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**National Narratives and their Impact on  
Intercultural Communication**

The Case of South Korea and Japan

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**TITLE:** National Narratives and their Impact on Intercultural Communication: The Case of South Korea and Japan.

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**ABSTRACT:**

Historical clashes and territorial conflicts in East Asia have caused South Korea and Japan to develop deep tensions and mistrust of each other. In the decades following the Pacific War (1941-1945), Japan and South Korea have gone back and forth in their relations. Although diplomatic relations were normalized in 1965, there have been countless tense episodes between the two nations since then. The scars of the war still run deep, and even though these countries share many cultural, economic, and geopolitical ties, their national narratives about each other are still woven with mistrust and rejection.

This Final Degree Thesis aims to explore how Japanese and South Korean national narratives influence intercultural communication and their diplomatic ties, in the historical context of the decades after the Pacific War. In order to correctly analyze each perspective, we will first focus on South Korea's historical, cultural, social and political narrative about Japan. Secondly, we will do the same from Japan's perspective towards Korea. Third and finally, we will strive to find how these national narratives are presented in artistic and cultural manifestations, in order to compare how similar or different one's vision of each other is.

**KEY WORDS:** South Korea-Japan relations, national narrative, identity, framing.

**TÍTULO:** Las Narrativas Nacionales y su Impacto en la Comunicación Intercultural: El Caso de Corea del Sur y Japón.

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**ABSTRACT:**

Diversos conflictos históricos y disputas territoriales en Asia Oriental han provocado que Corea del Sur y Japón compartan hoy profundas tensiones y una mutua desconfianza. En las décadas posteriores a la Guerra del Pacífico (1941-1945), Japón y Corea del Sur han experimentado altibajos en sus relaciones. Aunque normalizaron las relaciones diplomáticas en 1965, desde entonces ha habido incontables episodios de tensión entre ambos países. Las cicatrices de la guerra siguen siendo profundas, y a pesar de que estos países comparten muchos lazos culturales, económicos y geopolíticos, las narrativas nacionales que tienen el uno sobre el otro aún siguen teñidas de rechazo y desconfianza.

Este Trabajo de Fin de Grado tiene como objetivo explorar cómo las narrativas nacionales japonesas y surcoreanas influyen en la comunicación intercultural y en sus lazos diplomáticos, en el contexto histórico de las décadas posteriores a la Guerra del Pacífico. Para analizar correctamente cada perspectiva, nos centraremos primero en la narrativa histórica, cultural, social y política de Corea del Sur sobre Japón. En segundo lugar, haremos lo mismo desde la perspectiva de Japón hacia Corea. Por último, y en tercer lugar, trataremos de analizar cómo estas narrativas nacionales se presentan en manifestaciones artísticas y culturales, con el fin de comparar cuán similares o diferentes son dichas narrativas.

**PALABRAS CLAVE:** relaciones Corea del Sur-Japón, narrativa nacional, identidad, framing.

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# 1. INTRODUCTION

## 1.1 Purpose and reasons

The Republic of Korea (South Korea) and Japan are two of the most influential countries in East Asia today. It is easy to find similarities in their cultures, societies, and traditions, due to a long-shared history of influence from China, and of course, due to their geographic proximity. In addition to that, they are interdependent in both economic and security matters. Cultural interactions between the two countries are abundant, with Japanese food and animations readily available in South Korea, and Korean music and cinema easily accessible in Japan. Being both strong allies of the United States, all these similarities should have given place to an extremely close-knitted alliance between the two. However, this has not been the case.

After having spent a year living and studying in South Korea, I realized that there is a very specific and ingrained narrative about Japan. Having Korea endured so much war and conquests throughout history, it is quite interesting to see how South Korea has shaped their national narrative about Japan, and it would be interesting to explore if Japan has done the same back.

In order to understand the intricate relationship of these two countries, it is necessary to look into their shared history. Conflicts between the two have existed for centuries. It goes back to the Imjin War, in the sixteenth century, which was a brutal episode in the history of Korea. There is still talk today of acts of cruelty perpetrated by the Japanese during those times: “[Korea] was laid waste and desolated, and no mercy was shown to Korean victims. This war engendered a hatred for the Japanese on the part of the Koreans which still continues” (Gilliland, 1920, p. 47). The Imjin War might have been the start of a tumultuous relationship, but it was only the first episode of their strained history. Shifting our focus to the present day, the Pacific War (1941-1945) was a turning point in the relationship of these two nations. Japanese cruelty and their use of *comfort women* (Korean victims of sexual slavery<sup>1</sup>), and how both countries have interacted after the war have created a sometimes cordial,

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<sup>1</sup> The concept of *comfort women* will be further explained in section 3.1, *Definitions and clarifications*.

sometimes tense relationship between the two. In the last decades, there has been growing political discord, even though economic development has allowed for an easier and more productive interaction among both.

Japan and South Korea have not always seen eye to eye, but it is clear that tensions between both countries today are more alive than ever. Living in a time in which global issues require global solutions and international cooperation, it is important to find out how these two countries could overcome their differences.

## 1.2 Objective and Research Questions

The main objective of this Final Degree Thesis is to analyze how similar or different Japan and South Korea's national narratives are from each other, and how they impact intercultural and diplomatic communications between the two.

In order to do so, we will explore the three main historical issues that have led to such a strained relationship. First, we will delve into the different interpretations of their colonial histories. Second, we will focus on the issue of *comfort women* and the controversies of Japan's consequent apologies. Third and finally, we will investigate the various territorial disputes over the islands of Takeshima and Dokdo (Seo, 2021). To study these topics, we will analyze different types of mass media and artistic manifestations in the light of the Framing theory, through which we will aim to answer these three questions:

1. What is South Korea's historical, cultural, and political narrative about Japan?
2. What is Japan's historical, cultural, and political narrative about South Korea?
3. How are these narratives presented in their respective artistic and cultural manifestations?

In order to conduct this research, this Final Degree Thesis will consist of six sections. First, the introduction, which presents the Purpose and Reasons of the Thesis, as well as the main objective and research questions, right above. The second section will outline the methodology used for this research and the different methods in which the data was collected. Third, we will find the State of the Matter, which provides the definitions and explanations relevant to understanding this work. In addition to that, it will include a summary on the

historical and economic relations between Japan and Korea, as well as the main points of how nationalism presents itself in these countries. Fourth, we will delve into the theoretical framework of this research, in which we will cover the different theories and relevant authors in the field. Fifth, we will provide a more in-depth analysis and discussion of the issues mentioned right above, which will include various media examples of both Japan and Korea. Sixth and finally, there will be a conclusion, summarizing the findings of this Final Degree Thesis.

## **2. METHODOLOGY**

The methodology employed in this Thesis focuses on an analysis of the literature surrounding the national narratives of Japan and South Korea, and their influence on intercultural communication among the two. This approach combines an intensive literature review and a documentary study to provide a well-founded understanding of how national narratives shape communication patterns in these two nations.

The literature review involves a comprehensive assessment of already existing research on the role of national narratives in intercultural communication, as well as specific research on Japanese and South Korean history and culture, which is something that can impact the development of their narratives and their mutual perceptions.

Moreover, both primary and secondary sources have been consulted in order to have a detailed documentary study. Official documents, government reports and studies from international private and public organizations, all found on platforms such as Google Scholar, ResearchGate or JSTOR, have been reviewed to gather relevant data on the present topic.

An essential part of this research is the analysis of different artistic, cultural and media manifestations, in order to compare South Korea and Japan in their communication behaviors and narratives of their conflicts. By exploring how they depict each other, not only in governmental texts or media, but in artistic and cultural mediums, we will be able to get a bigger picture of the national narrative, which englobes the whole society and their perceptions.

## 3. STATE OF THE MATTER

### 3.1 Definitions and clarifications

This section will be devoted to defining and clarifying some concepts as a means to understand and simplify some notions that will be covered throughout the text.

