The Unknown Trade Conflict

An analysis of the 2019 trade conflict between Japan and South Korea

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Abstract

According to most mainstream theories of international relations, Japan and South Korea should be able to cooperate and have cordial relations. However, this does not seem to be the case. This points to a gap in understanding of how historical issues affect bilateral relations. Thus, this thesis attempts to explain and explore why and how Japan-Korean relations deteriorated as a result of the forced labour issue. It is discovered that the issue is connected to a larger web of issues between the two countries relating to history and the conflict is a continuation of a long running series of issues. Motivation, identity and politics are used to explain why relations routinely deteriorate. The paper concludes South Korea’s identity is strongly connected to the legacy of anti-colonialism making an important part of the country’s nationalism, making it a useful tool for politicians to gain domestic favour. Further domestic backlash in Japan make them unable to go further in terms of politics of contrition.

要約

国際政治論の一般的な論理によって日韓関係は協力的で交友的であるべき。しかし、実際にそうでもない。このことは、歴史問題が国際関係に及ぼす影響というものが十分に認識されていないことを示している。本論文に元徴用工問題のために日韓関係が悪化した理由を説明や探検と目的する。本紛争は前の紛争の連続性があるし他の日韓歴史問題と繋がりがあると結論できる。動機、アイデンティティと政治的な理由は定期的な悪化を説明する。韓国の反植民地アイデンティティは韓国のナショナリズムに強く繋がりがあるので国内政治的な選択としてとして便利である。しかも日本国内の「跳ね返る」のため政治の選択肢として韓国の要求を従うことができない。
1. Introduction

1.1. Purpose

Japan-South Korean relations face a number of challenges, most of which have their origin in history, particularly the period of Japanese rule over the Korean peninsula 1910-1945. A period which saw several abuses committed on the Korean people, something that is still a sensitive issue in Korea today.

The problem of forced labour has after the famous comfort women issue been one of the most difficult issues to solve. It is estimated that as many as 700 000 Koreans worked in Japan during 1939-1945. These workers were often subjected to harsh working conditions and were often not compensated for their work. ¹

Historical issues often cause friction in the political relations of states. The aim of this thesis is to explain and explore how and why Japan-Korean relations have been affected by the decision on the part of South Korea to pursue the issue of war time reparations for forced labour. This, as well as the ensuing trade war, will be placed in its historical and geopolitical context.

In October 2018, the South Korean supreme court ordered two Japanese companies (Sumitomo Metal Corporation, and Nippon Steel) to pay approximately 89 thousand dollars in compensation to each of four Korean nationals who had been subjected to forced labour during 1941-43. The Japanese companies refused to pay, supported by the Japanese government, and argued that the issue had been settled with the normalization treaty of 1965. ²

The reason why this order came so many years after the end of the colonial period is to the authors knowledge best explained by the theories of Kan Kimura. He argues that several factors explain why historical issues were largely non-existent from 1965 to the 1980s. He rejects the most common explanations that suggest Japan tilting to the right or South Korea’s democratization are the explanations. South Korea’s democratization cannot explain it because historical issues started becoming a problem already during Chun Doo-hwan’s presidency (which was hardly a democratic regime) with the 1982 textbook controversy. He rejects the Japanese tilt to the right as an explanation as well, because between 1970 and 2005 references to Japan’s invasion and colonization of Korea have

² Ibid., 53-59.
increased not decreased. The depiction of Japan’s invasion and the harm it caused is more detailed in all Japanese textbooks being printed during the time, according to Kimura. In the case of the 1982 textbook controversy, the suggestion to change the word “invasion” to “advance” had been a common occurrence long before 1982. Thus, it cannot be said that Japan tilted to the right on historical issues in the 1980s. He instead makes the case that generational change in South Korea, lower degree of interdependence between the two countries and a changing security environment made South Korea both less reliant on Japan and more willing to bring up historical issues.\(^3\)

As Codruta Sintoneian explains, it is widely believed that the forced labour lawsuits are what led to Japan removing South Korea from its export whitelist. This means restricting the exports of certain crucial materials, which is problematic for the South Korean high-tech industry. However, Japan officially claims that the ruling was not the reason for the removal of South Korea from its whitelist and that is merely a question of law enforcement. President Moon Jae-in of South Korea responded by leaving the General Security of Military Information Agreement (GSOMIA), a trilateral security sharing agreement with Japan and the United States as well as removing Japan from its whitelist. The South Korean President’s moves are widely popular despite the economic disadvantages. Codruta Sintoneian argues that the inability to find common ground on historical issues is the core reason for the deterioration of bilateral relations.\(^4\)

To understand the implications of the trade conflict, one must understand the semiconductor supply chain. The supply chain is particularly globalized, and Japan is South Korea’s biggest supplier of semiconductor relevant materials. Almost 90% of photoresistors and fluoride polyimides (which are two of the important materials) that are imported to South Korea come from Japan. The export controls that have come as a result of the dispute means companies have to apply for licenses to export these materials making it significantly more difficult and disrupting the supply chains causing economic damage. Acquiring such licenses could take up to three months according to an interview with industry specialists made by the United States International Trade Commission (USITC). In August 2019 the Japanese government approved some sales of the materials somewhat reducing tensions. However, the ongoing dispute creates significant uncertainty for the involved industries. Worth noting is that there

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\(^4\) Sintonian, op.cit., 53-59.
appears to be a lack of alternative sources for the materials. Other suppliers are of significantly lower quality and South Korea may be forced to invest in its own production which is difficult due to the capital heavy nature of the industry.\(^5\)

A trade conflict is especially sensitive to Japan and South Korea as both are major producers of cars and electronics and compete for world market share. They also in some cases as in the semiconductor trade, rely on each other for their high-tech industries.

Despite the fact that it is generally believed that the Japanese government started the trade conflict in response to the South Korean decision to pursue the issue of wartime forced labour, at the time the official explanation for the removal of South Korea from its whitelist by the Japanese government was different. In fact, Minister of Economy, Trade and Industry Hiroshige Seko claimed that the decision was made for security reasons, in order to deal with improper use of these materials. He further claimed that it is South Korea’s responsibility to “create an environment of trust between us”.\(^6\)

What exactly is meant by improper use is not entirely clear, but it could imply military use. However, on the third of July, Hiroshige Seko posted an explanation on twitter explaining the background to the decision, where he gives three reasons. The first is that the South Korean side had refused to discuss several improper incidents despite Japanese efforts to arrange meetings. What these improper incidents involve is unclear and Japanese officials have been cryptic in their answers.\(^7\)

The second reason is that South Korea have in recent years continued to allow improper incidents to occur. The third given reason, is that the South Korean side have made moves to ruin the friendly relationship on several occasions. Included in this, he mentions specifically the issue of former forced labourers. This all together has led to trust between the two partners collapsing and causing Japan to remove South Korea from its whitelist he says.\(^8\)

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\(^8\) Tomoyoshi Nakajima, “Nihon no tai Kankoku yushutsu kanri kyōka,” Erina Report, 30-33.
1.2. Theory

The theoretical foundations of this thesis are chosen by how well they are able to explain how and why history becomes an issue in international political relations. The realist theory of international relations is based on three core beliefs. The first is that states are the principal actors of international politics. The second is that states are mainly influenced by their external environment rather than their internal characteristics. The third is that calculations of power dominate state thinking and guide their behaviour.\(^9\)

John Mearsheimer argues that according to a realist understanding of international politics it is inevitable that China will try to dominate the Asia-Pacific region. This means that accordingly the other states in the region will try to balance against it.\(^10\) Indeed, Japan has made significant moves in that direction by moving closer to India but also to Vietnam and Indonesia, notably signing a weapons export treaty with Vietnam in late 2020.\(^11\) However, why does this not lead to closer ties and more security cooperation between Japan and South Korea?

Another theorist of international relations, Alexander Wendt, argues that the rules of the international system are largely socially constructed and that the rules do not arise naturally from the structure of the international system.\(^12\) However, even if the system is not a natural effect of the structure of the system, it nevertheless functions in a certain way. It still does not explain why Japan and South Korea do not cooperate more closely.

Another perspective on international relations, the liberal theory of international relations does not shed more light on the situation either. One subcategory of the liberal theory is democratic peace theory, which argues that democracies do not fight each other and are more likely to cooperate while democratic and non-democratic states are prone to not cooperate and fight each other.\(^13\) Another is the interdependence theory which argues that states that cooperate in different areas are more likely to cooperate and less likely to come into conflict.\(^14\)

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10 MOFA Japan (ministry of foreign affairs) “Nichi Betonamu shunō kaidan 2020 October 19”.
South Korea and Japan are both democracies. They also share a common security partner in the United States and share a worry about China and its regional ambitions. All theories as well as common sense suggest that they would be likely to form a close alliance. Yet, the relationship is plagued by constant bickering and bad political relations. Why is this? The explanation seems to lie in historical events and nationalistic tendencies. There are several historical issues where they clash and no matter how many times attempts are made to solve them, they seem to never dissipate.

