

Nina Lopez



The Collective Memory and Collective Amnesia:

Japan's Occupation in the Korean Peninsula

O G L E T H O R P E  
U N I V E R S I T Y

Honors Thesis

Reading Committee:

Chair: Dr. John Orme

Dr. Stephen Herschler-Mattern and Dr. Nicholas Maher

## **I. Introduction**

Due to an everlasting memory of the Japanese occupation in Korea between 1910 and 1945, South Korea continues to harbor resentful feelings against the Japanese for the harsh treatment displayed towards the Koreans. Japan refuses to acknowledge the war crimes committed in the Korean peninsula, creating an international dilemma that still affects the global stage seventy-six years later.

The Republic of Korea (hereafter South Korea) believe in the reoccurring theme of historical injustice related to wrongdoings by Japan during its occupation of the Korean Peninsula. Koreans refer to the wrong doings done to the Korean “comfort women”, who were young girls being forced into prostitution at a young age for Japanese soldiers; the lack of evidence of this historical fact in Japanese textbooks; visits to Yasukuni Shrine; and the lack of formal apology from the Japanese Government. The Japanese claim that Korea has misinterpreted some these events but have apologized to Korea on numerous occasions by reaching a financial settlement for their wrongdoings.<sup>1</sup> These ongoing issues affect the international relations between these countries, involving allies such as the United States who often has to act like a mediator. Nonetheless this leads to the question: how can one historical event be remembered in two different ways and what are the consequences of that disparity in perspective?

The theory of collective memory is that there are memories that are held by individuals that are shared across the community and affects said community’s identity.<sup>2</sup> In collective memory, we perceive, think, and therefore, remember events in ways that are to great extent determined by our social groups. Consequently, it can have a significant impact upon our

---

<sup>1</sup> Roman David. “The Past or the Politics of the Present? Dealing with the Japanese Occupation of South Korea.” (Contemporary Politics, 2016), 57.

<sup>2</sup> Jeremy K. Yamashiro, and William Hirst. “Convergence on Collective Memories: Central Speakers and Distributed Remembering.” (Journal of Experimental Psychology, 2020), 461.

behavior, feelings and thoughts.<sup>3</sup> In this case, Korea has a shared negative memory of Japan's occupation and wrongdoings that is taught to generations, so their version of history is never forgotten. On the other hand, Japan seems to be suffering from "collective amnesia", which is when an event or a portion of an event is entirely forgotten or glanced over. Japan may experience this to preserve their reputation by intentionally choosing to superficially teach their future generations the wrongdoings done during their tenure of power.

This paper is a multidisciplinary study that applies a historical, cultural anthropological, and psychological approach to an international relations dilemma. Utilizing a multifaceted lens will provide insight into understanding both cultures and their respective arguments. The focus of this study is on the memories of trauma caused by the Japanese wrongdoings during their occupation in Korea and the post-occupation confliction in perspectives. By performing a historical analysis and following the trends of opinion, a predictive indication can be drawn. Some of the wrongdoings that would be covered in this study are on the topic of "comfort woman", and the issue of racial superiority against Korean citizens during 1910 to 1945. Regarding the topic of "comfort woman", the concentration would be narrowed on the Korean comfort woman as this issue can be viewed all throughout Asia. The debate on this argument is that Japan denies that these very young Korean girls were forced. According to Japan, they were voluntarily paid prostitutes. Despite numerous testimonies from these comfort women stating otherwise, Japan has not made an official apology.<sup>4</sup> During their tenure of power, the Japanese held the belief that the race of the East Asian ethnic group Yamato, who in ancient times were mainly located in the Japanese islands and mainland, was superior and held the duty to govern the Eastern hemisphere. Therefore, in the hierarchy of power, they treated the Korean citizens as second-rate citizens. For the analysis on conflicting perspectives, the concentration

---

<sup>3</sup> Rauf Garagozov. "Collective Memory: How Collective Representations About the Past Are Created, Preserved and Reproduced." (Nova Science Publishers, Inc., 2015)

<sup>4</sup> Li Hongxi. "The Extreme Secrecy of the Japanese Army's 'Comfort Women' System." (Chinese Studies in History, 2020), 32-33.

will be on grievances expressed by the South Koreans. Although, the Democratic People's Republic of Korea (hereafter North Korea) prior to 1948 was part of the Korea Peninsula and therefore a victim of the Japanese occupation, this paper will exclusively focus on the Republic of Korea post occupation. As previously mentioned, this paper will additionally concentrate on specific topics of grievances such as the lack of evidence of this historical fact in Japanese textbooks, visits to Yasukuni Shrine and the lack of formal apology from the Japanese Government.

## **II. Historical Background**

Given the complex history between the two nations, it would be feasible to give a timeline of the historical events, including the Japanese invasions and the dynamics of control. The Korean peninsula was in an unstable situation at the end of the nineteenth century and Japan took advantage of that and on February 26, 1876 forced the Koreans to sign an unequal treaty that allowed Japan to tamper with the Korean politics. After winning the Russo-Japanese war, the Japanese were stationed throughout the Korean peninsula and made Korea sign the Elusa Protectorate Treaty in 1905 which provided the legal foundation to turn Korea into a Japanese protectorate. Consequently, Japan forced the Emperor to abdicate his throne in 1907 and Korea's internal administration was given to Japan and the Koreans were forced to pledge to obey the guidance of the local Japanese government. Later, Korea was completely annexed when the Japan-Korea agreement of 1910 was established.<sup>5</sup> Japan's driving force for colonization was to 'push the white race out of Asia' due to the West's growing influence in Eastern Asia.<sup>6</sup> Japanese Imperial Army had adopted the motto of the Meiji Restoration of 1868 of "Rich Country, Strong Army". This reflected Japan's blend

---

<sup>5</sup> Karina V. Korostelina, "The Normative Function of National Historical Narratives: South Korean Perceptions of Relations with Japan." (*National Identities* 21, no. 2, 2019), 171.

<sup>6</sup> Ian Buruma. *The wages of guilt: Memories of war in Germany and Japan*. (New York: New York Review Books, 2015), 9.

of militarism with aggressive belief of national destiny.<sup>7</sup> Common traits of the Japanese Imperial Army were having a warrior spirit, tendencies of racial superiority, self-sacrifice, and a collective discipline. The Japanese reign over Korea continued till the year 1945, lasting thirty-five years.

One of the major lasting events that the Koreans remember is the brutal treatment that the Japanese had with the Koreans during the occupation. The Japanese did not see them as human beings as they believed that any enemy of the emperor could not be right. Therefore, the more brutal they treated their enemies, the more loyal they were being to the emperor.<sup>8</sup> This factor combined with the Japanese belief that they had ancestry from the divine led to a proliferation of racial superiority. The narrative of divine ancestry arrived for the Japanese myth that says the Gods of Yamato had conquered and ruled Korea in A.D 200. They believed that the old three kingdoms of Korea were the feeble branch families that required Japanese protection. Hence, they celebrated the annexation of Korea in 1910 as the restoration of the legitimate arrangement of antiquity. Consequently, several generations of Japanese citizens grew up with this belief of racial superiority.<sup>9</sup> For Japan, a superior nation not only had the right but the moral obligation to act the part; the inferior nation had to know its place and fulfill its duties.<sup>10</sup> Japan as the superior nation had the duty to provide protection to the inferior nations from any outsiders and in exchange Korea had to uphold its place as an inferior nation in the hierarchical scale. The same confusion ideals that glorified order, harmony, and obedience within a hierarchy had promoted beliefs of racial superiority. These factors mixed with the sudden movement of patriotism and a commitment to the war effort gave the foundation and drive for many war crimes to occur. As they are ingrained with a

---

<sup>7</sup> Thomas Berger, *Cultures of antimilitarism: National security in Germany and Japan*. (Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2003, 8.

<sup>8</sup> Buruma, *The wages of guilt: Memories of war in Germany and Japan*, 173.

<sup>9</sup> Chong-Sik Lee. *Japan and Korea: The Political Dimension*. (Hoover Inst. Press, Stanford Univ., 1985), 156.

<sup>10</sup> Lee, *Japan and Korea- The political dimension*, 152.

belief in Japanese racial superiority and the manifest destiny of their nation, they were able to ignore whatever worries threatened to disturb their sleep at night. The dehumanization of the victims like the reduction to the belief that the inferiors were similar to animals helped maintain this credence.<sup>11</sup> Shiro Azuma, a young participant in the Nanking massacre in China, testimony aids in explaining the Japanese Imperial army's behavior in relation to the war crimes committed. Years after the massacre, the same questions run around his mind: "why did people who were good men at home turn into savages? Was it the militaristic education that made us so inhumane? The answers were "[The military] education taught racism and contempt for the Chinese, and that punishing was the right action. It taught that loyalty to the Emperor was the priority- that our lives were nothing more than a bird feather and [we should] not remain alive as prisoners of war, but rather die as a spiritual protection for our country. But this injunction to die was also a form of slavery. The only justice, we were taught, was victory"<sup>12</sup>

The structure of society was an important influence in the daily lives of the Japanese individuals. The order was demonstrated in the concept of 'chu' which is a double system of a Subject- Emperor relationship. The subject faces upward directly to the Emperor without intermediaries. They receive the command of the Emperor but hear these orders given through all the intermediaries that stand between them. "He speaks for the Emperor" is a phrase that would invoke chu.<sup>13</sup> This immense respect for the Emperor's orders arrived from the belief that every emperor had an assumed god mantle. Therefore, every royal act of whatever moral cast, was in perfect harmony with the divine.<sup>14</sup> The Japanese also had a concept of 'on', which means love is an obligation and loyalty. It is a limitless devotion when

---

<sup>11</sup> Erna Paris, *Long shadows: Truth, lies, and history*. (Washington, D.C.: National Library Service for the Blind and Physically Handicapped, Library of Congress, 2002), 129-131.

<sup>12</sup> Paris, *Long shadows: Truth, lies, and history*, 155.

<sup>13</sup> Ruth Benedict, *The Chrysanthemum and the Sword: Patterns of Japanese culture*. (Beijing: Central Compilation & Translation Press, 2008), 129.

<sup>14</sup> Paris, *Long shadows: Truth, lies, and history*, 124.

referred to a great indebtedness. Therefore, an 'Imperial On' is one's debt to the emperor which one should receive with immeasurable gratitude.<sup>15</sup> The combination of these two concepts leads to the belief that the set-up of the Japanese society was perfectly acceptable as the Japanese believed in the hierarchy of having a "proper station" which is ingrained in their social experience by having a specific role that they needed to maintain. Hence, inequality has also been an accepted fact. It is the belief that both who exercise control and those who are under other's control act in conformity to a tradition that is ancient in its own right.<sup>16</sup> Since Korea was considered part of Japanese Empire, they were considered citizens but treated as second rate subjects. Nearly half of Korean residents were conscript workers, pressed into service during the war, and often maltreated.<sup>17</sup> Japan needed Korea to provide manpower for the war as twenty-two million Koreans were assimilated for the tasks.

Nonetheless, the colonial policies of Japan are described as cruel as it specifically targeted the identity and culture of Korea. Japan hierarchically wanted to suppress the Korean culture, tradition, and language while simultaneously any uniqueness of Korean identity was denied.<sup>18</sup> Additionally, they wanted to eliminate Korean surnames from existence. This was a great conflict that Koreans still resent as ancestor worship and genealogical records which serves as family and clan ties are important notions in the Korean culture. The Japanese wanted the Koreans to change their surnames, therefore this is an unfilial act meaning that they would deny their ancestors by assuming foreign names that exhibit no relation to their past. The Japanese regime also attempted to force Japanese religion onto the Koreans. Koreans had to recite the "Oath of Imperial Subjects" bow daily to the east toward the imperial palace and confirm their faith in the Japanese national polity (kokutai) by worshipping in Shinto shrines.