#### *A. NATIONAL NARRATIVE*

James V. Wertsch (2021) defines the concept of national narrative in his book *How Nations Remember* as “units of analysis for examining the psychological and cultural dimensions of remembering particular events, and also for understanding the schematic codes and mental habits that underlie national memory”. As a simpler explanation, national narratives can be understood as the collective stories, historical accounts, and cultural symbols that a nation employs to construct its identity.

These narratives shape the way citizens perceive themselves and how they are perceived by others. According to William W. Cook (1993, p.4), narratives are “the primary means by which nations define themselves and their cultural identity”. Perspective is an essential aspect of all national narratives. National narratives are created by one’s nation's perspective on their own history and their relations with others, therefore they are subjective to each country. Because narratives are dependent on one’s own experiences, different nations can have their own narrative about the same experience<sup>2</sup>, sometimes even having completely opposite points of view. In this work, we will explore how national narratives are shaped by the media and by public opinion.

#### *B. NATIONAL IDENTITY*

According to Katzenstein (cited in Isozaki, 2015, p. 1), national identity can be understood as “how a country defines what kind of a country it is and what kind of foreign relations it should build”. It is a common culture, understanding of the past, and aspiration for the future

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<sup>2</sup> See Section 3.5 *South Korea and Japan’s national narratives about each other.*



that binds a group of people together and fosters a sense of belonging to a nation (Tüzün & Şen, 2014).

We can understand national identity as the collective consciousness, which provides a framework to understand the past, interpret the present and envision the future. In intercultural communication, the impact of national identity is important, as it influences how individuals perceive those from other nations, and it shapes the interactions between different cultural groups (Corbu et al. 2014).

Nevertheless, national identity is not a concept set in stone, but a developing understanding of the public narrative of the nation. According to Rogers Brubaker (2004, p. 123), “the question of what ‘defines us as a nation’ is not a matter of brute fact, but of public narratives, of self-understandings shaped and reshaped by stories.” National identity is formed by national narratives, and national narratives are based on national identity. They are both constantly changing and adapting to each other.

It is interesting to analyze the concept of national identity when comparing Japan and South Korea, as although their cultures are very much alike, their differing national narrative and understanding of common history are quite contrary.

### *C. CULTURE*

National identity is very much ingrained in one’s culture. However, the concept of culture is a broad one. For the purpose of this Thesis, we will use James H. Liu’s definition of culture: “a system of meanings with symbolic components fitted together as a system of knowledge that is shared to greater and lesser extents by different interacting segments of a society” (Liu, 2016, p. 6). South Korean and Japanese cultures have similar elements, similarities that can be explained by their common origins and shared experiences, together with China. However, they have each followed different paths in history, which has resulted in large cultural differences that can lead to disagreements or tensions. Because culture is such a big part of national identity, which is widely based on history, South Korea and Japan have similar cultural origins but different identities, thus giving place to different national narratives.

#### D. KOREA VS. SOUTH KOREA

We can talk about “Korea” or “South Korea”, depending on what territory we are referring to. The distinction between the two is extremely important to understand the historical and geopolitical context of the present Final Degree Thesis. Historically, Korea was a single, unified territory until the end of World War II, when the Korean peninsula was divided into two separate areas of occupation: one controlled by the Soviets, in the north; leaving the south of the peninsula to be controlled by the United States. This division led to the establishment of two different states: North Korea and South Korea.

“Korea” refers to the broader historical and cultural heritage of both North and South Korea. It is also the correct way of calling the peninsula before the official separation. Given the focus of this thesis, South Korea will be the primary subject of the investigation, by acknowledging its unique national narrative, and separate from the North Korean one, shaped by its post-war development, economic growth and geopolitical situation.

#### E. COMFORT WOMEN VS. VICTIMS OF SEXUAL SLAVERY

This definition examines the disagreement around the vocabulary used for this particular issue, although the topic will be covered in later sections of this thesis. The term *comfort women* appeared as a euphemism used by the Japanese Imperial Army during World War II to describe women who were coerced or deceived into providing sexual services to the military. This term has been criticized for minimizing the severity of the exploitation and the coercive nature of the system. In contrast, the term *victims of sexual slavery* seeks to more accurately reflect the severity of the experiences these women endured, as it aims to convey a stronger condemnation of the actions perpetrated during that period (Bisland & Shin, 2019), however, it does not differentiate Korean victims from others.

The choice between *comfort women* and *victims of sexual slavery* carries significant implications for intercultural communications between South Korea and Japan. This conflict point will be developed later on<sup>3</sup>, but for the sake of the objectivity and simplicity of this thesis, we will use the term *comfort women* to refer specifically to the women forced into sexual slavery by the Japanese Army in Japanese-occupied countries, the majority of them being from Korea and China.

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<sup>3</sup> See Section 5.1.2 *Comfort women*

### 3.2 Historical relations

To be able to fully understand why relations between Japan and South Korea are what they are today, it is paramount to observe and analyze their shared history. Although both countries have had numerous interactions throughout their long history, we will focus on their relationship from the early 20th century on. Hereunder we can find a timeline of the important events that have affected the interactions of Japan and South Korea.

YEAR	EVENT
1910	Japanese annexation of Korea as a colony.
1930s	Japan forced Koreans to work in factories, mines or enlist as soldiers, and forced women to work in military brothels ( <i>comfort women</i> ) (BBC, 2019).
1945	<b>End of World War II.</b> American forces occupy Korea south of the 38 parallel, Soviet forces control the North. Allied Forces occupy Japan.
1948	<b>Division of the Korean peninsula by the 38 parallel.</b> Republic of Korea in the South, and the Democratic People's Republic of Korea in the North.
1950-1953	<b>The Korean War.</b> Signed an Armistice in 1953, but there is still no final peace treaty.
1951	<b>San Francisco Treaty.</b> Allied Forces retreat from Japan, while Japan promises compensation to those who suffered under Japanese occupation.
1961-1979	Park Chung-hee military dictatorship in South Korea.
1965	<b>Treaty on Basic Relations.</b> Normalized diplomatic relations. Japan acknowledged its responsibility for the colonial period, and agreed to financial compensation to South Korea.

1972	<b>Implantation of the Yushin System in South Korea.</b> Restriction of the media and other human rights.
1979	Assassination of Park Chung-hee.
1980s	The issue of <i>comfort women</i> gains media attention. Victims start reporting their experiences.
1982	<b>First Japanese textbook controversy.</b> Controversial terms when speaking about the war, downplaying certain events and brutal episodes (Rosa, 2023).
1993	<b>Kono Statement.</b> The Japanese government acknowledges the existence of <i>comfort women</i> .
1995	<b>Murayama Statement</b> Japan officially apologizes for colonial rule.
1998	<b>South Korea-Japan Joint Declaration</b> Reaffirmed friendly relations and declared intentions of partnership.
2002	Korea Japan Joint FIFA World Cup.
2005	<b>Koizumi Apology</b> Japan apologizes for colonial rule and wartime atrocities.
2008	<b>Japanese textbook controversy on Dokdo/ Takeshima.</b> The Japanese Ministry of Education published a manual that established these islands as Japanese. South Korea removed their ambassador from Tokyo (Rosa, 2023).
2012	<b>South Korean president Lee Myung-bak visits Dokdo/ Takeshima.</b> Japan responds by moving their ambassador from Seoul.
2015	Japan apologizes about <i>comfort women</i> , and promises financial reparations to the victims.

<b>2016</b>	<b>General Security of Military Information Agreement (GSOMIA).</b> Bilateral military treaty for exchange of military information between Japan and South Korea.
<b>2018</b>	<b>South Korean boycott to Japanese products.</b> After Japanese firms refuse to go through with financial reparations.
<b>2019</b>	<b>Trade dispute.</b> Japan imposes export restrictions on materials crucial to South Korea.
<b>2020</b>	<b>National Museum of Territory and Sovereignty in Japan.</b> Japan exhibits Dokdo/Takeshima in the museum as Japanese territory. South Korea requests the closure of the museum.
<b>2020</b>	<b>GSOMIA termination threat.</b> South Korea considers terminating the agreement, but reverses the decision.