Thomas Berger identifies three categories of arguments about how history affects politics, experiential models, instrumental models, and cultural models.

The experiential models assert that experience is the driving force behind the formation of historical narrative. The lived experience of history determines the narrative. The potential problem with this theory is that history is often lived differently by different individuals and their experiences can vary widely. Experientialists argue that differences of historical perception can only be solved by developing a fuller and more nuanced understanding of history allowing the different sides to understand each other.

The instrumentalist understanding is very different. It starts with the assumption that history is a tool used to pursue concrete interests. In this view, history is more about the present and future than the past. At the core of each difference of historical perception lies a difference in concrete interests. As long as the root causes of the conflict are not addressed, trying to change others understanding of the past is futile because what is really important is the conflict of interests lying at the root of the problem.

The third perspective is the cultural one. It argues that the way a historical event is viewed depends on how it is defined and understood by the particular group. The cultural narrative is independent of how the state or other actors wish to portray it and also independent on the actual historical facts. Conflicts happen when different understandings threaten the interests of cultural groups.

Berger further points out that the truth is that none of these theories are perfect representations of reality, but idealised models to explain it.

As Berger correctly points out, which model one bases his or her understanding on determines what kinds of policies or remedies one favours. For example, if one follows an experiential model, one is likely to want reconciliation through understanding each other’s
perspectives of the event. While someone following an instrumentalist, view is likely to look at what the underlying conflicts that cause friction are.

He further argues that Japanese Korean disputes over history has been in neither countries interest. He argues that nationalist-driven discourse on history had become imbedded in the political systems of the respective countries when the historical issues came to the forefront.\textsuperscript{15} Scott Snyder and Brad Glosserman argue that most theories of international relations seem unfit to explain the inability of Japan and South Korea to form cordial relations. They argue that international relations theory lacks a proper understanding of the role of opposing conceptions of national identity. They argue national values, historical experiences and narratives form a sense of national community. Snyder and Glosserman cite Gilbert Rozman who argues that Japan is a country caught in a clash of different identities. Rozman identifies four competing ideologies, “statism”, “ethnic nationalism”, “internationalism” and “pacifism” that battle for control of the Japanese identity. South Korea he argues has several identities that have their origins in their formation as a state.\textsuperscript{16}

Rozman argues that after the end of the bubble economy and the start of Japan’s lost decades in the early 1990s, Japan could no longer have its economic identity. In some fringe circles there is significant support for the statist ideology which prioritizes state interest and loyalty to the state, before 1947 the Japanese state worked in this way. Generally, followers of this ideology are worried about reliance on the USA which they see as working against a state centred Japan. Ethnic nationalist ideology focuses on a distinct cultural identity and homogenous society. Internationalist ideology favours close ties to the USA and want Japan to be active in promoting what they see as universal values, it lacks the focus on a distinct and homogenous society. Advocates of pacifist ideology on the other hand, are supporters of the constitution. They are worried about unchecked state authority and militarism.\textsuperscript{17}

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\textsuperscript{17} Gilbert Rozman, “A National Identity Approach to Japan’s Late 2013 Foreign Policy Thinking” in Gilbert Rozman, in Gilbert Rozman. \textit{Asia’s Alliance Triangle Japan-South Korea Relations at a Tumultuous Time} (London: Palgrave Mcmillan, 2015), 220-233.
\end{flushleft}
Kan Kimura explains the issue of historical perception in the particular case of Japan-Korean relations. He lays out a theoretical framework for analysing the historical disputes between the two countries. He identifies three conditions that have to be present for an event to develop into a dispute. First, multiple actors must attach meaning to the event. These actors must also have different perceptions of the event. Finally, multiple actors must see sufficient benefit of pushing the issue. If actors do not find it important enough there will be no dispute. Further Kan Kimura identifies three factors that have influenced the historical development of the issue of historical perception.

The first is generational change. Kimura argues that the historical disputes between Japan and South Korea went through several phases. In the first phase which lasted from 1945 to the 1960s, the main issues were wartime reparations and the issue of Japanese collaborators in Korea. This was finally concluded with the treaty of basic relations in 1965.

The next phase was the silent era which lasted until the end of the 1980s. According to Kimura the reason the historical issues were not at the forefront during this period was manyfold. One was that legal issues were solved. Another was the international environment. The cold war and South Korea's economic difficulties made it difficult to reject normalization with Japan. Furthermore, many of the elites in both countries at the time had experienced the war and many had problematic pasts. Most of the South Korean elite at the time would today have been designated as Japanese collaborators, most notably former president Park Chung-Hee who served in the Japanese army during the war.

A final reason was that the generation in charge at the time was so heavily scarred by the war time experience that they were unable to deal with it. The third phase ran from the 1980s until the present. This was characterized by a new generation that did not experience the war directly, rediscovering the past. Kimura argues that this change of generation played a key role in starting the disputes over history, to the generation that experienced the period. It was a past that they had no wish to recall or deal with. But, to the new generation that did not directly experience it, it was a shocking discovery that had almost been forgotten because of the sometimes-deliberate silence on the issue of history. The second factor was the changing international position of South Korea. Japan became less important as a trading partner and

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18 Kimura, op.cit., 16-17.
South Korea found itself as a stronger economic power. The third factor was the end of the cold war which reduced the importance of Japan for South Korean security.\textsuperscript{19}

Alexandra Sakaki and Junya Nishino argue in a 2018 paper that Japan and South-Korea experienced a significant downturn in relations during 2011. This was caused in part by a court ruling ordering the South Korean government to reopen negotiation with Japan over the comfort women issue. This created substantial doubt in Japan about prospects for security cooperation. Japanese policymakers feel that there is a significant difficulty in resetting relations. They argue that both sides are suspicious of each other’s intentions. Further, the rise of China has made it clear that threat perception with regards to China is not the same in Japan and South Korea. With Japan significantly more worried and South Korea refusing to take sides between USA and China. They argue further that from the Japanese perspective it looks like South Korea is too preoccupied with the past and its nationalism and anti-Japanese sentiment prevent it from being a reliable partner. Finally, they argue that the election of Moon Jae-in who called for renegotiating the 2015 comfort woman deal made Tokyo pessimistic about the outlooks for positive developments in bilateral relations.\textsuperscript{20}

1.3. Method

Using mainly the culturalist model, the thesis will analyse how the issue of wartime labourers is identified and understood by the respective sides. Using Kimura’s theories it will identify whether the three conditions for a dispute happening is present in this case and identify how the three factors, generational change, South Korea’s position in the world and the reduced importance of Japan for security has affected the issue.

The thesis will analyse how the issue has been talked about in Japanese newspapers as well as tendencies in academic papers over the years and identify how it has been understood. For the Korean side, the author will rely on second-hand analyses to identify how the issue has been talked about over the years.

The two sides interpretation of the event will be compared to identify differences. Secondly the thesis will attempt to identify when the sides started to place meaning on the issue.

\textsuperscript{19} Ibid., 21-45.

\textsuperscript{20} Alexandra Sakaki, Junya Nishino, “Japan’s South Korea predicament” \textit{International Affairs} 94: 4 (2018) 735–775.
Thirdly, the author will try to find out why the two sides have found it beneficial to pursue the issue.

To answer the how, the thesis will look at the development of the issue from 2019 until the end of 2020 and identify what concrete effects the dispute has had on bilateral relations. To explain what motivates and drives the two sides to pursue the issue, the Japan-South Korea relationship will be analysed in terms of identity. National identity and differences of historical perception will be analysed to determine the causes of friction in bilateral relations.

1.4. Sources
This thesis makes use of relevant academic articles describing the bilateral relationship of Japan and South Korea as it relates to historical issues, both in English and in Japanese. It also uses several books on the topic. Giving greater weight to the content of Kan Kimuras book *Burden of the past, problems of historical perception in Japan-Korean relations*, as well as Brad Glosserman and Scott Snyder’s book *The Japan- South Korea identity clash, East Asian security and the United States*. Further, it uses news articles in both English and Japanese.

1.5. Organization
Because the issue has to do with historical events, chapter 2 deals with examining the history. The historical background is examined in detail, in the background chapter. First the 1965 agreement is explained because it is central to the conflict and is the basis for the Japanese position, without having prior knowledge of this agreement, it is impossible to understand bilateral relations.

