember, and it is due to this exact extreme character of events such as WWII that the discourse around collective memory also discusses the term *trauma*<sup>26</sup>. Psychologically speaking, trauma is a psychological injury so impactful that the individual is often unable to cope with it and henceforth represses it, which causes the trauma to "act out"<sup>27</sup>. In the political scope, then, traumata are events that have deeply affected the collective identity of a nation or group of people.

Furthermore, Rigney<sup>28</sup> argues that we have made a turn away from memories of glory to focus rather on memories of suffering in the aftermath of WWII; and similarly, Aleida Assmann postulates that we no longer exclusively

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<sup>24</sup> Assmann, *Der lange Schatten der Vergangenheit*, 30.

<sup>25</sup> Bell, "Introduction", 13.

<sup>26</sup> Bell, 7.

<sup>27</sup> Bell, 7.

<sup>28</sup> Ann Rigney, "Remembrance as Remaking: Memories of the Nation Revisited," *Nations and Nationalism* 24, no. 2 (2018): 240–57, <https://doi.org/10.1111/nana.12388>, p. 245.

speak in terms of winners and losers, but in *victims* and *perpetrators*<sup>29</sup>. This relationship is an asymmetric one<sup>30</sup>; whereas the therefore usual narrative of winners and losers implies involvement in fighting on both sides and therefore reciprocity. Victims, in this new sense, were subject to prosecution, pain, and death through the overwhelming asymmetrical power of the perpetrators. They have suffered *trauma*. This trauma is extremely difficult to cope with and to talk about, but especially highly affectively charged memories need to be recollected with others so that the trauma becomes recognized<sup>31</sup> – if it is not, the suffered pain could just as well be imagined. For example, a substantial part of reconciliation regarding the Holocaust is through the recognition of the victims' stories and creating space in society to listen to them<sup>32</sup>.

However, there can be a discrepancy between the victims' readiness to tell their story and society's readiness to hear it<sup>33</sup>. Even whether a memory is true or not is less a question of its accuracy and more one of whether it is acceptable within the framework of society. This unreadiness of society to listen to victims' stories plays a substantial role in their continued alienation and suffering<sup>34</sup>.

The preferred tactic of the perpetrators is silence, even suppression of the performed act of violence<sup>35</sup>. This suppression, continued after the act, ensures that the asymmetric structure of the victim-perpetrator relationship remains.

This structure, in addition to being asymmetrical, barely allows for complications. Especially on a collective level, the paradigmatic structure of clearly defined victims and clearly defined perpetrators is maintained, despite the

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<sup>29</sup> Assmann, *Der lange Schatten der Vergangenheit*, 72.

<sup>30</sup> Assmann, 74.

<sup>31</sup> Apfelbaum, "Halbwachs and the Social Properties of Memory", 87; Assmann, *Der lange Schatten der Vergangenheit*, 75.

<sup>32</sup> Assmann, *Der lange Schatten der Vergangenheit*, 77.

<sup>33</sup> Assmann, 75; Apfelbaum, "Halbwachs and the Social Properties of Memory", 87.

<sup>34</sup> Apfelbaum, "Halbwachs and the Social Properties of Memory", 87.

<sup>35</sup> Assmann, *Der lange Schatten der Vergangenheit*, 82-83, 101.

reality often including less clear versions of perpetrators, such as opportunists or people who simply remain indifferent<sup>36</sup>.

Politically, the silence of the perpetrators can also be extended through intentional forgetting on the governmental scope in favor of protecting them. Therefore, the asymmetrical relationship between victims and perpetrators continues even in the act, or lack of, remembering<sup>37</sup>. This asymmetry then fosters problems, as "a traumatic past which is not remembered starts to haunt."<sup>38</sup>

It is assumed as hypothesis 2.b that Japan and South Korea each have adopted differently shaped victimhood identities based on their trauma. In addition, Japan has assumed aspects of a perpetrator identity. These identities have impeded potential reconciliation.

In this chapter, the concepts of collective memory, victims, perpetrators, trauma and their respective relevance to politics have been explained. The hypotheses to be examined are 1) that there is differing set of collective memory in Japan and South Korea, 2) that collective memory has been incorporated into the respective country's national identity, which is shaped by 2.a) "salient" memories and 2.b) victimhood and/or perpetrator identities. To this aim, the historical background that forms the base for those collective memory sets needs to be examined.

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<sup>36</sup> Assmann, 83.

<sup>37</sup> Assmann, 83.

<sup>38</sup> Assmann, 249, translated by the author of this thesis.

## 2. Historical Background: Colonialization of Korea

In this thesis, it is assumed that the background of the ROK-Japan tumultuous relationship starts largely with the colonial occupation of the Korean<sup>39</sup> peninsula by Japan from 1905/1910 up until 1945. Hence, this chapter explores firstly the lead-up to the colonial period and then delves into its details and impact. The "comfort women" issue receives special focus since it later resurfaced as a significant contributor to bilateral tensions.

To understand what the Japanese colonization meant for Korea, we must first paint a picture of Korea before its colonization and the surrounding East Asia<sup>40</sup>. For centuries, the structure in East Asia had remained (mostly) unchanged: It was a tributary system under Chinese order that allowed Korea its own monarchs but did not recognize it as its own independent state. Nonetheless, for about twelve centuries, Korea had enjoyed a somewhat stable level of political unity under the Joseon<sup>41</sup> dynasty.

However, the 19<sup>th</sup> century disrupted this world order with Western imperialism starting to encroach. Korea gradually had to open up to trade and other powers. The most notable development was the Japan-Korea Treaty of 1876 (also: Ganghwa Treaty), which effectively ended the Chinese world order with its tributary system but still let China retain considerable influence over the peninsula. At the same time, Japan started to build its own empire and its interest in Korea grew, especially with their fear of Chinese influence in the area. After

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<sup>39</sup> In this chapter, "Korea" refers to the peninsula in its entirety, as the content deals only with matters preceding the 1945 division.

<sup>40</sup> Information in this section is taken from: Michael J. Seth, *A Concise History of Modern Korea: From the Late Nineteenth Century to the Present* (Lanham, Md: Rowman & Littlefield, 2010).

<sup>41</sup> This thesis uses the Revised Romanization of Korean unless the terms and names are widely known otherwise.

the Japanese occupied Gyeongbokgung Palace (the Korean monarch's historical seat), disarmed the Korean forces, and outnumbered the Chinese troops there, the conflict developed into the first Sino-Japanese War (1894-1895). After its loss, China recognized Korea as an independent state, but due to Japanese presence in the palace, the already immense Japanese influence led to reforms in Korea, effectively abolishing the old social structure.

With China out of the picture, Russia and Japan became rivalrous over influence over Korea during the next decade. When this rivalry, too, sparked into a war in 1904, Japanese troops once again entered Seoul and made Korea a de facto protectorate with various agreements: Japan was now allowed to "take any necessary action to protect [Korea]", to "occupy certain parts of the country", Korea's Ministry of Finance advisor was to be Japanese and Korea would have to "consult with Japan before signing any treaties or agreements with other countries"<sup>42</sup>. When Russia lost the war, an official Protectorate Treaty was signed in 1905.

During the five years Korea was a protectorate of Japan, the country was only nominally independent. Some resistance sparked with the so-called "Righteous Armies", consisting mostly but not exclusively of members of Korea's aristocratic class (the *yangban*) that formed guerilla bands<sup>43</sup>. Eventually, the movement ended in 1910 after Japan involved its military troops, killing an estimated 10,000 of the 50,000 Korean participants and driving a significant number of others across the northern border.

When Ito, the Japanese Resident-General in Korea, was assassinated in 1909, the Japanese government hardened their stance, which took the form of

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<sup>42</sup> Seth, *A Concise History of Modern Korea*, 2010, 32.

<sup>43</sup> Seth, 34.

annexation of the peninsula<sup>44</sup>. The other foreign powers in the region, namely Britain, the US, and to a lesser degree Russia, agreed to the annexation, as they did not associate it with further Japanese expansion into the area and thus did not attribute much significance to official annexation<sup>45</sup>.

## 2.1 Colonialized Korea: 1910-1945

Ku<sup>46</sup> summarizes the Japanese colonialization of Korea with the words that Japan "trampled on Korea's national pride and inflicted severe material and mental agonies". In a nutshell, the Japanese restricted political organizations in favor of independence, suppressed various resistance movements, often using violence, and heavily restricted usage of the Korean language, Korean surnames and Christianity, imposing Shintoism instead. Hundreds of thousands of Koreans were mobilized for the war effort, even conscripted, and many Korean women served as "comfort women" during the war. The term refers to many women who were involuntarily working in comfort stations, essentially military brothels, where they had to perform sexual acts. 80-90% of these women were Korean<sup>47</sup>.

Generally, the Japanese rule in colonial Korea was top-down and centralized<sup>48</sup>. The Government-General (GG), the Japanese official in power in Korea, had a broadly ranging authority regarding lawmaking or the appointment of officials. His building was – a point of humiliation for Koreans – in front of

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<sup>44</sup> Daeyeol Ku, *Korea 1905-1945: From Japanese Colonialism to Liberation and Independence* (Amsterdam University Press, 2021), <https://doi.org/10.1017/9781912961221>, 52.

<sup>45</sup> Ku, 61.

<sup>46</sup> Ku, 4.

<sup>47</sup> Roman David, "The Past or the Politics of the Present? Dealing with the Japanese Occupation of South Korea," *Contemporary Politics* 22, no. 1 (January 2, 2016): 57–76, <https://doi.org/10.1080/13569775.2015.1112953>, p.62.

<sup>48</sup> Information in this section is from Seth, *A Concise History of Modern Korea*, 2010, Chapters 1 and 2.

Gyeongbokgung Palace, whose grounds were "drastically reduced"<sup>49</sup> to make room for buildings such as that of the GG and a museum.

In the first ten years of colonialization, the Japanese occupants controlled the press, required police permits for public gatherings and prohibited political organizations and meetings. Japanese officials, even teachers, wore swords. In those first years, tens of thousands of politically based arrests took place.

Caprio<sup>50</sup> characterizes the background of the Japanese assimilation policy as one that took note of the similar historical origins shared between Japanese and Korean people, but that emphasized that the Joseon-era governments had been ineffective and therefore had created a distance between the two. Widely, Korean culture was described as "stagnated", making its people "dirty", "lazy", and "primitive"<sup>51</sup>. This distance between the two peoples would need to be bridged with a policy that combined classroom and social education, the latter of which for instance implemented a government-issued newspaper to spread assimilation policy messages (e.g. on the seemingly lacking state of Koreans' health standards). The policy also included encouragement for Koreans to participate in Japanese events and parades, such as for the imperial birthday or the anniversary of the GG's establishment. Such parades were designed to lead by the Japanese-built buildings such as the GG one that had encroached on the grounds of Gyeongbokgung Palace.

This first decade of colonial rule, Caprio argues, already showcased the contradiction between the Japanese assimilation rhetoric, pushing for a final goal of integrating the historically similar Koreans into Japanese society, and their

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<sup>49</sup> Mark E. Caprio, "Forming Korean Assimilation Policy," in *Japanese Assimilation Policies in Colonial Korea, 1910-1945* (University of Washington Press, 2011), 81-110, p. 108.

<sup>50</sup> Caprio, 86.

<sup>51</sup> Caprio, 88.

perception of Koreans as inferior, "underdeveloped", or "a spiritless people" that needed the Japanese rule to "awaken them to present reality"<sup>52</sup>.

In 1919, the First World War and its aftermath, especially the Versailles Conference, festered hopes for colonial peoples all around the world<sup>53</sup>. This also applied to Korea. Some Koreans in exile advocated for independence in Paris, and some Korean students in Japan also called for independence.

When Gojong (the penultimate Joseon monarch) died in 1919, action was triggered on a larger scale as rumors of Japanese influence on his death were circulating. Various groups' representatives were to issue a declaration of independence on March 3<sup>rd</sup>, the day of Gojong's scheduled funeral. Despite previously emphasizing the peaceful nature of their endeavor, the declaration was moved to February 28<sup>th</sup> for security reasons and later read to the public on March 1<sup>st</sup>. This sparked demonstrations throughout Korea with an estimated 500,000 to 1 million participants. Most of the protests were peaceful. However, the Japanese authorities attempted to suppress the movement, often violently.

The demonstrations, referred to as the March First Movement, served as an embarrassment to the Japanese government, resulting in both a call for more democracy in Japan and reforms in Korea. The following liberalist trend was modest but brought many symbolic reforms in Korea, e.g. that hated laws interfering with traditional customs were amended or abolished, that officials no longer wore swords, or that a ban on Korean newspapers were lifted. At the same time, the colonial government increased their police force to keep tight control, providing "intellectuals [...] an avenue to legally express themselves [...], while increasing the size and efficiency of the colonial administrative and police

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<sup>52</sup> Caprio, 89.

<sup>53</sup> Michael J. Seth, *A Concise History of Modern Korea: From the Late Nineteenth Century to the Present* (Rowman & Littlefield, 2010), 47.

organs"<sup>54</sup>. It was still prohibited to publicly advocate for independence, and doing so was punishable, resulting in numerous arrests, banning of organizations and closing of publications. The reforms therefore simultaneously managed to give hope to the Korean people that Japanese rule would change towards more liberalism while exposing Koreans increasingly to the administration, which facilitated control<sup>55</sup>.

In the 1920s, several student incidents such as strikes occurred and expanded into a wider, anti-Japanese movement. 54,000 Korean students took part in it by 1930, and the Japanese authorities reacted by arresting or expelling many of the participants<sup>56</sup>.

In 1926, a first step was taken towards a more repressive colonial rule, sparked by the death of Sunjong, the last Joseon monarch. Demonstrations that are referred to as the June 10 Incident took place, during which the Japanese authorities arrested many suspected leftists and shut down a series of publications.

Considering the Great Depression and its impact in Japan, Japan reoriented towards imperial expansion instead of closer cooperation with Western powers, marking Korea as more strategically important. It now served as a bridge between Japan and Manchuria<sup>57</sup>, as illustrated in Figure 1, and became a bigger source for raw materials, investments and trade.

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<sup>54</sup> Seth, *A Concise History of Modern Korea*, 2010, 50.

<sup>55</sup> Mark E. Caprio, "Post-March First Policy Reform and Assimilation," in *Japanese Assimilation Policies in Colonial Korea, 1910-1945* (University of Washington Press, 2011), 111–40, p. 139.

<sup>56</sup> Seth, *A Concise History of Modern Korea*, 2010, 57.

<sup>57</sup> Manchuria refers to a Northeast Asian region located in today's Northeastern China.

## Russow: South Korea and Japan's "History Problem"

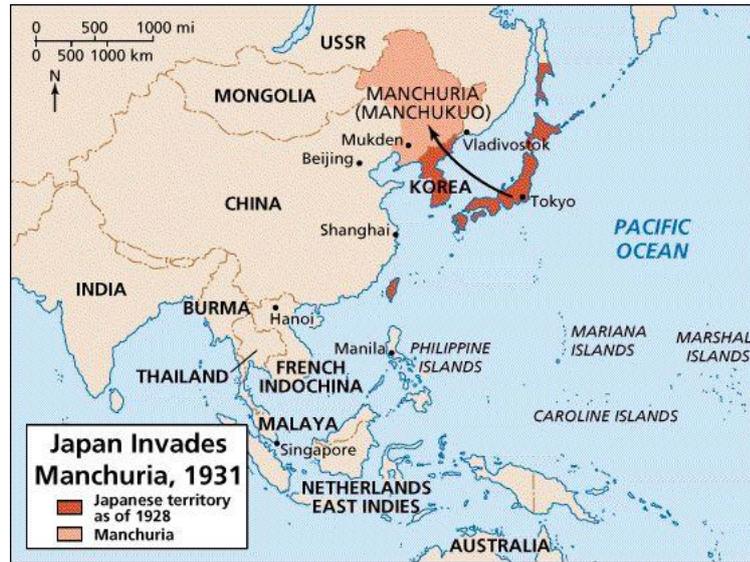


Figure 1. Korea as a bridge to Manchuria<sup>58</sup>.

Finally, in 1937, the Sino-Japanese War broke out, later widening into the Asian theater of WWII or the Pacific War. Where the Japanese rule had previously aimed at assimilating the Korean people gradually, they now changed that<sup>59</sup>: Koreans were mass mobilized for the war effort and Korean organizations were shut down and replaced by ones sponsored by the state whose purpose was it to redirect civil activities to the war effort<sup>60</sup>. In 1943, Japan also began to conscript Koreans directly. With compulsory drills and mobilization of Korean students to serve in labor and military service, education, too, became militarized. By 1945, classroom activity was almost entirely suspended.

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<sup>58</sup> Retrieved from "Japan and the Manchuria Crisis | History Revision for GCSE, IGCSE, IB and AS/A2 History," Mr Allsop History, 2024, <https://www.mrallsohistory.com/revision/japan-and-the-manchuria-crisis.html>.

<sup>59</sup> Mark E. Caprio, "Radical Assimilation Under Wartime Conditions," in *Japanese Assimilation Policies in Colonial Korea, 1910-1945* (University of Washington Press, 2011), 141–70, p. 146.

<sup>60</sup> Seth, *A Concise History of Modern Korea*, 2010, 72.

Outside of the war effort, the Korean "colonial experience changed profoundly"<sup>61</sup> also due to the Forced Assimilation Policy during that time. Utilizing slogans such as "Japan and Korea as one body" and "harmony between Japan and Korea" (Japanese: *Nai-Sen ittai* and *Nissen yuwa*, respectively), the assimilation policy incorporated the Name Order of 1939, which obligated Koreans to change their names to Japanese ones. The suppression of the Korean language extended further, as using Korean in school was heavily restricted by 1938 and punishable by 1943. In 1940, many newspapers in Korean were ordered to close. Additionally, registration at Shinto shrines became required, and students as well as government employees were even obligated to attend Shinto ceremonies. However, the policy remained ambiguous: it aimed at assimilating Koreans, therefore making them Japanese, but still maintained the stance that Koreans were distinctly subordinate and inferior to Japanese people.