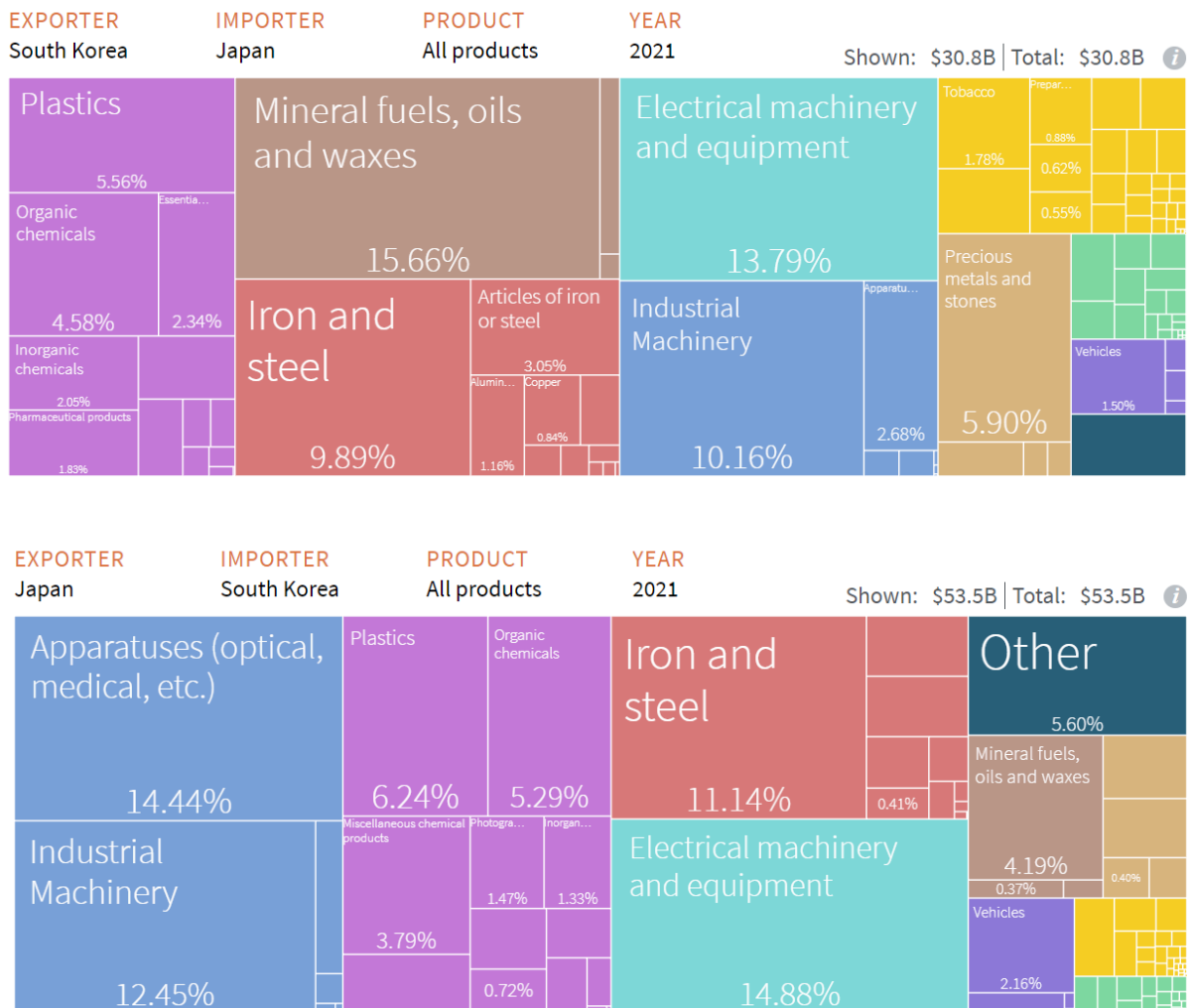
In March 2023, Japanese Prime Minister Fumio Kishida and South Korean President Yoon Suk Yeol had the first South Korea-Japan bilateral summit in 12 years. Although the two countries had had a strained relationship since 2018, they were able to find common ground on North Korea’s nuclear threat and China’s regional control (Lipke & Pohlkamp, 2023).

In this meeting, the two leaders normalized diplomatic relations, and “stressed the need to further strengthen their ‘deterrence and response capabilities’, bilaterally and within the US alliance system” (Lipke & Pohlkamp, 2023). Setting historical grievances apart, both countries have found common ground on which to rebuild and reinforce their relationship. The European Council on Foreign Relations published an article in which they covered the bilateral meeting, giving particular importance to thematic such as technology production and trade. Since Korea and Japan are two key technological leaders in Asia, the article highlights the potential for the joint action to build a coalition against China’s policies (Lipke & Pohlkamp, 2023). The Japanese and South Korean leaders agreed in their March meeting to resume bilateral talks at all levels (Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Japan, 2023).

### 3.3 Economic relations

To fully understand Japan-South Korea relations today, it is paramount to observe their economic relations, and the importance of the trade between them.

As we can see in Figure 1, right below, Japan has exported \$53.5B to South Korea in 2021, and South Korea \$30.8B to Japan. Although both countries have China as their biggest trading partner, it is clear that trade between South Korea and Japan remains an important part of their relations, mostly regarding mineral fuels and machinery. As was mentioned in the previous section, Japan and South Korea are considered key technological leaders in Asia, which gives them leverage when trading within the region.



**FIGURE 1.** Japan and South Korea’s Imports-Exports. (Harvard’s Growth Lab, 2021).

According to the Observatory of Economic Complexity (OEC, 2022), both countries hold two of the highest positions in the Economic Complexity ranking. In 2022, South Korea ranked fourth in the Economic Complexity Index (ECI 1.71), and fifth in total exports (\$705B). That same year, Japan ranked first in the Economic Complexity Index (ECI 1.99), and fourth in total exports (\$728B). This comes to show how Japan and South Korea are not only two of the biggest trading powers in Asia, but in the whole world. The economic development of both countries in the last few decades has completely transformed the economic panorama in the region, which has deeply affected their economic relations.

### 3.4 Nationalism in Japan and South Korea

Something important to ask ourselves when studying relations between these two countries is the degree to which nationalism affects perceptions of each other.

We can understand nationalism as a sense of “belonging to a common nation, which is defined by citizenship in the same nation-state, most often associated with feelings of loyalty and patriotism toward the states and fostering solidarity among citizens” (Stacey cited in Han, 2023, p.26). According to Han (2023), there are different types of nationalism, and he argues that grassroots nationalism, which uses individual and local action to reflect whole national movements, is reflective of how countries such as Japan and South Korea understand their national identity. Because it is taken to an individual level, patriotism is quite closely related to it.

Although nationalism and patriotism do not necessarily entail rejection of other countries, they can shape how one country thinks about others. For instance, South Korean nationalism is based on their relations with Japan, making it so that rejection is woven into the narrative. Japanese nationalism, on the other hand, considers other countries more important in their history, using the United States as an example, which creates a different narrative than the Korean one.

#### A. SOUTH KOREA

Koreans have different words for the concept of nationalism: *minjok* (민족주의), *guggajuui* (국가주의) and *gugminjuui* (국민주의). In order, they refer to the people, the state and the

nation (Han, 2023). Koreans differentiate the pride for one's country, for citizenship, or for the government. For the sake of this Thesis, we will focus on the concept of *minjok*, more relevant to the study.

