



NAVAL POSTGRADUATE SCHOOL

MONTEREY, CALIFORNIA

THESIS

**BETWEEN ANIMOSITY AND RECONCILIATION:
JAPAN-ROK RELATIONS**

by

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June 2022

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REPORT DOCUMENTATION PAGE			<i>Form Approved OMB No. 0704-0188</i>	
Public reporting burden for this collection of information is estimated to average 1 hour per response, including the time for reviewing instruction, searching existing data sources, gathering and maintaining the data needed, and completing and reviewing the collection of information. Send comments regarding this burden estimate or any other aspect of this collection of information, including suggestions for reducing this burden, to Washington headquarters Services, Directorate for Information Operations and Reports, 1215 Jefferson Davis Highway, Suite 1204, Arlington, VA 22202-4302, and to the Office of Management and Budget, Paperwork Reduction Project (0704-0188) Washington, DC, 20503.				
1. AGENCY USE ONLY (Leave blank)		2. REPORT DATE June 2022	3. REPORT TYPE AND DATES COVERED Master's thesis	
4. TITLE AND SUBTITLE BETWEEN ANIMOSITY AND RECONCILIATION: JAPAN-ROK RELATIONS			5. FUNDING NUMBERS	
6. AUTHOR(S) Graham Johnson				
7. PERFORMING ORGANIZATION NAME(S) AND ADDRESS(ES) Naval Postgraduate School Monterey, CA 93943-5000			8. PERFORMING ORGANIZATION REPORT NUMBER	
9. SPONSORING / MONITORING AGENCY NAME(S) AND ADDRESS(ES) N/A			10. SPONSORING / MONITORING AGENCY REPORT NUMBER	
11. SUPPLEMENTARY NOTES The views expressed in this thesis are those of the author and do not reflect the official policy or position of the Department of Defense or the U.S. Government.				
12a. DISTRIBUTION / AVAILABILITY STATEMENT Approved for public release. Distribution is unlimited.			12b. DISTRIBUTION CODE A	
13. ABSTRACT (maximum 200 words) Historical animosities within the Republic of Korea over Japanese atrocities committed prior to and during World War II continue to be evident in many aspects of contemporary Japan-ROK relations. Reconciling historical animosities has become an important aspect of Japan-ROK relations because they present a major hurdle in developing stronger bilateral ties between two major alliance partners with the United States. This thesis examines how state-led historical narratives, national mythmaking, and the promotion of self-other identities have influenced the intergovernmental and people-to-people reconciliation process and how they are preventing deep interstate reconciliation from occurring today. This thesis finds that postwar historical narratives and national myths have solidified divergent collective memories and cultural identities within Japanese and Korean societies that have negatively impacted their ability to permanently reconcile historical animosities. Specifically, reconciliation efforts are hindered by revisionist narratives over Japan's colonial occupation of Korea (1910–1945) as the issues of comfort women, forced labor, and territorial disputes have elevated divergent perceptions to crises of national identity. Understanding the barriers to greater reconciliation in Japan-ROK relations has implications for reconciliation's important role in providing stability within the East Asian region that aligns with the interests of the United States.				
14. SUBJECT TERMS Japan-ROK relations, historical animosity, reconciliation, historical narrative, national myths, collective memory, public opinion, Japan, Republic of Korea, South Korea, cultural identity			15. NUMBER OF PAGES 125	
			16. PRICE CODE	
17. SECURITY CLASSIFICATION OF REPORT Unclassified	18. SECURITY CLASSIFICATION OF THIS PAGE Unclassified	19. SECURITY CLASSIFICATION OF ABSTRACT Unclassified	20. LIMITATION OF ABSTRACT UU	

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BETWEEN ANIMOSITY AND RECONCILIATION: JAPAN-ROK RELATIONS

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Submitted in partial fulfillment of the
requirements for the degree of

**MASTER OF ARTS IN SECURITY STUDIES
(EAST ASIA AND THE INDO-PACIFIC)**

from the

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ABSTRACT

Historical animosities within the Republic of Korea over Japanese atrocities committed prior to and during World War II continue to be evident in many aspects of contemporary Japan-ROK relations. Reconciling historical animosities has become an important aspect of Japan-ROK relations because they present a major hurdle in developing stronger bilateral ties between two major alliance partners with the United States. This thesis examines how state-led historical narratives, national mythmaking, and the promotion of self-other identities have influenced the intergovernmental and people-to-people reconciliation process and how they are preventing deep interstate reconciliation from occurring today. This thesis finds that postwar historical narratives and national myths have solidified divergent collective memories and cultural identities within Japanese and Korean societies that have negatively impacted their ability to permanently reconcile historical animosities. Specifically, reconciliation efforts are hindered by revisionist narratives over Japan's colonial occupation of Korea (1910–1945) as the issues of comfort women, forced labor, and territorial disputes have elevated divergent perceptions to crises of national identity. Understanding the barriers to greater reconciliation in Japan-ROK relations has implications for reconciliation's important role in providing stability within the East Asian region that aligns with the interests of the United States.

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

I.	INTRODUCTION.....	1
A.	SIGNIFICANCE OF RESEARCH	2
1.	Japan-Republic of Korea Relations	2
2.	Implications on U.S. Foreign Policy	3
B.	LITERATURE REVIEW	4
1.	Historical Narratives and National Mythmaking	4
2.	Geopolitical Factors	8
3.	The Role of Public Opinion.....	10
C.	POTENTIAL EXPLANATIONS	13
D.	RESEARCH DESIGN	16
 II.	 PRE-NORMALIZATION PERIOD (1945–1965)	 19
A.	JAPAN	22
1.	U.S. Influence on Japan’s ‘New’ Postwar Identity	22
2.	Emergence of Victim Identity Through Places of Memory and Myths	24
3.	Prewar Perceptions of Koreans on Discriminatory Postwar Narratives	25
B.	REPUBLIC OF KOREA.....	27
1.	New Korean Identities for a Postwar Korean State	27
2.	Authoritarian Legitimacy from Anti-Japanese Narratives and Myths	29
3.	Balancing Historical Narratives and Public Sentiment.....	30
C.	CONVERGENCE/DIVERGENCE OF HISTORICAL NARRATIVES	32
 III.	 THE COLD WAR AFTER NORMALIZATION (1965–1990)	 37
A.	JAPAN	39
1.	Whitewashing Japan’s Official Narrative	39
2.	The Emergence of Prewar Japan Places of Memory.....	41
3.	Japan’s Apathetic Attitude Change Towards South Korea	43
B.	REPUBLIC OF KOREA.....	46
1.	The Rise of the <i>Minjung</i> Movement	47
2.	Internationalizing Korea’s Victim Narrative in Places of Memory	48
3.	Leftist Ethnonationalism and Democratization	50

C.	CONVERGENCE/DIVERGENCE OF HISTORICAL NARRATIVES	54
IV.	THE CONTEMPORARY PERIOD (1990–2022).....	57
A.	JAPAN	59
1.	Rise of Right-Wing Ethnonationalism in Mainstream Narratives	60
2.	Historical Revisionism and Japan’s Official Narrative.....	62
3.	Challenges to Developing Narrative Convergence.....	67
B.	REPUBLIC OF KOREA.....	71
1.	Dominance of Left-Wing Ethnonationalism and New Narratives	72
2.	Battle over Historical Revisionism and Narrative Convergence	78
3.	The Left-Right Political Polarization and Korean “New Right”	79
C.	CONVERGENCE/DIVERGENCE OF HISTORICAL NARRATIVES	81
V.	CONCLUSION	85
A.	SUMMARY OF CHANGE TO NARRATIVES OVER TIME.....	85
1.	Trends in Japan’s Historical Narratives.....	85
2.	Trends in the Republic of Korea’s Historical Narratives	87
B.	FINDINGS AND AIMS	89
C.	FUTURE TRENDS.....	92
D.	AREAS FOR POSSIBLE CHANGE	95
	LIST OF REFERENCES.....	99
	INITIAL DISTRIBUTION LIST	111

LIST OF ACRONYMS AND ABBREVIATIONS

LDP	Liberal Democratic Party
NGO	Non-governmental Organization
ROK	The Republic of Korea
SCAP	Supreme Command of Allied Powers

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ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

I want to acknowledge my thesis advisors, Dr. Covell Meyskens and Dr. Robert Weiner. I am grateful for their tireless mentorship and personalized attention throughout this learning experience. Their effort allowed me to stay true to my goals in writing this thesis and develop a greater understanding of just some of the complexities within the East Asia region.

I also want to offer my appreciation to the rest of the National Security Affairs Department faculty. I am indebted to their professionalism and passion for teaching as I get ready to embark on a new chapter in my career. Thank you all for that you do.

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I. INTRODUCTION

Historical animosities within the Republic of Korea over Japanese atrocities committed before and during World War II continue to be evident in many aspects of East Asian relations.¹ In South Korea, issues over the estimated 56,000 to 160,000 Korean comfort women still reflect deep wounds by survivors and are prominently displayed in longstanding diplomatic rows between Japan and South Korea.² Additionally, the use of over one million Korean forced laborers throughout the Japanese empire continues to occupy the highest courts in South Korea as individual victims seek compensation from Japanese companies despite legal precedent and international treaties.³ Finally, the issue of occupation and forced cultural assimilation of Koreans into the Japanese Empire after the annexation of Korea in 1910 still presents difficulties as distrust and disdain abound, and issues of minor importance are elevated to crises of national identity.⁴

This thesis will examine the history of reconciliation between Japan and the Republic of Korea over historical animosities since World War II. It intends to investigate how reconciliation efforts have driven Japan-ROK relations, what has pushed the countries to reconcile issues related to historical atrocities, and what issues prevent deep interstate

¹ Throughout this thesis, I will use the terminology referring to the Republic of Korea and South Korea interchangeably. When appropriate, I will use the official state name or the abbreviated form ROK.

² Gabriel Jonsson, "Can the Japan-Korea Dispute on 'Comfort Women' Be Resolved?," *Korea Observer* 46, no. 3 (Autumn 2015): 489.

³ Jaewon Kim, "South Korea Court Dismisses Wartime Labor Case Against Japan Companies," *Nikkei Asia*, June 7, 2021, <https://asia.nikkei.com/Politics/International-relations/South-Korea-court-dismisses-wartime-labor-case-against-japan-companies>; Patrick Hein, "The Ambiguities of Amending Historical Injustices and Espousing a Shared Collective Memory: The WWII Forced Labour Narratives in Germany and Japan," *State Crime* 9, no. 1 (2020): 59; Hyonhee Shin, "South Korea Court Dismisses Forced Labour Case Against Japanese Firms," Reuters, June 7, 2021, <https://www.reuters.com/world/asia-pacific/south-korea-court-dismisses-forced-labour-case-against-japanese-firms-2021-06-07/>; Troy Strangarone, "After the Latest Forced Labor Court Ruling, Where Do Japan-South Korea Relations Stand?," *The Diplomat*, June 10, 2021, <https://thediplomat.com/2021/06/after-the-latest-forced-labor-court-ruling-where-do-japan-south-korea-relations-stand/>.

⁴ "South Korea and Japan's Feud Explained," *BBC News*, December 2, 2012, <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-asia-49330531>; Yoon Soongu, "The Real Background to Recent Republic of Korea-Japan Disputes," *Straits Times*, September 20, 2019, <https://www.straitstimes.com/opinion/the-real-background-to-recent-republic-of-korea-japan-disputes>.

reconciliation from occurring after seventy-seven years since the end of World War II.⁵ In this discursive study of Japanese-Korean relations, I will focus my efforts on how state-led historical narratives, national mythmaking, and the promotion of a self-other identity have influenced the reconciliation process through three postwar historical periods categorized as pre-normalization of relations (1945-1965), the Cold War after normalization (1965-1990), and the contemporary period (1990-2022). I have selected these periods to closely correspond with significant changes in the reconciliation process to simplify the structure of this thesis. Still, they are by no means intended to downplay the complexities within the history of Japan-ROK postwar relations. More so, while the study of this topic is an endeavor that would consume an entire career in academia, I intend to narrow the scope of this study to develop a greater understanding of one aspect of many that influence interstate relations and people-to-people relationships between Japan and the Republic of Korea.

A. SIGNIFICANCE OF RESEARCH

1. Japan-Republic of Korea Relations

Reconciliation efforts in Japan-ROK relations are important because they present a significant hurdle in developing strong bilateral ties between the two nations. The inability of reconciliation efforts to progress bilateral relations beyond shallow reconciliation is primarily due to the historical issues of comfort women, forced labor, and historical revisionism in official narratives, along with elevating geopolitical issues to crises of national identity that take the form of territorial disputes over the Dokdo/Takeshima islands.⁶ While Japan and South Korea share many similarities in their world views on upholding democratic political institutions and norms, as well as a commitment to a global liberal trading order, Japan-ROK relations have suffered due to the inability of either nation to develop convergence in their historical narrative and national myths despite many shared

⁵ Deep interstate reconciliation is defined by He Yinan as a framework that “contains two key components—stable peace and an amicable atmosphere—that cover both intergovernmental and people-to-people relationships. Yinan He, *The Search for Reconciliation: Sino-Japanese and German-Polish Relations Since World War II* (Cambridge; New York: Cambridge University Press, 2009), 13.

⁶ He defines shallow reconciliation as two different types of relationships between states: friction and rapprochement. For a further explanation on the three stages of reconciliation, see He, *The Search for Reconciliation*, 14–20.

qualities.⁷ In South Korea, political elites are all too willing to foment anti-Japanese and leftist ethnonationalist sentiments among South Korean citizens to gain domestic support. In Japan, apologies and efforts at reconciliation are stifled by half-hearted initiatives, inflammatory actions by government officials, revisionist narratives over Japan's colonial occupation of Korea, and a sense of "apology fatigue." However, efforts at reconciliation—such as the Murayama and Kōno statements of the 1990s and the 2015 Japan-South Korea Comfort Women Agreement between Japanese Prime Minister Abe Shinzō and Korean President Park Geun-Hye—continue to occur between the two nations and, despite setbacks, show a desire towards stronger bilateral political, economic, and security ties.⁸

2. Implications on U.S. Foreign Policy

Reconciliation efforts between Japan and South Korea also have important implications for the present and future of U.S. foreign policy in East Asia. Japan and South Korea are major alliance partners with the United States and play an essential role in providing stability to the region that aligns with U.S. interests. Conversely, China continues to be a growing competitor of the United States in the form of great power competition that has substantial effects on regional stability and direction. Therefore, reconciliation efforts between East Asian nations are critical in deepening the alliance network between Japan and South Korea and alleviating tensions between China and an international-based order for the East Asian region.

Deep interstate reconciliation would allow Japan-ROK relations to pursue closer security-related ties that currently complicate trilateral and bilateral relations as information sharing agreements have been frayed in recent years as relations cooled. Additionally, greater relations between Japan and South Korea may reduce the need for

⁷ Brad Glosserman and Scott A. Snyder, *The Japan-South Korea Identity Clash: East Asian Security and the United States* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2017), 93, 117.

⁸ "Statement by Prime Minister Tomiichi Murayama 'On the Occasion of the 50th Anniversary of the War's End,'" Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Japan, August 15, 1995, <https://www.mofa.go.jp/announce/press/pm/murayama/9508.html>; "Statement by the Chief Cabinet Secretary," Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Japan, August 4, 1993, https://www.mofa.go.jp/a_o/rp/page25e_000343.html; "'Comfort Women': Japan and South Korea Hail Agreement," *BBC News*, December 28, 2015, <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-asia-35190464>.

other Asian nations to hedge between the United States and China. A stronger Japan-ROK relationship can provide a more decisive balancing action against Chinese intentions with perceived fears of a resurgent militant Japan. Even minor, sustainable initiatives that reduce historical distrust in critical areas of Japan-ROK relations would enable greater regional stability as China continues to rise and become a greater regional and global player.

B. LITERATURE REVIEW

Three primary bodies of scholarship emerge in detailing the efforts and impacts of reconciliation between Japan and South Korea since World War II. One body of scholarship examines major drivers behind historical narratives and national mythmaking within Japan and South Korea and how narratives and myths influence the perceptions of the “self” and “other.” Another body of scholarship that consumes much of the scholarly debate examines geopolitical factors as the primary instrument influencing efforts at reconciliation. Finally, another set of scholarship concentrates on the impact of public opinion on driving reconciliation efforts through people-to-people reconciliation and its impacts on driving decisions at the intergovernmental reconciliation level.

1. Historical Narratives and National Mythmaking

Part of the reconciliation process involves former adversaries addressing past issues and reaching a mutual understanding of how to perceive and treat their shared historical narratives.⁹ Scholars argue that historical narratives are uniquely positioned within domestic politics and international relations and form the basis of interaction between groups.¹⁰ The narratives become expressions of a group’s identity and convey its collective memory and cultural identity from one generation to the next.¹¹ In the case of Japan-ROK relations, historical narratives form around atrocities committed by Japan during its

⁹ Chengqiu Wu and Fan Yang, “Reconciliation and Peace Building in International Relations: An Empirical Analysis of Five Cases,” *Chinese Political Science Review* 1, no. 4 (December 2016): 649.

¹⁰ Peter Burke, “History as Social Memory,” in *Memory: History, Culture and the Mind*, ed. Thomas Butler (Oxford; New York: Basil Blackwell, 1990), 97–113; Maurice Halbwachs, *On Collective Memory*, ed. and trans. Lewis A. Coser (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1992).

¹¹ Jan Assmann, “Collective Memory and Cultural Identity,” trans. John Czaplicka, *New German Critique*, no. 65 (Spring-Summer 1995): 133.

colonial occupation of the Korean peninsula (1910–1945) that have developed a cultural identity of victimization within Korean society.¹² Conversely, Japan has adopted a form of victim identity within its historical narrative because of its own experiences during World War II and the postwar conditions emplaced on its political and societal structure, but also because of South Korea’s virulent use of anti-Japanese sentiments to form the core of its ethnonationalist identity. Scholars that examine the impacts of historical narratives on reconciliation examine how the formulation and transmission of a nation’s collective memory and cultural identity shape the interactions between two groups. The more divergent the narratives are between the groups, the less likely they will find a mutual understanding of the shared history.

Historical narratives are also shaped and manipulated by national myths created by the state to capture the origins, identity, and purpose of a nation.¹³ This body of scholarship views national mythmaking as an important aspect of the development of collective memory by examining it through the lens of interstate peace and conflict and how falsifiable, malign national myths designed around collective ethnonationalism permeate a divide between “self” and “other.”¹⁴ National myths that intentionally construct historical narratives that emphasize a self-other conflict generally are used to justify national security policies and suppress domestic political concerns—such as regime legitimacy. This form of self-other national mythmaking is primarily the case in the growth of historical revisionist narratives and symbolic politics that seek to manipulate the nation’s

¹² Rex Li, “Identity Tensions and China-Japan-Korea Relations: Can Peace Be Maintained in North East Asia?,” in *Identity, Trust, and Reconciliation in East Asia: Dealing with Painful History to Create a Peaceful Present*, ed. Kevin P Clements, Rethinking Peace and Conflict Studies (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2018), 63.

¹³ He, *The Search for Reconciliation*, 26.

¹⁴ Liah Greenfeld and Daniel Chirot, “Nationalism and Aggression,” *Theory and Society* 23, no. 1 (1994): 79–130.

perceptions.¹⁵ Propagators of historical revisionism in both Japan and South Korea leverage ethnonationalist myths to highlight the “other” in developing their historical narratives. South Korean ethnonationalism focuses heavily on Japan’s colonial occupation of Korea, which defines the Japanese “other” as imperialistic and aggressive. The South Korean elite conflated the concepts of race and nation to recover a national identity lost at Imperial Japan’s hands by promoting a historical narrative built around anti-Japanese sentiment.¹⁶ Japan has used national myths to develop a revisionist history that whitewashes many of the atrocities committed during its imperial rule to tie Japan’s current identity to the cultural identities formed during the Meiji era. Therefore, Japan uses its myths to distinguish the Korean “other” not as a victim of Japanese Imperialism but as a benefactor of modernization alongside all other Asian races.

Another major driver for historical narratives is the *lieux de mémoire* (places of memory) that seek to symbolize national myths. In the case of Japan-ROK relations, traumatic events experienced by the Korean nation at the hands of the Japanese crystallized into *lieux de mémoire* that promoted historical narratives of Japan as a historical threat to stability in the region.¹⁷ Additionally, Japan has controversially encapsulated its own *lieux de mémoire* in such places as the Yasukuni Shrine, Yushukan war memorial, and Meiji-era industrial sites that depict a whitewashed historical narrative and aims to portray Japan less as an aggressor and more as a victim alongside other Asians from World War II. Korean examples of these *lieux de mémoire* are seen in the Bronze Girl Statue outside the Japanese Embassy in Seoul, which depicts a seated unsmiling girl next to an empty chair, symbolizing the plight of the comfort women victims of Imperial Japan and the erection of statues of Ahn Jung-guen, the Korean national who assassinated Itō Hirobumi, as a national

¹⁵ Stuart J. Kaufman, *Modern Hatreds: The Symbolic Politics of Ethnic War*, Cornell Studies in Security Affairs (New York: Cornell University Press, 2001); Jin-kyung Lee, “Differently Politicizing Literature from the Authoritarian Era—the State, Antistate Leftist Nationalism, and Aesthetics,” in *Revisiting Minjung: New Perspectives on the Cultural History of 1980s South Korea*, ed. Sunyoung Park (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2019), 275–87; Ji Young Kim, “Symbolic Politics, the History Problem, and the Japan-South Korea Security Relationship During the Post-Cold War Period” (PhD diss., University of Delaware, 2011).

¹⁶ Glosserman and Snyder, *The Japan-South Korea Identity Clash*, 62–63.

¹⁷ For a discussion on *Lieux de Mémoire*, see Nora, “Between Memory and History: *Les Lieux de Mémoire*,” 19.

hero.¹⁸ South Korea has also used *lieux de mémoire* to internationalize its historical narratives by enshrining the plight of *zainichi* Koreans in Japan along the outskirts of the Hiroshima Peace Memorial Park and by emplacing copies of the Bronze Girl Statue in culturally sensitive areas around the world.

Education also plays a vital role in reconciliation efforts as historical narratives influence nationalism within a population.¹⁹ In the case of Japanese reconciliation efforts, national educational programs and media serve as a persistent issue that exacerbates efforts at reconciliation with South Korea as a disproportionately small minority of educational materials and textbooks promote right-wing ethnonationalist narratives on historical issues. These materials incited strong reactions by Koreans despite their insignificant impact on altering the widely circulated use of educational materials portraying critical views of Japan's militancy during the 20th Century. Conversely, Japan has protested South Korea's use of its anti-Japanese ethnonationalist narratives within its educational materials and curriculums.²⁰ While efforts have been made to improve their understanding of historical narratives—mainly through joint research projects—national education programs have yet to adopt findings that would alleviate misperceptions over historical issues because of politicized narratives and myths. The Japan-ROK joint research project halted in 2005 after Prime Minister Abe Shinzō revived a panel in Japan that promoted revisionist narratives in Japanese education that minimized the aggressive nature of Japanese imperialism during the late 19th and early 20th Centuries.²¹ The joint research project was resumed in 2007, but the sensitivities surrounding national education programs remain a significant influence in the reconciliation process between Japan and South Korea.

¹⁸ Leo T. S. Ching, *Anti-Japan: The Politics of Sentiment in Postcolonial East Asia* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2019), 75.

¹⁹ Yida Zhai, "Identity, Contact, and the Reduction of Mutual Distrust: A Survey of Chinese and Japanese Youth," *The Pacific Review* 30, no. 1 (January 2, 2017): 104.

²⁰ Sang-Hun Choe, "South Korea's New Leader Abolishes State-Issued History Textbooks," *New York Times*, May 12, 2017, <https://www.nytimes.com/2017/05/12/world/asia/south-korea-history-textbooks-moon.html>; "7th-Japan-South Korea Joint Opinion Poll," Genron NPO and East Asia Institute, 2019, 23, <https://www.genron-npo.net/en/7th-Japan-South%20KoreaJointOpinionPoll.pdf>.

²¹ David McNeill, "Resisting the Historical Deniers," *Japan Times*, November 23, 2013, <https://www.japantimes.co.jp/news/2013/11/23/national/politics-diplomacy/resisting-the-historical-deniers/>.

According to the scholarship, little progress has been made in reconciling divergent historical narratives despite attempts by both states to develop a shared historical understanding. In Japan and South Korea, many academics support the claims of Japanese aggression within East Asia before and during World War II. However, there is still resistance within the parts of the public to adopt these perceptions of “self” and “other” because of the prominence of politicized ethnonationalist narratives within Japan and South Korea’s official historical narratives and national myths.²² Therefore, without addressing divergent narratives and negative perceptions, Japan and South Korea cannot achieve deep interstate reconciliation.

2. Geopolitical Factors

The second body of scholarship that studies reconciliation efforts examine the major geopolitical factors that have influenced the reconciliation process. Much of the literature exploring postwar reconciliation efforts through geopolitics does so along with variations of realist theory that emphasize balance of power and balance of threat theory as causal mechanisms.²³ While many scholars emphasize the importance of historical narratives within the reconciliation process, they generally argue that they take on a secondary role to security concerns that pose existential threats to Japanese and South Korean sovereignty.