The colonial period ended with the surrender of Japan on August 15, 1945, after the atomic bombings of Hiroshima and Nagasaki, and the peninsula was divided along the 38<sup>th</sup> parallel.

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<sup>61</sup> Seth, *A Concise History of Modern Korea*, 2010, 70.

## 2.2 Special Focus: "Comfort Women"

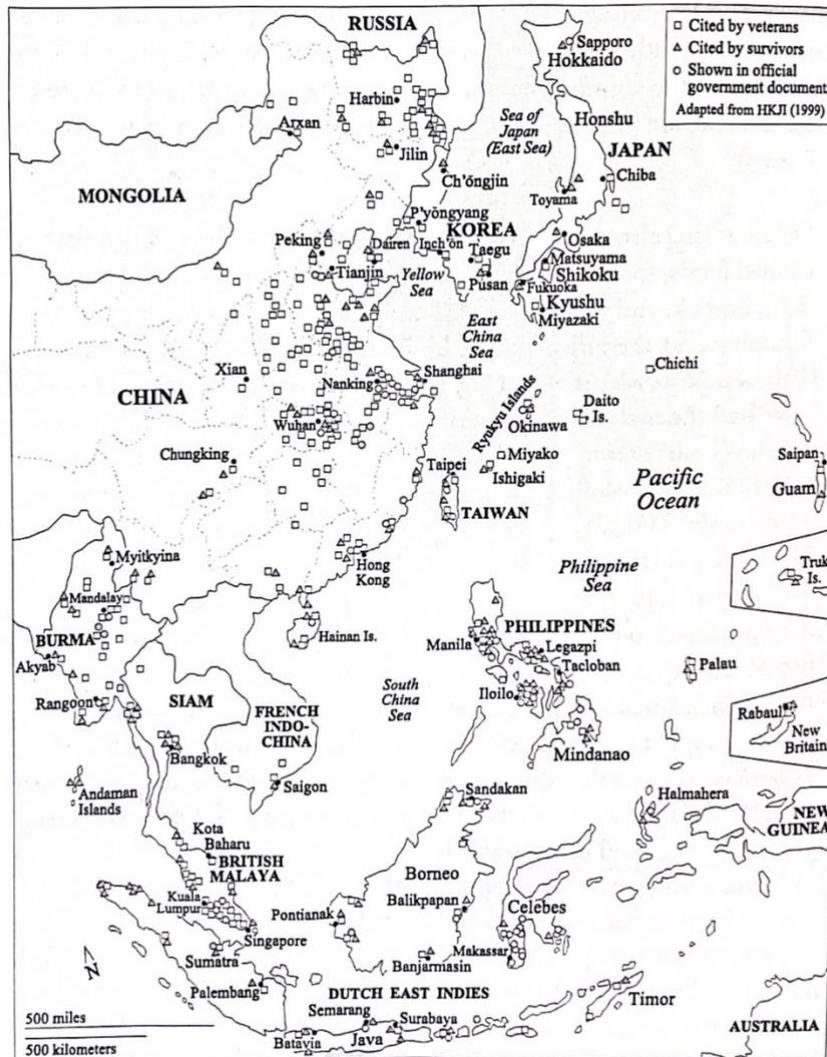


Figure 2. Map of major military comfort stations<sup>62</sup>.

<sup>62</sup> Taken from C. Sarah Soh, *The Comfort Women: Sexual Violence and Postcolonial Memory in Korea and Japan* (University of Chicago Press, 2020), 138.

The term *comfort women*<sup>63</sup> (Japanese: *ianfu*, Korean: *wianbu*) were tens of thousands of women (estimated numbers range from 50,000 to 200,000), the great majority of which Korean, who were in sexual servitude during the Pacific War<sup>64</sup>.

At the time, the narrative reason for the recruitment of "comfort women" was to prevent the stressed soldiers from seeking sexual outlets and e.g. mass-raping, resulting in a network of comfort stations (Japanese: *ianjo*) reaching all throughout areas occupied by the Japanese during the war (Figure 2)<sup>65</sup>.

In that sense, the comfort system was a way of giving imperial "gifts" to the Japanese soldiers, and the women were serving their "gendered duties as imperial subjects"<sup>66</sup>. However, the soldiers themselves often used derogatory slang and insults such as of "cunt" or "public toilet"<sup>67</sup>, although some soldiers also developed friendly or even romantic bonds with "comfort women".

Most of the women came from lower social classes and the manner of recruitment differed; some were "enticed away"<sup>68</sup> by the promise of paid work, some were forcibly taken, more violent methods becoming increasingly frequent as the war went on. Data on Korean survivors showcases that there was also cooperation or at least complicity by Koreans in various cases of recruitment: 64 of 172 interviewed cases were recruited by Korean civilian procurers (37,21%)<sup>69</sup>.

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<sup>63</sup> The term "comfort women" is viewed as controversial, as it is euphemistic. However, it is the term most widely known and used, which is why it will be used in this thesis but placed in quotation marks.

<sup>64</sup> C. Sarah Soh, *The Comfort Women: Sexual Violence and Postcolonial Memory in Korea and Japan* (University of Chicago Press, 2020), xii.

<sup>65</sup> George Hicks, "Chapter 10 / The 'Comfort Women,'" in *The Japanese Wartime Empire, 1931-1945* (Princeton University Press, 2021), 305–23, <https://doi.org/10.1515/9781400844371-012>, p. 310.

<sup>66</sup> Soh, *The Comfort Women*, 38, 31.

<sup>67</sup> Soh, 32, 39-40, 181.

<sup>68</sup> Hicks, "Chapter 10 / The 'Comfort Women,'" 312.

<sup>69</sup> Soh, *The Comfort Women*, 139.

Similarly to how the comfort facilities themselves differed vastly, conditions at the comfort stations also varied greatly<sup>70</sup>, but all women were supervised and had to follow restrictions by the military.

Mostly, Korean survivors seemed to have worked at what Soh calls the *concessionary* type<sup>71</sup> of stations: They were privately operated, often by former owners of brothels. Some other facilities were run by the military, the *paramilitary* ones, to provide regulated access to sex for the soldiers. Lastly, the *criminal* types of comfort stations emerged late in the war, were run by soldiers themselves and came into being after the commitment of sex crimes against local women, after which these women were confined and subjected to rape without receiving any type of payment.

While some of the stations were static and rooted in place, many were mobile and moved with the Japanese forces, bringing the women close to areas of hot conflict. Therefore, the women suffered similar hazards as the soldiers they were forced to follow<sup>72</sup>; as well as the consequences of the sexual acts they had to perform, chief among them sexual diseases even though preventative measures and rules were in place (that were not always adhered to). For example, the men were supposed to use condoms and the women were instructed to clean themselves after each customer, as well as using medication preventatively or as a treatment. Many of the women were later affected by sterility, which could have resulted from medications or damage to their reproductive systems.

At the end of the war, ethnic discrimination became visible against Korean survivors as Japanese "comfort women" were often informed of the Japanese defeat while their Korean counterparts were left behind. Especially in areas affected by hot conflict, the women were sometimes killed in enemy action,

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<sup>70</sup> Soh, *The Comfort Women*, 115.

<sup>71</sup> Soh, 115-119.

<sup>72</sup> Hicks, "Chapter 10 / The 'Comfort Women.'", 319.

sometimes subject to mass suicide (instead of surrendering), or even killed by the Japanese<sup>73</sup>.

Despite happening during the Pacific War, the "comfort women" issue did not gain major attention, either nationally or internationally, until the late 1980s and 1990s, following democratization in Korea<sup>74</sup>.

In conclusion, the "comfort women" system can be described as one that served out of the masculinist culture of providing the fighting soldiers with regulated opportunities for sexual release with little regard to the women in question. Recruitment as well as conditions at the facilities greatly differed, which means that the lived experiences of the survivors also differed from each other. Ethnic discrimination against the Korean "comfort women" especially played a role at the end of the war.

Effectively, all the women survived rape as well as the hazards that came with both their occupation as well as usually being close to enemy lines. As a direct or indirect consequence, they often continued to suffer long after the war had officially ended<sup>75</sup>.

This chapter explained the historical basis for the history issue with the dynamics before Japanese annexation of Korea, the Korean colonial experience, and the "comfort women". To understand how the history issue emerged, the next chapter now covers developments from 1945 to the present.

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<sup>73</sup> Hicks, "Chapter 10 / The 'Comfort Women.'", 320; Soh, *The Comfort Women*, 141.

<sup>74</sup> A more detailed analysis of this delayed discussion of the topic can be found in Chapter 3.3.4.

<sup>75</sup> Refer to Chapter 4.1 for more information.

### 3. 1945-Present: History and Reconciliation

In the following chapter, the developments after the end of the Pacific War will be discussed, investigating different reconciliatory or retributive measures and their perception. The chapter will trace from the Tokyo Trial in 1946 over the reasons and impact of the Treaty of Basic Relations in 1965 to the 1980s and 1990s, where the history issue gained new momentum with four main issues: Japan's history textbooks, the Yasukuni Shrine, the Dokdo or Takeshima islands, and the "comfort women". The chapter traces Japanese apologies and their perception and ends with the most recent issue, the trade dispute of 2019-2023.

#### 3.1 The Tokyo Trial

After the war ended, the Allied Powers started an effort to enforce universal standards of conduct, one of the main steps of which were the two war tribunals in Nuremberg and Tokyo.

The Tokyo Trial (officially *International Military Tribunal for the Far-East*), starting in 1946, consisted of eleven judges and eleven prosecutors sent from eleven Allied Powers. It used a classification system that prosecuted crimes against peace, meaning "acts of planning, conspiring, and executing an aggressive war"<sup>76</sup>, as Class A war crimes; violations of war conventions (Class B) and crimes against humanity (Class C). 28 Class A war crime suspects were tried in Tokyo, utilizing testimonies about the atrocities Japan had committed during the war. The Japanese defendants pleaded not guilty on all charges and the acts Japan had committed during the war were justified as "self-defense"<sup>77</sup>.

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<sup>76</sup> Hiro Saito, *The History Problem: The Politics of War Commemoration in East Asia* (University of Hawaii Press, 2017), 22.

<sup>77</sup> Saito, 22.

In November 1948, the Tokyo Trial ruled that the Japanese leaders had conspired for aggression and that war crimes against the Allies had been committed. Seven defendants were sentenced to death, sixteen to lifelong imprisonment. The remaining defendants either received shorter sentences or had died or become mentally ill during the trial.

However, the trial is regarded as problematic in various aspects. Firstly, suspects were prosecuted under the assumption of offenses legally not yet defined at the time they were committed<sup>78</sup>. Secondly, not all Class A war crime suspects were tried, and nineteen of them were even released because logistical problems emerged and because the Allied powers disagreed on various matters<sup>79</sup>. Additionally, the Allied Powers were not free of fault and had also committed some of the types of crimes that the defendants were prosecuted for. Lastly, the Japanese emperor in power during the war, Hirohito<sup>80</sup>, was exempted from prosecution, presumably due to his influence over the cooperation of the Japanese government with the task of forming a new constitution<sup>81</sup>.

The dominant domestic response in Japan to the trial was one of rejection<sup>82</sup>. Public opinion supported the release of war criminals, and upon independence, the Japanese government effectively no longer forbid war criminals and collaborators from working in public office jobs. A notable number of them (re-)gained influential positions. In 1952 and 1953, the Japanese government passed three resolutions that had the aim of reducing sentences or paroles. This rejection or even ignorance of the condemnation by both the dominant

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<sup>78</sup> Thomas U. Berger, "Of Shrines and Hooligans: The Structure of the History Problem in East Asia after 9/11," in *Power and the Past: Collective Memory and International Relations*, ed. Eric Langenbacher and Yossi Shain (Georgetown University Press, 2010), 189–202, <https://www.jstor.org/stable/j.ctt2tt597>, p. 192.

<sup>79</sup> Saito, *The History Problem*, 23.

<sup>80</sup> Posthumously also commonly referred to as the Showa Emperor.

<sup>81</sup> Berger, "Power and the Past", 192-193.

<sup>82</sup> Saito, *The History Problem*, 24.

conservative side of domestic Japanese politics but also parts of the public was additionally founded on the perception that a war criminal in the sense of the Tokyo Trial was "something that victors [made] up one-sidedly"<sup>83</sup>.

Despite this dominant discourse, other narratives were present in the opposition parties such as the Japanese Communist Party (JCP) and the Japan Socialist Party (JSP)<sup>84</sup>. They sought to commemorate much more actively: The JCP thought Japan should apologize especially to China; and the JSP wanted a fairer international tribunal that also looked at the war crimes committed by the Allies, most notably the dropping of atomic bombs on Hiroshima and Nagasaki.

In summary, the Tokyo Trial established Imperial Japan as guilty of war crimes and hence laid grounds for Japan's perpetrator identity, further proven by the dominant domestic response of rejection in favor of protecting the perpetrators in question or the nation.

### **3.2 The ROK's Economic Miracle & the Treaty of Basic Relations (1965)**

Shortly after the war, while the ROK and Japan did not have diplomatic relations, first calls for compensation were made in the ROK<sup>85</sup>, both directly to Japan and to the Supreme Commander for the Allied Powers (SCAP), Douglas MacArthur<sup>86</sup>. These claims were rejected by both Japan and the US, the latter of which favored a more lenient approach towards Japan in account of rising Cold War tensions and the potential of Japan as an ally against the communist Union of Soviet Socialist Republics (USSR) and China<sup>87</sup>.

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<sup>83</sup> Saito, 25.

<sup>84</sup> Saito, 25-28.

<sup>85</sup> Saito, 43.

<sup>86</sup> SCAP oversaw the Allied powers' occupation and administration of Japan following Japan's surrender in 1945 until the San Francisco Treaty came into full effect in 1952.

<sup>87</sup> Saito, *The History Problem*, 44; Berger, "Power and the Past", 193.

Hence, the approaches to compensation differed greatly when a first attempt was made in 1952 to normalize relations, and talks broke down in 1953 and were not resumed until 1960<sup>88</sup>.

In the interim, the burdensome history retracted to the background<sup>89</sup>, especially as the Korean War (1950-1953) ravaged the peninsula, leaving the ROK poorer even than the DPRK<sup>90</sup>. With heavy reliance on the US, the government in the South experienced problems not least due to the leader Syngman Rhee's stern position on Japan; whom he refused to normalize relations with. He infused the genuine fear of the population of becoming an economic colony of Japan with polarized dramatizations of fishing clashes and anti-Japanese sentiment. This began to change with the new government of 1960, which started to consider economic aid instead of compensation from Japan<sup>91</sup>, a position that was consolidated in the military rule under Park Chung-hee, who overthrew the previous government in 1961.

The Treaty of Basic Relations of 1965<sup>92</sup>, which finally normalized relations with Japan<sup>93</sup>, greatly facilitated the following economic miracle. The project faced furious opposition both in South Korea and Japan; and student demonstrations were struck down and martial law announced in Korea<sup>94</sup>. The treaty went into effect in December of 1965, its signage encouraged by the US, in

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<sup>88</sup> Saito, *The History Problem*, 44.

<sup>89</sup> Berger, "Power and the Past", 193.

<sup>90</sup> Seth, *A Concise History of Modern Korea*, 2010, 149.

<sup>91</sup> Saito, *The History Problem*, 44.

<sup>92</sup> Hereafter referred to as the Treaty of Basic Relations, or interchangeably as the 1965 Treaty.

<sup>93</sup> Seth, *A Concise History of Modern Korea*, 2010, 163.

<sup>94</sup> A. Skabelund, "Unhealed Wounds: Japan's Colonization of Korea," *Sigma: Journal of Political and International Studies*, 1994, <https://www.semanticscholar.org/paper/Unhealed-Wounds%3A-Japan%27s-Colonization-of-Korea-Skabelund/634542e28b7a5a45201a59fbd972b22aff1eac87>; Seth, *A Concise History of Modern Korea*, 2010, 163.

no small part because Japan's financial aid would greatly increase the possibility of the ROK sending troops to the US' ongoing war effort in Vietnam<sup>95</sup>.

Essentially, it aimed to legally settle all war claims by granting the ROK \$800 million in loans and aids without referring to them as "compensation"<sup>96</sup>. Through agreeing to economic zones, the fishing dispute was settled, and Koreans living in Japan were to be granted residency status. The treaty did not include an apology or a reparation clause, and the Japanese government continued to downplay and deny the committed war crimes during the writing of the treaty<sup>97</sup>. While intending to nullify all further South Korean reparation claims, it is vital to note that the "comfort women" issue had not yet become politically relevant and was therefore not included.

This treaty can be seen as one of the factors explaining the relative low importance the shared history was attributed at the time. Additionally, not only in the ROK but also in other East Asian countries strong authoritarian regimes were in power, who generally do not encourage transparency and discourse on such controversial issues<sup>98</sup> or even suppressed domestic criticism, such as the student demonstrations<sup>99</sup>. Additionally, the Cold War played a two-fold role in pushing the history issue to the background. Firstly, it simply made it subordinate in the larger scope of communist alliances, with Japan as an ally against both communist China and the USSR the US was not inclined to press and potentially complicate relations with. Secondly, the institutional structure of the Cold War in East Asia did not allow for much dialogue – the opposite of which was true in Europe, where the European Communities and the North Atlantic Treaty Organization

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<sup>95</sup> Saito, *The History Problem*, 45.

<sup>96</sup> Skabelund, "Unhealed Wounds", 50; Seth, *A Concise History of Modern Korea*, 2010, 163; David, "The Past or the Politics of the Present?", 63.