The concept of *minjok* (민족) can be translated to English as *ethnic nationalism*, which is the belief that all Koreans share the same ancestors and are blood-linked (Shin cited in Han, 2023). Two major historical events have shaped Korean ethnic nationalism: Japanese colonialism (1910-1945) and the Korean War (1950-1953). During the second half of the 20th century, *minjok* was connected to the reunification of the two Koreas. Because both countries share the same ethnicity, older generations believe that nationalism includes ethnic pride for both North and South Korea. Moreover, most Korean presidents since the end of the Korean War have utilized nationalism as a measure to legitimize their political regimes (Kim cited in Han, 2023). The most prevalent example of this is the Park military regime, in which President Park promoted an ultra-nationalistic sentiment, culture, and tradition (Han, 2023).

However, after the economic and social change that took place in the 1980s and 90s, which created a bigger division between the two Koreas, South Koreans of the younger generations realized that they could survive on their own. Young people have developed an identity based on economic success and a peaceful government, and the pride of their country is not so based on their ethnicity, but more on South Korea's own achievements and culture (Bangsoy, 2023).

South Korea's pride for their country is strong, even if older and younger generations differ in their objects of patriotism, however it is necessary to ask ourselves where such strong nationalism comes from. During the Joseon Dynasty (1392-1897), Korea was known as the "hermit kingdom" (Seth, 2008). Koreans had very limited contact with the rest of the world, rejecting foreign nations any exterior relations. During the Japanese occupation, Korean pride and customs were punished, as Japanese colonies were expected to take on Japanese traditions and customs (Seth, 2008). As a result, South Koreans today feel strongly about their national identity, probably as a reaction to so many years of prohibitions and rejection of the Korean identity.

There is a concept in Korean that has become part of the national narrative, and that is very closely related to nationalism. The word is *han* (한), and although it has no direct translation



to English, it is commonly explained as unresolved resentment, pain, grief, anger, or sadness (Kim, 2017). As John M. Glionna explains in *Los Angeles Times*, *han* is “a mystery of the soul, a puzzle that many say helps define their culture – the ineffable sadness of being Korean” (Glionna, 2011). Many scholars concur that although the concept has existed for centuries in Korean culture, it has only become so prevalent since the Japanese occupation. According to Sandra So Hee Chi Kim in her work *Korean Han and the Postcolonial Afterlives of ‘The Beauty of Sorrow’* (2017), the characterization of Koreans as perpetually sorrowful comes from the artwork that was produced by Koreans during the colonization. The Japanese utilized the sad characterization of Koreans for their colonial purposes, implying that such melancholy justified the Japanese occupation (taking the savior position). Today, *han* is a concept that has become part of the Korean national identity. Because they believe that all Koreans are born with *han*, it is something that allows them to differentiate themselves from others.

## B. JAPAN

In contrast with Korean ethnic nationalism, Japan leans more towards cultural nationalism. *Nihonjinron* (日本人論) is “a body of discourse which purports to demonstrate Japan’s culture differences from other cultures and Japan’s cultural uniqueness in the world and this tries to establish Japan’s cultural identity” (Manabe & Befu., 1994, p. 1). The same as in South Korea, Japanese nationalism has changed throughout the years.

According to Laura Hein (2008), Japanese nationalism has historically been linked to economic success and cultural identity. Before the war, its focus lay in modernization and imperial aspirations, while post-war nationalism shifted towards economic development and ethnic notions. In the years leading to the Pacific War, Japanese nationalism was centered around imperialist beliefs. The same discussions that were happening in Germany surrounding race and ethnic purity were happening in Japan. Of course, when the Pacific War came to an end, with the defeat of Imperial Japan, there were some years in which Japanese nationalism was quieted, under the surveillance of the United States (Hein, 2008). It was not until the 1980s that *Nihonjinron* spread, centering nationalism around “the homogeneity of Japanese society, largely ignoring the state and making no reference to either the war or the colonial empire” (Hein, 2008, p. 457). In the 90s, different Japanese leaders tried to reshape

Japanese relations with other Asian countries by opening up discussions about the war, and issuing various apologies for World War II (Hein, 2008).

In a study done in March 2020, Japanese people were asked to rate their love for their country, 38 percent of them felt a relatively strong love for their country, while over 14 percent felt a very strong love for their country (Statista, 2024).

The main difference that we can find in South Korean and Japanese nationalism is the origin of such feelings. It can be argued that South Korea's nationalism originates from a defensive reaction. Because Koreans have been the victim of the war, and their culture and ethnicity has been undervalued, they have reacted accordingly by taking pride in their own country. On the other hand, Japan has found in nationalism a way to forget the dark episodes of their history, giving a new meaning to their national symbols and cultural markers (Hein, 2008). South Korea is patriotic *because* of the war, while Japan is patriotic *despite* the war. Today, both Japan and South Korea's nationalism is centered on the economic success and development of the last decades, but it is clear that the colonial period and the Pacific War shaped how they feel about their own country, especially when creating a narrative about each other.

#### **4. THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK.**

Communication theory is a field of study within Social Sciences that looks into the principles and dynamics of human communication. Since it is a field that tries to understand human behavior, it studies the patterns and mechanisms of human interaction. However, it is important to acknowledge that not every culture has the same communicative behaviors. The same way that different cultures have different traditions, the way individuals express themselves and communicate with their surroundings is dependent on where they are from.

For instance, one of the main distinctions between Asian and Western communication lies in context, according to Edward Hall. In his study *Beyond Culture*, Hall (cited in Alizadeh Afrouzi, 2021) writes that Western cultures mostly have a low-context communication style. Openness, individualism and personal autonomy often result in straightforward and assertive communication styles, with less need for contextual information to understand the message.

On the other hand, East Asian cultures generally prioritize implicit communication and nonverbal cues, therefore having a high-context communication style.

On that account, it is important to recognize that not all theories can be applied to all cultures. Because the subjects of study of this Thesis are South Korea and Japan, two East Asian countries, the theoretical framework will be divided in two parts. First, we will look into Western communication theories, and second, we will delve into Asian communication theories, with the objective of acquiring a deeper understanding of how and why these two nations communicate the way they do.

## **4.1 Western communication theory**

### *A. ARISTOTLE'S PERSUASIVE COMMUNICATION MODEL*

Aristotle's rhetorical principles of *logos*, *pathos* and *ethos* form the basis of persuasive communication. *Logos* encompasses logical reasoning, *pathos* involves emotional appeal, and *ethos* focuses on the credibility of the communicator (Henggeler & Lutzke, 2009). Although it is not a theory in itself, these elements wield significant influence within the framework of national narratives, as they explain how countries articulate their stories globally and how intercultural communication dynamics are impacted. Especially important to this Thesis is the concept of *pathos*, as national narratives are based on emotions. *Pathos* plays an essential role in creating connections, and it is one of the most effective ways to have effective intercultural communication. However, since emotions are sometimes not completely objective, they can also hinder intercultural understanding. The analysis of *pathos* in the context of Japan-South Korea relations will allow us to understand how emotional elements are integrated into national narratives, which will then influence people's perceptions. As we will see in this Thesis, the different points of conflict that Japan and South Korea face today are quite emotional matters, which allows the media, the government, and the day-to-day conversations to be tinted with *pathos*.

### *B. AGENDA SETTING THEORY*

A second important theory to understand intercultural communication between Japan and South Korea is the Agenda Setting Theory. It was developed by McCombs and Shaw, in a

study of mass communications during the 1968 American presidential election. They based their research on Bernard Cohen's hypothesis that "the press may not be successful much of the time in telling people what to think, but it is stunningly successful in telling its readers what to think about" (Cohen cited in McCombs & Shaw, 1972, p. 177). The Agenda Setting Theory highlights the media's ability to influence public opinion by prioritizing certain issues, and deprioritizing others. Both Japan and South Korea have been accused on many occasions of manipulating the media in order to bring forth or hide certain sentiments about the other. For instance, one of the main disputes between the two countries has been the Japanese media and government not mentioning anything about *comfort women*, or other atrocities committed during the war. The Japanese were utilizing the Agenda Setting theory to deprioritize these issues in the minds of the Japanese people. They did not want people to think about it, therefore they did not speak about it in the media (Pharr & Krauss, 1996).