---

<sup>15</sup> Benedict, *The Chrysanthemum and the Sword: Patterns of Japanese culture*, 101,116.

<sup>16</sup> Benedict, *The Chrysanthemum and the Sword: Patterns of Japanese culture*, 47.

<sup>17</sup> Buruma, *The wages of guilt: Memories of war in Germany and Japan*, 276.

<sup>18</sup> Korostelina, "The Normative Function of National Historical Narratives: South Korean Perceptions of Relations with Japan.", 177.

By the end of second world war, there were 186,680 Koreans in the Japanese army and 22,299 in the navy. They were also conscripted for labor of mines and factories and the Korean laborers slaves were viewed as inferiors and in the bottom of the Japanese hierarchy. They went to concentration camps, where they worked long hours under abusive Japanese superiors with little pay and food.<sup>19</sup> Unfortunately, there were many victims in the Hiroshima nuclear bombing; this included Korean slave laborers that were brought over during the war. Therefore, many Koreans remember the brutal treatment that was displayed during the occupation of the Japanese. In modern times, the Korean minority in Japan are more discriminated against than Koreans in China, Soviet Union, and the US, respectively.<sup>20</sup>

Another prominent event in the collective memory is the “comfort women issue”. Between 1943 and 1945 the colonial government recruited some 200,000 Korean women between the ages 12 and 40. Some 50,000 to 70,000 were assigned to various war fronts as prostitutes.<sup>21</sup> As Shiro Azuma testified “for the Japanese rape was against military regulations, so they needed to destroy the evidence. While the women were fucked, they were considered human, but when we killed them, they were just pigs. We felt no shame about it, no guilt. If we had, we could not have done it,”<sup>22</sup> The Rape of Nanking was the culmination of countless massacres on smaller scales as barbarism was considered an unavoidable part of war. As a result of this barbarism, rape was getting out of hand which was causing a lot of resistance from the locals, so they needed a way to control it. Therefore, the Japanese decided to set up military brothels “sexual comfort facilities” near the front lines, stocked with Chinese, Korean, Southeast Asian, and some European women, taken from villages, towns, and POW camps all over the Japanese empire.<sup>23</sup> The purpose of the comfort women system

---

<sup>19</sup> Lee, *Japan and Korea- The political dimension*, 4-15.

<sup>20</sup> Lee, *Japan and Korea- The political dimension*, 186.

<sup>21</sup> Lee, *Japan and Korea- The political dimension*, 20.

<sup>22</sup> Buruma, *The wages of guilt: Memories of war in Germany and Japan*, 131.

<sup>23</sup> Buruma, *The wages of guilt: Memories of war in Germany and Japan*, 194.



was to lift the morale of Japanese soldiers, reduce the spread of venereal disease (comfort women were regularly checked) and to reduce the frequency of rape committed by Japanese soldiers.<sup>24</sup> Most of these comfort women died of disease, murder, or enemy fire.

Unfortunately due to the nature of the Confucian Korean society which emphasized chastity and associated any kind of sexual defilement with promiscuity, women who returned were seen as tainted<sup>25</sup> Although, the Japanese has denied multiple times in the past the existence of this occurring, historian Yoshimi Yoshiaki found some documents in the Self-Defense Agency library, in which state that official orders for the construction of “sexual comfort facilities”, signed by the high command of the Imperial Japanese Army that would indeed solidify said existence.<sup>26</sup>

Over time many testimonies have come to light from both the former soldiers and even comfort women themselves about the matter. Retired soldier in the Japanese Military during World War II, Yasuji Kaneko’s confession at eighty-seven years old: “I am ashamed to confess, that the lives of the ‘comfort women’ were horrible”. There were soldiers lining up everywhere outside the ‘comfort stations. When one soldier was finished and walked out, it was immediately followed by another soldier walking in. Awful acts like rape, including gang rape took place daily. The Japanese government tries to deny it, but facts are facts. So, the debate about whether there was any coercion involved in the recruitment of these women is just ridiculous. Mr. Kaneko also admitted that there were many teenage Korean women who were brought there by force.<sup>27</sup> On the other side of the experience, Kim Bok-Dong confession at age ninety-three gave a heart-wrenching perspective on the matter. She was

---

<sup>24</sup> Gabriel Jonsson. “Can the Japan-Korea Dispute on ‘Comfort Women’ Be Resolved?” (*Korea Observer* 46, no. 3, 2015), 4.

<sup>25</sup> Jonsson, “Can the Japan-Korea Dispute on ‘Comfort Women’ Be Resolved?”, 5.

<sup>26</sup> Buruma, *The wages of guilt: Memories of war in Germany and Japan*, 195.

<sup>27</sup> Justice4comfortwomen, “Ex-Japanese soldier Yasuji Kaneko’s confession about Comfort Women,” YouTube video, 1:33, July 18, 2012, <https://youtu.be/ewtKksMjuBg>.

born in South Gyeongsang province. She states “it was during the time all young Korean men were conscripted into the Japanese military. When WWII started, they even pulled the male students out of the school to fight as ‘student soldiers’ for Japan. They were also recruiting Korean girls by force. They would come to our house and take us away. Even though we did not want to go, they forced us. When I asked my mom where I was going, she told me that because of WWII, I was going to a factory that made soldiers’ uniforms. They promised my mom I would return once I was old enough to marry. If I did not go, we would have lost everything and gotten exiled from Korea. That’s how they blackmailed us.”<sup>28</sup> She was 14 at the time but at the initial port she encountered 32 women between the ages of 18 and 20. She was taken to the Guangdong Province in China. She was told to go into a big space. She states “there were many rooms where you could see everything from outside. You could see people having sex. The first time, I was dragged into one of these rooms and beaten up a bit. So, I had to comply. When the guy finished, I was bleeding badly because it was my first time. The bed sheet was soaked in blood. After they were done, I went back to my dorm upstairs, where I saw two girls crying because they just had the same thing done to them.” She even tried to commit suicide by consuming a massive bottle of Kaoliang wine (38-63%). Her and the three girls drank the whole bottle together. They fell unconscious but were revived when their stomachs were pumped by the medics. Now she cannot digest food properly and her stomach is permanently damaged. From then on, she had to comply if not she would get beaten. Unfortunately, the systematic prevention of suicide was a common aspect for comfort women. There was no escape for forced female workers as they were stuck in a continuous purgatory where they were neither killed nor allowed to die. This would be

---

<sup>28</sup> Asian Boss, “Life As A Comfort Woman: Story of Kim Bok-Dong,” YouTube video, 18:14, October 27, 2018, [https://youtu.be/qsT97ax\\_Xb0](https://youtu.be/qsT97ax_Xb0).

sometimes more agonizing than a violent death, especially for women at the frontlines who were constantly surrounded by death.

The Japanese made Kim Bok-Dong have sex with Japanese soldiers every day. The schedule was on Saturdays, she would start at noon till 6pm. On Sundays, she had sex from 8am to 5pm. She states, “they would line up and if there was a delay, the guy next in line starts banging on the door.” It was one after another in a continuous sequence. She states she did it so many times that she lost count. By 5pm, she could not get up or walk properly. Her entire lower body was in pain. She was stationed in Gyeongsang province, Hong Kong, Malaysia, Indonesia, and Singapore. After the Japanese lost the war, the Japanese tried to cover up the existence of these comfort stations by turning them into nurses at the army hospitals. She came back to her hometown at age 21, eight years after. She refused to get married after the unfathomable things done to her. When asked about Japan’s claims that they were paid prostitutes, she states: “Is that what a 14-year-old does to make money? How could I have thought about selling my body at that age? The evidence is all there but they try to hide it.” She just wants an apology from Japan for having dragged them away and making them suffer. She wants a sincere formal apology and that they correct their history books. It is not about the money for her.<sup>29</sup> Unfortunately, there are many testimonies similar to Yasuji Kaneko and Kim Bok-Dong that have not been able to be voiced either because they are ashamed, prideful, worried of ostracism or simply because they do not have a safe space to speak their truth. Therefore, it is the responsibility of their respective governments to be their voice and have their interests heard.

### **III. Diplomatic Record**

Korea and Japan contentious diplomatic history is one that spans seventy years. In 1951, the two nations were rushed into talks regarding pending issues from the post war.

---

<sup>29</sup> Asian Boss, “Life As A Comfort Woman: Story of Kim Bok-Dong.”

Japanese delegates insisted on restricting considerations wholly of any immediate issues such as Koreans nationals residing in Japan. They insist upon postponing any consideration of other matters until after the Japanese Peace Treaty has been ratified. The Korean delegates had a different opinion as they wanted to conclude a peace treaty that would resolve long standing emotional issues and begin a new relationship. As South Korean president Syngman Rhee stated Japan must provide “concrete and constructive evidence of repentance for past misdeeds and a new determination to deal fairly with us now and in the future”, which would therefore improve the Japan-Korean relationship. They had very different goals and the talks ended up hurting more than causing good as it caused greater tensions between the two nations.<sup>30</sup> The Koreans demanded elicit penitence from Japan, and the return of gold reserves and art treasures taken during the colonial rule and Japan need a repentant posterior to Korea.<sup>31</sup> As previously presented, Japan had no interest in meeting their demands. Due to the fact that the United States supervised Japan for a period, Japan no longer needed to fend for themselves and they concentrated their energy in developing the economy. Japan was able to achieve great power through economic growth that they previous failed to obtain by force. Therefore, Japan was more focused with rebuilding the economy than dwelling on the past. Additionally, they were very hostile to efforts that would keep the war guilt issue alive despite the left wing wanting to confront the issues of past atrocities.<sup>32</sup>

In 1953, the Korean loathing for the Japanese increased when Japanese chief delegate, Kubota Kanichiro stated “Japan had reforested the denuded hills of Korea, reclaimed land, constructed irrigation facilities that greatly expanded Korea’s rice production, built railroads, highways schools and government buildings, and poured millions of yen into Korean investments”. Due to numerous comments by Kubota much like these, there were not another

---

<sup>30</sup> Lee, *Japan and Korea- The political dimension*, 36-37.

<sup>31</sup> Lee, *Japan and Korea- The political dimension*, 38.

<sup>32</sup> Berger, *Cultures of antimilitarism: National security in Germany and Japan*, 29.

round of talks till four and half years later in 1958.<sup>33</sup> Nonetheless, the conflict sparked again in 1965 when Tokyo professor Saburo Ienaga sued the government of Japan for censoring textbook, this event is commonly known as the “Textbook Censorship scandal”. Ienaga states that the Ministry of Education was curtailing his constitutional freedom of expression. When the scandal broke out, many deemed it as ‘Anti-Japanese’ as his lawsuit was going after Japan’s reputation.<sup>34</sup> However, there seemed to be a beacon of light after many years of tense negotiations. South Korea was going through an economic crisis and needed money urgently. Japan believed this would be a great opportunity as Japan would give aid to solve the Korean Japanese issue, since no amount of compensation will solve the issue.<sup>35</sup> The settlement occurred between Korean President Kim Jong-Pil and Japanese Prime Minister Ohira and the official settlement was:

“as for property claims, Japan was to provide with \$45 million over a ten-year period. But Japan was to provide more funds as a “gesture of good will”: a grant in aid of \$300 million in Japanese products and labor for South Korea’s economic development over a ten-year period, a \$200 million government loan from the Overseas Department Aid fund (ODA) over the same period at 3.5 percent interest per annum, and \$300 million in commercial loans, of which \$90 million was to be allocated for Korean purchases of Japanese fishing boats. Japan also agreed to return a number of old Korean books and art objects. Koreans who had resided in Japan before August 1945 and their descendants were to be granted permanent resident status.”<sup>36</sup>

The treaty of Basic Relations and four agreements were initialed on June 22, 1965 after 14 years of negation. This was a breaking point for Korea- Japan relations as it gave leeway to break through to other topics and it provides the South Koreans a somewhat bitter-sweet

---

<sup>33</sup> Lee, *Japan and Korea- The political dimension*, 39.