<sup>97</sup> Skabelund, "Unhealed Wounds", 50-53.

<sup>98</sup> Langenbacher, "Collective Memory as a Factor in Political Culture and International Relations", 36.

<sup>99</sup> Seth, *A Concise History of Modern Korea*, 2010, 163.

(NATO) provided member countries with the sufficient institutional background for dialogue and cooperation.

When the Cold War ended, this changed. Authoritarian regimes in East Asia began to fall and make way for more democratic forms of government, and the increase in trade between countries sought a basis in the form of establishing institutional arrangements<sup>100</sup>. Therefore, the history problem became newly and urgently relevant.

### **3.3 Four Issues: Yasukuni, History Textbooks, Dokdo, and the "Comfort Women"**

From the 1950s, four main issues have painted the relations between Japan and the ROK, but also between Japan and the PRC<sup>101</sup>.

#### ***3.3.1 The Yasukuni Shrine***

The Yasukuni Shrine in Tokyo is a Shinto shrine where 2.5 million war dead are enshrined<sup>102</sup>. Built in 1886, the institution was central to the military for honoring soldiers fallen in war, and it was militarist in nature: Head priests commonly came from a military background, the shrine was under the jurisdiction of Army and Navy Ministries and victory celebrations were held on its grounds.<sup>103</sup> Sacrifices for the nation were perceived as "worthy and deserving favors from the

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<sup>100</sup> Berger, "Power and the Past", 195.

<sup>101</sup> Notwithstanding Chapter 2, "China" in the following chapters of this thesis refers, unless otherwise specified, to the PRC rather than the Republic of China in Taiwan.

<sup>102</sup> Amrita Jash, "Politics of Memories: The Yasukuni Shrine Issue," in *China's Japan Policy: Learning from the Past*, ed. Amrita Jash (Cham: Springer International Publishing, 2023), 175–244, [https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-031-44817-1\\_5](https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-031-44817-1_5), p. 177.

<sup>103</sup> Mike M. Mochizuki, "The Yasukuni Shrine Conundrum: Japan's Contested Identity and Memory," in *Northeast Asia's Difficult Past: Essays in Collective Memory*, ed. Mikyoung Kim and Barry Schwartz (London: Palgrave Macmillan UK, 2010), 31–52, [https://doi.org/10.1057/9780230277427\\_2](https://doi.org/10.1057/9780230277427_2), p. 32-34.

government"<sup>104</sup>. For such soldiers who, in battle, were deemed to have died a "bad death", enshrinement served to calm their spirits and bring them peace – *Yasukuni* in fact means "peaceful land"<sup>105</sup>.

With the occupation of Japan and its later new constitution, state and religion was separated officially, but the relationship simply continued in a new manner.<sup>106</sup> While Japan was administered by SCAP, no prime ministers (PMs) or members of the imperial family visited the shrine, but that changed with the San Francisco Peace Treaty in 1952. Both the PM and Emperor Hirohito visited the shrine<sup>107</sup>. Afterwards, the government provided special treatment for families whose deceased were enshrined at Yasukuni, e.g. with discounted train fares. When the new conservative Liberal Democratic Party (LDP) came into power in 1955, this relationship continued and was even extended, encouraged by the Japan War-Bereaved Families Association (*nihon izokukai*<sup>108</sup>). Founded in 1947, the Izokukai advocated for re-establishment of the shrine's state patronage well into the 1960s<sup>109</sup>. The LDP maintained close ties with the Izokukai as they made up a substantial voting bloc in the LDP's favor, despite the official separation between religion and state remaining with the shrine not under government patronage.

The government nonetheless continued their influence over the shrine. As was tradition, the list of eligible war dead was provided by the government, with the choice whether to enshrine them resting with the religious leaders. In 1958, the Ministry of Welfare submitted a list containing Class B and C war

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<sup>104</sup> Saito, *The History Problem*, 28.

<sup>105</sup> Mochizuki, "The Yasukuni Shrine Conundrum", 33.

<sup>106</sup> Jash, "Politics of Memories", 178; Mochizuki, "The Yasukuni Shrine Conundrum", 33-34.

<sup>107</sup> Saito, *The History Problem*, 31.

<sup>108</sup> Afterwards referred to as Izokukai.

<sup>109</sup> Mochizuki, "The Yasukuni Shrine Conundrum", 35; Saito, *The History Problem*, 32.

criminals to the shrine. 346 were enshrined in the following year, and by 1966, over 900 Class B and C war criminals were enshrined<sup>110</sup>.

In the same year, a list of Class A war criminals was submitted, but their enshrinement was postponed until 1978, which is seen as one of the center and starting points of the controversy<sup>111</sup>.

Before, PM Miki had visited the shrine on the anniversary of the end of WWII, August 15, 1975. Upon receiving backlash, the government proceeded to differentiate between official visits and private ones (e.g. by (not) using an official vehicle)<sup>112</sup>.

PM Nakasone again visited on August 15<sup>th</sup> 1985, this time narrated intentionally as an official visit. He elicited more interest than other visits had before; probably because of the way it was framed as official and due to its context: Nakasone criticized the Tokyo Trial and described its view of history that afterwards spread in Japan as "self-torturing"<sup>113</sup>. He also aimed at lifting the 1% Gross-National-Product limit on defense expenditure. Therefore, visits to the Yasukuni shrine were no longer framed as mourning and commemorating but became intrinsically political. This was amplified by Nakasone forgoing further visits after pressure from the Chinese government, whom he had close ties with and which was under domestic pressure due to student protests opposing Nakasone's visit<sup>114</sup>.

Until 2001, prime ministerial visits mostly ceased, and Emperor Hirohito stopped visiting after 1975. The posthumous revelation that his refusal to visit was due to the enshrinement of Class A criminals added fuel to the fire<sup>115</sup>.

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<sup>110</sup> Mochizuki, "The Yasukuni Shrine Conundrum", 38; Saito, *The History Problem*, 32.

<sup>111</sup> Jash, "Politics of Memories", 178.

<sup>112</sup> Mochizuki, "The Yasukuni Shrine Conundrum", 39.

<sup>113</sup> Mochizuki, 42.

<sup>114</sup> Mochizuki, 42.

<sup>115</sup> Jash, "Politics of Memories", 180.

When PM Koizumi started visiting in 2001, the problem erupted in full scale, with strong protests from both China and South Korea. Koizumi continued the visits nonetheless; presumably again due to seeking the support of the Izokukai. Meanwhile, he attempted to detach Yasukuni from a nationalist view of history, also by offering apologies that were not viewed favorable in light of his continued visits: "That Class A war criminals were enshrined there, that [the museum on the shrine's grounds] downplayed Japanese aggression"<sup>116</sup> in addition to the Japanese's governments efforts at the time to expand their defense policy in light of the terrorist attacks of 9/11 effectively undermined his emphasis on mourning and commemorating.

After Koizumi, most PMs refrained from visiting the shrine, except for Abe in 2013, once again provoking criticism<sup>117</sup>. Most recently, Japanese leaders have sent offerings instead of visiting the shrine directly. In March 2024, for the first time since 1978, an ex-military official and in this case ex-admiral, was appointed as head priest of Yasukuni<sup>118</sup> – showcasing that the issue, despite having receded into the background, still has the potential to alienate Japan from its neighbors.

Following the definition that collective memory is supported by certain symbols and traditions, Yasukuni has become such a symbol. It may stand for mourning of the dead akin to traditional Japanese Shinto culture, but also for a historical perspective overly positive in light of Japanese war crimes. Possible

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<sup>116</sup> Mochizuki, "The Yasukuni Shrine Conundrum", 45.

<sup>117</sup> Jash, "Politics of Memories", 187-189. For a list of all Japanese prime ministerial visits to the Yasukuni shrine, refer to Annex, Table 2.

<sup>118</sup> Yukiko Toyoda, "Tokyo's Controversial Yasukuni Shrine Picks Ex-Admiral as Chief Priest," *Reuters*, March 15, 2024, sec. Asia Pacific, <https://www.reuters.com/world/asia-pacific/tokyos-controversial-yasukuni-shrine-picks-ex-admiral-chief-priest-source-says-2024-03-15/>.

solutions like changing Yasukuni or building a new memorial, while domestically discussed<sup>119</sup>, have never been carried out.

### 3.3.2 *The History Textbook Controversy*

Because they teach what is "legitimate knowledge", (history) textbooks are always to some extent political<sup>120</sup>. In the case of Japan, history textbooks have led to four sets of intertwined crises.

The first such crisis happened in 1982, when both China and South Korea criticized newly published Japanese textbooks on the ground of Japanese media's allegations that words had been changed following orders from the Japanese government, softening the language and omitting details<sup>121</sup>. It was later revealed that the specific changes the media had reported on did not happen. Nonetheless, the Japanese government promised to listen to its neighbors' criticisms seriously in future debates in the so-called "Neighboring Countries Clause"<sup>122</sup>. Nonetheless, Japan did have a system of textbook inspection which negatively impacted authors portraying critical viewpoints<sup>123</sup>, most famously Ienaga Saburo<sup>124</sup> whose struggle started as early as 1955. Ienaga writes about having to omit details and descriptions, the suggested revisions favoring more

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<sup>119</sup> Mochizuki, "The Yasukuni Shrine Conundrum."

<sup>120</sup> Claudia Schneider, "The Japanese History Textbook Controversy in East Asian Perspective," *The ANNALS of the American Academy of Political and Social Science* 617, no. 1 (May 1, 2008): 107–22, <https://doi.org/10.1177/0002716208314359>, p. 113.

<sup>121</sup> Caroline Rose, "The Textbook Issue: Domestic Sources of Japan's Foreign Policy," *Japan Forum* 11, no. 2 (1999): 205–16, <https://doi.org/10.1080/09555809908721632>; Kazuya Fukuoka, "Japanese History Textbook Controversy at a Crossroads?: Joint History Research, Politicization of Textbook Adoption Process, and Apology Fatigue in Japan," *Global Change, Peace & Security* 30, no. 3 (September 2, 2018): 313–34, p. 314.

<sup>122</sup> Fukuoka, "Japanese History Textbook Controversy at a Crossroads?," 314.

<sup>123</sup> Saito, *The History Problem*; Samuel Guex, "La controverse nippo-coréenne au sujet des manuels d'histoire," *Cipango. Cahiers d'études japonaises*, no. 19 (October 30, 2012): 111–48, <https://doi.org/10.4000/cipango.1688>, p.3.

<sup>124</sup> See Saburo Ienaga, "The Glorification of War in Japanese Education," *International Security* 18, no. 3 (1993): 113–33, <https://doi.org/10.2307/2539207>.

subtle language. The rejections of his manuscripts were based on the dominant conservative approach to education at the time; its goal being "to make students recognize the efforts of their ancestors, strengthen their awareness as the Japanese people [...] and cultivate abundant love for the Japanese nation"<sup>125</sup>.

In 1986, the crisis erupted anew when a new textbook (the *Shinpen nihonshi*) passed following numerous adjustments and revisions<sup>126</sup>. After outcries from the ROK and PRC, especially relating to the "comfort women" and Nanjing Massacre<sup>127</sup> respectively, descriptions of such events became increasingly common. This, in turn, sparked domestic backlash from conservative politicians<sup>128</sup>, such as the Minister for Education or the Director General of Japan's National Land Agency. Respectively, they referred to the annexation of Korea as legal and questioned whether Japan had truly been the aggressor<sup>129</sup>.

Crises in 2001 and 2005 followed the creation of the Japanese Society for History Textbook Reform, or *Tsukurukai*<sup>130</sup> in the late 1990s, who believed in a neo-nationalistic approach that viewed the Japanese education after the war as "masochistic"<sup>131</sup>. After numerous revisions, their textbook eventually got approved and sparked a new series of criticisms<sup>132</sup> on the grounds of "glorifying"<sup>133</sup> the acts Japan had committed during the war. The timing of the newest crisis coincided with PM Koizumi's continued visits to Yasukuni, adding

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<sup>125</sup> Saito, *The History Problem*, 36.

<sup>126</sup> Fukuoka, "Japanese History Textbook Controversy at a Crossroads?", 315; Saito, *The History Problem*, 64.

<sup>127</sup> The Nanjing Massacre refers to a weeklong massacre and mass rape the Japanese Imperial Army committed in Nanjing in 1937 with victim number estimates ranging from 40,000 to 300,000.

<sup>128</sup> Schneider, "The Japanese History Textbook Controversy in East Asian Perspective", 110.

<sup>129</sup> Fukuoka, "Japanese History Textbook Controversy at a Crossroads?", 315-316.

<sup>130</sup> Hereafter referred to as *Tsukurukai*.

<sup>131</sup> Fukuoka, "Japanese History Textbook Controversy at a Crossroads?", 316.

<sup>132</sup> Guex, "La controverse nippo-coréenne au sujet des manuels d'histoire", 5; Schneider, "The Japanese History Textbook Controversy in East Asian Perspective", 111.

<sup>133</sup> Fukuoka, "Japanese History Textbook Controversy at a Crossroads?", 316.

fuel to the fire. Recognizing a need for increased bilateral cooperation, Koizumi and Kim Dae-jung (the ROK's president at the time) launched a joint history project between the two countries, aiming less at providing new material and more at discovering divergencies<sup>134</sup>. However, disagreements between the two countries were in abundance, and the project is largely considered a failure.

A revised Tsukurukai textbook passed the screening process again in 2005, although its adoption rate remained rather low<sup>135</sup>. At the same time, another attempt was made at the joint history initiative, failing again largely due to disagreements over whether Japan still owed compensation: Japan kept to the stance that the 1965 Treaty had settled all war claims, while the ROK emphasized the importance of the "comfort women" issue which had not been discussed at the time.

More recently, boards of education have bypassed the traditional process of adopting history textbooks, and versions of the Tsukurukai textbook were adopted in Yokohama, but also in Tokyo as late as 2015<sup>136</sup>.

In summary, the textbook controversy points out the politicization of history in favor of a certain narrative and thus corroborates the usage of memory politics, as well as their detrimental potential to evoke tensions.

### ***3.3.3 Dokdo / Takeshima / Liancourt Rocks***

The islands of Dokdo (Korean), Takeshima (Japanese) or Liancourt Rocks (English)<sup>137</sup>, as seen in Figure 3, are the remaining territorial dispute between South Korea and Japan. The islands in question incorporate two islets and various rocks. They are mostly uninhabited and do not have a lot of economic

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<sup>134</sup> Fukuoka., 318-319.

<sup>135</sup> Fukuoka, 317.

<sup>136</sup> Fukuoka, 327-328.

<sup>137</sup> Referred to as Dokdo in the remainder of this work.

value outside of the surrounding fishing grounds<sup>138</sup>. Both Japan and Korea claim sovereignty, but the islands have been under de facto Korean control since the beginning of the 1950s<sup>139</sup>.



Figure 3. Dokdo with distances to Japan and the ROK<sup>140</sup>.

Japan seized control of Dokdo in 1905, and despite playing a role in the following Japanese defeat of the Russian navy, the islands were of rather little importance among later territorial conquests<sup>141</sup>. However, the time and context of Dokdo's conquest ties it inherently to the Korean colonial experience<sup>142</sup>.

When the San Francisco Peace Treaty put an official end to the Pacific War, the matter of Dokdo was intentionally left unresolved, as previous drafts had still included the matter. The US played a crucial role in forming the treaty among

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<sup>138</sup> Mark Selden, "Small Islets, Enduring Conflict: Dokdo, Korea-Japan Colonial Legacy and the United States," *The Asia-Pacific Journal* 9, no. 17 (2011), 1.

<sup>139</sup> Paul Huth and Sunwoong Kim, "Why Is a Pathway to Peaceful Resolution of the Dokdo/Takeshima Dispute So Elusive?," in *The Dokdo/Takeshima Dispute: South Korea, Japan and the Search for a Peaceful Solution* (BRILL, 2021), 13–38, p. 13.

<sup>140</sup> Retrieved from "The Dokdo Takeshima Island Dispute between Korea and Japan," accessed May 2, 2024, <https://www.dokdo-takeshima.com>. Ulleung Island belongs to Korea, the Oki Islands to Japan.

<sup>141</sup> Selden, "Small Islets, Enduring Conflict: Dokdo, Korea-Japan Colonial Legacy and the United States", 2.

<sup>142</sup> Joo Yo Hyon, "Dokdo in the South Korean Politics," in *The Dokdo/Takeshima Dispute: South Korea, Japan and the Search for a Peaceful Solution*, ed. Paul Huth and Sunwoong Kim (BRILL, 2021), 152–70, p. 152.

their increasing tensions with the communist bloc and their viewing of Japan as a potential ally<sup>143</sup>.

Since, the territorial question has come up numerous times, especially with the United Nations Conventions on the Law Of the Sea and the prospect of natural gas and minerals in the region. In 1999, both countries sought to establish a fishing zone that included the islands and that was to be jointly administered, but Korean domestic opposition led to the failure of the project<sup>144</sup>. Afterwards, Japanese textbooks have started claiming the islands as Japanese territory and pronounced the Korean administration of it as "illegal"<sup>145</sup>.

Other attempts to resolve the matter, like the Japanese proposal to bring the matter in front of International Court of Justice (ICJ), have also failed. Despite some support in favor of the Korean claim, legal uncertainty remains, and any agreement on the matter would signify concessions on both sides<sup>146</sup> - most likely in the form of Japanese recognition of Korean sovereignty over Dokdo in exchange for a Korean acceptance of a Japanese apology and ultimate settlement of the history problem. Huth and Kim argue that under the current political circumstances, "a settlement in which both sides make some concessions is less attractive than the continuation of a stalemate"<sup>147</sup>.

Therefore, Dokdo stands as a symbol: a territorial, physical manifestation of the ROK-Japan tensions. The attractiveness of the stalemate further illustrates the politicization of the issue.