Apart from the Agenda Setting theory, there are other theories that also explain media effects in public communication. Among them, we can find the Priming theory, and most importantly, the Framing theory.

### *C. PRIMING*

Priming comes from the idea that the media draw attention to some aspects of political life, at the expense of others. Most studies regarding priming are related to political campaigns and elections. Priming occurs when news content suggests to news audiences that they ought to use specific issues as benchmarks for evaluating the performance of leaders and governments. It is often understood as an extension of agenda setting (Scheufele & Tewksbury, 2007).

Although Priming and Agenda Setting are important to understand how political communication works, we will focus on the Framing Theory, more relevant to the subject of Japan and South Korea's national narratives about each other.

### *D. FRAMING THEORY*

The Framing Theory was developed by Erving Goffman in the 1970s. In his book *Frame Analysis*, Goffman explained the idea of the frame to mean the culturally determined

definitions of reality that allow people to make sense of objects and events (Shaw, 2013). Other scholars have gone further to emphasize the role of framing in decision making.

Essentially, framing is used in mass communication to guide audiences to certain conclusions by highlighting particular aspects and hiding others. It is similar to the agenda setting theory, but while agenda setting chooses what to think about, framing focuses on how to think about it (Scheufele & Tewksbury, 2007). When informing about a certain topic, the media can choose how to talk about it. How the message is presented has a huge influence on how the public will understand it. For instance, when South Korea speaks about Japan, the adjectives the media uses to describe the message will make the public agree or disagree with Japan, and vice versa. In the Analysis section, we will go over different examples of how framing has been used in Japanese and South Korean media.

The United States Institute for Peace published an article in 2022 speaking about relations between Japan and South Korea, and which approach their governments should take when trying to rebuild the relationship between the two countries. Brazinsky (2022) argues that “an important reason that negotiations between Japan and South Korea over historical issues are so difficult is how they are framed. The dominant narrative in these discussions has been one of Korean victimization and Japanese aggression.” He later adds that both Japan and South Korea should be open to different perspectives of what happened in the war, to acknowledge that the narratives can be different, but valid on both sides.

#### *E. SPIRAL OF SILENCE THEORY*

Another theory that could be used to explain the phenomena that is intercultural communication between Japan and South Korea is the Spiral of Silence Theory. According to Elizabeth Noelle-Newman (1974), people holding views contrary to those dominating the media are moved to keep those views to themselves for fear of rejection.

This theory suggests that individuals are influenced by a desire for social acceptance, which makes them either voice their views or withhold them, depending on what they perceive the majority believes. The central basis of the theory is the fear of isolation, which causes individuals to conform to the dominant narrative. This causes minority opinions to become quite marginalized, creating a spiral effect in which a consensus is reached by not expressing dissent (Noelle-Newman, 1974).

The Spiral of Silence theory, although it is a Western Theory, can be easily applied to Confucian cultures<sup>4</sup>, such as the Japanese and South Korea. Since both are collectivist cultures (placing the needs of the group over the individual), there is a stronger fear of isolation. Therefore, individuals will keep their own views for themselves, and follow the mainstream arguments. Since the main narratives of Japan and South Korea about each other are negative (Seo, 2021), and no one wants to stand out against the current, these negative narratives experience no change.

## *F. INTERCULTURAL COMMUNICATION*

Within the field of intercultural communication, there are multiple theories that aim to explain how and why different cultures interact. Major theories focus on abstract factors, like cultural values, communication practices, speaker motivations, expectancies, or identities (Liu, 2016), therefore it being a quite subjective field. One of the most important theories in intercultural communication, and one of the most relevant for this study, is the Communication Accommodation Theory. Authors such as Gallois, Franklyn Stokes, Giles and Coupland (Gallois et al., 1998) speak about intercultural communication as group-based self-categorizations. They argue that there is a differentiation between the in-group (*us*) and the out-group (*them*). There is a constant competition between the two groups, and communication among the two will always be biased.

When Japan speaks about South Korea, Japan takes the position of the in-group, which is biased towards itself, and South Korea becomes the out-group; and vice versa. Considering that for many years these two countries were closed off to each other, as we can see in the timeline above, they have both created a narrative about the *other*. Although nowadays they know more about each other, there is still that narrative about the “enemy”, the “stranger” about their neighboring country (Brazinsky, 2022).

### **4.2 East Asian communication theory**

As mentioned before, it is important to acknowledge that most of the introduced theories in the previous section come from American or European studies. As East and West have

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<sup>4</sup> Further explained in Section 4.2 *East Asian communication theory*.

different communication cultures, it is interesting to analyze these theories through an Asian lens, in order to take into account these differences and fully understand their behavior.

### *A. CONFUCIANISM*

The first step to understand East Asian communication culture is understanding Confucianism. As a philosophy of humanism and social relations, Confucianism has a very strong impact on interpersonal relationships and communication patterns (Yum, 1988). Confucianism is a common philosophy among China, South Korea and Japan, and is deeply ingrained into their every-day life and interactions. According to Chan and Jiang, (cited in Lynn-Sze, 2021), there are five constants of Confucianism. *Ren* (仁) refers to an obligation to humanness and love toward others. *Yi* (义) means “righteousness”, which is to say, not behaving selfishly. *Li* (礼) refers to guidelines for ethical behavior. *Zhi* (智) pertains to wisdom and truth. Finally, *xin* (信) indicates loyalty and truthfulness. These five concepts are common in all Confucian cultures, and Japan and South Korea introduce these values in their customs. Confucianism also gives much importance to familial respect. In both the Japanese and Korean languages, there are different structures and vocabulary to denote respect to elders and to show loyalty to one’s family. Sincerity and prudence are also two quite important values in Confucianism, reflecting the importance of always being on the right behavior. All of these qualities and values shape the way these two nations communicate, building a high-context communication environment. Because respect and righteousness is so important, most Japanese and Koreans will not be as direct as other cultures are, which means that these cultures might seem harder to understand when one is not used to this style of communication.

### *B. SAVING FACE*

Related to the Spiral of Silence Theory that was explained in the previous section, the concept of “saving face” is particularly salient in East Asian cultures, emphasizing the preservation of social harmony and avoiding embarrassment. Because East Asian cultures give much significance to the collective (as opposed to the West, which is a much more individualistic society), in both Japan and South Korea individuals strive to communicate in a way that protects the dignity and reputation of all parties involved (Kim, 1993). In Japan, the

concept of *tatemaie* (建前 - public façade) reflects this concept. People often express their true opinions in a more private setting, while maintaining a polite and harmonious façade in public. In South Korea, there is a similar concept, *nunchi* (눈치), which emphasizes the ability to gauge other's emotions and respond accordingly, allowing individuals to navigate social situations without causing discomfort (Debaty, 2022). Moreover, the hierarchical nature of Japanese and South Korean societies adds another layer to the concept of saving face. The same way that respect for one's family is important, respect to higher authorities is a given. Individuals often avoid challenging the status quo or causing embarrassment to those in higher positions. Both cultures value subtlety, nuance, and the ability to discern unspoken messages, which gives place to an indirect and high-context model of communication (Kim, 1993). In summary, the most important thing is what others think, and communication molds around this belief.

Such a communication style, in which most things are left unspoken, gives rise to misunderstandings at certain times. Although Japan and South Korea follow a similar style and model of communication, their understandings and narratives are quite different.