Then history of bilateral relations is examined because it is essential to know how the historical conflicts developed, otherwise one will not be able to place the current events in a context. Finally, an overview of the recent issue of forced labour is explored.

Then, an examination of how the issue is portrayed in news and in academic papers, this is done to answer the question of how the issue is portrayed in Japanese media.

It is followed by an explanation why the relations have deteriorated, since exploring why it happened is a big part of the purpose of the thesis, this part explains the factors involved in the deterioration and the following chapters go into detail of theoretical explanations for these events. A brief overview of what concrete evidence of a deterioration exists, because it has to be shown that something has changed to make it worth analysing.
A chapter on politics of the area is provided to make it clear why from a security standpoint it is hard to explain why Japan and South Korea are unwilling to cooperate.

Finally, the analysis chapter ends with an overview of how identity affects politics in order to try and explain the why and the how. A brief comparison with other bilateral relations is provided to make it clearer that the Japan-South Korean situation has some unique qualities. It ends with a conclusion of what can be understood from the analysis.

1.6. Transcription

Japanese names are transcribed using the revised Hepburn system of romanization.
2. Background

2.1. The 1965 agreement

Given how central the 1965 agreement on basic relations is the author finds it appropriate to provide a short explanation of what it entails. The agreement in question is actually two different agreements made during the same period of time. The first is the *Treaty on Basic Relations between Japan and the Republic of Korea* which merely establishes diplomatic relations between the two countries. It also interestingly specifies that the South Korean government is the only legal Korean government. 21

The second agreement is the *Agreement Between Japan and the Republic of Korea Concerning the Settlement of Problems in Regard to Property and Claims and Economic Cooperation* which is of greater importance for this thesis. Its first article states that Japan shall provide services and goods of the equivalent value of 300 million dollars, as well as loans of 200 million dollars to the Republic of Korea. The second article states that all problems concerning property, rights and interests of the governments and their people as well as legal persons is solved once and for all. However, this does not apply to property and rights of people residing in the different countries and property that has been acquired under normal means after 1945. Article 3 states that all issues concerning interpretation of the agreement shall be solved diplomatically and it even outlines how this is supposed to happen. Three arbiters are to be nominated one from each country and a third from a neutral country who are to decide the issue. 22

2.2. Historical background

When the Japanese war effort was in its most active phase, between 1939-1945 around 1 million Koreans (according to Yang but 700 thousand according to Morris-Suzuki) were forced into labour in coal mines and factories. The victims have demanded compensation for many years and have filed several lawsuits. Finally, in 2018 South Koreas supreme court ruled that they were entitled to compensation. 23

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This long delay is consistent with Kimura’s analysis where he conceptualises the relationship as going through various stages, the post-war closure silent era and rediscovery era.

However, in the 1970s, Korean survivors of the atomic bombings, most of whom were in Hiroshima as forced labourers became an issue. A Korean survivor sued for aid in order to receive medical treatment for his many medical problems that had come as a result of the bombings. The Japanese government had already compensated the Japanese victims of the bombing and provided them with free medical treatment. As a fellow victim of the atomic bombings the Korean man believed that he had the same right to compensation as Japanese citizens. After years of legal battles, the Japanese supreme court finally ruled in his favour. However, the court ruled that victims could only receive the aid when residing in Japan, making it difficult for Korean survivors to access it. In 1980, an intergovernmental program was set up to deal with the issue. It allowed survivors to come to Japan for two months to receive medical treatment.24

Since the 1980s the post war generation who had not directly experienced the issues rediscovered the past and more actively pursued the issues. For example, the debate about comfort women which is another issue of recent contention, was before the 1980s mostly Japanese, academic, and attracted little attention in South Korea.25

Peter Duus argues likewise that before the 1980s relations were not as plagued by conflicts over history. He explains that relations with China whom are now even more plagued by conflicts over history than that of South Korea were in fact without any conflicts over history in the 1950s. Mao Zedong even going as far as making a speech where he explicitly states that Chinese now like Japanese people very much and explains that they have accepted Japanese apologies. Even mirroring the Japanese position that Japan cannot be asked to apologize indefinitely. This reconciliation was possible because of a shared historical understanding that it was the Japanese military leadership that was responsible for the war not ordinary Japanese citizens, and an understanding that the war was something bad and a mistake. China under Mao also had a Marxist view that imperialism driven by capitalism was the real enemy and Japan was just one of many imperialist powers.26

Relations with South Korea however where strained from the start with Syngman Rhee’s government being explicitly anti-Japan. However, this changed when the government of Park Chung-hee came to power in 1961. Park’s government had a less explicitly anti-Japan stance and sought cordial relations with Japan. Historical issues were not an important part of the 1965 agreement and both governments were willing to compromise and eager to cooperate. 27

In the 1980s this changed drastically, China and South Korea thought they perceived a change in Japan’s official narrative. Some argue that the collapse of the Soviet Union in 1991 which had acted as an external threat removed external reasons to avoid conflict.

However, Peter Duus argues that three other factors are more important. Regional economic growth, domestic generational change and new leaders with nationalist agendas. Comparatively strong economic growth in the region contributed to a change in identity in all three countries. They came to see themselves as successful because of their identities and culture rather than it being a hindrance.

This led to a more nationalistic identity and proud identity. Japan saw their own position as leaders of Asia threatened by the rise of the other two. Secondly, the generation that came into adulthood in the 1970s and 1980s were born after the war and had no personal experience of it.

This made their outlook on history different. In Japan they had only memories of a peaceful Japan and seeing conflict in for example Vietnam they concluded that Japan’s wars were probably not much different. Nationalists and progressives also put forward competing ideas of victimhood with the nationalist seeing Japan’s war as a war of liberation and the progressives emphasizing the suffering the war caused at home.

Thirdly, the period saw a rise of new leaders, more patriotic than previously. In Japan leaders like Yasuhiro Nakasone promoted patriotic education and wanted to strengthen the military, famously removing the 1% limit on military expenditures. When the history textbook issue blew up in 1982, although the Japanese governments official response was conciliatory, several politicians including later prime minister Shinzo Abe signed a petition opposing official apologies. This points to a collapse in a unified historical narrative in Japan. This

27 Ibid., 5.
coupled with a strengthened nationalism in South Korea and China is what drives the history wars according to Duus.  

Kimura argues that in the 1980s the issues of historical perception became prominent for the first time. The previous issue of atom bomb survivors right to medical treatment was not an issue of historical perception as it did not involve a difference between the two sides interpretation of the events. In 1982 the textbook controversy became a full-fledged dispute between Japan and South Korea. It began in 1982 when Japanese media reported that the Ministry of Education had ordered a publisher of a textbook on Japanese history to alter all references of “invasion of North China” to “advance into North China”. This turned out to be what Kimura calls an erroneous report, as it was a suggestion which didn’t hold the status of a compulsion. Furthermore, the suggestion had happened in a previous year and not actually in 1982, however the story spread quickly and became widely perceived as fact.

Forced labour among other issues was part of the debate about history textbooks in Japan as far back as the 1970s. However South Korea paid little attention to it until 1982. After the 1982 controversy had passed, South Korean media quickly lost interest in the issue again. This changed drastically when China took up the issue and started heavily criticizing the Japanese textbooks, which in turn aroused the South Korean media interest in the issue again. In South Korea it was discovered that Japanese textbooks were different from those in South Korea. The perception that Japan was becoming more nationalistic took root in South Korea and China, this despite the fact that the textbooks were becoming more similar to Korean textbooks and not less as the years passed by. It is how the facts are interpreted in the present and not the actual historical facts that create historical disputes according to Kimura.