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<sup>143</sup> Selden, "Small Islets, Enduring Conflict: Dokdo, Korea-Japan Colonial Legacy and the United States", 3-4.

<sup>144</sup> Selden, 6.

<sup>145</sup> Selden, 7.

<sup>146</sup> Huth and Kim, "Why Is a Pathway to Peaceful Resolution of the Dokdo/Takeshima Dispute So Elusive?", 13-15; 25.

<sup>147</sup> Huth and Kim, 15.

### 3.3.4 "Comfort Women"

As previously mentioned, the "comfort women" issue did not attract much attention until the 1990s<sup>148</sup>, but knowledge about it was quite common in both countries<sup>149</sup>. This corroborates an aspect of victimhood discourse, as the public was not ready to end the silence and stigma that was continuing the victim-perpetrator asymmetrical relationship<sup>150</sup>. With democratization in Korea in the late 1980s, the issue became a bigger topic, especially with the first "comfort woman", Kim Hak-sun, coming forward in 1991<sup>151</sup>. Other survivors came forward and filed a lawsuit against the Japanese government in the same year, demanding monetary compensation<sup>152</sup>.

In the beginning, the Japanese government denied their government's involvement<sup>153</sup> and argued that there was "no evidence of forced drafting of Korean women as 'comfort women' and therefore no question of any apology"<sup>154</sup> until the historian Yoshimi unearthed conclusive evidence in official documents that the Japanese government had in fact been involved (also referred to as the *Asahi Shimbun* report)<sup>155</sup>. Japan started to investigate the issue and PM Miyazawa became the first to publicly apologize. In 1993, the Kono statement was issued, which finally acknowledged both Japan's indirect and direct involvement in the

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<sup>148</sup> Thomas J. Ward and William D. Lay, "The Comfort Women Controversy: Not Over Yet," *East Asia* 33, no. 4 (December 1, 2016): 255–69, <https://doi.org/10.1007/s12140-016-9260-z>, p. 257.

<sup>149</sup> Soh, *The Comfort Women*, 146.

<sup>150</sup> This also illustrates the contributing factor the masculinist culture present both before, during and largely after the colonialization in Korea paid to the (continued) suffering of "comfort women", to be further explored in Chapter 4.1 of this thesis.

<sup>151</sup> Ward and Lay, "The Comfort Women Controversy", 257.

<sup>152</sup> Ward and Lay, 257; Soh, *The Comfort Women*, 43.

<sup>153</sup> Hirofumi Hayashi, "Disputes in Japan over the Japanese Military 'Comfort Women' System and Its Perception in History," *The ANNALS of the American Academy of Political and Social Science*, May 1, 2008, <https://doi.org/10.1177/0002716208314191>, 127.

<sup>154</sup> Soh, *The Comfort Women*, 63.

<sup>155</sup> Soh, 63; Ward and Lay, "The Comfort Women Controversy", 257.

issue and even admitted that the "comfort women" were largely recruited against their will<sup>156</sup>. In 1995, the Japanese government established the Asian Women's Fund (AWF) that was supposed to give money to "comfort women" survivors, approximately \$18,000 each. The initiative was faced with strong domestic opposition from the conservative side; mainly on the assumption that the "comfort women" asking for such compensation must be economically motivated, the fact that there had also been Japanese women among the "comfort women", and once again on the claim that the 1965 Treaty had settled all war claims<sup>157</sup>. In the ROK, the AWF faced criticism as well, notably from the Korean Council for the Women Drafted for Military Sexual Slavery by Japan<sup>158</sup>, an organization "widely seen as the spokesperson for the surviving comfort women"<sup>159</sup>. It asked for more than just financial compensation, calling for legal prosecution of those responsible and the inclusion of the topic in history textbooks. It also criticized the AWF for "asking Japanese citizens to contribute donations"<sup>160</sup>, which it viewed as a way to evade government responsibility. Most of the Korean "comfort women" resultingly rejected the AWF's offer<sup>161</sup>.

In 2007, Japan's PM Abe re-fueled the controversy by denying the responsibility of the Japanese government or even the aggressive nature of its war-time actions<sup>162</sup>. In the same year, Japan received international pressure from various sides: The US, Canada, the Netherlands, and the EU all passed resolutions

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<sup>156</sup> Soh, *The Comfort Women*, 44.

<sup>157</sup> Soh, 44-45.

<sup>158</sup> Hereafter referred to as the Korean Council.

<sup>159</sup> Ward and Lay, "The Comfort Women Controversy", 258.

<sup>160</sup> Saito, *The History Problem*, 93.

<sup>161</sup> Ward and Lay, 259.

<sup>162</sup> Hayashi, "Disputes in Japan over the Japanese Military 'Comfort Women' System and Its Perception in History", 123-124.

calling on Japan to formally apologize and assume unequivocal responsibility<sup>163</sup>. However, the resolutions had little political impact in Japan.

In 2011, the Constitutional Court in Korea ruled that the government had not done enough to secure compensation for Korean "comfort women" and atomic bomb victims. This led to Korean pressure on Japan, which maintained its stance that the 1965 Treaty had settled all matters<sup>164</sup>.

In 2015, Korean and Japanese leaders attempted to sign an agreement that would finally settle the issue. Abe agreed to apologize publicly, and the Korean government agreed to consult organizations responsible for the "comfort women" statue in Seoul, which is located facing the Japanese embassy, about its removal<sup>165</sup>. Additionally, a foundation for financial compensation was to be established. The Korean Council fiercely opposed, and the Japanese conservatives were just as critical. The agreement did not manage to resolve the problem and was even abandoned by the ROK's next president, Moon Jae-in.

Additionally, after another "comfort women" statue was erected in front of the Japanese consulate in South Korea's second biggest city Busan, Japan called its ambassador back and cancelled high-level economic talks and negotiations it was engaged in with South Korea<sup>166</sup>. Although the ambassador returned to the ROK in spring of 2017, it is clear that the "comfort women" issue remains capable of raising bilateral tensions.

The four issues explained powerfully illustrate the politicization of the conflict. As symbols relating to South Korea's trauma, they are highly salient and

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<sup>163</sup> Soh, *The Comfort Women*, 68; Hayashi, "Disputes in Japan over the Japanese Military 'Comfort Women' System and Its Perception in History", 128-129.

<sup>164</sup> Saito, *The History Problem*, 123.

<sup>165</sup> Ward and Lay, "The Comfort Women Controversy", 259.

<sup>166</sup> David Shim, "Memorials' Politics: Exploring the Material Rhetoric of the Statue of Peace," *Memory Studies* 16, no. 4 (August 1, 2023): 663-76, <https://doi.org/10.1177/17506980211024328>.

affectively charged. Thus, they repeatedly play a role in evoking and furthering tensions, as has been showcased above.

### 3.4 Apologies and Denials: Japan's Public Expressions

As already explained, before the 1990s, the history issue did not play a big role. Therefore, apology diplomacy started properly only in the 1990s.

Hong<sup>167</sup> structures Japan's apologies in three blocks (Table 1): the first, from 1991 to 1998, characterized by the question of whether Japan should apologize, with rise of anti-apologist sentiments towards the end of the period; the second, from 1998 to 2009, during which political backlash to apology diplomacy was dominant; and the third from 2009 to 2016, which is characterized by some renewed attempts, but also largely by the apology fatigue setting in towards the end that other scholars argue lasts until today<sup>168</sup>.

Phase	Apologies		Backlashes	
	Major Features	Administration	Administration	Major Features
1 <sup>st</sup> Phase: 1991-98	Apology on "comfort women" issue	Miyazawa (91-93)		
	Kono Statement	Hosokawa (93-94)		
	Murayama Statement	Murayama (94-96)		
			Hashimoto (96-98)	Justification of colonial rule, Yasukuni visit
2 <sup>nd</sup> Phase: 1998-2009	Korea-Japan Joint Declaration	Obuchi (98-2000)		
	Succession of Obuchi	Mori (00-01)		
			Koizumi (01-05)	6 Yasukuni visits
		Abe (06-07)		Denial of military involvement in "comfort women" issue

<sup>167</sup> Hong, 50-58.

<sup>168</sup> Fukuoka, "Japanese History Textbook Controversy at a Crossroads?"

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			Fukuda (07-08)	Avoiding of apology
			Aso (08-09)	Denial of military involvement in “comfort women” issue
3 <sup>rd</sup> Phase: 2009-2016	Refusal of Yasukuni worship Kan Statement	Hatoyama (09-10) Kan (10-11)		
			Node (11-12)	Denying “comfort women” characteristic as “sexual slavery”
			Abe (12-16)	Revising Murayama Statement, refusing further measures of 2015 agreement

Table 1. Prime ministerial apology and backlash diplomacy<sup>169</sup>.

The first apology by Miyazawa was prompted by the Yoshimi report on the “comfort women”, and the Kono statement followed an investigation into the matter. Both decoupled apologetic sentiments from compensation<sup>170</sup>. Hosokawa’s administration kept to the apology diplomacy, but the reasons for it had to do with economic recession in Japan and disagreements within the LDP, leading to Hosokawa as the first non-LDP PM. He used the word “war” instead of “act of aggression”, in which he diverged from his predecessors. Due to heavy criticism from the LDP, he soon retreated to their narrative of an “act”, but not a “war”<sup>171</sup>. His successor, JSP leader Murayama, decided to issue an apology statement, because the initially planned Diet<sup>172</sup> resolution that was supposed to include the word “apology” faced fierce backlash from the LDP-members of his coalition. Hence, the Diet resolution did not include the word “apology”, but Murayama’s statement did – which once again sparked criticism from the conservatives. Internationally, the statement was viewed positively, but with skepticism,

<sup>169</sup> Taken and modified from Sung Pyo Hong, “The Effects of ‘Apology-Backlash’ Recurrence on Korea–Japan Relations,” *Korean Social Science Journal* 43, no. 2 (December 1, 2016): 45–61, <https://doi.org/10.1007/s40483-016-0031-7>.

<sup>170</sup> Saito, *The History Problem*, 81.

<sup>171</sup> Saito, 83-84; Hong, “The Effects of ‘Apology-Backlash’ Recurrence on Korea–Japan Relations”, 51.

<sup>172</sup> The Diet is Japan’s national legislature, composed of an upper and lower house.

especially in China and South Korea, who wanted to observe whether Murayama's narrative would tie in with Japan's future actions<sup>173</sup>. Murayama's administration also coincides with the already discussed and largely negatively viewed AWF.

The apology diplomacy shifted with Hashimoto, mostly due to inter-party competition. Hashimoto's administration included denials of past wrongdoings as well as visits to Yasukuni.

However, geopolitics changed thereafter. With the new threat of terrorism and nuclear weapons in North Korea, PM Obuchi apologized; a reconciliation policy that his successor Mori continued. This diplomacy again faced domestic backlash.

With Koizumi's election, the LDP slid back to its more conservative side. During his administration, Koizumi visited Yasukuni numerous times, sometimes accompanied by other Diet members; anti-apology groups were founded in larger numbers than ever before, and previously discussed controversial history textbooks were adopted. This slide to the far-right only continued with the following administrations. However, during the Financial Crisis in the midst of Aso's administration, the split within the LDP between the conservatives and liberals worsened, and eventually, the Democratic Party replaced the LDP in 2009<sup>174</sup>.

The next two PMs followed a friendly diplomacy to the ROK, and Kan apologized in 2010. However, in the same timeframe, territorial disputes with both China and South Korea erupted anew. With the catastrophes of 2012 in Japan (the earthquake, tsunami, and nuclear accident), the LDP again gained majority. Afterwards, apology fatigue settled in. During Abe's second legislative period

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<sup>173</sup> Saito, *The History Problem*, 90; Hong, "The Effects of 'Apology-Backlash' Recurrence on Korea-Japan Relations," 52.

<sup>174</sup> Hong, "The Effects of 'Apology-Backlash' Recurrence on Korea-Japan Relations."

tensions heightened, as he visited Yasukuni again, expressed plans to revise the Murayama statement, and appointed government officials that had previously denied Japanese wrong-doings during the war. However, the attempt to reconcile in 2015 would have seen an apology from Abe's side, but only paired with the removal of the "comfort woman" statue in Seoul.

Since then, his successors have largely refrained from such drastic measures, but no further apologies have been voiced by PMs. No apology at all has been issued since Emperor Naruhito's in 2020, constituting the apology fatigue narrative<sup>175</sup>.

In conclusion, Japanese apologies have historically always been accompanied either by fierce domestic backlash from conservative politicians or were largely decoupled from compensation efforts. Most of them were thus not perceived as sufficient or sincere. This backlash and perceived insufficiency of the apologies illustrates the salience of the topics the apologies cover.

Nonetheless, the time period following the collapse of the USSR also brought some positive developments<sup>176</sup>. Despite their somewhat lukewarm receptions, the period brought the first Japanese apologies overall. In the 90s, non-governmental organizations (NGOs) that sought after reconciliation emerged in tandem with nationalistic counterparts like the Tsukurukai, although the ones promoting rapprochement were largely undermined by the others. Additionally, unlike the pragmatic incentives of political leaders before (e.g. Park Chung-hee's economic reasons for signing the Treaty of Basic Relations), ROK president Kim

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<sup>175</sup> "Japan Emperor Naruhito Expresses 'deep Remorse' over Country's Wartime Past," *Reuters*, AugUSt 15, 2020, sec. World, <https://www.reuters.com/article/idUSKCN25B07C/>.

<sup>176</sup> See Yangmo Ku, "International Reconciliation in the Postwar Era, 1945-2005: A Comparative Study of Japan-Rok and Franco-German Relations," *Asian Perspective* 32, no. 3 (2008): 5-37, p. 27-30.

Dae-jung and Japanese PM Obuchi called for a new Japan-ROK relationship for the approaching 21<sup>st</sup> century, with which they hoped to move forward<sup>177</sup>. During the 90s, the ROK and Japan increased their security cooperation, bilateral trade, tourism, and cultural exchanges. Despite these advances towards reconciliation, the history issue kept its significance, and in some ways even intensified during the same time, for instance with the "comfort women" discourse. Henceforth, the lukewarm relationship between the two has continued with varying degrees of fluctuation – despite ongoing trade and cultural exchange between the two, different disagreements have kept true and lasting reconciliation at bay.

### 3.5 Trade Dispute (2019)

Following a decision of South Korean courts to recognize the entitlement of forced laborers to compensation from Japan in 2019, the Japanese government placed restrictions on exports related to one of South Korea's significant sectors, the chemicals needed in the production of semi-conductors, in July of 2019<sup>178</sup>. Japan cited national security concerns as the reason for the decision without further specifying.

Due to this decision, large-scale boycotts of Japanese products took place in the ROK. In August, Japan removed the ROK from its so-called "whitelist" of trusted trading partners, leading the South Korean government to swiftly do the same<sup>179</sup>.

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<sup>177</sup> As illustrated in Table 1, the Joint Declaration of Kim and Obuchi also included an apology, which was the first written one.

<sup>178</sup> Chris Deacon, "(Re)Producing the 'History Problem': Memory, Identity and the Japan-South Korea Trade Dispute," *The Pacific Review* 35, no. 5 (August 22, 2022): 789–820.

<sup>179</sup> Kaitlyn T. King, "Japanese and South Korean Economic Decision-Making: The 2019 Trade Dispute and Retaliatory Policy - ProQuest" (Master, Washington, DC, George Washington University, 2023), <https://www.proquest.com/docview/2819212788?pq-origsite=scholar&fromopenview=true&sourcetype=Dissertations%20&%20Theses>.

Moon Jae-in's administration, the ROK's president at the time, perceived and publicly pronounced Japan's restriction and following reactions as related and retaliative to the court's decision on forced laborers. This corroborates the politicization of the history issue, in this case regarding the forced laborers. On the other hand, the Japanese government did not refer to the history problem other than to reaffirm their stance that everything had been settled with the 1965 Treaty.

Both narratives were reinforced by the respective nation's media, although it is noteworthy that there were also other narratives circulating, including some criticism towards Japan's PM Abe's handling of the issue<sup>180</sup>.

As a result of the dispute, trade but also tourism significantly decreased between the two countries. In fact, the Japan-ROK bilateral relations were largely considered as "at their lowest point" since the Treaty of Basic Relations<sup>181</sup>.

The dispute was escalated to the World Trade Organization (WTO) by the ROK in 2019, but the issue remained in a deadlock until 2023. In March of that year, Yoon Suk-yeol, the current president of the ROK, took a new stance in relation to his predecessor Moon Jae-in and announced that the forced laborers would receive compensation through a Japanese government foundation, but not by the Japanese firms themselves. Yoon pronounced that this decision was in line with a desire for a future-oriented policy with Japan.

Afterwards, Japan relaxed its export restrictions, the ROK withdrew their complaint to the WTO, and both countries reinstated the other on their respective whitelists<sup>182</sup>. Nonetheless, Yoon faced fierce domestic criticism for his Japan policy both from the public as well as the political opposition. Yoon's reasons for

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<sup>180</sup> Deacon, 803-804.

<sup>181</sup> Deacon, 790.

<sup>182</sup> Jo He-rim, "Japan Restores South Korea to Export 'whitelist' after 4 Years," The Korea Herald, June 27, 2023, <https://www.koreaherald.com/view.php?ud=20230627000584>; "Korea puts Japan back on export whitelist after three years - Pulse by Maeil Business News Korea," accessed May 5, 2024, [//m.pulsenews.co.kr/view.php?year=2023&no=314608](https://m.pulsenews.co.kr/view.php?year=2023&no=314608).

this shift are to be placed within the larger framework of the region's geopolitical tensions regarding both the PRC and North Korea<sup>183</sup>, in which Japan is evidently seen as a potential ally, along with the positive legacy probably associated with his administration in the future for restoring trade relations.