Realist scholars portray post-World War II geopolitical factors through the context of the Cold War, with Japan-ROK relations being heavily influenced by the United States.²⁴ The normalization of relations between Japan and South Korea primarily

²² Kim, “Symbolic Politics, the History Problem, and the Japan-South Korea Security Relationship During the Post-Cold War Period”; Cheol Hee Park, “South Korean Views of Japan: A Polarizing Split in Coverage,” *Joint U.S.-Korea Academic Studies* 31 (2020).

²³ He, *The Search for Reconciliation*; Michael J. Green and Benjamin L. Self, “Japan’s Changing China Policy: From Commercial Liberalism to Reluctant Realism,” *Survival* 38, no. 2 (June 1996): 42; Kei Koga, “The Rise of China and Japan’s Balancing Strategy: Critical Junctures and Policy Shifts in the 2010s,” *Journal of Contemporary China* 25, no. 101 (September 2, 2016): 779–81; Tom Phuong Le, “Negotiating in Good Faith: Overcoming Legitimacy Problems in the Japan-South Korea Reconciliation Process,” *The Journal of Asian Studies* 78, no. 3 (August 2019): 624–26.

²⁴ Cha, “What Drives Korea-Japan Security Relations?,” 78–80; Wu and Yang, “Reconciliation and Peace Building in International Relations,” 655.

occurred at the behest of the United States. Before the signing of the Treaty on Basic Relations between Japan and South Korea in 1965, the two states maintained a period of nonreconciliation. They spent fourteen years laboring over the treaty conditions.²⁵ The United States pressured Japan and South Korea into finalizing the treaty due to the growing threat of Soviet and Chinese communist influence and the need to strengthen its U.S.-led alliance network. Once Japan and South Korea reached the state of shallow reconciliation with the normalization of relations, other efforts at reconciliation were able to emerge as diplomatic ties were rekindled, and Japan's economic prosperity was able to be shared with South Korea and through loans and development assistance.

The realist scholarship highlights the primacy of geopolitical factors in the reconciliation efforts as security relationships initially drove the transition from a state of nonreconciliation towards a state of shallow reconciliation. Realists argue that historical animosities and their inclusion in narratives were quelled partly by the need for greater security in East Asia.²⁶ They argue that Japan and South Korea's relationship is predicated mainly on shared security threats and economic interests. When either of these interests is not aligned, relations between the two states suffer. Before the East-West détente, Japan and South Korea shared a common threat from the communist bloc countries and a mutual fear of U.S. abandonment that pushed the two governments to improve relations through diplomacy to counter existential threats despite an equally shared mistrust of each other. However, when the communist threat began to fade in Japan through normalizing relations with the People's Republic of China, Japan's and South Korea's relations cooled, and reconciliation efforts stalled. Scholars look at the necessity of the Park Chung-hee regime

²⁵ Wu and Yang, "Reconciliation and Peace Building in International Relations," 655; Oda, "The Normalization of Relations between Japan and the Republic of Korea," 35–40; Le, "Negotiating in Good Faith," 633.

²⁶ Il Hyun Cho, "Downsizing Hegemony: Alliance, Domestic Politics, and American Retrenchment in East Asia, 1969–2017," *Asian Security* 14, no. 3 (2018): 246–62; Kyungwon Choi, "Japan's Foreign Policy toward Korean Peninsula in the Détente Era: An Attempt at Multilayered Policy" (working paper, North Korea International Documentation Project, Wilson Center, November 2017), <https://www.wilsoncenter.org/publication/japans-foreign-policy-toward-korean-peninsula-the-detente-era-attempt-multilayered>; Carter J. Eckert, "Authoritarianism and Protest, 1948–1990," in *Korea Old and New: A History*, ed. Carter J. Eckert et al. (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1991), 349–87; Michael J. Green, *Japan's Reluctant Realism: Foreign Policy Challenges in an Era of Uncertain Power* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2003); Green and Self, "Japan's Changing China Policy"; Bae-ho Hahn, "Korea-Japan Relations in the 1970s," *Asian Survey* 20, no. 11 (1980): 1087–97.

to maintain positive relations with Japan over the growing public perceptions of neo-colonialist policies by Japan and the United States, which emphasize the determinant impact of geopolitics on Japan-ROK relations.

The realist argument also supports the re-emergence of historical narratives only after the Cold War because the loss of a common threat shared between Japan and South Korea no longer provided the *raison d'être* for a collective security arrangement. Shifting alliance concerns, suppression of deep-seated animosities derived from Japanese atrocities, and the re-emergence of territorial disputes after the Cold War showcase how geopolitical factors influenced by balance of power and balance of threat concerns had an influential role in promoting interstate reconciliation to improve bilateral relations.²⁷ Scholars point to the nuclear threat emanating from North Korea that continues to pose the greatest existential threat to South Korea and Japan today as a reason for Japan, South Korea, and the U.S.-alliance network to remain close security partners.²⁸ Additionally, scholars point to growing security concerns in Japan and South Korea about China's rise which has brought shared security concerns back into focus for the two states to maintain closer economic and security relations despite growing public discourse over historical animosities and shared negative perceptions.

3. The Role of Public Opinion

The study of public opinion addresses the people-to-people interaction as an essential part of the reconciliation process. This scholarship complements the literature on historical narratives and national myths as public opinion presents a different perspective towards reconciliation as historical narratives form the basis of popular sentiment and identity. Specifically, public opinion examines how the "other" is perceived and is viewed as a significant driver in the transition of reconciliation efforts, either forward or backward.

²⁷ Michael J. Green and Zack Cooper, eds., *Postwar Japan: Growth, Security, and Uncertainty Since 1945* (Lanham; Boulder; New York: Rowman & Littlefield, 2017); Alexandra Sakaki and Junya Nishino, "Japan's South Korea Predicament," *International Affairs* 94, no. 4 (2018): 735–54.

²⁸ Emma Chanlett-Avery et al., *Japan-U.S. Relations: Issues for Congress*, CRS Report No. RL33436 (Washington, DC: Congressional Research Service, 2021), <https://crsreports.congress.gov/product/pdf/RL/RL33436>; Green and Cooper, *Postwar Japan*.

Shifts in overall public opinion typically mirror the warming or cooling of relations between nations.²⁹ Much of the literature on public opinion draws its conclusions from opinion surveys that examine history, culture, identity, and perceptions that correlate to historical narratives prevalent at the time of the surveys. Scholars can glean insights and trends on shifts in either public opinion or revisionist historical narratives and how they drive perceptions impacting people-to-people reconciliation efforts.

In a recent joint public opinion poll conducted by the Genron NPO and East Asia Institute in 2019 between Japan-ROK relations, over 76 percent of the polled South Koreans view Japan unfavorably due to it not properly reflecting on its history of colonialism in Korea. Of those surveyed, 20 percent viewed the comfort women issue as a reason to view Japan unfavorably.³⁰ In contrast, over 50 percent of Japanese polled viewed South Korea unfavorably because they continue to criticize Japan over historical issues. Despite formal and informal apologies and attempts to address historical animosities by Japan with South Korea over historical atrocities, the levels of acceptance by the South Korean public remain relatively low due to the promotion of anti-Japanese narratives.³¹

Scholars using polling data examine how historical narratives have different effects on societies primarily due to how the narratives and myths are controlled by the government or the public. Specifically, governments use their ability to manipulate historical narratives to influence the emotions of their people and the perceptions of the intentions of others.³² Public opinion helps shape foreign policy and legitimizes a government's actions. However, this varies depending on the political arrangements of a country. South Korea, for example, was an authoritarian regime until democratization in 1987 that exercised firmer control over information shared domestically and internationally

²⁹ Glosserman and Snyder, *The Japan-South Korea Identity Clash*, 14–17.

³⁰ Genron NPO and East Asia Institute, “7th-Japan-South Korea Joint Opinion Poll.”

³¹ Genron NPO and East Asia Institute; Genron NPO, “Japan-China Public Opinion Survey 2019,” Genron NPO, 2019, <https://www.genron-npo.net/en/archives/191024.pdf>.

³² He, *The Search for Reconciliation*, 30–31; Roger Dale Petersen, *Understanding Ethnic Violence: Fear, Hatred, and Resentment in Twentieth-Century Eastern Europe* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002), 17–19; Kaufman, *Modern Hatreds*, 16,29-30.

and limited the individual freedoms of speech and press.³³ Public opinion in South Korea was strictly managed by the state, which influenced public opinion towards its policy measures, granting it a sense of legitimacy and control over the emotions of the public. However, since democratization in South Korea, and earlier in postwar Japan, political elites tend to cater more to the public opinion on matters related to historical animosities and reconciliation efforts to garner domestic support.³⁴ In these instances, public opinion takes on a more independent role that is no longer controlled by the state's historical narratives and national myths and can lead to the reformulation of a state's collective memory.

Scholarship that surveys public opinion also draws a connection between the emotions and intent of a people and their government. This is predominantly displayed in the efforts of Japan and South Korea to develop a common historical narrative to deepen reconciliation. In the 1980s, controversies over changes to the portrayal of history in school textbooks in Japan and the official visit to the Yasukuni Shrine by Prime Minister Koizumi Yoshihiro led to an international controversy with South Korea.³⁵ The controversy highlighted the divergent historical narratives within Japan and more importantly, in South Korea, as the Chun regime was revising its narrative to support the growing democratization movement. Scholars argue that Chun Doo-hwan saw the textbook controversy as a way to legitimize his regime and promote his economic aid demands on Japan by not compromising with Japan on neglecting its responsibility for the atrocities committed during the colonial occupation of Korea.³⁶ This shift from the dominant policy during the Park era was an attempt by Chun to enhance his legitimacy after his regime's violent suppression of the *minjung* movement during the Kwangju incident.³⁷ The

³³ Scott Snyder, *South Korea at the Crossroads: Autonomy and Alliance in an Era of Rival Powers* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2020), 43–52.

³⁴ Ji Young Kim, "Escaping the Vicious Cycle: Symbolic Politics and History Disputes Between South Korea and Japan," *Asian Perspective* 38, no. 1 (2014): 31–60.

³⁵ He, *The Search for Reconciliation*, 211.

³⁶ He, 214.

³⁷ Michael J. Seth, *A Concise History of Modern Korea: From the Late Nineteenth Century to the Present*, Third (Lanham: Rowman & Littlefield, 2019); Victor D. Cha, *Alignment Despite Antagonism: The United States-Korea-Japan Security Triangle* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1999).

handling of the textbook controversies and Yasukuni Shrine visits in the 1980s were real issues that bred resentment among the Korean *minjung* movement and served to strengthen divergent historical narratives in the national myths of South Korea. The Chun regime's use of the anti-Japanese narratives to shore up domestic support also helped to solidify the pro-democracy narratives founded on the anti-Japanese sentiments that were suppressed for so long under the Park regime.

The 2000s saw a revitalization of efforts to improve public opinion perceptions over historical issues through joint historical research committees between Japan and South Korea. The effort by the Japan-ROK committee to solve the historical narrative issue was met with pressure by both politicians and the public. Specifically, Japanese researchers were inundated with emails from Japanese citizens that disapproved of their work on the project due to common misunderstandings of the project's goals that were peddled by right-wing Japanese media and politicians to demoralize the researchers.³⁸ Attempts to reconcile divergent historical narratives by changing the public's perceptions is a positive step towards deepening reconciliation. However, challenges remain in developing common understandings over the more contentious points that drive divergent narratives and hamper deeper people-to-people reconciliation. While governments have an important factor in controlling historical narratives and national myths that influence public opinion and the emotions and perceived intentions of others, scholars argue that governments are also constrained in developing converging narratives because of the politicization of narratives within society. Therefore, public opinion influences political elite decision-making, which impacts reconciliation efforts at both the intergovernmental level and in people-to-people relationships.

C. POTENTIAL EXPLANATIONS

The above literature review discussed three scholarly arguments about the significant factors influencing reconciliation efforts between Japan-ROK and Japan-China. The first argument examines historical narratives, national mythmaking, and promoting a

³⁸ Alexandra Sakaki, "Japanese-South Korean Textbook Talks: The Necessity of Political Leadership," *Pacific Affairs* 85, no. 2 (2012): 263–85.

self-other identity as the major factor. The second argument claims geopolitical factors brought on by changes in the regional great power relations are the primary factor in reconciliation efforts. The third argument sees perceptions of self-other identities formed and promoted within public opinion as a major factor in reconciliation efforts in East Asia. Below is a short synopsis of the causal relationships between the major factors from each scholarly argument and how they influence reconciliation efforts between Japan and South Korea.

1. Hypothesis 1: The failure to achieve deep interstate reconciliation in Japan-ROK relations is primarily due to divergent historical narratives and national myths.

This hypothesis maps a causal relationship between the historical narratives and national myths created within each state and their ability to achieve a deeper level of reconciliation after a traumatic event. The more divergent or combative the historical narratives are between each other, the more difficult it is to achieve post-conflict interstate reconciliation. The creation of historical narratives and national mythmaking by a state is designed to develop and control a national identity that permeates into domestic and foreign politics, as well as public opinion that drives the perceptions of self and other. Scholarship that supports this hypothesis would point to periods of bilateral relations centered on developing more positive and congruent narratives as preconditions to further cooperation or where they emerge in public discourse and interstate diplomacy when bilateral relations cool.

2. Hypothesis 2: The failure to achieve deep interstate reconciliation in Japan-ROK relations is primarily due to changing great power relations in the region.

The second hypothesis states that geopolitical factors brought on by changes in great power relations in the region are the primary influences on post-conflict interstate reconciliation. This hypothesis claims that geopolitical factors have a determinant impact on reconciliation efforts. When geopolitical factors shift, so too do interstate reconciliation efforts. The scholarship that supports this thesis primarily resides in realist theory as states

are playing a zero-sum game in an anarchical international system, and interstate relations are based on temporary arrangements and alliances.

3. Hypothesis 3: The failure to achieve deep interstate reconciliation in Japan-ROK relations is primarily due to the perceptions of each other in public opinion.

The third hypothesis is similar to the first hypothesis in that the identities created by the states through historical narratives and national mythmaking influence public opinion but differs in that public opinion can achieve independence from the control of a state and become a major factor in the reconciliation process. The degree to which public opinion becomes independent of state control is dependent on the form of government within the state. This hypothesis would posit that within a democratic state where public opinion has guaranteed rights, such as the freedom of speech, public opinion is more independent of state control and has more influence over the reconciliation process. In a more authoritarian state where the public has fewer individual freedoms, public opinion is more dependent on state control, with the important caveat that the state may lose control of public opinion when non-state actors control the direction of reconciliation efforts through public protest. Therefore, this hypothesis would suggest that in reconciliation efforts where one or more states are democratic, public opinion and the perceptions of the other will be a major factor in the reconciliation between states.

The three hypotheses above each provide a comprehensive and detailed potential explanation of the major factors driving reconciliation efforts between Japan and South Korea since World War II. While one factor may better explain the influences driving reconciliation during a certain period of history, each of the three factors identified had an important and often complementary role in shaping intergovernmental and people-to-people reconciliation efforts between the two nations. Taken holistically, Japan-ROK reconciliation efforts have been strongly influenced by historical narratives and national myths, geopolitical factors, and public opinion.

Since the scope of examining the relationship between the three hypotheses over a period spanning nearly 85 years quickly escapes the purpose of this thesis, I have chosen

to focus my efforts on just one hypothesis to explore the influences at a more granular level. Therefore, I will focus on the first hypothesis and the role of historical narratives and national myths in developing the government-to-government and people-to-people relationships that influence reconciliation efforts. My reasoning for focusing on this hypothesis is because historical narratives remain a significant obstacle in achieving a state of deep reconciliation between Japan and South Korea today. If this hypothesis is correct, the data would suggest that when historical narratives converged or were non-combative, reconciliation progressed towards deeper reconciliation and vice versa. The data would also suggest that divergence in historical narratives and national myths would negatively impact the reconciliation process and relations between states would worsen due to a divergence in historical legacies.

Therefore, in examining the origins, changes, and impacts of historical narratives and national myths, this thesis attempts to test the hypothesis as to why the two states have not been able to achieve deep interstate reconciliation since World War II despite many shared qualities and characteristics, as well as within the changing geopolitical environment. While the other factors have been instrumental in Japanese and South Korean reconciliation efforts, the longevity of the impacts of historical narratives and national myths on the collective memory of a nation allows this thesis to map one major explanation across the entire historical period to help understand where and why certain narratives emerged even if they were not a significant influence during that time. Much of the literature that examines the other hypotheses is fenced into periods that are much shorter in length or end at clear historical periods. Those that argue for the importance of geopolitical factors point toward the period that defined the Cold War, while those that emphasize public opinion tend to begin after the democratization of South Korea because that is when reliable data became available. This thesis attempts to bridge that gap.

D. RESEARCH DESIGN

The thesis will follow a chronological review of the three historical periods: Chapter II, Pre-normalization Period (1945–1965); Chapter III, The Cold War after Normalization (1965–1990); and Chapter IV, The Contemporary Period (1990–2022).

Within each chapter, I explore the impacts of historical narratives and national myths on domestic and foreign policy within Japan and South Korea, respectively. Keeping the case study within the intended scope, I will be drawing significantly from a base of secondary sources for the historical periods covering the pre-normalization of relations and Cold War periods and using a mixture of secondary sources and primary sources for the contemporary period to incorporate the most comprehensive body of research possible on the topic. At the end of each historical period, I will examine how the country-specific themes lead to greater narrative convergence or divergence and how that impacted government-to-government and people-to-people reconciliation efforts.

Chapter V will conclude the thesis. It will summarize the changes to historical narratives and myths in Japan and South Korea since the end of World War II. It will summarize the aims of this thesis and the key findings that either contributed to deeper reconciliation or stalled reconciliation efforts. From these findings and themes, I will introduce potential future trends based on how historical narratives and national myths have influenced Japan-ROK relations and what the expectations for future reconciliation efforts may look like. Lastly, the chapter will close with potential areas where changes may lead to deeper reconciliation between Japan and South Korea.

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II. PRE-NORMALIZATION PERIOD (1945–1965)

The end of World War II brought about immense changes to the East Asian region. Not only was the world witness to the power of the nuclear bomb, but the Nuclear Age was ushered in by the emerging great powers. Empires were dissolved, and borders were redrawn into states that did not exist before 1945. Both Japan and its former colony, the newly formed Republic of Korea, felt the great powers' direct effects as U.S. forces occupied both states during the early postwar period. As both Japan and South Korea turned to rebuild from the war, their governments and societies had to contend with the profound changes to their collective memory and how they would redefine their identity. After Japan's sovereignty was returned in 1951 under the San Francisco Peace Treaty, Japan and South Korea began negotiations to normalize diplomatic relations and transition from a state of non-reconciliation to shallow interstate reconciliation.³⁹ Japan and South Korea signed the Korea-Japan Normalization Treaty on 22 June 1965, marking the transition from nonreconciliation to shallow reconciliation in government-to-government relations. However, while the Japanese and South Korean Governments achieved shallow reconciliation under the acute influence of the United States, people-to-people reconciliation efforts remained in a state of non-reconciliation primarily because the divergent postwar historical narratives and national myths perpetrated feelings of mutual distrust and fear that solidified during the lengthy and tumultuous normalization process.

During this period, newly formed historical narratives and national myths under the South Korean authoritarian leader Syngman Rhee showed little desire to develop a shared narrative with their former colonial ruler, Japan.⁴⁰ Under Rhee, South Korea was a new nation that needed to quickly establish a national identity to survive the Korean peninsula's geopolitical turmoil during the early postwar period. The narratives and myths developed under Rhee tied Korean ethnonationalism to a strong state (*minjok* and *han*) that would overcome the historically entrenched identity of victimization at the hands of more

³⁹ Victor D. Cha, "Bridging the Gap: The Strategic Context of the 1965 Korea-Japan Normalization Treaty," *Korean Studies* 20 (1996): 124.

⁴⁰ Seth, *A Concise History of Modern Korea*, 105, 188–89.

prominent regional actors in Korean myths. Following the war, Rhee dismantled the remaining vestiges of Japanese colonialism in Korea by replacing them with Korean ethnonationalist symbols and *lieux de mémoire* that elevated anti-colonial Korean actors to mythical status and cemented the anti-Japanese sentiments widely shared within Korea's populace. Additionally, education provided the state with the means to inculcate a collective memory and cultural identity within the population writ large as South Korean literacy grew three-fold. Yet, South Korea's authoritarian regimes were under immense pressure to balance its anti-Japanese ethnonational narratives and myths domestically with the influence of the U.S.-led alliance network applying pressure on the state to normalize relations with Japan that created conflict between the authoritarian government and the Korean people over their widely shared negative sentiment towards Japan.

Likewise, Japan was recovering from the devastation brought about by World War II. Under the direct influence of the United States and the occupation forces under the Supreme Command of Allied Powers (SCAP), Japan had to re-define its identity as a nation away from the prewar ultranationalism that defined the Japanese Empire.⁴¹ Japanese narratives quickly adopted a victim identity that separated the Japanese masses from the prewar ultranationalist political elites blamed for leading Japan into war. Under Imperial Japan, the Japanese people who firmly believed in the superior Japanese race found solace in the new narratives that painted them as victims alongside other Asian nations as they tried to recover their livelihoods from the devastation of war. This was evident in the *lieux de mémoire* established after the war, which highlighted Japan's victimization while neglecting to address the victimization of other Asians at the hands of the Japanese. However, as the postwar Japanese government had to contend with its imperial past in rebuilding a nation, many of the prewar influences and political elites resurfaced in Japan's political sphere under SCAP helped shape a narrative that downplayed Japan's agency in the war and blinded its society to the impacts of its harsh colonial policies on the Koreans. Therefore, prewar prejudices and negative perceptions of Koreans within Japanese society

⁴¹ Andrew Gordon, *A Modern History of Japan: From Tokugawa Times to the Present* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2020), 232–35; Glosserman and Snyder, *The Japan-South Korea Identity Clash*, 22.

persisted, leading to discriminatory policies against Koreans who remained in Japan after the war. Japan's postwar narratives promoting victimization and apathy towards understanding the plight of many Koreans because of prewar negative perceptions accentuated a superiority-inferiority complex within Japan, which had consequential effects during the negotiations process and solidified Japan's postwar narratives and myths within its society.

Examining the historical narratives and national myths during the period before the normalization of relations identifies many complex and competing factors hindering reconciliation efforts. With the height of the Cold War dominating the global geopolitical landscape, the United States saw the urgent need to bring its two biggest Asian allies closer together to assist in containing the rise of communism in the region.⁴² However, the inability of both Japan and South Korea to reconcile differences and normalize relations for fourteen years highlights that their newly formed historical narratives and national myths were impactful in establishing divergent narratives during this period. The inability of either state to establish the mechanisms necessary to reconcile with their shared past during the normalization process was largely due to the divergence in the postwar narratives and national myths that fostered victimization identities and negative perceptions of the other.

This chapter will examine how the development of the narratives and myths that defined the postwar identities of victimization in Japan and South Korea impacted efforts at reconciliation at both the intergovernmental and people-to-people levels. First, it will examine how the formulation of the victim identities and the influence of the United States on the development of such narratives had within the postwar environment. For Japan, this prevented the nation from coming to terms with perceiving itself as an aggressor nation. For South Korea, this meant an outpouring of anti-Japanese emotions to form its national identity. Next, this chapter will examine how postwar national educational systems and new *lieux de mémoire* crystallized the victim identities in both nations and solidified divergent narratives. Finally, this chapter will examine how public sentiments in both

⁴² Cha, "Bridging the Gap," 143; Snyder, *South Korea at the Crossroads*, 14.

countries were highly influenced by prewar stereotypes and negative perceptions exacerbated by postwar discriminatory policies in Japan and by a rise in public protest under South Korea's authoritarian regimes.

A. JAPAN

The occupation of Japan by U.S. forces concluded with the Treaty of San Francisco in 1951 and began the longstanding U.S.-Japan alliance that has dictated much of Japan's postwar identity development and reconciliation efforts. The signing of the San Francisco Peace Treaty returned Japan to the international community, allowing Japan's government to establish relations with foreign nations. The historical narratives and national myths that came out of Japan during this early postwar period were heavily influenced by the policies established by the U.S. occupation forces under SCAP. They challenged Japan's ability to reconcile with its recent past and its ability to normalize relations within the new geopolitical landscape of East Asia.