<sup>34</sup> Paris, *Long shadows: Truth, lies, and history*, 152,

<sup>35</sup> Lee, *Japan and Korea- The political dimension*, 48.

<sup>36</sup> Lee, *Japan and Korea- The political dimension*, 54.

satisfaction as some of their demands were accomplished. Nonetheless, at the time of the 1965 settlement, the issues of “comfort women” and forced laborers were not known. The treaty stipulated that new issues would be addressed bilaterally. The initial driving force of the 1965 treaty was US pressure, which was motivated by concerns about the regional power balance. The treaty was extremely unpopular in South Korea and contested in Japan. It was signed in secret and forced through the legislature via the authoritarian power of the Park regime. There have been several consequences of the turbulent process. For decades, the public did not know how the final settlement was agreed upon.<sup>37</sup> Therefore, it was not a complete steppingstone as it lacked the repentant apology that the Koreans were looking for and provided no substantial basis for overcoming the past or paving the way for reconciliation.

As the relationship grew, Japan became South Korea's largest trading partner since 1966. Nonetheless the relationship went through a massive setback in August 1974, when President Park went through an assassination attempt while delivering a speech commemorating the anniversary of Korea's liberation from Japan. The president survived however his wife was killed as she was sitting behind him. Korea held Japan responsible because the attacker went to Japan on a forged passport, a forged Japanese identity, prepared the assassination in Japan and utilized a pistol stolen by an Osaka station. The Japanese rebuttal with that the attacker was originally a Korean citizen who committed the crime in Korea. He bypassed all the security checkpoints at the Korean airport and theatre that the speech was to be delivered; therefore, it was Korea's negligence. This sparked outrage in Korea and led to events such as demonstrators ransacking the Japanese Embassy in Seoul. The Park government wanted an apology for the assassination incident and although the

---

<sup>37</sup> Tom Phuong Le. “Negotiating in Good Faith: Overcoming Legitimacy Problems in the Japan-South Korea Reconciliation Process.” (*Journal of Asian Studies* 78, no. 3, 2019), 630-631.

Premier of Japan personally attended the funeral however no apology was received. Japan and Korea were at an impasse until the United States was involved as mediator. The mediation was effective as Japan sent a representative to Seoul to issue two apologies of regret: one written and one oral.<sup>38</sup> Nonetheless, historical events cannot be forgotten as easily since after the war, official visits to Yasukuni by public figures ceased but 30 years later, conservative factions were once again so influential that Prime Minister Takeo Miki thought it advisable to pay a well-publicized personal visit in 1975. Most of his successors followed his lead, insisting that they did it as private citizens.<sup>39</sup> Unlike Germany, which has tried to remove all reminders of their Nazi past and criminalized the ideology that made it possible, the Yasukuni shrine remains an official site of religious historical memory.<sup>40</sup>

Despite the continuing conflicts, Carter's plan in 1977 to withdraw American ground forces within a five-year period caused a lot of uneasiness in Eastern Asia about the United States reliability. The decision was taken unilaterally, and Korea and Japan were worried with the East Asian security due to the continued presence of the Soviet Union in building up their military and navy arsenal in the region. Korea could not handle a frontal attack from North Korea without the United States support and if South Korea succumbed, then Japan's security would be at risk too. Both nations were worried with talks of escalation of war. Nonetheless, Carter's plan did not work as it was decided the plan should change from withdraw to reduction and the end result was that this event brought the Koreans and Japanese closer together.<sup>41</sup>

Japan security depends now on the support of the US and the economic health depends on the flow of the worldwide trade. Korea's value to Japan is purely economical and its

---

<sup>38</sup> Lee, *Japan and Korea- The political dimension*, 84-85.

<sup>39</sup> Paris, *Long shadows: Truth, lies, and history*, 127.

<sup>40</sup> Paris, *Long shadows: Truth, lies, and history*, 125.

<sup>41</sup> Lee, *Japan and Korea- The political dimension*, 98-99.

security as it is a buffer for Japan against communism. For Japan to thrive, it needs the Korean peninsula to remain at peace and maintain stability.

On August 14, 1982, the foreign ministry proposed that the government should give penitence or self-reproach (*hansei*) to the countries who have been wronged and revise the textbooks within the year, however the Education of Ministry and the LDP were unmoved. Despite the initial opposition, on August 23, 1982, Premier Suzuki acknowledged Japanese responsibility to various nations for damages done in the past and pledged the best possible effort to reflect Japan's penitent attitude in the textbooks. However, Suzuki stated "evaluation of our country actions in the past needs to await the judgment of future historians".<sup>42</sup> Japan is reserving its right to be judged by their fellow peers and letting the future judge their actions which is simultaneously avoiding any culpability.

One major turning point in Japanese history was when Emperor Hirohito passed away. After the defeat of the Japanese, the Emperor was the remaining symbol of what was of the Imperial Army legacy. Consequently, after his death many Japanese army veterans had started to relate their memoirs and retelling their experiences of their time in the occupation to the public. As a result of these stories coming to light, in 1994 former comfort women from South Korea as well as some surviving slave workers from China, arrived in Japan to claim compensation and started talking about their own experiences.<sup>43</sup>

With pressure being applied from many places, the slow pace of change in Japan moves forward for an instant, then stops or moves backward. In 1994, the Japanese government was forced to admit that there had been "comfort women", but in 1997, Seiroku Kajuyama, chief cabinet secretary, accused several of the former sex slaves, to their faces, of being willing, paid prostitutes. In 1995, Prime Minister Tomiichi Murayama apologized for the suffering of

---

<sup>42</sup> Lee, *Japan and Korea- The political dimension*, 148.

<sup>43</sup> Buruma, *The wages of guilt: Memories of war in Germany and Japan*, 228.



wartime victims, conceding that Japan had taken a path of war that resulted in “tremendous damage and suffering to the people of many countries, particularly to those of Asian nations. However, Murayama had failed to get support in the Diet for an official governmental apology by a margin of almost 2 to 1; a national campaign organized by a former education minister had collected 4.5 million signatures against his resolution.

On February 6, 1996, the UN condemned Japan for forcing tens of thousands of women into sexual slavery for its imperial troops during World War II. The UN special rapporteur on violence against women, Radhika Coomaraswamy from Sri Lanka, had in January 1996 concluded in her report that Japan should 1) acknowledge that the establishment of comfort stations was a violation of international law and accept legal responsibility for that violation, 2) pay compensation to the victims, 3) make a full disclosure of documents and materials on the comfort women issue, 4) publicly apologize to the survivors in writing, 5) raise awareness of the issue by amending educational curricula and 6) identify and punish the perpetrators involved in the recruitment and institutionalization of comfort stations. Her report was adopted by the UNHRC in April 1996. The comfort stations were defined as military slavery. Nonetheless as a response to the report, the Japanese government denied its legal responsibility by claiming 1) that present international law cannot be applied retroactively, 2) that slavery does not accurately describe the “comfort stations” and that Article 6(c) of the Charter of the International Military Tribunal in Nürnberg in 1945 defines crimes against humanity as “murder, extermination, enslavement, deportation, and other inhumane acts committed against any civilian population before or during the war, or persecutions on political, racial, or religious grounds in execution of or in connection with any crime within

the jurisdiction of the Tribunal, whether or not in violation of the domestic law of the country where perpetrated.” that the comfort women were engaged in prostitution voluntarily.<sup>44</sup>

In 1997, after thirty-four years of effort, Saburo Ienaga finally won his lawsuit over the history texts, a victory that allowed the facts about Unit 731 to enter the Japanese school system. But the previous year, Premier Ryutaro Hashimoto has visited the controversial Yasukuni Shrine, the first prime minister in a decade to do so. There were other backward steps: in 1999, Yuko Tojo, the granddaughter of General Tojo, spoke to The New York Times about her campaign to rehabilitate the image of her executed grandfather. “He died for his country. He died to save his people” she declared. “This isn’t a private matter... To improve the image of Tojo is to improve the image of wartime Japan, and that is my aim. An adult comic book, *Sensoron*, revised the claim that the main reason for the Second World War was to stop white people from colonizing Asia. In 1999, Tokyo elected as its governor Shintaro Ishihara, a nationalist who called the Rape of Nanking “a lie” and in May 2000, Prime Minister Yoshiro Mori told legislators and Shinto religious leaders that “Japan is a divine country with the emperor at its centre”. In the end, the decades long denial will be rejected by the young as they gradually come to know what was done in their country’s name. In a poll taken back in 1994, a massive 4 to 1 majority of Japanese said they disbelieved their government on war crimes and desired an official apology, including paying adequate reparations.<sup>45</sup>

On December 28, 2015, the governments of Korea and Japan reached a deal. Japan had to pay about 10 billion Korean Won (USD 8.8M) in reparations and the agreement was settled between ROK president Park Geun-hye and Japanese Prime Minister Shinzo Abe. Nonetheless, the deal received a lot of backlash from the Korean public as it is considered a

---

<sup>44</sup> Jonsson, “Can the Japan-Korea Dispute on ‘Comfort Women’ Be Resolved?’, 8-10.

<sup>45</sup> Paris, *Long shadows: Truth, lies, and history*, 163.

one-sided deal because it was negotiated without the consultation of the actual comfort women affected or hearing out their demands. Despite reaching an agreement Japan had the condition that they would not pay the reparations till the ‘Statue of Peace’ was removed. Korea agreed to ‘try’ to remove the statue. The stated sculpture is known as “The Statue of the ‘Comfort Women,’” but its original name in Korean, P’yŏnghwaŭi Sonyŏsang, translates as “The Statue of a Girl for Peace.”. The piece commemorates the 1,000th Wednesday Demonstration, a weekly protest held across the street from the Japanese embassy in Seoul since 1992, by Korean “comfort women” survivors and activists calling for an apology and reparations from the Japanese government. The sculpture is a bronze sculpture located in front of the Embassy of Japan in Seoul. The piece is in the form of a 13- to 17- year-old girl. The girl’s cut hair represents the sudden breakaway from her family. She has a small bird perched on her shoulder which symbolizes the victim’s spirit, which cannot leave this life for reincarnation because the issue has not been resolved. On the marble podium, the artists have created a shadow of the girl, in the shape of an elderly woman whose back and shoulders are hunched forward, indicating the survivors as they appear today. An empty chair next to the statue invites the viewers’ interaction with the statue and their participation in the protest. This statue gives the viewers’ a sense of sympathy so much that it is usually adorned with bouquets of flowers which are placed in front of the statue’s feet or on the empty chair.<sup>46</sup> The call for removal sparked many counteractions with young activists guarding the statue twenty-four hours a day and the statues has inspired many replicas across South Korea and abroad, expanding the movement even more than previously discussed. A 2016 Korea Gallup poll found that 54 percent of Korean respondents believed the 2015 agreement was wrong, and of that group, 34 percent believed it was due to a lack of representation of comfort