Seiko Mimaki similarly claims the issue of history was largely non-existent as an international issue until the 1980s. She argues that social changes in China are to blame. Until the 1970s the Chinese Communist party went as far as suppressing attempts to investigate Japanese war crimes. Filmmakers and scholars who attempted to investigate were criticised for stirring up unnecessary hatred. However, this changed abruptly in 1982, when the Chinese Communist party began heavily criticising Japan for distorting historical facts. She argues that after the end of the Cultural Revolution and the sweeping changes of economic policy that the then de-facto leader Deng Xiaoping was trying to push through, the Chinese

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28 Ibid., 5-15.
30 Ibid., 53-59.
government faced a crisis of trust, faith and belief in the government. Later, the legitimacy of the government was questioned even more after the 1989 Tianmen square incident and loss of faith in communism. The leadership looked for a new source of legitimacy and found that patriotism could serve this function. With the launch of the Patriotic education campaign in 1990 this development accelerated beyond the wildest expectations of the Chinese leadership. With popular sentiment, as a direct effect of this campaign, shifted from seeing ordinary Japanese workers as victims of militarism to seeing all Japanese as complicit.\(^{31}\)

The external criticism of Japans textbooks and demands for the government to actively change the textbooks and make them less nationalistic weakened the arguments of the progressive side who had argued for less government intervention and more freedom of the press. A different group now started to take an interest in textbooks, the nationalists who attempted to create their own textbook. This however met with heavy opposition from the government who prioritizing good relations with neighbours forced them to make several changes to the book. It was eventually published but adopted by less than 1 % of schools.\(^{32}\)

In 1991 when Prime Minister Toshiki Kaifu visited South Korea, the most important historical issue between the two countries was the forced labour issue. However, in 1992, when Prime Minister Kiichi Miyazawa visited South Korea, the focus had shifted to the Comfort Women issue. This changed largely due to a former comfort woman named Kim Hak Sun coming out with her own name in 1991. This led to a lawsuit being lodged in a Japanese court, and later to the South Korean government making a formal request to investigate the issue. This ultimately led to the Japanese government launching a formal investigation into the issue and in 1993 with the so-called Kato statement admitted that there had been government involvement in the comfort woman system.\(^{33}\)

The existence of the Comfort Women issue had been long known; it was not until the 1990s that it became recognized as a war crime. In fact, neither the Japanese nor the South Korean government lifted the issue during the 14 years of negotiation that ultimately culminated in the 1965 agreements normalizing relations. Mimaki explains the reason for this change as being the democratization of South Korea and the changing international context in the


\(^{32}\) Kimura, op.cit., 87-91.

\(^{33}\) Ibid., 103-110.
1990s. Further, she argues that the renewed attention on the Comfort Women issue coincided with a global shift in attitudes towards sexual violence, with the wars in the Balkans raising awareness of the issue.\textsuperscript{34}

During Miyazawa’s visit to South Korea, he apologized 13 times over the Comfort Women issue. According to Kimura the premise under which these apologies were being made was that all settlements were already solved with the 1965 agreement. However, on January 21, 1992 the foundation of the premise collapsed completely when the South Korean government demanded a full investigation and appropriate measures including compensation. All previous South Korean governments had agreed with Japan’s line that the 1965 agreements provided a complete and final settlement of all issues. Kimura argues that this is the moment that the cooperative relationship between elites in the two countries officially broke down. This placed the Miyazawa government in a difficult situation because if the government were to recognize the Comfort Woman issue as an exception it would open the door to countless exceptions.\textsuperscript{35}

The second Kato statement revealed that the Japanese government had some involvement but that they had been unable to uncover documents proving coercion. The South Korean side responded by conducting their own investigation concluding that it was obvious from the testimony of the comfort women that there had been coercion. This marked a diversion in historical perception between the two sides. This led to the establishment of the Asian Women’s fund in 1995, an organization funded in part by the Japanese government that compensated former comfort women. Finally, on August 4\textsuperscript{th}, 1993, the Kōno statement admitting coercive elements was released. The Kōno statement also admitted involvement by the Japanese military although it claimed that recruitment was mainly carried out by private recruiters. It also claimed, and used the wording “in many cases against their will” implying that some women were not coerced.\textsuperscript{36}

During the premiership of Tomiichi Murayama(1994-1996), a series of so called “irresponsible statements” were made by some key figures in the administration. Unlike previous statements, which were made by lower-level politicians, this time it was made by key figures causing uproar in South Korea. The comments of Ryūtarō Hashimoto (deputy prime minister) and especially Michio Watanabe caused great damage for bilateral relations.

\textsuperscript{34} Mimaki, op.cit., 741-745.
\textsuperscript{35} Kimura, op.cit., 114-117.
\textsuperscript{36} Ibid., 130-136.
Michio Watanabe had held high positions in previous governments including foreign minister and health minister. Ryūtarō Hashimoto had claimed that it was a matter of subtle definition whether Japan had intended to wage a war of aggression on its Asian neighbour. Watanabe had claimed that the annexation of Korea was made in accordance with international law, which had been the consistent official view of Japan. However, the issue had been avoided by previous administrations and the treaty of 1965 is worded in a way that made it possible to interpret it as either that the treaty of annexation was thereby null and void or that it had been so from the onset. When Fujio Masayuki then minister of education claimed that the annexation was carried out through mutual agreement, he was fired by Prime Minister Yasuhiro Nakasone. Watanabe however was not fired and only retracted part of his statement, choosing not to retract the part that says the annexation was lawful.³⁷ Kimura argues that the 1990s marks a shift in bilateral relations, when cooperation between the ruling elites of the two countries broke down. He goes on to argue that the end of the cold war and South Korean economic growth were contributing factors to what he argues was a South Korean decision to sacrifice bilateral relations for political benefit at home.³⁸

The 1990s saw the emergence of a new Japanese nationalism caused at least in part by the disputes related to history. A major example being the “society for history textbook reform” founded in 1997. Kimura argues that there is a key difference between this movement and the 1980s push to change the context of the textbooks. Namely that the 1980s group that tried to reform the textbooks was closely tied to the hardliners of the ruling party, making them easier to control. They demanded the removal of any mention of comfort women in history textbooks. They managed to influence politicians and their activities had a major impact on textbooks. By 2005 the term had disappeared from all Junior High textbooks. However, it continued to be mentioned in High School textbooks. While textbooks were not moving in a more nationalist direction between the 1980s to the mid-1990s, in the late 1990s it began to drift in that direction.³⁹

Mimaki explains the emergence of nationalism in Japan as a backlash caused by what was perceived as government capitulations against China and South Korea. In 1982, a “neighbouring countries clause” was added to the textbook screening procedures to promote harmony with neighbouring countries. Since the mid-1980s Japanese textbooks increasingly

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³⁷ Ibid., 142-145.
³⁸ Ibid., 148-149.
³⁹ Ibid., 151-157.
payed attention to Japanese misconduct during WW2. However, in the 1990s this was met with heavy backlash and led to the previously mentioned “society for history textbook reform” in 1997. They eventually managed to publish and have a history book approved in 2001 after hundreds of corrections had been demanded by the ministry of education. This led to heavy protests in China and South Korea. However, the book was adopted by only 0,04 % of Junior High Schools, due to a denouncement by the Japanese teacher’s union and the media.  

The early 2000s saw a rise of populism in East-Asia with leaders such as Junichiro Koizumi and Roh Mooh-hyun. Many of their populist moves had nationalistic aspects to them, they sought to break taboos of the old elite and Koizumi started visiting the Yasukuni Shrine. Roh wanted to challenge old historical perceptions. Political instability in both countries influenced bilateral relations in different ways. It led South Korean politicians to attack Japan on historical issues much earlier in their term and more intensely. Nationalist public opinion in Japan made it hard for the government to resist taking a tougher stance against their neighbours.

In 2002 the bilateral Joint History commission was founded by Japanese Prime Minister Junichiro Koizumi and South Korean President Kim Dae-Jung. The trend continued into the 2010s and a report released in 2010 by the commission revealed significant gaps between the two sides. The South Korean side pointed out that Japanese textbooks do not adequately explain that the annexation of Korea was illegal. The Japanese side on the other hand criticized South Korean textbooks for not adequately explaining that Japan had expressed remorse for past wrong-doings and has an actively pacifist constitution.

Later administrations failed to restore relations and continued to take a tough stand against each other. The legacy of the early 2000s can still be felt today. This brings us to the present when issues of historical perceptions once again flared up causing relations to deteriorate their worst state in many years, this time caused not by the Comfort Women issue but the forced labour issue.

40 Mimaki, op.cit., 741-745.
42 Mimaki, op.cit. 741-745.
Japanese conservatives and nationalists disagree over the degree of coercion involved in recruiting the Korean labourers and argue that they were subject to the same conditions as the Japanese.44

2.3. Recent history

In October 2018, the South Korean supreme court ruled that Nippon Steel and later in November that Mitsubishi Heavy Industries should compensate each victim with around 88 thousand dollars. Japan argued that all settlements were solved by the 1965 agreement on basic relations. However, the South Korean Supreme Court argues that the agreement does not pertain to individuals but only the state, therefore individual victims have the right to compensation. Japan views this as a gross violation of international law, showing a huge gap in perception between the two sides. On July 4th Japan imposed export restrictions on South Korea, later in August it was removed from the so-called whitelist of favoured nations were export and import are freely allowed. The Japanese government claims that South Korea had been managing exports inappropriately. This caused South Korea to react with leaving the intelligence sharing agreement with the United States and Japan. On a grassroots level, many South Koreans participated in a nationally fuelled boycott of Japanese products, widely known as “No Japan” 45

While most boycotts of Japanese products in South Korea are short lived this one was different. Over 80 % of Korean consumers agreed with the boycott, suggesting wide public support. Consumer patriotism can thus be said to be a strong force in South Korea.46

Despite, a widespread belief that Japan removed South Korea from its whitelist as a retaliatory action, it is noteworthy that when it was announced, the Japanese government’s stated reasons were not related to disagreements with South Korea. South Korea’s improper handling and operation of exports was given as the main reason. It was also explicitly stated that it was not meant as a retaliatory action against South Korea and it was not expected to negatively affect relations.47 It’s obviously difficult to know the motivations of the Japanese

44 Sintoniean, op.cit., 53-59.
45 Yang, op.cit., 1-6.
government, and whether it was a retaliatory action or not is perhaps less important than how it was perceived in South Korea and how it affected relations.