1. U.S. Influence on Japan's 'New' Postwar Identity

Under SCAP, Emperor Hirohito remained in place—albeit downgraded from absolute monarch to a “symbol of the State and the unity of the people”—as well as much of the Japanese governing bodies, political parties, and senior officials.⁴³ The pragmatic decision by SCAP to absolve the emperor from his role in Japan's prewar ethnonationalist fanaticism challenged Japan's new postwar identity because it kept his symbolic importance within Japan's right-wing ethnonationalist identity alive. Yet, after adopting the Peace Constitution in 1946, Japan embarked upon a new narrative that portrayed Japan as a peaceful state that renounced its right to use force for belligerent purposes.⁴⁴ Through this narrative, Japan cast off the atrocities its imperial forces committed during its colonial rule in Korea as policies and actions by a small group of radical militarists who manipulated

⁴³ Boyu Chen, “Decolonizing Japan–South Korea Relations: Hegemony, the Cold War, and the Subaltern State,” *Asian Perspective* 44, no. 2 (Spring 2020): 241; Gordon, *A Modern History of Japan*, 237–41.

⁴⁴ “The Constitution of Japan,” 1946, https://japan.kantei.go.jp/constitution_and_government_of_japan/constitution_e.html.

the state into committing atrocities during its imperial rule.⁴⁵ This established narrative whitewashed much of Japan's history and allowed the identity of the victim to become Japan's postwar self-identity.⁴⁶

Japan's education system following the end of the occupation of U.S. forces in 1952 resembled much of its prewar education system. However, during the occupation, SCAP instituted changes in the Ministry of Education to remove lessons on war and loyalty to the state and replace them with teachings on peace and democracy.⁴⁷ This policy alleviated the fears of inculcating a new wave of ultra-militarist ethnonationalism, but it also indirectly censored the content that fed into the whitewashing of past Japanese atrocities. After the occupation ended in 1952, the Japanese Government re-centralized control over the education content being taught in schools and replaced elected school boards with appointed members.⁴⁸ This further established the historical narratives in Japanese education as many institutions focused on developing workers for the growing economy instead of coming to terms with Japan's imperial past and how it viewed its former colonies.⁴⁹

Japan's adoption of a self-identity as a victim did little to help it address many of the prevalent issues before the war, particularly its view of its former colonial possessions as inferior to their own.⁵⁰ The "haughtiness" of Japan's superiority complex was exemplified before the negotiations to normalize relations with South Korea in 1949 when a Japanese foreign ministry official was quoted as saying, "[t]he Japanese have always considered the Koreans to be an inferior race...that this feeling on the part of the Japanese that Koreans are inferior to a great extent motivates Japanese uncertainty and hostility in

⁴⁵ Linus Hagström, "The 'Abnormal' State: Identity, Norm/Exception and Japan," *European Journal of International Relations* 21, no. 1 (March 1, 2015): 129.

⁴⁶ Karl Gustafsson, "How to Make Former Aggressors Repent Through Shaming and Praising: The Case of Sino-Japanese Relations," *Global Affairs* 1, no. 3 (May 27, 2015): 318; He, *The Search for Reconciliation*, 118.

⁴⁷ Gordon, *A Modern History of Japan*, 237–38.

⁴⁸ Gordon, 244.

⁴⁹ Gordon, 259–60; Chong-do Hah, "National Image and the Japanese-Korean Conflict, 1951–1965," *Studies on Asia* 1 (1967): 35.

⁵⁰ Cha, "Bridging the Gap," 126.

regard to the Koreans.”⁵¹ This sentiment carried on throughout the negotiations to normalize relations as evidenced by the remarks of the leader of the Japanese delegation, Kubota Kenichirō, in 1953, stating that Japan was justified in occupying Korea because if Japan did not, then either China or Russia would have.⁵² Japan’s portrayal of Korea during this period highlighted the whitewashed historical narrative in Japan that its colonial rule over Korea was akin to bringing prosperity to a primitive society and not one where forced cultural assimilation and brutality were hallmarks of the period.⁵³

2. Emergence of Victim Identity Through Places of Memory and Myths

Japan’s efforts at promoting a victim identity became enshrined in the national myths surrounding Japan’s atomic victimization during this period. The Hiroshima and Nagasaki bombings and the Lucky Dragon Incident,⁵⁴ reinforced Japan’s exclusive identity as victims of nuclear weapons in the new nuclear era and among growing Cold War tensions between nuclear powers.⁵⁵ Hiroshima became a *lieux de mémoire* that captured Japan’s past as a victim of war and its commitment to the future as a pacifist nation.⁵⁶ The creation of the Hiroshima Peace Memorial Museum and Park in 1955, alongside the other various memorials present on park grounds, served as a place to remember the atrocities of nuclear war and reaffirmed Japan’s commitment to world peace. However, the narratives represented at Hiroshima also enshrined the national myths that

⁵¹ Cha, 126.

⁵² Chen, “Decolonizing Japan–South Korea Relations,” 244.

⁵³ Cha, *Alignment Despite Antagonism*, 24.

⁵⁴ The Lucky Dragon Incident involved the Japanese fishing vessel named Lucky Dragon 5 that was exposed to the nuclear fallout from the United States’ hydrogen thermonuclear bomb test, codenamed “Castle Bravo” at Bikini Atoll on 1 March 1954. The incident gained national attention within a few days of the crew’s return to Japan after they exhibited signs of radiation poisoning. The death of the vessel’s radio operator, Aikichi Kuboyama, from the radiation poisoning in September created a surge in the grassroots ban-the-bomb movement that became a bipartisan effort to protest nuclear weapons. See Orr, *The Victim as Hero*, 47–58. Additionally, the Lucky Dragon Incident would spurn anti-nuclear sentiment in the original Godzilla film that would become a mainstay in Japanese popular culture. See Orr, *The Victim as Hero*, 199n.

⁵⁵ James J. Orr, *The Victim as Hero: Ideologies of Peace and National Identity in Postwar Japan* (Honolulu: University of Hawai’i Press, 2001), 43.

⁵⁶ Orr, 37.

left out Japanese culpability for the war.⁵⁷ Similar to other efforts by SCAP and the Japanese Government to whitewash past Japanese aggression in the national narrative, Hiroshima became a place to obfuscate Japan's agency in the war while promoting itself as a new nation committed to peace.⁵⁸ These efforts to disassociate Japan's aggressive actions with its identity of victimization would negatively impact the authenticity of Japan's efforts to reconcile with its past and mar Hiroshima's place as a universal *lieux de mémoire* against nuclear war. The *lieux de mémoire* of Hiroshima would entrench the Japanese identity of victimization and become a place of contention in Japan-ROK relations as Japan's efforts to promote itself as a nation of peace would come at the expense of reconciling its past colonial actions with the Korean victims of the atomic bombs.

3. Prewar Perceptions of Koreans on Discriminatory Postwar Narratives

The postwar rebuilding of Japan's image reinforced the public's perception of its former colonial possession. Japan's projection of the Korean 'other' manifested itself into viewing the entire Korean race as weak-spirited, low in cultural standards, toadyish, cleverly selfish, exceedingly vindictive, and lacking the desire to work—to name a few of the pejorative generalizations stated by Japanese politicians and public servants shortly after the war.⁵⁹ The general attitude of the Japanese public towards Koreans worsened after World War II mainly due to nearly 600,000 Koreans that remained in Japan after four years of repatriation efforts by the United States.⁶⁰ In 1947, when SCAP established the alien registration system in Japan, the Koreans that remained—known as *zainichi* Koreans—accounted for over 93 percent of all registered foreigners in Japan.⁶¹ Of that group, nearly 80 percent expressed the desire for repatriation.⁶² However, repatriation slowed in 1948

⁵⁷ Benedict Giomo, "The Myth of the Vanquished: The Hiroshima Peace Memorial Museum," *American Quarterly* 55, no. 4 (2003): 714.

⁵⁸ Orr, *The Victim as Hero*, 64–65, 70.

⁵⁹ Hah, "National Image and the Japanese-Korean Conflict," 34.

⁶⁰ Chong-Sik Lee, *Japan and Korea: The Political Dimension* (Stanford: Hoover Institution Press, 1985), 31.

⁶¹ Bumsoo Kim, "Bringing Class Back in: The Changing Basis of Inequality and the Korean Minority in Japan," *Ethnic & Racial Studies* 31, no. 5 (July 2008): 875.

⁶² Kim, 876.

after North and South Korea declared separate governments over Korea and ground to a halt in 1950 at the onset of the Korean War. Of the remaining *zainichi* Koreans, discriminatory policies first established by SCAP and then by the Japanese Government in 1952 stripped the *zainichi* Koreans of a legal nationality status in Japan that would remain in place until the signing of the Basic Treaty in 1965.⁶³

The Japanese public's prejudice towards the *zainichi* Koreans was widespread in public and private sectors. An example of widespread discrimination can be seen in the unemployment rate of the *zainichi* Koreans in Japan during the early 1950s. In 1952, 7.8 percent of the *zainichi* Korean population was considered unemployed, nearly fourteen times higher than the national average.⁶⁴ Additionally, unemployment led to higher crime rates within the *zainichi* Korean community that negatively impacted Japanese perceptions of Koreans.⁶⁵ These prejudices, along with the discriminatory legal policies in Japan, accentuated the importance of the immediate repatriation of the *zainichi* Korean population as one of Japan's main negotiation points with South Korea in 1951.

This level of a superiority-inferiority complex between the Japanese and Koreans heavily influenced the Japanese narratives taught in its educational systems. Teachers noted that students' beliefs about Korea continued to be shaped by colonial notions that the Japanese were the superior Asian race. In a poll conducted by Tokyo University's Izumi Yasuichi in 1951 examining Japanese attitudes toward other nations, 344 Japanese citizens were asked to rank their preferences of sixteen different countries. The respondents viewed the Koreans as the least liked among all other Asian nations. Generally, the poll indicated that respondents viewed colonial subjects with disdain and prejudice.⁶⁶ A similar study conducted in 1954 and 1959 at Kumamoto University revealed Japanese citizens' comparable perceptions of the Koreans.⁶⁷ Instead of Japan's postwar narratives attempting to remove prewar prejudices to improve people-to-people reconciliation efforts, the

⁶³ Lee, *Japan and Korea*, 32.

⁶⁴ Kim, "Bringing Class Back In," 877.

⁶⁵ Kim, 379.

⁶⁶ Hah, "National Image and the Japanese-Korean Conflict," 36.

⁶⁷ Hah, 37.

narratives of Japanese victimization blinded the Japanese to the impacts of colonial policies (e.g., forced labor) on the *zainichi* Koreans that remained in Japan.

B. REPUBLIC OF KOREA

After World War II, South Korea's geopolitical position shaped many of its postwar narratives and myths. A well-known myth about Korea depicts it as a victim of great power rivalry since antiquity. The often-cited Korean proverb "when caught in the fight between whales, a shrimp gets his back broken" emphasizes the geopolitical vulnerability of Korea over the centuries.⁶⁸ This vulnerability extended into the postwar mentality of South Korean leaders as it became a hotbed for great power rivalry and, ultimately, the Korean War.⁶⁹ In fact, the Korean peninsula was split into two states solely based on great power politics at play in the postwar settlement proceedings between the United States and the Soviet Union.⁷⁰ Within two years of establishing the 38th Parallel as the dividing line between North and South Korea, the two states were at war—backed by their respective great powers. The Korean War reinforced narratives of victimization within Korea's postwar identity.⁷¹ The Korean proverb acutely captured the ultimate lack of control that the South Korean government had in shaping postwar regional geopolitics and why its narratives of victimization imbued such a high degree of antipathy for the Japanese during the diplomatic normalization process.

1. New Korean Identities for a Postwar Korean State

Historical narratives in the early years of the new Korean state were formed around the self-identifying notion of *minjok* (ethnic nation).⁷² This identity presented a form of Korean nationalism that grew into existence and was fundamentally tied to Japan's colonial rule over Korea that focused on a narrative of an ethnically Korean people with shared

⁶⁸ "Korean Proverbs," CultureReady, accessed September 11, 2021, <https://www.cultureready.org/blog/korean-proverbs-0>.

⁶⁹ Snyder, *South Korea at the Crossroads*, 11; Seth, *A Concise History of Modern Korea*, 120–22.

⁷⁰ Oda, "The Normalization of Relations Between Japan and the Republic of Korea," 37.

⁷¹ Snyder, *South Korea at the Crossroads*, 23–24.

⁷² Li, "Identity Tensions and China-Japan-Korea Relations," 60.

ancestry, history, language, and culture.⁷³ Syngman Rhee used this form of ethnonationalism containing strong anti-Japanese sentiments alongside his anti-communist rhetoric to regain a sense of national identity lost due to Japan's colonization of Korea.⁷⁴ Rhee memorialized these anti-Japanese sentiments in two of South Korea's premier national holidays of *samilchöl* (Independence Day) and *kwangbokchöl* (Liberation Day), captured both the March 1st Movement and the day that Japan announced its unconditional surrender on August 15, 1945.⁷⁵

The second identity in South Korea's postwar historical narrative was a victim complex known as *han* (unredeemed resentment for past injustices).⁷⁶ Similar to the narrative of victimization adopted by postwar Japan, the idea of *han* takes on a more extreme view of victimization. It is directed solely at Japan and the Korean people's repression under Japanese colonial rule.⁷⁷ The notion of *han* was captured in the opening remarks by Korean delegates in 1951 during the first postwar meeting between Japan and South Korea and highlights the importance of the narrative in Korea that they were victims of Japanese rule and is a grievance that must be addressed directly by Japan:

The years of Japanese occupation left us with problems that cannot be easily solved...Our economic processes...were made to serve as subsidiaries to Japanese development...Our own people were barred from technical and managerial training and experience...We have never in our long history attacked you. We do not intend to do so. You have attacked us against our will and engulfed us.⁷⁸

Education in postwar South Korea also blossomed and had a robust anti-Japan component. Between 1945 and 1960, the literacy rate of Koreans increased three-fold, with

⁷³ Glosserman and Snyder, *The Japan-South Korea Identity Clash*, 62; Le, "Negotiating in Good Faith," 626.

⁷⁴ Cha, *Alignment Despite Antagonism*, 25; Glosserman and Snyder, *The Japan-South Korea Identity Clash*, 63.

⁷⁵ Cha, "Bridging the Gap," 126.

⁷⁶ Cha, *Alignment Despite Antagonism*, 20.

⁷⁷ Cha, "Bridging the Gap," 126.

⁷⁸ Cha, *Alignment Despite Antagonism*, 20.

over 70 percent of the population being able to read and write.⁷⁹ Coinciding with a growing urban population, education played an important role in fostering the identities of independence and self-reliance, and victimization at the hands of the Japanese. Much of the discontent over Japanese imperialism was cultivated and expressed in the form of protests by college students and professors. Although Rhee was a big proponent of anti-Japanese sentiment, he was not keen on allowing dissent to occupy the public domain. He saw it as a threat to his legitimacy and a means to foster communist dissent.⁸⁰

2. Authoritarian Legitimacy from Anti-Japanese Narratives and Myths

Syngman Rhee furthered anti-Japanese sentiment in the nationalist narrative through the destruction of the Japanese Shintō shrines shortly after the liberation of Korea. The shrines in Korea were part of Japan's colonial policies to assimilate Koreans into Japanese customs and emperor worship.⁸¹ In a particular attempt to promote anti-Japanese nationalism, Rhee commissioned the erection of a statue commemorating Ahn Chun-gŭn—the nationalist patriot who assassinated the first Japanese Resident-General, Itō Hirobumi, in 1909—on Namsan at the site of a Buddhist temple dedicated to Itō.⁸² Namsan, the mountain south of Seoul, was home to several Shintō shrines, including the monumental Korea Shrine, and symbolized the impacts of Japanese colonialism on Korea.⁸³ Rhee's efforts to replace the razed Shintō shrines on Namsan with nationalist monuments were an effort to wipe away remnants of Japan's colonialism in South Korea and create a *lieux de mémoire* that furthered his views of a Korean anti-Japanese nationalist identity. Rhee's efforts to cast Ahn Chun-gŭn as a national hero would culminate in Park Chung-hee declaring Ahn a national hero in 1967 and subsequently building a national museum in his

⁷⁹ Eckert, "Authoritarianism and Protest, 1948–1990," 353.

⁸⁰ Eckert, 352; Chen, "Decolonizing Japan–South Korea Relations," 247.

⁸¹ Todd A. Henry, *Assimilating Seoul: Japanese Rule and the Politics of Public Space in Colonial Korea, 1910–1945* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2014), 205.

⁸² Paul Huen Chan, "From Colony to Neighbor: Relations Between Japan and South Korea, 1945–1985" (PhD diss., Johns Hopkins University, 1988), 74.

⁸³ Henry, *Assimilating Seoul*, 1.

honor over the site of the Korea Shrine on Namsan that continues to represent a *lieux de mémoire* against Japanese colonialism.⁸⁴

3. Balancing Historical Narratives and Public Sentiment

Anti-Japanese sentiments held within the South Korean public and reinforced by Korea's postwar narratives and myths were mainly repressed under Syngman Rhee and Park Chung-hee to improve intergovernmental relations with Japan. However, Koreans still maintained their share of prejudice toward the Japanese, and notable public protests emerged within South Korea that altered the Korean Government's outlook on bilateral relations. The first event that had a significant influence on the normalization of relations was the overthrow of the Rhee regime during the April Revolution in 1960.⁸⁵ The overthrow of the Rhee regime indirectly removed a significant psychological barrier to the normalization of relations with Japan, that being Syngman Rhee himself and his disdain for the Japanese leadership. When Park Chung-hee came into power in 1962, his attitude towards rapprochement with Japan altered the trajectory of reconciliation efforts pragmatically. Despite Park's personal views on Japanese relations, the Korean public still held strong anti-Japanese sentiments. In a poll conducted in May 1962 by the Korean newspaper *Kyŏnghyan shinmun*, Koreans viewed Japan as 'very bad' behind the Soviet Union. A study conducted around the same time polled Korean college students where nearly two-thirds of respondents blamed Japan for the stagnation in the negotiations process and saw Japan as being insincere in their efforts.⁸⁶ These polls emphasize that even under authoritarian rule, the regime was reluctant to suppress the anti-Japanese press because it was ingrained in the historical narrative that their legitimacy rested upon remaining in power.⁸⁷

⁸⁴ Henry, 208.

⁸⁵ Eckert, "Authoritarianism and Protest, 1948–1990," 352–57; Hah, "National Image and the Japanese-Korean Conflict," 45.

⁸⁶ Hah, "National Image and the Japanese-Korean Conflict," 39.

⁸⁷ Hah, 40.

The second event that underscores public opinion's impact on reconciliation efforts had more of a direct effect on the normalization process. Koreans took to the streets to demand the removal of South Korea's Chief Negotiator Kim Jong-pil after the results of the 1962 Kim-Ohira secret agreement became public. The Kim-Ohira secret agreement concerned the demands South Korea was seeking in reparations during negotiations.⁸⁸ The issue arose when the public learned that the amount secretly agreed to by Kim Jong-pil was much lower than initially desired and that Kim took money and goods from the Japanese Government for himself and the Park regime.⁸⁹ The Korean public labeled him a traitor and associated him with Yi Wanyong, which forced the Park regime to remove Kim from his position as chief negotiator in 1964.⁹⁰ Portraying Kim as a prewar Japanese collaborator reinforced the historical narratives and tied prewar Japanese colonialism with the perceptions of the rise in postwar Japanese neo-imperialist intentions in South Korea.

The protests by the Korean people against reconciliation efforts continued after the Park regime ratified the Japan-ROK Basic Treaty in 1965.⁹¹ Labelled as South Korea's "humiliating diplomacy" and viewed as another Kanhwa Treaty,⁹² the people saw the treaty as an affront to its self-identity of self-reliance and independence.⁹³ More than sixty members of the opposition Minjung party and over 350 college professors and students took to the streets to protest the treaty's ratification in the National Assembly.⁹⁴ In response to the protests, President Park issued a stern warning: "From this very moment the government will resolutely block demonstrations regardless of their size, which would lead the nation to ruin and benefit nobody but the Communists."⁹⁵ The public protests were

⁸⁸ Cha, "Bridging the Gap," 135.

⁸⁹ Cha, 153, notes 71–72.

⁹⁰ Yi Wanyong was the Korean politician who signed the 1910 Annexation Pact with Japan that made Korea a colony of Japan.

⁹¹ Eckert, "Authoritarianism and Protest, 1948–1990," 368.

⁹² The Treaty of Kanhwa was signed between Japan and Korea in 1876 and has been widely viewed as the event that would lead to the eventual annexation of Korea by Japan. See Seth, *A Concise History of Modern Korea*, 17.

⁹³ Chen, "Decolonizing Japan–South Korea Relations," 247; Chan, "From Colony to Neighbor," 116.

⁹⁴ Hah, "National Image and the Japanese-Korean Conflict," 53.

⁹⁵ Hah, 53.

quickly quelled by the military. They highlighted the difficulties of developing historical narratives under the Park regime that fostered anti-Japanese sentiments while improving relations with Japan to gain aid for his economic development strategies. Despite quelling anti-Japanese protests, during a visit to Washington, D.C., in 1965, Park stated, “If you asked me if I am pro-Japanese or anti-Japanese, I would choose the latter for my answer. Such a feeling is common to all Koreans.”⁹⁶ Despite Park’s affinity towards Japan, even he publicly acknowledged the popular sentiment within Korea at the time.

C. CONVERGENCE/DIVERGENCE OF HISTORICAL NARRATIVES

The twenty-year period of non-reconciliation between Japan and South Korea following World War II was a time for the two countries to establish new identities for themselves. The narratives developed in Japan and South Korea played an essential role in how each country viewed itself and the other. They set the foundation for the animus within the lengthy negotiation process. Japan’s narrative of victimization downplayed its agency in World War II and whitewashed its imperialist policies. During the opening negotiations, Japan sought to omit its imperial actions by setting an agenda seeking legal settlements over the immediate repatriation of *zainichi* Koreans living in Japan and the demarcation of territorial waters not covered in the San Francisco Peace Treaty of 1951. South Korea’s approach to the negotiations took on an emotionally charged set of demands for apology and reparations that were indicative of the regime’s embrace of *minjok* and *han* narratives.⁹⁷

The initial attempts to establish shallow government-to-government reconciliation failed almost immediately because the divergence in narratives prevented either side from constructively approaching the topic of reconciliation. Statements made by the Japanese and Korean delegations from the outset of negotiations in 1951 often led to a suspension of talks as inflammatory comments reflected the unwillingness to compromise on their new identities. Additionally, Japan and South Korea’s territorial dispute over the Dokdo/

⁹⁶ John Delury, “The Kishi Effect: A Political Genealogy of Japan-ROK Relations,” *Asian Perspective* 39, no. 3 (July 2015): 452.

⁹⁷ Lee, *Japan and Korea*, 24–25.

Takeshima Islands became a major factor hampering the negotiations process. The islands became symbols for nationalist rhetoric and parts of their historical narratives that portrayed the vestiges of Japanese colonialism for South Korea and one of victimization in Japan.⁹⁸

Negotiations resumed in 1953 but met a similar result as Japanese Chief Delegate Kubota's comments over the reparations demands by Korea reflected the "haughtiness" of Japanese views of Koreans. The Kubota statement claimed that if Japan had not colonized Korea in 1910, "Korea would naturally have been occupied by another country and experienced a more miserable situation than under Japanese rule."⁹⁹ Again, the narrative fostered in Japan over its lack of remorse for their imperial policies further entrenched South Korea's *han* victim complex within the Korean people. Negotiations were halted for another five years due to Kubota's comments, and later attempts at resuming them met similar results through the remainder of the 1950s.

While Japan and South Korea reached shallow intergovernmental reconciliation with the signing of the Basic Treaty in 1965, attitudes and perceptions between Koreans and Japanese still showed a high level of disdain and distrust, which would indicate people-to-people interactions remaining in a non-reconciliation status. Public protests in South Korea attempted to alter the status of reconciliation efforts between Japan and Korea because South Koreans felt that Japan still viewed them as a subaltern state.¹⁰⁰ Japan, too, faced credibility issues in claiming to be a peace-loving nation during negotiations because of the widely shared negative perceptions of Koreans—mainly the *zainichi* Koreans—in Japanese society. Public opinion during this period emphasized the strong antagonistic

⁹⁸ He, *The Search for Reconciliation*, 301; Krista E. Wiegand, "The South Korean–Japanese Security Relationship and the Dokdo/Takeshima Islets Dispute," *The Pacific Review* 28, no. 3 (May 27, 2015): 350; Alexander Bukh, "'Takeshima', 'Northern Territories' and the Construction of Japan's National Identity," in *Assessing Maritime Disputes in East Asia: Political and Legal Perspectives*, ed. Barthélémy Courmont, Frédéric Lasserre, and Éric Mottet (London; New York: Routledge, 2017), 70–85; Cha, *Alignment Despite Antagonism*, 130–31.

⁹⁹ Cha, *Alignment Despite Antagonism*, 24.