---

<sup>46</sup> Vicki Sung-Yeon Kwon. 2019. “The Sonyŏsang Phenomenon: Nationalism and Feminism Surrounding the ‘Comfort Women’ Statue.” *Korean Studies* 43: 6–39. doi:10.1353/ks.2019.0006.

women. Most importantly, past treaties have lacked legitimacy because the voices of the victims were missing during the negotiation process. Millions of Koreans suffered under Japanese colonialism, and it is the norm for governments to negotiate on behalf of a population. However, the participation of the victims can provide treaty legitimacy because victim-centered reconciliation helps cultivate a shared recognition of humanity. The remaining eighteen comfort women (as of March 2020) and forced laborers must be at the negotiating table to ensure any agreement would receive their final blessing.<sup>47</sup> Enthusiasm for the 2015 agreement has decreased in Japan and South Korea, demonstrating the weaknesses of the reconciliation process and the need for action.<sup>48</sup>

Nowadays, public opinion in Japan and South Korea have decreased rapidly according to the 2020 annual report from the joint opinion survey conducted by Japan's The Genron NPO and South Korea's East Asia Institute (EAI) think tank. The opinion poll in Japan was conducted between September 12 and October 4 nationwide using the in-home self-administered questionnaire method, resulting in a collection of 1,000 valid responses. In South Korea, the face-to-face interview method was used to collect 1,008 valid responses between September 11 and September 25. The results were that 71.6 percent of South Koreans responded that they either had a "bad" or "relatively bad" impression of Japan against the 21.5 percent of the previous year. The younger generations were leading this trend as the Japanese perception had plummeted. Additionally, nearly 90 percent of the Korean respondents believed that current state of Japan-South Korean relations as being either "relatively bad" or "extremely bad,". On the other hand, 54.7 percent of Japanese respondents consider the present state of Japan-South Korea relations either "relatively bad" or "extremely bad" which has improved from the 63.5 percent from the previous year. Additional results

---

<sup>47</sup> Le. "Negotiating in Good Faith: Overcoming Legitimacy Problems in the Japan-South Korea Reconciliation Process.", 632.

<sup>48</sup> Le. "Negotiating in Good Faith: Overcoming Legitimacy Problems in the Japan-South Korea Reconciliation Process.", 638.

were that not many South Koreans and Japanese support their own country's policy towards the other country and there is an increasing number of South Koreans that want a new solution on the forced labor issue. Most importantly, both the South Korea and Japan respondents believed that historical disputes between South Korean and Japan might lead to another conflict between the two countries.<sup>49</sup>

#### **IV. Explanation: Why has this been so difficult to resolve?**

##### a. Collective Memory as a concept

The originator of the term “collective memory” was Maurice Halbwachs, a French scholar working in the first half of the twentieth century, whose work was translated into English in 1950. Academic studies of memory proliferated in the following decades, many of them abstruse and not especially pertinent to the present inquiry. Andrei Markovits and Simon Reich's study of Germany provides a useful summary. Markovits and Reich contend that after historical events have taken place, they are interpreted not only by academic historians, who are bound by professional standards of objectivity, but also by novelists, filmmakers, artists, journalists, teachers, agitators, and ordinary people relating their experiences around the dinner table or at a bar stool. Through this process, some degree of consensus usually forms within a social group about the meaning and implications of what has happened. These memories held in common, or in some instances repressed and denied, become an important influence on foreign and domestic policy.<sup>50</sup>

As previously discussed, historical events are the primary forces that drive cultural change. Historical experiences may become anchored in the collective memory of a given society and shape and support the population's orientations toward politics. Each subsequent

---

<sup>49</sup> The Genron NPO. “South Korean attitudes toward Japan have worsened dramatically, annual survey finds” [https://www.genron-npo.net/en/opinion\\_polls/archives/5562.html](https://www.genron-npo.net/en/opinion_polls/archives/5562.html), 2020.

<sup>50</sup> Dr. John Orme provided a summary of previous collective memory literature.

experience, in turn, is filtered through the lens of the existing political culture, although shock experiences may force a reinterpretation of the prevailing patterns of thought. Every episode in a nation's history, however, can be interpreted in several different ways. In the mind's eye every military setback can be redefined as a victory and every successful feat of arms can become a defeat. In other words, it is interpretation that determines the ultimate impact of a given political event and the kinds of lessons that are drawn from it. For conflicts to move on compromises need to be legitimated both internally, within the group, and externally to the larger public. A group's leaders may choose to claim that a compromise has been made for purely tactical reasons, saying in effect that they bowed to the superior power of the other side. In the long run, such half-hearted legitimations are inherently unstable. They reduce the likelihood that the group's membership will rally behind the compromise for long or that opposing groups will accept them as genuine. Once compromises have been reached, there exist strong pressures for the group to justify them through reference to higher principles. When a compromise has been negotiated and legitimized in this manner, it becomes difficult for a group to abandon it. The historical-political culture can be understood as a form of negotiated reality. What is up to debate is the version of reality and the norms and values done in the legitimation. Various groups participate in the process of interpretation and reinterpretation of events in a particular culture, guided by a combination of self-interest and ideology. In their participation in the political process, each group accommodate itself to forces dominating the political arena. While a particular group may reject the prevailing political reality for some time, ultimately it is forced to either make compromises or it runs the risk of becoming politically marginalized.<sup>51</sup>

---

<sup>51</sup> Berger, *Cultures of antimilitarism: National security in Germany and Japan*, 12-13.

b. Korean Memory

In the Korean narrative, there is deep feelings of victimhood and trauma, and strong beliefs of injustice.<sup>52</sup> The historical memory among Korean people is not based on facts but on emotions about the colonial experience and negative perceptions of Japan. History is still alive and very important for Korea. They learn from schools that their history was built on invasions. This said history of suffering and final independence is very important for their national identity.<sup>53</sup>

Unfortunately, the Korean political spectrum which is supposed to push this narrative is divided amongst these issues due to its partisan nature. Progressives criticize conservatives for being ‘pro-Japan’. Further deepening the internal divide is the success and prominence in contemporary South Korea of rich and powerful families alleged to have profited by aligning themselves with Japanese zaibatsu, or conglomerates often derided as collaborators. Some conservatives have been accused in the past of benefiting from said scheme. Other political scandals have been that former president Park Chung-hee was a former officer in the Imperial Japanese army (1944–45) and swore a blood oath to the Emperor, but he (and later his daughter Park Geun-hye) ascended to the presidency. Park imprisoned and even executed former patriots and their descendants because of their alleged communist ties.<sup>54</sup> His authoritarian rule has tarnished his legacy for many younger Koreans. Park is perceived to be overly close to Japan. This pro-Japan legacy has plagued even his daughter, former president Park Geun-hye, who was severely criticized for the 2015 comfort women deal and was

---

<sup>52</sup> It is important to note this is regarding the general main narrative of said event. Not every Korean citizen may exhibit the same collective memory nor to the same degree.

<sup>53</sup> Korostelina, “The Normative Function of National Historical Narratives: South Korean Perceptions of Relations with Japan.”, 177.

<sup>54</sup> Joseph Yi; Joe Phillips, and Wondong Lee. “Manufacturing Contempt: State-Linked Populism in South Korea.” (*Society* 56, 2019), 497.

impeached in December 2016 for corruption.<sup>55</sup> Right-wing party members dispute that they or their ancestors were active collaborators, but they rarely dispute the alleged brutality of the colonial regime. Nonetheless, progressives' groups continue to put pressure on Japan and demand a response.

Koreans agree that conflict must be managed, and harmony (absence of conflict) is essential in all relationships and situations. This belief is underpinned by Confucianism, which has influenced Korean thinking and culture for centuries. The Confucians sought to achieve harmony, and to this end, they prescribed relationships among people in the family and state. These laid out a hierarchical societal structure and prescribed that individuals should maintain their position; likewise, they should exhibit piety towards parents, render loyalty to superiors, and preserve harmony with group members. Accompanying these systems and prescriptions was/is the general philosophy that "inhwa" which translates to harmony, is the most desirable state, in the community or at work. Since it is an important goal in its own right, all parties should strive to maintain it, and once distributed, inhwa is best restored through compromise. For inhwa to be restored, the conflict has to be fully resolved. Therefore, leaders are under the obligation to maintain or restore harmony among those below them and when they do so they reap others' respect. Koreans in general accept the Confucian prescript of societal harmony as not only do they attempt to live in harmony, they feel obligated to assist others in maintaining or re-establishing harmonious interactions. Because it is the leader's responsibility to perform harmony/dispute management there is no possible way for them to ignore or avoid the conflict. Therefore, they will listen to each

---

<sup>55</sup> Le. "Negotiating in Good Faith: Overcoming Legitimacy Problems in the Japan-South Korea Reconciliation Process.", 631.



side's point of view, gather information, analyze the situation, and then advise as to how to solve the dispute. Additionally, they will address it and try to assist in its management.<sup>56</sup>

Nonetheless, one major issue that affects negotiations between Korea and Japan is that Korean culture emphasizes top-down decision-making and problem-solving in which leaders will use their power to resolve the conflict. That is, they will not rely on the disputants for the resolution, nor will they depend on third parties. Rather, they will personally assist in the resolution. Hence, a third party who has low power over the disputants cannot press them towards reconciliation. The only exception is when there is a third party that holds enough power, choosing to manage the reconciliation process. These stronger-power third parties are also more likely to use forceful tactics in order to achieve desired results.<sup>57</sup> In this case study, a powerful third party and influential ally like the United States could push Japan and Korea towards reconciliation through forceful measures. The United States can play an important mediating role in ensuring that an agreement is transparent and has appropriate confidence-building measures (CBMs) to decrease cheating and increase trust. CBMs are "military reassurance steps" that constrain a nation's military power, increase transparency, and demonstrate benign intentions, among other trust-building signals CBMs are designed to reduce mistrust and hostilities between states and have been successfully implemented by international organizations such as ASEAN. In the context of the reconciliation process, CBMs increase the costs of renegeing on previous agreements and decrease the costs of entering agreements and, thus, improve the likelihood that each party will continue to work towards reconciliation. Over time, CBMs allow states to operate from a starting position of cooperation and be better prepared to temper crises. A third-party mediator, such as the United States, can help ensure that these stipulations are negotiated fairly by offering insight

---

<sup>56</sup> Nam-Hyeon Kim; Dong-Won Sohn; Wall, James A, Jr. "Korean Leaders' and Subordinates Conflict Management." (International Journal of Conflict Management, 1999), 131.

<sup>57</sup> Nam-Hyeon Kim; Dong-Won Sohn; Wall, James A, Jr. "Korean Leaders' and Subordinates Conflict Management.", 132.

and a neutral location to meet. The United States can also help give the reconciliation agreement legitimacy by suggesting concessions that may favor one side or the other. This way the United States signals to Japan and South Korea that it is a concerned and responsible ally.<sup>58</sup> Nonetheless, the United States has taken the position of neutrality and simply continues to advise both its allies to resolve its conflict, hopefully before it compromises their position in the Eastern Hemisphere with the rise of power from China.