2.4. Views in Japan and how they are characterized

According to Torsten Weber, Japan under former Prime Minister Shinzo Abe routinely embraced a revisionist view of Japanese imperialism that seeks to emphasize the positive aspects of the war. However, the speech he is referring to contains no mentions of positive aspects of the Second World War, only the Russo-Japanese War (1904-1905) is mentioned in a positive light. A conflict happening many years before the second Sino-Japanese War (1932-1945) or the Pacific War (1941-1945).

The views in Japan are divergent and do not always have a positive view of past Japanese imperialism. Some newspapers such as Sankei Shimbun have a more positive or revisionist view of the past while other newspapers such as Asahi Shimbun tend to view the past in a negative light. The conflict over history is as alive in Japan as between Japan and the other nations in Asia. There is not just one Japanese view of history. Nevertheless, a majority of Japanese believe criticism of them is exaggerated and never-ending. On the other hand, a majority of Chinese and South Koreans feel that Japanese do not adequately deal with their historical guilt. In the past, Japanese apologies were seen as sufficient but since the 1980s this has changed. Japan has on numerous occasions expressed regret especially towards South Korea.

In the early 1990s with the coming out of several comfort women, Japan offered several apologies and expression of regrets. However, the issue was politicized in Japan and nationalist groups criticised the apologetic nature of officials and attempted to cast doubt on the historicity of the events. In 1995 Prime Minister Tomiichi Murayama made a statement offering a heartfelt apology for the past actions of Japan. This statement was criticised by both the left and the right for either being too self-critical of Japan or not going far enough in offering apologies. However, during Koizumi’s time as prime minister he officially visited the Yasukuni Shrine, a shrine that honours the war dead, including convicted war criminals. This cast doubt on Japan’s sincerity. When Prime Minister Shinzo Abe did not offer an

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apology in his 2015 statement on the anniversary of the Second World War it was welcomed by Japanese nationalists. Weber mentions how some academics such as Jennifer Lind and Thomas Burkman argue that apologies are not necessary for reconciliation and lifts the example of Japan-American or Japan-Thai reconciliation which did not rely on any apologies.  

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50 Weber, op.cit., 801-816.
3. Analysis

3.1. Newspaper analysis

徴用工 (choyoukou), a term often used as a euphemism for the forced labourers working in Japan during World War 2. The first time the issue is mentioned in *Asahi Shimbun* (one of the major newspapers of Japan) is in 1974, after having been completely silent on the issue since 1945 it is suddenly talked about again in this article. This is what Kimura calls the silent era, an era in which the leaders of Korea were either participants in the occupation or too scarred by it to bring the issues forth. The article talks about a group of survivors and families of survivors that are demanding compensation for working in a Mitsubishi factory in Hiroshima during the atom bombing. No comments from the Japanese government are included in the article.\(^{51}\)

朝鮮人強制労働者 (Chōsen hito kyōsei rōdō-sha), a more literal description meaning Korean forced labourers, has its first appearance in *Asahi Shimbun* in 1975, here a Korean former forced labourer describes his experiences, lack of food and beatings were frequent. The article depicts the events in a seemingly objective way, the conditions are described and neither condemned nor defended. There seems to be no significance placed on the issue and it is treated as a past event without much emotional attachment. The Japanese side had not placed meaning on the issue at the time.\(^{52}\)

The next time the issue is mentioned is in 1986, the article describes a Japanese man’s journey to South Korea to return the ashes of his Korean friend to his hometown. The Korean man had been forcefully brought to Japan as labour, he eventually fled and ended up living the rest of his life in Japan. The facts are described neutrally in the article and it does not seem to have been an issue of contention at the time.\(^{53}\)

The same issue of South Korean forced labourers is brought up again in 1989, the article describes how they had been left out of the memorial service for those who died in an air raid

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during the Second World War. The city where it happened had now decided to hold a memorial service for them.\textsuperscript{54}

Similar articles occur a few times, but in 1990 the particular issue of Korean labourers at Mitsubishi is brought up, the labourers are prepared to sue Mitsubishi for unpaid wages among other things. Mitsubishi responded that this issue is already solved and that it is not for one individual company to deal with.\textsuperscript{55}

Several articles during the year of 1990 mention the issue of former Korean forced labourers often in the context of so called “hibakusha” which are survivors of the atom bombings. Where they demand compensation and claim it is the company’s responsibility to pay for the damages occurred.\textsuperscript{56}

In 1991, a group from South Korea arrives in Japan to demand unpaid wages and compensation for damages occurred because of the atom bombings. They were former forced labourers at Mitsubishi and their representatives. The Japanese ministry of foreign affairs responded that the issue is solved with the 1965 agreement and that there was no promise of sending wages back to South Korea and that the Korean forced labourers were treated no differently to the Japanese ones.\textsuperscript{57} Several similar articles about the issue follow during the year.

In 1993 in what seems like an effort to raise awareness of the issue, \textit{Asahi Shimbun} runs a series of articles called “Mr Kim’s diary, a former Korean forced labourers 179 days” where the everyday life of a Korean forced labourer is described.\textsuperscript{58}

On December 11, 1995 victims of the forced labour at Mitsubishi Heavy Industries filed a lawsuit in Hiroshima, Japan. The case was ultimately struck down by the court which argued that the acts were not illegal under the law at the time. Furthermore, the court argued that unpaid wages and failure to follow safety precautions are crimes where the statute of limitations has already lapsed and therefore there can be no right to compensation. The court

\begin{footnotesize}
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\item \textsuperscript{54} \textit{Asahi Shimbun} “Kyōsei renkō de shinda Chōsenjin kō-in, 44-nen-me ni chinkon Handa [Nagoya]”, July 06, 1989.
\item \textsuperscript{55} \textit{Asahi Shimbun} “Kankoku no izoku ga Mitsubishijūkō ni shitsumon-jō kyōsei renkō no kikoku-ji chinbotsu [Ōsaka]” “June 22, 1990.
\item \textsuperscript{56} \textit{Asahi Shimbun} “Shazai hoshō no koe takameru zaikan hibaku-sha shokuminchi shihai no seisan kyōchō,” August 15, 1990.
\item \textsuperscript{57} \textit{Asahi Shimbun} “Miharai chingin haratte' kyōsei renkō no zaikan hibaku-sha-ra, mitsubishi+jūkōgyō ni motomeru”, August 2, 1991.
\item \textsuperscript{58} \textit{Asahi shimbun}“48-Nen mae (Kin-san no nik ki kangokujin moto chōyō kō no 179-nichi: 1”, January 09, 1993.
\end{itemize}
\end{footnotesize}
also stated that even if the statute of limitations had not lapsed it would still not entitle them to compensation because the 1965 Agreement of Normalization between Japan and South Korea ultimately extinguishes all claims of compensation and resolves all issues between the two countries. They appealed to the Hiroshima High Court and at the same time a court case in Busan South Korea was started. The Hiroshima High court dismissed the case in 2005 the victims filled another appeal to the Japanese Supreme court which also dismissed the issue in November 1st, 2007. On February 2nd, 2007, the Busan court ruled similarly that the right to compensation was extinguished. When the victims appealed to the Busan High court the case was dismissed as already decided citing the supreme court decision in Japan. The victims then appealed to the supreme court of South Korea.