¹⁰⁰ Chen, "Decolonizing Japan–South Korea Relations," 248.

feelings toward one another reconciliation. In Japan, a senior Ministry of Foreign Affairs official said that “public opinion will not allow us to take the initiative toward Korea.”¹⁰¹

The constant clash over the shared negative attitudes throughout the negotiation process is a significant factor in the delay of normalizing relations and came to be known as the *Han-Il ũngŏri* (Korean-Japan tangle). The mutual dislike shared between Korea’s Syngman Rhee and Japan’s Prime Minister Yoshida Shigeru (1948-1954) paralleled the historical narratives their governments perpetrated within their societies.¹⁰² Proponents of the historical narrative argument highlight the shift in negotiations after Park Chung-hee came into power in 1961 after a military coup in South Korea. The Park Government held a more favorable view of Japan due to Park’s prewar connections and many of his senior government officials with the Japanese Government.¹⁰³ However, despite the shift in relations between the Park regime and the Japanese Government, many of the hurdles that plagued earlier negotiations remained because of deep-seated animosities within the Korean public. Even after signing the Korea-Japan Normalization Treaty in 1965, Park’s acknowledgment that anti-Japanese sentiment remained at the treaty’s signing highlighted that people-to-people reconciliation efforts lagged behind intergovernmental reconciliation efforts.

Delays in the negotiation process during the fourteen years can be attributed to the divergent historical narratives and the widespread negative perceptions shared by both the Koreans and Japanese. The unwillingness of either side to seek lasting compromises over historical issues and find ways to mend animosities without outside intervention highlight how deep the hatred was entrenched. Internal correspondence from the Johnson Administration over the Japan-ROK normalization process provides a glimpse into the mindset of American policymakers who expected the normalization process to fail without their intervention—mainly because neither side was willing to compromise due to

¹⁰¹ Hah, “National Image and the Japanese-Korean Conflict,” 57.

¹⁰² Cha, “Bridging the Gap,” 127.

¹⁰³ Cha, 128; Chen, “Decolonizing Japan–South Korea Relations,” 247; Ja-Hyun Chun, “Have Korea and Japan Reconciled? A Focus on the Three Stages of Reconciliation,” *Japanese Journal of Political Science* 16, no. 3 (September 2015): 323.

historical animosities.¹⁰⁴ Although the increased pressure from the U.S. Government to finalize the Basic Treaty influenced the eventual outcome of Japan and South Korea normalizing relations, it created a two-track system where identities became entrenched in the narratives and opinions within each nation that would have an impact on future reconciliation efforts.

The identities of victimization in both Japan and South Korea inhibited efforts of both nations to develop a common narrative that would reduce the divide between “self” and “other.” Moreover, the widespread disdain for each other within the public realm fostered divides between domestic politics and international relations that restricted the ability of either state to compromise over contentious historical issues. While this study of historical narratives and national myths during the normalization process largely omits the impact of geopolitics on shifting policies and stances, it highlights how the short-term geopolitical gain of linking two of the United States’ biggest allies in the region created long-term impacts on their ability to reconcile differences that are required to establish deep interstate reconciliation.

¹⁰⁴ Gatz, *Foreign Relations of the United States, 1964–1968*, XXIX, Part 1, Korea: Document 342.

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III. THE COLD WAR AFTER NORMALIZATION (1965–1990)

The normalization of relations between Japan and South Korea brought two of the United States' biggest allies in East Asia closer together. During this period, relations between Japan and South Korea can be generally characterized as positive through the warming of economic and political relations. Still, periods of animosity emerged around divergent narratives and myths that stagnated efforts to improve reconciliation. However, by the end of the Cold War, Japanese and South Korean government-to-government reconciliation efforts were nearing rapprochement through bilateral exchanges and deepening economic relations. People-to-people reconciliation also improved as cultural exchanges and social relations reduced the prejudices and stereotypes entrenched in both societies. Nevertheless, the shared animosities quickly re-emerged as controversies over divergent historical narratives stoked mutual feelings of distrust and disdain. Overall, this period saw little progress on reconciliation efforts and much in the way of solidifying divergent attitudes and perceptions that would make reconciliation more difficult within the post-Cold War environment.

In South Korea, historical animosities and anti-Japanese sentiment became more repressed under Park Chung-hee during the 1970s as he saw South Korea's security and economic development being dependent on aid from Japan and the United States. As fears of U.S. abandonment emerged during the East-West détente period and Japan's economic interests shifted towards China, Park became more determined to reinforce the *minjok* identity as relations with Japan became confrontational.¹⁰⁵ In response to growing domestic unrest in South Korea that grew under successive authoritarian regimes, public sentiment in South Korea began to gain more influence over South Korea's narratives and myths through the *minjung* movement. In the waning years of this period, the democratization of South Korea brought historical animosities to the forefront of Japan-ROK relations, but neither government made little effort to focus on sincere efforts to address the longstanding animosities. South Korea's national perception of itself changed

¹⁰⁵ Chen, "Decolonizing Japan–South Korea Relations," 247.

during democratization as anti-Japanese sentiments emerged as a cornerstone of South Korea's new nationalist identity that would push South Korea's government closer to confrontation over lingering historical animosities with Japan.

In Japan, the whitewashed historical narratives and myths promoted by the conservative LDP were essentially unopposed within the national dialogue by the time diplomatic relations were normalized with South Korea. The alternative narratives over Japan's past atrocities championed by communist and other leftist political parties that took a more critical review of Japan's imperial past were effectively suppressed by Japan's conservative government. The lack of opposition to Japan's officially whitewashed narratives allowed the Japanese Government to promote a sense that Japan had moved beyond the prewar years and was only looking toward the future. Yet, the lack of opposition also left out opportunities for a critical dialogue on Japan's past within the public domain to shape the perceptions and collective memory of Japanese society, which would impact the nation's ability to empathize with other perspectives when historical animosities impacted bilateral relations.

This chapter will examine how the victim identities within South Korea and Japan became entrenched within their official narratives. For Japan, the narratives that portrayed itself as a victim alongside other Asian nations were solidified in its official narrative by the conservative-led political elite through whitewashing its past of Japanese aggression and incorporating prewar lieux de mémoire into its postwar cultural identity. South Korea, however, had a different experience in the solidification of its victim identity. The *minjok* and *han* narratives promulgated under the authoritarian regimes began to be seen by the South Korean democratization movement as contributing to the continued victimization of the Korean people at the hands of the Japanese. Therefore, the rise of the minjung movement within South Korea further entrenched the anti-Japanese victimization narrative into a new postwar ethnonationalist identity that would define the democratization movement at the end of this period.

A. JAPAN

The normalization of relations opened several opportunities to reconcile past animosities between Japan and South Korea, but the Cold War environment brought about realpolitik challenges that demanded the attention of the Japanese Government and kept opposing views and critical perspectives over Japan's imperial past out of the national dialogue. Between 1955 and 1990, the conservative LDP maintained absolute control of Japan's government and institutions, and control over historical narratives and national myths. Conservative and right-wing politicians began shaping the narratives and myths to re-introduce prewar cultural identities that were suppressed by SCAP in Japan's Peace Constitution. While many of their efforts failed in amending the constitution itself, they were successful in re-introducing ethnonationalist symbols tied to Japan's prewar identity by whitewashing the negative aspects of such symbols and myths from Japan's official narrative to fit its postwar victim identity.

1. Whitewashing Japan's Official Narrative

The LDP-controlled government controlled Japan's narrative and its interpretation of historical events and promulgated primarily through the educational system. Efforts by Japanese conservatives to pursue views that whitewashed historical Japanese aggression went unopposed by leftist actors in large part due to the United States' decision to suppress leftist groups out of fear of the growing communist elements in early postwar Japan.¹⁰⁶ Whereas those in Japan that wanted the nation to reconcile and accept its past actions as the aggressor was typically associated with left-leaning political organizations, they were no longer a voice in the national discourse to counter right-wing ethnonational mythmaking and narratives from within the government.¹⁰⁷ The historical 'amnesia' grew during the first half of this period and perpetrated its way into the Japanese education systems, causing a strain on relations with South Korea. The narratives being taught in Japan placed equal, if not greater emphasis on Japanese victimization alongside other Asian nations at the

¹⁰⁶ Daniel Sneider, "Textbooks and Patriotic Education: Wartime Memory Formation in China and Japan," *Asia-Pacific Review* 20, no. 1 (May 1, 2013): 51.

¹⁰⁷ Namhee Lee, *The Making of Minjung: Democracy and the Politics of Representation in South Korea* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2011), 301.

hands of the West instead of on its aggression against its neighbors by their own hand. It also did little to eliminate discriminatory views of Japan's colonial subjects from the public's perception.

The controversy surrounding these narratives were circulated within Japanese media and discourse since the 1950s but boiled over into international politics in 1982 and 1986 with proposed revisions to Japanese textbooks by the Japanese Ministry of Education.¹⁰⁸ The recommended changes were viewed by South Korea as historical revisionism and an attempt by Japanese conservative elites to whitewash Japanese aggression.¹⁰⁹ Japanese conservatives saw textbooks addressing Japanese ultranationalism and promoting liberal thought as too radical and would be detrimental to the development of patriotism and the Japanese identity.¹¹⁰ In the 1970s, Japanese textbooks did expand their narratives on Japanese imperialism to include Korean and Chinese liberation struggles as rapprochement with China pressured the Ministry of Education to adopt a more transparent view of Japanese aggression.¹¹¹ Despite the shift, the textbooks portrayed the Japanese people alongside other Asian victims by separating them from the Japanese militants who controlled the country during the war, thus continuing the victimization narrative of the Japanese people as seen in the early postwar period. Creating two distinct groups—the military elite and everyone else—whitewashed the agency of Japanese colonial policies by the Japanese people, as well as the discriminatory views they held of other Asian ethnicities, particularly the Koreans, before and after the war.

The 1982 textbook controversy created another shift within the conservative-leaning Ministry of Education that resulted in Japan further acknowledging its insensitivity towards other Asian nations. China and South Korea's protests to the textbook changes again pressured the Ministry of Education into adopting the "Neighboring Countries

¹⁰⁸ Sneider, "Textbooks and Patriotic Education," 51–52.

¹⁰⁹ M. Erika Pollmann, "Japan's Security and Historical Revisionism: Explaining the Variation in Responses to and Impact of Textbook Controversies," *Journal of Asian Security and International Affairs* 3, no. 3 (2016): 312; Claudia Schneider, "The Japanese History Textbook Controversy in East Asian Perspective," *The Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science* 617 (2008): 109.

¹¹⁰ Orr, *The Victim as Hero*, 72.

¹¹¹ Orr, 73–75, 99.

Clause” that took into consideration the perspectives of other nations over historical events within Japanese textbooks. While the policy resolved the 1982 controversy, it was not long before another textbook controversy emerged in 1986 as a reaction by Japanese conservatives to the Neighboring Countries Clause, which they viewed as foreign actors involving themselves in internal Japanese affairs.¹¹² In both instances, the textbook controversies led to the cancellation or postponement of bilateral ministerial or higher events between Japan and South Korea.¹¹³ However, the controversies also highlighted the growing acceptance of Japan’s narrative of victimization within mainstream society promulgated by Japanese conservatives.¹¹⁴

2. The Emergence of Prewar Japan Places of Memory

Japanese conservative’s historical narrative came through the emergence of the Yasukuni Shrine as a *lieux de mémoire*. Despite the shrine’s origins dating back to 1868 to enshrine the dead who restored Japan’s imperial rulers, it remained a popular public memorial throughout the immediate postwar period for the Japanese to mourn its war dead.¹¹⁵ Following the end of the war, SCAP saw the Yasukuni Shrine as a physical manifestation of *Kokka Shintō* (State Shintō) and sought to separate the state from the ideology it considered to be the primary factor in Japanese aggression by issuing the Shintō Directive.¹¹⁶ The directive, and later Article 20 of the new Japanese Constitution, prohibited the state from participating in religious activities, ultimately implementing a Western concept of separating the state from religion—in this case, Shintōism.¹¹⁷

¹¹² Schneider, “The Japanese History Textbook Controversy in East Asian Perspective,” 109.

¹¹³ Pollmann, “Japan’s Security and Historical Revisionism,” 320–21.

¹¹⁴ Orr, *The Victim as Hero*, 105.

¹¹⁵ Kei Koga, “The Yasukuni Question: Histories, Logics, and Japan–South Korea Relations,” *The Pacific Review* 29, no. 3 (May 26, 2016): 340.

¹¹⁶ Koga, 339; Akiko Takenaka, *Yasukuni Shrine: History, Memory, and Japan’s Unending Postwar* (Honolulu: University of Hawai’i Press, 2015), 132.

¹¹⁷ Takenaka, *Yasukuni Shrine*, 132.

However, the shrine was allowed by SCAP to remain as a place for the Japanese to privately practice *Ko Shintō*, the modern cultural and customary practice of Shintō.¹¹⁸

After signing the San Francisco Treaty in 1952, the Japanese emperor and prime ministers began to privately visit the shrine under the auspices of its significance under *Ko Shintō*.¹¹⁹ During the postwar period, the Yasukuni Shrine also became a symbol of the growing divide over Japanese views over its agency in World War II. Domestic debates between ethnonationalists, progressives, and moderates over the shrine comprised similar perspectives that encompassed nearly every other debate involving Japan's imperial past: its agency in the war, its treatment after the war, and the role of *Kokka Shintō*. The LDP during the 1960s and 1970s were primarily supportive of the ethnonationalist perspective that the Yasukuni Shrine is too embedded into Japan's cultural heritage and that state and religion cannot be separated along a Western concept.¹²⁰ In fact, the LDP attempted on five occasions to restore the Yasukuni Shrine's state support by removing the prohibitions under Article 20 of the Japanese Constitution, but each effort ultimately failed. Despite differing domestic views among Japan's polity, they all shared a common view that Yasukuni was a national memorial for the war dead.¹²¹

In 1985, the Yasukuni Shrine emerged as the site of international controversy when Japan's Prime Minister Nakasone Yasuhiro made the first official visit by a public Japanese official. This visit, together with the news of the enshrinement of fourteen Class-A war criminals from seven years prior, was captured in the South Korean *DongA* newspaper as the potential revival of *Kokka Shintō* and re-emergence of Japanese militarism.¹²² Despite every Japanese Prime Minister visiting the shrine after 1952, Nakasone's visit was under additional scrutiny because it fell on the fortieth anniversary of the end of World War II. Additionally, the backlash to his visit occurred internationally because he declared the visit

¹¹⁸ Takenaka, 136.

¹¹⁹ Koga, "The Yasukuni Question," 340.

¹²⁰ Koga, 340; Takenaka, *Yasukuni Shrine*, 133.

¹²¹ Koga, "The Yasukuni Question," 341–42.

¹²² Koga, 347.

as official and used public funds to pay for offerings.¹²³ Both Japan and South Korea sought to quickly resolve the controversy by Prime Minister Nakasone distancing himself from the Yasukuni Shrine and South Korea's Foreign Minister Lee Won Kyung requesting that Japan "deal with the matter prudently" as to not antagonize neighboring countries.¹²⁴

Although the controversy over Prime Minister Nakasone's visit to the Yasukuni Shrine was quickly subdued, the divergent historical narratives between Japan and South Korea over Japanese aggression and its unrepentant postwar narratives were visible in South Korean public sentiment. The Yasukuni Shrine became crystallized into a *lieux de mémoire* for ethnonationalist-dominated LDP during this period because they viewed its role as a national memorial for all war dead that could not be separated from the state.¹²⁵

Shortly after the response by South Korea over the visit, Japanese ministers began making more provocative comments regarding Japan's historical narratives by claiming Japan's actions during the prewar years were legitimate and for security reasons.¹²⁶ Additionally, the narrative took on the perceptions of Yasukuni Shrine as only a war shrine and neglected to consider the sensitivity towards the individuals that were enshrined there, whether they were Class-A war criminals or victims of Japanese imperial aggression.

3. Japan's Apathetic Attitude Change Towards South Korea

Japan's relations with, and the public's perception of, South Korea during the 1970s marked the lowest point of the period. The Kim Dae-jung incident not only embroiled a general feeling among the public that Japan's sovereignty was violated by South Korea when Korea Central Intelligence Agency agents kidnapped Kim from his Tokyo hotel room, but it also highlighted how domestic perceptions by Japanese Government officials influenced their decisions over international relations.¹²⁷ A New York Times article

¹²³ Takenaka, *Yasukuni Shrine*, 133.

¹²⁴ Koga, "The Yasukuni Question," 347; Takenaka, *Yasukuni Shrine*, 133.

¹²⁵ Takenaka, *Yasukuni Shrine*, 140–41.

¹²⁶ Koga, "The Rise of China and Japan's Balancing Strategy," 347.

¹²⁷ Hahn, "Korea-Japan Relations in the 1970s," 1093.

covering the incident aptly captures the Japanese public sentiment towards South Korea's involvement in the incident:

The Japanese appear to be deeply disturbed because a capital crime had been committed and because it appeared more and more evident that it was a political crime by a foreign government, thereby violating Japan's national sovereignty...It also appeared that the long and bitter history between the Japanese and Koreans accounts for some of the emotional response here and a resistance to a settlement in Seoul...Some Japanese contended that they would be upset by the kidnapping even if it had been committed by someone other than Koreans...but they also admitted that because Koreans were involved they were perhaps more angry.¹²⁸

Japanese political opposition figures also used the kidnapping to embarrass the ruling LDP in Japanese media in an effort to weaken their control over the Japanese Government and implicate the LDP's complicity in supporting South Korea's authoritarian regime.¹²⁹ Additionally, when news broke out during the U.S. Congress investigation into the "Koreagate" scandal in 1977 that the Park regime employed the same bribery methods with prominent LDP politicians in Japan, pro-communist Japanese opposition groups sought to use the information in domestic media to discredit the ruling LDP government's relations with South Korea. The publicity of these events and the responses by the Japanese public highlighted the indignation that still shared towards Korea.

The breakdown in relations during the early 1970s also brought to the forefront the staunch animosity that both nations still shared despite normalizing relations in 1965. Efforts to leverage domestic opposition against Japan's political connections with South Korea had tremendous effects on Japan's leading figures—particularly within the ruling conservative LDP.¹³⁰ However, with the fall of Saigon and the beginning of U.S. retrenchment from the region in the mid-1970s, a general fear emerged that Japan's security interests were in jeopardy again. The security commitments provided by the U.S.-

¹²⁸ Richard Halloran, "Tokyo Ties 2d Seoul Aide to Abduction," *New York Times*, September 6, 1973, ProQuest.

¹²⁹ Chan, "From Colony to Neighbor," 249.

¹³⁰ Yōnosuke Tanaka, "The World of the Zaikai," in *Politics and Economics in Contemporary Japan*, ed. Johannes Hirschmeier and Hyōe Murakami (Tokyo: Kodansha International Ltd., 1983), 64–78; Gordon, *A Modern History of Japan*, 313.

led alliance network in the region were viewed as vital to Japanese security and aligned with South Korea's interests, public perceptions over Koreans were relegated again to secondary importance in favor of establishing closer ties with South Korea to lobby for continued U.S. security commitments to South Korea as discussed in the section above.¹³¹

After normalization, Japan's general apathy towards deepening social and cultural ties with South Korea was evident in the views that the Japanese held towards South Korea vis-à-vis other Asian nations, including North Korea. Little effort was made to develop ties with South Korea outside of economic and security ties and the *zainichi* Koreans in Japan were still subject to widespread social and legal discrimination. When Japan began normalizing relations with the People's Republic of China in 1972, South Korea was viewed as significantly less important to Japanese interests than China.¹³² The Japanese generally viewed China in a more favorable way despite its communist society than it did South Korea. Even when relations between Japan and South Korea improved in the late 1970s, the public's attitudes towards South Korea remained distrustful and generally negative towards South Korea.

By the 1980s, Korean popular culture began making inroads into Japanese society. Known as the *konkoku būmu* (Korea boom), Korean culture and views of Japan were becoming more popular within Japanese society, which brought greater attention on changing the perspectives over *zainichi* Koreans in Japanese society.¹³³ Legislative changes gave *zainichi* Koreans greater legal rights in maintaining their Korean cultural identities and better access to Japanese nationality.¹³⁴ The improvement of cross-cultural engagement signaled progress in people-to-people reconciliation towards something akin to shallow rapprochement. However, changing perceptions within Japan of the ethnic

¹³¹ Glosserman and Snyder, *The Japan-South Korea Identity Clash*, 98.

¹³² Public opinion polls begin in 1975. "Opinion Poll List of Public Opinion Polls and Diplomacy," Japan Cabinet Office, last modified December 23, 2021, <https://survey.gov-online.go.jp/index-gai.html>; Il Hyun Cho and Seo-Hyun Park, "Anti-Chinese and Anti-Japanese Sentiments in East Asia: The Politics of Opinion, Distrust, and Prejudice," *The Chinese Journal of International Politics* 4, no. 3 (2011): 278.

¹³³ Cha, *Alignment Despite Antagonism*, 196.

¹³⁴ George L. Hicks, *Japan's Hidden Apartheid: The Korean Minority and the Japanese* (Brookfield, VT: Ashgate, 1997), 56–58.

Korean population also spurred a rise of right-wing anti-Korean groups in Japan in the late 1980s that would impact Japan-ROK relations in the contemporary period.¹³⁵ Despite the warming of perceptions of Koreans within Japanese society and a general feeling of “closeness” with South Korea by the end of this period, public opinion polls show that Japan-ROK relations were less critical than Japan-U.S. relations and Sino-Japanese relations, and roughly on par with Japanese relations with Southeast Asian countries.¹³⁶

B. REPUBLIC OF KOREA

Historical narratives and national myths played an important role in South Korea during this period as efforts by the Park regime to rapidly develop the country’s economy by deepening intergovernmental relations with Japan came at the expense of the people’s ability to reconcile their historical grievances with their former colonizer properly.¹³⁷ Despite the South Korean government’s efforts to improve economic relations with Japan, the historical narratives and national myths formed during the early postwar period highly sensitized the public to any issue that they perceived to be neo-colonial efforts by Japan. The strength of anti-Japanese sentiments fostered under the *han* identity nearly ended bilateral diplomatic relations after a series of incidents and scandals in and between Japan and South Korea during the 1970s drew public ire that pushed historical animosities resident within the collective memory to challenge the very legitimacy of the South Korean authoritarian regime.

The postcolonial counternarratives that developed during the 1960s and 1970s, challenging the South Korean regime’s narrative, significantly influenced Japan-ROK relations in the 1980s. Strong anti-Japanese narratives within South Korea’s changing leftist ethnonationalist movement forced the Chun Doo-hwan regime to make reconciliation efforts concerning historical animosities as a prerequisite for future Japan-

¹³⁵ Sharon J. Yoon and Yuki Asahina, “The Rise and Fall of Japan’s New Far Right: How Anti-Korean Discourses Went Mainstream,” *Politics & Society* 49, no. 3 (September 1, 2021): 369–71.

¹³⁶ See public opinion polls from 1980–1989. Japan Cabinet Office, “Opinion Poll List of Public Opinion Polls and Diplomacy.”

¹³⁷ Hein, “The Ambiguities of Amending Historical Injustices and Espousing a Shared Collective Memory,” 51.

ROK relations. The efforts by South Korean society to democratize played an essential role in entrenching left-leaning ethnonationalism as South Korea's new historical narratives and national myths.

1. The Rise of the *Minjung* Movement

The Rhee regime's efforts to elevate the Korean ethnonational identity of *minjok* were further entrenched in the historical narrative under the Park and Chun regimes. Both leaders leveraged the *minjok* identity narrative to justify greater state control and repression of threats to its policies by emphasizing the *minjok* identity's importance in South Korea's economic development, mainly through the idea that an economically strong *minjok* state could defeat communism.¹³⁸ However, counternarratives of Korean identity began to take shape as South Korea's rapidly urbanizing working class, and large student population began to see the human costs of rapid industrialization and the escalating repression under the Park regime in the 1970s take form under the Yushin Government.¹³⁹

Known as *minjung*, the Korean counterculture appropriated traditional Korean cultural practices to draw connections between Korean ethnonationalism and the people, not the state. The *minjung* identity became a revisionist movement to re-write Korea's historical narrative that included anti-foreign and anti-imperial narratives, among many others that would form the basis of a new Korean nationalist sentiment.¹⁴⁰ The *minjung* movement saw many of South Korea's policies with Japan and the United States as neo-colonial imperialism, which drew upon historical connotations of prewar Japanese colonialism and Korea's subaltern status.¹⁴¹ By 1979, the Korean *minjung* movement grew to encompass nearly every aspect of the economic, political, and social environment within

¹³⁸ Lee, "Differently Politicizing Literature from the Authoritarian Era," 178–79.

¹³⁹ Hagen Koo, *Korean Workers: The Culture and Politics of Class Formation* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2018), 29–30; Seth, *A Concise History of Modern Korea*, 220.

¹⁴⁰ Koo, *Korean Workers*, 142–43; Seth, *A Concise History of Modern Korea*, 221–22.

¹⁴¹ Seth, *A Concise History of Modern Korea*, 221.