The third chapter of this thesis illustrated the development of the history issue through significant events and controversies, i.e. salient memories. It has elaborated on the existence of bilateral tensions based on collective memory. The following chapter now examines how these salient memories are remembered, how this remembrance differs, and how this impacts the respective national identities.

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<sup>183</sup> This dynamic is explored in detail in Chapter 5.

#### 4. Diverging Narratives and Memories in Focus

To evaluate how the collective memories between South Korea and Japan differ and the way in which they are politicized, we need to answer the questions of which parts of history are emphasized in both countries in which way. To which narratives do these memories cater, and what message does this convey? In relation to the last chapter, significant developments and controversies will be elaborated upon as to how their meaning and impact differs between Japan and South Korea and why.

##### 4.1 South Korea

For South Korea, the especially salient memories are mainly represented in the four issues explained earlier. The Tokyo Trial and the Treaty of Basic Relations on the other hand take more of a background role, although with different meanings attached to them.

The Tokyo Trial was and remains largely accepted in the ROK. Due to its ruling, the trial places blame and guilt "solely and entirely"<sup>184</sup> on Japan. This reinforces the perpetrator identity of Japan in the eye of Korea(ns), without giving much note to the criticism voiced against the trial. This speaks to Assman's notion that there is not much room for complications when these types of identities are assigned and then politically used. In this case, accepting the Tokyo Trial as it is allows the ROK to view Japan as the solely responsible aggressor and to take no blame on itself (for example for the involvement of Korean people in the recruitment of "comfort women"). This narrative can then serve as a foothold for further memories that can strengthen and reinforce this picture, such as the

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<sup>184</sup> Saito, *The History Problem*, 130.

controversies surrounding Yasukuni and especially its enshrinement of people committed by the trial as Class A war criminals.

The Treaty of Basic Relations, on the other hand, is negatively connotated, especially because of the way it is continually used by Japan. For the ROK, the treaty may have had a largely positive impact on the ROK's following economic development, but it was also drafted and signed under Park Chung-hee's dictatorial regime. As Park brutally suppressed uprisings against his own decisions, it is not surprising that he may have considered all war claims settled by the treaty. However, dictators are not perceived as legitimate rulers by the public and their decisions do not generally represent the public's needs and wants. This is illustrated by the student demonstrations Park struck down.

Additionally, especially the "comfort women" issue only emerged in the 1990s, long after the treaty was signed. The feminist development in the world and in the ROK during the 20<sup>th</sup> century may have taken some time to arrive at a point where the stories of "comfort women" could be told and heard in return, but once the issue surfaced, it was clear out of the stance of feminist and human rights activists that compensation and retribution had not yet been fulfilled<sup>185</sup>. In this sense, the treaty is null and void out of the demands of the present. The fact that Japan keeps referring to the treaty represents to the ROK and the activists a disrespect and disregard of the development of human and especially women's rights since then. In this light, a perception is built of Japan as a country that to this day is capable of dismissing these rights. That in turn could be taken to mean that the Japan of today could still be capable of the atrocities it committed during the war in the eyes of survivors or activists.

More salient than the treaty itself, then, are the controversies in which it is brought up time and time again.

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<sup>185</sup> The narrative impact of the "comfort women" controversy will be evaluated later in this segment in more detail.

The Yasukuni Shrine paints a similar picture of disrespect in the eyes of the ROK: By allowing the enshrinement of war criminals and then visiting the shrine, the Japanese leaders in question portray that the perpetrators of these vicious crimes are still deserving of comfort and worship. Especially taken in context with the various apologies Japanese leaders have made over the years, the shrine represents Japanese hypocrisy: How can a nation apologize for the crimes it has committed under one leader, and enshrine and worship the people who committed them under the next? Or even from one day to the next? The answer, to the ROK, has consistently been that Japanese apologies therefore cannot be sincere, and that the regret that might have been expressed is not actually present. Therefore, once again, in the eyes of the ROK, a Japan that enshrines and worships people responsible for Class A war crimes cannot be very distant from the Japan that committed them.

The textbook controversy could even be taken a step further. With the perceived glossing-over of the issues that are detrimental to the ROK and the glorifying of the nature of Japanese actions, this can be taken to represent that the people who convey these messages want the future generations of Japan to, similarly, gloss-over its crimes and remember mostly a powerful nation that one can be proud to be a citizen of. The fact that there have been other textbooks that are more objective or that there have been domestic criticisms in Japan is not focused on.

Dokdo to the ROK represents the beginning of the colonialization. The fact that Japan still claims it as territory is therefore a painful reminder of the colonial period and is perceived as illegal based on the land having been conquered during the illegal annexation. By keeping up the dispute, Japan is perceived as unwilling to give up ground when it is not forced to, and that it cannot truly find the annexation illegal if this byproduct of it is still held on to and fought for.

The "comfort women" issue adds a new dynamic. Especially regarding the fact that the focus on human and women's rights only evolved in their new-found intensity after the horrors of WWII – or, as explained, in relation and constant reference to it – lends this narrative the affective power of long-standing suppression of women's rights. In this light, the "comfort women" are symbols for all women that have suffered suppression at the hands of masculinist society that deserve retribution for the crimes committed against them. As victims of sexual slavery, the source for this retribution is placed with Japan.

However, Soh<sup>186</sup> complicates the general picture that is the narrative put forward by the redress movement<sup>187</sup>. Generally, "comfort women" are seen as sex slaves that were recruited by the Japanese under false pretenses, often forcefully. A lot of people also believe "comfort women" to have been part of the Women's Volunteer Labor Corps, the Chongsindae, when most of the Chongsindae in fact were Japanese.

Thus, the reality is more complicated. Soh points out the variety of "comfort women" experiences, notwithstanding the certain pain and suffering all of them endured. However, she also points out that a "comfort women" identity as a sex slave settles that identity firmly within the concept of victimhood, which denies a lot of the individual women the agency they enacted "against gendered oppression"<sup>188</sup>, for example the stories of women seeking work to escape an abusive masculinist household and ending up in a comfort facility. In South Korea, "comfort women" are often also referred to as *halmeoni*, which translates to *grandmother*: a term that is used to address older women, but that can be seen as awkward or even insulting in its implied familiarity when it is used to refer to

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<sup>186</sup> Soh, *The Comfort Women*.

<sup>187</sup> The redress movement refers to the efforts by activists and survivors to obtain justice and compensation for "comfort women".

<sup>188</sup> Soh, 33.

older women with a high social status. This further deepens the idea of "comfort women" as victims in a highly asymmetrical relationship with no agency towards their oppressor, and it also coincides with the low societal standing many "comfort women" experienced even after the war. South Korea's masculinist culture contributed to the lifelong suffering of many of the survivors, because the humiliation, social stigma and alienation of former "comfort women" continued until well in their post-war lives. Similarly, the paradigmatic story of forceful recruitment by the Japanese is not always true, and not all Japanese soldiers treated the "comfort women" horribly. As pointed out before, some Koreans also took part in both the recruitment, the upkeep of "comfort women" stations and participated in usage of the facilities. The general idea of such military facilities was also not new to the Pacific War and Imperial Japan's "comfort women" were not the only such occurrence; as were the Japanese soldiers not the only ones to commit rapes – in fact, there were rapes committed against ordinary Japanese women by US officials during the occupation. However, this more complicated picture does not have the same emotional and therefore potential political impact. For example, some "comfort women" have given varying testimonies<sup>189</sup>, adjusting later ones for more emotional impact.

Soh argues that the redress movement, by omitting these more complicated aspects of the "comfort women" stories, has "failed to generate a sense of societal responsibility among Koreans for their compatriots' lifelong suffering"<sup>190</sup> and in fact "impeded" a less simplistic understanding of the problem that could have contributed to a solution<sup>191</sup>.

In addition to the general nature of the "comfort women" issue, it is also interesting to look at the statues that have been erected in South Korea but also

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<sup>189</sup> Soh, 99-100.

<sup>190</sup> Soh, 237.

<sup>191</sup> Soh, xvii.

elsewhere. The "comfort women" statues, most notably the one in Seoul that is located facing the Japanese embassy, is meant to commemorate victims of sexual slavery. It also stands for peace and human rights, at least for the ROK and the international community. However, for Japan, the statue is a source of tensions and even embarrassment, potentially also because the issue has been globalized, e.g. by the erecting of statues in other parts of the world, largely following diaspora initiatives. Indeed, Japan is the only country that has attempted (and in some cases succeeded<sup>192</sup>) to take down statues remembering victimhood. For the ROK and the activists, these attempts signalize a renewed silencing of the victims and erasure of these memories. Therefore, for both states involved, the "comfort woman" statue(s) serve(s) as a reminder that the issue is not settled in addition to the commemorative meanings<sup>193</sup>.

In conclusion, the picture of sexual slavery and with it the identity of victimhood is vital to the redress movement advocates to finally receive compensation and to restore the victims' honor. The issue has repeatedly garnered public and international attention, which adds additional tension.

This line of argument can also be applied to the larger South Korean narrative and how it relates to Japan: The upkeep of a victimhood identity is centered on a black-and-white picture of events, such as the simplistic narrative surrounding "comfort women" or the easy acceptance of the Tokyo Trial, because it paints Japan as the perpetrator. This picture can then be perceptively proven through the interaction with the symbols shaping the conflict, for instance the continued visits of Japanese PMs to Yasukuni and the outrage this provokes in the ROK.

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<sup>192</sup> See Rin Ushiyama, "'Comfort Women Must Fall'? Japanese Governmental Responses to 'Comfort Women' Statues around the World," *Memory Studies* 14, no. 6 (December 1, 2021): 1255–71, <https://doi.org/10.1177/17506980211054308>.

<sup>193</sup> Shim, "Memorials' Politics."

## 4.2 Japan

In Japan, the picture is largely characterized by political back-and-forth and nationalistic impacts of conservative parties.

The LDP, the party which held the majority for a long time, largely believed that the view of history portrayed in the post-war period was unnecessarily self-flagellating and hindered the development of pride in the Japanese nation. Thus, the portrayed narrative seemed to skim over those parts of history or to paint them in an overly positive light. This is reflected for example in the early denial of the Tokyo Trial judgements, but also in the Japanese involvement in the "comfort women" issue when it came up in the 1990s. In this, Assmann<sup>194</sup>'s view of perpetrators' preferred strategy of silence and denial can be clearly seen. Additionally, the history textbook controversy has its roots in the attempt to revitalize nationalistic pride through education, by omitting details or favoring subtler wording. The impact of these attempts is amplified by popular leaders' ties to the Tsukurukai, which signals that such policies are actively endorsed by people in positions of power.

Similarly, the continued visits to Yasukuni and its enshrined war criminals portrayed Japanese disagreement or even disregard of the Tokyo Trial, but also of criticism from neighbors. Yasukuni, as a publicly available symbol of Shinto tradition, reinforces Japanese Shinto tradition of commemorating the war dead, but also conveys the message that the crimes committed by the people it enshrines are still worthy of worship. Thereby, it has been used as a political tool and to placate domestic criticism. This illustrates that Yasukuni can in fact *not* be seen simply as a shrine commemorating soldiers fallen in war and is instead inherently and always political.

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<sup>194</sup> Assmann, *Der lange Schatten der Vergangenheit*.

However, the narrative of Japan also clearly encompasses victimhood over the dropping of the two atomic bombs on Hiroshima and Nagasaki. As a clearly salient event, the atomic bombs are traumatic memories which have gone on to shape Japan's national identity. Japan is the only country to have ever suffered through atomic bomb explosion on its territory, a trauma that was further politicized in the absence of opportunity afterwards to criticize the US after Japan had lost the war.

Thus, the Japanese national identity is a balance between memories of extremely salient victimhood (as the only country to suffer the effect of the harshest and most impactful weapons the human race has invented) and perpetration. This sense of being the perpetrator is lessened by its contrast to the concurrent sense of victimhood but has also been lessened through Japan's memory politics such as its refusal of the Tokyo Trial and its denial or justification of the "comfort women" issue.

Additionally, Japan has been catering a sense of identity that is "rational" or "logical"<sup>195</sup> and that wants to move forward – as evident by its early settlement of all war claims through the Treaty of Basic Relations. In contrast, by continuously bringing up history issues that are portrayed to be already settled in Japan, South Korea gains a picture of being overly emotional and irrational for its inability to leave the past behind. Therefore, the political discourse in Japan is marked by *forgetting* through its consistent referral of settlement through the 1965 Treaty, or through insisting its relationship with the ROK should face toward the future.

In conclusion, I assert that Japan's memory politics are focused on forgetting rather than remembering, and if it does remember, then in a way that

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<sup>195</sup> Deacon, "(Re)Producing the 'History Problem.'", 807.

shines light rather on the victimhood Japan has experienced than its crimes. This discourse of forgetting serves the national image as a rational or logical nation.

In turn, the ROK's identity is solely based on victimhood, and in this sense benefits greatly from a black-and-white picture of Japan as the evil perpetrator that refuses to apologize. There is no room for grey areas because this identity is defined in *otherness* to that of Japan. If for example the crimes committed by Japan were assisted by Koreans, this sharp distinction vanishes, and so does the sharpness of South Korea's identity. Therefore, the ROK, too, employs discourses of forgetting; but it is largely focused on remembering and thereby reinforcing its victimhood identity.

Thus, the postulations made at the beginning of this thesis can be affirmed. As explained above, the two countries greatly differ in their collective memories of their shared history, often due to governmental rhetoric. Such is the case in the history textbook issue or the Yasukuni shrine but especially also the 1965 Treaty. This, too, illustrates that these are the salient memories that have been reinforced in both countries: the shrine and the history textbooks, the Dokdo dispute, the "comfort women" issue as well as the 1965 Treaty and the Tokyo Trial. The paragraphs above illustrate how these have been incorporated into national identity, especially so the differently shaped victimhood identities but also Japan's perpetrator identity, and the following section of this thesis reinforces this by looking at available public opinion data.

Lastly, it is evident that these differently iterated memories and identities have caused tensions and impeded reconciliation, such as seen in the trade dispute of 2019 or the international incident in 2015 around the "comfort woman" statue in Busan.

### **4.3 Public Opinion**

To corroborate the idea of negative sentiments that are based on history issues being harbored by the public, it is vital to look at available data.

Generally, it is widely accepted that South Koreans have a negative image of Japan that is built on their troubled past<sup>196</sup>. Nonetheless, the public image of Japan is also shaped by deep economic ties as well as cultural exchange, although the historically founded distrust usually takes to the front.

However, that is not to say that there has been no variety in these opinions. For example, when Abe got elected for his second term in Japan, public opinion of Japan worsened considerably<sup>197</sup>, which showcases the importance of circumstances and especially the role national leaders play in public opinion.

More recently, public sentiment also worsened significantly in 2019 during the trade dispute and its aftermath<sup>198</sup>, and only warmed again slowly (Figure 4). These negative opinions were deeply influenced by distrust in the government of the other party.

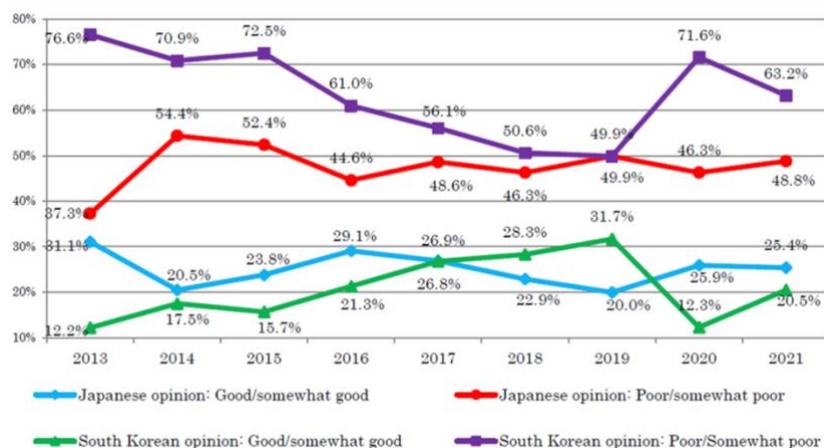


Figure 4. Japan and South Korea’s respective opinions of each other, 2013-2021<sup>199</sup>.

<sup>196</sup> See e.g. Jahyun Chun, “Who Decides Foreign Policy? The Role of National Trauma in Shaping the Influence of Public Opinion in South Korea” 43, no. 5 (2021): 1021–35, <https://doi.org/10.1080/01442872.2021.1895980>, p. 4-5.

<sup>197</sup> View Annex, Figure 6.

<sup>198</sup> Yasushi Kudo, “What signs are there that the relationship between Japan and South Korea will improve? Public sentiment less acrimonious, but still chilly,” The Genron NPO, accessed May 7, 2024, [https://www.genron-npo.net/en/opinion\\_polls/archives/5589.html](https://www.genron-npo.net/en/opinion_polls/archives/5589.html).

<sup>199</sup> Taken from Yasushi.

Surveys conducted in late 2023 showcase that public opinion dramatically improved after Yoon Suk-yeol’s shift in policy, although to a lesser extent in South Korea than in Japan (Figure 5). One possible reason for this might be the relatively poor impression of current Japanese PM Kishida by South Korean citizens on account of a perceived continued lack of apologetic intent, or the slow recovery of travel to Japan following previous Covid-19 restrictions as travel can improve impressions.