On the other hand, in the social stage, collective memory has the ability to preserve the memory of events that individuals or powerful state institutions would prefer to forget. This is achieved through public rituals of remembrance and commemoration practices maintained by powerful social institutions or through the transmission of informal stories in family networks from generation to generation.<sup>59</sup>

In the Korean case study, this is viewed especially through youth movements, women's groups, and pop culture as they are creating the narrative and continuing to push these issues into light. There has been a widespread adoption of these issues by a new generation of South Koreans. Many did not expect that the second generation would take on the victimhood of the first generation, yet there has been massive support that keeps these grievances alive. For example, when asked what motivates them, some state they wanted to do something that would support their grandmothers and the movement itself.<sup>60</sup> Another student stated "we, the protagonists of the next generation, will make sure that Japan's acknowledgment of war crimes, reparation, and punishment for war criminals are recorded in the history textbooks" However, transmitting collective victimhood to younger generations may also transmit

---

<sup>58</sup> Le. "Negotiating in Good Faith: Overcoming Legitimacy Problems in the Japan-South Korea Reconciliation Process.", 634-635.

<sup>59</sup> Garagozov. "Collective Memory: How Collective Representations About the Past Are Created, Preserved and Reproduced.", 2.

<sup>60</sup> Edward White. "Divided by History: Why Japan-South Korea Ties Have Soured." (Financial Times, 2019), [www.ft.com/content/13a3ff9a-f3ed-11e9-a79c-bc9acae3b654](http://www.ft.com/content/13a3ff9a-f3ed-11e9-a79c-bc9acae3b654).

intergroup hostility and threat. Accordingly, most Koreans in their twenties have negative attitudes toward Japan even though they have not directly experienced victimization.<sup>61</sup>

Likewise, civil society such as women groups were also motivators to affirm these issues into public memory. In 1991 three South Koreans former comfort women told their stories in public for the first time and lodged a lawsuit against the Japanese government. Rapidly, the subject was in the hands of feminist and human rights activists, not only in Asia but also the United Nations, in Korean-Canadian and Korean-American activist circles.<sup>62</sup> Another group that has played an immense role in bringing the dispute to the forefront of international awareness is The Korean Council for Justice and Remembrance for the Issues of Military Sexual Slavery by Japan. This Council was formed through 16 groups related to women's issues in South Korea in November 1990 as the Korean Council for the Women Drafted for Military Sexual Slavery by Japan, and in 2016, it effectively merged with its affiliate, the Korean Council for Justice and Remembrance, giving the organization its current form.<sup>63</sup> This group is a support system for comfort women and provides them an outlet to say their stories while also lobbying the Japanese government to take actions of a full apology and compensation. The comfort women issue is well established in the global memory space, symbolized by the statues of comfort women that civil society activists have erected around the world. They represent "restive memory", which moves across borders and establishes solidarity. Each time Japan officials lodge an official protest them; it seems that a new statue goes up in another town or city.<sup>64</sup> The statues are also representative of the slogan of 'never

---

<sup>61</sup> Hu Young Jeong and Johanna Ray Vollhardt. "Koreans' Collective Victim Beliefs about Japanese Colonization." (Peace and Conflict: Journal of Peace Psychology, 2020), 7.

<sup>62</sup> Carol Gluck. "Memory in Hypernationalist Times: The Comfort Women as Traveling Trope." (*Global-e: A Global Studies Journal* 12, no. 17, 2019), 2.

<sup>63</sup> Kan Kimura. "Comfort Women: Time's Up for Activist Leadership." (The Diplomat, 2020) [thediplomat.com/2020/06/comfort-women-times-up-for-activist-leadership/](https://thediplomat.com/2020/06/comfort-women-times-up-for-activist-leadership/).

<sup>64</sup> Carol Gluck. "Memory in Hypernationalist Times: The Comfort Women as Traveling Trope.", 4.

again' as they are historical symbols, standing there to prevent the reoccurrence of the unfortunate history.

Additionally, with the rise of Korean music and film, the platform of celebrities has grown as well, allowing them to speak on these issues and reach a greater audience. For example, a photo of Korean pop star Bae Su-Ji holding a phone case from the company Maymond, which makes fashion accessories dedicated to supporting the cause of former comfort women went viral. The company's products are designed to represent the stories of comfort women, and a portion of the profits go to the victims. The viral photo increased the company's sales more than a fivefold from 2015 to 2017.<sup>65</sup> Other artists such as top Korean group BTS have been seen using products from the same company. These artists have a huge influence on their fans, and it allows them to further the message that these issues will not be unheard nor forgotten.

Further contributing to the perceived urgency of preserving collective memories of victimization, is in part because the survivors are now very old. As survivors' testimonies are a crucial part of Koreans' collective memories, recording their memories before they die may be seen as an urgent task.<sup>66</sup> These movements will not allow these issues to be forgotten. Nonetheless one can wonder how can Japan easily dismiss such claims?

c. Japan and their 'Collective Amnesia'

After World War II, Japan suffered great losses for their defeat as three million were pronounced dead and a total of eight million were killed and injured. During the war, an American submarine blockade had paralyzed the Japanese economy and caused huge economical loss for the country. Additionally, Japan lost territory and were stripped of Taiwan

---

<sup>65</sup> White. "Divided by History: Why Japan-South Korea Ties Have Soured."

<sup>66</sup> Hu Young Jeong and Johanna Ray Vollhardt. "Koreans' Collective Victim Beliefs about Japanese Colonization.", 7.

and Korea.<sup>67</sup> As a result for their defeat, the United States now had the responsibility of overseeing Germany and Japan's military security.<sup>68</sup> Due to the fact, it was the only way to assure that these nations would no longer remerge and be able to make a threat towards their neighboring countries or to the global security. Most of Japan's military arsenal was destroyed and/or confiscated. Their military power was demobilized, and tighter restrictions were imposed on producing war fighting materials. The United States also removed the military as a political force and consequently made Japan dependent on them.<sup>69</sup> To this day, Japan officially has no army, navy, or air force due to Article 9 in their constitution which states "aspiring sincerely to an international peace based on justice and order, the Japanese people forever renounce war as a sovereign right of the nation and the threat or use of force as a means of settling international disputes."<sup>70</sup>

As victors of the war, the allied powers oversaw the task of how to prosecute the war crimes of the defeated nations. In Germany, the Nuremberg trials occurred where the tribunal convicted mostly everyone prosecuted as they focused on crimes against humanity. This included murder, enslavement, deportations, genocide, etc. Nonetheless, Japan's famous post-World War II trial is the International Military Tribunal for the Far East (hereafter Tokyo Trials). The trial had sessions between May 1946 to November 1948. The judges were of the 11 allied nations and the prosecution focused primarily on the conspiracy to wage aggressive war. Therefore, the defendants were 28 "Class A" military leaders who were high up in the governmental pyramid. Some of the defendants included General Iwane Matsui, the commander-in-chief of the Central Army in China at the time of the Nanking massacre, and General Hideki Tojo, premier of Japan between 1941 and 1944. General Tojo was the most important defendant for the allies as he was the personification of Japan's extremist nationalist

---

<sup>67</sup> Berger, *Cultures of antimilitarism: National security in Germany and Japan*, 5.

<sup>68</sup> Berger, *Cultures of antimilitarism: National security in Germany and Japan*, 23.

<sup>69</sup> Berger, *Cultures of antimilitarism: National security in Germany and Japan*, 25.

<sup>70</sup> Buruma, *The wages of guilt: Memories of war in Germany and Japan*, 32.

militarism. His ideal of ‘total war’ fueled Japan’s aggressive tendencies. Ultimately, on December 23, 1948 seven of the defendants were charged and hanged including General Tojo and General Matsui. They were inducted as martyrs and “gods” by their fellow compatriots into the Yasukuni Shrine.<sup>71</sup> The Yasukuni Shrine is more than a century old Shinto monument in Tokyo. It was dedicated to the cult of the imperial ruler of Japan in 1868, after the samurai defeated the Tokugawa shogunate and introduced the Meiji Restoration of the emperor.<sup>72</sup> This Shinto shrine is dedicated to the worship of those who died for the emperor since the Meiji Restoration. For Japanese people, it is the symbol of bravery and the ultimate sacrifice of their soldiers as well as of the glory of the empire.<sup>73</sup> It symbolizes self-sacrifice and militarism including those who were hanged in the Tokyo Trials who are now worshipped alongside with the other souls of the dead.<sup>74</sup>

Nonetheless, the most controversial point of the Tokyo Trials was that Prince Asaka, and the emperor were not listed as defendants. Joseph B. Keenan, the chief prosecutor for the allied powers, stated that the emperor was a powerless figurehead without a political role.<sup>75</sup> Additionally, Japan had seventeen cabinets since 1928, which made it hard to pinpoint one set of decision makers that ‘conspired to wage aggressive war’. Therefore, the emperor and prince were exempt to be tried and even to testify.<sup>76</sup> Despite Joseph B. Keenan’s dismissing statement, the emperor system held extreme cultural power as it was the ancient, ultra-conservative face of Japan. The pre-war leadership had grown so much under the emperor’s shadows that it was necessary to preserve the political and social right wing. Therefore, Japan had no break from the rulers that had previously governed them before and during the war. They remained in

---

<sup>71</sup> Paris, *Long shadows: Truth, lies, and history*, 132.

<sup>72</sup> Paris, *Long shadows: Truth, lies, and history*, 124.

<sup>73</sup> Korostelina, “The Normative Function of National Historical Narratives: South Korean Perceptions of Relations with Japan.”, 175.

<sup>74</sup> Buruma, *The wages of guilt: Memories of war in Germany and Japan*, 64.

<sup>75</sup> Paris, *Long shadows: Truth, lies, and history*, 133.

<sup>76</sup> Berger, *Cultures of antimilitarism: National security in Germany and Japan*, 28.

power to maintain the nation's political stability. This is unlike the case in Germany, where there was a clear break and disintegration of the political party in power. The main reason that the Allied powers let the right wing of Japan remain in power despite their turbulent past and not prosecute the emperor is the looming threat of a Cold War.<sup>77</sup> It was not the United States best interest to destabilize the nation as instability would lead Japan to be more susceptible to fall to communism. Therefore, they were trying to avoid domestic turmoil. Nonetheless from the view of the Japanese citizens, the defendant's actions of not testifying against the emperor led to public sympathy and were viewed as martyrs.<sup>78</sup>

After the Tokyo Trials, the allied powers, especially the United States had the task of supervising Japan and convincing them that they lost the war and bear the moral responsibility of the harm they have caused. They tried to do this with the Tokyo Trials but ultimately failed as the Japanese viewed their own as victims of an unjust system conducted by the victors of the war. This led many Japanese to resent the Westerners powers.<sup>79</sup> For them defeat meant an end of a militarist vision of a united Asia under Japanese rule. Additionally, an Allied occupation also symbolized that the military failed in achieving military independence, which was previously the driving force of the Meiji Era behavior and the creation of the Japanese Empire. By having the westerners powers being in charge the legitimacy of the emperor who is the living spiritual head of Japan now was at the mercy of foreigners.<sup>80</sup> Nonetheless despite Westerners reservations, on September 10, 1951, the Mutual Security Treaty (Anpo jōyaku or just Anpo) was signed which defined Japan's security relationship with the United States and an administrative agreement under which the Japan granted the United States the right to continued use of its military bases in Japan"<sup>81</sup>

---

<sup>77</sup> Paris, *Long shadows: Truth, lies, and history*, 133.

<sup>78</sup> Berger, *Cultures of antimilitarism: National security in Germany and Japan*, 28.

<sup>79</sup> Berger, *Cultures of antimilitarism: National security in Germany and Japan*, 27.

<sup>80</sup> Berger, *Cultures of antimilitarism: National security in Germany and Japan*, 24.

<sup>81</sup> Berger, *Cultures of antimilitarism: National security in Germany and Japan*, 39.