South Korea. It fomented a strong leftist ethnonationalist identity filled with democratic aspirations against the authoritarian regime.¹⁴²

While the impacts of the *minjung* movement on the authoritarian regime's national myths were minimal during the 1970s and into the early 1980s, it is essential to note here that the legitimacy of the authoritarian regime based on its national myths was being challenged by a growing domestic counternarrative. After Park's assassination in 1979 and the attempts at democratization in 1980, the *minjung* movement became the vanguard for political dissent in South Korea. Examining the Chun regime's responses to the textbook controversies and the Yasukuni Shrine visit highlights the regime's efforts to accommodate the popular anti-Japanese perspectives based on historical animosities being propagated in the *minjung* narrative, which before the Kwangju Incident, were consistently suppressed as they ran counter to the regime's economic development policies. Chun's use of the *minjung* narrative was a way to garner legitimacy for his authoritarian regime as it was being openly challenged by South Koreans who saw little change regarding his economic policies and relations with Japan and the U.S. since the Park regime. The anti-Japanese narrative used by South Korean leftist ethnonationalism served to politically secure domestic support for Chun as he claimed to be a proponent of dismantling the old regime under Park.¹⁴³ The handling of the textbook controversies and Yasukuni Shrine visits in the 1980s were real issues that bred resentment among the Korean *minjung* movement and served to strengthen divergent historical narratives in the national myths of South Korea. The Chun regime's use of the anti-Japanese narratives to shore up domestic support also helped solidify the pro-democracy narratives founded on the anti-Japanese sentiments that were suppressed for so long.

2. Internationalizing Korea's Victim Narrative in Places of Memory

Outside of the growing domestic contention between the South Korean regime's narratives and the growing *minjung* movement, South Korean historical narratives significantly influenced Japan-ROK relations in Japan concerning the Korean Victims

¹⁴² Seth, 221–22.

¹⁴³ Seth, 224; Cha, *Alignment Despite Antagonism*, 186.

Memorial in Hiroshima, Japan. While the Hiroshima Memorial became a *lieux de mémoire* for Japan's victimization narrative, its creation and placement commemorating the Korean victims of the atomic bombings crystalized South Korea's victimization at the hands of Japanese imperialism into its own *lieux de mémoire*.¹⁴⁴ In 1970, the Korean Victims Memorial was built to commemorate the estimated 5,000 to 50,000 Koreans who died in the atomic bombing of Hiroshima. The disparity in estimates of the Koreans killed in the bombing highlighted the subaltern and discriminatory status many Koreans experienced under the Japanese.¹⁴⁵ Additionally, the memorial site was placed outside of the grounds of the Hiroshima Peace Memorial and away from other memorials commemorating the victims of the atomic bombings. To the *zainichi* Koreans, the monument became a place of memory for the nearly one million *zainichi* Koreans who were recruited by or subjected to forced labor conditions under Japanese imperial rule and the 600,000 resident *zainichi* Koreans in postwar Japan that still experienced second-class citizen status even after receiving permanent resident status in the 1965 Basic Treaty.¹⁴⁶

In 1990, the memorial's location created a controversy that soured Japan-ROK relations. After many unsuccessful attempts by the South Korean Government and other Korean organizations to relocate the memorial onto the official grounds of the Peace Park, the City of Hiroshima approved a measure to relocate the memorial with the caveat that the memorial's inscriptions need to be changed in such a way as to represent both North and South Korea. To the *zainichi* Koreans, this was seen as an attempt by Japan to whitewash the Korean victimization at the hands of the Japanese and remove its status as a *lieux de mémoire*.¹⁴⁷ The Korean Victims Memorial symbolized more than the Koreans who died during the atomic bombings, but all Koreans, living and dead, and Korean independence from Japanese colonial rule. The controversy continued through the Japanese media that did little to address the issues of the historical meanings behind the

¹⁴⁴ Lisa Yoneyama, *Hiroshima Traces: Time, Space, and the Dialectics of Memory* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1999), 126.

¹⁴⁵ Yoneyama, 121.

¹⁴⁶ Yoneyama, 121–23; Orr, *The Victim as Hero*, 174; Kim, "Bringing Class Back In," 876.

¹⁴⁷ Yoneyama, *Hiroshima Traces*, 130–35.

protests to alter the memorial. Instead, the media's representation of the controversy fostered a negative image of the *zainichi* Koreans as demanding retribution despite the Japanese's humane efforts to memorialize the Korean victims within the official Peace Park boundaries.¹⁴⁸

3. Leftist Ethnonationalism and Democratization

Because South Korean public opinion poll data was rare before South Korea democratized in 1987, it is challenging to gauge comparable public opinion data with Japan regarding the effects on people-to-people relations during this period.¹⁴⁹ However, the 1980s present a shift from which Korean public opinion can be seen as having more influence on Japan-ROK relations even if it did not ultimately affect the outcome. Chun Doo-hwan's leaning on popular anti-Japanese sentiments to legitimize his rule can be seen as a shift in public opinion closer to independent autonomy from government control prevalent under Park Chung-hee. The Korean reactions to the textbook controversies and Yasukuni Shrine visit, and Chun's use of reparations language in demanding greater economic concessions from Japan for his Five-Year Plan (1982-1986) were signs that Korean public opinion over historical animosities was impacting Japan-ROK diplomatic discourse.

Chun Doo-hwan's efforts to legitimize his authoritarian rule through adopting the ethnonationalist sentiments of the *minjung* movement to "buy" domestic support for his regime's legitimacy signal a change in the influence that historical narratives had on South Korean reconciliation efforts.¹⁵⁰ In particular, Chun sought to extract significant concessions from Japan by leveraging popular anti-Japanese sentiments and their relation to deeply entrenched historical animosities by demanding economic aid from Japan as a "second round" of remittance payments over Japan's colonial atrocities.¹⁵¹ Chun needed

¹⁴⁸ Yoneyama, 136–37.

¹⁴⁹ Joonbum Bae, "Impossible Allies? When History and Security Collide: South Korea—Japan Relations in Context," *Journal of Asian and African Studies* 56, no. 6 (2021): 1145.

¹⁵⁰ Cha, *Alignment Despite Antagonism*, 186.

¹⁵¹ Lee, *Japan and Korea*, 116.

to alter his approach to pursue his economic development policies because his early efforts to suppress the public's sentiments led to larger and more regular protests against his regime.¹⁵² Chun still viewed economic growth as a strategic imperative. Still, after purging many of Park's followers from the government, Chun lost many of the personal economic connections that Park's associates maintained with Japanese businesses.¹⁵³ The *minjung* movement had tied Park's economic development policies in the 1960s and 1970s to neocolonial efforts by the U.S. and Japan because he sought to suppress their voices in favor of economic and security commitments. Therefore, Chun leaned on the leftist ethnonationalist narrative in South Korea to gain legitimacy and support for his economic promises.

As negotiations over the economic package with the Suzuki Government stalled in 1981, Chun also came under greater scrutiny domestically over a financial corruption scandal involving his wife.¹⁵⁴ The scandal was especially dubious for Chun as he justified purging the old Korean elites under Park as corrupt and colluding with the Japanese. Additionally, the South Korean economy was still sluggish from the late 1970 oil shocks, and Chun needed to secure Japanese economic assistance to alleviate pressure on the economy. Chun acquiesced to the mass discontent over the scandal to replace members of his cabinet dealing with the Japan-ROK economic package negotiations with individuals whom South Koreans widely respected. Chun's response to the domestic uproar caused by the scandal directly impacted Japan-ROK negotiation efforts because of the deep-seated animosity over the colonial era connections between Korea's elites and the Japanese. Chun was trying to break away from the Park legacy by promoting the *han'gŭl* generation, and his response to the scandal highlighted his dependency on the widespread support for legitimacy.

While Chun was more dependent on the public's support of his regime, he tried to leverage anti-Japanese protests within South Korea against the Japanese Government's

¹⁵² Lee, *The Making of Minjung*, 297; Cho and Park, "Anti-Chinese and Anti-Japanese Sentiments in East Asia," 286.

¹⁵³ Chan, "From Colony to Neighbor," 147–48; Lee, *Japan and Korea*, 116.

¹⁵⁴ Seth, *A Concise History of Modern Korea*, 210.

diplomatic protests in the renewed Kim Dae-Jung affair in 1980. Chun tried to deflect domestic pressure from growing unrest over the trial within South Korea's democratic movement by leveraging anti-Japanese sentiments. This was a clear shift from Park's diplomatic efforts with Japan as he suppressed anti-Japanese emotions in favor of stronger intergovernmental ties. Chun re-introduced historical animosities for domestic support at the expense of Japan-ROK relations. But his efforts to deflect criticism did not succeed. To move negotiations over his economic aid package beyond their impasse with Japan and shore up domestic support, Chun acquiesced to Japanese and U.S. demands to release Kim Dae-jung from prison and allow him to travel to the United States in 1982.¹⁵⁵ Kim's release was a big win for the South Korean democratic movement. Still, the consequences of his efforts to foment domestic backlash against Japan by re-introducing historical animosities as a tool would become widely used after democratization in South Korea.

The 1982 textbook controversy between Japan and South Korea probably provides the most compelling case for public opinion's impact on Japan-ROK relations during this period. Considering the importance of Chun's economic aid package, the reaction from South Korea to suspend further negotiations with Japan in protest of the textbook revisions emphasize popular sentiment's importance in guiding Japan-ROK relations through a historical narrative lens.¹⁵⁶ Chun's suspension of bilateral events with Japan and his use of strong anti-Japanese narratives during his Independence Day speech that year also emphasize his response to domestic animosity. The textbook controversy roused strong animosities shared between Japan and South Korea. Still, they also paved the way for a change in Japan's Prime Minister position as Suzuki's unpopularity in handling the controversy led to him not seeking re-election in 1982.¹⁵⁷

Prime Minister Nakasone Yasuhiro succeeded Suzuki and prioritized strengthening ties with South Korea as his major foreign policy initiative. Not only did Nakasone resume economic aid negotiations with South Korea, but he is also credited as the first Japanese

¹⁵⁵ Lee, *Japan and Korea*, 130–31.

¹⁵⁶ Pollmann, "Japan's Security and Historical Revisionism," 320; Cha, *Alignment Despite Antagonism*, 186–87.

¹⁵⁷ Schneider, "The Japanese History Textbook Controversy in East Asian Perspective," 109.

Prime Minister to officially travel to South Korea since the two states normalized relations.¹⁵⁸ During his visit in 1983, Prime Minister Nakasone finalized the economic aid package by offering \$4 billion in economic aid and issuing a joint communiqué with President Chun stating, “it would be in the interest of both the South Korean and Japanese peoples for the two countries, as neighbors pursuing the common ideals of freedom and democracy, to mutually maintain and develop close cooperative relations.”¹⁵⁹

In response to the positive reception of Nakasone in South Korea, President Chun was invited to Japan to deepen bilateral relations further. Chun leveraged the warming of relations with Nakasone by insisting on a formal apology for Japan’s actions during its colonial rule as a condition for his visit.¹⁶⁰ On 6 September 1984, Emperor Hirohito made a formal apology to President Chun during his official visit expressing, “This is truly regrettable; and it will not be repeated again.”¹⁶¹ This was followed up a day later by Prime Minister Nakasone with another formal apology to President Chun.¹⁶² The two apologies were the most substantial attempts by Japan since normalizing relations with South Korea to reconcile historical issues and were received favorably in South Korean media. Yet, South Koreans were less than enthusiastic about the apologies. According to a *Han’guk Ilbo*-Gallup poll, less than 50 percent of Koreans viewed the Japanese Emperor’s apology as satisfactory.¹⁶³ In response to the less-than-accepting attitude of Koreans, the Chun regime acknowledged that the unprecedented remarks by Japan lacked the apparent atonement Koreans were hoping for.

¹⁵⁸ Hong N. Kim, “Japanese-Korean Relations in the 1980s,” *Asian Survey* 27, no. 5 (1987): 503–4.

¹⁵⁹ Takashi Oka, “Japan’s Nakasone Explores Common Ground with Korea,” *Christian Science Monitor*, January 13, 1983, <https://www.csmonitor.com/1983/0113/011348.html>.

¹⁶⁰ Jane W. Yamazaki, *Japanese Apologies for World War II: A Rhetorical Study* (London: Routledge, 2012), 35.

¹⁶¹ Yamazaki, 36.

¹⁶² J.L. Battenfeld, “South Korean President Secures Second Apology from Japanese,” *United Press International*, September 7, 1984, <https://www.upi.com/Archives/1984/09/07/South-Korean-president-secures-second-apology-from-Japanese/6496463377600/>.

¹⁶³ Cha, *Alignment Despite Antagonism*, 194.

C. CONVERGENCE/DIVERGENCE OF HISTORICAL NARRATIVES

Government-to-government shallow reconciliation approached rapprochement as economic relations created more avenues for cooperation. Still, there was little effort between Japan and South Korea to use the opportunity to develop a shared narrative or address historical issues that would lead to lasting reconciliation.¹⁶⁴ Japan's postwar historical narratives unified under a conservative LDP exacerbated the official whitewashed versions of historical atrocities to promote a nationalist identity of victimhood that placed the Japanese people into a larger Asian victim identity against Western imperialism.¹⁶⁵ The suppression of leftist voices in Japan over fears of communism effectively eliminated the opinions of many Japanese who opposed the whitewashed narratives promulgated by the conservative LDP. Under the Yoshida doctrine, Japan's economic diplomacy and its insistent drive for rapid economic growth pushed domestic issues of war reconciliation out of international diplomatic efforts. This was seen in Japan's economic ties with South Korea under Park, but also during the détente period with the People's Republic of China when Deng Xiaoping announced they would not seek war reparations during negotiations to normalize relations.

Japan's economic diplomacy trumping reconciliation efforts was also seen through public opinion polls, where many Japanese citizens viewed Japan as committing to helping other Asian nations. Japan's apathy towards the lasting consequences of its colonial policies on other Asian nations only served to disassociate newer generations from reconciling with its past as the aggressor. These narratives, and the general attitudes of the Japanese towards Koreans, fed the growing consciousness within South Korea over their victimization at the hands of the Japanese as part of their increasing ethnonationalist identity.

The South Korean regime's efforts to keep historical animosities suppressed during this period also had deleterious effects on reconciliation efforts between Japan and South Korea. While issues over historical narratives impacted bilateral relations on several

¹⁶⁴ Sakaki, "Japanese-South Korean Textbook Talks," 276.

¹⁶⁵ Orr, *The Victim as Hero*, 103–5.

occasions, only superficial efforts by the state to reconcile the issues were conducted to allow bilateral relations to continue.¹⁶⁶ This prevented the root causes of the problems driving divides in Japan-ROK relations from being appropriately addressed, which implicitly supported the solidification of divergent narratives between Japan and South Korea that impacted people-to-people reconciliation efforts. The growth of the *minjung* movement in South Korea during the 1960s and 1970s appropriated the widely shared anti-Japanese sentiment that began to change the narrative supported by the Park and early Chun regimes. By the 1980s, the strength of student and worker protests over their perceived views of victimization and subaltern status at the hands of Japan and the United States helped to bring political change to South Korea. While Chun Doo-hwan's violent military coup thwarted their efforts to democratize in the early 1980s, it brought historical animosities to Korean domestic politics that fundamentally changed how South Korea's authoritarian regime retained its legitimacy.

Additionally, the South Korean regime's focus on improving its economic relations with Japan and security relations with the U.S. took more precedence than appropriately addressing the South Korean public's antipathy towards Japan. In response to growing counternarratives, greater repression within South Korea challenged the regime's legitimacy. It served to solidify a negative attitude among many South Koreans toward the U.S. and Japan's responsibility in keeping authoritarianism alive in South Korea. The relegation of public opinion to secondary importance in South Korea helped solidify its divergent historical narratives and national myths, making it more difficult for it to reconcile with Japan when the opportunities presented themselves.

The 1980s for Japan and South Korea were a tumultuous time that saw unprecedented cooperation on reconciliation at the intergovernmental level and visible dissatisfaction in the perceived shallowness of atonement and acceptance. While the efforts to strengthen relations between Japan and South Korea mainly revolved around geopolitics, the ministerial meetings over bilateral issues allowed both Japan and South Korea to initiate the first official visits by the heads of state to each country since Korean independence in

¹⁶⁶ Chen, "Decolonizing Japan-South Korea Relations," 246.

1948. However, the high-profile controversies surrounding the renewed Kim Dae-jung affair, the textbook controversies, and the Yasukuni Shrine visit by Nakasone overshadowed the progress made at the intergovernmental level. They served to embolden shared distrust over the intentions of properly resolving historical issues within public opinion.

After forty-five years since the end of World War II and twenty-five years since establishing diplomatic relations, Japan and South Korea manipulated historical animosities for economic gain and little to further the reconciliation process. As the contemporary period will show, the inability of both nations to find common ground over controversial issues and move towards deeper interstate reconciliation during this period would lead to lasting divergent attitudes that would continue to impact Japan-ROK relations to the present day negatively.

IV. THE CONTEMPORARY PERIOD (1990–2022)

The social and political shifts that occurred at the end of the Cold War became major influencers in Japan-ROK relations as deep-seated animosities suppressed under the Cold War environment surfaced when the region was adjusting to the new geopolitical landscape. As existential threats to Japan, South Korea, and the U.S.-led alliance network were reduced, the political elites in Japan and South Korea, who framed their respective historical narratives and national myths within the Cold War threat environment, now had to contend with a resurgence of ethnonationalism and growing calls in South Korea for Japan to accept responsibility for its past.¹⁶⁷ The changing narratives and myths within Japan and South Korea brought on by ethnonationalist identities would have consequential effects that are presently preventing both states from reaching deep reconciliation.

South Korea's democratization in 1987 introduced new actors and interest groups who would have significant influence over shaping new historical narratives and myths and promoting a leftist ethnonationalist identity based on the mass-led *minjung* movement.¹⁶⁸ Specifically, South Korea's new narratives elevated its myth of victimization and subaltern status at the hands of the Japanese during the prewar colonial period and postwar period under authoritarian rule to represent its inherently anti-Japanese ethnonationalist identity. South Korean civil society used the mass-led ethnonationalist narratives to influence the new political elite, who quickly leveraged anti-Japanese sentiments and leftist narratives to bolster their domestic approval ratings. This placed South Korean elected leaders who sought better relations with Japan in a challenging position. No longer could they suppress domestic sentiments to improve relations with Japan because it was viewed as an attack against South Korea's national identity. Bilateral relations, therefore, turned into efforts to extract justice to restore national honor for South Korea.

¹⁶⁷ Glosserman and Snyder, *The Japan-South Korea Identity Clash*, 156; Li, "Identity Tensions and China-Japan-Korea Relations," 47–73.

¹⁶⁸ Kim, "Symbolic Politics, the History Problem, and the Japan-South Korea Security Relationship During the Post-Cold War Period," 124.

In Japan, the transition from the Shōwa era to the Heisei era (1989–2019) after the death of Emperor Hirohito was widely viewed as a significant departure from its imperial ties overshadowing the post-World War II period.¹⁶⁹ Under Emperor Akihito, Japan could have freely discussed its war responsibility, conducted new research, and openly debated the variety of opinions in Japanese society to reconcile its past within its historical narrative. However, Japanese conservative ethnonationalist groups would become more vocal in the public narrative and push their revisionist views of historical events to tie contemporary Japan to its prewar ethnonationalist identity. Specifically, Japanese conservative ethnonationalist groups saw Japan's victim-complex born out of the early postwar period narratives and myths as an affront to Japan's long and rich cultural history. They view many of the restrictions enplaced by SCAP within the Peace Constitution as efforts to keep Japan from being able to embrace its cultural history—such as the cultural significance of Shintōism. They justify or downplay many of the issues related to historical animosities within their narratives through a whitewashed version of history. Therefore, Japanese historical revisionists seek to promote narratives that glorify the prewar Japanese empire and try to amend the postwar Peace Constitution to reinstate culturally significant practices.

Throughout this period, Japan and South Korea's relations would constantly be tested over what is commonly called the "history problem." Specifically, the issues primarily revolved around the portrayal of Japan's colonial occupation of Korea (1910–1945) and its responsibility concerning comfort women, forced labor, and the territorial dispute over the Dokdo/Takeshima islands. Despite the attention paid to the "history problem," the underlying force that drove these issues to the forefront of Japan-ROK relations and prevented sincere reconciliation progress was a rise of historical revisionism within each nation's ethnonationalist identity. The polarity between Japan's conservative/far-right and South Korea's progressive/far-left ethnonationalist identities politicized the reconciliation process at intergovernmental and people-to-people levels—effectively

¹⁶⁹ Koichi Nakano, "The Rightward Shift of Japanese Politics: Interest, Reform, and Identity," in *Japan in the Heisei Era (1989-2019): Multidisciplinary Perspectives* (London; New York: Routledge, 2022), 33.

creating insurmountable barriers to narrative convergence. When efforts to reconcile historical animosities did occur, they often were short-lived due to high levels of distrust and poor perceptions of each other, driving further resentment and distrust. However, the trend of historical revisionism becoming dominant within Japan and South Korea's official narratives and myths has given rise to opposing voices within Japan and South Korea wishing to challenge the mainstream narrative over historical animosities. While these minority opinions have complicated the reconciliation process, there are opportunities within some of these groups to improve reconciliation efforts and work towards deep interstate reconciliation.

This chapter will examine how the underlying influences of ethnonationalism within Japanese and South Korean historical narratives and national myths elevated the "history problem" to becoming a significant obstacle to improving relations. Under each country section, I will examine how a substantial rise in historical revisionism hampered efforts to develop a shared narrative; how rising domestic divides over the "correct" national identity and collective memory have created a domestic divergence in historical narratives and national myths; and how pro-revisionist groups who seek narrative convergence through a critical review of prevailing narratives challenge historical revisionism.

A. JAPAN

The transition to the Heisei era brought high hopes among many that the postwar identity dominant in Japan's conservative political elite could change to improve reconciliation with South Korea. Yet, despite a symbolic opportunity for Japan to realize its responsibility for historical animosities, three factors emerged as significant hindrances in Japan's ability to deepen reconciliation with South Korea. First, the rise of right-wing ethnonationalism within mainstream narratives challenged the identity of victimization within Japanese society and sought to rekindle prewar cultural identities. Second, historical revisionism pushed Japan's official narratives to a new degree of divergence and elevated revisionist narratives to issues of national identity. Third, domestic NGOs and actors promoting reconciliation are challenged by the Japanese Government's revisionist

narratives and myths which challenge the ability to develop narrative convergence within Japan's own collective memory and cultural identity.

1. Rise of Right-Wing Ethnonationalism in Mainstream Narratives

The first factor concerns the resurgence of revisionist history in mainstream narratives during the late 1990s that right-wing ethnonationalist groups and government officials promulgated.¹⁷⁰ In 1997, the emergence of the *Nippon Kaigi* (The Japan Conference) right-wing political organization was the first instance where right-wing narratives were spreading historical revisionist theories reached mainstream Japanese identity.¹⁷¹ Since then, the rise of right-wing ethnonationalist movements has challenged reconciliation efforts by diminishing the efforts by Social Democratic Party-led governments and progressive NGOs to come to terms with Japan's colonial past.¹⁷² Specifically, right-wing narratives advocate for new interpretations of Japan's past that seek to remove the victimized identity tied to postwar Japan and reintroduce many prewar ethnonationalist identities. Right-wing government officials also downplay the significance of official Japanese apologies and admissions of prewar Japanese aggression by challenging their legitimacy and issuing views opposing previous Japanese governments' efforts.¹⁷³ These contradictions within Japan's historical narrative create deep divides in the shared historical consciousness between Japan and South Korea, which

¹⁷⁰ Sven Saaler, "Heisei Historiography: Academic History and Public Commemoration in Japan, 1990–2020," in *Japan in the Heisei Era (1989-2019): Multidisciplinary Perspectives*, ed. Noriko Murai, Jeff Kingston, and Tina Burrett (London; New York: Routledge, 2022), 290; Nakano, "The Rightward Shift of Japanese Politics," 39.

¹⁷¹ Sachie Mizohata, "Nippon Kaigi: Empire, Contradiction, and Japan's Future," *The Asia-Pacific Journal* 14, no. 21 (November 1, 2016).

¹⁷² Wonhyuk Lim, "Economic Integration and Reconciliation in Northeast Asia," in *Rethinking Historical Injustice and Reconciliation in Northeast Asia: The Korean Experience*, ed. Gi-Wook Shin, Soon-Won Park, and Daqing Yang (London: Routledge, 2007), 240; 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): 26; Saaler, "Heisei Historiography," 289.

¹⁷³ Orr, *The Victim as Hero*, 178.

leads to the perception of insincerity and an unwillingness to come to terms with the past.¹⁷⁴

One mainstay in the right-wing playbook is to promote its revisionist narratives through textbooks that view Japan's current postwar narrative as masochistic and demeaning to the pride of a Japanese ethnonationalist state.¹⁷⁵ The controversy over Japanese textbooks is a periodic phenomenon that incites severe criticism from domestic and international audiences despite their relative obscurity in the Japanese school system. In fact, since the late 1970s and through the 1990s, most Japanese school texts have been quite clear on Japanese prewar aggression and the negative impacts it had on other Asian nations.¹⁷⁶ Yet, these progressive revisions to Japanese texts elicited a strong backlash from the resurgent right-wing groups in the late 1990s.¹⁷⁷ For the right-wing nationalist group *Tsukurukai* (Japan's Society for History Textbook Reform), it seeks to rewrite Japan's postwar history to bring back the prewar nationalist sentiments reminiscent of the *kokutai* identity that are integral to conservative views on Japanese nationalism.¹⁷⁸ The 2001 textbook controversy between Japan and South Korea reflects the contentious nature that these right-wing revisionist narratives bring to attempts to reconcile past animosities and develop a shared historical narrative. The controversies emerged after the *Tsukurukai* textbooks received significant support from conservative government officials and media outlets.¹⁷⁹ Despite the meager adoption rate of the right-wing revisionist textbooks (0.039 percent in 2001),¹⁸⁰ the cyclical controversy between Japan and South Korea over the

¹⁷⁴ Kim, "Symbolic Politics, the History Problem, and the Japan-South Korea Security Relationship During the Post-Cold War Period," 125.