### *C. FRAMING THEORY IN EAST ASIAN POLITICAL COMMUNICATION*

The framing theory provides a valuable lens through which to analyze how political messages are constructed, presented, and interpreted. As mentioned above, East Asian countries follow a bit of a different communication model, which means that some Western theories might apply in a different way to countries such as Japan and South Korea.

Given the influence of Confucianism, which places emphasis on harmony and social cohesion, political communication in Japan and South Korea often involves framing messages in a way that preserves collective dignity and societal harmony. Political leaders might try to frame their messages to align with the Confucian values, appealing to a sense of duty, ethical behavior, and loyalty to the collective good (Stowell, 2003). The media, as a reflection of societal norms, participates in framing political discourse to resonate with such values. Because of the inherently hierarchical nature of these two cultures, political narratives are framed to avoid challenges to authority, which means that failures from the government might not be objectively portrayed (The Economist, 2021).



## 5. ANALYSIS AND DISCUSSION

The following section will be divided in two parts. First, we will explore the three main topics of this Thesis: the different interpretations of the colonial era; the issue of *comfort women* in South Korea and its current standing, as well as Japan's consequent apologies; and the territorial dispute between Japan and South Korea regarding the islands of Dokdo/Takeshima. With each issue, we will review how each country expresses their national narrative on the matter through cultural and artistic manifestations. Second, we will focus on Japanese and South Korean newspapers, as well as history textbooks, to see if such national narratives are reflected by the media in the same way.

### 5.1 Cultural and artistic manifestations

#### 5.1.1 The colonial era (1910-1945)

##### A. SOUTH KOREA

Overall, South Korea's national narrative about Japan roots from the historical context that was developed in Section 3.2 of this Thesis. From the early 20<sup>th</sup> century, Japan's actions in the Korean peninsula have left a lasting impact in South Korea's collective memory of the colonial era, which marks a very dark chapter in Korean history. Japanese colonial rule was characterized by harsh oppression, cultural suppression, and various human rights abuses (Seo, 2021). The forced assimilation policies, including the suppression of Korean language and culture, further intensified Korean resentment against Japan, leaving behind a common sense of humiliation (Seo, 2021).

At the center of this narrative is the perception of Japan as an aggressor. "While Japanese historiography depicted cultural relics in the Korean peninsula as an Asian civilizational legacy that enabled the Japanese sense of cultural authenticity, Korean historiography presented Japan as a barbaric nation that could have not been civilized without the benevolent Korean nation" (Seo, 2021, p.9).

There are multiple artistic and cultural manifestations of these experiences in South Korea. To begin with, it is essential to acknowledge the importance of movies and TV series in South Korea, as the broadcasting business brings a lot of wealth into the country and has

allowed South Korean culture to globalize. Internationally known productions such as *Parasite* and *Squid Game* are known for their critique of Korean society, and critiques to Japan do not stay behind. In general, most Korean artistic manifestations about the colonial period speak about Japanese atrocities, and how Koreans tried to survive.



**FIGURE 2.** Movie posters for *Parasite* (left), *Battleship Island* (center) and *Mal-Mo-E* (right). (FilmAffinity, n.d.)

Movies such as 2017 *The Battleship Island* (군함도 in Korean) can be taken as an example of how Koreans remember the colonial era and critique Japan through TV productions. This movie, which tells the story of four hundred Koreans who try to escape from Hashima Island (Japan), where they had been forcefully taken to mine for coal, became a box office record in South Korea and is one of the most watched movies in the country (The Straits Times, 2017). According to the Korean newspaper *The Korea Times* (Shim, 2017), the Japanese media criticized the movie for containing distorted stories, while Koreans fans believed that the movie was too light and did not faithfully show the war crimes committed by the Japanese. This clearly shows how both countries have different narratives about the same issue. *The Battleship Island* tried to bring attention to the Korean forced workers in Japan during the Korean era, and while South Koreans thought it was not enough, the Japanese thought it was too much.

Another movie that can be taken as an example of Korean cultural and artistic manifestations about the colonial era is *Mal-Mo-E: The Secret Mission*, released in 2019. This movie is a historical drama about the Korean Language Society under colonial rule, and its struggle to preserve and document the Korean language, which essentially manifests Japan's efforts to

exterminate Korean culture during the colonial times. Again, we can see how Koreans speak about the oppression they felt during so many years, and they use artistic manifestations to express it.

In addition to films, it is important to mention the existence of the Museum of Japanese Colonial History, in Seoul. The museum exhibits the history of the Japanese occupation of Korea, as well as the Korean resistance movement. It includes antiquities from that period, as well as bibliographical materials, photos, original writings and drawings; also displaying a list of pro-Japanese Koreans who took part in civilian tortures. This is an interesting fact, as the museum shows that although it was the Japanese who carried out the occupation, there were people in Korea who also participated in the oppression.

As a final cultural manifestation, it is interesting to look into the topic of history textbooks, which has become a point of tension between the two countries. According to Shin Gi-Wook and Daniel Sneider (2016), “in Korean history textbooks Japan occupies almost one quarter of the coverage of modern history (late 1800s to 1945).” They also add that in Japan and South Korea, the ministries of education require all textbooks to undergo a strict screening process, as what they add or not add to these textbooks will influence the collective memory and national identity (Shin & Sneider, 2016).

Overall, it is clear that in South Korea there are multiple cultural and artistic manifestations that speak of the colonial era and Japanese occupation. Through museums, movies, textbooks, TV series and many other different mediums, South Koreans express and perpetuate the narrative of Japan as an aggressor, being most of these manifestations tinted with the negativity of the colonial era.

## *B. JAPAN*

Japan’s national narrative of South Korea, in contrast, has changed more throughout the years. Before the colonial period, the Japanese perceived Korea as an “uncivilized neighbor” (Seo, 2021, p.7), and it was that belief and perception they used as a justification for the colonization of the Korean Peninsula.

Japan and South Korea have completely different perceptions of the wartime period. While the Korean experience was completely tainted by the Japanese occupation, the Korean

peninsula was only a small part of the war in Japanese eyes. A study in which they analyzed history textbooks in South Korea and Japan concluded that “There is almost no discussion of Korea’s experience of colonial rule in Japanese high school textbooks [...]. By contrast, Japanese textbooks include extensive accounts of the unfolding of Japanese imperialism in China, from the takeover of Manchuria through the Sino-Japanese War” (Sneider, 2022). It is clear that for the Japanese, the narrative of this period is not centered around Korea, but around the whole war and imperial aspirations.

In addition to that, when speaking about the colonization of Korea, the Japanese utilize the narrative of modernization. Essentially, Japan argues that not only they helped modernize Korea, but that it helped modernize Japan. Western powers used to justify the acquisition of power with the belief that it was the only way to survive as a nation (for them, the only options were to colonize or to be colonized), and Japan followed their steps (Seo, 2021). This is a usual narrative of colonial powers regarding their colonies: the belief that it was done in the interest of modernization and development.

According to Thomas U. Berger, “the general tendency in Japan itself has been to focus more on the suffering of the Japanese people during World War II than on the suffering that Japan inflicted on others” (Berger et al., 2012, p.179). In fact, there are very few Japanese cultural or artistic manifestations about the colonial era that do not focus on the Japanese suffering in World War II. For instance, we can see it in the high quantity of movies about Japanese soldiers, kamikazes<sup>5</sup> and about the Hiroshima and Nagasaki attacks, which mostly depict these people as victims of the war and not of Imperial Japan’s actions.



**FIGURE 3.** Movie posters for *The Eternal Zero* (left), *For Those We Love* (center left), *The Truth about Nanjing* (center right), and *Michi — Hakuji no Hito* (right) (FilmAffinity, n.d.).

<sup>5</sup> Kamikazes were Japanese aircrafts loaded with explosives and making a deliberate suicidal crash on an enemy target (Oxford Reference, n.d.).