After the foreign powers left in 1951, Japan sought to prevent the spread of a view of history that would undermine their political legitimacy. The war crime trials were suspended and former war criminals that were imprisoned by the Allies were released. They controlled textbooks contents so children would have a distorted and better version of their country's history. The textbook censorship issue is one of greatest points of contention that the Koreans have with the Japanese. Between 1903-1945, Ministry of education had complete control of the textbook content and published uniform national books. However, a new system was implemented in 1947 by the United States government to discourage against militarist tendencies in textbooks in which anyone could write and publish textbooks but only those approved could be used in schools. The height of the textbook censorship was when all mass media was reporting on the ministry's news that all publishers of the 1983 high school textbooks to designate the Japanese movement into north China between 1935 and 1937 as 'advance' rather than 'aggression'.<sup>82</sup> One specific case in this matter that gained media attention was when the Ministry of Education deemed that Ienaga Saburo's text was too "one-sided" and that was too negative about the Japanese war in Asia. He was told to delete passages about Nanking Massacre, rape by Japanese Soldiers, and Japanese medical experiments in Manchuria, among other things. He rewrote the book several times, but it was never enough. In 1965 he sued the government for acting unconstitutional. He was still fighting his case after numerous appeals and counterappeals even till 1992. Unfortunately, his lawsuit was denied by all courts in 1997. The Japanese ministry and government were trying to distort and embellish their war crime history by repressing anyone and anything that would go against the narrative they have created. South Korea's complaints were that the previous textbooks had correctly stated that the "Japanese side induced a collision [with Korea in 1875], and using it as a pretext, forced the opening of Korea." This was revised to say that the "collision took place because

---

<sup>82</sup> Lee, *Japan and Korea- The political dimension*, 142.



the Korean side launched a bombardment on the Japanese ships”. The second complaint was that the word “aggression” in the previous textbooks was changed to “advance” to describe the Japanese movement into Korea after 1905. Thirdly, the March First uprising of the Korean people in 1919 was revised and depicted as a riot, rationalizing harsh Japanese suppression. Additionally, previous expressions about Japanese imperialists’ exploiting the lands belonging to Koreans were rephrased as “Koreans lost their rights to lands”. The Japanese also changed “Koreans were forced to worship Shinto shrines” to “Koreans were encouraged to worship at Shinto shrines”. Another complaint was that previous accounts of the banning of the Korean language in Korea were changed to a statement that “the Korean and Japanese languages were used simultaneously”. Lastly, many Koreans were “forcibly drafted” into the Japanese army or work force, but the new textbooks made the Japanese actions more innocuous by eliminating the expression “forcibly drafted.”<sup>83</sup> The Japanese wanted to do these revisions to gloss over Japan’s shame for its past actions. Nonetheless, nothing was changed as they tried to mitigate responsibility for the Nanjing massacre, massacre of Koreans during the March 1<sup>st</sup> movement in 1919, and the conscription of Korean laborers during the early 1940s. Japanese atrocities were treated as reactions to provocations, and descriptions of harsh treatments of victims were modified or deleted. Japanese public opinion data on the textbook controversy stated 50.2% said they should make corrections before it turns into an international issue and 69.4% say felt corrections were needed in the textbooks.<sup>84</sup> Japanese textbooks justify the Japanese invasion and completely avoid any discussion of the atrocities and crimes committed by Japanese rulers during colonization and World War II.<sup>85</sup> Therefore, the textbook censorship is one that sparks great resentment from the Koreans as their version of history is being disregarded as one left

---

<sup>83</sup> Lee, *Japan and Korea- The political dimension*, 144.

<sup>84</sup> Lee, *Japan and Korea- The political dimension*, 151.

<sup>85</sup> Korostelina, “The Normative Function of National Historical Narratives: South Korean Perceptions of Relations with Japan.”, 179.

to a simple matter of interpretation when there is solid evidence available. Nonetheless, Japanese right-wing groups have continued to pressure the media to avoid any topics that would go against the honor of the nation. The only difference that occurred after the foreign powers left was that members of the old military elite were forbidden from holding any political positions.<sup>86</sup> Therefore, Japan began to sanitize its history to preserve their honor in front of the global stage. As expected, once Korea began to solidify itself as an independent nation, this disregarding behavior caused a lot of conflict.

The denial of historical discrimination is not just a way to evade guilt. It is intrinsic to pacifism. To even try to distinguish between wars, to accept that some wars are justified, is already an immoral position. What happens in the cases of Japan is that pacifism happens to be a high-minded way to dull the pain of historical guilt. Or conversely, if one wallows in it, pacifism turns into national guilt into a virtue, almost a mark of superiority, when compared to the complacency of other nations. It can also be the cause of historical myopia.<sup>87</sup> In Japan, the post-war generations know less than Westerners about their country's war.<sup>88</sup> For almost twenty- five years, there was some public discussion, through certainly no teaching, about the facts of the war in schools. What people had been taught in school was: the unleashing of the world's first atomic bomb on the civilian population of Hiroshima and Nagasaki. This was the central content of the war, as taught to countless numbers of children born after 1945.<sup>89</sup> As a result of this learning, attacks done by Japan are barely remembered by the Japanese, however attacks done on Japan are vividly remembered. Therefore, it is easier to displace the bad parts of their history and focus on what was done to them. Even the people who feel like the government should apologize, they are so anxious to say or do

---

<sup>86</sup> Berger, *Cultures of antimilitarism: National security in Germany and Japan*, 30.

<sup>87</sup> It is important to note this is regarding the general main narrative of said event. Not every Japanese citizen may exhibit the same collective amnesia nor to the same degree.

<sup>88</sup> Buruma, *The wages of guilt: Memories of war in Germany and Japan*, 39.

<sup>89</sup> Paris, *Long shadows: Truth, lies, and history*, 136-137.

anything because in Japan to voice opinions even in private is considered as courageous.<sup>90</sup>

Noburu Tasaki, the director of the Peace Museum of Nagasaki, states “the Japanese do not want to believe that Japan did cruel things. We are living in harmony with other peoples, and we only want to forget”<sup>91</sup>

Japan throughout history is known for its tendency for group conformity. This characteristic can be demonstrated in the Japanese proverb *Deru kui wa utareru*: ‘If the nail sticks out, hammer it down’. This discomfort with minimum diversity is a sharp reminder of Japanese history of compliance. It is so ingrained in the society that the ideal has survived post-war Westernersization efforts in Japan.<sup>92</sup> Therefore this collective discipline must be managed well, so Japan does not fall back into its imperialist tendencies. During the Imperial rise and occupation, hardly anyone resisted since Japan is a nation of conformists. This is an important detail to note when compared to Germany as some individuals in the latter choose to resist and paid the price with their lives.<sup>93</sup>

Historian Erna Paris discusses in her book “*Long Shadows: Truth, Lie and History*” how nations come to terms with their painful history and the ways they reinvent themselves. Her work has aided in understanding collective memory in relation to war in various countries. She discusses that Japan like most Asian cultures are a shame-based society. A clear case study of this idea were the victims of the atomic bombs. After the incident, many if not all felt immediate shame as they believed they had no right to rejoin the community. A former victim states “many felt shame to be a part of the wounded, especially woman. During the years following the bomb, some never left their houses in daylight so as not to inflict the sight of their burned, disfigured faces on others.”<sup>94</sup> In the with Korea, the Japanese do not wish to

---

<sup>90</sup> Paris, *Long shadows: Truth, lies, and history*, 146.

<sup>91</sup> Paris, *Long shadows: Truth, lies, and history*, 149.

<sup>92</sup> Paris, *Long shadows: Truth, lies, and history*, 138.

<sup>93</sup> Buruma, *The wages of guilt: Memories of war in Germany and Japan*, 190.

<sup>94</sup> Paris, *Long shadows: Truth, lies, and history*, 142.

admit guilt as they prefer to remain silent and above all wishes others to remain silent too. It is not guilt in the face of God but worry of losing “FACE” which is interpreted as experiencing public shame or embarrassment.<sup>95</sup> The concept of face is one that is important in Japan as it can be viewed as a sense of worth that is associated with one’s dignity and status that a person has in terms of their social relationships. If one loses face, then one is viewed as less to others as you have been disgraced. Hence, Japan put emphasis on the importance of shame rather than guilt as shame is a major sanction. Shame is a reaction to other people’s criticism. In shame, one does not experience relief when he makes his fault public even to a confessor. If his bad behavior does not get out to the world, he does not need to be troubled, confession just causes trouble. In the shame culture, it is not probable to get a confession.<sup>96</sup> Additionally the concept of apology has a complex meaning in Japanese culture as the action to apologize means to put your life at the mercy of another person. Hence, by Japan apologizing and losing face to Korea, Japanese leaders may perceive this as an action of Japanese submission to Korea and making their faults known.<sup>97</sup> Hence, a failure to follow their explicit signposts of good behavior, a failure to balance obligations or to foresee contingencies is shame (concept in Japan is haiji). Shame is the root of virtue.<sup>98</sup> Nonetheless, this concept of saving face and shame is embedded into Japanese culture as it is a product of childhood teasing combined with the societal belief of conformity that has led into creating the fear of being ridiculed and shamed.<sup>99</sup>

Regarding the comfort women issue, the Japanese view sex and pleasure very differently. Japan has a conflicting view on the matter of sex as most men have at some time visited

---

<sup>95</sup> Buruma, *The wages of guilt: Memories of war in Germany and Japan*, 253.

<sup>96</sup> Benedict, *The Chrysanthemum and the Sword: Patterns of Japanese culture*, 222-224.

<sup>97</sup> Korostelina, “The Normative Function of National Historical Narratives: South Korean Perceptions of Relations with Japan.”, 182.

<sup>98</sup> Benedict, *The Chrysanthemum and the Sword: Patterns of Japanese culture*, 222-224.

<sup>99</sup> Benedict, *The Chrysanthemum and the Sword: Patterns of Japanese culture*, 263.

geishas, traditional female Japanese entertainers, or prostitutes. The visits are not clandestine at all. Prostitutes lived in licensed houses and the pictures of the girls of the house are displayed outside and men commonly spend a long time quite publicly studying the pictures and making their choices. In the earlier days, before Japan realized Westerners disapproval of the custom and ended it, the girls themselves used to sit in public showing their impassive faces to customers choosing their human mares. Their photographs are a substitution.<sup>100</sup> Nonetheless, for middle school boys, there is stern discipline against any kind of association with the opposite sex. Japanese education and public opinion attempt to prevent pre-martial familiarity between the sexes. On the other hand, geishas are trained to be skilled at different Japanese arts such as playing classical Japanese music, dancing, and poetry. The geisha house is the best way that Japanese young men learn to understand sexuality because, “she teaches them, and they just relax and just watch”. But many cannot afford geisha houses, so they learn through observed behavior of others. Sex is one of the few areas where young Japanese need to learn a new behavior without an elder guidance. Sex is an area of self-gratification which he masters with much fear of embarrassment.<sup>101</sup>

Ruth Benedict’s 1946 book “The chrysanthemum and the sword: Patterns of Japanese culture” was the first to discuss patterns of Japanese culture in the post-World War II. Her anthropological work continues to offer insights into modern Japanese culture as it is constantly being republished. She states that another factor of influence is that the Japanese are very concerned with their reputation. The Japanese believe in the concept of ‘Giri’ to one’s name. This means that they have the duty to keep one’s reputation unspotted. Therefore, it may demand that certain acts need to occur for one to remove a slur or insult as the slur darkens one good name and it is necessary for one to get rid of it.<sup>102</sup> During the

---

<sup>100</sup> Benedict, *The Chrysanthemum and the Sword: Patterns of Japanese culture*, 186-187.