¹⁷⁵ 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): 316.

¹⁷⁶ Orr, *The Victim as Hero*, 176; Kim, "Escaping the Vicious Cycle," 45.

¹⁷⁷ Fukuoka, "Japanese History Textbook Controversy at a Crossroads?," 313.

¹⁷⁸ "Prospectus: Meeting to create a new history textbook," *Tsukurukai*, accessed April 17, 2022, <http://www.tsukurukai.com/aboutus/syuisyo.html>; Kim, "Symbolic Politics, the History Problem, and the Japan-South Korea Security Relationship During the Post-Cold War Period," 97.

¹⁷⁹ Kim, "Escaping the Vicious Cycle," 45–46.

¹⁸⁰ Fukuoka, "Japanese History Textbook Controversy at a Crossroads?," 317.

textbooks highlights the continued strength of right-wing narratives in influencing Japan-ROK reconciliation efforts.¹⁸¹

2. Historical Revisionism and Japan's Official Narrative

The second factor considers the impact of historical revisionism within Japan's official narratives over the three major issues confounding the "history problem" and how Japanese far-right groups have impacted Japan's ability to reconcile key historical issues with South Korea officially. This section examines how Japan's official narrative has responded to the issues of comfort women, forced labor, and the territorial disputes over the Dokdo/Takeshima islands through a historically revisionist perspective controlled by Japan's conservative political elites. While the whole of Japanese society does not share the historical revisionist perspectives on these three historical issues, it is widely viewed to be Japan's official narrative because of the positions held by right-wing politicians who promote revisionist narratives, but also because of the international attention paid towards far-right groups that incite discrimination and harassment against those that oppose their radical narratives.

On the issue of comfort women, right-wing groups have lobbied for revisionist history textbooks to remove any discussion on comfort women,¹⁸² sought Diet investigations into the 1993 Kōno Statement to discredit it as an official Japanese Government report,¹⁸³ and have promoted narratives that either minimize or deny Japan's responsibility on the issue.¹⁸⁴ Japan's official stance according to their 2021 Diplomatic Bluebook promotes a revisionist narrative that seeks to discredit the comfort women issue by questioning the efficacy of survivor accounts and Japan's agency in the system of

¹⁸¹ Ku, "International Reconciliation in the Postwar Era, 1945–2005," 29.

¹⁸² Kim, "Escaping the Vicious Cycle," 41; Glosserman and Snyder, *The Japan-South Korea Identity Clash*, 100–101; Yumiko Iida, *Rethinking Identity in Modern Japan: Nationalism as Aesthetics*, Routledge/Asian Studies Association of Australia (ASAA) East Asia Series 3 (London ; New York: Routledge, 2002), 252.

¹⁸³ Snyder, *South Korea at the Crossroads*, 184.

¹⁸⁴ Gordon, *A Modern History of Japan*, 342; Kim, "Escaping the Vicious Cycle," 40.

“comfort stations.”¹⁸⁵ Statements from senior conservative political leaders also denigrate comfort women by labeling them greedy individuals trying to “double or triple dip” through compensation demands. In a statement from 1997, then-Tokyo governor, Shintaro Ishihara, stated, “If [the survivors] became successful millionaires, they would never think of coming out and speaking of such a thing. Back then, they traded their bodies for money; now they trade their pride for money.”¹⁸⁶

More recently, conservative narratives on the issue of comfort women have sought to distance Japan from its responsibility in the comfort women issue. In 2014, a United Nations human rights panel called on Japan to undertake independent investigations into its wartime sex slavery and to clarify Japan’s contradictory position on the issue.¹⁸⁷ Although the Abe administration finally accepted the 1993 Kōno Statement as Japan’s stance on the comfort women issue, they requested that the United Nations revise its previous report on sex slavery to remove terms that insinuated “comfort stations” were worse than other state-regulated brothels in many other Asian countries by promoting “sex slavery” and “sex slaves.”¹⁸⁸ Even after the landmark 2015 Comfort Women agreement between Japan and South Korea, Japanese conservative politicians denigrated former comfort women. In 2016, Yoshitaka Sakurada, a former senior vice-minister of Education, Culture, Sports, Science, and Technology, stated, “Military comfort women were professional prostitutes.”¹⁸⁹ Thus, conservative narratives continued to downplay the government’s responsibility while painting the comfort women survivors as no different

¹⁸⁵ “Diplomatic Bluebook 2021,” Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Japan, 2021, 38–39, 46–49, https://www.mofa.go.jp/fp/pp/page22e_000932.html.

¹⁸⁶ Hideko Mitsui, “The Resignification of the ‘Comfort Women’ Through Ngo Trials,” in *Rethinking Historical Injustice and Reconciliation in Northeast Asia: The Korean Experience*, ed. Gi-Wook Shin, Soon-Won Park, and Daqing Yang (London: Routledge, 2007), 38.

¹⁸⁷ Stephanie Nebehay, “U.N. Panel Tells Japan to Compensate ‘Comfort Women,’” *Reuters*, July 24, 2014, <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-japan-sexcrimes-idUSKBN0FT1F520140724>.

¹⁸⁸ Reiji Yoshida, “Government Requests Revision of 1996 U.N. Sex Slave Report,” *Japan Times*, October 16, 2014, <https://www.japantimes.co.jp/news/2014/10/16/national/history/government-requests-revision-of-1996-u-n-sex-slave-report/>; Ji Young Kim and Jeyong Sohn, “Settlement Without Consensus: International Pressure, Domestic Backlash, and the Comfort Women Issue in Japan,” *Pacific Affairs* 90, no. 1 (March 2017): 95.

¹⁸⁹ Kim and Sohn, “Settlement Without Consensus,” 78.

from other prostitutes despite claiming to have reached a “final and irreversible resolution” on the issue.

Far right-wing groups like the *Zaitokukai* took conservative views on comfort women further. They became known to use threatening tactics against organizations and former comfort women living in Japan as *zainichi* Koreans that went against their revisionist ideologies and overall anti-Korean sentiments.¹⁹⁰ While far right-wing organizations like the *Zaitokukai* were at the margins of the conservative views on the comfort women issue, their connections with larger right-wing groups like *Nippon Kaigi* and the large right-wing online community (*netto uyoku*) promulgate an ethnonationalist narrative within Japan that denies its agency in the coercive use of comfort women under Imperial Japan.¹⁹¹

On the issue of forced labor, right-wing groups and politicians saw efforts by foreign NGOs and individuals demanding reparations from Japanese corporations as an attack against their nationalist identity. Right-wing nationalist groups have emphasized ‘Japan as a victim’ in their narratives countering the forced labor issue.¹⁹² Specifically, victims of forced labor have been seeking restitution and acknowledgment of Japan’s official responsibility for its use of forced labor during the colonial occupation of Korea. Additionally, some right-wing groups share comparable views of a pan-Asianist identity prevalent in prewar Japan, where Japan’s colonial policies in Korea were legal and beneficial for the Korean people.¹⁹³ While Japan’s official stance currently states that all historical issues related to its colonial occupation of Korea were settled with the 1965 Basic treaty, conservative narratives paint the forced laborers as individuals who voluntarily

¹⁹⁰ Yoon and Asahina, “The Rise and Fall of Japan’s New Far Right,” 380, 384–86.

¹⁹¹ Paula R. Curtis, “Taking the Fight for Japan’s History Online: The Ramseyer Controversy and Social Media,” *The Asia-Pacific Journal* 19, no. 22 (November 15, 2021).

¹⁹² Hein, “The Ambiguities of Amending Historical Injustices and Espousing a Shared Collective Memory,” 51–52.

¹⁹³ Iida, *Rethinking Identity in Modern Japan*, 224–25; Kim, “Symbolic Politics, the History Problem, and the Japan-South Korea Security Relationship During the Post-Cold War Period,” 97.

came to Japan and were treated fairly and paid appropriately.¹⁹⁴ However, this narrative directly contradicts the prejudices faced by the *zainichi* Koreans, who were the forced/coerced laborers of Japan's prewar economy and continue to face discrimination today.

Additionally, right-wing government officials have also sought to revise the narratives over national myths by turning prewar sites where Korean forced labor was into UNESCO heritage sites. Places like the Aso gold mine on Sado Island and the Hashima industrial site on Gunkanjima Island (also known as Battleship Island) have sparked a significant backlash from Korean groups because of Japan's attempts to completely whitewash the atrocities at the sites and turn them into their own *lieux de mémoire*.¹⁹⁵ Japanese conservative groups seek to support their revisionist narrative and its ties to Japan's prewar ethnonationalist identity by glorifying symbolic sites from the Meiji Restoration while leaving out a transparent discussion on their use of forced labor during World War II.¹⁹⁶ A series of Meiji-era industrial revolution sites within Japan achieved UNESCO heritage status in 2015 but came under scrutiny in 2018 and again in 2021 by the UNESCO World Heritage Committee when they reported that the sites were not considered the full transparent view of the history at each location.¹⁹⁷ Particularly, the reports noted that specific areas failed to mention the use of forced laborers from Korea during the 1940s and downplayed the nature of their situation by claiming that they were treated equally compared to the other workers at the sites. Efforts to portray Japan's prewar past as critical to its present ethnonational identity by attaining internationally recognized

¹⁹⁴ Hein, "The Ambiguities of Amending Historical Injustices and Espousing a Shared Collective Memory," 51–52; "Fact Sheet: What Are the Facts Regarding Former Civilian Workers from the Korean Peninsula?," Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Japan, accessed April 1, 2022, <https://www.mofa.go.jp/files/000420466.pdf>.

¹⁹⁵ Hein, "The Ambiguities of Amending Historical Injustices and Espousing a Shared Collective Memory," 57–58; Taku Tamaki, "A Clash of Realities Blocking the Reset in Japan–South Korea Relations," East Asia Forum, last modified March 2, 2022, <https://www.eastasiaforum.org/2022/03/02/a-clash-of-realities-blocking-the-reset-in-japan-south-korea-relations/>.

¹⁹⁶ Hein, "The Ambiguities of Amending Historical Injustices and Espousing a Shared Collective Memory," 57.

¹⁹⁷ Motoko Rich and Hikari Hida, "Japan Wants to Showcase Gold Mines' History. Just Not All of It.," *New York Times*, February 21, 2022, <https://www.nytimes.com/2022/02/21/world/asia/japan-sado-island-unesco-heritage.html>; "UNESCO World Heritage Centre - State of Conservation (SOC 2021) Sites of Japan's Meiji Industrial Revolution: Iron and Steel, Shipbuilding and Coal Mining (Japan)," UNESCO World Heritage Centre, accessed April 17, 2022, <https://whc.unesco.org/en/soc/4085/>.

lieux de mémoire highlight the strength of revisionist narratives in Japan and detracts from any sincere effort to properly reconcile with its prewar past and address current historical issues with South Korea.

The final aspect of the “history problem” is the Dokdo/Takeshima islands dispute. While the disagreement re-emerged from a dormant state in the mid-1990s, it became a central point in the historical narrative argument for right-wing nationalists in 2012 after Korean President Lee Myung-bak (2008-2013) visited the disputed islands to garner domestic support back home.¹⁹⁸ While the issue over the proper claims to the Dokdo/Takeshima islands was a major stumbling block during efforts to normalize relations in the 1950s, both Japan and South Korea maintained a status-quo stance during the Cold War period that kept them from interfering with bilateral relations. The territorial dispute emerged in 1996 after the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea came into effect and was exacerbated when Shimane Prefecture passed an ordinance establishing Takeshima Day in 2005 despite opposition from LDP senior leadership and the Japanese Government’s official stance on the territorial dispute with South Korea.¹⁹⁹ However, the Japanese public became more aware of the issue after Japan’s diplomatic controversies with China over the Senkaku/Diaoyu islands in the mid-2000s.²⁰⁰ Right-wing nationalists were able to turn the Dokdo/Takeshima dispute into a symbolic issue that highlighted South Korea’s efforts to challenge Japan’s national pride again through their revisionist history to leverage historical animosities to extract greater concessions from Japan despite international law.²⁰¹ From a scholarly perspective, the Dokdo/Takeshima island dispute is more a consequence of early postwar SCAP occupation policies (e.g., MacArthur Line) and the rush to finalize the 1951 San Francisco Treaty than issues over national pride.

¹⁹⁸ Glosserman and Snyder, *The Japan-South Korea Identity Clash*, 107.

¹⁹⁹ Bukh, “‘Takeshima’, ‘Northern Territories’ and the Construction of Japan’s National Identity,” 75; Glosserman and Snyder, *The Japan-South Korea Identity Clash*, 103.

²⁰⁰ Kim, “Symbolic Politics, the History Problem, and the Japan-South Korea Security Relationship During the Post-Cold War Period,” 316–17; Bukh, “‘Takeshima’, ‘Northern Territories’ and the Construction of Japan’s National Identity,” 82.

²⁰¹ Kim, “Symbolic Politics, the History Problem, and the Japan-South Korea Security Relationship During the Post-Cold War Period,” 101; “10 Points to Understand the Takeshima Dispute,” Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Japan, March 2014, <https://www.mofa.go.jp/files/000092147.pdf>.

However, in the mounting conservative backlash to South Korea's efforts to internationalize the history problem around the time of President Lee's visit, conservative government officials sought to internationalize their revisionist perspectives on historical issues through strategic communication initiatives aimed at the international community.²⁰² These efforts solidified Japan's official stance on territorial disputes along the lines of conservative narratives bolstered by right-wing activities, such as Takeshima Day, which tied them to the greater "history problem" impacting Japan-ROK relations—creating insurmountable barriers for reconciliation to occur.²⁰³

3. Challenges to Developing Narrative Convergence

The third factor hindering Japan's reconciliatory efforts concerns the inconsistency in Japan's attempts to amend historical animosities and the challenges of developing historical narrative convergence with South Korea. Although the above discussion highlights the primacy of conservative ethnonationalist narratives, there is a clear divergence between Japan's official narratives and the critical examination of Japan during its colonial occupation of Korea by historians and academics.²⁰⁴ As discussed in Chapter II, the LDP-led government was able to control the historical narratives critical of Japan's imperial policies because many of the opposing voices came from the leftist/Marxist political groups and NGOs that were suppressed out of the fear of communist infiltration into mainstream Japanese society. Additionally, Emperor Hirohito remained the symbolic head of state in Japan after the war, which induced a form of self-censorship when examining Japan's agency in the war and its colonial policies.²⁰⁵ Yet, after the death of Emperor Hirohito, even efforts by Emperor Hirohito to address Japan's history under his

²⁰² "Diplomatic Bluebook 2015," Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Japan, 2015, https://www.mofa.go.jp/fp/pp/page24e_000100.html.

²⁰³ Similar issues exist in reconciliation efforts between Japan-China over the Diaoyu/Senkaku Islands and between Japan-Russia over the Kuril Islands/Northern Territories. Bukh, "'Takeshima', 'Northern Territories' and the Construction of Japan's National Identity"; Mari Yamaguchi, "Japan Says Disputed Islands 'Illegally Occupied by Russia,'" *Washington Post*, April 22, 2022, https://www.washingtonpost.com/politics/japan-says-disputed-islands-illegally-occupied-by-russia/2022/04/22/d99defd8-c22d-11ec-b5df-1fba61a66c75_story.html.

²⁰⁴ Curtis, "Taking the Fight for Japan's History Online."

²⁰⁵ Saaler, "Heisei Historiography," 288–89.

father became at odds with the right-wing narratives that glorify the role of the emperor in Japan's identity; particularly its prewar ethnonationalist *kokutai* identity.

Between 1990 and 2022, Japanese officials, including Emperor Akihito, have formally offered apologies over historical issues and, to a degree, Japan's responsibility for them. However, conservative officials contradict these statements of remorse and regret through their revisionist narratives and actions. For example, the *lieux de mémoire* of the Yasukuni Shrine has become a symbol of the historical revisionism in Japan because conservative politicians who support the revisionist narratives began visiting the shrine in an official capacity again after right-wing narratives became mainstream in the late 1990s.²⁰⁶ More so, right-wing ethnonationalist groups have further inflamed historical animosities by reopening the Yushukan war memorial museum at the Yasukuni Shrine in 2002 to inculcate a renewed sense of nationalism tied to Japan's prewar past with younger generations by removing any feelings of responsibility they may have to address historical issues.²⁰⁷ Not since the controversy of Prime Minister Nakasone's visit in 1985 had a Japanese Government official visited the shrine in an official capacity until Prime Minister Koizumi Junichiro began visiting the shrine on an annual basis between 2001 and 2006. Despite a Japanese court ruling in 2004 that stated Prime Minister Koizumi's visits to the shrine violated the Constitution, he continued to visit the Yasukuni Shrine in an official capacity until the end of his term as Prime Minister.²⁰⁸ Prime Minister Abe had also visited the shrine in 2013 in support of the right-wing ethnonationalist narratives of *Nippon Kaigi* and *Jinja Honchō* despite its unconstitutional nature because it shored up support among the right-wing factions seeking constitutional reforms.²⁰⁹ Recently, a visit to the shrine by

²⁰⁶ Jeff Kingston, *Contemporary Japan: History, Politics, and Social Change Since the 1980s*, 2nd ed (Chichester, West Sussex; Malden, MA: John Wiley & Sons, 2013), 155–59; Glosserman and Snyder, *The Japan-South Korea Identity Clash*, 102.

²⁰⁷ Hong Kal, "The Aesthetic Construction of Ethnic Nationalism: War Memorial Museums in Korea and Japan," in *Rethinking Historical Injustice and Reconciliation in Northeast Asia: The Korean Experience*, ed. Gi-Wook Shin, Soon-Won Park, and Daqing Yang (London: Routledge, 2007), 142–49; Takenaka, *Yasukuni Shrine*, 166, 188.

²⁰⁸ Ernils Larsson, "Jinja Honchō and the Politics of Constitutional Reform in Japan," *Japan Review*, no. 30 (2017): 244.

²⁰⁹ Larsson, 248.

former Prime Minister Abe Shinzō and a ritual offering made by Prime Minister Kishida Fumio sparked an immediate backlash from the South Korean Ministry of Foreign Affairs with a statement claiming “Japan’s responsible leaders have once again sent offerings to and paid respects at the Yasukuni Shrine which glorifies Japan’s history of the war of aggression and enshrines war criminals.”²¹⁰ Yet, despite all the international attention the Yasukuni Shrine receives, annual visitors to the shrine and the accompanying Yushukan war memorial museum pale in comparison to the yearly visitor logs of other prominent symbolic sites in Japan, such as the Hiroshima Peace Memorial Museum. In 2017, the Hiroshima Peace Memorial Museum recorded 1,680,923 visitors, while the Yasukuni Shrine recorded around 90,000 visitors.²¹¹

The strength of historical revisionism in Japan’s official narratives is seen in the efficacy of NGOs and individuals advocating for a greater scholarly retrospection of Japan’s imperial past.²¹² In 2015, 187 scholars and historians from around the world signed an open letter to Prime Minister Abe after his speech to a joint session of the U.S. Congress seeking an end to the revision of Japan’s history—particularly on the issue of comfort women.²¹³ Despite the attempts by scholars of Japan to address right-wing

²¹⁰ Elaine Lies, Soo-hyang Choi, and Eduardo Baptista, “China, South Korea Protest Over Japanese PM’s Offering to War Dead,” *Reuters*, April 21, 2022, <https://www.reuters.com/world/asia-pacific/japan-pm-kishida-sends-offering-controversial-shrine-war-dead-2022-04-21/>.

²¹¹ Kyosuke Mizukawa, “International Visitors to Hiroshima Peace Memorial Museum Reach High in Fiscal 2017, but Total Number Declines,” *Chugoku Shimbun*, April 4, 2018, <https://www.hiroshimapeacemedia.jp/?p=82026>; Gabriel Fung, “Are Yasukuni Shrine Visits a Sign of Rising Nationalism in Japan?,” *The Diplomat*, September 3, 2021, <https://thediplomat.com/2021/09/are-yasukuni-shrine-visits-a-sign-of-rising-nationalism-in-japan/>.

²¹² Saaler, “Heisei Historiography,” 295.

²¹³ After the letter was initially released, a total of 464 Japan scholars have signed the open letter. “Open Letter in Support of Historians in Japan,” *The Asia-Pacific Journal* 13, no. 19 (May 11, 2015); Shinzō Abe, “‘Toward an Alliance of Hope’ - Address to a Joint Meeting of the U.S. Congress,” Prime Minister of Japan and His Cabinet, last modified April 10, 2022, https://japan.kantei.go.jp/97_abe/statement/201504/uscongress.html.

narratives, Japan's official stances on the issues surrounding the "history problem" continue to imbue the anti-intellectual narratives of historical revisionism.²¹⁴

Earlier efforts by NGOs promoting reconciliation were also overshadowed by the rise in ethnonationalist political rhetoric in both Japan and South Korea. Transnational NGOs formed in the 1990s seeking to improve reconciliation efforts between Japanese and South Korean societies have made strides to enhance the exchange of views on contentious historical issues. Groups such as the Japan-Korea Forum, the Korea-Japan Committee for History Research, the Korea-Japan History Forum, and *Hanil Yondae 21* (Korea-Japan Solidarity 21) have brought perspectives from both societies together to promote a greater mutual understanding.²¹⁵ In response to the 2001 *Tsukurukai* textbook controversy, scholars from Japan, South Korea, and China began working on their own jointly produced textbook that would provide an alternative to the pro-ethnonationalist narratives re-emerging in Japan's education system. Published in 2005, *A History that Opens to the Future: The Contemporary and Modern History of Three East Asian Countries* provided the first non-governmental effort of a shared historical narrative that could be used within the education systems of Japan and South Korea.²¹⁶ Parallel efforts under the Koizumi and Kim Dae-jung governments under the Joint Japan-ROK Joint History Research Committee failed to produce a joint textbook because the governments could not reach a consensus on how to depict the period of Japan's colonial occupation of Korea.²¹⁷ Subsequent efforts failed under a DPJ-led government to produce a joint history textbook with South Korea in 2009.

²¹⁴ "Report of the Advisory Panel on the History of the 20th Century and on Japan's Role and the World Order in the 21st Century," The Advisory Panel on the History of the 20th Century and on Japan's Role and World Order in the 21st Century, August 6, 2015, https://www.kantei.go.jp/jp/singi/21c_koso/pdf/report_en.pdf; Saaler, "Heisei Historiography," 294–95; Linda Sieg, "Japan, Led by Less Apologetic Generation, Stays Tough in South Korea Feud," *Reuters*, August 8, 2019, <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-southkorea-japan-labourers-history-an-idUSKCN1UY1BA>.

²¹⁵ Ku, "International Reconciliation in the Postwar Era, 1945–2005," 28.

²¹⁶ Ku, 29; Gi-Wook Shin, Soon-Won Park, and Daqing Yang, eds., *Rethinking Historical Injustice and Reconciliation in Northeast Asia: The Korean Experience* (London: Routledge, 2007), 256–57.

²¹⁷ Gi-Wook Shin, "Historical Reconciliation in Northeast Asia: Past Efforts, Future Steps, and the U.S. Role," in *Confronting Memories of World War II: European and Asian Legacies*, ed. Daniel Chirot, Gi-Wook Shin, and Daniel Sneider (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 2014), 168.

Yet, efforts by transnational NGOs to develop joint textbooks to reconcile historical divergence and promote a shared collective memory among younger generations are hampered in Japan because of the strength of conservative narratives within the Ministry of Education and the politicization of the history problem within Japan's official narrative.²¹⁸ This underscores how right-wing narratives overpower the complex and diverse perceptions of Japan's history among scholars, NGOs, and the Japanese public within the state's official narrative. While the efforts are a positive sign of Japan's growing awareness of the problems caused by politicized narratives on reconciliation, improving people-to-people reconciliation from within Japanese society about historical narratives and national myths still has many hurdles to overcome if it wishes to achieve deep reconciliation with South Korea.

B. REPUBLIC OF KOREA

The "history problem" for South Korea has become a vexing problem for Japan-ROK relations, and challenges to its historical narratives and national myths hamper efforts to deepen reconciliation. Similar to the issues challenging contemporary Japan's historical narratives, three particular issues in South Korea prevent both the government and the people from progressing to a state of deep reconciliation. First, the rise of left-wing ethnonationalism in South Korean narratives and myths has complicated the nation's ability to find common ground with Japan to progress the reconciliation of historical animosities. Second, historical revisionism by left-wing ethnonationalism in South Korean mainstream narratives is changing the perceptions of Koreans toward Japan in a negative way that challenges any attempts to accept a shared narrative of their history. Third, the immense politicization of the "history problem" within South Korea has polarized the perceptions of South Korea's collective memory and cultural identity, which challenges its ability to reconcile with its postwar past.