In 1997 a similar lawsuit against Nippon Steel was filed in Osaka, but the case was ultimately dismissed on 27th March 2001 by the Osaka District Court. It further ruled that the current New Nippon Steel has a separate legal person to the old company which was dissolved in 1946 by the American colonial government. It also ruled that even if it was the same company the rights to compensation was extinguished in the 1965 Agreement. On October 9, 2003, the Supreme Court rejected the case. The case continued with a new lawsuit in South Korea which was struck down but appealed to the supreme court. The Supreme Court of Korea held that; (1) Korean courts had jurisdiction over the case; (2) the Lower Court misunderstood and misapplied the principle of res judicata (which is a legal term meaning that the matter is already decided and is used when a matter that has already been ruled on is brought up before a different court) pursuant to the decisions of the foreign courts because the decisions violated the good morals and social order of the Republic of Korea; (3) the current corporation de facto bears the same identity of the munitions company at the time of Japanese Occupation and can thus be evaluated as a legally identical company; (4) the 1965 Korea-Japan Claims Agreement did not extinguish the individual right to claim compensation for forced labour; and (5) the assertion of the defendants claiming completion of prescription is an abuse of right that violates the principle of good faith and thus cannot be accepted”. The Seoul High Court and Busan High Court then overruled their previous rulings stating that each victim was entitled a compensation of 100
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million won according to the Seoul High court and 80 million won according to the Busan High Court. 59

3.2. Analysis of academic views in Japan

Kiyoshi Aoki provides an analysis of the issue and the position of the two sides. Of the Japanese side he states that, when the ruling was announced the Japanese government maintained that it was a violation of international law. The reasoning for this is that from 1952 until 1965 meetings were held between South Korea and Japan in order to solve historical issues and establish diplomatic relations between the two. In 1965 an agreement was finally reached in which Japan agreed to pay compensation to the South Korean government and in exchange all issues between the two were considered solved. Consequently they argue that any new claims of compensations are counter to the agreement already made and thus constitute a violation of international law. Aoki argues that while this is true, any agreement between two parties can always be renegotiated.

Aoki further provides an explanation of how he views the South Korean position. The South Korean supreme courts repudiation of all foreign courts and foreign law is according to him very unusual. He further explains that in international law there is no principal higher than that of state sovereignty, which means there is no actual duty to follow any law that is outside the individual state’s own jurisdiction. However, if a suitable law to solve an issue exists in a foreign country it is usual to apply it even domestically. The basis of this system is that even if the foreign law differs from the domestic, a solved issue shall be considered solved. It does not presume that foreign law is always equivalent and reaches the same conclusions as domestic.

However, since South Korea for obvious reasons does not recognize the legality of the Japanese colonial government, they do not think that Japanese law is appropriate for determining whether the legal personality of the companies is the same and whether they have a debt to pay. He further explains that when Japan and South Korea were negotiating normalization of relations they clashed on the issue of the legality of the colonial government. Therefore, in the 1965 Agreement it does not specify the time when the colonial government became invalid. He argues that while it is true that agreements must be kept, one

should not forget that not all issues were solved at the time of the 1965 Agreement. He argues that Japan should once and for all come up with a way to deal with the problems instead of leaving them unsolved and postpone dealing with them. South Korea on the other hand should not go as far as denying the agreements they go into. Instead of doing things to inconvenience the other country they should come up with constructive ways of dealing with issues.\textsuperscript{60}

Kan Kimura and Koji Kakutani’s article where they analyse the motivations of South Korean leaders in relation to historical disputes is an illustrative example of the Japanese understanding of the driving forces behind the disputes. They find that there is a high correlation between the emergence of historical disputes and conflicts over trade. They argue that since Koreans generally believe that the president has a high degree of influence over the economy, the president needs a way to avoid responsibility and appealing to patriotism is an easy way to do this.\textsuperscript{61} Japanese academics tend to see historical issues as excuses that mask underlying issues and motivations, they do not tend to see historical issues as being caused by actual grievances from the South Korean side.

3.3. Why did relations deteriorate?

Japan and South Korea have had shaky relations for a long time, with issues such as comfort women and forced labour flaring up repeatedly. To explain why the relations deteriorated so dramatically now one must understand the background. In 2015 then Korean president Park Geun-hye and then Japanese Prime Minister Shinzo Abe came to an agreement to establish a fund that would tend to the needs of the Comfort Women, this agreement would solve the issue once and for all. However, already during his campaign to become president, Moon Jae-in was critical of the agreement, and in December 28 of 2017 a special task force appointed to look into the 2015 deal announced its findings. They concluded that the 2015 deal was flawed and should be scrapped. Among other things, not directly hearing the comfort women was brought up as a criticism of the deal. Foreign Minister Tarō Kōno issued a statement denouncing the findings and warning that revising the deal would lead to worsened relations between the two, at first Moon decided to keep the women’s fund.\textsuperscript{62}

\textsuperscript{60} Kiyoshi Aoki, “1965nen shika minai nihon, nittei ni kodawaru kankoku, “chyouyoukou ketsudan” no houtekibunseki tooshite,” Ajia kenkyu, vol 66 no 4, (October 2020) 22-38.


\textsuperscript{62} Yuki Tatsumi, “The Japan-South Korea ‘Comfort Women’ Agreement Survives (Barely)” The Diplomat January 11, 2018.
However, on July 4th, 2019 the fund was officially dissolved unilaterally by the Moon administration.\(^{63}\) With this development occurring during the same time period as the court decision to compensate forced labourers, the strain on relations becomes even harder.

When the forced labour issue flared up as a result of the Supreme Court decision in October 2018, relations with the Moon administration were already somewhat strained and when the Women’s Fund was unilaterally dissolved in November 2018 it made relations even more sour.

Relations continued its downward trend with a December conflict over whether South Korea locked on to a Japanese plane with its military ship. South Korea denied the allegations. A military exercise on the Liancourt Rocks which are a small group of disputed islands (known as Dokdo in Korea and Takeshima in Japan) caused further conflict. Pandu Indey makes the argument that part of the explanation for the antagonistic stance between the Abe and later Suga administration and the Moon administration is ideological, the Moon administration and its supporters belongs a Korean liberal left-wing movement which in South Korea also means nationalist and anti-Japan, to strengthen his domestic support he needs to appeal to his base and their demands. The recent Japanese administrations on the other hand often seen as right-wing nationalists taking pride in Japan.\(^{64}\) Further, the author argues that Korean nationalism relying so heavily on anti-Japanese sentiment and Japanese nationalism often being somewhat restrictive in their acknowledgement of past wrongdoings makes compromise very difficult.

In July 2019, the conflict escalated further with the Japanese decision to remove South Korea from its whitelist of preferred trading partners.\(^{65}\) Citing a lack of trust between the two countries and improper use of certain sensitive materials.\(^{66}\) Specifically it refers to 156 incidents of illegal exports of strategic goods from South Korea, as reported in Japanese media, the source being documents from the Korean Trade Ministry.\(^{67}\)

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The response in South Korean media was that this was evidence that South Korea operates in an adequate and transparent way, by officially reporting cases of illegal exports. They go on to argue that Japan does not operate in the same transparent way. Katsuhisa Furukawa argues that even if these incidents are caused by carelessness or ignorance by small and medium sized companies it is a serious blow to South Korea's credibility. Until around 2015, the Japanese and Korean Trade Ministries had regular meetings to discuss issues of policy, but this stopped from 2016 when relations deteriorated, which Furukawa argues is evidence that trust between the two governments have collapsed. He argues that for Japan this is a matter of law enforcement and is not politically motivated.

Daniel Sneider argues that it was in fact politically motivated and the export restrictions were meant to be used as leverage against South Korea in the dispute over the South Korean Supreme Court’s decisions on forced labour compensation. He claims that Japanese senior officials made it clear at the early stages that it was linked to the South Korean refusal to abide by the 1965 agreement and its arbitration procedures. He argues that Japan's decision to impose export controls has strengthened Korean patriotism and made future cooperation more difficult as well as pushing South Korea closer to China.

Also noteworthy is that from the end of Japanese colonial rule to the late 1980s South Korea ran a trade deficit, and in the 1990s the country started to run a deficit again, reaching a record high in 1991. Over 90% of this deficit was with Japan. Making frictions over trade an important part of relations.

3.4. How, what effects did the deterioration in relations have on bilateral relations?

One of the most visible immediate effects were the 2019 boycott of Japanese products that became a massive popular movement in South Korea. While these types of boycotts frequently occur when relations between the two become shaky, they are usually short lived, but the recent boycott was more organized and broader. Notably small business owners participate in the movement by openly advertising their participation and increasing prices to an unreasonably high level on Japanese products. As many as 81.5% of Korean consumers

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70 Kimura, op.cit., 111-113.
agreed with the boycott according to a survey made by the South Korean Rural Economic Institute. 70 % said they had stopped buying Japanese products all together. The Japanese Ministry of Finance stated that in October 2019 the exports to South Korea had shrunk by as much as 23 % compared to the same month the previous year. The Japan National Tourist Organization published statistics stating a 65.5 % decrease in tourists from South Korea during 2019.71 Another is the South Korean proposal to leave the Intelligence Sharing Pact with Japan and the United States, a decision that was later reversed in November 2019.72

3.5. Identity politics

In order to understand why relations deteriorate, it is also necessary to explore how identity influences relations.