One of the most famous Japanese movies about the war is *The Eternal Zero*, which became in 2013 one of the top-grossing Japanese productions of all time. The movie is about two siblings who learn about their grandfather, who decided to die as a kamikaze in the war. There has been a lot of international criticism regarding this movie, as many believe that the story is nationalistic propaganda and overshadows the actions of the Japanese during the war. (USNI News, 2014).

A second movie that we can take as an example is *For Those We Love*, written by the Governor of Tokyo, Shintaro Ishiharam in 2007. The film talks about the experiences and daily doings of a group of kamikaze pilots, from the point of view of the matron of the local restaurant. Again, there has been some controversy regarding this film, as the kamikaze pilots are glorified as heroes who died for their country, rather than tragic casualties of Japanese Imperialism (USNI News, 2014).

Not only are there very few Japanese productions that follow the Korean narrative about the war, but some directors have been criticized for their revisionist films. For instance, the 2007 movie *The Truth about Nanjing* by Satoru Mizushima denies the Nanjing Massacre. Not only has the director stated that “There is one indisputable fact: there was no massacre at Nanjing” (Reynolds, 2007), but also that Japanese leaders executed for war crimes are martyrs like Jesus Christ (USNI News, 2014). Of course, the director’s opinion is quite an extreme one and should not be taken as the general norm, but there are many other Japanese movies<sup>6</sup> that also include revisionist plots.

One movie that should be highlighted for being the exception to this norm is *Michi- Hakuji no Hito*. This 2012 film takes place in the colonial era, and follows a Japanese man who wants to preserve Korean culture, specifically traditional Korean ceramics. The movie exposes the inhumanity of Japanese rule, which is a very rare plot for a Japanese production.

The Mori Art Museum, in Tokyo, will sometimes have exhibitions about the colonial era and the war. One example of this is the documentary by Fujii Hikaru, *The Educational System of an Empire*, which is a commentary on how the educational systems of Japan, South Korea and the United States have formed the different narratives about the war, as it was used to reinforce nationalism during the time (Mori Art Museum, 2016). Essentially, the artist is

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<sup>6</sup> Among others, *Fires on the Plain* (1959), *Merdeka 17805* (2001), *The Men of the Yamato* (2005), *Sea Without Exit* (2007), or *Better Wishes for Tomorrow* (2007) (USNI News, 2014).

trying to express the fact that education is what creates opinion and narratives, and that anything can be framed from one point of view or the other.

### 5.1.2 *Comfort women*

#### A. SOUTH KOREA

Although the whole colonial period has scarred South Korea, it is the systematic exploitation of *comfort women* and forced labor in the manufacturing industry that especially continues to evoke anger and demand justice. South Korea has consistently requested acknowledgment, apologies, and compensation from Japan due to these wartime atrocities, and despite the several attempts at reconciliation, South Korea is still today looking for an appropriate compensation for such a traumatic period of their history (BBC News, 2015).



**FIGURE 4.** Exhibition in the House of Sharing (House of Sharing, n.d).

The most important representation of *comfort women* in South Korea can be found in the House of Sharing, which is a museum and cultural center located in Gwangju, a city not far from Seoul. First and foremost, the House is used as a shelter for the survivors. Many of the victims decide to live in the House, where they can share their experiences with visitors, take part in different leisure programs, and they are taken care of by health professionals. Secondly, the House is used as a museum, which tries to preserve the history and memory of *comfort women* through permanent and temporary exhibitions (House of Sharing, n.d.).

One of the most popular exhibitions that was shown in the House of Sharing is a photography collection by the Japanese artist Tsukasa Yajima. As we can see in Figure 5, right below, his collection consisted of a set of portraits he took of some of the victims that were living in the

House of Sharing. As the artist explained, he wanted to bring attention to this issue, not only to the Japanese society, but also to the South Korean one. As he wrote in his portfolio, “[*comfort women*] have been living their lives in a worry, even after the war, [believing] that [the fact that] they were forced to be sex slaves back then must not be exposed in public” (Yajima, n.d.). Although there is much talk about the issue of *comfort women* today in South Korean society, the topic was considered taboo until only some years ago. This can be explained by the culture of saving face<sup>7</sup> that is so prevalent in East Asia.



**FIGURE 5.** Japanese photographer Tsukasa Yajima with his photography exhibition in the House of Sharing (Sneider, 2022)

In the last decade, there have been many documentaries and testimonies made to bring attention to *comfort women*. One example is the 1999 documentary *My Own Breathing*. The film follows the life of a former *comfort woman*, and her journey trying to gain recognition and reparations. These movies and documentaries are important because not only do they explain the experiences of the victims during the colonial period, but they also highlight the difficulties they went through in the decades after. The shame, economic difficulties and disconnection with their country after being so many years away were very difficult to overcome.

Every Wednesday, the House of Sharing participates in the weekly protests in front of the Japanese embassy in Seoul, in order to educate the public and to pressure the Japanese government to apologize for their war atrocities. Although Japan has apologized for wartime atrocities and has given some reparations to the victims, in South Korea it is still believed that

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<sup>7</sup> Saving face - explained in Section 4.2 *East Asian Communication Theory*.

these are not enough, as there are other instances and publications that reflect that Japan does not actually believe the apology necessary.

## *B. JAPAN*

Regarding the use of *comfort women* and other human rights violations during the war, Japan believes that the issue is settled by previous agreements and consequent apologies. Some scholars argue that while the negative narrative of South Korea about Japan might come from Japan not apologizing correctly, others believe that the repetitive apologies by the Japanese government have resulted in apology fatigue (Seo, 2021). This has caused the Japanese society to feel a constant frustration towards South Koreans by the way they approach a historical issue that the Japanese themselves do not see as important in their narrative. “The problem with respect to apologizing emerges not from its genuineness or efficacy, but from the impossibility of determining for what and to whom to apologize” (Seo, 2021, p.11). Even if the Japanese feel regret for the colonial period, the fact that their narrative about it is so different from the Korean one causes that the apologies issued are not enough for the Korean community and might never be if they do not accept and understand the other’s national narrative.

The recent narrative about the issue of *comfort women* in Japan has been very influenced by the opinions of the previous Prime Minister Shinzo Abe, who did not fully acknowledge Japan’s behavior during the war. In fact, when in 2015 Japan and South Korea were about to sign a *comfort women* agreement, Abe stated “There was no document found that the *comfort women* were forcibly taken away” (Hosaka, 2021). When South Korea asked Abe to apologize, he refused, reviving again the South Korea-Japan tensions around this issue.

The Women's Active Museum on War and Peace in Tokyo has a collection of records and materials about *comfort women*. On their website, they say:

War crimes are never rectified unless the State faces its crimes; that a genuine apology and promise to prevent recurrence from the State is an absolute necessity; that in order to overcome the past we need to keep the memory of past aggression alive, and pass it on to future generations. (Women’s Active Museum, n.d.)





**FIGURE 6.** Exhibition in the Women's Active Museum on War and Peace (WAM, n.d.)

This museum is well known for their activism in favor of *comfort women*, and their dissemination of information about the issue in Japan. Since there is a general narrative of rejection and fatigue about *comfort women*, the role of the museum is very important to draw attention to the injustices that these women endured.

### 5.1.3 Territorial disputes



**FIGURE 7.** Map of South Korea and Japan (The Economist, 2018).

The islands of Dokdo/Takeshima are an archipelago located right between South Korea and Japan (see Figure 7). Dokdo is the name that Koreans have given the islands, while the Japanese call them Takeshima. They are two volcanic islands with very scarce vegetation and drinking water resources, which makes them quite difficult to inhabit (Genova, 2018). These small islands have been part of an ongoing conflict between South Korea and Japan for the

last three hundred years, and it is quite interesting to see how many diplomatic and social consequences it has had in the two countries.