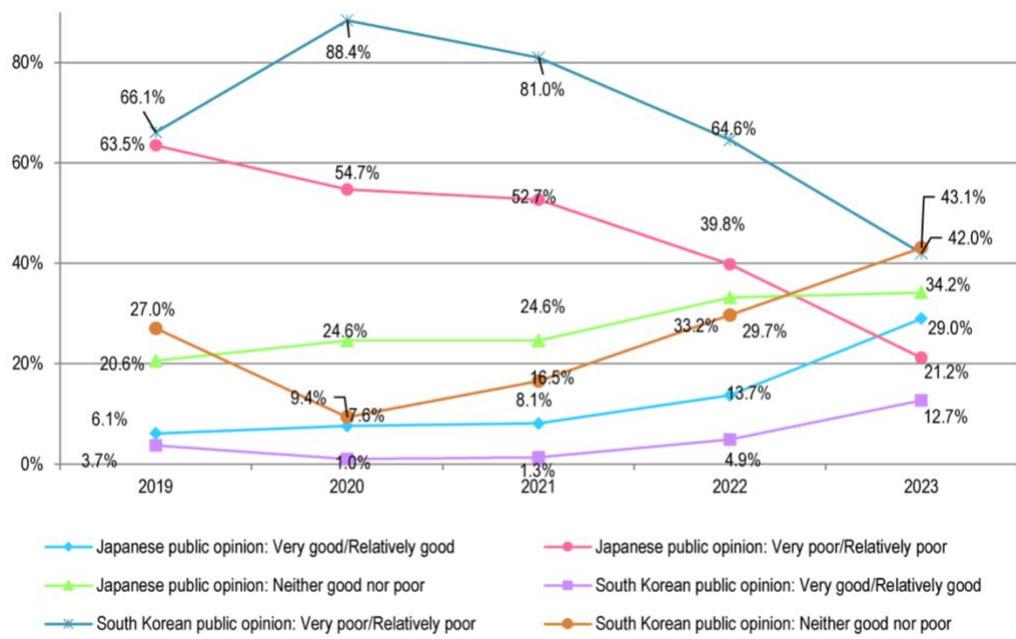


Figure 5. Current public opinion between Japan and South Korea<sup>200</sup>.

Generally, the polls showcase that South Koreans are not satisfied with the policies and efforts made by the Japanese government, and they largely believe that a fundamental resolution regarding historical awareness is necessary

<sup>200</sup> Taken from: “Analyzing differences in national awareness as Japan-South Korea relations improve - Opinion Poll,” The Genron NPO, 2023, [https://www.genron-npo.net/en/opinion\\_polls/archives/5629.html](https://www.genron-npo.net/en/opinion_polls/archives/5629.html).

to improve bilateral relations. The Japanese on the other hand have a largely positive image of Yoon and his government's efforts.

It is important to note that young people generally have a better opinion of the other country than older people<sup>201</sup>, probably because of the (perceived) temporal distance between them and the historical events that have so greatly shaped their countries' relations.

The data on public opinion exhibits that a general negative picture of the other country has prevailed in the past up to the present. The recent slow improvement of South Korean's perception of Japan resting on Kishida's lack of apology illustrates that Japan's perpetrator identity is largely accepted by the public, and that the majority of people still believe retribution is in order.

Recent efforts have improved bilateral perceptions. This reflects on new policy efforts<sup>202</sup> and offers a potential window of opportunity to solidify improved opinions that can then serve as a fruitful ground for further collaboration.

In summary, the antagonistic national identities can be seen in the largely negative public perception of each other. The salient issues in question have been politicized, as illustrated by increases in this antagonism. Thus, collective memory, shaped by salient memories and concepts of victimhood and perpetrators, has been incorporated into national identity.

The penultimate chapter of this thesis analyzed the salient memories in the Japan-ROK history issue, further corroborated by available data on public opinion. The last chapter hence asks how and through which factors this could be changed, and if permanent reconciliation is attainable.

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<sup>201</sup> See Annex, Figure 7.

<sup>202</sup> To be elaborated on in Chapter 5.

## 5. Pathways to Reconciliation

To discuss and assess potential ways to reconciliation, collective memory and its impacts in other countries' relations will be looked at. Then other factors that may facilitate rapprochement in the ROK-Japan context will be examined, namely the geopolitical and cultural factors in play, as well as the role of the US.

### 5.1 Historical Memory in Other Countries' Relations

To look at different countries' relations regarding collective memory, Germany as the other perpetrator of WWII is chosen to compare its approach to the one taken by Japan. Its relations with France are the most famous example of successful reconciliation, whereas the one with Poland, though also successful, is more complicated. Differences and their impact will be assessed in their meaning for the ROK-Japan case. The more strained relationship between France and Algeria will also be examined as it includes the colonial component Japan and South Korea also share.

#### 5.1.1 Germany & France

Germany and France nowadays share a vibrant friendship<sup>203</sup> as two democracies and two of the EU's biggest economies. However, Germany and France share centuries of tumultuous history, ethnic hatred, and territorial dispute<sup>204</sup>; WWII wreaking the biggest havoc. Collective memory could have

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<sup>203</sup> See e.g. Ulrich Krotz, "Three Eras and Possible Futures: A Long-Term View on the Franco-German Relationship a Century after the First World War," *International Affairs (Royal Institute of International Affairs 1944-)* 90, no. 2 (2014): 337–50.

<sup>204</sup> Alice Ackermann, "Reconciliation as a Peace-Building Process in Postwar Europe," *Peace & Change* 19, no. 3 (July 1, 1994): 229–50, <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1468-0130.1994.tb00609.x>, p. 237.

erupted in just as big of a history problem as the ROK and Japan share; but it did not. How did the two countries succeed in their reconciliation?

Firstly, conditions were favorable: Both countries wanted peace, they shared a common threat in the emerging USSR, and their cooperation carried opportunities to pursue their respective interests for both<sup>205</sup>.

Reconciliation, as much as it did have a moral component, presented a pragmatic opportunity for both West Germany<sup>206</sup> and France: Integration into the West, while reinstating Germany's sovereignty, would also ensure that nationalism could not rise again in a similar manner. Additionally, the emerging Cold War dynamics meant that Germany was always at risk of becoming a theatre of battles for the camps it was lodged between. For the Western European countries, especially France, these dynamics also highlighted the necessity of Western European integration. Despite France's initial goals of specifically securitizing their country against Germany, this soon became unfeasible as the political dynamics shifted, e.g. with the US recognizing Germany as a potential ally against the rising USSR<sup>207</sup>. Therefore, reconciliation largely started by tying Germany down into an economic agreement that would give France the needed security guarantees while re-instating Germany as a potential ally. This economic agreement was the Economic Coal and Steel Community (ECSC) that has developed into the EU.

However, reconciliation also had a private dynamic. While political leaders emphasized the importance of cultural and societal collaboration, private citizens pursued reconciliation as well. A large network of Franco-German collaboration emerged in areas such as town partnerships, joint historical

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<sup>205</sup> Yangmo Ku, "International Reconciliation in the Postwar Era, 1945-2005: A Comparative Study of Japan-Rok and Franco-German Relations," *Asian Perspective* 32, no. 3 (2008): 5-37, p. 13.

<sup>206</sup> Referred to as Germany for the remainder of this section.

<sup>207</sup> Ackermann, 233-237.

commissions that would revise textbooks, or youth and academic exchanges<sup>208</sup>. Many of these initiatives were later picked up in an official manner or by NGOs.

Additionally, political leaders and their insistence on reconciliation were highly significant<sup>209</sup>. For example, the ECSC project would have never succeeded without France's foreign minister Schuman and Germany's chancellor Adenauer. Similarly important were Mitterrand and Kohl, and De Gaulle and Adenauer signed the Elysée Treaty of 1963<sup>210</sup>.

Interesting to note is that rapprochement had already begun before Germany's "campaign of atonement"<sup>211</sup> properly took off in the 60s, on the grounds that France's fear of a revival of German nationalism was reigned in through the ECSC effort and the writing of joint history textbooks to be used in education. However, Germany still atoned in early years; Adenauer had already issued a first apology shortly after the war, and the long-since disputed Alsace-Lorraine region was given to France<sup>212</sup>.

In conclusion, Germany and France have succeeded in their reconciliation because of numerous factors: the political landscape of the time, which incorporated the rising communist threat of the USSR that pushed them towards cooperation; the institutions that drove their reconciliation forward, as well as significant political leaders. However, the private sector and NGOs were also crucial.

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<sup>208</sup> Ackermann, 240-242.

<sup>209</sup> Yangmo Ku, "International Reconciliation in the Postwar Era, 1945-2005: A Comparative Study of Japan-Rok and Franco-German Relations," *Asian Perspective* 32, no. 3 (2008): 5-37, p. 14.

<sup>210</sup> Also referred to the Friendship Treaty, this document institutionalized several key features of Franco-German reconciliation such as youth and education cooperation.

<sup>211</sup> Jennifer Lind, "Apologies in International Politics," *Security Studies* 18, no. 3 (September 18, 2009): 517-56, <https://doi.org/10.1080/09636410903132987>.

<sup>212</sup> Lin Ren, "Convergent Narrative of Sensitive Territories and Reconciliation," in *Rationality and Emotion: Comparative Studies of the Franco-German and Sino-Japanese Reconciliations*, ed. Lin Ren (Wiesbaden: Springer Fachmedien, 2014), 139-53, [https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-658-02216-7\\_7](https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-658-02216-7_7).

Generally, France and Germany had the beneficial condition of having largely shared a symmetrical relationship – despite Germany being the clear perpetrator of WWII, the long-standing history between the two was characterized by reciprocal conflicts and the two had somewhat equal economic standings pre-1945. Therefore, a collective memory that was based only on victimhood could not emerge in France, and it would not have been helpful to pursue its development through memory politics, as collaboration with Germany was also beneficial to France.

### ***5.1.2 Germany & Poland***

The German-Polish case is more difficult, as evidenced by the fact that reparation claims were made in 2022 by the Polish government (and dropped recently under the new Tusk administration)<sup>213</sup>. Like with France, the two countries share a long, largely negatively connotated history, the worst of which culminated in WWII<sup>214</sup>. However, reconciliation between the two<sup>215</sup> did not properly come to pass until after the collapse of the USSR in 1991<sup>216</sup>. Nonetheless, some reconciliatory attempts were made that are believed to have paved the way: letters initiated by Polish bishops and exchanged with German bishops used the phrase “we forgive and ask for forgiveness”<sup>217</sup>; and West German chancellor Willy Brandt fell to his knees in a gesture of apology and

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<sup>213</sup> Aleksandra Krzysztozek, “Poland Drops German War Reparation Claims,” [www.euractiv.com](https://www.euractiv.com/section/politics/news/poland-drops-german-war-reparation-claims/), February 16, 2024, <https://www.euractiv.com/section/politics/news/poland-drops-german-war-reparation-claims/>.

<sup>214</sup> See e.g. Stanisław Michał Pawlak, “The Reconciliation between Poland and Germany,” *Asia-Pacific Review* 27, no. 2 (2020): 124.

<sup>215</sup> Germany, used in this section in its context before 1989, refers to West Germany.

<sup>216</sup> Lily Gardner Feldman, “Germany’s Reconciliation with France, Israel, Poland and the Czech Republic,” *Die Friedens-Warte* 74, no. 4 (1999): 477–90, p. 483.

<sup>217</sup> Judith Renner, “Poland - Germany: Balancing Competing Narratives through Apology,” in *Apology and Reconciliation in International Relations*, ed. Christopher Daase et al. (Routledge, 2015), <https://doi.org/10.4324/9781315743554-3>, 75.

regret in front of a memorial for the Warsaw Ghetto Uprising in 1970 (*Kniefall von Warschau*, "kneeling of Warsaw")<sup>218</sup>.

When the Iron Curtain fell and democratic revolutions started to take place in Eastern Europe, conditions for reconciliation became more favorable. Additionally, a factor that had continuously been a source of tension between the two was finally settled: The German-Polish border, or Oder-Neisse line. Postulated by the Allies but never confirmed by international law, the border was finally recognized as such with the Two Plus Four Agreement in 1989/1990, under US influence<sup>219</sup>. After the end of the Cold War, apologies became accepted and common discourse between the two – also from the Polish side for the forced expulsions of Germans.

Generally, reconciliation between Germany and Poland was mainly anchored in legal agreements, such as the Two Plus Four or the Treaty on Good Neighborhood and Friendship<sup>220</sup>, and institutionalized, e.g. through foundations.

Like with the French case, the moral aspect of reconciliation was accompanied by a pragmatic one: For Poland, stability and modernization could be achieved with EU and NATO memberships; and for Germany, those memberships would mean a "zone of stability"<sup>221</sup> to the East.

However, the reparation issue has remained a source of tensions. In total, Polish victims received over \$2 billion dollars, but they were never considered legal reparation and instead "humanitarian aid"<sup>222</sup>. The issue is further

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<sup>218</sup> Michał Pawlak, "The Reconciliation between Poland and Germany", 125.

<sup>219</sup> Renner, "Germany – Poland", 73; Michał Pawlak, "The Reconciliation between Poland and Germany", 125.

<sup>220</sup> Signed in 1991, this treaty institutionalized cooperation in many policy and societal areas.

<sup>221</sup> Gardner Feldman, "Germany's Reconciliation with France, Israel, Poland and the Czech Republic", 485.

<sup>222</sup> Michał Pawlak, "The Reconciliation between Poland and Germany", 126-127.

complicated by the large amount of previously German territory that Poland received after WWII<sup>223</sup>.

It is important to note that Poland also experienced a downslide in democracy and rule of law in the 2010s, which could share part in producing enmities. Nevertheless, the two countries share a prospering economic partnership, and with Tusk's election as president in 2023, early signs such as the withdrawal of reparation claims suggest that the reparation issue might be settled, although whether this lasts remains to be seen.

Despite Poland carrying historical victimhood, the case while somewhat asymmetrical also incorporates reciprocal negativity. Both countries have apologized for historical wrong-doings, and these apologies have broadly been accepted well.

In both cases, reconciliation was therefore facilitated by the institutional environment (such as the EU) as well as external factors (e.g. the US), and contained pragmatic considerations aside from moral ones.

### ***5.1.3 France & Algeria***

France and Algeria lastly have shared a troubled relationship following French colonization of Algeria from 1830-1962. This cumulated in the devastating Algerian War (1954-1962), during which 300,000 Algerians are estimated to have died, with additional thousands tortured at the hands of French authorities<sup>224</sup>. After the war, approximately a million French Algerians fled to France.

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<sup>223</sup> This was largely the historical area of Prussia ("Preußen"). View Annex.Figure 9 for details.

<sup>224</sup> Michel-André Horelt, "France – Algeria : The Double Discourse of Apology," in *Apology and Reconciliation in International Relations*, ed. Christopher Daase et al. (Routledge, 2015), 195–217, <https://doi.org/10.4324/9781315743554-10>, p. 196-197.

For the first twenty years following Algerian independence, there was barely any official commemoration, despite societal pressure for it stemming especially from French youth. This changed in 2000, when a domestic debate was sparked through an interview published in a French newspaper about the torture committed by French soldiers, which was confirmed by the alleged perpetrators. Both from the scholarly and private societal sectors, people began calling for an official apology, a sentiment that was shared by most of the French population, but not the political elite – PM Jospin did not unequivocally condemn the torture committed<sup>225</sup>. However, this was not corroborated by similar calls for an apology from Algeria, possibly because similar crimes had been committed by the governing elite in the recent civil war.

This dynamic shifted in 2005, when the French parliament passed a motion pushing for school programs which would “recognize the positive role of France’s presence [...] in north Africa”<sup>226</sup>. Harsh reactions followed, this time also in Algeria, who henceforth tied the success of the Treaty of Friendship that was being negotiated at the time to the abolishment of the article and called for an official apology. French president Chirac eventually cancelling the article. But the act in itself, paired with a removal attempt failing due to French parliamentary opposition as well as the continuous refusal to apologize unconditionally prevented the signage of the treaty. Thereafter, president Sarkozy, while acknowledging Algerian suffering, continuously pointed out French suffering and refused to apologize as well. The issue continued well into the following years of bilateral relations.

In 2012, while still not offering an exact apology, president Hollande pushed ahead more than his predecessors in acknowledging French guilt and Algerian suffering. Following France’s symbolic gesture of allowing Algerian

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<sup>225</sup> Horelt, 200-201.

<sup>226</sup> Horelt, 204.

soldiers to participate in the French military parade, Algerian president Bouteflika shifted course and a French-Algerian "exceptional partnership"<sup>227</sup> became possible. Nonetheless, the intended friendship treaty still "has not materialized"<sup>228</sup> and the history wounds have not closed. Similarly to the Korean case, the Algerian national identity was forged in opposition to the French; and in France, some nostalgia for French Algeria remains.

At the beginning of Macron's presidency in 2017, new hope was sparked when he pronounced France's conduct during the Algerian war as "crimes as humanity"<sup>229</sup>. However, since then, he has continued the toned-down approach of his predecessors, saying in 2023 that France would not "ask for forgiveness".<sup>230</sup>

For France, an apology or acknowledgement going further would probably signify not only humiliation but could also obligate France to compensation<sup>231</sup>. For Algeria, the history issue is largely considered as a condition for a better relationship. However, the relationship has improved in the past decades, due to numerous factors: After independence, Algeria still depended on France economically for years. Although the two are still important trading partners to each other, the French monopoly has faded, which makes for a more

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<sup>227</sup> Raphaël Lefèvre, "A New Chapter in Relations between Algeria and France?," *The Journal of North African Studies* 20, no. 3 (May 27, 2015): 315–18, <https://doi.org/10.1080/13629387.2015.1029766>.

<sup>228</sup> Aomar Baghzouz, "Algeria–France: Permanent Normalisation," in *The Politics of Algeria: Domestic Issues and International Relations*, ed. Yahia H. Zoubir (London: Routledge, 2019), <https://www-1taylorfrancis-com-17zot4tov02ba.erf.sbb.spk-berlin.de/chapters/edit/10.4324/9780429447495-13/algeria%E2%80%93france-aomar-baghzouz?context=ubx&refId=98e762e8-d52b-4562-8e9d-d41969729230>, 181.