<sup>101</sup> Benedict, *The Chrysanthemum and the Sword: Patterns of Japanese culture*, 283-284.

<sup>102</sup> Benedict, *The Chrysanthemum and the Sword: Patterns of Japanese culture*, 145.

occupation, the Japanese felt like they needed to be respected in the world. They saw that military force had worked to gain respect for generations through other countries and they believed that this was the method to achieve it. Therefore, they created a pathway to equal them. Nonetheless, when this failed Japan had to change their course of action and they learned that aggression was not the way to honor. Ultimately, their goal was still their good name.<sup>103</sup> The Japanese avoid occasions in which failure might be shameful. Even though, they lay such emphasis on the duty to clear one's name of insult, in the actual practice this leads them to arrange events, so that insult need to be felt as little as possible.<sup>104</sup> Due to Japan's belief that the 'eyes of the world are upon them' it was important to them what account they gave themselves to the world and had to maintain their good name.

Additionally, the Japanese admission to the nation's shame is particularly hard after having such proudness of their country during the Imperial Japanese reign. For instance, when Japan was surrendering, Emperor Hirohito had to deliver the devastating news to a nation who believed that surrender meant unparalleled humiliation and could not come to terms with it as they were prepared to sacrifice their lives before coming to this result. The expression 'typically Japanese' is associated with the traits of defensiveness and pride. For Japan, all matters of war cannot be helped as when referred to the atomic bombs they believe that the bombs might have been necessary to bring balance into the conflict.<sup>105</sup> Therefore, it was in times of wartime and it was nothing personal. As they take on this same attitude with their manner of war, the Japanese paid less attention to the suffering they inflicted and had a greater inclination to shift blame. In Japan, the period of the occupation is referred to as the "Great East Asian War".<sup>106</sup> Therefore, it was a matter of historical survival and they needed to liberate Asia from the looming presence of the West. Hence, in their belief occupying

---

<sup>103</sup> Benedict, *The Chrysanthemum and the Sword: Patterns of Japanese culture*, 173.

<sup>104</sup> Benedict, *The Chrysanthemum and the Sword: Patterns of Japanese culture*, 157.

<sup>105</sup> Paris, *Long shadows: Truth, lies, and history*, 143.

<sup>106</sup> Buruma, *The wages of guilt: Memories of war in Germany and Japan*, 224.

Korea was a form of protection and fulfilling their ancestral duty caring for those inferior to them.

After the war, Japan citizens began to victimize themselves as they believed they were victims of blind ambition of Japan's wartime leadership and victims of the United States and foreign nations who had conducted a ruthless campaign of conquest in order to increase their own power.<sup>107</sup> Nonetheless, Japan preferred to put blame on everyone else rather than the emperor as since he was the archetypical symbol of Japanese spirit and unity<sup>108</sup>. The Japanese have a belief in the concept of 'wa' which translated means "harmony". The concept of 'wa' implies a peaceful unity and conformity within a social group in which members prefer the continuation of a harmonious community over their personal interests. Therefore, it is Japanese way of saying we will discuss things, but we aim for a harmonious whole. Hence, they will endure discussion if they must, then they will return to 'wa'.<sup>109</sup> This key factor of the idea of harmony is what differences the Japanese "wa" from the Korean "inhwa". This shows that the Japanese took a position where immediate issues were discussed so they could move on, but no sustainable long-term plan was going to be willingly talked about as it would disrupt the harmonious balance. Unlike the Koreans, for "inhwa" to be resolved, all points of contentions need to be addressed wholly. Nonetheless, this would not be tolerated by the Japanese as any discussion of putting blame on the emperor or Japan would cause the disruption of 'wa' and is believed to be very 'anti-Japanese'. The hesitation of Japanese delegates on confronting these issues directly for fear of disturbing 'wa' causes more of deadlock at the time of discussions than the Koreans would prefer.

Although collective amnesia is not ideal when discussing reconciliation, it is not uncommon as one might think since this idea was also viewed in guilt-based Germany prior

---

<sup>107</sup> Paris, *Long shadows: Truth, lies, and history*, 145.

<sup>108</sup> Paris, *Long shadows: Truth, lies, and history*, 150.

<sup>109</sup> Paris, *Long shadows: Truth, lies, and history*, 149.

to the 1960s. After the war people saw themselves as victims, and the children when they were young accepted this view. However, once they were old enough to learn about the actual role their parents played during the war, the children themselves became victims of a mentality in which silence about the past involvement was the norm and were susceptible to thinking the slate was wiped clean since Hitler and henchmen were dead or punished; nonetheless, they knew in the bottom of their hearts what had occurred in Nazi time is not easily forgettable.<sup>110</sup> Son of the head of the Nazi Party chancellery, Martin Bormann Jr. took refuge in the Catholic religion where although he believes his father is responsible of his consequences, he cannot fault him personally as everyone commits errors and has learned to forgive him, which is a key element in Catholicism. Likewise, even a criminal can be pardoned. This belief of forgiveness has saved him a lifetime of torment.<sup>111</sup> It was not until 1968 when the anti-establishment revolution took force, where young people rejected the values of their parents, adult society, and national institutions, believing that they could wipe out the past and kick start history anew. Young people demanded to know what their fathers had done and sicken by what they found out they sought to redefine German identity; rejecting the ideology of xenophobia and racism of the past. Some of them committed themselves to personal restitution Many internalized the guilt of their parents' generation and committed to restore the country's honor. Therefore, when this generation were able to produce change, there was a campaign of atonement where people began to work with Holocaust survivors, restoring Jewish cemeteries and building synagogues. Additionally, the education curriculum was reformed to teach about the Nazi era which included student visits to concentration camps and major memorials so that Germany no longer could not forget its horrific past and confront it directly. What was previously simply guilt which entailed

---

<sup>110</sup> Paris, *Long shadows: Truth, lies, and history*, 59.

<sup>111</sup> Paris, *Long shadows: Truth, lies, and history*, 57.



personal culpability shifted to communal responsibility.<sup>112</sup> Unfortunately, these post-war generations have a genetic culpability and are paying the price that their Nazi parents and grandparents never paid.

The difference between a shame-based culture like Japan and a guilt-based culture much like Germany is rooted back to the different religions displayed in the culture. Japan's belief in Shintoism is demonstrated in how the religion seeks to cultivate and ensure a harmonious relationship between humans and the gods and thus with the natural world. Therefore, the strive of this belief align simultaneously with the concept of "wa" the goal is to maintain a balanced harmony. Therefore, anything that would change this such as confronting past war atrocities would be viewed as atypical. This religious factor tied in with the cultural concept of shame where how others view you matter more than your own conscious has led to Japan to choose not to address its controversial past. On the other hand, German's Catholicism had a huge impact on the way its citizens forgave its own Nazi past. The idea of being pardoned for ones' 'sins' has led the country to confront its past atrocities and redefine its identity. Guilt-based Germany has transcended from its collective amnesia due to its religious background paired with the 1960s anti-establishment youth movement and has embraced the change to transform into a repentant nation who has apologized to its victims. Nonetheless, feelings such as shame and guilt are a double-edged sword that can provoke defensive, reactionary, and violent political responses and not always lead to positive transformations such as viewed in 1960s Germany and modern-day Japan.<sup>113</sup>

However as previously discussed all experience is filtered through the lens of the existing political culture and they are in charged with the historical interpretation. In Japan, two main political parties have conflicting opinions regarding what the nations' historical memory

---

<sup>112</sup> Paris, *Long shadows: Truth, lies, and history*, 24-26

<sup>113</sup> Le. "Negotiating in Good Faith: Overcoming Legitimacy Problems in the Japan-South Korea Reconciliation Process.", 624.

should be. The Left Political party which is considered as having a more communist or socialist approach are backed by labor unions, media, and intelligentsia. They want unarmed or minimum armed neutrality that would keep their nations out of east-west conflict. They keep the pacifist sentiments of general public. Their vision of national identity is a peaceful nation, and they are very antitradition. They have some war guilt towards Asia. They oppose patriotism in education. Additionally, they stick very close to the constitution which defends the Article Nine. On the opposing side, the Right Political party have a more conservative or centralist approach to matters. They are backed by businesses, former and ex-military. They favor rearmament. Their vision of national identity is a sovereign Japan and are very pro-tradition. They experience no war guilt and encourage patriotism in education. The Right wing wants to get rid of the Article Nine and encourage pride in Japanese military heroes. For them, the Japanese war in Asia was not that bad. They also want to reinstall the emperor to his previous status and revive Shinto as a national cult.<sup>114</sup> Right-wing politicians argue that by recognizing the Asia-Pacific War as a war of invasion, ancestors' pride would be hurt and it would be a serious insult to the souls of those killed.<sup>115</sup> Former prime minister Shinzo Abe's policies were described as a manifestation of romantic nationalism and strong conservatism.<sup>116</sup> In Japan's case, the Right-wing party holds most of the influence in the reinterpretation of Japan's history. One aspect that Japanese conservatives would have to face if they were to apologize is a domestic political cost. Business owners and military patriots that primarily support right wing parties, can interpret an apology as an entrenchment to the Japanese culture and can brand these leaders as 'not Japanese enough' affecting their

---

<sup>114</sup> Berger, *Cultures of antimilitarism: National security in Germany and Japan*, 65.

<sup>115</sup> Jonsson. "Can the Japan-Korea Dispute on 'Comfort Women' Be Resolved?", 18.

<sup>116</sup> Korostelina, "The Normative Function of National Historical Narratives: South Korean Perceptions of Relations with Japan.", 181.

current political advantage. Hence suppression and denial are the attitude taken by these politicians.

Although the Japanese government want to keep their war crimes hidden, new mediums are becoming available over time and have become a prominent role in the struggle over the right to know the past. For instance, through the power of the internet, Yoshiyuki Masaki, a Japanese college professor emailed liberal members of the Diet (parliament), asking them what they “thought about” the Nanking massacre. Takashi Kosugi, a former minister of education, said “I think it happened and it should be taught in Japanese textbooks”. However, when asked if they could put his opinion on the website, he decided not to for fear of criticism. Another Diet member Kei Hata said that Japan should emulate the positive steps the German government had taken regarding the Holocaust. Yet her opinion must be taken down after numerous hateful emails against her.<sup>117</sup> With globalization and access to a broader spectrum of information of electronic sources, Japanese have been shocked of hearing about the war crimes and massacres that have been done by the Japanese Army. They must ponder now over why it is that there is a discrepancy between what they thought and what the rest of the world accepted as common knowledge.<sup>118</sup> The Japanese have been taught that they had been the victims. It gave them a balanced view of history. Additionally, Japanese mass media had made a major effort to reorient Japanese attitudes towards South Korea as televised reports on South Korea became more frequent and less sensational and the number of Japanese studying in South Korea began to rise.<sup>119</sup> Nonetheless, public opinion between these countries continues to deteriorate as these issues remain unresolved.

---

<sup>117</sup> Paris, *Long shadows: Truth, lies, and history*, 160.

<sup>118</sup> Buruma, *The wages of guilt: Memories of war in Germany and Japan*, 166.

<sup>119</sup> Lee, *Japan and Korea- The political dimension*, 166.