Snyder and Glosserman argue that Japanese post WW2 identity that was largely reliant on its impressive economic growth has been subjected to several shocks in recent decades. The first is the so-called lost decade of 1991-2001 where Japanese growth was less than 1% yearly. The economy recovered somewhat during the first half of the 2000s but was again shook by the 2008 global financial crisis. In 2010 China overtook Japan as the world’s second largest economy. In the end of 2013 Japan’s real GDP growth averaged less than 0.8 % over the last two decades. This experience created the perception that it was not just one lost decade but two. Japan’s weak economy and the political leadership’s inability to deal with it ruined Japanese self-confidence which had relied on Japan’s identity as a mercantile state. A survey in 2002 revealed that 86 % of Japanese people were dissatisfied with the direction the country was going. The economic stagnation and the resulting loss of identity has led to rising social problems, falling birth-rates, rising suicide, and crime among other things. Japan who was once viewed as the rightful leader of Asia and a beacon for success in the eyes of Asians.73

Another core component of Japanese post WW2 identity, namely pacifism was also eroded, North Korean nuclear tests and the 1998 missile that flew over Japan made the nation acutely aware that they lived in a dangerous neighbourhood and that the promised future world where international law would be used to solve all conflicts would not come to pass. This coupled with the end of the Cold War has led to a partial revival of Japanese nationalism with a more assertive foreign policy and talks of removing article 9 from the constitution allowing the

71 Song, op.cit., 74.
Japanese Armed Forces to once again be allowed to be wielded outside strictly defensive purposes. Snyder and Glosserman are quick to caution against over interpreting this phenomenon and cite professor Soeya Yoshihide of Keio University who argues that if Japanese politicians were to clearly state a return to pre-war ambitions as policy the Japanese public would be the first to reject it. Rather than Japan returning to pre-war ambitions, what we are seeing is a reluctant return to normalcy. Snyder and Glosserman cite Paul Midford who argue that Japans public opinion on security policy has not been radically transformed but evolves slowly and steadily in what he sees as rational ways. There are four different views in Japan with regards to state identity. One argues that Japan should be as pacifistic as possible. Another argues that Japan should focus on economy which will make it possible to solve problems and promote peace via economic activities. A third group wants Japan to re-arm and coordinate with its allies to meet future challenges to its security. A fourth nationalistic group wants Japan to re-arm and pursue an independent active foreign policy.  

Noteworthy is that Japan has the lowest levels of patriotism among Asian nations. According to poll data, only 27 % of Japanese are proud of their own nationality compared to 46 % of Chinese and 93 % of Thais. Japan also has the lowest of 16 % that are willing to fight for their country of all countries polled.  

According to Snyder and Glosserman, Japan’s identity is best explained as proud of their nation but not chauvinist. Status quo oriented, egalitarian, and homogenous. Japanese focus on solving problems and improving conditions at home rather than project power abroad, in international arenas they want to export their own good behaviour and solutions. The United States is seen as the nation that best coincides with Japans values and interests.  

South Korean identity is different, it consists of anti-communism, anti-colonialism, and ethnic nationalism. Gloserman and Snyder cite Shin Gi-wok who argue that South Korean identity is based on the concept of a single bloodline and shared identity. Polls conducted in 2000 show that 93 % of South Koreans agree that “our nation has a single bloodline” and a majority agree that North Koreans and South Koreans living abroad share this single bloodline. Younger generations of South Koreans show growing support of civic nationalism where language and tradition are more important than blood.

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74 Ibid., 32-38.
75 Ibid., 38-39.
76 Ibid., 57-61.
Snyder and Glosserman argue that perhaps the loss of national identity during Japanese colonialism led to ethnicity being the only identifier of Korean identity and main justification for the struggle to recover national independence. Furthermore, this equating of race and nation is reflected in the nation building efforts of Syngman Rhee and Kim Il-sung as well as the latter North Korean xenophobic rhetoric. The dividing line between conservatives and progressives over identity is not of whether to prioritize ethnicity or not, but whether to prioritize national unity leading to closer relations with North Korea or to prioritize ideological considerations which would mean that North Korea’s ideology must be defeated before meaningful reunification can ever be achieved. This reveals that the progressive view is one of classical ethnic nationalism that prioritized unity at all costs and the conservative view is a more ideological one which argue that freedom and democracy are more important values.77

South Korea’s economic success has transformed identity in several ways, most notably younger Koreans higher expectations of South Korea’s position in the world. Where older citizens tended to see the country as a small insignificant nation with powerful neighbours. Younger Koreans see themselves as citizens of a rich country with a powerful army and expect the nation to act globally and as one of the main economies of the world. They want an international role for South Korea that acts as a bridge between East and West. Older generations prefer conservative politicians whereas younger people in their 20s and 30s prefer more progressive ones.78

56% and 58% of South Koreans believe they share values and way of life with China and Japan, respectively. Only 14% believed they shared values and way of life with the United States. However, more than 43% of South Koreans feel their interests align most closely with the United States. Analysis of poll data shows that the Japanese attitude towards South Korea has markedly improved since 1990. South Korean attitudes towards Japan have not shared the same positive development. For example, 46% of Japanese said they trust South Korea while only 10% of South Koreans in 2005 and 20% in 2011 believed Japan could be trusted. This difference in perception is due mainly to Japanese respondents focusing on contemporary matters while South Korean respondents are focused on historical issues.79

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77 Ibid., 65-68.
78 Ibid., 74-77.
79 Ibid., 77-105.
Another important concept is the concept of “routinized recognition” developed by Jianicy Bialy Mattern based on a theory of mutual recognition by Alexander Wendet, Karl Gustafsson uses it to describe the deterioration in Sino-Japanese relations. His argument is that functioning bilateral relations relied on a mutual understanding and recognition of each other’s identities. Japan had an identity as both a former aggressor and an economic leader. As long as China continued to recognize Japan as the economic leader Japan could also recognize itself as a former aggressor. With Japan’s lost decades and China’s economic rise the identity of economic leader becomes increasingly difficult to sustain and led to a search for a new identity in Japan. In China on the other hand the collapse of the communist identity led likewise to a search for a new one and they found patriotism and started emphasizing their resistance towards Japan in history teaching. This caused Japan to feel misrecognized as it feels China does not emphasize the “formerness” of Japan’s aggression and Japan’s new identity as a peace-loving country.\(^{80}\)

3.6. Geopolitical context

I will in what follows explain why it is so improbable that Japan and South Korea would not cooperate from a traditional international relations perspective. Here is a short explanation of the political context.

Japan and South Korea both have their own separate alliances with the United States. Established in the 1950s, they have survived for six decades. Despite American efforts to unite these two alliances in a regionalized framework for security cooperation, they remain separate institutions. Despite what Snyder and Glosserman argue is a convergence in values, interests, and stakes in global stability the two continue to have less than cordial relations. They argue that historical issues have become a tool in domestic politics. As the US rebalances to Asia to counter China’s increasing influence, the need for cooperation between South Korea and Japan become increasingly urgent from the perspective of American interests in the region. Further, Snyder and Glosserman argue that the industrialization and democratization of South Korea are important factors causing the Korean public to have a greater influence on foreign policy contributing to the conflict.\(^{81}\)

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\(^{81}\) Brad Glosserman, Scott A Snyder, op.-cit 12-13.
3.7. Comparisons with other bilateral relationships

In Europe, Germany enjoys close relations with its neighbours despite its WW2 legacy. In Asia 60 years have not been sufficient to put the past behind. Germany’s extremely apologetic policies of atonement have contributed to its reconciliation with its neighbours. However, Lind argues that it is not as simple as this. In fact, West Germany and France successfully reconciled before West German policies shifted to extreme atonement. Furthermore, neither the British nor the American apologized to Germany for fire-bombing their cities. Japan and The United States enjoy very close relations despite the lack of a Japanese apology for Pearl Harbour and no American apologies for burning down 68 of Japan’s largest cities and killing almost 1 million civilians.\footnote{Jennifer Lind, \textit{Sorry States Apologies in International Politics} (Cornell University Press, New York, 2008): 179-181.}

Lind also makes the case that a policy of constant apologies and atonement can trigger backlash as it has done in Japan. She suggests that in fact backlash is likely the more common scenario. The German experience was somewhat unique and largely a result of its strategic constraints during the Cold War.\footnote{Ibid., 182-183.} Why then is cordial bilateral relations so difficult in the Japan-South Korea case?
4. Conclusion

A realist understanding of international relations would argue that security always takes precedence over economics since without security no other goals can be pursued. The author finds this particular understanding of the relative importance of security to be logically sound. States can only pursue other goals when they continue to exist, therefore it follows that their highest priority would be a continued existence. However, in some cases other concerns seem to trump security, especially when a state does not feel particularly threatened.