<sup>229</sup> "En Algérie, Macron Qualifie La Colonisation de « Crime Contre l'humanité », Tollé à Droite," *Le Monde*, February 15, 2017, [https://www.lemonde.fr/election-presidentielle-2017/article/2017/02/15/macron-qualifie-la-colonisation-de-crime-contre-l-humanite-tolle-a-droite-et-au-front-national\\_5080331\\_4854003.html](https://www.lemonde.fr/election-presidentielle-2017/article/2017/02/15/macron-qualifie-la-colonisation-de-crime-contre-l-humanite-tolle-a-droite-et-au-front-national_5080331_4854003.html).

<sup>230</sup> Nicolas Camut, "Macron Will Not Ask Algeria for 'Forgiveness' over Colonization," *POLITICO*, January 12, 2023, <https://www.politico.eu/article/emmanuel-macron-france-will-not-ask-algeria-for-forgiveness-over-colonisation/>.

<sup>231</sup> Baghzouz, "Algeria–France: Permanent Normalisation", 185.

symmetrical trading relationship. Similarly, security cooperation in the face of terrorism and illegal migration has become an important topic; and due to the rich cultural ties, there is significant academic and societal cooperation. Lastly, the upsurge of Islam in France is a topic Algeria can "play a role in structuring"<sup>232</sup>.

#### ***5.1.4 Comparative Lessons for the Japan-ROK Case***

Germany, generally, is perceived as having achieved lasting reconciliation. Some of the factors playing a key part in this are: firstly, the political landscape, i.e. a common security incentive such as the rise of the USSR for Germany and France, or the stability offered by Poland's NATO membership; secondly, the institutional character of reconciliation, especially of the EU, often taking on characteristics of a spillover dynamic; thirdly, the significance of political leaders and their willingness for cooperation as well as the public support for such initiatives. Additionally, the private sector and NGOs have played an important role. So did external influence, specifically that of the US. It can hence be deduced that reconciliation between Germany and France or Poland incorporated a mixture of moral, but also pragmatic considerations, and was further facilitated greatly by the symmetry of the bilateral relationships. It is also important to note that territorial disputes were settled to advance the reconciliation process.

Contributing to the relative permanence of reconciliation is the (perceived) depth of German atonement: WWII especially is covered numerous times in school. There were extensive trials condemning German war criminals, and there is no time limit concerning crimes committed during the Nazi regime. Forced laborers have been compensated. In Berlin, a memorial for the victims spans 19,000 square meters and is often visited by school classes. Denial of the

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<sup>232</sup> Baghzouz, 190.

holocaust can be legally prosecuted<sup>233</sup>. These factors have contributed to the international perception of Germany as a nowadays trustworthy country that has apologized and retributed for its crimes during WWII, which has probably played a key role in securing lasting public support for reconciliation. Nonetheless, the rise of right-wing politics in recent years may challenge this perception in the future.

For France and Algeria, despite painting a mixed picture, factors that have helped facilitate the gradual reconciliation also concern security cooperation and trade (importantly: non-monopolized trade), as well as the deep cultural ties between the two peoples that remain interested and invested in reconciliation initiatives. However, the asymmetry natural to a colonizer-colonized relationship, paired with France's refusal to apologize, have impeded full reconciliation.

Thus, several lessons can be drawn for the Japan-ROK case.

Among the reasons for the continuous tensions are long-lasting unfavorable conditions<sup>234</sup>, e.g. the US pushing for Japan's remilitarization among the rising threat of the Cold War, thereby re-establishing pre-war elites – hence, the external influence that helped European harmonization impeded in the Japan-ROK case. The security environment of the Cold War hence did not produce a common response, for which steps towards reconciliation would have been necessary. Additionally, there was no comparable joint political leadership that could have pushed for rapprochement, largely due to antagonistic sentiments and lack of incentives. Similarly, the push-factor of reconciliation-promoting NGOs was inexistent in the early years after colonization and then subdued by the rise of nationalistic NGOs. There were also no institutions that could have tied Japan and

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<sup>233</sup> Patrick Hein, "Patterns of War Reconciliation in Japan and Germany. A Comparison," *East Asia* 27, no. 2 (June 1, 2010): 145–64, <https://doi.org/10.1007/s12140-010-9106-z>.

<sup>234</sup> See also Ku, "International Reconciliation in the Postwar Era, 1945-2005", 20-21.

the ROK together like the ECSC; and later-arising institutions such as the Association for South-East Asian Nations (ASEAN) are not as large in scope as the EU<sup>235</sup>. Following the importance of trade for the French-Algerian rapprochement, it is to note that deep trade relations between Japan and the ROK so far have even suffered under the history issue and thus cannot on their own suffice. Furthermore, territorial disputes remain unsettled between Japan and South Korea. Lastly, the ROK-Japan dynamic follows a colonial, i.e. asymmetrical pattern which further complicates attempts to reconcile, as in the French-Algerian case.

Nonetheless, among the conditions that have had a positive impact and may continue to do so in the future are increased security cooperation amongst new security dynamics and threats, continued trade, the push of external factors (especially the US) and cultural ties. These will be elaborated on in the following section of this thesis.

## **5.2 Geopolitical Factors**

The geopolitical situation in East Asia gives rise to security collaboration possibilities between the ROK and Japan.

Historically, the end of WWII reshaped the region in favor of the Allies' and specifically the US' interests. This included extended US involvement in Japan<sup>236</sup>. While the Cold War produced Japanese-US security collaboration, it did not advocate for cooperation with the ROK. On the contrary, remilitarization of Japan only heightened South Korean fears of repeating painful history.

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<sup>235</sup> See section 5.3 of this thesis.

<sup>236</sup> For details, see section 5.4 of this thesis.

The end of the Cold War thus could have tipped the region towards integration, but instead, North Korea emerged as a significant threat pursuing nuclear weapons in the late 1990s and 2000s<sup>237</sup>.

Considering the DPRK's continued development of nuclear weaponry despite political dialogue as well as the PRC's steadily growing global influence and Russia's invasion of Ukraine in 2022, the geopolitical situation of the ROK and Japan is characterized by their close proximity to (increasingly) hostile neighbors. For both countries, the US is a major ally that secures their defense in case of an attack; and for the US, both Japan and the ROK's locations offer the US the capability to project military power in the Asian theatre. The severity of the situation is illustrated by the fact that North Korea has tested more missiles in 2022 than ever before<sup>238</sup>, or by Japan increasing its defense budget in 2022 and expanding the capabilities of their Self-Defense Force<sup>239</sup>.

Hence, the geopolitical situation has and continues to promote deeper security ties for both countries with the US; and thereby with each other as democratic allies of the US. In light of common threats historically facilitating reconciliation, this gives hope to the previously tense bilateral relationship.

### 5.3 Cultural and Economic Factors

Cultural collaboration can also facilitate reconciliation greatly.

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<sup>237</sup> Akihiro Iwashita, Edward Boyle, and Yong-Chool Ha, *Geo-Politics in Northeast Asia*, 1st ed. (London: Routledge, 2022), <https://doi.org/10.4324/9781003288039>, 3-4.

<sup>238</sup> Leif-Eric Easley, "Stabilizing Japan-Korea Relations: Restraining Nationalism, Appraising Beijing, Reassuring Washington," *The Pacific Review* 36, no. 6 (November 2, 2023): 1273-1305, <https://doi.org/10.1080/09512748.2022.2090594>, p. 1295.

<sup>239</sup> Young K. Youn, "Japan at a Historical Inflection Point: Untangling the Complex Knot of Geopolitics, Domestic Politics, and the Security Alliance," *Journal of Indo-Pacific Affairs*, 2023, <https://www.airuniversity.af.edu/JIPA/Display/Article/3475820/japan-at-a-historical-inflection-point-untangling-the-complex-knot-of-geopoliti/>.

Between Japan and the ROK, popular culture has played a significant role. Especially among the youth, the rise of K-Pop and K-Dramas in addition to the popularity of Japanese Manga and Anime as well as the respective cuisines of the other country have helped cultural exchanges over the last decades. Through these types of media and content, interest in a country's culture can be fostered, which in turn logically leads to increased understanding. This is illustrated by the positive opinion most people interested in the other country's pop culture have cultivated of each other<sup>240</sup> – a positive opinion that is at least to an extent resilient to governmental relations deteriorating<sup>241</sup>.

Nonetheless, there is still a distinct lack of people-to-people relationships between the ROK and Japan, e.g. with travel growing largely unilaterally, from the ROK to Japan, but not necessarily vice versa<sup>242</sup>. But with the growth in cultural exchange in the recent decades as well as the youth's more positive overall view of the respective other country, the conditions for reconciliation become more favorable.

Similarly, regional integration has increased in East Asia not only regarding security but also economic arrangements. After the financial crisis in Asia in the late 1990s, regional cooperation developed new urgency. ASEAN held summits with the Northeast Asian countries of the PRC, Japan, and the ROK, and ASEAN became a hub for Free Trade Agreements (FTAs) between itself and another country (ASEAN+1 FTAs), three of which are in place with respectively the PRC, the ROK, and Japan<sup>243</sup>. ASEAN proposed an East-Asian wide FTA

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<sup>240</sup> Yasushi, "What signs are there that the relationship between Japan and South Korea will improve?"

<sup>241</sup> See Annex, Figure 8.

<sup>242</sup> Ryan Ashley and Joseph Su, "Mending Historical Memory: Improving People-to-People Ties Between Japan and South Korea," *Foreign Policy Research Institute*, May 1, 2024, <https://policycommons.net/artifacts/12293271/mending-historical-memory/13187490/>.

<sup>243</sup> Kazushi Shimizu, "The ASEAN Economic Community and the RCEP in the World Economy," *Journal of Contemporary East Asia Studies* 10, no. 1 (January 2, 2021): 1–23, <https://doi.org/10.1080/24761028.2021.1907881>.

under the Framework for Regional Comprehensive Economic Partnership (RCEP) in 2011. The agreement was signed in 2020, incorporating the ASEAN countries, the Northeast Asian countries of Japan, China, and the ROK, and Australia and New Zealand. It finally entered into force in 2022<sup>244</sup>.

The RCEP presents a large step forward in regional integration and bodes well for the conditions for potential reconciliation. However, in the case of EU and the successful Germany-France or Germany-Poland reconciliations, the institutional background expanded from an FTA and in fact advocates for and needs closer integration and collaboration that is much wider-reaching than just in the economic sense. Since neither Japan nor the ROK are part of ASEAN, but also due to geographical reasons (such as maritime borders as opposed to land borders) as well as the DPRK as a highly hostile regional actor in the middle of the Northeast Asian territory, it is unlikely that a comparable regional integrational model will emerge in Northeast Asia. Therefore, the existing integration attempts likely will not stretch and impact as far as the ECSC initiative did for Germany and its neighbors.

#### **5.4 The Role of the United States**

As already previously alluded to, the US plays a major role in the dynamic as the major ally of both Japan and the ROK.

After 1945, the US envisioned a crucial role for China, which at the time still consisted of the nationalist government. This plan was derailed with the rise of the communist government in mainland China and the establishment of the Republic of China<sup>245</sup> on the island of Taiwan<sup>246</sup>. Thereafter, the PRC aligned

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<sup>244</sup> Shimizu.

<sup>245</sup> Hereafter simply referred to as Taiwan.

<sup>246</sup> Rana Mitter, "The End of the WWII and the Shaping of Geopolitics in East Asia," *The RUSI Journal* 160, no. 4 (July 4, 2015): 14–17, <https://doi.org/10.1080/03071847.2015.1079039>.

themselves with the USSR in the north, and the US, which continued to recognize Taiwan as China's legal government, turned to Japan as a security ally. In 1951, the first US-Japan Security Treaty was passed to end the US occupation of Japan. The US pledged that it would defend Japan if it was attacked. In return, Japan granted the US use of its military bases. The treaty was expanded with a second security treaty in 1960 that now obliged the US to consult with Japan prior to using the bases for operations outside of Japan's defense needs<sup>247</sup>. When the alliance between the USSR and the PRC began to deteriorate, the US changed their approach to apprehend the USSR further by utilizing the PRC. The US' recognition of the PRC as China's legitimate government in 1971 proved the US assessed the USSR as the bigger threat<sup>248</sup>. Nonetheless, the Japanese-US security collaboration thus has long-standing roots.

But the association reaches further into history: The US played a big role in constructing post-war Japan. SCAP wrote the Japanese constitution, which has not been amended since<sup>249</sup>. The US' motivation was most likely rooted in having a "stable conservative government"<sup>250</sup> in the region that represented an ally against the rising communist bloc. In that line of argument, the US convinced the other Allies to waive all reparation claims "arising out of any actions taken by Japan"<sup>251</sup> in the San Francisco Treaty – notwithstanding the Netherlands, with whom the US had negotiated an additional agreement that did not refute potential Dutch claims and would not become public until 2000. However, that left various matters such as compensation and historical justice unresolved. This is in part due

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<sup>247</sup> Youn, "Japan at a Historical Inflection Point: Untangling the Complex Knot of Geopolitics, Domestic Politics, and the Security Alliance."

<sup>248</sup> Mitter, "The End of the WWII and the Shaping of Geopolitics in East Asia."

<sup>249</sup> Youn, "Japan at a Historical Inflection Point: Untangling the Complex Knot of Geopolitics, Domestic Politics, and the Security Alliance."

<sup>250</sup> Chien Liu, "Obama's Pivot to Asia and Its Failed Japan-South Korea Historical Reconciliation," *East Asia* 35, no. 4 (December 2018): 293–316, <https://doi.org/10.1007/s12140-018-9304-7>, p. 299.

<sup>251</sup> Liu, 300.

to the fact that acknowledgement would have meant the US would most likely have to recognise the impact of the American atomic bombing of Hiroshima and Nagasaki<sup>252</sup>.

Regarding the ROK, the US and South Korea signed a Mutual Defense treaty in 1953, following the Korean War, that set their security alliance in stone. The US also played a pivotal role in the Dokdo conflict, as they first excluded the islands from their occupation zone, then pronounced them as never having been "treated as part of Korea"<sup>253</sup>, and finally excluded them from the territory that Japan was explicitly renouncing in the San Francisco Treaty. Nonetheless, during the Cold War period, security collaboration between the US and the ROK continued.

After the collapse of the USSR, Japan and the ROK began to cooperate more directly on security matters as they were both critical parts of the common hub of the US' security alliance in the region. Therefore, this importance of Japan and the ROK for the US provides a good reason for worry over the continued tensions rising from the history issue.

Nonetheless, the US has largely employed a policy of steering clear of involvement in the issue in preference of the two parties resolving it without interference. However, the US has intervened on a few occasions and advocated for more collaborations; e.g. convincing Japan to return to the Korean Energy Development Organization following their withdrawal after a North Korean missile launch over Japanese airspace or the US Congress decision in 2007 to call for an unequivocal apology regarding the "comfort women". Generally, the US approach falls largely within a potential judge-mediator role. Another possible

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<sup>252</sup> Liu.

<sup>253</sup> Kazuhiko Togo, "Japan-South Korea Relations and the Role of the United States on History," in *U.S. Leadership, History, and Bilateral Relations in Northeast Asia*, ed. Gilbert Rozman, 1st ed. (Cambridge University Press, 2010), 97-123, <https://doi.org/10.1017/CBO9780511760945.006>, p. 121.

approach could be a more historically integrated one, that would for instance recognise the US' involvement in allowing Japanese annexation of Korea, but such an approach has not found much resonance in either Japan or the ROK on grounds of weakening US credibility and giving ammunition to Japanese nationalists to defend Japan's own imperialist policies<sup>254</sup>.

#### ***5.4.1 Pivot to Asia Strategy***

In 2011, the US administration under Obama announced its "pivot to Asia", to "reassert America's geopolitical influence in East Asia"<sup>255</sup> and to contain China. Therefore, the previously existing hub-spokes alliance, where the US formed separate alliances with Japan and South Korea respectively, was to be transformed into a proper trilateral alliance<sup>256</sup>.

To this end, Obama pressed the South Korean and Japanese governments to resolve the comfort women issue and expressed disappointment with the Japanese PM Abe for visiting Yasukuni. In fact, the ROK and Japan reached the aforementioned December 2015 agreement in line with and in reaction to the US regional policy. At first, the US therefore seemed to have succeeded with its desired proper trilateral alliance, and in some parts, it did: In 2016, talks on a security pact were renewed between the ROK and Japan. But a visit of Japanese Defense Minister Inada to the Yasukuni Shrine caused both governmental and public outcry in South Korea and China. After the comfort women statue was set up in Busan, the Japanese government recalled its

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<sup>254</sup> Togo, 120-121.

<sup>255</sup> Peter Harris and Peter Trubowitz, "The Politics of Power Projection: The Pivot to Asia, Its Failure, and the Future of American Primacy," *The Chinese Journal of International Politics* 14, no. 2 (June 2, 2021): 187–217, <https://doi.org/10.1093/cjip/poab002>, p. 191.

<sup>256</sup> Liu, "Obama's Pivot to Asia and Its Failed Japan-South Korea Historical Reconciliation", 303.

ambassador to South Korea: The reconciliation, with the US as a mediator, failed at this time.

Nonetheless, the US has continued to advocate for trilateral cooperation, for military issues including joint exercises and trainings, but additionally also across diverse topics such as health, environment or cybersecurity<sup>257</sup>. However, it remains clear that the trilateral cooperation is vulnerable to the bilateral tensions that continue to flare up between South Korea and Japan.

#### ***5.4.4 Present Role of the United States & 2023 Summit***

In recent years, the alliance has continued among the rising tensions in the international system. For example, both the South Korean and Japanese governments sided with US allies over the Russian invasion of Ukraine and condemned it<sup>258</sup>.