### **V. Reconciliation: What ought to be done?**

For Japan and South Korea relations to improve attitudes need to be changed. The dilemma at hand is that they either need to squarely face old troubles or decide to put them aside, adopt a usable line about what happened and concentrate on the future. In this case, Japan has chosen the latter route. However, the problem with Japan with “let’s start again” mentality is it is necessary a public acknowledgment of what took place and a minimal gesture of reconciliation with the victims for them to move on.<sup>120</sup>

As argued by the American, Indian and Romanian scholars Christopher Raymond, Mohita Mathur and Petru Roman, the comfort women issue will remain unresolved until Japan offers an apology and extends or is forced to extend a remedy for the horrific human rights violations it committed against the women during its colonial rule. A remedy should contain an apology to surviving comfort women for their sufferings, an acknowledgement that the drafting was implemented systematically and forcibly with the government’s knowledge, a recognition that the purpose was for sexual slavery and should be regarded as a crime against humanity, an acceptance of moral and legal responsibility and, finally, an extension of monetary compensation from the Japanese government. The similarity to the demands raised by Radhika Coomaraswamy and the KCWS is striking in spite of the time elapsed.<sup>121</sup>

In order to stop further violations of the survivors’ human rights, the Japanese government should immediately fully acknowledge historical facts and accept legal responsibility for the military sexual slavery system. The Japanese government needs to make an apology that is acceptable for the survivors, take legislative and administrative measures for compensation, teach the historical facts concerning the comfort women through textbooks

---

<sup>120</sup> Paris, *Long shadows: Truth, lies, and history*, 153.

<sup>121</sup> Jonsson, “Can the Japan-Korea Dispute on ‘Comfort Women’ Be Resolved?”, 18.

used in compulsory education and make a clear reference to the issue in national history museums in order to prevent a reoccurrence and, finally, refute any denial of facts by politicians and the media.<sup>122</sup>

One of the major foundations for the reconciliation process is a clear compensation program for people who were victims of Japanese occupation. For a successful reconciliation process, Japan should hold the Emperor responsible for crimes committed during occupation and war. Furthermore, it might be important to establish a Truth and Reconciliation Committee to promote truth-telling in Japan. Japan and Korea should have an open dialogue about their shared history. Japan and Korea should engage in sincere conversations and should have multiple channels of discussion, including common conferences, meetings on different levels, and public consultations. These are actions that could be taken by both countries, including increasing cultural exchanges, especially among young people. Additionally, the history in both countries should be de-politicized and should not be used as a tool in political games and successful reconciliation could be built based on common regional history.<sup>123</sup>

Reconciliation is a long-term process, and as conflict and enmity can be inherited from one generation to the next, it may take generations to deconstruct enemy images and build trust. Reconciliation is not a linear process; there can be progress made but there might also be relapses, particularly if violence re-emerges. There are several factors that can help people deal with the past and envision a shared future with a former enemy. These are security (an end to violence and an assurance that it will not recommence); truth (acknowledgement of the wrongs of the past); justice (making things right through

---

<sup>122</sup> Jonsson, "Can the Japan-Korea Dispute on 'Comfort Women' Be Resolved?", 24.

<sup>123</sup> Korostelina, "The Normative Function of National Historical Narratives: South Korean Perceptions of Relations with Japan.", 182-183.

punishment or reparations); and healing (at the individual, community, and societal levels).<sup>124</sup>

Possible solutions towards this issue can be done in two approaches: amnesty or accountability. Impunity is often legitimized by amnesty, and amnesty is a time-honoured tool for moving on after difficult times, especially in the wake of civil wars or when there is no clear winner to a conflict. On such occasions, amnesty is often described as an act of generosity on the part of the victors, and because it looks like the political expression of Christian forgiveness. There are often supposed economic reasons for indulging in amnesties. However, amnesty cannot be counted on to bring long-term peace and reconciliation since it is unjust to the victims, to the appalling crimes have been committed, and unjust to the perpetrators themselves by condoning a criminal act. Therefore, amnesty stands in the way of the personal and social rebalancing that can be brought about by acknowledgment and penalty. In contrast, accountability is the key to success as it addresses facts about the past and possibly an acknowledgement of wrongdoing, but most importantly accountability is a way of separating the ill-favoured past from the present and perhaps a steppingstone to something akin to justice.<sup>125</sup>

Reconciliation requires both sides to face the history squarely; Japan must acknowledge its colonialism and South Korea must acknowledge what Japan has done thus far. For Japan, it means acknowledging that past deals have been inadequate due to the haphazard approach to facing history squarely. For South Korea, it means admitting that Japan has provided aid, issued apologies, and sought to cooperate. Therefore, an agreement should have language that references previous agreements while looking forward. A new treaty should be multi-stepped with built-in language indicating that the issue will be revisited in the future. For example, a deal can provide a timeline where each side will honor

---

<sup>124</sup> Marwan Darweish, and Carol Rank, "Peacebuilding and Reconciliation: Contemporary Themes and Challenges"(London: Pluto Press, 2012)

<sup>125</sup> Paris, *Long shadows: Truth, lies, and history*, 457-458.

the previous commitment and add more cooperation activities. This will help decrease the chance of cheating in the short- to mid-term because both sides are expected to go back to the negotiating table. More importantly, it shows that Japan is committed to reconciliation and will not use apologies to prevent South Korea from seeking justice and reconciliation.<sup>126</sup>

## **VI. Conclusion**

In sum, the current study demonstrates the complex nature of the idea of memory in communal settings. The role of historical narratives is an important factor of identity formation. Korea has a deep emotional connection to its shared history of colonialism. It has profound grievances that its history has been distorted and is continuously being denied in the Japanese mind. The historical evidence of brutal abuse to Koreans, discrimination as second-rate citizens, the presence of comfort women stations, suppression of the Korean identity and racial superiority is constantly reminded in the Korean culture of its colonial past by public commemorations and transmission of stories.

Although it is easy to put the blame on Japan and simply say apologize, one must recognize this is a very Westerners perspective that Koreans are more inclined to share but the Japanese have cultural aspects that make this action harder. The idea of shame, preservation of reputation, maintaining ‘face’ and balancing harmony are all important Japanese cultural factors that must be acknowledged when weighing in on this dilemma. Both countries have their own internal political agendas that affect this situation at the time of discussions as viewed by its diplomatic record. Nonetheless, these issues continuously decline the public opinion and relationship between South Korea and Japan.

There are several paths towards reconciliation, but as mentioned previously the first step in the healing process is Japan’s recognition of its colonial past and Korea

---

<sup>126</sup> Le, “Negotiating in Good Faith: Overcoming Legitimacy Problems in the Japan-South Korea Reconciliation Process.”, 637.

acknowledging Japan's previous efforts to amend their relationship. Nonetheless, this is easier said than done because for Japan to get to this point, it would need a cultural shift much like the 1960s anti-establishment movement in Germany. Cultural shifts are difficult to occur because it requires intentional effort and must be controlled by an effective leadership, which is not always the case. South Korea has internalized its victimhood into its identity. By acknowledging Japan's previous efforts for reconciliation, their sense of identity is compromised.

The more understanding one develops into the aspects of South Korean and Japanese culture, one can see how entrenched this issue is. Nonetheless as activist Alan Paton once said 'it is not 'forgive and forget' as if nothing wrong had ever happened, but 'forgive and go forward,' building on the mistakes of the past and the energy generated by reconciliation to create a new future'. If South Korea and Japan are willing to take the first step, the process of reconciliation will allow mutual understanding and a sense of justice, while also ending seventy-six-year international dilemma.



### References

- Asian Boss, "Life As A Comfort Woman: Story of Kim Bok-Dong," YouTube video, 18:14, October 27, 2018, [https://youtu.be/qsT97ax\\_Xb0](https://youtu.be/qsT97ax_Xb0).
- Benedict, Ruth. *The chrysanthemum and the sword: Patterns of Japanese culture*. Beijing: Central Compilation & Translation Press, 2008.
- Berger, Thomas. *Cultures of antimilitarism: National security in Germany and Japan*. Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2003.
- Buruma, Ian. *The wages of guilt: Memories of war in Germany and Japan*. New York: New York Review Books, 2015.
- David, Roman. "The Past or the Politics of the Present? Dealing with the Japanese Occupation of South Korea." *Contemporary Politics*, 2016.
- Darweish, Marwan and Carol Rank. "Peacebuilding and Reconciliation: Contemporary Themes and Challenges." London: Pluto Press, 2012.
- Garagozov, Rauf. "Collective Memory: How Collective Representations About the Past Are Created, Preserved and Reproduced." Nova Science Publishers, Inc., 2015.
- Gluck, Carol. "Memory in Hypernationalist Times: The Comfort Women as Traveling Trope." *Global-e: A Global Studies Journal* 12, no. 17, 2019.
- Hongxi, Li. "The Extreme Secrecy of the Japanese Army's 'Comfort Women' System." *Chinese Studies in History*, 2020.
- Jeong, Hu Young and Johanna Ray Vollhardt. "Koreans' Collective Victim Beliefs about Japanese Colonization." *Peace and Conflict: Journal of Peace Psychology*, 2020.
- Jonsson, Gabriel. "Can the Japan-Korea Dispute on 'Comfort Women' Be Resolved?" *Korea Observer* 46, no. 3, 2015.
- Justice4comfortwomen, "Ex-Japanese soldier Yasuji Kaneko's confession about Comfort Women," YouTube video, 1:33, July 18, 2012, <https://youtu.be/ewtKksMjuBg>.
- Kim, Nam-Hyeon and Dong-Won Sohn; Wall, James A, Jr. "Korean Leaders' and Subordinates Conflict Management." *International Journal of Conflict Management*, 1999
- Kimura, Kan. "Comfort Women: Time's Up for Activist Leadership." *The Diplomat*, 2020. [thediplomat.com/2020/06/comfort-women-times-up-for-activist-leadership/](https://thediplomat.com/2020/06/comfort-women-times-up-for-activist-leadership/).
- Korostelina, Karina V. "The Normative Function of National Historical Narratives: South Korean Perceptions of Relations with Japan." *National Identities* 21, no. 2, 2019.
- Le, Tom Phuong. "Negotiating in Good Faith: Overcoming Legitimacy Problems in the Japan-South Korea Reconciliation Process." *Journal of Asian Studies* 78, no. 3, 2019.

Lee, Chong-Sik. *Japan and Korea: The Political Dimension*. Hoover Inst. Press, Stanford Univ., 1985.

Paris, Erna. *Long shadows: Truth, lies, and history*. Washington, D.C.: National Library Service for the Blind and Physically Handicapped, Library of Congress, 2002.

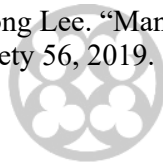
Sung-Yeon Kwon, Vicki. "The Sonyōsang Phenomenon: Nationalism and Feminism Surrounding the 'Comfort Women' Statue." *Korean Studies*, 2019.

The Genron NPO. "South Korean attitudes toward Japan have worsened dramatically, annual survey finds" [https://www.genron-npo.net/en/opinion\\_polls/archives/5562.html](https://www.genron-npo.net/en/opinion_polls/archives/5562.html), 2020.

White, Edward. "Divided by History: Why Japan-South Korea Ties Have Soured." *Financial Times*, 2019, [www.ft.com/content/13a3ff9a-f3ed-11e9-a79c-bc9acae3b654](http://www.ft.com/content/13a3ff9a-f3ed-11e9-a79c-bc9acae3b654)

Yamashiro, Jeremy K. and William Hirst. "Convergence on Collective Memories: Central Speakers and Distributed Remembering." *Journal of Experimental Psychology*, 2020.

Yi, Joseph and Joe Phillips, and Wondong Lee. "Manufacturing Contempt: State-Linked Populism in South Korea." *Society* 56, 2019.



OGLETHORPE  
UNIVERSITY