As previously stated, theories of international relations suggest it is highly likely that South Korea and Japan should form a close relationship. Which they did between 1965 and the 1980s. The relationship was cordial and without much issue as noted by Kimura. However, the change in the economic relationship between the two and the changing political situation in the world made them less reliant on each other, opening for the possibility of conflict.

However, this alone is not enough to explain why conflict over historical perception occurs. As Kimura states, there are three conditions that needs to be met for an issue of historical perception to become a conflict. Multiple actors must place meaning on an historical event, the actors must have a different perception of the event, and finally the actors must see sufficient benefit of raising the issue.

In the case of the forced labour issue, it was already discovered and imbued with meaning from the onset. There existed already differing perceptions of the event, and especially in terms of whether issues are solved.

Neither party saw a benefit in raising the issue of forced labour until the 1980s. This did not happen until cooperation between the elites in the two countries broke down in the late 1980s and in 1991 when Prime Minister Toshiki Kaifu visited South Korea. It was the most important historical issue. With the advent of the Comfort Woman issue, the issue of forced labour became less important. However, with the South Korean Supreme Court decision in October 2018, it quickly became equally if not more important than the comfort woman issue. According to the theories of Kimura this would mean that it was not until 2018 that the South Korean side saw enough benefit of making an issue of it.

Despite claims that it was merely a judicial decision it nevertheless coincided with the unilateral dissolution of the comfort women fund, established after an agreement between the Abe and Park administrations. Making it obvious that the Moon administration sees some benefit in raising historical issues.
The distrust that has existed since the Koizumi-Roh times makes it difficult for the Japanese government to take a conciliatory stance. Highley likely there is also a high degree of fatigue caused by the, from the Japanese perspective, seemingly never-ending demands and constant changes of position in relation to issues of historical perception on the part of South Korea. After all, previous attempts to reach an agreement have collapsed after just a short time, with the failure of the Asian women’s fund in the 1990s and the failure of the Park and Abe agreement on the issue. From the Japanese perspective it seems highly likely that any agreement reached will be void, come the next South Korean administration. However, it is of course easier for the victim to be more emotionally driven, making it harder to reach a complete and final settlement of any of the issues.

If one uses the theories explained by Berger to solve the dispute, the experiential model will propose that the two sides have to understand each other’s perspectives better. A more nuanced view of history in both countries, perhaps explaining and empathizing with the Japanese who were forced by their government to commit atrocities, would be necessary in South Korea. In Japan, properly explaining the suffering inflicted would be necessary. However, as Kimura points out, the relationship was without any larger issues between 1965 and 1980 despite differing historical perceptions. This would suggest that the past does not have to be understood properly to be forgotten and forgiven. Or it could mean that the issues were always there but failed to come to the forefront due to larger considerations. This seems unlikely since Japanese American relations are cordial despite no efforts to understand each side’s historical perspective. Japan and the USA having fought one of the bloodiest wars against each other in history. The USA have never apologized for the bombings of Japanese cities and Japan has never apologized for Pearl Harbour. Clearly neither apologizes nor a proper understanding of history is necessary for cordial relationships.

The second theory explained by Berger is the instrumentalist view. This would suggest there is an underlying problem that causes the friction. An issue of concrete interest, as mentioned earlier there is a huge trade deficit on the part of South Korea toward Japan. Perhaps this is one of the underlying issues. However as previously argued from the perspective of security the two countries have everything to win and very little to lose by cooperating. They both share an alliance with the USA, making them ideal security partners. However, they compete in the economic sphere, both countries being major producers of electronics and cars. It is still doubtful whether this is enough to cause the amount of friction we are seeing.
The third theory explained by Berger is the culturalist view. It argues that what matters is how the issue is interpreted and understood by various groups. If this is the case it would mean that the issue is threatening the interest of cultural groups. This can be nationalists in both countries. If this is the case the situation appears without a clear solution.

The experiential model seems lacking given the fact that the discovery and placing of importance on events have a significant impact on whether there is a dispute. Simply experiencing an event does not create a dispute. It has to be understood and interpreted by different groups. Furthermore, as Kan Kimura has shown there is a significant and long period of silence on historical issues between the two. If lived experiences was the most important factor, we would not have seen this long period of silence. The culturalist model seems most applicable in this case.

As Lind points out in the Japanese case, apologies have led to significant backlash. Causing the neighbouring countries to react to the backlash causing worse rather than better relations and it is likely that the perception of Japanese apologies as insincere has its origins here.

The issue can be further analysed according to the theory of routinized recognition, were Japan-Korean relations just as Sino-Japanese relations relied on Japans identity as an economic leader and a peace-loving country in the post war era. However, the author would suggest that there are significant differences in the Sino-Japanese case and the Japan-Korea case. In the former Japan was seen as an aggressor and not as a colonizer, making Chinese identity less reliant on opposition to the Japanese imperialists. In the Korean case, identity is too closely connected to the struggle against Japanese rule because Koreas existence as a nation was threatened in a more direct way. While the damage to property and life was worse in China the damage to identity was stronger in Korea. South Korea stopped recognizing Japans identity as a peace-loving and economically leading country both because it also became economically stronger but also because the usefulness of using Anti-Japanese sentiments for identity was too strong to forego for politicians.

The Japanese perspective which China up until the 1990s recognized was that that Japanese citizens who were conscripted into the army were more often than not forced to do so and fighting in the war involved often just as harsh conditions as those they fought. It was the military regime that was to blame not individual Japanese soldiers. It is of course worth noting that this is a very non-nationalistic point of view, if one views it from the perspective of individuals involved it is of course true that individuals from all countries suffered, only
when one starts to view it as nationalistic and identarian does it make sense to blame all Japanese.

On the Japanese side there is growing frustration that agreements don’t seem to survive beyond one Korean administration. On the Korean side it seems that a Japanese lack of understanding of the gravity of the issues make them unable to offer proper apologies and compensation. It is however difficult to understand what constitutes good enough as Korean administrations differ in their acceptance of Japanese apologies. It is unclear what policy except acceptance of every South Korean demand would constitute enough.

The author concludes that the forced labour issue is just one part of a whole that consists of many issues related to historical perception. In the case of Japan and South Korea, it appears that South Korean identity as a country relies in part on its anti-colonialism thus making it particularly sensitive to historical issues with Japan. Japan offers apologies and compromise but is unwilling and unable to go as far as Germany because of domestic backlash. A solution cannot rely solely on more Japanese apologizes. The South Korean side must also be willing to accept them and to accept compromise that might not be the ideal solution they wished for, further agreements have to be accepted beyond the next administration and have to be properly accepted by the South Korean public.

The reason the forced labour issue became so huge is because it coincided with the dissolution of the Comfort Women agreement causing Japanese frustrations leading to harsh measures and escalation of the conflict. Korean nationalism’s strong ties to its anti-colonial identity makes it an important and useful tool to gain domestic political favour, causing damage to bilateral ties. Domestic backlash in Japan makes it hard to both get their apologies accepted abroad and to go further than they have already done.

Unfortunately, as much as a close alliance would benefit both partners, it appears unlikely, and Japan is better to look elsewhere for the foreseeable future.

Further this thesis concludes that national identity is important for forming the goals of a state, sometimes security concerns are not strong enough to overwhelm goals based on identity. When identity is strongly linked to what is seen as negative historical events involving another state, it can easily become a national goal to make this state pay for these historical events. One such payment can be to be recognized as a victim or to receive compensation of some form. However, sustaining such an arrangement cannot be done indefinitely, as a national identity as a former perpetrator can only be sustained when it can
be simultaneously held with positive aspects of the same identity. Such as in the case of Japan, which had an identity as former perpetrator, economic leader and reformed peace-loving nation.

More research can be done regarding the questions of how identity affects the ability to cooperate, on quantifying security concerns as well as identity related goals and comparing them. On applying Kimura, Snyder and Glosserman and Further research on the possible application of the theories of routinized recognition on other bilateral relations are also a research desideratum. Finally, solution-oriented research with policy recommendations is needed. Especially in terms of reaching acceptance of agreements among the regular public of agreements.
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