In 2023, the three countries strengthened their alliance. They met in Camp David in August 2023 as a "show of force"<sup>259</sup> amidst rising Chinese and North Korean tensions, announcing new joint exercises and a newly established crisis communications hotline, and pronounced the meeting as a "turning point"<sup>260</sup> and a "time of unparalleled opportunity"<sup>261</sup>.

Following a trilateral ministerial meeting in November 2023, the three partners announced a multi-year trilateral joint exercise plan as well as a data

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<sup>257</sup> Easley, "Stabilizing Japan–Korea Relations", 1293.

<sup>258</sup> Easley, 1294.

<sup>259</sup> Arlette Saenz Judd Kayla Tausche, Donald, "Biden Looks to 'next Era of Cooperation' amid Growing Chinese Tensions | CNN Politics," CNN, August 17, 2023, <https://www.cnn.com/2023/08/17/politics/joe-biden-camp-david-japan-south-korea/index.html>.

<sup>260</sup> Aamer Madhani, Darlene Superville, and Matthew Lee, "US, Japan and South Korea Agree to Expand Security Ties at Summit amid China, North Korea Worries," AP News, August 18, 2023, <https://apnews.com/article/camp-david-summit-biden-south-korea-japan-0bc36bb3705a3dc1b69dc8cd47b35dd3>.

<sup>261</sup> Judd, "Biden Looks to 'next Era of Cooperation' amid Growing Chinese Tensions | CNN Politics."

sharing system regarding warnings of North Korean missiles. The system was activated in December 2023<sup>262</sup>. At the point of writing of this thesis, another trilateral summit is planned for July 2024<sup>263</sup>.

This showcases the opportune moment of deepening the trilateral alliance after Japanese PM Kishida and South Korean president's Yoon met for the first summit of its kind in over a decade, therefore putting the historical tensions to the side.

### 5.5 An Opportune Moment for Reconciliation?

The rising geopolitical tensions and the deepened security alliance with the US could be seen as the potential backdrop leading to permanent reconciliation.

However, the domestic backlash Yoon faced for meeting Kishida showcases that the bilateral tensions have not faded despite the leaders' initiatives. Hence, the increased security cooperation alone might not be enough to finally resolve the history issue, as there are still factors impeding reconciliation.

Japan's PMs continued visits and offers to Yasukuni, for one, remain a thorn in the eye of many South Koreans. As there are no initiatives to either remove the war criminals entirely or to move them to a different location and neither does there seem to be sufficient incentive to entirely refrain from religious offerings to the shrine for Japanese political leaders, the issue is likely to retain its

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<sup>262</sup> "United States-Japan-Republic of Korea Trilateral Ministerial Joint Press Statement," U.S. Department of Defense, accessed May 18, 2024, <https://www.defense.gov/News/Releases/Release/Article/3621235/united-states-japan-republic-of-korea-trilateral-ministerial-joint-press-statem/https%3A%2F%2Fwww.defense.gov%2FNews%2FReleases%2FRelease%2FArticle%2F3621235%2Funitied-states-japan-republic-of-korea-trilateral-ministerial-joint-press-statem%2F>.

<sup>263</sup> "US Plans Trilateral Summit with Japan, South Korea in July, Japanese Media Report," *Reuters*, April 1, 2024, sec. World, <https://www.reuters.com/world/us-plans-trilateral-summit-with-japan-south-korea-july-japanese-media-report-2024-04-01/>.

political potential for tensions. Similarly, the "comfort women" issue has never been settled and can be the cause for high-level political tensions many years after the war, such as Japan calling back its ambassador following the erection of the "comfort woman" statue in Busan. Additionally, the fact that there is no agreement in sight on the fate of the Dokdo islands powerfully illustrates another, in this case even territorial, theatre for clashes.

All these issues have contributed to the wide-ranging denial of Japanese apologies in the ROK, and, in response, apology fatigue becoming increasingly widespread in Japan. Hence, it is also questionable whether apologies that deviate further from the previous ones will be made, and if those will make a difference considering the other unresolved issues that have put Japanese apologies in jeopardy in the past.

With the recency of the trade dispute between Japan and the ROK that was only resolved in 2023 under influence of new leaders in Japan and the ROK, it is evident that the history issue has not lost its political potential for conflict.

Therefore, the current moment, while offering reprise from the tensions characterizing the previous years, does not necessarily mean permanent reconciliation. The background of the momentum, i.e. rising Chinese and North Korean but also international tensions, while having intensified in the last years, was already imminent in the years before, when the bilateral relationship was still troubled. Therefore, the significance of the new political leaders is large in the current upswing, which signifies also the potential for change in this trend with new leaders. This does not only refer to Japan and the ROK, but also to the US as a mediator and external factor pushing for reconciliation. With the possibility of Trump returning for a second term in November of 2024, the unpredictability of

his foreign policy<sup>264</sup> could also return, raising doubt about the US' commitment and willingness to engage in potential conflicts in the East Asian sphere.

Similarly, not all background factors have changed. While regional economic integration is increasing considering RCEP, this model still does not offer the same type of commitments and opportunities for deep collaboration that so greatly facilitated Germany's reconciliation with war-time enemies. The existing NGOs do not necessarily help the picture either, illustrated by the persistence of the Tsukurukai's political influence (e.g. over history textbooks) or the influence of the Korean Council, which advocates a simplistic picture of the "comfort women" discourse. Lastly, people-to-people cultural exchange exists but is not yet profound enough to greatly facilitate reconciliation.

Nonetheless, the cultural exchanges among popular culture especially along with the youth's improved opinion of the other state bodes well for attempts at reconciliation in the future. However, I argue that these factors alone would not be enough, because the politicization of memories and symbols such as the Yasukuni shrine or the "comfort women" issue is likely to retain its destructive potential unless the underlying national identities that feed into this politicization experience some degree of change. But this type of change cannot emerge in the space of a few years, like the newfound upswing in relations under Kishida and Yoon.

Therefore, the history issue is likely to show its head again in the future, when the surrounding circumstances such as the current political leadership have shifted. As long as the domestic negative feelings remain, they can react to changes in the policy of the two countries involved, and public opinion in turn can change in favor of the domestic situation. These negative feelings are refueled, time and time again, by various actors such as NGOs, political leaders, or even the

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<sup>264</sup> See Youn, "Japan at a Historical Inflection Point: Untangling the Complex Knot of Geopolitics, Domestic Politics, and the Security Alliance."

international public calling for empowerment of women's rights in the "comfort women" issue. But they are also incorporated, as argued, deeply within the respective national identities of Japan and South Korea, that is: in opposition to each other. This may have eased in recent years and may continue to do so, but the power of an affective memory to unite a nation is often too large to abandon it completely, which is why it is likely that the issue will be used by other political leaders in the future.

Until the issues sustaining these national identities are resolved, they retain their affective power, potentially for years or even decades to come.

The last chapter has assessed numerous approaches to reconciliation: Lessons learnt from other countries' reconciliatory processes; geopolitical, cultural, and economic factors; and the role of the US. While there are some factors indicating positive conditions for reconciliation, some impeding factors remain that are unlikely to become resolved in the near future.

## Conclusion

This thesis has analyzed collective memory in the Japan-ROK case to answer the question of whether this memory will continue to impact relations between them. Therefore, the first two chapters have covered the theoretical and historical basis for the history issue. The existence of a differing set of collective memories, shaped by salient events and incorporated into national identity, is illustrated in the third and fourth chapters, along with their deeply reaching impact on political relations. The ultimate chapter evaluated factors that could facilitate and impede reconciliation.

In summary, the political reconciliation might not be as imminent as current positive trends might lead one to believe. Considering the long-lasting impact of memories in the past and the only minutely changed backdrop of the international system and the East Asian sphere since the last significant conflict of 2019 to 2023, it is unlikely that the history issue will dissolve quickly.

Nonetheless, the past decades have offered grounds for hope, and some progress has been made, especially considering the trilateral security alliance and increased collaboration most prominently under leaders Kishida and Yoon. Additionally, the youth's generally more positive image of the other country leads to speculation that the affective charge of the memories might diminish in comparison to the cultural connectivity that has been growing especially in recent decades.

It therefore stands to reason that reconciliation, while not reached yet, is possible. To succeed in this endeavor, however, it is likely that progress needs to be made regarding the issues that have continuously fed the history issue and the antagonistic national identities. Time alone might help to dull the thorn of past pain, but memory can also keep it alive if actors with political sway find purpose in sustaining it.

In my opinion, the current reconciliatory mood still incorporates room for clashes as it has not attempted to solve these issues. Instead, both parties currently

seem to look forward, willing to put the history issue to the side in favor of the larger geopolitical threats. However, to look forward does not negate the past, especially if it is such a salient one; and putting the issue to the side does not signify that it is disappearing. On the contrary, it could show its head just as soon as political leadership shifts again.

For permanent reconciliation, I argue that the past cannot be simply put aside by looking forward, as that kind of looking forward implies once again discourses of forgetting. What is needed are neither simplified discourses of remembering such as the nature of South Korean "comfort women" remembrance or the glorified nature of Japanese nationalists, nor discourses of forgetting as showcased in Japanese insistence on the 1965 Treaty. Instead, I postulate that what could help are complicated and lasting discourses of joint remembering, for example through the renewed effort of writing joint history books. This may pave the way to solve other issues where pathways to reconcile are available, such as the possibility to raise the Dokdo dispute to the ICJ, in the hopes that a reconciling momentum could be established and supported by the government. If the joint remembering lasts, for instance by fortifying it through institutionalization, it may then lead to similarly lasting discourses of forgiving.

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Annex

Japanese Prime Minister	Term	No. of visits to the Yasukuni Shrine	Dates of visits to the Yasukuni Shrine
Yoshida Shigeru	1948-1954	5	8 October 1951; 17 October 1952; 23 April 1953; 24 October 1953; 24 April 1954
Hotoyama Ichiro	1954-1956	0	-
Ishibashi Tanzan	1956-1957	0	-
Kishi Nobusuke	1957-1960	2	24 April 1957; 21 October 1958
Ikeda Hayato	1960-1964	5	10 October 1960; 18 June 1961; 15 November 1961; 4 November 1962; 22 September 1963
Sato Eisaku	1964-1972	11	21 April 1965; 21 April 1966; 22 April 1967; 23 April 1968; 22 April 1969; 18 October 1969; 22 April 1970; 17 October 1970; 22 April 1971; 19 October 1971; 22 April 1972
Tanaka Kakuei	1972-1974	5	8 July 1972; 23 April 1973; 18 October 1973; 23 April 1974; 19 October 1974
Miki Takeo	1974-1976	3	22 April 1975; 15 August 1975; 18 October 1976
Fukuda Takeo	1976-1978	4	21 April 1977; 21 April 1978; 15 August 1978; 18 October 1978
Ohira Masayoshi	1978-1980	3	21 April 1979; 18 October 1979; 21 April 1980
Suzuki Zenko	1980-1982	9	15 August 1980; 18 October 1980; 21 November 1980; 21 April 1981; 15 August 1981; 17 October 1981; 21 April 1982; 15 August 1982; 18 October 1982
<b>Nakasone Yasuhiro</b>	1982-1987	9	21 April 1983; 15 August 1983; 18 October 1983; 5 January 1984; 15 August 1984; 18 October 1984; 21 January 1985; 22 April 1985; 15 August 1985
Takeshita Noboru	1987-1989	0	-
Uno Sosuke	1989	0	-
Kaifu Toshiki	1989-1991	0	-
<b>Miyazawa Kiichi</b>	1991-1993	0	-
			<i>*Some reports suggest that Miyazawa paid a secret visit in 1992.</i>
<b>Hosokawa Morihiro</b>	1993-1994	0	-
Hata Tsutomu	1994	0	-
<b>Murayama Tomiichi</b>	1994-1996	0	-
<b>Hashimoto Ryutaro</b>	1996-1998	1	29 July 1996
<b>Obuchi Keizo</b>	1998-2000	0	-
<b>Mori Yoshiro</b>	2000-2001	0	-
<b>Koizumi Junichiro</b>	2001-2006	6	13 August 2001; 21 April 2002; 14 January 2003; 1 January 2004; 17 October 2005; 15 August 2006
<b>Abe Shinzo</b>	2006-2007	0	-
<b>Fukuda Yasuo</b>	2007-2008	0	-
<b>Aso Taro</b>	2008-2009	0	-
<b>Hatoyama Yukio</b>	2009-2010	0	-
<b>Kan Naoto</b>	2010-2011	0	-
Noda Yoshihiko	2011-2012	0	-
<b>Abe Shinzo</b>	2012-2020	1	26 December 2013 <i>*2014–2019 Abe did not visit but sent ritual</i>

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			offerings to the Shrine *After leaving office, Abe visited the Shrine on 19 September 2020; 21 April 2021 and 21 April 2022
Suga Yoshihide	2020-2021	0	– *Sent ritual offering on 17 October 2020; 21 April 2021 and 15 August 2021
<b>Kishida Fumio</b>	2021-present	0	– *Sent ritual offering on 17 October 2022, 21 April 2023 and 15 August 2023

*Note.* Prime ministers mentioned at previous points of this thesis have been highlighted in bold.

Table 2. Japanese prime ministerial visits to the Yasukuni Shrine<sup>265</sup>.

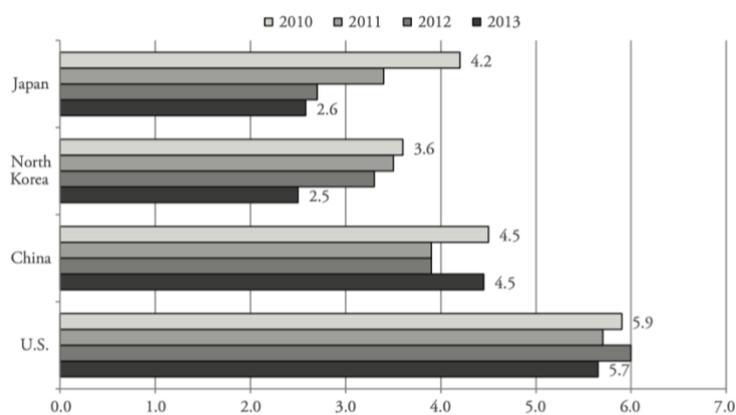


Figure 6. Japan’s rapid favorability decline upon Abe’s election as prime minister<sup>266</sup>.

<sup>265</sup> Taken from Jash, “Politics of Memories”, 187-189.

<sup>266</sup> Taken from Karl Friedhoff and Kang Chungku, “Rethinking Public Opinion on Korea–Japan Relations” (Asan Institute for Policy Studies, 2013), <https://www.jstor.org/stable/resrep08148>.

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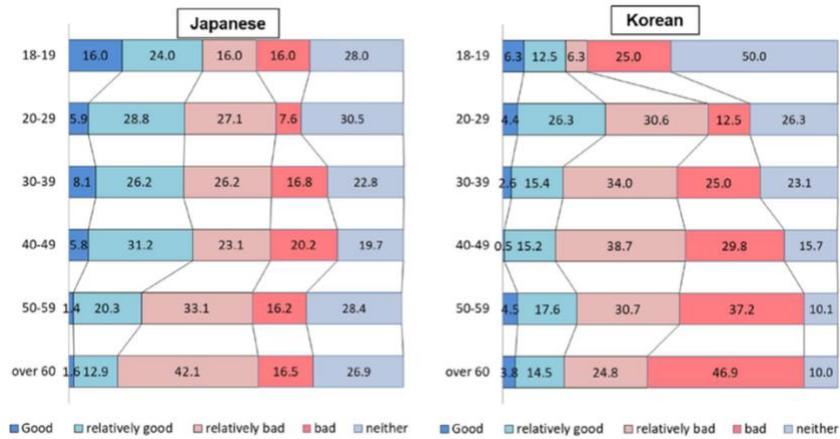


Figure 7. Japan and South Korea’s public opinion of each other, divided by age group<sup>267</sup>.

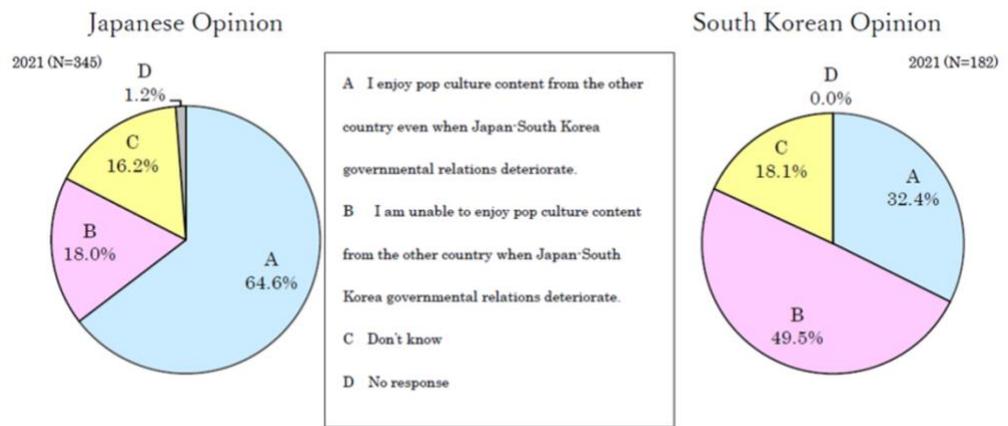


Figure 8. Public Opinion and Pop Culture Among Deteriorating Relations<sup>268</sup>.

<sup>267</sup> Taken from Yasushi, “What signs are there that the relationship between Japan and South Korea will improve?”

<sup>268</sup> Taken from Yasushi.



Figure 9. Poland and German territories before and after WWII<sup>269</sup>.

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<sup>269</sup> "The TIME Vault: December 10, 1956," *TIME.Com*, December 10, 1956, <http://time.com/vault/issue/1956-12-10/page/36/>.