South Koreans believe Dokdo to be part of their territory, and many South Koreans make a pilgrimage to the islands, which some even consider a civic duty. They visit the rocks and wave South Korean flags, showing how protective they are of these two miniscule islands. According to National Geographic photographer, Tim Franco, “this is one thing that they kept back from World War II and it’s very important to them to keep it” (Genova, 2018).

In contrast, the Japanese Ministry of Foreign Affairs website says that Takeshima is “indisputably an inherent part of the territory of Japan, in light of historical facts and based on international law” (MOFA Japan in Genova, 2018). In fact, they published a document in which they explain the “Definite clarifications as to why Takeshima is Japan’s territory”, as the title says (MOFA Japan, n.d.). On that document, they explain that Japan has recognized the territory for longer, and they claim that South Korea is going against international law. It also says that although Japan has proposed to take the issue to the International Court, South Korea has refused.

There have been countless gestures and tensions from both sides regarding this territorial conflict. For instance, in 2005 Japan declared a National Day of Takeshima. South Koreans, who already had anti-Japanese feelings, felt offended, and two protesters cut their own fingers in front of the Japanese Embassy in Seoul, while others burned the Japanese flag (Rosa, 2021).

In 2020, Japan reopened their National Museum of Territory and Sovereignty, in which they show the islands as Japanese territory. Again, this caused an uproar in the South Korean community, and the South Korean government released a statement asking for its closure. In 2021, South Korean politicians asked for a boycott of the Tokyo Olympics, after an official map of the Olympic torch relay showed the islands as Japanese (Rosa, 2021).

It is clear that the territorial issue is a very delicate one, and when juxtaposing it to the already latent issues of the perception of the colonial era and *comfort women*, it can be taken to a higher level. Although the two islands are virtually uninhabitable, it is the symbol of them that makes both countries claim their sovereignty, and the resentment that they have for each other that makes the conflict last so long.

## 5.2 The media

As the last medium that this Final Degree Thesis will focus on, we will look into the newspapers, and how each country depicts each other in them. In this final section of the analysis, it is important to recall the Framing theory. By analyzing different newspapers, we will try to see how the media can shape or redirect society's thoughts and topics of conversation. The more South Korean media mentions Japan, the more present the topic will be in daily conversations, and vice versa. Taking this into account, it is interesting to see how many articles each major newspaper has published about the other country, for which we will examine the two newspapers with the largest circulation in both Japan and South Korea.

South Korea's biggest newspapers today are the *Chosun Ilbo* (the main Korean newspaper, with news mainly in Korean, but also some in English), and *The Korea Herald*, the biggest English-language daily (University of Wisconsin-Madison, n.d). Regarding Japan, we will inspect the *Asahi Shimbun* and the *Yomiuri Shimbun*, both in Japanese, with a smaller English version. They all have physical versions, as well as an online version, which is the one that has been consulted for the following data.

On Figure 8, right below, we can see how many articles each of these newspapers has when searching the name of the other country (both in English and in their own languages). Because the online versions of these newspapers started publishing at different dates, the left column of the table shows the average quantity of articles published per year that include the terms mentioned. Looking at the data, it is clear that the South Korean media refers to Japan much more than the Japanese media does to South Korea. Certainly, the content of the articles is important, but how much these countries speak about each says a lot about their mutual narratives, and how the media displays them. As shown throughout this Thesis, South Korea has been much more vocal in their artistic and cultural manifestations of their narrative about Japan. On the other hand, Japan has been known to avoid speaking about South Korea and their strained relationship.

COUNTRY	NEWSPAPER	TERM SEARCHED	ARTICLES	AVERAGE ARTICLES PER YEAR
SOUTH KOREA	Chosun Ilbo (since 1993)	“Japan”	32,533 results	1,049 articles/yr
		“일본”	766,867 results	24,737 articles/yr
	The Korea Herald (since 2011)	“Japan”	34,918 results	2,909 articles/yr
		“일본”	9,635 results (English news)	802 articles/yr
JAPAN	Asahi Shimbun (since 2018)	“South Korea”	4,278 results	329 articles/yr
		“韓国”	19,849 results	1526 articles/yr
	Yomiuri Shimbun (since 2018)	“South Korea”	2,400 results	184 articles/yr
		“韓国”	7,271 results	559 articles/yr

**FIGURE 8.** Japanese and South Korean newspapers word search (Prepared by the author, 2024)

Shin and Sneider (2016), in their book *Divergent Memories: Opinion Leaders and the Pacific War* studied Japan’s collective memory of the war period, and they describe the Japanese media as using an evasion frame, which “partially accepts guilt but evades the trauma of perpetration by shifting focus to one’s own victim consciousness” (Shin & Sneider, 2016, ch.1). Within the bounds of this frame, the Japanese focus on the suffering of their own citizens (for instance, highlighting the Hiroshima and Nagasaki nuclear bombings), instead of acknowledging the victims of Imperial Japan (Shin & Sneider, 2016).

Conversely, South Korean media has clearly given more importance to their relationship to Japan. The same way that there were a lot more cultural and artistic representations of the war and Imperial Japanese cruelty before and during the war, Japan is a central figure in their media narrative, framing the news and the agenda so that it is a topic that can be talked about.

## 6. CONCLUSIONS

In conclusion, this Thesis has examined the intricate historical, cultural, artistic and political Japanese-South Korean narratives, and has brought to light the stark differences between the two national narratives of the colonial period and the Pacific War. By studying national identity, the historical and economic relations of both countries, and understanding how nationalism is portrayed in both Japan and South Korea, we have been able to apply the different Western and Asian communication theories. Among them, we have delved into the agenda setting and framing theories, through which we have been able to study the different mediums that South Korea and Japan use to express their narratives.

In the analysis section, we have been able to study, first, different cultural and artistic manifestations surrounding three main issues: the colonial era, *comfort women*, and the territorial dispute of the Dokdo/Takeshima islands. In addition to that, we looked into Japanese and Korean newspapers, and how often each country publishes news about the other.

There were three questions that we were trying to give answer to within this Final Degree Thesis:

1. What is South Korea's historical, cultural and political narrative about Japan?
2. What is Japan's historical, cultural and political narrative about South Korea?
3. How are these narratives presented in their respective artistic and cultural manifestations?

First of all, we can draw the conclusion that South Korea's narrative about Japan is heavily rooted in the historical grievances developed during Japan's colonial rule. This narrative often emphasizes the pain and suffering endured by Koreans by hand of the Japanese, shaping South Korea's perception of Japan as an aggressor and oppressor.

In contrast, Japan's narrative about South Korea has tended to downplay, and deny, in a way, its colonial past, and has focused more on shared cultural elements and economic cooperation in the present. However, it is clear that the territorial disputes and the unresolved issues regarding *comfort women* and their long-awaited apology have continued to strain bilateral relations.

Furthermore, these narratives have found expression in different artistic and cultural forms, ranging from literature, to film, to popular museums and exhibitions. South Koreans have often portrayed Japan in a quite negative light, highlighting the atrocities of colonialism and the war, while the Japanese have had a more self-centered view of that same time period.

It is important to acknowledge that this investigation was not without some limitations and difficulties. The challenge in accessing primary sources in Korean and Japanese reduced the possible analysis of original media, such as television news and specific newspaper articles. Moreover, the cultural norms of politeness that were mentioned in this Thesis limited open discussions and publications on sensitive subjects as this one is, which limited the scope of the research.

Despite these limitations, this Final Degree Thesis could serve as a baseline for further investigations on the topic of national Narratives. It would be very interesting to explore the nature of Japan and South Korea's relationship, taking into account the changes that will occur as more time passes and separates us from the time period that caused so much pain.

To end on an optimistic note, it is important to acknowledge that there is a way to reconcile. Although Japan and South Korea have quite different national memories, the gaps in their points of view can be bridged by understanding the various factors that have shaped each of their perspectives. Through genuine dialogue and understanding, Japan and South Korea can pave the way to a more cooperative future, built on recognition and mutual respect.

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