²¹⁸ Fukuoka, "Japanese History Textbook Controversy at a Crossroads?," 320.

1. Dominance of Left-Wing Ethnonationalism and New Narratives

The first factor impacting Japan-ROK relations was the rapid growth of South Korea's leftist civil society and its revisionist ethnonationalist narratives about South Korea's past. Specifically, the emergence of the *minjung* identity as the dominant narrative after South Korea democratized allowed for a narrative that saw the victimization of Koreans during the prewar colonization of Korea and the failure of South Korea's postwar authoritarian regimes to prevent neo-imperialist policies by Japan following the war. In this sense, the *minjung* identity of viewing itself as a victim both prewar and postwar increased the sensitivity towards any actions regarding historical interpretation by both Japanese and South Korean conservative politicians.

The leftist revisionist narratives in South Korea have been a source of contention in reconciling with Japan over historical issues, similar to how Japanese right-wing narratives created greater divergence over shared historical narratives. Examining the policies of South Korean presidents on the "history problem" provide prime examples of how revisionist narratives have negatively impacted efforts at reconciliation with Japan. President Kim Young-sam (1993–1998) set one of his central policy goals to remove Japanese imperialism's remaining vestiges in Korea and correct its distorted history.²¹⁹ Under Kim Young-sam, South Korea elevated the comfort women issue, its claims to the Dokdo/Takeshima islands, and Japan's conservative revisionist history to significant obstacles in Japan-ROK relations. The elevation of the historical issues by President Kim was indicative of the newfound influence of public opinion and approval ratings on the South Korean leadership. Kim was highly sensitive to his popularity ratings and was heavily influenced by the leftist organizations that found their voice in the democratization movement.²²⁰ Despite the 1993–1994 North Korean nuclear crisis, the top priority issue during bilateral talks with Japan was concerning comfort women.²²¹ More so, Japan and

²¹⁹ Chung-in Moon and Seung-won Suh, "Security, Economy, and Identity Politics: Japan-South Korean Relations under the Kim Dae-Jung Government*," *Korea Observer* 36, no. 4 (Winter 2005): 565.

²²⁰ Snyder, *South Korea at the Crossroads*, 73.

²²¹ Kim, "Symbolic Politics, the History Problem, and the Japan-South Korea Security Relationship During the Post-Cold War Period," 160–63.

South Korea suspended their defense agreements and bilateral security meetings in 1995, signifying that shared security concerns over North Korea were not the only factor driving the bilateral security relationship.²²²

President Kim Dae-jung (1998–2003) set a primary foreign policy goal of improving Japan-ROK relations after they soured under the Kim Young-sam government. During his first year in office, President Kim and Japanese Prime Minister Obuchi Keizō attempted to set aside lasting historical differences and establish a “future-oriented relationship” through the Joint Korea-Japan Declaration of a New Partnership for the 21st Century.²²³ However, despite the pragmatic approach of the Kim administration to improve relations with Japan and the ongoing security threats emanating from North Korea in the late-1990s, Korean sentiments towards Japan declined rapidly and strained relations during the 2001 textbook controversy.²²⁴ The Kim government suspended bilateral training exercises that it viewed as necessary to its security relationship with Japan after left-wing groups and political groups demanded South Korea take a hardline stance against what it dubbed to be a “second psychological invasion after the first militarist invasion.”²²⁵ The remainder of the Kim Dae-jung administration was constrained in improving relations with Japan by the negative Korean sentiments towards Japan due to the ongoing controversies surrounding the “history problem” in the early 2000s.²²⁶

President Roh Moo-hyun’s administration (2003–2008) took a much more radical view on Japan-ROK relations which was heavily influenced by leftist revisionism. For example, Roh established the Presidential Committee for the Inspection of Collaborations with Japanese Imperialism in 2005 that sought to identify and punish Koreans who collaborated with the Japanese during their colonial occupation of Korea and those linked

²²² Kim, 167.

²²³ Glosserman and Snyder, *The Japan-South Korea Identity Clash*, 100.

²²⁴ Snyder, *South Korea at the Crossroads*, 104.

²²⁵ Kim, “Escaping the Vicious Cycle,” 48–49.

²²⁶ Moon and Suh, “Security, Economy, and Identity Politics,” 570.

to the postwar authoritarian regimes.²²⁷ Additionally, under President Roh, the South Korean Foreign Ministry publicly released previously classified documents on the 1965 Basic Treaty that incited further anger and supported the leftist narrative of continued victimization.²²⁸ Lastly, President Roh stoked Korean anti-Japanese sentiments by calling into question the validity of the 1965 Basic Treaty in a letter to the Korean people, followed by a statement that “the South Korean Government has no choice but to sternly deal with Japan’s attempt to justify its history of aggression and colonialism and revive regional hegemony.”²²⁹ President Roh, however, implemented an official policy in 2005 that was supposed to permanently resolve the forced labor issue by providing up to \$17,843 to each of the 66,985 victims and family members who claimed to receive compensation from the South Korean Government under the 1965 Basic Treaty clauses.²³⁰ While this policy supported leftist narratives that the post-colonial South Korean regimes were complicit in victimizing South Koreans, the Roh administration attempted to correct a historical wrong by distributing the \$300 million provided by Japan during the 1965 Basic Treaty.²³¹

Roh’s successor, Lee Myung-bak (2008–2013), attempted to look past the history problem like Kim Dae-jung’s “future-oriented approach” but was pressured by the left-leaning South Korean Constitutional Court into elevating the issue of comfort women to a top policy issue with Japan. In 2011, the Constitutional Court ruled that South Korea had not been diligent enough in seeking compensation on behalf of comfort women.²³² President Lee’s foreign policy shift in response to the ruling began with a disastrous

²²⁷ Gilbert Rozman and Shin-wha Lee, “Unraveling the Japan-South Korea ‘Virtual Alliance’: Populism and Historical Revisionism in the Face of Conflicting Regional Strategies,” *Asian Survey* 46, no. 5 (2006): 768–69; Glosserman and Snyder, *The Japan-South Korea Identity Clash*, 104; Seth, *A Concise History of Modern Korea*, 291.

²²⁸ Je-hae Do, “1965 Treaty Leaves Thorny Issues Unresolved,” *Korea Times*, June 21, 2015, https://www.koreatimes.co.kr/www/nation/2021/10/113_181305.html.

²²⁹ Rozman and Lee, “Unraveling the Japan-South Korea ‘Virtual Alliance,’” 776–79.

²³⁰ Byong-su Park, “Japanese Foreign Minister’s Faulty Understanding of Forced Labor Ruling,” *Hankyoreh*, November 7, 2018, https://english.hani.co.kr/arti/english_edition/e_national/869269.html.

²³¹ A total of \$481.4 million was distributed by the Roh administration to compensate the victims of forced labor. Park, “Japanese Foreign Minister’s Faulty Understanding of Forced Labor Ruling.”

²³² “Court Says Seoul’s Inaction Over Former ‘Comfort Women’ Unconstitutional,” *Yonhap News Agency*, August 30, 2011, <https://en.yna.co.kr/view/AEN20110830007951315>.

summit with Japanese Prime Minister Noda Yoshihiko. Lee stated the history problem was a “stumbling block” in bilateral relations.²³³ Additionally, under the Lee administration, the National Assembly passed a resolution demanding a formal apology from the Japanese Government to restore the “honor and dignity” of the Korean people, linking leftist narratives of national disgrace to official Korean positions. Lastly, President Lee elevated the Dokdo/Takeshima islands dispute to a national identity issue after he visited the islands before the end of his term in 2012, which solicited an official solid rebuke by the Japanese Government.²³⁴

Since democratization, President Moon Jae-in’s administration (2017–2022) had the most deleterious impacts on Japan-ROK relations. Moon’s policies precipitated the divergence of a shared historical narrative with Japan by reversing the policies of his predecessor, Park Geun-hye (2013–2017).²³⁵ In 2018, President Moon began dissolving the Reconciliation and Healing Foundation established under the 2015 agreement between Park and Japanese Prime Minister Abe to be a “final and irreversible” settlement to the comfort women issue.²³⁶ President Moon also reversed Park’s decision to mandate state-issued textbooks to schools in favor of private textbook publishers.²³⁷ Moon made a great effort during his tenure to purge the South Korean Government and public sector of conservative officials and supporters and replace them with progressives, including South Korea’s judiciary branch.²³⁸ The impact of President Moon’s purge—particularly in the justice ministry—can be seen in the controversial 2018 Supreme Court rulings over forced

²³³ Snyder, *South Korea at the Crossroads*, 154.

²³⁴ Snyder, 154–55.

²³⁵ Park, “South Korean Views of Japan,” 177–78; “Diplomatic White 2021 Paper,” Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Korea, 2021, https://www.mofa.go.kr/upload/ebook/2021_whitepaper_en/ecatalog5.html.

²³⁶ Hyunmin Michael Kang, “South Korea Decides to Dismantle ‘Comfort Women’ Reconciliation and Healing Foundation,” *The Diplomat*, November 27, 2018, <https://thediplomat.com/2018/11/south-korea-decides-to-dismantle-comfort-women-reconciliation-and-healing-foundation/>; Snyder, *South Korea at the Crossroads*, 185.

²³⁷ Choe, “South Korea’s New Leader Abolishes State-Issued History Textbooks”; Jeong-hyun Kim, “‘Three-Nation Joint History Book’ to Bring Peace,” *Korea Times*, November 26, 2013, sec. National, https://www.koreatimes.co.kr/www/nation/2021/07/181_146883.html.

²³⁸ Park, “South Korean Views of Japan,” 172–73.

labor during Japan's colonial occupation of Korea. It led to a further breakdown of relations between Japan and South Korea, but it also sparked a backlash from the South Korean right-wing and academics.²³⁹ Academic consensus within South Korea views the forced labor dispute as being settled under the 1965 Basic Treaty by the Park Chung-hee regime. President Moon's efforts to seek retributive justice over historical animosities went against South Korea's official position set by Roh Moo-hyun in 2005 and was accepted by every successive presidential administration.²⁴⁰ Under President Moon, public sentiment in South Korea on Japan declined, reaching a near all-time low according to the Asan Institute's 2019 poll.²⁴¹ Despite worsening relations with Japan under Moon, nearly all self-identified ideologically progressive Koreans favorably viewed his policy stance towards Japan.

Leftist revisionist groups, government officials, and South Korea's mass media also propagate their ethnonationalist narratives within South Korean society through methods similar to Japanese right-wing groups. For example, school districts that left-leaning parties govern have increasingly used textbooks in schools that solely focus on the brutality of Japan's colonial occupation of Korea—often comparing the comfort women issue to that of the Holocaust—while neglecting similar abuses perpetrated by North Korea against South Koreans during the Korean War.²⁴² More so, individuals who challenge the prevailing leftist narratives on sensitive historical issues can—and have been—held liable under civil and criminal anti-defamation laws.²⁴³ Leftist revisionist groups are emboldened by South Korea's left-leaning mass media coverage and government officials who support the *minjung* identity, which creates a form of self-censorship by scholars who

²³⁹ Hein, "The Ambiguities of Amending Historical Injustices and Espousing a Shared Collective Memory," 57.

²⁴⁰ Hein, 61.

²⁴¹ J. James Kim and Chungku Kang, "South Korean Attitudes about ROK-Japan Relations on the Rocks," *Asan Issue Brief* 10 (October 14, 2019).

²⁴² Joseph Yi, Joe Phillips, and Wondong Lee, "Manufacturing Contempt: State-Linked Populism in South Korea," *Society* 56, no. 5 (2019): 497.

²⁴³ Yi, Phillips, and Lee, 498.

seek to apply critical views over South Korean interpretations of historical issues because they fear the harsh and overwhelming backlash by leftist groups.

New *lieux de mémoire* emerged alongside the rise of leftist narratives within South Korea after democratization that strengthened Korean and international perspectives on historical animosities. The most prominent *lieux de mémoire* reflecting the ethnonationalist identity and anti-Japanese sentiment is the bronze statue of an adolescent girl symbolizing a “comfort woman” facing the Japanese Embassy in Seoul.²⁴⁴ Erected in 2011 to commemorate the 1,000th weekly Wednesday Demonstration put on by the progressive Korean Council NGO and the 20th anniversary of Kim Hak-sun’s press conference, the statue has become a significant obstacle in Japan-ROK relations.²⁴⁵ The monument intended to capture the essence of the leftist narrative of equating sexual violation with national violation by depicting a young girl who remained defiant, dignified, and determined to endure despite the Japanese atrocities she represents.²⁴⁶ One of the bronze girl statue artists stated in an interview with Yonhap News that her expression is “of the determination that they [comfort women] will not give up until they have an apology.”²⁴⁷ Public memorials honoring comfort woman survivors began to make appearances internationally in 1998. Still, after the bronze girl statue’s emplacement in 2011, forty-four copies and variations of the statue have been erected elsewhere in South Korea and internationally in the United States, Canada, and Australia.²⁴⁸ South Korea’s efforts to internationalize a revisionist narrative that embodies strong anti-Japanese sentiments have drawn significant backlash among Japanese and South Korean conservatives. While the bronze girl statue is just one representation of the efforts to memorialize the victims of Japanese atrocities, it also symbolizes the politicization of a collective memory within South Korea that deepens divergent narratives and sincere efforts to reconcile the past.

²⁴⁴ Elizabeth Son, *Embodied Reckonings: “Comfort Women,” Performance, and Transpacific Redress* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2018), 153.

²⁴⁵ Glosserman and Snyder, *The Japan-South Korea Identity Clash*, 106; Jonsson, “Can the Japan-Korea Dispute on ‘Comfort Women’ Be Resolved?,” 504.

²⁴⁶ Son, *Embodied Reckonings*, 34.

²⁴⁷ Son, 150.

²⁴⁸ Son, 147.

2. Battle over Historical Revisionism and Narrative Convergence

The second aspect of South Korea's left-wing ethnonationalist identity is how its revisionist historical narratives have influenced South Korean views of Japan. The challenges posed by the virulent anti-Japanese narratives propagandized by leftist administrations and NGOs have left a visible absence in the ability for a critical review of history.²⁴⁹ The Moon administration's efforts to hypersensitize Japan's right-wing narratives have led South Koreans to view democratic Japan as less trustworthy than North Korea.²⁵⁰ While Japan bears the responsibility of properly reconciling with its past, the revisionist narratives of the South Korean left are creating an environment where South Koreans are becoming less able to reconcile with their historical narratives.²⁵¹ Despite many shared political beliefs and growing cultural ties since the 2000s, South Korean revisionist narratives have left little room for constructive engagement with Japan on historical issues. Efforts by organizations seeking greater reconciliation by critically and constructively addressing historical issues are overpowered within South Korea's mainstream, similar to how they are in Japan's right-leaning media.

However, a difference arises between South Korea's left-wing revisionist narratives and Japan's right-wing narratives within mainstream discourse. Since the emergence of civil society in South Korea after democratization, the strength of the *minjung* identity and deliberate efforts by administrations to use anti-Japanese rhetoric to improve domestic approval ratings have essentially removed the ability for an open debate on Japan.²⁵² This lack of discussion reinforces negative perceptions of Japan within the public writ large. While Japan's right-wing narratives are deeply imbued within its official narrative, there has been a considerable effort since the 1970s for Japan's public to examine its past

²⁴⁹ Chung-in Moon and Won-young Hur, "A South Korean Perspective: Trilateral Co-Operation: The Devil's in Domestic Politics," *Global Asia* 12, no. 1 (March 2017), https://globalasia.org/v12no1/cover/a-south-korean-perspective-trilateral-co-operation-the-devils-in-domestic-politics_chung-in-moon-won-young-hur.

²⁵⁰ Kim and Kang, "South Korean Attitudes about ROK-Japan Relations on the Rocks."

²⁵¹ Myungji Yang, "The Specter of the Past: Reconstructing Conservative Historical Memory in South Korea," *Politics & Society* 49, no. 3 (2021): 337–62.

²⁵² Glosserman and Snyder, *The Japan-South Korea Identity Clash*, 99.

critically. South Korea has tied its ethnonationalist identity to anti-Japanese sentiment. Therefore, public opinion that is negative towards Japan is viewed as nationalist, while those that look to critically consider the past are quickly labeled as anti-nationalist. This mentality reinforces issues that stoke nationalist sentiments but equally detract from improving the perceptions of the other. For example, South Korean nationalists view Ahn Chun-gŭn—the nationalist patriot who assassinated Japan’s first Resident-General of Korea—as a national hero. Japan views him as a terrorist who assassinated a quintessential figure in Japan’s modernization period.²⁵³ When South Korea stated they were going to build a statue of Ahn in 2013, the national myths surrounding him in South Korean history only reinforced the revisionist narrative that Japan’s protests against the statue support a fundamental difference between South Korea and Japan.

This continues to have an impact on Japan-ROK relations today. In a 2019 poll jointly conducted by the Genron NPO and the East Asia Institute, the notion that Japan is unrepentant for its past aggression is ranked as the number one reason for South Korea’s negative perception of Japan.²⁵⁴ The next top four reasons all deal with other historical animosity issues. This paints a bleak picture of how South Korea’s revisionist narratives have influenced South Korea’s perceptions that negatively impact future reconciliation efforts despite common security interests, shared threat perceptions, interconnected economies, and growing cultural affinity between the two states.²⁵⁵

3. The Left-Right Political Polarization and Korean “New Right”

This final factor that impacts South Korea’s ability to address its historical animosities with Japan is how the left-right polarization over South Korea’s historical narratives has created a domestic identity crisis.²⁵⁶ While the South Korean leftists have maintained a strong anti-Japanese nationalist perspective and are critical of all aspects of

²⁵³ Glosserman and Snyder, 161.

²⁵⁴ Genron NPO and East Asia Institute, “7th-Japan-South Korea Joint Opinion Poll.”

²⁵⁵ Yi, Phillips, and Lee, “Manufacturing Contempt.”

²⁵⁶ Hein, “The Ambiguities of Amending Historical Injustices and Espousing a Shared Collective Memory,” 50.

Japan-ROK relations, the emergence of the South Korean conservative-right in the early 2000s, also called the New Right, began challenging the left as historical revisionists undermining South Korean society.²⁵⁷ Specific to the impacts on Japan-ROK reconciliation efforts, the New Right has challenged leftist narratives over such issues plaguing Japan-ROK relations. An example often cited to represent the conservative backlash to the leftist narratives concerns the forced mobilization of comfort women by the Japanese. In a 2013 book published by Korean Professor Park Yuha, she argued that not all comfort women were forced into it by Japanese forces as the standard South Korean narrative would suggest.²⁵⁸ For her views, she received considerable backlash from comfort women advocacy groups and was tried and convicted under South Korea's anti-defamation laws. This example emphasizes state-led efforts to portray a historical narrative that selectively depicts Japan as an unrepentant neo-imperialist state where there is no room for critical views. This has prevented many measures by the state from reconciling historical animosity and establishing a 'future-oriented relationship' because it challenges the Korean identity issues of prewar and postwar victimization.

Given the strength of left-wing historical narratives since democratization, the growth of an opposing right-wing perspective on South Korea's history is the first serious intellectual movement of the right grown from the grassroots level.²⁵⁹ However, South Korea's right-wing narratives are comparable to Japanese right-wing narratives that label leftists as masochistic and solely focusing on the bad aspects of the past. One of the New Right's objectives in balancing Korea's "distorted" history is glorifying Syngman Rhee and Park Chung-hee. Alongside a growing media presence and available conservative literature, the emergence of right-wing NGOs in South Korea, such as the Syngman Rhee *haktang* (academy) in 2018, is trying to counter the left's ethnonationalist narratives with

²⁵⁷ Namhee Lee, "Social Memories of the 1980s: Unpacking the Regime of Discontinuity," in *Revisiting Minjung: New Perspectives on the Cultural History of 1980s South Korea* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2019), 17–45; Yang, "The Specter of the Past."

²⁵⁸ Park, "South Korean Views of Japan," 175; Yi, Phillips, and Lee, "Manufacturing Contempt," 498.

²⁵⁹ Yang, "The Specter of the Past," 349.

its form of revisionist history harkening back to Korea's statist *minjok* identity promoted under Rhee and Park.

Ironically enough, the conservative narratives that pose alternative views on South Korea's post-colonial past are enduring a similar treatment that the leftist narratives received under the conservative-led South Korean authoritarian regimes. Additionally, the rise of conservative narratives is coming from the grassroots level, which led to the *minjung* movement two generations ago. The left-right polarization intensified under the Moon administration as he rolled back many of the policies of Park Geun-hye, which increased the voice of South Korea's New Right. The importance of the rise of conservative voices in South Korea, while disruptive to Japan-ROK relations and revisionist in its own right, is also an essential step in balancing the narrative within South Korea to achieve a softer nationalist identity that is not primarily built from anti-Japanese ethnonationalism.

C. CONVERGENCE/DIVERGENCE OF HISTORICAL NARRATIVES

The underlying influences within Japanese and South Korean historical narratives and national myths elevated the "history problem" to a significant obstacle to improving relations and transitioning to a status of deep government-to-government and people-to-people reconciliation. Deep-seated mistrust and suppressed animosity became a hallmark of Japan-ROK relations and indicate that the people-to-people reconciliation remains closer to friction than rapprochement within the shallow reconciliation framework. The ethnonationalist narratives solidified in both states by the end of the Cold War and became a foundation for the divergent perspectives preventing the people-to-people reconciliation from achieving deep reconciliation. The revisionist narratives that influence public sentiments over the "other" have serious adverse effects on the efforts to align the two perceptions. Efforts by both right-wing and left-wing NGOs and groups within both societies are active in propagandizing divergent revisionist narratives and stymie efforts by other groups that advocate reconciliation. This has been most visible within polling data as many mainstream NGOs that promote revisionist narratives over historical issues have negatively impacted people-to-people perceptions in Japan and South Korea concerning historical issues. Unfortunately, these efforts to strengthen divergent narratives lead many

people in South Korea to view Japan with suspicion and express concerns over a resurgent militarization of Japan by its conservative political elite. Conversely, many Japanese express negative views of South Koreans who constantly criticize Japan over its handling of historical issues. Their anti-Japanese sentiments are an integral aspect of Korean patriotism.²⁶⁰

The domestic divergence over historical narratives also creates a headwind for interstate reconciliation by creating conflicting narratives that both sides of the political spectrum leverage against the other. Both Japan and South Korea are impacted by the politicization of historical issues and struggle to convey a shared narrative among the people. Transnational groups and NGOs during this period attempted to transcend the political divide to improve the perceptions of the “other” by focusing efforts on developing a joint narrative. While these groups were more successful than similar interstate efforts, their efforts have had a marginal impact on narrative convergence.

By the end of the Cold War era, government-to-government reconciliation showed signs of stalling in deepening interstate reconciliation. Yet, as the region transitioned from a Cold War environment, there were signs that greater reconciliation could occur. The coincidental timing of the end of the Shōwa era marked a symbolic transition point in Japan’s history that opened a greater possibility for the Japanese Government to reflect on its past officially.²⁶¹ South Korea’s transition into a democracy also showed promise in opening greater pathways for interstate reconciliation to occur. Yet, at the beginning of the contemporary period, the emergence of the comfort women issue and the re-emergence of the historical problems over the Dokdo/Takeshima islands and forced labor plagued the pre-normalization period began reversing the government-to-government progress.

Historical animosities suppressed by successive South Korean regimes during the Cold War are now at the forefront of bilateral diplomacy as revisionist narratives within South Korea and Japan have become highly politized within the mainstream. Progressive Korean governments emphasize concerns over a remilitarized Japan as conservative groups

²⁶⁰ Genron NPO and East Asia Institute, “7th-Japan-South Korea Joint Opinion Poll.”

²⁶¹ Saaler, “Heisei Historiography.”

within Japan's political elite continue to advocate for constitutional reforms over Article 9 and promote the glorification of Japan's prewar historical ties. South Korean political elites also elevated historical issues over territorial sovereignty disputes from a status-quo state to national identity crises to bolster domestic support under revisionist narratives and myths. Japan, too, elevated such problems to a national identity crisis after disputes with China erupted over the Diaoyu/Senkaku islands. Current issues between Japan and South Korea over the South Korean Supreme Court rulings on forced labor compensation have also politicized economic interactions. After the ruling, the removal of South Korea from Japan's trusted status list highlights the impacts that strong revisionist narratives can have on economic relations despite Japan and South Korea having highly interdependent economies.²⁶² The rise of ethnonationalism within the revisionist histories of Japan's right-wing and Korea's left-wing political elites has elevated longstanding disputes over historical issues to impacting bilateral economic and security relationships.

These examples suggest a backsliding in government-to-government reconciliation towards friction-based shallow reconciliation. While Japan and South Korea remain important regional allies and share many similar interests, they are hindered by their historical narratives and myths that prevent apolitical efforts from seeking deep interstate reconciliation. Successive progressive and conservative governments in both states have expressed sincere desires to improve relations and orient towards future relations. Still, the politicized nature of the "history problem" and the strength of revisionist narratives within the official government narrative has disincentivized political elites to go against the loudest voices within their domestic societies. Yet, efforts by NGOs and other nonpolitical organizations trying to bring together the divergent narratives have been a step in the right direction. As cultural ties deepen due to their efforts—especially among younger generations—there is room for deeper reconciliation.

²⁶² Henry Farrell and Abraham Newman, "Japan's Measures Against South Korea Are Leading to a Low-Level Economic War," *Washington Post*, August 1, 2019, <https://www.washingtonpost.com/politics/2019/08/01/japan-has-weaponized-its-trade-relationship-with-south-korea/>; Kristin Vekasi and Jiwon Nam, "Boycotting Japan: Explaining Divergence in Chinese and South Korean Economic Backlash," *Journal of Asian Security and International Affairs* 6, no. 3 (December 1, 2019): 299–326.

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V. CONCLUSION

A. SUMMARY OF CHANGE TO NARRATIVES OVER TIME

After seventy-seven years, Japan and South Korea have yet to reach a state of deep reconciliation. Charting the historical narratives and national myths over this period highlights how much collective memory and cultural identity have been used as a diplomatic tool in post-conflict reconciliation between an aggressor state and a victim state. It highlights how narratives and myths within Japan and South Korea over the seventy-seven years were susceptible to changes as domestic and international pressures challenged the collective perceptions of “self” and “other.” The following summarizes the major trends within Japanese and South Korean historical narratives from each historical period and how they changed over time.

1. Trends in Japan’s Historical Narratives

Japan’s historical narratives and national myths during the pre-normalization period imbued a notion of victimization within its collective memory as a reaction to the outcomes of World War II and the early postwar years under SCAP. Three significant trends that emerged from the early formation of a postwar victim identity foreshadowed the inability for narrative convergence with South Korea as Japan’s inability to reflect on its agency in the atrocities committed during the colonial occupation of Korea. First, efforts by SCAP to remove the perceived identity markers of right-wing ultranationalism of Imperial Japan applied inherently Western concepts of governance that forced the reformed Japanese Government to change its national identity radically. This change reinforced the idea of “victor’s justice” in Japan’s narratives because significant aspects of Japanese culture became forbidden under the new Peace Constitution. Yet, SCAP policies relied on many prewar Japanese military and political elites to form the early postwar Japanese Government and manage Japanese society, which created long-term impacts on the formation of Japan’s victim identity because prewar identities were able to survive within Japan’s postwar political elite. Second, the early postwar narratives and myths were crystalized into the collective memory because of the sheer devastation of Japan from the

war. The atomic bombing of Hiroshima and Nagasaki provided a legitimate justification for many Japanese citizens to feel victimized and attach themselves to the narratives that Japan was a victim alongside other Asian nations. Lastly, the victimization narrative was reinforced by Koreans' prewar prejudices and negative sentiments because Japanese attitudes were more concerned with viewing themselves as victims instead of seeing how their colonial policies impacted Koreans. The discriminatory policies towards the *zainichi* Koreans throughout this period emphasized the negative attitudes within Japan and directly impacted how Japan viewed its position vis-à-vis South Korea during the normalization process.

After normalization, Japan's historical narratives continued towards narrative divergence with South Korea because of the trends of trying to regain its prewar sense of ethnonationalism. First, the conservative LDP was firmly in power and in control of Japan's official narratives. The LDP suppressed opposing narratives critical of prewar Japan and labeled it leftist and anti-nationalist. Without a solid opposing voice, Japan's conservative elites were able to promote a whitewashed version of its imperial history that downplayed Japan's agency in the atrocities that were foundational in Korea's collective memory. Second, efforts to revive prewar ethnonational identities through controversial *lieux de mémoire* by Japan's political elite reinforced the shift in Japan's historical narratives to alter the collective memory and cultural identity of Japanese citizens. By reviving places like the Yasukuni Shrine, Japan's political elites tried to re-introduce the prewar cultural identities in Japan's national consciousness. Still, they were also reinforcing its victim identity by portraying SCAP's influence over Japan's postwar Peace Constitution as forcing Western concepts on Japan's cultural heritage. Finally, Japanese society's general apathy towards improving their perceptions of Koreans only began to change near the end of the Cold War period primarily because of greater cultural exchanges and the growing popularity of Korean pop culture in Japan. However, relative to other East Asian nations, the importance of Japan-ROK relations to the Japanese public remained low, highlighting the general lack of desire within Japanese society to address the historical issues to improve reconciliation.

The contemporary period within Japan highlighted the most significant shift of narrative divergence, which has caused the most impact on current Japan-ROK reconciliation efforts. The rise of right-wing ethnonationalism within Japan's mainstream narratives has pushed fringe perspectives that wish to restore Japan to a glorified prewar cultural identity. The general acceptance of these narratives has caused a trend in right-wing political elites and NGOs to exacerbate historical issues with South Korea by either denying they happened or claiming that they were "good for the Korean people." This trend has led to the growth of historical revisionism of Japan's narratives and myths that negatively impact efforts at reconciliation. Adopting revisionist narratives in the official narrative has been a major stumbling block in Japan-ROK relations since the early 2000s. It continues to be one of the first major issues that arise between new governments in Japan and South Korea. Lastly, these two trends of right-wing ethnonationalist identities and revisionist narratives within the Japanese Government have challenged Japan's intellectuals and NGOs seeking greater narrative convergence over its shared history with South Korea. The right-wing narratives often overshadow efforts to promote reconciliation through narrative convergence in the mainstream, which stymies their ability to influence the "self" and "other" perceptions within Japan's public sphere.

2. Trends in the Republic of Korea's Historical Narratives

During the early postwar years, South Korean narratives formed around the strong anti-Japanese sentiment that remained after Japan's colonial occupation of Korea ended with the war. The trends that emerged from the intense enmity towards Japan primarily focused on how the new Korean state would interact with its former colonial power and would develop significant barriers to achieving greater reconciliation. First, the *han* and *minjok* identities promulgated under the Rhee regime contained powerful feelings of victimization by the entire Korean ethnic population. They were structured to utilize these feelings as the foundation for their national identity. Second, South Korea's authoritarian government relied on the popular anti-Japanese sentiment within its historical narratives and myths to maintain legitimacy. Both Syngman Rhee and Park Chung-hee targeted Japanese cultural symbols and sites within Korea. They replaced them with their ethnonational symbols, deeply engraining the narratives about Japan's colonial occupation

of Korea for future Korean generations. Third, even under the pro-Japanese leader Park Chung-hee, the strong ethnonationalist identity within the Korean public influenced Japan-ROK normalization negotiations. Public protest over agreements within the normalization process established a trend that when Korea's ethnonational identity or collective memory was perceived to be violated—especially by Japan over historical issues—no amount of repression by the Korean political elite would stop the people from acting.

After diplomatic relations were restored, the historical narratives and myths within South Korea began to shift. During the Cold War period, the significant trends highlighted the fragility of South Korea's authoritarian regime because it used historical narratives and national myths to maintain legitimacy. When the narratives used by the South Korean Government became at odds with the perceived identities of “self” and “other” of the Korean population, the political elite within the Park regime was perceived to be a part of the “other” identity. The trend towards even greater victimization within the *minjung* movement reinforced the *han* identity and viewed South Korea's postcolonial government as contributing to the continued victimization at the hands of a neo-colonialist Japanese state, which was a departure from the regime's *minjok* identity. The *minjung* movement's growing popularity and shifts in Korean cultural identity and collective memory changed the dynamics of historical narratives as a diplomatic tool. This was seen in the second trend to emerge during this period when the *zainichi* Koreans remaining in Japan internationalized their new victim identity. The strength of the perceptions of continued victimization within Korea's cultural identity brought new meaning to Korean *lieux de mémoire* within Japan, which negatively impacted Japan-ROK relations and reinforced negative perceptions of the *zainichi* Koreans within Japan's right-wing narratives. The last trend to emerge from this period solidified the *minjung* movement's narratives into a leftist ethnonational identity that defined South Korea's democratization movement and new democratic government. Under Chun, the *minjung* narratives became a primary influence over his regime's legitimacy and pushed addressing the Korean collective memory with Japan as a primary foreign policy goal. This was a significant shift from how South Korea maintained relations with Japan under Park Chung-hee and highlighted how the regime's

legitimacy was tied to the dominant historical narratives and perceptions of “self” and “other” within South Korea’s collective memory.

The trends of historical narratives and myths in contemporary South Korea were a continuation of the dominant narratives of the democratization movement from the end of the Cold War period. While they take a fundamentally opposed view of South Korea’s shared history with Japan, many of the trends mimic the trends present in contemporary Japan. First, the rise of the left-wing ethnonationalist narratives and myths into South Korea’s mainstream collective memory after democratization became a trend. South Korea’s democratically elected leaders were keen to adopt confrontational foreign policies regarding historical issues with Japan. South Korea’s political elite’s sensitivity to domestic approval ratings allowed them to score easy political wins by adopting policies that fit within the leftist narratives and promoting new lieux de mémoire that reinforced the anti-Japanese sentiment within the *minjung* national identity. Second, the revision of South Korea’s historical narratives and myths under the new leftist ethnonational identity alienated any attempts to examine the revisionist narratives critically. This trend has stymied efforts by intellectuals and NGOs who have sought to overcome the divergent narratives between South Korea and Japan. Lastly, in reaction to the dominance of leftist narratives and myths, a rise of a Korean right-wing has challenged the revisionist narratives of the left and has created a domestic identity crisis in South Korea. The extreme politicization of South Korea’s historical narratives has questioned the nation’s ability to approach reconciliation with Japan in a constructive manner that would lead to narrative convergence and deeper reconciliation.

B. FINDINGS AND AIMS

This thesis aimed to understand why and how historical narratives hinder Japan-ROK relations today. By reviewing the formation and evolution of the dominant historical narratives and national myths within Japan and South Korea, this thesis has provided why particular issues over historical events have continued to dominate Japan-ROK relations. Below are four key findings that this thesis has identified regarding the impact of historical narratives on reconciliation.

The first finding is that the main divergence in the historical narratives and national myths between Japan and South Korea originates during the colonial occupation of Korea by Imperial Japan. The issues over comfort women, forced labor, and the territorial dispute over the Dokdo/Takeshima islands that cannot find narrative convergence occurred during the early 20th Century under Japan's colonization of Korea. While the issue concerning reparations for former comfort women emerged in the early 1990s, the issues over forced labor and territorial disputes were significant hurdles that Japan and South Korea could not overcome during the normalization process in the 1950s. This finding emphasizes how collective memory and cultural identity represented within each nation's narratives and myths are heavily influenced by an acute historical period and not by the much greater shared history between these two nations.

The second finding highlights how the Cold War environment and U.S.-alliance network solidified the aspects causing the most significant divergence in Japan and South Korea's historical narratives and making recent reconciliation efforts more difficult. During the Cold War period, historical narratives were relatively isolated from influencing the regional security arrangements for nearly fifty years after World War II. However, the relative isolation from the economic and security arrangements dominant in Japan-ROK relations during the Cold War, the underlying distrust and resentment in the perceptions of each other were not addressed by the political elite at the time. Therefore, the issues preventing deep reconciliation between Japan and South Korea today are mainly consequences of the lack of early efforts to address the people-to-people aspect of instate reconciliation efforts. Decisions during the early postwar period to curtail contentious issues within international treaties—such as the San Francisco Peace Treaty and Basic Treaty—out of expediency to focus on Cold War security concerns failed to develop the mechanisms necessary to address the contentious issues that were set aside during negotiations, causing the negative perceptions to solidify into the divergent narratives that became part of the national identity.

The third finding is specific to South Korean historical narratives as democratization created a paradigm shift in how Japan and South Korea managed reconciliation efforts during the postwar period. Before democratization, Japan had

relatively favorable conditions to work reconciliation efforts with the pro-Japanese Park Chung-hee regime. However, after democratization, the dominant narratives of the *minjung* movement and the new Korean political elite's sensitivity to domestic approval ratings introduced a completely different way in how South Korea's leaders addressed the historical issues limiting deep reconciliation with Japan. Even Japan's political leaders came under greater pressure to address the historical narratives, but this mostly came from the rise of right-wing narratives within the conservative LDP. The elevation of historical issues to the forefront of foreign policy issues since the mid-1980s has complicated efforts at reconciliation as the divergent historical narratives and national myths have become easy political targets impacting the ability of either government to accept responsibility for any issue that would make them lose popular support domestically. Instead, symbolic politics has garnered domestic support by incorporating revisionist narratives and myths into issues over national identity to boost feelings of ethnonationalism within Japan and South Korea.

The fourth finding concerns the domestic reactions to the rise of historical revisionism in the narratives and myths of Japan and South Korea. Specifically, the backlash against revisionist narratives and myths domestically has allowed for a greater voice for minority perspectives that have the potential to moderate the collective memory and create connections to promote narrative convergence. Due to the growing divide between Japan and South Korea's understanding of their shared history during the early 20th Century, both nations have adopted revisionist narratives and myths in their mainstream consciousness that have trended to opposite ends of the political spectrum. This has given rise to more significant efforts by scholars and apolitical NGOs to challenge the dominant mainstream narratives that do not represent a holistic understanding of the shared history. However, these groups do not have the reach or influence over the mainstream narratives and myths. They remain minority voices within each country, creating divisions within the domestic collective memory and cultural identity. While the current impacts of this domestic division hamper efforts to achieve greater reconciliation between Japan-ROK, it has opened the aperture for debate over what the national consciousness will be within their historical narratives and national myths.

C. FUTURE TRENDS

Given the poor current state of reconciliation between Japan and South Korea, what are some likely trends that will impact reconciliation efforts based on the current trends with historical narratives and myths within Japan and South Korea? Both Japan and South Korea have recently experienced changes in their political leadership within the past year. While the LDP coalition remains in power in Japan under Prime Minister Kishida Fumio (2021–present), South Korea has recently elected conservative President Yoon Suk-yeol (2022–present) to replace the progressive Moon Jae-in administration. Two trends will likely define how the new administrations will address the historical narratives hindering interstate reconciliation at the government-to-government and people-to-people levels.

First, Japan-ROK relations will not improve until historical animosities are appropriately addressed and accepted by both societies. Based on the continuing trend of historical revisionism within both countries, it is unlikely that the current divergence within the historical narratives will present favorable conditions to deepen reconciliation. However, there are indications that there will be greater cooperation between the Yoon and Kishida administrations concerning historical issues that may repair bilateral relations to a point where further reconciliation can occur. Recently, President Yoon announced to Japanese officials that he will not use historical issues relating to Japan’s colonial occupation of Korea within Korean domestic politics.²⁶³ Additionally, the incoming ROK Foreign Minister Park Jin indicated to Japanese Foreign Minister Hayashi Yoshimasa in an April meeting that the Yoon administration supported the 2015 Comfort Women Agreement.²⁶⁴ These are departures from the more confrontational narratives within Korean domestic politics against Japan over historical issues and may prove to be the spark needed to rekindle bilateral relations that soured under the Moon administration.

²⁶³ “Yoon Tells Japan Lawmakers He Opposes Politicizing Historical Issues,” *Kyodo News*, May 11, 2022, <https://english.kyodonews.net/news/2022/05/ab0e7e55b9d1-japanese-s-korean-lawmakers-vow-to-turn-bilateral-ties-positive.html>.

²⁶⁴ Eunil Cho, “South Korea’s New Government Looks to Reinvigorate Japan-South Korea-US Trilateral,” *The Diplomat*, May 11, 2022, <https://thediplomat.com/2022/05/south-koreas-new-government-looks-to-reinvigorate-japan-south-korea-us-trilateral/>.

However, the Kishida Government has shown a less optimistic stance at positively addressing historical animosities but does not present a deviation from the long-standing policy stances of the LDP coalition under Abe Shinzō. The recent ritual offering sent to the Yasukuni Shrine by Prime Minister Kishida reflects the conservative narrative within Japanese politics that ignores the symbolic nature of the act and the negative impact it has on the perceptions of Japan by South Koreans.²⁶⁵ Additionally, Prime Minister Kishida's request for Germany to remove a copy of the Bronze Girl statue erected in 2020 signals that the Japanese Government under Kishida is unlikely to compromise on the historical perceptions prevalent in conservative narratives to improve Japan-ROK reconciliation efforts.²⁶⁶ It is expected that Kishida will maintain the status-quo views of the LDP coalition despite representing the more liberal side of the party.

This trend indicates for the interactions between the Kishida and Yoon administrations that reconciliation over historical animosities will be a topic during bilateral talks but will not be a primary aspect of improving relations. While the Yoon administration has emphasized improving reconciliatory efforts with Japan, both administrations are likely to avoid addressing historical animosities or the revisionist narratives and myths to focus on enhancing bilateral and trilateral relations with the United States first. One might expect Japan to reinstate South Korea as a trusted trading partner if the forced labor disputes in South Korean courts uphold the Basic Treaty as a legally binding document. However, what will need to be seen is how the Yoon administration responds to the expected strong domestic backlash from the groups that support South Korea's leftist ethnonationalist narratives.

The second trend concerns how the people-to-people level of reconciliation will impact reconciliation efforts between the Yoon and Kishida administrations. In the 8th Joint Korea-Japan Public Opinion Poll conducted by the Genron NPO and East Asia Institute, recent trends highlight that the perceptions of the other remain low and are getting

²⁶⁵ Lies, Choi, and Baptista, "China, South Korea Protest Over Japanese PM's Offering to War Dead."

²⁶⁶ "Japan PM Asked German Leader to Help Remove 'Comfort Women' Statue," *Kyodo News*, May 11, 2022, <https://english.kyodonews.net/news/2022/05/0f0bb4bab970-japan-pm-asked-german-leader-to-help-remove-comfort-women-statue.html>.

worse in South Korea.²⁶⁷ Specifically, there was a significant increase in unfavorable perceptions of Japan by the youngest generation of South Korean respondents. For Japan, the favorability ratings regarding perceptions of South Korea remained relatively low (below 30 percent since 2014) but had shown a slight improvement in 2020 when the poll was conducted. An important takeaway from these statistics that will inform future people-to-people reconciliation efforts is that South Korean perceptions of Japan continuously declined during the Abe administration, where Kishida Fumio served as the Foreign Minister. Therefore, even though President Yoon will likely make better headway in improving intergovernmental relations with the Kishida administration since he represents South Korea's conservative party, it is unlikely that the perceptions of the people will improve because Prime Minister Kishida represents a continuation of the Abe administration and right-wing ethnonationalist narratives of the LDP.

This trend will likely cause concerns for Yoon's administration as he failed to gain the support of the youngest generation during his campaign. Instead, he appealed more to the voters in their 50s or older.²⁶⁸ However, as the joint survey also noted, the precipitous decline in favorability ratings of Japan by the youngest generations was less to do with anti-Japanese sentiments engrained in the national identity of South Korea's leftist ethnonationalism but from the issues stemming from Japan's export control restrictions and attacks against Korean national identity by members of Japan's Government who support right-wing ethnonationalist narratives. Therefore, President Yoon has an opportunity to improve the people-to-people relations alongside intergovernmental relations by addressing the concerns of the youngest generations with Japan without resorting to stoking leftist ethnonationalism through the promotion of revisionist narratives to gain domestic political legitimacy. Japanese perceptions, too, may change under the Yoon administration as well. While this does not indicate South Korea's responsibility to initiate efforts to improve reconciliation, the relative stability of Japanese reasons for their

²⁶⁷ Yul Sohn, "Korea-Japan Relations in Crisis: People Want a Change," EAI Issue Briefing (East Asia Institute, October 22, 2020), http://www.eai.or.kr/new/en/etc/search_view.asp?intSeq=20175&board=eng_reports.

²⁶⁸ Jun-tae Ko, "Both Presidential Campaigns Targeting Voters in Their 20s and 30s," *Korea Herald*, November 8, 2021, sec. Politics, <http://www.koreaherald.com/view.php?ud=20211108000687>.

unfavorable perceptions of South Korea would suggest that if President Yoon is not willing to criticize Japan over historical issues, then perceptions will likely improve.

D. AREAS FOR POSSIBLE CHANGE

After examining the history and trends of Japan-ROK reconciliation and the influence of historical narratives and national myths over the reconciliation process, it would be prudent to conclude this thesis with a brief discussion on areas within the narratives and myths that, if changed, could improve reconciliation efforts between Japan and South Korea. This final section aims not to simplify the complex reconciliation process between an aggressor state and victim state into an actionable path that would lead to deep interstate reconciliation but to impart a few parting thoughts from my time studying this topic that may inform further studies.

The first area that could lead to greater reconciliation requires both Japan and South Korea to form new national identities built on shared values and not just past injustices. While this may sound like an insurmountable barrier in the current environment of Japan-ROK relations, it would not require much more effort by either government than how they promote contemporary narratives and myths that influence the collective memory and cultural identities of both societies. What is problematic in implementing this change is dislodging the dominance of revisionist narratives from the official narratives of Japan and South Korea.

For Japan, this would most likely require greater representation within Japan's political space and the weakening of the Liberal Democratic Party to allow for more diversification of Japan's official narratives and myths. In a sense, this may hold government officials who make controversial statements that negatively impact Japan-ROK relations more accountable if there is a greater chance that they may lose their seats in the next general election. For South Korea, the opposite is the likely solution. Specifically, the political dependency on garnering domestic political support through stoking national sentiments over historical animosities requires a devaluation in its political currency. Current trends show a decline in the feelings of anti-Japanese sentiment within younger generations' perceptions of their cultural identity. Still, they have become the most

vocal opponents of Japan's actions regarding historical issues. These changes would cut the gordian knot that the rise of historical revisionism within the collective memory and cultural identities has caused to Japan-ROK reconciliation efforts. Suppose Japan and South Korea can divorce themselves of the sources of strength for the revisionist narratives. In that case, the nation can begin developing new identities that focus on shared values and cultures that can remove many of the perceptions and misunderstandings prominent in the divergent narratives.

The second area for possible change is establishing a transnational institution solely focused on improving reconciliation between Japan and South Korea that cannot be dissolved without a national vote by the public. While this has been done to a degree in the past with joint history research committees, domestic politics has always prevented any lasting changes from being implemented by the political elite. The difference is that while both governments should fund this institution, it should be comprised of NGOs, academia, and public/private groups to research and develop ways to improve reconciliation at both the intergovernmental and people-to-people levels free from any political pressures. This institution should be tasked with promoting shared histories that provide both governments with the materials needed to encourage greater narrative convergence in the historical narratives and national myths.

This does not mean that it should shirk from discussing controversial issues that have plagued reconciliation efforts. Instead, by allowing an apolitical institution to develop the materials that allow for a greater understanding of the issues, both states can inculcate a shared collective memory devoid of political intentions. However, there must be safeguards to allow for its implementation within each state for this to succeed. For example, if the institution develops a joint history textbook, Japan's Ministry of Education should not find any grounds to deny its use in Japan's education system. Or, if the institution develops a report detailing the stipulations of the 1965 Basic Treaty regarding reparations for forced laborers, then the South Korean government should not discredit the report to promote narratives that claim Japan still owes reparations to South Korean individuals. Similar to the first area of change, separating the dominant voices promoting divergent and revisionist narratives from the equation through a transnational institution

can allow for more opportunities for non-governmental groups to take up the cause of promoting reconciliation.

The final area for change, which I see as most critical to affecting any future attempts at reconciliation, is the need for both South Korea and Japan to acknowledge and accept previous attempts at reconciling historical animosities. For this, Japan needs to fully acknowledge its past as an aggressor nation and offer a sincere and official apology. South Korea needs to fully accept past apologies for what they were and reinstate previous measures to reconcile past injustices (e.g., the 2015 Comfort Women Agreement). Until both governments can step away from blaming each other for starting the souring of relations or demanding apologies as preconditions for better relations, deep reconciliation will never be achieved. Two options present themselves for issues that cannot be settled simply by accepting the validity of past statements and agreements (e.g., the Dokdo/Takeshima Islands dispute). The first option is for both governments to allow an international institution both are party to arbitrate on the issue and provide a recommendation on how to settle the issue permanently. The second option would be for Japan to end its claim to the disputed islands as a goodwill gesture to South Korea to highlight the importance of continued Japan-ROK relations. South Korea, in turn, could allow for a joint fishing zone around the islands that would enable the Japanese fisherman to continue with their way of life unabated by territorial boundaries. Option two would have a greater lasting impact on deepening reconciliation efforts but is less likely to occur without a paradigm shift in the historical narratives promoting the island disputes as national identity crises.

While these areas for possible change only scratch the surface of possible approaches to improving reconciliation efforts for Japan and South Korea, they all identify a need to change the divergent historical narratives and national myths within both countries. With very few individuals remaining from the prewar generation in Japan and South Korea, it should be in the interests of both nations to find a lasting and equitable solution to reconcile the past to provide solace to those who endured unbearable hardships and finally eliminate the animosities that have plagued interstate relations for seventy-seven years.

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